

Long Buckby Machine Knitters

Newsletter

March
2022



From the Editor

This month we have our first 'outside speaker' of the year: Claire Newberry, who is based in Northamptonshire, and will talk about her experiences as a knitwear designer and demonstrate some techniques. Read more about her at <http://knittingschool.co.uk/about-claire/>



Next month is one of our regular 'forum' meetings, when there is no central demonstration, but a series of smaller demonstrations and activities. These depend on members' requests and needs. Our intention next month is to demonstrate/ provide a workshop in crochet [drawing on last month's joining knitting topic]. We may also have a session on Dorset buttons, and a chance to view computer software and videos. The choice is yours!

The bulk of this newsletter is about the economics of crafting, specifically about making money [or not]. Inevitably, it is a chance to bemoan the demise of craft shops and suppliers, as well as the poor remuneration to be had from crafting - we pull no punches, and the situation can be depressing.

BUT most craftspeople do it for the love of the craft, and we are no exception. Handicrafts have kept lots of us sane during lockdowns, and I, for one, cannot contemplate a life without textile crafts.

And all this is without considering the producers of our yarn and equipment. In this issue I have decided not to look at these - there are some major issues here, but I have left them for the future.

Lynda Fiendley

Today's meeting

14th March***	Visiting Speaker – Claire Newberry who will talk about her experiences as a knitwear designer, show her designs, and demonstrate some knitting machine techniques
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Future meetings

LBMK calendar 2022	<p>All meetings are from 2pm to 4pm, and doors are open from 1.30pm. Membership fee: annual £5, plus £3 for most meetings, £5 for those with visiting speaker [marked with ***] Guest fees: £5 most meetings, £7 for those with visiting speaker. Tea/coffee and biscuits included, please bring a cup, and take it with you for washing later [we are limiting use of the kitchen post-Covid]</p>
Date	Topic
11th April	<p>Machine Knitting Forum – a chance to catch up on skills and friends! Multiple rolling demonstrations, basic skills to more advanced, patterns, gadgets and garments. Also, software demonstrations. Bring your projects to show, work on or seek advice about....</p>
9th May	Necklines – hoods, cowls, collars etc.
13th June***	<p>Visiting Speaker: Erica Thomson Erica will demonstrate how to use pressing to enhance your knitting</p>
11th July	<p>Machine Knitting Forum – a chance to catch up on skills and friends! Multiple rolling demonstrations, basic skills to more advanced, patterns, gadgets and garments. Also, software demonstrations. Bring your projects to show, work on or seek advice about</p>
8th Aug	Holding Position How to use this simple technique for shaping and other effects.
12th Sept	<p>Edges [hems necks bands etc] Demonstration of edging techniques on the knitting machine, and other ways to finish your knitting</p>
10th Oct	<p>Machine Knitting Forum – a chance to catch up on skills and friends! Multiple rolling demonstrations, basic skills to more advanced, patterns, gadgets and garments. Also, software demonstrations. Bring your projects to show, work on or seek advice about</p>
14th Nov	Maintenance. DIY maintenance and tools
12th Dec	AGM/ COMPETITION, DISPLAY AND SALES. End of year celebration

The business of knitting

Knitting for most of us is a hobby: some of us have tried to make a little extra income from it, but few have managed to make enough money to use it for a living.

Today we welcome a professional knitwear designer and teacher to our club, and I would like to consider the range of opportunities and potential pitfalls to using the craft as a business, or in trying to make money from knitting.

Semi-professional knitting

Most of us are amateurs in our craft [no reflection on skill or level]. To make money out of craft some of us have knitted for businesses, taken on a commission for knitwear from an acquaintance or possibly designed a pattern for others to use.

But making real money out of handicrafts is very difficult. Here are a few reasons why:

1. The competition - which is stacked against you - is in the form of unrealistically cheap machine made knitwear, produced in places with very low wages. Below are two photos from New York at the beginning of the last century, of two sweatshops with quite young girls



2. The real cost of producing knitwear - if you factor in an hourly rate for work - is prohibitive for most people, who are influenced by the previous reason. So, a simple scarf might involve three hours' work = £30 labour at minimum wage [which most people would not think of including in the price, and which leads to further low expectations]. If you produce items with a labour cost of much less, you are probably undercutting others who need to make a living - ethically it is complicated! And few will pay the labour costs if the finished garment is less than perfect - so charging a higher price means lots of quality control.
3. Production for other people also involves waste - you will need exemplar garments, there may well be 'returns' and you will have to buy surplus yarn to ensure you have enough.
4. If you make patterns rather than knitwear, you will need to factor in the cost of producing prototypes, including redesigns, as well as stationery, marketing etc. Having heard machine knitters gasp at the cost of patterns [as well as some copying being done] I know that it is difficult to make money from them.



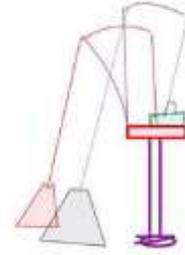
Cartoon used is from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ME_109_Thief.png

Which is a very negative outlook, but a reason to really value producers and suppliers who do work in this field.

Here are four of our members' accounts of working in a semi-professional capacity: none of us have had to do this as our main income, but we have all had similar experiences - the first one [mine] is probably the shortest career ever!

My [very brief] career as an outsourced home knitter - Lynda Fiendley

In 1976, I was doing my PGCE teacher training in Edinburgh, when I spotted a basic Knitmaster machine on special offer in a department store. I was hooked! Then a friend introduced me to another friend of hers, who had a very small studio/shop on the Grassmarket, where she knitted and sold Shetland jumpers to tourists. I agreed to do some of the knitting as piece work [paid according to the number of items I knitted]. It was simple knitting, and I did not do much, as I got very bored after the second jumper [I think I managed 10 at most] - the



money was welcome, but had I not been a student, I think I would never have considered it worthwhile. The shop owner had high overheads, I imagine, and, although she sold the jumpers at quite a high price, she paid me what she could afford - next to nothing! To be fair, I will admit to being a less than perfect fit for a home knitter in this circumstance - I much prefer knitting

for myself, family and friends.

And it all reminded me of my childhood neighbour, who supplemented her low pension with home working, making fireworks for a major company! Her living room smelled of gunpowder, and I dread to think about fire risk. Our country has a history of low paid home workers, especially in the textile industry.



An insight into past machine knitting experiences can be found in the Ruddington Framework Knitters Museum near Nottingham - even if you cannot visit the actual museum, you can find information and videos at

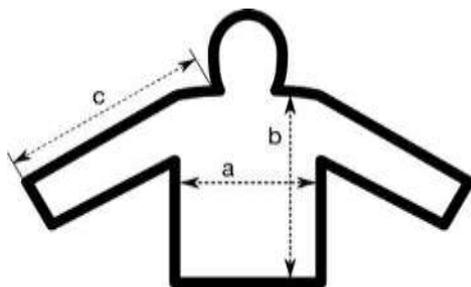
<https://frameworkknittersmuseum.org.uk/>

[and, of course, the knitters involved in this were not part-timers using it as a hobby!] Most of the framework knitters worked at home, often involving whole families in the process, at subsistence levels of income [or less].

Pat - running a knitting business [before the internet changed everything!]

Having knitted jumpers for my children, their cousins, and adults within the family I started getting requests from other people to knit things for them. As our children were settled at school, I found I had some time on my hands, so I started knitting jumpers to sell which I sold at local craft shows & charity fairs. Before long I realised that it was impossible for me to design, write patterns, knit, finish, market and do the accounts too so I realised that I would need to recruit some outworkers. I put adverts in local newspapers, spent time teaching the outworkers to read my diagrammatic patterns and knit "my way" and so the business began way back in the 80s.

I decided to just use King Cole Superwash wool which had been well tested by the family so I knew it would wear well, especially as I knit it at a tighter tension than normal. I found it was necessary to keep good records so that I knew who had knitted each garment. At shows customers might ask for



garments to have longer sleeves etc. but as each garment had a unique number it was easy to see who had knitted it and alter the pattern slightly. At the time drop shoulder patterns were in vogue so it was reasonably easy to design simple patterns for children with tractors, animals and bright colours being

especially popular. Grandmothers were especially good customers as they would come each year to kit the family out for the winter. I could refer to my sales records and tell people which size they had bought the previous year.

Advertising was very expensive, so my husband Charlie suggested I had our telephone number on the woven label. This worked well and I had many repeat orders over the years. Men were easy to design for as they just wanted something warm and comfortable, with stripes and all-over fair isle being popular. Ladies were more difficult as they came to the shows each year asking to see the new designs. Colour was important to the ladies, and many said that the French Navy that King Cole produced at that time wasn't dark enough. I badgered the salesman and eventually they added Irish Navy to the range and I'm proud to say that 30 years later it is still being produced!

As well as travelling to agricultural and craft shows across the country, I sold to some high-class shops in London. It was very exciting to wheel my suitcase of samples into a shop and come out with an order. Then I would put the suitcase in a left luggage locker at Euston and spend some time looking around the shops before catching the first off peak train home. Another way of selling was to hold open days at home. I had a friend in the village who made traditional dresses in Viyella and Liberty lawn, our products complimented each

other so we took it in turn to host these events. We sent out invitations to our customers and they enjoyed coming to our homes to drink cups of tea and chose things to order or buy off the rails. Trying to sell warm woolly jumpers in the middle of a heatwave was not easy so I added good quality sweatshirts and tee shirts with commission embroidered designs on the front. These were very popular.

By the mid-1990s times were changing, my customers were suggesting I should get into marketing on-line, but this was a new-fangled thing that I would have to learn. So, after 12 years of travelling around and selling over ten thousand garments I decided to have a sale and close the business. I still had quite a lot of yarn left so I've been able to clothe my family ever since!

And Jacqui has embraced the internet to further her hobby

Jacqui Bates - repairing and selling machines



I started collecting sewing machines about 15 years ago. I got an old treadle sewing machine from Freecycle to turn into a spinning machine (I was spinning a lot at that time). I fell in love with it, decided to strip it down and restore it (my father was an engineer and an accomplished carpenter, my mother was a seamstress, knitted and crocheted, I guess it's in the blood). From then, it was downhill. I have about 60 sewing machines now.

After that, I bought a knitting machine. I sold mine when I worked full time after having my children and decided to start again when I retired. It came from a charity shop, a brother KH881, with a ribber and a lot of accessories. I took out all the needles, cleaned them, cleaned the machine, replaced the sponge bar and got knitting.



Since then, I acquired about 6 knitting machines, cleaned them all and got them working. During this time, I knitted a lot and joined 2 knitting clubs. We had a local auction house which was very cheap, I was able to buy sewing machines, knitting machines and the odd spinning wheel and Hague linker, until people realised they could make money on them.

I thoroughly enjoyed restoring them all to working order, but I was running out of room. I decided to start selling them on eBay and I've been doing it ever since. It fulfilled my passion for restoring machinery, kept the house marginally tidier and bought in a little extra cash.

It would never be a full time business, in fact, I only do it in autumn and winter when I can't get out in the garden, and sewing machines tend not to sell in the summer. Knitting machines sell all year.

Now I service the machines for Long Buckby knitters when needed, service a few machines when people ask me, buy the odd knitting machine on Facebook marketplace, and sell when I can. Unfortunately, COVID 19 stopped both my supplies of additional machines, and most servicing. It's started to pick up a little recently, in fact I bought 2 Passap duomatics and a Knitmaster in January and have just finished cleaning them up.

And Mary took it one step further:

Mary

[who has an Etsy shop <https://www.etsy.com/shop/woolandwellies/>

HOW MUCH??!!!!

A quick search on the web would lead you to believe that it's easy to set up a small business and sell your crafting items online. Platforms, such as Etsy and Folksy, have capitalised on this growing trend and there are thousands of people trying to sell their hand-made items using the convenience of these sites as their shop front.



But there is a big difference between making items as a side-line hobby whilst earning elsewhere and making in order to grow a sustainable business.

Pricing hand-made items is a difficult part of running a business and there are few people actually making a full-time living from doing so. Often pricing is simply calculated by adding the cost of the materials used and a labour cost for the time taken to make the item, but this doesn't give the true cost of making an item.

Let's assume you've knitted a hat that you'd like to sell. You've used 1 ball of yarn purchased at a retail price of £5.00 and it took you two hours to knit it. Your hourly rate is £9.50, the minimum UK wage.

$$2 \times £9.50 + £5.00 = £24.00$$

But this isn't really the true commercial cost of making the hat. If you are producing these items as part of your business then you must also factor in those "hidden" business running costs that are often overlooked:

Studio Costs - Heating, lighting, rent, telephone/internet charges, insurance etc. Even if you are starting out by working at your kitchen table these costs will have to be paid when you are so successful that you need specific premises for your production and so should form part of your pricing policy right from the start.

Marketing - Time taken photographing your items, editing images, posting online, social media, advertising. These are all essential aspects of attracting customers and are both time consuming and can be costly, particularly if you need to source outside help.

Postage & Packaging - The "hand-made" industry is all about providing that special shopping experience, as well as a unique item. Packaging is an important part of the visual appeal of your item; sending your hand-crafted hat in a standard plastic postal bag might not give the image you really want! Many providers on Etsy give little extras with their items, such as yarn samples or little motifs attached to the parcels, while these are lovely little surprises they have a cost.

Postal charges are an inevitable part of running a business. If you don't send your items to customers but prefer to sell face-to-face then there are the costs of stands at craft fairs. Usually both are applicable to a craft business.

So, let's recalculate the cost of making the hat by including some (guessed at) costs:

Yarn	£ 5.00
Labour (knitting only)	£19.00
Studio Contribution	£ 2.00 (A minimal contribution)
Marketing	£ 2.00 (Listing fees, advert costs etc)
P+P	£ 4.50 (Packaging. Cost of postage)
Total	£32.50

These figures haven't accounted for the additional labour costs associated with actually photographing the item, packing it and taking it to the post box.

So, a more realistic cost to make the hat is £32.50

Now we come to profit. Every item has to make a profit, this is what enables the business to grow and develop and for the business owner to be able to actually earn a living from crafting.

If you decide to sell your hat to wholesalers then the recommended profit margin is about 50%. This means for a wholesaler to purchase your hat you would be charging $£32.50 + £16.25 = £48.75$ per hat.

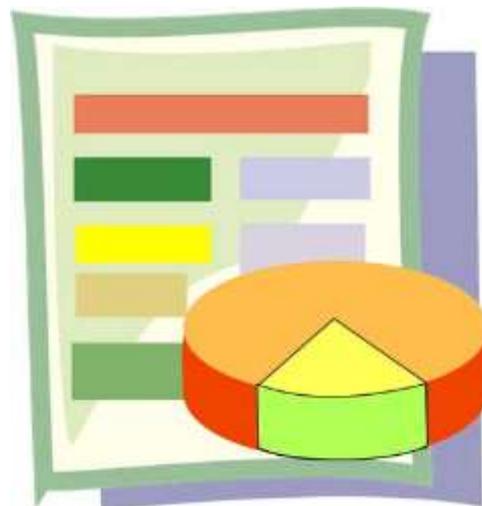
A retailer usually adds between 75-100% on top of the wholesale value. This would give your hat a retail value of $£ 48.75 + 36.56 (75\%) = £85.31$. Getting expensive isn't it?

Attracting sales is paramount so your pricing structure can be as flexible as you want it to be in order to encourage customers. For example if you are selling directly to customers you could ignore the wholesale element and simply increase your hat by 75% or 100%. This would ensure that the retail price covers the essential production costs of making the hat and makes some profit. So, at the very least, a customer should be paying the same as the wholesale figure of £48.75 in order for your hat to be a commercially viable item.

Making profit from your craft may not be important to you, it may be that you simply like to make things as a hobby and spend a day at a craft fair because it is fun. Yet, as soon as you enter the commercial market place the price charged for an item impacts on every other seller.

If your hat is priced to cover only the cost of the yarn it not only devalues your time and expertise but also compromises other crafters trying to build a business and make a sustainable living from their creations. In addition, it gives consumers a false expectation about the true cost of an item hand-made in the UK.

Ultimately pricing hand-made items is up to the individual crafter but I hope this gives you a rough idea of how to approach pricing in order for a sustainable business to be developed. 😊



Business traders



The pandemic has made a bad situation with yarn shops and general suppliers much worse, and online is now the only option for some supplies.

The following link describes the problems, and financial implications of running a bricks and mortar business generally, and, sadly, the shop is no longer in business. The owner found it hard to make even a pittance from her business, despite it having glowing references on TripAdvisor.

The article and others on this site are interesting, though.

<https://sheepshopcambridge.wordpress.com/2017/01/14/how-much-does-a-shopkeeper-earn/>

Lessons to be learned from this story might be:

- If we want to be able to visit yarn shops, we need to buy yarn from them
- We may need to be aware of the overheads that owners must fund, including premises, service charges and rates
- We might need to think twice before buying cheap yarns from supermarkets and pound shops [although I have done this, I am very wary of doing so, partly because of the nature of the yarn - on a visit to Hobbycraft recently, I looked at the yarn on display: almost all was acrylic, with a very small amount being a mixture of cotton and acrylic. If you wanted wool or other natural fibres, you would have to go elsewhere]
- And linking this to the 'value' of home knitted items, perhaps we need to realise that if we spend hours of unpaid labour knitting, then we should compensate by using more expensive/better quality yarns
- If, like me, you have a huge pile of unknitted yarn at home, and therefore feel you cannot justify a visit to a yarn store, think about where that yarn store might be in a few years' time. I remember the sudden demise at the end of the 80s of yarn and fabric shops - I didn't see it coming and was suddenly unable to buy supplies - which also meant I started stockpiling whenever I saw them. It is not a great solution!

If all this fails to put you off - good for you!

There is help out there: and these make an interesting read, if you wish to understand why we have a shortage of small independent traders!

<https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/articles/2022/02/how-to-start-a-crafting-business/> This one is good for general business requirements, legal and otherwise

<https://www.createandthrive.com/10-things-you-must-do-to-have-a-successful-online-craft-business> This gives good advice on setting up online selling

<https://www.oliveknits.com/yarn-shop-survival-guide/> And this one is another reminder that yarn shops take a lot of upkeep to be competitive and manageable [I think an underlying message is that customers are unrealistic in their expectations....]

<https://www.startupdonut.co.uk/start-up-business-ideas/types-of-business/how-to-start-up-a-needlecrafts-shop> and this one is particularly comprehensive

Marketing patterns or finished articles



Whether you want to sell or give away: the key to success is to present your wares well. The patterns on our website are not always easy to portray, and I have had many issues with photography [not my favourite pastime]. However, in true hypocritical fashion, I would recommend:

Use attractive photos - make sure the work is presented in a good light [literally and figuratively] and it is possible to see the best bits.

There are many helpful pages on this, including these:

<https://hearthookhome.com/photography-tips-for-selling-handmade-crafts-online/>

<https://craftyscrappyhappy.net/how-to-take-high-quality-photos-that-will-sell-your-crafts/>

<https://www.creativelive.com/blog/product-photography-tips-for-crafters/>

Local Yarn Stores

As my theme [above] is supporting craft traders, I felt I should include a basic list of local yarn stores - this is harder than might at first be thought, as these places come and go.

Bricks and Mortar



<https://www.yarnshopnorthampton.co.uk/> NN2 7HH

as the website says, a yarn shop in Northampton.

I have visited this one [only about a mile from me]. Lovely shop, not always open, probably needs checking before visiting!



<http://www.janknits.co.uk/janknits.html> NN8 4PG Wellingborough



<https://millersyarnsandcrafts.co.uk/> NN10 8BL Rushden

<https://www.wools.co.uk/> Uppingham Yarns - excellent for machine knitters LE15 9QL Uppingham, Rutland



I could not find a website for this one in Corby, but they are on Facebook and seem to be thriving.

Most of the other places I found were really online traders [partially because of Covid] and, of course, there are various branches of Hobbycraft e.g Rugby, Northampton, Rushden Lakes and Milton Keynes. The last time I ventured in to Hobbycraft [in Rushden Lakes] their yarn was almost exclusively acrylic [with a little cotton thrown into one blend].

Buying cones for machine knitting is almost exclusively online [see below], except for Uppingham Yarns ☺

Suppliers

These are still operating an online supply

www.wools.co.uk - Uppingham Yarns

<https://yeoman-yarns.co.uk/> Yeoman Yarns

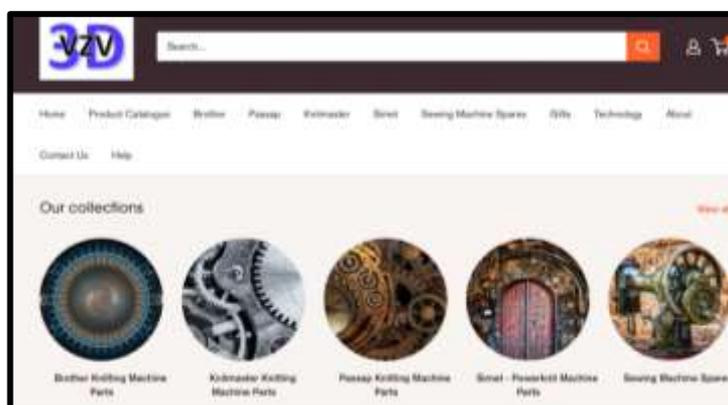
<https://www.yarnoncone.co.uk> Yarn on Cone

<https://woolyknit.com> Woolyknit

and this one deals in recycled fibres <https://www.iinouiiio.com/>

For 3d printed parts try

<https://vzv3d.com/>



Other information

Sally Butcher has a [Kalamunda Crafts](#) page on Facebook. Sally is an inspiring machine knitter, with lots of ideas and videos to keep you busy! And now she has her own YouTube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSDxy6pQHAs4gd5XBztYWmw>

which is well worth a visit. Well done, Sally, a marvellous resource.

<http://handymachineknitting.libsyn.com> is a regular podcast

<http://knitwords.blogspot.com/> is a blog

And Finally

I would like to involve others in this newsletter, so please let me know of anything I can include

Administrator@longbuckbymk.com is my club email address.