

Talking Quilts: Saving Quilters' Stories



Update on the ongoing project to record quiltmakers' stories

Talking Quilts is an oral history project of The Quilters' Guild of the British Isles, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is recording, preserving and sharing the stories of today's UK quiltmakers. The project is led by volunteers, both Quilters' Guild members and non-members, who are trained and supported to conduct and transcribe interviews. Over a three-year period, Talking Quilts will visit eight Regions, following the regional structure of The Quilters' Guild.

TALKING QUILTS REALLY has travelled the length and breadth of the country in the last twelve months, capturing the stories of quilters from Scotland (Region 16), the South East (Kent, Surrey and Sussex, Region 2) and the South West (Cornwall, Devon and Dorset, Region 4). In 2016, the Project will visit the counties of the West Midlands that form Region 11, as well as Region 9 (Cambridgeshire and Norfolk).

So far 120 quilters have been interviewed by a dedicated team of over 40 volunteers. Each interview is recorded and transcribed, as well as documentary photographs taken of the quilter with their quilt. It is an amazing achievement and, ultimately, the Collection will provide us with a fascinating snapshot of quilting in the UK today.

Recording an interview is only the beginning. Volunteers transcribe verbatim each interview; these are then checked by Project Manager, Vicky Martin. The transcription and photographs are then added to the Talking Quilts website; some of the interviews are also accompanied by a sound clip. Vicky explains, 'I listen to every interview – sometimes quite a few times, particularly if it is one that I'm editing a sound clip from'.

Each Talking Quilts interview

starts off by focusing on one 'touchstone' quilt, made by the interviewee. After hearing the story behind it the interview then broadens out to explore the quilter's relationship with quilting and the role quilting plays in their life.

Vicky says, 'One of my favourite things to listen out for is why the interviewee chose that particular quilt to talk about. For some of our interviewees it's an easy decision to make as they may only have made one quilt. But for some, especially those who have been quilting for a long time, it can be really difficult.'

Vicky continues, 'Some interviewees have chosen their first quilt and the interview becomes a lookback at quilting in the 40s, 50s or later. Others have selected a quilt that has a personal resonance as it highlights a special person or achievement, or their response to an international event. There have also been quilts which I call "milestone quilts", where the quilt represents a sort-of quilting light-bulb moment. Usually these are when an experienced quilter tries something new and it sets them off on a different route to what they'd expected, and the pleasure they've had from that unplanned journey since.'

Vicky Martin, Project Manager



Above:
Region 4 volunteers Celia Jones, Angela Richardson, Barbara Janssen (standing, left to right), Liz Cowley, Vicky Martin (Project Manager) and Amanda Davidge (seated, left to right) at the training day in October 2015

Below:
Interviewee and Talking Quilts volunteer Avril Clark with her quilt Laravera, for which she chose to share the story when she was interviewed in Region 16



Talking Quilts – get involved

If you would like to get involved as an interviewer in the final Region (Cambridgeshire and Norfolk) that Talking Quilts will visit, please get in touch with Vicky. She's also keen to hear from people who would be interested in transcribing for the Project. You can contact Vicky at: info@talkingquilts.org.uk

Fiona Callander told the story of her quilt Delectable Mountains made for a Quilters' Guild 'Best of Scotland' exhibition

Delectable Mountains by Fiona Callander (FC), Region 16: interview by Barbara Gregor (BG), transcription by Connie Wheeler

BG: Can you tell me a little bit about your quilt?

FC: ... I made this quilt for The Quilters' Guild of the British Isles 'Best of Scotland' exhibition. It was to be entirely whatever we thought was the best of Scotland. I immediately had a flash that the mountains were the thing that made me admire Scotland most and luckily there is the traditional block called Delectable Mountains ... I then [had to] decide, what am I going to make it in? No contest, second best thing in Scotland is paisley pattern fabric. So off I went to my stash of paisley to find what I had that would do for this project. I managed to find the main fabric and then the right shade of royal blue, also with the paisley on in gold. And then I did need to buy the background and I chose turquoise as the colour that best created sky or water so that is how I came about with this pattern and those colours.



BG: How do you feel about your quilt? Why did you make it?

FC: I like to take part in challenges because it makes me think, and it makes me perfect things, because I know other people will see it and I like to support The Guild when they are having exhibitions. I like to take part, because if nobody takes part they don't have any exhibition ... I decided when I first

started quilting that I was going to take part in things, because what you need to see at an exhibition is not only the best people's work, it's everybody's work. So that somebody who is new would come along and say I could do that and that is why I have been entering Guild Challenges since I have been quilting, less than two years [from first quilting].

These are just a few extracts from the interview.



Left: Region 2 volunteers Pam Harrison (left) and Carolyn Clark practise using the audio recording equipment at the training day in June 2015

Learn more about Talking Quilts

If you'd like to discover more about the Project, see some of the quilts that form part of the Collection, and listen to extracts from a selection of interviews, you can do this at The Quilters' Guild Conference & AGM at Llandudno in April. Talking Quilts has a stand throughout the event and Vicky will deliver a presentation about the Project on Friday 15 April at 11.30-12.30.

Talking Quilts will also have a gallery at The Festival of Quilts 11-14 August 2016 alongside The Quilters' Guild Collection exhibition. This will feature quilts and stories from the Collection with the theme 'Family Connections'.

The Talking Quilts website is coming soon! There you will be able to read and hear some of the stories, as well as find out more about the Project. Visit www.talkingquilts.org.uk