



Duration

01:03:42

Reference

OH3

Subjects

Woven textiles / Craft Revival / Technology

Recording date

20 May 2015

Recording location

Interviewee's home, Arundel, West Sussex

Interviewee

Sutton, Ann (AS – speaker, female)

Interviewer

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

Synopsis

In this 2015 First Decade interview, the weaver Ann Sutton (b. 1935) recounts some of her accomplishments and most interesting experiences. The interview begins with Sutton describing her first workshop on a small housing estate in Mollington, Banbury, in 1975–76. She describes how eight housewives, her £5 start-up budget and her own techniques resulted in a fine mohair bedspread commissioned by Harrods and an interview with Kim Evans, then a BBC presenter. Sutton speaks about her early involvement with the Crafts Council, her 1980s P&O 'craft cruises' on the *SS Uganda*, her love affair with Japan and establishing the Arundel Gallery Trail. Always forward-thinking and passionate about technology, she talks about the maker search software Sight Specific, which she developed for the Crafts Council *Index of Selected Makers* in the late 1960s – way ahead of its time – and the eagerness with which she sees how quickly technologies develop today.

Recording

00:15 AS begins by talking about a 'one man' exhibition commissioned by Ralph Turner.

01:00 AS briefly refers to the Crafts Council (CC) buying pieces she is embarrassed of.

01:35 AS describes a workshop she ran on a small housing estate with a 'good primary school'. She set up the workshop for eight housewives, whom she calls 'willing [...] intelligent people'.



02:45 AS had £5 to start the workshop, so she invented her own techniques. In the first morning, they made a bedspread and sent it to Harrods.

03:00 AS talks about materials and describes the process of making knitted-together padded squares for bedcovers and wall hangings.

03:55 GL asks about her link to Harrods. AS talks again about the workshop.

05:25 AS discusses her position within the CC, which she says was conceived in her house: **'Some people say it wasn't, but I was there!'**

07:41 AS tells an anecdote about how the CAC was formed.

11:00 In relation to the history of the CC, AS refers to Cyril Wood in the Cotswolds and his gallery in Waterloo Place (which was later turned into the CC Gallery). She recounts how he staged an exhibition throughout his house: **'And so, this beautiful polished Rolls Royce engine, all by itself on a plinth in one room. And, then, in other rooms he had very fine, the best of the crafts that were happening. And he also had a conference there, they all turned up, and he was saying, 'Something has to happen.' No more living in damp houses and, you know.**

14:20 AS explains the origin of the name Crafts Council: **'The Crafts Advisory Committee then had the best premises, which was already a crafts gallery, you know, so people were able to, just move in. They hardly realised that it had changed over. And Cyril Wood called it, he called the whole thing, the Crafts Council of Great Britain. And we said, 'You can't do that. It's like the Arts Council.' And he said, 'You've got to aim high.' And so, the Crafts Advisory Committee turned later on into the Crafts Council. But it could never be the Crafts Council of Great Britain, because he had already registered that name. Interesting isn't it?'**

15:20 AS remembers a limerick about Wood that Peter Collingwood sent her: **'There once was a Wood OBE of Swyre / Whose aims could not have been higher. / 'Gainst those who had laughed / At the dirty word "craft", / He set his evangelical fire.'**

16:50 AS talks fondly about Victor Margrie [director of the CC, 1977–84] and discusses the vision for the CC as part of the Arts Council.

19:40 AS laments the closing of the [V&A] textiles study room [at South Kensington], which was so important to textiles students ('should've had a preservation order on it'). She refers to it as a 'learning thing'.

28:45 GL asks how AS's involvement with the CC affected her as an artist. AS discusses the support that she got from the CC and the British Crafts Centre.



22:20 AS talks about craftsmen working it out for themselves. **'We were the first craftsmen to ever employ an office manager.'**

23:40 GL refers to the ethos of the CC as a centre for learning and asks whether AS has any thoughts about that. AS refers to the Index as a very important tool for the CC and setting up her own craft search software, 'Sight Specific'.

26:00 AS talks about her knowledge of technology: she joined the Computer Arts Society and borrowed a terminal at the weekend.

29:00 AS: **'I've done lots of things that are too early for their time.'**

30:00 GL asks how AS came up with the idea for searching for makers on a computer. AS replies: **'I just thought, "what is ideal?"'**

31:18 AS refers to her multitasking talents: **'I've always got around six balls in the air hoping one will make my fortune.'**

31:28 GL prompts AS to discuss her time on a P&O 'crafts cruise' in the Mediterranean by showing her an advert from a magazine. AS talks about a hugely popular BBC television series on weaving.

33:46 AS tells an anecdote about a 'crafts cruise' on the SS *Uganda* that was cancelled when the ship was sent to the Falklands by Thatcher.

37:00 AS talks about a subsequent compensatory cruise around the Mediterranean with 12 makers, including Michael Casson, Peter Collingwood, Wendy Ramshaw and David Watkins.

41:56 AS talks about the art trail she set up in Arundel.

46:00 AS recalls when she started weaving with a digital loom in 1982; before that she had used a dobbie loom.

48:00 AS describes her love of Japan, where she has travelled on business between six to eight times. She partnered with Junichi Arai (who made things for Issey Miyake). Miyake was fond of Lucie Rie, but not just for her buttons. AS says that he told her, 'I like going to see her [Lucie Rie] because she makes the best chocolate cake.'

50:20 AS discusses an annual general meeting that ended with makers on the Arundel Gallery Trail carrying her out on their shoulders.

53:05 GL asks what AS's idea of success would be and AS is stumped. She denies being a craftsman because she doesn't make 'scarves and things'.

56:00 AS remarks that she got a bursary for £2,000 from the CC.





58:00 AS refers to her passion for technology: 'Everything has changed so wonderfully now [...] I am very, very, very cross that I won't see future technology [...] you come to the end of your life and there's still so much happening out there [...] things have quickened up so much.'

01:03:15 AS refers to the CC Index re-launch: 'I wonder if you can yet type in "who makes aluminium chairs [or] stools with three legs?" That was our [...] little "aim" for doing it [laughs].'

