

Modernity, crafts and guilded practices: locating the historical geographies of 20th century craft organisations

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The historical geographies of craft organisations reveal much about the spatial and social formation of the creative economy. This chapter explores the historical geographies of craft societies that grew through the 20th century in the UK, forming to serve the collective needs of craft practitioners and the burgeoning craft movement. By 1970 the spread of craft organisations and societies was such that a Federation of British Craft Societies was formed to enable the craft profession to be represented by a single body. The 1976 members list of the Federation shows that membership organisations were providing support for individuals who were making a living from their craft, either through single-craft specialist organisations (such as The Society of Scribes and Illuminators) or 'mixed discipline' organisations where potters, basket makers, ironmongers, and jewellers might sit alongside makers such as hand weavers, printmakers, book binders, and shoemakers (for example the Society of Designer-Craftsmen). Many organisations that joined the British Federation of Craft Societies also had a geographical similarity: they were regional organisations, with the names that followed defined 'county' administrative geographical boundaries: The Guild of Yorkshire Craftsmen; the Worcestershire Guild of Artist-Craftsmen, Norfolk Contemporary Crafts Committee, and the Cornwall Crafts Association. By 1976 the Federation was supporting forty-three associate and full member organisations, representing over 10,000 craft practitioners (Federation of British Craft Societies, 1976). A common bond between the diverse societies was the value placed on the hand work of craft practitioners who produced original work to their own designs, distinctive from those who were not admitted to these organisations: visual artists and those that involved larger scale manufacturing. The Federation aimed to work as an overarching crafts development organisation to: improve information flows across the sector; enhance retail and selling opportunities; address training needs; support

recreational craft pursuits; and to enhance the status of craft. This chapter explores one of the organisations that joined this Federation, the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, to locate the context through which such organisations developed, the way in which they came into being, and to understand the purpose they hoped to serve in supporting craft practitioners.

This chapter offers an analysis of the creative economy that is sensitive to both its histories and its geographies. While much contemporary research around making cultures explores the current practices, there remains a critical need to understand past expressions of creative industries. As Knell and Oakley (2007:p.5) reminds us: “ ‘one of the besetting sins of creative industries policy-making is its obsession with the new, its insistence that everything is ‘changed utterly,’ and its seeming ignorance, of its own history’ . Exploring the founding stories of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen is a trenchant reminder that making and craft practice has a long association with government policy. We learn that while makers working in their studios might feel that they are disconnected from central government policy, they are in fact caught in a nexus where creativity and policy are bound through the support mechanisms that aim to enable thriving creative or economic activities. Indeed, when we look into the development of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen we find the messy entanglements of this nexus: the energies of crafts practitioners, the spirit of the international artistic movement of modernism, the efforts of a government department, and a rural development experiment. The combined efforts resulted in the formation of an organisation that continues to support contemporary crafts practitioners in much the same spirit as the founding members hoped for.

Locating the historical geographies of craft and the creative economy.

This chapter stems from observations within a research project addressing the regional governance of the South West of England creative sector undertaken from 2007 - 2010 by myself, David C. Harvey and Harriet Hawkins. We were exploring how the flows of policy, investment and activities that had been released as a result of the UK governments adoption of creative industries economic development strategies were affecting lives of those living and working in the region (Harvey et al, 2011 and 2012). We heard much about the proliferation networks, of the ups and downs of

networking in rural areas, of networks that didn't result in the promised changes, and of the fatigue as policy led finance ran out and networks relied on voluntary labour (Thomas et al, 2013). Some of these conversations were with designer makers who were invested in a range of networks, including some of the very long-established craft guilds in the region. Their conversations interested me as they were using positive registers when they talked about the benefits that their guild membership brought, and the role that the guild played in their lives. They talked about the value of the social relationships that were forged through the guild, and the importance of accessing a high-quality retail market offered through the organisations. Although not everyone was positive about their guild membership it seemed that guilds stood apart from other networking organizations in the region, and they had distinctive qualities that pointed to the need for more engaged research to understand the dynamics that made them into resilient organisations.

Given that little attention has been paid to this group of craft organisations, it is timely to note that the activities that such organisations have traditionally organised are now being aspired to in support of the new broader creative industrial economy, particularly networking, professional development and accessing new markets. Recent sector research by the Crafts Council (2014) demonstrated that in 2012/13 the UK craft sector generated nearly £3.4bn for the UK economy accounting for 0.3% of UK GVA (gross value added). The craft sector is a challenge to define, not least because of the historical legacies from the ways in which the sector has defined itself around distinctive disciplines and artistic traditions (see for example, Greenhalgh, 1997, Adamson, 2007). In recent years the UK Crafts Council has been keen to break open the traditional idea of craft, exploring the broader presence of skilled craft labour in fields from bio engineering to aeronautical sector, alongside their efforts to better capture the scale of craft micro-businesses to ensure the ongoing support of a small, but thriving economic sector (KPMG/Crafts Council, 2016). The dynamics of policy and practice within the craft sector reveals the synergies with other creative sector labour practices and also the specific challenges that are more unique to the craft sector, such as the challenges of apprenticeships, the extreme dispersed nature of practitioners, and the difficulties of sustaining an income where the value of hand-crafted labour is undercut by mass production (see Jakob and Thomas, 2015, Luckman, 2015 and Luckman and Thomas eds., forthcoming).

An interest in regional craft networks links to geographical writing that looks beyond the creative city and creative cluster literatures, to find the 'other geographies' that bind together the creative economy (see Gibson et al., 2010; Harvey et al., 2012; Bell and Jayne, 2010). This literature is often more nuanced around the importance of historical legacies in the contemporary sphere. For example, Warren and Gibson's (2014) work exploring the emergence and development of the surf board industry highlights the attentive connections between materials, hand skills, social and spatial contexts, and the importance of place and connections over time (Warren and Gibson, 2013; see also Carr and Gibson, 2017). This approach of addressing the cultural and historical geographies of the creative economy is highlighted within this chapter, recognising that while makers and markets continually change, the contexts are shaped by the reservoir of past practices, imaginaries and connections that continue to shape the contemporary creative economy.

When one becomes attentive to understanding past expressions of the creative economy, the antecedents of the contemporary creative economy are revealed. Of particular note in relation to the craft guilds are the organisational structures that have now come to more widely govern the sector. The creative field of craft as traditionally organised and curated by organisations like the guilds, had selection and election committees reviewing new applications for members, and the achievement of membership being a mark of quality for those who successfully gain entry. The field configuring events of exhibitions and shows has become a way in which the standards of craft, inspired by guild practices, are maintained, but also act as events that bring the communities of practice and their audiences together. Just as, for example, Power and Janson (2008) describe the form and function of trade shows as field configuring events, the smaller scale 20th century craft exhibitions and the spaces where makers would sell their work are part and parcel of the creative economy (see also Delacour, H & Leca, B. 2011 and Comunion, 2017).

Within craft, the dominant narratives that have 'sold' the romance of making have revolved around the studio and the 'hand' of the maker. Revealing the making practices and demonstrating how a lump of clay becomes a bowl has become a critical device through which a maker's work is marketed. Revealing the 'hand-made' nature

of the work is particularly important in communicating value, as the labourious of making by hand, demands a higher price than mass produced goods (Shayles, 2017). Curiosity and concern around how crafts skills are communicated, exchanged, and the meanings that become known through embodied practice has also led to a focus on the body in relation to craft practice. This sits alongside curiosity as to how embodied practice, not easily represented through text or media, can be conveyed to others (Marchand, 2010; Patchett, 2017; Ingold, 2013; Paton, 2013). For makers earning a living from their skilled embodied practice, how they sell their work, gain commissions, and continue to work within the current systems of economic exchange, is of fundamental importance. Considerations of the organisations and structures of education, mentoring, workspaces, networks, and display opportunities are equally important to understand as embodied practice, if we are to appreciate a rounded understanding of the geographies of making. Through the lens of the Devon Guild this chapter contributes to knowledge of organisations and interactions that have been developed to support makers to secure their livelihoods, and form a community of practice that promotes their work and provides structures of support.

Framing context: arts and crafts in early 20th century and the Rural Industries Bureau

Craft guilds certainly have an enduring presence in the UK context: they emerged as powerful trade institutions in the early modern period; experienced a revival in association with the Arts and Crafts movement in the late nineteenth century; and developed in a new form as practitioner-led networks during the twentieth century. One of the enduring features of the guild system is the necessary achievement of standard of skill in order to join, recognising that members are professional makers, using their craft skills to secure their livelihood. This requirement of 'standard' in order to join a guild was established within the medieval guild system. Medieval guilds had strict regulations of standards, offered a system for the division of labour in the market, offered a degree of care for the welfare of their members, and sought to enable the intergenerational passing on of skill and standard through the training of apprentices. Although there are debates amongst economic historians on whether these practices fostered innovation or stagnation (cf. Richardson, 2001, Richardson, 2004), the standard was seen as a mark of trust in the quality of a person's work, and this 'stamp' of approval continues to be a powerful signifier of the guild ideal. Although the guild

system was weakened by the time of the industrial revolution in the UK, the 19th century saw a revival of guild ideals through the anti-industrial critiques and the spirit of new-medievalism in the Victorian period. The 19th century socialist Arts and Crafts Movement railed against the demeaning impacts of mass production, and promoted the standards of medieval hand-skilled labour and collective workshop organisation. Such sentiments were found in the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris and through figures such as Charles R. Ashbee, a noted architect and designer of silver and jewellery. For Ashbee, 'The Arts and Crafts movement then, if it means anything, means Standard, whether of work or of life, the protection of Standard, whether in the product or in the producer, and it means that these two things must be taken together.' (Ashbee, 1908:p.10). His reflections on standards were written in 1908 shortly after he moved his workshops called the 'Guild of Handicrafts' from London to Chipping Camden in rural Gloucestershire. This enterprise was ultimately to fail, but Ashbee had attempted to run his workshop with a vision of a standard that brought together the value of craft and human labour.

The late 19th century arts and crafts movement saw the development of a series of arts and crafts organizations emerge, imbued with the ethos of collective solidarity and a vision of the importance of beauty, aesthetics, and the ethical treatment of the craftsman in society. Ashbee's Guild of Handicrafts was a workshop consisting of what he called 'a collective grouping' which saw 'a number of workman practicing different crafts, carrying out as far as possible their own designs, coming into direct contact with the material, and so organized as to make it possible for the workmen to be wherever necessary in touch with the consumer' (Ashbee, 1908:p.171). Other models were in the vein of a networked organisation, where individual makers would join as a mark of recognition through their membership. The Art Workers Guild in central London, formed in 1884, is an example of an organisation that enabled the gathering of likeminded and skilled practitioners in a city-wide context, to collectivise, to gain support, and inspiration through a programme of education, alongside access to exhibition and display opportunities. It is these models of organisation and the spirit of the aesthetic and socialist principles of the arts and crafts movement that infused the models of craft organisation that evolved in the 20th century. Ashbee reflected that there needed to be formalised governance if standards were to be maintained across the crafts sector. He suggested 'voluntary associations', the 'greater union and

organisation of Arts and craftsmen' and direct government legislation that would provide 'general regulation of Industry in the interest of the whole community' as potential routes to secure standards of living and securing the quality of outputs for the crafts sector (Ashbee, 1908:p.91).

These late 19th century organizations were the inspiration for many geographically-based guilds which established themselves from the 1930's onwards, under the guidance and encouragement of the Rural Industries Bureau. The Rural Industries Bureau (RIB) was established in 1921 by the Ministry of Agriculture and was routed through the Development Commission, which the Treasury funded (see Bayley, 1996). Its work was designed to address the challenges experienced by declining rural economies and communities in the post-1st World War period. Organised from central London offices, the RIB reached its audiences through printed publications and through a network of staff who were based in county administrative regions across the UK. Their remit was to develop rural industries in their host county by providing technical advice and assistance directly to local business and people looking to develop enterprises. The RIB also had to cope with the diversity of rural industrial activities including farming and agricultural craft trades, and the burgeoning presence of studio based crafts practitioners living in the countryside. The RIB published a quarterly magazine, *Rural Industries: the quarterly magazine for country trades and handicrafts*, written for their desired audience who made a living in the countryside. Within the first decade of this publication you can see the spread of their remit as they published articles to improve the business skills: *Book-keeping is so easy*, by J.A.B. Hamilton, Summer 1934; articles exploring new technologies within established trades: *Oxy-acetylene Welding III Precautions against expansion and contraction*, by S.L.P. Brewster, Winter 1934; articles encouraging women and the unemployed to become entrepreneurs and develop home industries based around their craft practice *Thrift Crafts for Women*' by Alice Armes, Spring 1933; *Woodwork for unemployed workers III: Cupboards, Sideboards etc.*, by A Romney Green, Winter 1933; and articles written by specialists to extend the aesthetics sensibilities of the readership: *Pottery, Decoration in Slip and Metallic Oxides* by R.W. Baker, Spring 1935 (Rural Industries Bureau, 1933-1935).

At a county based level, the RIB rural organisers provided practical support direct to their clients. For the craft sector this included business support and the encouragement of county based collective organisations. In counties such as Gloucestershire, the efforts of the RIB staff resulted in the development of the Guild of Gloucestershire Craftsmen in 1933, one of the earliest county based regional organisations, and also provided an outlet for selling makers work at the RIB offices in Gloucester (Robinson, 1983). The ongoing support of the RIB in Gloucestershire enabled the Guild to establish itself as a broader membership organisation, and establish a regular pattern of temporary exhibitions to enable members to sell directly to the public through a collective event that brought together the range of the members' work (Thomas et al., 2012). Such events can be seen as extensions of the weekly markets that dominated the rural exchange networks (for a review of debates around the historical and economic geographies of periodic markets in the context of the creative economy see Norcliffe and Rendace, 2003) and are the forerunners of the ubiquitous pop up fairs and festivals that now dominate the experience and event economy of the creative sector (Hracs et al, 2013, see also Harris, forthcoming). This periodic, and sustained mode of selling was critical to the success of regional craft guilds as they sought to secure new retail markets in the mid 20th century.

Founding stories: The Devon Guild of Craftsmen

Given that the RIB supported crafts people in nearby counties to established craft guilds in the 1930's, it is curious that the Devon Guild of Craftsmen did not emerge until 1955. The 'official' history of organisations often starts at the 'first' formal gathering or with the first committee minutes. However, for organisations like the Devon Guild of Craftsmen such 'firsts' are never clear-cut. Although the Devon Guild has a well-preserved set of records that details the activities of the Guild through its history, these archives are fairly silent on the earliest 'founding story' of the Guild. The first substantive record associated with the early years is the first exhibition catalogue of 1956 and this lists the patron, committee and members who displayed their work in the first exhibition. These names give us an entry point to start exploring the connections between people, and the places in which founding members were circulating. The first exhibition catalogue tells us that Leonard Elmhirst was Vice-President, and half the committee were based out of Dartington Hall, a large rural estate in Devon (The Devon Guild of Craftsmen, 1956). Indeed, many early members

of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen had workshop and studio addresses near Dartington Hall. In the absence of paper archives within the Devon Guild of Craftsmen's own records, this research turned to the Dartington Hall archives, now held at the Devon Heritage Centre. These records help us understand the way in which craft and support for rural makers was being addressed in the inter-war period in Devon; and reveals the role of Dartington Hall and the RIB in enabling a rural creative community to collectivise.

Dartington Hall advertised itself as 'an experiment in rural reconstruction' (Rural Industries Bureau, Summer 1935:p.22) through visionary approaches to modern estate management and the intersection of modernist ideas and creative practice. Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst bought the dilapidated Dartington Estate in the mid 1920's, bringing with them personal finance to invest, and an innovative vision of rural landownership. The letter paper heading of Dartington Hall Ltd. by the mid 1930's notes the business-like nature of the estate, stating its incorporation 'for the purpose of research and rural development' (see, for example a letter from the manager of the Dartington Sawmills to Rex Gardner, July 31st, 1935, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre). It was a place where two people's vision, and wealth, brought a specific sort of modernity to the British rural countryside: a modernity inspired by international currents of thinking around progressive education, social improvement and aesthetics. It expressed the place of creativity in society, and the connections between arts and economic regeneration. Dartington was seen as a living laboratory and within the first ten years the dilapidated estate had new model farms, architect designed housing estates for workers, signature modernist homes, crafts workshops, dance and theatre companies, a school, garden department, burgeoning art and craft collections, sawmill, textile mill, international conferences and summer schools attracting artists and leading thinkers from all over the world. It was an experiment that had a national and international profile and was linked to an idea of regenerating country house estates in an age of decline (for discussion of the history of Dartington Hall in relation to cultural policy see Upchurch, 2013). The agenda of rural reconstruction was key to the Dartington Hall project. It is therefore of no surprise that the Elmhirst's found a way to link to the national Government rural development agenda delivered through the Rural Industries Bureau.

Given Dartington's profile and its reach one might expect to find a connection between the RIB and Dartington, but the correspondence and records show that it was a complex and close relationship. Unlike other counties where the work of the RIB was organised through the county council committees, the work of the RIB in Devon in the inter-war period was tied into the work of Dartington Hall. In the mid 1930's, we see Rex Gardner, Dartington's Head of Building Works, an architect and wood turner, being employed as the RIB County organizer for Devon. Gardner wrote a letter to the eminent potter, Bernard Leach, on the 2nd February 1934 that details the training he was shortly to undertake as part of the Bureau work, and also points to the uncertainty of his economic position:

I am required to spend a few weeks with the Rural Industries Bureau touring the Eastern Counties and in their drawing office to learn the tricks of the trade...[RIB] has no money to spare at present for my salary and I understand that Dr Slater [Dartington Director] managed to persuade L.K.E [Leonard Elmhirst] to stand the strain for 6 months... I hope I shall not find myself without the R.I.B. job or the studio in six months time and be landed high and dry. (Gardener writing to Bernard Leach, 2/02/1934, Devon Heritage Centre C/RIB/1/C)

It is notable that the RIB were not paying his salary unlike other county coordinators, instead the Dartington Estate covered this. The arrangements about who would pay his salary, and the management of him as a worker continued to be very tortuous throughout the next four years (see Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre). Gardner was continually uncertain about his job security during this period, particularly as the Elmhirst's were having to retrench and reduce their subsidy to the estates loss-making activities. Within a few years of Gardner's work, the Managing Director of Dartington was negotiating directly with the RIB for a special dispensation to apply for grants to fund the Bureau's work in Devon. It was noted in Whitehall that it was highly unusual for a private company to be contracted to deliver work of this nature. For Dartington, it was a timely diversification of income, enabling Gardner to continue to work on the estate funded through his government work, whilst raising the profile of Dartington within central government.

Surveying the creative activities within Devon

Rex Gardner was employed to undertake a survey of rural industries in Devon. Although he was supposed to offer marketing and product development advice, much of his time was spent mapping the industries. This was an incredibly slow process and the letters exchanged show that the RIB was anxious for swift results. However Rex Gardner was faced with a large county with a highly dispersed set of makers. When he started his mapping survey he made a special request for a car, petrol budget and two OS maps: one for his wall to flag the places he had visited, and a second to guide him to Devon's many settlements (Gardener, 1934). Gardner's job was to talk to people and gather evidence. He witnessed the rivalries of workshops competing for the declining trade, the isolation felt by workers, he judged peoples work on aesthetic and practical grounds, and considered the needs of the industry. Within his regular reports he reflected on what he was finding and his own aesthetic judgments were clear. This is a taste of his experiences of the more commercial potteries he encountered in Devon:

I have visited several of the rural potteries, which are so distinctive of the county, but in no case have they shown any desire for help. Some are so large that they can hardly be included as rural industries, while all have their own sales organization and are perfectly satisfied with their technical efficiency. Much of their output is artistically bad, but so long as it sells readily it will be difficult to convince the firms concerned that good-class ware might sell even better. Should trade fall off they might be more amenable to suggestions, but meantime they are quite content. (Gardner, First Report to the RIB, 21/1/1936, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre).

We see here the tension between small batch production and artists led craft aesthetics compared to larger scale industrial manufacturing. We also see that at the time of Gardner's visit, such commercial potteries were still viable within the Devon countryside.

Rex Gardner's reports are revealing of the suggestions that were circulating at the time to develop rural industries. He noted the problems of attracting young people to stay in rural crafts such as blacksmithing, and the concern that the skills would be lost,

despite the fact that there was still sufficient demand for the work. To overcome this problem he suggested that such industries might cluster into village repair centres to serve a larger area. He was also thoughtful about the need to invest in the marketing work, both in terms of exposure at the large county based shows, but also in niche shops associated with the Dartington Estate (Gardner, First Report to the RIB, 21/1/1936, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre).

Gardner also raised issues of the need for cooperative action, supporting rural crafts practitioners at a collective level. Gardner had spent time listening to the issues of makers, and was particularly exercised about what he referred to as 'the evils of credit'. He wanted to encourage a trade association that would offer financial support to makers, and address issues of price-cutting amongst rivals that was undermining income. He saw this as a way of supporting their welfare and sustaining community life. For these issues to be addressed, Gardner turned to his socialist cooperative principles to achieve his aims, and in his report he advocated an approach that: '...entails organizing concerted action on a scale not hitherto attempted; it entails, in fact bringing all the active tradesmen into an organization or a Guild.' (Gardner, First Report to the RIB, 21/1/1936, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre).

It is in these threads of thought that we start to see the embryonic ideas of a regional craft guild forming. However, Gardner was not suggesting a 'fine craft guild' following the lines of the neighbouring Gloucestershire Guild of Craftsmen and Somerset Guild of Craftsmen (both founded in 1933). Although Rex Gardner was more personally invested in work that was made by who we now might refer to as 'designer-makers', he took his job to support agricultural trades very seriously. The work that Gardner did in Devon gathered momentum in the late 1930's and various one-day events were organised, supported by the Bureau, Dartington estate and Leonard Elmhirst. Gardner organised a Devon Rural Trades Conference, which included his survey results, and showcased the ways in which the RIB could give support to rural crafts traders. Alongside a film of logging and saw milling and a slide show of Devon trades, the idea of a cooperative organisation was discussed (reported in the Totnes Times, October 1st 1938, Devon Rural Industries, Conference at Dartington Estate, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre)

Dartington and International Creative Connections.

The onset of the Second World War focused Devon RIB activity on agricultural trades, at the expense of what were referred to as 'luxury products' of craft. Letters between Mr. Slater, Director of Dartington, and Mr. Marston, the Director of the RIB, demonstrates the wartime conversation around the future of the RIB work was facilitated by Gardner's research:

Agricultural plough up will suggest that e.g. smiths and wheel wrights will be needed more than ever...certain of the rural industries which deal largely with luxury products would, I think, have to be closed down... the change in case of war would be the intensification of that part of the work which deals with agricultural implements at the expense of the more artistic sections of your [RIB] work...

(Letter from Slater to Marston, 30/5/1939, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre)

During the war period Dartington Hall's own arts research department developed a series of reports and served on national committees that addressed the ways in which art, design and urban planning might be enrolled in the post war reconstruction period (see Upchurch, 2012). Such committees were part of the discussion from which the Arts Council and the Council for Industrial Design emerged. The Council for Industrial Design notably hosted the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition in 1946 which triumphantly showcased manufacturing within Britain, including both industrial and artist led craft. Dartington also had a very close relationship with the new-formed British Council, particularly working with the Crafts Director Muriel Rose, an esteemed crafts collector, curator and gallery owner.

Within Devon the post-war years leading up to the development of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen in 1955 were associated with a celebration of the work being produced by artist craftsmen in the county, and cementing the national and international connections that Dartington brought. There was a continuous shuttling between the inward-looking perspective on Devon, and outward look to its connections beyond the county boundaries. The Elmhirst's own international outlook and the creative space of

Dartington meant they could attract prestigious crafts makers such as Bernard Leach (an internationally renowned studio potter) to the estate and infuse the ethos of the organisation. The zeitgeist of the time certainly encouraged this celebration of the local, amidst the national reconstruction agenda. This was demonstrated by the 1950 'Made in Devon' (Figure 1) summer exhibition at Dartington, which celebrated 'beautiful objects' from the past and contemporary makers in Devon that were valued for rooting the crafts in a particular place (see T Arts Applied 2, B2 Exhibition from 1950, Dartington Hall Records, Devon Heritage Centre).

<Figure x.1 in here>

Figure x.1 'Made in Devon' exhibition invitation card, 1950 (Source: Devon Heritage Centre)

Many of the contemporary makers whose work was displayed went on to become founding members of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. This exhibition was a pilot for the regional celebrations planned for the Festival of Britain that would take place in 1951.

This was a burgeoning time within the Dartington Hall estate. The International Summer School had been established, and key figures within British studio craft were connected to the estate's creative vision. These included Devon Guild founding members including Marianne de Trey who had moved with her husband T.S. Sam Haile to establish a pottery at nearby Shinner's Bridge in 1946. Before his untimely death in a road traffic accident (1948), Haile was working for the RIB as a Pottery Advisor, which further bound Dartington's connection with the RIB (VADS, n.d.).

Alongside 'Made in Devon' we also have to see the 1952 'International Conference of Craftsmen' as a key context out of which the Devon Guild of Craftsmen emerges. The Conference was organised in cooperation with the British Council with Muriel Rose working closely to bring the international delegates to the conference (see D1 International Conference of Craftsmen 1952, Proposal, notes and minutes, Dartington Hall Archives, T Arts Applied 2, Devon Heritage Centre). Opened by Leonard Elmhirst, delegates heard talks from across a range of themes including: Bernard Leach, 'The Contemporary Potter'; Dr S Yanagi, 'The Japanese Approach to the Crafts'; Michael

Cardew, 'The Craftsman's Use of Scientific Development' and Alec Hunter, 'The Craftsman and the Textile Industry' (The Report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery & Textiles at Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon, July 17-27, 1952, copy held in uncatalogued papers, Devon Guild of Craftsmen).

The conference press coverage of the time recorded the delegates who had made their way to Britain, including the Catalan potter Josep Llorens Astigas (Dartington Hall Archives, T Arts Applied 2, Devon Heritage Centre). Associated with the conference was an exhibition of Pottery and Textiles made in Great Britain between 1920-1952 (ibid.). The Arts Council played an important role funding this exhibition, which went on to tour Edinburgh, London and Birmingham. Together these activities brought together an international community of crafts practitioners and gave a visible presence to the ongoing importance of Dartington Hall. Founding members of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen were present at this conference, took part in the exhibitions, and were part of the creative community around the Dartington experiment.

Early years of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen

Returning to the exhibition catalogue of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen in 1956 we are reminded that Leonard Elmhirst is named as the Vice-president, and Dartington Hall based makers including Bernard Forrester, potter, and Edward Baly, furniture maker, were founding members. The Devon Guild papers tell us that committee meetings were frequently held at Dartington Hall (and included Rex Gardner), and the Devon Guild regularly held weekend gatherings hosted at the Hall to bring the dispersed members together. The discussions around the role of cooperative working that Gardner raised in the late 1930's were brought into the ethos of the Devon Guild from the start. We can also see that the arts and crafts movement ethos is firmly present in the founding of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen: fine craft skills, with the maintenance of quality, standards and aesthetics regulated through strict membership criteria and a bringing together of like-minded crafts practitioners to sell their work through collective endeavors. The connections between the arts and craft movement were brought into the Guild through another founding member, Judith Hughes, furniture maker, whose mother trained under Charles Ashbee and George Hart in the Guild of Handicrafts in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire.

The Devon Guild of Craftsmen's founding principles as set out in the 1959 Summer exhibition catalogue point to the desire of the Guild for the membership to support makers' livelihoods by creating a retail opportunity, but also in pushing the boundaries of craft: 'At the time of founding the Guild, it was agreed that the best way of providing this encouragement [to crafts practitioners] was to create a market, by means of Exhibitions, for members' current work; and in particular for work of a more experimental kind not readily acceptable by the normal outlet open to craftsmen [sic.]'

<Figure x.2 in here>

Figure x.2 The Devon Guild of Craftsmen Summer Exhibition, 1958. Source: Devon Guild of Craftsmen

(The Devon Guild of Craftsmen, 1959). The 'Aims of the Guild' go on to state that 'Membership of the Guild is open to all practising craftsmen ... the applicant must satisfy the Council of the Guild as to their technical and creative ability' (*ibid.*). The concerns with quality craftsmanship and 'standard' defined the Guild in its founding decade continue to be a key element of the ethos of the organisation (with the outmoded gendered expression of the 'craftsman' [sic.] causing tensions for some contemporary members). The distinction round fine craft had always been a tension as Rex Gardner went around the rural crafts workshops. He wanted to raise the standards of craft production, as an artist's craftsman himself he had an affinity to those who were engaged with the development of the aesthetic sensibilities of their work. However, he understood the need to support the broader agricultural and rural crafts, with a more open, and cooperative approach. The emergence of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen returned to the ethos of an exclusive arts and crafts tradition that valued fine craft skills, with the maintenance of quality, standards and aesthetics, regulated through strict membership criteria.

The early activities of Devon Guild set a strong precedent. The annual Summer exhibitions were selling opportunities: there were craft demonstrations and curated exhibitions that customers could imagine in their own home, and then go on to purchase or commission items to take home. The minutes of the meetings record the labour that went into making these avenues to market: identifying exhibition spaces, organising access, insurance, marketing, designing the exhibition, organising delivery

of items to be displayed, ensuring the items were of the right quality for display, stewarding, and financial accounting of sales. It has to be remembered that in the context of the 1950 the avenues of selling direct to your local audience were limited. Guild exhibitions were part of the seasonal calendar and the periodic selling exhibitions continued until 1986, when members of the Devon Guild invested their own money to purchase the Riverside Mill in the village of Bovey Tracey and set up their permanent gallery. In one swift shift, the guild moved from being a practitioner-led organisation to one which required staff to manage the building and raise money to secure the building and the future of the guild.

Conclusions

The early context out of which the Devon Guild of Craftsmen emerged is important for the history of the Guild in its own right. However, this history also reminds us of the on-going intersection of economic policy and creative practice. The Devon Guild of Craftsmen emerged from the spirit of international modernism encouraged on the Dartington Hall estate, combined with the rural development policies of the Rural Industries Bureau. The entanglements of local and global currents of thinking around craft aesthetics and function show the complex place that regions like Devon have in the development of twentieth century craft and design. They also allow us to consider how a very specific vision of craft was enrolled, enabling highly skilled and dedicated makers to sell and exhibit their work, within a cooperative guild.

The Devon Guild of Craftsmen has now been established for over 60 years, but it is still tied to the ethos of the early years. It continues to define its membership through the quality of a person's skilled practice which fits within disciplines of craft. The boundaries of craft are stretched as craft practice changes, with digital tools and technical materials being adopted by makers, and the guild navigates these changes within the selection and election committee. It continues the opportunity to provide members with access to support for their business, particularly for emerging makers who are starting to make their living through their craft practice. The guild continues to exhibit contemporary craft in its gallery spaces, as well as providing sales opportunities within Riverside Mill as well as online. The guild has retained its international perspectives, with international exhibitors and exchanges happened within its

membership. In addition, the guild continues to be bound into a creative policy environment funded by the UK Government and independent trusts and foundations. Indeed, as an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation it receives regular income which places it very centrally as one of an elite set of cultural organisations in the UK that receives financial support underpinned by the UK government. The ties with Dartington Hall continue to be present with guild members teaching and working in studios on the estate.

The geographies of making that are entangled in this story are ones that reveal the webs of connections within a creative community of practice. Thinking about the quality of these connections reveals that it has been individuals working together that made the Devon Guild come into being. Although Dartington Hall and the Rural Industries Bureau were bound together, it was actually the strength and persistence of the personal relationships between individuals in the organisations that forged the relationship, and delivered the national policy trends at a regional level. The richness of the creative conversations and practice that emanated from Dartington Hall attracted the attention and enthusiasm of practitioners and funders who saw it as a place where something would happen. The vision of Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, and the people who were employed to bring this vision into reality created opportunities for the conversations to take place that resulted in a guild forming. As this chapter has indicated, these conversations didn't happen by accident, they evolved from over twenty years of activities that provided the foundations for the Guild to emerge and develop into a secure organisation that was very sure of its purpose, and with a membership that was committed to securing its future.

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