

These beautiful flowers are among the knitted items in the Montse Stanley knitting collection



A knitting legacy

Linda Newington opens up the doors to the University of Southampton's fascinating Knitting Collections



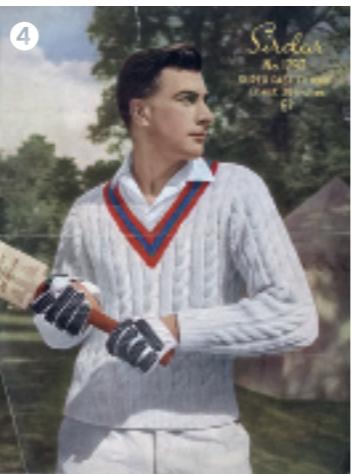
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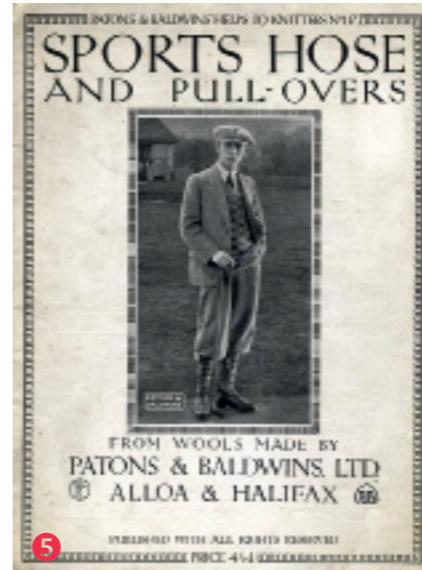
1 The Library has many Victorian patterns, such as this 'Receipts on Knitting, Netting and Crochet' by Miss Terry, 1847
2 + 3 Montse Stanley collected items from around the world, such as this pansy doily and South American knitted toys
4 Sirdar cricket jumper is one of many classic patterns in the Library



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6 + 8 With patterns from every decade of the 20th century, it's fascinating to see how menswear has changed; here, an early pattern from Patons & Baldwin, and a 1970s design from Sirdar 6 The Stocking Knitter's Manual by George Cupples is from 1870 7 Montse Stanley's collection of knitted objects and patterns provided the foundation for the Knitting Reference Library

VISIT THE LIBRARY

The Knitting Reference Library is on the Winchester Campus near the centre of Winchester, and visitors are welcome to come and make use of the variety of materials that are held here. The earliest works are the small Victorian knitting books, and the latest the knitting pattern books and exhibition catalogues of today.

Visits are by prior appointment only, and you can check the comprehensive catalogue of the books and journals held by the Library before you visit. The knitting patterns and pattern books have all been sorted firstly by the named collector and then by type of knitwear according to decades. The online catalogue is accessible on the internet at www.southampton.ac.uk/library.

To get in touch, you can call 023 8059 8531, send an email to wsaenqs@soton.ac.uk or take a look at the website at www.soton.ac.uk/intheloop.

Our fascination with the knitwear of the past seems to know no bounds – the classic, elegant knits of yesteryear continue to inspire and influence designers and knitters alike. Working to collect, preserve and share these patterns is the University of Southampton Library, whose Knitting Collections contain more than 12,000 patterns from the early 20th century to the present day.

The Library holds the resources of three renowned figures from the world of knitting: Montse Stanley, Richard Rutt and Jane Waller. Through their collections, they reflect their personalities and passion for the many different aspects of knitting, and provide a legacy for future generations of knitters.

The beautiful and everyday

Writer and designer Montse Stanley is known for her book *The Knitter's Handbook*, a comprehensive guide to the principles and techniques of handknitting that has guided many knitters (David & Charles, 1986). She also established a collection of patterns and knitted objects in her Cambridge home.

Her collecting started in rather an unexpected way, with historic postcards and photographs on the theme of knitting. She acquired these when attending postcard fairs with her husband, Thomas Stanley, who possessed one of the largest postcard businesses in the country. Over her lifetime, she amassed more than 800 knitted objects from the elegant, beautiful and technical to the everyday and kitsch. Born in

Barcelona, she was particularly influenced by her roots, and her collection includes Spanish and Hispanic items such as a pair of Balenciaga stockings, a fine black mantilla and South American hats, toys, slippers and flowers. She also gathered together photos and postcards representing many countries and themes, as well as books, journals, magazines and knitting patterns.

This collection has provided the foundation for the Knitting Reference Library, so named in Montse's honour and now located at the University's Winchester Campus. This library provides a wealth of material for researchers interested not only in the history of knitting, but in areas such as social history, gender studies and anthropology.

Victorian visions

Richard Rutt, familiar to many as the 'Knitting Bishop', generously donated his Library to the University in recognition of his long-standing knitting friendship with Montse Stanley.

A particular feature of his Library is the Victorian knitting books, first printed for wider distribution back in the 1830s. These ground-breaking books represent a translation of a handcraft practice into written and visual form, and may be seen as a precursor of the contemporary knitting patterns and pattern books familiar to us today. From these Victorian books patterns he knitted a group of fourpence jugs using the patterns which appear in his classic book *A History of Handknitting* (Batsford, 1987).

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON LIBRARY. ALL THE VICTORIAN KNITTING BOOKS ARE EX LIBRIS RICHARD RUTT, NOW PART OF THE KNITTING REFERENCE LIBRARY

His collection also includes several thousand knitting patterns with an emphasis on menswear. It is fascinating to look through the collection and spot the influence of popular culture over the decades – from the Liverpool Look of the Beatles to Starsky and Hutch – and even a few celebrity faces, such as a young Billy Connolly in a book entitled *Celebrity Knitting*. We have also found Joanna Lumley and Marie Helvin modelling knitwear for yarn companies Wendy and Lee Target.

A passion for fashion

The Library also holds the fascinating collection of Jane Waller, who is known for her pioneering work with vintage knitting patterns dating from the first part of the 20th century. She discovered the core of her original collection through a chance house clearance.

Her first book on knitwear, *A Stitch In Time* (Duckworth, 1972), was revised with Susan Crawford in 2008 and republished by Arbour House. Jane is the author of a number of other books which reinterpret these vintage patterns, including *The Man's Knitting Book: classic patterns from the '20s to the '50s* (Thames & Hudson, 1984).

Jane gathered together around 5000 patterns and pattern books, which were bought at auction by the University of Southampton Library. These have added a further dimension to the Knitting Collections, with their focus on fashionable knitwear for both men and women.

Building the collection

As well as these three well known collectors, the Knitting Reference Library has received many kind donations of knitting patterns and books from members of the public. These donations have been very gratefully received, and have helped to extend the range of the Knitting Pattern Collection into the 1970s and 1980s. We continue to accept donations and also buy new patterns each year, to ensure that the knitting of the 21st century is also represented in the collection.

The Collections have been the source for a range of activities intended to reach all who are interested in knitting, regardless of age, gender and ethnic background; from the amateur to the professional, from the domestic environment of home to the 'yarn-stormers' who work in the landscape and on the streets.

Among these activities are two successful conferences exploring knitting's past, present and future, called *In The Loop*. The first, held at Winchester School of Art in 2008, resulted in a fascinating book entitled *In The Loop: Knitting Now* edited by Jessica Hemmings (Black Dog, 2010). The second was a collaboration with the Shetland Museum and Archives and held at the Museum in 2010 [read *The Knitter's report on the event in Issue 24*]. A third is planned for 2012, to be held in Winchester, with a working title of *The Voices of Knitting*. ♦

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