

HISTORY OF THE TRADITIONAL BASKET PROJECT

In 2007 the need to preserve the information re British Traditional Basketry was discussed at the BA Committee Meeting. There was no detailed information or records of the large variety of national and regional styles of basket. It was decided to undertake a Survey. The first approach was to the Membership asking for information. Ireland was not included as Joe Hogan had researched his country for his book and Scotland was not included as they were producing the Woven Communities website. We requested information of any type of basket e.g. Industrial, Commercial, Agricultural, Horticultural, Fishing (Lobsterpots, Eel Traps, Crans, Swills etc) and Domestic including Basket chairs but not Cane seating. All materials were included, willow, rush, straw, hedgerow. Etc. Myfanwy Baldwin headed this Survey.

In 2006/7 Oxfordshire Basketmakers did a survey of their county's baskets. This was carried out by Joanna Gilmour, David Nutt and Felicity Wood and resulted in the excellent leaflet: *Oxfordshire basketry map*.

Hilary Burns and Geraldine Jones have also spent time researching the Baskets of the South West of England. There is much information on their website <https://www.basketryandbeyond.org.uk/resources/> They held Festivals at Porthleven in Cornwall 2007 and Dartington in 2013. All involved research and exhibitions including traditional baskets.

In June 2010 a BA Sub Committee was formed with the title of the Indigenous Basketry Project to collect and record information about our British Traditional Baskets. Members were Bunty Ball, Mary Butcher, Rae Gillott, Barbara Karlsson, and John Page. The Worshipful Company of Basketmakers donated £1,000 and another £1,000 was donated from BA funds. The name was changed to the Traditional Basket Project in August 2010 and the research for the time being was restricted to East Anglia to tie in with the large Basketry Exhibition to be held in Norwich in 2011. Mary Butcher's QEST award funded 6 weeks of research in 1995 on the information of baskets and basketmakers which were a basis for further work. She also produced a detailed paper on Eel Traps. Rae approached all the Accredited Museums for information re Baskets in their collections. Most were extremely helpful. Museum Conservator at the time, Sherry Doyal, helped us put together a sample Collection of Material information sheet and Guidance notes. It was agreed that we would pay up to £30 for travel expenses for those helping to collect information. This was later increased to £50 and it was agreed to seek the information from the rest of the country. Our aim was to collect the information and set up a database on either the BA website or a separate website. Sadly, this did not happen. One of our other proposals was to produce a basket map for each County like the Oxfordshire one. Further Meetings were held over the years. It was suggested we approach Local History Societies and the Arts Societies (NADFAS) for information and methods of recording.

Another idea put forward was to produce a Journal which could include some of the Special Studies on Traditional Baskets that are researched by some of the City Lit Students. Eventually the Journal idea was turned down.

Initially there was only one Traditional Basket Bursary but now there are three, two come from the BA funds and one comes from money donated by the Worshipful Company of Basketmakers. It is essential that Members who are awarded these Bursaries are given a timetable for the completion of their report which should be printed in the Journal and a copy sent to the BA Archive.

Mary Butcher has spent her life keeping traditional skills alive through teaching, talking, and writing. Her Willow Work book first published in 1986 is still a best seller. Sadly, many of the other tutors who

taught traditional skills are no longer alive. Olivia Elton Barratt, Joy Vial, D J Davies, Jack West, and Colin Manthorpe to mention just a few. Colin's collection of half size traditional baskets that was in Maurice Bichard's collection is now kept at the Food Museum (previously known as the Museum of East Anglian Life) at Stowmarket Suffolk. I have collected information and photographs of traditional baskets some of this has been donated to the project.

Over the years many of the Traditional Basket techniques have been recorded on film and some in books. Some have been recorded by the BA and others by the makers. E.g. DJ Davies the Cyntell and Terry Bensley the Herring swill.

Some Basketmaking DVDs are also for sale from BA Sales. Not sure who filmed all the following but some were filmed by Rae Gillott.

Fred Rogers (First Trade Advisor) Round basket with side handles, oval basket with crossover handle, English square work.

Norfolk Pea Gatherer by Colin Manthorpe filmed by Rae Gillott

Four bases & Partition by Colin Manthorpe filmed by Rae Gillott

Welsh Smallholder basket in hazel by Ruth Pybus

Oak Swill by Owen Jones filmed by Rae Gillott

Asparagus Basket by Colin Manthorpe

Yarmouth Herring Cran by Colin Manthorpe

Lowestoft Trawl by Colin Manthorpe

Oyster Tendle by Mike Frost. Filmed by David (Tech) Evans of the Worshipful Company.

Porthleven Lobster Pot by George Chambers

Devon Maund by Jack West.

Domed Lidded Hamper by Sally Goymer filmed by Rae Gillott

Fitched Shopper by Sally Goymer filmed by Rae Gillott

The Book Basketmaking in Bedfordshire 1981 published by Luton Museum and Art Gallery gives the history of basketmaking in that area and information of some of the baskets Held in the Museum.

The Catalogue for the Exhibition held in 2011 at the Gallery, Norwich University College of Arts curated by Mary Butcher and Victoria Mitchell, titled East Anglian Basketry contains photos of many of the East Anglian baskets.

The important books the BA have produced are the Book of Borders and the recent Rush Book. Buntly Ball.