

# Knitted together: a new pattern for the future

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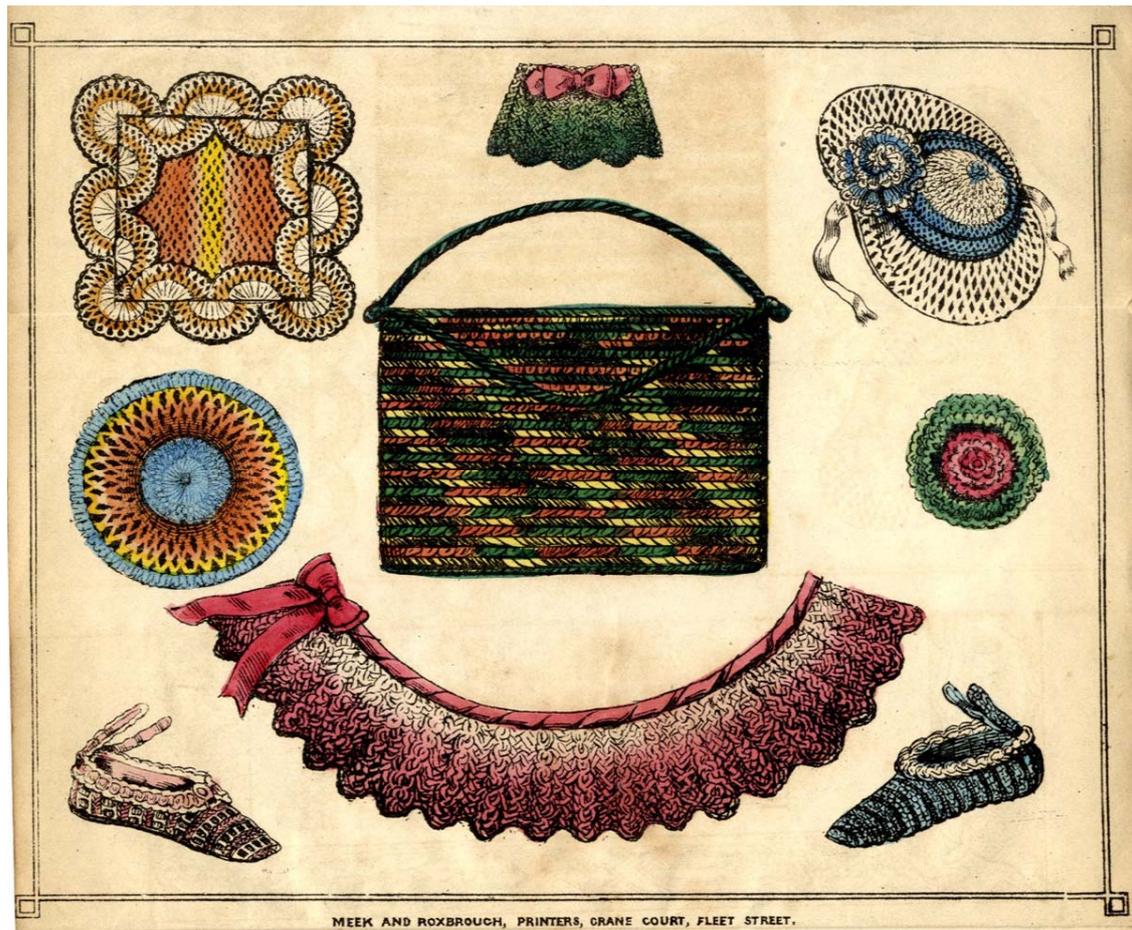


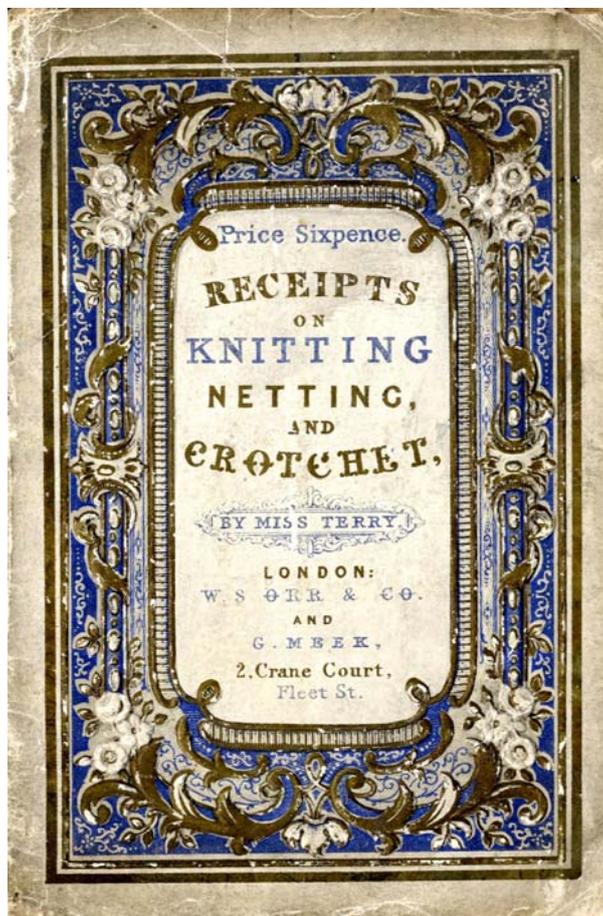
Image from 'Receipts on Knitting, Netting, and Crochet' by Miss Terry, 1847.  
Richard Rutt Collection of Victorian Knitting Books, Knitting Reference Library.  
Courtesy of the University of Southampton Library.

## Background

The Knitting Collections held by the University of Southampton Library together comprise knitted objects, tools, photographs and postcards, knitting patterns, books, journals and women's magazines.

The collections are located at two sites. The Knitting Reference Library is located at the Winchester Campus of the University and is part of Winchester School of Art Library. It includes the books, patterns, journals, magazines and a small handling collection. The knitted objects, tools, photographs and postcards are all located in Special Collections at the Hartley Library on the Highfield campus in Southampton.

This specialist resource has been established from the collections of three renowned figures in the field who are Montse Stanley, Richard Rutt and Jane Waller. In addition, new acquisitions are regularly added to the Knitting Reference Library including donations from members of the public.



Front cover from 'Receipts on Knitting, Netting, and Crochet' by Miss Terry, 1847.  
Richard Rutt Collection of Victorian Knitting Books, Knitting Reference Library.  
Courtesy of the University of Southampton Library.

The Knitting Collections have been the basis for a range of both academic and outreach activity, for example, two international interdisciplinary conferences, an exhibition, public talks and displays at knitting events, and a community focused

event, *The Knitting Room @ Cornershop* held in Winchester in 2009. The second conference *In the loop 2: knitting origins and evolution* held at the Shetland Museum & Archives in September 2010 was covered by Woman's Hour on Radio 4.

The contemporary interest in knitting and more broadly in all types of making has gained noticeable coverage in the media and has also been shaped by the Internet and social networking. Knitting as an activity has undergone a renewal that continues in a number of contexts. This renewal is found in the new knitting clubs located in public places such as libraries, in the work of contemporary artists who use craft as part of their practice, and in the numerous Internet based resources, one of the first being "Cast-off" which attracted media attention with live knitting on the Circle Line tube.



**THE KNITTING ROOM**   
**CORNERSHOP June 5 – 28th**  
Curated by Linda Newington

June 5	Open Knitting Evening 5 – 7pm
June 6/7	11- 1pm & 2 - 4pm
June 11	5 - 7pm
June 12/13/14	11 - 1pm & 2 - 4pm

Free events, all welcome. Cornershop will transform into a knitting room with a difference, so come and participate in our activities, bring your own knitting or use Cornershop's wool and needles. Find out about the Knitting Collections housed by the University of Southampton including the Knitting Reference Library based at Winchester School of Art.

Followed by a special commission for Cornershop  
**'YOU AND WHOSE ARMY?' June 15 – 28th**  
See the creatures escape from the museum into Cornershop.  
Textile artist Bethany Mitchell  
Drop in and meet the artist 11- 4pm. June 15- 19. Viewing only June 20- 28  
Supported by Creative Crafts

[www.cornershopwinchester.co.uk](http://www.cornershopwinchester.co.uk)  
27 St Thomas Street, Winchester, SO23 9HJ, 07979 341823

Event poster from the Knitting Room @ Cornershop, Winchester, 2009.



The Knitting Room @ Cornershop, Winchester, 2009.

Display includes books, knitting patterns, and knitted objects from the handling collection at the Knitting Reference Library.

## Expectations

The popular and extensive interest in knitting is the context for improving and extending access to the Knitting Collections through the Look-Here! project. The potential audience is physically scattered and is not located in any one institution or one part of the world. Both the Visual Arts Data Service (VADS) and the University of Southampton Library offer a framework for digitising and providing online access to parts of the Knitting Collections ultimately to this local, national,

and international audience. An expectation of the Look-Here! project has been that it would provide a framework for exploring that potential in more detail and greater depth with the support of the University Library and the project partners.

With a collection comprising a variety of resources such as books, objects, and ephemera, covering the period from the late eighteenth century to the present day and with a very diverse audience, a key challenge has been to consider and decide priorities for digitisation, as well as cataloguing approach and copyright procedures.

### Approach

The author's MA dissertation completed in 2006 explored the image and status of knitting: it provided a useful starting point for thinking about how best to approach working with the Knitting Collections in the context of an academic library. The background research for the dissertation included scoping the collections, a literature search and contact with knitters and related researchers through public events. This basic research proved relevant to deciding priorities and in developing an approach to selection.

The experience of community engagement, for example through one specific event *The Knitting Room @ Cornershop*, highlighted the public interest in the Knitting Collections. The contemporary "world of knitting" as scoped in the dissertation, and as evidenced on the Internet in the prevalent use of social networking, encompasses all age groups from across an international community. The many websites devoted to knitting reveal an interest in historical collections and their contemporary counterparts so digital resources will contribute to this picture. There is potentially further development broadly through community engagement although the HE context is a consideration as knitting has many facets from the academic to the popular, the aesthetic to the kitsch, and the technically expert to the subversive.

Academic interest has tended to focus on material culture, issues around gender and consumption covering the everyday to haute couture knitwear, and from the Victorian knitting manuals to contemporary cultural studies, specifically for academic outputs such as exhibitions and publications. Artists and designers may use the collection as a source of inspiration and ideas for practice based work that takes many forms from a collection of knit for interiors to a knitted installation. In contrast other users are interested in learning to knit, in finding inspiration and in researching their personal interests which may not have a specific output.

In considering the selection of resources for possible digitisation, a qualitative approach emerged focusing on selected themes in order to profile the collection. This approach was reached through knowledge of the collection, contact with the users and the profiles of the collectors. A contrasting approach would be to systematically digitise the total collection over a longer period, however it is important to acknowledge that potential users are interested in the many aspects profiled by knitting.

The final themes chosen included the following as each theme could comprise a range of resources for example knitted objects, knitting patterns and knitting books:

- The nineteenth century
- World War One, World War Two
- Domesticity
- Sport
- Vintage Fashion

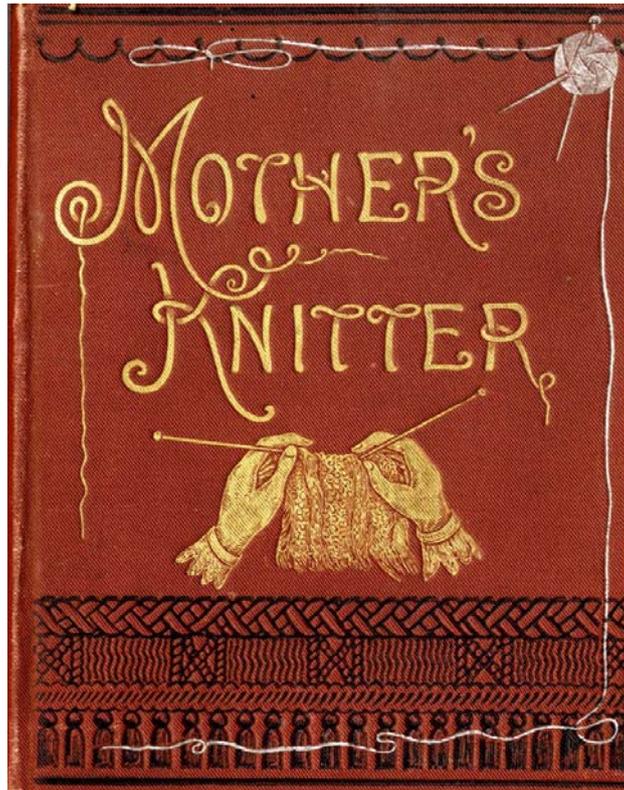
Copyright clearance has been a key issue regarding permission to digitise a variety of knitting patterns around the selected themes. Prior knowledge of the issues was limited and clarity of approach had previously been difficult to establish given also the size, range and ephemeral nature of the collection. The definition of the procedure has proved difficult and time consuming as knitting patterns involve many contributors creating a complex web of rights regarding the written pattern, the yarn companies, photographers and designers. However the project helped in moving this work forward through the specialist workshops given by experts in the field and with the support from partners.

This complexity includes the anonymity of knitting patterns; there is usually no named creator or photographer, no dates, and only company logos. It has become apparent that knitting patterns were written by freelancers for companies whose focus was on selling yarns. It is sometimes possible to trace dates, it is also important to check for named designers, and it is possible to create meaningful catalogue records but there is no prior model for establishing approach to this material.

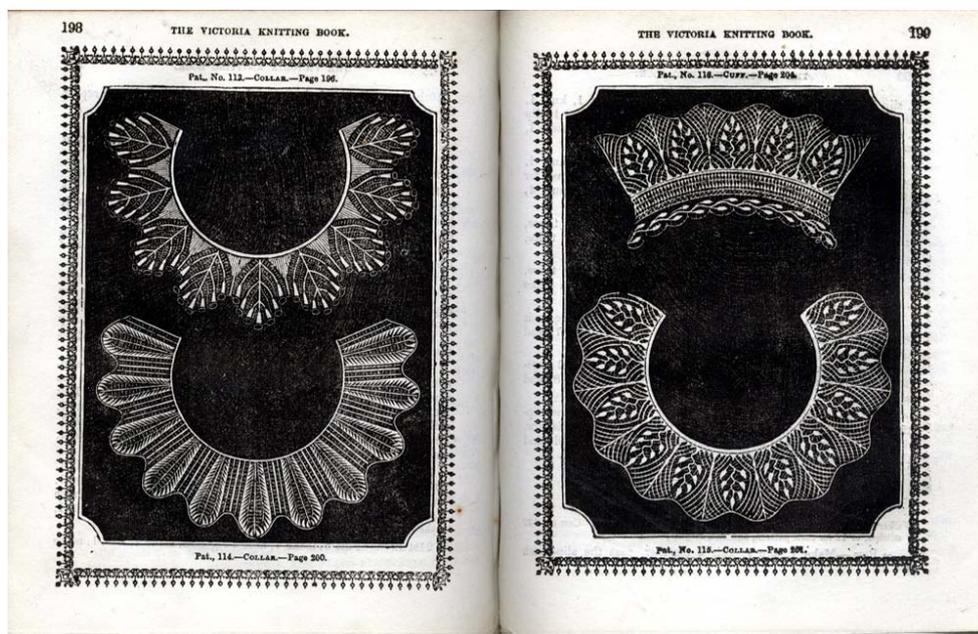
The drafting of a "permissions letter" began with a visit to the Museum of Design in Plastics at the Arts University College at Bournemouth as their digitisation framework provided a useful starting point. The first draft then underwent many changes and revisions within the University Library and it was then forwarded to the Legal Services in the University. It was finally agreed and formatted by Legal Services enabling the University Library to begin the process within a legally supported framework which is an essential part of the digitisation cycle regarding this material. Identifying contacts and addresses for named companies has been part of the research. This included the use of Ravelry a social network for knitters providing some information through its network of users. Companies may have merged, relocated, or disappeared altogether whilst having transferred business to another company. A range of patterns are being selected and permissions will be applied for to specific companies.

Although they may be regarded as ephemeral, like all library resources in order to be accessible they do require traditional catalogue records. The decision has been reached to catalogue each box of patterns in the first instance and to include the MACHine Readable Cataloging (MARC) records on the online catalogue.

The digitisation of the Victorian knitting manuals from the Richard Rutt Collection as full text, digital copies with MARC records attached, provided by the University Library Digitisation Unit, have been deposited with VADS. The MARC records are the preferred format for this material as they are already attached to this group of books and are consistent with the University's online catalogue. The deposit with VADS ensures access to a wider internet audience beyond the University, reaching further into the community.



Front cover from 'Mother's knitter, containing some patterns of things for little children' by EMC, 1882. Richard Rutt Collection of Victorian Knitting Books, Knitting Reference Library. Courtesy of the University of Southampton Library.



Images of collars and cuff from 'The Royal Victoria knitting book' by W.Carter, 1851. Richard Rutt Collection of Victorian Knitting Books, Knitting Reference Library. Courtesy of the University of Southampton Library.

## Conclusions

The Look-Here! project has provided an effective starting point, the project has undoubtedly moved digitisation forward; positive progress has been made and the collaborative approach provided constructive support.

At public talks and especially at *In the loop 2: Knitting origins and evolution*, held at the Shetland Museum & Archives in September 2010 the knitting patterns generated considerable interest. The Knitting Reference Library receives many requests for information so it has felt at times that progress has been more complicated and slower than users would appreciate. As individuals their understanding regarding copyright may be limited and the complexity of this ephemeral resource may to them be unexpected. In addition a large public institution such as a University is aware of the legal requirements and the risks involved. Consequently there is sometimes a tension between individual knowledge, opinion and requirement as compared to the demands made by law regarding legal issues for an institution.

## Key Points

The progress which has been made is due to the support of the Look-Here! project and the following have been an essential part of the learning process:

- Learning through collaboration developed confidence and knowledge.
- Support from the partners aided progress and provided a testing ground for ideas.
- Opportunity to hear from key figures in the field covering different aspects of the digitisation life cycle provided thinking time with a focus on development too.
- Constructive discussion and useful feedback from the project partners.
- Catalogue records remain important for access.
- Digitisation must be part of working with a collection if access is to be improved via the Internet.

## References

Cast Off

<http://www.castoff.info>

MARC Standards

<http://www.loc.gov/marc>

Radio 4. 'Woman's Hour: 24 August 2010'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00tffpw.html>

Ravelry

<https://www.ravelry.com>

University of Southampton 'In the Loop 2: Knitting Origins and Evolution'

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/intheloop/intheloop2010.shtml>

University of Southampton 'The Knitting Room @ Cornershop'  
<http://www.soton.ac.uk/intheloop/knittingroom.html>

University of Southampton 'Library Digitisation Service'  
<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/library/bopcris/scanning.html>

VADS  
<http://www.vads.ac.uk>

## Further Reading

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Freeman, J. (1986). *Knitting a Common Art*. Aberystwyth: Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

Hemmings, J. (2010) (ed.). *In the Loop: Knitting Now*. London: Black Dog Publishing.

Miller, D. (2008). *The Comfort of Things*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

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Rutt, R. (1987). *A History of Hand Knitting*. London: Batsford Ltd.

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