



WOOL GATHERING

Have a ball in Kendal

Knit wits will be more than welcome when this Lakeland town hosts a new event called The Wool Gathering. Mike Glover spins a yarn



Shepherdess Alison O'Neill, who is opening her farm for the event

It is difficult to find a newspaper or magazine these days that doesn't feature the joys of knitting, or a celebrity wearing tweed, or a Scandinavian TV detective wearing a distinctive woolly jumper.

When the media were camped outside the Lindo wing of St Mary's Hospital in Paddington, West London, for the 'Great Kate Wait' before the birth of Prince George, American TV anchor-woman Natalie Morales was photographed knitting.

There is a boom in wool-related hobbies, with traditions crafts like spinning and weaving enjoying a revival. The natural source and sustainability of the cloth made from fleeces, whether from sheep or imported animals like alpacas, has caught the zeitgeist.

And there is one town this side of the Pennines whose relationship with wool goes back many centuries. So the only surprise in the immediate

welcome for a new series of events to celebrate Kendal's associations with wool is that no-one has done it before.

Called Kendal Wool Gathering, it will mix demonstrations, fun activities and displays, all connected to the cloth on which the town's wealth was built.

The Gathering runs from Friday October 11 until Sunday, October 13, the weekend before National Wool Week, an increasingly popular national campaign. Kendal Town Council's motto, clearly stated on its coat of arms, is *Pannus Mihi Panis*. This Latin pun is usually translated as 'Wool is My Bread'. There are other clues on the coat of arms: the quartered shield shows bale hooks used for lifting heavy bales of wool; and teasels which were used to brush up the nap on the finished cloth.

Almost all of the Auld Grey Town's assets can be traced back to the wool trade, whether it was the fleeces



Fun with the fleeces on a Lakeland farm
(Museum of Lakeland Life)



themselves or the making of wool or felt products from them.

There are the dozens of yards where cottage industries of combers, spinners, weavers, fullers, dyers, shearers, tailors and drapers flourished over the centuries and these alleyways now give Kendal its unique shopping experience.

There are the fine buildings created with the money from the wool trade - for instance, Kendal Museum is housed in a converted wool auction warehouse. Even empty spaces, like Tenterfell, betray the town's woollen past. After dyeing, fulling and washing, the cloth was hung on the hooks of a tenter frame to dry. The hooks held the cloth to stretch it and keep its width.

Kendal's prosperity can truly said to have been kept on tenterhooks. There is the Lancaster Canal which was built to carry the wool produce down to the Lancashire and

Yorkshire mills, and coal and iron back again.

Even Abbot Hall Art Gallery and Brewery Arts Centre were kick-started by family fortunes made in banks, which only existed because of the wool trade.

'Our aim is to establish an annual event which celebrates Kendal's wool heritage, attracts tourists and increase commercial opportunities,' said organiser Adrian Swenson.

The team behind the Kendal initiative, including Mr Swenson, a wool spinner with a specialist interest in Textile Heritage, and well-known shepherdess Alison O'Neill, have already recruited support and encouragement from K Village, Cumbria Tourism, Kendal Town Council, South Lakeland District Council, the Rough Fell Sheep Association, and British Wool Marketing Board's Campaign for Wool.

English Heritage is among

5 fleecy facts

The Campaign for Wool is a global community of sheep farmers, retailers, designers, manufacturers and wool lovers presided over by royal patron, The Prince of Wales.

We complain about Europe, but by the end of the 18th century England had 300 laws pertaining to the sheep industry.

In the Middle Ages the Spanish regarded Merino sheep as prized gifts and they rarely left the country.

In the 1870s, it took the Australians just ten years to double sheep numbers to 41,000,000 finally surpassing the UK as number one wool supplier.

Wool is now being used more and more for home insulation and it only takes a fraction of the energy to produce compared to many man-made materials.

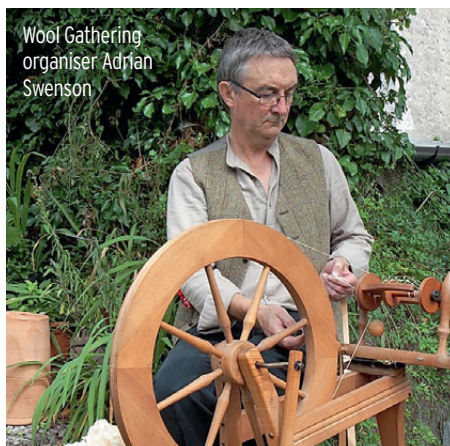


Sheep gathered for shearing
(Museum of Lakeland Life)

organisations planning to take part, as are Town End Alpacas from Crosthwaite, Lakeland Arts Trust, Kendal College and Museum, Kendal Quaker Tapestry, Williams Wools shop, Cumbria Wool Carpets and local craft groups and textile artists.

‘We want this to be a fun event, but one that also reminds visitors and residents alike the part that Wool played in making Kendal what it is today,’ added Mr Swenson.

Get yourself to Kendal and have a ball. 🐑



Wool Gathering
organiser Adrian
Swenson

Purpler of a weekend

The Gathering will launch on Friday, October 11, with an open afternoon at Alison's farm on the hill, Shacklabank (LA10 5EL for satnav users), near Sedburgh, where she will take visitors on a farm walk, pointing out how traditional farming methods have benefitted the environment. This will be followed by tea and cake in the barn.

The main hub for Saturday and Sunday's events will be at K Village's Netherfield Place, where sheep and alpacas will be on show. Stands and stalls representing all aspects of commercial wool products, including carpets, looms, spinning wheels and associated crafts.

A wool trail of support events and displays will be held at Kendal Town Hall, the Museum of Lakeland Life, Kendal Museum, Quaker Tapestry and other participating retailers, and a guided wool walk will take in sites in the town where the wool trade flourished.

Linked fun events in the town, like a knitting blitz and other have-a-go activities in the shopping precincts are being organised by Williams Wools, of Kirkland. Artist Sandra Parker, who specialises in sheep portraits will have a pop-up gallery in Elephant Yard. Kendal Homespun, a local social enterprise, is joining in the weekend events by launching its new base at Nether Hall, between K Village and the parish church.

English Heritage is getting involved by promoting its newly reopened Great Stott Bobbin Mill at Lakeside, Windermere, at the Kendal event.

For more updates see:
www.kendalwoolgathering.co.uk or contact
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A hard day shearing
(Museum of Lakeland Life)