



BASKETRY

Then and Now

THE FIRST WORLD WAR YEARS AND THEIR LEGACY

APRIL 2017

In this newsletter, we have an update on the progress of the project, have details of news and events, and look at uses for waste willow material

Basketry Then and Now finally has its own website! Here you can find information about the researchers and the research they're doing, watch the project films, read the basketry blog posts, find copies of the newsletter, and find out about our project events. The web address is currently:

https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/?page_id=3066

But we are hoping that this will soon change to the more memorable:

<https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/basketry>

Filming is underway for our next three project films. For our willow film, Adam Jones-Lloyd, our film-maker, has set up a time-lapse camera at Rothamsted Research to capture the willow as it comes into leaf. It's incredible to see the

difference that just three weeks can make (see main image).

For our film about basketry in the skies, Adam has been to Inverness to film Tim Palmer making a replica World War One aeroplane seat for a Sopwith Camel, and I've been on a 'location scouting' trip to Martlesham Heath Control Tower, a small museum on a former WW1 airfield in Suffolk, where we will be filming Bunty Ball talking about her research into aeroplane seats and balloon baskets (see February newsletter).



Image: Tim Palmer at work on camera.

For our film about basketry as therapy, we will be filming at Seale-

Image above: The time-lapse camera at Rothamsted Research, catching the difference in three weeks of growth during March and April.

Hayne, Devon, later this month. Seale-Hayne was built as an agricultural college but was requisitioned during WW1 as a specialist military hospital for treating shell-shocked soldiers, and basketmaking was one of the recommended treatments (see December newsletter). We hope this film will also feature some of the research Tim Palmer and Stephanie Bunn have been doing in Scotland, where they have met with Catherine Paterson, an occupational therapist who has written about its history in Scotland, and Joyce Laing, an art therapist who worked with Angus McPhee, a traumatised WW2 veteran. And there's plenty more filming to come!

I've been keeping in touch with our project researchers, and have met up with Welsh basketmakers Clare

Revera and Jane Clarke. It is proving difficult to find much about basketmaking in Wales during the war, and it appears that there was never much of an industry in Wales. If anyone has any leads do let us know.

In the February newsletter we focused on Bunty Ball's research into basketwork aeroplane seats – but it turns out they weren't only used in aeroplanes. Greta Bertram tells us more

Last week I attended an event at the National Museum Wales in Cardiff for community groups interested in researching their First World War history, and was surprised to see this familiar image stuck to a noticeboard.



Image: From an advert by the Aircraft Supplies Co. Ltd. for wicker seats, AGS 264.

The excitement clearly showed on my face! The noticeboard was about *Project Zero*, a project which started in January to explore the history of airships (rather than aeroplanes) during WW1, and the work of Ernest Thompson Willows (1886–1926), a pioneer of early airship aviation who was based in Cardiff. It turns out that pilots in airships were sitting on exactly the same seats as those in aeroplanes.

It also seems that the seats weren't the only bits of basketwork in an airship. The pressure in the envelope of an airship was maintained by two

air-filled 'ballonets' inside the envelope – these were kept at a positive pressure by an aluminium tube positioned in the wake of the propeller slipstream, which was fitted with a one-way fabric valve known as a 'crab pot'.

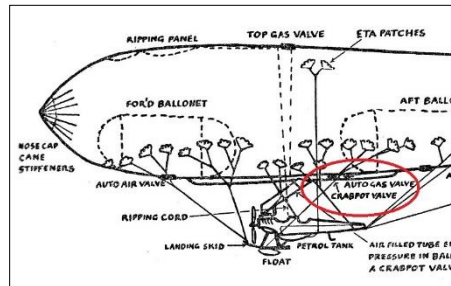


Image: The plan of the front half of an SS Zero airship. Image from <http://airshipsonline.com/airships/ss/images/Plan.jpg>

According to Gary Ball, who runs *Project Zero*, these contained a form of basketwork structure. If you know anything more about basketwork in airships or have any images, please do get in touch. You can find at more about *Project Zero* at: www.historymattersonline.com

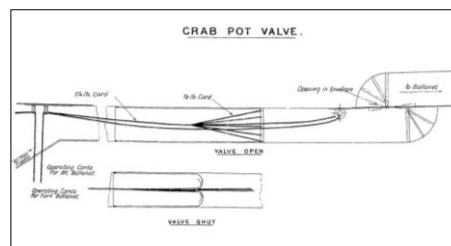


Image: A diagram of a crab pot valve. Image from 'Handbook on S.S. Type Airships', Air Department Admiralty, 1917.

Dave Evans, Hilary Burns and Nicola Coate have been considering historic uses for willow 'stripple'

Three 'types' of willow are used in basketmaking: brown (bark on), white (peeled) and buff (boiled and then peeled). Peeling for white willow is done from April to early June, whereas buff willow can be

peeled at any time of year, although it is usually done in the winter months. Until the 1930s, peeling was carried out by hand using a brake and was hugely labour intensive, and was mostly done by women and children, but today most commercially-grown willow is peeled by machine. Huge quantities of peelings, also known as 'stripple', are produced, so we've been looking into whether this waste material has any use.

Dorothy Hartley, a prolific writer on countryside crafts and traditions in the 1930s and 1940s, wrote in her 1942 book, *The Countryman's England*: "Down in the West, Piers Rodman is working overtime, where the mantle of King Alfred spreads over the new Isle of Athelney... and King Alfred's men, strong of heart and hand, are working the willows, reaping and reclaiming the land that we lost unwisely after the last war. They hope soon to use again the willow strippings, those long, strong, waterproof fibres that were used to weave cloth for the windmill sails. That will be a welcome change."

This is the only reference we've managed to find relating to the use of stripple for windmill sails, and so do not know when this was last put into practise. In Somerset windmills were only used for grinding corn – they were never used to pump flood water for land drainage as in East Anglia. Most windmills in Somerset had ceased operation by the mid-nineteenth century as a result of changes in land use from arable to pasture, and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, which saw huge quantities of cheap grain imported from the Americas. Nicola Coate has suggested that this would probably have been the peelings from white willow, as the largest sticks can be peeled in really wide strips if done at the right time of year.



Image: A wide strip of willow peeling. Image courtesy of Nicola Coate.

Another possible use for the peelings was as compost or fertiliser. In his book *The Cultivation of Osiers and Willows*, W. Paulgrave Ellmore writes: "It may be of considerable interest to growers to know that willow peelings, up to now regarded as a by-product of no value, form excellent manure for potato growing and other purposes. It was demonstrated in 1906 by Messrs. Sutton & Sons on their experimental grounds at Reading, that this manure, used at the rate of 30 tons per acre, produced a heavier crop than farm-yard manure at the same rate. The peelings are allowed to be on the ground and rot for twelve months or more before use. Peelings have also been used with success for cucumbers and vegetable marrows, and celery grown by the aid of willow peelings always obtained first prize at a Midland Counties show. The peelings, when ground down into a fine powder, are found to be a fine fertiliser for many kinds of plants."

If this is correct, it seems like a vast quantity of stripple was needed to have any significant impact on the crops. However, there are tales of giant marrows and pumpkins being grown on top of a pile of stripple, with the peelings perhaps offering insulating properties akin to a dung heap.

More recently, basketmakers such as Karen Lawrence have been experimenting with making willow

stripple into cordage. Karen hopes to make a basket with her cordage.

Nicola has also come across the use of willow bark for making ink, in the same way that oak bark has been used – but doesn't know anything further. We've also heard about the use of stripple to cover the willow bolts ready for stripping to keep them cool and damp.

If anyone has further details on uses for stripple and other willow wastage, please do get in touch.



Image: Karen Lawrence has made cordage with willow stripple from Coates English Willow. Image courtesy of Karen Lawrence.

Other news

On the blog:

- An introduction to the shell basket by Mary Crabb:

<https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/?p=2825>

- Processing cane for shell baskets by Mary Crabb:

<https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/?p=3122>

Booking open: Booking is now open for our pigeon basket course at Coates English Willow in Stoke St. Gregory, Somerset, 22–23 September 2017. The course is suitable for those with some basketry experience, and will cost £160 (including all materials, light lunch and refreshments). To

book your place please email hilary@basketryandbeyond.org.uk.

The course will be accompanied by a small display and talk about the work of the project on 23 September, which will be open to the public.



Image © IWM (FEQ 813)
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30028471>

Hunt for photos: We're on the hunt for photos of baskets from the period 1914–18. We're particularly interested in photos used in food, fishing, farming, transport and other aspects of daily life, and also baskets used for military purposes from the period, such as pigeon baskets.

While it's great that so many museums and archives are making their photographic collections available online, it can be very difficult to search specifically for baskets. This isn't because they don't appear in photographs (they invariably do) – instead it is because they either go unnoticed or are taken for granted, and so very few catalogue descriptions ever mention the word 'basket'. So if you happen to be browsing photographs from the WW1 era and come across some baskets, then please do let us know. All contributions are most welcome.

Contact us

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