

The History of Hand Knitting

Purpose: This seminar will investigate the origins and development of hand knitting from its inception as a practical skill to its incorporation into an art form.

Moderator:	Vivienne Carey
Date and Time:	Tuesday afternoon, 1:30-3:30 9 weeks, starting October 2
Format:	Seminar
Location:	Applewood in Amherst, The Tavern

Description: Using extant samples as our primary source, our initial focus will be to trace the evolution of hand knitting from the earliest known examples, which date to around 1,000 CE in Egypt, through its appearance in thirteenth-century Spain, fourteenth-century Switzerland, sixteenth-century Italy, and thence throughout Britain and Europe.

The identification of these samples, including modern pieces that serve both practical and decorative functions, can lead to a wider exploration of the background, history, and culture of their time.

Participants do not need to know how to knit, as a practical session will not be part of the seminar. Nor is this a “women’s interest” study. Indeed, the earliest knitting guilds were restricted to men who had the monopoly in producing some of the finest spun silk garments.

Role of participants: Prepare a thirty-minute presentation that has a specific sample as its focus, which can include a detailed study of either the techniques involved in its manufacture, or information describing the wider cultural or historical background. Then lead a fifteen-minute discussion.

Resources: All books can be borrowed from either Amherst College’s or UMass’s Library.

A History of Hand Knitting, Richard Rutt.

Optional:

Diffusion of Knitting in Medieval Europe, Turnau;

Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe, ed. Harte and Ponting 1983, pp. 19, 368-89;

Knitted Masterpieces: Textile History Vol. 7, Turnau and Ponting, 1976, pp.7-59.

History of Knitting before Mass Production, Turnau.

No Idle Hands, Macdonald.

About the Moderator: I have been knitting since the age of six. Having taught Middle School in England, I then moved to the US and majored in Classics at Smith. I joined 5CLIR in 2016.

Maximum number of participants: 16

Auditors: yes, up to 2

Course # 18FHK