

Rochdale Cloth Stories

Names in brackets are the people who created the artwork that represents that particular story in the Blanket.

1.

Kathy

My Father's dressing gown. Circa 1000's. Crossley and Porter Boarding School - Halifax

He wore it at boarding school. His relations packed him off there as his father died just before he was born and they didn't want to care for him. But I remember him wearing it when I was a child!

The gown is tatty, it is 100 years old! Dad was 52 years when he died. Mum is still going strong at 102 years.

2.

Gertruda

African cotton cloth acquired 1956-59 in what was then the Belgian Colony, Congo. (Republique Democratique du Congo), at independence.

Generally used, in layers, as part of the ladies' outfit then known as the 'panji' - lengths of cloth wrapped round the hips, above the breast or around the shoulders. Shorter ones could be a headdress.

My family used it as a baby and children's blanket, tablecloth, picnic blanket and cover for an occasional table.

The centre is worn away with use.

(Gertruda also created the Phoenix artwork that is printed onto the base of the dressing gown. She wrote; Colours of the bird echo those of the fabric. They can also be seen as: green; the colour of hope, spring and renewal, green links to the faith of the Islamic community. Yellow/gold; suggesting the riches Rochdale once held as a thriving industrial town, as well as the golden future we wish for our children A phoenix, as Rochdale is down in the dumps and needs to rise from the ashes. As a town, it has made big efforts to achieve this renewal.)

3.

Wendy

A flamboyant tie, narrow, striped red and orange which belonged to my late husband, Barry.

He wore it in the 1960s when he was an architect in a Manchester practice. Ties were an essential item in a professional man's wardrobe even though an individual may have preferred not to wear one. However, there was no rule about what sort of tie should be worn so the rebel sported as unconventional a tie as could be found. Barry's collection was loud and colourful.

I'd like it included in the blankets as a souvenir of a marriage to a creative exciting man. When we first met I was attracted to him since he was the first person I met who really didn't seem to care what convention demanded, what other people thought. In the late 1950s that was a rare and liberating quality.

Wendy wrote this:

Haiku for Barry

I married a man

who just didn't give a damn

about convention.

4.

Cath

There is picture of Cath wearing this very dress at the seaside on side B of the blanket!

5.

Gertruda - see no. 2

6.

Punam

The cloth dress is Indian bought from a bazaar. It is maroon with small mirrors on.

I went to India, a place I had warm memories as a child/teenager, to find all the glory and memories had been dissipated by life and growing up. My Grandma's flat in the bazaar, had become a storage unit, and the people looked grey, tired and unrecognisable. The journey of self discovery had changed to a reality check - "don't look back"

I want to tell the world' 'Don't look back, only look forward'.

7.

Shamin

Silk shalwar kameez

It was given to me by a friend of mine, going back several years ago, to 1986.

I think I wore it to her wedding, and she let me keep it.

She was like a mentor, very inspirational to a lot of people of South Asian and Caribbean background.

She inspired me. I feel really lucky to have met her when I met her, because it enabled me to build up the skills that I've been using to date.

(Shamin's shalwar kameez is the one piece of cloth that links all three of the blankets together as there a piece of her cloth in each blanket.)

8.

Janet

Grey blanket with Scout, Guide, Brownie and County badges sewn on

My Dad gave me this camp blanket, he used to take it to Scout Jamborees where he would swap his county badge with other scouts from different areas

(There are tiny printed 'badges' from the scout blanket in some of the white dots in the dress)

9.

Evie

This is my t-shirt that I have worn over the summer, it is bright and cool.

It is pretty.

Hope you like it!

10.

Cath (Dot)

Baggy pants, batik

Black with white stripes on, and then different coloured pink purple yellow splodges. Very baggy I bought them in the Lake district in 1990 I think from a hippy shop that sold all kind of cheese cloth, that kind of material, that was trendy at the time. And they've been in the drawer probably for 20 years since then and I haven't worn them.

I always liked sewing. I got a sewing machine for my 21st birthday. I used to make a lot of my own clothes. It was the cheapest way. There wasn't Primark and M and S was for middle aged ladies. We went to C and A which was the teenage store at the time. So making your own clothes was a hobby and a way of making things cheaply.

Crimpelene was a God send because it didn't need hemming. You could buy the minimum amount of material and the maximum out of it.

I went to pattern making class and eventually made a coat which was my most ambitious.

11.

Wendy

My piece of cloth is a small white handkerchief. A triangle of gauze replaces one corner on which is a decorative machine-embroidered traditional motif stitched in blue, green and white threads. I like to imagine the design represents forget me nots. The piece isn't a hand made lovingly crafted textile but to me it signifies love, loss, joy and sorrow.

In 1993 it was given to my adopted granddaughter Amy by her birth mother before she was handed over to foster parents. I imagine the pain of that moment.

A few months later Amy came into my family, chosen for adoption by my daughter and her then husband.

The handkerchief must have come with her then as a small memento of her origins. We knew Amy was born with Down's syndrome. We knew there were health and developmental issues to be confronted but, there she was, our first grandchild, a beautiful little girl showing a strong determined personality and bringing us joy and laughter. Amy was soon big sister to brothers Max and Hal whom she bossed around mercilessly. Max was led into mischievous pranks and Hal was endlessly pushed over as he practised his new skill of sitting up.

Suddenly, cruelly, without warning, in April 2000, Amy died. The shock was immense, the loss tragic. My daughter gave me the handkerchief as a material souvenir of Amy's brief happy life.

Wendy wrote the haiku for Amy

A
rare
shooting
star
soared
above
our
horizon
showering
us
with
light

12.
Punam created this artwork to represent Cath's baggy pants

13.
Kevin
My wife Christine made clothes for us both for years, including shirts for me, a bush jacket and even a pair of jeans – which she repaired later with flowers! – long after the flower power period!
She started with a play designing and making costumes for plays at the Curtain Theatre in Rochdale, and when we both retired from teaching, we opened a fancy dress shop in 2003 called "Mirage Fancy Dress". We continued making costumes but also bought from fancy dress suppliers.
The photo is from "TheFirebird".

14.
Wendy created this artwork based on Evie's t-shirt

15.
Josefa
Shiny silk, green (dark) with white patterning
I lived in Angola. We watched Brazilian programmes on TV. I saw the dress on an actress. All my friends and I saw fashion on TV and wanted it! Around 1983, I told my Godmother that I would like that dress, she was a fashion designer. She made the dress in silk and gave it to me as a Christmas present. It was a surprise. I felt in fashion, I felt most special.
(Josefa had to leave the dress in Angola, so she drew it for the project instead)

16.
Heidi (Sue)
A cotton dress my Mum made. Beautiful on a white background, big flowers, a black belt to it very colourful a pinky mauve colour.

(My Mum was from Denmark.) When she fell in love after the war with an Englishman, and came here to Littleborough, as she had done a lot of sport and was continental (Danish) as well, she couldn't find her size in women's clothes in the shops, so she bought Vogue magazine and fashion magazines and a sewing machine, and made her own designs which were very elegant. She was like my Grandmother who used to make costumes for carnival for people. I remember one dress my mother wore; a dark blue velvet, with tating, a nice little collar she tatted. I remember another one in the 50's a beautiful on a white background, big flowers, a black belt to it very colourful a pinky mauve colour.
She learnt from my Grandmother, my Grandmother was good at a sewing machine.
I can sew. When I was in school we made our own school uniforms. We were proud because we'd made the blouses and skirts and wore them ourselves. Some of the teachers didn't like it because it was hand done; snobbery.
I knitted some slippers the other year. Some fluffy slippers, they're nice. I ran out of wool and someone gave me a wedding cake so I improvised and I took the ribbons of the wedding cake and sewed them onto the slippers.
So perhaps I've inherited something from the family.

I was invited to a wedding and because I'm tall I couldn't find my size to fit me. So I looked in the cupboard and found one of my Mothers dresses, and one that fitted me.
I loved it. It was cool, a very, very hot September day and the dress was cotton, like a linen cotton, so I was happy with it.

17.

Sarah (Shamin)

This saree was a gift from my sister-in-law, when I visited my husband's family for the first time in Madras India, August 2015. Traditionally it is the custom for the woman of the household to gift a saree to the women who visit. I wore this dress for my wedding recently in October this year. I thought the colours would reflect the season, being autumn where we managed to tie in the colours of gold, purple and blue nicely with my English/Indian themed wedding.

(Shamin has also represented Heidi's and Cath's cloth in her artwork)

The following stories came with no image, just words. They will soon be included as artwork and placed in the pockets of the dressing gown)

Andy

Mum's knitted tank top! Blue with orange band across the chest

Wore this for school. Never really liked it. Once it stretched, it stayed stretched!

Let's kids know how lucky they are!

In his early 20's, Andy did textiles in Huddersfield Poly. He designed a fabric with three grey blocks and an over pattern. It got sent off. Gordy, in London, bought 3 rolls of the fabric. One day, in Blackpool/Morecambe, Andy saw a woman wearing a skirt in his fabric. He wanted to go and say "I designed that!", but at the he was into heavy rock, wearing a leather jacket with denim over the top and beer mat on the back, and he thought, 'she's never going to believe me if I do go and speak to her'.

Antana is Christian and her husband Hindu. Antana made a skirt and blouse from one of her Saris. The outfit was made for her daughter as it is a more traditional form of Hindu dress. Her Grandmother sent the daughter 'Simiki' earrings (Tamil). This made a beautiful outfit. Antana and her family left Sri Lanka with nothing to come to the UK.

Donna

rare clothes memories — wallabies and Ali Baba pants from Afflex Palace

My favourite item is a green jacket that I think was from Next. It got so worn out that when I saw another one in the second hand shop I decided to buy that one as a substitute or a replacement, and I thought I'd combine the 2 and make one good coat out of both them.

Frank

mixed cotton and nylon shirt

I had one of the first shirts of mixed cotton and nylon. It was purchased at a tailors shop on Yorkshire Street. My age at the time was 6 years old. It was dark grey, pin-striped. A normal day shirt, worn to school. The shirt was comfortable and warm in winter but cool in summer. My Mum worked as a Slubber; cotton bales, broken up, blowing room, come out on lap, put on cards to straighten out. Dad worked as a finisher; in charge of the whole process. Cloth came in, booked in, wash, bleach, dye. Depends what it was for. Some fireproof fabrics. I worked as an engineer for Famatex, in Germany, made textile machinery; cards, scrubbs, intermediate, all the way through. 6 year apprenticeship. First wage 2 pounds and 10 shillings. I took a holiday and went to see my Dad at his work. He had a machine that needed looking at and he asked me. The machine was running on oil and I realised that oil wasn't being cooled before it went back through. I told him, if it started bubbling, he should run like hell! He told his boss.

Ghazala

Muslim Pakistani background; historically textiles would be put away for a girl's wedding, throughout their lives. Always give odd numbers. It's the Trousseau-completely different from a Dowri. Bride's family give clothes to the groom's family, new clothes leading up to a wedding, given by hand. Gifts of material are given - always look for special wedding outfits.

Josie

Mum's aunty, 60 when Josie was born. Trained tailoress - earlier she had worked in the cotton mill. Lives were difficult in textiles. No training - carding - 9 children, 5 girls, all in the cotton mill. She was a half timer, often have no breakfast. Children were exhausted. One lady was pregnant and kept fainting, but because she wasn't married (16 years old) they were told to leave her until she came round. Aunty Mary Seddon, never married, oldest girl, had to look after the family, encouraged not to get married to help look after the family. As a seamstress she used the Singer sewing machine with a treadle; lots of memories.

Khadija

A sari, black with a red border

The sari is very old. It was given to me by my aunty for a wedding. My Grandmother gave it to my aunty. My Grandmother was from Bangla Desh. I leave it to my Mum's because she is very careful with them, and puts them away very carefully.

Marlene

Blue and white gingham seersucker dress for school uniform. It had a big bow. Buttons down front. Short sleeved. I also wore a blue woolly cardigan — knitted by auntie/Mum. It used to itch. You could only wear the dress from Easter to summer. The dress had been passed from my two cousins before me, and after I had it was passed to my two sisters.

Maureen

American tan tights Circa 1966

After finishing my Saturday job I would browse the shops in Manchester, one expensive buy a pair of tights costing 10/6 at Vallerina on Market Street. I would wash by hand and pack away for each weekend. School wear was white socks only.

Naseem

I value cloth, I value the way it is made, especially a lot of the Asian material, all the hard work and effort that goes into making a lot of the outfits especially the intricate embroidery, the mirror work.

It's such detailed work. I look at the clothes and the texture at the actual time and effort that has gone into the making.

Gifts - there is a big connection between clothing and gifts. Especially with the Asian community where, say in weddings, there is a tradition for the groom's family to gift the bride's family the clothes, a suit for each family member.

My Mum makes her own garments, so everything I'm wearing she has made. She never knew how to sew back home, she learnt it here. And ever since we were children she could, say, open a catalogue, when we used to have the old catalogues, and see a design for a frock and just make it, from scratch. So that's where my fascination and the way I value clothes has originated from stuff that my mum used to make, she's very creative, talented. My fascination I suppose, with clothing, and value and appreciation has stemmed from there. To be honest so everything she has made I value because of the effort that's gone into it, and because it's been made by my mum for me.

Tracey

Cream background with light blue flowers embossed skirt A-line

My daughter, who is 20, she loves to shop in the charity shops in Manchester, including Afflecks Palace. She bought a skirt from there, and came and showed me it — it was identical fabric, pattern, colour to dress worn by my Nanna, which I have a photo of. Probably around 1970s. Nanna's dress was an A-line skirt, with a top with a rounded collar, buttons down the front. I said to my daughter, take the skirt round to your Nanna's, my Mum, to show her. Mum said it was really surprising, it was an emotional response.