

From Friends of Peter Collingwood

It could be argued that Peter Collingwood contributed more to our knowledge of textile techniques—including his own innovations—than any other weaver of any other time or place. He invented an ingenious system of shaft switching for weft-faced rugs, devised a technique for twisting warp threads in large-scale patterns he called “macrogauzes,” and analyzed, wrote about, and extended the techniques of sprang, tablet weaving, and ply-split braiding.

His definitive books are essential volumes in the libraries of weavers, textile historians, and all textile enthusiasts: *The Techniques of Rug Weaving* (1968), *The Techniques of Sprang* (1974), *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving* (1982), *The Maker's Hand: A Close Look at Textile Structures* (1987), *Rug Weaving Techniques, Beyond the Basics* (1991), and *The Techniques of Ply-Split Braiding* (1998).

Handwoven asked some of our readers who knew him well to contribute stories about him. Here is a small sample. We plan a collection of them online; please send yours to us at handwoven@interweave.com.

Peter Collingwood made his Convergence teaching debut in San Francisco in 1974. His post-conference workshop, held at Mills College, was not on rugs—it was on the making of a netlike fabric called sprang, and I was lucky enough to be there. One of the most advanced techniques we learned was the very difficult Double Interlinked Sprang (similar to doubleweave pick-up in weaving). At the week's end, after we struggled with this technique, Peter gave us a story he wrote for us:

When Dante was shown the lower circles of Hell, he beheld a group of women, each of whom did moan and writhe before tangled threads set upon a frame. Asking his guide the reason, Dante received this reply, “These, for their many sins on earth, are condemned to work for eternity in Double Interlinked Sprang.”

“Surely this must be the bottom of Hell, the final torment!” said Dante, casting a pitiful eye on the suffering around him.

“No, no,” said his guide, “there is yet a level lower still, where the most wicked of humans are tortured eternally.”

Dante feared greatly to ask the form of this torture, but was made most curious by the sounds that came from below, a suppressed and anguished muttering, an endless scratching of chalk on board. So at length he did enquire and received this answer in a voice that trembled.

“Those below must forevermore, and to students of a wondrous foolishness, *teach* Double Interlinked Sprang.”

I believe that Peter Collingwood is now in the Elysian Fields, sharing stories with friends and colleagues and thoroughly enjoying all the interlacements that he created in his lifetime.

—Rosalie Neilson



PHOTOS BY LAURA FRY

When I interviewed Peter Collingwood in 1987 for *Handwoven*, I was interested to hear him say that he wrote *The Techniques of Rug Weaving* largely so he wouldn't have to teach! This plan, as anyone who took a Peter Collingwood workshop knows, failed miserably. The book had the opposite effect; he was sought after all the more because of it. If I had to pick only a few volumes in my library to hold onto, his books would be at the top of my list. Though he is no longer with us, Peter Collingwood's work is very much alive.

—Jane Patrick, former editor of *Handwoven*

Peter hurried into the classroom on the first day of an Advanced Tablet Weaving workshop I took at Harrisville Designs in 1995 and proceeded to read aloud Chidiock Tichborne's elegy. It begins:

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
My crop of corn is but a field of tares,
And all my good is but vain hope of gain . . .

Peter explained to us that the author had written it in 1586, the night before his execution for conspiracy to murder the queen, and what was remarkable about it, he said, was that nearly every word was only one syllable long. What an unusual way to start a tablet-weaving class!

Years later, he started a prose/poetry section on his website, (www.petercollingwood.co.uk) and added some of his favorites from time to time with interesting comments and explanations. You can read Chidiock Tichborne's elegy there, along with thirty-one others. He also wrote poetry, and here is a poem he sent to me:

Perhaps it is a tablet; all
English call it thus. But I
Think you, being American,
Expect it is a card,
Resulting in a verbal dilemma.

Look at all the first letters and then all the last letters of the lines.

—Linda Hendrickson