

DYEVOOLUTION



Newsletter

Welcome to the Dyevolution Newsletter, your opportunity to find out more about the progress of our exciting 3 year project.

Dye Garden Thrives

Following months of hard work from the gardening volunteers led by Trills Keng of Hyde Park Source, clearing beds, preparing soil and planting, the Dyevolution Dye Garden is now flourishing and in full bloom

.The garden aims to be a living research and learning space, exploring the journey of colour from plant to fibre. Growing traditional dye plants such as madder, weld and woad, alongside a range of other dye-related species, it helps connect cultivation, seasonality and the environment to textile production while encouraging conversations about sustainability and the impact of colour on the natural world.



This week, volunteers harvested Greater St John's Wort flower heads, with Calendula and Dahlia harvests planned in the coming weeks. These plants will be used to explore the rich palette of colours that can be achieved through natural dyeing techniques.

As the garden continues to grow, it will support workshops, research and public engagement activities, helping more people discover the fascinating journey of colour from seed, to plant, to pigment, and finally to textile.

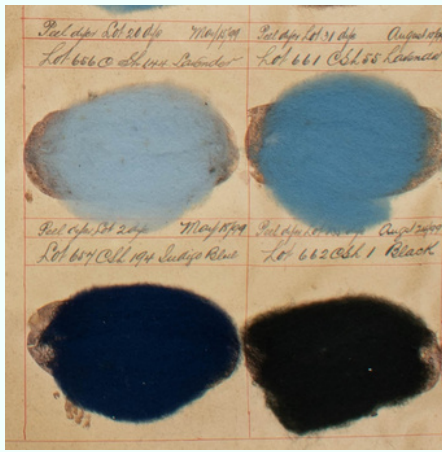


The dye gardening volunteers are also beginning to plan visits to a number of other dye gardens and growing projects, gathering inspiration, sharing knowledge and learning how others are using plants to explore colour, sustainability and textile heritage

The Digital Team Begin to Unlock the Secrets of the Dye Ledgers

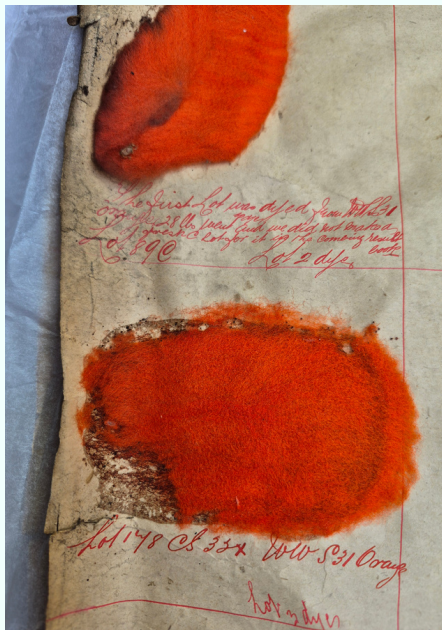
major milestone has been reached in the Dyevolution project, with the digitisation of all six historic dye ledgers now complete.

The digital volunteer team, which is led by Alison McMaster, Heritage Officer here at Sunny Bank Mills, has already moved on to the next stage of the project: transcribing the handwritten pages from the newly digitised images. This painstaking work is making the contents of the ledgers more accessible and searchable, while helping to uncover the stories hidden within their pages.



As transcription progresses, the ledgers are beginning to reveal some of their secrets. Volunteers have already identified the names of dye companies, shade numbers and colour names, alongside fascinating glimpses into the day-to-day workings of the dye house at Sunny Bank Mills and unexpected connections across time. On more than one occasion, volunteers have experienced a real goosebump moment when the date they were transcribing matched the current date exactly, despite being separated by 135 years.

It is remarkable to think that, on that same day all those years ago, someone working in the dye house at Sunny Bank Mills was carefully recording recipes, shade numbers and production details as part of their daily routine. Written in flowing copperplate script with a fountain pen, these records feel surprisingly immediate, offering a direct connection to the people whose knowledge and skill helped shape the mill's history.



Each page transcribed adds another piece to the puzzle and, as work continues, we look forward to sharing more discoveries from these remarkable records and uncovering the colourful stories they have preserved for over a century.

The findings are already helping to inform other strands of the Dyevolution project. Information emerging from the ledgers, including the names of dyers, dye companies, shade names and numbers, possible dye stuffs used, and references to key geographical centres of the dye industry, is now being shared with the history research team.

History Team start digging in the Museum & Archive

The Dyevolution history research team has begun delving into the Sunny Bank Mills Museum & Archive's collection to uncover more about the people who worked in the mill's dye house. Through staff records, local history sources and archival documents, volunteers are piecing together the lives of the in-house dyers, exploring where they came from, where they lived, and the roles they played in the mill's success.



Alongside this research, the team has been following some of the fascinating global stories hidden within the dye ledgers themselves. One area of particular interest has been logwood, a natural dye identified in the records and once prized for producing rich blacks, purples and blues. Research into logwood has taken volunteers far beyond Farsley, uncovering connections to the Caribbean, colonial trade networks, and even tales of pirates and privateers battling over valuable cargoes on the high seas.

By combining local history with international stories of trade and colour, the project is building a richer picture of the people, materials and global connections that shaped textile production at Sunny Bank Mills. As research continues, the team looks forward to sharing more discoveries from the ledgers and the remarkable stories they contain.



British Museum Update

Rachel Moaby, our Heritage Director, recently visited the British Museum to learn more about the analysis of the 50 wool samples taken from the dye ledgers at the start of the project. These samples have undergone a wide range of treatments; they have been wet, dry, hot, spun and just about everything in-between and the results are both fascinating and tantalisingly incomplete.



While the findings have provided valuable insights, they have also highlighted just how much more there is to uncover. Further investigation will be needed, and Dr Katie McClure from the University of Glasgow will present the latest findings at a conference in Helsinki this October. Once the results have been shared and discussed there, we look forward to revealing more about what has been discovered.

For now, the journey of these 50 samples continues, reminding us that research is often as much about the questions raised as the answers found.

Natural Dye Workshops Begin

As part of Dyevolution Project, Kayleigh of Ocre Natural Dye Studio, an experienced natural dyer and textile practitioner will be running a series of free workshops. The programme will involve exploring natural dyeing techniques, developing creative responses inspired by textile heritage, and working collaboratively to create pieces for a group exhibition at Threads Festival 2027. Kayleigh will be working with makers from a wide range of creative disciplines, including embroidery, knitting, crochet, appliqué, textiles and mixed media who have an interest in natural dyes but have not yet had the opportunity to explore them beyond a beginner level, with sessions taking place at Sunny Bank Mills, Farsley, across six workshops running from August 2026 to March 2027, with two groups running concurrently to enable more people to take part.



For further information about anything in this newsletter, including how to get involved please contact heritageevents@sunnybankmills.co.uk.

The Sunny Bank Mills Museum and Archive is a unique resource representing over 180 years of cloth production at the Mills and the lives of those who worked here.

