



So far, sew good

The last few years have seen a resurgence in small creative businesses, friends Cathy Reavy and Jani Barnard recently decided to strike out with one of their own...

On the border of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, Alstonefield is well-known to walkers, the many frequenters of its popular pub, 'The George', and visitors to its beautiful 12th century church. It is an idyllic village between the spectacular valleys of the rivers Dove and Manifold set around a picturesque green complete with 'spreading' trees. At one time an important focus of various trading routes across the White Peak, today this largely residential village is home to some excellent craftspeople.

After leading the local Alstonefield Arts & Craft Group for a number of years, residents and friends Cathy Reavy and Jani Barnard decided to join forces and make the most of their

creative skills. The result was 'Threads', which runs a series of innovative needlework workshops with themes such as 'Stitches in a Handmade Booklet' or 'A Girl Can Never Have Too Many Shoes'. The mainly one-day workshops take place in Alstonefield's Village Hall and participants can learn to work designs in crewel wools or silk, make Japanese embroidered temari balls, fabric boxes, corsages, and much more.

At the end of the day everyone leaves having learned a new skill and with an item they can be proud of that looks equally lovely in a country cottage as in a modern house. Most of the items have been designed by Threads, many with a modern twist and themes such as cupcakes, shoes and teacups. Jani and Cathy also offer a bespoke service to groups

celebrating special events such as a birthday, anniversary or wedding. They are happy to design whatever item a group desires and will even travel to a different venue.

The venture may seem surprising for Jani, who trained as a nursery nurse, worked in special education for many years and has also owned and bred Exmoor ponies, but she has a lifelong interest in the arts, crafts and needlework. A recent course in silversmithing, even led to her making her own jewellery, so she is no stranger to the satisfaction gained from creating your own work of art. She commented: 'Although there is much to interest the seasoned crafter we are particularly interested in encouraging those with no experience in needlework to come along and have a go.'

Above: Jani Barnard (left) and Cathy Reavy
Photograph by Brian Ross



Threads

'For example, we recently designed a needlework stitches sampler, where students can learn and work a variety of embroidery stitches and then make it up into a booklet decorated with real flower petals on the cover.'

Cathy's background includes a music degree from Leeds University - she still plays the flute in the local 'Manifold Trio' - and background in Human Resources, which has given her a particular love of training. She said, 'Our main aim is for people to have a fantastic day, a real treat, whilst at the same time learning a new skill and ending up with a beautiful hand-made item to be proud of. We also seek inspiration from history and the arts. For example, one of our latest designs is a spectacle case based on a "Mucha" stained glass window and worked in silk in Bayeux stitch - the

stitch of the Bayeux tapestry.'

Cathy and Jani have been thrilled by the feedback they've received from their enterprise. One student remarked recently, 'I had a wonderful day and loved the hospitality, the tea, coffee and cake, the warm welcome, the clean bright room and the clear instructions. At no time did I feel rushed or that I was waiting around, a lovely atmosphere.' Threads certainly seems to have found a new way to bring industry and more visitors to this picturesque Peak village. ■

The workshops in Alstonefield include all materials, tea, coffee and home baking and cost £35 per person for the day. For details see www.threadsworkshops.co.uk, telephone 01335 310125 or 07732 222206, or email threadsworkshops@gmail.com

Top centre and above right: Japanese Temari Balls
 Above centre: 'A Girl Can Never Have Too Many Shoes'
 Below: Cupcakes on a Bag
 Photographs by Jo Wood and Cathy Reavy

