

Get Crafty

Lucy Corkhill explores some of our traditional crafts that can be enjoyed as a family

Traditional crafts are currently enjoying something of a revival but for our ancestors they were a part of everyday life.

Crafts such as felt-making, pottery, weaving, carpentry and blacksmithery were an integral part of a busy, stable community, with products either used, traded or sold. With the rise of industrialisation and factories able to mass-produce items, crafts went into decline. For instance in a village in Lincolnshire in 1851, there were 13 tailors, 8 cobblers, 6 blacksmiths, 14 carpenters, bakers, a miller and a brick-maker for a population of 900. In the same village today, there is a shop, a butcher, a school and 2 pubs.

We are slowly getting back into crafts, with more people now concerned about where and how things are made; supporting local tradespeople and individual care and workmanship. Learning about crafts is a great, hands-on way to get in touch with history. Children get to experience first-hand the work that goes into an item of clothing or a piece of pottery, getting in touch with the day to day lives of their ancestors.

There are plenty of traditional crafts to learn and experience so there is sure to be something that appeals to every member of the family.

Felt-making

This is one of the oldest textile techniques traditionally used for making hats. Felt can be made out

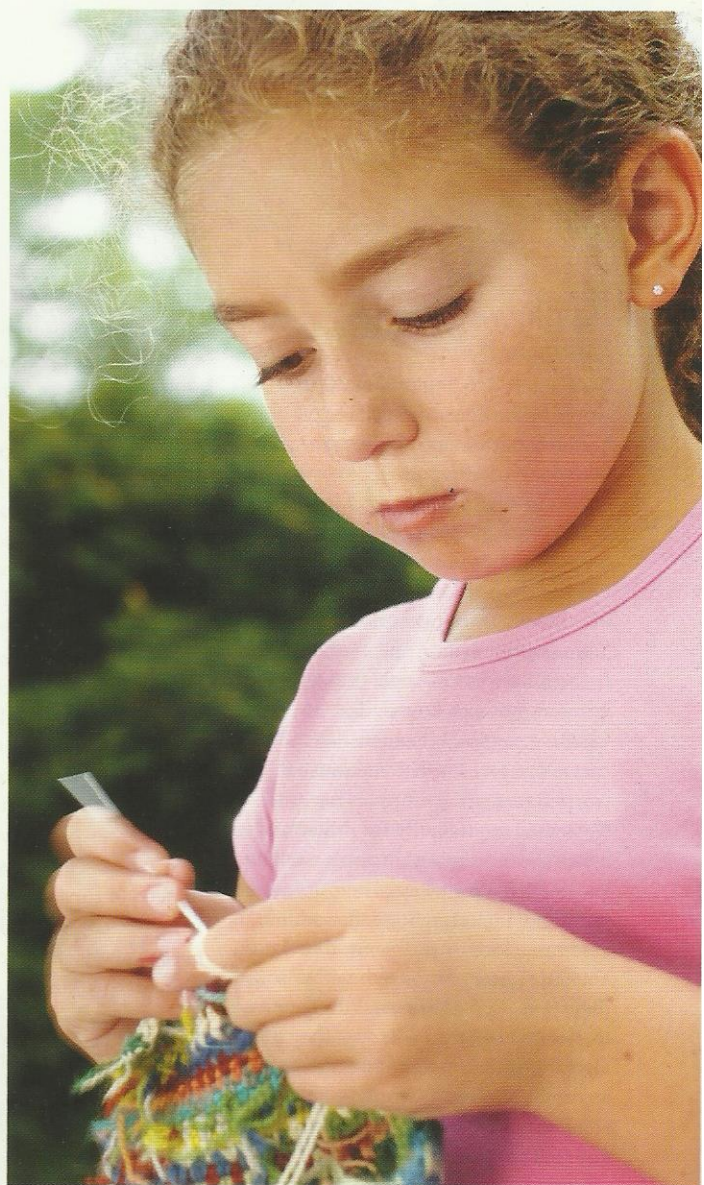
of fur or wool, with fur now defunct because of animal cruelty issues. The fibres of the wool are matted together to form felt using different tools and techniques. This is a great fun craft to learn as felt can be dyed and used to make toys, hats and bags. The Natural History Museum is running a felt-making course in December, nhm.ac.uk, tel: 020 7942 5000, or the only felt-making mill in the UK, in Ludlow moralfibre.uk.com, tel: 01584 856654 has courses for schools.

Pottery

Making items out of clay is not only considered one of the first inventions, but also one of the first art forms. Some of the signs of the earliest civilisations have been decorated clay objects. Pottery has adapted with time, with the first potters wheel appearing in China in 3100BC and different clays being used and the art of firing learnt. See bromyardpottery.co.uk for details of children's pottery workshops held in rural Herefordshire.

Spinning and Weaving

This is a fantastic craft to learn as it teaches kids about where clothes come from and how all cloth was traditionally made before machines. The art of spinning wool using a spindle and then weaving it into a garment dates back to Neolithic times. To watch demonstrations and learn more, why not visit Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire? See quarrybankmill.org.uk, or tel: 01625 527468 for details.



'Learning about crafts is a great, hands-on way to get in touch with history'

Basket-making

Another vital part of everyday life for our ancestors, woven strips of wood such as willow were used to create fences, baskets and even the walls of houses. We are now used to containers constructed with many different types of materials but originally there were only woven baskets. For individual classes in Reading, see stripeybasket.co.uk, tel: 0118 966 2250

Corn-dolly making

The tradition of making a design from the last sheaf of corn in the field was practiced throughout Britain and corn dollies were hung around the home to ward off bad spirits. Plaiting wheat stalks is a relatively easy craft to learn and one that can be practiced at home. Watch demonstrations at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, near Chichester, Sussex. See wealddown.co.uk, 01243 811363