



Reviving Quilting and Patchwork in the 20th Century

After years of thrift and ‘making do’ during World War Two, patchwork and quilting fell out of favour. Only a few determined women continued with the craft, especially in South Wales and the North East of England where they had access to quilt classes and groups.

One of these women was Amy Emms, born in 1904 in County Durham. Taught by her mother who made quilts for a ‘quilt club’ and for local shops, Amy continued to teach after the war so that quilting ‘never became a dying craft’. She was awarded an MBE for her outstanding contribution to quilting and kept on quilting up until she died in 1998.

Another of the women keeping the craft alive was the influential British quilt historian and maker, Averil Colby, who published three books during the mid 20th Century. Her influence is clear in patchwork from the period.

Both of these women, along with many other passionate people, played a central role in establishing the Quilters’ Guild of the British Isles in 1979. Quilting began to re-gain popularity, this time as an ‘artform’.



From top:
Amy Emms with the quilt commissioned by the Quilters’ Guild of the British Isles

Cover from Averil Colby’s ‘Patchwork’ book