

Are all quilters women?

During the 1800s and early 1900s most quilters worked in their own homes and for their own family. Mothers passed quilting and patchwork skills on to their daughters. Learning to sew was central to a girl's education, but even up to the late 19th Century boys also learnt needlework skills at an early age, entertainment being the main reason.

Although quilting was, and remains widely considered as a female past-time, men did make quilts and still do today.

Joseph Hedley, better known as 'Joe the Quilter', lived in Northumberland from the mid 1700s. Joe originally trained as a tailor and developed a real talent for quilt 'stamping' or marking. His designs were very popular with wealthy quilters as far afield as Ireland and America. In 1826 Joe was murdered but the crime went unsolved. People assumed someone killed Joe while looking to steal the money he had made from quilting.

Many male quilters were trained tailors or injured servicemen using quilting as hobby whilst recovering from their injuries. Today there are many male quilt artists, like Michael James and Kaffe Fassett.

You can download an interview with



Whitehall, January 17th, 1826.

WHEREAS

IT hath been humbly represented unto the King, that on the Evening of Tuesday the 3rd instant

JOSEPH HEDLEY,

Residing alone in a Cottage in Homer's Lane, near Warden, in the County of Northumberland, Quilter, was Inhumanly MURDERED, by some Person or Persons unknown.

His MAJESTY, for the better Apprehending and bringing to Justice the Person or Persons concerned in the Atrocious Murder above mentioned, is hereby pleased to promise his most gracious PARDON to any one of them, (except the Person who actually Committed the same) who shall discover his Accomplice or Accessories therein, so that he, she, or they, may be Apprehended and Convicted thereof.

ROBERT PEEL

And, as further encouragement a REWARD of

One Hundred Guineas

Is hereby offered by the Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Warden aforesaid, to any Person (except as aforesaid) who shall discover the said Offender or Offenders, so that he, she, or they, may be Apprehended and Convicted of the said Offence.

B. BUCKINGHAM, PRINTER, BETHNAL.



From top:

Illustration of a sewing class in a Victorian school; A quilt made by Joseph Hedley; Reward notice for information about the murder of Joseph Hedley ('Joe the Quilter') 1826. Images courtesy of Beamish Open Air Museum

Kent Uniform Coverlet made from pieces of uniform by injured soliders. Image courtesy of Quilters Guild of the British Isles.