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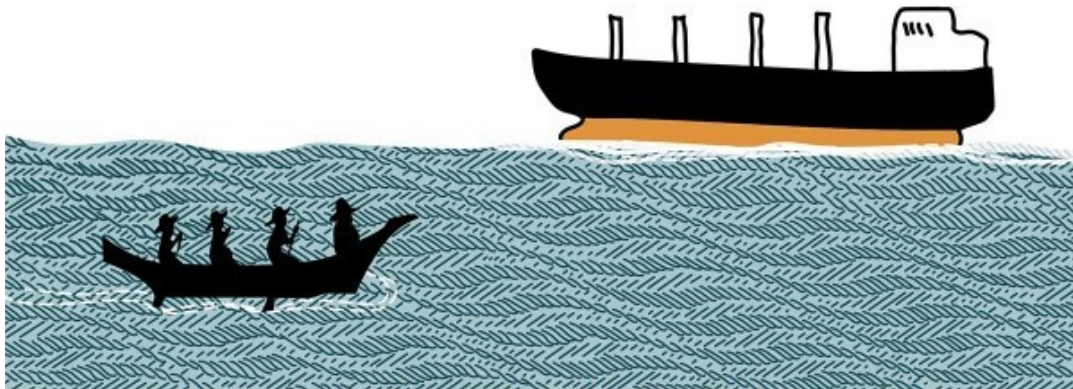
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The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global



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Sanquhar Gloves: An Exemplification of Deep Local to Pan Global?

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This paper explores the idea of the Deep Local and the Pan Global, the theme of the Textile Society of America Symposium 2018, with respect to the hand knitted gloves found and still knitted in the small Scottish town of Sanquhar, in the UK. The paper begins by describing the gloves and goes on to outline the research approaches and critical framework used in the construction of the research. Features of the gloves that can be identified as “local” are then described and discussed. Ways in which aspects of the glove production can be construed as “global” are identified. The move from the local to the global is described and explained, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the reasons for the continued existence of the Sanquhar glove into the 21st century.

Sanquhar is a small town in rural Southern Scotland, UK. With a population of two thousand, it is hardly more than a village. It has a history as a producer of textiles including woven cloth and carpets, partly due to the availability of local wool and water for power and washing, in common with most upland rural areas of Britain. It was also a centre for the production of a particular type of embroidery in the mid 19th century. However, it is for the highly patterned hand knitted gloves that take its name that it has become known to knitters all over the world.

Sanquhar gloves have several distinguishing features:

- They are hand knitted.
- They are knitted in the round, that is, constructed without seams.
- Two contrasting colours of fine wool are used, often black and white.
- They are patterned all over, there being four generally recognized and named patterns.
- The fingers are constructed with a small gusset or fourchette at the base of each finger, a piece of shaped knitting which makes a better fit for the wearer.
- Around the cuff the owner’s initials and sometimes the date are knitted into the fabric.

Although knitted gloves from other parts of the UK and northern Europe can share some of these elements, the distinctive Sanquhar patterns, especially those based on the grid or

damrod, make Sanquhar gloves unique. It is gloves in this type of pattern that are the focus of this paper (Image 1).



Image 1. A selection of Sanquhar gloves knitted by the author. Photograph Angharad Thomas.

The research approaches used in this paper are various. Since 2011 the author has been engaged in The Glove Project, a personal research project encompassing several types of activity including designing and making knitted gloves; the study of historical examples in museums in the UK and Europe; and the study of contemporary glove knitting in the UK, Estonia and Latvia. The construction and study of Sanquhar gloves has formed an important and founding part of The Glove Project.

The critical framework which underpins the research is informed by a feminist approach and acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed.¹ The model for the work that has resulted in this paper is essentially an action research approach which has included making, designing, travelling, meeting people, and visiting museums in the course of data collection.

¹ H. Roberts, H., ed, *Doing Feminist Research* (London and New York: Routledge Keegan Paul, 1981); L. Stanley, and S. Wise, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (London: Routledge, 1993, 2nd ed.); P.L. Berger, P.L., and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 1966).

Essentially the research methods are qualitative and acknowledge the role of the researcher as part of the research process.²

I argue that the Sanquhar glove embodies the local, as defined by the call for papers for this symposium, *The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global*, that is, “knowledge, beliefs, resources, and practices that are profoundly anchored in particular communities and places.”³

Sanquhar gloves demonstrate “the local,” i.e. they are anchored in their particular community or place, Sanquhar, in a variety of ways. They are made by a small number of women who knit them by hand in their homes in the local area as documented in a Japanese book “Traditional Gloves in Scotland.”⁴ Gloves are sometimes to be found for sale alongside other knitwear in the Sanquhar style in the local arts centre in the town centre. If none is available for sale, then a pair may be ordered which will be made by a local knitter.

The Tolbooth Museum, also in the town centre, has a permanent display of Sanquhar gloves and information about their history (Image 2).

Materials for knitting the gloves can be bought in a craft shop in the town. Thus, in the centre of Sanquhar there is activity related to the production of gloves and other items in the Sanquhar patterns, in the arts centre and its shop, the Tolbooth Museum and the craft shop, all of which indicate the local nature of the production of the Sanquhar glove in the town and the immediate area around.

² A. Albers, *On Weaving* (London: Studio Vista, 1966); A. Albers, *On Designing* (Connecticut: Wesleyan U.P., 1962); A. Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn* (Thousand Oaks, CA, and London: SAGE Publications, 2005); K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA, and London: SAGE Publications, 2006); A.E. Clarke, C.E. Friese, and R.S. Washburn, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Interpretive Turn* (Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE Publications 2017, 2nd ed).

³ Textile Society of America, “The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global. Call for Submissions,” accessed May 22, 2017, <http://www.textilesociety.org>.

⁴ Anonymous, *Traditional Gloves in Scotland* (Tokyo: Miro Press, 2013).



Image 2. Display in Sanquhar Tolbooth Museum. Photograph Angharad Thomas.

Additionally, other activity makes use of the patterns found in the gloves to produce a range of knitwear from a workshop adjacent to the arts centre, an initiative organized to provide employment, and to provide goods for sale in the next-door arts centre.⁵

The Riding of the Marches is an annual event in many towns in Scotland including Sanquhar. In Sanquhar however, since about 1910, one of the leading riders in the ceremony, the Cornet, wears Sanquhar knitted gloves in the Cornet pattern according to the reply to an enquiry to the Sanquhar Riding of the Marches web site. These can be seen in an image on the Facebook page for the 2019 event in which the riders are wearing Sanquhar gloves.⁶

If the above discussion demonstrates the local qualities of the Sanquhar glove, and its knitted patterns, how can it also be global? The move from local to global can be demonstrated to have taken place through a variety of ways and different media.

⁵ Sanquhar Pattern Designs, “Sanquhar Pattern Designs,” accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.sanquharknits.com/about/>.

⁶ Personal communication (email) received in response from Sanquharridingofthemarches.com, February 1, 2017; “Sanquhar Riding of the Marches,” Facebook page, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/sanquharridingofthemarches/>.

Until after World War Two, knitting of Sanquhar gloves was confined to Sanquhar and its close environs, and patterns were shared between family members, friends and acquaintances. From 1933, knitting of the Sanquhar glove was overseen by a teacher of domestic crafts at the secondary school in the town, Mary Forsyth, as she ensured that every girl at the school knit a Sanquhar glove during her time there.⁷ Rutt goes on to say that fortuitously this teaching also extended to girls from a Glasgow school evacuated to Sanquhar during the Second World War for safety, and thus knowledge of the glove knitting was spread to a wider area.



Image 3. Patons & Baldwins Sanquhar glove pattern.. Collection of Angharad Thomas.

In the mid 1950s printed patterns for gloves and other items were published with a national and potentially international distribution and it could be argued that this began to make the change for the Sanquhar glove from local to global. Patons and Baldwins, the wool producer, published a pattern for Sanquhar gloves in the mid 1950s although an exact date is not

⁷ R. Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting* (London: Batsford, 1987), 201.

known. The pattern specifically named Sanquhar as the source of this pattern, stating “Sanquhar in Dumfriesshire gives its name to these traditional gloves” (Image 3).⁸

Also in the mid 1950s, the Dundee based publisher of the *People’s Friend*, a women’s magazine, issued two booklets of Sanquhar and Scottish knitting as free gifts with the magazine which included patterns for knitting Sanquhar gloves and other items using the grid based patterns (Image 4).⁹



Image 4. *The Sanquhar Knitting Book* from the *People’s Friend*. Collection of Angharad Thomas.

Further publication of print resources for knitting Sanquhar gloves enabled knowledge of them to grow. In the 1960s the Scottish Rural Women’s Institute, a membership organization for women in rural areas of Scotland produced a pattern for the Midge and Flea pattern glove followed by patterns for other named Sanquhar gloves during the 1970s. Little is known about the production of these patterns although it is clear from using them that they were

⁸ Anonymous, *Sanquhar Gloves: A Traditional Scottish Style* (Brentford, Middlesex, UK: Patons & Baldwins Limited, n.d).

⁹ *People’s Friend*, “The Scottish Knit Book No. 1,” *People’s Friend*, 1955; *People’s Friend*, “The Sanquhar Knitting Book,” *People’s Friend*, 1955.

based on instructions given by a person who was used to knitting them.¹⁰ They were re-issued in about 2015, reformatted slightly, but are only available as hard copy and not electronically.

Through the publication of these patterns in the mid 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, knowledge of Sanquhar patterns was spread throughout an area wider than the vicinity of Sanquhar and in a form that could be sent by post and shared with others further away.

Sanquhar gloves have also been brought to wider attention through print media including a reference in *Scottish Knitting* while Richard Rutt documented both history and patterns in his *History of Hand Knitting*.¹¹ An A5 colour booklet, *Sanquhar Pattern Gloves: History and Knitting Pattern* was published locally and is still available in the town.¹² This is based on Reid's Master's thesis and also forms the basis for the information found on the web page entitled "A History of the Sanquhar Knitting Pattern."¹³

Sanquhar gloves have been the focus of interest in knitting magazines throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Their history, the intricate patterns and the seeming puzzle over their continued existence provide a continual curiosity, and articles have appeared in the American leisure press and in the UK knitting press too.¹⁴ Articles about Sanquhar gloves, often with patterns for knitting them, have appeared in print from one-page outlines of their origins and patterns to longer articles and patterns for knitting them.¹⁵ The most recent, at the time of writing, was *Vogue Knitting* (USA) or *Designer Knitting* (UK and Europe) which in 2017 ran a special issue on Sanquhar knitting with a feature and several Sanquhar inspired

¹⁰ Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, *Sanquhar Gloves: Midge and Fly Design* (Edinburgh: Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, 1966); Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, *Sanquhar Gloves: Shepherd's Plaid Design* (Edinburgh: Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, 1979); Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, *Sanquhar Gloves: Duke Design* (Edinburgh: Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, n.d); Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, *Sanquhar Gloves: Prince of Wales Pattern* (Edinburgh: Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, 1980).

¹¹ H. Bennett, *Scottish Knitting* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1986); Rutt, *History of Hand Knitting*, 199–202.

¹² R. Reid, *Sanquhar Pattern Gloves: History and Knitting Pattern* (Moniave, Scotland: The Galloway Tryst, 1998).

¹³ R. Reid, "A History of the Sanquhar Knitting Pattern," Accessed January 24, 2019, <http://www.dumfriemuseum.demon.co.uk/knithist.html>.

¹⁴ T. van Deijen, "Light & Shadows," *The Knitter* (Bristol: Immediate Media Co Ltd., 2013), 14–15.

¹⁵ I. Bigelow, "Sanquhar Gloves," *Interweave Knits* (USA: Interweave Press, 2004), 6; N. Bush, "The Spectacular Gloves of Sanquhar," *Piecework* (Loveland, CO: FW Media, 2014), 32–5; N. Bush, "Sanquhar Gloves in the Drum Pattern," *Piecework* (Loveland, CO: FW Media, 2014), 36–41; A. Thomas, "By the Dexterous Use of Two Threads: Gloves and the Handknitting Industry of Sanquhar, Scotland," *Knitting Traditions* (Loveland, CO: Interweave, 2014), 33–36; A. Thomas, "Prince of Wales Sanquhar Gloves," *Knitting Traditions* (Interweave: Loveland, Colorado, USA, 2014), 37–40.

patterns.¹⁶ It is worth noting that these publications, post 2010, although primarily hard copy, are also available in digital form.

Through all the published patterns and features, the Sanquhar glove, with its striking patterns, has become more widely known as these are distributed globally.

However, since around 2000 the rise of the Internet and the World Wide Web has offered opportunities for writers and historians to share material about Sanquhar gloves and knitting, and through these media I argue that the glove and its associated knitting patterns has become accessible to a more global audience, even allowing for the fact that electronic communications are not universally available.

Through all types of electronic media, web sites, blogs and online exhibitions, knowledge of Sanquhar gloves can be shared with a worldwide audience, and these are now looked at in turn.

Dumfries and Galloway Museums, Dumfries and Galloway being the local government area in which Sanquhar is located, have an online resource, the Future Museum, a section of which is devoted to the Sanquhar glove and to showing those in their collection.¹⁷ It also gives a history of Sanquhar knitting as well as information about other textile activities in that area. It is worth noting that Sanquhar knitting is included under the heading of “Life and Work: Key Industries,” reflecting the status of the glove knitting as an income generating activity rather than a leisure activity.¹⁸

Another web site, also from Dumfries Museums, gives the history of the Sanquhar pattern based on Rowan Reid’s book.¹⁹

¹⁶ A. Thomas, “Unraveling a Scottish Mystery,” *Vogue Knitting* (New York, NY: SoHo Publishing, 2017), 52, 54, 102; A. Thomas, “Unraveling a Scottish Mystery,” *Designer Knitting* (New York, NY: SoHo Publishing, 2017), 52, 54, 102.

¹⁷ Future Museum, “Textiles: Sanquhar Knitting,” 2012, Accessed January 19, 2019.

<http://futuremuseum.co.uk/collections/life-work/key-industries/textiles/sanquhar-knitting.aspx>.

¹⁸ See the opening web page of the Future Museum’s section on Sanquhar knitting: “Textiles: Sanquhar Knitting.” <http://futuremuseum.co.uk/collections/life-work/key-industries/textiles/sanquhar-knitting.aspx>.

¹⁹ Reid, “History of the Sanquhar Knitting Pattern.”

Sanquhar gloves can be found on several blogs, including that of the author who blogs about her research, designing and knitting of gloves with pages covering visits to Sanquhar and the process of knitting the various patterns of Sanquhar gloves.²⁰ Others which include pages that record and discuss the Sanquhar glove and knitting activity are those of Potter Wright and Webb and Kate Davies.²¹

A key resource in enabling knitters and makers to communicate and share information worldwide has been Ravelry, the wiki for knitters and crocheters primarily, but which includes other textile crafts.²² Founded in 2007, the “About Us” section explains what Ravelry is:

Ravelry is a place for knitters, crocheters, designers, spinners, weavers and dyers to keep track of their yarn, tools, project and pattern information, and look to others for ideas and inspiration. The content here is all user- driven; we as a community make the site what it is. Ravelry is a great place for you to keep notes about your projects, see what other people are making, find the perfect pattern and connect with people who love to play with yarn from all over the world in our forums.²³

A Ravelry search for “Sanquhar” shows the Sanquhar knitting group that has over 600 members in countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Holland, Japan, Norway, South Korea, Sweden and UK.²⁴ A pattern search gives examples of over 50 projects, many gloves, but also other garments using the Sanquhar patterns.²⁵ Through Ravelry in particular, very localized activity such as the knitting of Sanquhar gloves and using the Sanquhar patterns can be shared and made available to people in many different countries, such is the power of electronic media to enable global communication with relative ease.

²⁰ A. Thomas, “Sanquhar Gloves.” *Knitting Gloves*, 2014, blog, Wordpress, <https://knittinggloves.wordpress.com/sanquhar-and-yorkshire-gloves/>.

²¹ R. Reynolds, “A Traditional Crafts Journey Around the British Isles,” *Potter Wright & Webb*, 2012, accessed January 20, 2019, <http://www.potterwrightandwebb.co.uk/textiles/sanquhar-gloves>; K. Davies, “A Day at Sanquhar,” 2014, Kate Davies Designs: Scotland, <https://katedaviesdesigns.com/2014/11/03/a-day-at-sanquhar/>.

²² Ravelry, web site home page, 2019, <https://www.ravelry.com/>.

²³ Ravelry, “About Us,” n.d., accessed January 19, 2019, <https://www.ravelry.com/about>.

²⁴ Ravelry, “Sanquhar Knitting Group Members List,” 2019, available if signed in at <https://www.ravelry.com/groups/sanquhar-knitting-group/members>.

²⁵ Ravelry, “Sanquhar Knitting Group,” 2019, accessed January 19, 2019, available if signed in at <http://www.ravelry.com/groups/sanquhar-knitting-group>.

The American Center for Knit and Crochet is a not for profit organization with a mission “to preserve and promote the art, craft, and scholarship of knitting, crochet, and related arts.”²⁶ In 2015 this organization invited the author along with fellow knitter and designer Beth Brown-Reinsel to co-curate an online exhibition of Sanquhar gloves.²⁷ The resulting work is a repository of information and images of Sanquhar gloves both historic and contemporary available, as the CKC says, “24 hours a day, seven days a week.”²⁸

The description above demonstrates that Sanquhar gloves and their making are both local and global. Locally, in the town of Sanquhar itself, the knitting of the Sanquhar glove and other items in the patterns derived from the gloves is evident in the town’s arts centre, the museum, and the shops. Additionally, people who knit the gloves live locally. The presence of internationally distributed publications as well as online resources, web sites, blogs and exhibitions, show that Sanquhar knitting also has a global reach.

So why have the Sanquhar glove and the Sanquhar patterns survived and even thrived? There are several features of the context within which the Sanquhar glove is produced that make it unique, and that I argue that these have ensured its continued existence.

- The construction of the glove can only be done using hand knitting, thus meaning that production cannot be industrialized and therefore the numbers produced have to remain low.
- There is a market for the gloves from visitors to Sanquhar.
- The gloves can be, and usually are, customized, and this adds novelty and exclusivity in a globalized market place.
- Support was given to glove knitting by the local landowner in the nineteenth century by payment of cash for support or the placing of orders for gloves.
- The teacher Mary Forsyth ensured that all Sanquhar girls had knitted a pair of gloves while at school over a period of about four decades.

²⁶ Center for Knit and Crochet, web site home page, 2019, <http://centerforknitandcrochet.org/>; Center for Knit and Crochet, “About the Center for Knit and Crochet,” accessed January 19, 2019, <http://centerforknitandcrochet.org/about/>.

²⁷ B. Brown-Reinsel, and A. Thomas, “Sanquhar Gloves: A Living Scottish Tradition,” 2015, accessed January 19, 2019, <http://sanquhargloves.centerforknitandcrochet.org/>.

²⁸ See the opening page of the online Sanquhar Gloves exhibition, accessed January 19, 2019, at <http://centerforknitandcrochet.org/exhibitions/>.

- The gloves are used in the ceremony of Riding the Marches, and this has meant that a pair has to be knitted every year for the Cornet, a key figure in the ceremony, and this gives the gloves publicity.
- The gloves are an enjoyable challenge for a hand knitter and this is made possible by the information available on the Internet.

Sanquhar gloves are demonstrably and visibly local, as the visitor to Sanquhar can see, but global reach is now possible, expanding awareness of the gloves, and enabling the continuation of the local. They are an exemplification of the dual idea of the “deep local” and the “pan global.”

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