

Spinning a Yarn: The Story of Sheep and Axminster
Temporary Exhibition 16th April – 29th October 2022

Hand Shearing Sheep in the Axminster Heritage Centre Courtyard 16th April 2022



Two days before the sheep in the courtyard Axminster Heritage Centre on Tuesday 16th April 2022



Carol Withering hand shearing one of the sheep in the Axminster Heritage Centre courtyard Tuesday 16th April 2022

Many people might have questioned the suitability of bringing sheep into the Axminster Heritage Centre, especially as we have an display some of the original Thomas Worby Axminster carpets made during the Georgian period. However, in the design process an undertaking in 2018 and 2019, we included an outdoor space where we could hold events and activities. In truth, corralling sheep in the courtyard had not been one of the suggestions for its use. In 2019 we had planned to do an exhibition on the story of sheep in Axminster and had planned to bring in sheep in April 2020. With Covid forcing our closure back then and heavily restricting what we could do in 2021 we delayed the exhibition until 2022. We watched on as Easter 2020 and 2021 were days of glorious sunshine and regretted we had lost the opportunity on those days to bring in sheep. We couldn't have worked on on Saturday 16th April 2022 the Heritage Centre backed in sunshine. Carol Withering brought in 13 sheep from her small holding into our courtyard, some of which were hand sheared in front of the waiting crowds. Visitors could ask questions about the hand shearing, the sheep breed and how the wool was processed after being collected. The sheep naturally drew people close and many were surprised at how tame they were, with many able to pet the sheep, feed them and for some lucky younger visitors they were able to give a lambie cuddle. It proved to be a great day for all the visitors, especially the families and of visitors left with a smile on their faces and for some an experience they had never had before, or expected.

The sheep are the first part of a story which summer season at the Axminster Heritage Centre, mostly linked to our temporary exhibition 'Spinning a Yarn: The Story of Axminster and Sheep'. What from the sheep shearing is to be used in a number of workshops allowing people to take part in sorting and cleaning the fleece, carding the wool, spinning the wool and then using the wool in a number of creative ways. There will also be a series of related talks. For more information please visit www.axminsterheritage.org or follow us on Facebook.