

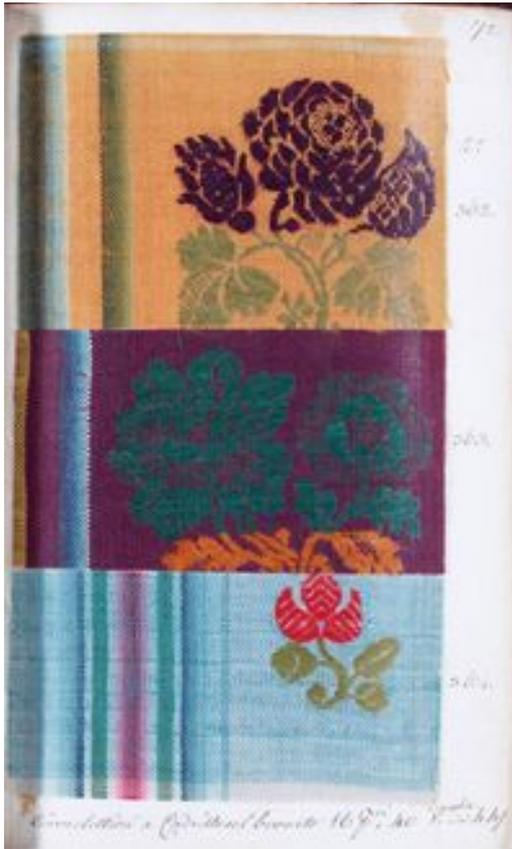
‘Norwich Textiles: a Global Story, 1750-1820’ Lecture by Michael Nix, formerly Research Manager Textiles and Technology, Glasgow Museums. Joint meeting with NAHRG at the Town Auditorium, Norwich Castle Museum Saturday 5th Dec. 2015 2.30pm

When first seeing a late eighteenth century Norwich pattern book in the conservation studio at the Norfolk Record Office Dr Nix could not make head nor tail of its meaning, but he discovered an unexpected world of bright colours and diverse patterns. Although told he was wasting his time researching the history of the city’s textile industry between 1750 and 1820 using the Norfolk Museums Service’s collection because all the work had already been done, he felt it worth the risk to spend a lot of time trying to understand them, in decoding their meaning. He has been surprised by the enormous range of sources and the amount of information and data available.

Dr Nix first read a paragraph from W.G. Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn* which described the vast numbers of textile swatches in these books as being ‘of a truly fabulous variety, and of an iridescent, quite indescribable beauty as if produced by Nature itself, like the plumage of birds’. He then highlighted the importance of the surviving pattern books and cards as essential management tools used in communicating orders and for recording shipments. They provided Norwich’s merchant-manufacturers with a history of their trade, acted as an archival resource, and communicated complex technical information quickly and efficiently to correspondents. Indeed, swatches conveyed information about pattern, colour, texture and finish which verbal descriptions failed to match.

To give a sense of the city’s global reach, the five collections of Norwich pattern books and cards were outlined. Besides a significant collection of a dozen items in Norwich, there are also books and cards in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Nordiska Museum in Stockholm, the Winterthur Museum and Library in Delaware and the Bibliotheque Forney in Paris (since the talk another has been noted in the Netherlands). Those in London were created by the firm of Stannard & Taylor in St Giles’s Broad Street, Norwich, while a number of swatches in a book in Paris form part of a much wider European collection put together by the Piedmontese merchant Gian Batta Moccafy. Anders Berch, who became first professor of economics and state economy at Uppsala University in Sweden during 1741, acquired the grouping of swatches now in the Nordiska Museum as part of his programme of collecting visual material such as models, books and production samples to aid his teaching. The six books in Winterthur formerly belonged to the Pennsylvania Museum & School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia.

Although much has been stated in the past about Norwich weavers in their garrets, little has been said about the manufactories themselves, the groups of warehouses and workshops essential to managing and finishing.



Swatches from the Charles Tuthill pattern book
1800–1809 (NAS, 1957.384)



Swatches from a Norwich pattern book
dated 1769 (NAS, 1947.32)

(Images by kind permission of Norfolk Museums Service)

Dr Nix, focusing on the manufactory of Stannard & Taylor, explained the structure adopted by the firm and how the various crafts of dyeing and hotpressing were integrated into the set-up. He then moved on to outline the system of transport, not only to distribute the finished goods by carriage overland and by river and sea, but also to acquire yarn from East Anglia, Ireland and to a lesser extent Scotland. He then explained the purpose of pack ships, vessels entirely employed to convey packs of stuffs made by a number of Norwich manufacturers to European ports.

The extent of the distribution of Norwich goods to Europe was represented by the trade of Stannard & Taylor who had correspondents as far away as Russia in the east and Italy and Spain in the south. The Spanish colonial trade provided further access into the South American market. (Since this talk, research has been carried out on the north American trade through a research fellowship awarded by the Winterthur Museum and Library). The system of communicating and trading over long distances was addressed through arrangements made between Stannard & Taylor and a commission agent and traders in Moscow, an agent for handling payments in Amsterdam, and Peter Gausson Jnr, a banker in London.

Dr Nix next showed a portrait of Jeremiah Ives Junior, a Whig mercantilist opposed to the exportation of wool to prevent its use by competitors in France. During the 1780s, he successfully led a national campaign against Lincolnshire wool growers, led by the agriculturalist and economist Arthur Young and the naturalist, botanist and explorer Sir Joseph Banks, who wanted free trade. A table showing the returns made by J. J. Ives, Son & Baseley, of which Jeremiah Ives Junior was a partner, reveals not only the extent of the firm's Continental trade, but also the importance of making camblets for the East India Company for sale in China. Analysis of one of the firm's pattern books also disclosed how the closure of the Gulf of Finland by winter ice impacted on the trade with Russia.

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The President, Sophie Cabot thanked Dr. Nix for his detailed and interesting account. There were a few questions about his research from the sizeable audience of seventy-nine people. Dr. Nix couldn't say when his work would be ready for publication.