

Month two, and I'm hoping for a slightly smoother delivery of parcels this time. Turns out that doing the club letters just before Christmas means that you manage to leave out a section of the addresses on your mail merge. If you had to wait a long time for your parcel I can only apologise, things should be much quicker this time.

We're leaping forward in time by a couple of thousand years, much closer to present day, but still long enough ago that life would have been very different. If you like colour it's possibly the most exciting period of time, the world was literally exploding with colours, in vivid shades that were impossible to achieve previously. Aniline dyes changed the spectrum of the world around us. Previously cloth could only be dyed using natural pigments. Shades of yellow and green were pretty easy, you could get blue from Indigo and Woad, and a red from Madder, and as natural dyers know, intense shades are challenging, most people would have worn clothing a muted palette. Purple however... a true purple was very rare. Madder is a very orange shade of red, so when combined with natural blues it doesn't make a good purple. Purple had to come from Murex shellfish, you needed 250,000 of them to get enough dye for a single toga, wearing purple was a sign of extreme wealth, comparable to driving around in an Aston Martin today.

It's something of an irony that the first synthetic colour was purple, or more accurately Mauve. It was discovered completely by accident by William Perkin in 1856. He was looking for a way to synthesis Quinine, the Victorians were at the height of their Empire building, and the demand for Quinine to prevent Malaria in tropical countries was extremely high. There was also a large supply of coal tar, extracted from coal gas, and a bi-product of another revolution, the installation of gas lighting. This coal tar contained lots of Hydrogen and Carbon, and scientists worked out they could use it to make all sorts of useful things.

Perkin never found a synthetic Quinine, instead he noticed that when he rinsed out a flask at the end of an experiment that a beautiful purple colour was produced. To make the leap and realise it might be a dye is something that I think gets overlooked, but Perkin did, and the discovery made him his fortune.

So here's to William Perkin, who made our world the colourful one we see around us.

Happy Spinning,

Katie