

Luther Hooper

In the period from 1910 to 1932, Luther Hooper wrote seven books related to handweaving. Despite the passage of time since these books were written, they still are praised for the insights they offer.

This brief autobiography, written shortly before his death, tells much about the man and his work

Short Autobiography

I was born at Upper Tulse Hill, Brixton, on 4 April 1849. My father was manager of a drapery business at Highgate and my mother was the daughter of James Webb, builder, of Long Melford in Suffolk.

In 1855 the family, consisting of father, mother and two boys, of which I was the younger, removed to Finsbury Pavement, Moorgate Street, City. Here I remained at home until my marriage in 1872. I was educated at private schools, one at Stoke Newington and another in High Street, Hoxton. At the age of fourteen I was taken from school and a situation as office-boy was found for me with a stockbroker in Cornhill. During the time I was thus engaged, about two years, I developed some skill in ornamental writing and illuminating and was rather petted by some of the Stock Exchange members and was introduced by one of them to Mr Henry Shaw, well known as an antiquary and an authority on old manuscripts. His office was in Southampton Row, Bloomsbury. Mr Shaw offered to take me into his office as a pupil to learn illuminating by assisting an artist whom he employed to copy ancient illuminated books, etc. I paid no premium for this privilege, nor of course received any wages; I was allowed however to work at home at designing and drawing on wood for the wood engravers, my chief customer being Mr Joseph Swaine of Bouverie Street, Fleet Street—a noted engraver.

I remained with Mr Shaw about two years and then, answering an advertisement for a designer and obtaining an interview with the advertiser, who was a traveller for a French paper-hanging firm and also carried designs with him for sale to English paper stainers, succeeded in pleasing him and, as he found my designs saleable, our connection lasted for some years.

Thus I added wallpaper designing to my work for the engravers. Also during that period I began the practice of watercolour painting and exhibited pictures, and occasionally sold them, at the Old Dudley Gallery in Piccadilly.

I reckoned myself fairly successful in these occupations and in September 1872 felt that my prospects were such as to warrant my marriage with a young lady I had known for some years whose family were connected with the silk-weaving industry of Spitalfields.

Soon after my marriage I made an agreement with a wallpaper firm in London, Messrs Carlisle and Clegg, to make designs of wallpapers exclusively for them. I undertook to produce three designs a week, working at home in my own time. This agreement ran on for seventeen years and was terminated only by the death of the two partners and the absorption of the business by a combine formed by several London and Lancashire firms.

For about three years after my marriage I remained in London, but finding I could work better in the country I removed to Bentley, near Ipswich, where I remained until 1901.

About 1890 I began to study the history, principles and technique of weaving and assisted in the formation and development of a handloom silk-weaving firm in Ipswich, where I thoroughly mastered the techniques of weaving rich silk damasks, brocatelles, velvets, etc. and the preparation of designs for the loom. This study of the craft has enabled me to be of some use to the Art and Craft movement, in which I became interested about that time.

In 1901 I returned to London in order to design for and superintend a small tapestry-weaving industry at Bushey, a branch of weaving I had not hitherto studied: here I remained for rather more than a year and then removed to Haslemere, where there was a group of kindred

craftsmen, and set up a few looms assisted by my son and three skilled weavers who had been with me at Ipswich.

In 1910 I left Haslemere, my son having married and removed to a distance and, taking a studio in the Grosvenor Road, Westminster, began the part of my life for which all the earlier portion seems to have been a preparation. Here I wrote my most important and successful book, *Handloom Weaving, Plain and Ornamental*: it was one of the well-known 'Arts and Crafts' series of technical handbooks edited by Professor Lethaby and published by the late John Hogg of Pater-noster Row in 1911. *Silk, Weaving for Beginners, Weaving with Small Appliances, Books I, II and III*, intended for use in schools, occasional articles in magazines, etc., all followed in due course.

Lecturing for the Royal Society of Arts, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Ropemaker Street Technical College and various Arts and Crafts and other Societies, as well as for the London County Council, particularly in the Central School of Arts and Crafts, Southampton Row, was carried on at the same time as my literary work.

During the war for three years at the Central School I lectured on textile subjects twice a week to about a hundred drapers' assistants, who attended from various leading drapery firms, and afterwards for two years I taught tapestry and other kinds of weaving to a class of disabled men as well as textile students of the Central School.

In 1923 I had to retire from work for the L.C.C., having exceeded the regulation age limit by nine years.

I am now in my seventy-eighth year and am still teaching weaving to private pupils and writing books on textile subjects in my studio at Hammersmith.

— Luther Hooper

Books

Here, in chronological order, is a listing of Luther Hooper's books:

Hand-Loom Weaving Plain & Ornamental, 1910, London: John Hogg, 342 pages.

Silk: Its Production and Manufacture, 1911, London and New York: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 126 pages.

Weaving for Beginners with Plain Directions for Making a Hand Loom, Mounting it and Starting the Work, 1919, London and New York: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 114 pages.

Weaving with Small Appliances: Book I, The Weaving Board, 1922, London and New York, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 82 pages.

Weaving with Small Appliances: Book II, Tablet Weaving, 1923, London and New York, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 78 pages.

Weaving with Small Appliances: Book III, Table Loom Weaving, 1925, London and New York, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 84 pages.

The New Draw-loom: Its Construction and Operation Described for the Use of Handicraft Pattern Weavers, 1932, London and New York, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 219 pages.

Hooper's first three books have appeared in several editions and have been reprinted.

Silk: Its Production and Manufacture, which incidently contains a significant amount of material on weaving, was translated into the Chinese:

Can si gai lun, Qian, Jian and Hou, Shaoqui, translators, 1924, Shanghai:
Shang we yin sahu kaun, 122 pages.

Address to the Royal Society of Arts

In 1912, only two years after the publication of his first book, Hooper presented a series of invited lectures to the Royal Society of Arts on the subject "The Loom and Spindle: Past Present and Future".

These lectures were reprinted in the *Smithsonian Institution Annual Report for 1914*, pp. 629-678.

Illustrations

As his autobiography indicates, Luther Hooper's early work included illustration. Many of the illustrations in his book were drawn by him in a easily recognizable style. See the examples in the appendix. Most of his illustrations carry his monogram:



He also is credited with the following published illustrations:

Studies in Westminster Abbey, sketched and drawn on stone, 1867.
Words of Our Lord, sixteen cards from designs, 1969.

Victoria and Albert Museum Holding

The National Art Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum holds the following item:

Luther Hooper: *Album of photographs, sketches, excerpts and proofs, mainly concerned with textile manufacture and pattern design, botanical illustration and Romanesque art, including some of Luther Hooper's own sketches and designs.*

Looms

Luther Hooper designed many improvements to looms and related equipment. His draw loom is particularly notable. It is interesting that he does not mention his work in this area in his autobiography.

His looms were sold commercially, as evidenced by advertisements, which appeared, among other advertisements, in the backs of his books. Here is an example:

The
HAMPSHIRE HOUSE
WORKSHOPS (Jordans Village
Industries, Ltd.)

□ □ □ □

The Hooper Looms & Accessories

ANY PATTERN MADE TO ORDER

Let us quote for your requirements

6 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, W.6

Availability of Hooper's Published Works

All of Luther Hooper's published works, except for the Chinese translation of *Silk*, are offered for sale from time to time through on-line used book dealers.

Hand-Loom Weaving can be found in its original edition for \$50 to \$100 depending on condition and the dealer. Later editions and recent reprints are considerably cheaper.

Silk is harder to find and has been offered for prices ranging from \$35 to \$100.

Weaving for Beginners has been offered recently at prices ranging from \$10 to \$35.

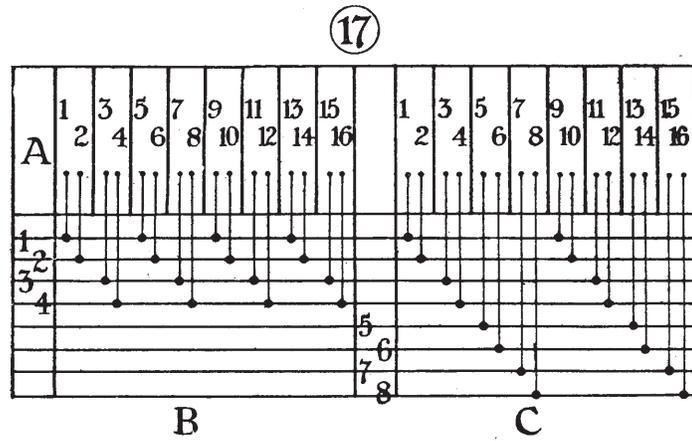
The *Weaving with Small Appliances* books are available separately and as a set. The individual books sell for \$35 to \$45. A set recently has been offered for \$125.

The most elusive of Hooper's books is *Draw-Loom*. In recent years, only one copy, in not the best of condition, has been offered at a price of \$150. Beware of a facsimile, taken from microfilm: The quality of the illustrations is very poor and, of course, the color is lost.

The 1914 *Smithsonian Annual Report* is available in the \$50 range.

All of his published works, with the exception of the Chinese translation of *Silk*, can be obtained through Interlibrary Loan. They also are available from Complex Weavers Lending Library and on the Web: <http://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/weavedocs.html>.

Examples of Illustrations in Luther Hooper's Books



From *Table Loom Weaving*

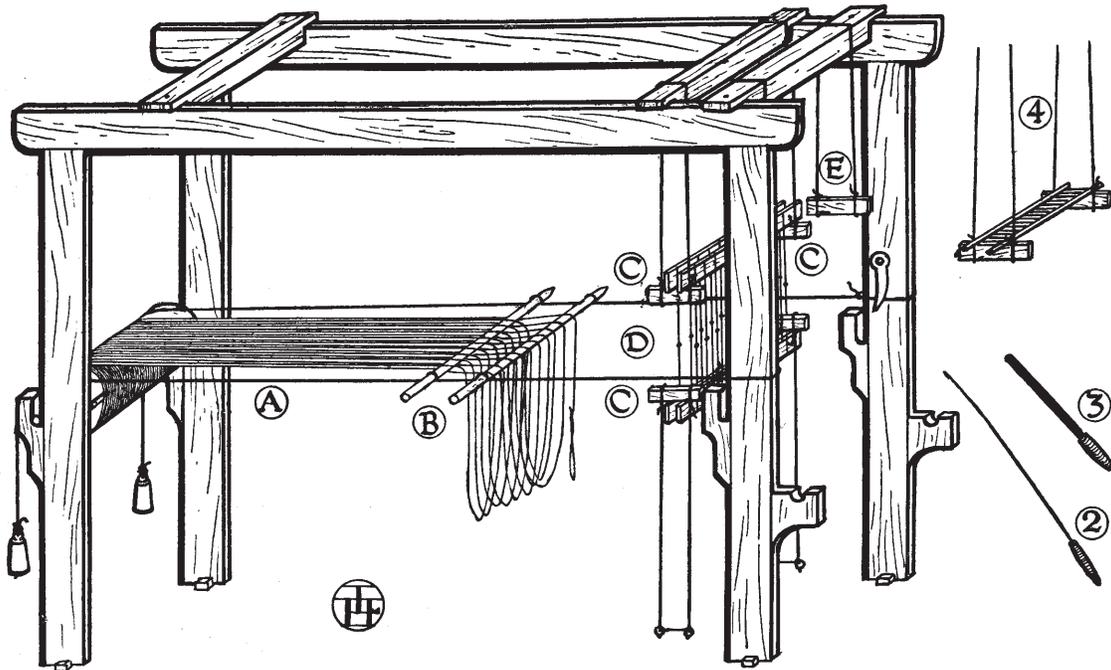
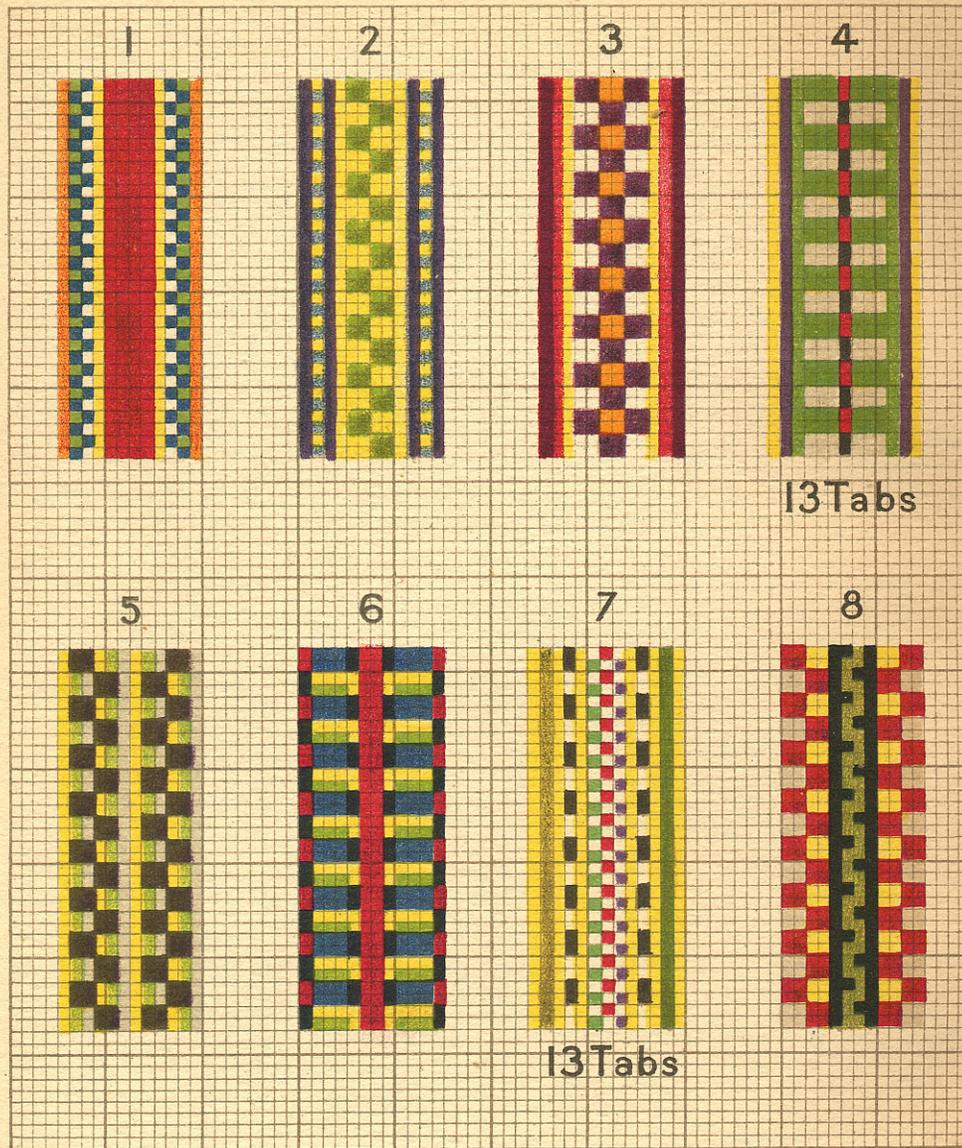


FIG. 32. LOOM PREPARED FOR ENTERING.

From *Weaving for Beginners*



From Tablet Loom Weaving