



Susanne Lervad and Kathrine Vestergaard Brandstrup

# Save the Loom: Defining, documenting and preserving looms

## Introduction

In Denmark, looms, weavers, and the transmission of craft knowledge in the period from the 17th to 20th century underwent a huge development (Nyberg 1974). Before industrialisation, weaving was conducted as both a professional craft in market towns and as household production on smaller farms in rural villages. During industrialisation, powered machine looms made handweavers and handlooms redundant. In the late 19th century, a new era for handweaving began with the Organisation for Handicraft and Crafting at the Folk High School institutions (Klitmøller and Rykind-Eriksen 2009). New types of looms were developed (fig. 1), new ways of teaching weaving were established, and new styles of woven textiles were introduced (la Cour 1937). This handweaving tradition co-existed with the powered machine looms of the textile industry. For several reasons, the handweaving tradition suffered a setback and there were no new looms produced in Denmark since the 1980s. Today, there are only few schools that offer an education in handweaving, and it is not a common subject in public schools anymore. It has become a rare and unique handicraft, practiced by a small and often elderly segment of the population. The goal of the Save the Loom project is to obtain new knowledge about looms, weavers, and pass on craft knowledge in the past, so that history can build a bridge from the present to revive handweaving in the future.

## The project and the team

The five members of the project group first met in 2018 and have spent the first couple of years getting to know each other, defining the core of the project and how to collaborate in it. The main participants come from different disciplines and are also in different stages of their life cycles. This provides both strengths and challenges to the project. Eva Andersson Strand

is the head of the Centre for Textile Research (CTR) at the University of Copenhagen and supervises the project. She has delegated the work to a project assistant Kathrine Vestergaard Brandstrup, who has a degree in medieval archaeology and has spent a year studying at the weaving school in Borås, Sweden. She is one half academic and one half craftsperson. She knows the CTR method of working and will be able to combine theory with her craft knowledge. After 10 years as a museum communicator, she will now spend her working life on loom research. The true craftsman in the project team is weaver Flemming Lundholm. He is not only one of the finest traditional handicraft weavers in Denmark, he has also gathered information

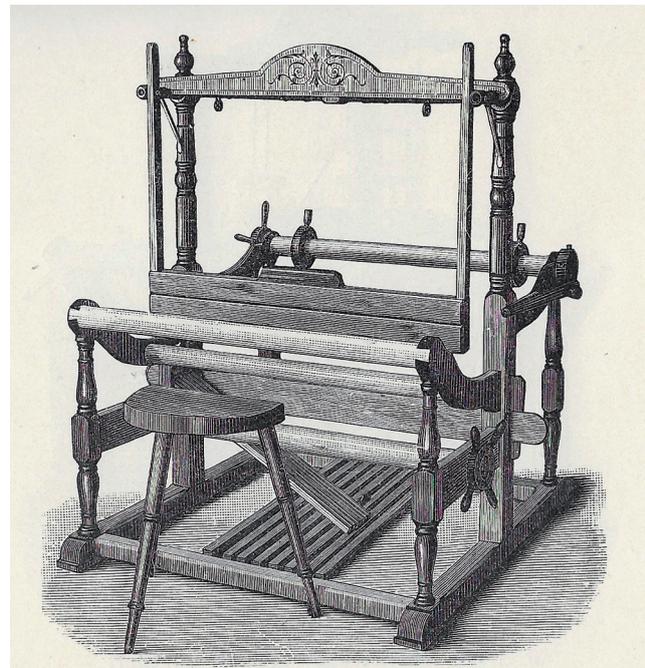


Fig. 1: The iconic first Lervad loom produced from 1895 to the 1920s (Image: Susanne Lervad)



Fig. 2: Catalogue photo of the Lervad loom no. 9 – the folding counter-march loom. The woman in the picture is Susanne Lervad (Image: Susanne Lervad)

about looms, weavers and woven textiles during his working life. He is newly retired and operates from home in his own weaving workshop. Flemming Lundholm gave the project its name because of how he has saved old looms from being discarded from museum collections. The fourth participant is Susanne Lervad. With more than 10 years as a guest researcher at CTR, she has been involved in every project with a terminological dimension. Her focus in the project is to work with verbal and nonverbal presentations of looms to create a technological vocabulary. She also has a personal connection to the project as a member of the Lervad family which was the largest loom producing company in Denmark from the 1890s to the 1980s (Lervad 2018). Susanne introduced Linda Klitmøller to the project. She was an ethnologist and a curator at Museum Sønderkov, where the Lervad Company history was documented, and has a special interest in the looms and the era of handicrafts in Denmark. Linda is now retired from museum work. The project also includes CTR student assistants Mathilde Sonne and Helene Lilja Jensen, who have set up and maintained the website.

Starting up the project was slow, and the group spent a lot of time clarifying individual strengths and roles. The knowledge, expertise and craft knowhow was shared in the group. The balance between working

academically and with craft knowledge presented some challenges. The two experienced and retired project members have a great deal of knowledge to offer. The challenge is to record this knowledge, and set it to work in the project. The weavers' craft knowledge will be combined with the terminological definitions, and the archaeological approach to objects will be combined with the ethnological perspective. The five project members are each working at a different pace and only one project member has this project as her full-time employment. This demands great patience both in progress and in communication.

### The goals and purposes of the project

The main focus of the project is defining, documenting, and preserving old loom types in Danish museum collections. The project is divided into three parts:

1) A basic analysis of the concept of tools for weaving, using the focus and perception of the weaver as a framework for defining the fundamental characteristics of the tool for weaving. The project will look at the definition of the loom by doing a functional analysis of the different types. This type of analysis involves classifying the fundamental characteristics of the tool for weaving, such as how the sheds are controlled and how the weft is inserted. Functional definitions of the characteristics of a loom are entwined with the definition of weaving. After all, the definition of a loom is a tool for weaving, and weaving is defined as: perpendicularly interlacing weft and warp threads into fabric. This terminological entanglement is a challenge when creating a technological vocabulary. (Burnham 1981; Andersen 1982; Cyrus-Zetterstrøm 1990).

2) A registration of old looms in Danish museum collections. The project aims to gather knowledge of all the extant types. We will also create a nationwide strategy for preserving looms. For the purpose of registering the looms, we have developed a registration form that includes all information relevant for a loom; for example, loom type, producer, and technical functions (Andersen 1955; Nyberg 1974; Strömberg et al. 1974; Becker 2014).

3) A study of the Lervad loom factory, which operated during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The history of Lervad is closely connected to the modern Danish weaving tradition that was introduced by Jenny La Cour at Askov Folk High School in 1888. This new weaving tradition, inspired by Swedish folkcraft, was intended as a meaningful occupation for women from the upper middle class, and supported the ideas of that period about reviving the crafts of folk culture before industrialisation. An assistant at the Folk High School

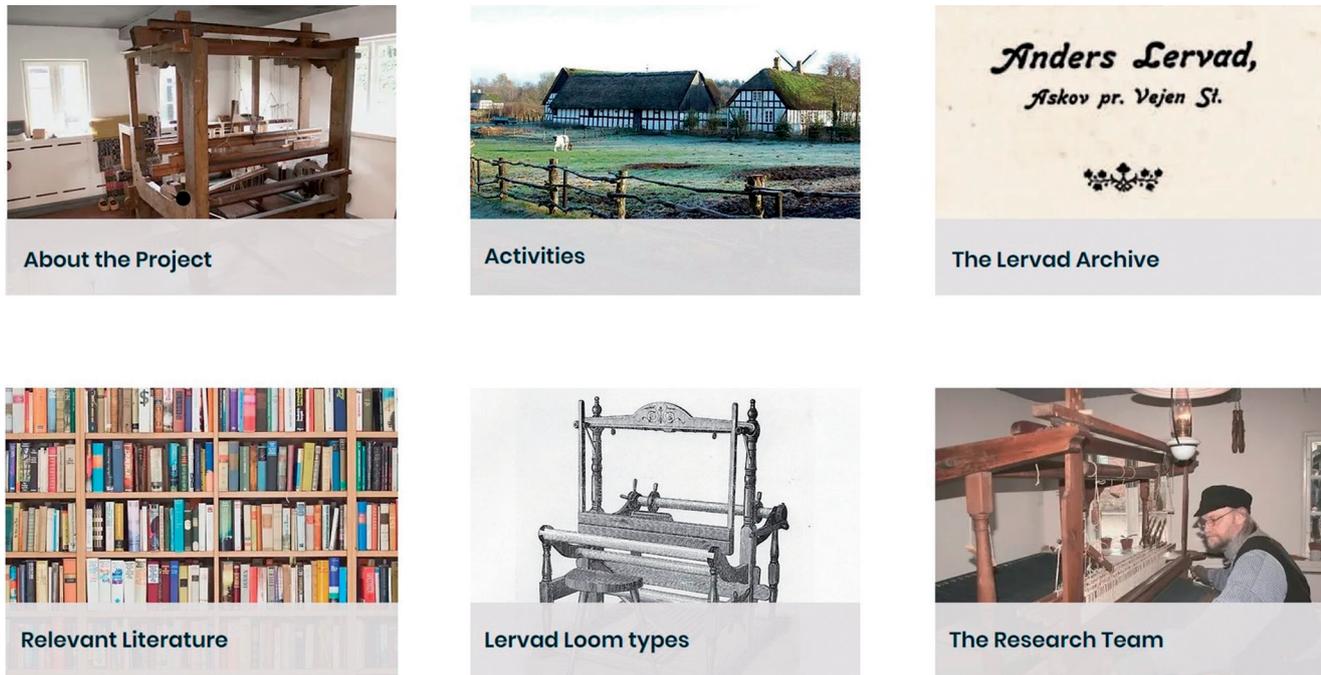


Fig. 3: Content on *Save the loom* website: [traditionaltextilecraft.dk/savetheloom](http://traditionaltextilecraft.dk/savetheloom) (Image: Kathrine Brandstrup)

of Handicraft and Crafting in Askov, Anders Lervad, began to produce looms in 1889, where he helped Jenny La Cour by adjusting and refining the looms for her weaving courses. The year after that, Anders Lervad manufactured new looms of the type used in the weaving school, and in 1895 he was employed as the headmaster of the school (Klitmøller and Rykind-Eriksen 2009). In the years up to the 1920s, the production of looms and the purpose of the education at the weaving school were to spread the handicraft and encourage women to weave at home. In their 1925 catalogue, the Lervad Company had five different types of looms for sale, and in the 1935 catalogue, there were 14 different types of looms for sale. Among the new loom types were looms for professional production of textiles, and looms for therapy. From the 1970s onwards, the varieties of smaller looms for education and therapy increased. The basic types of looms sold from the Lervad factory were:

- a) The classical treadle loom with shafts, both the original pulley-lifted shafts and the later variation with countermarch controlled shafts. This loom type was produced in a variety of smaller and larger looms (fig. 1 and fig. 2);
- b) The tapestry loom – an upright high warp loom designed for tapestry weaving; and
- c) Table looms and rigid heddle looms for education and therapy.

Throughout the years, many different types of Lervad looms were produced for domestic use and for export. Many of them are still in use today.

### The project online

More detailed information about the project is available on the website (fig. 3). The webpage “The Lervad Archive” consists of digitised archival material from the company. Price catalogues from 1898 and 1970s brochures as well as instruction manuals for assembling looms and basic weaving tips are included. The purpose is to make the history of Lervad accessible for everyone and to make the archival material more comprehensible and easily to consult. Another webpage shows the Lervad loom types. This gives an overview of the different loom types sold by the Lervad Company through the ages.

### Acknowledgements

*Save the loom* has received funding from the Louis-Hansens Fund and the Beckett-Fund to undertake a pilot project with registration and definition of loom types in Danish museum collections until the summer of 2024.

### Bibliography

- Andersen, P. (1955) *Vævning (Redegørelse og Spørgsmål). Udvalg for Folkemaal's Publikationer Serie C 10*. Copenhagen: J. H. Schultz Forlag.



- Andersen, P. (1982) *Væven Udvikling – funktion*. Borgen.
- Becker, J. (2014) *Pattern and Loom A practical study of the development of weaving techniques in China, Western Asia and Europe*. Second edition. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Burnham, D. K. (1981) *A Textile Terminology Warp and Weft*. London: Routledge and Kegan Poul Ltd.
- Cyrus-Zetterström, U. (1990) *Handbok i vävning*. Helsingborg: Natur och Kultur.
- Dury, P. and Lervad, S. (2013) Synonymic Variation in the Field of Textile Terminology: A study of diachrony and synchrony. In C. Michel and M-L. Nosch (eds), *Textile Terminologies in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the third to the first millennia BC*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Klitmøller, L. and Rykind-Eriksen, K. (2009) En Rod – Tre Stammer. *Museumsavisen* 48 (29), 4–12.
- La Cour, J. and Sigumsfeldt, J. (1937) *Vævebog for Hjemmene*. Copenhagen: N.C. Rom.
- Lervad, S. (2018) Textile Terminologies and Relations Between Key Concepts in the Context of My Family's Story and My Own Life. In C. Ebert, S. Frisch, M. Harlow, E. Andersson Strand and L. Bjerregaard (eds), *Traditional Textile Craft: an intangible cultural heritage?* Copenhagen: Centre for Textile Research, 49–57.
- Nyberg, G. G. (1974) *Lantheimmens vävstolar Studier av äldre redskap för husbehovsvävning*. Stockholm.
- Strömberg, E., Geijer, A., Hald, M. and Hoffmann, M. (1974) *Nordisk Textilteknisk terminologi Förindustriell vävnadsproduktion*. Stockholm.

Corresponding author:  
kathrine@textilarkeolog.dk