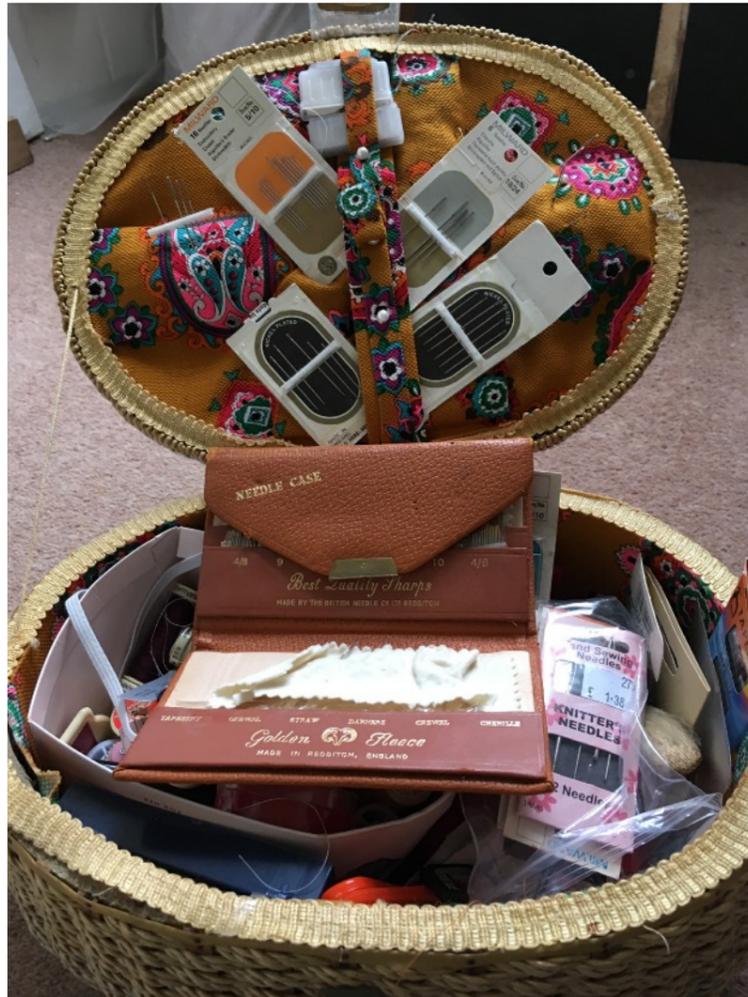


## Lesley Miller remembers.....



*My Sewing box with Milwards needles.*

Images courtesy of Lesley Miler

Facings and zips presented their own challenges, not to mention getting the sleeves in smoothly, but gradually the penny dropped and it stood me in good stead for making lots of shift dresses, shirtwaisters, and other styles which were the in thing in the 60-70s.

I remember being very proud of making my sixth form dress in navy with a white collar – our first escape from school uniform.

In Redditch, there was a fabric shop called Gibbs (where the Fisherman's Catch now is) and I was a frequent visitor. I've always loved materials so it was easy to find something for my next dress. In those days, making dresses was something most of my friends did and shops like Lewis's and Rackhams etc, all had a floor dedicated to sewing and materials. Gradually over the years, these of course died a death with the imports of cheap clothing and the importance of designer labels, but now I'm glad to say that this seems to be taking a turn once again with a revived interest in crafts. However having done a reccie on Google, I found that you can still buy paper patterns but they now cost around £9!

## A Skill for life

I only did one year of Domestic Science, as it was called then, in my second year at Redditch County High School, where I attended from 1962-69. We learnt dressmaking from a Mrs. Williams which was good fun. I'd always enjoyed doing embroidery at home, mainly due to the influence of my aunt who lived next door to us in Arrow Road - but this led me to develop a really important skill which has stayed with me throughout my life. I remember being incredulous just a few years ago when a girl at work said she didn't know how to take up a hem!

Dressmaking as I was taught then, involved cutting out patterns made from tissue paper and finding out what all the mysterious lines meant. We bought patterns of various makes – Butterick, Mcalls, etc, plus yards (not metres then!) of a material which took your fancy and then laid it on the fabric, pinned it, cut it out and tailor tacked it. That done, you snipped the tailor tacks, unpinned the pattern and lifted it off the fabric, all ready with guidelines to sew. Having roughly tacked the seams together, you could then machine the seams in place and remove the tacking. Darts were one of the first things to get right to make sure it fitted your bust, followed by shoulder seams and side seams, depending on the pattern of course.



*With my mum Margaret Lucas wearing a home-made dress.*

Images courtesy of Lesley Miler

**Lesley Miller (nee Lucas)**

# Lesley Miller remembers.....



## My Cresta Sewing Machine



My father bought my mum and I a sewing machine in 1963 - a 'Cresta' made in Wolverhampton by a company called Wittfield, a sturdy thing which proved it's usefulness over and over again. It was typical of him that he always went the extra mile to get something of really good quality so he wouldn't settle for a Singer and this one cost £59.12 shillings and came with a 25 year guarantee. I also inherited my aunt's sewing box which is full of Milwards needle cases.

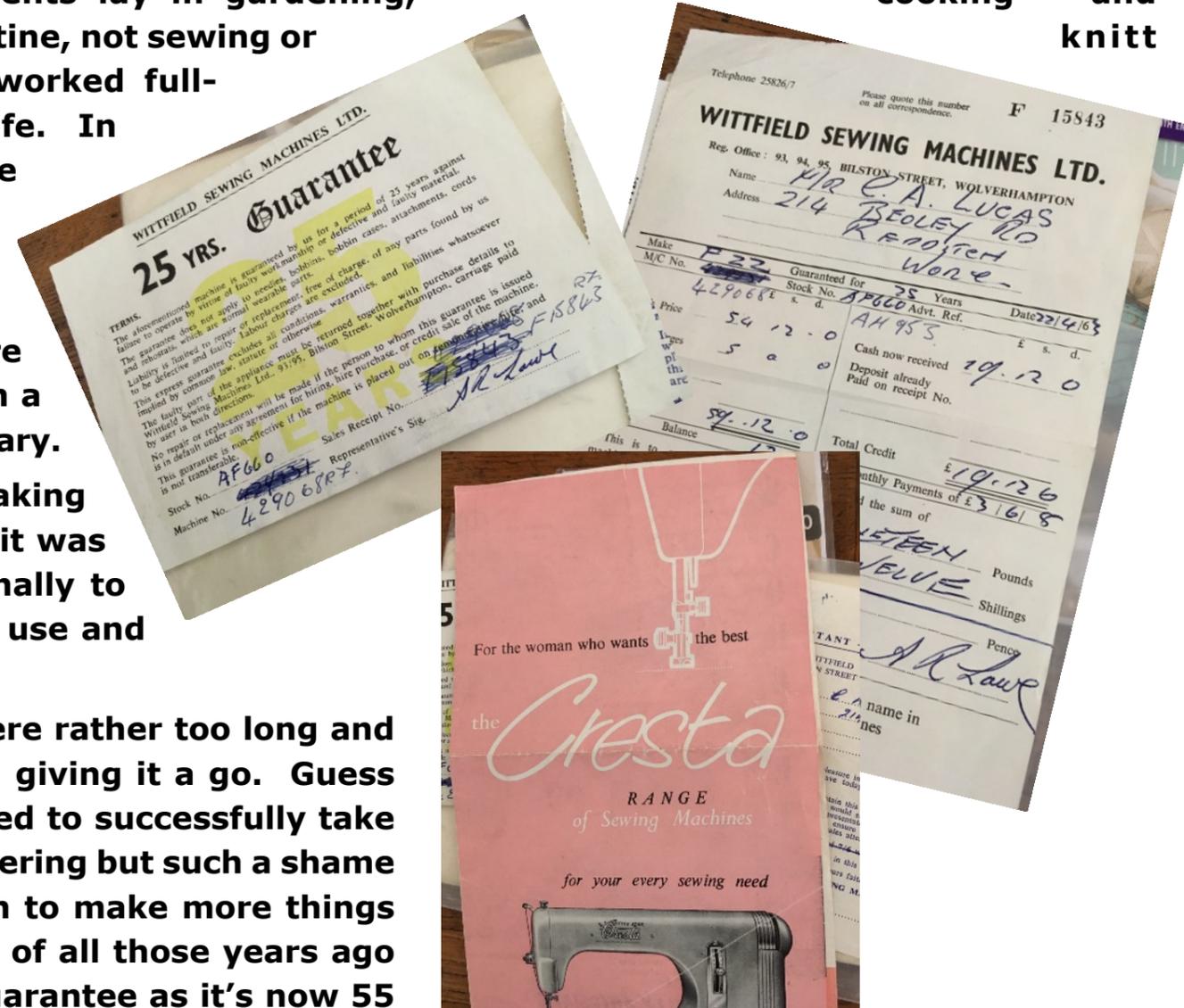
My mum went to dressmaking classes at Redditch College more or less at the same time as I was doing the school course, but she could not cope with the clutch-like pedal any more than she could driving a car (she had seven provisional licences and never took a test!). Her home talents lay in gardening, cooking and knitting, and she always worked full-time throughout her life. In her early days she worked in the needle industry so maybe

that experience put her off!

The new machine was also useful in changing my dad's shirt collars - he wore the Double Two variety - so-called as when the collar got worn, it came with a second one to prolong the life of the shirt. It therefore fell to me to do the necessary.

I used the Cresta machine for various jobs, usually repairing things, and making curtains even at one point but then didn't touch it for about thirty years, so it was relegated to the attic and moved house several times till it followed me finally to Scotland. I kept meaning - as we often say - to try it out again but lack of use and growing lack of confidence in my ability, stopped me trying it out.

However with our latest house move, we inherited a lot of curtains which were rather too long and so I have to thank my mother-in-law for bullying me into plugging it in and giving it a go. Guess what? The light worked, the motor responded straight away and we managed to successfully take up six pairs of curtains without any problem! A real testament to British engineering but such a shame that the company doesn't exist any more. However, it's now spurred me on to make more things again, - I might even try making a dress! And, of course, it stirs memories of all those years ago when I first learnt to sew. It's certainly earned its stripes in terms of the guarantee as it's now 55 years old!



Lesley Miller (nee Lucas)

Images courtesy of Lesley Miller