



"As each garment is finished comes the sadness of parting, soon assuaged by the casting on of stitches for the next. And how comforting to be engaged in the creation of artifacts for which the demand is - as far as I can see - infinite."

— Elizabeth Zimmermann, in [The Opinionated Knitter](#)



a knitting newsletter from
Meg Swansen

Dear Knitters,

Traditionalists find great pleasure in reproducing classic garments from the past. And, since our knitting is our very own, we permit ourselves to apply "modern" techniques and ideas to old garments.

The British Isles brim with a rich and varied knitting history and, although I'm not a trained historian, my great interest in knitting traditions has brought me into deeper contact with history than I expected. As I pored through my tottering stack of books on this subject, I found a bit of conflicting information on specific definitions of Guernsey, Jersey, and Knitfrock, but plenty of satisfying agreement as well. The Channel Islands (Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, and Sark) not only developed the Guernsey cow—from 10th-century origins—but, under Governor Sir Walter Raleigh in 1600, established international trade in knitted woolen jerseys for mariners; plus, the islanders shipped out about 10,000 pairs of knitted stockings per week! Twenty thousand individual socks: a sobering thought for us ssk people (single-sock knitters).

The exported mariners' garments were thick, navy blue Guernsey pullovers. (By the way, "gansey" is not a different sweater style, but simply a colloquial term for a Guernsey.) Guernseys were distinct from the fisherman's jerseys which were being knitted in scores of villages around the British Isles; jerseys came in an assortment of colors and the wool was lighter in weight. While the origins of certain motifs were identified to specific areas of the country, the patterns quickly became fairly widespread among all knitters.

Gladys Thompson, a self-described "Guernsey Hunter," spent over three years stalking fishermen, talking to knitters, and documenting details of a wide assortment of these magnificent sweaters—all included in her 1955 book *Patterns for Guernseys, Jerseys & Arans* (see right column). Fortunately for us, Ms. Thompson's book is still available; I highly recommend it for its altogether fascinating, touching, and humorous stories, as well as its charts and patterns. The book includes scores of historic photographs of knitters and the old salts for whom they lovingly knitted these splendid and practical garments. Features that unite these three otherwise slightly diverse sweaters include:

- a square shape
- totally seamless construction
- relatively short sleeves (to keep the cuffs out of the bilges, no doubt)
- doubled wool used for the cast-on and the first round, to postpone the inevitable mending
- a very firm gauge to help defeat wind, water and wear
- deep welts
- side "seam" stitches diametrically opposed in the seamless body (usually one stitch, but sometimes two or three stitches wide)

[Schoolhouse Press Website](#)

- underarm gussets
- sleeves knitted up around the armholes and worked to cuffs
- shoulder straps (narrow saddle shoulders)
- and finally, the recipient's initials, name, or the name of his boat knitted in

Five-ply wool was the stuff to use, very firmly spun and plied to achieve gauges of about eight to ten stitches per inch. The finished garment could practically stand up by itself and lasted through years of rigorous wear.

There are an extensive variety of stitch patterns available using only knit, purl (see image below) and perhaps an occasional cable.

Knit and Purl Guernsey



Channel Island Cast-On is a method invented specifically for the classic Guernsey Pullover with its split garter-stitch lower edge.

Channel Island Cast On: Pull out a long length of wool and double it. Set your hands for Long Tail Cast On and put the doubled strand over your thumb. Take your thumb out and wrap the 2 strands counter-clockwise around your thumb (4 strands). *Come up through the 4 strands, hook the finger wool through; yarn over. Repeat from *. The knots are separated by a yarn-over to keep them apart and produce a picot appearance. I have experimented with use of this cast-on for k1, p1 rib—to most interesting effect. (See technique image and completed cast on below.)

Channel Island Rib Outside (left) & Inside (right)

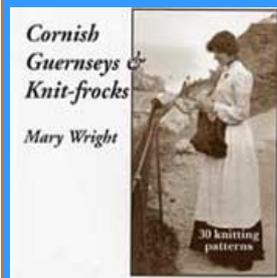


Channel Island Cast On Technique

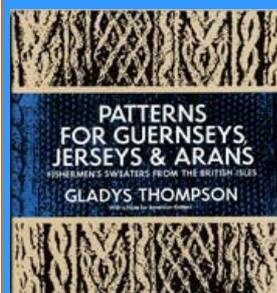
Books, Patterns, DVDs:

Click image to go to its product page

Cornish Guernseys & Knit Frocks



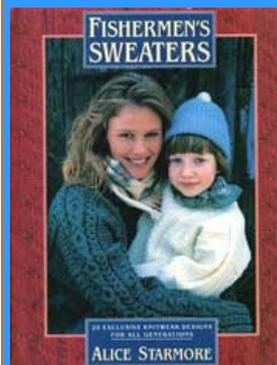
Patterns for Guernseys, Jerseys & Arans



Country Weekend Knits



Fishermen's Sweaters





Completed Channel Island Cast On, on Garter Stitch



Indian Corn Stitch

This (apparently) unique stitch (see image below) is found in only one of the many books available on the subject, Rae Compton's Complete Book of Traditional Guernsey and Jersey Knitting, and it is worked as follows: *Yo, k2, pyoo. Repeat from * around body. K 2 or 3 plain rounds between stitch pattern rounds. (My new fave word, which I have just made up: pyoo = pull-yarn-over-over.)

Indian Corn Stitch



Reverse Stocking-Stitch Gussets

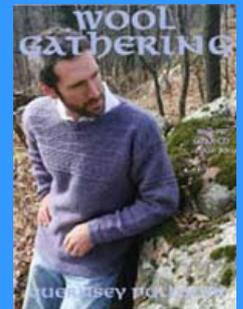
This is not traditional, but my mother and I found it to have practical application: Stocking- stitch gussets tend to bulge out, whereas reverse stocking-stitch recedes beautifully, keeping the gusset out of the way, but available when needed for flailing. A single k1b (knit into the back of the stitch) in the center makes a nice fold line for blocking.

Side 'Seam' Stitches

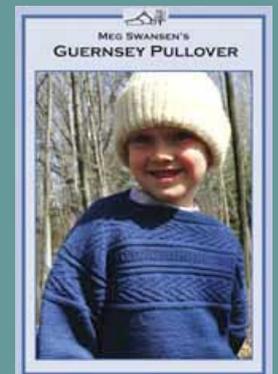
Two Guernseys Pattern



Guernsey Pullover



Guernsey DVD



All the books instruct knitters to purl these stitches every round. But, in the interest of mindless knitting, I prefer to work straight to the underarm, drop the seam stitch and hook up EZ's Phoney Seam from the inside (not skipping any ladders), which produces the traditional single, vertical purl stitch on the outside.

Gusset and Side-Seam



Looking at old photographs of Guernsey and Jersey knitters in their cottage doorways, or knitting while walking along the quay, or leaning on the sea walls waiting and knitting, fills me with pleasure at the thought of being able to reproduce such historic, romantic, and practical garments.



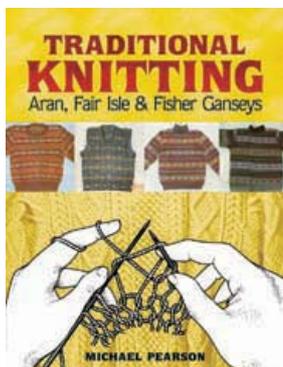
Newsletter Archive:

We have established a [newsletter archive page](#) where you can re-view NL #1-16. Note that discount offers in those newsletters no longer apply, and internal links may not always work. However, the technique information is still valid and, we think, helpful.

Book News:

Guernsey Wool





Michael Pearson's, [Traditional Knitting; Aran, Fair Isle and Fisher Ganseys](#) is being republished (to be published by fall 2012). Dear Dover again! This was always one of my very favorite books as it covers the three major British knitting traditions and augments McGregor's steek information in [Traditional Fair Isle Knitting](#). You will find a wealth of historic information as well as scores of charts and inspirational photos.

If you have questions you wish to see answered in a future newsletter, please write to us at info@schoolhousepress.com.

Outward,
HJP

Discount for Subscribers



20% discount and free shipping* on orders over \$75 placed between April 3rd and April 15th, 2012.

***To receive the discount, copy and paste the following discount code MA620%FS into the comments section of your order. We will apply the discount and free shipping when we receive the order; your e-invoice will not reflect the discount or free shipping. Discount does not apply to items already discounted. Free shipping is valid only for contiguous U.S.**