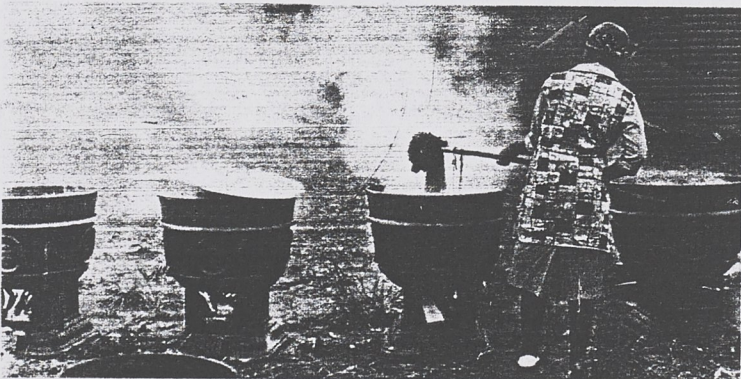
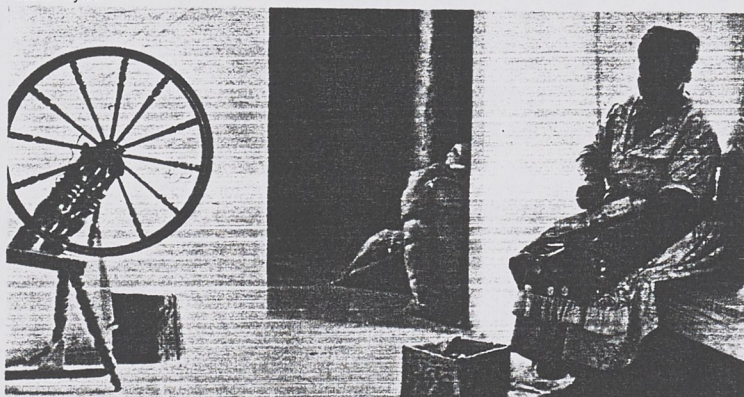


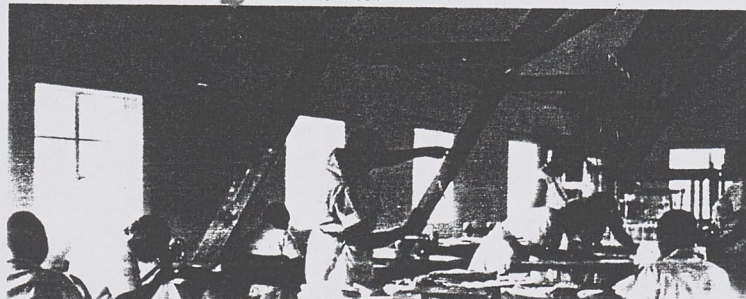
The weaving workshop at Rorke's Drift.



The weavers do all their own dyeing, using chemical dyes which are more colour fast than natural dyes.



Wool is used for the tapestries and carpets, chiefly karakul from the market in Durban but also mohair and merino. Here a worker cards wool.



'SOUTH AFRICA has so far shown very little interest in us,' says Peder Gowenius sadly. 'In this country we still have to find the galleries...they don't come to us.' And yet in his native Sweden, the Rorke's Drift weavers' first big exhibition at the Museum in Stockholm was a sell-out in two-and-a-half hours. Some 38,000 people saw it, an attendance record for the year beaten only by a later collection of Van Goghs. Museums and art galleries all over Europe and America are queueing up to show the Centre's work and examples of its carpets and tapestries are already hanging in churches, schools, libraries and banks all over Europe, as well as in homes. 'We will probably be better represented in the museums of Europe than all other South African artists soon,' says Mr. Gowenius, 'but so far we've sold only one tapestry to an official building in South Africa and three to the National Gallery.'

The biggest prejudice the group has to overcome in this country is price. 'People find the weaves "terribly expensive". Persian carpets are much more expensive—but then I suppose our designs are modern and people find it difficult to judge the standard of the carpets for that reason.' Tapestries sell here at half the price they would fetch in Europe. 'We could sell everything we make in Europe but we think we should try to keep at least some of the work in its home country—although this means creating a greater financial burden for the project.'

But by any standard the carpets are not over-priced at anything from R200 upwards. The weavers buy fine quality mohair and wool, spin and card it themselves, then dye it, chiefly with expensive synthetic dyes. They weave the patterns they devise straight on to the looms, creating with each carpet an original design—fascinating mixtures of African folk history, with here and there an abstract showing the more sophisticated influence of town life. In 1966 the centre sold R34,000 worth of tapestries, making a modest profit of R4,000—the first year it has been out of the red. But it has no working capital—'we are continually in trouble.'

THE E.L.C. Art and Craft Centre was established by Peder and his wife Ulla Gowenius in 1961. Its two main aims were to foster and encourage a viable cottage industry for the local Zulus and to support the school which is an integral part of the Centre. Ultimately the Centre hopes to be self-supporting but for the first few years at any rate it has been relying heavily on grants from its mother church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and generous donations from other organisations—the students of the art school in Stockholm have provided no less than R7,000.

The main activity of the school is the arts and crafts advisory course—a two-year course aimed at producing qualified occupational advisers to work in hospitals. The students—women of all ages and a few men—study the basic principles of hygiene, hospital ethics and anatomy, craft subjects such as spinning, material printing, pottery and the like, with a smattering of general subjects: domestic science and English, a little theatre, a soupçon of music.

The fee for the course and residence is an unbelievable R34 a year. Last year there were 700 applicants for forty places. So far seventeen students have graduated from the course and all those who wish to are working. Unfortunately the fourth course starting in September may be the last. There are too few hospitals left willing or able to employ the graduates. A new two-year fine arts course got under way only last year and is as yet a very small section of the school.

'To start a thing is simple,' says Peder Gowenius. 'To keep it going is difficult—and there we have had a lot of help.' So far six district centres with about fifty workers have been established, but their success depends to a large degree on finance. Each centre has to support its cottage workers as well as teachers—only half of each salary is paid by the church in Sweden. The Gowenius's ran Rorke's Drift single-handed for two years. Now there are nine teachers—seven Swedish, two South African—and finding their salaries is a continual headache.

But they have come this far, in itself remarkable, and Peder is philosophical about the future. 'We have just started and made many mistakes. We must try to improve—particularly in the area of finance.'