range of greys and whites, mapping what remains of the reactive-dyed surface. What we see in the final piece is a record of erasure and excavation, revealing not only the precision of the parallel topings that establish the original stitching patterns, but also the history of the evolution of the piece. Visual records of the physical tensions between stitch and layered cloth gradually emerge over time through repeated printing and shrinkage. Harrison makes use of the dialogue between natural fabrics in this process. Cotton shirks, silk doesn’t; joining them creates new material stresses. The visual layering of stitched stripes over emerging floating organic forms echoes the repetitions of the process itself.

In more recent textile ‘drawings’ the parallel equal stripe gives way to a crossing of stitched lines, building up solid areas that subtly alter the rectangular regularity of the original shape by gently drawing in the sides symmetrically. This calls attention to the collective force of thread under tension that not only adds layers in depth but gradually shapes the whole surface contour. In stitched sketches for future work, some of these shaped movements and sections within the work begin to separate entirely, dressing and revealing reverse surfaces, sometimes picked out with bright colour. These suggest a movement toward more sculptural approach in testing the formal boundaries of the format.

This sense of seeing the recorded history of the making of an object can be seen in some surprising visual objects in Harrison’s studio. A beautiful collection of metallic fragments turn out to be old torn and distorted cigarette pockets, flattened by road traffic. An intriguing irregular solid patchwork form is explained as the inside of a long-tarred football ground. Old sanding discs and cracked rusting lids record the solid beauty of the natural processes of decay and change. In all of these there is a characteristic valuing of the found, and, in the accidental record of a single object, its transformation over time. In view of the repeated journeys of these processes of making, it is not surprising that she speaks of ‘traveling’ as one possible source of her emergent imagery. The merging chevrons in some of the work evoke repeated ‘robotic’ driving over familiar routes. Repetition and curving of lanes and cartageways, of crossing roads punctuated by bridges, the broken lines of stitching echoing clashes on driven roads, repeat her daily experience of travelling familiar territory. She is also interested in crop circles, perhaps connecting with the way repeated bending paths of their formation provide records of regular geometric spaces. Over time, like her work, these are physical records of journeys of making.

Her first encounters with the quilting process resulted from a need to make practical use of her textile training. This experience, first concentrating on embroidery at Goldsmiths and then in print at the Royal College in the 1970s, led to her first collaborations with furniture designer Michael Hoyams. Many familiar with her early work will recall the subtle sprayed colour of these initial experiments with quilted surfaces. Another kind of fruitful collaboration resulted from her membership of the unique crafts community at 407, set up by Hoyams, where she worked alongside landscape weaver Joanna Burton and potter Carol McNicol, Jill Crowley and Alison Britton. Here the crop of recent craft graduates were able to continue the inventive explorations they had begun in London’s art colleges, linking them to what is sometimes seen as an anti-industrial ‘crafts renaissance’ of the 1970s, in its renewed valuing of the unique and the handmade. Commissions for textile applications to furniture led to other domestic uses in seating, cushions, bedspreads, developing techniques of working with dye and stitch that are still evident but transformed in more recent work. This vision of crafts as a quasi ‘art’ activity was also evident in Harrison’s world’s largest stitched printed canvas-like hangings made for large spaces, appearing more like paintings than textiles.

Teaching has always been part of her working life. She currently teaches at the University College for the Creative Arts at Farnham (formerly the Surrey Institute of Art and Design) and this experience has given an important reflective opportunity to articulate and test her thinking about the uses of textile and the transformation of makers. Today’s textile students, although less ready for the commitment of setting up workshops on their own as individual makers, find the textile understanding and confidence gained through the practical nature of this course effectively prepares them for a breadth of careers connected with industry, retail, fashion and marketing. The opportunity of contributing to shaping their experience and understanding of textile processes and language has been key in refining Harrison’s own work. Current emphasis on research in all university institutions, and a particular emphasis at Farnham, with its own textile collection and resources, alongside the Crafts Study Centre, has cost a different light on the ways textile practice can be perceived and described. Exhibition is redefined as research, providing a platform for articulating meaning as well as the means of making.

As I leave, I notice that the roads look different. I look for what might have been left as physical traces of passing traffic. As I note the ‘stitching’ of my journey home, I am reminded of the power of textile thinking to transform vision of the everyday.