

Friends in Stitches

The Australian Quaker Narrative Embroidery

May 2021,

<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Stitches>

This is the first newsletter for 2021. In January when it came to Newsletter time, I didn't have any news and I wasn't led to put out a Friends in Stitches Newsletter. I was cutting back on lots of my activities at that time and the newsletter was swept up in that.

But in the last month there has been a flurry of Friends in Stitches news and here we are again!

Two finished Tasmanian panels

<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Stitches/friends-school-0>



Nadia Frick, who teaches at Friends, spent her April holidays finishing this stunning panel which she designed. I believe she stitched 12 hour days! It beggars belief!

And this panel, designed and stitched by me, was finally finished in time to take it to Brisbane to join the Workshop and the Lyceum lecture. A lot of it was stitched during 2020 in countless Zoom meetings.



<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Stitches/cherish-our-place-1>



My next step is to organise an event in Hobart to show off the two panels prior to mounting them properly. Currently the *Friends School* is on display in the Friends School library.

Ghost of a Thylacine,



A devil, nothofagus cunninghamii with bronze new leaf, and a swift parrot.

Workshop in Brisbane

On the 17th of April a stitching workshop was held at the Kelvin Grove Meeting House in Brisbane. Tessa was going to run the workshop and I was going along to learn how it is done. On the night of the 11th I woke up at 4am and checked my emails on my phone. There was one from Tessa, sent at 2.am. 'I am sorry to say that I am waiting for an ambulance.' (I hasten to anticipate your concern to let you know that Tessa is now, if not fully recovered, a lot better.) She spent the next week in hospital being treated for a Hiatus Hernia. This was further complicated by the fact that her husband, Richard, had been in hospital for some weeks and was due home the day Tessa was admitted to hospital. There was no way she could be in Brisbane on the 17th.

So it was breathlessly uphill for me, otherwise known as a 'steep learning curve'.

The workshop was organised by Mary Grbavac and was attended by members of Brisbane Friends as well as members of the Brisbane Embroiderers' Guild. It was COVID Safe!



It was all new to me and I would do a better job when I have to do it again. I tried to give the participants time to imagine a story they might want to narrate, but really, participants, especially the Embroiderers' Guild members, didn't want to do that: they just wanted to learn the Quaker stitch. When we came to make a name tag, they had to write their names in the right font, and draw it onto the calico back-to-front. Being the skilled embroiderers they were many of them wrote their names in tiny letters. It was only when I went around the room helping them get the stitch right that I realised this issue. It is very hard to do the Quaker stitch in small letters! It was designed to be done quite big on the Kendal Quaker Tapestry panels. So there was some frustration with that. I didn't explain it properly. But when you are teaching something for the first time, you don't know what the students assume.

Something I learned: transferring the image onto calico is made easier by louvre windows. You can tuck the calico and the paper into the top of the window and it holds it in place while you trace your design. No need for sticky tape. Ah Queensland! So warm and full of bird song.

One of the Quaker participants, Margaret Keya, had a wonderful narrative. She is from western Kenya where most people are Quakers. She told the story how the first Quaker

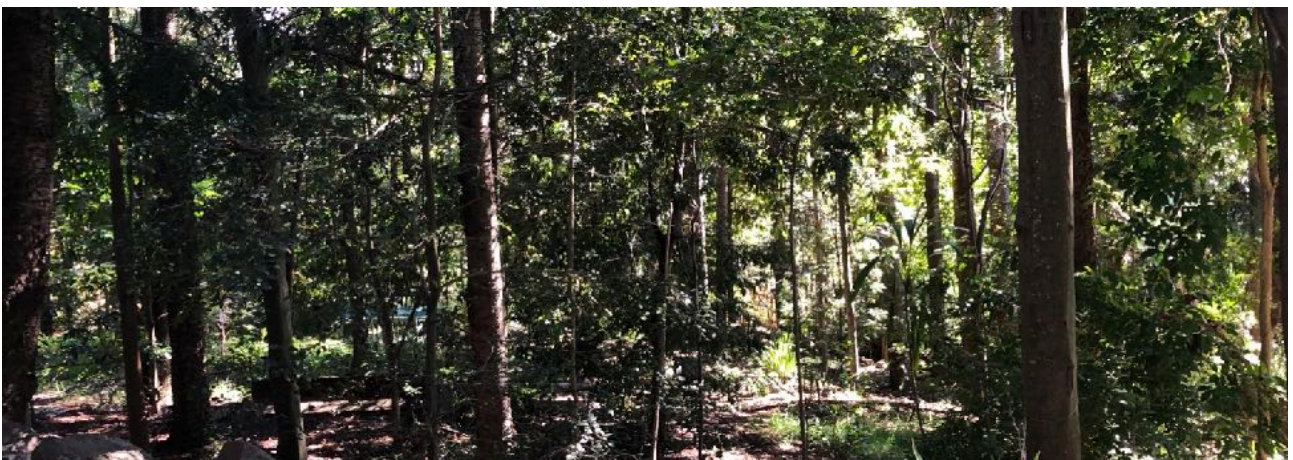


Missionaries arrived by train in 1902. Previously missionaries had been unable to reach western Kenya because they had been eaten by lions. This seems like a story to tell in embroidery!

(<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Stitches/kelvin-grove-quaker-arboretum-0>).

It has been Mary's dream to build a Brisbane Friends in Stitching group to meet regularly to stitch. The Kelvin Grove Meeting House has had a lot of work done already and that can be finished by a group. Another idea for a panel is Margaret Thorpe, a suffragette Friend, active in the WW1 anti-Conscription campaign, the Women's Peace army and YWCA among other things. Quaker Plain dress has sparked interest in Brisbane Friends and Paxton Farm, which sheltered conscientious objectors during WW2 is also on their list. We look forward to seeing the group beginning and these ideas coming to fruition. Any interested Queensland friends should contact Mary Grbavac. marygrb@palllake.net.au

All the 23 finished panels, which had been exhibited at the Brisbane Library unit recently, were displayed around the Meeting house and very impressive they looked too. We left them there for Sunday Meeting for Worship and Brisbane Friends admired them tremendously.



The Kelvin Grove Quaker Arboretum.

Lecture at the Lyceum Club

Even scarier than the workshop was presenting the Neita Bell annual lecture at the Lyceum Club in Brisbane. This had been organised by Valerie Joy who is a member of the Club. I'd never heard of it but this is a very established prestigious women's club with a focus on education. It's like University for the 3rd Age only for women. Mary Gilmore's picture as well as images of many other be-hatted well dressed Victorian women, were on the walls of the rooms in the CBD of Brisbane. They serve sherry in the afternoon.

This lecture, with a focus on craft and design, had been organised last year following a lecture the year before that about the Scottish National Tapestry. Valerie had suggested the idea to the organising committee and Tessa had gone and charmed them when she was in Brisbane for another purpose. It had to be postponed for a year because of COVID. I did hope they wouldn't be too disappointed that the charming Tessa was unable to deliver the lecture and they got me instead! The panels were arranged around the room in historical chronological order. They did look good. *Cherish our Place*, unmounted, was draped under the lectern.

After a short introduction to the history of Narrative embroidery the Kendal Tapestry and the development of the Australian project, I used the website to take them through a short history of Australian Quakerism. We began with Sydney Parkinson and finished with Silver Wattle. To tell you the truth it was dead easy! My anxiety was completely misplaced. The women were enthusiastic and supportive. Valerie Joy stepped in to explain the two Queensland panels, the *Backhouse and Walker try the Treadmill* and the *Burundi Friends arrive at Kelvin Grove*.

Then there was cups of tea, sandwiches and cake and milling about talking to very interesting, well dressed women.

I think Tessa would have been proud.

Judy Schubert the co-convenor of the Lyceum Club Handcraft and Design Circle, Sally O'Wheel and Valerie Joy standing next to a piece of furniture which had been donated to the club by Neita Bell, whose family owned a furniture business.

