

Friends in Stitches October '23 Newsletter

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Dear Friends,

As many of you know, my husband died on the 27th of August. He had been sick for a long time and this had been a specially hard winter. He died peacefully in his sleep at the North West Tasmania Regional Hospital in the presence of his god daughter. We painted his cardboard coffin with scenes from the East Coast Tasmanian kelp forests where he loved to dive for abalone, a long time ago. I am learning to live a new life. Thank you to the many Friends who have sent messages of support and love.

On the upside it means I can attend the FIS workshop in Sydney in October.

Tessa Spratt is enjoying visiting England with her daughter, Kyrstie Crane, and Margaret Bywater is in Cambodia. So I am keeping it together while they are away. I am missing them.

Sally O

History of the Brisbane Quaker Arboretum Panel

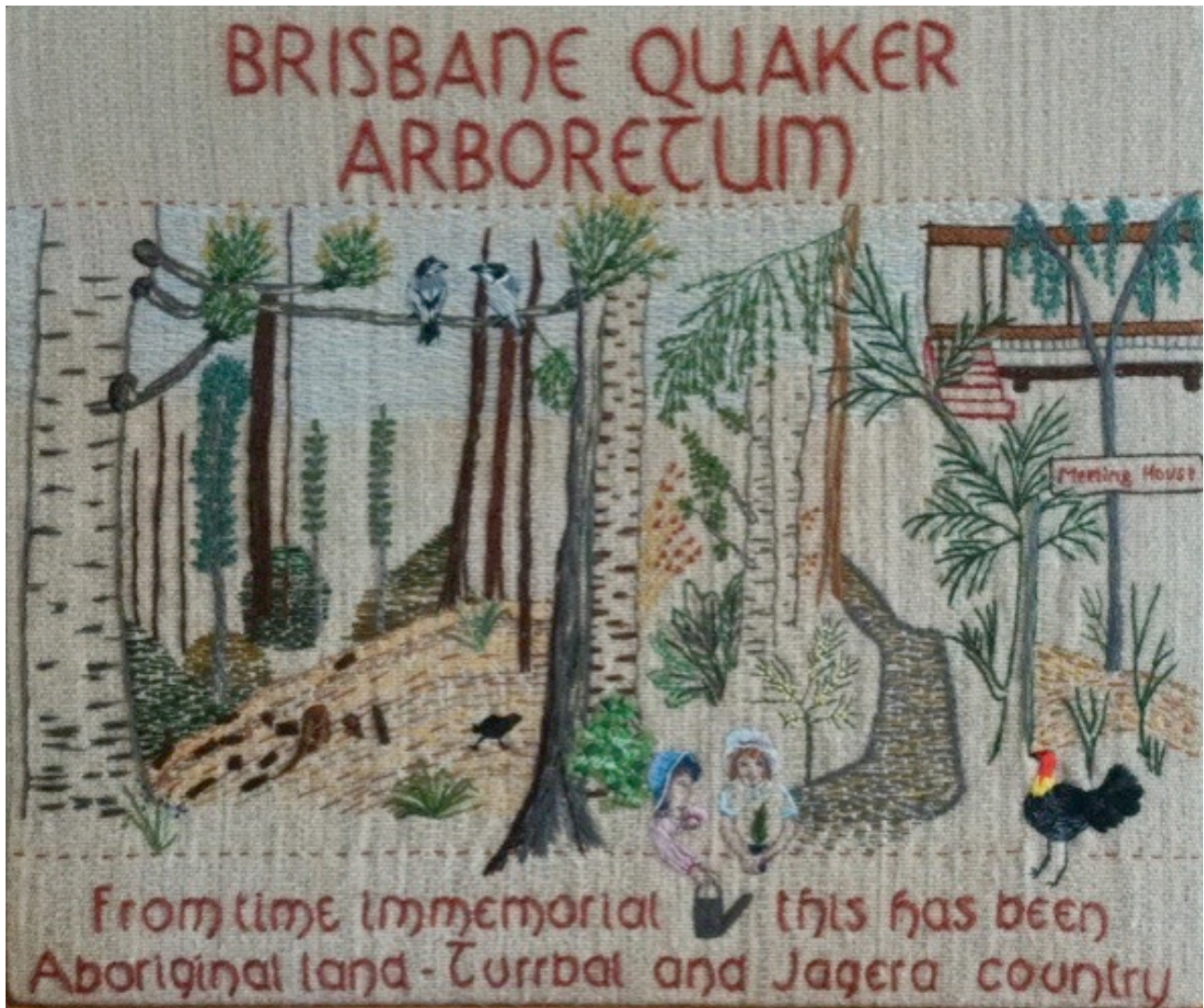
by Gillian Ridsdale and Saadia Thomson-Dwyer

We understand that the panel design was first mooted around 2012 when a workshop was presented for Friends in Stitches by Cathy Davies and Tessa Spratt.

Ellan had the initial idea and undertook to create the design and colour drawings. Judy Wollin, another Friend from the Gold Coast was the first stitcher and did a great deal of work on the panel in the early stages¹. She remembers that the panel was to be in autumnal colours, showing the light as it came through the forest, giving a nod to the history of the site (the planting and felling of trees for Mr Mellor's Joinery business), the cooperation of Friends restoring the forest (the children with their seedlings), and to include nature's visitors (the various birds and maybe a possum or two); the caption was to acknowledge the original custodians of the land.

Both Judy and Ellan retired from the project a few years later. Mary Grbavac became the sole Queensland FIS member at this point but as there was no longer a stitching group as such, her role changed to that of FIS Correspondent for a number of years and the Arboretum panel sat idle. Sadly, Mary herself was no longer able to stitch due to issues with her hands. More time passed until Mary, ever determined, found newly interested stitchers within the Meeting.

¹ The cartoon for the panel was drafted by Ellan and Judy at AYM in 2018 and there was wide consultation with Friends attending Yearly Meeting.



She regained her vigour and set about finding other interested stitchers in the Embroidery project.

In 2020 Mary, with help from other Friends, organised an exhibition of all the panels at the Brisbane City Square Library. Unfortunately, COVID-19 hit our shore shutting down the warmly received exhibit which had only been installed for about 1 week when lockdown came. Instead the panels were later displayed at the Meeting House.

By early 2021 Mary was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. However, she was ever hopeful of seeing the panel completed within her lifetime. In order to garner interest and recruit stitchers, Mary organised a FIS workshop to be held in the April in Brisbane with AYM Convenors Tessa Spratt and Sally O'Wheel to attend. The workshop was a great success. Preceding the workshop a display of all the completed panels (around 23 at that time) was held at the Lyceum club with assistance from Friend, Valerie Joy. Tessa Spratt was listed as guest presenter of the *Neita Bell Lecture*. Unfortunately, Tessa was unable to present due to ill-health (at either the workshop or the Lyceum event) so Sally O'Wheel bravely stepped in with the Quaker Narrative Embroidery project being well received and generating much interest.

During late 2021 following on from the FIS workshop held at the Kelvin Grove Meeting house and the Lyceum event, three women from the Queensland Embroiderers' Guild.

Carolyn Mason, Hilary Crawfoot and Glenda Strachan came on board and started stitching under Mary's guidance. Sadly Mary passed away in April 2022 without a formal FIS group being reformed, although Mary knew planning was in place. She died happy knowing the panel would be finished. Several months after Mary's passing, Gillian Ridsdale and Saadia Thomson Dwyer from Brisbane Meeting came on board as co-convenors of the Queensland FIS group to maintain a Quaker presence within the project and the five women worked together and completed the panel by July 2023.



(L-R) above, right: Carolyn Mason, Mary Grbavac and Glenda Strachan



QLD FIS Co-convenors, Gillian Ridsdale and Saadia Thomson-Dwyer with fellow stitchers Hilary Crawfoot and Carolyn Mason, reveal the panel, 16 July 2023 at the Kelvin Grove Meeting House



Open House at Devonshire Street

by Mary Jane Hogan.



On September 16th 2023, Devonshire Street Local Meeting held an Open House all day to celebrate 120 years since the Meeting House was opened (September 1903). The Open House included a free sausage sizzle and Devonshire Tea. There were two exhibitions, one on the history of the Meeting House and one on Quaker peace activism around WWI, which had been curated at the time of the centenary of the outbreak of the war. It was a great meeting of Friends, many of whom had not been to Devonshire Street for many years, but also attracted people who had never been inside a Meeting House before.

A significant part of the Open Day was an exhibition of seventeen of the Narrative Panels in the Upper Hall. For reasons of space we were unable to exhibit all the panels currently at Devonshire Street, much as we wished to. After much thought and examination of the Upper Hall, we decided to set the panels up on music stands, most of which were kindly

obtained just for the weekend by Clare Cowie, on loan from the school where she teaches. It was very exciting to open both the suitcases collected from Cathy Davies and see all the panels for the first time. The embroidery group spent a happy hour selecting all their favourites to exhibit. On the day, the panels were much admired, with larger crowds in the morning (perhaps people avoiding the heat?), and many comments were made especially about the quality of the work. Several people commented that they found the panels very moving, and everyone stopped and read the explanatory cards for each one. We also sold some merchandise. Several suggestions were made as to other venues where the panels might be exhibited, and we are exploring options while they are in NSW.



Mary Pollard and Helen Gould at the exhibition.

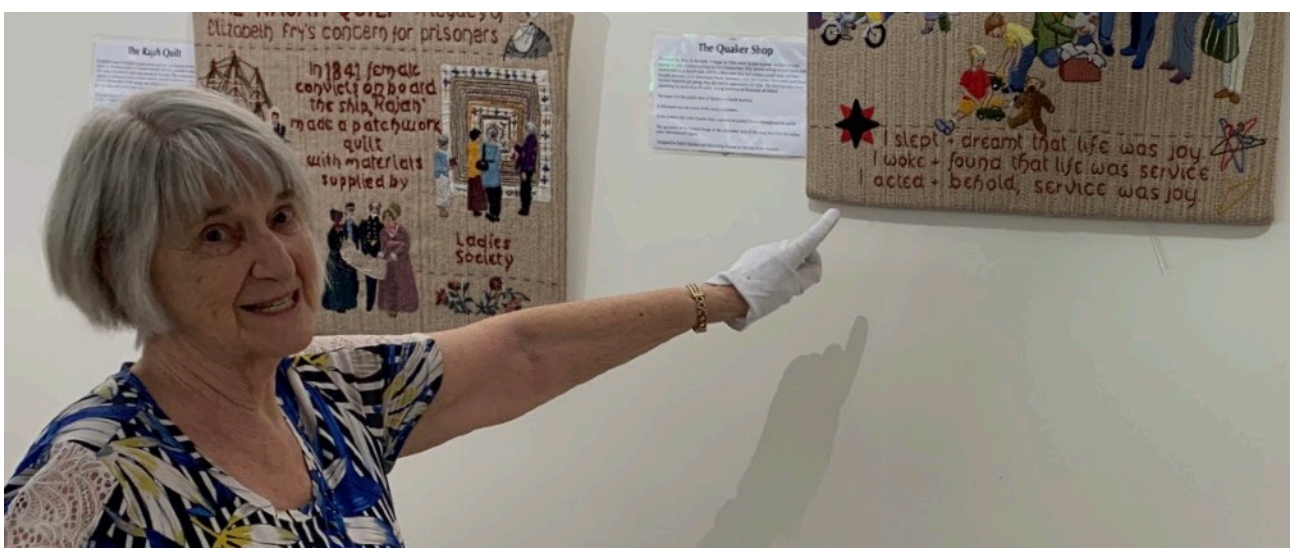
Devonshire Street Panel and FIS Workshop in October.

The Embroidery Panel group have held two sessions to work on an initial cartoon for a Devonshire Street panel, with lots of research being done behind the scenes. The panel will feature an image of the meeting house façade with an open door. Apart from providing continuous worship for 120 years, the meeting house has been the home for much social justice activism: **education**, (free Kindergarten from 1906, mothers', girls' and boys' clubs; a Children's library and Creative Leisure centre; adult education classes – forerunner to WEA); **Aboriginal Land Rights**, (first public meeting for Land Rights 1969, national and state Land Rights Conferences 1976-1977); **LGBTIQ+ rights** (hosted first service of Metropolitan Community Church 1975); and the **Peace Movement**. The focus on these four areas was whittled down from a fairly overwhelming list of the many, many groups who have found a home at the meeting house over 120 years.

Having now had a good look at all the panels, the group at DS realised that images not only convey as much or more than words, but are probably easier to stitch accurately! For this reason we have limited the use of text and intend to use symbols. Jacque Schultze has undertaken to sketch the preliminary cartoon, although her final weeks of work at AYM and subsequent travel has meant some unavoidable delays.

Nonetheless, we are holding an initial workshop at Devonshire Street on the weekend of 14-15 October, which we think will be eye-opening for all concerned, but at which we hope to make great strides in the task of developing our skills on practice samples, as well as coming to an overall understanding of just what we have taken on. We are also exploring the possibility of mounting a second exhibition of some of the panels during the workshop.

We would warmly welcome any Friends interested in lending a hand (or setting a few stitches!) who would like to come to the workshop. If you would like more information or to express an interest in joining the workshop, please contact Mary Jane Hogan at maryjane.hogan@icloud.com.



AYM 2020.

Friends, in 2020 we held our first Zoom Yearly Meeting, driven to it by COVID. It has its drawbacks but it has offered blessings too, as many of us can attend who wouldn't otherwise have been able to because of financial constraints or not being able to travel away from home. To recognise this historic change for Australian Quakers we have designed a panel which depicts 15 friends at a Zoom Meeting. The plan is for 15 people to make self portraits to fit in the zoom meeting. I have had a go. This is my sample piece.



a work in progress.

If you would like to try it, I can send you the materials you need. It doesn't matter if it looks like you, or anything like a photograph. This is art, community art and we welcome all styles. This is an easy start for someone who has not embroidered before - indeed I have been told the Royal School of Needlework children's class does a similar project to get the kids involved: stitch a selfie. Once you have a basic drawing, it is only a very small embroidery and you do a practice piece before you embroider onto the big panel. Why not have a go?

All Day Saturday & Sunday afternoon 14 - 15 October Friends in Stitches Workshop at Devonshire Street Meeting House

There will be an all-day workshop on producing a Friends in Stitches panel on Saturday 14 October & again on Sunday afternoon 15 October, at Devonshire Street Meeting House. The workshop is focused on producing a panel, conducted by Friends in Stitches (including how to get the design onto the calico, then the calico onto the woolen material, onto the embroidery stand and getting started, plus learning the six approved stitches that are used in the panels.) This weekend workshop will be open to Friends at all New South Wales meetings, as others may like to be part of this too (or think about doing their own!)

From the NSW Quaker Notices, 28th Sept, '23.