

Friends in Stitches

The Australian Quaker Narrative Embroidery

Friends in Stitches Newsletter. January, 2020

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As we enter 2020 we hold close everyone who has been affected by the catastrophic fires all over our country. This includes all the millions who for months have had to breath in smokey air.

The idea of 'Happy New Year' seems out of place in the face of these cataclysmic days. We have little faith in our government but we do find hope in the growing awakening of the people of the world.

Tessa and I met up at her place in Victoria before Christmas and had a productive day sorting through material that had been donated by Deborah Schrader. We made lists, took decisions and had a happy time.

Deborah

By Tessa Spratt.

Many of you will know Deborah Schrader. She lives near me and has been an enormous support and help with the Tapestries from the very beginning. We designed and put together most of the kits we sold for practice. She and I both went on the Australian 1652 tour in "Foxy" country, staying at

Swarthmore Hall which included a workshop in Kendall with Bridget Guest. Deborah has also kept me on the straight and narrow with money matters concerning all things "Friends in Stitches." And of course we have become friends.

Some years ago, Deborah battled breast cancer – and won but, alas, it turned out not to be a permanent win – it has now metastasized to the brain. Deborah's attitude to her multiple craft activities leaves me



Deborah, Jim Palmer and Tessa, working on the Lorrie Gardener panel at Silver Wattle.

gasping with admiration. She is determined to clear out and find places where her craft materials will find a good home. She does not want to leave it for her family to have to deal with.

Deborah was a librarian by profession – and has a garage full of bookcases – full of books. Most of her books are going to the Country Fire Authority for their big book sale early next year. I have about 120 Quaker Books, trying to find willing takers. I will send anyone the list to choose from if you email me at tessas@optusnet.com.au.

Of course, the Tapestry stuff has come to me. Anybody needing wool, check with me first - I have quite a good stock again now!! And lots of calico too. Oh! And a box sampling all the Appleton's wool colours.

One interest Deborah had was box making and she made some beautiful boxes for the Library at our new Melbourne Friends Centre for storing pamphlets like the Swarthmore and Backhouse Lectures etc. Bevianna Fitch, our librarian asked if she could have the box making materials – hopefully someone else can learn that skill and make more. Deborah has also left me with book covering materials. Again, the library uses that for repairing books that need some tender loving care.

One thing that Deborah can still do is crochet – when last seen she was making a beautiful baby's shawl in an exquisite mint green and white. And, being an avid reader, she can also still read!

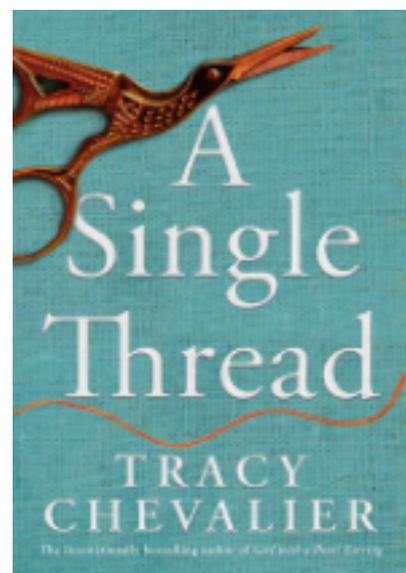
I know that you will all hold Deborah in the Light.

January, a time to read

By Sally O'Wheel

A Single Thread

I have just finished listening to the latest Tracy Chevalier novel: *A Single Thread*. I have read lots of her novels now and it was a great thing to learn that she is a Quaker. (Her novel, *The Last Runaway* is about Quakers in 1850s Ohio.) *A Single Thread* is set in 1930s. The heroine is Violet Speedwell, a single woman, whose fiancé and brother both died in World War 1. She escapes her difficult (and grieving), mother and tries to make an independent life, scraping by on a typist's wage in Winchester. It is here that she becomes involved in the Winchester Embroiderers' Guild and a community project to stitch cushions and kneelers for the Cathedral. My own great aunt, Aunt Mary Godlee, (whom Elizabeth Stevenson knew) also lost a fiancé in the war and Violet's story resonated with me because of that connection. Of course I loved the references to embroidery, (Canvas embroidery) and when stitches were referred to, I had to look them up in my book of stitches. I recommend this book to Friends in Stitches.



The Great Tapestry of Scotland: the making of a masterpiece

One of Deborah's books which I took home is *The Great Tapestry of Scotland* by Susan Mansfield and Alistair Moffat. No doubt more knowledgeable Friends will have heard of this, or even seen it, but I had not and found the story incredible.

Alexander McCall Smith, (of *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* fame,) went to see another amazing Scottish tapestry - the Prestonpans Tapestry. That embroidery of 104 panels tells the story of Bonnie



Prince Charlie and this particular battle. It in turn is inspired by the Bayeux tapestry. (I looked it up on line and it's amazing!) Within a week of seeing this work McCall Smith had enlisted the artist/designer, Andrew Crummy, and an author and historian, Alistair Moffat to draft the story of Scotland.

The book acknowledges the resurgence of large scale embroidery as a way of telling history and notes the Kendal Quaker Tapestry which during the 1980s was worked on by 'four thousand men, women and children from 80 countries'. It mentions others: the Fishguard Tapestry, Millennium Tapestries; But, say the authors, 'none have attempted to tell the story of an entire nation.'

A charitable trust was created, stitch coordinators appointed and Alistair Moffat started working on producing a text that told the story from the last ice age to the year 2000:

The panels had to tell a story of all of the people, the people who came north after the long millennia of the ice, the people who first saw the great rivers, the mountains, the firths and the sea lochs; the people who made Scotland over eleven thousand years.'

His brief included presenting his text to the Festival of Politics in 2012 where other historians and the audience were invited to contribute ideas.

This text was passed to Andrew Crummy who translated these ideas into images.

Many of the designs have areas around the edges where the stitchers can contribute their own ideas. His biggest challenge was finding ways to simplify and condense complex events into a one metre square of linen. 'How do you show thirty million years in two metres?'

The background fabric, a linen/cotton blend, was sourced from one of the few surviving linen mills, in Kirkcaldy. The wool was chosen, Appletons.

While Andrew was still working on the design the first call for stitchers went out in 2011. Letters went out to local Embroiderers Guilds, and news was broadcast on radio and in the print media. In a short time more than 500 people had responded and this continued to grow. They had too many volunteers for each one to do a panel so unless they were already a group, (a rowing club, and a community choir, for example, had signed up to do panels!), they put them in groups, including inexperienced and experienced stitchers.

A fundraising group set the goal of £250,000 covering the cost of materials, premises and other basics. A studio, known as The Hub, was established where volunteers worked to trace Andrew's

designs onto the linen. The first stitch was made by the presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament, overseen by Alexander McCall Smith. Kits were packed up consisting of the linen, the wools and a picture of the design and sent out to the stitching groups across Scotland.

Over 165 panels, over a thousand stitchers. the work was finished in two years. I would love to hear from any Friends in Stitches who have seen this work.

It was interesting that the story of the tapestry was written in advance and it made me wonder about our own project and the value of having that kind of plan. We keep coming up with new ideas for panels, far more ideas than we have designers or stitchers. There would be value in writing down all those ideas in a list. I am thinking of returning to Bill Oats' book, *A Question of Survival*, and books of 20th century Australian Quaker history and having a go at jotting down 70 topics - minus the 20 we already have.

