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PULLING THE STRINGS:
The Changi Quilts and the Evolution of Historical Significance

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Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my dissertation, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Abbreviations

Australian War Memorial	AWM
British Red Cross Museum and Archives	BRC
Imperial War Museum	IWM
National Museum of Australia	NMA
Military Heraldry and Technology Section (AWM)	MHT

1. Introduction

The museum gallery is small, dark and narrow. 'Gallery' is too large a name for this space; 'alcove' would sound better. Glass display cases line the walls. In the gloomy shadows, it is difficult to view the artefacts. Some of the display cases look like traditional Victorian cabinets of curiosities, with too many artefacts squeezed into too small a space. The only light comes from a softly glowing blue button on a wall. The button is pressed. Bright lights are sparked. Music rises from hidden speakers. The show has begun. The golden lights shine upon the central object in the main display case. The star of this show is, of all objects, a rather large quilt.

* * *

The alcove is officially known as the Prisoner of War Gallery, and it is found within the extensive Second World War Gallery of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.[1] Prisoners of war are associated in the national mythology with the Burma-Thailand Railway, and famous diggers like Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop. Australians do not associate prisoners of war with quilts. Yet this specific quilt, known as the Australian Changi Quilt, dominates the Prisoner of War Gallery. Not only does it occupy a great deal of space, but the quilt has its own sound and light show. The Australian Changi Quilt is bathed in golden glow, and visitors are left with the impression that this is a historically significant artefact. However, little academic research has been conducted

[1] The author viewed the Australian Changi Quilt and Japanese Changi Quilt at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The author also travelled to London to view the British Changi Quilt at the British Red Cross Museum and Archives, and the Girl Guides Quilt at the Imperial War Museum (London). The archives of all three institutions were scoured for relevant wartime, primary sources, which have been incorporated in this thesis.

into the three Changi Quilts, including the Australian Changi Quilt at the Australian War Memorial, or the women who made them.

The story of the Changi Quilts began in February 1942, when the Imperial Japanese Army defeated the 'impregnable fortress' of Singapore. Most of the Western women and children in Singapore had already escaped by ship. However, some women were not able to obtain a shipping berth before the Japanese invasion, and others had made a conscious decision not to leave. When Singapore fell, the Western civilian population still included 388 women and 69 girls.[2] The Japanese ordered all Western civilians to be interned in Changi Prison, a modern prison on the Changi peninsula. The prison was only 6 years old, and possessed an efficient sewerage system with flushing toilets. However, the prison had been designed to hold only 600 prisoners, and the Japanese ordered all of the 2,400 Western civilians to squeeze themselves inside its walls.

The women and children occupied half of the prison, while the civilian men were squeezed into the other half. The majority of the female civilian population was British, with 278 women and 44 girls claiming British citizenship. Australian and Dutch women were also well represented, with 30 Australian women and 11 girls in Changi, and 21 Dutch women and one girl in the camp. There were also small numbers of Irish, American, Armenian and New Zealand women in Changi, as well as 17 Malayan women who requested internment due to fear of the Japanese. The average age of the internees was 41 years and 10 months (see Graph 1).

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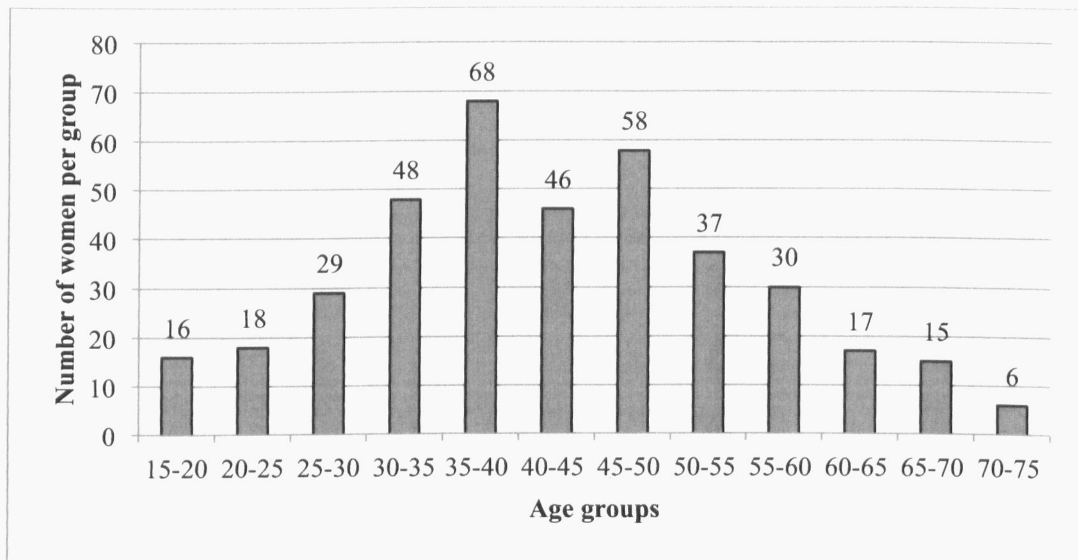
[2] Freddy Bloom, "Total number of [female] adults interned up to 25th September 1942," in the private record collection of Freddy Bloom, (IWM) Documents 66/254/1.

Graph 1: Ages of the civilian women internees, 25 September 1942.[3]



Over half of the women (195 women) had been colonial housewives prior to the Japanese invasion. Mary Thomas, an interned socialite, would later recount in her memoir how "to be a prisoner is in itself a miserable condition anywhere, and for prisoners who had been accustomed to the easy life of the East and to all the privileges of a ruling race, it was an especially bitter and difficult experience".[4] However, a substantial proportion of Changi's female population were well-educated, professional women. Dr Cicely Williams had trained as a paediatrician at Oxford University, while Freddy Bloom had earned her journalism credentials at Trinity College, Dublin.[5] The well-educated interned masses included doctors, nurses, schoolmistresses, physiotherapists, missionaries, secretaries and stenographers, a pharmaceutical chemist and even a riding instructress.[6] The data reveals that there was no one 'typical' internee in Changi. A range of nationalities were represented, and the women had undertaken a

[3] Bloom, "Total number of [female] adults interned up to 25th September 1942".
[4] Mary Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2009), 51.
[5] Sally Craddock, *Retired except on demand: The life of Dr. Cicely Williams* (London: Green College, 1983), 30; Freddy Bloom, *Dear Philip* (London: Bodley Head, 1980), 10.
[6] Freddy Bloom "Classification of internees according to occupation prior to 8 December 1941," in the private record collection of Freddy Bloom, (IWM) Documents 66/254/1.

great variety of occupations prior to internment. Even their ages had a normal distribution, as shown in Graph 1. The interned women, therefore, represent an interesting cross-section of colonial Singapore and Malaya.

Shortly after arriving Changi Prison, Elizabeth Ennis started a Girl Guides troop to keep the young girls busy and entertained. Elizabeth was a British nurse and, prior to the invasion, had been captain of the 4th Singapore Girl Guides Company. The Changi Girl Guides troop consisted of nineteen British, Dutch and Australian girls aged from eight to sixteen, with Trudie van Roode, a Dutch beautician, assisting Elizabeth. The girls borrowed white dresses to wear as their uniforms, and embroidered badges of European and Malayan flowers from a donated navy skirt and silk threads. The Girl Guides met weekly in the corner of exercise yard, and took their promise in a ceremony overseen by Lady Thomas, the former Girl Guides commissioner for the colony. In March 1942 the girls discovered Elizabeth's date of birth, and decided to make a gift for her. By collecting scraps of material and meeting in secret to sew them together, the girls were able to produce a large patchwork quilt. The quilt consisted of twenty hexagonal rosettes, with each girl embroidering her name onto the central patch of her rosette. The quilt, hereafter known as the 'Girl Guide Quilt', was presented to Elizabeth on her birthday, and inspired Ethel Mulvaney to organise the creation of another three quilts.[7]

Ethel was the Canadian wife of a British military doctor, and she had appointed herself as the camp's Red Cross Representative. Ethel organised the production of another three quilts, which would all be dedicated to various Red Cross organisations. It was

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[7] Sheila Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1999), 176.

anticipated that the British and Australian Red Cross branches would be the most likely organisations to send Red Cross parcels to the camp. For this reason, one quilt was dedicated to the British Red Cross, while a second was dedicated to the Australian Red Cross. A third quilt was dedicated to the Japanese Red Cross, as a political move to placate the Japanese guards. Incidentally, the British Red Cross did not have a branch in Asia prior to the Japanese invasion, and did not send a single Red Cross parcel to Changi. The Australian Red Cross did send parcels, but the Japanese did not allow the women access to them. The Japanese Red Cross sent parcels to Japanese internees in Australia, but did not send parcels to Western civilians in Japanese-run camps. In a twist of fate that the women could not have predicted in May 1942, it was the American Red Cross who successfully sent parcels into Changi in 1945.[8]

The Changi Quilts themselves each consist of 66 individually embroidered squares, which have been sewn together to form a patchwork quilt. As the Red Cross Representative for the internment camp, the Japanese allowed Ethel to leave the camp once a month to purchase supplies. She bought the necessary embroidery silk threads outside the camp, while the squares were made from washed cotton rice bags. The women who participated in the project were given the option of choosing which quilt they wanted their square to be a part of. Once the squares had been embroidered, Ethel sewed them together to form three quilts. The Japanese Changi Quilt included images designed to appeal to Japanese tastes, such as a depiction of Mount Fujiyama, the word "Banzai!" (a battle-cry popular amongst Japanese soldiers during the war) embroidered in Japanese characters, and many brightly-coloured flowers. Floral imagery was also very popular amongst the women who contributed squares to the British Changi Quilt.

[8] Bernice Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians Under the Japanese 1941-1945: A Patchwork of Internment* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 161.

However, British nationalism is also reflected in the British Quilt, with squares depicting Scottish thistles, an Irish harp and shamrock, and King George's initials beneath a crown. Whereas the women who contributed squares to the Japanese and British Quilts were skilled sewers, the women who made squares for the Australian Changi Quilt were less adept. Nonetheless, the Australian Changi Quilt includes the most diverse squares, with striking images of English, Scottish, Australian and Canadian nationalism prevalent. Furthermore, the women embroidered a significant amount of text onto the Australian Changi Quilt, which makes interpretation of this quilt easier than the British and Japanese Quilts.

It has not been recorded what happened to the quilts between September 1942 and September 1945. By September 1945 the Australian and Japanese Quilts had come into the possession of a British medical officer, Colonel Collins. Shortly thereafter, Collins gave the quilts to Colonel Webster, the Australian medical officer in charge of Kranji Hospital. Upon returning to Australia in late 1945, Webster donated the Australian Quilt to the Australian Red Cross, who, in turn, permanently loaned it to the Australian War Memorial. Colonel Webster gave the Japanese Quilt to his wife as gift, and she donated it to the Australian War Memorial in 1968. It is unknown how the British Quilt voyaged from Singapore to London, but it was found amongst the collection of the British Red Cross Museum and Archives. Elizabeth Ennis kept the Girl Guide Quilt until her death, whereupon her husband donated it to the Imperial War Museum in London.[9] The Australian Changi Quilt is permanently displayed at the Australian War Memorial, while the Japanese Changi Quilt is only displayed when other artefacts are removed temporarily. The British Red Cross does not currently have the funding for an

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[9] Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*, 179.

operational museum, and so the British Changi Quilt is hidden beneath a blue tarpaulin in the organisation's basement archives. The Imperial War Museum is undergoing major redevelopments ahead of the centenary of the First World War in July 2014. In December 2012 the Girl Guides Quilt was being displayed in the Education Gallery of the Imperial War Museum, but this may change during redevelopments.

Although the Changi Quilts are in the collections of esteemed institutions, little academic research has explored why the quilts were made, or why they are historically significant. The research that has been conducted has relied heavily upon modern sources, especially oral history testimonies, and has used wartime sources and modern sources interchangeably. As the women have made wildly different statements about the Changi Quilts in the wartime sources and modern sources, this has resulted in confusion about why the Changi Quilts were made. Furthermore, overreliance on modern oral history testimonies by historians has resulted in museums presenting a skewed perception of the past. This dissertation will untangle the divergent primary sources, to discover why the women made the quilts in 1942, and how they perceive the quilts in the modern era. By comparing the historical significance of the quilts in 1942 with their historical significance in the modern era, this dissertation will explore how and why the historical narrative of the Changi Quilts has evolved.

Chapter Two will investigate the previous historiography of embroidery and quilt studies, and historical narratives. In addition, the limited academic research on the Changi Quilts will be examined to determine how historians have influenced the creation of the current historical narrative of the quilts. Chapter Three will conduct a new analysis of the visual context of the Australian Changi Quilt, as only one other historian has ever analysed the quilt's images. Chapter Four will explore the primary

sources created by the women during internment, both textual and material, to understand how the women viewed the Changi Quilts when they were produced. By contrast, Chapter Five will incorporate modern primary sources to reveal how the women's connection with the quilts has changed, and the historical significance of the quilts to museums and the nation has evolved. With a stronger understanding of the context in which the Changi Quilts were created, and how their historical significance is evolving, the artefacts will be open to deeper interpretation.

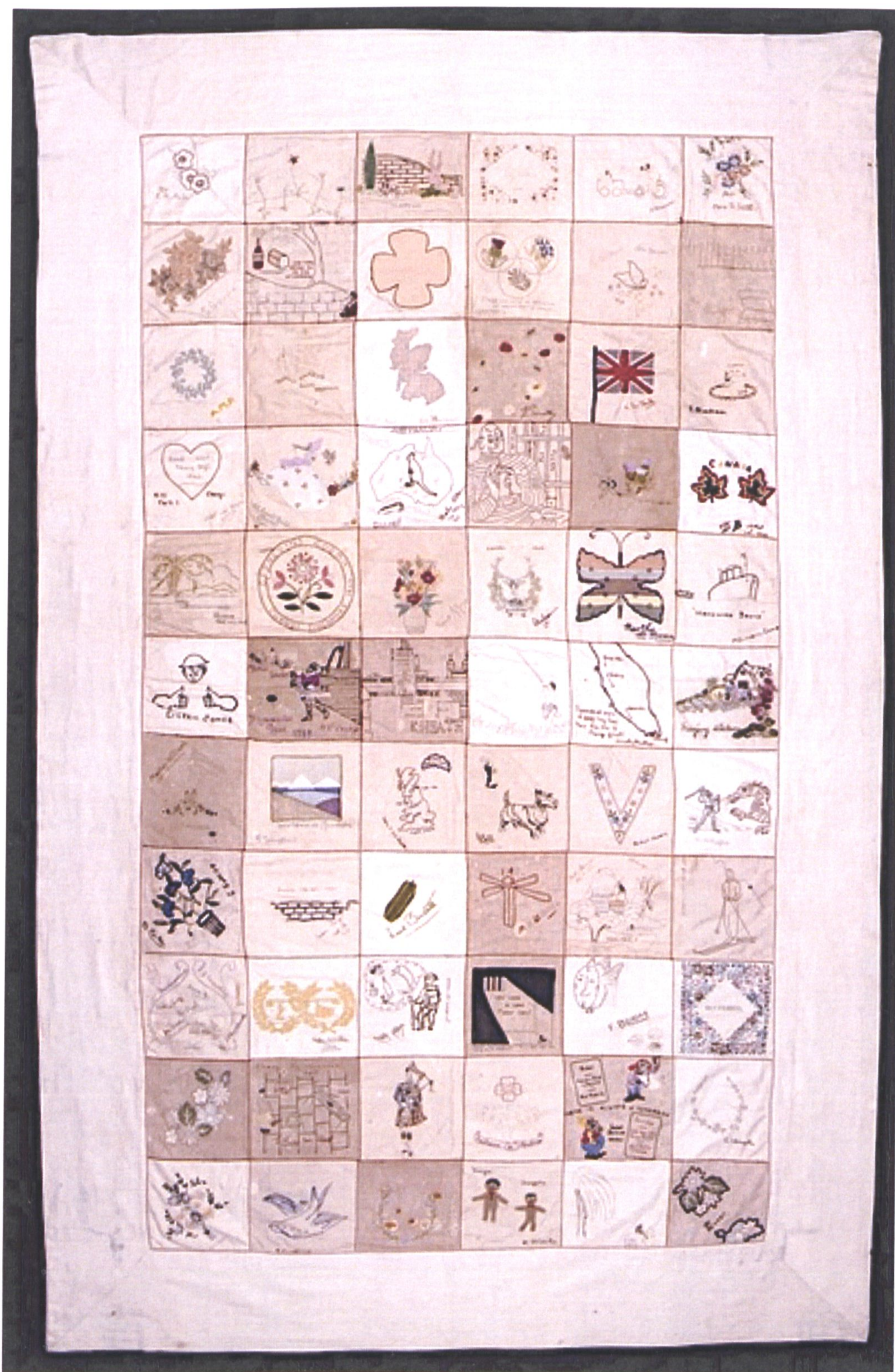

Fig. 1: The Australian Changi Quilt (AWM).

Fig. 2: The Japanese Changi Quilt (AWM).

Fig. 3: British Changi Quilt, in the basement of the British Red Cross Museum and Archives. Photograph by author, December 2012.

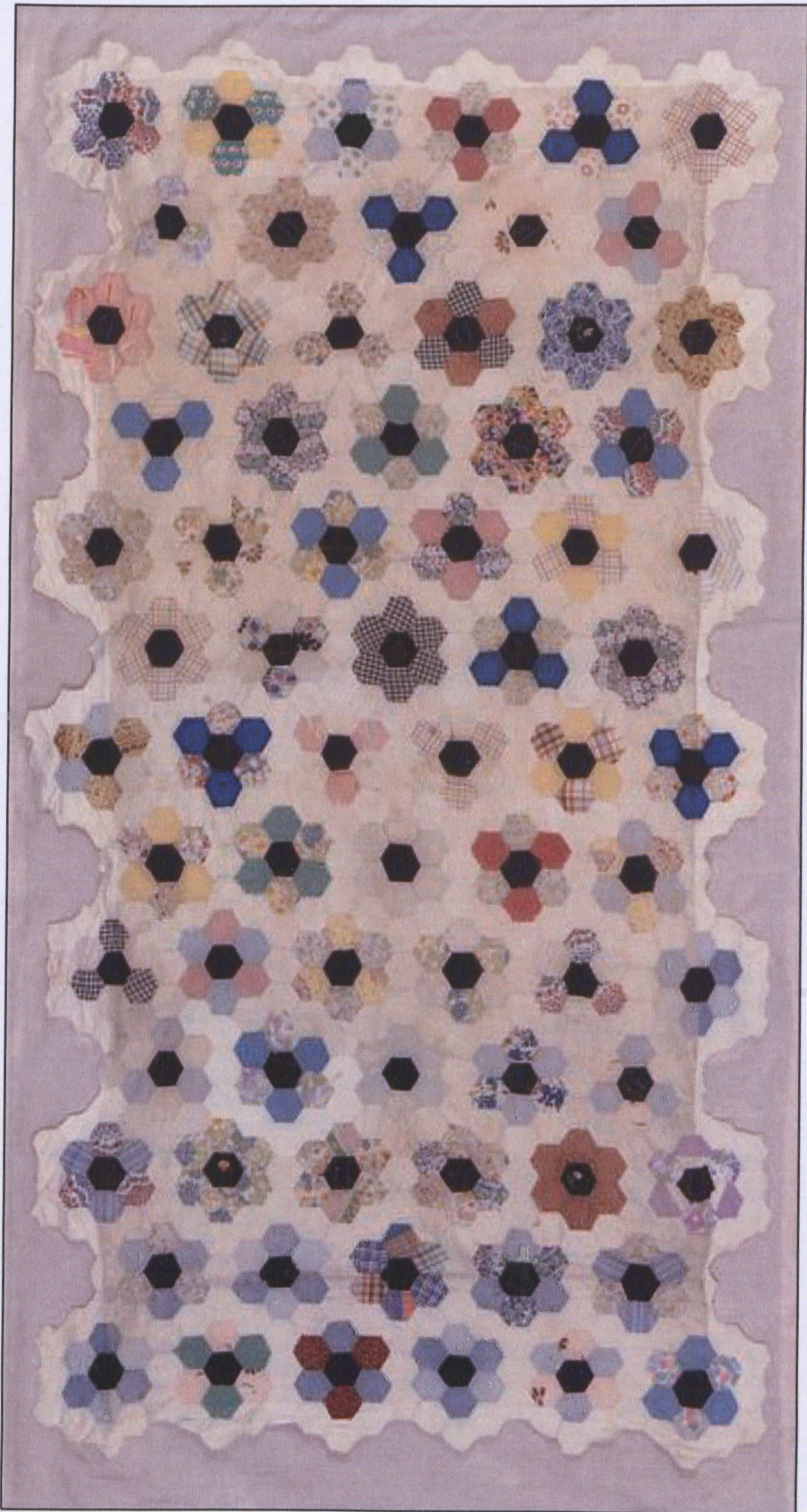

Fig. 4: Girl Guides Quilt (IWM).

2. The Historiography of Quilt and Memory Studies

Quilt and Embroidery Studies

Both old and new, quilts and embroideries have generally been a niche area of academic studies in the areas of art history and visual culture, anthropology, and museum studies, which has resulted in the historiography being fractured and contentious. The making and meaning of quilts and embroideries have also been of particular interest to feminist scholars because of their immediate association with women's cultural practices and amateur craftworks. In addition, the survival of quilts created by the collective efforts of North American slaves in the nineteenth century has also made them valuable sources of material culture for historians of slavery. In this way, the historiography of quilt and embroidery studies is, in itself, a multicolour patchwork of ideas and debates.

Lady Marianne Alford wrote one of the first histories of embroideries and quilting in the late nineteenth century. A wealthy widow and art critic, she published a detailed history of 'low' art in Europe, noting, "Of one thing we may be sure – that it is inherent in the nature of Englishwomen to employ their fingers".[10] Although Lady Alford claims that she wishes to highlight the strengths of quilting and embroidery, she consistently refers to the crafts as being 'lower' than the 'high' arts of painting and sculpture.[11] Almost a hundred years later, and art historians were still struggling to fit quilting and embroidery within the art hierarchy, largely because of its associations with amateur craftswomen and increasingly collective modes of production. Patricia Mainardi, an American art historian, argued that "women have always made art. But

[10] Lady Marianne Alford, *Needlework as Art* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886), 399.
[11] Lady Alford, *Needlework as Art*, 13.

for women the arts most highly valued by male society have been closed to them for just that reason".[12] Although she praises quilting and embroidery as being "our cultural heritage," Mainardi still struggles to classify the work or its cultural significance within the confines of the traditional artistic hierarchy, which values the genius of the individual male artist working in the higher ranked areas of painting, sculpture or architecture.[13] In this way, both Lady Alford and Mainardi are challenged to recognise the status of quilts and embroideries as useful historical artefacts. It is this pre-existing artistic hierarchy that, with notable exceptions, largely continues to provide a framework for the displays and exhibitions at many of the most prestigious museums and art galleries in the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, feminist art historians have successfully analysed quilts and embroideries by ignoring the traditional art hierarchy. The two leading feminist scholars of quilting and embroidery are Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. In their monograph, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Parker and Pollock attack the discourse of art history for creating an artificial dichotomy between what is 'high' and 'low' art:

> In this hierarchy the arts of painting and sculpture enjoy an elevated status while other arts that adorn people, homes or utensils are relegated to a lesser cultural sphere under such terms as 'applied', 'decorative' or 'lesser' arts. This hierarchy is maintained by attributing to the decorative arts a lesser degree of intellectual effort or appeal, and a greater concern with manual skill and utility.[14]

[12] Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," *Feminist Art Journal* 2 (1973), 1.
[13] Mainardi, "Quilts," 1.
[14] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 50.

Parker and Pollock also criticise art historians' analysis of quilts and embroideries for their focus on gender. In their monograph, the feminist historians proclaimed that "the sex of the artist matters. It conditions the way art is seen and discussed. This is indisputable".[15] Parker expanded upon this idea in her monograph, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, noting that:

> Embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another, characterised as mindless, decorative and delicate; like the icing on the cake, good to look at, adding taste and status, but devoid of significant content.[16]

Parker and Pollock argued that the content of quilts and embroideries are significant enough to warrant academic analysis, no matter whether or not they are considered high art. They also founded the Feminist Art History Collective in London, and their controversial approach to quilt and embroidery analysis has greatly influenced their later work.[17]

Quilts and embroideries have proven to be useful historical sources in the field of African-American slave history. As slaves were often illiterate, quilting gave them an opportunity to bear witness to their experiences. This alone would seem to make them valuable historical sources and authentic examples of the emotional experience of slaevery. Gladys-Marie Fry, an American historian of slavery, argues that slave quilts

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[15] Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, 50.
[16] Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984), 6.
[17] See Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970-85* (London: Pandora Press, 1987); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1987); Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (London: Routledge, 2007).

can reveal hidden clues about their makers' lives. She notes that long, even and consistent patterns may have reflected a degree of inner harmony, whereas colour and pattern deviations might have hinted at mental confusion or unhappiness (see Fig.6).[18] In addition, she argues that "all of these clues help us trace the life cycles of individual slave women, as well as chart their experiences and the knowledge they gained along the way."[19] The inherent significance of the quilts is further reinforced because, "in a sense, the stitches, the tears, and the blood stains are 'time markers' of the everyday events in their lives".[20] The quilts and embroideries made by convict women during the colonisation of Australia have also proven useful to historians and curators.[21] The "Rajah" Quilt is one such quilt, and its national significance is recognised by its prominent display at the National Gallery of Australia (see Fig.7). The quilt reveals the hope and determination of the convict women as they were transported to the colony of New South Wales in 1841. Robert Bell, senior curator at the National Gallery of Australia, argues that the Rajah Quilt is a "tangible link to this country's fragile early society and the women who transcended their conditions to work together in the service of art".[22]

Yet, despite the inclusion of quilts in the spaces of the modern art museum and gallery, they continue to hold a controversial status in scholarship, particularly within debates generated amongst material culturalists. Jules David Prown, a leading figure in the material culture movement, defines material culture as "the study through artefacts of

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[18] Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1.
[19] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 1.
[20] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 1.
[21] See Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (Melbourne: Random House, 2010); Carolyn Ferguson, "A Study of Quakers, Convicts and Quilts," *Quilt Studies* 8 (2007), 54-55.
[22] Robert Bell, "Unfolded: The Rajah Quilt," National Gallery of Australia, accessed 16 September 2013, http://nga.gov.au/rajahquilt/.

the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time".[23] Yet, while quilts and embroideries are slowly gaining prominence in museums and art galleries, material culturalists argue that by removing the artefacts from their original context they lose their significance. However, it is often necessary to remove fragile artefacts from their original context, particularly when the artefact's physical condition requires conservation efforts. Likewise, if a museum or art gallery does not have the supplementary resources to provide information regarding an artefact's original context, the only options are to decontextualise the artefact, or not display the artefact until resources are made available. The challenges of displaying artefacts in appropriate contexts, especially when the original context is no longer known, is explored by Henry Glassie:

> Like a story, an artefact is a text, a display of form and a vehicle for meaning... The artefact has its own way to meaning, and in learning it we begin to hear the voices in things, the screams of the stone gods behind glass in the museum. Then we accept the strange responsibility of putting into words that which is not verbal.[24]

Kristin Langellier, an American anthropologist, argues that the material culture debate is particularly relevant to quilts and embroideries. "In art galleries and on walls, quilts may be divorced from the fabric of women's lives, domestic labour, and homes," argues Langellier, "Which is to say, from their lived experience".[25] In her research, Langellier is focused on exploring the lived experiences of quilters in Maine, USA, and

[23] Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (1982), 1.
[24] Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 8.
[25] Kristin Langellier, "Appreciating Phenomenology and Feminism: Research Quiltmaking and Communication," *Human Studies* 17 (1994), 68.

does not suggest a solution to the problem she poses. Material culture theory argues that artefacts lose their significance when removed from their context, and, therefore, quilts and embroideries cannot be appreciated and understood correctly in museums and galleries. While material culturalists vigorously engage with the debate about the problems of displaying quilts and embroideries in public institutions, it is extremely difficult to find a material culturalist proposal regarding more appropriate settings for the public display of craftwork.

The field of material culture is closely related with the study of public history, where a similar debate rages. Pierre Nora, the leading light in the public history movement, has renamed public history artefacts as *lieux de mémoire.* Nora argues that a a *lieu de mémoire* is "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time, has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community".[26] A *lieu de mémoire* is "where memory crystallises and secretes itself," and artefacts, museums, archives, monuments, rituals and commemoration ceremonies can all be classified as *lieux de mémoire.*[27] The most important aspect of Nora's argument is that *lieu de mémoire* and constructed history replace 'real' and 'true' living memory. *Lieux de mémoire* evolve over time, and the significance of an artefact is altered when it is displayed or interpreted as part of its continuing history. While Nora recognises the evolution of an artefact's significance as natural, Rom Harré disputes this approach. Harré, a New Zealander critical realist, argues that "material things have magic powers only in the contexts of the narratives in which they are embedded".[28] By removing the artefact from its original context or

[26] Pierre Nora, "Introduction," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, edited by Pierre Nora and Lawrence Kritzman, XVII. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
[27] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989), 7.
[28] Rom Harré, "Material Objects in Social Worlds," *Theory, Culture and Society* 19 (2002), 25.

altering its narrative, Harré argues that the object loses its significance. Harré and Nora disagree about the role of artefacts within their contexts, but they agree on the ability of narratives to evolve. The evolution of historical narratives are is a key concern for historians and museologists alike, and a major factor in this dissertation. A significant weakness of Harré's argument is that narratives evolve, as new generations reinterpret the past and the surviving relics. Although Nora's argument is, at times, quite convoluted, his point is convincing. It is natural for artefacts to be removed from their original contexts, and historians and curators need to be open to the reinterpretation of artefacts in new contexts. While the notion of constructed history replacing true memory sounds antithetical to the goals of historians and curators, Nora's argument acknowledges the reality that history, memory and significance evolve over time.

Historical Narratives and Memory

Jay Winter, a luminary of American public history, has argued that terms such as 'national memory' and 'historical narratives' have been incorrectly interpreted as "some vague cloud which exists without agency".[29] Yet this could not be further from the truth. Historical narratives are organic conceptions, which are capable of creation, evolution and mutation. Joan Beaumont, an Australian military historian, argues that "the construction of memory is a dynamic interactive process between individuals, organisational stakeholders and the state".[30] This is particularly true in Australia, where the term "ANZAC" is synonymous with national identity, and the legitimacy of the ANZAC legend is controlled by the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Beaumont's interpretation of Australian historical narratives is

[29] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 11.
[30] Joan Beaumont, "Contested Transnational Heritage: The Demolition of Changi Prison, Singapore," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 15 (2009), 298.

supported by John Bodnar, who found many similarities in the creation of the American national memory. Bodnar argues that "the shaping of a past worthy of public commemoration in the present is contested and involves a struggle for supremacy between advocates of various political ideas and sentiments".[31] Bodnar also argued that "public memory speaks primarily about the structure of power in society," and the prominence of Australia's military past in the public sense of national identity reveals how tightly the government controls this ephemeral aspect of the nation state.[32]

The struggle for control of the Australian national memory is seen most clearly in the national institutions, specifically the National Museum of Australia (NMA) and the Australian War Memorial (AWM). While the NMA attempts to tell the story of the nation's fractured past, the AWM is both a museum of wartime and a memorial to fallen soldiers. The NMA's struggle for legitimacy has been well documented in the observations of historians, politicians and journalists. More interesting is the analysis of the NMA's review board in 2003, which compares the NMA's failures with the AWM's successes. The AWM, argues the review board, "gains gravitas through recalling tragedy – its task is much easier here [than the NMA's], in that the tragedy is supportive of national mythology".[33] It could also be argued that the AWM has succeeded in connecting with the national memory as it actively listens to the public, and evolves its narratives and exhibitions accordingly.

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[31] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13.
[32] Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 15.
[33] John Carroll, *Review of the National Museum of Australia: Its Exhibitions and Public Programs. A Report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia* (Canberra: Department of Communications, Information, Technology and the Arts, 2003), 10.

Thomas Woods argues that successful museums evolve their narratives according to the expectations of the public:

> Exhibitions and programs form part of a dialogue, constantly circling from the museum historian to the public audience and back to create an inclusive museum community. They are a community experience with both intellectual and affective aspects. Exhibitions developed this way contain many different perspectives, and so they can be enjoyed by the broadest possible group of people. Public history becomes history done with the public, for the public, and in public.[34]

While museums that employ this method may have a stronger connection with the historical narrative, they may find themselves drifting further from the historical truth. Bernice Archer argues that war museums have a propensity to represent what the public expect, and neglect their role in educating the public as to what actually occurred. Archer argues that "war is still considered a military – and therefore masculine affair". Moreover that, "prisoners of war and wartime internees are still a predominantly masculine concept in the minds not only of the general public, but also of museum curators who are, among other things, the keepers and exhibitors of the public memory".[35] Military and wartime museums have generally neglected their responsibility to educate the public on the experiences of women. When museums have chosen to represent women they have tended to be portrayed in a sexualised manner, such when female civilian internees have been represented as helpless victims of Japanese sexual crimes.[36]

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[34] Thomas Woods, "Museums and the Public: Doing History Together," *The Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 1113.
[35] Bernice Archer, "A Patchwork of Internment," *History Today* 47 (1997), 17.
[36] Christina Twomey, "Australian Nurse POWs: Gender, War and Captivity," *Australian Historical Studies* 124 (2004), 256.

Christina Twomey has published widely on the experiences and representations of civilian women internees. She argues that civilian women have, until recently, been neglected by war museums as "war spent as an internee did not fit any of the available categories for understanding and interpreting war".[37] When civilian women's experiences have been represented by institutions, "captivity is more often than not presented as a threat and a challenge to bodily and moral integrity".[38] This voyeuristic interest in the civilian women's sexual vulnerability is consistent with the broader representation of the women in the media. The depiction of Japanese soldiers as violent and lecherous, and civilian women as sexualised victims, began during the war itself. Mike Armstrong's "Bushido" cartoon, published on 12 March 1942 in *The Argus* (Melbourne), had a strong influence on the national understanding of internment (Fig. 8). The cartoon depicts a naked and helpless white woman being held aloft by an enormous, ape-like Japanese soldier, which created a wartime narrative which still endures today. The film *Paradise Road* (1997) claimed to be "based on a true story" of interned civilian women in Sumatra, including the diary of Betty Jeffrey. However, Hank Nelson argues that the film simplifies the complex issue of sexual relations in the internment camp. Rather than being weak and helpless victims, the interned women could actively trade sex for food and medicines for themselves or the children, or form sexual relationships with Japanese guards for protection.[39] Christopher Castiglia argues that films such as *Paradise Road* not only continue to mutate the historical narrative, but also legitimise the "prurient interest in the sexual exploits of the helpless white girl, and [the] hatred and fear of the brutal man of colour".[40] The historical narrative of the

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[37] Christina Twomey, "Double Displacement: Western Women's Return Home from Japanese Internment in the Second World War," *Gender and History* 21 (2009), 681.
[38] Christina Twomey, "Captive Women and Audiences," *Meanjin* 58 (1999), 50.
[39] Hank Nelson, "A Map to Paradise Road," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 32 (1999), accessed 22 April 2013, http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j32/nelson.asp.
[40] Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

interned civilian women is hyper-sexualised and fallacious, yet it is this narrative which influences how artefacts from the period are interpreted and exhibited.

The Changi Quilts

The Changi Quilts have been analysed by four different female scholars who have utilised different approaches to reach different conclusions about the significance of these artefacts. Bernice Archer, a British historian, argues that the quilts are representative of the women's anti-Japanese defiance and resistance. She quotes Rozsika Parker several times in her work, and is clearly influenced by Parker's feminist approach. Archer regards the quilts as a "paradox of political caution and defiance hidden behind the femininity of embroidery and quilt-making," and is intrigued by their "active, harsh, and, by definition of that time and place, unfeminine quality".[41] All historians are influenced by their personal bias when they interpret history, and Archer is no exception. Her political and ideological bias is most evident in her analysis of the quilts' iconography. Referring to a square sewn by internee J.D.M. Summers on the British Changi Quilt (Fig. 5), Archer argues:

> This one here is very delicate, with tiny little flowers on each line. Now, you only have to close your eyes very slightly and that looks like barbed wire. So you have no doubt that that was the kind of image she was trying to create.[42]

In contrast to this highly specific interpretation, J.D.M. Summers never explained the message she was trying to express in her square. Arguably, it is also highly unlikely

[41] Bernice Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians*, 163.
[42] Bernice Archer, Radio Broadcast, "Document: Threads of Hope," London: BBC Radio 4, 13 September 2001, (IWM) Sound 22236.

that she intended her pretty floral design to be viewed through half-closed eyes. Archer also argues that the quilt reveals how the women found a "paradoxical personal freedom of expression within the confinement of the prison camp... in which they were unprotected and unconstrained by the patriarchal colonial society".[43] Yet, her sources for this perspective are largely based on personal interpretation and imagination as opposed to supporting documentation in text or oral history by the internees themselves. This dissertation argues that Archer's desire to interpret the quilts as symbols of political defiance causes her to read too much into the squares. Instead, this dissertation will explore wartime sources to discover how the women themselves viewed the Changi Quilts, and allow the primary sources to influence the interpretation of the quilts.

Jane Peek, a curator in the Military Heraldry and Technology (MHT) section at the AWM, also disputes Archer's interpretation of the Changi Quilts. However, Peek is hesitant about whether the embroidered messages can be understood in the modern era. "The meaning of many of the messages that are obviously included in the squares is now lost to us," argues Peek, "Some would have been private messages only comprehensible to the couples themselves".[44] She also acknowledges that few of the interned women had husbands or friends in the military camps to whom the messages could be passed. Peek argues that the purpose of the Changi Quilts, therefore, was simply to give the interned women a means of passing the time and alleviating boredom, rather than as an overtly political or ideological act.[45] Whereas Archer clearly argues that she believes the quilts are significance for their supposed political

[43] Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians*, 164.
[44] Jane Peek, "History of the Changi Quilts," Australian War Memorial, accessed 12 September 2013, http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/quilt/history/.
[45] Peek, "History of the Changi Quilts".

messages, Peek is less forthcoming in her personal opinion on their significance. In her history of the Changi Quilts, it appears that Peek considers the quilts to be significant as depositories of memory because they allowed ordinary women in extraordinary circumstance to bear witness to their experiences. Although Peek and Archer interpret the Changi Quilts differently, they both take academic pathways to reach their conclusions. In contrast, Sheila Allan uses a less academic route to her conclusions. Allan was 17 years old when she was interned in Changi in 1942, and contributed a square to the Australian Changi Quilt. In the second edition of her published diary, Allan included an appendix entitled "The Changi Quilts".[46] Yet, neither Allan's original diary, which is held in the archives of the AWM, nor her published diary contain any references to the Changi Quilts or her individual square. By contrast, the appendix provides a detailed description of how the quilts were produced, and a brief analysis of the quilts' iconography. Allan is not a trained historian, and she appears to have based the majority of her text on Archer's published work. The appendix to her published diary, therefore, provides no new information or arguments about the quilts. Although her diary contains not a single contemporary reference to the Changi Quilts, Allan became a champion of the quilts and their historical significance during the 1980s and 1990s. The evolution of the Changi Quilts' historical narrative, and the role of Sheila Allan in this development, is explored in depth in Chapter Five.

The only other academic reference to the Changi Quilts is by Sue Prichard, curator of the "Quilts 1700-2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories" exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The Girl Guides Quilt was included in the exhibition, and Prichard wrote in the exhibition catalogue how:

[46] Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*, 174.

> Each patch communicates a story of survival: a girl's endurance, her time passed, and her refusal to disappear from the visual landscape," argues Prichard, "The patches testify to the hope and independence of individuals through the creation of beautiful objects, seemingly at odds with the difficult conditions in which they were created.[47]

Although it is unlikely that the interned girls consciously thought that by making the quilt as a birthday gift they were 'refusing to disappear from the visual landscape,' Prichard's short analysis of the quilts is the most convincing. Whereas Archer sees defiant politics where there is no definite proof that this existed and Peek regards the quilts as a mere pastime, Prichard argues that the quilts occupy the middle ground. As some of the women clearly went to an effort to embroider enduring images, the quilts were evidently significant to a minority, even if the messages can no longer be decoded. Likewise, the patches on the Girl Guides Quilt reflects the enduring hope and resilience of teenage girls, even as their freedom is taken from them. In this way, while history of the Changi Quilts has been written, there are few academic analyses of the quilts' social, political, cultural and histoircal significance from the perspective of their inherent material qualities, and past and present written sources. This dissertation will explore the contentious significance of the Changi Quilts, both during the war and in the modern era, in order to analyse the evolution of their place in the national memory.

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[47] Sue Prichad, *Quilts 1700-2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2010), 221.

Primary Source Analysis

A diverse range of primary sources is employed throughout the dissertation to achieve the objective of closely analysing the historical significance of the Changi Quilts. Historians of the civilian women's experiences have been prone to using wartime sources and modern sources interchangeably. However, the content and language of wartime and modern sources are markedly different. This dissertation argues that by writing about the civilian women's experiences using both wartime and modern sources, the Changi Quilts have been interpreted incorrectly. The dissertation aims to resolve the confusion by clearly separating the two types of sources, and analysing them for their flaws and benefits.

Chapter Four will explore the historical significance of the quilts when they were created in 1942 by relying solely upon the wartime sources of letters, diaries, newspapers and material culture. Although there are difficulties associated with using only primary sources produced during internment, there are also advantages. One significant problem is the shortage of surviving contemporary sources. In her book on power structures and intimacy in eighteenth-century Scottish marriage, Katie Barclay argues that letters are impacted not only by social conventions, but also by physical realities.[48] Paper and ink were finite commodities in Changi, and many women did not have the opportunity to write letters or diaries during internment. The Japanese authorities also banned the writing of letters and diaries in Changi, as they feared the women might smuggle operational information out of the prison. Not only were few letters and diaries written during internment, but even fewer were donated to archives following liberation. Whereas the women viewed their experiences as important during

[48] Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 27.

internment, after the war the women tended to compare their experiences to those of the prisoners of war and the survivors of the Holocaust. Internment in Changi was safer than internment in the Dutch East Indies or the Philippines, and paled in significance compared to the atrocities experienced by victims of the Holocaust in Europe. The liberated women tended to keep their letters and diaries as personal mementoes, rather than viewing them as important historical documents.[49] The contemporary letters and diaries that can be found in archives are few and far between, but they provide a fascinating insight to the women's daily experiences in Changi.

One of the most interesting aspects of contemporary letters and diaries is that the distinction between what constituted a letter and a diary collapsed. The Japanese governed communication between the civilian women's camp and the civilian men's camp, and communication with the prisoner of war camp was sporadic. Letters were often written without being sent, and as the letter collections grew they gradually acquired the characteristics of diaries. Likewise, Joan Beaumont observed "there is always a 'you' to whom a diary is addressed," which resulted in the diaries developing into letter collections.[50] The intimacy of the letters and diaries allows historians an insight into the women's personal reflections on internment, and how they viewed the Changi Quilt projects.

The women's camp newspaper, the *POW WOW*, does not allow historians the same insight to the women's private thoughts. However, many editions of the weekly newspaper survive in the archives of the Imperial War Museum, and they provide

[49] Christina Twomey, "Bearing Witness: Modes of Testimony Among Civilian Internees of the Japanese," in *When the Soldiers Return: November 2007 Conference Proceedings*, ed. Martin Crotty (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2009), 38.
[50] Joan Beaumont, "Prisoners of War," unpublished paper presented at the Fiftieth Anniversary Conference of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, November 1991, 117.

comprehensive detail about daily life in Changi. The *POW WOW* newspaper does not suffer the weaknesses identified by Joseph Baumgartner, including the separation between the eyewitness and journalist, need to appeal to subscribers and advertisers, and issues regarding freedom of the press.[51] As the newspaper was written by the women themselves and published in the camp, it is an extremely useful primary source.

The most significant contemporary primary source is the material culture produced during internment. This dissertation focuses on the Changi Quilts, and it is important to examine the other embroideries that the women created. Many women produced embroideries in Changi, and it is important to compare the iconography of the quilts with similar works created at the same time. Embroidery was also a popular pastime in women's internment camps throughout Asia, and a small number of Australian prisoners of war embroidered in Asia and Europe. Embroideries created by other civilian women and prisoners of war during the Second World War will be examined in conjunction with the Changi Quilts.

Whereas Chapter Four will rely solely on primary sources created during internment, Chapter Five will incorporate modern sources. The focus of Chapter Five is the historical significance of the quilts during the late twentieth century, and so it is appropriate to include memoirs, published diaries, newspaper interviews and radio interviews. The women's memoirs and published diaries reveal their modern opinions on the Changi Quilts, and provide an interesting contrast to their wartime writings. A weakness of memoirs and published (edited) diaries, according to Mendel Piekarz, is the influence of modern attitudes. "Consciously and unconsciously," Piekarz argues,

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[51] Joseph Baumgartner, "Newspapers as Historical Sources," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 9 (1981), 256.

"the witnesses tend to overstep their personal experiences and constantly impregnate their remarks with new trends of thought".[52] The inclusion of modern ideas and attitudes in memoirs and published diaries is certainly problematic for historians attempting to use these sources for details of wartime experiences. However, this dissertation will use these primary sources to understand the civilian women's modern attitudes. To investigate how the civilian women perceive the historical significance of the Changi Quilts, the published memoirs and diaries are advantageous sources.

The Changi Quilts have been the subject of newspaper articles and radio programs in the twenty-first century, and many civilian women have given interviews. Their oral history testimonies are interesting, but there are several weaknesses regarding using newspaper and radio interviews as primary sources. The most significant problem is that interview quotes can be edited or misrepresented by the media. This is particularly common in radio broadcasts, argues Peter Read, where "sentences will vanish and whole minutes of talk will be transposed in the producer's effort to make a good narrative".[53] While the weaknesses of newspaper and radio interviews need to be acknowledged, Jerry Knudson disputes that they are useless to historians. The advantage of newspaper and radio interviews, argues Knudson, is that they provide an indication of people's thoughts at a particular time and place.[54] Memoirs, diaries, and newspaper and radio interviews are not flawless primary sources. However, as they reveal people's perceptions of past events, and as the focus of Chapter Five is how the

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[52] Mendel Piekarz, "On Testimony Literature as a Historical Source in the Perpetuation of the 'Final Solution,'" *Kivunnim* 20 (1983), 129.
[53] Peter Read, "Presenting Voices in Different Media: Print, Radio and CD-ROM," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 414.
[54] Jerry Knudson, "Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources" *Perspectives* 31 (1993), accessed 31 March 2013, http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1993/9310/9310ARC.cfm.

civilian women perceive the Changi Quilts in the late twentieth century, their value to this dissertation cannot be overestimated.

No surviving civilian women were contacted for oral history interviews. This decision was made for two reasons. The first reason is that a plethora of modern primary sources already exist regarding the women's current views on the Changi Quilts. The contemporary (wartime) primary sources are far more interesting and relevant to this dissertation, and these sources have not been subjected to the same degree of historical analysis. It was decided that expending greater effort in searching for wartime-era primary sources in archives would be a more profitable pursuit. The second reason is that the majority of women who contributed squares to the Changi Quilts were British, and most returned to Britain following liberation. Sheila Allan is the only Australian contributor to the Changi Quilts who has been willing to discuss her experiences during internment. However, Sheila is now 88 years old and she no longer consents to interviews due to the emotional strain caused by reflecting on difficult memories. Furthermore, her opinions regarding the Changi Quilts are well documented in her published diary. It was therefore decided that no oral history interviews would be conducted for this dissertation.

A large section of Chapter Five also involves the relationship between museums and the Changi Quilts. This relationship was explored through a number of interviews and e-mail conversations with curators and archivists at the Australian War Memorial, Imperial War Museum, and the British Red Cross Museum and Archives. These primary source interviews have been extremely valuable, and allowed an insight into the historical significance of the quilts from an institutional perspective.

Fig. 5: J.D.M. Summer's square on the British Changi Quilt, 1942. Photograph by the author, December 2012.

Fig. 6: Unfinished embroidered quilt, made by an African-American slave, 1839 (Smithsonian Institution).

Fig. 7: "Rajah" Quilt, embroidered by British convict women aboard the *Rajah,* during transportation to Van Diemen's Land, 1841 (National Gallery of Australia)

Fig. 8: "Bushido" cartoon, Mike Armstrong, *The Argus (Melbourne)*, 12 March 1942.

3. The Australian Changi Quilt: Visual Context and Material Culture

The Australian Changi Quilt is a large, eye-catching collaborative craftwork. Measuring 260 by 180cm, it consists of 66 patchwork squares surrounded by a thick white cotton border. Each white cotton patch is approximately 20cm square, and made from washed rice bags. After the squares were sewn together to form a quilt, a white sheet was attached to the back so as to protect and strengthen it. While most women of the women chose to embroider their squares individually rather than in pairs or groups, however, certain iconographic themes are present in the quilt as a whole (Fig.10).

"The iconography of women's work is rarely given the serious consideration it deserves," argues Rozsika Parker, "The meanings of any embroidered picture have to be carefully considered within their historical, artistic and class context".[55] This chapter will examine the Australian Changi Quilt with reference to the fundamental context of its essential visual and material qualities as an object. Moreover, by exploring the iconography of the squares that make up the Australian Changi Quilt both individually and collectively, the significance of the women's creative expression will be better understood and valued.

The most common images depicted on the squares are traditional flower motifs and symbols, similar to those found in early Victorian British samplers. This is unsurprising as the majority of the women who were involved in the project came from British, white, middle class backgrounds. Growing up in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of the women would have been expected to learn embroidery and

[55] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 12.

create floral samplers themselves.[56] However, the types of floral motifs depicted on the Australian Changi Quilt varies greatly. The women who had been colonial housewives prior to the Japanese invasion had the strongest embroidery skills and sewed specific flowers on their squares. Pink Tudor roses, pansies and daisies are found on the housewives' squares, whereas the pre-war nursing sisters chose to embroider stylised, non-specific floral varieties. For example, Geraldine Cogan, a British nursing sister, embroidered three stylised pink flowers, while Alice la Cloche, a British housewife, embroidered her square with a thistle and bluebells.

The women who contributed squares to the Australian Changi Quilt were arguably the least skilled sewers, in comparison to the women whose squares now adorn the British and Japanese Changi Quilts. Rather than simple and stylised flowers, the latter women embroidered tulips, daffodils, crocus flowers, poppies and a garden of forget-me-nots. Not only does the Australian Changi Quilt reveal embroidery of less skill, but the British and Japanese Quilts were decorated with more colourful silk threads. Whereas many of the squares on the Australian Quilt were embroidered using white, cream, pale pink and pale gray silk threads, the British and Japanese Quilts produced a cacophony of colour. This indicates that the Australian Quilt was not a priority for the women, perhaps due to the small number of Australian women interned in Changi. Of the 30 Australian women in Changi, only 9 were involved in the Australian Changi Quilt project. Whereas of the 278 interned British women, 189 of their number contributed squares to the three quilts.

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[56] Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, 61.

National icons were also popular amongst the Australian Changi Quilt embroiderers. Edith Harle Hickie Murphy, Judy McIvor, S.K. Mackenzie, Diana Logan, Olive Sowerby and Jessie McCubbin were Scottish nursing sisters prior to their internment, and all six women chose to incorporate Scottish icons in their squares. Edith and Jessie decorated their squares with images of thistles, heather and bluebells, and Edith also embroidered the words, "There Will Always Be An England As Long As Scotland Stands". Judy and S.K. embroidered their square together, which was unusual as most women preferred to embroider as a way to create personal space in the cramped prison. The two women cut a scrap of tartan fabric into the shape of Scotland, and appliqued the map upon their square. Diana embroidered her square with an image of the Gordon Highlanders' hat badge and the regimental motto, 'Bydand' (watchful), while Olive decorated her square with the patriotic image of a Scottish piper in full regalia. The Australian Changi Quilt reveals that even women with low embroidery skills were encouraged to participate. More importantly, it reveals that all of the women gave their design a deep level of thought, and the squares were regarded as an appropriate channel for nationalist spirit.

An Australian woman created one of the most patriotically English squares on the quilt. Vera McIntyre's square depicts an armoured St George fighting a red dragon, which is blowing red and yellow flames. It is not known why Vera chose to embroider an English icon rather than an Australian design. However, colonial Singapore was a hierarchical society, where women of British background had a higher social status than Australian women.[57] There may have been some form of social advantage, therefore, in embroidering British symbols rather than Australian ones. In addition,

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[57] Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), 71.

H.G. Lacey embroidered another English hero, Sir Francis Drake playing bowls at Plymouth before defeating the Spanish Armada. The Union Jack is shown flying proudly on Alice Louise La Cloche's square, and the placement of her square at the centre of the patchwork quilt makes it one of the most dominant images on the quilt. New Zealand is represented on Gladys Tompkin's square, with an appliqued fabric landscape of snow-capped mountains and a still lake. The two Canadian women in the camp, Ethel Mulvaney and Margaret Burns, decorated their shared square with two maple leaves. The only representation of Australian nationalism is on Sheila Allan's square. Although Sheila was born in Malaya and had never visited Australia, she identified as being Australian and her square depicts a map of the mainland with a large kangaroo at the centre.

Whereas the Japanese Quilt is an exhibition of excellent floral embroideries, and the British Quilt is interesting for the combination of floral and British nationalist icons, the Australian Quilt reveals more of the women's personal creative expression. There is no overarching theme in the Australian Quilt, and it is often quite difficult to read what the women were trying to express in their squares. Only two squares on the Australian Quilt reveal clear messages to the modern observer. The individual square by Eunice Austin-Hofer, and collaborative patch by Joan Macintosh-Whyte and Iris Parfitt, communicate the homesickness and despair the women felt during internment. Eunice's square is certainly one of the most poignant on the Australian Quilt. The centre of the square is occupied by a pale gray stem-stitched wall, with the figure of a woman in a red dress sitting in the lower right corner. A thought bubble emanates from her head, containing a tree, a loaf of bread, a wine bottle and the words "And Thou Beside Me In The Wilderness". The phrase is a quotation from a poem by the Persian

poet, Omar Khayyam. Written in the 11th century, the correct stanzas are, "A Book of Verses underneath the Bough, A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread – and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness – Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!".[58] The passion and despair of Eunice's square is mirrored in that created by Joan MacIntosh-Whyte and Iris Parfitt. Prior to the war, Joan had been a British nursing sister in Singapore, and Iris had been the British principal of St. George's Girls' School in Penang, Malaya. The two women shared Cell 20 in Changi, and together they created an emotive square for the Australian Quilt. A small figure made of black fabric sits in a shaft of sunlight in a Changi cell, with the words, "How Long, O Lord, How Long!". The quote is from Psalm 13 of the Bible, with the entire psalm revealing the women's sense of isolation and abandonment:

> How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
> How long will you hide your face from me?
> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?
> How long will my enemy triumph over me?
>
> Look on me and answer, O Lord my God.
> Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
> My enemy will say, "I have overcome him."
> And my foes will rejoice when I fall.
>
> But I trust in your unfailing love;
> My hear rejoices in your salvation.
> I will sing to the Lord,
> For he has been good to me.[59]

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[58] Omar Khayyam, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. Edward FitzGerald (London: Siegle, Hill and Company, 1901), 15.
[59] Psalm 13, *Holy Bible: New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1984), 388.

Although the front of the Changi Quilts receives the most attention with the individual squares, the backing is also significant. All three quilts had white backing sheets attached, with that of the British Quilt left bare. However, Ethel embroidered donation instructions upon the backings of the Australian and Japanese Quilts (Fig. 9). The Red Cross donation instructions were embroidered in thick black embroidery silk thread, with a small red cross above them. The donation square on the Australian Quilt reads as follows:

> Presented By The Women Of Changi Internment Camp 1942 To The Wounded Br. & Australian Soldiers With Our Sympathy For Their Suffering.
>
> It Is Our Wish That On The Cessation Of Hostilities That This Quilt Be Presented To The Australian Red Cross Society.
>
> It Is Advisable To Dry Clean This Quilt.

The Japanese Quilt's instructions are the same, except for the women's sympathy being directed to the "wounded Nipponese soldiers". Many women embroidered in Changi and the other internment camps around Asia, with a large number of the embroideries surviving in the collections of the IWM and AWM. However, it is the Changi Quilts that have been remembered and displayed publicly. It is likely that the Changi Quilts would also have been forgotten from history, were it not for the donation instructions upon their backing sheets. The donation instructions connected the interned women from a small internment camp with the multinational aid organisation, and gave them a permanent place in historical memory.

The squares on the Australian Changi Quilt reveal how the women wished to express themselves at that particular time and moment. Symbols of hope and beauty, such as flowers and shining suns, reflect the women's spirit after three months of internment. The number of landscape embroideries also indicate that the women had a strong yearning for wide open spaces. The beautiful gardens and snow-capped mountain peaks would have been a strong contrast to the overcrowded cells where the women were held. The popularity of the patriotic icons amongst the women is not surprising, as the war in the Pacific was raging around them. Furthermore, national identity had been an important aspect of Singaporean social life since the colony was established, so it may have been an important part of the women's identity.[60] There does not seem to be a strong connection between the Red Cross, to whom the quilts were dedicated, and the designs which the women chose to embroider. Rather than a series of coded messages as Archer argues, the Australian Changi Quilt is far more nuanced. The Australian Changi Quilt is a memory capsule of the women's thoughts, hopes and fears at that specific moment in time.

[60] Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 109.

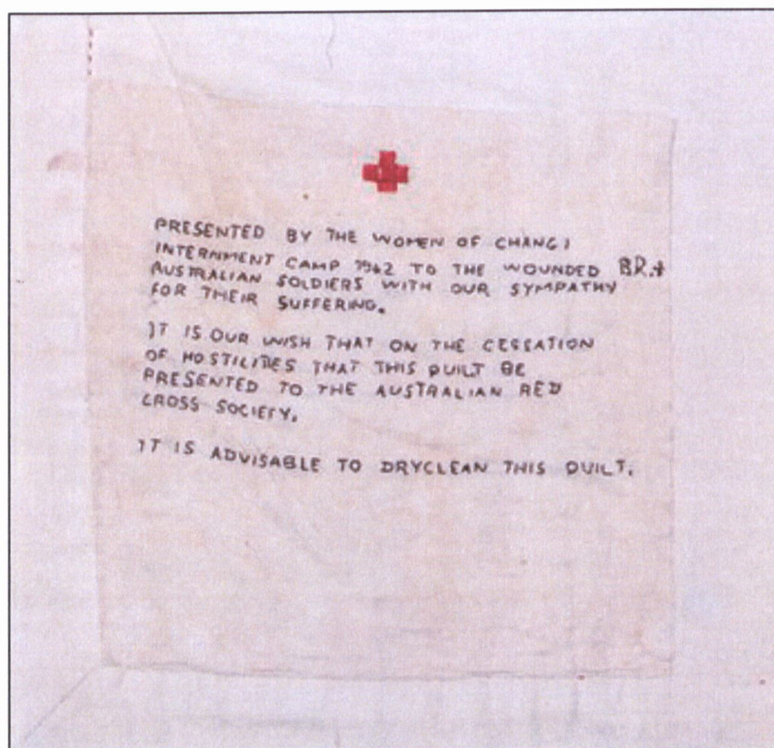

Fig. 9: Donation square on the backing sheet of the Australian Changi Quilt (AWM).

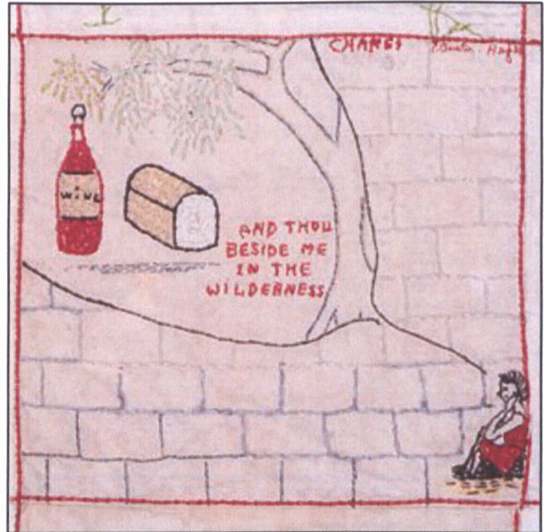

Fig 10: Example squares from the Australian Changi Quilt (AWM).
Upper line: Joan MacIntosh-Whyte and Iris Parfitt; Eunice Austin-Hoffer (Australian).
Middle line: Sheila Allan (Australian); Vera McIntyre (Australian).
Lower line: Edith Mary ‘Kay’ Francis; Freda E. Russell-Davis.

4. The Historical Significance of the Changi Quilts in 1942

Purpose of the Changi Quilts

During the 1980s and 1990s, historians put forward arguments that the Changi Quilts contained coded messages. Bernice Archer has gone so far as to argue that the women made the quilts to show their anti-Japanese defiance and resistance.[61] However, Archer came to this conclusion through an analysis of oral history testimonies, rather than wartime documents. This chapter will examine the wartime sources and discover what they actually reveal about the Changi Quilts. This unbiased approach to the wartime sources will make it possible to analyse the contemporary significance of the Changi Quilts to the women who made them in 1942, in their own words.

Of the 388 women interned in Changi in 1942, only two women mentioned the Changi Quilts in their writings. The two sources reveal one clear message: the creation of the Changi Quilts was contentious and debated amongst the women. Helen Beck, a British internee, wrote positively of the Changi Quilts. In an essay entitled "Internment (From A Woman's Personal Viewpoint)," Helen described daily life in the women's section of Changi. Helen wrote the essay for her husband, who was interned in the civilian men's section, and did not submit it for censorship by the elected Women's Committee. Instead, "by the simple expedient of putting it into a scarlet toffee tin in a dustbin, getting a secret agent to warn [her] husband to save the tin, & then forming one of the Dustbin Fatigue in the main yard," Helen was able to communicate freely with her

[61] Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians*, 163.

husband.[62] In addition to recording a comprehensive history of the women's experiences in Changi, Helen noted:

> To those who would learn a woman's point of view about internment, I would recommend a close inspection of the embroidered patches in the hospital quilts worked for the Red Cross. That sprig of heather, those snow-capped peaks, a miniature flower garden in full bloom, and the brave gesture or motto traced in coloured thread – these reveal, more clearly than any essay, the secrets of the heart.[63]

Helen's own square in the British Quilt reveals a great deal about how she viewed internment during the initial months. Prison bars and a brick wall are depicted in thick black thread, with the following poem embroidered below:

> God made the Earth and sky for one and all,
> Man made these prison bars
> But faith in England scales the highest wall,
> Above it shine the stars.

Whereas Helen indicates in her essay that she believed the Changi Quilts to be important creations, the only other contemporary source disputes Helen's assertion. Katherine de Moubray, also a British internee, kept a meticulous diary whilst she was held in Changi.

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[62] Helen Beck, "Internment (From A Woman's Personal Viewpoint)." In the Private Record collection of Lieutenant-Colonel Stahle, (AWM) PR89/59, Folio 3.
[63] Beck, "Internment".

In contrast to Helen, Katherine's diary entry records a far more scornful opinion of the Changi Quilts:

> These squares (cut out of good sheeting) that the women are embroidering to make patch work bedspreads, beyond providing entertainment and occupation for the women – seem so futile. One is for the hospital here I think, so one is for the Japs at the General Hospital and one for Changi military. God knows where else, and what use a patch work quilt can be to a hospital the Lord alone knows. One feels the sheeting would have been more useful as sheets![64]

It is interesting to note that although in her diary Katherine belittled the women who contributed squares to the Changi Quilts, she later embroidered a square herself. Appearing on the Australian Changi Quilt, Katherine's square depicts a pink Tudor rose with a cream stem and leaves, with her name embroidered in lavender silk thread. Although Helen and Katherine disagreed on the benefits of creating the Changi Quilt, their writings hint at the overall purpose and significance of the quilts to the women. As almost 200 women contributed squares to the Changi Quilts, with some women making multiple squares, it is likely that the women chose to participate for a variety of personal reasons.

Katherine may have seen the creation of the Changi Quilts as a "futile" exercise, but she acknowledged that for some women the project gave them "entertainment and occupation".[65] Embroidery was a popular pastime in Changi, particularly amongst the

[64] de Moubray, Diary entry for 6 May 1942.
[65] de Moubray, diary entry for 6 May 1942.

interned middle-class housewives. It allowed the women a form of creative expression and a means of creating a sense of personal space in the overcrowded prison. The civilian women's section had a symbiotic relationship with the civilian men's section in Changi. The prison kitchen was located in the men's section, and so the men cooked the rice rations for the women. In return, the women practiced their well-honed domestic arts, such as repairing shoes, darning clothes, and making socks. Dr. Eleanor Hopkins, the women's Fatigue Officer, noted in June 1943 that "sewing is a good camp chore and must make for the comfort of the men".[66] Likewise, the Japanese often exploited the women's sewing skills for their own benefit. In May 1942 the Japanese Camp Commandant, Lieutenant Okasaki, ordered the women to embroider 4,000 insignia patches for the Imperial Japanese Army. Although the women were not pleased about embroidering the patches, Freddy Bloom argued in her diary how "sewing them would not help their army in the slightest, [but] it might make them better disposed to the thousands completely in their hands".[67] Whether the women sewed for themselves, the interned men or under Japanese orders, the fact remains that embroidery was a popular pastime in the camp.

While Katherine viewed the Changi Quilts as a way for the women to occupy themselves, Helen saw them as a way for the women to record their view of internment. Paper was a finite resource in the prison, but that did not stop many women from keeping meticulous diaries, or the publication of the weekly *POW WOW* newspaper. Likewise, it was difficult to obtain the cloth and thread necessary for embroidery, yet not impossible. For women who preferred to express themselves creatively and visually, rather than through the written word, embroidery allowed them

[66] Eleanor Hopkins, "Fatigue Officer's Report, Thursday 17 June 1943," in Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians,* 153.
[67] Bloom, *Dear Philip,* diary entry for 29 May 1942, 57.

a channel for their talents. Arts and crafts exhibitions were held regularly during the years of internment, and the *POW WOW* reports of the events reveal the extent of the women's creativity. An arts and crafts exhibition in December 1942 saw prizes awarded for the finest embroideries, knitted garments, crocheted articles, patchwork quilts, dresses and children's toys.[68] "The standard was so high," remarked Freddy in her *POW WOW* report, "it must have been a difficult choice for the judges.[69] The Changi Quilts offered the camp's embroiderers a novel opportunity. Rather than creating something simply for their own enjoyment or as a competition entry, the Changi Quilts allowed the women to come together and use their skill and creativity to produce a material record of their shared experiences. As Helen Beck observed, for the women who expressed themselves through embroidery, the Changi Quilts did allow them to "reveal, more clearly than any essay, the secrets of the heart".[70]

The women interned in Changi came from a broad cross-section of colonial Singapore, and their motivations were as diverse as their personal backgrounds. A possible motivation for creating the Changi Quilts, which neither Helen or Katherine mentioned, was the sense of normal domesticity it would have created. Internment was a traumatic experience for all of the women, and many sought to recreate domestic life as best they could. Freddy was a prodigious writer during internment, and her diary entry on 4 April 1943 records how:

> Being civilised is our strong point. We've put up pictures, have flowers in bowls and use tablecloths. It's darned funny but we get a terrific kick out of

[68] *POW WOW* newspaper, Edition 38, Volume 1, 23 December 1942, (IWM) Documents 66/254/1.
[69] *POW WOW* newspaper, Edition 38, Volume 1, 23 December 1942.
[70] Helen Beck, "Internment (From A Woman's Personal Viewpoint)."

> this. How the internees have changed the jail – no longer grey and bleak. We planted papayas and shrubs all over.[71]

Freddy's desire for domesticity was also felt by Sheila Allan, whose diary records the events organised in Changi, from music concerts and birthday parties to a even a circus in November 1942.[72] "This evening was our Fancy Dress Ball held in the Carpenter's Shop," wrote Sheila in December 1942, "Marvellous all the get together and the different costumes... everybody enjoyed themselves – for the first time we forgot about being in here".[73] The women craved a sense of normality, and the collaborative creation of the Changi Quilts would have alleviated their homesick pangs slightly. Each woman embroidered her own design upon her square, and it is likely that each woman attached her own meaning to the Changi Quilts as a whole.

The connection between the Red Cross and the Changi Quilts is not immediately obvious. None of the embroidered squares on any of the three Changi Quilts directly reference the Red Cross. By contrast, the Girl Guides Quilt is decorated with symbols of the organisation, and the connection between the quilt and the Girl Guides is evident. Ethel collected the embroidered squares from the participating women, and sewed them together using red embroidery silk thread to form the three quilts. She also sewed a white backing sheet to each of the quilts. An additional square was sewed upon the backing sheets of two of the quilts, the Australian Changi Quilt and the Japanese Changi Quilt. The backing sheet squares were not signed, however, it is likely that Ethel made them herself as the embroidered text matches her handwriting. These squares, known as the 'donation squares,' indicate that the quilts were made

[71] Bloom, *Dear Philip*, diary entry for 4 April 1943, 57.
[72] Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*, diary entry for 6 November 1942, 47.
[73] Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*, diary entry for 26 December 1942, 55.

specifically for the Red Cross branches. The message on the donation squares indicates that the women, or Ethel at least, intended for the quilts to endure beyond the immediate war years. The reader is informed that "It Is Our Wish That On The Cessation Of Hostilities That This Quilt Be Presented To The Australian Red Cross Society". It may have been thought that by gifting the quilts to the aid organisations, the women's designs would be conserved for posterity. Furthermore, the donation square instructs the reader that "It Is Advisable To Dry Clean This Quilt". This instruction may seem absurd coming from an internment camp where the air was so humid that their clothes were disintegrating into rags. However, the instruction reveals that there was an intention for the quilts to endure until a time where the quilt's significance may be recognised, and dry cleaning a real possibility. The donation square reveals less about the women's general motivations for embroidering squares, and more about Ethel's own inspiration for the project.

Ethel was one of the most controversial personalities in the camp. As the self-appointed Red Cross Representative, she was granted exceptional powers by the Japanese authorities. Ethel was allowed to leave the camp once a month to purchase the food and medical supplies necessary for the women's survival. However, in addition to the supplies she was authorised to purchase, Ethel also spent the camp's money on indulgences, such as embroidery silk threads and needles. Her irresponsible use of camp funds caused tensions amongst the women. In her diary entry for 11 July 1943, Katherine ranted furiously about how Ethel had spent the women's money on 100 nightdresses, at a cost of $2000. "It sent everyone up in the air, as this irresponsible use of camp funds – call it Red Cross funds or what you will, seems terrible," argued Katherine, "Shall we all be short of food? And are nightdresses or even shoes

legitimate Red Cross work?".[74] In addition to spending the camp's funds, Ethel organised a Red Cross Corner in the camp, where goods could be traded.
Freddy recorded the fallout of this decision in her diary:

> Ethel has gone quite haywire with her Red Cross. The usual fanatic energy with absolutely no system. So has won the adoration of a certain crowd but antagonised Dr Hopkins [the elected Fatigue Officer] and the Committee.[75]

Not only was Ethel an autocratic decision-maker, but she struggled with mental health problems throughout the years of internment. The exact cause of her mental health problems was not recorded, except that she was "nearly certified once, and has been almost bats more than once".[76] It is clear that she suffered from manic episodes and severe mood swings while interned, and required hospitalisation on several occasions.[77] Ethel's mood swings, combined with her domineering nature, made her difficult to live with in the prison confines. Several skilled embroiderers chose not to participate in the creation of the Changi Quilts, due to their personal disagreements with Ethel.[78] However, as women of all sewing abilities were encouraged to participate, all of the three quilts were successfully completed.

The significance of the Changi Quilts to the women when they made them is a difficult measure to gauge. The quilts may have had cultural significance to the women, if they viewed it as a way to record their experiences. However, the idea that their experiences

[74] de Moubray, diary entry for 11 July 1942.
[75] Bloom, *Dear Philip*, diary entry for 9 April 1942, 40.
[76] de Moubray, diary entry for 11 April 1942.
[77] Bloom, *Dear Philip*, diary entry for 29 May 1942, 56; *POW WOW* newspaper, Volume 7, 13 May 1942.
[78] Bloom, *Dear Philip*, 55.

were worth recording for posterity was not a generally accepted one. Although women kept meticulous diaries, they were almost always addressed in letter format to loved ones outside the prison. In an editorial in *POW WOW*, Freddy scoffed at the idea that anyone not immediately connected with the women would find their experiences interesting:

> Undoubtedly it is of international importance that we internees, like all other internees all over the world, be treated humanely but this camp is of no particular merit and how we individually fill our days may interest our parents, mates or children, but surely no one else.[79]

The overwhelming opinion in the camp was that they were a motley mass of colonial housewives, forgotten and hidden at the farthest edge of the Empire. With their equally forgettable days filled with boredom and monotony, it is unclear if the Changi Quilts had any overall significance to the women. Very few women saw the quilts once they were assembled, and they were transferred to the civilian men's section in September 1942 for an arts and crafts exhibition. The quilts only merited two references in the women's wartime writings, with many women contributing squares but neglecting to mention the quilts at all. Sheila Allan and Mary Thomas maintained meticulous diaries throughout internment, but never wrote of the Changi Quilts.[80] Likewise, Freddy kept a regular diary and wrote the weekly *POW WOW* newspaper. The Changi Quilts did not warrant a reference in her diary, nor a single edition of *POW WOW*. Yet Sheila, Mary and Freddy all contributed embroidered squares to the Changi Quilts, with Freddy embroidering one square for the Australian Quilt and another for the Japanese Quilt.

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[79] *POW WOW* newspaper, Edition 8, Volume 2, 24 February 1943.
[80] See Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*; Mary Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun*.

During internment, it appears that the majority of the women, except for Helen Beck and Ethel Mulvaney, saw the Changi Quilts as insignificant at best, and futile at worst.

Bernice Archer has put forward an argument that the Changi Quilts contained some form of coded message, which can no longer be decoded so many decades after their creation. Yet wartime sources dispute this assertion. The Changi Quilts were displayed in the civilian men's section of the prison in September 1942 for an arts and crafts exhibition. The report of the event in the *Changi Guardian,* the men's section equivalent of *POW WOW,* recorded:

> Among the exhibits sent over by the women were three quilts made up of individual patches combined together. Each patch provided a mirror of wit and humour, tragedy and pathos and the indomitable spirit existing in the women's camp.[81]

The civilian men, rather than recognising the Changi Quilts as political and ideological artefacts, saw them through an emotional lens. The men recognised their own hope and homesickness in the women's work. This interpretation of the Changi Quilts is also found in the relevant diary entry of a British civilian internee, Tom Kitching:

> There is a remarkable display of talent, industry and patience at the camp exhibition… Among the contributions from A-Block [the women's section]

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[81] *Changi Guardian* newspaper, Edition 117, 7 September 1942, (IWM) Documents 897.

are three quilts worked for presenting to the Red Cross. Each patch was sewn by a different individual – most amusing.[82]

The significance of the Changi quilts to the civilian men was not any secret message, but the obvious effort the women had gone to in order to create the documents. Once the Changi Quilts had left the women's section of the prison, the significance of the quilts immediately evolved. The quilts changed from craftworks made to pass the time or domesticise their environment, and became symbols of the women's spirit. The evolution of the historical significance of the Changi Quilts was sparked, and it continues to develop today. The changing nature of the Changi Quilts' historical significance in the modern era will be further explored in Chapter 6.

Other Examples of Wartime Embroidery

Before delving into the modern sources and debate, it needs to be recognised that the Changi Quilts were not the only example of embroidery in prison confines. Embroidery was a common pre-war pastime throughout colonial Asia, and women in internment camps in Hong Kong, Malaya, Borneo, the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines embroidered.

Daisy 'Day' Joyce was interned in Stanley Camp, Hong Kong, and embroidered a sheet with over 1,100 signatures and a pictorial diary (Fig. 11). In her memoir, Day remembered that her sheet "was not begun with any purpose consciously in mind, nor was it continued with any after-the-war ideas. It was simply a hand steadying, mind

[82] Tom Kitching, diary entry for 6 September 1942, quoted in Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians*, 161.

employing, secret thought recorder of my own".[83] Interned women in the Netherlands East Indies also found solace in embroidery. Jan O'Herne was 19 years old when the Japanese removed her and six other Dutch girls from Ambarawa internment camp in Java. The girls were kept as sex slaves, or "comfort women," in a military brothel for four months. Jan embroidered a white handkerchief with the girls' signatures and '26-2-44', the date they were forcibly removed from the camp (Fig. 12). "It has been one of my dearest possessions but also my most hidden," wrote Jan in her memoir, "The secret evidence of the brutal crimes that had been done to us".[84] While Day used embroidery as a way to combat the boredom of internment, Jan's handkerchief was her proof of the war crimes committed by the Japanese in Java. In December 1992, an International Public Hearing was held in Tokyo, where Jan and other 'comfort women' gave evidence. Once her secret proof of Japanese crimes, Jan's embroidered handkerchief evolved into evidence of international significance at the trials.

When people find themselves in oppressive situations, they have historically turned towards arts and crafts for solace.[85] This was true during the Second World War, when a significant number of men created embroideries during the Second World War. Although embroidery is stereotyped as 'women's work,' Major Alexis Casdagli, of the British Army, made one of the most famous embroideries of the war (Fig. 13). While he was held as a prisoner of war in a German *oflag*, Casdagli cross-stitched a canvas sheet with images of the Nazi swastika and eagle, and the Communist hammer and sickle. However, around the edges of the canvas Casdagli included two borders with

[83] Daisy 'Day' Joyce, "Ordinary People: The Sheet" (IWM) Documents.9789.
[84] Jan Ruff-O'Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence* (Sydney: Editions Tom Thompson, 1994), 90.
[85] Nicholas Saunders, *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 114.

coded messages. The inner border reads "God Save The King" and the outer border states "Fuck Hitler," with both messages cross-stitched in Morse code.[86]

Australian prisoners of war, in both the European and Pacific theatres, took up embroidery as a way to pass the time. Corporal Clifford Gatenby was held at a *stalag* near Hohenfels, Germany, and embroidered his Army-issue blanket with images of North Africa and Germany (Fig. 14).[87] Likewise, Private James Kettle decorated a scrap of white cotton with the Australian coat of arms while captive in Athens (Fig. 15).[88] Patriotic themes were common in prisoner of war embroideries of this period. Lance Corporal Albert Mitchell, of the Australian 22nd Brigade Headquarters, embroidered a handkerchief with a nationalist message while held captive in Formosa (Taiwan) (Fig. 16). The white handkerchief features a map of Australia in green and yellow thread, with an Australian Army 'Rising Sun' badge embroidered in the centre of the map. The handkerchief is bordered with the words "There's No Place Like Home".[89] Dutch prisoners of war also took up the pastime. Leading Seaman Jan van Os, of the Royal Netherlands Navy, embroidered a white handkerchief a map of Sulawesi (Netherlands East Indies), surrounded by eight flags of the Allied forces (Fig. 17).[90] During captivity, Os maintained a detailed diary which described the activities he undertook to alleviate boredom. These included attending lectures, learning Arabic, Bahasa Malay and Sanskrit, wood carving and aluminium engraving.[91] However, as with the women in Changi, Os neglected to mention any details of his embroidered handkerchief.

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[86] Patrick Barkham, "Nazis, Needlework and my Dad," *The Guardian (UK)*, 3 September 2011, accessed 27 May 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/sep/03/tony-casdagli-father-stitching-nazis.
[87] Corporal Clifford Gatenby, "Embroidered Blanket," (AWM) REL33287.
[88] Private James Kettle, "Embroidered Australian Coat of Arms," (AWM) REL33541.
[89] Lance Corporal Albert Mitchell, "Embroidered Handkerchief," (AWM) REL03964.
[90] Leading Seaman Jan van Os, "Souvenir Embroidery," (AWM) REL34275.
[91] Artefact Dossier Notes, "Souvenir Embroidery," (AWM) REL34275.

The creation of the Changi Quilts needs to be understood within the relevant context of their birth. Embroidery was a popular pastime, amongst both interned women and male prisoners of war. Although the act of embroidery was widespread, the designs and themes used varied greatly. The significance of the embroidered works to their makers also differed. The Changi Quilts were created from 198 squares, and it is possible that the women had 198 different motivations for participating. The variations in motivations and design have made it difficult for historians to analyse the Changi Quilts. However, the wartime sources reveal that the Changi Quilts were not particularly significant artefacts to the women when they made them in 1942.

Fig. 11: Section of Daisy 'Day' Joyce's Quilt, interned in Hong Kong (IWM).

Fig. 12: Jan Ruff-O'Herne's Handkerchief, interned in Sumatra (AWM).

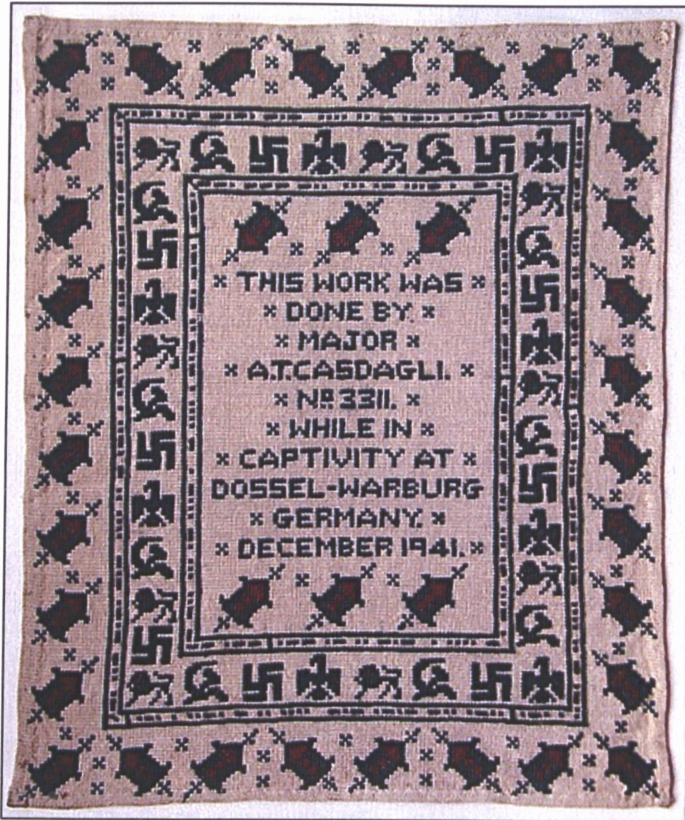

Fig. 13: Major Alexis Casdagli's cross-stitched sheet with Morse coded borders, POW in Germany (photograph courtesy of *The Guardian* (UK)).

Fig. 14: Corporal Clifford Gatenby's embroidered and appliquéd sheet, POW in Germany (AWM).

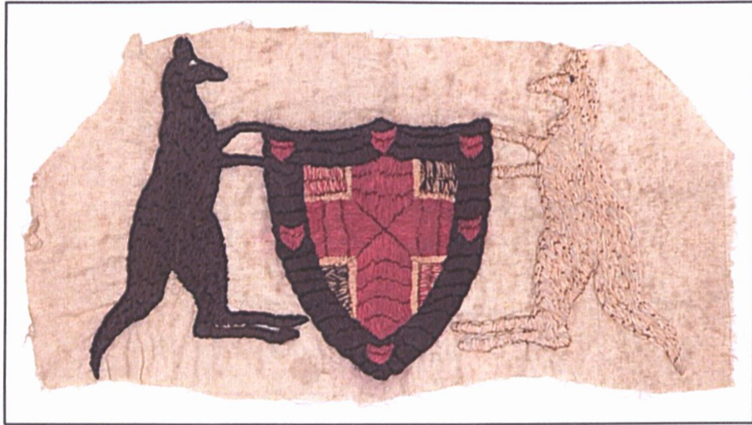

Fig. 15: Private James Kettle's embroidered coat of arms, POW in Greece (AWM).

Fig. 16: Corporal Albert Mitchell's embroidered handkerchief, POW in Taiwan (AWM).

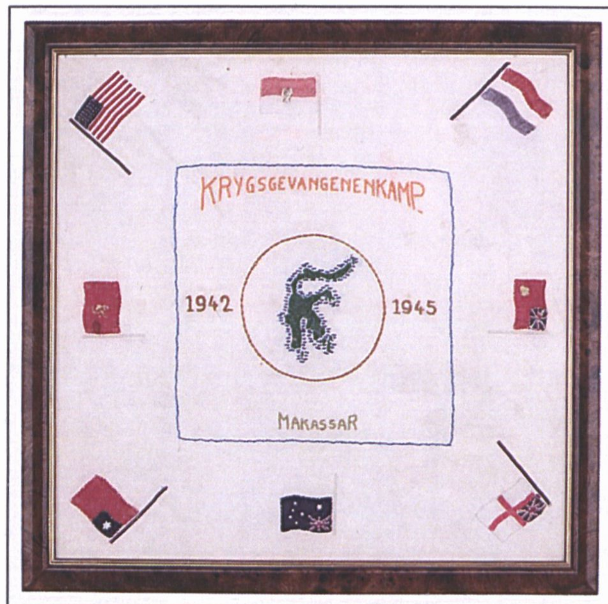

Fig. 17: Leading Seaman Jan van Os's embroidered handkerchief, POW in Celebes (Netherlands East Indies) (AWM).

5. Historical Significance of the Changi Quilts in the Modern Era

"That was my square, 'Homeward Bound'. I'm Elizabeth Ennis, homeward bound! That was it".[92] In a BBC radio interview conducted 59 years after the Changi Quilts were created, Elizabeth gleefully pointed out her square. Yet she did more than just locate her square on the Australian Quilt. Elizabeth clearly acknowledged the Changi Quilts as important historical artefacts, and revealed how her personal identity has become intertwined with the quilts. Her husband, Jack Ennis, was held as a British prisoner of war during the war, and shared Elizabeth's connection with the quilts. In the same radio interview, Jack gave a long testimony as to the historical significance he attached to the quilts so many years after the war:

> If we have a difference of opinion, as all married couples do have from time to time, I remember Elizabeth and the pain she had gone to do that stitching. She wasn't great with needle and thread really, and there she had composed something which meant so much to both of us, and really, it still does. Quilts rather hold us together, not only us together, but some of the others who we've since met who were interned in the same places... When we would get together we would always talk about the quilts and how the quilts sort of bound us into a kind of sect almost, the quilt people.[93]

Not only did Jack connect the Changi Quilts with his enduring relationship with Elizabeth, but also saw the quilts as connecting him with the broader internee community. The language used by the former internees to describe the Changi Quilts in

[92] Elizabeth Ennis, "Threads of Hope".
[93] Jack Ennis, "Threads of Hope".

the 1980s and 1990s is poles apart from the language used by the same community during the war. As discussed in Chapter Five, only two women referenced the Changi Quilts in their contemporary diaries and letters: Helen Beck, who viewed the quilts positively, and Katherine de Moubray, who scorned their creation.

Yet half a century after the birth of the Changi Quilts, the former internees consistently reference the quilts in their published books and media interviews. In 1999, Sheila Allan dedicated an entire appendix in her published diary to the Changi Quilts. "These quilts are important historical and social relics," Sheila argues, "[As] each of the squares in the Changi quilts represents an individual shout of hope and of encouragement, and is a visual record of civilian internment".[94] Olga Henderson (née Morris) shares Sheila's passion for the Changi and Girl Guides Quilts, but her memory of events is weaker. Her interview with the British newspaper, *The Telegraph*, is riddled with factual inaccuracies, but still conveys her modern enthusiasm for the wartime projects. A member of the Girl Guides troop, Olga created an embroidered rosette for the Elizabeth Ennis's birthday present of the Girl Guides Quilt. "We didn't know which year she was going to get the quilt but we started it anyway," remembers Olga, "It gave our lives a sort of permanence".[95] As the Girl Guides Quilt was completed in less than two months, Olga's assertion that the quilt was made without a specific deadline is factually unsubstantiated. However, the modern recollections of Elizabeth and Jack, Sheila and Olga reveal the strong and sudden significance which many internees now attach to the quilts.

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[94] Allan, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*, 179, 181.
[95] Olga Henderson quoted. Elizabeth Grice, "The Secrets of the Changi Girl Guide Quilt," *The Telegraph (UK)*, 1 June 2010, accessed 24 August 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/7768593/The-secrets-of-the-Changi-Girl-Guide-quilt.html.

This dissertation argues that reason for the change from how the women related to the Changi Quilts in 1942 compared to how they connect with the quilts today, is that the historical significance of the quilts themselves has evolved substantially. In 1942 the women debated the purpose of the quilts, and an opinion existed amongst the internees that they were not a rational use of resources or significant creations. Fast forward to the 1980s and 1990s, and the quilts are on display in museums around the world, while the women publicly discuss the historical significance of the quilts at length. This dissertation argues that the historical significance of the Changi Quilts has evolved, from a contentious pastime in 1942 to important national artefacts in 2013. This chapter will explore how the significance of the Changi Quilts evolved during the late twentieth century, and analyse their importance to the women who made them, and the nation at large.

Between 1945 and the late 1980s, the Changi Quilts were largely forgotten, both by museums and the women who had created them. The Australian Changi Quilt was donated to the Australian Red Cross Society, who permanently loaned it to the Australian War Memorial (AWM). The Japanese Changi Quilt was also donated to the AWM in 1968. The AWM did not subject the Australian or Japanese Quilts to any form of structured, recorded historical significance tests when they were accepted into the collection.[96] Jane Peek, curator in the Military Heraldry and Technology (MHT) section of the AWM, explained via e-mail that the institution did not use written significance tests until the mid-1990s. Instead, curators were trained to specialise in a

[96] Jane Peek, e-mail message to author, 27 September 2013 (the entire e-mail message is included in the Appendix).

particular field, such as textiles, and the decision of whether an artefact ought to be accepted into the collection was made based on the relevant curator's judgement.[97]

Significance tests are a relatively new practice in Australian museums and art galleries. However, they can provide a wealth of information to researchers, as they require institutions to record the perceived significance of artefacts. Significance, according to Museum Australia, refers to the "values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities".[98] The values and meanings attached to an artefact can be historic, artistic, scientific, social or spiritual, and they may be relevant to past, present or future generations.[99] The AWM has now adopted a written and structured significance test for new acquisitions, which is influenced by Museum Australia's guidelines and their own mission statement. The AWM sees its purpose as "to assist Australians to remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact on Australian society".[100] This mission statement heavily influences how the AWM assesses new acquisitions. In order to determine whether an artefact has national significance, curators analyse it for:

> Historic, social or spiritual, aesthetic or scientific, research or technical significance, or a combination of these. Representativeness, rarity, unusual or outstanding value, intactness, completeness and originality, and interpretive potential are also considered if appropriate.[101]

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[97] Jane Peek, e-mail message to author.
[98] Museums Australia, *Caring for our Culture: National Guidelines for Museums, Galleries and Keeping Places* (Fitzroy: Museums Australia, 1998), 10.
[99] Museums Australia, *Caring for our Culture*, 10.
[100] "About the Australian War Memorial," Australian War Memorial, accessed 27 August 2013, http://www.awm.gov.au/about/.
[101] Jane Peek, e-mail message to author.

Artefacts are also assessed for benefit and resource implications, the donor's or vendor's legal title to the artefact, the physical condition of the artefact, and concerns regarding conservation and storage.[102] Rebecca Britt, the Acting Head of the MHT section of the AWM, revealed in an interview in January 2013 that the thorough acquisition assessment process results in approximately one-third of offered artefacts being rejected.[103] As the Australian and Japanese Changi Quilts were never subjected to a structured significance assessment, this dissertation will break new ground in the analysis of the artefact's historical significance.

The Australian and Japanese Changi Quilts were accepted into the AWM's collection, and then promptly catalogued and forgotten. They were not displayed until 1975, when they were used as a wallpaper backdrop for women's service uniforms, without any information about the quilts being provided to visitors. The women's service uniforms were in a gallery devoted to women's experiences in wartime, and when it closed in 1982 the quilts were removed from display.[104] It is interesting to note that the Australian Changi Quilt required only three hours of conservation work as it was prepared for display. This is an extremely short period of time, as artefacts of its size and age normally require a substantially longer conservation effort before they are ready for presentation. However, the Australian Changi Quilt was presented to the AWM in nearly perfect condition, without any evidence of use, or any sweat or blood stains consistent with use in a hospital. The squares had already turned varying shades of yellow when the quilt was accepted into the collection, as the squares were made from cotton rice bags and some of the bags had not been thoroughly washed before

[102] Jane Peek, e-mail message to author.
[103] Rebecca Britt, interview by author, 24 January 2013.
[104] Jane Peek, e-mail message to author.

being cut and embroidered.[105] The British Changi Quilt suffered an even more ignominious fate when it arrived in London. Elaine Fisher was curator of the British Red Cross Museum and Archives in 2001, and she argued that the historical significance of the British Quilt was not recognised in the post-war years:

> We imagine it probably took a few years to actually get to Britain, so by the time it arrived, a lot of its story had maybe been lost on the British Red Cross, and they wouldn't have picked up on this as a document.
>
> It was just seen, perhaps, as another gift.[106]

During the immediate post-war years, there was a general lack of public interest in the experiences of the former internees. In Great Britain, the media had focused on the war in Europe, while the public had experienced the horrors of the Blitz and the difficulties of rationing. The experiences of the internees in Asia were not easily comprehended in this context, and they did not arouse interest amongst the general public. The internees who returned to Australia found a more receptive audience. The war in Asia and the Pacific had dominated the Australian media, and the public was more aware of the sufferings of the prisoners of war. The experiences of the internees aroused some interest, as they were understood in the same context. However, prisoners of war and civilian internees largely chose to not speak about their experiences after the war, and they began to lose their place in the historical narrative of the Second World War.

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[105] Jane Peck, interview by author, 24 January 2013.
[106] Elaine Fisher, "Threads of Hope".

The modern understanding of the Second World War was forever altered by the watershed intervention of Hank Nelson and Tim Bowden. Nelson, a historian, and Bowden, an oral historian and radio broadcaster, collaborated to produce the 16-part ABC radio series "Prisoners of War: Australians under Nippon" in 1984. The radio series was groundbreaking in Australia, as the former prisoners of war spoke of their wartime experiences, many for the first time, and in their own words. The ABC radio series spawned a resurgent interest in the prisoners of war experiences, and the civilian internees were recognised on the cusp of this public interest. The renewed public interest in the prisoner of war experiences coincided with a resurgent public pressure on historical institutions to better represent women and civilians. Although the AWM had included representations of women in the galleries since it first opened in 1922, the representations were marginal, and most involved women as nurses.[107] The "marginalised [female] memories of war do not occupy a separate or alternative space of remembrance," argues Takashi Fujitani et al, "Their marginality is linked to the centrality, volume, visibility and audibility of more dominant [male] stories".[108] Peter Stanley, concept leader of the AWM's Second World War Gallery, argues that the AWM actively tried to address this neglect of the female experience of war:

> I want to briefly discuss the gallery's representation of women. This is especially significant because war is too often regarded as being a masculine experience, of interest largely to men... We felt that it was important for women visitors to see that women were recognised by an

[107] Peter Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation: The Australian War Memorial's Second World War Gallery," in *National Museums, Negotiating Histories: Conference Proceedings*, ed. Darryl McIntyre and Kirsten Wehner (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2001), 67.
[108] Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey White and Lisa Yoneyama, *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific Wars* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 4.

> institution often perceived as unrelated, indifferent or even hostile to their interests.[109]

The AWM conducted a comprehensive consultation process with all of the various interest and lobby groups regarding the redevelopment of the Second World War Gallery. Of all the consulted groups, Stanley claims it was the women's groups who were most vocal in their demands.[110] The women's groups wanted to be included in the sections devoted to their respective services, with the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) included in the navy section, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in the air force section, and so on. Stanley argues that "these impulses were diametrically opposed" by his team. [111] The AWM feared that proportional representation of the women's services would result in the women being overshadowed by the men's services. The resulting compromise involved creating a women's services 'ghetto,' and integrating representations of women heavily throughout the rest of the gallery. Stanley indicates in his conference paper that this compromise resulted in Jan Ruff-O'Herne's handkerchief and Sister Vivian Bullwinkel's nursing uniform being displayed, when they were not part of the original plan. As these are, arguably, two of the most significant artefacts in the Prisoner of War Gallery, it is horrific to imagine that the gallery may have been opened without their inclusion. However, it is disheartening that the women's opinions during the consultations were largely ignored, despite "the discussions with women's groups [forming] the single largest element in an extensive process".[112] As the point of establishing the women's services was so that

[109] Peter Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation," 67.
[110] Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation," 68.
[111] Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation," 68.
[112] Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation," 68.

Australian women could serve alongside Australian men, it is disappointing that the women's efforts are not commemorated alongside their colleagues.

When visitors enter the Prisoner of War Gallery within the Second World War Gallery today, they experience the Australian Changi Quilt sound and light show. The down-lights, which are activated when the visitor presses a button, highlight the quilt clearly but cast all of the other artefacts into shadow. Speakers are also triggered, and "Largo" from Antonin Dvorák's "Symphony, Number 9" is played, which was hummed by a choir of interned civilian women in Sumatra. The gallery uses the humming of an un-credited choir to reference the similarities between the interned women's experiences. The song may be familiar to visitors as it was included in the film *Paradise Road* (1997), the film that introduced the experiences of civilian women internees into popular culture. The choice of music clearly reveals the cyclical dialogue between the public and museums. Visitors may have seen the film and be expecting to see representations of women internees as per the film, and by connecting their display to the film through music, the AWM reinforces visitors' preconceived ideas of internment.

The use of lights and music in the presentation of the Australian Changi Quilt reveals the AWM's desire to make visitors emotionally engage with the women's experiences. Edward Alexander, an American historian and museologist, argues that modern museums "rely heavily on sensory perception – sight, hearing, small, taste, touch, and the kinetic muscle sense – to enable the museum-goer to emotionally experience

objects".[113] The visitor certainly has a sensory experience with the Australian Changi Quilt, however, it is at the expense of other artefacts in the gallery.

The Australian Changi Quilt occupies the majority of the display case, but many other artefacts are squeezed into the remaining space. As mentioned above, both Jan Ruff-O'Herne's handkerchief and Sister Vivian Bullwinkel's nursing uniform, showing the bullet hole from the Banka Island massacre, are included. Civilian internees in Yangchow Civil Assembly Centre, Shanghai, were given coded armbands which they were required to wear at all times. Alice Neville and Ruth Frances Brown's Yangchow armbands are displayed, alongside Gwyneth Brown's calico apron embroidered with the Yangchow internees' signatures. Betty Jeffrey was interned at Palembang, Sumatra, and her watch and a photograph of a page from her diary are also displayed. Numerous other small artefacts are included in this 'cabinet of curiosities,' including small toys made for interned children, and a child's Boy Scout neckerchief from the Changi civilian men's internment camp.

The display case is crowded with fascinating artefacts, but the golden lights only shine upon the Australian Changi Quilt. The consequence of the lights, music and space dedicated to the Australian Changi Quilt is that the visitor is left with the impression that the quilt is the most historically significant artefact. A moderate amount of text is provided alongside the display case, but the majority of the text does not refer to the Changi Quilts. The little text provided about the quilts reinforces the impression that they are important artefacts:

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[113] Edward Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1996), 12.

> **The Changi quilts**
>
> Among the civilian internees in Changi were some 400 women and children. To enliven their drab camp life, internees formed a Girl Guides group and took up activities such as quilt-making. Inspired by their work, Changi's Red Cross leader, Ethel Mulvaney, suggested that each woman contribute squares to one or more quilts, embroidered with her name and "something of herself". Presented to hospitals in the military camps, these quilts were often the sole means of communicating details of the women's location and safety to husbands and friends. Two of three surviving quilts are held by the Memorial. Their detailed work and messages make a moving record.

The text reveals how they want visitors to interpret the Australian Changi Quilt. No information is provided about the messages embroidered upon the quilt's squares, nor is the visitor assisted in their interpretation of what the quilt 'records'. The visitor is encouraged to engage with the quilt emotionally, rather than intellectually. The pretty floral designs may cause the visitor to view the quilt as an expression of hope, while the stark images of lonely women may lead the visitor interpret it though a lens of homesickness and desperation. There are 66 squares on the Australian Changi Quilt, and it is possible for the visitors to leave with 66 different interpretations of the single artefact. Stanley would view this as a tremendous success. The post-occupancy evaluation of the re-developed gallery reveals that this diversity of interpretation was achieved. A sample of the visitors' responses were made publicly available, and are detailed below:

Table 1: Post-Occupancy Evaluation of the Second World War Gallery, 1999.[114]

Evaluation Questions	Agree	Disagree
The exhibition made me think about what happened in the war.	99%	1%
I was really moved by some of the stories.	90%	10%
This exhibition dealt with violence and suffering in a sensitive way.	93%	7%
It treated Australia's wartime enemies in a fair and balanced way.	92%	8%
Wartime enemies were portrayed as real people.	90%	10%
I know more about the war now than I did before.	82%	18%

The statistics are impressive, with 90% of visitors engaging with the stories and artefacts on an emotional level ("I was really moved by some of the stories"). "We found that what our visitors wanted (and what they've been given in our galleries) is to understand those 'big stories' through the medium of encountering human aspects of them," argues Stanley, "What we called 'stories of emotion and experience'".[115] The Australian Changi Quilt was included, therefore, to reflect the experiences of almost 400 ordinary civilian women, who were caught up in war and created something meaningful out of that experience. The significance of the Australian Changi Quilt is not its aesthetic appeal or the supposed 'coded' messages in the squares. The Australian Changi Quilt has national significance because it is a time capsule of the emotions experienced by 66 civilian women at that time and place. The diversity of women interned in Changi, from different nationalities, ages and occupations, make them easy for modern women to relate to. The historical significance of the Changi Quilts has evolved beyond the women who made them, and they have become symbols for all civilians who have been unwillingly caught up in war. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, a

[114] Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation," 69.
[115] Stanley, "Diversity of Visitors, Diversity of Interpretation," 63.

leading scholar of museum studies, argues that the evolution of an artefact's significance is a normal process:

> Individual objects have shifting and ambiguous relationships to meaning. Being themselves mute, their significance is open to interpretation. They may be viewed from a number of positions, which may be diverse in history and culture... Objects are subject to multiple interpretations, some of which may be contradictory.[116]

As the AWM has evolved over the decades, and developed a stronger interest in representing female and civilian experiences, the significance of the Changi Quilts to the institution has grown. Likewise, as the interned women have aged, their relationship with the Changi Quilts has changed. Elizabeth and Jack Ennis, who were quoted at the start of this chapter, exhibit a strong connection with the Changi Quilts. The artefacts have become symbols of their shared trauma, their enduring marriage, and their identity as former internees. Similarly, the Girl Guides Quilt has become physical evidence that Olga Henderson was interned in Changi as a child. When an elderly Olga told the *Telegraph* reporter that making the Girl Guides Quilt "gave our lives a sort of permanence," she is also saying that the quilt is everlasting proof that she was there, and that she lived.[117] By having their craftworks held in the collections of museums worldwide, the interned women have created an enduring legacy for themselves. It does not matter whether the quilts were made because they were bored,

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[116] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.
[117] Olga Henderson quoted. Elizabeth Grice, "The Secrets of the Changi Girl Guide Quilt," *The Telegraph (UK)*, 1 June 2010, accessed 24 August 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/7768593/The-secrets-of-the-Changi-Girl-Guide-quilt.html.

or because they wanted to express their emotions through floral imagery. What matters is that these, now quite elderly, women will be remembered forever.

It is evident that the Changi Quilts have one sort of significance for the women, as their legacy, and another sort of significance for the institutions, as symbols of civilian victims of war. A third type of significance, a far more personal significance, can also be identified. Sheila Allan was 17 years old when she embroidered her square for the Australian Changi Quilt, and she was one of only two Eurasians allowed to participate. Sheila's Malay mother passed away during labour, and she grew up in the white, colonial society of her father. Sheila was interned in Changi with her hated Thai stepmother, while her Australian father was interned in the civilian men's section. Eurasians occupied a difficult place in colonial society, as they were often rejected by both white and Asian communities. In Changi, Sheila was one of the few Eurasian women who were accepted into white society, and her rejection of her Thai stepmother had more than a hint of racial undertones. Sheila's desire to identify with her beloved white father and white Australian society is reflected in her obsession with seeing the Changi Quilts displayed at the AWM. Although Sheila did not mention the quilts in her wartime diary, she later became a strong advocate for having the quilts publicly exhibited. Sheila has a strong connection with the Australian Changi Quilt because it is physical proof that Sheila has a place in white, Australian society. Sheila had never visited Australia until November 1945, after the internees were liberated, and yet she created the most patriotically Australian design on any of the quilts. Sheila's strong connection with the Australian Changi Quilt was not due to any imagined political or ideological coded messages. Sheila Allan identified with the Australian Changi Quilt because it is evidence of her place in white Australian society as a Eurasian woman.

The significance of the Changi Quilts has evolved in ways which the women would never have anticipated when they embroidered their squares in 1942. The quilts themselves have proven to be open to interpretation, both by the women and the museums which display them. The Changi Quilts are evidence that a single artefact can have several meanings for different communities, and each form of significance is equally valid. This chapter has outlined that to Elizabeth and Jack Ennis the Changi Quilts are important symbols of their marriage, while to Olga Henderson they are her enduring legacy. To Sheila Allan, the Australian Changi Quilt is a personal reminder of her place in her father's community. The same artefact is viewed by the AWM as a symbol for interned civilians, whose emotional experiences still resonate today. The evolution of the Changi Quilts' significance is a fascinating phenomenon, which reveals the diversity of interpretations that a single artefact can create. The significance of the Changi Quilts is different for every individual and organisation who interprets them. They are truly kaleidoscopes of evolving historical significance.

Fig 18: The Australian Changi Quilt on display at the AWM (downlights activated). Photograph by the author, February 2013.

Fig. 19: The display case containing the Australian Changi Quilt, AWM (downlights activated). Photograph by the author, February 2013.

6. Conclusion

Many thousands of words ago, the reader was introduced to the Prisoner of War Gallery at the Australian War Memorial. When visitors enter the long, narrow gallery, the first display case which they see contains the Australian Changi Quilt and other artefacts relating to civilian women internees in Asia. At the opposite end of the gallery is a replica of a bamboo shelter, which were built by prisoners of war when they laboured on the Burma-Thailand Railway (Fig. 20). The gallery's structure establishes a dichotomy between the female, civilian experience of internment, and the male experience as prisoners of war. The differences between the two groups' experiences at the hands of the Japanese were stark, as the men were often fed less than the women, while also being forced into years of exhausting labour for the enemy war machine.

However, by establishing the male prisoners of war at one end of the gallery and presenting the female civilian internees at the other end, a sense of equilibrium is created. While the male prisoners of war and the female internees had very different experiences, they were all held captive by the Japanese for years. Their stories and artefacts are given equal space within the gallery, and visitors are not guided to focus their attention on one group at the expense of the other. While the Australian Changi Quilt has a sound and light show, the bamboo shelter is permanently lit up. Beside the shelter are three telephone handsets, which visitors can pick up to listen to former prisoners of war talk about their years in captivity. Visitors are able to emotionally engage with both the male and female experiences of captivity, and create their own interpretations of the stories presented to them. The presentation of the Australian Changi Quilt in this manner allows visitors to interpret the quilt in the female, civilian

sphere. More importantly, visitors are able to interpret the quilt, and the women's experiences, within the much broader idea of wartime captivity generally. The Australian Changi Quilt, its story and its significance are consequently open to the widest possible interpretation by visitors.

This dissertation is rooted in the question of historical significance of the Changi Quilts. How did the women themselves view the Changi Quilts when they were made in 1942? After almost six decades have passed, how do the women now look upon their creations? To what extent has the significance of the Changi Quilts evolved, and what factors have influenced that evolution? This dissertation has incorporated many under-utilised archival primary sources to answer this aim, and determine the exact nature of the Changi Quilts' historical significance.

As shown in Chapter Two, the Changi Quilts occupy a contentious place within a number academic debates. Art historians, museologists and anthropologists disagree about how embroideries and quilts ought to be analysed and categorised. Likewise, civilian women internees do not easily fit within the national narrative of the Second World War. Without an established framework of how to analyse the women internees or the Changi Quilts, historians have been free to interpret the artefacts according to their own personal bias and background. Bernice Archer's feminist ideology influenced her interpretation of the Changi Quilts, as she argued that they were the political creation of women suddenly "unconstrained by the patriarchal colonial society," and free to resist the Japanese through embroidered secret codes.[118] This interpretation was strongly disputed by Jane Peek, who argued that they were the byproduct of the

[118] Archer, *The Internment of Western Civilians*, 164.

women's boredom and community spirit.[119] Peek chose not to analyse the meaning of the individual squares on the Changi Quilts. Archer did interpret the squares but, influenced as she was by her feminist, political perspective, she came to the conclusion that the individual squares were as ideologically driven as the quilts as a whole. This dissertation conducted a new visual analysis of the Australian Changi Quilt in Chapter Three. This dissertation argues that the squares are creative expressions of the women's emotions at that specific time of internment. Their hope, homesickness and despair are expressed through colourful silk threads, and the meanings of the individual squares cannot be generalised or simplified.

The significance of the Changi Quilts to the women in 1942 is explored in Chapter Four. The wartime primary sources reveal that the quilts were a contentious and debated project amongst the women. While some women, specifically Helen Beck and Ethel Mulvaney, saw them as important creations, the majority of the internees viewed the quilts as being insignificant. Chapter Five reveals the stark change in the women's opinion of the quilts during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The development of the women's relationship with the Changi Quilts indicates that the artefacts have an evolving historical significance. The evolution of the quilts' significance is not contained just to the women, for they have grown in significance to museums and historical institutions, and to the nation at large. The Changi Quilts have developed into symbols of all civilians caught up in war, from the Second World War to conflicts continuing to the present day.

[119] Peek, "History of the Changi Quilts".

The Changi Quilts have always been debated and open to interpretation. The women who created the quilts disputed their significance in 1942, but five decades later they had each attached their own personal significance to the artefacts. Likewise, the AWM was slow to recognise the significance of the Australian Changi Quilt, but it now has pride of place in the Prisoner of War Gallery. The story of the Changi Quilts is one of emotion and evolution. As Australian society changes in the future, the significance of the Changi Quilts to the national memory of war will evolve in response. For war is no longer fought on battlefields. Wars are being fought in the cities and streets of nations globally. The distinction between battlefronts and home fronts no longer exists, and civilians are increasingly becoming caught up in the conflicts. The Changi Quilts will continue to evolve into potent symbols of innocent civilians in situations beyond their control. The historical significance of the Changi Quilts is real and growing, and they deserve greater recognition in the academic debate and national memory of war.

Fig. 20: The replica bamboo shelter, Prisoner of War Gallery, AWM. Photograph by the author, February 2013.

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APPENDIX

Acquisition Assessments at the Australian War Memorial

The author emailed the AWM seeking further information regarding how they assess an artefact's significance. On 27 September 2013, the following reply was received from Jane Peek, curator in Military Heraldry and Technology section of the AWM. The email has been re-printed here with Jane's permission:

SUBJECT: ACQUISTION ASSESSMENTS

Hi Lucy,

I met you with Rebecca when you came down to our section to discuss the Changi Quilts.

Standardised formal acquisition assessments for all objects being offered to the AWM have only been used since 2007. Before that each collection area had its own policy. Small objects offered as donations to my section were accepted or rejected on the basis of detailed curatorial knowledge of the collection, which was often only a verbal instruction to an assistant curator. All items offered to us for sale, or large objects whose acquisition would have major storage or conservation implications were assessed in writing and approved (or not) by a head of section, assistant direct, director, or even our minister, especially in the case of large purchases. At that time curators tended to specialise in specific areas of the collection e.g. medals, aircraft, uniforms, and tended to both know 'their' collection and have expert knowledge in that field. These days we are expected to be generalists rather than specialists.

Objects offered for the National collection are now assessed in two ways:

1. Items offered as part of a Mixed Collection i.e. a variety of objects ranging across a number of collection areas. These are assessed centrally with representatives of all relevant collection areas present. Each object is listed and then assigned a number (or numbers) by the assessing curator for or against acquisition, and signed off. This information is later transferred to the object's electronic record. The reasons for

acquisition are: Aesthetic; Aesthetic/Historical; Comparative; Historical; Interpretive/Provenance; Social Commemorative and Technical. The reasons for rejection are: Already held in collection; Collection Policy not met; OH&S; Ownership/Access; Physical condition; Purchase price; Need for special handling, and Space considerations.

2. Items offered to an individual collection area are assessed filling in an electronically generated form. There is a short version and a longer version for major acquisitions – purchase or oversized items whose acquisition would have major storage and conservation implications. The form first outlines donor/vendor details and gives a brief a description of each object being assessed. This is followed by Part 1, Assessment of Significance. This and subsequent sections have questions and tick boxes that need a response. Not all are relevant to each collection and the assessing curator fills in those which they consider relevant. An object may have historic, social or spiritual, aesthetic or scientific, research or technical significance, or a combination of these. Representativeness, rarity, unusual or outstanding value, intactness, completeness and originality, and interpretive potential are also considered if appropriate. A statement of varying length is written in support of whichever criteria you select. You are then required to state which section of the Collection Development Plan the object/s support, using a number code. The Plan is reviewed every 3 years to identify gaps in the collection i.e. a future wish list. The provenance of the item/s is detailed, together with relationship to other items in both the AWM 's collections and other institutions collections (if known). After all this has been filled in a short or long statement of significance is written, as well a single tick box from the following: highly significant; significant; limited significance and not significant.

Part 2 assesses benefit and resource implications. The donor's or vendor's legal title to the object is detailed, followed by a series of yes/no answers relating to legal requirements for managing the object, wishes by the donor to impose conditions and an assessment of whether they are feasible or reasonable, and a series of questions relating to copyright, if applicable. Ethical considerations are filled in if the item being offered (especially for purchase) is being offered by an AWM staff member. The physical condition of the object is assessed. If there are concerns about future conservation or maintenance a detailed conservation assessment has to be attached

before an acquisition is approved. Finally, storage, handling and hazardous material are assessed. A final section deals with anticipated costs – purchase price estimate; transport/recovery, conservation, storage, export licences and other fees. None of this section is filled in for small donations.

As you can see, the above is fairly comprehensive. None of these criteria was applied to the acquisition of the Changi Quilts as far as we know, though I'm sure some of the considerations did take place in the relevant curator's head. They just weren't written down, as was customary for the majority of acquisitions by donation here before the mid 1990s. The quilts themselves were not researched or interpreted until the mid-1980s. Between 1975, when the first gallery devoted entirely to women was opened, until 1982, when it closed, the quilts were essentially used as a "wallpaper" backdrop for women's uniforms.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if you need any further information.

Best wishes,

Jane

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