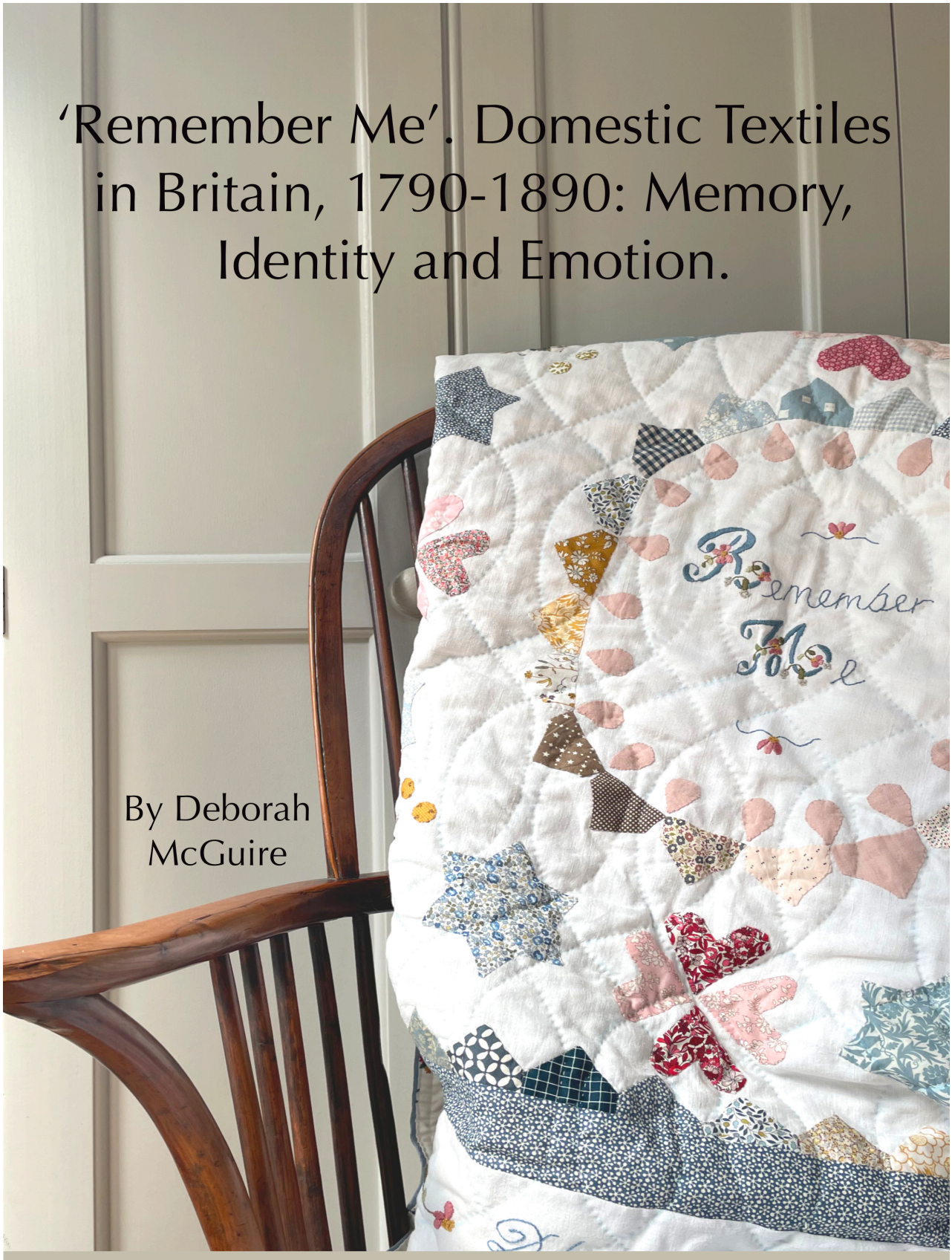
‘Remember Me’. Domestic Textiles in Britain, 1790-1890: Memory, Identity and Emotion.



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‘Remember Me’. Domestic Textiles in Britain 1790–1890: Memory, Identity and Emotion.

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Abstract

Women repeatedly stitched the self-memorialising command 'Remember Me' into their domestic needlework production. The thesis '"Remember Me". Domestic Textiles in Britain 1790–1890: Memory, Identity and Emotion' presents items of domestic needlework as objects of selfhood, akin to life writing. These often-overlooked objects reveal how makers sought to be remembered by their contemporaries, and how they passed objects between generations to do emotional memory and legacy work for anticipated future audiences. Whilst situated in the period 1790–1890, the nature of these palimpsest objects – often subject to repeated reusing, repurposing, and recycling – allows us to track emotional behaviours that begin or end outside of this frame, an arc of emotional behaviours through space and time. Framing analysis within the life-cycle allows study of the synchronic and diachronic changes in makers' emotional lives, expressed through their material production as they aged. In doing so, this study historicises domestic needlework as emotional care work and elevates textile items and vernacular stitched practice as valuable tools of cultural transference. This research offers new insights into under-studied groups by examining the importance of emotional objects to both makers *and* users. The needle might be wielded with agency to subvert traditional moral narratives associated with the needleworker; by the poor, by the disenfranchised, and by those otherwise marginalised. New research into male participation in public needlework competitions challenges established narratives and reveals how the emotional benefits of engaging in domestically situated stitched production were available to some men as well as women within the gendered parameters of conventional needlework. By heeding their stitched command to 'Remember Me', we gain new insight into the quotidian lives of makers in the past.

Abbreviations

CREW – Census Returns of England and Wales.

IQMSC – The International Quilt Museum and Study Centre at The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA.

OBPO – Old Bailey Proceedings Online.

PRO – Public Record Office.

The QGMC – The Quilters' Guild Museum Collection, York.

TNA – The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey.

V&A – The Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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I first pondered many of the questions that underpin this research as I hand-stitched my own domestic textiles. Turning my wandering thoughts into a structured thesis has only been possible through the insightful questioning, gentle guidance, and firm encouragement of my supervisor Joanne Begiato. Despite the upheavals in the wider world, Joanne has maintained a space of calm intellectual rigour to keep me focused. Her curiosity, kindness, and inspirational precision have proven the perfect foil to my boundless enthusiasms, and I could not have written this thesis without her example, exacting challenge, and warm friendship.

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It is beholden upon me to thank Ann West, the West Country maker of the first coverlet that this study examines from 1820. Her direct challenge across the centuries to 'Remember Me' was heard by my friend Cathy FitzGerald, and addressed in her V&A *Hidden Histories* and BBC Radio 4 *Moving Pictures* programmes. When Cathy asked me to contribute to this endeavour in 2017, I was also beguiled, and this study is the result. I thank Cathy and Ann for instigating this rich adventure.

I am indebted to Bridget Long, who first listened to my arguments and insisted that I develop them further. Without her help and guidance, which encouraged me to submit a paper to the British Quilt Study Group and then to apply to study further, I would probably still be holding forth over a cup of tea! The august researchers of The British Quilt Study Group and the wider quilt study world, including but not limited to Dorothy Osler, Jan Rae, Mary Jenkins, Rachel Terry, and Janice Lawson, have shared their wisdom and generously offered their research insights. The work and foresight of these pioneers in collecting the objects, context, and stories of domestic folk art in this country over the last 40 years make my research possible today. I also thank the American Quilt Study Group, who have been similarly important to and encouraging of my work.

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Mary Miah, Melanie Gardner, Karen Buchanan, and Lori and Kay Triplett have all answered my questions and offered insight and fascinating examples to help me develop my arguments.

I learnt a love of textiles from the factory floor, my parents taught me about the importance of making things, of care work and hard work, and my nan taught me to sew; those threads of early enchantments are clearly stitched into my research interests today. In a year of lockdowns and limited horizons, I remain forever grateful for the opportunity for my mind to range free through the kitchens and parlours of the past on an emotional adventure with needleworkers in castles and slums alike. Yet this experience would have been immeasurably bleaker without the loving companionship of my family and friends on the journey, in analogue or digital form. Despite the restrictions on our lives, my world has remained full of colour and variety through the ever-inspiring cohort of textile-loving friends, irl or via social media across the world; I love sharing your enthusiasms and my research finds.

Finally, and most importantly, my husband and children have lived this work alongside me. The beguiling magic of the study of past lives has swept us into online archives and down rabbit holes of census research, and we've experienced my sources in a colourful, ever-expanding panoply of characters around our dining table, to be pored over and wondered about. My family's fierce belief in me, their ability to knock up a fish finger sandwich when all else fails, and their unfailing love and humour have been crucial to this endeavour. I return their steadfast love, not least in the quilts I stitch for them, and ask that in those, and in these words, they Remember Me.

Introduction
'Remember Me, Forget Me Not. Ann West's Work'

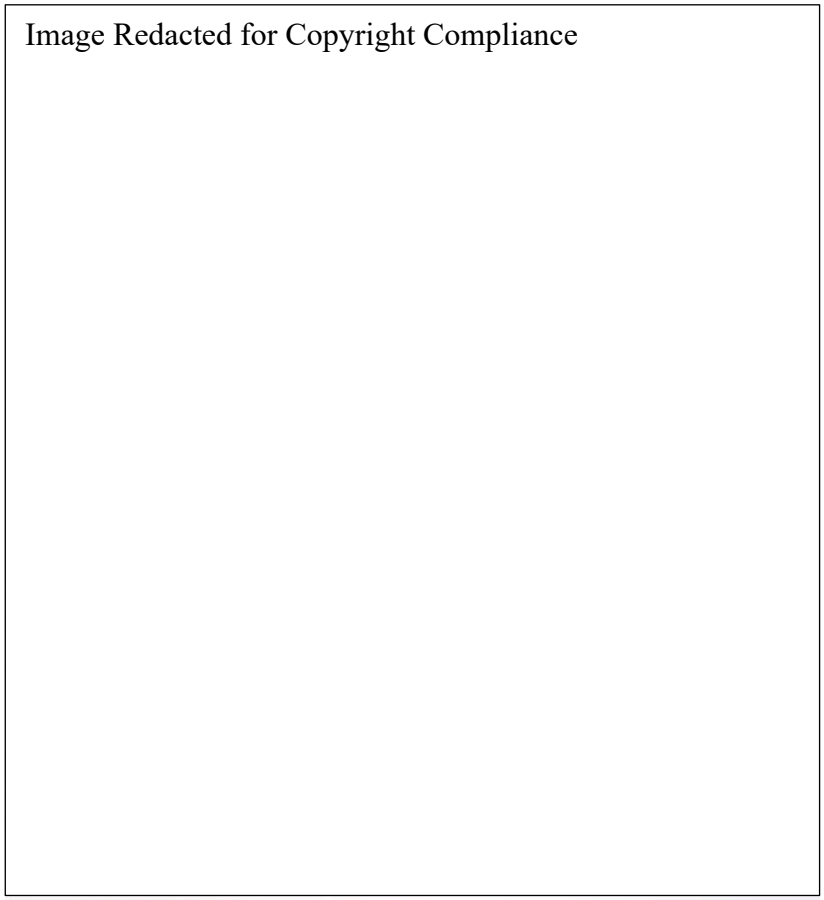

Figure 1: Ann West Coverlet, 1820, England, patchwork and appliqué hanging, 244 x 221cm. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.23-2007.

In a West Country market town in 1820, the seamstress Ann West stitched the words 'Remember Me, Forget Me Not' into her virtuoso wool appliqué coverlet. As Ann embroidered the words 'Ann West's Work', covering her handwritten script, she overtly claimed her authorship. In its multiple panels of finely wrought appliqué figures telling stories from the Bible, she stitched the moral concerns of her society. In the quirky, humorous, and perfectly observed vignettes of provincial life that filled the outer panels, she revealed her wry personality, reflecting on her small town's diversity and idiosyncrasies. It is likely that the coverlet was made at home, perhaps to be displayed by a school or church group. Ann added intimate clues about herself, including a cryptic message on the Bible held by a clergyman as he officiates a double wedding – 'I will AW [always or Ann West?] love her'. Did Ann also place herself within the narrative, a character in the perfectly observed appliquéd society she stitched?[1] Ann West's exact identity remains obscured by the ubiquity of her name, but the two embroidered motifs 'Remember Me' and 'Forget Me Not' near the centre of the coverlet still speak to us today, 200 years later. Attention to this emotional command forms the basis for this thesis, which analyses domestic stitched items

1 See *Moving Pictures* by Cathy FitzGerald, BBC Radio 4, first aired 20 January 2018. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09ly6rk (accessed 23/2/2021).

in the period from 1790 to 1890 such as quilts, patchwork coverlets, and sampler embroideries. It reveals an emotional world of remembering expressed in a 'multivariant and eloquent' stitched form of life writing that was both as articulate and as opaque as the pen, and one in which most women and many men were fluent.[2]

Ann West was not alone in her desire to be remembered as she stitched.[3] The phrase 'Remember Me' is a refrain that occurred on textiles as early as the seventeenth century, and is an emotional concern repeated by women in stitch throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[4] Writing his memoirs, Thomas Wright (1736–1797) referred to this impulse at the end of the eighteenth century, remarking that it was a 'congenital' concern to the human heart 'to remember and be remembered'.[5] Women used textiles as a tool to record memories; the intimately woven etymology of 'textile' and 'text' reflects a long-understood, shared, communicative potential.[6] Of course, the desire to be remembered was often materialised in objects as well as text. Remembered domestic objects contain emotions associated with their use and making; exploring them allows us to illustrate how they do work to sustain memories, and how these memories help to construct notions of selfhood, family relationships, and generational lineage. Hence, the role of objects as carriers of emotional resonance, and repositories of meaning, has been an important focus of historical research in recent years.[7] How we remember our pasts, and how we hope to be remembered, are emotional concerns that illuminate the study of the self, of identity, and of the wider societal milieu within which the self sits. This study therefore explores domestically stitched ego-documents to demonstrate their emotional work as reflections of individual identity, repositories of family memory, and sources of intergenerational cultural transference.

The critical study of stitched textiles has often been a story of female powerlessness, yet closer investigation of women's self-conscious and often joyful use of the needle to tell their own stories reveals the agency they sometimes wrested from within their broader oppression.[8] This study asserts that creating and preserving textiles was an 'act against

2 Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 248.

3 Joanne Begiato, "Selfhood and 'Nostalgia': Sensory and Material Memories of the Childhood Home in Late Georgian Britain." *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 42.2 (2019): 229–246.

4 Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Witney Antiques, *When This You See Remember Me* (Oxford: Witney Antiques, 2001).

5 Thomas Wright, ed. *Autobiography of Thomas Wright of Birkenshaw in the county of York, 1736–1797* (1864), 1–2. London, quoted in Joanne Begiato (Bailey), "The 'Afterlife' of Parenting: Memory, Parentage and Personal Identity in Britain c.1760–1830." *Journal of Family History* 35 (2010): 249, 250.

6 Kassia St Clair, *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed History* (London: John Murray, 2018), 1. As one of the three Fates, Clotho wove the thread of human life and created the alphabet. Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (New York: Norton, 1995), 235, 242.

7 For example, Arjun Appadurai ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) or Marius Kwint, "Introduction: The Physical Past" in *Material Memories. Design and Evocation*, eds Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford, Berg, 1999) or Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (eds) *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

8 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Bloomsbury, 1984).

oblivion', as Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux describe, for female makers.[9] The stitched product of female domestic labour has long been negatively subject to what Amanda Vickery called 'a hierarchy of critical value', relegated, if lucky, to the role of sentimental family heirloom.[10] A periodisation of the study of stitched material culture has tended to overlook the extended changes and continuities that span generational epochs. A focus on needlework as a class-defined commodity has tended to obscure similarities in women's emotional experiences of domestic making. This study historicises women's stitched production, recognising its value in the construction of identity and familial history across classes and through generations.[11] In doing so, it draws attention to the dignity of domestic making by exploring its emotional intent. That Ann West wished not to be forgotten is clear – she could not have written it more directly had she kept a diary.

This thesis obeys the stitched commands of domestic makers to remember them by recognising their agency and exploring their emotional world.[12]
The research concerns the century from 1790 to 1890 in Britain, an era of unparalleled change in the material lives of makers of domestic needlework. The study first considers the home and family. The period between 1790 and 1890 was a tumultuous era in which notions of masculinity and femininity polarised and the venerating of, and finally 'flight from', domesticity had impacts on how textile making in the home was viewed and valued.[13] Moralised needlework became ever more central to the growing middle-class notion of respectable domestic womanhood, whilst in parallel the traditional assumed virtue of the working-class seamstress was increasingly threatened by the coarsening effects of commerce. Needlework's role as a conduit for the communication of educational and moral values, not least in childhood, is also central to this analysis. Religion and piety continued to offer a framework through which makers expressed their emotional concerns and needlework remained linked to benevolence. Public and private practices marking death and remembrance were undergoing shifts that influenced how needlework was used as a tool for memorial. An ever-growing consumption of manufactured goods caused re-evaluation of the perceived value of the homemade. The makers and users of textiles were also experiencing their *place in time* differently as a burgeoning new sense of time flux occurred. A fresh sense of nostalgia for time passing led to a closer emphasis on memory and remembering. Textiles could assuage the anxiety of change through their evocation of memories of the past, as an emotional proxy for care and home, and as a generational link between past and future.

Memory, Identity, and the Self

Ann West entreats us to remember; the study of memory sits at the heart of the understanding of the self. The ego-document continues to be an important historical source for examining how diaries, day books, common-place books, autobiographies, and material

9 Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux, *The Pocket: A Hidden History of Women's Lives 1660–1900* (New Haven: Yale, 2019), 215.

10 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors,* 12; Sue Pritchard, *Quilts 1700–2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories* (London, V&A Publishing, 2010), 10.

11 Raphael Samuel, *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture: Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), ix, 6; Pritchard, *Quilts 1700–2010*, 21.

12 Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91.

13 Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 87.

objects such as portraits have all been the sources for an analysis of selfhood.[14] These sources privilege men, the literate, and the middling and upper classes. By encompassing made items, particularly things that were made over long periods alongside daily life such as the stitched embroidery or the patchwork quilt, as equally rich sources of memory, we can further explore selfhood amongst less privileged groups.[15] Marius Kwint alerts us to the importance of things in mediating memory, in their role in 'furnishing recollection' and by forming records.[16] Susan Stabile describes how eighteenth-century American women used domestic items to memorialise their lives and thus their nation.[17] Joanne Begiato explores the centrality of haptic memories in recollections of the family for autobiographers of the early nineteenth century, whilst Julie-Marie Strange encourages the embrace of psychological memory in exploring the self-memorialisation of the working-class family.[18] Death sees the eventual corporeal rupture of the self and, thus, memorialisation is a further crucial aspect of memory that this thesis explores through the textiles associated with it.[19]

In responding to the stitched command to 'Remember Me', we must ask who is 'me' and how was identity understood by needleworkers. This study proposes that the things that were made were externalised material representations of the internal self. In making the plea, makers must have had a sense of what should be remembered about their selfhood or interiority. Yet the 'self' has its own history, understood differently over time and by different groups. This study begins in 1790, in the decade widely seen as the nexus of the development of a modern notion of the self. Philosophers had wrestled with this debate for at least a century since John Locke's (1632–1704) writing at the end of the seventeenth century linked the self firmly to memory.[20] Dror Wahrman describes how by 1790 a change had occurred, from a more fluid *ancien régime* to a more fixed 'modern' identity, a move towards individualism shaped by a range of ruptures including European and American war, revolution, and rapid social and economic change.[21] This modern self was a reaction to the uncertainty that the flux of change had brought about, less mutable and less rooted in the fixed safety of identities such as class, locality, nation, and gender. Carolyn Steedman concludes that this also offered the individual more agency to shape their selfhood as the importance of individual experience to form the self, especially in childhood, increased.[22] At

14 Serena Dyer, "Barbara Johnson's Album: Material Literacy and Consumer Practice, 1746–1823, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42.3 (2019): 263–282.

15 Serena Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

16 Kwint, "Introduction".

17 Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

18 Joanne Begiato, "The Afterlife of Parenting: Memory, Parentage and Personal Identity in Britain c. 1760–1830", *Journal of Family History* 35.3 (2010): 249–270; Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class 1865–1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13.

19 Sarah Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1999); Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983); Hilary Davidson, "Grave Emotions: Textiles and Clothing from Nineteenth-Century London Cemeteries*", TEXTILE* 14.2 (2016): 226–243.

20 John Locke*, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694), quoted in Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 191.

21 Wahrman, *The Making,* 195.

22 Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4–5.

the beginning of the nineteenth century, Romanticism encouraged a turn towards greater engagement with the inner depth of the self for creative and authentic expression.[23] Selfhood in the nineteenth century was variably shaped by factors such as the emergence of the new middle-class, the elevation of maternity, the rise of evangelical Christianity and increasing imperialism.[24] By the end of this study in 1890, the self was poised to evolve further as the new ravages of world war, and social change evolved again how 'me' was defined.

Emotions History

Remembering and being remembered are emotional transactions carried out across temporal and geographical distance. Emotions history can provide a framework to understand their meaning. Memory is shaped and defined by emotions such as hope, love, fear, and grief. That objects like embroidered samplers and patchwork quilts have an associated emotional weight is widely understood today, but our postmodern feelings about what they convey are unlikely to correspond with the original maker's intent.[25] The framework of the history of emotions allows us to interrogate the relationship between what makers intended and what subsequent audiences understood to be emotionally communicated by these objects. The extent to which emotions are biological or cultural constructs is a maturing debate that continues to evolve amongst historians, sociologists, psychologists, and more lately neurologists.[26]

The French Annales historian Lucien Febvre turned to the emotions to explain the upheavals in Europe in the first part of the twentieth century, drawing together thinking from previously disparate schools of psychology, anthropology, and economic structuralism to create a new way to explain how the expression of emotion drove history.[27] A modern mapping of the field has concentrated on historicising emotions such as hope, love, fear, and grief, and has its roots in the writings of Carol and Peter Stearns in the 1980s. Their formative work in the field of emotions history moved on from the universalist view of 'basic' emotions proposed by psychologists such as Paul Ekman, to a more constructionist approach that studied the cultural expression of emotion through the theory of 'Emotionology'.[28] Emotionology identified feelings within their approved societal frameworks of culturally shared emotions and related them to their 'basic form', exploring how emotion was societally mediated.

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23 Iain McCalman, "Introduction: A Romantic Age Companion" in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

24 Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

25 See Thomas Knauer, *Why We Quilt* (North Adams: Storey, 2019) for a modern discussion of the issue.

26 For example, on tears through time see Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

27 Lucien Febvre, *Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past* (1941), explored in Barbara Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What Is the History of Emotions? (What Is History?)* (Oxford: Polity, 2017), 27.

28 Carol Z Stearns and Peter Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards", *American Historical Review* 90.4 (1985): 813–836.

The Stearnses' work was subsequently expanded by historians who illustrated how competing sets of emotional standards could be held by different groups at the same time, to properly explain the complexities of emotional geographies. For example, the historian and anthropologist William Reddy emphasised the expression of emotion, using the theory of the 'emotive' to describe how emotions could be expressed in speech to effect an emotional action.[29] The instruction 'Remember Me' expressed in stitch might be understood as an emotive, since the command instructs an emotional action from the reader. The emotive enmeshed in the materiality of the object brings into being that emotion, encouraging an emotional act of memory or memorial. Susan Matt uses a study of the experience of emotions of homesickness to demonstrate the importance of societal context in creating emotional responses.[30] Barbara Rosenwein drew together the strands of thinking about the plurality of emotional expression and its failure to demonstrate a linear understanding of emotional maturation in her theory of 'emotional communities'.[31] She postulated that there existed groups with shared affective values and communication that bound them together in a shared emotional set of norms and behaviours.[32] This work has direct implications for how we read the words, objects, and acts of makers and owners of stitched textiles. Historians such as Sally Holloway direct us to see emotions communicated through practice; the very act of the generational creation of meaningful needlework might be seen as an example of this.[33] Needlework was a regular rhythm, whose very action – sewing daily and throughout life – can be seen as an 'emotional practice' or habitus.[34] This study will argue that intergenerational emotional communities were forged through the making and giving of textiles that bound groups together, and that the preservation across generations of objects conveying meaning encouraged shared values of preservation and veneration.

Emotions and Material Culture

New work in the field of emotions history explores the physical role of the object in capturing, communicating, and creating emotion. Emotions can be enmeshed in the materiality of objects because material production reflects and absorbs makers' emotional and personal lives.[35] The patchwork quilt has haptic qualities, its key properties bound up with the senses, in comfort, warmth, and softness, yielding to the body and communicating emotions through touch and smell.[36] To explore the role of stitched items such as these in

29 William M Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

30 Susan J Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

31 See Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What Is the History of Emotions?*, for a summary of current approaches.

32 Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

33 Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship. Emotions and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 170.

34 Monique Sheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History?). A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion", *History and Theory* 51.2 (2012), 193–220; Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019).

35 Susan J Matt (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Emotions in the Age of Romanticism, Revolution, and Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

36 For example, see more discussion of these issues in the work of Alice Dolan, "Touching Linen: Textiles, Emotion and Bodily Intimacy in England c.1708–1818." *Journal of the Social History Society* 16.2 *(*2019): 145–164. Alice Dolan, The Fabric of Life: Linen and Lifecycle in England 1678–1810. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire (2016).

communicating emotion, we need to include a sense of the materiality of the object and the role it plays in the gendered body it 'affects'. Joanne Begiato drew attention to the haptic and embodied nature of emotion in parenting bodies, encouraging historians to recognise how emotion is porous.[37] The archaeologist Sarah Tarlow's work saw the gravestone as an object that materially captured emotions such as love, loss, and grief, which it was then able to communicate forward in time.[38] Sara Ahmed described an object's agency, for example arguing that an item could be seen as a 'happy object' containing and transmitting its emotional energy.[39] Domestic textiles are objects rich in sensory impact and Mark M Smith challenges us to explore this under-researched area of historical analysis.[40] This study sees domestic textiles, such as the stitched sampler or the patchwork quilt, as an 'affective object' capturing and communicating emotion through touch and senses, and transferring emotion through generations and across distances. Emotions might also transcend periodisation in history, for example the domestic textile can be seen as a palimpsest that carries meaning through generations, illuminating what Reinhart Koselleck calls 'multiple overlapping layers of emotion'.[41]

The study of material culture has become mainstream in the twenty-first century as the intersecting spheres of cultural heritage institutions, media platforms, and historical research embrace an audience-friendly object-centred narrative in telling our common histories.[42] From the genre-defining *History of the World in 100 Objects* with Neil MacGregor to the ongoing BBC Radio 4 *Moving Pictures* with Cathy FitzGerald, the role of objects in generating new understanding of the lives of those in the past is widely accepted.[43] Object-centred research has flourished since the historical archaeologist James Deetz encouraged scholars to 'set aside our perusal of diaries, court records, and inventories, and listen to another voice'.[44] John Styles highlighted the power of small scraps of material life in the tokens of the Foundling Hospital to impart significant emotional stories and communicate multi-layered meanings.[45] Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles' edited volume *Feeling Things* in 2018 bought together a multi-disciplinary conference to explore materially embedded emotions such as fear, grief, hope, and love, and new work continues to flourish in this area.[46]

Within this wider field, the particular role of textiles as emotional objects is a vibrant area of study, with meticulous research amongst the 'accumulated shards of evidence' such as

37 Joanne Begiato, "Between Poise and Power: Embodied Manliness in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Culture." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 26 (2016): 125–147.

38 Tarlow, *Bereavement*.

39 Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects" in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 2010), 29–51.

40 Mark Michael Smith, *A Sensory History Manifesto* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021).

41 Discussed further in Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What Is the History of Emotions?*, 109.

42 Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

43 Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) or *Moving Pictures* on BBC Radio 4, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09mtb0b (accessed 2/3/2021).

44 James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).

45 John Styles, *Threads of Feeling: The London Foundling Hospital's Textile Tokens 1740–1770* (London: Coram, 2010).

46 Downes et al., *Feeling Things.*

Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux's *The Pocket,* and Antonia Brodie's analysis of the complex meanings in an embroidered linen sheet.[47] That women's lives, and by association their society, are expressed materially in the things they made and kept is explored by writers such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Marla Miller in their studies of women along the Atlantic seaboard in this period.[48] Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin have comprehensively demonstrated the philosophical and sociological importance of the material culture of needlework and its indelible links with femininity.[49] Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* comprehensively explored needlework's oppressing role in this gendering. This study widens the focus to include the users of domestic needlework, encompassing all members of the family. Karen Harvey and Joanne Begiato have both advocated for a focus on how men interacted with crafted material culture.[50] Lastly, patchwork quilts and embroidered samplers have a vibrant and abundant specialist historiography in published research papers by groups such as the British Quilt Study Group.[51] Museums have also embraced telling the emotional stories of textiles, for example the ground-breaking *Quilts 1700–2010* at the V&A in 2010, *Frayed: Textiles on the Edge* at the Time and Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth in 2013, and the latest International Quilt Museum and Study Centre exhibition *Quilts of Emotion* in 2020, which chose emotional themes to show a range of quilted objects spanning 300 years.[52]

Primary Sources and Methodology

The field of material object study for this thesis is wide, since domestic objects of stitched textile appear in museums, but also remain in widespread private ownership.[53] This survey includes more than twenty-five quilts and embroideries from more than ten British museums as well as two in private ownership, and references records from the nationwide survey of quilts in private homes undertaken by the Quilters' Guild Heritage Search.[54] Including within the definition of domestic textiles both embroidered samplers and patchwork or quilted bedcoverings and coverlets allows us to access makers at different times in their lives and making with different functions and audiences in mind, to explore how emotional concerns and their expression in stitch change as makers age. This study also examines several manufactured commercial items or those handmade for commercial sale,

47 Burman and Fennetaux, *The Pocket; Antonia* Brodie, "Marking and Memory: An Embroidered Sheet in the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum." *TEXTILE,* 14.2 (2016): 160–175.

48 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun, Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2001); Marla R. Miller, *The Needles Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

49 Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles 1750–1950* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

50 Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2020).

51 For example, The British Quilt Study Group journal *Quilt Studies.*

52 *Quilts 1700–2010* at the V&A, 20 March and 4 July 2010*; Frayed: Textiles on the Edge* at Time and Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth, 10 October 2013 to 2 March 2014; *Quilts of Emotion* at The IQM at The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 4 December 2020 to 27 March 2021.

53 Katie Barclay, Sharon Crozier-de Rosa, and Peter N Stearns, eds, *Sources for the History of Emotions: A Guide* (London: Routledge, 2021). Katie Barclay, *The History of Emotions: A Student's Guide to Methods and Sources* (London: Macmillan, 2020).

54 Public documentation for quilts in private ownership is carried out by The QGBI. 4,183 quilts were recorded in 1990–1993.

acknowledging that meaning can also be imbued or embellished in items that have been bought rather than made.[55]

Sewing was ubiquitous but commonplace across society, so the diversity of written sources offers us an insight across different social and cultural settings. Eulogies, diaries, wills, letters, and inventories can alert us to objects with emotional meaning. Sewing was so routine in most makers' lives that any particular mention offers valuable emotional communication about its significance. Usefully, eulogies or death notices in newspapers sometimes alert us to makers' proficiency, and this study draws on ten of these. Letters, diaries, and autobiographies were subject to editing and revision and were written with specific audiences in mind, but they can offer a frustratingly infrequent yet valuable insight into how makers used self-memorialising in navigating their sense of self; this study refers to ten diaries or memoirs.[56] It also utilises textual sources, including more than thirty newspaper articles remarking on quilt making or citing criminal trial or coroner's reports, as well as trial transcripts to assist in exploring social groups where items were less likely to be preserved or recorded. Through these documents we can investigate groups that might not be visible in other sources, such as marginal women, male sewers, and the poor. It is possible to identify items deemed important by their elevation into evidence or narrative, such as in *The Proceedings of The Old Bailey* online database, from which twelve examples are quoted. Less explored sources such as reports of local and national exhibitions that included textiles offer valuable evidence of the varied participants and suggest a more diverse population of makers than instructional literature conveys. This study draws from more than twenty reports of local and national exhibitions that included textiles across urban and rural locations and across groups associated with different social classes.[57]

The depiction of fictional or apocryphal stitched textile objects as imagined items in literature and art is also a rich source to communicate how stitched textiles were seen and used as sites of emotional meaning. Stories and pictures where stitched textiles are employed as metaphors for the emotions associated with memory and legacy are plentiful and include novels, newspaper fictional serialisations, paintings, and poetry. These sources also require agency to be considered. What emotional role did stitched textiles have in this transaction between sitter, painter, commissioner, and viewer? Six paintings and ten poems or novels are also included from across the century 1790–1890.

Methodologically this research draws on approaches outlined by practitioners of object research such as Jules David Prown, who laid out a systematic approach in the 1970s, rooted in analysis of American folk-art objects, which proposed a set of analyses of the object's history, through its construction, material, design, and function.[58] Historians such as Karen Harvey went on to propose the separation of the history *in* things from the history *of* things,

55 For example, sewing tools such as inscribed thimbles and bobbins are discussed in Chapter One.

56 For a discussion of these sources issues, see Begiato, "The 'Afterlife' of Parenting", 249.

57 An 'Industrial Exhibition' was typified in Britain by The Great Exhibition, 1851, but was adopted by varied organisations such as Windsor Royal Association for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Poor.

58 Jules David Prown, "Mind In Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method", *Winterthur Portfolio* 17.1 (1982): 1–19; Giorgio Riello, "Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives" in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009).

advocating the use of art-historical methods to explore the emotional meaning in objects. This study recognises that there are structural issues with the study of extant items in this – until recently – under-valued field. Objects of obvious elite financial value or items recognised as more complex were much more likely to be collected by institutions in this century.[59] The continued power of generational emotional meaning ascribed by private owners means that this study also includes items in private ownership. The over-privileging of objects with obvious value threatens to obscure other rich evidence of emotional value; this study recognises that the newspaper report of a patchwork used as a child's coffin pall in a London slum demonstrates equivalent emotional value to the high-status embroidery preserved in a family property for generations.[60] Adopting an integrated approach links the huge body of extant domestic stitched textile objects with written sources to explore the sporadic traces that these items leave in the lives of those who made and owned them. However, the sources can seldom be neatly joined, as the quilts or embroideries that appear in written commentary most often have no extant form and those objects that are extant can have become separated from their context. By piecing the accumulation of evidence together, we can begin to assess the original makers' meaning and agency *in* these things, to move beyond a simple history *of* stitched textiles.[61] The next section outlines some of the problems with creating a sample to analyse.

Defining the sample of items to include in this study is complex because the legibility of meaning is nuanced, multi-faceted, and can shift and change between the original maker and the subsequent generational owners of an object. Stitched text could act as a form of textural legacy and a study of extant quilts allows us to explore this. Some makers created inscriptions of their name and dates, perhaps for example stitching the phrase 'own work', like the maker at Figure 12. Occasionally makers went further and added prescriptive labels or text with precise instructions for their legacy in the next generation, for example the stitched commands on the quilt at Figure 20. A maker might even look beyond one generation to instruct a dynastic inheritance of the object within the future family. Many items might be deemed to hold a layering of messages, because an inscription usually (but not always) relates to the original maker, but some subsequent owners added new overt inscriptions, such as the Hutton quilt discussed at page 64.

More often in this study the meaning carried by an object is implicit. Even when dates and inscriptions do occur, they can be opaque or misleading. For example, stitched messages could evoke intimate memory of loss, such as the quilt at Figure 9, which uses biblical language of struggle to reflect on the loss of their baby son in its inscription for the maker's husband. Needlework practice was governed by often rigid conventions of design or style outside of which makers seldom strayed. A search for unique and striking examples of meaning yields few bold unconventional makers, yet this study suggests that meaning more often sits in the small subversions, the clues, the marginalia.[62] Implicit meaning could be yet more opaque when it was imbued through sentimental fabric choice in the emotional reuse

59 See Bridget Long, "Anonymous Needlework: Uncovering British Patchwork 1680–1820", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire (2013), for a discussion of this issue.

60 *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 17 March 1850.

61 Serena Dyer, *Material Lives*, 6, 7.

62 For example, see MO Grenby, *The Child Reader 1700–1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011).

of fabrics and the memory that they might evoke. This study does not attempt to include every item that held implicit meaning, and perhaps some are inaccurately read. John Styles's exploration of the symbolism inherent in the textile tokens left with babies at the Foundling Hospital concluded that reading their symbolism required 'a kind of material literacy that is now much diminished'.[63] Complex stitched textiles, made often over long periods, could also gain meaning through their very proximity to life events. Repeated commentators are evidenced in this study who speak of the emotional power that textiles were felt to wield through direct testimony, poetry, and art. Recourse to sources such as written documents, newspaper articles, creative writing, and paintings allows us insight into how contemporary audiences viewed these domestic objects when they appear as allegories for emotion in depictions of everyday life.

Chapter Overview

This thesis uses the arc of the life-cycle to explore how the emotional concerns of the expression of identity, the accessing of memory, and the creation of legacy changed in the journey from cradle to grave. In doing so it explores the role of agency, how we define it, who had it, and how it was expressed in stitch throughout these life stages.[64] Chapter One explores birth, childhood, and parenting and demonstrates how domestic textiles did emotional work within the family. Textiles could reinforce sibling and parental relationships, contribute to family legacy, and impact narratives about family situations that transgressed normative ideals. The labour and leisure of working life are explored in Chapter Two through the concepts of idleness and industriousness and their relationship to needlework. The discussion shows how an association with the needle and its skills offered agency, and how the creation of stitched textiles could affect how needleworkers were perceived and might present themselves across a range of settings where work was carried out. Chapter Three looks to the end of life, and explores the emotions of nostalgia, legacy creation, and making preparations for death. It shows how stitched textiles were used to reflect on a life lived, to preserve legacy and fix status, or to help to ease loss by memorialising the dead. Ann West's command to remember her and other makers like her invites us to consider how textiles, as tools of emotional and personal expression, carried out emotional work across the social and gendered spectrum between 1790 and 1890.

63 Styles, *Threads of Feeling,* 70.

64 Megan Clare Webber, "Troubling Agency: Agency and Charity in Early Nineteenth Century London", *Historical Research,* 91.251 (2018): 116–136.

Chapter One

Making the Family: Childhood and Parenting, Birth and Loss

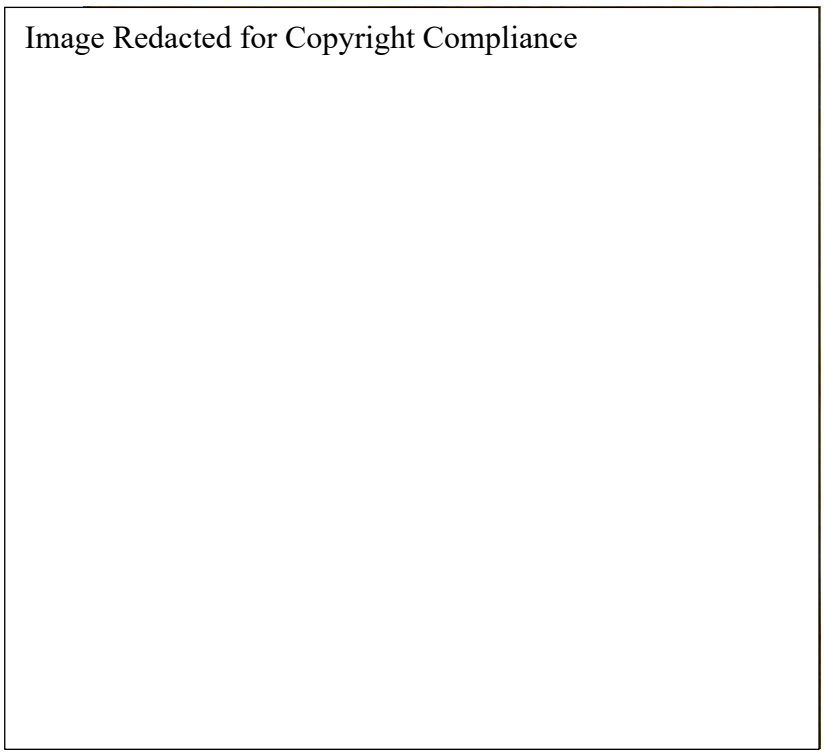

Figure 2: Walter Langley, *The Tender Grace of a Day that is Dead will Never Come Back to Me*, 1909, oil on canvas, 115.5 x 105.5 cm. Gallery Oldham, 3.10.

Patchwork quilts and embroidered samplers were often sewn at home, long-worked projects within the rhythms of family life, and thus perhaps inevitably reflective of its emotional currents. In the painting at Figure 2 a mother sews at home alongside her son, lost in reverie, her needlework in her lap – a depiction of an association between maternity, memory, and needlework so ubiquitous that it appeared as a regular motif in social realist art in this era.[1] The painting further links the practice of making with emotional reflection and remembering for its contemporary audience through the title, taken from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 1842 poem 'Break, Break, Break' – a verse of mourning. This painting's artist Walter Langley (1852–1922) was the materially literate son of a journeyman tailor in whose work the emotional power of the textile as an artistic metaphor was a recurring theme.[2] In employing it he reflected the fact that sewing as a practice was a regular rhythm within most families that shaped women's identity by its very pervasiveness.[3] The emphasis on obedient sewing in education ostensibly schooled girls in docility, application, and care, but the needle was as powerfully expressive as the pen in a society of varied literacy.[4] The products of maternal home sewing practically clothed and covered, emotionally warmed

1 For another example, see *Maternity* by Walter Langley, Bristol Museums, K357B.

2 Mary O'Neil, *Cornwall's 'Fisherfolk' – Art & Artifice* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2014), 15.

3 Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 136–138.

4 Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680–1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 83.

and protected, and symbolically codified the family, its status, and its members' bonds. Material fluency, gained through both the use and the creation of textiles, was widespread and shared by all members of the family.[5] As objects of domestic art, stitched textiles were intimate items of emotional use, held in the hand and rested in the lap, draped over a sleeping child or laid over a coffin. Such tactile proximity meant that many stitched objects had the potential to embody emotional meanings for their makers and owners and reflected aspects of their authors' selfhood.[6] When authors stitched the words 'Remember Me', their first audience was those with whom they had the closest emotional bonds – their family. By emphasising the emotional *use* of stitched textiles alongside their makers, we include the men and boys of the family, like the child pictured in Figure 2, who existed alongside these objects, in order to catch a glimpse of how textiles facilitated emotional exchanges across a range of families.

Domestic needlework remained foundational in most women's lives between 1790 and 1890, but along with many aspects of everyday feminine practices within the home, it remains under-historicised. This chapter reaches beyond second-generation feminist critiques to address the role of domestic sewing as a powerful tool of emotional communication within the family.[7] Pervasive narratives of practical utility have demeaned domestic textiles such as quilts as either the pragmatic coverings of poverty, or products of an elite trivialised feminine distraction. Similarly, textiles such as samplers continue to be viewed as objects merely of feminine accomplishment, framed through an androcentric lens of marriageability that fails to value the agency in expression that needlework proficiency offered women, even within its narrow remit.[8] If we continue to see domestic textiles only as evidence of the patriarchal structures of feminine performance or household practicality, we perpetuate a misogynistic view of their emotional meaning to the women and girls who made them. Instead this chapter explores how women used their hard-won skills to create objects that held memories, and through their labour memorialised themselves and their emotional experiences.[9] This chapter redefines needlework practice as a powerfully communicative tool, which could be deployed to carry out emotional work within the bonds of the family.

The understanding of the family, and the questions asked of family life, have changed over time. Whilst widely accepted as an important bedrock of society and discussed by philosophers in the long eighteenth century such as John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), the family lacked its own historiography until the 1970s.[10] Lawrence Stone's seminal work *The Family, Sex and Marriage 1500–1800* stimulated much debate about the variety of emotional bonds expressed within the form of the family, with

5 John Styles, "Objects and Emotions, The London Foundling Hospital Tokens 1741–1760", Keynote Speech Text, Emotional Objects Conference, 2013.

6 Bridget Long, "'Regular Progressive Work Occupies My Mind Best': Needlework as a Source of Entertainment, Consolation and Reflection". *TEXTILE*, 14.2 (2016): 177.

7 For example, Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Bloomsbury, 1984).

8 Serena Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 78.

9 Susie Steinbach, *Women in England: 1760–1914. A Social History* (London: Orion Books, 2004), 45, 47.

10 See for example John Locke*, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (*London: Thomas Basset, 1690); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* (translation of French edition, 1763).

many historians disputing his conclusions.[11] This chapter will illustrate stitched textiles' reflection of a wide diversity of emotional bonds present within the family. The emerging sphere of gender studies in the 1980s and 1990s drew on the frameworks of family historians such as Anthony Fletcher to understand power dynamics between the sexes.[12] Naomi Tadmor widened our conceptualisation of what a family is, describing fictive bonds and connections outside of the nuclear family to include members of a household.[13] Object-specific work in this field contextualised the meaning of care practices such as women's sewing, and Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* remains influential in its description of the role of needlework in both reinforcing and subverting gendered roles.[14]

A postmodern approach emphasises power differentials between members of the family and their wider class environment.[15] This more holistic vein of analysis, which concentrated on understanding the nuanced power interactions between men and women, yielded a new canon, such as Amanda Vickery's *Behind Closed Doors* and Joanne Begiato's *Parenting in England*, drawing on a wide range of sources to explore the emotional relationship dynamics present within the family.[16] As feminists theorised women's roles, historians also re-examined masculinity. Michele Cohen, John Tosh, and latterly Karen Harvey and Joanne Begiato have revealed a more nuanced web of emotions than a straight reading of Victorian patriarchal structures suggest.[17] Julie-Marie Strange has emphasised the importance of class, exploring working men's emotional role as fathers in the Victorian home.[18] The role of needlework, regarded ambivalently for many decades, is arguably ripe for re-examination through a postmodern lens that recognises its role within the sexual dynamics of the family by restoring agency to needlework practitioners. New work such as Serena Dyer's *Material Lives* and Joseph McBrinn's *Queering the Subversive Stitch* bring fresh analysis through an attention to women's agency, and to men's diverse participation in this often-under-explored area of everyday domestic life, on which this chapter will build further.[19]

The ways in which familial emotion was communicated through the creation and use of domestic stitched objects in the period between 1790 and 1890 will be explored in this

11 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1977); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); or refutations by Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450–1700* (Harlow: Longman, 1984). A summary of these arguments in Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5; Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

12 Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

13 Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

14 Parker, *The Subversive Stitch.*

15 Carol Beardmore, Cara Dobbing, and Steven King, eds. *Family Life in Britain 1650–1910* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

16 Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Joanne Begiato (Bailey), *Parenting in England 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

17 Michelle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1996); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity & Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2020).

18 Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

19 Serena Dyer, *Material Lives*; Joseph McBrinn, *Queering the Subversive Stitch: Men and the Culture of Needlework* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

chapter. We will travel the life-cycle of the needleworker in the intense period of life that included schooling, marriage, childbirth, and parenting. Paintings, poetry, and novels help us to explore the symbolic role of making within the family, and six such cultural works are referred to. Objects made for, or by, parents for their children are amongst the most overtly sentimental objects and thus they survive extant in large numbers, both within museum collections and in private homes. Invariably women and girls marked the key emotional accents of their lives in stitch, and this chapter draws on eighteen extant quilts or coverlets and samplers from twelve British collections to demonstrate this. It begins in girlhood, recognising that education's emphasis on needlework was part of the broader training of female obedience, deference, and conveyed morality. Yet it also proposes that needlework could reflect girls' interior lives and offer some agency within these boundaries for the expression of emotional concerns. The chapter then follows these girls into womanhood to explore the centrality of textiles in the formation of an adult feminine selfhood rooted in maternity and domesticity, using details from six diaries that span the dates 1700 to 1890 to contextualise objects' place in family life. It then explores textiles that manifest the emotional experiences of loss within the family by drawing on these dual sources further. Within this life-cycle narrative, the chapter demonstrates how materialisation of emotion in textiles was also important for fathers and sons within the family.

Schooling Dutiful Daughters: "This I have done to let you see, what care my parents took of me"

The earnestness and careful application involved in making complicated needleworks were seen as improving character in contemporary religious teaching, influenced by an increasingly evangelical focus in the first decades of the nineteenth century on virtuous toil within a sanctification of the domestic.[20] The embroidered phrase 'Remember Me' might be phrased as the entreaty 'Lord, Remember Me' in stitched samplers, a plea for the ultimate recognition of virtuous application with the needle.[21] Rooted in childhood, sewing was morally improving work and conscientiousness was stitched firmly to notions of self-respect for girls across the social spectrum. The practice of needlework was a means of instilling self-control, practised virtuously in the moral sanctum of the home.

20 Tosh, *Man's Place*, 5.

21 English sampler, by Jane Frame, 18th century, Lot 683. Pook & Pook Auctioneers, 23 June 2021.

Figure 3: Paul Knight, *The Sewing Girl*, 1895, oil on canvas, 28.6 x 38.7cm. Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, BURGM:paoil164.

Conduct books characterised sewing education for girls as the dutiful submission to a chore of self-improvement, and depictions in art of the neat, bowed head of the young needleworker were common (Figure 3). The philosopher and educationalist Jean-Jacques Rousseau reflected commonly held views in 1762 when he proposed that 'little girls always dislike learning to read and write, but they are always ready to learn to sew', and an adherence to this false polarity shaped girls' education for more than 150 years.[22] An oppositional narrative that pitted intellectual development against pursuits such as domestic needlework framed contemporary debates about girls' education and has been stubbornly pervasive since.[23] Yet this tone of lugubrious toil is often at odds with the expressively creative needlework that young female artists conceived. Even mundane items might be intoxicatingly embellished as objects of creative self-expression. Extended projects such as samplers and patchwork quilts could be projects of creativity, imagination, planning, application, dexterity, perseverance, and skill.[24] Many girls found enjoyment and fulfilment in their work, reporting 'intoxicating pleasure', as Jane Johnson wrote to her aunt in 1749, in creative making.[25] Whilst needlework skills served both moralistic and utilitarian purposes, women and girls nevertheless went to great lengths to make aesthetically pleasing objects that also might reflect the maker's selfhood. Those who did not relish the needle could use it to express agency in a pointed choice of a sampler's verse.[26] Of course, not all girls

22 Rousseau. *Emile,* Book 5. Also see prints such as James Gilroy's 1809 'Showing Daughter Betty Off on her Return from School', referenced in Aimee. E Newell, *A Stitch in Time: The Needlework of Aging Women in Antebellum America* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 42.

23 Girton College Oxford 'pioneer' in 1873 and suffragist Dame Louisa Lumsden was a noted enthusiast for needlework tuition *alongsid*e academic education; Janet Rae, *Warm Covers: A Scottish Textile Story* (Bristol: Sansom, 2016), 53. See, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (London: J Johnson, 1792).

24 Marybeth C Stalp, *Quilting*, *The Fabric of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 17.

25 Dyer, *Material Lives*, 30. Jane Johnson. BOD.MS.DON c.190,ff.11–12.

26 Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux, *The Pocket: A Hidden History of Women's Lives 1660–1900* (New Haven: Yale, 2019), 66.

enjoyed sewing and many were very aware of the judgement that their needlework invited.[27] In 1797 Frances Johnson chose a verse for her sampler that laid bare the hypocrisy of the critical scrutiny of her work in its role as a reflection of her character: 'In reading this if any faults you see, mend first your own and then find fault in me.'[28]

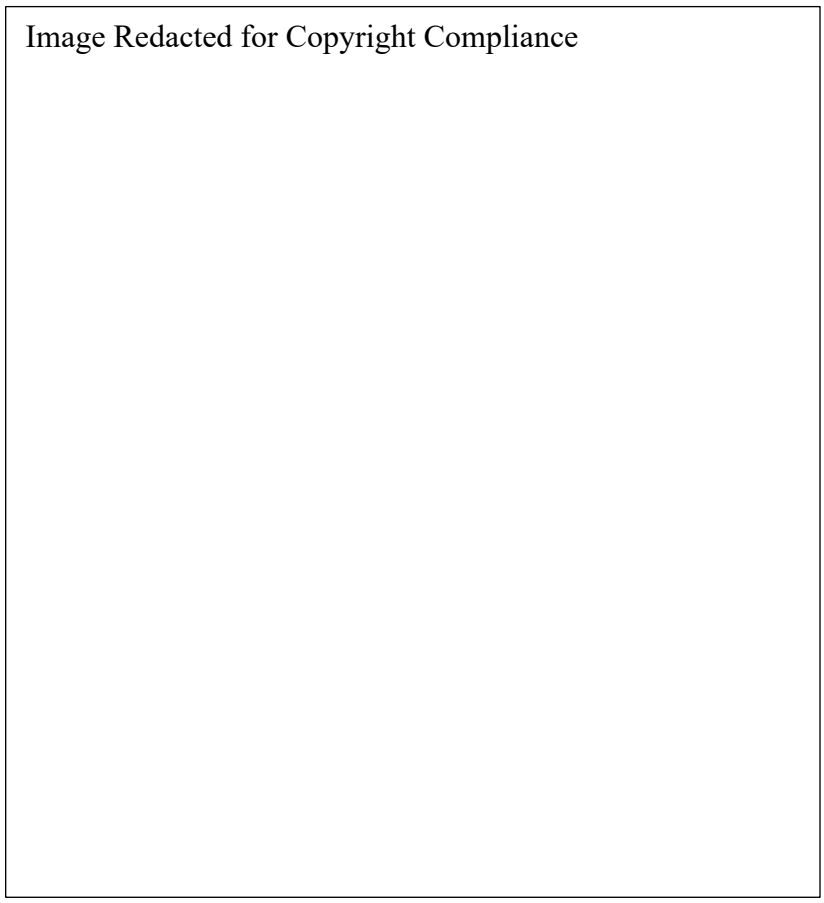

Figure 4: Mary Staveley Medallion Quilt, 1833, East Yorkshire, whip-stitched and embroidered, 99 x 82.5 in. Collection of the International Quilt Museum NE USA, 2006.031.001.

Mothers were often girls' first needlework teachers, and girls used stitch to memorialise their foundational emotional relationships with parents in a long-standing practice that linked dutifulness with affection. Overtly stated gratitude to a parent reinforced the societal and familial pecking order and bolstered mothers' status in a society that elevated motherhood. For more than 200 years, girls made statements similar to that of Ann Clark in her band sampler from 1723: 'Ann Clark is my name and with my nedel I wrot the same and by this you may see what cear my parents took of mee'.[29] This reciprocal emotional transaction appears repeatedly in stitched samplers and crosses into other textiles such as patchwork quilts.[30] In 1833, Mary Staveley of East Yorkshire embroidered the same verse and then incorporated the embroidery into a patchwork quilt of colourful chintz dress

27 Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 131.

28 1797 sampler by Frances Johnson in Marcus Bourne Huish, *Samplers and Tapestry Embroideries*, (London: Longman Green, 1913), 49.

29 Ann Clark Sampler 1723 in Mary Eirwen Jones, *British Samplers* (London: Batsford, 1948), 87.

30 For example, this verse also occurs on Patchwork and Embroidered Bedcover, 1827. York Castle Museum. YORCM: BA 3043.

fabrics completed with simple trellis quilting (Figure 4). Needlework's inclusion of doggerel religious and moral verses encouraged the contemplation of death as a tool for virtuous living. Separation of parent and child through death was not unusual, and some girls anticipated their mother's grief, imagining their own death as they stitched. Seventeen-year-old Ann Edwards prepared her own memorial for her mother in 1850 when she stated: 'Ann Edwards is my nam with my needle I can do the sam. When I ham ded and in my grav and all my bons are roten my deer mother will remember me and I am all forgotin'.[31] Domestic stitched textiles were thus a vessel for emotional exchange within the family, which offered fortifying assurance in the present, and a consoling memorial in case of future separation. Girls memorialised the maternal bond in a practice in which their own future status was bound up.

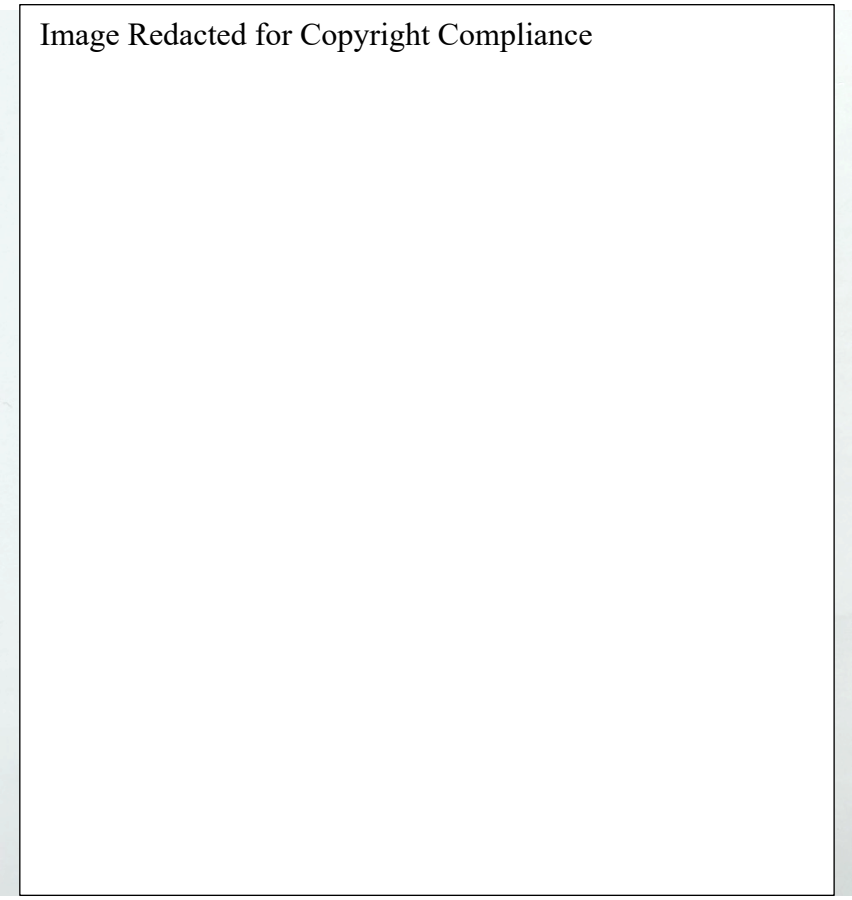

Figure 5: Hannah and Jane Cook Quilt, 1827–1835, Yorkshire, patchwork, embroidered and quilted, 2660 x 2600mm. York Castle Museum, YORCM:BA3041.

Sororal relationships, described by Leonore Davidoff as 'life's longest relationship', were also marked through the emotional and practical bond of making and gifting stitched items.[32] Sisterhood was an emotional resource and societal safety net for women, which might include living together if widowed or unmarried, as well as providing healthcare, childcare, and social connections in a society underpinned by familial networks. Confined to largely domestic pursuits, sisters were often each other's foremost sewing companions and

31 Embroidered sampler, Welsh, from private correspondence with Mary Jenkins, January 2020.

32 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (revised ed., London: Routledge, 2002), 348.

their emotional bonds can be traced in the items they left.[33] Yorkshire sisters Hannah and Jane Cook collaborated on the long-term project of an embroidered, pieced, and quilted bedcover that included both their names in the crewel embroidery dated February 20th 1827, perhaps marking its start (Figure 5). It was a long collaboration, finished some nine years later in 1835 after being meticulously hand quilted. It is not clear how they shared the joint labour, sustained over long years of application. Sisters Katherine and Margret Sheriff from East Lothian instead chose to make two matching samplers in East Lothian in 1770, stitching the arms of Great Britain. Although matching pieces, the stitched 'handwriting' of each individual remains distinct.[34] Brothers might also be involved in family sibling endeavours – George Eyre Evans, from Abergwili, Dyfed, stitched an unfinished hexagon coverlet with a brother and sister in 1865.[35]

The age and situation of needleworking boys invite an interpretation of this activity as a shared familial task, encouraging collaborative work in families with similar-aged sisters who shared a schoolroom. Brothers who contributed to a family sampler alongside their sisters were sometimes listed together, such as Robert Henderson, stitching alongside his sister Jean in 1762.[36] Boyhood sampler makers tended to be of an age where they might still be at home under the care of a mother. For example, 'Mathew was born April 16 1764 and sewed this in August 1774'.[37] Young boys who shared a schoolroom were materially familiar with the tools of sewing, such was its ubiquity in the domestic home. Pins and bodkins were co-opted as reading aids; Anna Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778–9) includes instructional ditties such as 'Now read your book, Where is the pin to point with? Here is a pin… Spell that word. Good boy.'[38] In many working families, pragmatism outweighed any gendered assignment of household tasks. George Mockford (b. 1826) describes how, as the eldest son, 'I had, as soon as I was old enough, to be mother's help to amuse the baby, clean the house, and do sewing like a girl.'[39] It seems likely that the task of completing a sampler, or the skill of embroidery, was also used as a way of inculcating moralised behaviour in the same way as for girls.

Of course, not all sibling bonds were positive and needlework's centrality to girls' emotional lives might be equally exposed in stories of broken relationships. Catherine 'Kitty' Jones was acquitted of stealing her brother-in-law's watch, chain, and keys, after her sister Susan Sullivan accused her of the theft in May 1822.[40] The case hung on the detail of her disputed concealment of the objects in a piece of patchwork she was sewing in her sister's parlour at the time the watch and chain disappeared. This was clearly not a scene of domestically harmonious sewing. Perhaps the quiet intensity of individual sewing concealed complex emotional currents in their sisterly relationship; as Susan's husband exasperatedly stated in the court proceedings, 'I would sooner lose it [the watch] than interfere with them about

33 Helen Wyld, *Embroidered Stories, Scottish Samplers* (National Museums Scotland, 2018), 76.

34 Wyld, *Embroidered Stories*, 19.

35 Christine Stevens, *Quilts* (Gomer Press and National Museum of Wales, 1993), 26.

36 Jones, *British Samplers*, 32. Huish, *Samplers,* 84.

37 Huish, *Samplers,* 84.

38 Referenced in MO Grenby, *The Child Reader 1700–1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), 195.

39 John Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from 1820–1920* (London: Penguin, 1982), 221.

40 OBPO (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 09 May 2021), May 1822, trial of CATHERINE JONES (t18220522-52).

it.'[41] A finished piece of needlework might also exist as a powerful metaphor for the power of femininity. A patchwork quilt formed the symbolic embodiment of a catastrophic sisterly schism in 1898 when 21-year-old Emily Young appeared in court, accused by her sister, Mrs Claxon, 'dressed exactly like the prisoner', of stealing her quilt. It emerged that Mr Claxon had a summons pending for desertion for leaving his wife to live with her sister Emily, and Emily removed the quilt as they left together.[42] Emily was found not guilty, since the court deemed that Mr Claxon was the ultimate owner of the domestic quilt, despite Mrs Claxon's claim that she had owned it since 'two years before I know him'. He claimed ownership as it was a gift from his wife, whatever its emotional significance in their marriage, and thus he was free to give it to his new partner Emily, perhaps the ultimate act of betrayal. Domestic needlework embodied a woman's selfhood, femininity, and domesticity, and thus might be used as a powerful emotional weapon.

Men like Claxon and Sullivan clearly understood the weighty emotional communication inherent in the disputed textile objects, because they lived alongside the items and participated in their emotional use within relationships. Men gained material literacy and invested in the meaning that domestic textiles carried through their familial adjacency to the making of domestic textiles, and as subsequent users and owners.[43] Within the home the role of men has seen a new focus, troubling stereotypical views of the remote or absent Victorian father and warning against a gendering of the domestic space that did not reflect the reality of how participants of all classes used the home.[44] In domestic spaces, all fathers were invariably urged to seek out morally improving occupations that included the whole family around the hearth of the suburban villa or working-class cottage, 'sharing blameless amusements by the fireside' that often involved stitched projects.[45] Male domestic leisure remains subject to gendered assumptions that delineate male and female spaces in ways not reflected in the analysis of real interiors.[46] Yet men might clearly collaborate in complex needlework projects alongside wives and partners. Interviewed at the end of the nineteenth century about her grandmother's 1800 quilt, a needleworker recounted that the complex geometry of the project was designed by a young man yet carried out by her grandmother: 'Some of the octagons are in three pieces. It was a young man's planning.'[47] Chapter Two offers evidence that questions further these assumptions around the nature of domestic male leisure. Men's material knowledge of the needlework of the home could be a useful emotional tool to express engagement, as a suitor, husband, and father.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *South Wales Daily News*, 1 August 1898.

43 Joanne Begiato (Bailey), "'A Very Sensible Man' Imagining Fatherhood in England c1750–1830." *History,* 95.319 (2010): 267–292.

44 Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class 1865–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 83; Harvey, *Little Republic,* 10; Vicky Holmes, *In Bed with the Victorians: The Life-Cycle of Working-Class Marriage* (Cham: Palgrave, 2017), 37.

45 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 112; Strange, *Fatherhood,* 110.

46 Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 44.

47 Averil Colby, *Quilting* (London: Batsford, 1962), 111.

Figure 6: Engraved silver thimble 'Forget Me Not', 1883, 2cm. Carved wooden lace bodkin 'When this you See, Remember Me', undated, 10cm. Author's own collection.

As women and girls made the transition from schoolgirl to wife, the sentimental phrase 'Remember Me' might be a romantic entreaty for remembrance to a lover. Needlework practice carried an erotic undertone in contemporary discourses around courtship that valued female passivity in the face of an ardent suitor. The intimate use of the phrase in a textile mnemonic might symbolically bind a couple together emotionally. Sally Holloway's analysis of courtship rituals describes the sale of ribbon garters with the amatory woven message 'when this you see remember me'.[48] The phrase is commonly seen engraved or even scratched onto needlework items such as lace bobbins, thimbles, or bodkins (Figure 6).[49] George Eliot's faithless Hetty Sorrel receives a silver thimble from Adam Bede engraved with the words 'Remember Me', which she keeps in her pocket whilst fatefully pursuing another man.[50] These items were associated with a young woman's private use, kept about her person concealed in pockets under the skirt; used on the hand next to the skin, their sensuous and sentimental emotional communication was clear.[51] For young men there were emotional benefits for a suitor who could demonstrate an understanding of stitched projects undertaken by women.[52] In Oliver Goldsmith's 1773 play *She Stoops to Conquer,* Marlow attempts to woo Miss Hardcastle with a patriarchal reframing of his skills: 'Then you must shew me your embroidery. I embroider and draw patterns myself a little. If you want a judge of your work, you must apply to me.'[53] Collaboration in a flirtatious domestic needlework project might constitute a metaphor for a fruitful collaboration in marriage.

48 Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship. Emotions and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 78.

49 Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 106.

50 George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (New York: Harper, 1859). This reference from the Wordsworth Classics edition, 1997, 326.

51 E D Longman and S Loch. *Pins and Pincushions* (London: Longmans Green, 1911).

52 Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 77.

53 Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer: or, The Mistakes of a Night* (London: F. Newbery, 1773), 62.

Marriage, Motherhood, and Identity

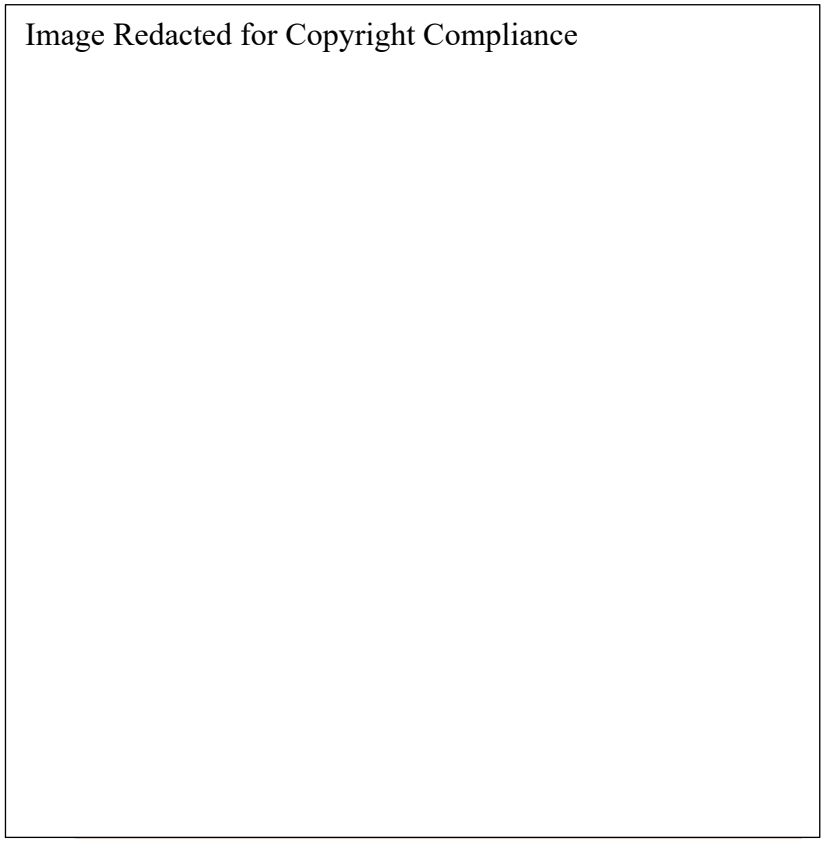

Figure 7: Nancy Horsfall Coverlet, 1833, Yorkshire, patchwork, appliquéd and embroidered, 257 x 259cm. Gawthorpe Textile Collection, 6420.

A girl's identity transformed when she became a wife, and then a mother, and these pinnacles of Victorian female achievement were often marked in textile and stitch, the most feminine of mediums. Needlework skills learnt as children were important tools for adult women. The power of the domestic textile to memorialise a woman's life was so widely recognised that Elizabeth Stone wrote in her instructional book for makers, *The Art of Needlework* (1840), that whilst men have biographies and historians to record their every utterance, without the memorial of stitch womankind 'steals noiselessly through her appointed path in life'.[54] There is evidence that women self-consciously used domestic sewing as a flexible, accessible, thrifty tool to memorialise their emotional lives when few others were available to them. The Yorkshire farmer's daughter Nancy Horsfall stitched a pretty frame-style patchwork coverlet before her wedding in 1833 (Figure 7), and the next year made a similar, smaller cot cover for her first-born child.[55] Pointedly, only Nancy's own name is stitched into the embroidered verse – she is overt in placing the transformation of her own selfhood at the centre of her quilt. At this moment of evolution in her identity, Nancy ideates her legacy following death when she implores future audiences to 'take up this work and think of me when I am quite forgot'. The quilt became both an enduring

54 Maureen Daly Googin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles 1750–1950 (*Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 22.

55 Gawthorpe Textile Collection, cot coverlet by N Horsfall, 1834. 87 x 115cm. 6445.

commemoration of her identity and a potential memorial to her in death. Women sometimes returned to work over or add details of their status to an old sampler.[56] In 1789, the new bride Anne Raffan from Banffshire went back to her youthful family tree sampler to further stitch a record of her marriage to George Allardyce.[57]

After marriage, becoming a mother was the 'central defining identity' of many adult women and was indelibly connected with the preparation of domestic textiles, from the commemorative and decorative to the mundane.[58] Hand-worked items demonstrated an emotional investment in the unknown 'Little Stranger'.[59] Men might also engage in preparation. Jane Austen recounts her brother Francis's involvement in cutting out patterns for clothes for his first unborn child in 1807.[60] Crib-sized covers exist in collections today in numbers evidencing that their construction was a recognised rite of passage for the transformation of identity that accompanied birth.[61] Nancy Horsfall made a coverlet for her new baby in 1834, a year after her marriage. She incorporated in its patchwork block-printed chintzes from before 1800 in a practice that melds thrift with emotion. It can be seen in objects such as the Mosaic Cot Coverlet from 1820, which includes fabrics from 1780, forty years earlier.[62] Preserved together, the contemporary shared fabrics of the marriage coverlet and smaller cot coverlet, with its verses to 'welcome sweet babe', materially unite mother and baby, but also form a link with generations before, a material marker fixing a child's identity in a generational lineage.

It is important that we also recognise that much plain sewing within the family was also emotional. [63] Thrifty management of clothes and bedding through a recognised ladder of reuse was the mark of a prudent mother's emotional and practical care work.[64] The Georgian diarist Anna Larpent (1758–1832) described the emotional satisfaction that women might gain through this regular plain family sewing when she expressed in her diary that mending 'warms my heart as much as mental pursuits delights it'.[65] Many women clearly revelled in their role as mother and affectionate parenting was common.[66] Motherly affection was not the unique preserve of the biological mother – women such as nannies might also use textile creation to express attachment. Susan Southgate, the nanny to the

56 Aimee Newell, 'Tattered to Pieces', in Daly Googin & Fowkes Tobin eds., *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework.*

57 Wyld, *Embroidered Stories,* 21.

58 Tim Reinke Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15.

59 Giorgio Riello, "Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives" in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 159. Joanne Begiato, "Breeding a Little Stranger: Managing Uncertainty in Later Georgian England", in Jennifer Evans and Ciara Meehan, *Perceptions of Pregnancy from the 17th Century to the 20th Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 26.

60 Paula Byrne, *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 5.

61 See satin wholecloth crib quilt 1750–1790, likely recycled from an elite gown, V&A, T.429-1966.

62 Mosaic Cot Coverlet, 1820, 112cm x 115cm, patchwork. The QGMC, 1994-8-B.

63 For example, Burman and Fennetaux, *The Pocket* widely illustrates this.

64 See Stalp, *Quilting*, 138; Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 265.

65 Bridget Long, "'Regular Progressive Work Occupies My Mind Best': Needlework as a Source of Entertainment, Consolation and Reflection". *TEXTILE*, 14.2 (2016): 183.

66 Begiato, *Parenting,* 26.

Baker-Baker family of Elemore Hall in County Durham, made each child in her care a meticulous white wholecloth quilt in the 1890s, as a material memorial to an emotional bond rendered less secure than that with the mother, through her status as an employee.[67]

Grief and Loss

Sometimes the inevitable price of love is grief, and so parenthood was a state beset with anxiety, despite an unevenly falling rate of child and infant mortality through the period from 1790 to 1890.[68] Joanne Begiato's comprehensive study of parenting before 1830 concludes that the loss of a child was experienced as a 'profound disassembly of self' for parents fundamentally defined by their familial relationship to their children.[69] Whilst notions of providence offered bereaved parents an explanation and religion a solace for their pain, testimony in letters and diaries records repeatedly the searing emotional blow that the loss of a child could bring.[70] Sara Coleridge describes how 'these little speechless creatures do twine themselves around a parent's heart from the hour of their birth' in a letter describing the death of her eleven-day-old daughter in 1840.[71] Women's diaries often talk of grief in material terms, as Susan Stabile characterises it 'their grief-stricken hearts clothed in sorrow'.[72] Fathers also felt grief for lost children, heartbreakingly described in diaries and letters. The Bradford Minister Benjamin Goodwin wrote after the death of his young daughter in 1849, 'I see her in every corner of the room – oh the agony of pain which these remembrances excite.'[73] Loss in this period was profoundly linked to the role of sentimental objects that might help to mediate grief and mourning, and textile items were central to this.[74] Grief might be seen in actions, and textiles offered a way to express loss for taciturn men like a Yorkshire Dales farmer. In 1846, eleven-year-old Jennet Maudesley and her mother made a huge coverlet patchwork. The quilt survived after they both died three years later because her father took the coverlet, signed and dated it for them, and folded it carefully away as a material memorial.[75] Such textiles were an embodied material representation of the family member, a talisman, and a comforter to both the men and women of the family.[76]

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67 Dorothy Osler, *North Country Quilts, Legend and Living Tradition* (Barnard Castle: The Bowes Museum, 2000), 37. Fig. 41.

68 Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 4.

69 Begiato, *Parenting,* 157.

70 See Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

71 Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 130, quoted in Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 82.

72 Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 203.

73 Tosh, *A Man's Place,* 100.

74 Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 299.

75 Averil Colby, *Patchwork* (London: Batsford, 1958), 110.

76 Beverly Gordon and Laurel Horton, "Turn of the Century Quilts: Embodied Objects in a Web of Relationships", in Daly Googin & Fowkes Tobin eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework*, 95.

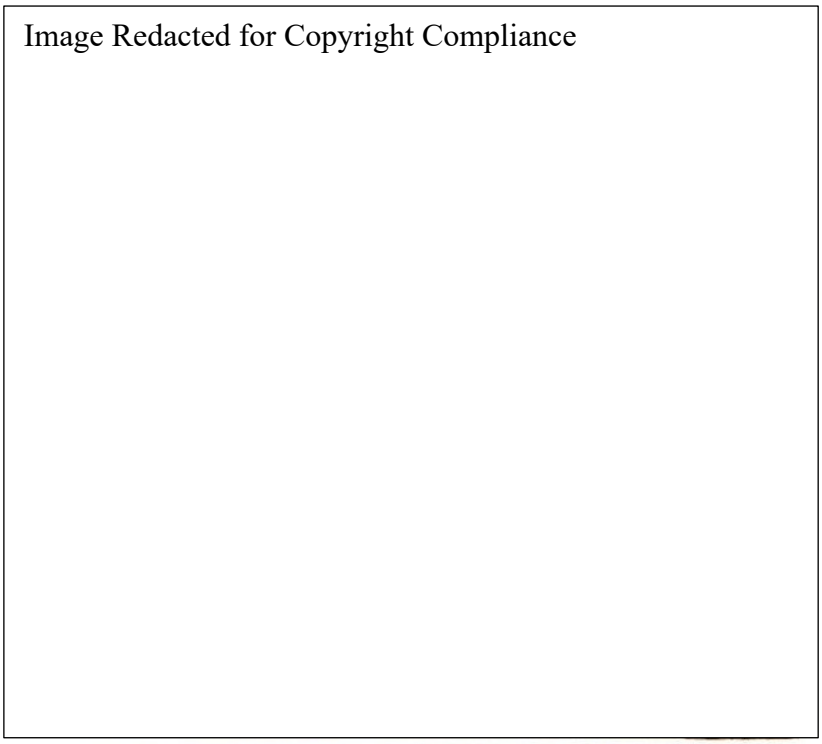

Figure 8: Coverlet from the Anna Margaretta Brereton set of bed hangings, 1800–1805, Norfolk, pieced over papers and appliquéd, c.3 x 3m. Norfolk Museums Trust, NWHCM: 1929.116.6.25.

The physical act of sewing also offered therapeutic support to bereaved parents. Enlightenment mourning tacitly approved of emotional expression but, in a religious society, there was criticism of excess and incapacitating grief that failed to recognise that death was God's will and that He offered succour through piety. Thus women might turn to actions that could help channel their distress, such as the familiar and reassuring practice of sewing.[77] In 1800 Anna Margaretta Brereton (1756–1819) of Brinton Hall, Norfolk suffered a maternal heartbreak that is described in her eulogy by Rev. William Upjohn, in his *Testament to Departed Worth* in 1819, as sending her into 'an abyss of sorrow'.[78] The death of her fifth child John in boyhood led to a deep depression and resulting religious crisis, during which Anna withdrew to her room for five years and sewed a complex set of covers, hangings, and curtains for a bed in the newly fashionable pieced-over-papers patchwork style (Figure 8).[79] Anna's husband John, clearly complicit in the emotional balm that this project offered, probably procured the varied textiles for this mammoth task. Women's diary entries link the motion of sewing to periods of mental distress. News of family bereavement caused Anna Larpent to seek solace in the 'mechanical' soothing of needlework that held the power to quiet a troubled mind. Perhaps this was a practice many women had used for emotional control and mental processing since childhood.[80]

77 Stabile, Memory's Daughters, 181; Begiato, *Parenting,* 40.

78 https://frayedtextilesontheedge.wordpress.com/2014/02/17/the-brereton-donation-cathy-terry-social-history-curator/(accessed 5/5/2021).

79 Now in the Collection of Norfolk Museums Collections. Accession Number: NWHCM : 1929.116.6.25.

80 Anna Larpent, 12 June 1797, 4 June 1798.

Making something tangible helped to sustain memories of a lost child, enabling them to remain an important influence on parents' lives and identities.[81] When an infant baby died it lacked other material identifiers for the wider family, which might be kept as items of sentimental memorial. Making memorial items thus gave materiality to an unborn or neonatal death.[82] However, for some the overwhelming grief of the loss of a child might also serve to stop material creativity. Serena Dyer's study of the biographical costume watercolours of Ann Frankland Lewis (1757–1842) describes how she abruptly stopped creating after the death of her daughter.[83] It is likely that without the future audience of her daughter, the importance of the work as a legacy was negated. A child was seen as a 'second self', the loss of which caused a rupture in maternal identity.[84] The bluestocking writer Melesina Trench (1768–1837) described this fragmenting in her journal in 1806, after the death of her toddler son Frederick: 'the misfortune from which I date my second life, as different, certainly, from the former as two separate modes of being'.[85] If the regular practice of the work of sewing sustained maternal identity, then it could also die when a child died.

It is a misconception to equate uniformity of form with uniformity of feeling. The form of acceptable expression of grief became more tightly codified as the nineteenth century moved into its middle decades, but maternal anguish remained. The power of the ubiquitous memorial embroidered sampler waned as its proliferation into spaces such as workhouses and charity schools engendered doubts about the authenticity of the emotion it expressed. Despite the increasing conformity of style in characteristic needlework items at the end of the century, the Victorian tendency to 'concretise feelings as if a material object were equivalent to an emotion' meant that textiles might still be able to communicate a distinctly personal loss.[86] Queen Victoria (r.1837–1901), widowed at forty-two with nine children, offered the nation's mourning mothers a template for domestic memorialising. After Prince Albert's death in 1861 the family withdrew to Osborne House, 'making their own memorial tributes to Albert's memory' that reportedly included the queen embroidering a handkerchief with a motif of black and white tears.[87] For other Victorian mothers the form of the widely adopted 'scripture quilt' might offer a canvas for personal or familial memorial reflection. The scripture quilt, drawing texturally from non-conformist and evangelical Christian vocabulary, included stitched representation of religious verse that paralleled the embroidered mourning samplers of the previous generation. The often superficially formulaic layout of scripture quilts has led them to be overlooked as sites of individual memory and memorial, but this societally prescribed form allowed makers to communicate in a widely comprehended format with their contemporary audiences.[88]

81 Begiato, Parenting, 244.

82 Jalland, *Death*, 293, 296.

83 Dyer, *Material Lives*, 57.

84 Begiato, *Parenting,* 157.

85 Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, 42.

86 Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 187; Rozsika Desnoyers, *Pictorial Embroidery in England: A Critical History of Needlepainting and Berlin Work* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

87 Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 155.

88 See The Widows Quilt, 1860–1900, The American Quilt Museum in Britain, 1959.4 as an example, or see Carol Williams Gebel, "Quilts in the Final Rite of Passage: A Multicultural Study", *Uncoverings,* 16 (1995): 199-228.

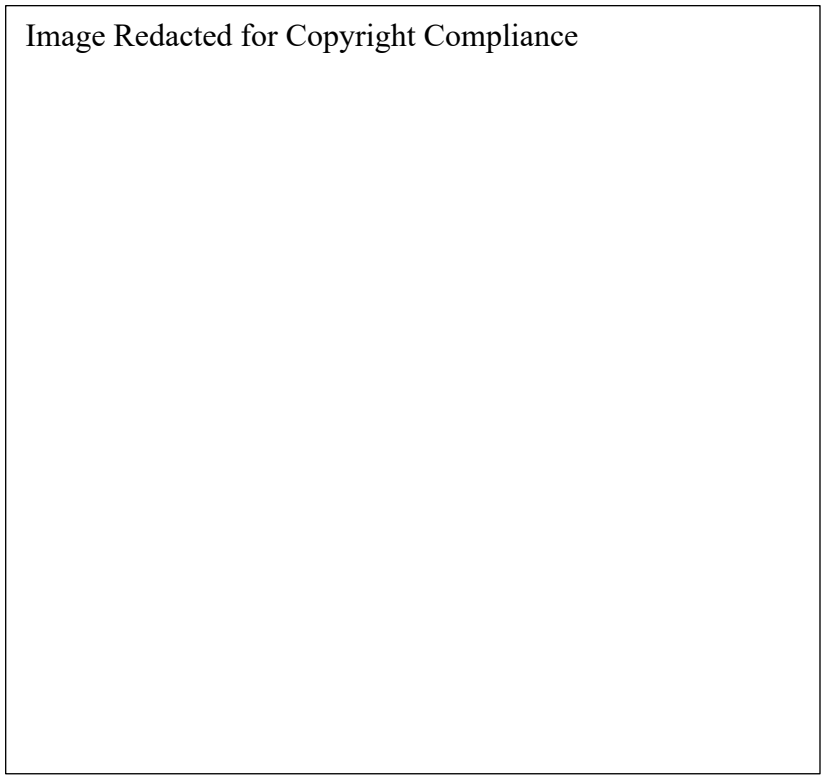

Figure 9: Wyatt Coverlet, c.1849, appliquéd and embroidered coverlet, 254 x 267cm. The Quilters' Guild Museum Collection, 2004-11-A.

Mary Wyatt and Anne Bloomfield (both *née* Newson) were two Suffolk gentry sisters who likely sewed together at home as girls before they married. They are also linked in a shared experience of maternal grief expressed in two emotionally communicative appliquéd quilts.[89] It is not definitively known who made the two coverlets, but Anne, a vicar's wife, is the most likely maker because her own name is missing, reflecting conventions of feminine authorial self-effacement.[90] One coverlet (Figure 9) includes the name 'William Wyatt', Anne's rector husband, whilst the other (Figure 10) names 'Edwin. Mary Bloomfield', her sister and sister's soldier husband.[91] Within the quilts' embroidered verses taken from scripture, hymns, and other devotional literature are clues suggesting that they were made as items of grief, created in empathy for the shared sisterly experience of maternal loss. The scripts in the Wyatt Coverlet reflect a time of religious doubt, as a wife records in stitch her pleas to her God for the need for equilibrium, emotional safety, and religious refuge from the storms of life: 'let me … find a peaceful home', 'Oh god my refuge hear my cries, behold my flowing tears', 'safety in god when overwhelmed with grief my heart within me dies'. Anne and William's second son and fourth child, Thomas Edward Wyatt (1847–1848), was buried near the high altar in St Stephen's church, Sneinton, where his father was vicar.[92] In dedicating the quilt to her husband, perhaps Anne also sought to reassure him of her religious and wifely faith after the destabilising loss. The timing of Anne's maternal

89 Carolyn Ferguson, "The Wyatt and Bloomfield Coverlets: The Family Connection". *Quilt Studies* 10 (2009): 52, 54.

90 Margareta Faust, "The Third Quilt: An Investigation into Possible Connections between a Coverlet in Notts Museums and Galleries and the Wyatt and Bloomfield Coverlets". *Quilt Studies* 10 (2009); Strange, *Fatherhood,* 10.

91 Margareta Faust, "Victorian Piety on Cloth: The Wyatt and Bloomfield Coverlets". *Quilt Studies* 9 (2008): 7–26.

92 Ferguson, "The Wyatt", 53.

bereavement, pre-dating the making of the first quilt for her husband William by just a year (and that of her sister's quilt by two years), must be seen as emotionally significant in initiating the construction. It seems likely that the selection of meaningful verses and the creation of the coverlets were completed whilst Anne mourned, and that she found comfort in the careful repetitive rhythm of needlework as she cross-stitched consoling passages in an intimate emotional communication with her sister, her husband, and her God.[93]

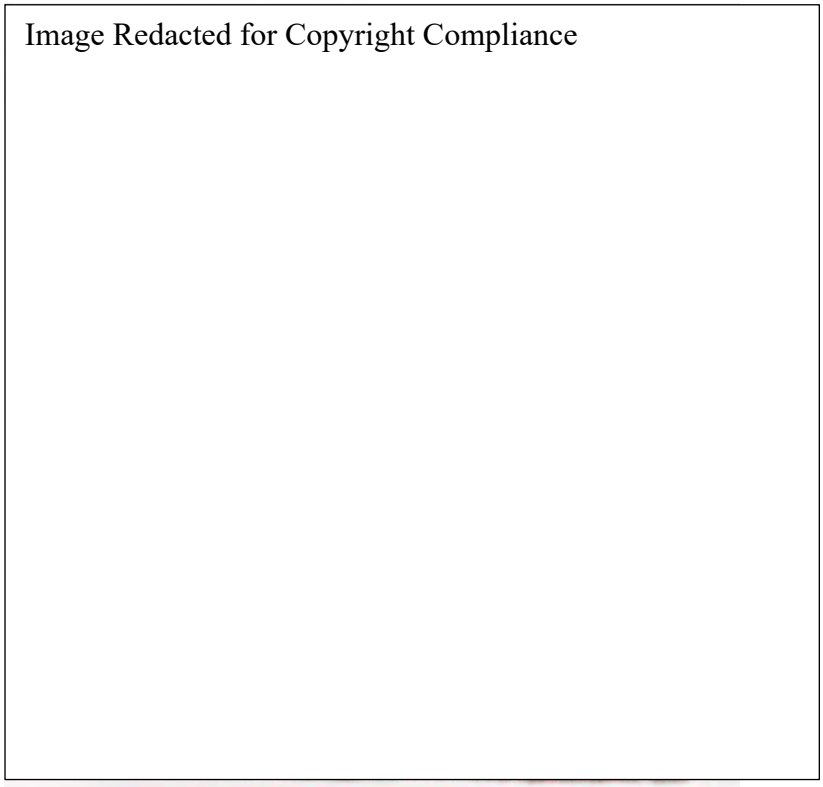

Figure 10: The Bloomfield Coverlet, c.1850, appliquéd and embroidered, 230 x 246cm. The QGMC, 2004-11-B.

In the second year after her loss Anne embarked on the second coverlet, an act of emotional communication and empathy for her sister and brother-in-law. The Bloomfield Coverlet wears its memorialising intent more overtly in its verses of comfort: 'Why should believing parents mourn? To see their childr'n die? When on the wings of angel borne, They to the Saviour fly?' 'Then let your tears no longer flow. Your sorrows all dispel; Soon shall you to Your infant go, and with your SAVIOUR dwell'. It was addressed 'To mourning parents'. Some years earlier, Edwin (1786–1861) and Mary (1798–1888) had been bereaved of two of their eleven children, Matilda Caroline before her first birthday in 1831, and nine-year-old Thomas in 1837. That this coverlet reflects the sisters' shared experience of motherly grief is clear; perhaps Anne felt better able to empathise with her sister after her own bitter experience and wished to mark her sister's now long passed loss with the legacy of a textile, as she had her own. The use of a formulaic scripture as a prescribed canvas to express familial grief alerts us to the coded nature of emotional expression when cloaked in

93 The Bloomfield Coverlet was the central part of The QGMC Challenge at The Festival of Quilts Exhibition in 2019 at the NEC, with new work inspired by the piece often reflecting contemporary women's bereavements, visited by more than 25,000 people across 4 days in August.

overt religious language, and reminds us that the scriptural and material literacy of later audiences often veils the immediacy of the original maker's true emotional communicational intent in the use of a borrowed religious language. Scripture quilts might act as a flexible form that could absorb and express a range of emotions, from religious doubt to scriptural reassurance, maternal grief to sisterly compassionate sympathy.

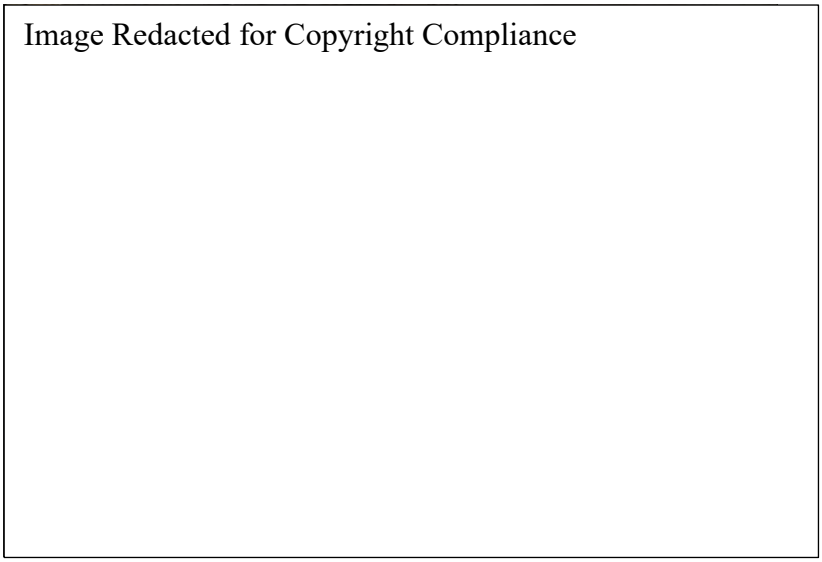

Figure 11: John Everett Millais, *A Flood*, 1870, oil on canvas, 99.3 x 144.9cm. Manchester Art Gallery, 1891.7.

Not all babies were mourned with regret, and not all family bonds were positive. The potent associations of domestic stitched textiles were co-opted to defend against accusations of criminality in the home, from murder and infanticide to neglect. John Everett Millais relied on patchwork's tenderising affect in his painting *A Flood* (1870) – the baby is understood by the viewer to be a cherished child rather than an abandoned one as it is carried away in its cradle, particularly because it is covered with a handmade textile (Figure 11).[94] In a maternal practice that echoes the foundling textiles archive, dead babies were often noted in coroners' and newspaper reports as being wrapped in distinctive patchwork.[95] In 1834, a coroner reported on a newborn deceased female child discovered in a heap of dung in the garden of a West Country cottage, found due to the 'piece of patchwork quilt' that she was wrapped in poking out of the heap.[96] Those defending themselves against the charge of infanticide after a neonatal death repeatedly turned to the claim that their dead baby was shrouded tenderly in a textile, understood as a proxy for motherly care that might refute the suggestion of malice.[97]

The inferred allegorical power of the care of the quilt was also drawn on by those accused of the murder of their children. On the night of 23 November 1874, William Parker covered his two children up in a patchwork quilt and tucked them into their bed dressed in nightshirts

94 Inspired by a dam collapse in Sheffield in March 1864.

95 John Styles, *Threads of Feeling: The London Foundling Hospital's Textile Tokens 1740–1770* (London: Coram, 2010).

96 *Sherborne Mercury*, 7 April 1834.

97 Joanne McEwan, 'At My Mother's House': Community and Household Spaces in Early 18th Century Infanticide Narratives', in Sally Broomhall, *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2015), 26-48.

as if asleep. But he carried out this caring ritual after, or just before, cutting their throats. Indeed, John Rouse, the police inspector, was not immediately clear that the children were dead until he had turned down the patchwork cover.[98] William was suffering a 'great depression of spirits after the loss of his wife and other troubles' and was recommended for mercy on account of the tender care, evidenced in the textile, he had then shown his victims. When the infamous serial killer Amelia Dyer, baby farmer and 'Murderess of Reading', was arrested in 1896, she was incongruously 'at work on a quilt' – the very symbol of maternal care.[99] That quilt, and a second that had been used in the cradle 'in which so many of her innocent victims had slept', were sold in an auction and bought for 7 *l.* 15 *s.* Their appeal as macabre souvenirs was in part rooted in the juxtaposition between the nature of her crimes and the moral purity that patchwork would usually convey.[100]

Conclusion

The practice of making handmade items offered an intimacy of communication commensurate with important affective bonds. Women understood textiles as a place to assert identity and reinforce status, returning to and reworking their legacy, since identity was mutable throughout a lifetime. Textiles functioned as domestic memorials, linked to children through the intimate haptic bond between parent and child, mediated through textiles, and thus had particular significance after the loss of a child. The practice of stitch was meditative, and the lessons of emotional control taught in childhood were used positively as emotional mediation by women in later life, allowing mindful psychological processing of loss. In dysfunctional families, textiles might stand as a proxy for lack of care, as they were widely understood to be part of the bedrock of good mothering. Whilst Victorian needlework was ritualised and formally prescribed, women used these boundaries to subvert and personalise their emotional messages. Forms such as the embroidered sampler or the scripture quilt offered a societally approved vehicle for more nuanced emotional communication to be conveyed. The emotional language of handmade domestic textiles was widely understood by all members of the family.[101] Whilst making was largely, but not universally, gendered, men and boys were also invested in the emotional bonds that stitched textiles could convey. Of course, the idealised construct of 'the family' looms theoretically larger than its practical footprint. Venturing outside of the nuclear family also offers a wealth of communicable bonds in textiles to those from aunts to nannies, from friends to servants.[102] Chapter Two will now explore the nature of the work of the needle in the phase of life characterised by economic and familial toil.

98 OBPO (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 09 May 2021), January 1874, trial of WILLIAM PARKER (40) (t18740112-123).

99 *Northern Echo*, 12 June 1896.

100 Lionel Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain, 1800–1939* (London: Routledge, 1986), 161.

101 See men who used the association of a patchwork quilt in intimate partner murder trials, for example *Evening News* (London), "Matlock Tragedy", 30 March 1891.

102 Deborah McGuire, "The Importance of Aunts: Textiles, Emotions and the Matrilineal Family". Inheriting the Family Network Seminar. Workshop 4. 'Familial Emotions Across Time". https://inheritingthefamily.org/resources/ [accessed 1/1/21].

Chapter Two
The Needle as Work: Agency, Industry, and Emotions

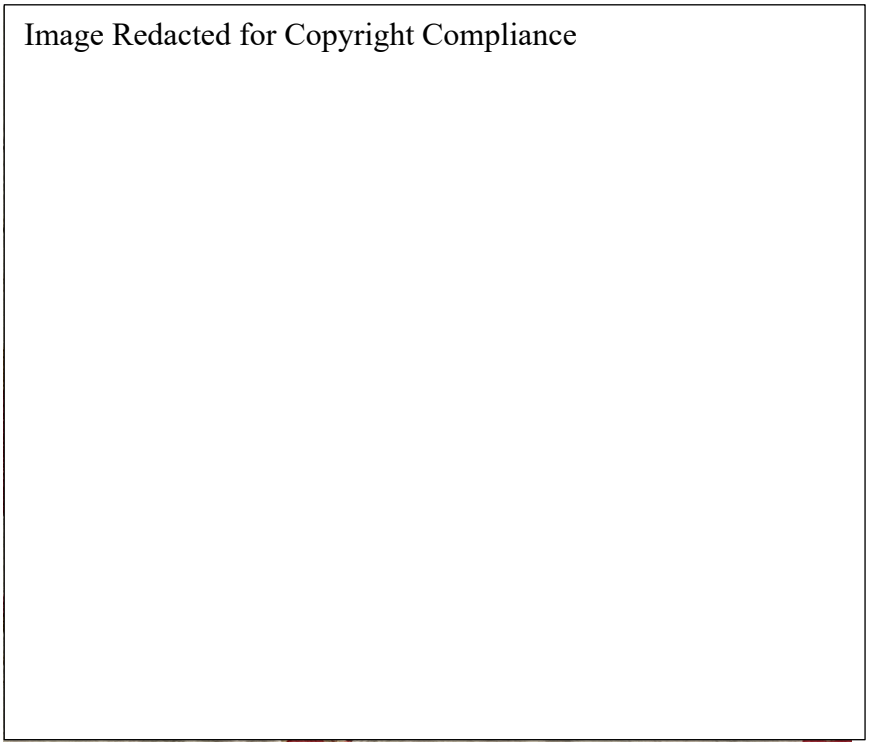

Figure 12: Isabella Peacock embroidered quilt centre, 1855, Swaledale, block patchwork and embroidery, 198 x 237cm. The Bowes Museum, 2017.2.

When women wrote of their sewing in their diaries and letters, it is significant that they used the simple term 'work' as a contraction of 'needlework'.[1] Needlework was not predominantly a leisure activity for display as it was so often depicted in art and literature, but a necessary domestic task: a form of both practical but also emotional labour, carried out within a wider family and household economy.[2] Most women across the social spectrum plied the needle as regular work. Fourteen-year-old Isabella Peacock, for example, worked intricate embroidery that she declared her 'own work' (Figure 12) whilst keeping house for her widowed mining and farming father in remote Swaledale in 1855. The middle-aged London shopkeeper Mary Blow, in 1815, similarly stitched the phrase 'my own work' on her cloth in recognition of her labour in the family business.[3] Needlework was a task carried out inside the home or outside in a workplace; and in either setting it could be part of unpaid household duties or waged labour. As this indicates, the boundaries of women's needlework were mutable and cannot be neatly classified. In stitching their firm assertions of their

1 Bridget Long, "'Regular Progressive Work Occupies My Mind Best': Needlework as a Source of Entertainment, Consolation and Reflection". *TEXTILE*, 14.2 (2016): 177.

2 Joanne Begiato (Bailey), *Parenting in England 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7.

3 *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1861*. (TNA): (PRO), 1861. Class: *RG 9*; Piece: *3673*; Folio: *41*; Page: *6*; GSU roll: *543170*. OBPO, 9 May 2021. June 1815 trial of Elizabeth Green (t18150621-2).

labour onto the objects they made, Isabella Peacock and Mary Blow made sure that their toil was recorded and 'could not be swallowed up by the patriarchy'.[4]

The work of the needle generated valuable income for some women, but this chapter will also recognise its economic value in unpaid economies of emotion, where women contributed intangible social and emotional benefits to the family through their unpaid work with the needle. In an era where the conceptualisation of waged employment became masculinised, women's stitched labour was increasingly defined as leisure rather than work. The records are largely silent about the emotional reward of the work of women's needlework, especially for pay; perhaps the answer lies in the meticulous creative extant work they left us.[5] Yet within the performed passivity of feminine leisure, work with the needle offered women rare agency to act independently. Whilst needlework was practised within the boundaries of economic and moral convention, women sometimes used it to access new opportunities outside of the home, and to advance social agendas of change between 1790 and 1890.[6] Since the practice of needlework was so common to a range of very disparate working circumstances, it facilitates an analysis of how the needle could be applied as a tool of self-determination in materially different settings. This chapter will therefore demonstrate how women from very different social groups wielded the needle to affect change in their own lives, and each other's.

The very ubiquity of the practice of needlework allows us to interrogate concepts often presented as binary oppositions, such as the 'separate' spheres of work and home, or notions of idleness and industry, labour and leisure. The details of most needlewomen's working circumstances evade neat classification. In Bishop Auckland in 1883, the newly widowed Jane Tarn, a 'careful, clean, painstaking and industrious woman', toiled at a large frame that would have dominated the two rented rooms that constituted her home.[7] On the frame she meticulously hand-quilted bedcoverings to sell. The loss of a male wage, and seven small children to feed, meant that Jane had little choice but to apply for parochial relief. Her story was only reported in the press due to a bureaucratic complexity in discerning which parish should be responsible for the relief of the children, who had been born in different districts. Jane's description conforms to all the contemporary stereotypical characteristics of the deserving worthy poor, and the Poor Law Guardian who visited her rooms declared himself 'forcibly struck with the cleanliness, order and regularity of the place', but she could not make ends meet through the practice of her skilled artisan work. Despite her emphasised moral worthiness and her industriousness, achieved alongside her maternal responsibilities caring for a family of seven, her earnings were insufficient to keep her family out of dependent poverty. Her plight was symptomatic of women's powerlessness to leverage their skills in an economic system that seldom provided a living wage for female work.

4 Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 254.

5 Monique Sheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History?). A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion", *History and Theory* 51.2 (2012), 209.

6 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (revised ed., London: Routledge, 2002), 111.

7 *Northern Echo*, 23 November 1883.

Skill with the needle offered Jane Tarn at least the promise of economic agency with which to support her family. It is recognised that the term 'agency' is imprecise.[8] Women throughout this period acted within the significant constraints of a patriarchal labour market that marginalised female work to support an idealised family structure where women's domestic labour was carried out unpaid.[9] Megan Clare Webber characterises agency as an ability to work with intention to effect practical change through 'making agency', and Jane clearly possessed skills that might influence her circumstances as a wage-less widow.[10] Agency must also possess a strategic goal; ownership of the tools of needlework, such as the substantial wooden quilting frame, were significant to Jane's ability to access her skilled agency – this was work that she could weave around the demands of mothering at home, and also a role she clearly took considerable pride in carrying out. Furthermore, Webber highlights that agency exists behind a submissive or compliant façade such as the idealised domestic needleworker.[11] This chapter explores the agency inherent in a skill that could offer economic benefits, as well as conform to idealised feminine moral virtues. Within the home, needlework could harness social expectations by enhancing domestic decorative interiors to boost social status, whilst in the public sphere women could use needlework as a tool of benevolence. Any analysis of women's agency, or lack of it, also asks questions of men's privilege. John Tosh describes male privilege as the freedom to operate in different spaces at will.[12] This study will demonstrate that the agency afforded by male privilege was expressed in some men's practice of leisured needlework, which offered them many of the emotional rewards it afforded women.

That women's unseen work in the home should be theorised as economic labour owes much to the work of historians such as Margaret Hunt, as well as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, in their exploration of middling families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[13] The sphere of what constituted work was further widened by Amanda Vickery, who redefined elite women's domestic 'leisure' needlework as work when situated within the economy of the country house; this chapter reflects that classification.[14] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's work importantly theorised the place of women's sewing in the exchange economies of the social sphere, recognising the relationship between elite women's needlework and their reliance on the poorly paid labour carried out in their homes by other women.[15] These complex networks of assertion and powerlessness ask how agency in needlework was differentially accessed and Webber's 'troubling' of the concept has shaped this thesis's classification, describing activities in which women have access to practices that

8 Megan Clare Webber, "Troubling Agency: Agency and Charity in Early Nineteenth Century London", *Historical Research,* 91.251 (2018): 117

9 Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes,* 29; Emma Griffin, *Breadwinner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 297.

10 Webber, "Troubling Agency", 117.

11 Webber, "Troubling Agency", 121.

12 John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); 77.

13 Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes,* 33; Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680–1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

14 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

15 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650–1750* (New York: Knopf, 1980); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun, Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2001); Marla R. Miller, *The Needles Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

might bring about changes in their circumstances.[16] Lastly, this chapter challenges established notions around gender in leisured sewing as a counterpoint to work. Karen Harvey, John Tosh, and Julie-Marie Strange have all called for a more nuanced understanding of men's leisured role within the home, and Harvey has specifically urged researchers to explore male crafting.[17] Male involvement in craft activities as an adjunct to their paid work, such as by soldiers and sailors, has been theorised by Joanne Begiato as a class-based response to the threat of working-class masculinity, as well as a socially cohesive force within homosocial communities such as onboard a ship.[18] This study suggests a wider application for these conceptualisations to other male working-class work cultures. Joseph McBrinn's recent assessment of the significance of male and queer sewing in the historiography of needlework brings new focus to the overlooked area of male leisure sewing, which this research will also address.[19]

In applying needlework as a unifying analytical factor to explore work, this chapter challenges established classifications, which are often considered separately. Feminist reassessment of women's economic histories, whilst crucial, tends to understate the value of practices such as needlework within the family unit. After all, the stability of homes, marriages, and status might be underpinned by a woman's work in its sustaining of waged workers.[20] Women as needleworkers continue to be painted as economically powerless, a view influenced by postmodern Marxist assessment of the power differentials inherent in labour models. But what agency did they find in their marginal practice of needlework?[21] Women's class distinctions could also be read in classifications of fancy and plain sewing, but there was more that united than divided in their use of the needle as a response to their varied economic circumstances that these binaries concealed.[22] Lastly, of course, gender has undeniably been the least challenged distinction when needlework has been explored. To suggest that men and women deserve an equal focus in the history of needlework is to 'insert an unwelcome phallocentric discourse' into the history of sewing, as expressed recently by Joseph McBrinn.[23] Yet men did sew, and this chapter begins to address some of the gaps in our knowledge about the emotional reward that sewing might also offer them. Needlework imposed moral and societal expectations upon those who undertook it. This chapter asks: What of its agency, how was this experienced, and what were the limits?[24] A range of sources continues to offer the most holistic reading of these issues. Extant objects still underpin the chapter – we draw upon three objects that can lead us to women's agency

16 Webber, "Troubling Agency".

17 Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Tosh, *A Man's Place;* Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class 1865–1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

18 Joanne Begiato, "Between Poise and Power: Embodied Manliness in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Culture." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 26 (2016): 125–147; Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2020)*;* Freya Gowrley and Katie Faulkner, "Making Masculinity: Craft, Gender and Material Production in the Long Nineteenth Century". *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 14.2 (Fall 2018): 1-11.

19 Joseph McBrinn, *Queering the Subversive Stitch: Men and the Culture of Needlework* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

20 Hunt, *The Middling Sort,* 75.

21 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes,* xxvii.

22 Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 150.

23 McBrinn, *Queering, 8.*

24 Webber, "Troubling Agency", 117.

– but the discussion further makes use of evidence from idealised paintings, from ten court records, from twelve newspaper reports, and from diaries, to allow a wide-ranging exploration of an array of homes at work in this period.

This chapter is divided into three sections. It begins by detailing the skilled labour involved in making a complex domestic textile such as a patchwork quilt. Then it explores how the artisan skills of needlework offered women of different social ranks access to a tool of agency that they might use to benefit their own lives, and those of others. The second section explores the moralised connection between needlework and notions of industriousness and idleness associated with labour, and their links to gender, character, and class. The final section, as a counterpoint to women's work with the needle, explores male needlework undertaken as leisure, showing how models of prevailing masculinity accommodated male stitchers in this period.

Sewing as Work

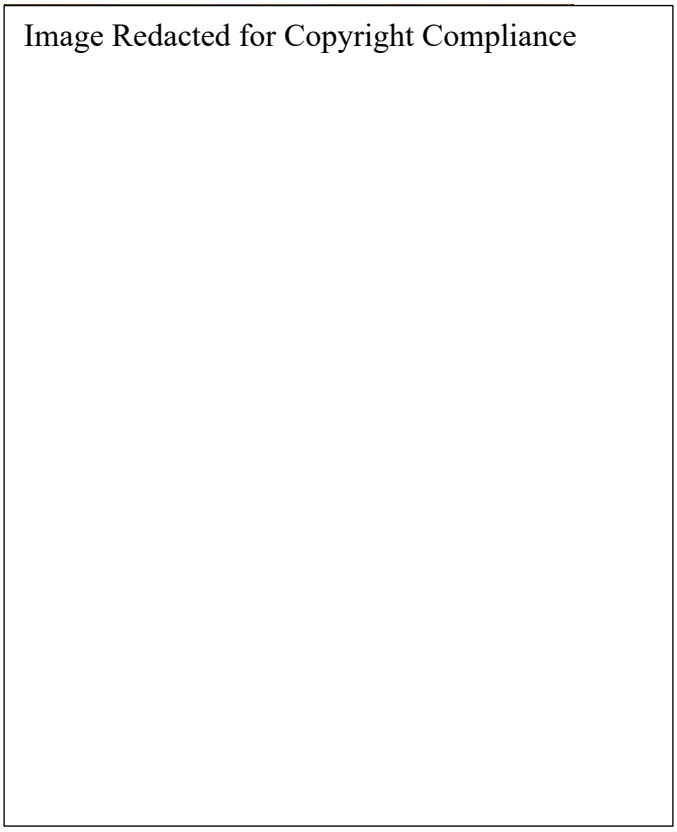

Figure 13: Laurence Calkin, *The Patchwork Quilt*, 1887, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 61cm. Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, NCM1936-21.

Needlework was commonly depicted in nineteenth-century art as a practice of domestic feminine leisure. Yet this idealised image disguised significant complexities in the labour of the creation of a domestic textile such as the patchwork quilt shown in Figure 13. Laurence Calkin's needleworker is shown engaged in a project that probably spanned several years of work.[25] This was no idle, leisured undertaking; the scale of the project is reflected in the

25 For complex needlework projects, see Joanne Begiato (Bailey), "Stitchers in Time and Space: Women in the Long Eighteenth Century", in Sue Pritchard, *Quilts 1700–2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010).

artist's use of elongated perspective and in the strain of the woman's neck as she bends to her task. Contemporary commentators were keenly aware of the investment of toil that domestic textiles represented. *The Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette* in 1848, for example, urged its readers to consider entrants' work in the needlecraft category at the local Horticultural Show, reminding readers that 'such works of patience should not be evanescent; tapestry, patchwork, bed-quilts and quilted petticoats, [were] handed down to posterity as monuments of fair woman's industry'.[26] Domestic items existed as enduring material 'monuments' of the 'industry' of the otherwise unseen domestic labours of women.

For today's audiences, removed from the realities of this multi-phased, multi-skilled process, it is important to emphasise the significant labour involved in making a domestic item like a patchwork quilt.[27] Calkin's painting disguises in its serenity various skilled tasks of work necessary in creating the pretty quilt it depicts. A pieced-over-papers patchwork, as shown in the painting, would include multiple processes of fabric collection, geometric template drafting, and cutting, all before any final stitched construction took place. Curiously, the final sewing was generally the only part of the process to be reflected in artwork. This labour was physical work, manipulating a large heavy bedcovering from floor or table to lap to frame, yet was only ever captured as a demure pose in a chair. The complexity and consistent application in the construction of a domestic quilt offered makers ample opportunity to invest their work with all the same skill, pride, meaning, and sense of emotional reward that any paid artisan labour, such as that enjoyed by many men, might offer.

Agency in Industrious Needlework

For some women sewing skills were a defence against the vagaries of economic providence, because an ability to wield the needle could be a valuable insurance policy. For the middle-class woman, needlework could respectably assuage a loss of income. The Lancashire governess Ellen Weeton (1777–1850), for instance, wrote of reversals of fortune in a letter to her estranged daughter, after her marriage breakdown precipitated a return to financial insecurity. She observed, 'I do not look upon it as a merit for any young person to make her own dresses, bonnets shoes or lace, if she be rich; I do consider it a merit that she should be able to make them; for no one so affluent but may suffer a reverse, and every female should know how to earn a living.'[28] At the other end of the class spectrum, the practical skill of patchwork could be both economically sustaining and morally protective. Recourse to modes of behaviour codified in patchwork neutralised any suggestion of impropriety for an industrious woman in the eyes of the middle-class justice she came before. In 1817, an elderly woman was called to account for the silver she had pawned. Reportedly, she 'daily searches the streets of Exeter to procure rags … sold to papermakers, and what would do

26 *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*, 2 September 1848.

27 For example, see Jacq Barber, "Fabric as Evidence. Unravelling the Meaning of a Late Eighteenth Century Coverlet (Sundial Coverlet)". *Quilt Studies* 3 (2001): 11–32 for further discussion of the complex work involved in many objects. Also see appendix 1.

28 Miss Weeton, *Journal of a Governess 1811–1825* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 396. Letter June 1825.

for patchwork she made into quilts and sold to the brokers and farmers'. The magistrate pronounced her 'to be a pattern of diligence, industry and sobriety', after she had explained how her commitment to making patchwork had allowed her to accrue forty-three pounds of silver.[29] In their navigation of the moral codes and the practical skills of needlework, these women expressed agency, since they used their skilled labour to effect change in their lives. Yet any study of agency, especially in a situation so bounded by structural patriarchy as needlework, must be alive to the constraints upon women. Recourse to life histories expressed through needlework items can help to illuminate both these women's agency and their subjugation.

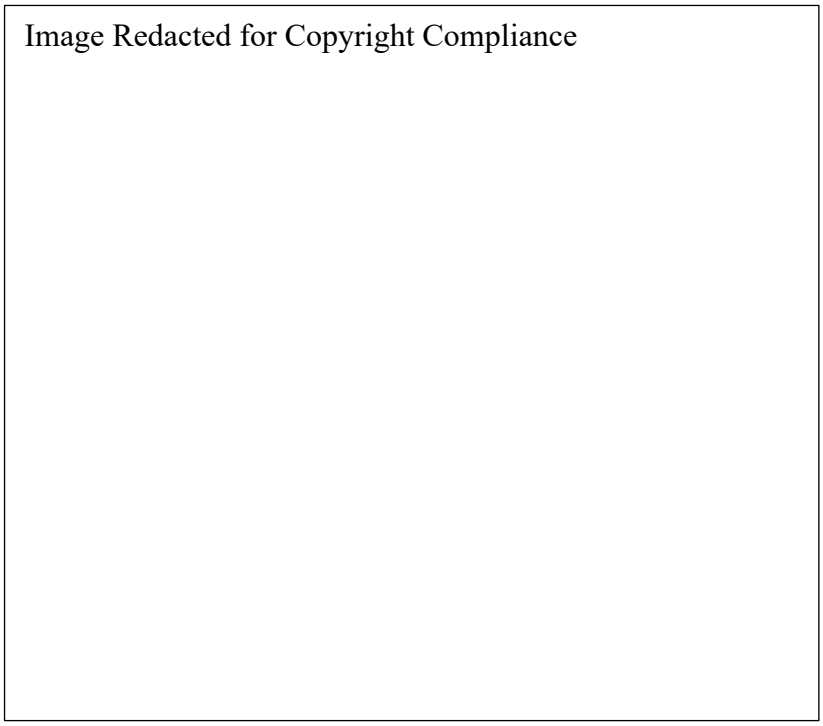

Figure 14: Agnes Bentham Frame Quilt, c.1870-1886, West Yorkshire, appliqué and patchwork coverlet, 234 x 229cm. The QGMC , 2014-8-A.

Control over economic and familial choices was frequently limited for single, unmarried, working-class girls in isolated rural areas, and thus exploration of their agency is often opaque. In 1880, the forty-year-old Dales farm labourer's daughter Agnes Bentham (1840–1886) made a pretty quilt as she worked as a seamstress and supported her elderly father (Figure 14).[30] Agnes's working-life choices were affected by her father's need for her labour; she never married or had children. An ability to make use of the needle offered girls like Agnes a skill that could be utilised throughout their lives, and as such it offered the promise of agency. Even though neither Agnes's agency nor her toil leaves a mark on the historical record, we might trace this work in the materiality of the quilt she sewed, which survives extant. The growing Bentham family moved frequently within a local area securing seasonal labouring work. A typically large span of the seven children's ages meant that Agnes would have contributed to the needlework demands of the family, having been taught by her

29 *Hull Packet*, 18 March 1817.

30 Death Certificate, 13 September 1886. Registrars District: The Burnley Union, Subdistrict: Kendal in the County of Lancaster. *CREW, 1881*. (TNA): (PRO), 1881. Class: *RG11*; Piece: *4297*; Folio: *141*; Page: *8*; GSU roll: *1342026.*

mother to sew.[31] There were probably quilts, like the one Agnes later made, present in her childhood. In choosing a frame layout for her quilt, for instance, she references a vernacular style from generations before her.[32] After the early death of her mother and all but one of her siblings when Agnes was a teenager, the household broke up and she and her father took in lodgers, labourers who worked on the railway, for whom Agnes kept house.[33] In a pattern characteristic of girls of her status, Agnes had 'worked' since childhood in the domestic environment. However, within a few years her father remarried and moved to his new wife's home, and Agnes migrated to Liverpool, where her skill with the needle surely contributed to her securing work as a domestic servant to an elderly blind widow.[34] Agnes's working life was entirely typical of her class and her time. It merged fluidly across distinctions of spaces of home and work, and between notions of work and leisure, where needlework was both a paid and an unpaid task. By her forties, when she made this quilt, Agnes had returned to the close-knit rural Dales community of her birth and is listed in the 1881 census as the head of household, working as a seamstress and supporting her father; her early death occurred five years later. Her needlework skills thus eventually offered her the agency to support her family economically.

Production of complex textile pieces offered a thread of generational and community continuity in lives often characterised by familial and geographical dislocation. By the addition of her cross-stitched name, Agnes claimed this quilt as a reflection of her hard-won professional skills as well as an item of personal expression. Her choice of a vernacular regional style reinforced her wider identity and probably evoked generations of needleworkers before her. The quilt stood as a testimony to her economic independence, an act of agency in creating a material legacy as a single woman as she reached middle age.[35] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich comments on the enhanced poignancy of an object when the maker owned few others.[36] We cannot know what this complex, creative quilt meant to Agnes. However, it survived, perhaps through the line of her youngest and only surviving brother, who was raised, after the family fracture, by his paternal grandparents and inherited their farm.[37] Agnes used her skills within the scope of her agency against the ravages of economic uncertainty and personal obscurity, to create an object that stands now as a legacy to her work, but also to the many ordinary anonymous seamstresses that history so often failed to record.

The agency that young single women might earn through their access to paid employment was a source of increasing moral anxiety in the city, coloured by the gendered perceptions of a lack of virtue that was frequently associated with poverty. In the early decades of the nineteenth century work with the needle had maintained a veneer of respectability, until

31 *CREW, 1851*. (TNA): (PRO), *HO107*; Piece: *2277*; Folio: *11*; Page: *16*; GSU roll: *87462*

32 Osler, *North Country Quilts*, 7.

33 *CREW, 1861*. (TNA): (PRO), Class: *RG 9*; Piece: *3177*; Folio: *158*; Page: *12*; GSU roll: *543091.* Holmes, *In Bed,* 84.

34 *CREW, 1871*. (TNA): (PRO), census 1871; Piece: *3803*; Folio: *11*62 Page: *45*.

35 *CREW, 1881*. (TNA): (PRO), Class: *RG11*; Piece: *4297*; Folio: *141*; Page: *8*; GSU roll: *1342026*

36 Also see 1881 quilt. Sarah Henshaw Ward, "Great Objects Make Great Minds"; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.

37 The QGMC. Agnes's brother signed her death certificate. Death Certificate, 13 September 1886. The Burnley Union: Kendal in the County of Lancaster.

official reports emerged of the poverty needleworkers endured.[38] A narrative of the degradation of the inherent virtue of the seamstress by market forces began to appear in literature and art.[39] The reality was that many female sempstresses were forced to augment their low pay with supplementary work.[40] In contrast to the depictions of saintly but worn-down seamstresses, women needed to employ more active measures to survive. The needleworker Mary Kitching was indicted for assaulting teenage James Jennings, 'putting him in corporeal fear and danger of his life and taking from his person 9s'. Jennings recounted:

> She hustled me about very much and wanted me to go to bed. I would not. She asked me if I had any money. I said I had none for her. She pushed me up into a corner of the room and searched all my pockets. When she came to my righthand pocket, she took out 9 s. I told her she should not have it. She swore she would; and when I asked her for it, she said I might go and be d – d, for she had none of my money there, she said she got her living by needlework.[41]

Industriousness alone was clearly insufficient to sustain the needleworker and preserve the innocence that needlework's connection to the morality of home had once endowed.

The discordant moral position of representations of the needleworker as sex worker had long been a source of societal anxiety. The London Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes had been retraining inmates in spinning and sewing since 1758.[42] Needlework was a proxy for femininity, and femininity for morality – a transgression of either was a betrayal of both. Ann Birch was a sixteen-year-old sex worker, charged in Cheltenham for the theft of a patchwork quilt, belonging to Mrs Eliza Gregory who had hung it on her line to dry. The quilt was identified by Eliza on the grounds that she recognised portions of the patchwork 'by it having bits of her gown in it'.[43] Women's daily domestic propinquity to textile objects meant that they were disproportionately more likely to steal clothes and household linens.[44] The patchwork quilt existed in this marginal arena as simultaneously a symbol of the defence of industrious femininity for working-class women such as Eliza and her respectable clean line of washing, and a reflection of Ann's immorality as a temptingly accessible, pawnable, financial resource.

The moral associations of needlework were contextualised by place, race, gender, and class. Men might also benefit from industrious work alongside the needle. James Dunch, whose 'clothes were barely sufficient to cover him' and whose pack was wrapped in an old bed quilt, was born the son of a Wiltshire gentleman, but buried at the expense of the parish of Cathcart, Glasgow in 1826. By then he was an itinerant peddler of needlework items; following a reckless bankruptcy and a spell in the army besmirched by a desertion, 'he took

38 For example, The Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission in 1840.

39 For example, see Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips* (1844), and Charles Dickens's character Little Emily in *David Copperfield* (1850) for the corruption of the seamstress.

40 Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 173.

41 OBPO (09 May 2021), October 1761, trial of Mary Kitching Elizabeth Alexander (t17611021-38).

42 Webber, "Troubling Agency", 121.

43 *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Tuesday 2 November 1858.

44 Garthine Walker, "Crime and the Early Modern Household", in Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster eds, *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77.

to a wandering life'.[45] His death notice nonetheless afforded him the privilege of highlighting his industry rather than his previous indolence. Does this reflect his needlework occupation, or more the privileges of his gender and class, in its description of his life as 'overcome by the pressure of misfortune'? The privilege of gender did not extend to all working men. The boarding-house keeper Esau Armstrong unsuccessfully prosecuted his cleaner, Hannah Barton, in Cardiff in 1862 for stealing and pawning a quilt from his business, despite clear testimony from the pawnbroker that implicated her. Perhaps the description of Armstrong as 'a man of colour' is a clue to the failure to convict. Evidently the moral halo that surrounded the patchwork quilt was not strong enough to overcome other intersectional prejudices.[46]

The tools of the work of embroidery or quilt making were important conduits of agency and were gifted to daughters, such as the Thornton sisters in West Yorkshire who received 'twilting frames' in their father's will, bulwarks against future financial insecurity.[47] Craft tools appeared equally in both men's and women's wills.[48] In London, forty-one-year-old Elizabeth Wood and her sister were single women who lived together in rented accommodation, labouring as embroiderers at a large frame set up in the room that was both workplace and home. When the paid work was scarce, they were forced to pawn their landlord's patchwork quilt, probably hoping that they could claim it back quickly and its loss would not be noticed. Instead, Elizabeth was charged with theft in 1838. Her morality was compromised by her poverty and her dishonesty shamed her status as a needleworker and denigrated the symbolically homely patchwork quilt she stole.[49] Without her tools Elizabeth was even more vulnerable; she described how her landlord 'will not let my sister have the frames which I work in, nor anything to enable me to get my living'.[50] Industrious skilled work offered women the promise of a rare agency to secure their own and their daughters' futures, but even with the ownership of tools like Wood and Tarn's frame, the precariousness of women's wages had the potential to lead them to undertake acts deemed immoral, which no amount of industry on their part could defend against. As the Lancashire governess Ellen Weeton remarked, fortunes could change quickly in this fluid economic society, and single or widowed women were amongst the most economically, and thus morally, vulnerable.

Agency and Needlework Benevolence

Just as the thread of needlework connected women of very different socioeconomic situations, the conceptualisation of needlework as leisure for upper-middle-class Victorian women also left them vulnerable to the accusation of the morally corroding effects of idleness. Like the biblical housewife Bathsheba, they must 'eateth not the bread of idleness', and thus charitable work with the needle offered the chance of unpaid, but socially approved, employment both within and outside of the home.[51] In a society where women's

45 *Caledonian Mercury,* 17 August 1826.

46 *Cardiff Times*, 21 March 1862.

47 Janet Rae et al., *Quilt Treasures* (London: McDonald Books, 1995), 16.

48 Amy Louise Erikson, *Women & Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), 216.

49 Susie Steinbach, *Women in England: 1760–1914. A Social History* (London: Orion Books, 2004), 31.

50 OBPO, 9 May 2021. Feb 1838 trial of Elizabeth Wood (t18380226-828).

51 Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 59.

status was tightly linked to their mothering, charitable needlework provided a public-facing platform for the performance of their care skills.[52] Women united needlework and benevolence in 'an economy of kindness', a set of emotional and sometimes subversive exchanges outside of the economics of paid work.[53] The Trinity Chapel 'Dorcas Society' in St Leonards stitched a fashionable 'Scripture Quilt' in 1871 for their local hospital. The labour associated with benevolence, including needlework, constituted work for many women, a point that one would hope hardly needs restating.[54] Women's commitment to this labour can be materially measured in the huge numbers of sewn items that were created with charitable intent in this period. The Dorcas Society's quilt depicted The Lord's Prayer in embroidered script, and other biblical texts were arranged 'that part can be read, not only by the occupant of the bed on which the counterpane is laid but others can be seen by patients in adjoining beds, nurses etc'.[55] This quilt was a publicly garlanded material manifestation of the makers' domestic caring and nursing skills, performing emotional work for the user and those who viewed it on the hospital bed, where it evoked maternal care. Whilst ostensibly rooted in the conservative practices of the home, women deployed wide-ranging commercial skills in their projects, demonstrating a public fluency in project management, publicity, procurement, advertising, event management, public relations, and charity fundraising. By modern standards, middle-class women's benevolence was laced with condescension and no little naivety, but it was widely practised. Needlework in particular offered a route to the moral transformation of the poor, because the practice of careful, diligent sewing taught lessons about perseverance and thrift, and the stitched object represented middle-class domestic aspirations. Sharing with the poor the needlework skills that middle-class women had always been taught to prize offered at least some agency in earning a living to working-class women, which was after all better than none. The role of stitching remained powerfully moral. The long-held associations between needlework, moral purity, and character improvement that had dogged women and girls for centuries were now redeployed by them in intersectional discourses with the poor or needy.

Using needlework as a tool of benevolence exploited a female arena that could sometimes deliver progressive social agendas to benefit other women. We can explore this exchange of agency in the emotional gift-exchange relationships between elite women benefactors and their female working-class recipients.[56] In the Buckinghamshire village of Shalstone, the women of the landowning Purefoy/FitzGerald family had offered maternal benevolence locally from their county seat, Shalstone Manor, since 1415.[57] In the summer of 1880, the widowed Elizabeth FitzGerald (1809–1899) offered the lawns of the big house for the local fête, an annual tradition that stretched back into the previous century.[58] The diligence of Shalstone tenants was celebrated in a needlework display in the white marquee on the

52 Webber, "Troubling Agency", 119.

53 Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848–1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2006), 47.

54 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes,* xxxvii; Steinbach, *Women*, 57.

55 *Bury and Norwich Post*, 17 January 1871; the Dorcas Society was named for the biblical character renowned for charitable needlework.

56 Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848–1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2006), 47.

57 L.G Mitchell (ed.), The Purefoy Letters 1735–53 (New York: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973), 1.

58 Edward C. McAleer, *Learned Lady: Letters from Robert Browning to Mrs Thomas FitzGerald* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 8.

bowling green.[59] The focus of the display was a large patchwork counterpane (Figure 15), the work of the children of Shalstone School, of which Elizabeth was founder and patron. In performing benevolence in her parish, Elizabeth conformed to a patriarchal model rooted in the manorial systems of previous centuries and in traditional gender and class expectations of supporting the estate's working tenants through feminine skills such as needlework.[60] In the making of the coverlet, her tenants and employees demonstrated a centuries-old ritual of manorial fealty, expressed in deeply gendered feminine stitch. Yet in this exchange it is also possible to see a more nuanced narrative, which ultimately advanced women's economic life chances.

Figure 15: The Shalstone School Quilt, 1880, Buckinghamshire, patchwork and embroidered coverlet, 284 x 294cm. Author's own collection.

Elizabeth lived a life of privilege; birth and marriage secured her position, but she was hardly idle. Voraciously academic, she collected a vast library, corresponded with the intellectuals of the time such as the poet Robert Browning, and learnt Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in her last two decades.[61] She worked tirelessly in support of the poor, including establishing and endowing a village school that welcomed the daughters of her tenants.[62] Her obituary in 1899, published in both *The Times* and the *Workmen's Messenger,* described her as a 'veritable Dorcas', the needleworking female endower of biblical benevolence.[63] Clearly,

59 *Buckinghamshire Advertiser and Free Press*, 21 August 1880.

60 Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, & Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870–1912* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 99.

61 McAleer, *Learned Lady,* 10.

62 Elizabeth also endowed a 'reading and recreation room' and in her parklands created a public pleasure ground called the 'People's Park'; McAleer, *Learned Lady*, 12. Ingrid Tague "'Aristocratic Women and Ideas of Family in the Early Eighteenth Century", in *The Family in Early Modern England*, Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

63 *Workmen's Messenger,* September 1899, 136.

agency was easier to access when facilitated by class and money, but Elizabeth used her position to share this agency with others, in a practice that Webber describes as 'dynamic and relational'.[64] During the American Civil War, the interruption of raw cotton supplies to northern English mills in 1862 caused mass unemployment and hunger. Elizabeth visited Lancashire mills and then along with 'sixteen little girls, and forty villagers worked for nineteen days in the Shalstone School making clothes for workers': petticoats, baby clothing, shirts for men, pillows and bedcoverings.[65] The bill for materials was 20*l.* 14*s.* 51/2*d.* and Elizabeth wrote on it: 'When I think that all this would be but the price of one velvet dress!' It would seem that the injustices of birth, whilst not shared, were not invisible to her, and she also gifted the millworkers a large sum of money. In return, mill girls knitted a large counterpane as a gift. This emotional exchange was expressed in fabric – a medium that could convey empathy and gratitude across a geographical, class, and economic divide.[66]

Figure 16: The Shalstone School Quilt, 1880, details of embroidery. Author's own collection.

Feminine needlework was a Trojan horse that Elizabeth and others used to advance progressive ideas about social justice and women's education. Contemporary feminists such as Josephine Butler in *The Education and Employment of Women* (1868), for example, claimed that using domestic skills to promote social justice causes in the public realm showed an excess of femininity rather than a reduction.[67] The scripts the schoolgirls neatly cross-stitched conveyed society's economic and social control through the promotion of

64 Webber, "Troubling Agency", 124.

65 McAleer, *Learned Lady,* 11; Roddy et al., *The Charity Market,* 107.

66 Elizabeth is also recorded as having travelled to Berlin with sewn items to distribute amongst the sick and wounded of the Franco-Prussian War; McAleer, *Learned Lady,* 12.

67 Zakreski, *Representing,* 13.

industriousness amongst its working poor (Figure 16).[68] Yet women might subvert the emphasis of society's codes to effect change on their own behalf. Access to education elevated the girls who made this coverlet: some became nurses, elementary school teachers, and a county council clerk, as well as, perhaps inevitably, dressmakers.[69] Charity began at home, and the trailblazing career of Elizabeth's granddaughter Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald (1872–1973) also benefited. 'Encouraged by her grandmother', Mabel became one of the first female students to unofficially study medicine at the still all-male Oxford University, going on to become a clinical pathologist and physiologist of renown.[70] Whilst class still divided, needlework connected. Feminine needlework created spaces for all-women endeavours, which could allow social justice to bloom.[71] Elite agency could be shared through the medium of cooperative needlework practice, and these exchanges can be mapped in textiles like this embroidered coverlet, which encouraged and valorised individual industry and self-determination, whilst still advocating for the moderation of community charity.

Needlework and Male Leisure

Men's domestic leisure, particularly working men's, remains under-explored, opaque, and subject to gendered assumptions.[72] Men who increasingly worked outside of the home might more easily achieve a separation between their work and leisure time than could women. Engaging in absorbing domestic sewing projects could be a counterpoint to the toil of paid work. Jane Austen, for instance, recorded that her brother made tatting for a curtain with affection, rather than with any sense that his behaviour was particularly unusual.[73] Joseph McBrinn challenges historians' preconceptions, asking why it is not conceivable that men also sewed for pleasure, though he acknowledges that the evidence has been difficult to locate.[74] Male biographers tended not to record domestic sewing. Conduct books ignored it in favour of strict gendered codes, and extant items are likely to be automatically attributed to female makers unless specifically named. Yet newspaper reports of needlework exhibition and competition refute this wider silence, suggesting that a significant minority of men were making textiles at home in their leisure time. Moreover, they were publicly displaying their stitched work and enjoying the emotional rewards of competition and public approval. In fact, the reporter of the *South London Industrial Exhibition: VI* reported such a wealth of male entrants (four of the thirteen total entries) into the patchwork category in 1865 that he was moved to ponder, 'The workers in silver have at times been alarmed by the employment of women in the making of watches; but

68 A second piece of Berlin embroidery was made by the children, inscribed 'We have worked with a will; May it gladden all eyes: And those most deserving: Be blessed with a prize'. *Buckinghamshire Advertiser and Free Press*, 21 August 1880.

69 Most of the girls' mothers worked as lace makers; their fathers' occupations included gardener, labourer, shepherd, and groom.

70 Elizabeth's patronage influenced the village doctor as an early teacher. On Mabel's 100th birthday in 1972, she was finally awarded an honorary MA from Oxford and made a member of the Physiological Society; www.blogs.bodlein.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/2016/03/03/mabelfitzgerald_1/ (accessed 5/5/2021).

71 The American feminist Susan B Anthony gave her first suffrage speech at a church quilting gathering; Ruth E Finley, *Old Patchwork Quilts and The Women Who Made Them* (New York: 1929), 37.

72 Strange, *Fatherhood,* 112

73 Paula Byrne, *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 5. 4 September 1796.

74 McBrinn, *Queering,* 4.

what will the sempstresses pronounce of men who make quilts and counterpanes in the hours succeeding those of their necessary labour?'[75]

Sewing was also a skill that some men practised as part of their paid occupation. The transference of this needlework into their leisure time upheld notions of industrious labour. Mr Munroe of Paisley, a tailor, made counterpanes that were described as 'the production of his leisure evening hours, a proof of extraordinary skill, taste and industry'.[76] The links with a working skill allowed these activities to be accepted within models of masculinity, and applauded in print narratives.[77] Leisured sewing bestowed virtues of diligence and industriousness on the tailor without threatening his masculinity in a role where a tailor's speed and application in a skill (perhaps further honed in the commitment to leisure sewing) were of commercial benefit to other men. Moreover, overtly masculine roles such as that of sailor or soldier could counterbalance the gendered threat of feminised needlework.[78] Sewing neutralised the latent menace of uncontrolled masculinity, such as that of the idle ordinary-ranked soldier or sailor. Certainly, *The Camp Industrial Exhibition* at Aldershot in 1864 listed more than 100 industrious winning entrants amongst the ranks, from Private Pope's embroidered watch pocket to Colour Sergeant Deals's patchwork rug.[79]

Yet there was a wider, overlooked group of working-class men, who were anonymously engaged in leisure sewing in the evening that was unconnected to their paid work. It is likely that they broke the surface of historically recorded behaviours only when they won a prize in a local show. The public nature of the show suggests that this was not conceived as a covert feminised leisure activity, and competitiveness was clearly understood to be part of manly motivation and at the heart of a more muscular Victorian masculinity.[80] Shows occurred across a range of parochial homosocial organisations such as Skinningrove Miners Institute Horticultural and Industrial Society Annual Exhibition in 1880, where Mr C. Dawson won the 'Quilt, Quilted' section.[81] By openly competing for needlework prizes, working-class men like Simon Evans, who came second in the 'Best Specimen of Quilted Patchwork' in Cwmavon Cottage Gardening Society First Annual Exhibition in 1881, demonstrated their male privilege to operate in different spheres.[82] It is significant that these entries fell under the guise of 'Industrial Categories', offering entrants cash prizes as well as an opportunity for public approval of their needlework. The repeated phrase of male 'ingenuity' in relation to patchwork reflected a new sense that complex making with the needle could be aligned with other feats of masculine modern industry, engineering, and mathematics.[83] Yet a language of 'elegance' and evidence of materials such as velvets and silks belie the existing narratives of more 'masculine' practical materials such as the woollen greatcoats of soldier-sewers; indeed, even the rank-and-file soldiers of Aldershot seemed to favour silk and

75 *South London Chronicle*, 18 March 1865.

76 *Leeds Times*, 13 December 1845.

77 For example, sewing soldiers; see Annette Gero, *War and Pieced: The Annette Gero Collection of Quilts from Military Fabrics* (Lincoln: IQSC, 2018).

78 Begiato, *Manliness*.

79 *Aldershot Military Gazette,* 9 July 1864.

80 Begiato, "Between Poise and Power".

81 *Northern Weekly Gazette*, Durham, 14 August 1880.

82 *Central Glamorgan Gazette*, 20 August 1886.

83 Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 211.

velvet.[84] Prize money may have motivated entry; men like Mr E. A. Penley from Margate in 1851, W. Morris, a labourer, and H. Johnson, a packer from South London, all won cash prizes for needlework, which included large, intricate, and long-worked items such as patchwork counterpanes in velvet, silk, or cottons.[85] However, these were hard-won prizes when the investment of such lengthy hours for labouring men was calculated. Whilst male prize-winners were still significantly less frequent than female, their regular appearance across the country raises questions of our conception of these little-understood makers.

These men who disrupted our modern notions of gendered leisure appeared largely in exhibitions associated with male working-class culture, such as labour clubs and horticultural societies. Leisure pursuits like gardening were promoted as alternatives to the pub, with all the deleterious effects of alcohol dependence on marriage, the family, and wider society. Perhaps sewing could be added to this list? A turn to temperance meant that needlework was the ideal sober and industrious evening entertainment; certainly Henry Riddle was a prize-winner for his patchwork quilt at the Church of England Temperance Society exhibition in 1890.[86] The importance of the domestic component of male identity remains under-emphasised: the cosy fireside could be as much a feature of men's lives as the pub and the material culture of needlework was often to be found sharing male spaces.[87] Were these men making within the context of a wider family group including women sewers at home, hinting at a less gendered construction of emotional communities of needlework practice within generational families?[88] Biographers recalling fathers used recollection of their leisure to gain insight into the 'real' man in extra-economic terms, although none mentioned sewing.[89] In rural areas such as South Wales and the north of England, the making of quilted bedcovers had remained a significant vernacular folk practice embedded in family and social community interactions.[90] Men in these regions probably reflected a localised dynamic where cultural identity trumped gendered identity. Yet winners were geographically diverse and, whilst broadly working class, were just as likely to be labourers, invalids, coachmakers, or schoolteachers, and to live in parts of the country where quilt making was less regionally rooted.[91] The existence of these male leisure sewers disrupts our understanding of gendered Victorian needlework and their lives invite further analytical scrutiny.

Conclusion

This chapter has placed needlework back into dialogue with work, recognising that all domestic work, including needlework, has been economically under-valued. The demanding nature of complex needlework has been neglected due to gendered binary assumptions around what constitutes leisure. Women's domestic work was vital because it had both emotional and practical value. It reinforced women's identity and projected their morality.

84 *Aldershot Military Gazette*, 9 July 1864.

85 *West Kent Guardian*, 7 June 1851; *South London Chronicle*, 18 March 1865.

86 *Surrey Mirror*, 29 March 1890.

87 Strange, *Fatherhood*, 211; Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 44.

88 Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 44.

89 Strange, *Fatherhood*, 110; John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment 1790–1990* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

90 Osler, *North Country Quilts*, 6; Stafford M. Linsey, *The Life and Times of Thomas Dixon 1805–1871* (Hexham: Wagtail Press, 2006).

91 *Berkshire Chronicle*, 14 October 1865.

Whilst women's work was gendered, a textile offers us an unusual insight into women's toil, which is often lacking because the other work they undertook has left no trace. Across society, although needlework was differently framed, makers' emotional experiences united more than divided. Analysing the emotional relationships inherent in charitable needlework allows us to map the exchanges of agency in benevolent work between social classes, where privilege might be shared through needlework practice in order to advance progressive social justice agendas amongst women. Male domesticity expressed in needlework was recast as ingenuity and technical mastery, and thus was less likely to disrupt understood gender norms. Both male and female needleworkers found the needle a source of emotional solace, pride, and self-determination. As working lives waned, we follow these makers into the final arc of the life-cycle and map how the needlework influences of young and middle life continued to make themselves felt through the textiles made, and used, in old age.

Chapter Three

Making a Legacy: Memory, Generations, and the Grave

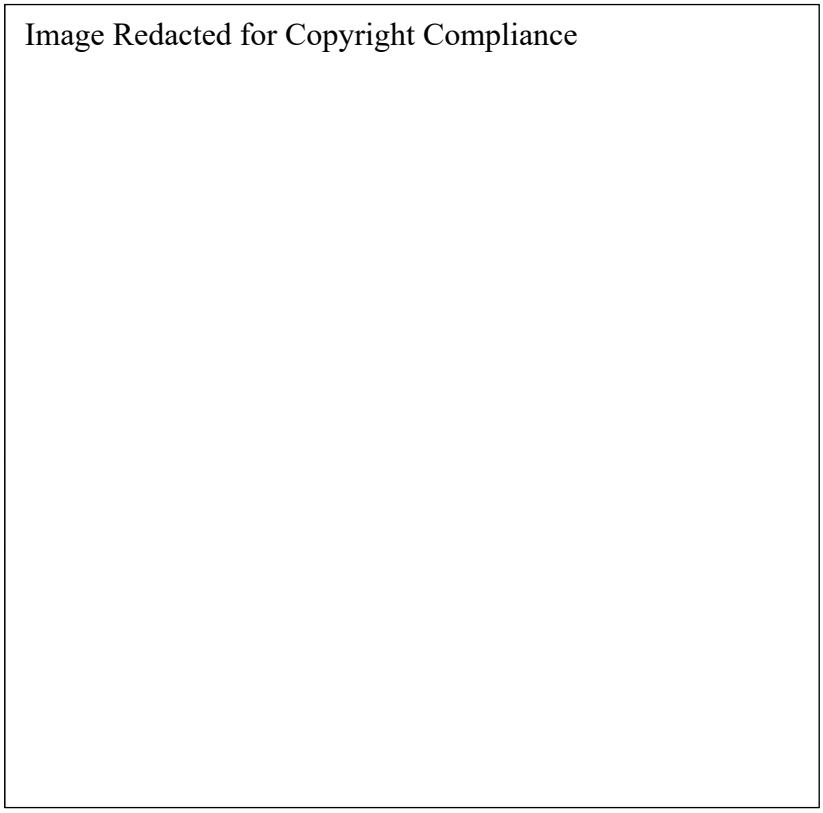

Figure 17: Frederick Millard, *The Thread of Life Runs Smooth as Yet*, 1885, oil on canvas, 31.5 x 24.5cm. Penlee House Gallery and Museum, PEZPH 2000.89.

Victorian artists repeatedly returned to the image of an elderly woman, pensively sewing whilst lost in nostalgic reverie, as illustrated in the 1885 painting by Frederick Millard (1857–1937) (Figure 17).[1] In doing so they reflected the cultural connections between women, textiles, and memory keeping; links that became yet more acute in later life. This chapter explores the themes of memory, legacy making, and demise. The period from 1790 was one, as Peter Fritzsche explains, where 'the past was an object of both mourning and desire' and items of domestic needlework created accessible routes of memory back to a rapidly receding past.[2] The figurative connection between the needleworker's material thread and the essential life thread was widely understood, established in western artistic tradition in the legend of Clotho, who, as one of the three Fates of Greek mythology, was responsible

1 For example, also see *A Patchwork Quilt*, 1890, by George Henry Wimpenny (1857–1939), Gallery Oldham, 4.08/5, or *An Old Cornish Woman* by Walter Langley (1852–1922), Birmingham Museums Trust, 1986P113, or *Interior of a Highland Cottage* by James Trout Walton (1818–1867), York Art Gallery, YORAG:60.

2 Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

for weaving the threads of mortal lives.[3] The title of Millard's painting borrows a line from the Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) poem *The Thread of Life*, which itself concerned reminiscence, secure in the knowledge that contemporary audiences would clearly understand the allegory.[4] Although the painting depicts the needle as a metaphor for reflecting on a life past, those who sewed textiles in their later years did so for several reasons.[5] When a needleworker, at the end of their life, created new stitched work, inscribed old work, gifted items, or left instructions as to the dispersal of their work amongst family and friends, they acted to ensure that they might not be forgotten.[6]

Domestic textiles, which had travelled through life alongside their makers, were inevitably repositories of personal memory. Many elderly makers in the period studied came of age in an era where their emerging identity was shaped through their stitched self-production. Women whose girlhoods were steeped in stitch used needlework nostalgically to revisit, both metaphorically and literally, their pasts.[7] Contemporary needlework manuals reflected this: in 1844 one stated that 'no one can look upon THE NEEDLE, without emotion; it is the constant companion throughout the pilgrimage of life'.[8] Needlework offered older women a particularly flexible and expressive form of agency to revisit, revise, and reflect in ways that can be seen in other forms of memorialising at the end of life such as written texts, all of which enabled memories of the past to be redrafted or embellished.[9]

Makers also invested textiles with powers of legacy extending beyond their death. Evangelical Christians' use of stitch as a tool of moral instruction gave needlework a special relevance when older makers prepared for the final judgement.[10] Later, material signifiers of legacy became more acute as the religious security of an afterlife faltered and the Victorian bereaved relied more on material memories of the deceased's status in life rather than in heaven.[11] Many older needleworkers believed that their textile items might hold and

3 Kassia St Clair, *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed History* (London: John Murray, 2018), 1; Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (New York: Norton, 1995), 235, 242.

4 Christina Rossetti, *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1880). https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/christina-rossetti (accessed 14/6/2021).

5 Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 147.

6 Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux, *The Pocket: A Hidden History of Women's Lives 1660–1900* (New Haven: Yale, 2019), 202. For women's gifting and bequeathing patterns, see Maxine Berg, "Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England". *Journal of Social History* 30.2 (1996): 415–434; and Maxine Berg, "Women's Property and the Industrial Revolution". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24.2 (1993): 233–250.

7 Aimee. E Newell, *A Stitch in Time: The Needlework of Aging Women in Antebellum America* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 2, 8, quote from Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnson Coe, *American Samplers* (1921), 94.

8 From *The Ladies Work-Table Book* (New York; J. Winchester, 1844), iv, referenced in Newell, *A Stitch in Time*, 143.

9 Newell, *A Stitch in Time,* 43, 161; Marybeth C Stalp, *Quilting*, *The Fabric of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 13; Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c.1500–c.1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991).

10 Jalland, *Death*, 17.

11 Jalland, *Death,* 359.

stimulate memories for family members after their death.[12] Indeed, grandparents played an important role as cultural curators, passing on to the next generation an emotional veneration of their textiles, as well as the skills to make new ones. Making constituted 'a form of caring, binding generations of women together'.[13] The power of legacy offered makers agency, where items might be left with specific instructions, or given before death with firm constraints as to their use.[14] Mnemonic items like the stitched sampler and the patchwork quilt evade the temporal constraints of human lifespan. These powerfully emotional objects existed in cyclical as well as lineal time, gifted and bequeathed at the end of one life-cycle to begin new emotional work in subsequent generations.

An exploration of needlework's role at the end of life occurs at an intersection between the historiography of the materiality of death and that of memory and self-memorialisation in the family. Peter Fritsche's *Stranded in the Present* describes the early nineteenth century's intense preoccupation with the past as a way to stabilise an uncertain future, and needlework offered a way to smooth this rupture.[15] Susan Matt's use of textual and material sources to explore the history of nostalgia provides a framework for this chapter in its use of an emotional lens to explore broader historical changes.[16] The chapter will demonstrate the value of material object study in illustrating individuals' response to broad generational and societal changes. Joanne Begiato has explored the role of nostalgia on selfhood in life writing at the end of life[17] and Raphael Samuel theorises the meaning inherent in personal recollection of time and memory, both resources on which this chapter draws as it explores domestic and generational histories.[18] The role of the object as a repository for emotion is explored in Marius Kwint's edited volume *Material Memories*, which demonstrates the range of source material, from jewellery to textiles, which can illuminate the study of memory and loss.[19] Finally, this chapter's focus on the end of the life-cycle explores women in the role of family matriarch. Begiato urges a greater focus on the role of grandparents in shaping, preserving, and maintaining family narrative histories, and this work offers some insight into this less explored emotional relationship.[20]

12 Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 181.

13 Burman and Fennetaux, *The Pocket*, 53.

14 Amy Louise Erikson, *Women & Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), 209.

15 Fritzsche, *Stranded* .

16 Susan J Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

17 Joanne Begiato, "Selfhood and 'Nostalgia': Sensory and Material Memories of the Childhood Home in Late Georgian Britain." *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 42.2 (2019): 229–246.

18 Raphael Samuel, *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture: Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), ix, 6; Pritchard, *Quilts 1700–2010*, 21.

19 Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford, Berg, 1999).

20 Joanne Begiato (Bailey), "Reassessing Parenting in Eighteenth Century England", in *The Family in Early Modern England,* Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 230 .

The role of textiles in death customs was mapped by the sociologists Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin in their 2013 edited volume *Women and the Materiality of Death.*[21] Cultural and dress historians such as Lou Taylor, Anne Gordon, and Anne Buck comprehensively detail the nuanced textile funerary customs of the past, describing a material resource that likely ended up within recycled and meaningful objects such as patchwork.[22] Historians such as Pat Jalland and Julie-Marie Strange have described grief in middle-class and working-class Victorian households, respectively, in which textiles reflect people's emotional concerns. This study will demonstrate how textiles associated with the end of life can offer new insight into the concerns of both groups.[23] Michelle Iwen, Antonia Brodie, and Hilary Davidson have all demonstrated the range of commemorative objects that can do emotional work, from bed sheets to grave goods to mourning jewellery, a list to which this study of quotidian domestic textiles will contribute.[24] Quilt historians have described the role of the quilt in funeral practice in the US context, and this study will begin to offer the first British analysis on which to make comparisons.[25] In the UK, the American Museum in Britain's exhibition *Hatched, Matched, Dispatched, and Patched* was a formative prompt to this study's theme, valuably framing the significant emotional accents of birth, marriage, and death where the domestic quilt acts as a tool of powerful material communication.[26]

This chapter presents the study of memory and legacy at the end of life in three sections. It opens by exploring memory, examining the metaphorical connection of the needleworker's thread to the life thread, through sources including ten newspaper accounts, five court records and diaries, and six examples of novels, poetry, and art. The second section interrogates legacy, showing how makers ascribed objects to act as memorials to themselves. This section focuses on eight extant items as well as more than ten reports of legacy objects. The final part of the chapter explores how makers and owners of domestic stitched textiles used familiar stitched items to console, ease, and support themselves as they contemplated their own end, or that of a loved one.

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21 Maureen Daly Googin & Beth Fowkes Tobin eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Death* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

22 Jalland, *Death*; Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Batsford, 1979); Anne Gordon, *Death Is for the Living* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris Publishing, 1984); Taylor, *Mourning Dress.*

23 Jalland, *Death*; Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

24 Brodie, "Marking and Memory"; Ariane Fennetaux, "Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment – Mourning Jewellery in Britain in the Eighteenth Century", in Daly Googin & Fowkes Tobin eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Death*; Hilary Davidson, "Grave Emotions: Textile and Clothing from Nineteenth Century London Cemeteries". *Textile, Cloth and Culture* 14.2 (2016); Michelle Iwen, "Reading Material Culture", in Daly Googin & Fowkes Tobin eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Death*.

25 Carol Williams Gebel, "Quilts in the Final Rite of Passage: A Multicultural Study", *Uncoverings* (1995); Linda Otto Lipsett, *Elizabeth Roseberry Mitchell's Graveyard Quilt* (Dayton: Halstead & Meadows, 1995); Anita B Loscalzo, "Commemoration and Grief. Two Coverlets and the Death of Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales". *Quilt Studies,* 13 (2012); Janet Rae, *The Quilts of the British Isles* (London: McDonald Books, 1987).

26 The American Museum in Britain, *Hatched, Matched, Dispatched – and Patched* (Exhibition Guide, 2015).

Needlework, Memory, and Metaphor

'The Thread of Time', an image invoked as a poetic line and a painting title (Figure 17), reflected a notion, new to the nineteenth century, that time might be understood as running in a long continuous line, akin to the needleworker's thread. The preoccupation with time amongst needleworkers in embroidered verse clearly reflects these changes. Fritzsche states that time had previously been seen as an iterative process of gradual improvement, but modern life was unpredictable, non-repeatable, and time was now experienced as irretrievable. This new conceptualisation had impacts on how people marked and measured their lives.[27] Before 1790, stitched emphasis, in the memento mori tradition, reflected notions of 'life's short portion', as embroidered by Mary Wakeling in her sampler in 1742.[28] By 1843, the cadence of embroidered verse reflected the sense that time had sped up: 'swiftly see each moment flies, every pulse beats time away'.[29] However, in practice the rate of hand sewing remained comfortingly unchanging until the sewing machine was available in domestic homes from the 1870s, and so handmade domestic textiles stitched over years, and alongside meaningful periods of an individual's life, still functioned as a reliable and comfortable measure of personal emotional time. Whilst the places of the past were theoretically easier and quicker to visit on new roads and by train, the sense grew that the world of yesterday no longer existed in reality. In a time of rapid social and industrial change, preserved memory became an anchor against disorientation. Needlework projects, whose making span could be linked to past events, acted as a practical measure of time passing. The material world of fashion, characterised by ever-changing fabric, offered a new way to mark the cycles of time, and so old fabrics in patchwork could invoke the past accurately in relation to a particular fashionable season.[30]

The reaction to this time shift was an inevitable upswelling of nostalgic consideration of the past, marked by a growth in autobiography and life writing that sought to link individual narratives to larger social change.[31] The emotionally communicative medium of the domestic textile also marked this shift. Items such as patchwork quilts could preserve old traditions and textiles through reuse as new objects to pass on to future generations, creating a material autobiography. In 1838, an elderly writer to a newspaper reflected on a quilt as a biographical object when she said:

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27 Fritzsche, *Stranded,* 3–5.

28 Mary Wakeling, 1742 Plate 49, Clare Browne and Jennifer Wearden, *Samplers from the V&A* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), 79.

29 Averil Colby, *Samplers* (London: Batsford, 1964), 248.

30 Serena Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021),63. Fashion textiles as memory are discussed in Edwina Ehrman, "Dressing Well in Old Age: The Clothing Accounts of Martha Dodson 1746–1765". *Costume* 40.1 (2006): 28–38.

31 Fritzsche, *Stranded, 8.*

> There it lies displayed before me, its varied and once gay colours, like myself now faded and dull with time. Fifty years ago, and I remember well the day, my grandmother gave me that square centre-piece, part of the hangings of her own room, which certainly had been in the world since good Queen Anne…. And now, when life is drawing to a close, when years and climate have done their work on my once strong frame, I have returned to my native country, where I must soon expect to 'be at peace'. I have found … my old patchwork quilt…. my whole life seems traced out in your bright squares.[32]

The patchwork quilt could act as a material manifestation of a family: a palimpsest of generational memory preserved in one single object. A newspaper column in 1891 describes the emotions that each patch of a family quilt might represent, listing 'emotions of joy and of sorrow, of loss and of pain, ambition and disappointment, hope and fear, love and despair'.[33] For Victorian families, the death of a Georgian grandparent broke a link to a shared but rapidly receding past; keeping their needlework could cushion the chasm.[34] There was a comforting familiarity in needlework from prior times, evoking reassuring associations of home and maternity. This overlapping of generational 'emotional communities' blurs the evolution of fashionable changes in needlework and increases the sentimental longevity of objects as items of emotion.

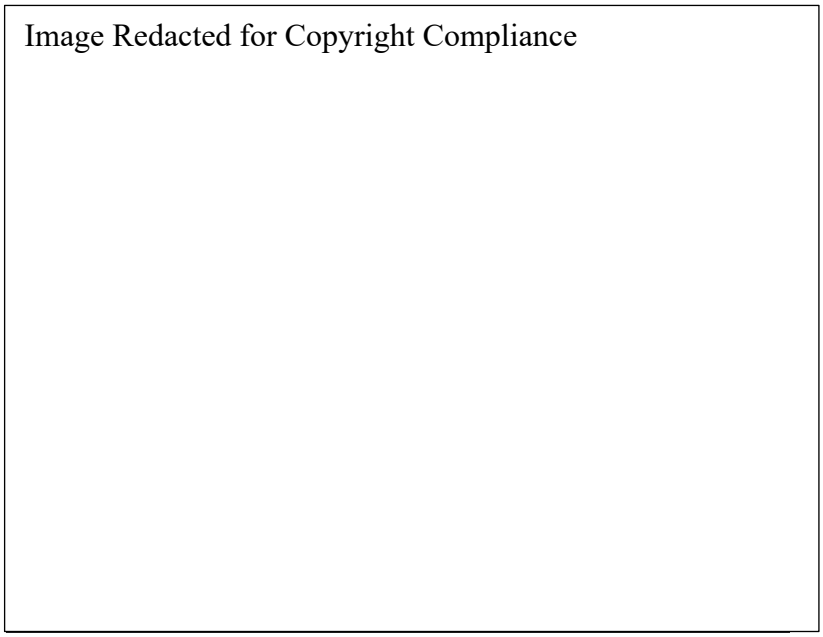


Figure 18: Walter Langley, *Memories,* 1906, oil on canvas, 100 x 123cm. Ferens Art Gallery, KINCM:2005, 5117.

32 *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 27 October 1838.

33 *Preston Herald*, 11 April 1891. Also see *Newry Reporter*, 'The Patchwork Quilt', 24 July 1890, which describes how 'piecing a quilt was the first work and the last of the members of the Mumford family'.

34 Jalland, *Death*, 150. Caroline Fox describes such a disorienting death in 1842.

Cloth had an almost portentous power, a 'kind of memory' that linked to significant people or places.[35] Individual fabric pieces were understood as 'tangible fragments of the past'.[36] Their sensory associations, such as touch and smell, were a way to return to a previous era, as evoked by Walter Langley's painting *Memories* in Figure 18.[37] The older woman in the picture is lost in reminiscence whilst she touches tattered textiles draped over a chair in a reverent pose reminiscent of prayer. *Godey's Lady Book* in 1864 referred to quilt patches as 'storied fragments', and we are invited to reflect with the painting's elderly subject on the individual memories that each square might evoke in a long life.[38] As objects invested with such spiritual power, old fabrics demanded reverence, reflected in the language used by makers in this era. A writer for *Blackwood Magazine* in 1821 speaks of a grandmother 'that was extravagantly fond of patchwork', who 'preserved every thread with a religious veneration'.[39] Charlotte Turner Smith's 1792 novel *Desmond* invokes this talismanic notion when a character describes fabric contained in a patchwork quilt as 'a relict' of an old gown in a time past.[40] The patchwork quilt, an 'intricate mosaic of which was made up of the scraps of old gowns and corresponding remnants', was therefore understood to provide 'chronological data of a highly interesting domestic character'.[41] Alphonse Daudet describes these domestic histories as 'feminine chronologies'.[42] Women's use of memory-capturing practices such as fabric diaries demonstrates how valuable fabric was as a 'domestic archive' of memory.[43]

Making a Legacy – 'A Trifling Memento of her Industry'[44]

35 Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 203.

36 Burman and Fennetaux, *The Pocket*, 207.

37 Mary O'Neil, *Cornwall's 'Fisherfolk' – Art & Artifice* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2014), 22.

38 *Godey's Lady Book* 68 (1864), 396.

39 *Blackwood's Magazine* column reprinted on 18 March 1821, *Windsor and Eton Express*.

40 Charlotte Turner Smith, *Desmond: A Novel in Three Volumes*, Vol 3. (London: GGJ and J Robinson, 1792), 206.

41 *Preston Herald*, 11 April 1891.

42 Cited in Fritzsche, *Stranded, 199.*

43 See Barbara Johnson in Dyer, *Material Lives*, 23; also see Mary Yutzy Nissley archive, now in the IQM, cited in Janneken Smucker, *Amish Quilts: Crafting an American Icon* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 57.

44 *Louth and North Lincolnshire Advertiser*, 22 June 1861.

Figure 19: Ann Rawling, Log Cabin Quilt, 1883, Cumbria, patchwork, 222 x 219cm. The Tullie House Quilt Collection, CALMG:1958.53. Cat 33.

Women in the latter stages of their lives continued to make items of overt emotional communication with often more inclination.[45] At the age of eighty, Lakeland widow Ann Rawling stitched her age 80 and the date 1883 into the centre square of her complex log cabin quilt (Figure 19).[46] The reduced domestic pressures of family life on older women meant that they might have greater time to sew, even if the physical pressures of declining age meant that they could struggle with issues of eyesight or arthritis.[47] In the two years before her death aged 100 years in 1861, the hard work of Mrs Ayscough of Humberstone was rewarded with an obituary that praised her legacy of 'well-made bed quilts' that she made for each of her daughters; a labour radically understated when described as 'a trifling memento of her industry'.[48] A narrative of need that frames needlework production as a function of practical necessity rather than emotional or aesthetic desire still clings to the production of domestic stitched textiles, despite several decades of quilt historians' attempts to dispel this myth with evidence of women's other motivations in making.[49] Analysis of the obituaries of Victorian women reveals numerous examples of older women defined by their commitment to stitch, in often heroic terms. In January 1849 Mrs Jane Watson, a ninety-six-year-old widow, finished a piece of patchwork 'and conversed cheerfully with those around her in the few moments before her dissolution'.[50] The

45 Newell, *A Stitch in Time,* 147.

46 Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, *Stitches in Time: Quilts Since 1790* (Penrith: Reeds Ltd, 2004).

47 Newell, *A Stitch in Time,* 2.

48 *Louth and North Lincolnshire Advertiser*, 22 June 1861.

49 Linda Parry, "Complexity and Context: Nineteenth-Century British Quilts", in Pritchard, *Quilts,* 58.

50 *Liverpool Mercury*, 26 January 1849.

Victorian notion of a 'good death'[51] undoubtedly affected the emphasis of these death notices; slipping off to a better place without care or complaint, completing the last stitch in an exemplary life in this world, was the desire of many. The production of stitched textiles at this stage of life offered a material way to mark a life of making, of caring and nurturing, for future generations to venerate.

Makers were conscious of the need to manage their legacy and they used various means to do this, including editing and reworking in practices augmented and overlapping with written accounts such as memorial writing.[52] As a young woman in 1779, the Georgian diarist and letter-writer Catherine Hutton (1756–1846) wrote in her diary that she was to be entrusted by her Aunt Perkins with the preservation of a quilt, still extant, containing fabric from the dress of her grandmother Ann Hutton.[53] In her own old age in 1839, Catherine secured the legacy of these women in the generations before her by writing a label with the quilt's oral provenance and securing it to the back, where it remains today.[54] Later, at the age of ninety, she attempted to do the same for the products of her own decades of material production by writing an account of her life, which began with the things that she had made with her needle:

> I have made shirts for my father and brother, and all sorts of wearing apparel for myself … I have quilted counterpanes and chest covers in fine white linen, in various patterns of my own invention. I have made patchwork beyond calculation, from seven years old to eighty-five. My last piece was begun in November 1840 and finished in July 1841. It is composed of 1,944 patches, half of which are figured or flowered satin, of all colours formed into stars. Here ended the efforts of my needle.[55]

Did the intimacy of stitched expression offer the closest manifestation of the private selfhood of the women who made these textiles? Catherine, blessed with intelligence and independent means, also wrote histories, published papers, and corresponded widely with notable characters of the age, men such as Napoleon and Charles Dickens, using her made objects as items of political diplomacy.[56] Yet her own account does not begin with her societally lauded achievements in the public sphere – in fact, she lists an exhaustive catalogue of domestic material production and care work. Whilst this comprehensive list

51 Jalland, *Death*, 3.

52 Joanne Begiato (Bailey), "The 'Afterlife' of Parenting: Memory, Parentage and Personal Identity in Britain c.1760–1830." *Journal of Family History* 35 (2010): 250.

53 Catherine Hutton, *Reminiscences of a Gentlewoman of the Last Century* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1891), 21.

54 Hed 3649, British Quilt Heritage Project Papers. The Quilters' Guild Museum Collection, York.

55 Hutton, *Reminiscences,* 213, 230.

56 For example, correspondence with Napoleon, to whom she sent a hand-worked netted bag in exchange for an autograph; Hutton, *Reminiscences,* 207.

reflects conventional expectations of virtuous women being diligently employed, it can be contrasted with the published eulogy that appeared in the *Birmingham Journal* on 21 March 1846. This made no mention of Catherine's domestic life, but opened with her father's achievements as a historian of Birmingham and closed with her brother's achievements in amassing a library. A woman might consider objects such as domestic textiles as an important part of her legacy and could even emphasise this in her own writings, but that still might not be enough for these to be recognised as such by the men who write women's histories.

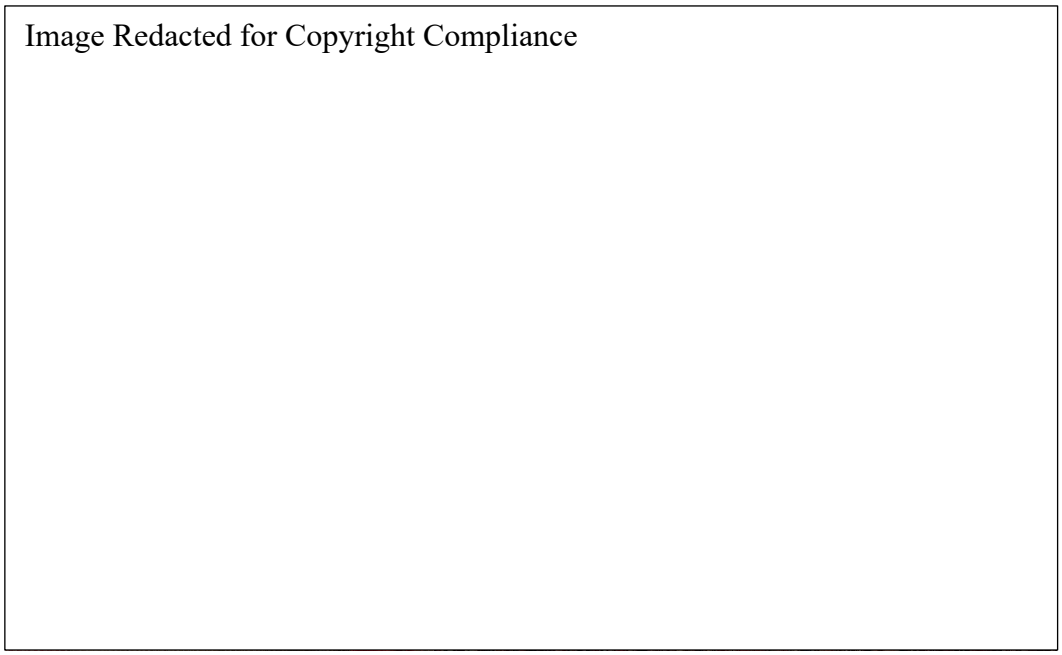


Figure 20: Lauderdale Ramsay, Lady Burnett Appliqué Coverlet, 1878, Scotland, c.3 x 3m. National Trust for Scotland.

Even elite women, part of dynastic families with extensive archives and records, might turn to the intimacy of the domestic objects of their self-production as a personal legacy. In 1878 at the age of seventy-two, Lauderdale Ramsay, Lady Burnett of Crathes Castle (1806–1888), completed a large appliqué coverlet (Figure 20). Whilst Lady Burnett was born the daughter of a baronet, married a baronet, and lived in a 300-year-old castle surrounded by portraiture and fine furnishings that as a widow she might have some power to bequeath, she chose her handmade coverlet as the site of an emphatic self-memorial. For the avoidance of doubt as to her intention, she stitched a triangular fabric label for the back of the coverlet: 'This coverlet is worked entirely by Lauderdale Ramsay Lady Burnett is given by her to her grandnephew, Thomas Burnett Ramsay of Banchory Lodge to be kept in remembrance of her as an heirloom for the family 1878'. Lauderdale chose to use her maiden name along with her married title to sign the work, underlining both her birth and her married family's pedigree. This was clearly a self-conscious, direct act of personal self-memorialisation, spelling out the quilt's emotional role as an heirloom and insisting that it

was kept in memory of her. This coverlet was inscribed for her grandnephew, rather than her children or grandchildren, suggesting that it was perhaps just one survivor of more objects made for her extended family in this period of widowhood before her death in 1888, and asks questions of the precariousness of women's legacy, even within their own family.

Older women, in their role as mother to adult children and grandmother to a new generation, remain under-researched – a focus in the study of the emotional history of the family that Begiato encourages researchers to address.[57] Intergenerational bequeathing of domestic textile items was a behaviour that offers insight into these familial and cultural transferences.[58] Grandmothers in the century between 1790 and 1890 were taking on a role that only became more consequential as life expectancy rose, and a new understanding of the value of cultural transference gave piquancy to women's conception of their role in the layered family. Granddaughters often expressed sentimental attachments to textile items made by their grandmothers. An account in 1821 states: 'we love our grandmothers' memory; and, although it smack somewhat of days gone we delight in preserving her patchwork'.[59] The object, despite, or perhaps because of, its declining fashionability, stood as an authentic material metonym for the memory of a loved grandparent. Bequests after death, or gifts during life, could have an influence over how the younger woman valued and used needlework. Begiato urges family historians to give greater weight to this behavioural influence when she claims that 'the hypothesis that one's exposure to parenting shaped one's behaviour as a parent is hardly addressed at all in existing historical studies and needs to be more fully explored'.[60] This thesis presents evidence throughout that needlework veneration as a site of emotional memorial and familial memory was an 'inherited' behaviour, which might illustrate the existence of 'emotional communities' within families running through generations.

57 Begiato, "Reassessing Parenting", 230.

58 Hamlett, *Material Relations,* 194.

59 *Windsor and Eton Express*, 18 March 1821.

60 Begiato, "Reassessing Parenting", 219.

Figure 21: Beatrix Potter, *Bedroom. Camfield Place. Hatfield. Herts*, c.1882–1888, pen and ink drawing, 177 x 113mm. © V&A, BP.285.

Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin remind us that history can be preserved not only in the object, but in the tradition of making the object.[61] An intergenerational emphasis on the needle as a means of emotional communication created matrilineal emotional communities where generations of women shared an emotional understanding about the value of an item and its importance, as well as sharing a set of inculcated skills. The children's author Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) alerted us to this when she scribbled a pencil note on her pen and ink drawing (Figure 21) of her childhood room at her grandparents' home.[62] The pictured bedroom is annotated 'Bedroom Camfield Place, Hatfield, Herts. No 4 where I always slept. After my grandmother's death I asked for … the red bed quilt I also had many years at B[olton].' Potter associated the quilt with a much-loved grandmother; the warm emotions it conveyed were often evoked in her illustrations of beds in patchworked depictions of homeliness.[63]

The exchange of skills and patterns between generations is largely intangible, faintly visible only in rare archives of family production.[64] Potter's mother made the quilt that covered Beatrix's bed at Hill Top farm (in spite of, or perhaps because of, their complex emotional

61 Daly Googin & Fowkes Tobin eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework,* 5.

62 V&A BP.634(22).

63 See Mice Sewing by Candlelight BP.1097III, A Mouse in a Four Poster Bed BP.576, and Peter Piper Lying on his Blue Quilt by the Fire 157.1994. All V&A.

64 Burman and Fennetaux, *The Pocket,* 72; Barbara *Burman, The Culture of Sewing Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999).

relationship).[65] Continuing this chain of making, Beatrix went on to create her own needlework items, some of which are extant in the collections of the V&A.[66] The influence of an emphasis on domestic emotional textiles within a family could have far-reaching effects into the next generation's behaviour and values.[67] These inherited behaviours might be seen as a 'habitus', a set of behaviours unconsciously linked to imbuing objects with emotional values, and in the very practice of sewing domestic textile objects invested with emotional potency.[68] This habitus affected behaviour across generations, establishing in girls a responsibility to preserve and venerate textiles from the past, and encouraging them to view their own creative production as items of legacy. A rigid periodisation of the history of needlework has arguably obscured this important facet of textile history inheritance, cut off makers from their generational influences, and negated the recognition of the power of memory and legacy to affect aesthetic decisions.[69]

Making Material Preparations for Death

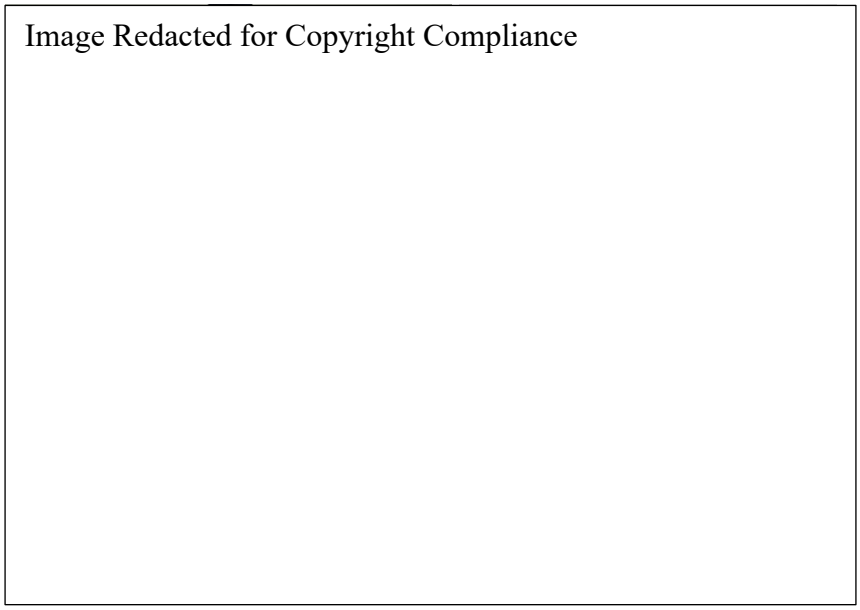


Figure 22: Black Quilted Burial Skirt, c.1875-1899. Jen Jones Private Collection. Eliza Lewis, Death Socks, c.1850, knitted, 600 x 220mm (per stocking). National Museum Wales. 41.51.1-2.

65 For more on this quilt and their relationship, see https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hill-top {accessed 28/11/2021}.

66 V&A BP.1571(XVI).

67 Potter had material influences on both sides: her paternal grandfather Edmund Potter (1802–1883) was a Manchester industrialist, MP, and calico print manufacturer; his company was the largest calico producer in the world by 1873. Katha Kievit, "Edmund Potter: Nineteenth Century Calico Printer", *Uncoverings* (2019).

68 Sheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice", 203.

69 The role of emotion as a classifying system is discussed in Alain de Botton and John Armstrong, *Art as Therapy* (London: Phaidon Press, 2013).

Julie-Marie Strange reminds us that for people who owned very little, the public display of any possession was loaded with symbolism in establishing social worth.[70] These concerns were never more pointed than at the Victorian funeral, where a skill with the needle might offer a means to guard against the shame of a shoddy burial. For working women, preparations for death were concerned with the maintenance of decency and respectability, expressed as a desire to 'go off very smart'.[71] Deaths like that of the impoverished Mrs Webb in 1833 served as a warning to respectable women; she 'had neither blankets, sheets nor any linen, excepting an old patchwork quilt'. The woman who laid out the body stated at the inquest, 'what she is now laid out in I borrowed'.[72] Domestic textiles remained an intimate part of the commercialised funeral, and winding sheets made at home might even be given as gifts between women.[73] The shame of a pauper burial hung over those who lived with the precariousness of working-class wages.[74]

Women's own needlework skills might offer them the agency of control over their own respectability in death. The women of South Wales and the West Country controlled their legacy by leveraging needlework skills to also make their last outfit at home.[75] Oral histories attest to the domestic production of hand-quilted 'burial' petticoats in black satin, merino, or alpaca (Figure 22).[76] The quilted petticoat was retained as a warm, hardy workwear item amongst working country and coastal women into the latter parts of the nineteenth century; it associated working women's labouring selfhood with notions of Georgian fashionable splendour a century before.[77] Yet the desire for respectability was neither fashionable nor status-seeking snobbery; instead, these homemade rituals allowed working-class communities to invest death with personalised and regionally specific meaning.[78] In Carmarthenshire, petticoats were paired with specifically hand-knitted white stockings where the initials of the wearer were knitted into the rib pattern of the cuff (Figure 22). Both items allowed the wearer to express their selfhood through the addition of significant patterns or names and reflected a local cultural tradition where women's labour could offer agency to guarantee respectability and individual selfhood, even in poverty; even in the grave.[79]

70 Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

71 Mavis Fitzrandolf, *Traditional Quilting* (London: Batsford, 1954), 140; Gordon, *Death*, 100.

72 *Huntingdonshire, Bedford and Peterborough Gazette*, 14 December 1833.

73 Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty,* 29.

74 Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty,* 98.

75 Elizabeth Hake, *English Quilting Old and New* (London: Batsford,1937), 9. Colby, *Quilting,* 149.

76 Mavis Fitzrandolf, *Traditional Quilting* (London: Batsford, 1954), 139.

77 Christine Stevens, *Quilts* (Gomer Press and National Museum of Wales, 1993), 12.

78 Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty,* 99.

79 John Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from 1820–1920* (London: Penguin, 1982), 35.

Poverty threatened dignity and challenged agency, but the poor invested the objects with which they lived with all the same complex meaning and symbolism as did the rest of society. It is significant that the patchwork quilt increasingly appeared in newspaper articles or illustrations alongside the deaths of the destitute poor.[80] Sarah Berriman died in Marylebone, London in January 1867 at the age of seventy – the inquest reported that she died from 'a want of warmth and food', and was found naked and deceased in a filthy rented apartment. [82] The report described her material conditions: 'she had no bed, no blanket to cover her, nothing but a quilt'. It remains impossible to quantify the emotional importance of that quilt to elderly people like Sarah Berriman, or indeed Mrs Webb, who died a similar death in the countryside. Was the quilt an emotional item from a life less sparse before fortune brought these elderly women to their desperate end, or just an anonymous cheap item of practical warmth? It is likely that the emotional importance of an object increases if it is the o*nly* item that someone owns – poverty, after all, does not brutalise all sentiment. The inclusion of the detail of the patchwork quilt in newspaper reports of this kind also served as a moral warning to the rest of society of how fragile was the veneer of sophisticated domesticity that was so valorised.[83] To the women who owned and died alongside these quilts, their emotional significance should not be dismissed.

Making practical preparations for death might include taking a quilt to the grave, a final expression of agency. Although there are descriptions of women being hastily buried in a patchwork quilt during the arduous overland journey west in the expanding United States, it was considered in Britain that the formalised nature of Victorian funerals left no room for idiosyncratic sentimentality.[84] Yet in the newspaper archives of funeral notices there are faint traces that this distinction may not be so clear-cut. In 1887, the opera singer and international celebrity Jenny Lind-Goldschmidt (1820–1887) was buried near her home in Great Malvern. The newspaper emphasised her prior instructions: 'In accordance with the oft expressed wish of the deceased a patchwork quilt presented to her many years ago by children of the United States and an Indian shawl, the gift of Queen Victoria, were buried with her remains.'[85] Lind eschewed more traditional markers of her status such as jewellery, and instead chose textiles, items traditionally denoted feminine and domestic, for her interment. This might be seen as a sentimental gesture by a woman known for reducing her audiences to tears, if it were not for the fact that this was a stipulation that others shared. In 1892 a newspaper described a new bride buried 'at her own request' with her wedding garments incorporated into a kind of coffin-lining patchwork quilt, 'consisting of a white

80 For example, Illustration, London, 1868 by Luke Fildes (1843–1927) or BETHNAL GREEN Tailor & family, 10 Hollybush Place 1863, *Illustrated London News*. Also see Holmes, *In Bed,* 93.

82 *London Daily News*, 9 January 1867.

83 *South London Press*, 13 March 1886; Sarah Lloyd, "Poverty", in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832*, Iain McCalman ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

84 Williams Gebel, "Quilts in the Final Rite of Passage".

85 *The Era*, 12 November 1887.

negligee and petticoats, which were quilted into a matrass[sp], pillows and lining to her coffin; her wedding shift was her winding sheet'.[86] This was not confined to the sentimentality of femininity: Mr John Allen of St Anne's died by suicide in 1904 and repeated the request.[87] The small death notice recounts that as he desired, 'the body was wrapped in the patchwork quilt made by his mother when 70 years of age and placed in the box' before he was interred with his pre-deceased wife and child.[88] Grave goods, the last expression of selfhood at the mortal rupture from the body, offer perhaps the final and most compelling evidence of the emotional significance of domestic textiles.[89]

Conclusion

Textiles gave women, raised to understand their stitches as personal expression, a method to mark the important aspects of their lives. Needlework allowed them to create tangible objects that they might be remembered by and gave them agency as makers in managing and shaping this legacy. Made items existed in the emotional economy of the family as items of feminine validation through their personification of socially praiseworthy female traits. Yet more than societal praise, textiles offered women material evidence of their own successes as women, and as mothers and wives. The items that women passed on within their friendship and family networks existed as items of cultural capital. Elderly women makers possessed agency within this capital, since they taught, encouraged, and supported the traditions and practices of making across generations. The objects they gifted and bequeathed evade the temporal frame of the human lifespan, existing in cyclical phases that did emotional work that both links and separates generations from their past. This chapter questions the assumption that thrift drove domestic making and suggests that the widespread understanding of the role of textiles as items of legacy and memory was often significant. Through time, reaction to objects such as the patchwork quilt have been framed by notions of 'sentiment', sometimes a misogynistic dismissal of the acknowledged emotional power of the object for generations of owners. This study has begun to map the path that led from the highly ritualised Victorian funeral to the much more personalised funeral rites we see today, where emotional items such as the patchwork quilt are often conflated with care at death and beyond.

86 *The Newcastle Courant*, 16 January 1892.

87 *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1904. Cremation was not established until the Cremation Act in 1902, but there were only 800 in the UK by 1908. See Holmes, *In Bed,* 86 for discussion of male working-class suicide after the death of a partner.

88 Archaeological excavations such as along the HS2 high-speed rail route in the UK have disrupted agreed narratives about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century burial practice by finding domestic items such as china plates buried with their working-class owners.

89 On death as sleep, see Sasha Handley, *Sleep in Early Modern England*.(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

Conclusion
Remember Me?

Close attention to the question of why women stitched allows us to restore the dignity of domestic sewing by identifying the agency of needleworkers and returning emotional meaning to their labour. This research has demonstrated that the use of domestic textiles as tools of memory, legacy, and selfhood was strikingly ubiquitous, whether home was castle or tenement, and throughout the century between 1790 and 1890. The previous narrow focus on differences of status and quality in the material of domestic sewing has falsely separated women who shared an emotional experience of making and using textiles at home that, whilst related to class, was not defined by it. As this dissertation has shown, contemporary practitioners regularly attested to the power of textiles to memorialise them and store their memories. This was manifested in their actions and language and reflected in the depictions of domestic needlework in art and literature. By returning maker intention to the discourse of stitch, we recognise how skills conceived as gendered and patriarchal might have been reframed by women as tools that offered agency through solace, self-expression, benevolence, and legacy. Furthermore, the agency of needlework extended far beyond the domestic space; indeed, it could journey through both space and time.[1] Through time, needlework's role in matriarchal legacy keeping helped it to elide human lifespans, travelling through the overlapping cycles of generations. Through space, needlework's mutability gave women opportunities for influence and advancement outside of the home. Furthermore, by expanding our lens beyond makers to include *users* of domestic textiles, we move beyond a concentration on women to uncover the importance of these emotional objects in the lives of the rest of the connected family. In exploring men and boys, this study has also opened new avenues of research into the emotional motivation of previously overlooked male domestic makers. Needlework, expressed both in the object and through the practice, was clearly a powerful emotional tool that contemporary makers recognised, understood, and wielded to construct their selfhood and memorialise their lives within the bounded patriarchal society in which they stitched.

In recognising women's emotional intentions when they stitched, we uncover their agency. There remains a latent reluctance to valorise women's domestic work, particularly practices as saturated with patriarchy as sewing. The long debate over whether needlework is an 'authentic voice' or an instructive medium continues to be influenced by gendered assumptions about the limits and form of needlework self-expression. Women worked within approved frameworks of form and style, but it is a mistake to equate this uniformity of form with uniformity of emotion. This thesis therefore troubles narratives of passivity and demonstrates how women created and used objects with purpose, self-consciously constructing their own selfhood through their authorial creative production whilst doing important, emotionally binding work within the family. This feminine sphere of needlework was a space that invited a rare autonomy in the application of agency, for example through

1 Joanne Begiato, "Moving Objects. Emotional Transformation, Tangibility, and Time Travel", in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History,* Downes et al. eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

the performance of benevolence across class divides or as empowered agents of cultural transference. Needlework gatherings could be places for homosocial exchanges that privileged female concerns of social justice or educational access. Moreover, agency was inheritable. Women's powerful generational influence created objects and actions whose ability to 'affect' is traceable in the behaviours identified between generations.

There remain further questions about the limits of women's temporal agency. The mechanisms and generational pathways of gifting and inheritance are still opaque. A longitudinal inheritance study would offer potential insights into the lottery of which objects survived, and which did not. In asking *why* objects survived, we can begin to explore the posited 'emotional communities' between generations who preserved and venerated some women's work.[2] For example, what weight do influences such as religiosity, endogamy, social class, family size, and gender structures have on the likelihood of intergenerational emotional communities forming? Similarly, there are questions about how this agency varied by geographical and social space. Did behaviour vary in town or countryside communities, or in the varied domestic contexts of prisons, schools, hospitals, or asylums? Could the emotional communication inherent in needlework travel across physical or national distances, for example when families were separated?[3] How were the ever-present moral didactics of needlework disseminated to new audiences? What emotional work did domestic items and practices such as needlework do in the wider cultural transference of societal values in new British colonies in this period?[4]

In this study, domestic needlework within the family is conceived as care work, a labour undertaken with both practical and emotional nurture at its core. The contribution of women's emotional care work within the family has often been difficult to quantify. A less recognised significance of decorative domestic textiles is that they also form a uniquely tangible yardstick of such work.[5] A patchwork, made over a long period, could be both a quantitative material ledger, equating fabric pieces to thousands of hours of emotional care during its construction, and a qualitative record of domestic memories evoked by fabric pieces or quilting patterns. There exist few other extant objects that stand as evidence of the labour that women did daily that were not consumed, undone, or worn out.[6] The power of a corporeal measure of makers' labour has clear resonance and relevance to both the original care-giving makers and their cared-for descendants.[7] The scarcity of authorially

2 For example, see Diana Boston, *The Patchworks of Lucy Boston* (Cambridge: Oldknow Books, 2009) for an account of the intergenerational preservation of the quilts of the novelist Lucy Boston.

3 Joanne Begiato, Personal Blog, *Joanne Begiato Muses on History: Homesickness: Emotions, Families and Nations* https://jbhist.wordpress.com/ (accessed January 2021).

4 On the eighteenth-century quilting traditions of the American east coast, see Lynne Zacek Bassett ed., *Massachusetts Quilts: Our Common Wealth* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2009); Beverly Lemire, *Draping the Body and Dressing the Home: The Material Culture of Textiles and Clothes in the Atlantic World 1500–1800 (*Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); and Linda Baumgarten and John Watson, *Costume Close Up: Clothing Construction and Pattern 1750–1790* (Los Angeles: Costume and Fashion Press, 1999).

5 Stalp, *Quilting,* 138.

6 The American author and women's rights advocate Lida Obenchain (1856–1935), writing under the penname Eliza Calvert Hall, makes this point via her character 'Aunt Jane of Kentucky' in her 'perishes with usin' quote about southern American women at the end of the nineteenth century, repeated in Daly Goggin & Fowkes Tobin eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework*, 31.

7 Susan Marks, "Quilt as Icon", *Quilt Studies* 11 (2010), 60, a call for a reassessment of the domestic quilt.

named extant quilts has led to a narrow focus in object-centred study on form or construction, and a concentration on elite needlework. Whilst named makers' lives are explored, subsequent users and keepers of textile items have been largely overlooked or subject to rigorous policing for authenticity of the oral histories that travelled with objects. This research deliberately takes a more inclusive view, for it seems likely that textiles, such as those presented in this study associated with grief, probably form a more visible peak of a yet wider group of objects less easily identified today, which were made as testament to everyday affection and care. These were objects that memorialised quotidian emotional experiences, frequently overlooked in historical sources, the quietly unremarked-upon bonds of ordinary family life, including amongst working families whose emotional ties are often otherwise opaque.[8] By expanding our view to include textile users, we open a lens into the wider family's expressed bonds of affection. Care work was usually a two-way relationship and care was not the exclusive preserve of women; the emotional bonds that were predicated in textiles had relevance to all members of the family, and their emotional significance to men and boys is also often neglected. Furthermore, the emerging evidence of male leisured sewers asks questions of their intention. Male needleworkers' rewards of status, pride, and esteem in competition seem likely to be shared by women, but what of their domestic emotional motivations?

By returning to the role of textiles as tactile items of comfort, we begin to revalue their haptic communicational power. Contemporary language and representations of these textiles highlight touch as significant in their ability to 'affect'. In recognising this, we place quilts back in laps, over beds, wrapped around and over bodies, and so return to an area often inexplicably overlooked today.[9] A contemporary reframing of the quilt within folk and modern art disciplines has elevated the view of the quilt as art on the wall rather than in its social context on the frame or the bed.[10] Privileging art intention tends to equate meaning as commensurate with skill or aesthetic intention, and thus fails to recognise that much mundane, plain, or poorly hewn, homely sewing could also be emotional. This study therefore resituates quilts within their domestic environments, telling their emotional history in the interiors in which they were made and used. In recognising the power of the domestic textile to emotionally 'affect' the body, this study also addresses an important question, posed in a recent special issue of *Textile*: Are textiles such as the domestic quilt more emotional than other objects? Perhaps the answers lie in their ability to engage all of the emotional senses to tell a complex story about identity, memory, and care.[11]

Whilst this study has described the continuities of emotional needlework practice, expressed through the long overlapping generational arcs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it recognises that at the close of this period in 1890, the landscape of the domestic making of objects like the bedcover were set for a catastrophic schism. The flowering of the Arts and Crafts movement might have bought about the reconceptualising of the folk and medieval roots of quilt making, but a class-based emphasis on classical

8 Joanne Begiato (Bailey), "'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel.' Parenting in English Pauper Letters c.1760–1834". *Family and Community History* 13.1 (2010): 5–19.

9 Constance Classen ed., *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire,* Vol 5. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

10 For further discussion, see Smucker, *Amish Quilts*, 65–84.

11 Dolan and Holloway, "Emotional Textiles: An Introduction", *Textile,* 14.2 (2016), 152.

embroidery occurred instead at the expense of the associated skills of patchwork and quilting.[12] The romantic yearning phrase 'Remember Me' was soon to be reconceived as the tragic lament of men in an industrialised conflict as the last Victorian generation fell on the mechanised European battlefields of the First World War. This societal and memorial rift induced a rejection of aspects of the material culture of the nineteenth century, including much stitched practice. This resulted in a break in generational needlework skill transference in the first decades of the twentieth century across much of the country, which has negatively contributed to inherited understanding and knowledge of needlework's evolved historiography today.

We are overdue a new appraisal of the value of domestic creativity in the home. Maturing third-wave feminist arguments are reclaiming practices ambivalently addressed by the second wave as symptomatic of patriarchal oppression.[13] New groups continue to preserve and make emotional needlework at home, redefining what it means through a more nuanced focus on intersectionality.[14] Analysis of historical makers has also benefited from this new framing, highlighting the work of racially marginalised groups, as well as other excluded groups such as the mentally ill, and calling attention to the emotional communication of textiles in historical spaces such as campaigning and demonstrating.[15] Unlike some other Victorian leisure skills, patchwork and quilting remain relevant and evolving; a twenty-first-century revival gathers pace as an overt rejection of environmental consumption and as the practice is re-embraced as a medium of individuality in a global world. The rich biographical selfhood inherent in a quilt is again part of death rituals for increasing numbers of makers contemplating how loved ones might 'Remember Me' at a postmodern funeral.[16] Now, as ever, makers continue to take up the needle as a tool of emotional communication.[17] Whilst the message, medium, and method of expression change with each generation, a palimpsest of material memory continues to loop through the history of the domestically worked textile, linking today's makers to those of the past through an evolving emotional language embedded in a haptic object with the power to make emotional journeys.

12 Rozsika Desnoyers, *Pictorial Embroidery in England: A Critical History of Needlepainting and Berlin Work* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 43.

13 Marybeth C Stalp, *Quilting*, *The Fabric of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 22. Also see Jane Brocket, *The Gentle Art of Domesticity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007), 3 for an argument extolling modern domesticity rather than domestication.

14 For example, see Zac Foster and Grace Rother, *Queer Quilters Tell All* (New York: Self-published e-zine, 2021); also Laurel M. Horton, *Whitework: Women Stitching Identity* (Western Kentucky: Indy Pub/WKU Foundation, 2021).

15 Jess Bailey, *Many Hands Make a Quilt: Short Histories of Radical Quilting* (Norwich: Common Threads Press, 2021).

16 Susanne Paquette, *Modern Memory Quilts* (Concord: Stash Books, 2019),

17 Thomas Knauer, *Why We Quilt* (North Adams: Storey, 2019)

Appendix.

The 'Remember Me' Quilt.

The completed quilt top before hand quilting. Detail of embroidery.

In seeking to argue that women's stitched material production was a labour which could encompass aspects of selfhood, memory capture, and legacy it is necessary to fully appreciate the materiality of domestic production. To this end, I also set out to make a quilt alongside my written thesis. Immersion in the practice of historical archaeology has been characterised as part of the affective turn in history where practitioners look to understand the quotidian experiences of everyday living in the period in which they study, often amongst underrepresented groups such as women and their everyday domestic work.[1] This undertaking to create a nineteenth century bed quilt is not to seek to argue that re-enactment intrinsically automatically furthers historical understanding, rather to suggest that a forensic recreation of the *technical* construction of an extant item such as this, offers insight into the way that an object existed bodily in the domestic space and thus could exert *emotional* 'affect' on the body of the maker and user.[2]

The large bed quilt was an object of some physicality which existed within the home for long periods; its construction took up physical and temporal space and resources and thus had the ability to affect both the wider web of relationships within the home, and the selfhood and emotion of the maker; Caitlin Desilvey calls this the 'tangled' relationship between identities and the things with which we surround ourselves.[3] Furthermore, an attention to the corporeal realities of the physical labour involved in the construction of large

1 For example, see the BBC Victorian Farm programmes and later iterations of this format.

2 Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What is Re-enactment?", *Criticism* 46/3, 2004, 327-339.

3 Caitlin Desilvey, "Salvage Memory: Constellating Material Histories on a Hard Scrabble Homestead", *Cultural Geographies*, 14/3, 2007, 401-424.

cumbersome textiles offers insight into how complex and exacting labour might have been conceptualised by the original makers. The physicality of making a bedquilt challenges many of the presented tropes of passive and gentle female sewing.

I set out to make a quilt by hand, using techniques which were common to the period and vernacular to English quilt making. This includes piecing over papers, embroidered text and decorative embroidery, patchwork piecing and hand quilting in a large wooden frame, extant since the 1890s. This project offered valuable prompts to my written thesis analysis by contributing insights into the physicality of making and its impact on the body and the domestic space. More than this, it reminds us that the quilt as an affective body existed almost as an embodied member of the family as it was constructed, through its ability to change and dominate space. It also offered insights into sociability and the associated possible influences on emotional engagement with domestic making. Finally, this practice asked questions of the trope of the lone demure stitcher when placed within a busy domestic environment, demonstrating that at every stage from the planning to fabric choice, to the physical labour associated with making, could be social and collaborative.

The process of planning and preparing fabric-wrapped papers.

Creating an accurate frame quilt relies on an awareness of complex mathematics to compute the growing size of each border, accounting for extra seam allowances within this measurement. Planning began with research into similar quilts from around the period 1800-1840 to establish that the frame style was the predominant layout.[4] The inclusion of non-standard shapes such as hexagons, created into 'flower' wreaths of 7 shapes, themselves then encased within a square placed on point, for example, required maths or at the least patience in trial and error. Paper shapes then had to be produced to act as paper templates to 'piece' the fabric over before stitching them together. The technical geometry and application of mathematical knowledge should not be underestimated, having said that, many extant examples show 'fudged' corners where measurements have not worked out as planned where solid maths and tactile fabric collide. The planning of this quilt took several weeks and I recorded around 20 hours of work in this stage over the period of a month. Little or no extant written evidence of this stage of women's work exists, the thesis references reports of collaborative planning amongst women and men within the family and

4 For wider analysis of this style of quilt see Janet Rae, "In the Frame" in *Quilt Treasures* (London: McDonald Books, 1995), 16.

it seems likely that this stage may have required at the very least the reassurance of collaboration before scissors cut fabric.

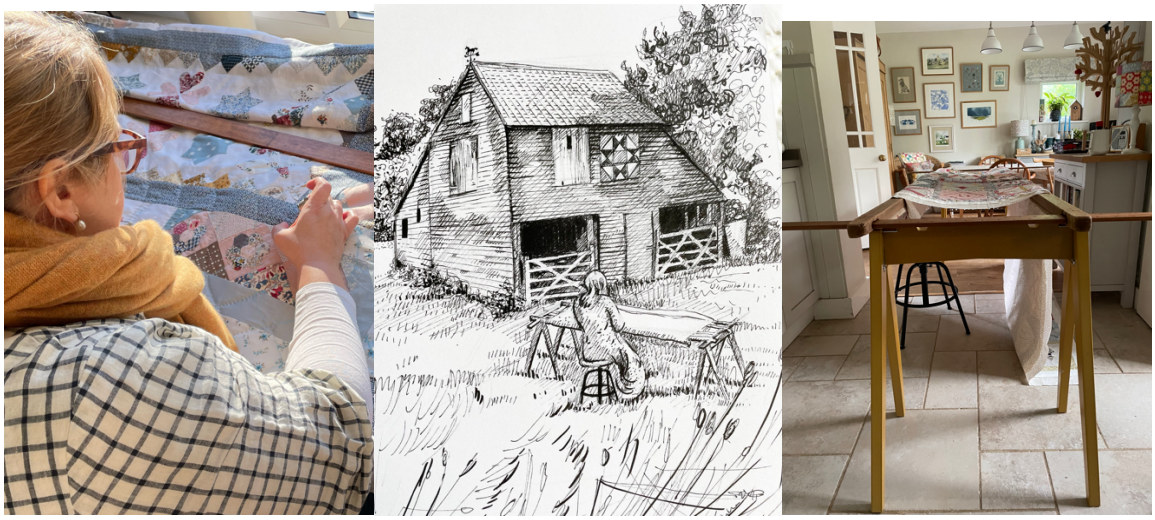
Embroidering and constructing the ‘frames’.

The emotional potency of reused and carefully selected fabric is well explored in my thesis. This quilt was made from offcuts and scraps of fabric, meaning that planning was pragmatic and reliant on the availability of materials whose quantities might fit specific places. The fabric assimilation and then construction took place over a period seven months. The seasonality of stitched work is a topic unexplored in the history of needlework. The centre square was hand embroidered, a process which itself took around a month to complete and was reliant on good light and meticulous marking of the linen ground; it required a magnifying glass to complete accurately. Thus, the construction of the quilt ‘top’ took place between April and October, sewing most days for around 30 minutes to an hour when academic and family care work responsibilities allowed. Presumptions that needlework was an indoor, and thus winter activity, are unproven and an archaeological approach such as this casts further doubt on this easy assumption.

A domestic historical geography of stitch can be explored in a project of this nature. This stitched work was completed in small sections, each then painstakingly joined together which facilitated portability, and work was taken on visits away from home and into the garden which also helped it grow more quickly. The sociability and portability of quiltmaking in block form, characteristic of the American style, is well explored in the US and attributed to the often transient nature of new settlement there, but the similar ability of the units of an English frame casts new light on where and when women in this country sewed.[5] Whilst the limits and spaces of my modern life are clearly very different to makers of the past, the limitations and domestic focus of this period of lockdowns and reduced social mixing is perhaps an approximation of the focus on domestic spaces that previous makers might have also experienced. I recorded more than 150 hours of work hand sewing to complete the quilt top across a range of locations far more varied than easy stereotypes of the needleworker might suggest were customary.

5 Read more about the American tradition in Patricia Cox Crews and Carolyn Ducey eds, American Quilts in the Industrial Age, 1760-1870 (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 1-24.

The spatial physicality of quilt making is also underexplored and completely absent from contemporary depictions of the needleworker. As the frames grew outwards from the centre the size of the coverlet (eventually 78” by 78”) became more difficult to handle and keep clean as I worked, and it draped on the floor. Measuring and checking dimensions required ‘laying out’ of the large cover on the floor as pieces were fitted and tweaked to size. The quilt took over the domestic space, even storing a large textile uncreased between work sessions meant that it had a presence in our domestic space all day. The practical challenges of working in domestic spaces of the past with rooms of multiple use, open fires, public and private functions is clear and warrants greater investigation.



Hand quilting. The antique quilt frame depicted in pen and ink and showing the trestles.

Finally, the quilt top was hand quilted on an antique quilt frame, a stage which asserts perhaps the most significant ‘affect’ on the domestic space of the home. The frame is unwieldy at 8 feet long and around 4 feet square, rested on separate trestle legs or apocryphally on the backs of kitchen chairs. The method of quilting in a frame holds the backing and filling square at tension by the wooden stretchers whilst the complex pattern is stitched from the top through all three layers. This method of quilting is now very rare, modern makers rely on sewing machines or if hand quilting, they tend to use a hoop in the lap. My frame is antique, around 140 years old, pock marked with worm holes and worn smooth by the wrap of fabric around the beams and the recurrent leaning of the stitcher onto the frame. It creaks gently as the maker adjusts their weight and stance to stitch in different directions. My dissertation describes contemporary women quilting at these frames in small cottages or rented rooms. The practical ramifications of this work and its physical volume in the home is clear. Setting up the frame requires more than two hands, stretching and wrapping the fabric evenly is a joint effort. The oak ‘pins’ which hold the frame taunt had to be carved by a family member as they can break or bend under force. Whilst the frame took up much living space, an unexpected experience was that it acted as a magnet for sociability. My children liked to lie underneath, leaning against my legs and chatting, household passers-by stopped to chat – the tactile appeal of running fingers over quilted ridges was strong, the dog curled up beneath in this quiet pool of space in a busy home. The real use of this object over long months suggests that the idea that the whole

family were emotionally if not physically invested in material production within the home was entirely likely.

Sitting at a quilting frame for long hours is a bodily experience very different to the often-pictured Victorian needleworker with small embroidery held demurely in lap. The tight tensions achieved by the frame's stretchers facilitates a form of hand quilting known as 'rocking stitch' which is also seldom practiced today because its successful completion relies of the conditions that the flat bed frame allows, namely a level surface and tension. The rocking stitch allows the needle to be rocked between two metal thimbles held, one on each hand, held above and below the work. This specialist skill of rocking offers the practitioner close control of the size and frequency of the stitch allowing for very small and regular stitches to be taken in quick succession without any of the customary 'up and down' of conventional sewing when the needle is held and passed between the hand as it passes through the fabric. Yet to do this work, the needleworker must assume a particular stance, reaching deep into the centre of the frame, crouched, stretched, hand assuming a customary 'claw' shape to allow a space where the rocking motion can take place. Hand quilting is experienced bodily in muscle aches and sore fingers. Yet the rhythmical rocking motion of the needle is also an unexpected salve, allowing the maker to achieve what we might today call 'flow' but which is also a form of physio-emotional comfort much described by makers in the eighteenth century in studies such as that by Bridget Long.[6]

The quilting pattern is marked onto the quilt using chalk and a cardboard template.

The physical limits of the frame also shapes the creative output as it makes quilting towards the sewer more easily achieved; this results in patterns where long sinuous forms such as cables are most easily produced. There remains little research into the sources and transmission of quilting patterns, outside of regional specific identification of repeating forms and this is also an area which merits more academic focus. I chose a weaving lozenge shape, created by the repetition of a simple template to create a pragmatic all-over pattern, common on pieced quilts of this era. This example is often seen in the northwest of England and was taken from the Agnes Bentham quilt referenced in this thesis.[7] The quilting took

6 Bridget Long, "'Regular Progressive Work Occupies My Mind Best': Needlework as a Source of Entertainment, Consolation and Reflection". *TEXTILE*, 14.2 (2016): 177.

7 For example, see the Agnes Bentham Quilt. The Quilters Guild Museum Collection, see Chapter Two.

around a month of very sustained work, at least an hour a day, sometimes much more when light allowed in the mid-winter and I completed around 60 hours of work in the hand quilting.

Details of embroidery, taking phrases from the thesis which women wrote or stitched which demonstrate the emotional significance of their domestic production.

Beyond academic engagement, making a material representation of some of the arguments in the thesis offers opportunities for wider impact of this work with public audiences. Making arguments about material culture alongside a recreated piece of that material culture allows a tactile experience for readers to explore the materiality of the subject. A quilt is a haptic object, but in a museum, it must not be touched – an experience a long way from its original corporeal use. For modern audiences, the method of making textiles of this kind is still accessible and, in many ways still familiar – offering a route to engagement. Artistically, representing the women of my thesis' overt phrases of selfhood stitched onto a quilt juxtaposes post-modern arguments about our modern overt expressions of selfhood with what we see on extant quilts, a rich area for discussion about the value of a study of the history of the emotions.

Glossary

Appliqué	The application of shaped pieces of fabric, usually via an embroidery stitch, to a ground material to create a design.
Block quilt	A quilt made from a series of pieced or appliquéd block units, often square.
Bobbin	A centre, often wooden, to which thread is wound, used in controlling lengths of thread for weaving or in lace making.
Bodkin	A large, blunt needle used for threading ribbon or other thick threads, often used to lace clothing, such as stays or corsets.
Broderie perse	A form of appliqué in which individual motifs are cut from printed fabrics and then stitched to a ground to create the design.
Chintz	Printed cotton of an often floral nature, usually with a glazed finish.
Counterpane	A general term for a decorative bedcover, which could be a quilt, coverlet, bedspread (woven), etc.
Coverlet	Pieced, embroidered, or appliquéd quilt top that has no wadding or quilting. Usually made as a decorative bedcover, sometimes with an unquilted backing.
Framed quilt	A quilt with a central panel or pieced or appliquéd centre, around which a series of borders is sewn. The borders can be pieced, appliquéd, or of a single fabric; they may increase in width towards the outer edge of the quilt. An archetypal style of English quilt construction at the start of the nineteenth century.
Log cabin quilt	A form of patchwork block that begins with a central square. Strips are added around the square in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction (mimicking the construction of a log cabin), often with two opposing sides of lighter fabrics and the other two sides of darker prints, to create complex secondary patterns when blocks are joined.
Patchwork	A patchwork or ‘pieced work’ is a form of needlework that involves sewing together pieces of fabric to form a flat design.
Pieced-over-papers	A technique of patchwork (sometimes also called ’mosaic patchwork’ or ‘English paper piecing’). Geometric paper templates are cut into shapes required to complete a tessellating patchwork pattern. Slightly larger fabric pieces are then cut, wrapped around, and finally tacked over the paper to create units that are then sewn together using a

	tiny whipstitch. The paper templates are sometimes removed or may be retained for structure or heat.
Piecing	The method of sewing cut shapes of fabric together.
Quilt	A bedcover made of three layers, to include a top and bottom of fabric and a 'wadding' or filling in between.
Quilting	A practice of stitching through three layers, usually holding the fabric in a quilt frame, to secure layers together. Traditionally using a technique of rocking stitch, where the needle is rocked between two thimbles to create small, even running stitches. Patterns stitched can be functional or highly decorative.
Quilt frame	A wooden stretcher frame consisting of two 'lengths' of most commonly approx. 7–8ft, which slide through two wooden 'swords' and are then tensioned using wooden pegs through holes made through the swords. Metal tacks hold a length of woven tape to the wooden lengths. The quilt back is then tacked or pinned to the tape, and the back is wound around the length until tensioned to leave a working area. The wadding and top are then laid on the tensioned back fabric. The whole frame is rested on tables, chairbacks, or trestle legs. The quilter sits at the frame and sews.
Rocking stitch	A method of 'quilting' whereby a small needle is rocked between two thimbles, which both exert force to control the path of the needle. The thimbled hand on the top of the frame controls the needle's forward motion; the thimbled hand below pushes the needle tip back up through the three layers to create the stitch and control its size. This method allows a series of stitches to be created on the needle before the thread is pulled through. It facilitates small, regular running stitches.
Sampler	An embroidered form whereby a range of stitches can be recorded, for decorative or reference use.
Scripture quilt	The use of biblical or scriptural images or text as decorative or didactic content for a quilt or coverlet.
Thimble	A metal, bone, or horn cup held on the finger to protect it and offer greater traction when stitching.
Top	Colloquial name for an unquilted coverlet, perhaps before quilting, eg. 'a quilt top'.
Wadding	The soft 'filling' between the decorative quilt 'top' and 'back', which distinguishes a quilt from a coverlet. The wadding might be carded

	cotton or wool, flannelette, an old quilt, a blanket, cast-off clothing, or other household textiles.
Whipstitching	A method of creating a seam where two fabrics are placed face to face and a looped stitch is sewn over and over the two edges to create small, largely invisible stitches to hold patchwork shapes together.
Wholecloth	A wholecloth quilt is made from a single fabric (sometimes joined to create a large single piece), usually decoratively quilted in complex patterns.

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