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MARGARET CAMERON

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda Tiensdale</td>
<td></td>
<td>12/2/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Bari</td>
<td></td>
<td>03/6/97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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DATE DUE

15 Feb. 1997
10/6/98
"Our Fingers Were Never Idle":  
Women and Domestic Craft in the Geelong Region,  
1900-1960

By


Submitted to the Arts Faculty, Deakin University, in total fulfillment of the degree  
of  
Master of Arts  
September 1993
I certify that the thesis entitled "OUR FINGERS WERE NEVER IDLE":

"WOMEN'S DOMESTIC CRAFT IN THE GEELONG REGION 1900-1960"

and submitted of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: ____________________________

Date: ________________________________
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedicated to the memory of my father

I wish to thank the following people who have supported and encouraged me in the creation of this thesis. In particular I am in debt to the women I interviewed who so generously shared their stories with me.

Stephen, Tessa and Zoe
Nancy Sturgess, Lorraine Sainsbury and Marj Lowe
My supervisors
Bobbie, Hilda, Judy, Alva, Alma, Dawn, Vera, Corinne, Marjory, Anna, Ljerka, Delfa,
Elizabeth, Ilona, Maria, Mena, Wilhelmina, Jean, Janet, Margaret, Betty, Beatrice, Molly, Maic,
Sylvia, Anita, Lillian, Glenda, Diana, Joan, Alec, Ted and Edna
Ros Lewis, Shurlee Swain, Kathy Phelan, Karyn Howie, Greg Kelly,
Joe Di Stefano
Judith Lagging, National Wool Museum, Geelong
Tricia Slack, National Trust, Geelong Branch
Ann Ecket and staff of the Migrant Resource Centre, Geelong
Lisa Dale and Elizabeth Willis, Museum of Victoria
Ann Stephen and Kimberley Webber, Powerhouse Museum
Norm Houghton, Historical Records Centre, Geelong
Peter Barclay, Deakin University Audio Visual Unit
Library and computer staff of Deakin University, Geelong
Macintosh support from Deakin Student Services, Jan Wapling, Val L'Estrange and Marion Grant
Colour photocopies from Print Stop, Geelong

This work was facilitated by scholarship support from Deakin University.
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SYNOPSIS

This thesis is an exploration of women's domestic crafts in the Geelong region, between 1900 and 1960. Through analysing oral testimony and the women's handicraft artefacts, the nature of the domestic production of handicrafts and the meanings the makers have constructed around their creations and their lives is illuminated. The thesis is organised around the themes of work, space, the construction of femininity, memory, time and meaning.

The thesis argues that until recently, the discipline of history has privileged the experiences of men over those of women. It challenges the trivialising of women's handicrafts. It also argues that within the restrictive social structures around them and within the confined nature of their situations, the women of my study asserted themselves to transform their environments and to improve their situations through labour in the home. In 'making do', recycling materials and creating functional and decorative needlework items for their homes and families, the women were often finding solutions to pressing practical and economic problems. Doing handicrafts was rarely just a passive way of filling in time.

Rather, making and creating was for these women a multi-layered activity that simultaneously fulfilled a complex range of needs for themselves and their families. A multiplicity of deeply personal, aesthetic, familial, social, practical and economic needs were met in the making of domestic craft artefacts, whose symbolism reflected the values and meanings of the women's cultures, homes and families.
INTRODUCTION

The area of women’s domestic handicrafts has rarely been a topic for academic research in Australia. I have found this topic to be rich indeed and I have pursued this research for various reasons that encompass my family background and my current interests. On my father’s side, my grandmother trained as a milliner prior to the 1920s. Once a populous female occupation, millinery was a trade that virtually vanished from Australia throughout the 1960s to the 80s. My great aunts (of whom there were five) variously practised dressmaking and fine embroidery also. Throughout my childhood I was surrounded literally by the remnants of their past lives - fabrics and fine evening dresses, hats, embroidered handkerchiefs, gloves and crocheted d’oyleys, all made with great skill. On my mother’s side there was her mother’s d’oyley collection as well as those made by my mother in the 1940s for her glory box. This was my female inheritance but it was all taken for granted, never spoken about and not celebrated. It was just something that those women did. I was ignorant but curious as to why some women of those generations devoted so many hours and so much skill to the pursuit of fine and beautiful needlework. This curiosity was partially addressed with the appearance of Jennifer Isaacs’ book, The Gentle Arts: 200 Years of Australian Women’s Domestic and Decorative Arts, published in 1987 for the Australian Bicentenary.

This book surveyed the range of artefacts existing at that time drawn from women all over Australia. The book was written to redress the invisibility and silences surrounding women’s handiwork:

Because women traditionally devoted all their creative energies to the family, the home, the garden, most of the objects they made were hidden - seen only by their family or friends or visitors. The history of Australian women’s domestic and decorative art is therefore largely unknown.¹

Largely missing from its pages, however, were the handicrafts of migrant communities. Also lacking were detailed explanations that allowed the women themselves to speak. To pursue this interest I realised that my major research methods would need to be oral history due to the paucity of written sources, and material culture, to show the richness of the surviving artefacts.

I have also been motivated by a feminist concern to challenge the trivialised stereotype of women's handicrafts. This marginalisation of activities connected with women's labour in the home - of which handicrafts is but one activity - is symptomatic of the larger question of the historical and current devaluing of women's labour because it is performed by women in the private sphere and is unpaid.

I was motivated also through wanting to make public the achievements of previous generations of women who were actively denied opportunities for education and paid work that I take for granted today. Hopefully this research will contribute to a breaking down of the invisibility of these women, the negative stereotyping of 'old' women and the ageism that accompanies such attitudes.

Researching this area has, of course, entailed dealing with the problems of invisibility and silence. From the beginning I was aware that I could never know the size of the phenomenon I was investigating. How many women engaged with handicrafts in the home in decades past? Which activities were more popular than others and when? The artefacts stand in mute testimony to the fact that a great many women embroidered d'oyleys in the 1920s and 30s, that white work was very popular prior to and during the First World War, but there are no numbers or statistics available on the size of this phenomenon. Records of companies who supplied the handicraft market, such as Singer, Semco, Madame Weigall and Patons and Baldwins would probably enlighten us further. However at this stage these records, if they exist, have not to my knowledge, been accessed by historians. The *Richmond Guardian*, however, reported that Madame Weigall had sold over a million patterns in Australia for the year 1917\(^2\) when Australia's female population in 1921 was just over two and a half million, at 2,672,864.\(^3\)

There are further large questions concerning this area of study which have not yet been fully addressed: questions such as, is there a tradition of needlework in Australia? What is the nature of this tradition? How does it compare to those of other countries, such as the United States of America?(U.S.A.) Are there other

---


craft traditions in Australia? Are there connections between professional crafts people in Australia and domestic craft? Why have the textile arts been relegated to the status of craft? Should women's textile handicrafts be defined as art? Various scholars are working in this field but much more research needs to be done.

I have drawn much from feminist theory for this study. Firstly, there is the feminist critique of the discipline of history itself. Feminists have challenged the construction of the discipline as privileging men's experiences over women's. Other historians have exposed the quests for 'objectivity' and empiricism as impossibilities;⁴ as disguising a masculinist definition of the world.⁵ The discipline has also been criticised for being slow to change. For example, the study of social history only became acceptable after 1960; the use of oral testimony as evidence is still sometimes regarded with suspicion.⁶ Women as the focus of academic historical investigation was rare before 1970. The writing of women's history subsequently burgeoned, as feminists realised the importance of documenting women's past in order to develop a strong collective identity.

Feminist theory stresses the importance of self reflexivity, that is, stating clearly one's interest in a project, one's values; that the researcher is very much part of the research process and an influential part of the outcomes. This is based on the premise that research is never objective, but bounded by the researcher's position. What is required is a clear and honest statement of the researcher's values in doing the project. The 'ownership' of this project is evidenced by my use of the first person in the writing up of the research.

---

⁴ During the oral history debates of the 1980s Peter Spearritt, Bill Gammage, Tim Rowse and John Murphy, to name a few, agreed that the notion of objective truth was unobtainable in the writing of history. See for example, Peter Spearritt, 'Growing Up in the Late 1930s: Rationale, Methods and Materials', Australia 1938, A Bicentennial History Bulletin, Number 1, 1980, p. 9.


I have also taken from feminist theory the notion that research should be grounded in the lived reality of women's lives, rather than starting with a theory and making the research fit. Feminist theory should arise from women's experiences and not vice versa.7 Coupled with this valuing of women's lived experiences is the notion that it is important for women's voices to be heard.8 Consequently, oral testimony can be ideally suited to studying women's lives, as so few women's lives have been documented in texts. Oral testimony allows individuals' subjectivities9 to be part of the intellectual landscape, in all their diversity, subversiveness and variety. These are my assumptions and they are the boundaries of this research. These are further articulated in Chapter Two - Methodology.

The Study
The broad aims of my project were threefold. Firstly, I wanted to uncover the motivations and meanings that women attached to their domestic craft work; secondly, to understand how they constructed their life stories and lastly, the place that the doing of handicrafts had in their lives. Living in Barwon Heads and having family responsibilities, I chose the Geelong region as my focus both for accessibility and from a desire to start with my own community. I felt that the Geelong region offered a positive location as historically, until around the 1880s, it rivalled Melbourne as the State's premier city. Its current population encompasses a range of women - urban and rural, Anglosaxon and European, old established families as well as those more recently arrived since the Second World War. I also wanted to see if the Geelong region was reflected in the women's crafts.

The Geelong region is defined by the Geelong Regional Commission as an area of 2500 square kilometres running from Little River and Meredith in the north to Inverleigh in the west, Lorne in the south and Queenscliff/Point Lonsdale in the east.10 These are the boundaries I have adopted in this study. Figure 1 on page 6 shows a map of where the women of my study currently reside.

9 Subjectivity "refers to the state of being a thinking, speaking, acting, doing or writing agent". Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, Autumn, 1981.
Figure 1: Map of the Geelong Region

As it is virtually impossible to estimate historically how many women at a given time were involved in the domestic production of craft - we know that needlework was actively resisted by many women - I could not attempt a representative sample of women. Instead I aimed at a 'snapshot' of women currently residing in the Geelong region; starting with women who had been active in making handicrafts for some period of their lives.

As I was not primarily concerned with issues of artistic quality or specialist craft expertise, I did not approach the specialist craft groups in Geelong, such as the Embroiderers' Guild, the many patchwork groups, or the Handweavers' and Spinners' Guild. I intuitively surmised that this was a widespread phenomenon that crossed class and ethnic barriers, so I began in my own community and spoke to the Senior Citizens Club. Those who were interested referred me on to other women and I contacted the Geelong Branch of the National Trust, the Country Women's Association and the Migrant Resource Centre.

The study encompassed women from all classes. (See the biographical sketches in Appendix One.) I defined 'working class' as those whose husbands had been employed doing manual labour in factories and by the location of their residences in Geelong. I defined 'upper class' as being determined also by the husband's occupation, location of residence, schools attended by the women (Three of the women attended the Anglican private school 'The Hermitage' in Geelong) and other details that emerged from the interviews, such as having clothes made by a tailor or shopping in Melbourne's prestigious Georges Department store. I placed three of the women in this group. However, the question of social class in this study is problematic because of the rural bias of the group and because of gender.11 Fifteen of the women came from farming backgrounds and eight went on to marry farmers. The most obvious determinant of social status, that of the husband's occupation or income is not easily applied to farming. Social class was not a focus of the study and I did not ask questions specifically directed to this end. I placed the majority of the farming women as 'middle class' and thus the study included women from the usual three social classes.

The oral history research comprised locating and interviewing 28 women about their or their female relatives' lives. Twenty-six of the women were the subjects of the interviews and they were all born before 1935. The interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes each and this included discussing their craft artefacts. I arranged for the most significant of the craft work to be photographed whose selection I discuss in the following section, 'Material Culture'.

It should be noted that I did not preselect my interviewees in any way - the only criteria for inclusion were that the woman was born before 1935 and that she had been active in the crafts for some period in her life. I relied on recommendations and contacts as well as attending C.W.A. meetings in Barwon Heads and in Geelong on their craft day.

I was very aware of the absence of Koori women from the study but after some thought decided that, as a white outsider, at this specific point in history, should not attempt to interpret or even describe material that culturally and spiritually was the property of the Kooris. I hope the silences in the area of Koori women's crafts will be filled by Koori women themselves in the future.

The Women
In this study I interviewed 28 women - in three cases I interviewed female descendants about their female relatives who are now deceased (Martha, Ruby and Vera N) but who left a wealth of craft artefacts.

Figure 2 on page 9 gives an indicator of the main characteristics of the women. I think it is notable that 15 of the women's fathers were farmers or orchardists and that approximately three fifths of the group were from rural backgrounds in Europe as well as in Victoria. From this 15, eight of the women went on to marry farmers. This indicates a rural bias in the group which was not intentional but predictable, given that Geelong has been a rural as well as an industrial centre throughout its history. It may also indicate that rural women are more likely to be involved in crafts.

Six of the women migrated to Geelong in the post-war period. Mena migrated from Italy in 1954, Anna migrated from Bosnia in 1958, Della also migrated from Bosnia in 1959, Wilhelmina migrated from Holland in 1960, Anita migrated from Germany in 1961 and Ilona migrated from Yugoslavia in 1970.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Women</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>School Finishing Age</th>
<th>Type of Paid Work Outside the Home</th>
<th>Year Married</th>
<th>Child-bearing Years</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>CWA Member</th>
<th>Voluntary Work</th>
<th>Period of Life Lived in Geelong Region</th>
<th>Craft Artefacts Kept</th>
<th>Father's Occupation</th>
<th>Husband's Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Martha (dec.)</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1885 - 1905</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived all her married life at Stonehaven and retired to Newhaven, Geelong</td>
<td>Embroidered d'oyles, cloths, hand and down to daughters</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ruby (dec.)</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived all her married life at Stonehaven and retired to Newhaven, Geelong</td>
<td>Embroidered d'oyles, cloths, hand down to daughters</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bobbie</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Matriculated</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Childhood and then from 1950 on in Newtown, Geelong</td>
<td>Died flower arrangements - has kept very little</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vera N. (dec.)</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Canteen worker</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Colac district and retired to Belmont, Geelong</td>
<td>Knitted garments</td>
<td>Policeman &amp; Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Alma</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Childhood in Geelong Retired to Anglesea</td>
<td>Martha's fancy work, her own fancy work</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Motor parts business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jean</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>16 Intermediate</td>
<td>Nursing, Matron of Boy's Home</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired to Geelong</td>
<td>Embroidered items from her glory box, tasseled</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Head of Boys' Homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Beatrice</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Shop assistant and buyer</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Late 40s - early 50s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived all her life in East Geelong</td>
<td>Embroidered d'oyles and cloths</td>
<td>Shop manager</td>
<td>Textile mill worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Vera M</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Postal Clerk</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Late 40s - 1950</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Farmed at Lower Gellibrand and retired to Barwon Heads</td>
<td>Has given away her fancywork</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Delta</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1933-1947</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Migrated to Geelong in 1959</td>
<td>Embroidered national costumes, fancy work, weaving, crochet</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Factory work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Wilhelmina</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>1936 &amp; 1938</td>
<td>1938 - 1945</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Migrated to Geelong in 1940</td>
<td>Tapestries &amp; cross stitch embroideries</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Welder-Shell Refinery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Molly</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15 or 16</td>
<td>Haberdashery Shop Proprietor</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived in Geelong and Pt Lonsdale</td>
<td>Woven garments</td>
<td>Bank Manager</td>
<td>Never married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hilda</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Merit 14</td>
<td>Cleaning Gardening, Fruit Shop</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1940s - 1950</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived in Fyansford and then in Barwon Heads</td>
<td>Embroidered fancywork, wedding dresses</td>
<td>Farmer/orchardist</td>
<td>Cement works, rural labourer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Judy</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seamsstress</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived all her life near Geelong West</td>
<td>Dresses she had made</td>
<td>Crane driver</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Alva</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Stonehaven and then retired to Barwon Heads</td>
<td>Ruby's fancy work</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Marjory</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Married life in Geelong West</td>
<td>Embroidered fancywork, crochet, patchwork</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Real estate agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Betty</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Matriculated</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Late 40s - early 50s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Farmed at Lathbridge and retired to Geelong</td>
<td>A large range of items of various techniques</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Stock and station agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Sylvia</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Matriculated</td>
<td>Deputy Principal of a High School</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Early 60s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired to Pt Lonsdale</td>
<td>Some fancywork &amp; crochet</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Janet</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15 or 16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Farmed at Meredith and retired to Geelong</td>
<td>Some fancywork &amp; crochet</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Anna</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>3 yrs only</td>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Migrated to Geelong in 1958</td>
<td>Items made in Ukrainian style, cross stitch embroideries</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Factory work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Male</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15 or 16</td>
<td>Handicraft Instructor</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Early 1960s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lived in Geelong and Torquay</td>
<td>Family items - patchwork, crochet, fancywork</td>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>Gardener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Corinne</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Merit 14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Married life in Barwon Heads</td>
<td>Embroidered fancywork</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Printer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Anita</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Migrated to Geelong in 1961</td>
<td>Embroidered fancywork, crochet</td>
<td>Lutheran Minister</td>
<td>Draftsman - Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Margaret</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15 or 16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Late 50s - 60s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired to Pt Lonsdale</td>
<td>Family fancywork &amp; crochet</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Lena</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>3 yrs only</td>
<td>Factory work</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Migrated to Geelong in 1970</td>
<td>Her embroideries in Hungarian style</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Factory work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Dawn</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15 or 16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired to Barwon Heads</td>
<td>Family fancywork</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Bank Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five women spent periods of their lives in large cities, such as Melbourne and Sydney. Corinne spent her childhood and adolescent years in both Sydney and Melbourne, Dawn lived in Melbourne for some of her childhood, Bobbie spent 30 years of married life in Melbourne. Menà lived in an industrial city in Italy before migrating to Australia.

The women's birth dates ranged from 1866 to 1935. Eleven of the women were born in the decade 1910-1920; ten were born in the years 1921-1932. This had implications for the organisation of Chapter Four, 'Public and Private Worlds', as I focused on this dominant cluster of women who mostly married and bore their children in the decades 1940 - 1960.

One woman (Molly) never married; two of the women never bore children (Molly and Jean). Martha bore the largest family of 10 children born before 1905. All of the other women had families ranging from six to one child.

Twenty of the women were in paid employment for short periods of their lives (under 10 years), particularly in the years before their marriages. Those who were not were all on family farms and although they laboured, this was not always for wages.

Seven of the women had careers or prolonged periods in the paid workforce, often in work related to their domestic experience. Jean was a matron of several boys' homes, Maic was a handcraft instructor and supervisor of a department, Anita was a nurse, Molly owned a haberdashery shop and Sylvia was a secondary school manual arts teacher, rising to the position of Deputy Principal.

Figure 2 shows the occupations of the women's spouses which reflect the industries and enterprises of the Geelong district.

Twenty-four of the women have worked for community organisations voluntarily, ranging from local churches, ethnic communities, Geelong charities such as hospital auxiliaries, the Grace Mackellar Centre and Red Cross.¹² Fifteen of the women were members of the Country Women's Association.

¹² The Grace McKellar Centre is a hospital and homes for the aged in Geelong.
Three of the women would, I think, identify themselves as professional craftswomen, having had paid careers directly using their craft skills. However, these women also produced 'domestic' craft in their homes, so I have not excluded them from this study. There is a division within the craft world illustrated to me by Molly's question: "do you mean the real crafts - weaving and pottery - or just the rest?" Amongst the women of my study there is a continuum of crafts, ranging from the domestic, mostly textile crafts, to those associated with the Arts and Crafts movement in Australia, crafts such as weaving, ceramics, jewellery making etc. Maie, Sylvia and Molly have continuously been engaged with crafts professionally throughout their working careers, and straddle both the public and private worlds of craft.

The Material Culture
The material culture was an integral part of the study. As well as the immediate purpose of the thesis, I felt it imperative to record the material culture before it is gone. I hope my slides can be lodged in an appropriate place in Geelong. However, currently there is no fully functional museum in Geelong.

Due to the volume of items made or inherited by the women, I was unable to photograph every person's items. Instead, I photographed what I selected as significant. I photographed items that were representative of other women's work, such as doyleys; some items that were unique; others that illustrated an ethnic tradition; others that were historically rare. I have approximately 200 slides, some of which appear in this thesis as colour photographs. The period 1900-1960, for most of the women, was characterised by domestic production as opposed to the public consumption of necessities for the home. The styles and types of crafts practised in the home seemed to be relatively stable throughout this time, whereas from the 1960s on, a wide range of new crafts became popular. This was also a means of limiting my study. With the photographs I have made one exception in the case of Ilona, who was only able to take up her embroidery again when the time became available in retirement, after 1960. Her work continues what the family assured me was a traditional Hungarian style. I have excluded most clothing and dressmaking from the photographs as a way of limiting the focus except where it is unique or outstanding.

13 Interviews with Joan and Diana of Semco 1993; with Betty, Molly and Maic, 1992.
Some anonymous artefacts have also been included - many of them found in opportunity shops in the Geelong region - which usefully illustrate items that the women have described but had no examples to show me. This was the case with rag rugs, smocking and a 'wagga' quilt for example.

The question of accurately dating the artefacts needed to be addressed. It is problematic for a number of reasons. Expecting that the women would be able to remember the exact years they made things was unrealistic. However, women such as Alma, now in her eighties, had a surprisingly clear recall of when her mother Martha had made some fancywork items. When items were associated with events, such as marriages or births of children, the attribution was easier. Almost all of the women dated their items this way; this is explored further in Chapter Six, 'Making Meaning'.

Stylistic evidence can also be used to pinpoint the date of an artefact. This includes such things as the choice of a particular item and not another (for example, the 1930s is commonly known to be the doyley era), colour and ply of wool, the design motifs used, the types of stitches and materials used, the types of stitches and materials used, the colours, shapes and overall design of an item.

Another method of dating is to refer back to the original pattern used in the creation of the artefact. This would seem the most accurate way of attributing a date to an item. However, there are problems also with this method. Pattern books and leaflets were often published without a date of publication. One can use stylistic evidence here which is quite reliable for identifying time periods such as a decade. However, for more accurate dating this it is not reliable. Company records may enlighten historians further. However, my experience with the Semco Company was that the company did not copyright their designs and therefore no file was kept that would attribute accurate dates to patterns, although a numbering system was used for their pattern leaflets which may be the key to future research. Further complications are that the women often reworked old designs and older crafts and techniques were and are constantly being resurrected. Companies such as Patons

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14 I am indebted to Lorraine Sainsbury for locating many items.

15 The wagga is not quite anonymous as a woman in the shop told me it had belonged to a Mrs Wall of Grovedale, now deceased.
and Semco did likewise, reissuing popular designs over many years and incorporating certain motifs into newer designs.

In collecting the material culture for this research I have recorded the dates attributed to the items by their makers. However, I cannot claim that these dates are totally accurate because of the imprecise nature of the subject matter and the difficulties outlined above. The focus of the thesis is on the women's motivations and meanings rather than a study of the artefacts divorced from their contexts. Therefore precise dating was not essential. It is not primarily a study of the changing styles over the decades - this awaits further research.

Feminism has highlighted the power of language to define the nature of the world and with this in mind I have not altered the women's testimonies in any way other than to insert punctuation. (To avoid multiple repetitions of the women's interview dates and details, I have not listed them in the footnotes but in the bibliography under 'Primary Sources'. Interviews that are in addition to those with the 28 women are acknowledged in the footnotes.)

Further to this, are the definitions of terms that I have used in the study. In using the term 'domestic' I am referring to the place where the handicrafts were made, namely in the home, and not made for wages. There is no firm agreement on whether women's domestic arts should be termed 'art', 'decorative art', 'domestic arts', textile arts', 'craft', 'handiwork', handicraft', 'handcrafts', 'needlework', 'embroidery', 'plain and fancywork' etcetera. The terms are used differently in different countries. For example, 'needlework' is favoured in the United States, 'embroidery' in England and both terms are used in Australia.

The Art/Craft Debate
What is always apparent in popular and academic discussions is the gendered and classed nature of art and craft. Historically art came to be defined as painting and sculpture, upper class and male - textile arts were relegated to the realm of craft , the working class and female. Debates have raged about what is art or craft and what is not, usually serving as a bastion to male privileges. Grace Cochrane in *The

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Crafts Movement in Australia provides a useful overview of this complex issue. She defines 'craft' in the following way:

Above all, however, 'craft' is really a particular attitude to a way of making things. A craft attitude is recognised in a very positive sense by the broadest population - which is why it is applied to everything from making bread to writing novels. Pursuing an idea, through an affinity for materials and an enjoyment in understanding the necessary skills and processes associated with them, to make something well, remains the core of crafts practice. 17

In this thesis I will use the range of terms associated with women's domestic arts and crafts interchangeably and the term 'craft' not in a perjorative sense but in the spirit of Cochrane's definition, which is to do with the maker's attitude and not the viewer's judgement.

One of my aims was to attempt to redress the fact that most of women's domestic craft work is anonymous and the maker may only be known to her family or descendants, and the conditions as well as the date for the making of the artefact unknown. However, for reasons of privacy and security, I have only been able to partially achieve my aim of linking the maker with her creations and at the wishes of most of the women interviewed I have used only their christian names. However, my other aims have not been affected by the requirement for anonymity.

These are the issues that have informed the project overall, while other academic debates structure various chapters of the study. Chapter One assesses the literatures that have informed and shaped this study. These are the academic writings about the discipline of history, the practice of oral history and material culture, women and the family in Australian history, women and work, the public/private debate, the construction of femininity, as well as works dealing with women and craft in Australia, the U.S.A. and Britain. These themes are taken up in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two outlines the methodology chosen for the project and in particular discusses the feminist practice of oral history while Chapter Three places the women in the historical, social and economic contexts of the Geelong region.

Chapter Four examines the theme of women and work in society and particularly focuses on the public/private debate. The interview testimony adds further insights into this debate about the nature of women's paid and particularly, unpaid domestic work, which was the context for much of their production of craft.

Chapter Five takes up the theme of femininity and the role of needlework in its construction. Using a range of sources such as The Geelong Advertiser and the fancywork designs of the Semco Company in addition to the interview material, the discourse of femininity that surrounded the women is examined.

Chapter Six examines the themes of time, remembering, inheritances and making meaning. The central process of the oral history interview - remembering over time - and the role of the craft artefacts in remembering is examined. The oral testimony is used to examine the meanings some of the women have derived from being involved in craft over their lifetimes. The theme of making meaning is an under researched area in history but a potentially fruitful area. These are the themes with which my study engages.
CHAPTER ONE - A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Feminist Histories of Women in Australia

It is traditional to begin a review of the feminist histories of women in Australia with the pioneering works of Summers\textsuperscript{18}, Dixson\textsuperscript{19}, Kingston\textsuperscript{20}, Ryan and Conlon\textsuperscript{21} all published in 1975. These works were indeed seminal as they set the agenda for debates about the nature of the oppression of Australian women, (Summers and Kingston), the nature of women's domestic work (Kingston) and the nature of women's paid work (Ryan and Conlon). There are, however, numerous other themes in the field of women's history that have developed since 1975, and a useful recent survey is that by Kay Saunders.\textsuperscript{22} For the purposes of my study I have selected only those works of direct relevance - specifically the themes of women and the family and women and work. I will also discuss some general histories which I have drawn upon and then discuss works on women and craft.

Prior to 1975 historical works about women had been written particularly within the genre of autobiography and in books honouring pioneer ancestors, such as Eve Pownall's \textit{Mary of Maranoa}, first published in 1959.\textsuperscript{23} However these were not feminist analyses as they did not challenge the existing gender order or the patriarchal construction of the discipline of history, which had always rendered women invisible with its focus on masculinist radical nationalism as the dominant paradigm in Australian history.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{22} Kay Saunders, 'Recent Women's Studies Scholarship, 1: History', \textit{Hecate}, Volume 16, Nos. 1 and 2, 1990, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{23} Eve Pownall, \textit{Mary of Maranoa}, Melbourne, 1959.

\end{flushleft}
The Nature of Women and the Family

Summers' _Damned Whores and God's Police_ boldly broke the relative silence about women in Australian history. Her aim was to understand the contemporary position of women in Australia and to expose the ideology of sexism. She argued that this ideology stemmed from women being colonised as a sex from the early days of conquest and settlement of Australia and that the stereotypes of women as either "damned whores" or "God's police" arose from this period and reflected the limited positions presented to women in Australian society ever since.²⁵

Summers did not aim to write a scholarly historical work and consequently the book is very general, wide ranging, lacking historical detail and specificity.²⁶ Dixson's _The Real Matilda_ suffers similar weaknesses to Summers. Women are depicted as passive victims in history - Dixson describes them as "doormats of the western world" - and large areas of female experience, such as the family, are omitted from both works.

With hindsight, these works reflect their historical position (the beginning of the second wave feminist movement in Australia) and it becomes clear how much the writing of the history of Australian women has advanced since then. These were ambitious books seeking to account for women's oppression in general and show flaws in their historical analysis as a result. They attempted to break free of the radical nationalist tradition but did not succeed. As Patricia Grimshaw wrote:

they in some senses accepted the radical nationalist interpretation of the male experience of colonial life but described women's experiences as the exact opposite, the other side of the coin. If colonial life had been liberating for men, if it had fostered mateship, collectivism and radical politics, the converse was true for women. Colonial females had experienced exploitation, exclusion, isolation, hardship.²⁷

Both have been criticised by Elizabeth Windschuttle for their lack of proper historical method - of selecting their material to suit their arguments and relying too

²⁵ Anne Summers, op. cit., p. 21.
²⁶ ibid., p. 20.
heavily on secondary sources. And as Susan Magarey observed, Summers and Dixson advanced mono-causal explanations for the oppression of Australian women. However, the writing of feminist histories of Australian women had begun and debates arose from what Summers and Dixson chose to include as well as what they chose to exclude.

The quest to uncover the nature of Australian women’s experiences moved on various fronts throughout the 1980s, such as the family, the construction of femininity and the nature of women’s work.

Pat Grimshaw’s work on the family in colonial times has made a substantial contribution to the history of Australian women. In 1980 and again in 1986, she disputed Summers’ and Dixson’s views of women as passive victims. She claimed that, despite many hardships, colonial life had for many women been an improvement on what they had experienced in England.

In her first article she wrote:

The patriarchal subordination of wife to husband did not appear to be a general characteristic of nineteenth century pioneering society...women’s participation in the economic concerns of the family led to a greater appreciation of their worth, rather than to their degradation.

She drew on the ease with which Australian women received the vote as evidence of a lack of animosity towards women improving their situations. This article is argued persuasively but lacks a solid amount of primary evidence. relying instead on theories of the family espoused by Aries, Elkin and Shorter for example.

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Grimshaw's later article presents far more substantial evidence to refute Summers and Dixson. Drawing on detailed studies of Castlemaine in the 1860s and Horsham in the 1870s, she compares these with studies of Melbourne in the 1880s, thus placing women in specific material and social contexts. She recovers "colonial women from the obscurity of the male frontier" and then argues that it was not the frontier ethos that became the dominant ideology in Australian society, but rather the ideology of the family, which arose out of the gender division of labour employed in the rapidly industrialising work force and the urban development of cities such as Sydney and Melbourne.\(^\text{33}\) In this way she questioned the dominance of the masculinist radical nationalist view of Australian history.

Her 1980 article was challenged convincingly by Marilyn Lake in 1981.\(^\text{34}\) Lake argued that it was a nonsense to speak of 'pioneer women' as a homogenous group and that they were actually separated by class, political and economic circumstances. She also questioned "the notion that women in general participated in rural life in the ways and with the rewards Grimshaw postulates". \(^\text{35}\)

The significance of Lake's article for my work is that it draws attention to the notion of differences among women (such as ethnicity and class) which has become an important theme in the latter half of the 1980s. Lake points to the necessity for historical work to be grounded in specific times and places and the impossibility of generalising widely about women in history. Both her and Grimshaw's work are meticulously researched and both complement each other (particularly Grimshaw's later article) in depicting the conditions of different classes of women in various rural and urban situations in different periods in history.

\(^{33}\) Patricia Grimshaw, 'Women in Colonial Australian History' in op. cit. p. 186.

\(^{34}\) Marilyn Lake, 'Building Them Up With Aspers: Pioneer Women Re-assessed', in Hecate, Volume 7, Number 2, 1981.

\(^{35}\) ibid. p. 9.
The focus on women and the family substantially broadened in the 1980s, especially with the works of Jill Matthews and Kerreen Reiger. While women and the family remained central to these works, both of their analyses went far beyond this - Matthews examining the construction of femininity throughout the twentieth century and Reiger focusing on the period 1880-1940, a time when attempts were made to modernise the Australian family with profound implications for women.

Reiger charts the rise of a new group of professionals or experts - doctors, teachers, nurses, child guidance specialists and kindergarten teachers - who initiated strategies to modernise all aspects of the Australian family. These strategies ranged from the medicalisation of childbirth and child rearing, the infant welfare movement, the education of women about contraception, health, hygiene, nutrition and new practices of housekeeping to advocating the adoption of new domestic technologies in the home, which were all attempts to apply principles of science to the home and family. Reiger argues that the traditional model of the family as a warm safe refuge from the economic world was undermined by the rationalising forces of this new class of experts, which was an unintended consequence of their efforts.

This study is significant and Reiger differentiates it from studies that have preceded hers in women's history - because her theoretical analysis is more substantial than many works in women's history. She draws on the Frankfurt School's study of the family, Chodorow's investigations into mothering and Ehrenreich and English's research into a similar phenomenon in the U.S.A. She suggests that the 'rationalising' of the home in Australia was part of a wider movement occurring in other industrialised capitalist societies and states that those processes "raise the issue of how the social relationships of capitalism relate to the social relations of a patriarchal society in 'modern times'."

38 ibid, p. 3
39 ibid, p. 4.
Reiger's work provides specifically Australian material which seriously explores motherhood and child rearing. I have taken from her work a recognition of the role of the State in ordering women's lives and the ways in which it impacts on family life.

Other studies of the inter-war years, such as Lesley Johnson's study of radio, Ann Stephens' study of the advertising industry and H. Wolfer's study of department stores all tend to reinforce Reiger's finding that Australian women were being educated to become consumers instead of producers of household necessities during this era in capitalism. These studies have provided my study with an economic context of specific relevance to women situated in the home.

The linking of Australian women's history with wider historical questions is something that Kay Daniels had urged, as she felt that there had been a failure for feminist social history to impact on mainstream histories.

Reiger clearly demonstrates that the role of housewife was a historical construction that changed according to economic and social conditions, something that Matthews accomplishes for the construction of femininity generally. As she states: "Woman creates herself and is created by her specific circumstances. Her nature is not a fixed quality, but peculiar to her time and place."

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43 Kay Daniels, 'Feminism and Social History', *Australian Feminist Studies*, No. 1, Summer, 1985, p. 27.

44 Jill J. Matthews, op. cit. p. 4.
Her aim was to:

understand the specific meaning and experiences of becoming a woman in twentieth century Australia, to analyse the civilisation that produces us, to uncover the peculiar circumstances in and from which we have made ourselves.45

In order to do this she examined the lives of women who had failed to live up to the prescribed feminine ideal, those who had been categorised as 'mad' and admitted to Glenside Hospital in South Australia between 1945 and 1970. A random sample of 60 women's records was examined. Matthews looked at these women's lives because: "mad women's lives are the antithesis or negation of the lives of ordinary women." The failure to be a good woman sheds light on how femininity has been constructed, "indicating the impossibility of the task we have been set and accepted".46

Matthews' work is significant because she challenges the masculinist tradition of the 'objective' historian on many levels - through her choice of subjects - "ordinary women"; through her self-reflexivity - stating her values unequivocally and articulating her assumptions and view of the world as part of her theoretical analysis. She uses unorthodox sources and reads these 'against the grain' in order to uncover the silences surrounding ordinary women's lives. And she states categorically that feminist history is "deeply partisan and politically committed history. It takes the experiences of women as central and denies the validity of those histories that do not".47 Matthews' work informs my study substantially in that I share her use of 'unorthodox' sources - through using oral testimony and material culture - as sources of evidence. Her delineation of the construction of femininity provided my study with a framework on which to build and my study adds the further dimension of the role of needlework in this construction.

In many ways Matthews has achieved what Daniels had urged:

We need to move beyond women's history being a supplement to history and move towards the notion of women's history as a challenge to the existing concepts on which historical writing has been based.48

45 ibid, p. 5.
46 ibid, p. 21.
47 ibid, p. 18.
48 Kay Daniels, op. cit. p. 27.
Other feminist historians, such as Lake and Saunders for example, have expressed similar positions. I shall move on now to examine two articles in particular that seem representative of the feminist challenge to the discipline of history.

**Critiques of the Discipline of History**

Matthews further articulated her challenge to the discipline of history (and to academia generally) in her article entitled 'Deconstructing the Masculine Universe', where she stated that all epistemologies were essentially masculine constructions presented as universal truths: "We have not acknowledged completely the gender bias of all knowledge, perception and experience". She further stated:

Not only are we faced here, as everywhere else, with the enforced silence of women: the records of our struggles have been destroyed or never made, statements of our experiences have not been heard. But we are confronted with a torrent of masculine words, a wall of masculine analysis which proclaims itself to speak the objective truth.

One implication of this is that feminist historians need to forge new methods and ways of uncovering the experiences of those who have not been heard in history. My study, in giving women voice and taking seriously their involvements with handicrafts, attempts to do just this. This is a transforming practice, a process that has already been occurring, although unevenly and not without resistance in the discipline of history.

However, Judith Allen despaired of a transformed discipline of history ever being accepted as valid history, in her article 'Evidence and Silence: The Limits of History'. Here she detailed how history excludes women:

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49 Marilyn Lake, 'Women, Gender and History', *Australian Feminist Studies*, No. 7 & 8, Summer 1988.


52 ibid, p. 12.
Phallocentric disciplines like history are constituted on the exclusion of women - literally, professionally, conceptually, methodologically and epistemologically... What has been done in women's history raises considerable doubt that accepting the discipline of history as presently constituted is a serious option for feminism... it is likely that the phallocentric nature of the discipline can remain intact, despite the radical and logical character of the current feminist critique. 53

She states that history is too important to be ignored by feminism and that a way out of the impasse is to acknowledge a position outside traditional academic disciplines. "For feminists there is no choice but to start and continue on from this position, most of the time and separate and external to traditional knowledges." 54 My study presents 'alternative' knowledges to those traditionally accepted in academia through its focus on old women, craft and through using 'marginal' methods - those of oral history and material culture. This can be seen to be following Allen's directive to build a transformed discipline.

Women and Work
A major topic of debate throughout the 70s and 80s has been the nature of women's work in Australia and this work has been of major importance to my study. (Chapter Four focuses on the nature of women's work and the public/private debate). As mentioned previously, Beverly Kingston drew attention to the domestic context of much of women's paid and unpaid work up until 1940,55 and Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon traced the history of women's struggle for equal pay throughout the twentieth century, focusing on women's paid work performed outside the home56. Both these works countered the relative lack of historical knowledge about women and work. Kingston's study was pioneering with its focus on domestic service - something that has left few traces in Australia - as well as her research on housework, a theme that was not taken up again for almost a decade.

54 ibid, p. 189
55 Beverly Kingston, op. cit.
56 Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, op. cit.
Paid work is the site of a major form of inequality in Australia and an early area of investigation for feminist historians. Paid work has been traditionally organised around the patriarchal ideology of 'separate spheres' that developed in nineteenth century Britain. This ideology espoused the 'naturalness' of women being in the home and responsible for child rearing while paid work was reserved for men and performed outside of the home.\textsuperscript{57} One of the crucial tasks for feminists was to expose the masculine nature of this division between the public and private worlds and the effects this dichotomy has on women.

Feminists have rejected the masculinist notion that only paid work is of value and have succeeded in revaluing women's unpaid labour, exposing the connections between the two and making clear the dependence of the public sector on the private. Matthews' article, 'Deconstructing the Masculine Universe' articulates this position very well and this debate has been central to my study. It provides the conceptual framework for Chapter Four which looks at the women's paid and unpaid work.

The examination of women's paid work proceeded quickly with publication of the papers from the Women and Labour Conferences, held until 1984, which were rich compilations of studies of women in the paid workforce. Other works of note are Daniels' and Murmane's \textit{Uphill All the Way}, a collection of documents which included a section on women's paid and unpaid work\textsuperscript{58}, while more recently, Aveling and Damousi's \textit{Stepping Out of History} has made accessible previously unknown documents about women and work\textsuperscript{59}. There have been numerous articles on women and work in journals and in books such as \textit{Australian Women New Feminist Perspectives} \textsuperscript{60} and its predecessor; Saunders and Evans (eds) \textit{Gender Relations in Australia}\textsuperscript{61} in Bicentennial histories such as \textit{Australians: A

\textsuperscript{57} For a detailed discussion of this ideology and the ways historians have used it, see Linda Kerber,'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', \textit{Journal of American History}. (75:1), 1988, pp. 9-39.

\textsuperscript{58} Kay Daniels and Mary Murmane, \textit{Uphill All the Way: A Documentary History of Women In Australia}. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1980.


\textsuperscript{60} Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds), op. cit.

\textsuperscript{61} Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) op. cit.
Historical Library and Burgmann and Lee's three volume A People's History of Australia.

Women's paid work has been the focus of study more often than their unpaid work and the connections between these two sectors of the economy have not always been made. Yet it is unpaid work that has been an experience shared by all of the women of my study. This weakness in the literature is partially addressed by my study. At first glance the literature on women's unpaid work seems to be sparse, probably because, as yet, no single history of domestic work in Australia has been published. However, I located a number of relevant chapters in books.

Kingston's My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann includes probably the most detailed history of domestic technologies and housework; there is a chapter by Saunders and Evans in their Gender Relations: Domination and Negotiation, Matthews' Good and Mad Women, Reiger's The Disenchantment of the Home and Raelene Frances’ 'Never Done But Always Done Down' in Burgmann and Lee. This work has been crucial to the public/private debate as it has closely detailed women's unpaid contribution to the economy which in turn has had implications beyond academia. Domestic labour is crucial to national economies and this is finally being acknowledged in some quarters. However, the fact that it has only recently been valued has been a major source of oppression for women. These works provide a context for my study, that of women's unpaid labour. My study further sheds light on the connections between the two spheres and shows that the women fluidly negotiated both sectors.

General Histories
There are some general histories that have contributed to the conceptualising of my study. Firstly, there is Marilyn Lake's The Limits of Hope, a study of the soldier settlers and their families in Victoria 1915-38. I found this study significant in

64 Raelene Frances, 'Never Done But Always Done Down' in ibid, 'Making A Life'.
that it succeeded in focusing on the lives of the women and children on the settlement blocks and not just on the experiences of the men. (This is in stark contrast to, for example, Lloyd Robson's *History of Tasmania* which hardly mentions women.)\(^{66}\) As well as official correspondence and records of the relevant government departments, Lake used settlers' letters as source material. The theme of the agency of the women is developed throughout the book, culminating in their political mobilisation and the discrediting of the scheme, which she attributes to the women.\(^{67}\) I have taken from this study a focus on the agency of women and the necessity for detailed analysis to uncover this.

Janet McCalman in *Struggletown* similarly demonstrates the agency of women who devised strategies for surviving the Depression in Richmond, and working class life in general.\(^{68}\) Using oral history, McCalman gives equal voice and space to the women and the domestic domain (sexuality and children for example) as she gives to the public domain of politics. She demonstrates the effects of decisions made in the political and economic spheres on women in the home, clearly delineating the connection between the two. The use of oral history adds the dimension of the personal in all its immediacy to her history.

McCalman uses the technique of 'introducing' her subjects at the outset and follows their lives throughout her book. This is a very effective technique, again linking the public with the private; chronological, public time with the personal time of her subjects' lifespans. This adds coherence to her narrative, something which I think Dianne Bell's *Generations*, arranged thematically, lacks.\(^{69}\) Although ostensibly not an academic historical study, I have included *Generations* here because my study has some central elements in common with it. Firstly, there is the centrality of women's lives as her subjects. Secondly, her focus is on meaning - what the women value, inherit and pass on. Thirdly there is her use of oral testimony as her main research tool and it is these three aspects that my study shares. *Generations* was written for a popular market, although informed by

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66 Cited in Kay Daniels, op. cit. p.27.
academic literature. It is a celebratory text and is notable for what it reveals about traditions and meanings that women make in their lives.

It also provides a salutary lesson about the dangers of generalising about women and not acknowledging differences. As Judith Brett wrote:

It is interested in establishing the unities in Australian women’s experience, both across and within generations, and this leads Bell to gloss over differences between the interviewed women’s experiences.\(^7^0\)

Attempts to redress the failure of women’s history to tackle differences of class and race is now being addressed by works such as Saunders and Evans' *Gender Relations in Australia*.\(^7^1\) Instead of women's history it is a history of the interaction of both sexes, hence its subject is 'gender relations'. There has been much debate about the merits or otherwise of using terms such as 'women's history' or 'gender history'. Saunders argues that the term 'women's history' is too narrow:

gender relations research is not academically advantaged by labelling it merely as 'women's history', to which men can never contribute, nor even really understand... What, therefore, is basically at issue here are situations of conflict and accommodation (or conflict resolution), and these are open to examination by any committed scholars, whatever their gender, ethnicity or class.\(^7^2\)

This argument has a great deal of merit, but it is predicated on the now extensive body of women's history that has been published in Australia since 1975, for without this body of knowledge, gender relations in its entirety, could not exist. It points, however, to a possible new direction for women's history which may avoid it becoming a narrow backwater, ignored by the mainstream. I place my study firmly in the 'women's history' camp as I think there are large areas of women's history that still need to be consolidated before the discipline moves into the wider area of gender relations.


\(^7^1\) Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans, op. cit.

\(^7^2\) ibid, p. xxi.
Despite the potential hazard of narrow specialisation I see my study contributing specific knowledge about one group’s experiences through highlighting their creativity. Lacking from historical studies of women (apart from Bell’s Generations) have been works dealing with meaning - what is significant for women in their lives. As Jane Lewis wrote:

> Exploration of the way women mediated or resisted the role expected of them, or of the tensions they experienced, still does not tell us what meanings they attached to family, home, marriage or children.  

She discusses the need for unusual sources to be accessed for this information. My study attempts to do this through examining material culture - the women’s handiwork and what this says about the women - as evidence of the meanings they made of various phases and events in their lifecycles.

Attention has also been drawn to the dearth of information on the social history of crafts. The Autumn 1990 edition of the British Oral History journal entitled 'The Crafts', focused on this problem. The editorial noted that:

> oral historians have tended to neglect the connection between the material and the cultural...At the same time, craft historians have paid little attention to the importance of the social, the cultural and the physical environment which determines the development of crafts and craft workers.

In another article June Freeman commented that:

> The craft world is desperately short of information about most past craftsmakers’ attitude to their work, how it fitted into their lives and the meaning it held for them.

These are some of the issues my study addresses - hopefully it will fill a gap between the social history of Australian women and their creativity. As will become apparent from the following sections, there are relatively large areas of silence about women and their engagement with handicrafts.

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75 June Freeman,'The Crafts as Poor Relations', in ibid. p. 26.
I locate women’s domestic craft in the context of unpaid work performed in the home and for this reason I have surveyed the studies of women’s domestic work written not just in Australia (discussed previously) but in the United States of America and Britain as well. The following section discusses these works.

Feminist Histories of Women’s Domestic Work (U.S.A. and Britain)
In this section I have selected what I think to be some of the more representative articles, as a survey of the whole field would be too vast for my purposes.

In 1974 Joann Vanek’s article entitled ‘Time Spent in Housework’ was published in the journal *Scientific American*. It presented her finding that "Nonemployed women, meaning women who are not in the labor force, in fact devote as much time to housework as their forebears did".\(^76\) This was despite the introduction of household technologies in the U.S.A. since the 1920s. She had compared data collected in 1925 about how women budgeted their time with a 1966 survey and it revealed a wealth of information about both rural and urban women.

The main finding was that although technologies such as washing machines had lightened the load physically, women were spending more time washing clothes, as standards of cleanliness has risen. Other tasks such as shopping and childcare had increased and more time was spent on tasks associated with consumption. Women in the paid work force spent only slightly less time on housework than those who were unemployed.

This study was of great significance for the feminist movement as it confirmed what women had long suspected. Ruth Schwartz-Cowan’s studies of the history of housework concurred with Vanek’s argument and shed further light on the nature of housework.\(^77\) Her studies drew attention to the nebulous nature and complexity of housework both as an occupation and as an area of study:

> Housework is as difficult to study as it is to do. The student, like the houseworker, is hard pressed to decide where the activity begins and

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where it ends, what is essential and what is unessential, what is necessary and what is compulsive.\textsuperscript{78}

Her history of housework is competent but lacks a theoretical perspective; Susan Strasser's \textit{Never Done: A History of American Housework} is more comprehensive in scope and informed by a feminist analysis, contributing to the public/private debate.\textsuperscript{79} Her work validates Australian studies of unpaid work through providing a cross cultural perspective.

In Britain early works such as that by Caroline Davidson\textsuperscript{80} were purely descriptive without any theoretical engagement with the issues posed by Vanek and lacking, like Schwartz-Cowan and Strasser, a grounding in the wider context of a capitalist and patriarchal social system or a consideration of wider social changes.

Stevi Jackson's 1992 article is a more comprehensive analysis where she develops a materialist feminist perspective\textsuperscript{81} placing housework within its capitalist and patriarchal contexts. The dependence of the public economy on the unpaid labour of the private sphere is revealed. The depth and range of her analysis is impressive, as she includes ideology and questions of meaning. I found it very relevant to my study and took from this her framework of providing links between ideological, economic and social levels of society that impact upon women's lives.

These studies, representative of a wider body of literature, demonstrate the gendered nature of housework and that it is an integral part of a capitalist economy. Together they show that work in the public sector is dependent upon work being performed in the private sector, which is crucial to the feminist investigation of work and the persistent exclusion of women from the paid economy.


These studies demonstrate the importance of women’s labour in the home and many of my interview questions were directed to this area drawing out connections between women’s domestic work and their handicrafts. In the next section I discuss works specifically on women’s handcraft skills.

**Feminist Histories of Women’s Domestic Craft (U.S.A. and Britain)**

I have used the term ‘feminist histories’ in order to distinguish the authors I have selected from the huge volume of literature on women’s crafts in the U.S.A. and in Britain. There are three strands of craft literature - the ‘how to’ books ranging over all manner of techniques, providing patterns, ideas and inspiration and there are some histories of specific crafts - for example, patchwork in the U.S.A. or lace making through the ages. These works invariably concentrate on outstanding works that may have been collected by museums. Thirdly, there are what I term ‘feminist’ works on women’s craft.

In using the term ‘feminist’ I am referring to an attitude that values women’s work, often previously ignored, that recognises the oppression of women and is inclusive of all women, not just those who are in some way special or who are professional artists.

The literature on patchwork is enormous and I have mostly not engaged with it, as I think that the American tradition is unique and quite different from an Australian patchwork tradition.\(^82\) One notable American work is *Pieced by Mother*, papers from a symposium held in 1988,\(^83\) which investigate the social contexts of the makers and questions of meaning. Many of the articles provide new ways of seeing women’s domestic needlework, although the specific context is American.\(^84\) This study validates my focus of investigation, that of linking makers with their work and exploring with them questions of the meaning of craft artefacts.

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\(^84\) It was also a community history project where families were invited to register their textile heirlooms and supply family photos and oral reminiscences about their female relative who quilted. It is a very useful model for a community history project.
A significant scholar of women's domestic needlework is Rachel Maines who, in 1974, established the Centre for the History of American Needlework at the University of Pittsburgh. In her article 'Fancywork - the Archeology of Lives' she emphasises the importance of women's needlework as an historical source for the study of women's lives. She and Lucy Lippard expose the masculine prejudice against textile arts:

This cultural blindness is traceable to our deep seated prejudice against textiles as a woman-dominated area of society...grassroots needlework is especially frightening in its implications for a broadening of artistic definitions to include mainstream women.

Rachel Maines's more recent article 'Evolution of the Potholder: From Technology to Popular Art' provides a model for analysing needlework artefacts when information on the makers is unavailable. She surveyed 900 patterns to describe the stylistic changes of the artefacts over the decades. Unlike her earlier articles, the makers are missing from this project and the items are viewed in isolation, reflecting a traditional material culture approach. However, Maines demonstrates the principal means of dating women's fancywork - through using patterns - and emphasises their value in studying women in history.

Susan B. Swan's Plain and Fancy also makes the point that needlework is an extremely important historical artefact, particularly for women:

Except for needlework, almost no tangible products made by the women of centuries past remain... surviving needlework projects represent one of our few remaining links with half our ancestors.

She argues that "beneath the cloak of domesticity and subservience" women expressed themselves and their agency:

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89 ibid, p. 6.
For needlework, in addition to being the most important contribution made by early American women to the decorative arts, was also their most acceptable outlet for creative expression, and indeed...the only concrete evidence of their endeavours.  

Other scholars, such as Laurie Yager Lieb have contributed to my thinking about women's domestic needlework, the latter in particular for her work on the symbolism of women's needlework. I have taken this theme and explored it in Chapter Five in investigating the designs and motifs of the Semco Company's embroideries. I have taken from Lieb the insight that the symbols of women's embroidery embodied values and communicated messages that were not simply ornamental.

A useful collection of work on women's material culture is Making the American Home: Middle Class Women and Domestic Material Culture 1840-1940, by Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne. While some of the authors, such as Susan Arpad, link oral testimony with artefacts, the works remain largely descriptive rather than theoretical. However, collectively these works have legitimated my choice of subject for study and emphasised the importance of needlework artefacts in the history of women. My study shares the methodology used by both Mainco and Arpad of combining oral testimony with material evidence.

In Britain a feminist reassessment of women's needlework is illustrated by the work of Rozsika Parker. The Subversive Stitch; Embroidery and the Making of

90 ibid, p. 12.
93 Susan Arpad,'"Pretty Much to Suit Ourselves": Midwestern Women Naming Experience Through Domestic Arts' in Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne(eds), op. cit.
94 Rozsika Parker, The Subversive Stitch; Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine. The Women's Press, London, 1984. I was unable to trace other feminist works on women and craft. There are other recent works on patchwork, such as that by Janet Rae for example, but this lacks a broad social analysis.
the Feminine is a history of embroidery in England from the Middle Ages to recent times (the 1980s) written to accompany an exhibition of the same name. Her thesis is that embroidery has become indelibly associated with the stereotypes of femininity, such as domesticity, chastity and passivity. As is indicated by the title, Parker claims that embroidery has been an important means of educating women into the feminine ideal over centuries. Conversely, women have also used embroidery as a weapon in their resistance against femininity through using it to disguise their rebellion and subversiveness under its cover of socially acceptability or to express their resistance directly by using sewing and embroidery to create political messages of protest, such as the AIDS quilt and banners made by the women of Greenham Common.

This book shows clearly how ideologies of femininity changed over the centuries in Britain, although the expectation that girls be taught to sew and that women should embroider, remained constant. Parker shows how embroidery was a signifier of class and 'respectability', so that class and gender intersected in embroidery. For her sources she uses needlework artefacts (again reinforcing the notion of how crucial textile artefacts are in the history of ordinary women) as well as analysing paintings of each era, which also provide a wealth of information about women's lives.

However, there are weaknesses in the book which is predominantly a history of white British women of the upper and middle classes. There is little written about race or ethnicity and Parker's thesis tends to break down in her final chapters where she analyses the 1960s and 70s. and suddenly widens her scope geographically to include Russia, Europe and the U.S.A.

Nevertheless, I have found this a most useful text as it drew my attention to a number of aspects: the importance of the symbolism in women's needlework, the rich tradition of British embroidery and the nineteenth century attitudes which still echo through our culture. Parker shows the complex nature of women and their needlework - an activity that can be a source of agency and creativity for some women can be for others a source of tedious oppression, to be rejected and resisted. Parker successfully shows how historically embroidery was intimately

95 ibid, p.1.
connected with the workings of patriarchy. Her thesis informs my Chapter Five - The Construction of Femininity and I have also taken from her the use of material culture as a source of evidence in history.

**Australian Works on Women and Craft**

Compared with the U.S.A., the literature on women's domestic crafts in Australia is sparse. I have located six monographs, five of which were published in the 1980s. As well as the sparseness of the literature, its location speaks volumes about the current status of this subject. Only two articles were located in academic journals; (these were in women's studies journals) and the most obvious craft journal *Craft Australia*, yielded few articles on the history of craft and unfortunately ceased publication in 1989. Instead, information was unexpectedly located in the journals *The Antique Collector* and *Fibre Forum*.

Another valuable source of information was catalogues from exhibitions, specifically from: the *Colonial Crafts of Victoria* exhibition, Melbourne 1978 - 79; *The D'Oyly Show*, Sydney 1979; *Wool Quilts Old and New, Victoria* 1986-87; *Bedjackets, Bootees and Balaclavas*, Melbourne and Geelong 1991; *Hearth and Home*, Sydney 1991; and *Golden Hands*, Melbourne 1992. These are indicative of the increasing interest in the history of domestic craft in Australia and they contain information unavailable elsewhere.

**General Surveys of Craft**

Murray Walker curated the *Colonial Crafts of Victoria* exhibition in 1978 and his catalogue of the same name indicates a reasonable coverage of women's craft artefacts, beginning with Koori women's baskets and ranging from colonial settlers' cabbage tree hats to patchwork items. His survey, the first of its kind, was notable for establishing that Victoria did have a domestic craft tradition. (Notable also was the fact that it was held at the National Gallery of Victoria, the first craft exhibition to be held there.) The exhibition expressed a valuing of objects that had previously been taken for granted. This was demonstrated by Walker's attention to the provenance of objects as, wherever possible, he connected the artefact with its maker and the place from which they originated.

His well researched monograph, *Pioneer Crafts of Early Australia*, published also in 1978, built on the success of the Victorian exhibition. However, only one out of ten chapters is devoted to women, reflecting the radical nationalist view of a male
environment on pioneer rural farms of the nineteenth century, or the fact that more of the men's creations - buildings, structures, fences, furniture - have survived.

Unlike other craft books, Walker makes an attempt to place women's domestic craft work in a wider historical context:

In Victoria, after the end of the surface gold era, the re-shuffled social pattern in bigger inland towns and cities was the gradual suburbanising of women, whose husbands now had steady wages and lived close to their work. With cottage, garden and steady money, the crafts of necessity were largely replaced by the crafts of leisure. From one extreme to another, with little transition between the two, the town householder became the static consumer of other people's skills and products. There was no need to spin or weave for industry supplied excellent fabric; the new sewing machine was in common use and many thought it far superior to the time consuming practice of sewing by hand. One of the signs of wealthy and ordered female society was involvement in making non-functional, decorative works. To sew the patchwork quilt from scrap dress material was to indicate rather more humble, even austere origins. Little social value was to be gained from showing friends reconstituted old garments. People admired the latest and that included the factory woven coverlet...In the main, much of the handicraft of the town and city woman was directed towards decorating the domestic interior.97

There are some points I wish to challenge in his explanation. Firstly, Walker differentiates between "crafts of necessity" and "crafts of leisure" which I think is a rather unhelpful way of looking at women's craft artefacts because it reflects a male view of the world, where work is separated from leisure and paid work is separated and privileged over unpaid work. The neat boundaries implicit in this model of the world do not reflect married women's lives whose leisure time was often devoted to making things for the family. The fact that a woman may have decorated these items should not obscure the fact that the process involved labour, or that the items were useful.

The expression "crafts of leisure and necessity" stems from the terms 'plain' and 'fancy' work which historically women used to distinguish different types of needlework both here, in Britain and the U.S.A.98 Undoubtedly the women who used these terms understood and shared a common meaning, however, attempts now to classify work as either 'decorative' or 'functional', 'plain sewing' or

98 Susan B. Swan discusses the differences between 'plain' and 'fancy' work in the U.S.A. in the eighteenth century in *Plain and Fancy*, op. cit.
'fancy' or 'crafts of leisure or necessity' can never really be historically accurate, unless we know what the maker intended. (There has been a similar debate about how to classify 'folk art' recently in Australia). In my research I have not found anything that I could name as solely decorative and having no function whatsoever. Rather, the processes of labour and aesthetic expression are invariably intertwined in women's craft artefacts and that to classify objects arbitrarily as 'leisure' or 'necessity' can be historically inaccurate. An object should be viewed in the light of the maker's intentions.

Secondly, Walker generalises broadly about town dwellers becoming "static consumers of other people's skills and products". He implies that the widespread purchasing of treadle sewing machines (available in Australia from the 1860s) deskillled women and that the purchasing of factory made cloth did likewise. However, I would argue that these 'conveniences' allowed women to find creative solutions to practical problems, such as clothing the children or sewing curtains for the house. They may well have been an impetus to craft work, which Walker does not seem to consider.

Thirdly, he links types of craft with social class. This is a difficult issue to generalise about. It has been documented by historians Susan Swan and Rozsika Parker that embroidery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a indicator of the class position of a woman - embroidery signified female upper classness and leisure. However, to link patchwork with "humble social origins" is a broad generalisation. Women's crafts crossed many social barriers and there are examples existing in Australia of patchwork quilts being made in the nineteenth century by 'gentlewomen', such as Elizabeth Macarthur and Annabella Boswell and these being a source of great pride.

A local example is Mrs Elizabeth Keen, a dressmaker and hotel keeper of Fyansford, near Geelong, who won a medal in 1879 for her patchwork quilt exhibited in the Geelong Industrial and Juvenile Exhibition. If she was ashamed of

of her social origins I doubt whether she would have exhibited her quilt! In
fairness to Walker, much of the research on patchwork in Australia has only been
completed since 1978. The literature on patchwork in Australia, which I shall
discuss later, clearly demonstrates that detailed case studies can add much to dispel
the void about women's domestic craft in Australia. This is also an aim of my
study - to add further knowledge towards an understanding of Australian women
and their traditions.

In 1987 Jennifer Isaacs' *The Gentle Arts: 200 Years of Australian Women's*
*Domestic and Decorative Arts* was published. It appears to be the first book,
other than exhibition catalogues, concerned exclusively with the large range of
Australian women's domestic arts. This book aimed to redress the invisibility of
women's domestic arts, which it certainly has done, with many coloured
photographs.

It is an extensive survey of women's crafts, detailed in some respects, such as the
range of crafts included, but lacking detail in other ways, such as in its chronology.
It is not an academic work but written for a popular market and reads somewhat
superficially as a result. Broad generalisations are made; it jumps chronologically
and ranges from rural to urban women without much coherence. It has been
criticised for its romantic notions, but considering the book's purpose and market,
this is not surprising. Unfortunately it is lacking in mention of crafts
introduced by migrants, particularly after the Second World War. Its time period is
unclear - the main focus seems to be on the nineteenth century rather than the
twentieth, although the author draws on her family for information.

Like Bell's *Generations*, the book generalises about women, focusing on what they
share rather than any differences between them. It lacks analysis and remains at the
level of description, and does not attempt to answer any of the more serious
questions about women's craft, such as whether we can say that there is a tradition

102 Jennifer Isaacs, op. cit.
103 James Broadbent, 'The Chore and Art of House Furnishings', *Hearth and Home: Women's*
*Decorative Arts and Crafts 1800-1930*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney,
1988, p. 29.
of women's needlework in Australia. By implication, her book does answer in the affirmative. However, my debt to this book is great, as it was this work that originally inspired me to formulate my study. It was the 'weaknesses' of Isaacs' work that stimulated my curiosity about older women and their craft work in Australia.

In a similar spirit to Isaacs' work is the catalogue by Ann Toy et al. entitled Hearth and Home: Women's Decorative Arts and Crafts 1800-1920, from an exhibition of that name, held in Sydney in 1988-89. It is a collection of critical essays on the range of crafts shown in the exhibition. The essays present solid, historical work on the nineteenth century background of women's domestic craft in Australia. Items have been matched with their makers, who were researched for this exhibition. A particularly provocative article is that by James Broadbent. He questions whether there is any tradition of women's craft in nineteenth century Australia: "To look for a craft ethic in early colonial culture is futile". However, he neither defines what he means by the term 'tradition' nor 'craft ethic'.

Handwork in colonial houses is explained as "largely the result either of necessity or the meeting of contemporary social and fashionable standards rather than a proud and conscious creativity" and he asks: "How many miles of tatting, acres of worsted work and tons of beadwork promoted the mid-Victorian woman as usefully useless - or promoted nothing at all?" He argues persuasively, but finally the objects themselves cannot be denied. Their existence should not be belittled. Broadbent challenges but provides very little evidence for his argument that there is no needlework tradition in Australia.

The article in this collection by Kylie Winkworth 'Ways of Seeing Women's Domestic Craft' is particularly useful as it points out the shortcomings of trying to analyse women's domestic crafts in the ways that are traditional to museums and collectors, that is "locating the artefact as a commodity". Instead she locates the

106. Ibid
107. Ibid, pp. 31 and 32.
108. Kylie Winkworth, 'Ways of Seeing Women's Domestic Craft', in ibid,
items in their social context, detailing such things as married women's fragmented
time, a demanding domestic environment, an emphasis on proficiency in a broad
range of skills rather than a focus on original production and specialisation. She
also links domestic production with major debates such as the ideology of the Arts
and Crafts Movement. Her concluding point is most pertinent to my study:

it is important to locate the meaning of the work not just in the context of
women's labour in the past, but also in relation to contemporary attitudes to
women's craft work.109

Through her critique of a number of possible ways of viewing women's domestic
craft she has provided my work with a significant amount of direction in
formulating the framework for my study.

Crafts of Migrant Communities

Australia's Hidden Heritage by Judith Winternitz and John Houldsworth surveys
handicraft artefacts from cultures other than Australia, transported here when their
owners have migrated. In doing so it addresses the neglect of this area of our
heritage. It offers a critique of museums and aims to remedy their oversights:

With the exception of Aboriginal material culture, Australian museums,
galleries and other cultural institutions have, historically, collected and
placed on display as 'Australian art' and 'Australian life' artefacts, crafts
and objects reflecting the experience of Australians whose families originate
in the United Kingdom or Ireland.110

This project, sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, aimed "to document
some examples of privately held material culture items from Australians of non-
English speaking background". Due to limitations of finance and time, the
documentation process comprised the photographing and describing of 1,000
objects without any further research or analysis. This is most unfortunate as details
of the makers, the meanings they attached to their creations, and the circumstances
under which they were made, are absent. It is not even clear whether objects were
made by men or women, as the attributions are general, for example "Palestinian -

p. 44.
109 ibid. p. 46.
110 Judith Winternitz and John Houldsworth, Australia's Hidden Heritage. Australian Government
Australian Community, Canberra". No doubt this was in the interests of privacy, but it is frustrating nevertheless to view objects that remain shrouded in mystery.

Judith Winternitz states that items may be classified into the broad categories of 'transported' and 'transformed' heritage items, although acknowledging that there are many other sub-groups within these categories. The task of categorising items in this way is vast and she rejects this method. Instead she states:

All this leads to the conclusion that in a multicultural Australia created by a complex series of waves of immigration, we have present not a number of fully rounded 'ethnic' folk cultures side by side but quite differentiated material fragments of various cultures and various levels of those cultures, at various stages of development or change or interaction. 111

This is a useful observation, which reflects my experiences, that the study of craft is not neat nor easily categorised within definable boundaries. Simple assumptions about people and their crafts cannot be made. As Winternitz points out, "It will be seen that the cultural background of the owners does not necessarily fully describe the cultural influences and styles present in their material artefacts." 112

Another similarity with my findings is that through cross-cultural comparisons "surprising parallels as well as distinct differences" emerged in the styles, techniques and ages of the material artefacts. 113 For example, in my study, an Italian woman had crocheted bedspreads in the 1950s in a style that I thought dated back to nineteenth century Australia - that of Afghan rugs. But it was a technique she had learned in Italy prior to migrating to Australia.

Winternitz's book contains stunning photographs but it remains firmly within a traditional 'material culture' approach. Objects are separated from their makers, they become artefacts in a gallery remote from their original context. Its strength is its focus on migrant craft. At least this book draws attention to the wealth of cultural artefacts in Australia, but it is limited without more explanation and analysis.

111 ibid, p. xi.
112 ibid, p. xi.
113 ibid, p. xi.
Embroidery

Marion Fletcher's book *Needlework in Australia: A History of the Development of Embroidery*, is the only general survey of women's embroidery Australia since its white settlement. It is a descriptive book and the focus remains on the works and techniques rather than on historical analysis and explanations. Although Fletcher notes that embroidery has remained "an anonymous contribution to the arts" and that embroidery designers' names have only been recorded when they were male, the reasons for this exclusion of women are not discussed.

There are also contradictions in this book. For example, Fletcher excludes "decorative needlework produced by the working classes" yet in the following paragraph discusses convict women! She also does not explain how one can ascertain the class of a woman through her embroidery. Her chapter on patchwork is disappointing when compared to the wealth of documented research offered by Margaret Rolfe and Annette Gero, whose work I will discuss in the following section.

This book does not include the embroidery of non-English speaking women in Australia. However, her chapter on ecclesiastical embroidery in Australia is valuable as little seems to have been written about this rich, although usually anonymous, area of women's embroidery. This work did not contribute to my study.

Patchwork

Currently this is the area of women's domestic craft that has received the most attention, particularly from Margaret Rolfe and Annette Gero, whose articles have appeared in journals for those interested in antiques. Their detailed case studies of quilts and their makers are enlarging the picture of our textile heritage. In 1989

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115 Ibid, p. 4.
116 Ibid, p. 5.
117 Annette Gero, op. cit.
a 'convict' quilt was located in London when none before had been discovered in
Australia.\textsuperscript{118} As the study of this field is so recent, unlike in the U.S.A., most of
the work I have located focuses on provenances of the artefacts and does not
extend to larger questions of historical significance.

The largest single body of work on patchwork and the first to be published in
Australia is Margaret Rolfe's monograph \textit{Patchwork Quilts in Australia}.\textsuperscript{119} It is
based on a nationwide search for patchwork which yielded several hundred quilts.
This is a small number when compared to America and Ireland where similar
surveys have been conducted. Rolfe believes:

There are two possible explanations. Firstly, that few quilts were made
because of social conditions, or secondly, that many quilts were made, but
no longer exist, and therefore our view of the past is distorted.\textsuperscript{120}

She discusses the differences in population size - Australia's population only grew
to one million by 1850 compared to America's thirteen million by 1830, as well as
other differences such as climate: "Australia's relatively mild climate did not
courage the use of the multiple quilts needed in America". America had a large
cotton industry (patchwork was a cotton based textile activity) whereas Australia
grew wool which was exported. Rolfe has examined written sources that attest that
more quilts did exist than have survived today. Records of exhibitions from the
1870s on mention patchwork quilts regularly. She also lists reasons such as
abundant sunlight, bushfires and lack of storage space in Australian houses as
reasons why our textile heritage is small today.\textsuperscript{121} The examples of wartime quilts
made by female prisoners at Changhi, as well as other Red Cross quilts, alerted me
to the significant craft activity that took place during the Second World War. I have
found this book essential background for my study.

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\textsuperscript{118} Margaret Rolfe, 'The Convict Quilt', \textit{Textile Fibre Forum}, Vol. 9, 3, No 29, 1990.
\textsuperscript{119} Margaret Rolfe, \textit{Patchwork Quilts in Australia}, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{120} ibid, p.7.
\textsuperscript{121} ibid, pp. 7-10.
Items of an indigenous form of patchwork, 'wagga' blankets, were collected and provenanced by a group called 'Running Stitch'.122 These were exhibited around Victoria in 1985 and subsequently donated to the Wool Museum in Geelong. Waggas were made from pieces of knitted or woollen items - such as the sleeves of jumpers - unpicked, laid flat and stitched together to form the filling for a quilt. This inner layer was then covered with cotton or woollen fabric, often cretonne, to make a finished quilt. The outer layer could also be of patchwork, such as tailor's samples sewn together. (See Plate 11). The catalogue, Wool Quilts Old and New, as well as Annette Gero's article on waggas,123 has greatly expanded my knowledge of rural and working class women, and waggas were made by city dwellers as well. This is further evidence of how women's domestic craft crossed boundaries of class and geography, one of the key findings of my research.

Crochet
The largest body of work to date on women's crochet was assembled and presented in 1979 by the Women's Domestic Needlework Group as The D'Oyley Show in Sydney. The catalogue of the same name is invaluable with its research on Aboriginal women's crafts, crochet patterns, designers and the working conditions of women in the textile industries.124 Unfortunately, the entire collection was destroyed by a fire in 1984. However, it remains one of the few surveys of women's crochet work and, with a crochet chapter in Isaacs' The Gentle Arts, has highlighted the fact that crochet and knitting were probably more popular crafts than patchwork in the twentieth century.

Knitting
I have located only one article on the history of knitting in Australia, that by Hughla Davison, which examines items mostly from the nineteenth century, such as knitted cotton bedspreads.125 This makes the research presented by the Hand Knitters' Guild for their 1991 exhibition Bedjackets, Bootees and Balaclavas invaluable as little has been written on the decades this century when knitting flourished - the

124 Women's Domestic Needlework Group, The D'Oyley Show, An Exhibition of Women's Domestic Fancywork, Sydney, 1979
125 Hughla Davidson, 'The Development of Knitting as a Craft', Craft Australia, April 1977.
1930s and 40s. It provides essential background for the craft of knitting in Australia as currently very little else exists.

**The Crafts Movement in Australia**

Although the realm of professional crafts people is beyond the scope of my study, I have included Grace Cochrane's book as it is the first history of the crafts movement to be published in Australia. Cochrane delineates the social context of the crafts movement through Australian history and she considers the theoretical issues and debates that have taken place within the crafts movement. The book traces the development of specialist craft groups such as the various guilds, and locates people, times and places up until 1992. It is most comprehensive and provides a very clear discussion on what constitutes craft in its conclusion. Cochrane provides a total picture of the Australian craft world, including the development of specialist guilds, the role of the technical colleges in fostering craft and the important craft contribution of women's war work.

**Exhibitions**

I have included articles on women's exhibitions as they provide another context for women's domestic craft. Denied serious attention by the art establishment, exhibitions and shows were the venues through which women could view others' works and learn how to improve their own. They provided an important incentive for women practising crafts at home.

Two articles, one by Ann Stephen in 1977 and the other by Robert and Ingrid Holden in 1980, drew attention to the importance of women's work exhibitions and, in particular, the importance of the 1907 Australian Exhibition of Women's Work held in Melbourne. The term 'women's work' was synonymous here with women's craft, and this exhibition included a wide range of crafts. However, the term was usually used to describe women's needlework. Ann Stephen wrote:

127 Grace Cochrane, op. cit.
Given the enormous scale of the exhibition (over 16,000 exhibits), the scope of the activities involved and its contemporary significance (over 250,000 people attended the Melbourne venue) it is extraordinary that this event has since been "hidden from history".  

Carolyn Miley's 1988 article also emphasises the importance of this exhibition as reflecting the huge participation of women in the arts and crafts at that time, a participation that seems to have dropped off dramatically after 1930 until the 1960s for reasons still unknown. These articles have signposted my study the importance of exhibitions as a way of locating craftswomen historically.

Exhibitions and shows provided the sole public context for women's craft and in doing so, provided a stimulus for women engaged in craft work in the home. The participating in and viewing of exhibitions or the reading about them in the media would have provided a strong incentive to women engaged in domestic handiwork. This is discussed in Chapter Five of my study.

In conclusion, this literature review has shown the diversity of women's history writing in Australia. It has highlighted three themes: women and the family, women and work and women's handicrafts and has shown which relevant themes, approaches and techniques have informed my study. Women's work, paid and unpaid, in the public and private spheres has been an important theme. Although the theoretical framework of feminist history has developed in the public/private debate there has not been much actual research completed. The connections between these two spheres of work need to be clearly delineated and there are still large areas of invisibility about women's unpaid work performed in the domestic realm.

Similarly, in the area of Australian women's craft the literature is sparse and very little research has focused on this topic or on the domestic production of craft. My study addresses these areas of relative silence. In doing so, it contributes to the history of Australian women.

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130 Ann Stephen, op. cit. p. 73.

CHAPTER TWO - METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to outline the choice of methodology for my research. The term 'methodology' involves not just research methods but the theory and analysis of how research should proceed. My study is informed by certain strands of feminist theory, and I have applied these ideas to the practice of oral history. I have also used ideas about material culture in this study as a means of making women's lives visible.

Feminist Theory

From the outset of the second wave of the women's movement in the late 1960s, feminism has been characterised by its dual engagements with both theory and practice. While there are many types of feminism, a broad definition used by some feminists (Philippa Rothfield, Linda Nicholson, Rosalind Delmar for example) and the one I have adopted in my study is: "Feminism has been described as the attempt to look at women's subordination for the very purpose of changing it."

In Australia the early gains of the feminist movement were largely in the realm of reforming patriarchal structures to include women. Equal pay (granted in 1972) and Equal Opportunity legislation were developments that characterised a liberal approach to the subordination of women. However, the women's movement developed a multitude of political positions, including radical and socialist feminisms. Contiguous with these developments was the emphasis in feminist theory on developing a critique of the existing academic disciplines, all of which were predicated on the exclusion of women. However, it was soon realised that simply adding in women did nothing to change oppressive social and political structures. Theoretically, there began a move towards constructing theory anew; of working towards a goal of female autonomy, the right for women to choose and define the world for themselves; for political, social, economic and intellectual self-determination.

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From the activity of critiquing existing epistemologies came the knowledge that these were fundamentally masculinist, masked beneath a veneer of objectivity and truth. The masculine was positioned as universal and women were defined as 'other'. The refusal of feminist theorists to put women uncritically into existing phallocentric theories arose from this knowledge and the task of constructing new ways of developing theory that more accurately reflected the realities of women's lives was begun.\textsuperscript{135}

Feminist theory is complex, continually developing and diverse - there is no one united body of thought. At the risk of this account seeming reductionist, I will select those strands of theory that have seemed central to the development of feminist theory and have determined the rationale for my research. I will discuss these and state how I have used them to underpin the conceptualisation of my study.

A fundamental construct that arose from the rejection of phallocentric theories was the imperative to start with women, their lives and experiences to allow new theoretical positions to develop from this grounding in practical realities.\textsuperscript{136} In my research I have started with women and placed them at the centre of my study. It is their lives, their experiences and their knowledges that are the focus of this research.

Another feminist principle is the rejection of the notion of one universal truth and that a researcher must always be 'objective'. Universal truth was exposed as a concept that privileged one point of view over others and assumed a phallocentric view of the world that did not acknowledge the history and the material context of the production of its knowledge. Liz Stanley expresses this clearly, stating that knowledge "is contextually located and irrevocably bears the marks of its origins in the minds and the intellectual pursuits of those...who give voice to it".\textsuperscript{137} Thus I have made explicit my investment in the research (in the Introduction) as well as

\textsuperscript{135} ibid, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{136} ibid, p. 193.
making explicit my reasons and hopes in doing this project with the women I have interviewed.

Closely allied to this conscious statement of one’s values is the respecting of others’ values. Feminist theory does not privilege one point of view over others - it aims for a plurality of voices.\textsuperscript{138} Similarly, feminism acknowledges the importance of language in the process of social change.\textsuperscript{139} This has had important implications for my project as it has influenced and legitimated my choice of research method, that of oral history. This method directly challenges the silences and omissions surrounding women in history. It enables women’s voices to be heard in all their diversity.

These elements of feminist theory - of focusing on women, of recognising the boundedness of knowledge and recognising different voices - have informed the rationale of my study and influenced the choice of research methods.

**Feminist Research**

Exactly what constitutes feminist research is contested. As a consequence, what is apparent is the diversity of methods that can be labelled ‘feminist’.\textsuperscript{140} Some authors emphasise the importance of subjectivity and personal experience (for example, Naomi Black)\textsuperscript{141}; others distinguish it as research being carried out by women for women (Liz Stanley, Duelli Klein)\textsuperscript{142}; some see it as a set of research methods (Sherna Gluck)\textsuperscript{143}; others see it as distinguished by its research questions; others argue that feminist research can be differentiated by its recognition of women’s oppression and a commitment to work towards the emancipation of women. There are aspects of all of these perspectives in my study.

Shulamit Reinharz, in compiling her anthology *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, used the authors’ self definitions as a means of distinguishing feminist projects. From the range of perspectives in that collection, she extracted the

\textsuperscript{138} Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross (eds), op. cit. p. 204.

\textsuperscript{139} ibid. p. 203.


\textsuperscript{141} Quoted in ibid, p.3.

\textsuperscript{142} Quoted in ibid, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{143} Quoted in ibid, p. 126.
following ten themes, which provide a useful descriptive framework for what distinguishes feminist research. She argues that: feminism is a perspective, not a research method; that feminists use a multiplicity of research methods; and that feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship. Other characteristics are that feminist research is guided by feminist theory, that it may be transdisciplinary, that it aims to create social change, and that it strives to represent human diversity. She also states that feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person, that feminist researchers frequently attempt to develop special relations with the people studied (in interactive research) and lastly, that feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.¹⁴⁴ These attributes indicate a plurality of methods - there is no one feminist research method. My project incorporates most of these points. In particular, my work is transdisciplinary, combining the methods of oral history and material culture, drawing on the disciplines of history, sociology and museum studies and my study is also informed by feminist theory and practices. I have consciously used interactive interviewing techniques and I have been personally involved with my interviewees beyond the interviews.

Sandra Harding notes that there are really only three methods of social enquiry. These are listening to or interrogating informants, observing behaviour and examining historical records or traces.¹⁴⁵ As women have been silenced by the academic disciplines, and have left so few traces in written records, interviewing as a research technique to give women voices has become particularly important, whether it be through collecting life histories as in anthropology and sociology, recording oral history testimony or the myriad of other research projects that are grounded in women's experiences. Kathryn Anderson wrote that for women, oral history can be:

a basic tool in our efforts to incorporate the previously overlooked lives, activities and feelings of women into our understanding of the past and of the present. When women speak for themselves, they reveal hidden realities: new experiences and new perspectives emerge that challenge the 'truths' of official accounts and cast doubt upon established theories... ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ ibid, p. 240.
¹⁴⁵ Sandra Harding, op. cit. p. 2.
Oral History

Oral history can be broken into two distinct parts - the interview, whose practices can vary widely, and the analysis brought to bear on the texts. The central research practice of oral history is interviewing people with an audio recorder. Oral history is a dialogue and a joint construction of both the interviewer and interviewed.

Oral history derives from many disciplines: anthropology, linguistics, folklore, psychology, sociology, history and literary theory. For my study, following some literary theorists, I have viewed the oral testimony as a text and not a reproduction of reality. This point is linked with some from psychology and history - namely the importance of memory and subjectivity and the dynamic interaction between past and present in women's construction of their memories. From sociology, I have used the insight that individuals are constrained by and contest their environments, that people's life stories are never unproblematic.

Sherna Gluck classes oral history practices according to the type of interview as: topical, biographical and autobiographical. This is a useful way of categorising the interviews for my project as in three cases the interviews were biographical, that is, about people who were dead,(Martha, Ruby and Vera N) while the remainder were autobiographical interviews, where the subject's life determined the form and content of the interview. Unexpectedly, in the first three cases more information was given about the deceased than in many of the autobiographical interviews. This suggests that some of the women felt more comfortable talking about people other than themselves to an interviewer.

I see oral history analyses as placed on a continuum ranging from oral testimony viewed as fact, where it is largely descriptive, to that of an analysis that is concerned with the workings of memory and the interviewees' subjectivities, that is, qualitative data. Because of the questions I have asked in this study concerning the meanings the women make of their engagement with handicrafts throughout their lives, I have viewed the oral testimonies as texts indicating the interviewees' subjectivities.

148 Sherna Gluck quoted in Shulamit Reinhart, op. cit, p. 126.
The Interview

Within much feminist theory there was a desire to end the exploitation of women as 'other', as the objects of research, and to equalise the power dynamic operating between the researcher and the researched. Ann Oakley articulated a critique of mainstream interviewing procedures in 1981.\textsuperscript{149} The interview was the site where a new protocol was developed by feminist researchers. As this is the main research method for my study and the main research tool for oral history, I shall discuss interviewing in detail.

Oakley's critique of traditional interviewing protocols juxtaposed procedures from textbooks on interviewing with her experiences of interviewing women in depth about childbirth. This presented startling contradictions which highlighted the power relationship involved in conducting interviews. Traditional interviewing, based on a masculine paradigm, is distinguished by three aspects. The first is that the interview is a one-way process in which the interviewer receives but does not give information. Secondly, the interviewers view the interviewees purely as 'data' and thirdly, interviews have no personal meaning in terms of social interaction. Often traditional research is also concerned with numerical data and downgrades the importance of qualitative data. Oakley exposed these practices as exploitative and "morally indefensible" when interviewing women. The central contradiction within traditional interviewing methods (which encourage emotional distance) is that in order to gain information from an interviewee, the interviewer needs to establish a rapport, which is normally done in everyday social life through a sharing of information, where both parties are equal and feel at ease. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.\textsuperscript{150}\end{quote}

I aimed for this ideal in conducting my interviews. However the reality was far more complicated than Oakley's portrayal, which I shall discuss later.


\textsuperscript{150} ibid, p. 41.
There are various models of interviews, ranging from structured interviews - where the researcher asks everyone the same questions to enhance comparability of results - to unstructured, open-ended interviews, where the interviewee has much more control over the encounter. As my concern was for experiential, qualitative data, rather than 'facts', I chose to use semi-structured interviews. Reinharz emphasises the advantages of this method stating that, "open-ended interview research produces non-standardised information that allows researchers to make full use of differences among people". This is also something I strove to achieve in the analysis of my data.

Using semi-structured interviews meant that I mostly covered the same topics with the women, but often in different sequences. I facilitated them to lead the interviews, particularly when they were remembering things that greatly affected their lives and when, for example, they were showing me their handiwork. In order to lessen the power differential that existed I shared my own experiences, so there was a two-way flow of information. Thus within my interviews there was a range of emphases, which is consistent with giving women voices. (A schedule of my interview topics is included in Appendix 3.)

Feminist oral historians have recently come to the realisation that doing oral history is never unproblematic, no matter how honourable one's intentions and practices might be. There is always the power differential between the researcher and the researched. However, this can operate in unpredictable ways and is not a fixed characteristic of interviews as Oakley suggests. While some authors are pessimistic about the possibility of not exploiting their interviewees (Judith Stacey and Daphne Patai for example) others, such as Pamela Cotterill have argued that the interview can be a fluid encounter where power balances shift continuously. This reflected my experiences in interviewing older women. Some of the women were formidable in their achievements which countered their potential feelings of

151 Shulamit Reinharz, op. cit. p. 19.
152 Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, op. cit. This anthology provides an excellent perspective on the problems of doing feminist oral history.
powerlessness in the interview. Jean, for example, was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community. All of them seemed to welcome the opportunity of the interview and the experience was mutual, where I welcomed the opportunity to get to know them and felt privileged that they would share their stories with me. I also felt in their debt for their generosity towards my work, and I think this reduced any assumptions of power my position invested in me. Oakley reported her subjects' vulnerability, no doubt due to the intensity of their experiences (childbirth), whereas Cotterill wrote about her feelings of vulnerability as a researcher, something I also shared. It is apparent that interview situations vary a great deal and so do the structural and interpersonal dynamics of power, vulnerability and control.

Among the women I interviewed were six who had migrated to Australia after the Second World War. The power dynamic is an important factor when interviewing women from non-English speaking backgrounds, as the interviewer may represent the dominant culture. However, I do not think the power dynamic in these interviews was totally in my favour; or I was younger than the respondents and an outsider coming into their homes, which undermined my dominant position. In three cases, the women's daughters were present to assist with the interviews; in three cases the husband was also present, which again reduced the dominance of my presence. One woman's achievements in her community were most impressive - Delfa had organised her community to build a hall - and I experienced her as far more personally powerful than myself.

The language dynamic continually shifted. The interview was conducted in English, with the women mostly replying in their native tongue with a family member interpreting. Other talk occurred in their native language which I did not share, and consequently the 'outsider' status (in the sense of being excluded by language) continually shifted. I cannot deny that the language barrier was not a problem for me - and I cannot presume that I fully comprehended their stories due to the very real cultural differences, which included age, nationality, experience, language and understandings of the world.

These were just two of the problems in gathering oral testimony. There were many others, such as my anxiety as to how far I should become friends with the women and whether I should make overtures in that direction. I experienced a confusion of emotions in the interview situation as I had shared in their intimate stories and
felt emotionally involved with the women as a result. Because I was interviewing women born before 1935, I think there were elements at certain times, of a grandmother/granddaughter relationship.

I also felt awkward because these stories were also my 'data', whose analysis I would control. This emotional involvement however, has ensured that my commitment to finishing the project has remained constant. The issue of friendship has resolved itself over time through seeing some of the women in my community and through being involved with them for photography sessions, so the relationships have 'naturalised' on a friendly basis. I would have liked the women to collaborate in the writing of this project, however I was not able to logistically achieve this. As this is an institutionally based project, I am required to take responsibility for the analysis. Nevertheless, I will share the results of my project with the women at the completion of the thesis and I am anticipating that my analysis will please them.

**Analysing Oral Testimony**

Throughout the 1980s there has been a shift away from analysing oral history data as 'facts' towards a focus on oral histories as texts that are constructed by both the interviewer and their subjects. Oral histories are vehicles for individuals' memories, and it is the workings of memory that have occupied historians such as Luisa Passerini, Alessandro Portelli, Alistair Thomson, the Popular Memory Group at the University of Birmingham and others. There is a vast literature on biography and autobiography also, where the boundaries between oral history and these forms merge. However, I have viewed the theoretical

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155 Early in the 1980s in Australia debate focused on the unreliability of oral history when used for obtaining empirical evidence.


considerations of biography and autobiography as beyond the bounds of this project and have focused instead on the works of the aforementioned historians.

Alessandro Portelli, in common with the Popular Memory Group, sees "the special attention to subjectivity...which oral history requires and permits" as a strength.\textsuperscript{160} He defines subjectivity as "the study of cultural forms and processes by which individuals express their sense of themselves in history". Memory is understood as "not a passive repository of facts but an active process of creation of meanings".\textsuperscript{161}

James Fentress and Chris Wickham usefully describe the workings of memory:

> When we remember, we represent ourselves and to those around us. To the extent that our 'nature' - that which we truly are - can be revealed in articulation, we are what we remember. If this is the case, then a study of the way we remember - the way we present ourselves in our memories, the way we define our personal and collective identities through our memories, the way we order and structure our ideas in our memories and the way we transmit these memories to others - is a study of the way we are.\textsuperscript{162}

Passerini, Portelli, Thompson and the Popular Memory Group have all used oral testimony to shed light not just on individual's memories, but on the workings of collective, social memories.

Luisa Passerini's study of the Turin working class draws on folklore and anthropology in analysing her oral testimony for "forms of cultural identity and shared traditions". She describes her testimonies as "first and foremost, statements of cultural identity in which memory continuously adapts received traditions to present circumstances".\textsuperscript{163} Alistair Thompson, in his work on Australian diggers from World War One, includes the analysis of a popular legend in his study.\textsuperscript{164} Alessandro Portelli takes one central incident, the death of Luigi Trasstulli, and analyses the oral testimony from a number of witnesses, comparing

\textsuperscript{160} Alessandro Portelli, op. cit. p. IX.

\textsuperscript{161} ibid. p. 52


\textsuperscript{163} Luisa Passerini, op. cit. p. 17.

\textsuperscript{164} Alistair Thompson, op. cit.
their accounts with reference to wider social and cultural processes that shape the participants' recollections.165

These and other studies, such as the work of Paula Hamilton and John Murphy,166 alerted me to the importance of memory and signalled that oral testimony is above all else, memory and self representation. Luisa Passerini's work, in dealing with a heterogeneous group, shows the possibility of analysing texts for cultural and linguistic forms, such as stereotypical attitudes and sayings. This is something I would have liked to pursue further, as in my interviews some of the women who shared rural backgrounds and were of a similar age - such as Jean, Marjory and Hilda - used similar expressions and seemed to share a certain view of life, expressed in homilies and proverbs such as "do unto others","we were taught the golden rule","we always helped others less fortunate than ourselves","we were always very happy", etcetera.

While these texts were an inspiration to my work, I did not analyse my testimony at this level of linguistic sophistication, as I felt it was beyond the bounds of this thesis and my expertise. Instead I have analysed my texts as women's constructions of themselves and their experiences, grounded in my feminist belief that women's subjectivities need to be part of our intellectual and cultural life. I was also interested in recording descriptions of old ways of doing things and skills now long gone. My analysis was guided by Wickham and Entress's words:"the way we present ourselves in our memories...a study of the way we are".

In analysing my interviews I found that I had focused more on gathering information about the women and their handiwork than on their feelings and the meanings they derived from the activities. There was also the problem of women being unused to reflecting on meanings of everyday things in their lives and unable to articulate this (I did not select my interviewees in terms of their articulateness). I found that the social context of the interview tended to produce everyday, polite conversation and I was not willing to push people to try to get them to articulate often unconscious or uncomfortable reflections. The interviews partially succeeded

165 Alessandro Portelli, op. cit.
in getting the women to articulate questions of meaning, but not as much as I hoped.

This is a similar problem to that experienced by Kathryn Anderson and others, described in their article 'Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History'. Anderson wrote:

Dominant ideologies distorted and made invisible women's real activities, to women as well as men. For example, until recently it was common for women to dismiss housework as "not real work". In effect, women's perspectives combined two separate consciousnesses: one emerging out of their practical activities in the everyday world and one inherited from the dominant traditions of thought. Reconstructing knowledge to take account of women, therefore, involves seeking out the submerged consciousness of the practical knowledge of everyday life and linking it to the dominant reality.\textsuperscript{167}

In my study this was exemplified by Vera M, who had given away her fancy work years ago, to fundraising stalls. "We didn't value it as we should have".\textsuperscript{168} The reason for this lack of valuing was probably because fancy work was relegated either to a women's craft or to the realm of housework and thereby devalued and trivialised. This dominant attitude would have influenced women to throw out their old items regardless of how they had previously valued them.

One solution to this and various other dilemmas proposed by Kathryn Anderson, Susan Armitage, Dana Jack and Judith Wittner is to work in an interdisciplinary way whereby, for example, the insights and counselling skills from psychology might be applied to interviewing.

Following this principle I designed my research to be transdisciplinary and incorporate another source of evidence - that of material culture - to enrich the study. My aim was to focus on the place and meaning of craft work in the women's lives, to record reflections that are perhaps difficult for some to articulate and are not part of an everyday, social, conversational repertoire. These were the limitations of interviewing. I hoped that the material artefacts would add another dimension to the study.

\textsuperscript{167} Kathryn Anderson et al, op. cit. p.97.
\textsuperscript{168} Interview between Vera M and author, Barwon Heads, 1992.
Material Culture
The field of material culture has its roots in archaeology and anthropology and has existed within museums for centuries. With the growth of public history and the modern museum industry, the study of material culture became more closely linked to history as opposed to natural sciences, and has grown substantially since the 1970s, particularly in the U.S.A. It is transdisciplinary and is used by professionals in areas such as cultural geography, folklore, architectural history and museum studies. Its growth has paralleled that of social history, although historians generally have been slow to use objects as evidence in history.169

The term 'material culture' refers to physical objects made by humans, used as evidence in the study of history. Thomas Schlereth defines it as "the study through artifacts of the belief systems - the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions - of a particular community or society, usually across time".170 McVille Herskovits highlights the potential of objects as symbols of meaning:

the totality of artifacts in a culture, the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy and to create symbols of meaning.171

Jules D. Prown emphasises that through the study of artefacts, it is possible to ascertain the values, ideas and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time.172

Much has been made about the democratic potential of using material culture. Many authors have claimed that it provides insight into communities that have left no written records and that it is more representative as a form of evidence than literary or statistical data. This echoes the claims made by Paul Thompson in the

171 Cited in ibid, p. 112.
1970s about the potential for oral history.\textsuperscript{173} I would agree that both forms of historical practice have made accessible cultures previously silenced in history, particularly non-literate societies, but these disciplines have also been slow to focus on women.

Within the field of material culture there is a wide range of approaches and possibilities, ranging from the examination of artefacts as artistic objects as in an art gallery, to the methods of archaeology. However, in the study of history, I think it is simplistic to assume that all objects are equally valuable. Gaynor Kavanagh writes on this question:

\begin{quote}
What really counts and is central to the historian’s craft is the relevance of the problems posed and the questions asked...and the forms of criticism applied. It is from this that the value of any material as evidence emerges or is determined.\textsuperscript{174}
\end{quote}

This point I have adopted in documenting the material artefacts. I found that the women’s collections of needlework were too vast for my resources to catalogue every item. So I chose to photograph what I felt was most significant (see the Introduction).

Kavanagh also emphasises an object’s symbolic potential and notes that an artefact undergoes a number of different shifts of meaning and reading throughout and beyond its useful life.\textsuperscript{175} These are fruitful insights for my study, as I found that the women’s intentions at the time of making an object were different from the symbolic function that the items had taken on with the passing of time. There were indeed different readings of the same object, at different times and in different contexts. Things made for practical reasons, such as baby clothes, became imbued with emotional memories many years later, and symbolised experiences, people and times far beyond the object itself. The craft items became remembrances of things and times past - what Asa Briggs terms “emissaries.”\textsuperscript{176}


\textsuperscript{175} ibid, p. 131.

Susan B. Swan stresses the importance of needlework artefacts in the study of women in history. She observed that women had left few other traces outside of literary sources, which tended to reflect only an educated few. This is certainly the case prior to the development of photography in the nineteenth century. (Even with photography the type of evidence it provides is often formal, selective, less intimate and stylised than material evidence). The vast literature on American women and patchwork is testimony to the richness of the study of women's needlework artefacts.

Although there is a large literature concerning the value of material culture in the U.S.A., the field is largely untheorised especially when compared with feminist theory which developed greatly in the same time period, from the 1960s on. There is a need for insights such as those of literary theory, semiotics or cultural studies to inform the discipline.

Lacking sophisticated theoretical insights, I think there are limits to the use of material culture. When used as a sole source of evidence in history, studies of a particular artefact taken out of its context and analysed purely as an object, has limitations. However, where no other evidence exists, this type of information is certainly valuable.

Conversely, the study of artefacts can provide new and rich dimensions to historical research that written and spoken sources cannot approach. Objects provide a three dimensional, sensory and aesthetic experience which allow the viewer to engage physically and sensorily. They function on a rich symbolic level and can be read for different meanings depending on the questions the historian asks. The material culture of women can illuminate areas of existence that other sources cannot, such as levels of skill, technique, time spent, effort expended and aesthetic pleasure.

For my study, I have read the women's craft artefacts as demonstrating what has been valued and preserved by them and imbued with symbolic significance over time. The artefacts have the potential to demonstrate attitudes and values in ways that the makers may not be conscious of. In the interviews, the artefacts functioned as a strong stimulus for questions and responses as well as a trigger for

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177 Susan B. Swan, op. cit.
memories, something I will discuss further in Chapter Six. They give concrete form to all manner of intangible aspects of the women's lives - time and effort expended, attitudes, patience, skills, emotional attachments, generosity, caring and nurturing of families, statements of cultural identity and expressions of aesthetic pleasure.

Combining this evidence with oral testimony is a mutually enriching method of research. The limitations of interviewing about questions of meaning are addressed by the evidence of the material artefacts, while the limitations of studying objects in isolation diminish when oral testimony is drawn upon. When applied to the study of women's lives, they are a powerful combination.
CHAPTER THREE : SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter highlights characteristics of the Geelong region and places the women interviewed within their physical and social contexts. It is a necessarily brief and selective account of aspects of Geelong's history that are of particular relevance to the 26 women of my study.

A Brief History of the White Settlement of Geelong

The context of this study concerns Geelong and its region, the geographical location where all but four of the women (Wilhelmina, Margaret, Sylvia and Ilona) have lived the longest. The white history of Geelong has been documented first by Walter Brownhill\(^\text{178}\) (particularly for the nineteenth century) and by Ian Wynd\(^\text{179}\) and it is their work that much of the following draws upon.

Although there was probably some contact with whites prior to 1802, such as with whalers, the Koori ownership of the land around Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula - being the Wathaurong group of tribes - was largely undisturbed until 1802, when the area was sighted officially first by John Murray and then Matthew Flinders. In 1835 the Port Phillip Association, a group of Van Dieman's Land settlers, sent John Batman to explore new territory for settlement and he took possession not only of land around the Yarra River, but of 100,000 acres of land around Geelong, including the Bellarine Peninsula.

This was the beginning of a flood of settlers from Van Dieman's Land, rushing to take up land around Port Phillip Bay. Wynd gives details of the squatters and the runs they took up.\(^\text{180}\) Many moved out further from Geelong into the Western District, and the destruction of the Koori people there has been documented by Jan Crichtett in her *A Distant Field of Murder*.\(^\text{181}\)


\(^{180}\) ibid, p. 10.

Brownhill supplies documents that mention the destruction of the Kooris around Geelong as they resisted white settlement during the 1830s and 40s. More recently, Mrs L. Lane has researched the Kooris around Geelong. The impact of white colonisation was devastating for the Koori people through disease, disruption to land use and direct conflict.

The town of Geelong was surveyed in 1838 and settlement slowly grew. Victoria's oldest morning newspaper, *The Geelong Advertiser*, was begun two years later. By the 1850s, land had been sold and many subdivisions made - the suburbs of Ashby, Newtown, Irishtown, Little Scotland, Kildare, Chilwell, Belmont and Highton were all subdivided by 1850. Geelong had become a popular destination for British immigrants, with its main industries being wool processing and handling and flour milling and the population quadrupled over the 1840s. In this decade many (mostly Protestant) churches and schools, the first post office and the Mechanics' Institute were built. By 1851, the population numbered 8,291.

The discovery of gold at Clunes and then Buninyong near Ballarat in 1851, had wide repercussions for the town of Geelong, as the fastest route to Ballarat was by steamer to Geelong and then overland to Ballarat. The town experienced increases and decreases in its population and enterprises simultaneously as a result of the gold rushes. For example, hotels, boarding houses and shops increased their business, while manufacturing decreased between 1857 and 1861. The building trades boomed as substantial private houses were erected for those who had made fortunes from gold and a number of those still exist in Geelong today. Many previous household names began their businesses in Geelong in this decade - Morris Jacobs began his shop in 1852 and Bright and Hitchcock began their emporium a year later. By 1853 there was a daily steamer to Melbourne and in 1857 the railway connection to Melbourne began. From 1851 to 1861 the population had increased by 300% to 22,959.

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182 Walter Brownhill, op. cit. See Chapter 3.
183 A collection of her articles is housed in the Deakin University Library’s Special Collection, Geelong.
185 Ian Wynd, op. cit. p. 16.
Wynd details the establishment of industries at this time - flour and textile mills, a rope works and tanneries on the Barwon River. Textile mills established were: the Victorian Woollen and Cloth Manufacturing Company (1868), the Barwon Woollen Mill, the Albion Woollen Company (1869) and the Union Woollen Mill (1874). Other industries established at this time were the Geelong Boot Factory (1874), the Barwon Paper Mill (1878), the Cheetham Salt Works (1888), the Fyansford Cement Works (1889) and the Geelong Cheese and Butter Factory (1893).^{186}

At least four of the women interviewed trace connections to the Geelong region in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Hilda's grandfather, Christian Baum, arrived from Germany with his brother in 1850 for the goldrushes. The brothers began the family's orchards and farms, with numerous sons and daughters settling in the Fyansford and Waurn Ponds areas.^{187} Similarly, Alma's grandfather (also Alva's great grandfather) Andrew Condie, arrived from Scotland with his parents in 1852 for the goldrushes. The family first settled at Connewarre near Geelong, then at Lake Corangamite. Andrew selected land at Rapunyup in the Wimmera in the 1870s and then moved back to the Geelong region in 1905 and bought 'Frogmore' and then 'Meltham' near Stonehaven in 1910.^{188} Beatrice traced her family back to a George Atkins who was the first rabbit keeper for Thomas Austin at Barwon Park, probably during the 1840s. The house 'Merchiston Hall' built by James Cowie in 1856, later was Bobbie's childhood home. Her father moved to Geelong in 1900 from Gippsland and founded the Wyett Manufacturing Company which still exists today.

After such a rapid period of growth there followed decades of relative stagnation, although as Wynd notes, there was steady progress made around the town, with tree plantings, the development of the Botanical Gardens by Daniel Bunce, and with the town's water supply. In 1868 Geelong's Female Refuge was established.

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186 ibid., p. 42.
188 *The Victorian Centenary Book*, 1935.
(later to become Bethany Babies' Home)\textsuperscript{189} and a philanthropic network was in existence. By 1870, Geelong had a population of 21,459 people. In 1872 primary schooling was made compulsory for all children in Victoria. In 1887 the Gordon Memorial Technical College was opened and major parks established. By 1881 Geelong had four of Victoria's woollen textile mills and the predominance of this industry was established, which lasted until the 1970s. Other technological developments proceeded apace with gas having been available for stoves and lighting since 1860,\textsuperscript{190} piped water from 1874, telephones from 1888\textsuperscript{191} and electricity available from 1900.\textsuperscript{192} In the 1890s a freezing works, a brickworks and a timber mill began operations.\textsuperscript{193}

1901 saw the birth of Federation and votes granted to women in Victoria in 1902. In 1907 the first car was built in Geelong, in 1912 the first automatic telephone exchange in Australia was installed in Geelong and also in that year the electric tramway service began.\textsuperscript{194} After much deliberation, in 1916 the task of sewerage Geelong was begun.\textsuperscript{195} Of course, perhaps with the exception of sewerage and water, the adoption of these conveniences depended on one's ability to afford them. Beatrix's family, for example, did not have electricity connected to their house in East Geelong until about 1919. For rural communities, these conveniences were much slower in arriving. Vera M, living on a farm at Lower Gellibrand, did not have electricity connected until 1964.

Geelong's High School was built in 1915 and this remained Geelong's only high school until after World War Two when eventually 14 other high schools were built. This reflected the idea prior to World War Two, that high schools were predominantly for academically gifted boys who would go on to further study. This partly explains why so few of the women in the study matriculated.


\textsuperscript{190} Peter Begg, op. cit. p. 18.

\textsuperscript{191} ibid, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{192} ibid, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{193} Ian Wynd, op. cit. p. 42.

\textsuperscript{194} ibid, p. 97.

\textsuperscript{195} ibid, p. 56.
The First World War saw many men from the region enlist and fewer return afterwards. Vera N's husband was wounded at Gallipoli but survived. The women of Geelong were active in working for the Comforts Fund, the Red Cross and the war effort in general, with the inception of the annual fundraising Gala Day in 1916.\footnote{Ibid, p. 296.} In November 1917 Geelong people voted in the referendum and rejected conscription. \textit{The Geelong Advertiser} reported:

Another point on which all seemed agreed was that the bulk of the No vote was given by the women. The argument about not sending another woman's son to his death seemed to carry more weight than anything else.\footnote{Ibid, p. 302.}

The crisis of the war was followed swiftly by the pneumonic influenza epidemic in 1919. Bobbie had just completed her nursing training in Colac and went to Melbourne to assist in the epidemic. Schools were closed and turned into emergency hospital wards. She remembered the time vividly, particularly because so many died as there were no antibiotics for treatment. She finally contracted the flu herself, but survived.

Technological developments paved the way for further industrial development. This first half of the century in Geelong was characterised by massive industrial development. This changed the face of Geelong from being predominantly agricultural, textile and maritime and the capital of the Western district, to an industrial city, the second largest in Victoria. Its reputation as a woollen textile centre in particular was consolidated. The early years saw the further establishment of textile mills: Commonwealth Woollen Mills (1915, and later the Federal Woollen Mills), the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Woollen Mill (1922), the Valley Worsted Mills Ltd (1923) and W. R. Redpath and Sons (1934). Established also were: Cresco Fertilizers Ltd. (1923), Ford Motor Company (1925), Phosphate Co-operative of Australia Ltd (1925), Corio Distillery (1928), Pilkington Brothers (1937), and International Harvester (1940). In 1940 the Grain Elevators' Board Terminal was erected at Corio Quay, which increased traffic at the port.\footnote{Ian Wynd, op. cit. p. 43.} Suburban development accompanied this expansion and the suburbs of North Shore, Corio, Manifold Heights and Herne Hill were established from the
1930s. After the Second World War, many of these industries were expanded and provided employment for returned servicemen, such as Beatrice's husband, and for large numbers of European migrants.

However, the rate of industrial development was interrupted by the Depression from 1929 and into the 1930s. Charity networks in Geelong sprang into action, such as the Mother Hubbard's Cupboard fund for the needy. The Great Ocean Road, originally started after the First World War to employ returned servicemen, was finally opened to the public in 1932. The final section to Apollo Bay was built by men who laboured in return for unemployment relief in 1933. In 1929 the first American talking pictures were shown in Geelong, radio 3GL started in 1930 and in the same year Amy Johnson, a famous female aviator, flew into Geelong. In 1933 the first issue of The Australian Women's Weekly was produced - many of the women interviewed read this and other women's magazines.

Prior to and well beyond the First World War both Madam Weigal and Semco, two Melbourne companies, were experiencing booming sales for knitting and crochet patterns; embroidery transfers, cottons and linens. (See Plate 1). Many of the women (those born before or in the 1920s) were adolescent or newly married in the inter-war period. Many of them commented that handiwork lost much popularity with the advent of television in 1956.

The inter-war years generally, as Kerreen Reiger has highlighted, saw a concern for 'modernity' in society and a move by a new class of professionals to apply scientific principles to infant welfare and household management. The Geelong Advertiser reflected this concern:

'Keeping house' had become a more complicated and dangerous occupation every decade; and the State has ignored that fact and made no provision to keep mothers up to date. In the good old days when every baby was suckled at the breast, there was no need for lectures on the dangers of sour milk and dirty bottles.

199 Peter Begg, op. cit. p. 5.
200 ibid, p. 6.
201 ibid, pp. 3, 12 and 177.
202 The Geelong Advertiser, 11 May 1918, quoted in Shurlee Swain, op. cit, p. 72.
Plate 1: Pattern books including those by Madam Weigel and Semco (Corinne)

Plate 2: Dolls made for the Red Cross in Melbourne during World War Two (Bobbie)
In Geelong, the District Nursing Society opened the first baby clinic in 1917 with others following, which were taken over by the Baby Health Centre Association in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{203} Bobbie, who had her three children in the 1920s in Melbourne, went from having her births at home to the last one in a hospital, reflecting the increased medicalisation of childbirth at the time. According to Bobbie, the current Queen Mother followed the teachings of Truby King, a New Zealand medical practitioner, in bringing up her babies. Bobbie did likewise, rigidly applying a four-hourly feeding programme and leaving the baby to cry rather than picking her up, in an effort to follow expert advice and to be modern.

The year 1919 had seen the return to Geelong of the city's first female medical practitioner Mary De Garis, who did much to improve maternal and infant welfare in Geelong for over 50 years. She was involved with the rebuilding of the Geelong Hospital in the 1920s and was active in the establishment of the Bethany Babies' Home in Geelong from 1928. From 1923 to 1931 she fought for the establishment of a maternity ward in the Geelong Hospital and also attended to her antenatal clinic.\textsuperscript{204} In 1936 the antibiotic - sulphanilamide - became available to treat bacterial infections and this improved maternal death rates markedly.\textsuperscript{205} Also in the 1920s kindergartens were beginning to be established throughout Victoria and the Free Kindergarten Union had two centres operating in Geelong by 1922.\textsuperscript{206}

A valuable support for rural women, the Country Women's Association (C.W.A.) began in 1928. The C.W.A. began as an organisation to address the terrible hardships and isolation rural women were experiencing throughout the Depression years. It was started by upper class, philanthropic Melbourne women but quickly spread to all classes in the country, having 137 branches established within the first

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\item[203] Shurlee Swain, op. cit. p. 73.
\item[204] ibid, p. 77.
\item[206] Shurlee Swain, op. cit. p. 74.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
five years.\textsuperscript{207} The Geelong branch began in 1933.\textsuperscript{208} It arose in response to the crisis of the Depression and the drifting of unemployed rural men to the cities, leaving women and children in hardship. Pam Roberts argues that it was women who bore the emotional cost of the Depression, that it was their cottage industries and craft skills that ensured a family's survival once the wage earner became unemployed or a farm was no longer viable.\textsuperscript{209} The C.W.A. accepted rather than challenged the role segregation of rural society and aimed at elevating the role of the housewife. Consequently, its journal focused its efforts on supporting women and children in their separate spheres, filling its pages with recipes for cheap and nutritious meals, and practical ways to make survival easier. Its meetings were an opportunity for women to come together and reduce their isolation. Fifteen of the women were members of the C.W.A. for many years and a number of these praised the friendship that C.W.A. offered. Vera remarked "C.W.A. was a saviour down in the bush". Similarly, Jean said: "The companionship, the fellowship, you come home a different person, you've got something to talk about. Country women - it's the greatest thing that ever happened".

\textbf{The Second World War}

\textit{War changes everything}
Corinne

With the outbreak of war in 1939 many men and women enlisted from the Geelong region and its factories and mills were turned over to production for the war effort. Some married women were left to raise their families alone - such as Vera M - or to cope with spouses who had been killed or injured in the war. This was the case with Beatrice, whose husband was a prisoner of war. In 1944 Unemployment Benefits and the Commonwealth Widows' Pension were introduced\textsuperscript{210} but it was some years before people such as Beatrice's mother would apply for the pension, such was the stigma attached to receiving 'charity'.

\textsuperscript{208} Conversation with Jean, August, 1993. The early records of the Geelong Branch are not yet publicly accessible.
\textsuperscript{209} ibid, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{210} The Australian Encyclopaedia, Vol. 7, Australian Geographic Society, Sydney, 1988, p. 2648.
For the five women on farms at this time (Margaret, Betty, Janet, Hilda and Vera N) their husbands and fathers were often present rather than absent during the war years, as farming was viewed as an essential industry. Many farmers did enlist where there were others to take over their work. Margaret recalled that on their family farm they had the help of some Land Army girls.211

Corinne, single and in Melbourne, experienced the excitement of American servicemen in the city. She recounted that they were known for their custom of buying flowers, particularly daphne, for their girlfriends, as well as giving silk stockings which were in great demand. Corinne asserted her independence and active involvement in the war effort by enlisting in the airforce for two years.

Other single women, such as Molly, devoted themselves to voluntary work. Many of the women recalled doing war work, ranging from knitting socks to knotting camouflage nets. "Horrible work" said Bobbie who, in Melbourne at the time, set up doll making workshops for the Red Cross instead. She trained many women on treadle machines, first in her diningroom at home and then in a room at the Anzac Hostel in Brighton. The dolls were in great demand due to a general shortage of toys during the war, and a sale was held in the Melbourne Town Hall which raised four thousand pounds in one day. "Never been done before or since" said Bobbie. (See Plate 2)

Betty, in Hamilton (in the centre of Victoria's Western District), was occupying a 'man's position' in an insurance office for the duration. She recounted her experiences:

We belonged to Red Cross and the Comforts Fund. We'd knit. I could only knit because I had a job to go to all day and I'd write letters to servicemen and help with feeding troops going through the town on troop trains. I didn't make camouflage nets and things as it would take all day and you'd go into a hall and do, because I was working, so I was knitting at night, in my evenings or on weekends. Socks and balaclavas and scarves.

Molly was extremely active in Geelong collecting scrap iron and other materials for recycling:

During the war they ran a very good scheme in Geelong called the War Funds. And Dad was treasurer of that. He'd retired during the war... We had an enormous collection of rubbish. I was a driver for that. We used to go round in an old MacRobertson delivery van and in front of it they had fitted one of the old bells from the trams that you twanged with your foot. We had regular shifts with a team - all women. Sometimes we did one area, sometimes we did another. Well there would be paper... One of our main things was old cast iron. We used to heave this jolly stuff in. Old rags... what we used to see waiting for us with a white flag floating over it, stuck on the gate! It was pretty hard work.

Molly and her mother also joined a group run by the C.W.A.:

We all did camouflage nets at home. It was set up on our side verandah and you netted away... Anyway they used to set these nets up... you unwound it and you fixed it on to four particular posts, and then we did all the netting around the edges to hold it firm.

Maic's mother had a sock knitting machine which she and her friends used to knit socks for the war effort. (See Plate 3)

In Europe, Ilona, Anita, Delfa, Anna, Mena and Wilhelmina experienced the war far more immediately. Delfa's, Anna's, Mena's and Wilhelmina's districts were occupied by invading armies. All of the women experienced social upheaval and trauma during this time. Their war-time experiences influenced their decisions to migrate to Australia and they are illustrative of the post-war migration patterns to Geelong. Due to considerations of length, their stories of the war and afterwards are recounted in Appendix Two.

Post-War Expansion
After the war, Geelong was to be irrevocably changed, as the expansion of mainly existing industries, such as Ford, provided employment for waves of displaced people from Europe. In 1954 the population of Greater Geelong was 72,600.\textsuperscript{212} The 1986 Census indicated that Geelong's population had grown to 183,403 people and that 10.2% of its residents came from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Shire of Corio, north of Geelong, had a population of 53,085 people.

\textsuperscript{212} Census figure quoted in W. Brownhill, op. cit. p. 654.
residents in 1986 of which 18.3% were born overseas. The six women who migrated to Geelong in the post-war period were part of this process. Mena arrived from Italy in Geelong in 1954, Delfa and her family migrated from Bosnia in 1957 and Anna and her family arrived in 1958, also from Bosnia. Wilhelmina migrated in 1960, Anita in 1961, and Ilona migrated in 1970.

In 1946 the C.S.I.R.O. wool research complex was established in Belmont and in 1954 the Shell Oil Refinery was built in Corio. In the post war economic boom, the Housing Commission started building public housing estates in Corio, Geelong's trams and museum were jettisoned and Geelong's predilection for demolishing its heritage proceeded more hastily.

In 1954 Geelong's fundraising network, the Community Chest began, later to become United Way. The Grace McKellar Homes for the elderly were also established in the 1959; Anita visited as a volunteer here and Maie worked for 20 years in charge of the handicrafts section. New suburbs and accompanying schools and kindergartens were created close to the industrial areas of Geelong, such as North Geelong, Bell Park, Norlane, Rossvale, and Bell Post Hill. The six women who migrated to Geelong all settled in these suburbs. Other more outlying districts became suburbs - Lara, Grovedale, Highton, Whittington, Newcomb and Moolap. A new vitality and diversity of people became part of Geelong's predominantly Anglosaxon culture.

Since 1960 the development of Geelong and its satellite townships, such as those on the Bellarine Peninsula, has been rapid. Farming people from the Geelong hinterland have often chosen to retire to the city of Geelong. This was the case with Martha, Ruby, Vera N, Margaret, Janet and Jean. Others retired to the Bellarine Peninsula: Sylvia and Margaret retired to Point Lonsdale, Alma retired to Anglesea, Alva, Dawn and Vera M retired to Barwon Heads, while Corinne and Hilda had lived there all their married lives. The 1991 census numbered the

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214 Peter Begg, op. cit. This book gives depressing witness to the destruction of Geelong's architectural heritage throughout this century.


216 Peter Begg, op. cit. p. 77.
population of greater Geelong at 192,000.217 Ian Wynd's postscript to Walter Brownhill's book outlines the developments in the region from 1960 to 1990.218 The major economic factor has been the decline of the textile mills due to international restructuring of the textile industry throughout the 1970s and 80s and the building of Alcoa's aluminium smelter in 1963. An important social development was the establishment of the Migrant Resource Centre in Geelong West and the Pako Street Festa, established in the 1980s. The latter is a cultural celebration of communities who have arrived in Geelong since World War Two. The six women who migrated have participated in these organisations and found contacts and friendships through these, as well as in their own communities.

Having placed the women in their social and historical contexts, the next chapter moves on to look at the work the women have performed in both the public and private sectors, with particular emphasis on their handiwork.

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217 The Geelong Advertiser, 8 October 1992, p. 3.

218 Walter Brownhill, op. cit. See the Postscript chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORLDS

Women's work has been a major area of analysis in feminist historical enquiry and this chapter offers provides new evidence as to the nature of women's work in Australia to 1960. It examines both paid and unpaid work, focusing on the women's handicrafts as an activity that broached the public/private divide.

The Public/Private Debate

Feminist debates in the past decade have often examined the nature of various oppositions, such as public/private, paid/unpaid work and production/consumption, in an effort to understand these ways of viewing the world and the effects on women that these concepts have had. (See for example Eisenstein, Matthews, and Kerber). Sociologists Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle assert that these oppositions are a major means through which patriarchy functions and are thus of great significance.

Patriarchy, in its contemporary form operates less through the direct authority of the father than through the preservation of these splits - between the 'economy' and the world of nature/culture (the two become fused); between objectivity and subjectivity, the public and private; and between rationality and emotionality, 'work' and 'leisure'.

The effects of defining the world in such oppositions are far-reaching. Private, unpaid work is defined as feminine and, being located in the home, it is invisible, ignored and not valued. The private sector is defined as the feminine world of consumption which, in most Marxist analyses, has been seen as inferior to the masculine work of production, which takes place in the paid, public arena. The public definition of work is privileged over work done in the private sphere. Society is described according to a model that does not fit the lived experiences of most women's lives. Game and Pringle wrote:

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221 Linda Kerber, op. cit.
223 ibid, p. 67.
224 ibid
"Although social life is spoken about in these terms, they do not correspond to women's social reality".  

Throughout the 1980s feminist historians examined the nature of women's paid and unpaid work in order to discover women's experiences. For example, Ryan and Conlon, Kingston, Frances and Probert in Australia have examined paid work while Oakley, Schwartz-Cowan, Strasser, Matthews, Frances, Evans and Saunders examined housework in particular. By examining the work processes and technologies of housework, feminist historians have made public what had been located in the private realm of the home and have established a solid case for women's unpaid labour to be defined most definitely as work. Economist Duncan Ironmonger's study *Households' Work*, which estimates the economic value of unpaid work to the Australian economy, further legitimised the case for recognising women's unpaid work as contributing to the national economy.

The nature of housework makes it a deceptive topic to research. It has been downgraded and its importance trivialised for so long that, until the 1970s, it was only intermittently considered a serious subject for study. The term itself encompasses a large range of different yet interrelated processes and there is no

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225 ibid, p. 78.
226 Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, op. cit.
227 Beverly Kingston, op. cit.
228 Raclene Frances, 'Shifting Barriers: Twentieth Century Women's Labour Patterns' in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), op. cit.
231 Ruth Schwartz-Cowan, op. cit.
232 Susan Strasser, op. cit.
235 Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) op. cit.
universal definition of what exactly constitutes housework. Various authors have analyzed it around different categories, and it has also been seen as performed over changing economic and social circumstances over time. Individuals have intensely personal responses to housework; what may be pleasure for one person may be another's punishment.\footnote{Ruth Schwartz-Cowan, op. cit. p. 14.} Housework is open-ended and expands to fit the time available in which to do it - all of these attributes obscure its often unexpectedly complex nature. As Ruth Schwartz-Cowan noted:

> Housework is as difficult to study as it is to do. The student, like the houseworker, is hard pressed to decide where the activity begins and where it ends, what is essential and what is inessential, what is necessary and what is compulsive.\footnote{Ibid}

Whether or not women's domestic craft should be defined as a form of 'housework' is debatable. Certainly both activities take place in the home and sewing, knitting and crochet, depending on their purpose, could contribute to the on-going maintenance and improvement of the material comfort of the household and its occupants. Handiwork, however, was not necessarily a routinised activity and, unlike most housework, such as cleaning, the results of making a textile item were not immediately undone and this certainly allowed more scope for ongoing personal satisfaction. However, mundane maintenance work, such as repairing clothes and darning, would most likely be defined as 'work' by most people. In my interviews though, Beatrice spoke at length about her mother's exacting standards for darning and her pride in being seen as the "best darning in the family" when she was a child. Domestic handiwork shares many of the characteristics of housework in its variable levels of interaction, the context of the home and family, its shared purpose of maintaining and contributing to the material well being of the family, its fluidity with no external controls regulating the flow of the work, its open-endedness and the fact that it is not easily quantifiable in terms of time. Where they differ is in the meanings that people attach to the activities, the time rhythms and the purposes for which it is done. Above all, making something is an act of creation and not solely a maintenance activity.
Plate 3: Sock knitting machine bought in the 1930s (Maie)

Plate 4: Knitted tea cosies (Vera N)
In my interviews I found ambivalent opinions as to whether the women's sewing/knitting/crochet work was work or pleasure. As Vera M said "It was pleasure when it went right", and Dawn remarked, "A bit of both". Betty said it was both work and pleasure, "because when we sewed for our children it might not always have been pleasure (not for me but for some it was) but it saved your housekeeping and there was pride in something you'd made nicely..."

This intimate connection between the economic and aesthetic is reflected in the artefacts. In the objects, the two concepts of decorative and functional are not separate, but combined in every item the women showed me. There is a long tradition of decorating objects made for practical purposes in Australia - teacosies with flowers on top, or made in the shape of an animal, teapot holders made in the shape of parrots, a d'oyley with a cup and saucer on the top of it, a milk jug cover finely crocheted where a plain one would have sufficed, tea towels embroidered with the days of the week, a peg bag in the shape of a doll's dress, coat hangers covered in patchwork - the list is endless. (See plates 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). These all indicate an activity with time and energy expended well beyond the initial practical need. This is indicative of the many layers of meaning and purpose that individuals could invest in the activity of 'making' and that, although the economic incentive could provide an initial stimulus, it is not, on its own, an adequate explanation for women's domestic craftwork. Account must also be taken of the time, the skills developed, the energy invested, the aesthetic choices and the maker's meaning, all of which are intertwined with the economic motive.

Jill Matthews asserts that married women did not fit their lives into the masculine, public view of the world.

The boundaries of the two spheres (public/paid and private/unpaid) were far more permeable than the ideologues postulated or desired. Married women moved at times out of their own homes and into others, or into more formal workplaces for short periods of time, where they undertook the same or similar work to which they did in the home. Alternately married women brought into their own homes paid work...the criterion was that of an integral fit between financial, emotional, ideological and material necessities and possibilities.

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Plate 5: Tea pot holders (Dawn)

Plate 6: Cup and saucer d’oyley, 1930s (Hilda)
Plate 7: Crocheted milk jug cover (Martha) 1920s

Plate 8: Embroidered peg bag (anonymous)
Other writers, such as those in *Households*’ Work, have stressed the dependence of the paid sector of the economy on the work performed in the domestic sphere. The next section examines the economic strategies and the role of handicrafts in the women’s families of origin during their childhoods, in the period 1920-40 and then in their marital homes when raising their own children in the decades 1940-60.

**Women’s Domestic Work 1920-1960**

*Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.*
Anonymous

**Childhoods and Adolescence, 1920-40**

Unless one was upper class, publicly and privately, this period in Australian history can be viewed as characterised by scarcity.241 Encompassing the Depression years, usually defined as 1929-1932, surviving economically became a major preoccupation for many families as each individual unit experienced its own private ‘depression’ often at different times. Some families, such as Bobbie’s, Alva’s and Alma’s and others on the land may not have experienced an economic depression due to family wealth.242

Many of the women recounted the economic strategies their mothers employed in the private sphere to counteract the effects of large families, of low wages paid in the public sphere, or perhaps, at times, no wages at all. Farmers did not earn weekly wages.

Judy grew up near the Cement Works in Geelong West in the 1920s where her father was an electric crane driver. Judy described her family as “working class... We were really poor but everybody was in the same boat”. She described how children’s clothes were made from flour bags. “Everybody had the same clothes on. It was like a uniform”. Calico flourbags, three pence from the grocer, were cheaper than buying fabric. They were washed and hung on the line to bleach in the sun and made into pillowcases, tea towels, shorts, pyjamas and girls’ dresses, decorated with pieces of ribbon or lace. Sometimes they were dyed. Rag rugs for

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241 My attention was drawn to this perspective by Frank Campbell.
242 In 1922 Bobbie and her husband were given a house in Hawthorn, Melbourne, as their wedding present. Between the wars, she and her sisters shopped for their clothes at Georges, one of the most exclusive shops in Melbourne.
the floor were made from hessian sacks and scraps of material. "You scrounged whatever bits and pieces you could find...So many people did make them". (See Plates 9 and 10)

The women residing in the Geelong region in the period 1920-1940 testified to a lack of consumer goods available in the shops, particularly children's clothes, while those living in rural Europe reported a similar lack of ready made consumer articles. Many also did not have the income to afford shop bought goods. Making items at home was economical and, in this way, most of the women interviewed reported how their mothers stretched the wage earner's salary much further. Saving money was a form of empowerment, as money made more choices possible. However, the grinding need to stretch money tended also to undercut feelings of empowerment. However, this was something most of the women continued to do in their marital homes in the 1940s and 50s.

Corinne described how everything in her family home was used for years over and over again, objects were valued because they had so few, shoes were mended and not thrown away and the same coats were worn for years."You made everything you possibly could because it was cheaper to do so". Judy's mother would cut down adult clothing for children's clothes as well as unravel woollen jumpers in order to make new ones. Hilda remembered a patchwork blanket, a wagga, made out of "coats and things" and backed with some old curtains.243 (See Plate 11)

Marjorie, growing up at Ouyen in a family of 10 children, said:

We didn't have a lot of money...lots of times we had to be very sparing with things. We passed on our clothes, we made our own bread, economised in every way...There was no such thing as throwing out clothes...you passed on all those things in the family and you wore them till you wore them out ...We only spent what we had...we would never buy anything on credit, we would only buy what we could afford.

Beatrice, from a family of 12 children, has lived all her life in Geelong. Her father was a storekeeper "a cut above the ditchdiggers and stonebreakers". In common with many families, they had a large vegetable plot and kept chickens for eggs. "We certainly wasted nothing. In fact we used to vie with each other for the

243 There is a collection of waggas in the National Wool Museum, Geelong, presented by the group Running Stitch in 1980.
Plate 9: Flour bag, 'Mammy oven puff flour'.

Plate 10: Close up of a rag rug (anonymous)
crusts... The fish man called and that was cheap". Relatives sent bags of fruit by train from the country and her mother would make jam in their copper. Sauce bottles were saved for their father to make into jam jars by cutting off the necks with an iron ring heated in the fire.

What emerges from these memories is a necessary tradition of thrift and frugality. Beatrice: "Mother never sat down and counted out and was pinch penny but we all knew that this was the way of life. And I think it was the way of life for most people in those days". Her mother did most of the sewing for the family.

People were more neighbourly and we exchanged sometimes our fresh eggs for her to make me a frock or something like that... pants, yes, they could be made out of the good parts of a frock that was beyond everything else, and I'd have a new pair of cambric pants... Petticoats were mostly made out of other garments too and the frocks... unravelling jumpers and the girls doing embroidery or mending frocks or sometimes cutting out using newspaper patterns, probably from friends or neighbours, and they would make simple frocks. But the better frocks were made by, well there was a widowed lady who lived near us and she would make the better frocks.

Alva described life at 'Meltham' at this time and before. "Although they were quite well-off people, they never wasted anything. During the shortages of World War One "[Martha] used to make aprons out of the backs, the good parts of men's shirts... she might decorate them with a bit of cretonne". Martha also made children's bathers from the tops of her cashmere stockings, children's bedspreads from oversized sheets where she embroidered Dolly Varden figures in the centre. Aunt Lena made tea towels from flour bags.

In Ukrainia survival was a daily struggle. Anna recalled:

My father he was really poor because in Ukrainia he had only a block of land and house... haven't got milk, haven't got enough food for the first year, no house, just make a little shed, a very difficult life... When I start thinking about my life... it was horrible... not enough clothes.
Plate 11: A wagga (Mrs Wall)

Plate 12: 'MELTHAM', STONEHAVEN, AROUND 1910
Anna's mother taught her to sew:

and she always say 'you have to learn because you need always need something with your life'...and before I got married she teach me to make trousers, you know, men's trousers. I said 'I don't want to do that.' She said 'you need' and I never tried to do it. And when I got married I pull out one trousers from my husband, one jacket and I take a pattern and after that I make them myself.

In Delfa's village the flax was grown in order to make fabric. "First of all the wheat had to be gathered and stored and the corn and the beans and everything had to be stored for winter...flax and weaving, we did that during winter".

In Potenza, Italy, Mena's mother also sewed to enhance the economic survival of the family. "She sewed everything...she crocheted, she sewed, she knitted socks, jumpers, sewed mattresses with a big needle...with a sewing machine, a Singer [treadle]."

These recollections demonstrate the interconnectedness of the two sectors of the economy. Work done in the private sector enhanced the value of wages earned in the public sector and contributed substantially to the family's economic well being and survival. Upon marrying, many of the women continued to employ the productive strategies they had grown up with, in order to empower themselves and contribute to the family's economic well-being. During the period 1940-60, when 11 of the women were raising their children, the following practices were remembered,
Marriage and Children, 1940-60
Beatrice recalled:

Yes I had a table model Singer...I was able to make all my babies' clothes...the knitting I mostly did. I'd have patterns and we'd swap, friends and I, if we had the same age children. I remember a neighbour giving me a pair of khaki men's working trousers and in those days, [1950s in Geelong], little girls looked very smart in jodhpurs. I made Cynthia a lovely pair of khaki jodhpurs. I well remember doing those. [For babies] You bought flannelette by the yard for napkins...we always waited for the Lindsay's sale and you hemmed all your own napkins because they were too expensive to buy... you were brought up to use it up, wear it out, make it do or go without...so this was the norm, what we did, so I'd go and machine these...we'd buy skeins of wool...you knitted all your baby clothes. So it was a great pleasure to be able to make as many things as you could and I remember making singlets for the children out of Frank's cotton interlock singlets and parts of them would be really good and I just didn't throw them away and I was able to hem...herringbone was my favourite stitch as it stretches with you...yes I did a lot of sewing for the children. (See Plate 12)

Hilda remembered sewing her first baby's clothes on her hand operated table Singer machine in the caravan when she and her husband went rabbiting after the war. Vera M and Hilda cut down old clothes to make things for their children. Hilda explained "Someone would give you a jumper that was no earthly good to you...well you'd pull it all out to make a jumper again".

Betty, Dawn and Janet also made their children's clothes. Anna, Ilona, Sylvia and Mena sewed for their grandchildren as well. Dawn said: "Well you had to make clothes for the children. There was never enough money to go and buy things". Betty: "But you found it was just so much more rewarding to make your own...and cheaper". Janet:

My mother did a lot of sewing for my first baby. Possibly after I had my first child I may have got my first Singer sewing machine. It was pleasurable and I suppose in those days, you've got a lot of things that you want and I suppose...it was moneywise too.

Judy, Vera M. and Beatrice recalled the popularity of smocked dresses for their babies - Vera taught herself to smock from a book. Beatrice: "I was never very good at smocking and I had someone smock their Shepherd frocks as they were called. They were a cream Viyella frock buttoned through". (See Plate 13)
Plate 13: A Singer treadle sewing machine

Plate 14: Smocked girl's dress (anonymous) 1950s
These were some of the strategies the women adopted, using their handiwork skills to contribute to the economic and material well-being of their families. Two other strategies deserve particular attention - those of dressmaking and knitting. Dressmaking and knitting were activities that crossed the boundaries between the public and private sectors. As I shall discuss in the following section, various women were employed professionally on the basis of their sewing skills, outside of the home. Others, who I shall discuss here, used their dressmaking and knitting skills to earn some income from home. Most of the women have made clothes and/or knitted for themselves for most of their lives. Sylvia was the sewer of the family and kept her other three sisters in clothes. Ilona’s daughter Maria said:

Back home [Yugoslavia] when she [Ilona] was young, all she had to do was knit all winter...she was the knitter of the family. She had to knit everybody’s jumpers and socks...gloves, everything, mittens.

Molly used her knitting skills to earn money from home in Geelong during the war years. “I’d begun knitting and I was knitting layettes for babies to sell them. I was on a very small allowance. It was always like that”. (See Plate 14)

Judy, who had worked professionally as a dressmaker, sewed clothes for her nephews and nieces, while her sister, who was a good knitter, knitted jumpers for all of the children. Mena, Marjorie, Sylvia, Margaret and Molly still sew their own clothes. Molly first weaves the fabrics:

I’m still making my own clothes and still designing and all my spinning and all my weaving, I always landed into clothing. I always tended to go into materials for skirts and jackets, dresses and suits.

Margaret, Janet, Judy and Anna used their skills to earn money from home as dressmakers prior to marrying. After their training, both Janet and Margaret ran small dressmaking businesses in their rural towns.

As a girl in Croatia in the 1920s, (the family shifted to Croatia from Ukraine) Anna embroidered and sewed for money:

I do lots of embroidery up there for other people for money...before married...It was a tradition, particularly for Orthodox Serbian people, for national costume. I made the patterns myself. I did lots of work with a sewing machine too when I was young. And I can buy clothes for me.
Anna’s mother's sewing saved the family during the war. Her daughter said: "That saved them because she was a dressmaker and was a tailoress. The [German] army used to force her to sew for them. You used to sell eggs to buy cotton".

Through handcraft skills such as these, the women made a substantial economic contribution to their families, either in terms of the money they saved through home production of clothing or through producing items that they could sell outside of the home from time to time. Through cottage industries based in the home, such as knitting and dressmaking, the women crossed the boundaries of the public sector when the need arose.

Farm life, for eight of the women who grew up prior to 1930, excluded them from training for a job in the paid workforce. The assumption was that they would stay at home, helping on the farm, until marriage. Martha, Ruby, Alma, Hilda and Vera N lived in the Geelong region while Marjorie was in the Wimmera. Anna and Delfa were from villages in Europe and Wilhelmina, although living in the city of The Hague, Holland, similarly did not train for a paid career. The women gave similar explanations to Hilda: "I didn't look for it because we knew we had to help Mum and Dad". Hilda had wanted to be a childcare nurse on a farm but her daughter has fulfilled this ambition.

Marilyn Lake has detailed the substantial economic contribution of women in rural Victoria prior to the Second World War.²⁴⁴ Farming life was physically demanding with few machines to lighten the load. Thus women's labour was crucial for survival. However, there were also strong gender prohibitions against women obtaining paid work particularly if a housekeeper was needed at home. This was Wilhelmina's experience:

My mother - in the family there was always teachers and that sort of thing and she wanted me to teach but my father said 'no you can better do the household'...I was mostly in the household. ...No sometimes I wanted to go out to work so I would have some money...One sister a teacher, a brother a cabinet maker, another sister a dressmaker, another a hairdresser. The youngest stayed at home. I did crochet.

In Alma's family at 'Meltham' there was also the upper class expectation that the five girls would stay home until they were married. One sister wanted to train as a

²⁴⁴ Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, op. cit.
nurse but was prevented by her father from doing so. For these eight women, opportunities in the paid workforce were denied and their labour was retained in the unpaid, private sector for the benefit of their families.

**Women's Paid Work - Training and First Jobs**

The picture changes for the women who left school in the 1930s and 40s, with more women entering the paid sphere of the economy. The five women from farming backgrounds - Jean, Sylvia, Vera M, Janet and Margaret - all obtained positions in paid work or training. Vera worked in post offices for six years; Janet and Margaret studied Diplomas of Needlework at the Gordon Technical College and the Emily Macpherson College in Melbourne respectively. Jean trained as a nurse at Ballarat in the mid 1930s and Sylvia trained as a secondary teacher (manual arts) in the years 1937-41. In Europe Anita trained as a nurse in Germany during the Second World War. In Geelong, Molly did an art and drafting course at the Gordon Technical College, Beatrice obtained her first job as a nanny in a private home in Geelong around 1929 while Judy obtained her first job as a seamstress at the age of 14 in 1933. Betty and Male entered office work in the 1940s while Corinne's first job was a sewing position in Melbourne in 1938. Dawn trained as a primary teacher in Melbourne in the late 1940s.

However, among this group there were women who were also unable to fulfill their ambitions. Ilona was discouraged from pursuing a career in sewing. Her daughter said:

> [Ilona] always wanted to do sewing. She wanted to learn dressmaking...but her mum didn't want her, just wanted her to do the knitting because that's what she learnt when she was very little and she had to do the knitting. But that's why when she got married she did a bit of sewing.

The war also disrupted lives. For example, Sylvia commented:

> In those days we didn't really have the choice of a career...the parents did for the children whatever they could, and as I had three younger sisters, my expertise was in maths - and I was also interested in architecture - but because it meant living away from home and going to Melbourne - there was no suggestion of ever doing that...If it wasn't for the war, I would have pursued maths. It was a matter of doing something you could afford to do.
Maie said: "I would really have liked to be a florist, but it was the trend then [1940s] - you either went nursing or into an office". Married women were actively discouraged from returning to work and it was only during the war years that this regulation was altered in the public service. (Vera M returned to work as a post office clerk after her marriage in 1941, but Dawn, a primary teacher, had to resign when she was married and return as a temporary in the early 1950s).

A number of the women's first jobs and training courses built on the skills they had learned at home - the traditional feminine skills of nurturing, caring for others, needlework and housewifery. Judy finished her Merit at age 14 in 1933 and then approached the firm of Bryant and Lanes, dressmakers, in Geelong. Because of her proficiency and love of sewing ("All my life I was going to sew") as well as her aunt having worked there, Judy was employed as a seamstress and trained on the job. Judy described the work: "everything was done by hand...everything had to be perfectly done". She described doing fine roulee work by hand when "our fingers were bleeding". Bryant and Lanes "only made for the top notch in Geelong, like the bank managers' wives, Mrs Bender, people with money".

Similarly, in 1938, Corinne's first job in Melbourne as a seamstress was obtained through her school, where she had excelled at the domestic arts. She had chosen to attend Prahran Technical School as it specialised in the domestic arts curriculum for girls and this built on the skills she had learned at home. She found her mother's warning to be true - that the sewing trades were indeed "slave labour" and left that job for office work which paid much better wages.

Beatrice's first position, a children's nurse, also built on skills she had learnt at home - those of housework and caring for others. She had spent three years at home after leaving school at 14. She later obtained a position as a sales assistant at Bright's, a Geelong department store and became a manager of the children's wear section for six years.

Hilda's work on the family farm and orchard developed into paid work when her father opened a fruit stall at Malthy's Market (now Market Square in Geelong) in 1929. The skills required there had been learnt at home, as she had always gardened. After her marriage, she worked as a house cleaner and gardener for many years.
Sylvia and Maie also built paid careers on skills they had learned initially in the home and developed through their own interest and efforts. Sylvia had shown talent for needlework early in primary school and later made all her school uniforms to go to boarding school at the age of 12. In 1937, after matriculating, she went to Castlemaine Technical School to do a Manual Arts course with the intention of becoming a teacher. She obtained a studentship to do her teacher training in Melbourne and was appointed to Bendigo Girls’ School in 1942, where she stayed for 12 years. With a brief interruption in the 1960s when she had two sons, she stayed teaching until her retirement in 1980, rising to the level of Deputy Principal of a Melbourne high school.

Maie has also pursued crafts professionally, working as a handcraft instructor at the Grace McKellar Centre, Geelong, for 20 years, retiring in 1985. She initially trained in office work after leaving school in the 1940s and had a number of varied jobs, pursuing craft in her spare time. "My mother was always involved with crafts and we used to have little craft evenings once a week with people just within our vicinity". She rose to head of her department supervising 16 other instructors.

Women’s entry into the public world of paid work in Victoria was accelerated by the onset of the Second World War when their labour was channelled into the war effort. Corinne joined the airforce, Vera M was allowed to return to work in the post office after her marriage, and two of the women reported that their mothers, who were trained primary teachers, were given the opportunity to return to the workforce in those years as a special concession. Molly and others contributed voluntarily to the war effort.

Many of the gains in women’s employment were eroded after the war and women’s entry into the world of paid work was never guaranteed and often problematic. Pressure was exerted on some of the women to remain in the private sphere caring for others; career choice could be denied and marriage remained the expected career. Once in jobs, there were other barriers, such as the discriminatory policies that Sylvia and Dawn encountered working for the Education Department.

For three of the women, although in paid work, there was little division between this and their home life. The boundaries between the two spheres were flexible. Maie spoke about the amount of preparation and finishing of projects that she had to do at home in the evenings; Sylvia reported a similar situation with her teaching.
Maie would often train new staff at her home in the evenings. Molly creatively combined her haberdashery business with her artistic work as she set up her loom in the window of her shop and would weave in the quiet winter months. The boundaries between the public and private were fluid.

Influences from the professional crafts world also crossed into the private sphere. Women's domestic craft work did not occur in a vacuum. Undoubtedly, influences and trends filtered through from the public, professional level of craft and perhaps through women's magazines. Women's lives were rarely strictly divided into 'professional' and 'amateur'. Many women, such as Maie, Molly, Janet, Margaret and Sylvia undertook training in crafts at technical colleges or schools. Molly had her own studio at home where she would exhibit her craft work to the public. Molly and Sylvia taught voluntarily for women's organisations, such as the C.W.A. and were judges at shows and exhibitions, having an influence beyond their immediate circle. This is another example of how women's lives fluidly crossed over from the private into the public sphere and back again repeatedly.

These examples bear out Matthews' assertion about the unreality for women of the division between public and private worlds. Through many ways the women earned part-time and full-time incomes, with skills developed initially in the home, in between and while caring for children, spouses and homes. They moved fluidly between the two worlds of public and private, both in time and physical space.

Women's Spaces
This section moves on to look at the physical spaces the women inhabited in performing their work, both paid and unpaid. Feminist geographers, such as Linda McDowell, have noted that space in our society is gendered; that public space has been the preserve of men while women, historically, have been relegated to the private realm of the home.

The ideology of separate spheres arose in the nineteenth century as industrialisation proceeded apace in Britain and America. Suzanne Mackenzie and Damaris Rose argue that the separate spheres of home and the workplace were obtained only

through working class struggle in Britain as, prior to the *Ten Hours Act* of 1847, the excesses of capitalism threatened to devour family life completely.\(^{246}\)

Throughout this century, unlike in earlier periods, cities in the U.S.A. and Australia have been built around the idea of the public/private separation, where domestic living spaces (houses) have been relegated to the outskirts of cities in suburbs with the centres of cities reserved for the public activities of paid work. This has emphasised the home's symbolic importance in the private sphere - it is the women and children's space, the place where the breadwinner returns after a day's work in the public sphere.

In this section I will firstly examine the women's private spaces in the home and then move on to look at the types of public spaces they inhabited when employed in the paid workforce. As with time (see Chapter Six) there are various types of space. For this discussion I will contrast two types of space - that of personal, private, emotional space with physical space.

**Private Space**

Leonore Davidoff et al. have traced the historical development of the idea of the house as a home from the eighteenth century in Britain. They suggest this idea originated from a combination of a domestic ideal and a rural ideal they term the 'beau idyll' and this was built upon male and middle class dominance. This ideal was given material form in the house. They wrote:

"In the construction of this 'country of the mind', the idea of domesticity as a general good was intimately tied to the powerful symbol of the home as a physical place."\(^{247}\)

In Australia this was translated into the suburban dream (as opposed to the rural idyll), where each family had a self-contained home and privacy. Davidoff, like


Ann Oakley, noted how the wife and mother image often merged with that of the house, as mothering and nurturing were important elements of domesticity.²⁴⁸

The essence of domesticity in the daily round, the weekly and seasonal rituals within the home, emphasized the cyclical and hence timeless quality of family life in opposition to the sharp disjunctive growth and collapse of commerce and industry.²⁴⁹

This domestic ideal underpinned the notion of separate spheres, of public and private worlds, throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In Australia, moves such as the 1907 Harvester Judgement, which established a basic wage for a family man with three children, further legitimised the ideal of the married woman who stayed at home to raise the family and did not go out to work in the public economy.

The rise of the scientific housework movement in the 1920s further entrenched the position of the wife at home. She was charged with new responsibilities, such as hygiene and child development and the emotional well-being of the family. Her role was now a domestic professional in which she should strive to excel.²⁵⁰

Although the home was designated as the woman's realm, I will argue that in reality, in most homes, a married woman's private space was actually very limited and usually transitory in that the spaces they occupied for their handiwork were spaces not primarily designed for that work. Through examining women's interaction with needlework, I will demonstrate that doing needlework was often a way of increasing the women's physical and emotional space within the home.

Rozsiska Parker has convincingly demonstrated that historically, ideologies of femininity have been closely allied with needlework. In Britain and America, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in colonial Australia, needlework symbolically signified respectability for all classes of women and, "was the norm of proper female behaviour".²⁵¹ However, attitudes towards

²⁴⁹ ibid, p. 156.
²⁵⁰ See Kerreen Roiger, op. cit.
²⁵¹ Rozsiska Parker, op. cit. and Laurie Yager Lieb, op. cit. p. 33.
needlework could be complex, ambivalent and contradictory, both amongst men and women.

The tools and materials of domestic handiwork, the items produced and the business of producing them took place in the physical location of the home. The woman engaged in needlework, in effect, delineated her physical space within the home with the tools of needlework - her work basket, paper patterns for dressmaking, fabrics, scissors, pins, needles, cottons, magazine patterns, wool, etcetera, as well as the ubiquitous treadle sewing machine. All of the women interviewed had either a treadle or a hand operated sewing machine in the family home where they learnt to sew, and most had electric sewing machines in the marital homes.²⁵²

In most houses married women's (and men's) private space was very limited. Until relatively recently houses in Australia were not built with sewing rooms, although a 'den' or 'study' has been an acceptable part of domestic architecture for many years. From my interviews, it was only the wealthy or single woman who had a permanent studio, and thus an exhibition space, detached from the house, for their handcraft work. For 30 years Bobbie worked in her studio at the Heights, Geelong, making dried flower arrangements for charities as a virtual full-time job; Molly did likewise with her weaving and exhibited her work.

For most of the married women with children living at home, their private, physical space was often temporary (except perhaps for the kitchen and laundry) and a way of designating space or at least imprinting the larger spaces with their personality, was through using their handiwork to transform the physical spaces in the home. For example, Jean and Janet made their bedspreads for their first homes; bedspreads are the largest textile surface in a house that can be decorated. Over the years Jean covered her dining room chairs with her Bargello style tapestries. At the time of interview Wilhelmina had her tapestries displayed on her lounge room walls, Corinne had her d’oyleys displayed, Marjorie had her patchwork cushions and quilts in her sitting room, Ilona’s embroidered table mats

²⁵² The treadle sewing machine was designed to double as an elegant piece of furniture. When the machine was not in use and folded down, it became a small wooden side table with ornate cast iron legs on castors, so that it could easily be moved from room to room.
and Delta's crochet were evident in their lounge rooms as was Molly's spinning wheel.

This personalising of physical space to expand psychological space gives another perspective to Corinne's explanation of the female role:

Everything pertaining to the home was done by the woman...you made your own possessions, such as your duchess set for your dressing table, to dress up the room. It was a way of making your home nicer than just bare boards and furniture, making it more homely with a feeling of comfort, which in those days, I think there was very little of it, and it was a necessity.

Thus, while fulfilling economic imperatives, the women were also transforming their homes in their own images and exhibiting their work within them.

Intimately connected with this was the predominantly female audience that would view the woman's creations. Beyond the immediate family, female friends and neighbours provided a ready audience to view the handiwork in the course of visiting each others' homes. Visiting usually involved the offering of hospitality - morning or afternoon teas when the men of the household were absent, or lunches and dinners when the family was present.

Alva described her mother's and aunt's lives at 'Meltham' prior to World War Two. "That was part of their entertainment, entertaining people with nice china teaset". Many of the items made by the women were made for such purposes, for the dual function of serving food as well as showing one's handiwork: d'oyleys for sandwich plates or cake plates, afternoon tea cloths, supper cloths, traycloths, placemats, tea cosies, teapot holders, milk jug covers, d'oyleys on which to place vases of flowers. (See Plate 15) As well, there were the furnishings of the lounge or dining room - piano runners, mats for table lamps, rag rugs for the floor, antimacassars for the sofa and chairs, loose covers and cushions, perhaps a crocheted afghan blanket.
Plate 15: Knitted baby’s dress (Vera N)

Plate 16: A sandwich d’oyley (Ruby) 1920s
Transforming the physical spaces of the home was not, however, a completely individualistic enterprise, but rather a collective expression of long established traditions and role expectations, often presented as the latest fashion in women's magazines. Whether the women were conscious or not of the rituals they performed, there were correct ways of doing things. "You'd never set a tray without a traycloth" said Alma, referring to her memories of growing up at 'Meltham'. (See Plate 16) Corinne recounted her family's custom prior to the war: "Floral d'oyles in bedrooms but not the Harbour Bridge. Harbour Bridges could be in the less intimate spaces, such as the lounge or dining room."

While handiwork could be a means of personalising the physical spaces of the home and increasing the woman's psychological space within it, it could also be a means for the woman to gain emotional and psychological space from the constant demands of the family, or a respite from other demands. It required concentration, absorption in the task at hand, decisions about colour and style and it was done mostly when the children were in bed, in the evenings. Individual projects could legitimately provide women with private, mental space while still being physically located within the family. Many of the women mentioned sitting around the dining room table after dinner, or by the fire, listening to the radio while doing their handiwork, particularly before the arrival of television in Australia in 1956.

Corinne described fancywork as "wonderful for the mind", that it was relaxing and gave her serenity. It may also have provided a place free from the restrictions of what she described as a "chauvinistic" father. This situation was shared by at least one other of the women - Vera N - whose father and husband were described by her relatives as oppressive and controlling. Margaret, also, recalled the following incident:

In the early days with two small children I used to sew a lot at night. My husband used to be horrified...so one night he put the power out...he thought I should be in bed, so that rather put me off for years and I didn't do much sewing at all for perhaps 20 years.

Conversely, doing handiwork could also lessen the emotional spaces between family members and friends and create a warmth and closeness between the females of the household. Rozsika Parker wrote: "Sewing allowed women to sit together without feeling they were neglecting their families, wasting time or
betraying their husbands by maintaining independent social bonds". Many of the women remembered working on joint projects with their mothers, aunts or sisters, particularly Anita, Corinne, Alma, Delfa and Ilona. Close bonds could be forged through the process of learning to sew, knit or crochet. Beatrice recalled turning the handle of her mother's table model machine while her mother sewed shirts for the missions. "I didn't mind because Mother would tell me stories of missions and missionaries". In Delfa's, Ilona's and Anita's villages, prior to 1960, the women would come together to sew. "When the farm work was finished ... we would have sewing nights, embroidery nights, things like that".

Fifteen of the women were members of the C.W.A. which, in Geelong, currently holds monthly craft days which are well attended. The C.W.A. was founded in Sydney in 1926 and in Melbourne in 1928 specifically to foster friendship amongst rural women and reduce their isolation. As Marjory explained: "The main thing that it's meant to me is the wonderful friendship that we make in C.W.A." Betty also remarked that when she was a Group President of C.W.A. in the 1970s, the branches that seemed to work best were the ones that pursued handicrafts. This was a crossing over of the private and public realms. In these ways the women used their handicrafts to come together, to foster a sense of community and to reduce the physical and social spaces between them.

In conclusion, although the home as a large physical space was designated in ideological terms as the woman's space, the reality for married women was that this space was often - symbolically at least - controlled by the man. There was only limited private space available for themselves, as most spaces within the home were communal spaces, for example the lounge room, or shared spaces, such as the bedroom. Doing handicrafts could be a way of claiming private psychological space and of personalising the physical space, through decorating it and transforming it. In this way a woman could expand the psychological space available to her within the home and display her talents to other women who could view the work in the private space of the home.

253 Rozsika Parker, op. cit. p. 15.
Public Space

In Australia the public/private divide has historically also been maintained through the segregation that has existed within the paid workforce. Women have crossed the public/private divide but have not been allowed into the most public positions of power in society until recently, and have not received equal pay until 1972.\textsuperscript{254} Certain occupations have been more open to women than others - particularly those that built on the feminine skills taught in the home, the 'traditional' jobs for women, such as the sewing trades, teaching, clerical work and nursing. Consequently the workforce has remained segregated along sexual lines. This has been reflected in the lives of the women, where an examination of the spaces they inhabited while at work in the public sphere reveals that the women spent much of their time in segregated spaces.

Judy Bell's dressmaking 'apprenticeship' was served almost exclusively in the company of women in Geelong in the 1930s. The clients were women, the seamstresses were women, they were trained by women and the creations were modelled by women for a female audience. The head cutter, however, was a male. Judy described it thus: "There was the blouse table, there was the skirt table, there was the costume table, there was the debutante table...everything was done by hand". She was ambivalent in her attitude towards the work and aware of the exploitative working conditions.

We worked from 8 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock at night...mind you we got about 4/6. Nobody grumbled. I mean, you had to work hard. They got their pound of flesh, but we loved it. I think all the girls loved it.

The "head girl" was tyrannical and demanded perfect work. Judy enjoyed telling this story, which was vivid in her memory. "She just came over and she pulled everything out and she said, 'Never, ever tack on my table in green. After I'd done it all so beautifully, it was all pulled out. 'Always use white'."

Beatrice also worked in the female dominated world of shop assistants at Bright and Hitchcock's department store in Geelong in the early 1940s and Corinne experienced similar conditions in office work in Melbourne during this time. Within the textile mill where Mena laboured as a bobbin winder in the 1960s in Geelong, she worked mostly with women. All of the managerial positions within

\textsuperscript{254} Edna Ryan and Ann Conlon, op. cit.
these places were held by men. Vera N, who had lived on isolated farms for 50 years of her life, "blossomed" when she moved into Belmont (a Geelong suburb) and worked in the canteen at Ford Australia. Denied a social life on the farm, "the women never, ever had an outing", the experience of being with other women in paid work transformed her life. "It changed her outlook absolutely. She'd only ever known Warrion - not exactly domination, but close to. Once she got into the factory amongst women...she blossomed."

Sylvia inhabited a female world when she taught manual arts in girls' high schools in Bendigo and Melbourne. Until the mid 1960s girls' high schools were staffed predominantly by women. "It was only in latter years that men came into it...to start off [1940s and 50s] it was all women. They were the only schools [women] were allowed to be principals of. You were all on a par." She remembered the prejudice from men that she encountered when she was teaching art and sewing in the 1970s. Referring to the academic/manual distinction, she said: "I'd never come across that distinction before". Her explanation for the negative attitude of some of the male staff was: "Men don't like it [handicrafts] because they can't do it." Sylvia also remembered the opportunities given to men after the war but denied to the women who had kept the teaching service going for the duration.

The privileges were given to the men who returned because of active service. They had the opportunity to go and do university courses and degrees whereas the people who had maintained the system during the time they were away, didn't receive any of the privileges.

This treatment was based on the public/private split where men were considered as 'breadwinners', but women were not and therefore did not need to be paid or treated equally.

Bobbie and many of the women who "worked for every charity in Geelong" crossed the boundaries of the public/private split, as their labour was voluntary and performed at home, while the goods they produced were sold in the public marketplace. Bobbie remarked on this female charity network: "I've always worked with women".

Farm work, similarly, does not fit neatly into the public/private categories but crosses the boundaries as the work is performed in the private realm, often unpaid for women, yet the products are sold in the public sector of the economy. Here
again the work spaces were often segregated for large parts of the day. All of the
farm women spoke of the traditional division of labour - the men did the outside
work while the women did the housework as well as the garden, although
sometimes within gardening there was a distinction between men doing the
vegetable gardening while the women concentrated on the flowers.

The isolation of farm life was relieved by women's networks that crossed the
public/private divide, through organisations such as the C.W.A., church and
events such as local and district shows. The women's sections in shows were
intended to publically display women's household skills and were an important
way that a woman could achieve public recognition and status for accomplishments
that for most of the time, were ignored.

To summarise, this chapter has examined the idea of the public/private divide
within our society and how this has affected the lives of the women interviewed.
Their examples bear out Matthews' assertion that the boundaries of the two spheres
were fluid for women and that they crossed over into the public sphere in many
varied ways - through cottage industries such as dressmaking, through casual work
such as house cleaning and gardening, through voluntary work for charities. The
women's housework, of which their needlework was a part, contributed
significantly to the economic well-being of their families and illustrates the
interdependence of the two spheres of public and private. The women's
experiences of paid work reflected the segregation of the labour force in Australia
in the 1930s-1960s and this could be either liberatory or oppressive. Within the
private sphere of the home an examination of the women's use of space and their
interaction with their handicrafts showed a creativity in their use of space.

The following chapter will consider the role of needlework in the construction of
ideals of femininity and will examine the major sites where this discourse operated.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY

This chapter looks at the theme of femininity and needlework, a theme first developed by Rozsika Parker writing about British women. She drew attention to the close links between women's handiwork and the construction of femininity since Medieval times in Britain and Europe. At various times needlework has been used in families and schools to actively inculcate 'feminine' virtues; it has been seen as a measure by which feminine accomplishments are judged and it has been resisted by many women. From my interviews, the role expectation that women should be able to sew for their families crossed class, geographical and cultural boundaries and was very resilient. This is undoubtedly a reflection of patriarchy, which also crosses cultural boundaries.

This chapter examines the various sites and processes in the women's lives where the concept of femininity was given meaning. It looks at learning in the home and school, the common rituals of the glory box, marriage and becoming a housewife. Showing their craft work and voluntary work were experiences shared by the women and these are also examined. I have used The Geelong Advertiser's Ladies Pages of the decade 1920-1930 as a source for the public discourse that surrounded the practice of housewifery. I have also explored the motifs and symbols of the women's embroidered fancy work of this period, which were frequently designs from the Semco Company in Melbourne. I view the media - women's magazines, newspapers and radio - as operating as a mirror to people lives, reflecting and reinforcing attitudes, values and the ways we live. I have therefore considered this to be a relevant and significant indicator of the public discourse about femininity. In contrast to the reflected or ideal views of reality, I conclude with the example of Vera N, who used her knitting to transcend the usual boundaries open to women prior to 1960 and who resisted many of the role prescriptions of femininity.

255 Rozsika Parker, op. cit.
The Discourse of Femininity 1920-1960

Femininity is an empty shell. It purports to be the truth, the essence, the absolute meaning of being a woman, but...it is a concept waiting to be given meaning by whoever conjures it into use.
Jill Julius Matthews²⁵⁶

This quote draws attention to the chameleon-like nature of the meaning of femininity; an examination of history shows that it is not a fixed and universal attribute, but is largely socially defined and constructed, as is masculinity. It has been ascribed with different characteristics and emphases over time with the discourse²⁵⁷ often reflecting the interests of those most powerful in society. A pertinent example of this is during the Second World War²⁵⁸ when women, who had previously been restricted in the types of occupations to which they had access, were encouraged into a whole range of previously 'male' occupations, such as working in public transport and in armaments factories, yet still were seen as 'feminine' women.

Jill Matthews describes the process of becoming a woman as the pursuit of femininity.²⁵⁹ While various aspects of femininity have been emphasised at different times, the central values of femininity have stayed reasonably constant throughout this century in Australia. These are: heterosexuality, marriage, the bearing of children, the nurturing of the family, purity, unselfishness, service to others, diligence and proficiency in household skills, caring for the elderly, not being overly assertive or sexual, being skilled at personal relationships.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women, op. cit. p. 7.
²⁵⁷ By using the term 'discourse' I am referring to "the specific structure of statements, terms, notions and beliefs that categorize women. These are found in institutional and organizational behaviour as well as in language and texts." Linda McDowell and Rosemary Pringle (eds) Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 7.
²⁵⁸ Amanda Dunstan, 'Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones But Words Will Never Hurt Me': Public Representations of Australian Womanhood During the Second World War, unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1991. This thesis shows how the discourse of femininity changed to accommodate the seemingly opposing discourse of war, to recruit women to the war effort.
²⁵⁹ Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women, op. cit. p. 7.
²⁶⁰ ibid. p. 6.
Various attributes have been emphasised at different points in history - for example, until the Second World War for a middle class woman to work outside the home was seen as the failure of the breadwinner to provide adequately, but this attitude broke down as the ideology of consumerism became increasingly dominant by the 1950s. Matthews makes the point that there are a multitude of ideals and each woman carries her own class specific ideal of femininity.261 The discourse of femininity has always been contested by different groups at different times - there has never been complete consensus on single values such as the right to work or equal pay, etc. Ideals also do not necessarily reflect the realities of people’s lives.

How femininity is constructed is contested. Reiger and Matthews have accounted for the sites and agents who promoted the ideology of femininity, but Reiger does not account for how individuals negotiated these ideals in their own lives. Matthews shows us examples of those who failed to successfully become feminine women. How this process occurs is still debated. In the 1970s the dominant view amongst historians was that women conformed to role prescriptions.262 Far more complex and subtle processes are now being delineated by feminist writers such as Valerie Walkerdine:

> How can it be that femininity is a fiction and yet lived as though it were real, felt deeply, as though it were a universal truth of the psyche? It is not that we are filled with roles and stereotypes of passive femininity so that we become what society has set out for us. Rather I am suggesting that femininity and masculinity are fictions linked to the fantasies deeply embedded in the social world which can take on the status of fact when inscribed in the powerful practices, like schooling, through which we are regulated.263

I do not propose to enter into the debates about how individuals take on their gendered identities - the processes are complex, contested, resisted and negotiated minutely in every individual’s life. Walkerdine wrote: “It is how we live those fictional identities and their link to the materiality of the social world that interests me. Such questions are located at a place which understands the psyche as formed in and through the social.”264 In this study I can delineate the construction of femininity at the social level, and how some individuals negotiated the ideals of

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261 ibid, p. 7.
262 Marilyn Lake, 'Women, Gender and History', op. cit. p. 7.
264 ibid.
femininity. I am assuming that individuals interact with dominant ideas and trends within their social realms; that aspects of this discourse were taken up by individuals at some points in their identity formations. Discourses also change and are not static, so that over the lifetime of an individual, femininity can take on many dimensions.

Jill Matthews and Kerreen Reiger outline the relevant background to the discourse of femininity in Australia after 1900. Matthews argues that the discourse was considerably stable from 1910 to 1950 with this period preceded and followed by significant shifts. Both writers agree that from the 1890s there was increasing concern about the dramatic change in the birthrate and that a populationist ideology arose in response to this perceived crisis which included the banning of contraceptive advertisements in 1905. Out of this crisis new ideas of a woman's role developed, fuelled by technological developments in industry and a push towards scientific management, the discovery of bacteria, the 'first wave' of feminism, the decline of domestic service and the trauma of the First World War. Economically, the woman’s place as a 'dependent' was in the home supporting the breadwinner. This had been increasingly defined by State bureaucrats after1895.265 This combined with the severe effects of two economic depressions and the the First World War led to 'breadwinner' jobs being reserved specifically for men. Working class women, who had always worked in factories and in the sewing trades, were ignored.

The middle class married woman’s role shifted from one of household manager to household worker and a new class of professionals developed to educate her about her widely increased levels of responsibility, ranging from the emotional welfare of her children, the correct methods of feeding infants to household hygiene and nutrition. These professionals - infant welfare sisters, psychologists, social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses - aimed to educate the working classes in particular. Their concern for public health was also taken up by people such as town planners and architects who, meanwhile, urged the clearance of slums and the development of garden suburbs. The role of the housewife became elevated in importance especially between the wars, with women’s magazines and radio

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265 For a description of the institutionalisation of women's economic inequality by the turn of the century see Desley Deacon, Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830-1930, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989.
programmes regularly giving advice specifically on topics aimed at housewives.\textsuperscript{266} Similarly, throughout the 1920s The Geelong Advertiser had a 'Ladies' Page' at least weekly full of household hints, including sewing projects and recipes for the housewife.\textsuperscript{267} The rapid upheavals of the war gave way to the ideology of consumerism that was forged by the advertising and marketing industries in the face of the rapid growth of manufacturing throughout the 1950s. Matthews, Reekie and others show how female sexuality and desire was channelled into the wish for consumer goods, beginning in the 1920s but dominating by the 1960s.\textsuperscript{268} One consequence of this, as well as a buoyant economy, was the steady increase in married women entering the paid workforce from the 1950s on.

Attempts to construct femininity occurred at various stages in a girl's life, beginning in the family home, at school and in the workforce. Marriage and motherhood were crucial moments in this process. From the interviews, the women have indicated that before 1960 the ideology of femininity crossed barriers of class, geography, ethnicity and culture, although with variations in emphasis. In all of their diverse situations, needlework in particular was utilised in the development of femininity. Exactly how an individual negotiated the becoming of a woman is debated. What is apparent is that major institutions within society espoused dominant values and embodied these values in their practices. Thus this chapter looks at the various moments and sites in the women's lives that particularly were used to inculcate femininity.

\textsuperscript{266} Lesley Johnson, 'Radio as Popular Education', Labour History, Vol. 45, Nov. 1983, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{267} I sampled one issue per month for the years 1920, 1925 and 1930. The 'Ladies' Page' stayed very consistent throughout this time, appearing at least once a week, sometimes up to three times a week. The day was not fixed. There was also a larger section every Wednesday which was called the 'Social News of the Week'. This carried on the tradition of the Advertiser's previously separate magazine called News of the Week, which had been integrated into the Advertiser in 1924. These social pages concentrated on the social news, particularly of the upper class and those of the Western District. It was illustrated with photographs, unlike most of the remainder of the paper. I focused on the Ladies' Pages, rather than the social notes, as the Ladies' Pages concentrated on the skills of housewifery, with recipes, cleaning hints, things to make, etc.
\textsuperscript{268} Gail Reekie, 'Market Research and the Post-War Housewife', Australian Feminist Studies, No. 14, Summer, 1991, p. 15.
Learning

Children and young girls should never be without a piece of work in their pockets, crochet, knitting, wool, anything, if only an iron holder to stitch, that they can take out at odd moments, say while waiting for meals, while waiting to go out, while talking to visitors, all these moments should be filled up.\(^{269}\)

Mrs Lance Rawson

For most of the women interviewed, learning to sew, knit or crochet occurred in the private sphere of the home, prior to starting school. It was a handing on of skills and knowledge to the rising generation as well as the child modelling herself on a female relative. Invariably it was the mother who taught the daughters or, if the mother did not sew, a sister, grandmother or an aunt. Some of the women learned through a mixture of instruction and imitation. Great stress was placed on learning to sew, knit or crochet, as these were regarded by the families of most of the women interviewed as essential, survival skills.

Corinne was taught by her aunt who was a professional seamstress: "I was only five when I had a needle and thread put in my hand...You sat and you crocheted or you did fancywork".

Beatrice commented:

We all learned darning very early and I took pride in that...I suppose Mother taught the older girls and then I just learned by watching them and doing it...Mother had a hand machine and it was usually my job, even when I went to school, I'd like to do that [turn the handle].

Anna remembered learning to do handwork around the age of 10, although her mother was not happy initially because it was not a Ukrainian tradition.

This village where I grew up, it was all Croatian people. Next village was...Serbian people. Always was friends. Little girls took the sheep or cows to the pasture and they usually do something with their hands - little small girls start teaching [learning]...Because people did everything by hand - socks and fabric for the costume, lace, embroidery...I was happy when I made something.

Delfa grew up on a village in Croatia. Her daughter said:

Mum [Delfa] would always say hands that are not busy with embroidery are useless hands...it was a shame to see girls sitting and not having some work in their hands. Idleness was perhaps even a sin.

Delfa’s mother taught her "cooking, crochet, sewing, how to embroider...she taught her how to weave, mainly ... linen material, sew shirts". (See Plate 17) Delfa’s daughter, Branka, did a sewing course in the 1950s, and then helped the village women to sew more accurately and to use patterns. "Back in the village it was accepted I suppose and preserved that way, that everybody learnt and if anyone like Mum [Delfa] was really proficient...she would help and teach the younger girls".

Marjorie said:

Yes my mother sewed, we had an old New Home Sewing Machine. The four girls learnt to sew and we used to have it [the treadle machine] out on the verandah...we used to really give it the works...we automatically got on the machine and learnt to cut out things. I think with a family like that you’d have gone without if you didn’t sew.

Molly, in common with Bobbie, learnt to sew through making dolls’ clothes.

With me I think it began from the very earliest age - sewing - probably under Mother’s supervision - making dolls’ clothes. My youngest sister and I...we finished up with about 60 or 70 dolls and they all had to be clothed and they all had to be sent to school with school uniforms, they all had to have nighties and dressing gowns and party dresses, the works. So we were kept very busy.

Vera M’s sister Gret taught herself to dressmake, at the age of 12, through unpicking a dress. She did not teach Vera as she was "too impatient".

Two of the women remember honing their skills through joint projects with their mothers. Corinne: "My mother sat one end of the table and I used to sit at the other and we’d work on the same tablecloth for wedding gifts or things". Anita, who grew up in a German village in Poland, has a tablecloth that was a shared family project. (See Plate 18)

The whole family used to sit around and everybody did a little bit...we used to sit in a circle and everybody had such a corner...I could have been eight or nine years old helping...there were my three sisters, my mother, and then we had the housemaid, and the secretary. I didn’t do much - they wouldn’t let me do much. I just had my stamp of approval on this one.
Plate 17: Embroidered afternoon tea cloth (Alma) 1930s

Plate 18: Croatian woven and embroidered shirt (Delfa)
The process of learning needlework occurred in the private realm of the home, and it was a handing on of skills and traditions to those daughters who showed an inclination to sew, knit or crochet. Those who had no inclination were still expected to sew. There were many, however, who did not learn to sew and rejected it, such as Alva, who was left-handed and was scolded for being so. This knowledge gained from the private sphere of the home was built on by the public sector through the schooling system, both in Victoria and in Europe. The women shared these common experiences despite the vast differences of culture, time and place.

**Schooling**

"To learn to sew, so that you'd always have a dress to put on your back."

Corinne

**Primary Schooling**

Since 1872 in Victoria elementary schooling had been compulsory and was therefore an ideal opportunity to socialise boys and girls into gender roles as well as skill them for later life. For boys the process was clear cut, but for girls there was always the dual roles of firstly, becoming a married woman and secondly, a worker in the paid economy. The debates about the centrality of gender in the curriculum for girls were prominent in Victoria from the outset until at least the 1930s.\(^{270}\) The primary school curriculum was undifferentiated for many decades, due to the expense of teaching separate subjects to girls and boys. However, needlework was included as a subject from the outset and remained there for both boys and girls for many decades although concern was being expressed about the need for a gendered primary school curriculum by the 1890s.\(^{271}\)

All but one woman, Delfa, attended primary school. Her daughter explained that "Her brothers went to school but girls were not encouraged to go to school, because they were needed at home to help" (rural Bosnia, in the 1920s). Anna and

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\(^{271}\) ibid, p. 20.
Ilona's times at school were brief. Anna:

Would you believe I got only 3 years primary school, because we lost our teacher, in the country, and books cost a lot of money and my father said 'No you've got enough, three years primary school. No high school.
(Rural Croatia, also in the 1920s)

Ilona's schooling in rural Yugoslavia was cut short due to World War Two. 
"Germans went out, the Russians came in, no school". 

All of the other women reported doing sewing at their primary schools. Hilda, who started at Fyansford Primary School around 1922, said "Right from the start we had to do sewing". She remembered hemming a handkerchief and embroidering a "huckaback towel". Sylvia, who started school in 1926, also remembered hemming a handkerchief, although she was given a man's handkerchief to hem as her advanced skill was recognised.

Needlework, with its focus on girls, could be used to inculcate patience, persistence, manual dexterity, concentration as well as obedience and fear of authority. In popular memory, needlework teachers in Victorian schools are remembered as particularly repressive individuals. Beatrice attended Matthew Flinders Girls' High School in Geelong every Friday afternoon for sewing, in the early 1920s.

I had a dreadful sewing teacher. Did I mention just how strict they were and rigid in just about anything? I had to make a white flannelette nightgown, full length and all made by hand. The seams had to be herringbone. We were allowed to do some of it at home, but by the handling of that all those months it got grubby, and with wood fires and coal the hands got grubby very easily. Then she told me one day to hold my nightdress up and I couldn't get over it. I was so thrilled to think that I was chosen. I held it up in front of the class. "Now turn it round and show them the back", and I did and she said:"That's the dirtiest nightgown that I have ever had the privilege of teaching" and she laughed when she said it, and I just crumpled right up, because we weren't allowed to wash anything.

Alva, at primary school after 1925, also suffered for being left-handed.

Being left-handed I did everything wrong. I used to get smacked on the hand...I was more of an outdoors person - I'd rather be on a horse. Fancy sitting for hours doing that. I just wouldn't have the patience.
The school curriculum continued to offer needlework to girls in Victoria for decades, usually as part of a domestic science stream at secondary school level.

**Secondary Schooling**

The 1910 *Education Act* in Victoria paved the way for the establishment of post primary schools and raised the school leaving age to 14. Three types of post-primary schools were eventually established - domestic arts schools (for girls), technical schools and single sex high schools. From the beginnings of compulsory schooling the debate about the education of girls remained strong and was entered into by *The Age* and *The Argus* newspapers in the 1920s and 30s. Should girls be prepared for the workforce? And what kind of jobs should they do? Or was the purpose of schooling for girls solely to prepare them for marriage and the responsibilities of running a household? This latter view included a curriculum specifically designed for girls and was enshrined by the State in the move for domestic arts (later domestic economy and then science) to be taught in secondary schools to girls.

The aim was to inculcate in girls new ideas of a 'scientific' approach to managing a household. Principles such as economy, efficiency, organisation, planning, hygiene and nutrition were foremost.\(^{272}\) The success of this lobby culminated in the establishment of domestic arts schools around Victoria, the first one in Melbourne in 1906, which later became the Emily Macpherson College of Domestic Economy in 1926.\(^{273}\) Kerreen Reiger delineates the differing ideologies that united behind the domestic science movement,\(^{274}\) as well as the school girls' resistances to methods that were taught.

In accepting, modifying or ignoring the advice, they were not passive but making a variety of responses. Perhaps most telling of all is that as secondary education spread in the interwar period, more girls chose the academic rather than domestic courses at senior level. The domestic science movement was never as fully accepted in high schools as its advocates had hoped.\(^{275}\)

\(^{272}\) Kerreen Reiger, op. cit. Chapter 3.

\(^{273}\) ibid, p. 58.

\(^{274}\) ibid, Chapter 3.

\(^{275}\) ibid, p. 63.
By the 1920s there was public agitation for more high schools to be established. In Geelong throughout the 1920s, George King, the Principal of the Gordon Technical College, opposed the establishment of a domestic arts school, as he felt this would create a class distinction between the high school and the domestic arts students. Domestic arts schools lacked the prestige of high schools that offered a broader curriculum and included commercial subjects.  

Technical schools also existed with a specifically vocational orientation - the first junior technical school in Victoria opened in 1916. Corinne attended a technical school in Melbourne in the mid 1930s, leaving at age 14 in 1938.

I went to Prahran Technical School...when I went there it was just a girls school and a boys' school and it was called a technical school because you did domestic work. You did housekeeping and you did sewing and you did designing and dressmaking and art and all those domestic subjects they were called - cooking, and that's why I was sent there. You did arithmetic and English too, but it wasn't considered really important. I did very well with dressmaking and designing...and the school got me job when I left and it was in the Block Arcade in Melbourne, in a boutique, 10/6 a week to start, and I walked out and got a job in an office for 14/6 a week. So I didn't stay in dressmaking as the wages were lower...and then I graduated to a housewife that sewed.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, after finishing secondary school, both Janet and Margaret attended technical colleges to do diplomas of needlework in the 1940s. Both went on to briefly work as dressmakers from their homes prior to marrying.

Throughout this century there was always opposition to a gender specific curriculum in secondary high schools. However, from the 1920s on, the domestic arts lobby was influential in Victoria, with centres being established throughout the state. During the period when most of the women interviewed were attending school a domestic arts curriculum would have been available to many of them. From the 1950s, as more career opportunities progressively opened up for girls, the teaching of domestic science became only one option in a wide array of curriculum choices for girls.

276 Susan Thomas, op. cit. p. 126.
The Glory Box

'To provide a home. The glory boxes all stemmed from the fact of providing a home.'

Corinne

The ritual of filling a glory box was, on one level, an economic strategy of the private realm, aimed at providing material comfort for the newly married couple. It was a ritual invested with deep symbolic significance, as the ideology of femininity prior to 1950 and before, in Europe and Australia, presented young girls with one ambition in life - to marry and have a family. This ideal also entailed owning a home of one's own. The glory box as well as wedding gifts was a means of providing a home. The seriousness of this expectation in Corinne's family is indicated by the fact that she was given her glory box for her fourteenth birthday. Some of the women remembered their adolescent years as the times when they were busy making and buying items for their glory boxes. Betty reported that "a lot was given to you". Filling the glory box gave great incentive to the doing of fancywork - multiple items could be made for a seemingly endless future of married life and a home of your own. Some of the items were so plentiful or so treasured that they have survived decades and now are symbolic reminders of the women's weddings. Five of the women interviewed - Jean, Anna, Beatrice, Delfa and Anna - still had items they made for their glory boxes some 50-60 years on. Margaret still had some fabric 40 years on - it had been an insurance policy. "I saved up for when I might be hard up and might not be able to afford to buy grey flannel, Yarra Falls or black and white check". Delfa had her daughter's embroidered sheets which were ruined by rain when they crossed the border to freedom on their way to Australia. Anna explained her situation in Croatia:

I remember before I was married I made this. For me, especially for glory box. That was really expensive, and I hadn't got enough money...I sold my one suit and I buy this [the fabric for the cloth]. Can you believe that? Because my father was working on a farm. It was very hard, because it was a small farm - we can't sell nothing just food for us...it was really tough you know. Life was not easy. (See Plate 19)
Plate 19: German embroidered tablecloth (Anita) 1940s

Plate 20: Wooden glory box (Corinne) 1930s
Some glory boxes were made up from 'make do' materials, particularly for those women on farms, and others were purchased items of furniture, such as Corinne's cabinet. Corinne's father made her a second box from materials he found at the wharves. (See Plates 20 and 21) Margaret's "started off as a shoebox when I was about nine and it grew into a camphor wood chest...when I was engaged". Marjorie's "was just a big box covered over with cretonne, my father had some box things there on the property and we just made our own". Maie's was handed down from her mother and had been made by her grandfather out of four kerosene tin boxes: "it would have been a type of pinc...it was made out of four kerosene boxes and painted white". Beatrice's was:

a tin trunk...It would have been bought at Maurie Jacobs probably. My mother gave me my tin trunk for my 21st birthday...it wasn't a very big one. It would be two foot by one foot by one foot high, fixed up with brass hinges and brass clips. And into it went all the precious things you had made - kettle holders, crocheted tea pot cosies, milk jug covers.

Jean's was a drawer in a cedar chest of drawers."There wasn't a girl married in those days that didn't have a glory box".
Alma: "My glory box consisted of everything my sisters and mother made. So I was spoilt...Even if you weren't going with anyone in particular...you were still expected to have a glory box just in case". Delfa's daughter Elizabeth explained about Croatia prior to the Second World War:

It was more or less an unwritten law, that the girl in the family would bring all the linen for the bedding - everything - the doonas, the cushions, the tablecloths; the only thing they didn't have to bring was the actual dishes...And it was the custom to give the best man, the mother-in-law and the father-in-law and the closest family gifts of cushion or socks or handmade towels...Started even before school, because up there we always started school at eight years of age...all the girls in the village would do their own embroidery and linen so they would start off family life with quite a few...that was traditional. Also they would have cushions and doonas - that was all provided by the girl in the family - all the feathers and down would be done by her.

Vera M said: "I had a very big glory box - three feet long, opened on top, two drawers on the bottom. That [her glory box] and the sewing machine were the two things I had to shift from place to place".
Plate 21: Cabinet style glory box (Corinne) 1940s

Plate 22: Close up of a cut work cloth (Alma and Martha) 1930s
Two of the women, Ilona and Sylvia, did not have glory boxes, marrying after the Second World War. Ilona, growing up on a farm in Yugoslavia, "didn't have the time, had to work on the farm". Similarly, Sylvia, who was working as a teacher, reported that "Apart from anything else you didn't have time".

For some of the women a pre-marriage ritual was the viewing of the contents of the glory box by neighbours and friends. Bobbie, married in 1921, referred to her trousseau: "Once you were engaged you started your trousseau". This term may have indicated a class difference, however, the purpose was the same as the glory box, to bring some items to the new home.

The glory box symbolised a transition between youth and living in the parental home to marriage, maturity and living independently from one's parents. It symbolised the girl's hopes and aspirations for her future. On a practical level the filling of the glory box shows how the women contributed to the economic expenses of setting up a new household upon their marriages. Because most workplaces disapproved of married women working in the public realm, the years prior to marriage were the time to spend any surplus income on a home-to-be. The women did fancywork for years in their homes in order to benefit materially at some point in the future. (See Plate 22) The bringing of a glory box to a marriage was part of the woman's role, in Croatia, Italy, Germany, Melbourne and Geelong. This tradition has also been upheld depending often on family culture.

The Good Housewife

We do everything - to clean, to iron, to make pasta, making gnocchi, make pizza, everything homemade we do, lasagna - we make sausage and wine too.

Mena

25 out of the 26 women married between 1920 and 1960 and most of those in Melbourne and Geelong reported leaving for their honeymoons by train (prior to 1950), before embarking upon their new careers as wives and mothers.

As mentioned previously, housewifery as a career was promoted increasingly by agents of the State as well as the popular media from the 1920s onwards in Australia, with the skills of household management taught in domestic science in
many schools. The popular media was another means for the values of femininity to be reinforced. Many of the women reported reading women's magazines, such as *The Women's Weekly* or the women's pages of newspapers such as *The Geelong Advertiser* and *The Weekly Times*, which featured patterns for needlework. From my reading of the Ladies' Pages of *The Geelong Advertiser*, throughout the 1920s and 30s, running a home was seen as an arena where a woman could excel in economy, efficiency and practicality. A woman was judged by her housewifely skills of which needlecraft was one, besides cookery and general household economy. Consequently, the *Advertiser*, in its 'Ladies' Pages', included patterns for crochet alongside perhaps a hint for household cleaning, an article about marriage or husbands, a recipe for family cookery, with an article on something pertaining to children or nutrition.\(^{277}\) By 1930 the focus had broadened with fashion news, diagrams for sewing (make your own pattern!), news of charity events in Geelong and a serial story included. Throughout the decade there is a strong emphasis on 'making your own' rather than consuming. Articles of this nature covered making your own shampoo, cleaning preparations, cakes, clothes, underclothing, etc. A 'professional' approach to housekeeping is assumed. This was dominant in the 1920s issues but was still prevalent in those of 1930. For example, the following is a quote from an article entitled 'Keeping the House Tidy'.

> Tidiness can be cultivated even when the faculty has not been inherited... Few people, however, realise the amount of energy and time which could be saved by paying more attention to motion study. Scientific research in factory life has proved that not only can more work be done by judicious planning of all movements, but with far less wear and tear to the system... The housewife should look upon housecraft as a skilled job, requiring the utmost engineering to obtain the best results from a minimum of cost to herself.\(^{278}\)

The mass media discussed and reflected ideas of appropriate activities for women and supplied women with inspiration, ideas for new projects and the means to do them - patterns. The underlying assumption was always that marriage was a woman's crowning achievement and raising healthy children and running an efficient, happy home was a woman's career.

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\(^{277}\) By 1925 this page was titled 'Mainly for Women'.

\(^{278}\) 'Mainly for Women', *The Geelong Advertiser*, 9 May, 1930, p. 3.
The *Women's Weekly* began in 1933 and although it made some effort to cover the public achievements of women, these articles were accompanied by recipes, wedding guides, household hints, knitting patterns and its sewing pattern service. It catered for a wide variety of age groups and situations - rural and urban women around Australia. Many of the women interviewed read the *Weekly* over many years. Both the *Weekly* and The Geelong Advertiser reinforced rather than challenged the status quo of separate spheres for men and women.

All but one of the married women reported the traditional role separation of male and female within their households. Only the gardening was shared with the husband. On farms, the men did the outdoor, heavier work while the women did all the housework and tended poultry, domestic animals and the gardening. After the war in Yugoslavia, due to shortages, Maria reported that her mother and other women did "just about everything." Fruit bottling and preserving "that was a must. If you didn't do it, then you didn't have for winter fruit, pickles, cucumbers, paprikas, cabbages and all the fruit and the jam - we still do the jams - that was a must. Without that you could not survive."

The women in Geelong and on farms reported a common routine of housework, in that Monday was washing day, prior to obtaining a washing machine, which occurred for most of the women in the 1950s. Tuesday was for ironing and folding while Thursday was the day country people went to town. "It was meeting day for country people" said Alma. Hilda, Beatrice, Alma and Betty reported that Saturday was for baking in preparation for family get-togethers on Sunday, a day on which ideally no work was done and church attended, prior to 1960. Needlework was seen by all of the women as part of the housewife's role. As Jean said: "It made you ... a better person, because you were doing something. You were creating something and you were helping perhaps somebody else."

The lifestyles of many of the women interviewed were home centred and for those on farms, meetings of Red Cross, church or the C.W.A. facilitated social contact. Special events, such as shows, punctuated the rhythms of the year, when a housewife who normally only showed her handiwork in private, could exhibit her skills to a wider range of admirers.
Showing Work and Making for Others

'You show to learn and you learn to show.'

Edna

Shows
Women were judged by others on their ability to live up to the ideology of femininity current at the time. For example, Corinne mentioned the pressure to conform during the war years and afterwards in the 1950s when there was prejudice against women who wore slacks. Similarly, Vera M on an isolated farm at Lower Gellibrand before 1960, always wore a tweed skirt and stockings at home. "I always wore a tweed skirt and a sugar bag apron. You didn't dare wear slacks in the bush." Showing one's handiwork and other domestic skills, such as cookery, was an important way of establishing one's reputation amongst other women in the community. It was also an incentive to one's work, a means of seeing what others were doing, of gaining inspiration and pleasure as well as learning to improve. Amongst the women, their participation in shows ranged from local church flower shows, (which usually included cookery, and handicrafts), the Pako Street Festa held in Geelong West (this began in the 1980s and it celebrates migrant communities), C.W.A. Shows (local and State wide) and the Geelong Show organised by the Geelong Agricultural and Pastoral Society.

As noted previously, Geelong's Agricultural Show has been operating since 1855. Since at least 1914 and probably before the turn of the century, exhibition categories for paintings, preserves, cookery, needlework and associated arts and crafts existed. These are still strong sections in the Show, although I was unable to obtain any indication of the numbers of exhibits annually submitted. In the Annual Report for 1929 the entries were counted: needlework, 160; cookery and preserves, 176; and flowers, 125. These numbers were similar to those categories of blood horses, 150, and cattle, 170, which indicates that the women's homecrafts were probably as popular as the men's

279 W. R. Brownhill, op. cit. p. 238.
280 I have not been able to determine the date when these homecraft categories began as they were rarely mentioned in the Geelong Agricultural and Pastoral Society's Minute Books, 1885 - 1959. I was unable to locate records specifically pertaining to the Homecrafts Section.
281 I was told by the current administrator that such records are not kept.
animals in that year. In 1938 when Edna took over as chairperson of the Homecrafts Committee (then called the Ladies' Committee) she organised 12 women on the committee - now she organises 30 or more helpers. "Every year, except in wartime, the entries have increased".  

The philosophy of the Society, as told to me by the Show historian, Mr Ted Stevens, was originally to teach new British migrants the skills of farming under Australian conditions. The aims of the Society now are to: enable farming people to come together and exchange ideas in agriculture; to educate through displays and competition and to provide a stimulus to improve standards and quality. The Society is not profit driven, but wants to encourage new people to enter and to improve the standards constantly.

As well as this major event on the Geelong calendar, other shows were held regularly to commemorate special events, such as various industrial exhibitions: the 1887 Industrial and Juvenile Exhibition, the 1907 Women's Work Exhibition, the 1938 Geelong Women's Centenary Exhibition of Antiques, Historical Relics, Women's, Girls's Work and Interests, to name a few.

The Geelong Women's Work exhibition held on 25 and 26 September, 1907 is of particular interest as it focused specifically on showing women's work, however I have not been able to locate a copy of the programme. It resulted from an invitation from the president of the First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, Lady Northcote, for the women of Geelong to contribute to the exhibition which was to be held in the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne that year.  

The Geelong Advertiser stated:

It was remarked that the exhibition would give the public an opportunity of judging for themselves the progress and excellence achieved in the different branches of women's work and the relative degrees of ability shown in each.

282 Interview with Edna, Ceres, 15 February 1993.
284 The Geelong Advertiser, 12 February, 1907, p. 3.
285 ibid.
By March of that year it was decided that Geelong should have its own local exhibition and then the work be forwarded on to Melbourne. Caroline Miley\textsuperscript{286} and Ann Stephen have shown that these exhibitions were part of a world-wide resurgence of women in the arts and crafts. A quarter of a million people attended the Melbourne exhibition and there were 16,000 exhibits in ten areas of work: art, needlework, inventions, horticulture, cookery, music, elocution, literature, medicine and nursing and physical culture.\textsuperscript{287} Given its size, it was an exhibition of immense importance. The Geelong Advertiser’s News of the Week proclaimed the Geelong exhibition “a brilliant success”..., “the skilled workers in the town and district have responded well to the appeal to show what the women of the Geelong district can do”.\textsuperscript{288} (See Plates 23 and 24)\textsuperscript{289}

The Geelong Women’s Centenary Exhibition held in 1938 had categories for antiques and other objects of interest, craft demonstrations - bookbinding, barbola, lace making, poker work, and weaving - as well as the usual handicrafts. There was a large C.W.A. section with 42 categories similar to those of the Geelong Show. In the needlework, lace and knitting category there were 284 entries.\textsuperscript{290}

The C.W.A. is the other main venue for women to show their handiwork - it holds branch and State shows and many of the women have participated in these. Molly and Sylvia have worked as judges in the crafts sections. Molly explained the aim of the shows - that of improving and learning one’s craft:

That’s why you go in, to find out from somebody who knows better what you’re doing wrong. Even when I am judging, that’s what I am looking for, to find out how things are done and to admire the work... Have a look at the other lovely things that people are doing - a first class opportunity, judging.

\textsuperscript{286} Caroline Miley, op. cit. and Ann Stephen, op. cit. p. 73.
\textsuperscript{287} Ann Stephen, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{288} The Geelong Advertiser, News of the Week, 26 September 1907, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{289} I am indebted to Mr Norm Houghton of the Geelong Historical Records Centre for drawing my attention to these plates.
\textsuperscript{290} Catalogue of the Geelong Women’s Centenary Exhibition of Antiques, Historical Relics, Women’s, Girls’ Work and Interests, Geelong, 1938.
Hilda and Marjorie have won many prizes for their cookery. Hilda related the following:

One of the highlights of my life...Mrs Champ...she always got first prize for shortbread. She gave me the recipe for shortbread...and I beat her in shortbread!!...I've a shoebox full of cards for different flower arrangements, jams and cakes...you name it, I've got it.

Geelong has a long tradition of shows that are a coming together of the whole community. Shows have provided an interface between the public and private worlds of women where a woman's housewifery skills usually only seen in private, can be displayed to others, while she has the opportunity to learn and be inspired by the efforts of others in the community. Shows also provided opportunities for women to model their work to others as well as earn status and rewards through competition.

Making for Others

'I always believed in doing voluntary work, helping somebody less fortunate than yourselves.'

Jean

Voluntary Work

One of the central values of femininity is unselfishness, symbolised by motherhood. A truly feminine mother always gives to others. This is also a central Christian value and I found these two strands interwoven in most of the women's lives. Making for others emerged strongly from my interviews, whether it be for family and friends, for the church, or for charities. I have previously discussed the women making clothing for their families, so this section will focus on their involvements with their churches and other charities. Voluntary work gave public recognition to activities such as handicrafts and other domestic skills that usually remained in the private realm. It was unpaid labour that crossed into the public sphere of fundraising.

Many of the women's involvement with charity work stemmed from their active involvement in churches. Although I did not specifically ask questions about their religious faith, the topic emerged throughout the interviews - church and religion was mentioned in 21 out of 26 interviews. Childhood experiences of Sunday school and church as well as family mottos were remembered. For example, Jean,
Plate 23: View of the Geelong Women's Work Exhibition, 1907

Plate 24: View of the Geelong Women's Work Exhibition, 1907
Beatrice, Hilda and Marjorie all commented on the fact that their families were always helping somebody. Jean said:

...the way we were brought up. We were always taught to help somebody else. Mother always used to say that it was far better to wear out than to rust out...that was a great saying of Mother's. Do unto others as you would they do unto you - the old golden rule.

Marjorie: "We enjoyed our life together...we never had to depend on any help. We gave out a little bit of help to others too quite often...You get back all you give in life, that's my philosophy." Hilda said: "We were taught to help wherever help was needed, our parents always did." Delfa's daughter similarly commented: "Mum has always been very active and also very concerned for anyone that wasn't able to...in any way that they needed help, they could always come to Mum".

Making things for the church could be in the form of making items for fetes and street stalls, making clothing for the missions or embroidering items to be used in church services and rituals. In this last category, Anna and Jean in particular mentioned works they had embroidered. Anna referred to the embroidered cloths made by the women for the Easter blessing at her Ukrainian Catholic Church in Bell Park. (See Plate 25):

You can really feel something, it is a very special night...And then we would have everybody with different embroidered cloths and that on their baskets...Boiled eggs, a candle, special bread, some ham, cheese, salt, some butter, onions, and so you take this and you decorate your basket beautifully and you place this cloth on the top and you take it to the Easter vigil and have the meal blessed. And it's a tradition after the Easter vigil you come home and take part with the family cracking the Easter eggs and that type of thing and the Ukrainians go to a lot of trouble colouring the Easter eggs as well.

Jean said:

I have worked the new emblem for the Uniting Church...two on blue velvet and two on burgundy velvet, Florentine tapestry. I always wanted to do it...so when the union came in I decided I would like to do one and I was the first child christened at Kogarah's Creek...and I did one for that church...The emblem with the dove on it - I did ones for East Geelong, Herne Hill, Learmonth Church, Leopold Church, mostly as pulpit drops.

Many of the women mentioned the work they did for church fetes and street stalls, like Jean, who said:"I still do a lot of work for our church in the way of
making aprons and things like that for stalls". Anita described her involvement in fundraising for her church:

Two years ago we made from our German church group, we had a street stall at Market Square and oh the handicrafts - they went! Handicrafts and the German cake, in no time it was sold out. I made I think nine aprons and before we turned around they were gone, all the handicrafts. That is what they asked for.

Various women have worked for numerous charities, whether using their handicraft skills or other talents in such activities as organising and attending functions, visiting the elderly at the Grace McKellar Homes in Geelong, fundraising ventures for Red Cross and other charities. Beatrice mentioned her mother's church visiting in the 1920s, in Geelong. "She always had a pot or two [of jam] to take on church visiting".

In Geelong, upper class women were particularly involved in working for charity, usually in organisational roles. Bobbie mentioned that her involvement with charities included attending luncheons. The history of one institution, Bethany, shows the involvement of some influential Geelong families from its early days.\footnote{Shurlee Swain, op. cit.}

In The Geelong Advertiser in the 1920s and 1930s the same names appear in the social pages (which indicates their upper classness) as in the news of various charity groups. As Geelong was a relatively small community, it is possible to follow family names in the Advertiser linking involvements in business, charities, certain sporting clubs, private schools, marriages, places frequented, etc. The women were, of course, from the families of the leading business men in the city. This indicates that wealthy women worked for charities in Geelong, which is still the case today.
Bobbie's involvement, although part of a class expectation, had much greater personal and spiritual significance for her. Making for charities was her vocation for over 30 years. She explained:

I have to be helping someone. It was my only way of helping. I didn't need to work, but I had to have something to do...it's just my nature...I can't sit still and be idle...It isn't a day here if I don't do something for someone.

Molly was involved with Red Cross with her mother and assisted her father with secretarial work when he was president of Rotary in Geelong after the war. Delfa has been deeply involved in the Croatian community in Geelong, organising the building of the Croatian Hall. Her daughter said:

She would do a lot of weddings for young people. If they couldn't pay her, that was beside the point. She would just organise it and they would pay for the food and drink and that way she would help them to start off.

The examples are numerous and voluntary efforts particularly intensified for the women during the Second World War, as mentioned in Chapter Three. For many of the women service to others has been an important value - a living out of the central values of femininity and Christianity, expressed creatively through making handicrafts for charities. This activity crossed into the public area of fundraising. The craft work made for street stalls and fetes often bore the designs of the Semco Company of Melbourne.

**Reflections of Domesticity: The Motifs and Symbols of Semco Embroideries**

*This I made in Australia. That's quality from Semco.*

Anna

The Semco Company of Melbourne was a major supplier of materials and designs for women's fancywork in Victoria from 1915 onwards. Repeatedly in the interviews Semco was mentioned and many of the women's needlework items were from Semco designs. Because so many examples of embroidery have survived, they are easier to access than examples of knitting, which were often more utilitarian in purpose and have not survived. The company Patons/Baldwins
served a similar function for the craft of knitting in Australia over the same decades as Semco.

Semco presents a visual dimension of the discourse of femininity in its symbols and motifs for embroidery. These, like the photographs in women’s magazines, gave visual expression to dominant ideals of femininity, and in doing so, could reinforce ideas of appropriate behaviour, ways of living and activities for women. Whereas photographs in women’s magazines had the possibility of influencing trends, I do not place the designs for embroidery into this category. From my research into the patterns of the Semco company, I have found that the making of the designs and patterns was a response to perceived demand, rather than aiming to set trends, and thus, it was an essentially conservative enterprise.

After briefly outlining the company history, I will focus on design and marketing processes before examining the changes in design styles over the decades. The following information is from Semco records and an unpublished paper by a former director of the company, Mr. Alec Murray, which included interviews with company members now deceased.

The Semco company developed out of the Stanley E. Mullen Company which was incorporated in Melbourne in 1908. It sold imported sheet music, song books, postcards, paper transfers and other lines.\textsuperscript{292} Charles Henry Mylius, already an investor in the company, took over the business after Stanley Mullen’s death in 1911 and reconstructed the business. It relinquished the music publishing side of the business in 1915 and developed the manufacture of women’s apparel, whitework and transfer patterns. After a visit to England in 1920, Mr Mylius decided to concentrate on the manufacture of traced art needlework, paper transfers and handicraft instruction booklets.

In 1924 the Semco business was relocated from central Melbourne to Black Rock, an outer suburb, where Mr Mylius’s dream of a ‘garden factory’ was realised - extensive gardens were planted and recreational facilities for the staff were created. Members of the predominately female workforce - of 250 -300 - were encouraged to join the Semco Ladies’ Cricket Team which was particularly strong in the 1920s and 30s.

\textsuperscript{292} Alec Murray, Unpublished paper on Semco Pty. Ltd. 1990, p. 1.
Semco specialised in supplying the handiwork market with the materials for embroidery, which included traced patterns on linen for all manner of household nappery - ranging from d’oyleys to table cloths, cushion covers, aprons, antimacassars etc. - coloured cotton threads, iron on transfers for embroidery and assorted materials for sewing and craft work. In 1983, the company was bought by the Scottish company Coats and its Melbourne operation was significantly reduced in size. The company’s Black Rock premises had previously been sold in the 1970s to Glenville Homes who developed a housing estate on the site.

Reflecting wider society, the management at Semco was exclusively male, while the workforce was predominately female. The commercial travellers were all men, while the designers of the patterns were all women, usually numbering six. The designers were very much accountable to the management and the travellers and had to produce six ranges of linen twice a year (each in 22 different sizes), the designs of which were selected by the men. In between times the designers produced a novelty range. The designs seemed to be viewed by management as part of the process of production, rather than as works of art, as the designers could not put their signatures to their work. The patterns, as far as I could ascertain, were never copyrighted either - only the name was patented. (This has made dating of the patterns difficult as no accurate records appear to have been kept.) Diana, a retired head of the design department, described the selection process:

Designers had to submit 20 or 30 or 40 designs and take them down to the big chief and the travellers and everyone had a look at them and decide which six they were going to have. They never chose the ones we liked you know...but still they were selling them I suppose and they knew. What they thought would sell. They didn’t always know.

293 There was one female Associate Director in the 1960s and 70s. Interview with Alce Murray, Black Rock, 9 August, 1992.
294 ibid.
295 Interview with Diana, Melbourne, 28 February 1993.
The philosophy of the company was explained by Alec Murray:

mainly to provide an avenue of craft, mainly for ladies, although that's not necessarily the case, as there were many men who did needlework...but the philosophy...was to give the people what they wanted and I'm referring to the majority of the people.296

Diana explained further:

It was no good getting too highbrow - the public liked things they knew. They were just ordinary working people like all of us - we were all pretty poor in those days - they liked pretty things. They liked pussy cats in baskets, they liked Dolly Vardens, a lot of lazy daisies which could be made into a lot of different flowers by clusters...because people could do it...Most people just outlined. They'd buy these endless calico aprons that we sold for 1 shilling [1920s -50s]...but the clever ones used to fill them in and put them in the Royal Show. You had to cater - we always said that - it was no good being smart. I did an Egyptian design once and it didn't sell. I tried to push it, nobody understood it I suppose....Particularly before the war, people hadn't travelled you know...they'd never even seen Sydney, most people hadn't been anywhere because we had no money. And so the good old simple stuff, I mean there was no television and not much radio, and the men were at war...and of course, wartime was a very popular time for needlework.297

296 Interview with Alec Murray, op. cit.
297 Interview with Diana, op. cit.
Plate 25: Ukrainian embroidered cloth (Anna)
Plate 26: Semco pattern leaflets
Semco marketed its products widely throughout Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Pacific. Corinne remembered the Semco shops of Melbourne in the 1940s.

We made our own gifts ...Little d'oyleys that you could get in those days with a little chart on what colours to put on them and what crocheted edges, they were only 6d or a shilling, depending on the size... During the war years you didn't have to walk far along any street whereby you'd come across a Semco shop and in it they'd have all the cottons, and all the tapestry cottons. Tapestry was another thing that everybody got into because you could do it while you were in the train or while you were in leisure hours, but the Semco shops were always displayed with lovely d'oyleys and things showing you what you could buy, and when you went in they had boxes and ranges of things that you could do - pillow slips, tea towels, everything that could be handworked. But of course, I don't know where they've all gone now - they're just not there anymore.

An examination of the motifs and designs of Semco patterns shows overwhelmingly a reflection of the ideology of domesticity. (See Plates 26 and 27) The good housewife could show off her needlework skills through embroidering household linen with images of the family, the house and garden and of the housewife herself. Flowers are the dominant motif over a range of styles and techniques (for example, cut work and white work of the 1920s) until the 1950s when the range of motifs widens considerably to incorporate foreign lands, exotic people, hunting scenes for tapestries, historic buildings and commemorations of historic events, such as the 1953 coronation. Australian flowers were used periodically from the 1920s on, although the dominant impression is that of English motifs. Diana explained: "Up until the war we were a lot of British stock, you've got to remember that, and they reverted back to British things". The designers often reworked older designs and had very few sources from which to work until later decades. "You had to work with what you had, which was so simple. I'm amazed now...our reference books were pitiful". One famous design, SM 11 - a rose, has been issued repeatedly for decades. The English hollyhock also appeared repeatedly in garden scenes.

The colours used also became brighter over the period 1920-60, with white work popular in the 1920s and before, subtle colours in the d'oyley era of the 1930s and brighter embroidery in the 1940s. Diana was responsible for the 'Mexican lady' motif which she first produced in 1941. This became a best seller right into the

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298 Interview with Joan, a Semco designer, 2 October 1992.
50s, although a similar design of a South Seas Islander did not similarly inspire the public, for reasons still not known! Flowers had been traditional in English embroidery for centuries, while images of technology, for example, never featured. Joan, a current designer, produced a range of historic houses including a tram, in the 1980s. "That kind of bombed out a bit... I thought people were interested in history, but perhaps they aren't, they want pretty-pretty things". The world depicted by the motifs of the linen embroideries of 1920-50 is domestic, (for example, days of the week teatowels), timeless (Sunbonnet Sue in a crinoline), usually rural and British (a thatched cottage), where houses and gardens feature. It is a static world and intensely feminine, reflecting a nostalgic view of a domestic idyll. Around 1950, dreams of far-away places and people appear and there is a broadening of subjects, although still within the domestic realm - pets, for example, rather than kangaroos, which came much later.

In these ways, Semco embroideries generally reflected and reinforced the domestic world of the Anglosaxon housewife. They were used on a huge range of items - small d'oyleyes and tray cloths, piano runners, children's clothes, tea towels, peg bags, table cloths, place mats, cushions, handkerchiefs and the ubiquitous calico apron - the archetypal symbol of housewifery. There were always exceptions, however, usually made for the novelty ranges, such as Diana's horses, but the travellers always ensured that not too many of these were produced, as they didn't always sell.

The embroidery designs and motifs produced by the Semco Company are a valuable historical source giving concrete expression to an ideology of femininity and an ethos of housewifery that stayed rather static until after the Second World War. The designs express an ideal world of domesticity without links to time or the outside world. That they proved so popular with women indicates the totalising nature of the dominant discourse of femininity prior to 1960.

**Agency**

*The art of embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal and of proving that they have attained it, but it has also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity.*

Rozsika Parker²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Rozsika Parker, op. cit. Foreword.
The women of my study negotiated gender prescriptions individually throughout their lives. Outlining the structures that surrounded them runs the risk of portraying them as passive individuals with circumstances overwhelmingly dictating their lives. However, all of the women asserted themselves in many ways to seize opportunities, such as with paid work, to raise their children, to involve themselves in their communities and express themselves artistically. For six of the women their decisions to migrate are examples of their agency. For others such as Vera M, personal agency was expressed through making the most of circumstances, such as educating her son at home rather than have him denied access to education. This was encapsulated in her words: "Life is what you make it".

I have selected one woman's life as an example of personal agency and as someone who resisted the pressures of femininity. Vera N used the feminine accomplishments of knitting and gardening to achieve attention and status in the public world, rewards usually reserved for men.

Her childhood was spent in relative isolation on a dairy farm at Warrion near Colac with a father who was chauvinistic and oppressive. Her niece related the following about Vera's father:

He didn't do anything. Grandfather Martin was a non-trusting, I'd say bigoted, almost tyrant, a very chauvinist man who believed Grandmother, that was OK for her to milk the cows, it was OK for her to cook, for him to sit down for her to serve the meal.

As a girl, Vera was not allowed to attend dances or leave the farm. "The women never, ever had an outing". Her niece told the story of his unfaithfulness. "'Mother, get my boots. Mother get my boots.' For him to go up and see the lady up the road. And she did. And Grandmother she was quiet. We [the children] were terrified actually of him".

Vera married Charles, ten years her senior, in 1921. They lived at a neighbouring farm at Warrion raising three children, and then retired to Geelong in 1950. Charles was described as "similar, but not as aggressive, not as autocratic" as her father. Both Vera's father and Charles attended the Lodge. "Aunty Vera used to stay and do the ironing. She always had to milk when Pop was going to Lodge. She was never happy about the Lodge." Her niece and grand-daughter thought
Plate 27: Semco pattern leaflet

Plate 28: Knitted bedspread (Vera N)
Vera started to knit "out of boredom". In an interview in 1989 before her death, the following was recorded: "She swears she has been knitting all her life and can't even remember where she first learned the craft." She was also a talented gardener, supplying a Colac florist with flowers, as well as selling eggs for income. "That was her main thing in life - her flowers and the flower shows".

Vera pushed fine hand knitting to its technical limits, using sharpened piano wire for needles and using one or two ply wool. "I needed something finer so I bought the piano wire and had it sharpened to a point." Her grand-daughter said:

I always remember that she wanted to enter shows...She never knitted anything ordinary. She wanted to be the best. I'm quite sure she would be very surprised if anybody beat her. She wouldn't think it fair if they did.

Most of her knitting seems to have been done in the 1940s-60s, although it is difficult to date, as she burnt many of the certificates she had received from showing her work before she moved to Geelong in 1950. It is also problematic trying to date the items from patterns, as she often used patterns from previous decades. Her knitting became "very proud possessions" and she entered shows around Victoria. She told a journalist who interviewed her before her death in 1990 that one year she had entered 33 shows and won 33 prizes.

Her knitting was not for the family to wear - it was wrapped in tissue paper and put away in a camphor wood chest and only allowed to be viewed by those Vera decided were worthy. "Everybody just accepted the fact that Aunty Vera didn't do that...She never gave anything away, ever." Vera said: "I just knitted to fill in time. I never had anyone in the family in mind, it was mainly for shows actually."

Vera's ambition for recognition was achieved in her lifetime as well as beyond - her knitting is now part of the National Wool Museum collection in Geelong, although she never intended for this to happen. (See Plate 28)

She resisted ideals of good housewifery, living in a cluttered, disordered house. "She hated housework, absolutely hated housework; loved knitting and

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301 ibid.
302 ibid.
303 ibid.
gardening." When she moved to Geelong and obtained her first paid job in the canteen at Ford Australia, she started to buy and hoard wool. "The hoarding was shocking - you couldn't move on the back verandah". Her wool and other bargains filled a spare room of her house,"You couldn't open the door", and she knitted "at all times of the day". Instead of doing housework, "she used to admit that she'd much rather be out in the garden". She resisted technology, fearing household appliances, washing clothes by hand, never drove a car and her neighbour vacuumed her floors. "She used a fridge but in a manner that no-one else would use it".

Vera was intensely competitive with her knitting, knitting to show and not to give to others. She achieved public recognition for her work through one of the few avenues in public life that were open to rural women in the decades 1920 to 1950, that of shows and competitions. She negotiated the constraints of an oppressive, male dominated family life to achieve status in her own right for her achievements with knitting. Her niece said: "She would think, yes, it was the best. Well actually, it was, to be truthful".

This chapter has examined specific aspects of the discourse of femininity that positioned the women as subjects throughout the years 1920-1960. Through an analysis of the main sites, both public and private, where the ideals of femininity were inculcated and given expression in the women's lives, I have shown how, at important moments in their lives, the doing of handicrafts was a means of learning femininity, of proving one's femininity as well as in the case of Alva, (who was left-handed and rejected sewing) and Vera N, of resisting and transcending the usual confines of their gender.

From my interviews, the role prescription of femininity and the sites where this was constructed hardly varied between the women, who came from diverse policial, cultural, linguistic, geographical and class backgrounds. This was not something I had anticipated and it certainly points to the centrality of gender as an organising category of society.

The theme of the construction of femininity has revealed elements of the structures and systems that shaped the women's lives. However, within these confines the women actively shaped their lives. This ranged from leaving their countries of origin in search of a better life to less obvious expressions of agency, such as
resisting the pressure to consume in favour of home production of goods and clothing, as Chapter Four has revealed. Perhaps consumerism did not spread as quickly or as pervasively as is generally believed. Some of the women resisted constraints, while all of them negotiated role prescriptions in unique ways. The following chapter examines the ways the women have experienced craftwork and the meanings they have attached to it.
CHAPTER SIX: MAKING MEANING

This chapter examines the theme of meaning. Here I was interested in the meanings the women made of their life stories as presented in the interviews, and the significance they invested in craftwork, for which their words about the artefacts are evidence. In particular this chapter focuses on the women’s accounts of their interactions with their craft artefacts.

My focus on meaning is based on the idea that it is the meaning which persons attribute to their experience that is constitutive of their lives. It is through the stories that persons have about their own lives and the lives of others that they make sense of their experiences.\(^{304}\) People’s life stories can determine the meaning that they give to experience as well as determining which aspects of experience they select out for expression.\(^{305}\)

Several sub-themes emerged from the interviews which I have grouped together under the theme of ‘making meaning’. Firstly, there was the theme of remembering, which involved close analysis of the process of remembering as it was displayed in the interview testimony. Secondly, there was the theme of time, which involved both analysis of the interview testimony as well as the women’s craft artefacts. Thirdly, the theme of traditions and inheritances emerged and here I focused on the artefacts and their symbolic significances as articulated in the interviews. Lastly, there was the theme of making meaning of craft. Here some of the women’s voices expressed the range of meanings they individually invested in the activity of making craft items.

These themes are all closely interwoven; for example, in order to remember their experiences for the interviews the women constructed their stories with reference to time. Keeping traditions and inheritances alive also relies on the process of remembering. Conversely, the visual stimulus and the symbolic significance of craft artefacts also triggered memories for all of the women in the interviews.


\(^{305}\) ibid.
Remembering

'You have to begin to lose your memory...to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all.'

Luis Brunuel

This section is concerned with memory and time in the women's lives, as understanding how the women's memories were constructed sheds further light on their lives, past and present. Specifically this section deals with remembering as a general process and the generation of meanings and memories of particular artefacts.

Two characteristics of the interviews were significant. The first was to do with the coherence of the women's life stories and the second concerned the dominant events in their stories. I will discuss each of these in turn.

After interviewing 26 women I was aware of a sense of completeness and wholeness about their stories. Events in their lives seemed to unfold effortlessly, when at the time they probably could not foresee any resolution to their problems. Looking back and composing a narrative from the present gave a sense of coherence and inevitability to the women's memories which did not include much of the sadness, anxieties and pressures that would have been felt at certain times in their lives. In fact, most of the women tailored their stories to the length of the interview (about an hour and a half) as well as its focus on their handicrafts. Bobbie, for example, told me "I haven't told you of my sad life". Hilda, similarly, chose not to talk about the death of her son: "We won't mention Geoffrey".

These interviews tend to bear out the findings of the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{307} Their theory of memory was outlined by Alistair Thompson:

We compose our memories to make sense of our past and present lives. 'Composure' is the aptly ambiguous term used by the Popular Memory Group to describe the process of memory making. In one sense we 'compose' or construct memories using the public language and meanings of our culture. In another sense we 'compose' memories which help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives, which give us a feeling of composure. We remake or repress memories of experiences which are still painful and 'unsafe' because they do not easily accord with our present identity, or because their inherent traumas or tensions have never been resolved. We seek composure, an alignment of our past, present and future lives... We compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable, or, if we have been excluded from general public acceptance, we seek out particular publics which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives.\textsuperscript{308}

The form of the interview had contributed to this sense of coherence as I usually asked questions chronologically and the focus on craft work tended not to be a problematic area for the women. In structuring my questions chronologically, as a conventional, historical way of organising the women's experiences, events were followed by other events, such as schooling, starting work, meeting a future husband, marriage, children etc. in a linear fashion.

I was struck by the dominance of common events in the women's lives - those associated with the lifecycle. Others researching women's lives have noted the same thing (such as Kathryn Holmes\textsuperscript{309} and various authors included in the Canadian anthology Taking Our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality.).\textsuperscript{310} The way the women remembered was not always chronological, (although at least half of the interviews were structured this way for mutual ease) but also through the recollection of peak experiences in their lives, such as the births of children, emigration or marriage. The lifecycle was often an organisers of

\textsuperscript{307} Popular Memory Group, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{308} Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia', op. cit. p. 25.
memories. I also found that there was an intimate relationship between their memories of their lives and their craft artefacts. Although I had focused on this aspect I did not expect to find a necessary connection between the craft items and their memories.

The women's handicraft artefacts often prompted memories because they were usually created for a specific purpose such as an event or ritual in the woman's life, e.g. a crocheted silk baby's bonnet was a reminder of the birth of a certain child, and then the date would be worked out from the artefact or memory this triggered. About half of the interviews started through the women showing me their craft artefacts which they had gathered in preparation for the interview, and then the chronology of their lives was imposed over it. (This was usually my choice). This flow of memories could also work the other way - the date of a child's birthday could trigger the memory of an artefact made for that child.

When showing me her needlework Jean commented: "This was done before I was married. I know because I always wanted a pink bedroom and I wanted my duchess set and my pillow shams". Alma, in her eighties, clearly remembered her mother Martha's fancywork items and valued them strongly."I know each piece," she said."Yes, I can remember her doing it. I think she did it in Geelong". Anna said:"That was my special bedspread when I was married and I made it. I was 16 years old. That was really traditional when I was young". Ljerka explained how her mother Anna remembers: "Mum works out when she got things by my children - I've got four." Hilda and Bobbie similarly worked out dates through associations with a lifecycle event, such as the births of their children.

Dawn's father was a teacher and this entailed the family moving regularly. She identified pieces of handiwork through their association with place. For example, she described one piece with the words:"That was done in Portland". Four of the six women who had emigrated associated artefacts or techniques and styles of needlework with the places they had come from. The physical artefacts seemed both to trigger and intensify many of the women's memories.

Artefacts can have a number of readings at different times and for different purposes - the women's artefacts, made long ago, perhaps for specific practical purposes, now, with the passing of time, function as symbolic remembrances of particular times in their lives.
Time
The work of historians is intimately bound up with time. How people used their
time in the past underlies much historical investigation. Time, like space in our
society is gendered, due to various historical factors (see Chapter Four). As a
category of analysis in the study of women's lives, time has the potential to
uncover the depth of experience of many women's lives, because women's
engagement with time is different from men's. This is because their experience of
biological time is more pronounced than is men's. There are other socially
determined aspects of women's time that are different from that experienced by
most men. I refer to 'married' women (those in on-going intimate relationships)
with children and the cyclical and repetitive nature of many tasks connected with
the labour of maintaining a home and nurturing a family. This section analyses the
women's interactions with time as it emerged from the interviews.

All of the women in my study spent the greatest periods of time in the domestic
realm, although six of the women had paid work, some for over 20 years, in the
public sphere. There are various systems of time that correspond with the different
levels of experience in the women's lives. Kathryn Holmes, in her study of 19
women's diaries, discusses the different experiences of time.311

She outlines four types of time that affect women: industrial time, "the dominant
public time [which] governs the experience of time outside the home"; domestic
time, "not nearly so easily regulated and integrally linked to family time"; biological
time, "women's monthly cycle of menstruation, periods of pregnancy, childbirth
and lactation...life rhythms of menstruation, menopause, ageing and death" and
individual time, "the time of events and of daily life...subject to the individual's
idiosyncrasies".312 Holmes cautions against simplistically equating women's time
with the biological lifecycle as this excludes other dimensions of personal and
domestic time. In a person's life, the different types of time are interconnected.
Holmes also points to the gendered nature of both time and space, stating that "the
daily experience of time is inseparable from the space in which it is lived".313 I will
use Holmes's framework in my analysis of the women and time.

311 Kathryn B. Holmes, op. cit.
312 ibid, pp. 19 & 20.
313 ibid, p. 20.
Biological time became apparent from many of the interviews, as the women's interactions with craft varied according to position in their lifecycle. A number of the women reported that the types of craft work done had changed over time and according to their stages of life. For example, Margaret said that her handwork stopped when she was married, being replaced by dressmaking and knitting when her children were born. Corinne, speaking of Melbourne in the 1940s, said that it was only the young, unmarried women in the office where she worked that did handwork. The older married women did none. The availability of personal time affected the doing of handicrafts and this often was linked with the woman's stage in her lifecycle. Alva spoke about Martha and Ruby of 'Meltham': "They worked very hard in the early years but in their latter years say 30-40 years, they sat around and did needlework. They had 30-40 years of leisure". Ilona, Wilhelmina and Jean's handwork (embroidery, tapestry and knitting) flourished once they retired from paid jobs. Although more lately, old age with failing health and eyesight has affected Anna, Delfa, Jean, Wilhelmina and Corinne, causing a decrease or a change of medium in their handwork. Women's biological time has affected the nature of these women's handicrafts.

The women experienced much of their time over the years as domestic time. Although this was not directly referred to in most of the interviews, 20 of the women spent most of their adult lives as housewives. The six who worked in the paid sector also spent countless hours doing housework. Ann Oakley's deconstruction of the term 'housewife' indicates the conflating of three roles into one:

A housewife is a woman: a housewife does housework...The synthesis of 'house' and 'wife' in a single term establishes the connections between womanhood, marriage and the dwelling place of family groups. The role of housewife is a family role; it is a feminine role. Yet it is also a work role.\textsuperscript{314}

The women's silences on the topic of time spent on housework are notable and, I suggest, are connected to the invisibility and lack of status of women's work performed in the private sphere. Although I asked questions about household appliances and methods of doing housework, the time spent doing this activity and the ramifications for the women's lives were taken for granted by both myself and

the women in the interviews. However, this is a large area of the women's lives and demands examination.

An American feminist, Bettina Aptheker provides a further development of Holmes's domestic time with her concept of 'dailiness'. She defines 'dailiness' as "the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of their subordinated status to men". Aptheker also links women's creations to their experiences of domestic time, whose features are recurring tasks, fragmented time and attending to a multiplicity of matters often simultaneously. She states:

In studying women's quilts, and by extension the many specifically female artifacts produced in the course of a lifetime, we are able to construct a more detailed understanding of the dailiness of women's lives. Moreover, we can see the ways in which that dailiness has structured women's ways of thinking. We see that the quilts, the stories, the gardens, the poems, the letters, the recipes, the rituals are examples of women's ways of knowing.

While I do not agree with her essentialist view of a woman's way of knowing, I find her idea of 'dailiness' useful in that it describes an important characteristic of many women's domestic and personal time. The rhythms and repetitions of the tasks of domesticity and caring for others are aspects of women's time that I have found reflected in the domestic lives of all of the women I have interviewed. These tasks, however, took place in widely varying settings - the lives of the rural women on farms differed greatly from say, Mena and Ilona, who worked in factories for some years. The women's individual circumstances due to class and ethnicity varied greatly, although the role of housewife was a common experience.

The doing of handiwork took place in the women's individual or personal and domestic time and it could be used to gain more personal time instead of having time consumed by domestic chores. This was the case with Vera N who did her knitting at "all times of the day" and only ever did the minimum of housework. Most of the women only took up their handiwork after the day's housework was done, depending on the nature of the handiwork and the urgency of the need. But

316 ibid, p. 74.
doing handiwork as a form of leisure and relaxation in the evenings (personal and social time) was stressed repeatedly in my interviews. Corinne said: "At home, in the evenings, you listened to the radio and you sat and you crocheted or you did your fancywork". Jean commented: "I always liked my knitting, I always had knitting on the go - that to me was relaxation". Now she is retired and has more personal time, "any time of the day I can sit down and do it". Jean described doing handiwork in terms of personal time as opposed to domestic time: "a relaxation, something out from what you were doing, the mundane things you are doing all day and every day". Molly, who never married, spoke of the intrusion of domestic time into her personal time: "You run out of time, that's the thing, I would spend the whole night if I could. I've got to allow time for the house, the cat and the garden".

All of the women had also been subject to the demands of industrial time, in varying degrees, whether through their direct experience of being employed in the public sphere or through their husband's employment and their children's schooling. Maie, Sylvia, Anita, Jean and Molly negotiated the combined demands of industrial time in their paid work as well as that of domestic time at home for many years. Retirement has given them more individual time.

The women from Europe spoke of the influence of another category of time, that of the seasons, or natural time. Winter was particularly the time when handicrafts were pursued. Anita explained:

Handcraft is very important. You see, in Europe, winter is long, is cold and the nights... the early evenings, and there's no work in the fields and garden, so people had to do something...at home my mother insisted that we always had something, had a hobby.

In her German village in Poland, "On winter nights all the people came and met at certain homes and did handicrafts and sang folk songs".

Maria spoke of rural Yugoslavia:

In summer they didn't do much [handiwork]...On Sunday, every fifth house would have all the ladies come together, with their work and they would knit and crochet and embroider. Sunday afternoon was special...after lunch they would all set out on the street...but in winter, at night, they would do it and on the weekend. They had more time in the winter to do their crafts and their knitting...It was special...time to do what they wanted to do.
Another additional category of time the women mentioned was that of idleness - an excess of time. Handiwork could be a way of filling in time, of being productive and active instead of passive. As Marjorie commented: "You can always be doing something. There's no need to be idle". Dawn said: "I hate doing nothing...travelling in the car, watching TV...I suppose I feel guilty for doing nothing...I've got to have my hands working". Corinne spoke of wartime in Melbourne: "Nobody sat on the train with idle fingers. In between at work, when we weren't busy, we knitted". In Croatia young girls were not allowed to be idle. Anita said of her family in Poland: "Well actually there was no such thing as being idle...If you really didn't have anything to do you just read".

In conclusion, the women did not experience their time in discrete categories. Rather, they interacted with various layers of time - industrial, domestic, biological, personal, seasonal and excessive - in unique ways and often in simultaneous combinations. Their use of time was fluid and complex brought about by multiple roles and fragmented time. Their craftwork, like their time use, was also fluid and episodic. Maintenance sewing or darning could be part of the repetitive cycle of housework; knitting a jumper for a child could be subject to biological time, could be part of domestic time but subject to the seasons and done in spare leisure moments throughout a day filled with domestic work. Cycles within cycles emerge, repetitions and 'dalliness' all characterising the married women's domestic lives and their craft work. Upon these layers, the women employed in public, paid work, had an overlay of industrial time which diminished their amounts of time in the private sphere of the home significantly.

There was a consciousness also of the passing of time throughout the interviews, as details of childhoods and past times were recounted and artefacts from previous times shown to me. The preserving of craftwork artefacts was a means of keeping times past alive. The following section examines this aspect of time.

Traditions and Inheritances
From the women's recollections of how they learnt to sew, knit or crochet, it became evident that in continuing these activities throughout their lives, the women were keeping family customs alive, by practising what they had learnt in their families of origin. Many, in turn, had passed these skills and knowledges on to
their daughters. Many of the women had a sense of a family tradition and spoke of
their female relatives who had done craft work, such as Maie:

They were all crocheters... I was just thinking of my grandmother and my
great grandmother on my father's side. It was all very fine - edges around
tablecloths - they were all very fine crocheters and also they did netting...on
pillow slips and things like that.

For the women who migrated from Europe, the keeping of tradition took on great
importance. It was a very conscious activity, as their experiences of possibly
losing their culture through leaving their countries meant that the continuing of their
traditions in Australia could not be assumed. Effort was needed to preserve their
heritages. Their losses and adjustments were very apparent in the interviews.

For example, Anna remembered migrating to Australia from Bosnia in 1958 on the
ship Aurelia where she made a bedhead hanging in cross stitch worked on hessian
bags. She used wool to embroider a peacock design from a pattern given to her by
a Macedonian woman with whom she shared a cabin. (See Plate 29) The items she
brought with her on the ship from Bosnia are very important to her. "Because not
much ladies have got things like this you know." Anna's daughter further
explained:

Because there were so many years from the time we originally planned to
go, we found ourselves selling things off, plus we lost so many things in
the Second War. Precious things were put away outside, but still people
stole and sold things. My mother lost everything.

Delfa's family also arrived with virtually nothing as everything had been lost or
sold in order to survive after the war.

Ilona and family brought nothing with them, just "one suitcase" as they emigrated
by plane in 1970. Ilona now recreates the traditional embroideries she did as a
child and young woman in Hungary. "Hungarian style" is very important for her.
It was traditional for "everything to be embroidered" including the d'oylyes on the
pantry shelves. She also recreates the tradition of the women in her village coming
together on Sunday afternoons to do handiwork. Now her female friends come to
her house in North Geelong on a Sunday afternoon to do their embroidery and
share their patterns, which invariably are what she describes as traditional
Hungarian style. (See Plate 30)
Plate 29: Tapestry woollen peacock bedhead (Anna) 1930s

Plate 30: Embroidered tablecloth (Ilona) 1980s
Mena, also a refugee after the war, brought very little and had to start again in Geelong. Wilhelmina, who emigrated to Australia in 1960, spoke of her memories of her more recent trip back to Holland as the source of inspiration for her vast output of tapestries and cross stitch designs. Many of her cross stitch tapestries are of traditional Dutch scenes - houses and interiors in the style of Vermeer. In particular, she mentioned witnessing the festival of 'Prince Day' in Holland, where there is a procession with a gold plated coach and horses through Amsterdam. This was a source of a work made for her grandson.

Delfa's daughter Elizabeth spoke of the customs of their village in Croatia:

Also weddings were a village affair. Family and relations and everybody would chip in and come and help cook the day before, and the men would kill the pig and roast the pig on the spit and the ladies would bake the cakes. In the early 30s, Mum remembers when they were doing community works, they were always happy. As soon as there were more than two gathered they would sing and dance and the young men would form a group and have guitars and play. It wasn't like a chore for anybody, it was more like a party....There was a lot of working as a community...

As mentioned previously, Delfa has continued the communal wedding tradition within her community in Geelong, organising the building of the Croatian Hall to make this possible. She has woven many items in traditional Croatian style and has carried on the craft traditions of her childhood throughout her life. (See Plate 31) She also showed me an antique national costume, with the linen hand woven from flax and heavily embroidered, which is a family treasure, although not embroidered by Delfa. (See Plate 32) She also showed me the national costume she had made for her daughter to wear in community celebrations.

Both Delfa, through her daughter, and Anita, spoke about the Christmas traditions of their home countries. Anita remembered:

Also before Christmas, at this Advent time, we used to sit children mostly in the dining room round a huge table, we used to sit and do Christmas presents. We children...mainly made decorations for the Christmas tree, the chimes, from this paper and all sorts of things. Cut out angels, and we used to buy angel hair...and they were sitting on clouds. It looked very pretty...it was a beautiful time...Yes, we kept the German tradition...Everybody put a lot of pride into having homemade things. They were much more valued than what I see now. And then of course, you saved a lot of money and in our family there was never much money...No, but homemade, that was the custom...not just in our home, that was the German custom.
Plate 31: Woven rug (Delfa)

Plate 32: Embroidered apron, Croatian national costume
(anonymous, Delfa)
Many of the women demonstrated their inheritances in terms of their craft skills mostly learnt in their families, as well as items that they had kept and treasured that had been passed down to them from their mothers. My findings here bear out those of Diane Bell's Generations - that many of the women have kept and treasure their mother's or grandmother's handwork. As Marjorie explained, in her family her father "put five sons on the land", which was common in rural Australia, indicating the gendered nature of family inheritances - the women might receive the jewellery and the textile items, while the men would receive the property. There are clear inequities here in terms of market value and the social power of these inheritances.

For example, Hilda showed me both her and her mother's wedding dresses. Alma and Alva inherited their mothers' fancywork (that done by Martha and Ruby of 'Meltham'), which they treasure. Marjorie, Dawn, Margaret and Jean had fancywork from their mothers or grandmothers and Mena had her mother's finely crocheted bedspreads made in Italy. Maiie showed me her mother's sock knitting machine as well as her aunt's rare and beautiful crazy patchwork dressing gown (made in the 1930s in Geelong) and her great grandmother's crochet pattern book. (See Plates 33 and 34) Many of the women had preserved these items as remembrances of their female relatives, families and places.

With the passing of time, the craft artefacts the women have made will become symbolic remembrances of their lives. Marjorie spoke about the patchwork quilts she has made in recent years, which her family value "very much":

Quite often you finish a quilt and you do things and you think 'Oh, that was a dress I had'. And then people give you materials, knowing that you do patchwork - I get a lot of materials given to me - and I've not sold any of those, but I've given them away to different things...The family have had them of course, and I've passed them on to my niece.

Anna's daughter explained:

For me, at home, Mum's done some tapestries which I've had framed because I feel they're going to be there for ever and ever and they can be passed on. It's something that is from Mum to me so I've got a few of those...Well that's very important because Mum would say to me "Oh you know, I'd like to buy you something that you would remember me by", but I mean this is something that definitely no-one else could do for me. It's unique.
Plate 33: Crazy patchwork dressing gown (Maie) 1930s

Plate 34: Book of crochet patterns (Maie) pre 1900
Many of the women have consciously kept traditional ways of doing handiwork alive. In doing this they have often created items that will outlive them and will serve as symbolic reminders of their lives for future generations of their families.

This section has examined the theme of traditions and inheritances, and craft work is a major means of keeping alive traditions and of passing on female inheritances. In the actual doing of craft, many of the women are repeating patterns and techniques taught to them in childhood and are thereby preserving knowledges that may not be preserved otherwise. This also extends to the notion of culture and is highlighted particularly by the women who migrated from Europe. In repeating their traditional ways of making things they are preserving the memories and culture of their countries of origin. Textiles particularly have been a traditional form of female inheritance within families both in Australia and Europe and the women have variously both preserved their inheritances and have created items that they will pass on to their relatives in the future.

Making Meaning of Craft
This final section focuses on the question of the meanings the women invested in the activity of making. In my interviews I asked the women what the activity meant for them. Their answers indicated a range of meanings encompassing creative satisfaction, self expression, the importance of family, the giving of love, a source of self esteem and achievement, a mental challenge, an inner contemplation, and personal agency. It seemed that each person's answer encapsulated her own core values. Jean spoke about her craft work as a special dimension in her life:

To me it's another part of life. You were designing something, you were creating something. That's what I feel with the tapestry, you're designing something, and knitting - I used to do a lot of fairisle knitting and I'd do a row and I'd think, "Oh I'll do another row and see what that will look like"...I love doing something and especially for somebody else, you're giving pleasure to somebody. You just don't know how much pleasure you're giving to some people. If I do a jumper for them, oh they're thrilled to bits. It's the pleasure you see on their faces.
Marjorie and Wilhelmina emphasised the importance of family and the ability to work with their hands. Marjorie:

I think the important part is your family and I've been happy to be home doing things and other things like that. I feel with craft, it's something to do, even of an evening or anything like that. I've found it's time rewarding...plus you see something after and you can use it around your home or you can give it away... It's been important in my life, it's been very important that I've been able to do things. I would hate not to have been able to do something with my hands and I'm very fortunate that my hands are all right that I can do it.

Wilhelmina explained:

I like it, I am very proud of it [tapestry] and I give it to my son. I love it, I love to do the crochet too and I was proud of it too...The whole family asks for it but no, never pay for it...I don't like to do it for pay, I just do it for my pleasure...In Holland I think a lot of women did that [cross stitch]. Nowadays the women are working...It is hard for me now. I cannot do anything [due to failing eyesight]. I cannot read, crochet, nothing.

For Anna, needlework has been her favourite activity throughout her life. "Yes, always. Yes because I can make it with my hands. That was important for me that I can make it with my hands."

Betty said:

I just feel it keeps my mind alert - I fear old age. It gives me friendship as I do a lot of my craft with other women and there is a sense of achievement trying to perfect something. [Flowers]...they always...mean so much to me. That's what I find when I paint I come back to flowers all the time. It's nature - wonderful colour.

Implied in Betty's comment is a valuing of the creativity involved in craft work and an appreciation of nature as a life force.

Molly spoke of the whole cycle of creating something:

You are continuously making something new, thinking it up, working it out and doing it and then you put it in this exhibition. Then I either wear it, give it away or sell it. There's always something going on and if I run out I get quite upset until I think of what to do next...Because that's what I want, that's what I need, the creative side of making things. Inventing things, creating, planning, designing and making, and that is...my satisfaction. And if I can spend a good night here, when I have a good spell of that, I'm very contented. It works off the frustration.
Anita explained the importance of a woman's handcraft skills in her German tradition as a source of self esteem and an expression of love:

I feel happy that I have created something nice. It adds to the beauty and you see, I was brought up with handcrafts, something handcrafted was for the housewife, was her pride. She made, she created something and it beautified her home like these cushions. She could say 'I made it, I didn't go and buy it' - anybody can go and buy it - but sit down and make it, and make it pretty and make it nice. That was a strong value and everybody put their pride in creating something and something that could be of value also...I grew up with feeling good when you create. When you go and buy something or do some sewing or knitting, it's more an expression that you care for this person...and you put your skills, your talent...I mean you have to like doing it, you have to love and this way you put also your love into what you do and give it to the person you want to give it to....It gives me pleasure and I know what to do with my time.

This chapter has explored how the women have remembered and recounted their lives and has made some observations on how they have interacted with various forms of time. Through the processes of remembering over time, preserving their textile inheritances and through the doing of craft work, the chapter reveals how many of the women have constructed meaning in their lives. Craft work, for many of those interviewed, has been a central element in their constructions of personal meaning and thus, a source of personal agency. The women's explanations of the satisfaction they derive from craft reinforces the idea, discussed in Chapter Four, that the doing of this work was creating inner psychological space for themselves which satisfies many needs simultaneously.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This study has developed in response to a number of silences in the discipline of Australian history. These are the omission of women in general histories written before 1975, the silence in the area of the history of women's craft, the invisibility of women's unpaid work in the home and the silence around women's creative skills in the domestic sphere. The first of these is being redressed with a wealth of feminist studies written since 1975 to which this study contributes.

It is important that the examination of women in Australia continues to be written and that it proceed from alternative, feminist principles, given that the masculinist tradition has proved so narrow and inadequate. Histories of women need to start with women's lives in order to build alternative theoretical frameworks and not impose theories from above. Account needs to be taken of individual differences through allowing a plurality of voices to be heard and not privileging one point of view above others. Methodologies that validate women's experiences and knowledges and are inclusive of women need to be developed, such as interactive interviewing and using alternative sources of evidence such as material culture.

In applying these principles, my study has yielded material that builds on the work of various feminist historians. In the context of the public/private debate (in Chapter Four), my research confirms the observations made by Jill Matthews that married women's lives were fluid and that the boundaries between the public and private economies were crossed when circumstances required. A close examination of the women's craft work has yielded new information about women's unpaid domestic work, particularly how crucial it was for the economic well being of families, as most male wages had to be supplemented constantly and this was done often through handicraft skills. This demonstrates how interconnected the two sectors of the economy actually are, although this has generally not been acknowledged beyond feminist circles. The women's unpaid economic contribution was also very significant both for their families and for the wider community through their voluntary work. Only six of the 26 women worked in the paid economy after marriage and this reflects the lack of educational and paid work opportunities available to women born before World War Two. The type of work open to these women mostly built on the skills they had developed in the private sphere. On one level this shows a lack of participation in the public
sphere with most of the women remaining in the home. But as my work has shown, being a housewife involved regularly interacting with the public sphere through such things as women's organisations, working for charity, exhibiting craft work in shows and selling craft work and farm produce through an informal economy. This lack of a rigid separation between public and private domains in the women's lives is reflected in their capacity to make craft artefacts that combine aesthetic with functional purposes. There is no rigid separation between the two dichotomies of functional and decorative.

Within the private realm of the home the women used their handiwork to negotiate the constraints of their privatised situations creatively with their handiwork. For example, the women showed their work to each other at various times connected with the lifecycle - through the glory box, engagements, marriages, births of children, christenings and birthdays; through decorating their houses with their work and through visiting rituals that involved the offering of hospitality. These were all opportunities for showing work while still located within the home, and for meeting other needs, such as expanding the physical and psychological spaces available to them in the home.

Through organising my research thematically the impression has been created of similarities rather than differences between the women. I will therefore discuss the differences before moving on to examine the similarities that Chapters Five and Six highlighted.

Within the group of six women who migrated to Geelong there are differences of nationality, language, religion, geography and culture, with all of the individual nuances that these categories contain. Within one country rural or urban situations can represent large differences. The women's ages vary, as do their reasons for migrating to Australia. Their wartime experiences affected each person individually, although social upheaval was shared by all of the women. The geographical region of Geelong, with its industrial development, has produced common situations amongst these women in later life - they or their spouses have been employed by the large industries in Geelong, such as Ford, and they have all settled in close proximity to each other in the northern suburbs of Geelong. General characteristics are shared, but beyond these, the individual differences are great. The differences between these women and those who were born in Australia are also significant.
The same observation can be made about the other 20 women of predominantly Anglosaxon descent. They share some similarities - a common language and rural backgrounds - but within this group there are wide differences of class, region, religion, age, interests and life experiences. However, they share a common cultural tradition of a relatively homogenous society, of both a rural and urban nature, which characterised the Geelong region until after World War Two.

Given these differences it is remarkable to find the striking similarities of these women's lives. Chapter Five examined the process of the construction of femininity building on the work of Jill Matthews and Rozsika Parker, who first drew attention to the role of needlework in this process historically. Through applying her thesis to Australian women my study contributes new material, mainly the important role of needlework in the construction of the ideology of femininity which crossed boundaries of geography, culture, language and nationality. This gives an international perspective to the workings of patriarchy. Despite the wide differences between the women, they shared a common ideology of femininity of which needlework was a major component. All of the women were taught needlework in the home, in schools and it was an important indicator of feminine domestic skill in Europe and in Australia.

Women's craft work also crossed class barriers. In the study women of all social classes pursued craft work and made the same types of items with the same styles. There were no discernible differences across social class. Class differences however, were manifested within the membership of women's organisations. Charity networks in Geelong have traditionally been run by the wealthiest women whose position and wealth necessitated a public display of civic duty. However, within groups such as the C.W.A., with its craft days, there was an attempt to bring social classes together.

There were stylistic differences according to whether one was professionally involved with craft. Sylvia, Molly and Maic had practised a wider range of crafts than the other women by virtue of their training and paid employment.

Chapter Six explores questions of meaning - which have not yet had much attention from historians - initially drawing on the work of Rachel Maines in the U.S.A. Using the handicraft artefacts as a focus I found that there were intimate
connections between remembering, time, inheritances, keeping traditions alive and the making of meaning for the women interviewed. The women used the artefacts to celebrate as well as remember times in their lives and to preserve memories of others' lives through their textile inheritances. In addition to this, the women used craft artefacts to express a range of social and personal meanings. The making of craft items as gifts and investing meaning in these was a significant activity. Gifts could be used in a range of situations - for marking occasions in the lifecycle, religious celebrations, for fetes and stalls, to clothe children and increase someone else's comfort. The artefacts could also be read differently over time and some of the women were conscious that, with the passing of time, their artefacts will become remembrances of their lives.

From the interviews it was apparent that, despite the constraints that most of the women faced, they demonstrated numerous examples of personal agency, in the sense of asserting themselves to make a difference to their lives. Whether on a large scale, such as during war time and after - Anita worked as a nurse in Germany, Delfa supported her husband for three years while he was in gaol, fleeing oppression - or on a more everyday level, examples of the women shaping their own lives within given constraints are many. Six of the women uprooted themselves to migrate to Australia and an unknown future. Many of the others empowered themselves and their families economically through finding creative solutions to the problems of scarcity. Home production of clothing was also a means of resisting the consumer culture that was rapidly developing in Australia throughout the 1950s and after. All of the women raised children and supported their families. Six of the women were in paid employment for periods longer than 10 years, forging careers in traditionally female occupations. Despite poor eyesight, Molly developed her craft skills to a level whereby she exhibited professionally. Vera N also achieved recognition and status through her knitting. All of the women expressed themselves through their craft work for varying lengths of time. This was a source of pride, self-esteem and aesthetic pleasure and thus a source of personal agency.

The women's often life long involvements with handicrafts as well as other evidence, such as that from the companies that supplied these markets, suggests

317 Although Molly and Jean had no biological children they both parented children over many years.
that there has always been a tradition of domestic handicrafts in Australia. Grace Cochrane's work has documented the activities of those who classify themselves as part of the Crafts Movement in Australia. My research has shed light on the area of domestic crafts, often labelled 'folk' craft by the folklore academics. The recent *Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* includes an extensive entry on the history of patchwork in Australia. Domestics crafts have been practised by Aboriginal women and white alike. However, there has not been a historical survey done of the handiwork artefacts of the white settlement of Australia. There is definitely a tradition amongst women, but it has not been officially documented yet.

Related to this question is that of a connection between the region of Geelong and the women's craft. Given the presence of the textile mills and the wool industry, perhaps I could have expected to find a distinctive regional style of knitting. However, I did not find many examples of knitting, probably because knitted garments were made for comfort and were invariably worn (out). This highlights the significance of Vera N's knitting - not only is it technically exceptional, but it is among the few examples preserved for posterity. Thus I did not find any direct reflection of the Geelong region in the women's craft artefacts although domestic crafts were perhaps practised for longer in regional areas.

However, my study has exposed what could be most significant for the Geelong region and that is the presence of strong women's networks. The region developed as a rural centre and its early industries were closely allied to the agricultural activities of the region - tanneries, flour mills, woollen textiles and a refrigeration plant to export frozen meat. The C.W.A. arose in response to the economic crisis of the Depression specifically to address the needs of women and children in rural areas. One of its main values has always been to reduce isolation between women. To this end, handicrafts - the teaching, doing and showing - has long been the means through which friendship is fostered between women in the C.W.A. Similarly, some of the ethnic women's groups in Geelong, though not as old as the C.W.A., also include handicrafts as an activity. Some of the women's craft has been exhibited in Geelong at events such as the Pako Street Festa. In my study

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318 Grace Cochrane, *op. cit.*

almost all of the women had participated in one or another women's network; some participated in many groups working voluntarily through their churches and for charities as well. It appears that women's networks are strong in the Geelong region, particularly the C.W.A. which reflects Geelong's rural face. Despite Geelong's other industrial face, the women in my study still participated in craft, it being a means of sharing and meeting together. It is in this sense that I have found a regional focus in my study. This focus deserves future investigation.

The focus on women's craft has been most rewarding for looking at women's domestic lives in a new light. The craft artefacts provided a rich stimulus to the women remembering and articulating their lives in the interviews. Researching and writing this work has demonstrated how well oral testimony can capture the richness, diversity, depth and subversiveness of individuals' experienced realities. Personal experiences stand in marked contrast to the stilted, formal language of newspaper reports, Parliamentary Reports or powerful people's speeches, which were often constructed with hidden agendas in mind.\textsuperscript{320} The formal, written sources, particularly ones concerning women, cannot be said to reflect an experienced reality, but a desired ideal. Oral testimony, although having some limitations when dealing with issues that are difficult to articulate, still gives women voice; voices that are far richer than most written sources.

The craft artefacts have also revealed another dimension to that offered through language. This study has highlighted just how important women's craft artefacts are in researching the histories of women. As Susan Swan has stated, women's needlework and craft artefacts are extremely important as they are actually one of the few sources of material evidence of past women's lives. Most women's lives have been lived in the private realm performing domestic work which has been devalued in our society. Most of the evidence of their endeavours is ephemeral and unrecorded. Thus craft artefacts are one of the few things that give concrete expression to ordinary women's endeavours in the concealed realm of the home.\textsuperscript{321} As such, they are invaluable evidence in history.

\textsuperscript{320} My research for Chapter Five on schooling in Victoria alerted me to this observation. See Susan Thomas, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{321} Susan B. Swan, op. cit. p. 6.
Material artefacts also provide sensory and material dimensions to the study of history that are unique. The artefacts enriched the women's accounts of their lives; they indicated intangible dimensions that were usually not articulated - levels of skill, time spent in the making, symbolic meanings and aesthetic choices. Material culture used in conjunction with oral history are mutually enriching methods. While each of these in isolation has limitations as a source of evidence, the combination of them in this study has been exciting.

In conclusion, my research set out to discover the reasons and motivations for women expressing their creativity through craft in the home. The structure of femininity and needlework was established early in all of the women's lives. Another factor was the general economic climate of scarcity that characterised most of their lives prior to the Second World War. Overlaid on this was the social climate between the wars of 'modernity' and the elevation of the role of housewife and mother to that of 'scientific manager' guided by a new class of professionals. Here the economic and social incentives for using one's handicraft skills were certainly powerful. However, this explanation does not fully account for the women's involvement in crafts, which for many of them, has been a passionate, lifelong involvement. Chapters Four, Five and Six revealed the complex range of motivations, attitudes, involvements, values, symbolic significances and aesthetic pleasures many of the women invested in and derived from their engagement with craft. A single practical activity, such as making a child's dress, could involve a range of other meanings - it could be a gift expressing love, with a symbolic motif embroidered on the pocket, it could be a sign of a caring mother, and a competent sewer; it could also be an aesthetically satisfying and pleasing occupation. The activity of 'making' for the women was invariably satisfying a wide range of needs simultaneously. Above all, it was a creative act. For most of the women, at various stages throughout their lives, their fingers were certainly never idle.
APPENDIX ONE

The Women

Martha was born in 1866 at Rapunyum, Victoria and died in 1950. She married Andrew Condie, of Scottish descent, in 1884 and bore 10 children. The family moved to a property 'Frogmore' near Geelong and then to 'Meltham' at Stonehaven, 10 kms west of Geelong around 1910. In the 1920s, after her husband's death, the property was taken over by her son-in-law and daughter Ruby. Martha retired to Newtown, Geelong. She did fancy needlework, tatting, knitting and crochet throughout her life and left many examples of fine needlework existing today. She was a member of Red Cross throughout both world wars and the C.W.A.

Ruby, daughter of Martha, was born in 1888, one of 10 children, five males and five females. She lived at 'Frogmore' and then at 'Meltham', near Stonehaven, west of Geelong, until her marriage in 1918. She had two children and lived at 'Meltham' from 1928 onwards. After a large output for her glory box she did not take up needlework again until she retired to Geelong around 1950. She died in 1983. She was also a member of Red Cross throughout the two wars, a C.W.A. member and her needlework items have been inherited by her daughter Alva.

Bobbie was born in 1894 in Gippsland, the third in a family of four girls. Her father was an inventor and entrepreneur. They moved to East Geelong around 1907, where her father set up the Wyett Manufacturing Company. Bobbie trained to be a nurse and worked in Melbourne during the pneumonic influenza epidemic of 1918-19. Bobbie married an architect in 1922 and lived the next 30 years of her life in Brighton, raising three children. On the death of her husband she returned to Geelong to live with her sister and brother-in-law. She remained in Geelong until this year when she went to live in Queensland at the age of 98. Throughout her life she has worked for many charities using her handcraft skills, particularly making dolls and dolls' houses and dried flower arrangements.

Vera N was born in Natimuk in central Victoria in 1901, the youngest of five children. Her father was a policeman but then took on a dairy farm at Warrion near Colac when Vera was a child. Vera married Charles in 1921 and they stayed as dairy farmers at Warrion, raising two children. They retired to Belmont, Geelong in 1950, Vera experiencing her first paid job in the canteen at Ford. She was well
known for her gardening skills and for her fine knitting, examples of which are now in the National Wool Museum, Geelong. She died in 1990.

Alma, the youngest child of Martha, was born in 1905. She lived at 'Meltham' from 1909 to 1919 and then in Newtown with her mother until her marriage. Alma didn’t do as much fancy work as her mother Martha, as Martha and her sisters made her glory box items for her. However she has a wide knowledge of stitches and techniques used in embroidery. She has lived in rural Victoria and now lives at Anglesea.

Jean was born in 1910 at Ascot in the Maryborough area, and moved to the Bungaree district (near Ballarat). She had one brother and her father was a farmer. She trained to be a nurse but was unable to pursue this due to ill health. She married a farmer in 1931. In 1941, her husband being an elder of the Presbyterian Church, they were given the job of running various boys’ homes. They ran Killmany Park at Sale for 10 and a half years where Jean was the Matron. In 1952 they retired to Geelong where Jean has been involved in voluntary work and using her handcraft skills constantly. She has been a C.W.A. member for many years.

Beatrice was born in 1912, in Geelong, the youngest of 12 children. Of Scottish descent, she was the fourth generation of her family born in the Western District of Victoria. Her father was the manager of Hooper’s Wine and Spirits Merchants in Geelong. Beatrice worked as a children’s nurse and then as a sales assistant and buyer at Bright and Hitchcock’s Department Store in Geelong throughout the Second World War. She married in 1946 and her husband worked at the Returned Soldiers and Sailors’ Mill. She had two daughters and lives in East Geelong.

Vera M was born in 1912 and raised on a farm at Stewarton, near Benalla. She was the third of five children. Her mother died when she was nine and so Vera’s sister Greta took over the mothering role. Vera was a post mistress for six years before she married Gordon in 1941 in Melbourne. She was recalled to her job during the war and also bore two of her four children in the war years, when her husband was in the army. In 1950 they bought a property near Gellibrand, Victoria and spent 20 years there. They retired to Barwon Heads, where Vera obtained her driver’s licence at the age of 60. Vera has been an active C.W.A. member for many years.
Delfa was born in 1915 in Bosnia, one of five children. She did not go to school as she was needed at home to help on the farm. She married in 1933 and has six children. The family moved to Croatia in 1947 and had a farm in a village. Her husband was in telecommunications which saved his life after the war when the communists took over, although he was gaoled. In 1957 the family left for Austria and then Australia. They were employed picking peas and then at Goodchild Shoe Manufacturers, Geelong. They settled in Bell Park, Geelong and Delfa has been active in the Croatian community and church, as well as doing a wide assortment of handicrafts, including weaving in traditional Croatian styles.

Wilhelmina was born in the Hague, Holland, in 1916, the youngest of seven children. Her mother died when she was eight and her oldest sister took over that role in the family. She married in 1936; her husband maintained boats for a living. She raised three children and was widowed in 1951. She emigrated to Australia in 1960 and met her second husband in 1964, when he was working as a welder on the Shell Oil Refinery, Geelong. She has been a member of the Dutch Women's Club and a card club in Geelong. She has specialised in cross stitch and tapestries of traditional Dutch scenes.

Molly was born in 1917, one of three children. Her father was a bank manager and the family settled in Geelong in 1936. She trained at the Gordon Technical College in art and worked in an architect's office as a draftsperson for a year, when failing eyesight curtailed her career in that field. Her eyesight stabilised and with glasses Molly was able to pursue her interests in music and all manner of crafts. She did much voluntary war work and discovered weaving shortly after that. She was encouraged by the C.W.A. and became a demonstrator and show judge in the 1950s. In 1957 she bought a gift and haberdashery shop and ran it for 40 years in Point Lonsdale, where she would weave sitting at her loom in the shop window. She has pursued weaving, dressmaking and pottery in particular.

Hilda was born in 1917, in Geelong, one of 10 children, of German descent. The family moved to a farm and orchard at Fyansford and in the 1930s her father opened a fruit stall at Maltby's Market (now Market Square) in Geelong. After completing her Merit she worked in the family orchard and fruit business. She married in 1941 and settled in Barwon Heads in 1950. Hilda had six children and has been a C.W.A. member for many years.
Judy was born in 1919 and died in 1992. She was one of five children. Her father was an electric crane driver at the Geelong Cement Works and her mother had been in service prior to her marriage. Judy completed her Merit and obtained seamstress positions with Bryant and Lances, Dressmakers, Geelong, and Amy Farrell until her marriage in 1940. She married a draftsman and had three children, living all her life near Geelong West. She was active in fundraising for charity and an accomplished dressmaker.

Alva is the daughter of Ruby and niece of Alma and was born in 1919. She lived at 'Melitham' from 1928 onwards. She married a farmer in 1949 and raised two children. She hated sewing and being left handed, did not excel with needlework, preferring outdoor activities such as gardening. She now lives in Barwon Heads.

Marjorie was born in Ouyen in 1919 on a farming property, the second oldest of 10 children. She married in 1942 and had three children. The family moved to Geelong West in 1952 where her husband took on a sports shop. She has always pursued craft work as well as cookery and she has been an active member of the C.W.A. for 30 years.

Betty was born in Horsham in 1921. Her father was a stock and station agent and her mother was a primary teacher. She was the oldest of four children. She matriculated and then worked in an insurance office in Horsham throughout the war. She married a farmer in 1943; however, he was in the airforce for the duration of the war. After 10 years on their first farm they moved closer to Geelong at Lethbridge, where they stayed until 1987 when Betty moved to Geelong. She raised four children and has been a C.W.A. member for many years. Her main artistic interests have always been flowers and gardening.

Sylvia was born in 1921 in Harcourt, near Castlemaine. The family had an orchard there and she was the oldest of four daughters. Her mother was a teacher. Showing proficiency in many practical areas - carpentry as well as sewing - Sylvia did a Manual Arts course at Castlemaine Technical School. She would have preferred to do architecture or pursue maths, but this was not possible due to the war. She trained as a secondary teacher and remained in this field for the rest of her career. She married in 1953 and had two children, returning to work in Melbourne, where she rose to the level of Deputy Principal of a high school. She
retired in 1980 and lives in Point Lonsdale, near Geelong. She has investigated all manner of crafts professionally and for leisure and is active in voluntary work.

Janet was born in 1922 at Meredith, near Geelong, where the family had a sheep property. She was one of three children and liking sewing, she took out a Diploma of Needlework at the Gordon Technical College. She returned to the farm and was a dressmaker until she married a farmer in 1945. She had one child and they lived in the town of Meredith. She moved to Geelong in 1988. She has been a member of C.W.A. and pursues handcrafts as one of her hobbies.

Anna was born in 1922 in Ukrainia, when it was under Polish rule. The family moved to Bosnia when she was seven. Her father did not own land but worked for other farmers. She married at age 16 and moved to a nearby city. After surviving the Second World War and having one daughter, the family migrated to Australia in 1958 and settled in Bell Post Hill, Geelong. Anna has always done handiwork, much of it in traditional Ukrainian style. She is an active member of the Ukrainian community in Geelong.

Maie was born in 1925 in Newtown, Geelong. After training in office work at the Gordon Technical College, she worked in a variety of jobs pursuing her craft interests in the evenings. She obtained a position as a handicraft instructor at a rehabilitation centre and built her career in this field. She married in 1961 and had two children and then returned to her position at the Grace McKellar Centre in Geelong, until her retirement. She practises a range of cookery and handicrafts and sells the products through a co-operatively run craft shop in Torquay, near Geelong.

Corinne was born in 1925, and spent childhood years in Sydney and in Melbourne as her father was in the navy. Her mother and aunt were both employed as seamstresses by Anthony Hordern and similar establishments; her aunt hand beaded the trail of a gown for Nellie Melba around 1918. Corinne joined the airforce during the war years and then married a printer in 1947. They went to live in Barwon Heads where they raised three children. Corinne has been an active C.W.A. member and in recent years took up fancy work again.

Anita was born in 1926 in a German village in Poland; her father was a Lutheran minister and she was one of five children. During her secondary schooling the
family moved to Germany where she then trained as a nurse during the Second World War. During the war the family were scattered as well as afterwards when Germany was divided. She escaped to West Germany in 1952 and met her husband in Cologne. Her son was born in 1954 and in 1961, due to discrimination, they emigrated to Australia. In 1964 her husband obtained a job at Ford and she was employed at the Geelong Hospital until retirement. They settled at Bell Post Hill, Geelong. Anita has always done embroidery and had an interest in herbs; she has been involved in voluntary work for a number of community organisations.

Margaret was born at Baulah, Victoria, in 1928. Her mother was a primary teacher and her father a farmer. She was encouraged at high school to apply for a scholarship to Emily Macpherson College, Melbourne, and attended there for two years, doing needlework. She witnessed the first mannequin parade held in Australia after the war, when two Australian models were selected to model clothes with the French models. She married an engineer in 1951 and lived in a variety of country towns raising four children. She now lives in Point Lonsdale and has been involved in the Girl Guides and the C.W.A.

Mena was born in 1929 in an industrial town in the Portenza region of southern Italy, one of five children. Her father owned a small oil factory (a donkey turned the wheel that crushed the olives) but this was closed by the authorities during the war. After the Second World War, her region was taken over by Yugoslavia and Mena emigrated to Australia in 1954 where she joined her future husband and was married that year in Geelong. She has two children. Her husband worked at Ford and for the Phosphate Company; she worked for Sunkist for eight years and then in a woollen mill in Geelong for three years. She lives in Geelong West and dressmaking is her favourite past time.

Ilona was born in 1932 in Yugoslavia, although the area had been part of Hungary prior to 1919. The family were Hungarian and Ilona was the oldest of four children. Her father was a farmer. There was a family tradition of spinning and knitting but not weaving. Ilona married in 1950 and had two children, living on a farm. Her husband was a transport driver on a government farm. Shortages after the war meant that self-sufficiency was a way of life. The family emigrated to Australia in 1970 where her husband worked for 20 years at Ford. Ilona worked at
Grosbies Shoes and at Henderson's Springs. Since her retirement she has been embroidering in traditional Hungarian style, now that she has the time.

Dawn was born in 1932 in Melbourne; her mother was a tailoress and her father was a teacher. After working as a primary teacher, Dawn married a bank clerk in 1953. She had four children and has always sewed or knitted. Amongst many activities, she is a member of the C.W.A. and lives at Barwon Heads.
APPENDIX TWO - Migrating to Geelong

'We've all got equal rights - that's mainly what people want and need.'

Delfa's daughter Elizabeth

Six of the women interviewed migrated to Geelong - five came directly as a result of political and religious oppression in their countries of origin. Their wartime experiences of trauma, dislocation and courage in adversity were momentous times in their lives. Australia has provided freedoms that were destroyed for them by the war.

Delfa's story as told by her daughter Elizabeth

The family lived in rural Bosnia and during the war Delfa's husband was conscripted into the German army. Members of their family were killed during the war.

My Dad was in the army and my Mum was left on her own...the politics are quite complicated...

After the war, it didn't matter what side or what religion or nationality you were, but especially if you were Croatian you were...the only thing that saved my Dad from death was that he was in telecommunications. Dad went straight to gaol after the war. There was a lot of persecution for anyone that was involved in the war, so we left Bosnia...Mum was left to feed three children and feed Dad too in gaol, because if she didn't take him food he would have starved to death. Actually, my Dad keeps saying my Mum saved the whole room because he shared all the food she would bring regularly...We had land. We could have lived there quite comfortably, if there wasn't so much persecution...They were slowly and systematically taking over the villages and moving in Serbian people. If a person wasn't a communist working for them, then he couldn't be promoted into any management or position of power. My Dad heard that in Australia there was opportunity for children to grow up. It was big and wide and we chose Australia instead of America. My sister was here before us and my Dad's cousin...My Dad didn't have a job to start (they arrived in 1958), so he went pea picking. Then Dad was employed in 1963 [by Goodchild Shoe Manufacturers, Geelong].

Their experiences of leaving were traumatic: "We left everything - the land and the house. Everything was bartered...we were not free to leave. One nephew was killed crossing the border. We actually tried to cross the border three times". They were all gaol after their first attempt. They were third time lucky, crossing very close to a police station. They crawled under cover of darkness for a couple of kilometres. Elizabeth: "I thought at that time that the luckiest people in the world
were those who could just sit in a train and travel to wherever they wanted." They came out on the ship *Roma Lauro* and settled in the new suburb of Bell Park, Geelong, because their daughter Branka, had married and settled there six months previously. Many other refugees settled there also.

Delfa found Australia "terrible":

> We came in summer and we came here to Bruce Street and there was only one house in Bruce Street and there was a small half a house down there where we stayed. We had about 10 people in two rooms and a kitchen and there was nothing here except dried grass and my Mum was very upset for the first month...She couldn't see any trees, any vegetables growing on a big scale. She was quite concerned that we would never be able to survive here...but when she went to Werribee and saw the vegetables and the farms, she reconciled herself - yes, there was life in Australia.

Delfa worked on farms: "I picked peas, dug lettuce, picked tomatoes and packed potatoes...the work took us all over the place to Werribee Colac, Anakie and up near Ballarat." After a year or so, they built their own house. In the 1960s, there were only about 10 Croatian families in Geelong and they were a very close-knit community. Their street is now a multinational street - Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian.

**Anna's Story**

Anna is Ukrainian but grew up in a Croatian village and describes her nationality as "mixed". "Because I grew up with Croatian people, Catholic religion and my religion is Ukrainian Catholic".

Her daughter Ljerka recounted:

> That's one reason why they left Yugoslavia, to give me a better life and also, while we were there, practising your faith was something that was looked down on and you were threatened to lose your job. And I still remember as a young child, Mum putting money in a match box for me to go to my religious education lessons to the parish priest. It all had to be hidden and if Mum took me to church on Sunday, then someone at work, when Dad would get to the factory on Monday, would say "Saw your wife and daughter going to church", so it was not very favourable.

Anna's parents had already immigrated to Geelong in 1952.

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Anna: "Looking for a better life...because we was stranger nationality up there (Yugoslavia)...the government you know, was very hard for a job, not enough money". Her parents were in the Bonegilla camp, a holding camp for new migrants, before coming to Geelong. Anna, her husband and only daughter came:

straight away to Geelong...My husband worked at International Harvester. It took us a long time to migrate - about five years...We started in 1954. We were in Teslic, Bosnia, spending more and more money paying solicitors' fees.

Arriving in Geelong was difficult. "First of all it was really hard because I was married already 18 years...We came here, we had nobody...we lost friends...the next door neighbour was Russian and I couldn't understand her." Anna worked on a farm for 12 years picking peas. Her daughter explained:

For Mum, coming here was a little bit degrading, because, as she said, she never worked outside the home...she never had to work for anybody else. And when she came here they bought this block...and to earn the money to build a home on it, Mum went to farm work.

Anna: "I couldn't get another job because of the language. It was very hard for me". The family also settled in Bell Park.

Mena's Story
Mena, from the Potenza region in what was previously Italy, left her region, as it had been annexed by Yugoslavia after the war. She emigrated in 1954 to Geelong, following her fiancée who had arrived there two years previously. She was married in St Mary's cathedral in Geelong in 1954. As with Delfa and Anna, she told of how her village had been occupied throughout the war, and atrocities that had taken place. She worked for Sunkist for eight years and then for three years in a textile mill. Her husband worked for Ford and the Phosphate Company. They settled in Geelong West.

Wilhelmina's Story
Wilhelmina survived the German occupation of Holland, and bore two of her children during the war, in 1941 and 1943.

Yes it was hard. All the things we had to buy on tickets [coupons]. I had a big crochet bedspread and I had to take it off and I made it into underwear for the kids. Lots of people were hungry, nearly dead...My husband's father worked in a bakery so we'd get bread. And then we changed the
bread for potatoes and beans and so we had not so hard a time, but people were eating tulip bulbs and that sort of thing. A very hard time then.

Wilhelmina emigrated to Australia in 1960. "I didn't bring anything out here". She remarried in 1964 and settled in Norlane West. Her husband had previously come to Australia from Holland to help in the construction of the Shell Oil Refinery.

**Ilona's Story as told by her daughter Maria**

Ilona and her family migrated to Australia from Yugoslavia in 1970, following her brother as well as her husband's brother who had previously settled in Australia.

Every year in Yugoslavia was hard. They guaranteed you two years work, and when you come out it wasn't there, you had to find it yourself...it wasn't as it was in the brochures...Dad's brother was already in Geelong, so they came straight to Geelong. He worked at Ford. Dad got a job there a few days after we arrived.

Ilona was lonely when they first arrived. She learnt English "just through my husband. He is Hungarian, but he was little when they came out. Then we had the children...I just started learning it too, just everyday." The family settled in North Geelong.

**Anita's Story**

Although German, Anita grew up in Poland. She completed her nursing training in Germany during the war.

We left Poland in 1939...because there was this agreement between Germany and Russia. They took over our part. After that we moved back to Poland when things became quieter...in 1943, we left Poland all together. The German army had been driven back and we more or less had to leave. They gave us two or three hours to pack a suitcase and out as the Russian army moved in...At this time you didn't have time to think about it - the drama came later.

Anita's brother had been killed in action and her father had to stay behind while Anita and her mother were evacuated. Three sisters were scattered and she did not know their whereabouts. She worked in Silesia as a nurse and as the German army retreated, she lost contact with her mother.

And then it was such chaos, my mind just gets muddled up. I can't remember clearly. And then one day - it could have been the end of 45 or 46, my mother suddenly turned up and my sister from Norway actually, with a little suitcase and she said 'Now let's start somehow'.
The family was caught up in the division of Germany into east and west with Anita working in a hospital in the east. She resisted pressure brought to bear to join the communist party "Look, when you are a practising Christian it is no problem. You just think, well, I'm not doing it...because it interferes with my Christian beliefs...and they knew it". She left with her father to join the rest of the family in the west.

We had to go over to Berlin and we had to apply for permission to go and... it was quite a process, and scary, scary as well. But they didn't touch my father, we don't know. He had been left alone really, never been searched. It was such a chaos. One day you were here, the next you were miles away...It was a time when you just lived from one hour to the next. It was a really bad time but we survived.

Anita met her Polish husband in a refugee camp in Cologne and they were married in 1953. Experiencing prejudice in Cologne, they migrated to Williamstown near Melbourne in 1961, as her husband's family were already there.

Because of our name, my son had difficulties in school...It wasn't a German name...big discrimination everywhere, even in the infant welfare...against every foreigner from the east - Poles, Russians, Czechs. We had to leave as they became very aggressive towards us...a very unsettled life we had.

Anita obtained a job as a nurse's assistant and her husband obtained a job as a draftsman. In 1964, they moved to Geelong, as her husband obtained a job with Ford, and Anita later worked at Baxter House in the Geelong Hospital. They settled in Bell Post Hill.
APPENDIX THREE - Interview Schedule

This appendix includes a list of the topics covered in the interviews with the main interviewees. (Different questions were asked of the Semco designers - Diana and Joan- and of Ted and Edna who were connected with the Geelong Show).

The following topics were covered by the interview questions with the women:

1. date and place of birth; family background; occupations of parents; number of siblings; position in the family; the house; emotional tone of the family; mother's economic strategies; her involvement with craft; learning to sew, knit and crochet; pastimes
2. the general social and economic environment of her childhood
3. details of childhood and schools attended; career aspirations
4. training for any occupation; details of her first job
5. rituals such as the glory box and afternoon tea
6. marriage, a home and children; dates and places of births; location of residence, economic strategies employed in the home; husband's occupation; household appliances; methods of doing housework; when these changed; pastimes; radio, television, women’s magazines, her attitude towards craft
7. sources of patterns - Semco, Madam Weigel, women’s magazines, newspapers etc.
8. wartime experiences; crafts used for the war effort
9. employment outside of the home
10. voluntary work and membership of any clubs or groups
11. migrating to Australia; the family’s reasons for leaving, the background, what happened, how and when they left; arriving in Geelong; what it was like; the problems of settling
12. When viewing an artefact I asked for information about: its name, the date it was made, who by, what for, the pattern used, the style chosen, why it was kept, its significance.
13. the woman’s involvement with craft over her life - whether it had changed over time and in what ways; the different types of activities that had been pursued and the reasons; her motivation for making; the meaning this activity had for her.
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