

**HIDDEN VALUES AND POINTS OF
TENSION IN SHARED EMBROIDERY
PRACTICE**

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Abstract

This thesis, through a series of case studies, interrogates stitch-based practice in community orientated projects by a professional embroiderer. It adds to the discourse on the power of the needle (Daly Goggin 2009a) and articulates the many undisclosed, rich and widespread benefits of hand stitching as a shared activity. The study outlines some of the tensions and ethical dilemmas that permeate socially engaged practice(s) and explores and advances insight into the collaborative/participatory process, in which the production of the tactile artefact is but one element. This practice-based enquiry, similarly, offers new insight into craft collaboration in light of Ravetz's (2012) assertion that this subject has not been systematically debated or critically reviewed.

The research seeks to reveal and elucidate the dynamics inherent in stitch-based community collaborations through the process, documentation and critical analysis of three projects led by the author. Based, respectively, at Robin Hood's Bay Museum in rural North Yorkshire, the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archive and Burnage Academy of Boys in Manchester and the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, West Yorkshire, each project engages overlooked communities and diverse partner organisations. The range signposts the breadth of this enquiry, illuminating the scope and cross disciplinary potential of this method. Central to the enquiry is the signature cloth – a textile made up of hand sewn autographs which are utilised to locate activities and processes within a defined and accessible form within each case study.

In shedding light on embroidery as a form of social engagement, the study also offers evidence of its power as an alternative, tactile means of communication. In addition, this enquiry formulates new avenues to access historical textile artefacts and illuminates their significance and contemporary relevance. The self-reflexive methodology employed throughout the thesis offers a transparent model for those who may engage in similar practices and highlights its applicability to different audiences.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

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1. Introduction

This thesis, through a series of three case studies, interrogates stitch-based practice in community orientated projects undertaken by a professional embroiderer. It adds to the discourse on the power of the needle (Maureen Daly Gogginⁱ 2009a:4) articulating some of the undisclosed, rich and widespread benefits of hand stitching as a shared activity, which are termed ‘hidden values’. The study also outlines the points of tension and ethical dilemmas that permeate socially engaged practice(s) and explores and advances insight into the collaborative/participatory process, in which the production of the tactile artefact is but one element. This enquiry offers new insight into craft collaboration in light of the assertion by Amanda Ravetzⁱⁱ et al (2012:4) that the subject has not been systematically debated or critically reviewed.

Working with a wide range of partner organisations and marginalised communities, the three projects highlight hand embroidery’s potency and reach far beyond its framing as a trivial domestic pastime, as Daly Goggin (2009a:2) and Lesley Millarⁱⁱⁱ (Kettle and McKeating, 2012:14) corroborate. Each initiative examines strategies in collaborative engagement and explores how factors such as serendipity, knowing through making and having to think on one’s feet, impact on working practices and outcomes. The study elucidates some of the different and overlapping positions adopted by the researcher, including the conundrum as to ‘what transgressions matter’ (Grant Kester^{iv}, 2011:10) in socially engaged art practice, many of which involve the representation of others. This is something D. Soyini Madison^v acknowledges ‘is always going to be a complicated and contentious undertaking’ (2012:4). Thus, the importance of empathy, side by side with a firm grasp of ethical protocols, are vital tools in the research process.

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ⁱⁱ Research Professor/Visual Anthropologist.

ⁱⁱⁱ Professor of Textile Culture.

^{iv} Professor of Art History.

^v Professor of Performance Studies and Anthropology.

The investigation also sheds light on the wider implications of shared embroidery practice in what David Gauntlett^{vi} refers to as our imagined futures (2011:217); for shared, slow working and face-to-face contact are both necessary, yet sometimes overlooked assets, in an increasingly fast-paced, remote and digitalised world. This is in line with the Government-led organisation, The New Economics Foundation, which has for a number of years encouraged *Five ways to wellbeing* (2008) in relation to mental health. These are to connect, be active, take note, keep learning and give, and all these processes feature in different forms in the projects offered up for scrutiny.

Terminology

The complexities within shared/collaborative/participatory art practice are highlighted in the uncertainties which inhabit its language, many of which have multiple meanings. ‘Socially engaged art’, (SEA) which Pablo Helguera^{vii} defines as ‘art that is dependent on social intercourse as a factor of its existence’ (2011:2) is the most widely used phrase for this form of engagement. However, ‘public’ or ‘social engagement’ and ‘community arts’ (although somewhat derided) are used also along with ‘participatory art’ (Claire Bishop^{viii} 2006). The terms ‘collaboration’ and ‘participation’ are used frequently to denote the involvement of others, with the former suggesting more of an equal partnership. However, Viv Golding^{ix} questions some of the overlap and asks how ‘meaningful collaboration may differ from participation’ (2013:25). ‘Shared’ and ‘joint working’ are also used in this study. This highlights the variety of approaches, projects and ways in which people/communities are involved. The fact that the researcher is deeply involved at every stage of the enquiry is a vital ingredient and one that instills a bond that is not present in all socially engaged art practice.

The word ‘craft’, another key term in the enquiry, is similarly not easy to pin down. The term usually involves skill and the use of materials and processes (both digital and hand) and, on the whole, it is those who self-identify as crafts’ practitioners that define the field. ‘Community’ likewise is also fluid and open to interpretation.

^{vi} Sociologist and Research Chair in Communication and Design.

^{vii} Artist and writer.

^{viii} Professor of Art History and critic.

^{ix} Emeritus Associate Professor in Museum Studies.

However, Anthony Cohen's^x definition as something 'symbolically constructed, as a system of values, norms and moral codes which provides a sense of identity within a bonded whole to its members' (1985:9) is a useful term in this enquiry, especially given its focus on the symbolic. 'Hidden values', a term coined by the researcher, refers to the benefits that are not widely-known, acknowledged, tangible or visible in embroidery practice, such as social and cultural worth. 'Embroidery' describes a way of working by hand with a needle and thread to embellish or add to a surface of a material. Quilt-based artefacts, despite some overlap, sit on the periphery of the research. This is because most contemporary quilts privilege pieced fabrics and patchwork with an emphasis on machine processes rather than hand embroidery.

Voice

The viewpoint is that of a professional embroidery-based practitioner and lecturer, instigator and curator of collaborative and participatory endeavour - a voice seldom heard in academic discourse. This stitch-driven perspective embedded in the research process brings a different emphasis to textile discourse and is welcomed by Jessica Hemmings^{xi} who calls for 'a diversity of voices and styles to add to the emergent academic discipline of textile scholarship' (2014:27). Paul Harper^{xii} goes further arguing that 'dominant academic conventions have not given sufficient recognition or value to the epistemology and lived experience of craft practitioners and this has led to a problem with researching and theorizing about craft' (2013:230).

The subjectivity of the researcher, then, is seen as a positive attribute, offering (as it does) specialist stitch-based knowledge and insider information. Judith Okely^{xiii} encourages this personal voice when she advocates that 'specificity, positionality and personal history... are resources to be explored and not repressed' (2012:125). The study thus presents a different way of knowing that is derived from the act of embroidering and deep understanding of the subject area and follows activist, feminist and author, bell hooks^{xiv} (1994 cited in Cahnmann-Taylor

^x Social anthropologist.

^{xi} Professor of Craft and writer on textiles.

^{xii} Craft practitioner and writer.

^{xiii} Emeritus Professor of Anthropology.

^{xiv} hooks uses a pen name derived from her maternal grandmother with no capital letters.

and Siegesmund 2008) plea to dislodge stereotypical ways of thinking. The investigation will reveal an alternative narrative, presenting a female voice focused on stitch and cloth-based shared dialogues, given that Judith Butler^{xv} (1993 cited Buchli 2002:11) asserts that ‘much of the materialised world is forged within [a] masculine bias’. This perspective includes the researcher’s embroidery-based practice, away from shared engagement, that possesses strong autobiographical content and a celebration of the ordinary and overlooked in (women’s) daily life. The early hand-stitched cloths have titles such as *The Bathroom Shelf* and depict overlooked but vital (mostly female) domestic objects such as shampoo, nail varnish, cotton buds and earrings. (Figure 1.1.)



Figure 1.1 *The Bathroom Shelf* (1989).

Some of the data collected during this investigation may be that which is termed mundane. However, it is precisely the valuing of evidence of the ordinary that

^{xv} Professor of Comparative Literature.

underpins the research by shedding a light on different viewpoints. Scrutiny of the small details and seemingly insignificant aspects of the various embroidery projects are crucial parts of the unfolding story. This extends from small talk at a coffee morning in a Methodist church, to the arrangement of tables and chairs in a shared stitch workshop. Attention to the ordinary correlates with Ian Hodder's^{xvi} suggestion that the everyday may be 'of great importance to the expression of alternative perspectives' (2000:705-6).

Case studies

The three case studies undertaken in the North of England between 2014 and 2017 connect through their use of hand stitch, archive resources, shared endeavour and the tactile artefact known as a 'signature cloth'. Whilst this is the term used throughout the study, there are a number which are used elsewhere including 'autograph', 'friendship' or 'bazaar quilt /coverlet'. The conjoiner is a textile with a surface made up of hand sewn signatures. These tangible documents, which record community, friendship and fundraising, form a key component in the methodological framework and enable a neglected area of stitched social history to be brought into the light. The link between these arrangements of embroidered autographs and the petition is not accidental, conjuring up both group allegiance and also murmurings of discontent. The proposition that the hand drawn autograph still acts as 'a statement of defiance' against the homogenisation of today's 'commodity culture' (Jeff Edwards^{xvii}, cited in Harb 2010: no page number) is central to the enquiry.

Within the projects there are several issues that can be seen as both points of tension and hidden value. One that is central to the research is the blurring of borders between professional and amateur, novice and accomplished, skilled and unskilled embroiderer, which in turn causes confusion when trying to fix and define what constitutes good embroidery. This may in part relate to Roszika Parker's^{xviii} observation that whole ranges of meaning 'are all too often overlooked when embroidery is treated only in terms of technical development practice' (1984:6). This friction is highlighted in the strategy of open workshops, in that this inclusive

^{xvi} Archaeologist.

^{xvii} Art critic.

^{xviii} Feminist scholar.

approach means anyone taking part can become part of the finished embroidery. However, if the artefact is judged on embroidery prowess, the project can be misread. A stitched contribution (Figure 1.2) in the final study highlights this fact; for although only a simply worked autograph, the embroidery was nevertheless an extremely important part of the whole, not least because its creator was a committed member of the group.



Figure 1.2 Detail from *Sew Near – Sew Far* (2017).

Arguably, this confused state can also be viewed as a hidden benefit for embroidery practice. For not only does it allow a freedom from fixed definitions, it opens up opportunities to explore ‘community-based creativity, resistant to the modern notion of heroic genius’ (Sue Rowley^{xix}, 1999:16).

Interrogating this form of alternative, tactile expression also shines a light on some of the overlooked British embroidered textiles made, on the whole, by ordinary amateur females. As Stephen Knott^{xx} suggests, this way of working can ‘create a space of suspension from everyday normative capitalist alienation’ (2015:83).

^{xix} Professor in Humanities and Creative Arts.

^{xx} Lecturer in Critical and Historical Studies.

Something which is exemplified in the myriad of Women's Institute tablecloths and stitched commemorative hangings made voluntarily by groups around the country. The enquiry, by focusing in on an historic church cloth in the first case study draws attention to the hidden knowledge stored in these tactile artefacts, in the hope that further investigations will take place. This includes the (mostly) undocumented, yet ubiquitous, canvas work kneelers that are hand-sewn and donated to places of worship. (Figure 1.3.)



Figure 1.3 Church Kneelers, St Wilfred's Church, Monk Fryston, Yorkshire. (March 2018).

Although there is substantial evidence of the international reach of embroidery, the study is mindful of the restraints of the doctoral time frame. Therefore, the focus of the investigation is on data collected during a series of British-based stitch projects. Cross-cultural exchange does however, take place in two of the studies, providing evidence of stitch-based methods' ability to draw together people from different nations and backgrounds and encourage non-verbal communication. This can be seen at the end of a workshop in Bradford, when a cake appeared amongst the threads and fabric to celebrate the birth of a son. (Figure 1.4.)



Figure 1.4 Stitch workshop in Bradford as part of the Talk-English group. (August 2017).

Daly Goggin's assertion that stitched artefacts can 'play complex roles beyond the aesthetic' (2013:148). Each of the artefacts interrogated in this thesis is affirmative, documenting in thread the 'residues of human activity' (Hodder 2000:705) containing what E P Thompson^{xxi} refers to as a 'history from below' (1963, cited in Rowlands, 2002:111). Michael Rowlands^{xxii} concurs, outlining how 'Objects also act as aide-memoires for an external conversation or a narrative about a person or event that is in danger of being forgotten' (2000:110). Evidence of this is uncovered in the first case study which captures in thread the members of a tight-knit 1930's community. (Figure 1.5.)

^{xxi} British Historian.

^{xxii} Anthropologist.



Figure 1.5 Margaret Pennock pointing out her father’s sewn signature (2015).

Although the thesis focuses on the creation of these hand embroideries as positive acts, Marcel Mauss^{xxiii} ‘obligation attached to a gift’ (1974, cited in Candlin and Raiford Guins, 2009:23) draws attention to several points of tension. Mauss’ theory suggests that gift giving, instead of being viewed as a generous unselfish act, the giver achieves benefits beyond that of the receiver. This issue throws up a series of quandaries, not just for this enquiry but potentially many others. For example, in socially engaged practice are the good intentions of artists, organisations or funding bodies thrust upon the individuals or groups involved whether they like it or not? Likewise, who receives payment for any resulting artwork or has ownership, and could this become another hurdle given the continued low status of textile artefacts? An inequality that Beverly Gordon^{xxiv} suggests still remains in place, asserting that textiles continue to be taken less seriously than many other art forms (2011:242). This is what Stuart Hall^{xxv} sees as

xxiii Sociologist.

xxiv Emeritus Professor of Design Studies.

xxv Cultural theorist.

'a hierarchy of value' (1997:190) in heritage practice, in terms of what gets saved, and who gets to make the decisions.

Uncovering and highlighting the points of tensions and hidden values which emerge from the three case studies will help to locate stitch-based practice within a wider social perspective. Similarly, this robust investigation from an embroidery practitioner deeply involved in craft collaboration, will add to and enrich the academic discourse in the developing field. For as Jillian Riley^{xxvi} acknowledges, to fully 'understand creative craftwork ... and... how it influences quality of life... [we] would benefit from naturalistic studies of craftspeople in different cultural settings and across different craft disciplines' (2009:278).

^{xxvi} A health care professional and member of the British Guild of Weavers.

2. Methodology

A series of case studies, which are both the product and process of this enquiry (Stake 2000:436), provide the methodological framework for this practice-based enquiry. The characteristics of this rich and multi-method approach are borrowed from anthropological study, given the employment of qualitative and interpretive methods including fieldwork. The investigation privileges alternative epistemologies in which visual and sensory textile strategies come to the fore, in order that different voices may be heard. David MacDougall^{xxvii} (1998) advocates the employment of such alternative methods, suggesting 'visual practices hold the possibility of different ways of speaking and knowing to those traditionally sanctioned by the field' (Ravetz and Webb, 2001). These are appropriate, allowing different types of data to be gathered, evaluated and interpreted, and eliminate bias. Stake's suggestion that a case study should not aim to represent the world but to represent the case (2000:448) resonates with this investigation that offers in-depth exploration of the local in order to explore the global.

The projects under scrutiny are distinct entities, involving a different number of people, communities, agendas, places and archive sources. The act of embroidering in itself is an appropriate method as it does not require complex prior knowledge and is open to all, young and old, experienced and novice and is practiced in many different cultural contexts. Stitch as a collaborative tool is also extremely valuable because it is accessible and seemingly non-threatening, a fact supported by the researcher's long-standing experience in the field. During the 1990's as part of *Out of the Ordinary* (1994-5), her solo exhibition in Gallery Oldham, she worked with women of Bengali descent on a series of embroidery-driven workshops. This shared activity encouraged an exchange of knowledge and a better understanding of each other's worlds, despite the barriers of spoken language. The valuing of this haptic approach echoes with Goggin, who argues that embroidery is overlooked in the 'cultural facets of humanity' (2009a:4). That it

^{xxvii} Anthropologist and filmmaker.

can be carried out without expensive equipment or technology is also seen as a positive. Likewise, that cloth and thread are easily transportable is another advantage already touched on in this study, for as Knott acknowledges, this 'elastic relationship' (2015:83) with other spaces is a positive for crafts.

Whilst the research underlines the communicative value in stitched engagement, it is also mindful of the possibilities in embroidery practice to encourage internal dialogues. Nigel Hurlstone^{xxviii} in *Speaking up for Silence* (2012) highlights the benefits of working with a needle and how in our noisy world we are rarely quiet, yet embroidery can provide a space for contemplation. Likewise, within these shared workshop environments, there is the opportunity to listen and take note, for, as Suzi Gablik^{xxix} argues, empathetic listening is valuable as it allows room for the 'Other' (cited in Lacy 1995:82).

Stitch-based methods form part of the developing field of sensory practice, an area that Judy Barry^{xxx} acknowledges has much potency. She talks of an 'overwhelming desire to touch' (2012:17) and an 'explosion of pure physical pleasure we feel on encountering a perfect example of stitched, sewn or embroidered cloth' (2012:16). This sensory way of working can also allow different knowledge to be excavated. For example, someone with a limited grasp of spoken or written English could communicate with others using their stitch-based ways of knowing. For as Millar acknowledges: '[w]e experience the world through our senses, [and] our skin is the active medium through which we process information' (2013:15). Sarah Pink^{xxxi} also advocates the implementation of these less established strategies, suggesting that these methods may help uncover '...alternative and ultimately valid ways of seeking to understand and engage with other people's worlds through sharing activities, practices and inviting new forms of expression' (2009:9).

Uniting embroidery practice and hand-stitched autographs together to create relevant artworks is an appropriate strategy. The signature is a mark, whether, drawn, sprayed or stitched that acknowledges individuality and is widely known

^{xxviii} Academic and embroidery practitioner.

^{xxix} Artist and activist.

^{xxx} Academic and embroidery practitioner.

^{xxxi} Social anthropologist.

and recognised. Artist Shuraq Harb concurs arguing that, 'Signatures are personal and physical inscriptions... but also visual signs that are still used today as information or evidence for verification of someone's identity'. (2010: no page number). The historical roots of the signature cloth, too, highlight its applicability both as a conjoiner and commemorator of communities and friendships. These tactile artefacts carrying important and poignant messages, to not only 'Remember me' but 'You are not forgotten' (Jacqueline Marx Atkins^{xxxii}, 1994:48). In exploring this handwritten motif, the study also draws attention to a skill which is becoming less and less part of our daily lives (Hensher 2012:3).

Heuristic methods (Moustakkas 1990) that include hunches, trial and error, chance and learning through making are important in this investigation, given that participants may all have different goals, time restraints and skill sets. This approach encourages adaptable ways of working and helps avoid too much fixity (Kester 2004, Golding 2013) when it comes to practice-based outcomes. However heuristic methods can prove challenging, in that they may create uncertainty, even stress and worry. For example, partner organisations may want precise details of the final outcome, either to publicise an initiative, or because the funding body require transparent outcomes. However, the inflexible nature of schedules, prevalent in such types of engagement, can have a negative impact on working patterns and leave little opportunity to manoeuvre. For example, information regarding workshop dates and venues is usually printed and distributed at the start of a project which make unexpected changes problematic. Serendipity is another connected and under scrutinised method exploited in this study, in which both happenstance and chance are utilised. For example, the signature cloth in the first case study was selected as a result of happy accident, but nevertheless this approach proved to be immensely valuable and worthwhile.

The reflexive journal is a method that enables a crucial repository of information pertaining to embroidery practice and collaborative engagement to be posited. It records and documents the practice-based journey relating to each case study. It is an interactive device in which ideas and thoughts, successes and perceived failures can be stored. The journal offers a quick and direct way of recording

^{xxxii} Writer and researcher in quilt studies.

information and describes the research process with all its positive and negative twists and turns. It can also capture a snapshot of the incidental conversations and exchanges that occur by chance during the projects. Reflexivity, as a method, can be perceived as too subjective, in that over familiarity can mean that vital evidence is overlooked. This study, however, is mindful of Riley's suggestion that researchers should not take for granted ordinary rituals in order that they 'develop reflexive awareness of the mundane aspects of practice' (2008:66), both in individual and shared endeavour.

Visual methods that focus on drawing, sketching and collage are also used in this enquiry to gather data. This involves of a mix of sketchbooks, found images, scrapbooks, diagrams and mind maps related to the embroidery projects within this study. Each showcases the value of making information visual in order to test, order and clarify thoughts. It follows Ravetz suggestion that "[t]he language of craft is enriched by articulating ideas and processes in different ways (2012:13).

Photography is a method that is embedded in each of the case studies in a variety of ways. It is used both to document the different stages of the durational projects and also to capture detail and technical aspects of the act of embroidering. As a form of documentation, it records the ongoing individual and collaborative research strategies. Pink's observation that photography can 'potentially construct continuities between the visual culture of the academic discipline and that of the subject or collaborators or the research' (2013:66) is pertinent to this approach. The strategy may also act as a prompt to recall particular events and details.

Crucially this method allows the researcher's unique perspective of the projects to be shared and made known. Photography can capture fine detail and enable close examination of embroidery practices, bringing something different to the documentation of workshops and the durational whole. For example, visually capturing the seating arrangements in a workshop can show how the space can encourage interaction. Recording hand movements and the techniques involved in creating a stitch can demonstrate the variety of strategies employed in embroidery practice. Whilst this methodology preferences the stance of the researcher, others may also be involved in the documentation process to offer different perspectives. Photography is also an appropriate method in this investigation as it is an

accessible and widely known and should be familiar to all those taking part. Given that the case studies took place over a three-year period, the photographs taken at the time can be used to help the researcher re-engage with the work and act as visual prompts. This method can also be used to share visual data with the groups as the research progresses.

Disadvantages of using photography as a method are that digital images can be lost or corroded, and an ongoing strategy needs to be in place to back up and store digital data. Photographic data is also very easy to collect but can sometimes lead to an overload of information. For example, Banks and Morphy (1997:11) discuss this very problem for the seminal anthropologist Margaret Mead who collected so many visual records she was never able to analyse them all. Ethical permission is also required from all those involved when using photography as evidence. This can be not only a time-consuming act, it may also be a barrier to creativity and openness, in that spontaneous recording of information may be stalled by form filling. Furthermore, some groups do not favour this approach and so cultural appropriateness needs to be taken into consideration. In some cases, photographing hands and the back of heads rather than faces may be a better solution with regard to some participants. There is also an increasing tension in relation to this method, given the rise of social media, concerning what happens if images leave the control of the researcher. As Pink asserts, when researchers take photographs to make an academic point, they should also 'consider the personal, social and political implications... for their subjects' (2013:166).

Film is also used in this study to support and underpin the other methods. It captures moving images and sound in the projects as and when possible. However, given the time restraints, this form of data collection is employed sparingly with the support of specialist film makers. It is likewise acknowledged that the outputs are seen as secondary supporting evidence, rather than films in their own right. Nevertheless, the short films related to two of the initiatives examined do allow information sharing beyond the time frame of the projects. They similarly enable different audiences to know of the work, extending the reach of the stitched-based enquiry. An additional filmic method involving a drone camera captures moving images of the large-scale artwork in the final study. This

unusual strategy unfurls a different way of seeing and understanding the power of the sewn signature.

A more traditional method of data collection which is employed in this study, particularly in the social sciences, is the interview. This strategy allows the thoughts and views of others involved in the study to be gathered and help eliminate bias. It is also used gather data from other British-based embroiderers who employ hand-stitch approaches to shared working. For example, Hannah Leighton Boyce and Emily Hayes of Pathway Arts. The latter being a Manchester-based organisation that is well versed in funding applications for stitched-based projects. However, this is not a comparative study, the enquiry is focused instead on an embroidery practitioner and her community partners and co-workers, immersed in shared making, one little studied to date.

A disadvantage of this form of data collection is that it can be a time-consuming act, involving not just the interviews themselves, but transcribing any resulting audio recordings and then analysing the data. With this in mind, the interviews within this study will be on the whole semi-structured and simple, in order that the information gathered does not become over--facing. Another issue with this method of data collection is what Okely calls 'the bureaucratic controlling gaze' (2012:25). Further too the possible negative implications of using the interview as a method of data collection, Marcus and Fischer^{xxxiii}, (1986, cited in Lincoln and Denzin 2000:657) voice concerns regarding the undue influence the researcher may have on interviewees when employing this method. However, this is not seen as a significant concern given this method is only one of many strategies for data collection within this study.

Artefact analysis of the historic embroidery/ies will allow another type of data, relevant to the enquiry, to be collected. This includes a maker-to-maker understanding and tacit knowledge of the act of embroidering by hand. Likewise, this primary research will enable new visual and sensory evidence to be accrued, alongside secondary photographic images of the cloths. The visual examination includes an interrogation of the different embroidery skills employed as well as

^{xxxiii} Anthropologists.

scrutiny of mistakes and unnoticed or overlooked sewn details pertaining to the creation of the work.

Exhibition display of the embroidered cloth/s is a method which is frequently employed to disseminate the findings of this type of research. The display of the stitched outcomes in the investigation takes place in locations close to the site of creation. This allows as many of those as possible invested in the endeavour to see and share the outcomes in an informal setting. A negative aspect of this strategy is, due to the short time frame, not everyone that has been involved may be able to see the results and could as a result feel excluded and undervalued. Online resources, such as the websites, will work alongside the exhibition display to allow information sharing and access beyond the local, so that images and information related to each project can be made known. This method is also useful in enabling sharing and collecting data pertaining to historic and contemporary signature cloths. For example, online searches connect to the researcher's website www.lynnsettington.co.uk, when looking for information on signature cloths, so that the site becomes a knowledge base. This allows those interested in the subject to expand their understanding by sharing information, in particular the custodians of these stitched, social history documents (see Appendix 1a. and b.).

Empathy as a method is under-utilised, as psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen in *Zero Degrees of Empathy* (2012) acknowledges. In this investigation it is employed to encourage an understanding and awareness of others' feelings. It is embedded throughout this research procedure, given the emphasis on shared and collaborative working. Empathetic understanding helps also to ameliorate dilemmas pertaining to involvement and control, ownership, authorship and co-design, issues more widely explored in ethnographic study. As Donna Haraway^{xxxiv} acknowledges: '...vision is always a question of who has the power to see' (1991 cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2000:109). Feminist scholar, Mary Field Belenky's term 'connected knowing' (1986 cited in Kester 2004:113), a method of engagement based more on a conversational, than authoritative mode, relates strongly to this empathetic approach. Young and Goulet^{xxxv} agree, suggesting

^{xxxiv} Anthropologist.

^{xxxv} Anthropologists.

'...empathy, complicity and the accumulation of shared experience may unleash long sought-after knowledge' (1994 cited in Okely 2012: 85).

The critical literature review, ongoing throughout the investigation, provides a vital tool to facilitate understanding of the discourse surrounding the topic, some of which intertwines and overlaps. The breadth of the search highlights the scope, reach and complexity of the study and draws attention to some of the gaps in knowledge. The sources range from hand embroidery, crafts, material culture, socially engaged art practice, stitch as marginalised discourse and ethnography. It includes primary research into archival documents as well as secondary sources such as published material including books, magazines, journals and newspaper articles. There is also an interrogation of online data, for example, websites, blogs, YouTube and Twitter accounts as well as television and radio broadcasts.

The publications surrounding contemporary embroidery practice are dominated by a preponderance of manuals and how-to books. This acknowledges both the huge interest and also the intertwining of professional and amateur status of the subject, an issue exacerbated in Britain by the bundling together of embroidery practice with folk, hobby-craft and outsider art. Critical discourse on stitch is, however, limited with the discussion of collaborative embroidery-based work even more lacking. Alice Kettle^{xxxvi} and Jane McKeating's^{xxxvii} *Hand Embroidery: Perspectives* (2012) is a welcome addition, offering a range of viewpoints on the current position of embroidery in the professional world. In her introductory essay, Millar acknowledges the international reach of stitch and also its power as a mark of resistance (2012:13). Whereas the intertwining of amateur and professional status of embroidery is highlighted by McKeating. She acknowledges that this is a craft where professional and amateur 'muddle along together' (2012:30); citing the annual Knitting and Stitching Shows as a prime example of the eclectic mix of embroidery-based work from kits to internationally renowned professional artists. Melanie Miller^{xxxviii} and Heather Belcher's^{xxxix} essays in the publication also relate strongly to this enquiry. Both acknowledge the long history of collaborative quilt

^{xxxvi} Professor of textiles.

^{xxxvii} Academic and embroiderer.

^{xxxviii} Academic and embroiderer.

^{xxxix} Textile artist and felt maker.

making and embroidery and uncover information about a number of contemporary practitioners. This includes Norwegian artist, Lise Bjerne Linnert, the creative partnership *Arthur and Martha* and the researcher herself. The specialist journal *Embroidery Magazine* also showcases from time to time a miscellany of individual makers who work in the expanded field of embroidery, but its content is popular rather than academic.

The last decade has seen a marked rise in the interrogation of shared embroidery practice as alternative discourse from academics worldwide across a range of disciplines. However, given the British focus, only a small number are pertinent to the investigation. Elizabeth Robinson's doctoral study (2012), *Women and Needlework in Britain 1920-1970* pays close attention to the problems of needlework's visibility in ordinary women's history. She highlights the complex position of the subject as 'both and neither work and leisure' (2012:15). which she acknowledges may have contributed to its neglect. Robinson acknowledges too the 'burgeoning field' (2012:11), citing a range of perspectives including 'art history, design history, archaeology, biography, fashion and women's history' (2012:12) which embrace needlework history, yet not contemporary making. She also draws attention to Daly Goggin's academic rather than practical stance, pointing out that the author exposes 'the context and meaning... but not the process of its making' (2012:22).

Bernice Archer and Alan Jeffreys^{x1} study '*Women's Embroideries of Internment in the Far East*' (2012) connects to this enquiry in that the social historians acknowledges how these stitched records of interned life in the Far East were neglected simply because they were sewn. They also make clear how their enquiry helps redress the 'balance between dominant and subordinate discourses' (2012:259) so that these very important stitched records are no longer overlooked.

Daly Goggin, referred to earlier, has contributed much in the last decade to the increasing debate on embodied material culture, particularly needlework and textiles. In a number of articles and publications including *Women and the Material*

^{x1} Social historians.

Culture of Needlework and Textiles (2009a), edited with Beth Fowkes Tobin^{xli}, she uncovers examples of stitch as a form of alternative discourse. In her investigation of Elizabeth Parker's 1830's sampler, in the collection of the V&A, London, she brings from the shadows the life of an overlooked and downtrodden working-class woman, exploring how hand stitch offered an alternative means of expression. Brenda Schmahmann^{xlii} too has written insightfully about this different type of tactile discourse, with emphasis on her native, South African society. In her introductory article, *Textiles: Parodies and Quotations in Cloth* in the special edition of *Textile; the journal of cloth and culture* (2017) edited by Schmahmann, she interrogates Cornelia Parker's *Magna Carta (An Embroidery)*, acknowledging hand embroidery's strength in enabling some who may not see themselves as possessing technical skill (2017:339) to participate.

However, despite the increased academic interest, the critical academic debate from the embroidery practitioner's standpoint on shared approaches remains limited. Françoise Dupre's^{xliii} observations in *From Brixton to Mostar* (2015), however, are a welcome addition. Despite her training as a fine artist, Dupre's observations have strong connections to this investigation. She not only preferences visual and haptic methods in collaborative work but supports and encourages the use of textiles practice in cross-cultural exchange. Dupre also argues that stitch can be a positive form of communication (2015:184), acknowledging that, '[t]extiles ...make an ideal medium and context for an art practice that is actively involved with others' (2015:186). Some of these sentiments are echoed by museum curator Sue Prichard who was involved in a stitched-based collaboration with Fine Cell Work^{xliv} as part of *Hidden Histories*, the quilt exhibition at the V&A museum in 2010. Prichard writes about the making of the *Wandsworth Prison Quilt* and how it 'demonstrates the continuing appeal of the needle as a tool of both subversion and salvation' (2010:220).

^{xli} Professor of English and Women's Studies.

^{xlii} Professor of Visual Identities.

^{xliii} Senior Lecturer in Fine Art.

^{xliv} A charity which makes handmade, often stitched, products in British prisons, many designed in collaboration with contemporary designers.

Hannah Leighton Boyce^{xlv}'s *The Event of the Thread* ((2014) a collaborative artwork also connects to one of the case studies in the thesis. In this outdoor installation/publication, the artist devised with Helmsore Textile Museum and a number of local residents, Leighton Boyce describes the aspects of shared working. She also talks about how this 'created a process that felt vulnerable' (2014:28) given that the outcome would not have been realised without the support of others. The strategies employed in another communal textile project appropriating Picasso's *Guernica*, into an anti-war banner, are discussed by Nicola Ashmore^{xlvi} in *Guernica Remakings: Action, Collaboration and Thread* (2017). Although not involving a new design or a single maker's vision, the article does explore the rewards of public sewing events as well as the denigration of cloth and the domestic. Ashmore also draws attention to the importance of tension in craft collaboration (Helen Carnac^{xlvii} 2013, cited in Ashmore 2017: 362).

Emma Shercliff's^{xlviii} 2015 doctoral thesis '*Articulating Stitch: skillful hand stitching as personal social and cultural experience*' suggests strong links to this enquiry. However, Shercliff's research takes a different path in that she explores stitch as a rhythmic and embodied act rather than a political or expressive means of communication. Furthermore, she uses the term 'skillful' in her title and focuses on those already well versed in stitch-based methods. Karen Nickell's^{xlix} 2015 thesis *Embroidery in the expanded field 1960-2014* is also superficially related to this enquiry, in that Nickell investigates embroidery/textile art in Ireland, drawing on the knowledge and experience of those in the field. She also questions the making of textile art and its overlooked status in art history. However, the study is a broad overview rather than an in-depth examination of individual makers. Another study which explores hand-stitch as a method to draw people together is Ele Carpenter's^l *Open Source Embroidery* (2005). In this research, Carpenter, from a fine art background, combines new media and hand stitch as a form of socially engaged practice and highlights the need to keep 'valuing ...amateur approaches to expert fields of knowledge' (2015:345).

^{xlv} Leighton Boyce trained in textiles but operates in different areas of art practice.

^{xlvi} Lecturer in Art and Design.

^{xlvii} Craft practitioner and researcher.

^{xlviii} Senior Lecturer in Textiles.

^{xlix} Researcher in Textiles.

^l Lecturer in Curating.

A number of high-profile fine artists, most notably Cornelia Parker, Tracey Emin and Grayson Perry have also produced embroidery driven outputs. However, only Parker and Perry have employed it as a tool to work with marginalised communities. Perry has written eloquently about his approach and his affinity to anthropology and material culture. However, his textile-based outcomes are always executed by someone else, frequently, a team of people. In the case of a hand-stitched portrayal of Northern Irish loyalist marchers designed by Perry, in *Who are you?* at the National Portrait Gallery in 2014, there is no mention of the name of the skilled embroiderer/s, despite their important contribution.

Parker's *Magna Carta (An Embroidery)* (2015) as the title suggests embraces, celebrates and shines a spotlight on hand stitch as a method. This monumental artwork was created with four British-based organisations, known for their hand embroidery skills: the Embroiderers Guild, Fine Cell Work, the Royal School of Needlework and Hand and Lock. Stitch contributors included prisoners in British prisons as well as members of the legal profession. Parker talks of this as a collective effort and also outlines her interest in the permanence and impermanence of monuments, (2015:no page no.), both issues that resonate with this enquiry. Paul Bonaventura in the introductory essay also applauds the efforts of the project's independent producer, Caroline Smith, and her 'diligence, professionalism and sheer industry' (2015:no page no.). This chimes with Knott's observation that the artist's role in this form of engagement is often that of 'choreographer' (2015:86).

Ethnographic discourse is also pertinent to this enquiry with the shared interests in field work, working with others and the value of self-reflexivity. The research by Pink on sensory and visual ethnography are particularly prescient, with her assertion that images and words should be regarded with equal meaning (2013:10) Likewise her observation that material thinking and creative research 'is... often an intuitive, messy and sometimes serendipitous task' (2009:119). Patricia Leavyⁱⁱ, too, encourages different methods of engagement, highlighting how visual strategies allow alternative voices to be heard, including those 'long

ⁱⁱ Sociologist and advocate of arts-based approaches.

prohibited from participating in collective historical representation' (2009:219). She, too, supports and welcomes alternative approaches, arguing '[v]isual images are unique and can evoke particular kinds of emotional and visceral responses from their perceivers' (2009:215). Tim Ingold's^{lii} championing of creative strategies over many years also connects strongly to the study. His assertion that making is integral to being and his encouragement of intuitive approaches chime with this enquiry, as does his observation 'that the form of objects is not imposed from above but grow from the mutual involvement of people and materials in an environment' (2009:89).

Maria Elena Buscek's^{liii} *anthology Extra/Ordinary* (2011) presents a series of essays on contemporary craft from practitioners, critics and theorists in a wide range of craft disciplines. Buscek points out that it is unsurprising that the handmade should resonate in today's high-tech world (2011). Textile artist Lacey Jane Roberts in her paper describes how craft can 'exploit the marginalised position' (2011:18). She acknowledges, too, 'how crafting becomes a manner to resist stereotypes and to challenge the constructed systems of visual and material culture' (2011:18). Betsy Greer^{liv} also contributes to the volume and talks of the benefits of 'both process and product' (2011:176) of craft. Another recent publication which also adds substantially to the emerging debate surrounding contemporary craft is *Craft Through Collaboration* (2013) edited by Ravetz, Kettle and Felcey. The wide-ranging essays by practitioners, academics and curators examine different approaches to, and ways of working together, using craft. In common with this research, the authors' talk of 'how collaboration opens up the core principles of craft to deeper examination' (2013:14).

Gauntlett's influential *Making is Connecting* (2011) also interrogates approaches to, and aspects of, making and the benefits of this hands-on way of working in our technology-driven age. He highlights the social worth of making and observes how this act 'gets the brain firing in different ways' (2011:4). Harper's doctoral research is likewise extremely pertinent to this investigation in that he highlights a number of

^{lii} Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology.

^{liii} Associate Professor of Art History.

^{liv} Greer termed the phrase Craftivism (activism and craft) and is known for her writing on the subject including her blog.

problems with the research and theorising around craft. Writing from the perspective of a maker, Harper draws attention to the poor visibility and credence given to 'epistemologies and lived experiences of craft practitioners' (2012:230). Richard Sennett's^{lv} *The Craftsman* (2009) philosophically explores writing about crafts and connects to this study, in that he asserts that making is a positive approach that reaches out too many areas of life.

Knott's reappraisal of amateur practice, referenced earlier, is an important addition to the developing and complex debate of amateur and professional craft. In *Amateur Craft* (2015) he suggests we reassess the worth accorded to amateur making to appreciate the actual act of making itself. Knott likewise contests the marginalisation of amateur space, suggesting it has 'the potential to be productive and add to human artifice' (2015:51), asserting that scholars have so far failed to recognise the potential of amateur making.

Fiona Hackney^{lvi} also writes on craft's value to society. In *CAREful or CAREless* she admonishes the cultural invisibility of amateur home and hobby craft, calling for an exploration of other forms of agency and activism (2013:26). She talks of a methodology which 'foregrounds doing' (2013:28) and acknowledges that hobby craft can be a 'mode of quiet activism' (2013:26). In common with this research, she asserts that these tactile strategies have the capacity to 'absorb people and draw them together' given their enjoyable and fulfilling nature (2013:23).

The publications examining socially engaged art practice have exploded in the last decade, as have the numbers working in this domain. However, the focus in the majority of the texts is on fine art practitioners, with crafts-based ways of working and doing, little in evidence. The activist and artist Suzanne Lacy, an early proponent of SEA brings a together a number of artists and critics' views and insights in *Mapping the terrain* (1995). She highlights ethical concerns, talking of power relations that are 'exposed in the process of creating' (1995:31). Kester's *Conversation Pieces* (2014), too, is an insightful appraisal with, as the title suggests, its focus on dialogical projects. Crucially he underlines the fact that

^{lv} Centennial Professor of Sociology.

^{lvi} Professor of Fashion Textile Theories.

'these projects cannot be grasped by traditional methodologies' (2004:10) and talks of a developing new paradigm in which the work of art is a process (2004:12). He also asserts, in relation to the ongoing enquiry that, 'a concept of empathetic insight is a necessary component of the dialogical aesthetic' (2004:115). Claire Bishop's influential *Artforum* article, *The Social Turn* (2006) is much cited in relation to SEA. However, in her search to uncover criteria to judge this type of practice she tends to overlook social relations and its benefits and instead preferences discomfort and rupture in artworks. She also argues, in some iterations of SEA, that aesthetic criteria are sacrificed in favour of the ethical.

In *The Common Turn* (2007) Maria Lind^{lvii} examines collaborative working practices in the arts and the roots of this surge. She also interrogates some of the challenges in this way of working such as remuneration and ownership. Lind is also insightful in raising awareness of the proliferation of biennials and commissioning agents in supporting and feeding this shift in art practice. She discusses Jeremy Deller's^{lviii} re-enactment of *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) and asks how the term collaboration can be used in these forms of art practice when the responsibility very clearly lies with one party (2007:26). Such complex dilemmas resonate across other disciplines, for example Richard Heeks^{lix} paper on business management, in which he argues that:

'Outcomes of supposedly participative processes are frequently dominated by those individuals who are themselves powerful through position, knowledge etc. or who have representatives of powerful groups or who, more prosaically have the power of being publicly articulate' (Biggs and Smith 1998, cited in Heeks, 1999:3).

In *Education for socially engaged art* (2011) Herguera writes from the perspective of an artist/curator. He acknowledges that, at times 'my expertise is knowing not to be an expert' (2011:52), making it clear that on occasions it is more helpful to listen and be attentive when working with others. Holly Crawford^{lx} (2007) edited

^{lvii} Art critic.

^{lviii} Conceptual Artist.

^{lix} Professor of Development Informatics.

^{lx} Artist and critic.

volume *Artistic Bedfellows* also offers a range of perspectives in relation to SEA. It includes innovative approaches from artists' interviews, monologues and visual essays, yet the voices of craft practitioners remain absent.

Material culture, as the study of objects and their relationship for and with people, is pertinent to this research examining the creation of collaborative artefacts. Anthropologist's Schneider and Weiner's edited volume *Cloth and Human Experience* (1989) is a seminal work that situates textiles within a new analytical framework where it performs as a connector, linking humans not only to their ancestors and past but also informing their future. Igor Kopytoff^{lxi} (1986), too, demonstrates how objects can have different social biographies and how their meaning can change over time. Victor Buchli^{lxii} presents a number of different perspectives in his anthology, *The Material Culture Reader* (2002). He cites Ruth Odendzeil^{lxiii}, who highlights the masculine bias in the field in which the feminine is seen of an 'abject category', not 'mattering physically' and also 'not mattering as social worth' (1999, in Buchli 2002:12). In the same volume, Rowlands' assertion that whilst heritage is ostensibly about the past, it is also always about the future is also apposite in relation to this study, as is his call for 'newer, more active and inclusive expressions of heritage and museology' (2000, in Buchli, 2002:112). The claim that artefact collections are on the whole 'objectifications of authoritative knowledge' (Thomas 1991, cited in Buchli 2002:4) similarly is important in relation to this embroidery-focused research enquiry.

The multi-stranded methodological approach adopted in this investigation is robust and rigorous. It allows different forms of data to be collected and a balance to be achieved. A process of sieving and disregarding is also important, given the wide range of strategies employed. The enquiry similarly adheres to David Fetterman's^{lxiv} recommendation of 'a clear and easy to read writing style that no academics and readers unfamiliar with the ... study will find interesting and understandable' (1998:13). Throughout the research process, it is made clear that

^{lxi} Anthropologist.

^{lxii} Professor of Material Culture.

^{lxiii} Professor of Technology and Engineering Innovation.

^{lxiv} Professor of Anthropology.

the evidence itself may at times prove contradictory and thus the author acknowledges the uncertainty which reflects 'real world research' (Gray and Malins 2004), where mistakes are revealed for the sake of methodological transparency.

3. Case study one

Rachel Scales Autograph^{lxv} cloth

Introduction

This chapter takes a different methodological turn to the other two embroidery-based projects interrogated in the thesis. Instead of investigating current stitched-based endeavour, the study explores an embroidered signature cloth created in the 1930's. It follows Hackney's (2013) suggestion that studying craft as process necessitates the adoption of a range of methods. Not only does it expose points of tension and hidden values in historic needlework practice, it helps to foster recognition of two unchampioned areas of amateur female work, ecclesiastical embroidery and signature cloths, neither of which have been studied in any great depth. The significance of amateur making and folk art are particularly highlighted in the enquiry, given its scrutiny of a different, non-professional maker, one sublimated by the voice of a community. This is acknowledged by curator Ruth Kenny^{lxvi} (2014), who suggests that folk art can often seem to privilege group identity so that the individual maker is subdued or viewed as irrelevant. Archer and Jeffreys (2012) have also drawn attention to the oversight, acknowledging there may be many such anonymous embroidered artefacts hidden in the back of cupboards, yet to be discovered.

Intertwining practice-based research, folk art, feminist theory, social history and material culture, described by Elizabeth Cory-Pearce^{lxvii} as 'the material traces of human activity persevered therein' (in Hallam and Ingold 2007:128) signposts the breadth of the study. However, despite the historic shift, the stance remains the same, that of a maker, intimately connected with the practice of stitching. For it is through a practice-based embroidery approach that another way of understanding an object and its maker is made possible. This follows archaeologist Elizabeth

^{lxv} Although the term signature cloth is used throughout the chapter in reference to the artefact, archive documents refer to it as Mrs Scales Autograph cloth and so that is the name given to the textile.

^{lxvi} Curator and writer of Folk Art catalogue at The Tate.

^{lxvii} Anthropologist.

Wayland Barber's assertion that '...recreating...artifacts step by step can shed light on the lives and habits of the original craft workers that no amount of armchair theorizing can give' (1994:23). By employing these alternative visual and sensory methods, the study opens up different research strategies and viewpoints. As Pink suggests, testing new approaches will allow us to find '...alternative and ultimately valid ways of seeking to understand and engage with other people's worlds through sharing activities, practices and inviting new forms of expression' (2009:9). In purposefully selecting an historic signature cloth for interrogation, the knowledge accrued by the practice-based researcher in this area is harnessed and interspersed within the investigation. This embroidered textile is but one example amongst many of a genre of British hand-sewn autograph cloths that commemorate both community and individual identity.

The investigation involves four interlinked strands; 'first sight', 'distant', 'near' and 'far' which weave in and out, and alongside each other as well as a range of methods, old and new. For as Desai ^{lxviii} et al acknowledge, 'history [is] not a linear narrative of facts but a dynamic, uneven often surprising collection of memories' (2010:64). 'First sight' then, as it suggests, involves the initial happenstance discovery of the cloth. 'Distant' refers to preliminary research undertaken away from the site - prior to the in-depth survey. 'Near' and 'far' is a midway point where study is carried out both in the field and remotely as the investigation develops momentum and close work is undertaken in the field and with the object within touching distance. It follows what anthropologist George Marcus (1998) calls 'multi-sited fieldwork' and Helena Wulff describes as 'Yo-Yo fieldwork' (2002, in Okely 2012:19) where the researcher comes and goes from the site over a period of time.

Whilst it is not certain when the first signature cloths/quilts were created, their origins date back to North America to the 1840's, where there remains much higher visibility and value than in the UK. This is largely due to their place in the country's history and the fact that there are a number of quilt museums, collectors and academics. The first iterations were made and 'used to acknowledge bonds of friendship' (Angelo, 2000:87) when loved ones moved from a community and

^{lxviii} Art Historian.

joined the westward migration. These early examples which began life as a way of memorialising friendship and family, subsequently developed into fundraisers for a variety of worthy initiatives, and also gifts for esteemed members of the community. Money was raised when donors gave to the cause, in return for having their signature embroidered on to the cloth. The resulting textile was on occasion auctioned or donated as a raffle prize, another way of attracting more funds for the cause. The good causes ranged from new church buildings, the temperance movement to the Red Cross efforts in both World Wars (Hedges 1987, Brackman 1989, Angelo 2000, Johnson 2007, Reich 2012).

In Britain, whilst not as plentiful as their American counterparts, a substantial number of these hand-worked textiles have recently come to light in private and museum collections. So that despite having been overlooked for many years, knowledge and interest in signature cloths is increasing. Two recent exhibitions by the researcher, *Please Sign Here* at Touchstones Gallery in Rochdale (December 2013 - March 2014) and *Sign Here* (October - December 2014) at the Quilters' Guild Gallery in York have helped raise awareness of these embroidered social history documents in this country. Internationally, *Signature Cloths* (September 2014 - April 2015) the researcher's co-curated exhibition of historic and contemporary cloths at the International Quilt Study Center, Lincoln, Nebraska has helped to promote transatlantic dialogue on the subject.

Journal articles and several book chapters add to the increasing academic discourse on the subject. Archer and Jeffreys research, outlined earlier, is useful as it examines and raises awareness of a number of hand-stitched artefacts. The social historians demonstrate how these tactile objects created in overseas prisoner of war/internment camps in WWII by women, acted as keepers of historical knowledge. Another strand of this type of tactile documentation, which has recently come under scrutiny relates to the sewn signatures connected to the suffrage cause. For example, Ann Macbeth's banner on display in the Museum of London documents 80 sewn autographs of women hunger strikers in Holloway Prison in 1910. Daly Goggin's *Fabricating Identity*, (2009b), too, highlights a suffragette tactile commemoration featuring stitched autographs, however this artefact is discussed in more detail in relation to the second case study.

Maxine March (2012), Anne Jeater (2013) and Rachel Nichols (2013), all members of the British Quilt Study Group of the British Isles, have each explored individual signature cloths, uncovering information about their purpose and origins. Similarly, social historian Alison Slater has made known the story behind, and the makers of, an 1895 signature cloth made in Rochdale, Lancashire in *Stories of Collaborative Making* (2017). The stance, however, in each of these investigations is that of an onlooker, on the fringes of engagement. Although Jeater was key in the creation of a new signature quilt as a fundraiser for the British Quilt Study Guild in 2014-15.

First Sight (object analysis)

What, then, led to the study of this one particular tactile object given the number of hand-stitched autograph cloths brought to light in museums and private homes across Britain? In the end, serendipity and luck played their part in that the cloth in question was discovered on a family holiday, innocuously displayed in the small museum in Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire. Even on the initial, unexpected viewing, the originality and innovation in this signature cloth was plain to see. Crucially, too, given the intensity of the stitched surface, the work signposted someone who, like the researcher, loved to embroider. The investigation also then celebrates, embraces and makes known the value of serendipity. It demonstrates how, in the study, instinct and happenstance allow practice-based ideas and knowledge to unfold and take shape; a strategy supported by Okely who suggests that 'Knowledge is, at crucial stages acquired through accident' (2012:23).

The significance of the object, even on this brief encounter, positioned as it was, in amongst a mix of local artefacts, was clear. It was apparent from the colour and stitched surface of the cloth that the textile was in very good condition, despite its longevity; made in 1936, a fact sewn boldly into the fabric. A single brass drawing pin provided the means of display, fixing the object to a wall and allowing the cloth to drape and reveal the surface covered in hand-sewn autographs. (Figure 3.1.)



Figure 3.1 First-sight of the cloth displayed in Robin Hood’s Bay Museum (August 2012).

The embroidery’s provenance in Robin Hood’s Bay was another important factor in selecting this object for further study, given that the location conjured up happy family memories and associations.^{ix} In addition, the village’s idyllic setting and rich sea-faring history presented something different, offering as it did a sharp contrast to the busy, urban environments in which most of the signature cloths had been created by the researcher and various collaborators over the last five years. Today, Robin Hood’s Bay is primarily a holiday resort and tourist destination, but it was once a thriving self-contained fishing village with houses crammed together and filling a small hillside overlooking the sea.

^{ix} The cloth was found by the researcher and her brother during a holiday to Robin Hood’s Bay. She had taken him there as it was one of his favourite places. Sadly, he died in 2014, so selecting this object has very personal connections.

Distant (object analysis)

Having only a short initial viewing of the signature cloth, photographic evidence procured on this first unplanned visit proved crucial in enabling more detailed and sustained scrutiny of the embroidered object to take place. The 'Distant' examination was also useful in allowing periods of concentrated study, for in the Museum visitors would come and go causing interruptions and noise distractions at times. Likewise, when working in the Museum, time is limited due to opening hours and therefore time restraints are constantly in place. This stage of the investigation was also productive as it enabled speculation and hypotheses pertaining to the history and making of the cloth to emerge. A process of enquiry that Heather Pristash^{lxx} et al, (2009) support, acknowledging that speculation is '...a necessary and productive and component in research into material culture' (Daly Goggin 2009a:14).

Experiencing the embroidery from a distance was indeed useful in a number of ways. It allowed a focusing in, to examine the surface stitch qualities and at the same time gain a better understanding of the layout and composition of the whole cloth. This surface investigation is in line with the view of cultural theorist Victoria Kelley who acknowledges textile objects '...have very particular and not at all free-floating histories. These histories are directly inscribed upon their surfaces' (2009:219). The most immediate and obvious fact then stitched on the surface of the cloth is the striking, bold, red stitched lettering forming a square framing pattern which acknowledges the date of and reason for the cloth's creation - Robin Hood's Bay, Methodist Church, Building Fund, March 1936. (Figure 3.2.)

^{lxx} Professor of English.



Figure 3.2 Centre section of the 1936 cloth (2012).

A further visual investigation of the photographic images confirmed the quality of the workmanship with the densely stitched surface signposting a consistent stitch quality and indicating an experienced, assured maker/designer, with considerable knowledge and understanding of her chosen medium. The closely worked embroidery also suggests that one maker was responsible for the sewing. A fact supported by first-hand knowledge and experience of creating a stitched, collaborative whole cloth, i.e. a textile that is not made up of pieces or sections joined together. For example, the *Who Cares?* project (2011) which explored mental health attitudes and was devised by the researcher in conjunction with the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, acknowledged a number of the problems with this way of working and resulted in the researcher working the majority of donated

autographs, as it was not feasible to have several people working on the central area of the cloth at the same time.

Another of the many unusual features evidenced in the textile is the blue stitched ribbon motif used to create a series of border patterns and framing devices on the cloth. Where did this unusual feature derive from; was it copied from another source? A serendipitous find of a Women's Institute plate, suggests a visual connection, given that there is a strong link between the blue-ribbon motif found on the ceramic object and the sewn pattern on the 1936 signature cloth. (Figures 3.3 and 3.5.)



Figure 3.3 Found plate made for the Wortley WI - no date (2015).

This visual referencing, from the domestic and ordinary, was and is common in quilts and needlework and it demonstrates how women use resources and objects close to home. Averil Colby^{lxxi} points this out when she notes that cups, shells and feathers are seen in many British quilting patterns (1972:59). Another suggestion is that the composition of the textile was devised and drawn onto the cloth by someone else, possibly a skilled draughtsman commissioned by the embroiderer. An itinerant draughtsman or woman could be responsible; one such as Elizabeth

^{lxxi} Author known for her work on quilts.

Sanderson, who Rosemary Allan^{lxxii} suggests was a respected 'stamper' and marker of quilt tops, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, (1987:15-16) around Allanheads, a remote area of County Durham.

Following the initial visit, email discussions began to take shape with the Museum curator, Pat Staniforth. Through these distant communications it transpired, that she had selected and positioned the artefact in the museum. However, searching for information related to its provenance, all that could be found was the handwritten line in the Museum acquisition book stating that the embroidery was made by a Rachel Mills. Subsequent emails with Staniforth revealed more information but also raised more questions given that they included images of three other signature cloths made in Robin Hood's Bay in the early twentieth century. Two of the cloths, including the 1936 example, were given by John Marsland, a local Methodist researcher. One of these was made to celebrate Jermyn Cooper's fifty-five years of service as minister in Robin Hood's Bay in 1913 and the other was made for/by the local girl guides. Seeing the images, it was obvious that each of the four sewn cloths had a well-designed composition and the embroidery in each was accomplished. The 1909 signature cloth in particular, also made for a Methodist Church bazaar, shares a number of design features with the 1936 example suggesting both were fundraisers, possibly made by the same hand. (Figure 3.4.)

^{lxxii} Textile curator and author.



Figure 3.4 The two Robin Hood's Bay Methodist church fundraiser cloths (2015).

The two cloths are each made up of a white square of hemmed linen into which the embroidered names are stitched. They employ the same device of an embroidered flowing ribbon motif to frame the design and both include a pulled work border. Intriguingly the signature of R A Mills is visible on the 1909 cloth, discreetly placed in a corner next to what are likely other family members, M A Mills and I R Mills. Could this, then, be Rachel Mills, the proposed creator of the 1936 cloth?

A number of differences are also noticeable between the two signature cloths: the 1909 cloth, for example, contains only a fraction of sewn autographs seen in the later textile. Another inconsistency is in the stitch techniques; the 1909 cloth uses a satin stitch throughout, whereas the 1936 cloth employs stem, satin stitch and chain stitch across the surface of the fabric. If the same maker is responsible for both objects, these changes can be justified given that one was made twenty-years before the second. Likewise, it is not surprising that the embroiderer may

have explored different stitch techniques in the later, grander and more ambitious example.

Returning to the scrutiny of the 1936 cloth, each visual search revealed new information and in turn added to the speculation. A cursory glance acknowledged that the textile is densely covered in red hand-sewn signatures, however further sustained inspection draws attention to two autographs which are stitched in blue thread, that of Rachel A Scales and Geo Taylor. Visual research suggests that these two signatures are carefully positioned on the cloth, in knowing, discreet locations - as was the signature of R A Mills on the 1909 cloth. Indeed, looking at the two signatures of Rachel A Scales and R A Mills side by side, there is a close resemblance between the drawing of the letter 'A' in both names. Who then is Geo Taylor, the other blue stitched signature on the 1936 cloth? The blue thread and location on the cloth certainly appears a considered act. Indeed, this subtle, yet deliberate marking of significant signature/s is very much in keeping with the way the researcher would acknowledge and commemorate her contribution to such an endeavour. (Figure 3.5.)

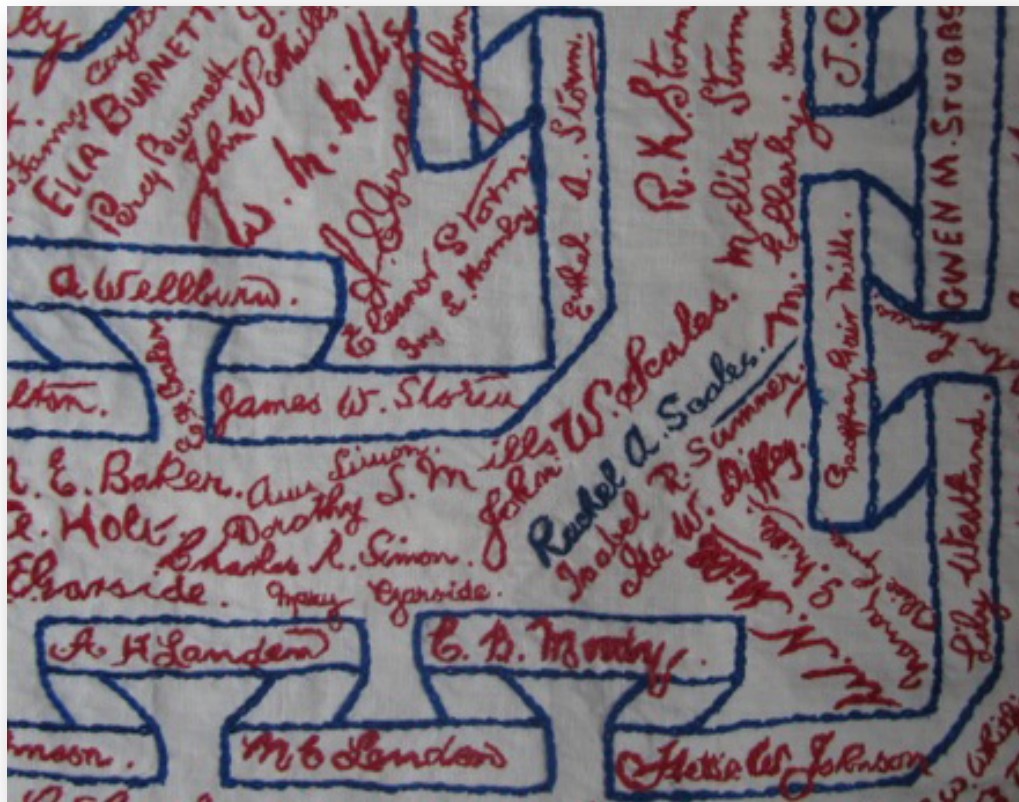


Figure 3.5 A section of the 1936 cloth featuring the autograph of Rachel A Scales (2015).

Ironically with most signature cloths, the designers, instigators and invariably female embroiderers remain invisible, their names are hidden, amongst the mass of stitched autographs. (March 2012, Jeater 2013, Slater 2013 and Nichols 2013). One of the few signature cloths attributed to men is a simple tray cloth in the British Red Cross archive in London. (Accession number – 341/92.) This poignant reminder of the human side of WWI captures in stitch a handful of signatures of soldiers recuperating in a hospital in France in 1917 and in doing so, acknowledges a fragile, brief community.

Therefore, if the blue signature of Rachel Scales does signal her as the maker of the fundraiser, it is an unusual example of the embroiderer leaving a visual clue. Why is it that women as the makers of signature cloths rarely leave their mark? Is it as Kenny points out, group dynamics (especially in folk art) can override the individual? Or could it be as Gauntlett (2011) and Knott (2015) suggest that in amateur making, the process of making is often more important than the final object and thus makers do not always see the need to attribute their work?

Near and Far (object analysis and practice-based study)

Following on from the distance study, a visit to Robin Hood's Bay in February 2015 allowed a more detailed physical examination of the cloth - only two hours due to the Museum's out-of-season opening times. It also facilitated a first face-to-face meeting with Museum curator, Staniforth. Seeing the object again, it was immediately obvious its display had been changed; instead of the cloth being draped and pinned, it was now laid flat on a table and covered with a clear acid free film. (Figure 3.6.)



Figure 3.6 The 1936 cloth in Robin Hood's Bay Museum (February 2015).

A small caption, unnoticed on the previous visit, acknowledged the sum of £210. 6 shillings and 9 pence the amount raised by the stitched fundraising initiative, the equivalent of around thirty thousand pounds today. An important fact, sewn into the corner of the cloth had been overlooked in the distance research, because this one corner of the embroidery was not included in the photographic documentation. Revisiting the cloth again in person, the vibrancy of the coloured threads was striking; similarly, being physically close allowed the surface nuances and intimate sewn details to come to life. Other visual information previously overlooked in the distance searches was the way in which several names were squeezed in at odd angles, contrary to the ordered positioning of most of the stitched names. (See Figure 3.7.) This is something which appears even more at odds with the overall compositional layout, when only inches away, a section of the blue embroidered ribbon pattern remained empty. Why did this happen? Did the designer focus on the central area of the composition, leaving the edges of the cloth empty? This pragmatic approach would seem to make sense, as it would allow new donations

to be added around the perimeters of the cloth, as and when without detracting from the central densely covered area.

Examining the cloth with Staniforth proved very useful as it encouraged more of her extensive local knowledge to come to the fore. She picked out names here and there and talked about the roles these individuals played in the Robin Hood's Bay community. She explained that Isaac Stainthorp was the Court Leet, a role involving the collecting of fines for the Lord of the Manor, whilst Matthew Cooper had been the coxswain of the Robin Hood's Bay lifeboat. Staniforth uncovered local gossip too; when seeing the name of Martha Hutton, she commented that her husband James had been the eldest of the local Squire George Farsyde's five illegitimate children. During the conversation, the Museum curator also acknowledged there was at least one person living in Bay, who would have been around in Bay (as a child) at the time the cloth was worked. Staniforth offered to contact the person to see if they were willing to talk; if so, another lengthier visit could be arranged.

Returning to Manchester the 'distant' study continued, revealing yet more visual evidence but also unearthing new conundrums. When examining closely the autographs sewn into the surface, it was evident that a number of notable signatures were interwoven with the many local names. For example, the Prime Minister at the time Stanley Baldwin was in evidence, as was a past leader, Lloyd George, and also the emerging film producer J Arthur Rank. Rank was born nearby in Hull and his first ever location filming was carried out in Robin Hood's Bay in 1936 for his feature *Turn of the Tides*.

To try and find out more about some of those autographs Slater's (2013) strategy of searching for unusual names was explored, given that these uncommon names are likely to throw up more concrete leads. Thus, the names of Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland Bt. and Arnold Rowntree were selected for further investigation (using a simple online search) to see if they revealed any useful facts. Sutherland (1867-1953) it transpired was a wealthy baronet and entrepreneur from Northumberland who had made his fortune as a shipbroker. He was a well-known philanthropist and had donated substantial amounts to good causes. Arnold S Rowntree was a member of the prominent Quaker (not Methodist) family; an MP for York who had

previously worked for the family business, Rowntree's confectioners, he too was a philanthropist, born in 1872. How did the maker acquire these signatures? Did she know these two men personally (they were all of a similar age) or did she write to a number of well-known benefactors in the hope of boosting, not only the amount raised but the profile of the initiative? Either possibility indicates an individual confident in exploiting their networking skills. Another suggestion is that given Robin Hood's Bay's popularity at this time as a holiday resort, these people were staying in the area and got to know of the project, or embroiderer, during their stay?

To occupy the central portion of the cloth, one would surmise, is a coveted position, given that the middle area affords the greatest prominence and visibility. Who, then, are the two people at the very centre of the cloth, Edward Wyman and WE Selby? Searching online records, a Whitby Gazette article of 1937, with its headline of '*Opening of New Church by Miss G Rymer*' helps locate one of these men. Indeed, the article is useful, confirming that GE Waterhouse, W Humphrey, HO Bowyer, S Brunskill Harris (all who feature in the centre of the cloth) and Edward Wyman, are local ministers officiating at the first service in the new building (1937:8).

Near (object analysis and embroidery practice)

The research continued with yo-yo fieldwork (Wulff), returning to Robin Hood's Bay for two sustained periods during the summer of 2015. These longer visits enabled yet more evidence to be accrued concerning the 1936 embroidered signature cloth. This included interviews with Bay residents, research into local records and archives (see appendix 4) and close examination of the tactile object, thanks to an extended loan of the cloth by Staniforth. The detailed first-hand inspection of the cloth was vital as it enabled the surface qualities to be interrogated, including the type of technical stitches used, the feel of the fabric and the physicality of the cloth itself. Sampling stitch techniques helped analyse the manual processes involved whereas drawing areas of the cloth allowed a better understanding of compositional arrangements. McKeating acknowledges the value of stitched-based knowledge suggesting, 'Embroiderers' experience ensures that creativity is not subservient to materials but enables a careful selection and balance between components. Sensitivity and knowledge help the work to make

sense' (2012:36). This different, embodied approach is also welcomed by Okely who observes that 'the bodily experience of the field worker has been under scrutinized' (2012:107) Similarly, Dipti Desai^{lxxiii} et al also acknowledge that 'not often considered by historians and scholars is the sensual experience of the archive' (Desai, 2010:53).

Laying the embroidery out, with good light and no time restrictions, there was a chance to fully observe, feel, measure and smell the object. The discussion of materiality resonates strongly with Barry, who advocates another phrase that occurs in conversations about cloth, its handle - a term she acknowledges is not easy to illustrate. This, Barry suggests, involves: '...the touch, feel and movement of fabric, through the fingers and against the skin; the performance of the cloth, and the stitch upon it' (2010:18). Undertaking the concentrated visual and tactile examination confirmed several facts. The fabric on which the embroidery was worked was a white linen cloth measuring 118 x 118 centimetres square, including a hand-sewn hem.

The 1920's editions of the Embroideress magazine acknowledge the popularity of this fabric at the time, with its many adverts for 'Old Bleached Linen'. Returning to the sensory investigation, the investigation suggests that the red and blue embroidery was worked in stranded cotton, a thread, still used widely today. Interestingly, there is no trace on the fabric of any permanent marks such as would be found when a pen or pencil had been used to draw the signatures. This can be seen on the Coedpoeth WWI fundraising signature cloth mentioned earlier, now in St Fagan's Museum, Wales. The level of precision and detail in the Robin Hood's Bay example would suggest that a tool of some sort has been used to draw and position the various features, possibly a fabric crayon which has since disappeared from view.

Drawing and imitating the stitched details was another strategy that helped to gain a better understanding of the cloth. These pragmatic methods concentrated thought on the arrangement of signatures and type of stitches used to sew the

^{lxxiii} Associate Professor in Art and Education.

autographs and again drew attention to the awkward positioning and squashing in of some names (Figure 3.7.)

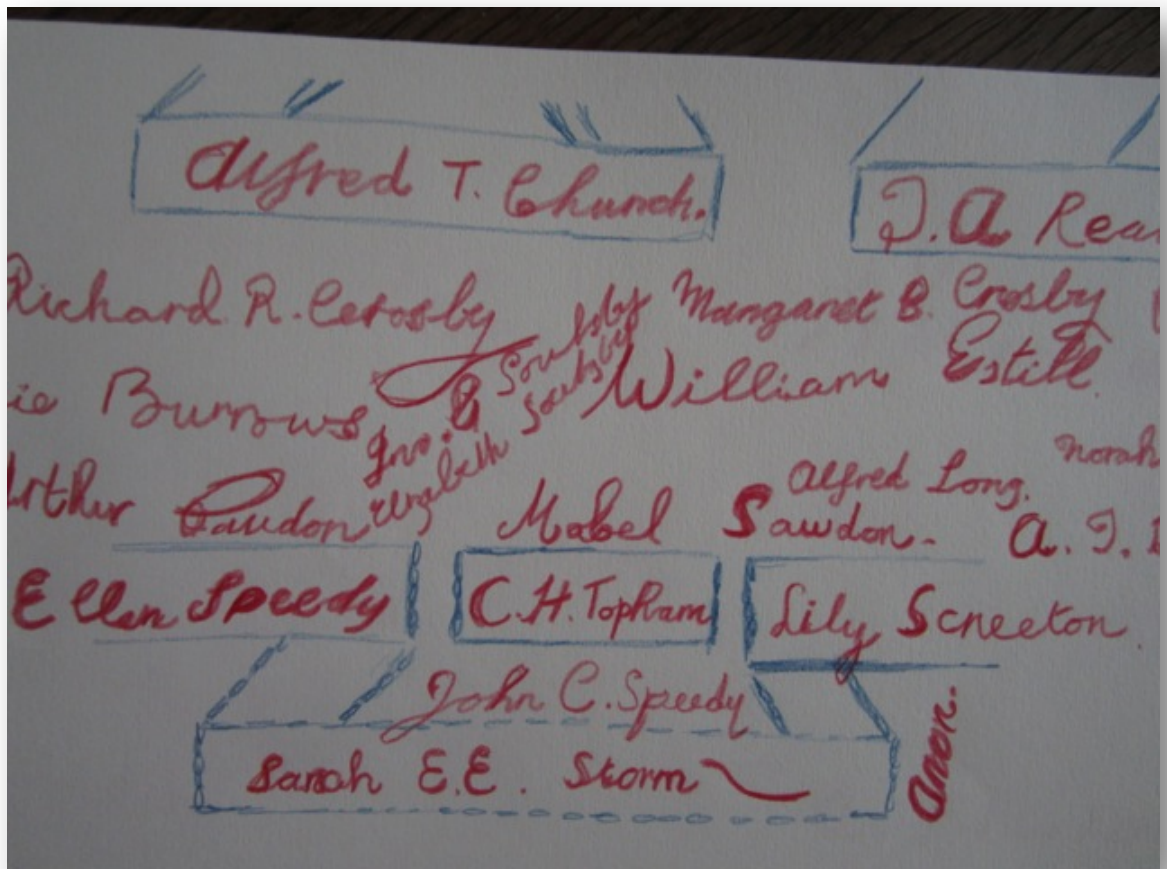


Figure 3.7 Sketchbook drawing of a section of the 1936 cloth (2015).

The close inspection also confirmed that the majority of signatures are worked in a stem stitch, a simple linear process and well suited to the flow of a signature. The signature of J Arthur Rank is also unusual in combining two stitches, shifting from a chain stitch to a stem stitch in the capital 'R' in Rank. Could this be also to do with the standing of Rank as a filmmaker and local celebrity, and something only a confident and experienced embroiderer would be likely to explore?

Whilst other British signature cloth research has attempted to document all the sewn names on the cloth (Jeater, 2013, Slater 2013) this study instead selects a few small sections for in-depth examination. Something which allows different aspects of the object (and maker) to be investigated and new information to come to the fore; for example, the arrangement of names, the style of writing and the sewing techniques, both front and back.

The choice of Rachel Scales' autograph for scrutiny was both a visual and pragmatic decision; focusing on the blue signature offers a clear visual reference point given that in the mass of names all embroidered in the same colour, finding a particular name may prove difficult. Also, as the possible creator of the embroidery, it is appropriate to explore her autograph more fully. Rachel A Scales, then, as suggested, was positioned not in the centre of the cloth but midpoint on the cloth on a diagonal, close to one of the blue-ribbon motifs. The name is between the signatures of John W Scales and Isabel R Sumner. The blue autograph and stitching is undistinguished without any flourish. (See Figure 3.5.) The signature John W Scales however is a strong flowing autograph, suggesting an educated individual. It is also worked in a neat satin stitch. Searching the surface of the cloth for more clues, in contrast, a name nearby that of Owen M. Stubbs, is drawn in block capitals and positioned within the ribbon motif on a slant. (See Figure 3.5.) Was the name written in a rush? Was Stubbs, perhaps, less well educated than some signatories or did, in fact, someone else mark this name on the cloth and use anonymous capital letters so the name could be read? Not far away, Ella Burnett's name is also drawn in block capitals, yet the letters (LRAM, which stands for Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music and MRST) after her name indicate she was a well-educated woman.

Exploring again the variety of scripts, the same scenario plays out across the cloth. This would suggest that someone else wrote these names and, looking again, there is a strong similarity in the style of the names drawn in capitals. The answer may be that these people were not in Robin Hood's Bay at the time of fundraising, or they simply gave money to the cause and someone else (Rachel Scales, perhaps) wrote their names in a simple bold manner onto the cloth.

The sampling of stitch processes was another method that proved useful in uncovering information about the artefact for example, when reproducing the stitch techniques used to create the blue ribbon-like motif. The initial reaction was, when looking in detail at the stitch technique, that the embroiderer had somehow made a mistake or lost her rhythm. However, in actually recreating the stitches on cloth, there was an awareness that this was in fact a deliberate act. All the vertical and diagonal lines in the ribbon motif were formed using a chain stitch, whilst the

horizontal lines were created using a twisted chain stitch, a subtle but noticeably different technique, once closely examined. What at first appeared to be a form of straightforward linear embroidery, on closer inspection highlighted two related processes, a chain and a twisted chain stitch.

Another section of the cloth studied closely was a corner where one of a number of anonymous signatures is to be found. (Figure 3.11.) This is an unusual feature, given that the cloth celebrates and acknowledges many local individuals and some from the wider community. In making these names known, the cloth recognises people's generosity in giving to the cause. Why, then, do some remain anonymous? Is it that a few individuals preferred to maintain their privacy? Whatever prompted the creation of these unidentifiable signatures, it seems unlikely we will ever know the true facts.

An additional reason for the close scrutiny of the corner of the cloth is that tacking stitches remain in place in this area, a thread leftover from the construction of a pulled-work border. This was a painstaking, yet common, technique employed on linen and tableware of the time as any needlework book of the time will testify. A white sewing thread is used to hem the cloth and the pulled-work border, a feature found on many domestic items of the early to mid-twentieth century. Many contemporary embroidery books illustrate pulled and drawn thread work, for example Gladys Winsor Fry's *Embroidery and Needlework*, first published in 1935 includes step-by-step instructions. The fact that embroidered tablecloths are popular at the time is also acknowledged in an article in the *Whitby Gazette* of May 8th 1936 which records the details of the monthly WI meeting in Robin Hood's Bay and recounts how Miss Leadley discussed handicraft and showed a beautifully worked tablecloth. (No author, 1936.)

Surely leaving these stitches in was an oversight by the maker, who having spent so long on the detailed embroidery, forgot to remove these simple threads. Yet, in so doing, we are poignantly reminded of, not just the surface stitching but the other complex processes involved in the object's construction and, in turn, the human hand which carried out this intricate work. (Figure 3.8.)



Figure 3.8 Detail of the 1936 cloth showing an anonymous signature, tacking stitches and the pulled-work border (2015).

Close (archival research)

The historic focus of the case study, encompassing both past knowledge and embroidery practice, necessitates a number of lines of enquiry that are not appropriate within the rest of the thesis. One strand involves the study of archival sources pertaining to Robin Hood's Bay's past, including census records, local history archives, Methodist Church accounts, trustee meeting minutes and local newspaper reports in order to help paint a picture of life in a coastal community in the early twentieth century. This strategy is useful in that it helps corroborate and clarify important facts and hypotheses about the making and maker of the cloth. The Robin Hood's Bay Methodist trustees meeting of the 11th March 1936 reports that it was resolved to purchase the old manor house to be converted into the new church. Methodist historian John Marsland also comments on the momentous event suggesting 'It was not difficult to imagine the excitement that must have run through their veins as they returned home' (1978:22).

Whilst most of the 1930's Robin Hood's Bay Methodist Church records had been relocated to the Northallerton County Records Office some years ago, some information still remains in the local church archives. Thus, as part of the fieldwork,

a detailed exploration of these written documents took place. These papers crucially included an inventory of monies raised for the new church building in 1936-7 dated 2nd June 1937. Examining these documents closely, including a list of amounts donated for the new venture, one line stood out - 'Mrs. Scales cloth £160'. This vital detail supports the hypothesis that Rachel Scales, one of the two blue signatories on the cloth was the maker of the embroidered object. The fact that the amount does not match the figure of '£210. 7. 6.' stitched into the corner of the cloth only suggests that more signatures and money may have been added in after the inventory was completed. This is something which strikes a chord with a signature cloth made in 2012 with a refugee and asylum seekers organisation Rainbow Haven, based in Abbey Hey, East Manchester. In this instance as the project neared completion and the cloth took form, several individuals realised they were not present on the cloth, thus initiating a flurry of late signatures.

A number of other local archival resources including those found in Robin Hood's Bay Museum itself helped piece together some of the facts pertaining to the life of Rachel A Scales, including confirmation that her maiden name was Mills. Some of these were local census records copied by John Marsland, a Methodist archivist and author, for use in the museum. These documents show that Rachel Ann Mills was born in 1874 in Robin Hood's Bay and was, in 1881, living with her family; mother, father (a mariner) and two siblings. Her name appears again in 1886 in local hand-written records when, aged 12, she is listed as the local May Queen. By 1901 (aged 27) she is living by her own means in Elm Grove in a house that still exists in Robin Hood's Bay, with her sister Isabel and mother Margaret, her father having died in 1897. Once again local resources proved useful in verifying facts, in that booklets in the Museum list all the names and locations of those buried in the old and new St Stephen's churchyards in Robin Hood's Bay.

The name of Rachel Mills appears again in 1921 in Robin Hood's Bay in connection with the Methodist Church when John Marsland (1978:21) notes that the list of trustees: '...is the first one to include amongst the fisherman and farmers the names of three women trustees, who were Rachel Ann Mills, Florence Hunter and Grace Granger, all single women'. Later in the same year Rachel Mills' name appears once more, when, aged 47, she marries an itinerant stonemason, John Scales. Scales appears on the 1901 and 1911 census living as a boarder in Robin

Hood's Bay and working there as a stonemason, with his home cited as Sinnington, some 20 miles away.

A visit to the Northallerton County Records Office to examine Methodist church archives, as part of the fieldwork, added further detail of the life of Rachel Scales. Two hand-written documents, one headed 'Mrs. Scales Autograph cloth', and the other a ledger detailing the fundraising amounts for the new church help fill in some of the gaps. The first document containing 23 entries beginning in April 1936 and ending in January 1939 details the amounts raised during this period. It names Mr and Mrs Merryweather and J Arthur Rank (December 1936) as giving monies and, in the case of the latter, acknowledges a figure of one guinea. The second document lists entries relating to fundraising for the new church from 1936 - 1945. Mrs Scales' autograph cloth appears several times mixed in amongst these items. Of crucial importance, in regard to this investigation, is the fact that the first entry is dated 1937 and the last 1943. The time frame suggests the cloth was constructed over seven or eight years and may help to explain the variation in embroidery prowess, in that Scales began the project in her early sixties but did not complete it until much later than originally thought, when she was 69. This also explains how the project could have been carried out by one person; collecting and sewing 1,100 signatures in one or two years is an onerous task. However, spread over seven years, whilst still a major feat, would seem more reasonable.

Other hand-written documents from the Trustees' minutes book, presumably written by Rachel Mills (1921:62) as the secretary, tell us more of her role in the community, noting that in 1921, the year of her marriage: '[T]he organist Miss R. A Mills was resigning her post... and it was unanimously resolved that a special vote of thanks be accorded to her for 26 years faithful and efficient service'.

So, not only was Rachel Mills/Scales a long-standing member of the church and a trustee, she was a vital asset to church community given her musical skills, which were used on a regular basis for over 25 years. The centrality and importance of music in past village life was underlined in a current museum display. (July 2015.) A photograph shows the annual outing of the Choral Society in 1924 and which included several churches. It also highlights the fact that over 20 rehearsals took place for the annual concert that year. So, maybe, Rachel Mills met her husband

through a musical connection. Methodist historian, John Marsland adds to this supposition when he points out that the organ in the new church was dedicated to John and Rachel Scales, suggesting a shared interest (1978:24).

The fact that John Scales' sudden death in July 1936 came too soon for Rachel is noted in the Methodist Church trustee minutes' book when 'a vote of sympathy was proposed for Mrs. Scales for her sudden bereavement. (17. 10. 1936' no page no.) Did stitching the signature cloth help Scales deal with her grief? This may be the case in that the cloth was begun three months before John Scales' death in July 1936 and work continued on it for several years after. Gauntlett suggests that taking time to make something, in particular using the hands, can offer opportunities to clarify thoughts and feelings and enable us to communicate and connect with other people more directly (2011:4). This could have echoes with Scales, in that working on the cloth following her husband's demise not only kept the widow active and involved with the village but finishing the fundraiser may have offered her a purpose and goal in life.

Close (interviews)

Malcolm McLeod's^{lxxiv} admission that 'Any fieldwork is a matter of accidents and opportunities more than any ruthless plan' (no date in Okely 2009:49) was seized upon, when the unexpected opportunity arose to interview at least one Bay resident who was living locally at the time of the signature cloth's construction. This unanticipated but useful new evidence adds to the information gathered so far and attempts to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge, mindful of Wayland Barber's assertion that 'there are plenty of facts about women's place in society but [we] women need to know how to look for them' (1994:300).

The first of the interviews took place in the home of 87-year-old Margaret Pennock who had lived in the village since the age of three and had until recently, been chair of the Robin Hood's Bay Museum. The cloth provided both a visual prompt and a memory aid and was a vital component in the interview process. Pennock began by explaining that her father had been a minister of the Congregational Church in Robin Hood's Bay and this precipitated the family move to Bay from

^{lxxiv} Social anthropologist.

West Yorkshire in the 1930's (Pennock, 2015). Examining the cloth, she quickly found her father's signature within the central square. (Figure 3.9.)



Figure 3.9 Pennock (centre) with Staniforth (left), searching the embroidery for her father's sewn signature (June 2015).

However, Pennock was not able to shed any light on the maker of the embroidery, and the name Rachel Scales or Mills meant nothing to her. Nevertheless, holding the textile and seeing the sewn autographs, she shared some of her local knowledge. She recalled people from the village, their occupations and familial connections. One such individual was spinster Sarah Elizabeth Esther Jane Skerry Harrison Storm, a contemporary of Scales, born in 1875. Pennock pointed out that she was well known as a seamstress and also as a maker of textile items for the annual church bazaars, something she acknowledged Harrison would have plenty of time for as she never married (Pennock, 2015).

Whilst useful in eliciting new information about life in Bay this first interview did not add significantly to the story of the cloth's making or its maker. However, a short article in the June issue of *Bayfair*, a small local magazine (that is read by many in the district), helped raise awareness of the project and also facilitated a new lead.

This came in the form of a telephone call from a woman who, whilst no longer living in Bay, still subscribed to the journal and had read the article. She recalled lucidly the fundraising project and remembered going (as a six-year-old child) to sign the cloth at the Methodist Church fête. Again, however, she was not able to put a name or face to the maker of the embroidery. Searching the cloth for her maiden name of Thompson as we spoke, a signature was quickly found positioned in amongst other family members who she acknowledged were her mother, father and two brothers. She went on to describe how her childhood home of North Ings backed onto the Manor House, the building that was to become the new Methodist Church in 1937. She also named other people who may know something of the cloth's history, including an old friend in Robin Hood's Bay, who she suggested contacting (Clarke, 2015).

A visit to the weekly Methodist coffee morning at the church offered another strand in the social gathering of knowledge and follows the example of Pink who suggests: 'Scholars interested in the senses seem generally agreed that the transmission of knowledge should be seen as a social, participatory and embodied process' (2009:34). This small event was helpful in enabling a sensory understanding of the building that had sparked the creation of the embroidered object, absorbing its atmosphere, smell and material properties. It also allowed the reason for the fundraising activity to be examined at close quarters. (Figure 3.10.)



Figure 3.10 The new Methodist church in Robin Hood's Bay, the former Manor House (February 2015).

The visit also uncovered a further living connection with the 1936 cloth, a man named Jim Hibbert. Conversations at the coffee morning highlighted that Hibbert's mother had been prominent in the Methodist Church at the time of fundraising. It was therefore suggested that he may remember the fundraising activity. Once again, with the cloth in hand, a visit was arranged. At 90 years of age he was still alert and was very happy to discuss the cloth. After just a few minutes examining the surface of the embroidery Hibbert was astonished to discover his name stitched alongside that of his mother, father and brother. He suggested that his mother may have drawn his name as he did not recognize the hand writing as his own and also pointed out that he was only a young boy at the time. He, like Pennock, had no recollection of the cloth or its maker (Hibbert, 2015). (Figure 3.11.)



Figure 3.11 Examining the cloth for names (June 2015).

Despite this, seeing and handling the cloth brought memories back and reminded Hibbert of growing up in Bay. He recounted going to school in the village and having ‘a childhood you could only dream of’. He picked out several names on the cloth and their occupations in the village and also suggested a visit to a couple of people now living in the care home in Bay (Hibbert, 2015). One of those he suggested, although not involved in the Methodist church, was nevertheless able to conjure up memories of the life of Robin Hood’s Bay on examining the cloth^{lxxv}. Seeing the name of Merryweather she recalled that this person was a stationmaster in the village and mentioned how she had seen the last train in Robin Hood’s Bay in the 1960’s before the line closed for good. The cloth also brought to mind recollections of the annual village bazaar, an event for which people made clothes and handmade crafts. The name Sarah Storm was also mentioned in connection with her dressmaking and crochet skills.

^{lxxv} This person died in early 2018, so although she signed the anonymous consent form, it was not possible to gain her permission to use her name in the thesis.

Two other interviews during the fieldwork, with older residents in Bay, helped to fill in the gaps. Val Mennell, the first, was interviewed in her home with, once again, the cloth in touching distance. Mennell immediately expressed pleasure at seeing the embroidery again and recalled how she was required, as a child, to find her paternal grandmother's signature, Annie Harrison, on the textile. In common with the others questioned, she remembered nothing of the construction or maker of the cloth. However, searching for her grandmother's autograph she was, after a while, able to place her finger on it. This delight turned to astonishment when she also discovered her own maiden name sewn alongside it. The signature was easy to pick out as it was squeezed in at an angle amongst the rest of the family names. Mennell confided that she was born in 1938 and wondered if her name had been added in later amongst her relatives who had already signed the cloth, which would necessitate the awkward positioning (Mennell, 2015). (Figure 3.12.)



Figure 3.12 Detail of the 1936 cloth showing Valerie Harrison's name stitched in between other family members (July 2015).

This finding relates to the earlier observation in which the signatures of Joan Herbert and Geoffrey and Bronwyn Gaunt are also squashed in between other family names. (Figure 3.6.) Were they too new family members added in later amongst other relatives already sewn into the cloth? In the interview Mennell also picked out the stitched name of Frank Newton, who she remembered well as a child and who she described as “a dapper little man”. She recalled him particularly because he had his coffin made at her family’s joinery/building yard. She laughed, recalling how he would come and stand in the upright coffin, trying it out for size (Mennell, 2015).

Avery Nelson was the final interviewee and another long-term Bay resident. Once again with the embroidery in front of her as a memory aid, she searched for stitched clues. The first find was her Methodist grandparents’ signatures worked into the cloth. Seeing and feeling the intensely stitched surface, she too recalled aspects of village life including the church bazaars. She recounted details of the hand-crafted items which were made for sale including pillowslips, bed jackets and tray cloths. Noticing the name of Ella Burnett in block capitals, Nelson commented that Ella had been her childhood piano teacher. She also acknowledged that she was a very modest person who would not have put initials after her name, even though they were sewn onto the cloth. This suggests that someone else wrote Ella Burnett’s name for her. Nelson, like Pennock, mentioned the name Eleanor Storm, prompted by her signature on the cloth. However, also in common with the earlier interviewees, she had no memory of the making or maker of the signature cloth (Nelson, 2015). Eleanor Tennent (nee Storm) aged ninety-eight was approached as part of the study but she did not have any new information to offer on its maker or making; although she concurred that the Eleanor Storm signature was her own.

Hidden values and points of tension

In deploying a female-focused approach to the study of tactile material culture a different perspective is made known. This resonates with the findings of Daly Goggin’s who suggests:

‘In turning our attention to the various kinds of artefacts women have made used and collected, scholars in material culture have carved a space for

rethinking what counts as epistemic evidence and who counts in our investigations' (2009a:32).

One of the most important hidden values that has emerged in this embroidery-focused enquiry is the rediscovery of Rachel Scales and her role in her community. In exposing her as the maker and instigator of the 1936 signature cloth, the life of an individual, central to this village for many years, has been reassessed. Similarly, a past way of life and detailed aspects of the close-knit coastal community are revealed. Desai et al support the inclusion of these alternative strategies suggesting that 'by challenging the rules of historical narrative, some people and events are allowed to come out of the shadows'. (2010:78) For without heirs to pass on her stories, Scales has been all but forgotten in recent cultural memory. Geo Taylor the other blue signature on the 1936 cloth is however acknowledged in several local publications. For example, *Focus on Fylingthorpe* (no date) states that Captain George Taylor was a past master mariner who in 1935, became the landlord of the Victoria Hotel, a position he held until the 1950's.

So, not only has the enquiry ascertained that Rachel Scales was an experienced and accomplished embroiderer, it provides proof she was also intimately involved in many aspects of village life including the Methodist Church over several decades. For example, she played the church organ for over 25 years and she was one of the first women trustees in the Methodist church and her stitched efforts helped raise a substantial amount for the new place of worship. Thus, whilst the only hard evidence of Rachel Scales is her gravestone, her mark on the community remains in the soft, embroidered commemoration. (Figure 3.14.)



Figure 3.13 The Grave of John and Rachel Scales in St Stephen's churchyard Robin Hood's Bay (June 2015).

In fact, revisiting Scales headstone in 2018 with more time for reflection, led to the discovery of several graves of those sewn into the cloth including Florance (sic) Hunter, a church warden with Scales and Ella (Isabella) Burnett, the local piano teacher.

Hand embroidery's role as a means of alternative discourse is another benefit brought to light in the chapter, in that new knowledge was uncovered through the discussions with a small number of older people in Robin Hood's Bay. Many of these stories of growing up in the small community may not have been told before, had it not been for this stitch-driven enquiry. At the same time, the rewards of using tangible objects as memory aids are made clear. Each of the conversations initiated by the stitched artefact were not only a privilege, they were timely, given that the interviewees, all in their eighties and nineties, may not have many opportunities to share such narratives again. Seeing, touching and holding the cloth brought back many memories of growing up in Robin Hood's Bay for each of

the seven people interviewed; important stories pertaining to individuals, social life, school and work all came to the fore with this embroidery close at hand.

An unexpected benefit of the study emerged visually, in the creation of a cloth made in Manchester, during the fieldwork in Robin Hood's Bay in June 2015. The impact of seeing and experiencing the embroideries made in the early 1900's is made clear in this tactile artwork which re-appropriates an old tablecloth for an event at a local food festival. (Figure 3.14.)



Figure 3.14 *Levenshulme Rocks* - an embroidered tablecloth made for a local food festival (July 2015).

Another rich reward of this investigation is the way it elucidates a different view of history, through the eyes and hand of a female central to a small coastal community. Rachel Scales, in creating this stitched fundraiser records the lives of those around her and offers a tactile archive of village life before and during WWII. Desai et al (2010) acknowledge the benefits of alternative epistemologies,

highlighting the fact that historians rarely highlight the emotional or embodied qualities in historic storytelling. They go further, arguing that contemporary artists can bring something different to the historic record in their ability to seek out ‘...unique perspectives and previously unheard voices often in the form of unrecognized individuals and communities’ (2010:50).

Other unexpected hidden values that emerged during the course of the investigation is an appreciation of the importance of local history societies and small regional museums. Within the study this includes the large number of local volunteers who help fund, run and maintain these institutions. Something which is in sharp contrast to the monetary benefits offered to the major metropolitan museums, especially in London, where funding and sponsorship deals are plentiful, an issue Hewison draws attention to. He highlights the crisis in regional funding in the new millennium, when the Government-appointed task force acknowledged that regional museums are culturally rich but suffered financial impoverishment (2014:104). The running of Robin Hood’s Bay Museum, and potentially many more such institutions, is made possible by numerous volunteers, who play a vital (but precarious) role in maintaining local history and also a sense of place.

Related to the above, one of the tensions which is illuminated in the study is how to care for and preserve the delicate sewn object for future generations. The poor funding in such small institutions is a problem, as with many local museums, and there is the reality that most (volunteer) staff do not have specialist textile or conservation skills. The researcher having created the situation in raising the profile of this object has the conundrum of whether to move on to new research agendas or try and help in some way. However, the textile focused conversations and the subsequent repositioning of the 1936 cloth, including a protective transparent cover, suggests that the curators understand and appreciate the value and significance of this stitched object.

The Methodist Church’s important role in one small community is additional knowledge brought to light in the research. The wide range of activities for and by the local residents is made known in this embroidery-focused study, from musical and choral events to parades and bazaars, each of which drew people together on

a regular basis. Several of the interviewees also pointed out the proliferation of sewing and dressmaking in the pre-war life of Robin Hood's Bay, some of which was produced for the church bazaars. One of those interviewed acknowledged how all the girls learnt to sew, whilst her husband talked of the handicraft skills he acquired in school including woodworking. The overlooking of Rachel Scales' fundraising endeavour may be in part due to the fact that sewing was such a commonplace activity, in which many women took part. In sharp contrast to the above, the dwindling numbers attending the Methodist Church in Robin Hood's Bay today acknowledges another point of tension in the study. A fact that is common not only in the Methodist Church but other religious denominations where congregations dwindle, and buildings become obsolete. Visiting the weekly coffee morning and witnessing first-hand the tiny group in attendance demonstrates the gradual decline of this once vital community asset and highlights the redundant space occupied by the church.

A more informed and rounded picture of life in Robin Hood's Bay today, beyond its role as a tourist destination, is another benefit to emerge from this embroidery-based study. The investigation has revealed a thriving, although smaller, permanent community, which continues to underpin the transitory visitor population. For instance, the Museum's volunteers are made up of local residents but also includes people with second homes in the village who all work on a regular basis to help keep the Museum open. Something which is reinforced during this study given the opportunity to visit people in their own homes and experience another, ordinary, side of village life.

Reverberating throughout this chapter and indeed the thesis is the tension surrounding the undervaluing of stitched-based records as sources of information. This signature cloth, however time consuming, skilled and accomplished, does not appear to have been fully appreciated at the time of its construction; there is no mention in newspapers of the day and it is only recalled in church accounts in relation to the money raised. In line with feminist analysis of material culture, the study acknowledges the dominant masculine bias that continues to privilege male production rather than objects of female use and consumption. A fact reinforced by

Mary Beth Stalp^{lxxvi} who admits that, ‘...missing in much culture research is the recognition of women as legitimate cultural producers, and an understanding of the non-economic meaning-making process of the production of culture’ (2007:20). Social anthropologist Alfred Gell acknowledges this gender bias in the arts, stating that in anthropology too much attention is paid to context of art production dominated by men, adding that most decorative arts worldwide are produced by women (1998:73). This factor may still account for the continuing undervaluing of textile discourse as practised and advocated by women.

Hall, too, argues that ‘like personal memory, cultural memory is highly selective’ both highlighting and silencing and ‘eliding those episodes that might form the opportunity for alternative narratives’ (2001 cited in Rowlands 2002: 108). This study, through its analysis of an embroidered signature cloth, exposes one such alternative narrative and sheds light on the life of a woman at the centre to the Robin Hood’s Bay Methodist community in the early 20th century. In so doing, the investigation also presents hidden value by drawing attention to the wide number of anonymous female makers of ecclesiastical embroidery and signature cloths who are rarely acknowledged in or for their stitched endeavours.

Adding to the tension surrounding the lack of significance attached to stitched objects is the fact that some of the women makers themselves do not place a high value on these tactile artefacts. This is highlighted by Linda Connell in *Textile Treasure of the WI* when she points out that individual Institutes, when asked to carry out an audit of the textiles they held, frequently said they held no textile objects. It was only when prompted again about table covers, groups responded ‘Oh yes we have one of those’ (2007:39). Connell goes on to acknowledge, sadly, that one of the main findings of their study was how many textile-based objects had been lost overall from the Women’s Institute history. Archer and Jeffrey similarly point out women’s dismissive attitudes to their own sewn history, in their research into the overlooked embroideries made in internment camps in the Far East in WWII. They comment on how, even with these powerful (embroidered) artefacts, constructed during the event, the women internees ‘appear to have prioritised their memoirs and diaries over them.’ (2012:259) Parker also laments

^{lxxvi} Sociologist and quilt maker.

that 'women's work' is not given the time it deserves arguing: 'Sadly... prejudices undermine the potential that exists within this artistic genre and denies these embroidered records their deserved place as important primary historical documents' (1984:259).

Something else that can be viewed as an obstacle in this embroidery-focused study is the uncertainty that arises when employing these new and innovative methods of enquiry. This particular object was chosen for study on personal, emotional and visual grounds. However, this intuitive approach is speculative and there was no way of assessing at the start of the enquiry how much information would emerge. This in turn leads to the conundrum as to when to end the quest for new data, highlighted in this study in deciding who and how many of the older residents to interview regarding the story of the cloth.

Related to the above, another fact that could be interpreted as a tension in this study is the understanding that some of the knowledge accrued, despite the depth of enquiry, remains speculative. We will probably never know if Rachel Scales alone sewed and designed the 1936 cloth or whether she also instigated and made the other embroidered Methodist fundraiser in 1909. It is also acknowledged that the unexpected discovery of a number of other local signature cloths during this investigation is extremely positive, adding yet more hidden benefits to this study. Interestingly, one of the earliest examples of signature cloths so far discovered in Britain was found during this investigation in Pickering, North Yorkshire, some twenty miles across the moors from Robin Hood's Bay.

Could Rachel Scales have seen or known about the earlier cloth? Information did, at this time, change hands in a number of ways including via the ministers travelling on the Methodist circuit (Jeater 2013). There was also local gossip, hand-written letters and journals for women, each of which transmitted information and provided welcome knowledge. Dora De Blaquiere's article '*Autographs and Their Uses*' in *The Girls Own Annual* of 1897 sits within this time frame and would appear to support this suggestion. The author describes signature quilts made as fundraisers and suggests several ideas for creating new work. She also discusses how autographs can be used as a decoration and observes the range of objects they can be applied to, from furniture to quilts and tablecloths, commenting 'The

autograph tablecloth has been with us for three or four years, and is, I think rather a clever idea' (1897:501).

The final hidden value in this study is the dissemination of the findings of the enquiry within the Robin Hood's Bay community, addressing what Laurel Richardson^{lxxvii} refers to as the 'demotic constituencies and not a congregation of scholars' (2005, cited in Brewster 2009:127). This took place in a number of ways, firstly in a talk to the local history group in June 2016 and then to the older residents who were interviewed as part of the research process. This was followed by an embroidery workshop with pupils in the local primary school, to ensure that a new generation learns through doing, and knows of Rachel Scales' embroidered legacy. For, as Windsor Fry suggests, 'Stitches are a means to an end in needlework, not an end in themselves. They are the words of our needle language, without them we cannot speak' (1935:3).

^{lxxvii} Professor of Sociology.

4. Case study two

Threads of Identity

Introduction

This chapter examines a cross-cultural, pedagogic and intergenerational project, *Threads of Identity* to add further evidence pertaining to the hidden values and points of tension in shared embroidery practice. It builds on *Culler Blanket*, a transatlantic stitch-based signature project with children, most from refugee families, in Lincoln Nebraska USA 2014-15. The signature (cloth) with its ability to shape shift and engage across generations, gender and ethnicity remains at the heart of the investigation. For, as Hensher argues, handwriting is something that ‘registers our individuality and the mark our culture has made on us’ (2012:15).

Key to the enquiry were 15 boys in year eight at Burnage Academy for Boys, a school where the majority of pupils are of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage, the head of art in the school and the craft researcher. Involved but on the periphery were a PGCE student, a film maker, three textile students and two members of staff from the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Educational Trust, (AIUET). This is the smaller, sister organisation of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relation Archive, (<http://www.racearchive.manchester.ac.uk>) both based in Manchester Central Library. Interweaving the views of those active in this investigation is a crucial element in this enquiry as it allows different and sometimes overlooked voices to be heard; for as Bishop argues the artists and participants may be the only ones who can witness the ‘full unfolding’ (2012: 6). It also supports Buscek’s claim that craft practice ‘offers a way of communicating beyond an elite community’ (2012: 5) and can be a powerful force for good. In addition, by paying close attention to the views of the embroidery researcher embedded in the investigation ‘the literature on craft [becomes more] wide ranging’ (Harper, 2012:147).

Drawing attention to the pedagogic value of craft-based learning is also valuable in this chapter, given that creative subjects are given less time and space in the curriculum. Indeed, the Cultural Learning Alliance suggests ‘there is fear that many

schools especially in the state sector have begun to marginalise arts subjects as they are not counted as indicators' (cited in Harper 2013: 238).

Context

Threads of Identity was the final of three projects in 2016 to raise awareness of the 13th anniversary of the death of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah, a young boy killed in a racially motivated crime in Manchester. A traumatic event that the local authorities at the time were heavily criticised for, given their handling of the murder. The first initiative, *The Legacy of Ahmed*, a year-long project focused on oral histories. It explored the short life and legacy of Ullah, seeking out information and stories from those that knew him and examining the impact of his death. The second, *Kotha and Kantha* took place in the summer of 2016 and was initiated to forge links with a group of Bangladeshi women recently arrived in South Manchester. The catalyst for the Burnage Boys project was a discussion between Julie Devonald, AIUET's manager, and the researcher during *Kotha and Kantha*, given her involvement in this stitched-based partnership. A successful funding bid to HEFCE's National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) enabled the ideas with the school to develop and take form.

The wider potential of craft and some of the 'political and cultural ramifications this brings' (Ravetz 2013:1) are explored in *Threads of Identity* given its focus, an inner-city state school for boys from (largely) under privileged backgrounds. The project focused on an exploration of new and different forms of visual expression with pupils in Burnage Academy, the school attended by Ullah. It also sought to produce a collaborative, lasting, tactile artefact and was delivered through a series of creative workshops in the autumn of 2016. Key to the undertaking was young male identity and breaking down stereotypes about embroidery. Following the advice of the (male) Widening Participation Officer who knew the boys and school well, the idea of the signature as a marker of young identity was agreed as something pertinent to the group involved.

Instead of detailing each individual session, an overview of the three-month long partnership helps to highlight the ebb and flow of the project. This strategy also elucidates the benefits of not having too much fixity (Kester 2004 and Golding 2012) in the project, acknowledging some of the shifts and changes that took

place as the weeks progressed. This approach also allows different skill and levels of involvement to be accommodated once the initiative is underway; something that is especially important when craft or skill-based activities are involved, given their scope, range and time-consuming nature.

The first workshop shared information pertaining to signature cloths using tangible examples, new and old, and outlined the project's aims and objectives. The idea of the hand worked signature as a form of personal and group identity was discussed with the group and also the collection, by the boys of ten signatures of people significant in their lives. Sketch books for each participant allowed them to foster creative learning and collate personal responses. Session two, led by the Widening Participation Officer, developed these ideas further and involved a discussion-based activity with a focus on personal identity. He encouraged the group to talk, reflect and write about who was important in their lives and, in turn, whose signatures they were collecting and why. Visual and haptic approaches were then reinforced and developed in the proceeding weeks. This explored testing out new mark-making strategies and was enhanced through the creation of drawn signatures, large and small, using thread, felt pen and braid. Some of these linear images were selected to be enlarged to an even bigger scale in a form of thread-based performative workshop, using the floor and several less confined spaces in the corridors of the school, which fostered a small team to work in unison and interact with other groups working nearby. (Figure 4.1.)

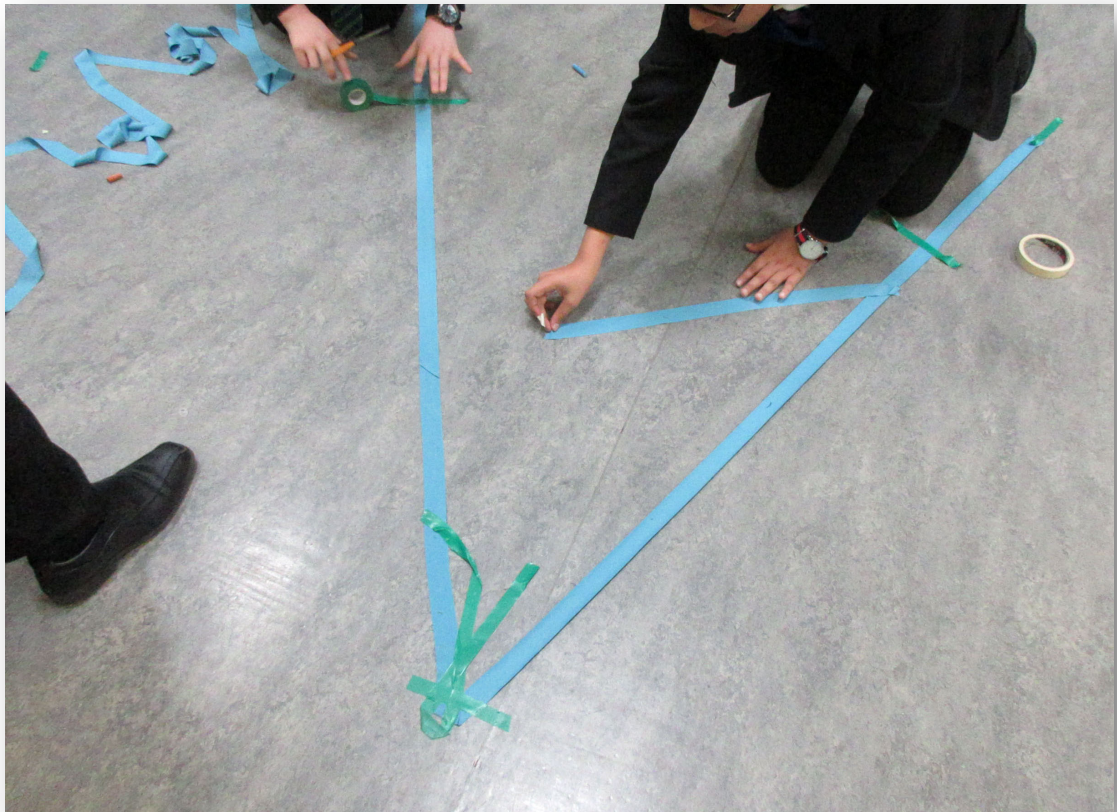


Figure 4.1 The boys drawing with tape (September 2016).

As the signatures grew in scale the boys were able to look at the work in a number of ways, including viewing from the upper levels of the school, to offer different perspectives on the line drawings. It was also important in allowing other students and staff access to the creative work when moving around the school during lesson breaks.

Sewing by hand was introduced into the classroom in week four and continued throughout the remaining sessions with an adult allocated to each of the three classroom tables to help with practical learning. White cotton handkerchiefs were used as a ground for each boy to test and hone their stitch-based skills. Basic processes such as threading a needle and tying a knot were re-enacted each and every week with the hope that the participants would eventually be able to work independently.

The time and effort needed in these sessions to teach, and learn, new skills were aided by additional help from volunteers alongside the researcher and teacher.

The slow and time-consuming nature of any form of hands-on, skill-based work is not to be underestimated, given the lack of credit and attention paid to it in education today. The paucity of sensory engagement is something highlighted by Pallasmaa^{lxxviii} who talks of ‘the regrettable loss of the touch of the human hand in our mechanically mass-produced products and environments’ (2009:51).

During the creative workshops, a series of short interventions helped to breakdown the routine of the stitch sessions and connected the project to related information of a different kind. For example, popular culture was brought to the fore in a discussion of famous people, their signatures and the types of products they endorsed. A different tactile focus was also generated in a handling session to highlight an awareness of the feel and touch of different types of cloth. These, sometimes serendipitous interventions, allowed the tacit knowledge of the embroiderer to come to the fore, something that Catherine Kano Kikoski and John Kikoski^{lxxix} acknowledge can open up new paths to creativity (2004: 87).

The plain cotton handkerchiefs used as the ground for the embroidery were a conscious choice given the researcher’s interest in the ordinary and vernacular. This artefact proved to be a unifier which democratised and unitised the stitched-based work, an important element in this joint approach, given that a final collaborative cloth was the goal. The inclusion of this everyday textile was also a conduit which enabled knowledge of its history to be interwoven into the project. For example, featured in the British Museum’s *Teaching in 100 Objects* (www.teachinghistory.org) is the *Peterloo handkerchief* (in the collection of the People’s History Museum, Manchester). This textile is one of the many items mass-manufactured months after the Peterloo massacre (1819) to raise awareness of this landmark political event which took place in Manchester. Many handkerchiefs containing printed messages were used as propaganda in historical events including WW1. In contrast, the singular significance of a suffrage handkerchief, embroidered in Holloway prison in 1912 by Janie Terrero, is examined by Daly Goggin. The author describes how this tactile object, covered in the sewn autographs of women hunger strikers, serves as a form of political

^{lxxviii} Architect.

^{lxxix} Political scientists.

protest. She also highlights how this soft, domestic item can be interpreted as an art object and important historical record of suffragette prison experience (2009b: 34).

As the project found its rhythm, the design and composition of the shared textile came into sharp focus. The design eventually agreed upon by the group not only gave each contributor autonomy and individual control, it also enabled a cohesive artwork to emerge. This idea proposed by the researcher involved her stitching the outline of a number of letters using the cornely machine onto 15 individual handkerchiefs. The cornely provides a chain or moss stitch and several are housed in the Manchester School of Art. More information on its properties can be found in Beryl Johnson's 1983 book *Advanced Embroidery Techniques*. These letters would come together to make up the words, Burnage Academy. This solution would not only give each boy a framework in which to compose their ten signatures, the letters could also be joined together, to create a communal banner. Because the words only amount to 14 letters and there were 15 participants, one boy was given the number four as his framework for signatures. An additional handkerchief was also included with the word 'boys' sewn into it, this final square contained the signatures of those important individuals involved behind the scenes on the project. (Figures 4.2 and 4.3.)

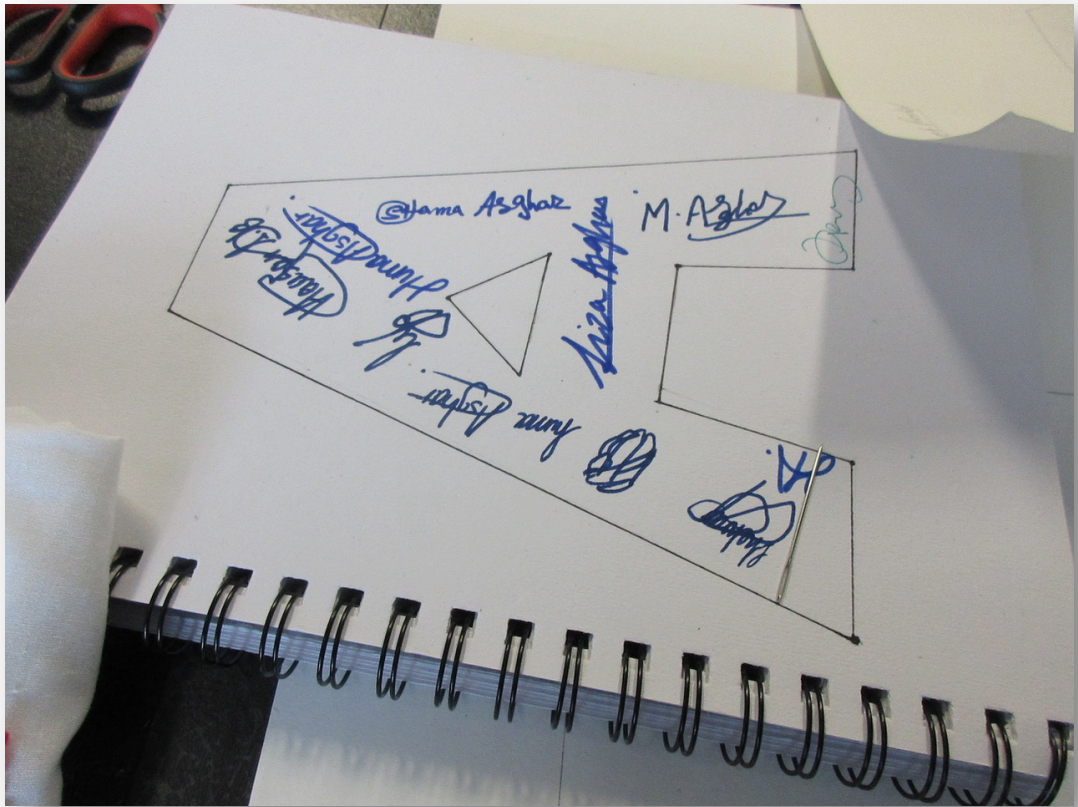


Figure 4.2 Composing signatures inside a letter A (November 2016).

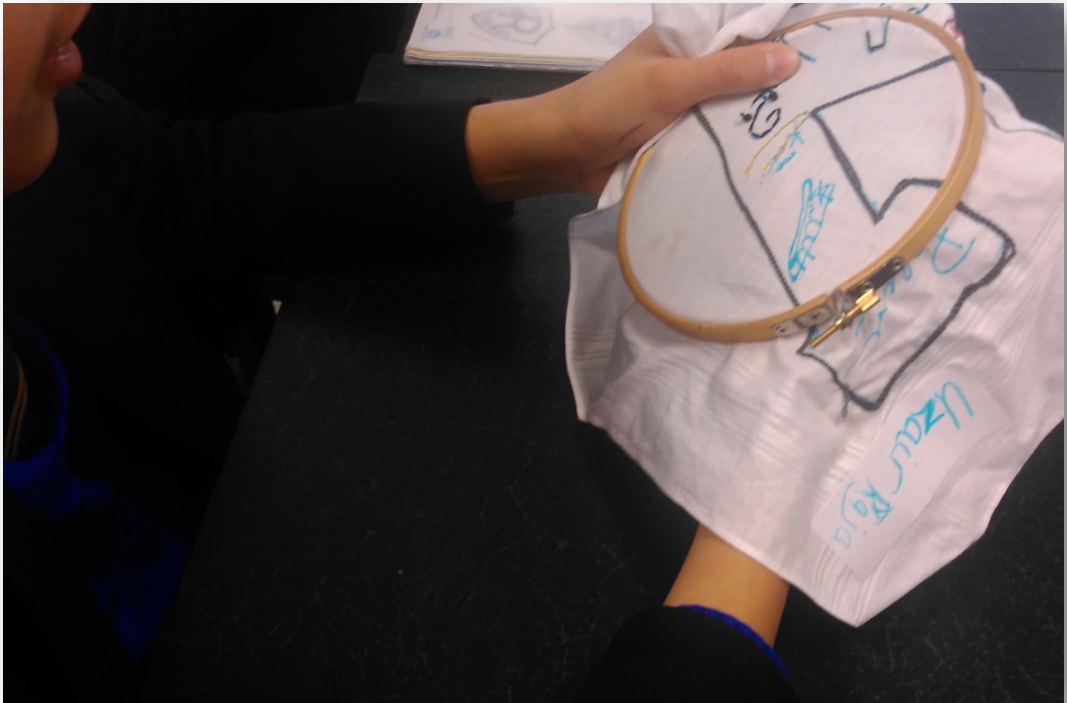


Figure 4.3 Stitch work in progress (November 2016).

This stage also involved testing out ideas for the layout of the final composition to allow visual strategies to be shared such as colour combinations and arrangement of the letters. (Figure 4.4.)



Figure 4.4 Composing the design (November 2016).

Ultimately the final configuration was determined by the location of the banner's display in the main entrance of the school, and followed a traditional format, involving a simple rectangle shape. This resonates with an earlier project devised and led by the research practitioner. In *Stitching Up Oxford Road*, (2007) a collaborative large-scale banner was created from recycled carrier bags. Like *Threads of Identity* this was composed of square units, so that different formations and arrangements could be tried and tested. However, in both cases the wall space allocated for displaying the work, together with the practicalities of protecting and making accessible the collaborative work, dictated their final compositions. (Figure 4.5.)



Figure 4.5 *Stitching Up Oxford Road* in progress (2007).

Once the format for *Threads of Identity* was decided, the method of joining all the stitched units needed to be resolved. A lightweight outcome was favoured by the researcher, in order to retain some of the delicacy and feel of the fine cotton handkerchiefs. This led to more experimentation, testing appropriate and fitting ways of joining the cotton squares. In the end, an insertion stitch on the faggoting machine proved the most practical and suitable strategy. (Figure 4.6.)



Figure 4.6 Sewing the handkerchiefs together on the faggoting machine (December 2016).

This method was also beneficial as it enabled the piecing together to be achieved in a relatively short time given that, as is often the case with shared endeavour, some leave final completion close to the deadline. The final activity bore with it a weight of responsibility for the researcher, as any mistakes at this stage could lead to delays in the completion of the work. Nevertheless, despite this pressure, this was an immensely valuable and insightful task. Not only did it allow time for reflection through the act of joining the squares, the close inspection of each embroidered handkerchief reconnected the researcher back to the different personalities stitched therein.

Hidden values

The hidden values uncovered in the investigation are again far-ranging and diverse, highlighting how the embroidered object was created is but one facet of

dispersed creativity (Leach 2004, cited in Ravetz 2013: 233). The trial and error method employed highlights its value as a shared working strategy, one that allows shifts and changes to be accommodated. Such an approach can, on occasions, evoke tensions and feelings of uncertainty for as Lacy argues, 'artists take such huge risks becoming associated with a process that might not end up as a beautiful object' (1995:44-5). Connected to which is the common requirement and sometimes burden of commissioners or/and partner organisations to create a finished object. Belcher in *Stitching a Social Fabric* discusses these challenges, acknowledging that the freedom to explore the boundaries of design, as well as allowing participants the space to make their mark, is crucial to the success of any community project (2012: 63).

Dialogical exchange, as in the study set in Robin Hood's Bay, permeates *Threads of Identity*. The focus of the conversations was, however, very different in this second initiative, given that the project involved 15 young men on the cusp of adolescence, most of whom were of Asian descent. Cross-cultural, intergenerational and gender-based debate were dominant within the classroom, whereas the discussions at the final celebration event involving each of the different parties invested in the project were wide-ranging. For example, families new to the work came to see and share in their sons' achievements, but, in attending, also witnessed and validated this unusual initiative. There was also the discourse between other teachers, pupils, and support staff which opened up new ways of experiencing and thinking about textiles. For example, for those in and around school, not involved in the project, who encountered the boys in this act of performative drawing, in the main school corridor. (Figure 4.7.)



Figure 4.7 Thread work in the school corridor (September 2016).

The discussions during the workshops themselves were diverse and stretched from 'sideways talking' (Joan Mc Fadden^{lxxx}, 2017) with the boys, to global, political debates. For example, the workshop in early November coincided with the day of the US presidential election and therefore classroom talk included the merits (or otherwise) of the two candidates. Talk in the workshops leading up to Christmas touched upon holiday activities, such as going to the mosque and visiting family and initiated an understanding of some cultural differences as well as similarities. The art teacher also commented on the value in these sessions in facilitating group work, a new concept for the boys, and also in encouraging an exploration of space, scale and different surfaces.

The creative exchange between two of the key partners, the researcher and art teacher were another of the hidden values to emerge in this project. The sustained dialogue allowed the teacher's deep understanding of the pupils and also the

^{lxxx} Newspaper journalist.

curriculum to be shared with the practitioner, which in turn, enabled the researcher to reinforce the arts-based agenda. Such a dynamic was also extremely valuable in ensuring that the consent forms were completed on time. Jill Spencely, as a member of the Burnage Academy staff was able to communicate easily with parents and ask the boys directly to encourage their families to return the signed forms. Exchange also continued intermittently after the project ended, with the teacher sharing the fact that she was exploring, in her own time, stitching by hand (Spencely, 2017).

Dialogue of a different nature took place when a stitch workshop had to be moved from a morning to an afterschool session. The boys (at this later meeting time) were more relaxed and open, however they were also far less focused, due to the fact that the session was outside the school hours and not controlled to the same extent. Also, other pupils were able to wander into the classroom and talk, so concentrating on the work by hand became harder. One of the benefits of this informality was that discussion was less guarded and more open. It also enabled others to witness and join in the creative working. For example, a teacher who visited the classroom and shared with the boys his involvement with sewing, declared with pride that he had stitched by hand his car steering wheel cover. Each of these encounters added value, facilitating direct face-to-face interaction, for although screen-based communication has huge benefits, it also has consequences. Sherry Turkle^{lxxxix} acknowledges this, suggesting that ‘Online, we easily find “company”, but we are exhausted by the pressures of performance’ (2011:280).

Intergenerational exchange was another unexpected benefit to result from the initiative, given that the ages of those taking part ranged from the early teens to those in their fifties, which allowed different insights and glimpses of other lives. Something Hannah Maughan^{lxxxix} refers to as ‘the small stories’ (2016: 199). The involvement of the final year Textile in Practice students at the Manchester School of Art in the practical workshops was also important in a number of ways. The students’ role was more informal and relaxed than that of the researcher and they

^{lxxxix} Professor of Social Sciences.

^{lxxxix} Academic and embroidery practitioner.

were therefore able to discuss their studies, home life and views in a more intimate way.

The fact that, by chance, the three students were from different cultural backgrounds (Bangladeshi, Northern Irish and white British) was also serendipitous and added another dimension to the shared working. Two of the volunteers who were considering teaching as a career gained valuable experience in the classroom, including discussion with the PGCE student during several of the sessions. One of the students, Sameera Miah, later commented that it was interesting to see how the young boys gained interest in hand sewing as the project progressed. She also acknowledged that the group were surprised when she showed them her work, confounding stereotypes concerning embroidery, because the boys assumed hand stitching is always flat, but her work was three dimensional. She added:

‘Teaching has been a great interest of mine to have as a career after graduating. This experience has allowed me to be aware of what difficulties can occur while in the classroom for example, having some students working at a faster pace than others’ (Miah, 2017).

The student from Northern Ireland commented more fully:

‘I was asked lots of things, which football team did I support? Did I play football? What position did I play in football? The boys were fascinated with the fact I played Gaelic football and not soccer. They were intrigued by my Irish accent... It wouldn't be a conversation with teenagers if I didn't get asked the boyfriend question, but no I got asked why I wasn't married yet! The boys were so vibrant and eager to learn, they really had a keen interest in learning how to sew which was so nice to see’ (B, 2017).

Another of the discussions in the classroom explored history when the group looked at how hand embroidery could represent the past. This focused on stitch processes and the narrative sewn into the iconic 11th century *Bayeux Tapestry*. For example, that haircuts and weapons were depicted in stitch in this early social history document, shines a light on important aspects of military life in the middle

ages that was little known about. The boys, following this conversation, were able to contemplate the immense value and worth in this stitched cloth, not only as a narrative textile but as a window into the past. By emphasising the embroidery's worth and longevity the researcher enabled the boys to think again about the value of stitch-based working. This discourse also, as Simon Taylor, former education manager for The Making suggests, provides 'a way in' to craft that is practical and 'accessible to non-experts' (2013: 145). He also acknowledges this form of craft engagement can encourage different thinking about craft making and foster opportunities to translate this into the classroom (2011: 153).

The AIUET Engagement Officer worked in a practical capacity on *Threads of Identity* and her gentle manner and sustained commitment underlined another hidden value to emerge from this project. She acknowledged that the boys seemed very open to the idea of sewing and did not seem to see it as a solely female occupation, and also commented that they grew in confidence as the weeks progressed and their skills improved. The Engagement Officer also suggested that sewing had become a lifelong skill for many of the boys (A, 2017).

Another positive benefit to emerge within *Threads of Identity* is the significance of listening. This is an important and undervalued method in the visual arts and is something that Turkle suggests in society today, given the rise of the Internet and 'our text driven world of rapid response' (2011:172), is becoming increasingly sidelined. She uses the example of a conference where a speaker delivers a lecture to a seemingly engaged and listening audience but who, on closer inspection, in a number of cases, are reading emails and getting on with work. Within this project an example is that of sitting with and hearing from the boys to discover whose autographs in the family have (or have not) been collected for the project. This supports Sennett's observation when he suggests 'communication is as much about what is left unsaid as said' (2012:28). Listening is not only a useful device but something necessary in shared working, as it enables other opinions and differing points of view to be heard and explored. It also relates to the notion of empathic understanding which is a recurring, valuable and important attribute in collaborative endeavour. Feminist academic, Field Belenky (1986), too, values the ability to listen, conceding that our 'connected knowledge is grounded in our capacity to identify with other people' (Kester, 2004: 114).

Having flexibility in the budget was another small, hidden benefit in this undertaking, allowing slight shifts and changes to take place without disrupting the project's overall flow. For example, a filmmaker was brought in to record the unfolding story, rather than a photographer as originally proposed. This shift allowed a different type of data to be collected and also allowed others involved in the work to come into view. The video '*Final Cut of Threads of Identity*' can be viewed via the following link <https://vimeo.com/291655632> and is also supplied as hard copy in Appendix 2 (p 158). This resonates with the observations of Helguera who suggests that the documentation process should not be the exclusive domain of the author, given that there are multiple accounts, witnesses and interpretations of any shared undertaking (2011:75-6).

Creating a cohesive, aesthetically pleasing and meaningful artwork can also be seen as something of a hidden or sometimes under-appreciated result in this and other such endeavours. In this complex terrain which utilises craft processes, skill, dexterity and an end product, all are likely to be seen as evidence of success, in that, these are the main signifiers people use to judge the results of textile-based projects. This is further complicated by the happenstance approach employed at intervals in this study, the need to risk-take and, at the same time, bring something new to a project outcome. Hallam and Ingold (2007) are keen to encourage this way of working, commenting that improvisation can be a positive, offering generative, relational and temporal knowledge (Ravetz et al, 2013: 13) (Fig 4.8).



Figure 4.8 The finished cloth (December 2016).

The short life of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah was brought into sharp focus during this project and presents a final, poignant hidden value to emanate from this partnership. Whilst the starting point of the project was the 13th anniversary of Ullah's death, it was not the original intention that he would be featured in the embroidery-focused outcome. The discovery of his hand drawn signatures during *The Legacy of Ahmed* project enabled his adolescent signature to be worked into the cloth. This brought not only a tangible, stitched connection between past and current Burnage boys, but memorialised and joined this fleeting community through the embroidered epitaph. Devonald, the manager of the archive, was keen to point out the rich rewards of the project and how sharing the life of Ullah with current pupils at Burnage was a positive and affirming act (Devonald, 2017).

Points of tension

Within this three-month collaboration, various tensions did arise. Given that the project involved a number of partners, including a group of young adolescent boys, the problems were, on the whole, remarkably few. One of the hurdles during the initial stages related to the role of one of the key AIUET workers in the project. His involvement began to fade as the practical side of the project began and a major

repercussion of this was that time set aside to talk to the boys about their identities and heritage from a male perspective was severely curtailed. Similarly, a planned session developing reflective learning and exploration of young identity, run by the Reclaim organisation, did not materialise. This absence also resulted in more work for the researcher and art teacher, planning and coordinating group activities such as the visit to the Manchester School of Art and the celebration event. There were, however, some benefits, in that decisions could be made more quickly and directly between the two rather than three key coordinators.

The handkerchiefs purchased for the final collaborative banner project initially proved something of a hurdle, in that they were found to be irregular in shape and could not therefore be joined together to create an even, uniform cloth. As they were bought online, it was not possible to judge the quality or shape of the cloths in advance. Fortunately, given the ubiquity of handkerchiefs, new ones were easily purchased, and the hurdle was overcome relatively easily allowing the project to continue on track. In fact, the misfortune turned to an advantage later, when the fifteen redundant cloths were repurposed to create individual mementos for each of the boys. A sublimation printer (a form of photocopying onto cloth) allowed these artefacts to be turned into a set of commemorative handkerchiefs, with a print of Ullah's stitched signature impressed on each surface. These were subsequently given to each of the boys (and the race relations archive) as a keepsake at the end of the project. A chance encounter of an exhibit in the Manchester Central Library in April 2018 highlights an earlier example of this form of gift giving. On display was a printed handkerchief, one of 250,000 given Manchester pupils in 1934 to commemorate the opening of the new library.

A logistical problem arose midway through the project when the art teacher's illness meant that the visit to the Manchester School of Art had to be cancelled at very short notice. Nevertheless, once again, a solution was found which proved positive in a number of ways. A new date for the visit in February meant that, although the project had finished, it was in fact positive in that it helped to ameliorate a sense of loss which can be felt when there is an abrupt ending to a partnership, something voiced by the art teacher and also experienced by the researcher. The visit included an exploration of the art school, its workshops and some of the machines used on the collaborative banner. The delayed timing was

also valuable in another way, in that it enabled the group to come together, see and discuss the short film of the shared work.

A more widely felt conundrum brought to light in *Threads of Identity* relates to evaluating a project and finding the most effective ways to gauge the impact of an arts-driven initiative. This is something Robert Hewison^{lxxxiii} highlights as problematic, suggesting ‘the term impact was very hard to define’ (2014:124). The outcomes, large and small, and the numbers of people benefitting from such initiatives can be hard to assess. For example, it may not be known for some time if any of the boys involved in the project will follow or even contemplate a creative vocation as a result of being involved in *Threads of Identity*. Similarly, will the initiative be deemed a success if they or their families visit an art gallery or museum for the first time, remember the story of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah or pick up a needle and sew on a button? How can these actions be quantified and put into order to measure real value? Hewison argues that the prevailing methods, often involving impact studies, are not necessarily the most effective tools to evaluate creative work. This study supports these findings and advocates that longer-term and more wide-spread impact studies may be more beneficial, despite the need of funding bodies for quick answers. This was because Devonald had to compile a report on the project before the end of December, only days after the completion of the initiative. A commonly-used current form of evaluating arts funding often requires the filling in of questionnaires, ticking boxes and ascertaining the views of those involved during or after an event. Something that Pathways Arts, an organisation which specialises in arts-based work with asylum seekers and refugees, concedes is not always satisfactory (Hayes, 2017). Although anecdotal, this approach was brought into sharp focus during a visit to Hull, the UK City of Culture in July 2017. At every art venue visited there was a form to be filled in with thoughts and feedback on the initiative.

Findings of the study

Threads of Identity highlights how the humble, hand sewn signature/s can be used to explore and commemorate young male identity, break down stereotypes and acknowledge marginalised groups. Gauntlett’s claim that: ‘Through creative

^{lxxxiii} Cultural historian.

activity, where making is connecting, we can... unlock innovative capacity and build resilience in our communities' (2011:245) resonates strongly with the initiative. The study also underlines how craft can open up different approaches to storytelling and overlooked histories. Cross-cultural, intergenerational and gender-based study likewise helps to invert some of the dominant, yet widely held, beliefs concerning needlework and history by foregrounding the intricacies of shared working. In so doing, the enquiry uncovers some of its rewards and conundrums and supports Knott's claim that, in amateur craft practice, the product is subservient to the experience of making (2015:89)

Within this study Hewison's claim similarly rings true: 'that trust is an essential condition for creativity, encouraging the imagination to extend itself, offering security in the face of risk' (2015: 234). The tacit understanding and trust that developed between all those involved in the act of embroidering added significantly to the success and smooth running of the project. The positive, close and distance working relationships, which evolved between the researcher, the art teacher and the manager of the AIUET, ensured that deadlines were adhered to budgets met and the outcomes disseminated widely across and between the varied partner organisations.

In terms of unexpected benefits, the observations from some of those involved emphasises the reach of this stitched-based initiative and its polyvocality. Devonald, the Trust's manager, acknowledged that she was extremely pleased, not only with the visual outcomes of the undertaking, but also its positive message and the audiences it reached. She also spoke about how this project provided the opportunity for her organisation to work alongside Manchester School of Art for the first time (Devonald, 2017). The boys themselves individually commented that they had enjoyed using a new and different art form. They also spoke of seeing the variety of work in the art school. The textile students talked of the benefits of observing creative teaching in a school and one admitted she was surprised the boys did not seem at all averse to sewing and was pleased to see the overall dedication to the work (Hampson, 2017).

The short film also presents an added bonus, offering a different viewpoint. It is also significant as an accessible resource than can be shared, not only within the

project but also in wider circles, beyond the confines of arts research,^{lxxxiv} helping to ‘insert craft into the contemporary debate about what it means to work with others’ (Ravetz 2013:1). Peter Bazalgette^{lxxxv} underlines further the value in embedding all types of creativity into society, when he acknowledges: ‘[I]f we ensure each generation immerses itself in arts and culture, in all its many manifestations, we’ll build better citizens who understand each other’s feelings and needs. This is what it is to be human’ (2107: 290).

Discovering Ahmed Iqbal Ullah’s signature was a significant and highly-charged moment in the initiative. The fact that the textile outcome affirms his positive presence once again in the school, some 30 years after his death, is one of the most poignant, yet unplanned, outcomes in the project. (Figure 4.9.) The handkerchief as social history and a tactile conjoiner was an important element in this undertaking, binding the group together and linking them to their past and present but also importantly, their future (Schneider and Weiner, 1989:3).



Figure 4.9 The handkerchief with Ahmed Iqbal’s sewn signature (December 2016).

^{lxxxiv} The Trust/Resource has a website, blog, Facebook group, newsletter and as part of Manchester University, has contacts with academics in a number of areas.

^{lxxxv} Former Chair of Arts Council, England.

Finally, the Casey report (2016), which looked into opportunity and integration in Britain today, is timely in terms of the measures it suggests. Its findings highlight the prescience of this project, acknowledging that boys are underperforming in art and design subjects. Dame Louise Casey^{lxxxvi} also confirms the low rates of social mobility amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups - who are the groups most concentrated in deprived areas (2016:11) and make up the majority of participants in *Threads of Identity*. She also, crucially in light of this project, suggests that working with schools and local communities to promote opportunities for pupils to mix with others from different backgrounds is a way forward (2016: 17). This wide-reaching stitched-based study, with its varied and unexpected outcomes makes clear the benefits of cultural exchange and shared understanding and resonances with Hewison's assertion that 'culture ...is a form of power' (2014: 209).

^{lxxxvi} Former Government official specialising in social welfare.

5. Case study three

Sew Near – Sew Far

Introduction

In this final chapter the research moves into new territory, away from an interrogation of an interior-based hand-sewn cloth, to focus instead on an ephemeral, outdoor embroidery rooted in the Yorkshire landscape. The tacit knowledge of the female practitioner with her ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz 1975, cited in Scott-Jones and Watt, 2010:9) remains embedded within the enquiry. The fact that this initiative was part of a nationwide commissioning process adds to the thesis, allowing some of the snares and benefits of liaising with major funding bodies to be interwoven into the research. Furthermore, that the partner organisation was the Brontë Parsonage Museum^{lxxxvii}, a literary destination on the edge of the moors, yet within touching distance of a sprawling multicultural conurbation, brings fresh challenges and a different perspective to this enquiry. In common with the earlier studies, this final investigation uncovers the many interconnected stages of the project which lead to its outcome, for, as educational reformer John Dewey (1934, cited in Harper, 2013:114) acknowledges, ‘the experience of making and encountering the object [is] the real work of art’. In combining a rich blend of embroidery, ethnographic and fugitive methods, with literary, empathetic and site-specific ways of working, the research opens up new approaches, something Pink advocates, suggesting that ‘..different methods take us into other people’s worlds’ (2009:49). These interdisciplinary and innovative strategies are especially pertinent in this study, given that the commissioners^{lxxxviii} sought ‘to test ways of working in the environment’ and had an interest in ‘non-traditional methods of exhibiting work’.

^{lxxxvii} The Parsonage Museum is, and always has been, run as a Society, guided by a board of Trustees and thus operates differently to the other museum partners cited in this thesis.

The signature as a catalyst for a site-specific commission

The signature cloth, despite the shift in direction, remains central to this study, in that the hand-sewn autograph is once again key to this investigation. This commission-led project was part of an initiative Meeting Point2, led by the organisation Arts and Heritage (www.artsandheritage.org.uk). The aim of the large-scale undertaking was to pair 10 museums in the north of England with artists from a range of disciplines. The rewards of looking afresh at history from a creative perspective is a model much favoured today, as Desai, Hamlin and Mattson acknowledge, arguing that, 'Art... has the power to reframe public debate about the past and to help us transform popular memories and histories' (2010:11).

Given the variety of museum partners involved in Meeting Point2 ranging from a Salt Works in Cheshire to a Gaol in Northumberland, focusing attention on one, the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, was a serendipitous act. It also came from an unexpected source, a television drama, *To Walk Invisible* written by Sally Wainwright. The programme about the Brontë family was broadcast at a time of receptivity, shortly after the Meeting Point2 launch. It was also meaningful as it focused its attention on a period of intense creativity in the sisters' lives. It presented a counter-narrative to the usual depiction, as frail, tragic and doomed and instead portrayed the young women as radical thinkers and independent-minded. The impetus to work with the Museum gained further momentum following a visit to Haworth itself. On this excursion, the beauty and bleak, open expanse of the iconic Yorkshire moors clashed and jarred with the objects of material culture on display in the dark, claustrophobic, Parsonage Museum. Most notable in this interior space were three ink-drawn autographs of Acton, Currer and Ellis Bell, the pseudonymous male names of the Brontë sisters; poignant, signature markers invented by the authors following their first joint publication. The creative juxtaposition of these delicate, symbol-laden, paper-based artefacts and the dramatic landscape was the mainstay of the idea, with the three signatures literally writ large on the hillsides of Haworth.

A participatory element added further richness to the commission proposal and extended the scope of the signature cloth significantly; for, by inviting local people to donate stitched names, the project would celebrate collective and individual

identities, near and far. The sisters themselves could also be released from the confines of the Museum, to be reunited with the landscape that inspired much of their creativity.

However, whilst imagining the signatures on the moors was both an inspirational and evocative idea, it also required careful visual translation in order to convince the expert panel to commission the work. Achieving this aim then informed the next stage in the research process, and once more drew on specialist embroidery-based knowledge; alongside drawings, photography and digital approaches to help visualise the signatures in the moorland setting, there was an interrogation of stitch-based methods. This focused particularly on an embroidery technique known as couching. In this method, a thread sits on the surface of a cloth/fabric and is fixed in place by a secondary top stitch. By testing small scale renditions of the Bell/ Brontë names using threads of varying types, colours and thicknesses, it was possible to explore different linear forms and help move the work forward.

(Figure 5.1.)



Figure 5.1 Couched signature of Curren Bell on rubberised cloth (February 2017).

The community-based element which connected the sewn signatures of local people to those of the sisters would be developed through a series of workshops in and around Haworth over the summer period. During this stage, the individually embroidered, ordinary names would be sewn together to form long ribbons of

cloth. These stitched signature strips would then be embedded within the three linear Brontë/Bell autographs, to not only intertwine the contemporary and historical markers of identity, but to also bring changes to light.

Entangled research methods

Following a rigorous interview process, the commission was secured, the reality of *Sew Near – Sew Far* moved one step nearer. The title itself draws on both the outdoor, stitch-focus of the initiative as well as the successful, yet short-lived careers of the three sisters. A series of planning meetings with staff from the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Lauren Livesey and Jenna Holmes, marked the start of the partnership, in light of the new and complex challenges involved. These exchanges covered a series of practical issues from dates and times for the workshops and the launch event, potential contributors and partner organisations, as well as a number of site visits and excursions in and around Haworth. One of the first decisions to be agreed was the last weekend in September 2017 for the launch of the project. This was the closest weekend to Michaelmas, 29th September, the date originally proposed by the researcher, an often-overlooked seasonal marker today, but one undoubtedly known and commemorated by the Brontë family. Fixing this date was an important marker, given the new outdoor challenges of this site-specific project. For example, having to contend with poor weather and limited daylight later in the year could create problems, not only for installation but viewing the work too. The timing also had to take into account several other Meeting Point2 launches around the same time and a number of events taking place at the Parsonage Museum.

As the planning took shape, research exploring new materials and approaches to stitch began. The outdoor focus meant that a different, weather-proof, strategy was needed to create the sewn signatures, compared to the interior-based outcome sought in *Threads of Identity*. This involved sampling and testing materials that could withstand the unpredictable weather conditions on the exposed hills, with the selection process eventually narrowing to a range of net mesh fabrics. The chosen material not only provided an interesting lightweight ground, the transparency of the fabric made the embroidered marks far more visible; it also offered a counter to the usual dense cotton fabric found in signature cloths. The use of this utilitarian fabric also resonated with a famous Brontë novel,

that of *Jane Eyre*, in that the bride to be, Jane, in keeping with her plain demeanour, chooses an ordinary simple unadorned net for her wedding veil, rather than the expensive, embellished one, selected by the groom, Mr Rochester. Experimenting with a number of sewn signatures using Brontë characters' names helped in the testing of different types of yarns and, at the same time, entwined the sisters' work with the contemporary stitch project. This practical application of the project developed further following a fortuitous sighting of scaffold netting on a building site. This ubiquitous fabric was fit for purpose in that it was not only in plentiful supply, it was inexpensive, given the large quantities needed, came in a variety of colours, was waterproof, lightweight and would not need ironing, like conventional cloth. (Figure 5.2.)



Figure 5.2 Testing Brontë signatures on scaffolding net (March 2017).

With this material strategy in place, the next stage involved seeking out local participants for the signature workshops. Despite prior knowledge in this sphere, unfamiliarity with Haworth meant that this aspect of the research was, initially, a slow process. The fact that the Brontë Parsonage Museum staff were unused to this way of working and also had their day-to-day duties to complete, compounded the issue. As the local links slowly developed, another participatory avenue was

explored, one which would complement the Haworth-based workshops. This involved Talk-English, a North West-based initiative teaching English to adult learners from all parts of the world. A small exhibition created by tutors from Talk-English in a local Manchester library showcased their work and innovative approach to teaching and learning. Photographs showed a walk in the park and facilitated haptic learning, making memory wraps using found twigs and coloured twine. Although a few miles from Haworth, the Bradford-based group were an appropriate partner. Not only would they bring a different audience to the museum but working with this organisation offered an opportunity to extend knowledge of the Brontë sisters to a group unfamiliar with their work. The key workers in the Bradford team not only acknowledged that the theme resonated with their strategies for creative learning, they outlined how they encouraged alternative approaches to teaching. It was therefore agreed to run a series of drop-in sessions in Bradford, involving two venues during late July and August, when formal ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching ceased. The work would focus on sewing signatures, speaking English and talking about the lives and work of the Brontë sisters. In fixing these sessions in place, a structure began to form for the workshops, enabling several dates for Haworth to be timetabled.

Locating the signatures in the landscape

As the collaborative/participatory strand of *Sew Near – Sew Far* took shape, finding a suitable outdoor location for the work took precedence. This venture was foregrounded by *Welsh Sampler* in 2016, in an initiative that also explored scale and embroidering into the grass. This was a text created in the car park of the crafts centre, written in Welsh in the style of a stitched sampler. It draws attention to one of the first uses of the term sampler and was part of *The Wit of the Stitch* (2016) exhibition at Ruthin Crafts Centre. However, despite the experience of this earlier outdoor work, a number of the issues encountered in the Meeting Point2 commission were new. Creating text-based art in this rugged, exposed and unpredictable environment presented a very different set of hurdles to those encountered in an urban, managed landscape. Nevertheless, by privileging sensory methods, mainly that of walking and exploring the local landscape, new, important understanding emerged. This method, developed in ethnographic and art-based research over a number of years, allows for different types of knowledge

to be excavated, for as Pink suggests, this is 'a near-universal multisensorial activity that most ethnographers will engage in' (2009:76).

First there was a scoping exercise, examining the town itself on foot. This was useful in obtaining a better understanding of Haworth, both as place to live and as a tourist destination, which journalist Joan Bakewell (1977) refers to as the '*Brontë Business*', a 1977 television programme by Joan Bakewell about the Brontë industry which had developed in Haworth. This began with examining the shops on the cobbled high street selling all manner of Brontë-related products, and the heritage railway station in the lower part of the town, home to the Keighley and Haworth Steam Railway, another tourist attraction. Rural walking followed, in order to grasp the topography of the local moorland better, for as Katrin Lund^{lxxxix} argues, this connects '...the body to the ground but also includes different postures, speeds and rhythms ... and plays a fundamental part in how the surroundings are sensually experienced' (2005, cited in Pink, 2009:77).

Occurring over several weeks these excursions incorporated rich visual, tactile and olfactory understandings of place. These extended from the edifying sight and sound of curlews flying overhead in the spring, to the colour and smell of the heather carpets across the moors in summer and the noise of the torrents in the beck, following heavy rainfall in autumn. Employing this approach also encouraged empathetic understanding, in that walking on the moors was a strategy frequently employed by the sisters themselves. It also brought to light the international appeal of the writers, in that the wooden signposts along the Brontë Way are written in both English and Japanese. Such an active, outdoor approach was useful too, as it suggested a possible location for the signatures in a site discovered on a walk from the village of Stanbury. The area included gently sloping hillsides, rich green pastures and drystone walls and was suitable on several fronts; not only was it accessible on foot, it was near to a minor road with a good view over the valley, and the patchwork configuration of the fields resonated with that of a pieced quilt.

^{lxxxix} Cultural anthropologist.

With a focus on the outdoors, new and varied challenges began to emerge related to the location of the artwork and lack of local knowledge. Something vocalised by Leighton Boyce in *The Event of the Thread*, where she acknowledges ‘I was an outsider, so to arrive with an idea about a place but without knowing it... is both daunting and potentially problematic...’ (2014:28). One of the first hurdles was in relation to land ownership, in that, in order to place work on the hills, permission was needed from the custodian of the fields, something that was unknown and thus, potentially a slow process. Once again, serendipity played a part, in that Fields of Vision, an enterprise with the skills and experience needed, was discovered. The organisation, based in the area, not only had strong links to the Young Farmers and several local groups, they had prior knowledge of working on the land around Haworth. This fortuitous connection came to light on social media, with the discovery of their artwork *Branwell on a Bike*, a large-scale work situated in a field in Haworth. A site-specific work was created for the Tour de Yorkshire, to help raise awareness of West Yorkshire and its celebration of Branwell Brontë strongly connected it to *Sew Near – Sew Far*. Approaching the two co-ordinators, Andrew Wood and Joe Holmes, uncovered a shared interest in the community, land art, and a background in Yorkshire and both Holmes and Wood were generous in sharing their expertise and knowledge. Discussions explored suitable sites for the artwork, land ownership and ways to fix the work in place. Wood outlined that Yorkshire Water, given the large number of reservoirs in the area, owned much of the land around Haworth. Despite this, he advocated speaking to the farmers who rented the fields from Yorkshire Water and were in control of local land use.

The hillside location suggested for the signatures, just off the Brontë Way was also discussed. This is a popular route linking various places associated with the Brontë family. Wood’s local acumen, however, drew attention to the fact that the farmer of this land was unlikely to entertain anything other than cows and sheep in his fields. Another walk opened up more possibilities and led to an exploration of an area close to a local landmark known as the Brontë Waterfalls. Although the fields in this area were less uniform and smaller than the earlier site, the location had potential, in that it was more rugged, enclosed and, as a result, more intimate than the previous site. It was also a spot known to have been visited by and popular with the Brontë sisters themselves, a fact relayed by Livesey. Locating a

viewing point near the waterfalls offered a vantage point, so that all three fields/signatures could be seen on the other side of the beck. Providing an interpretation board would not only allow information about the project to be shared but would also highlight the optimum viewing point. Although this location was three miles from Haworth, given its proximity to the popular waterfalls, the work would be seen by many different people. Wood's acknowledgement that the farmer of this land was much more amenable than the other and would be much more likely to give us permission to use his fields, added more weight to the argument to site the work in this area. He agreed to liaise on the team's behalf to see if the farmer would be willing to loan the three chosen fields for the siting of the artworks in late September, early October. (Figure 5.3.)



Figure 5.3 The site chosen for the installation by the Brontë Waterfall (May 2017).

Literary-based research strategies

As the outdoor strategies took shape, an exploration of other avenues and approaches began, in order to gain insight into different perspectives and ways of knowing the Brontë's. The scoping exercise extended from the National Theatre and Bolton Octagon productions of *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* respectively, a series of radio broadcasts examining Charlotte Brontë's letters, as

well as close reading of novels by each of the three sisters and publications such as Lucasta Miller's *The Brontë Myth* (2010) which examines the phenomenon surrounding the family and interrogates the biographies of the sisters and how the term Brontë has become a business, and also Samantha's Ellis's *Take Courage* (2017) which explored the overlooked creativity of the youngest sister Anne. It also included a visit to the Parsonage archives to see stitched artefacts made by the sisters. This approach also uncovered knowledge from a literature expert's stance, in the form of Emma Liggins, based in the English department of Manchester Metropolitan University. A strategy which proved useful, not only in sharing pedagogic approaches, it also brought to light a connected strand of research - *Textile Stories* (dwtextilestories.blogspot.com) - led by Deborah Wynne^{xc}, which explores textiles and dress in nineteenth century English novels.

The collaborative stitch workshops

A total of 12 two-hour, stitch-based workshops were eventually configured as part of *Sew Near – Sew Far* to collect sewn autographs, beginning in late July and running through August and into September. Although the same basic method was employed in *Threads of Identity*, there was a difference in approach, in that the *Sew Near – Sew Far* sessions were open to all comers and the material enactment was of a different scale and substance. The Haworth sessions were publicised using local media outlets such as Radio Leeds, The Keighley News and the Haworth and Worth Valley Journal, and also social media, including Twitter and the Parsonage Museum website itself. Promotional material was also visible locally, including information boards outside the venue and printed flyers detailing the events. In the case of the Bradford workshops, flyers and notices created for sharing by Talk-English were used as a way of enticing learners. A film maker was also employed at this stage in the project to document snippets of the processes and people involved. The short film then would be available to share information and visual images of the initiative, for example on the Brontë Parsonage website.

The workshops in Bradford in July and August targeted adult learners already known to Talk-English, so had a different feel to those in Haworth, which favoured

^{xc} Professor of Nineteenth-Century Literature.

an open-door policy. In Bradford, the majority of women taking part in the sessions were of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage with widely varying levels of written and spoken English. Thus, a volunteer Urdu-speaking tutor was helpful with translating when necessary. As at the end of the workshop sometimes women stayed behind to talk, those who may have felt less confident speaking English to a large group, or those who wanted to share more intimate stories. The sessions held at Haworth, as suggested, had a different atmosphere, not only because there was less certainty regarding the type and numbers of people taking part, as a result of the open-door policy, but because the venue itself was part of the mythology of the family, as the site of Charlotte Brontë's marriage. Nevertheless, despite challenges in planning such sessions, the method is inclusive and is a strategy frequently employed by the researcher. If the workshops involved booking, given the stitch focus, attendance would most likely be dominated by women well versed in textile processes. Without a booking system anyone, with or without prior stitch-based knowledge, could take part, for as Hallam and Ingold state, 'Improvisation and creativity... are intrinsic to the very processes of social and cultural life' (2007:19).

Although the two workshops in Haworth were configured in a very similar way, with several sessions spread throughout the day, the second was the more vibrant and well attended. This may have been because concerted efforts were made to swell numbers, by inviting local businesses, residents and the Young Farmers group, all of whom turned up at different intervals. Ways of securing the net fabric on the moors were discussed at this session, as members of Fields of Vision and the local Young Farmers group took part in the workshop. A decision was also made at this point to place a layer of white fabric under the embroidered net, to ensure that the hand stitched names stood out clearly on the moors. This new strand of the visual research brought a local flag making company into the picture, given that they had ends of rolls that were disposed of as waste material.

In early September, work began on piecing the donated signatures together in order to create the linear structures which would in turn form the autographs of the three authors. This began as a solo effort (Figure 5.4) but led to another workshop event to share the stitch-based task and extend knowledge of the project beyond West Yorkshire.



Figure 5.4 The researcher joining together the donated signatures (September 2017).

An extra session at Gaskell House in Manchester not only enabled the task of sewing the autographs together to be opened out into a shared activity in a new communal public space, it also allowed a different audience to see the work. The venue itself was apposite because, through the acquisition of new literary knowledge, it became known that Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë were friends. Not only that, Brontë had visited the Gaskell home/museum. The two became irrevocably entwined when, some years later following Charlotte's death, her father asked Gaskell to write his daughter's biography.

The final stitch event took place on the 27th September, once again in the Old School Room in Haworth. The date, although near the conclusion of the project, was timed to coincide with the Bradford group's excursion to the Parsonage, and, as with the Manchester event, enabled a number of new women to create their sewn signatures and become part of *Sew Near – Sew Far*. This visit was also

important as it allowed the group to see and experience for themselves the place nearby, where the sisters lived and worked. (Figure 5.5.)



Figure 5.5 The Bradford group in the Old School Room in Haworth (September 2017).

Fixing the work in the landscape

In September, the project emphasis shifted from the indoor to the outdoor, with positioning of the work on the moors taking precedence. Knowledge acquired over the summer, involving ways to fix the signatures in the ground, was thus utilised. Practice-based research also helped in the decision to use a white net ground, rather than a coloured one for the signatures, given that, in these trials, the visual impact of the white was far greater. A test involving the placement of the Currer Bell signature on location was also useful at this stage and eased tensions in such unchartered territory. Demarcating the position and length of each signature prior to the installation was an additional strategy which helped with fixing the work in place on the day.

Installation of the artwork was scheduled for the week prior to the launch, in late September, which offered a compromise solution. This is because, putting the work on-site too early could result in it getting damaged or vandalised, but leaving

it too late was also a risky strategy, should any readjustments or changes be needed to be made. In addition, it was impossible to predict the weather conditions on any set day, another factor that could affect the progress of installation. Two consecutive days were timetabled, including, crucially, on the first day, the expert help of Fields of Vision. The aim then was to achieve as much as possible on the first day, with the second set aside for contingencies. Fortune once more played a part, in that, despite rain and winds in the night, the weather on the day of installation was ideal, with blue skies, warm sunshine and very little wind. The local knowledge of the co-workers was extremely helpful at different points in the day, for example, in accessing the off-road site, so that the reams of white fabric and buckets of nails need not be carried long distances on foot. Similarly, bringing the vehicle close to the site offered some form of refuge, should the weather conditions deteriorate.

Beginning work on the Currer Bell signature was the first joint decision of many. Not only was this site relatively easy to get to, it was the largest and most straightforward of the artworks to install and, so, was a shared and pragmatic choice. Working together, with one person directing manoeuvres from the viewing point, the other two team members worked together, placing and pegging the white cloth into the ground. The task involved intense collaborative working, bearing in mind the distance between the two parties and unexpected challenges of the site, such as a gentle horizontal ridge in the field which distorted some of the letters. The long-standing working partnership between members of Fields of Vision came into its own at this stage, in the way Wood and Holmes were able to interpret each other's simple gestures and instructions, despite the distance. Mobile phones could not be used in this scenario as there was no signal on the moors and although walkie-talkies were initially employed to help with communication, the batteries quickly ran out of charge. Once the first linear drawing was in situ, the placement of the other two signatures proceeded, with each having its own unique challenges. For, although Acton Bell was positioned close to the viewing point, involving less journeying back and forth, the long tussocks of grass were problematic on that particular site and made fixing the nails and tent pegs in place harder and more arduous. In contrast, Ellis Bell's autograph was designed to sit on a gradient in a square field, so presented the conundrum of how to position the signature and accommodate the unusual angle. Finally, as the day was drawing to

a close, the signatures were in position and, despite the fading light, a few photographs captured the day's achievements.

The final stage of the installation, on the day prior to the launch, involved the positioning of the community-made sewn autographs on top of the white signatures. Although a crucial part of the overall artwork, this was a relatively straightforward task, in comparison to the fixing of the large-scale signatures. There was, nevertheless, an unforeseen hurdle, mainly because of safety concerns should people venture off the path to examine the embroidered names within Acton or Ellis Bell's signatures. Fortunately, tacit knowledge came to the fore once more, and a solution was found which involved reconfiguring the donated signatures into just one artwork, that of Currer Bell, positioned close to footpaths and therefore easily accessible. The performative act of reworking the lines took place on site, coinciding with the drone filming and the Meeting Point2 documentation of the work, which enabled still and moving images of it to be visible at the launch event the next day. (Figure 5.6.)



Figure 5.6 Left to right, Holmes, Livesey, Setterington and Wood adding the sewn signatures (September 2017).

A small interpretation board, positioned at the viewing point, disseminated information about the project to passers-by and indicated the best place from which to see the three signatures together. The text included the hashtag #sewnearsewfar to enable information sharing on social media. (Figure 5.7.)



Figure 5.7 The three artworks as seen from the viewing point (October 2017).

Hidden values

The outdoor focus of *Sew Near – Sew Far* suggests that the hidden values uncovered in this study may differ from those encountered earlier in the thesis, and indeed, this proved to be so. One of the triumphs of this commission was that *Sew Near – Sew Far* resonated with other linear forms, new and old, in the landscape of Britain, such as the iconic *Cerne Abbas Giant*, a listed monument dating back several hundred years, carved into the chalk uplands of the Dorset countryside. Another is that the project moves the signature cloth away from its usual interior setting and allows us to look afresh at this form of stitched social history document. With its limited lifespan of fifteen days, the work also celebrated the here and now and its impact remains ingrained on the memories of those who experienced it, by chance or design, in the Yorkshire landscape. (Figure 5.8.)



Figure 5.8 Drone shot of Curren Bell including a visitor examining the work (October 2017).

Within this final study, although dialogical exchange was also commonplace, it had, on the whole, a different tone and emphasis to the other projects undertaken, which are linked to its literary and outdoor locations. These more fleeting exchanges also reflect the fact that this initiative took place over a relatively short period of time, involved over one hundred and fifty participants and a specialist partner organisation. There were also the chance conversations with ramblers and walkers out on the moor, related more to the landscape and local area, and also the discussions with Wood and Holmes about their work and in-depth knowledge of living and growing up in this location. There was, likewise, the sustained and ongoing exchanges pertaining to literary themes with both Liggins, the English lecturer and Livesey and Holmes from the Brontë museum.

The conversations in Bradford with Talk-English groups, although also focused on the Brontës were of a somewhat different nature. In both settings, hand stitch once more proved to be an effective communication tool, however, it was especially

useful in Bradford as a way of drawing the groups together given, the varied levels of spoken English. More personal knowledge exchanges also took place at the end of the Bradford sessions when the group dispersed, and individuals stayed behind to talk about their lives and families.

The launch event also created opportunities for debate and a sharing and exchange of ideas and information related to the initiative, something which resonates with the celebration at the culmination of *Threads of Identity*. The Haworth event at the Old School Room enabled many of those involved in the shared work to come together for the first time. This ranged from a number of participants in the project, several staff and volunteers from the Brontë Parsonage, Gata Aura from Talk-English, Liggins from MMU, Wood and Holmes from Fields of Vision and Judith King, a Director of Arts and Heritage. There were also people new to the initiative, some who arrived serendipitously in passing, whilst others came as invited guests to celebrate the culmination of the project. A short film 'Sew Near showing the work on the moors allowed those unable to visit the location to see the final outcome in situ and led to logistical discussions about fixing the work in place linked to the uncertain weather conditions. The video 'Sew Near – Sew Far(5)' can be viewed via this link <https://vimeo.com/243918812> and is also supplied as hard copy in Appendix 2 (p 158). A conversation about the fate of the embroidered signatures, once the work was removed from site, also proved useful – given the conundrum of what to do with an artwork after the event, as cited earlier in the thesis. A proposal to return the signatures to Haworth for a community event seemed a fitting solution, providing the stitches remained intact.

Uncovering some of the unexpected skills of the students from the Manchester School of Art, Textiles in Practice programme who volunteered on *Sew Near – Sew Far* was another positive aspect of this project. In that, alongside the expected stitch-based knowledge, there was the discovery of new expertise. For example, one student used her graphics skills to create printed flyers, another had extensive knowledge of the new data protection laws and a third had experience of working with film-based methods. These varied and different ways of sharing knowledge were useful in other ways, as Lucy Kent outlined:

'I found the project very insightful, as a student it was really helpful to see how the different stages of a project develop. I was also able to learn about all the necessary planning and organisation required for the project to come together' (Kent, 2018).

Something which can be taken from this study and interpreted as both a positive and negative outcome is the wide variation in hand-embroidery skills seen in the workshops. On the one hand, this may denote a falling-off of craft knowledge, however, on the other, it could also highlight the reach of this method, in that it was not only those confident and proficient in embroidery taking part in the workshops. Possibly, a number of people enjoyed re-visiting a long-neglected skill and doing something inclusive, as this comment testifies: 'If you get a chance, give this a go. A lovely welcoming group who passed the afternoon with a chat, a laugh and a cuppa, while remembering how to embroider' (Eyre, 2017).

Related to this, the power of the drone images to look afresh and bring a different perspective to this environmentally-based work is another important outcome of this research. The aerial shot not only highlighted the colour and beauty in this expanse but the human presence in the landscape is also brought into sharp focus. (Figure 5.9.)



Figure 5.9 An image taken by the drone capturing the three signatures together in the landscape (October 2017).

The potency of these still and moving images also enables visual information about the project to be circulated far and wide and the photographs provide important evidence of the initiative, given that the signatures were only on the hillside for a short period of time. For example, the short film was shown at a symposium in the Humanities faculty at Manchester Metropolitan University, a text-focused conference in a leading British crafts venue, and a photograph of the work appeared in a national newspaper to promote the Parsonage Museum's contemporary art initiatives. Images of the work have been used by Arts and Heritage, the commissioning organisation, at several national events to promote their role and arts engagement agenda.

Poignantly, the overhead images also draw attention to the relationship between the three signatures, which, in turn, reflect the sisters' personalities and relationships. The flamboyant, bold autograph in the central position, that of Charlotte/Currer, sits well with her role in the family as the oldest sibling and most outward-looking family member; similarly, Anne/Acton's signature is less visible and partly hidden by a tree, in keeping with her shy and often overlooked persona, and the fact that Emily/Ellis's marker is positioned in the most remote spot, at an awkward angle, somewhat removed from the scene, speaks for itself. (See Figure 5.7.)

These transient, stitched markers also provide an unexpected outcome in the form of fleeting, rural identifiers, which run counter to the fixed graffiti which infiltrates many urban environments; chiming with the ancient and modern practice of carving lasting identifiers/names (or scars) in/on the landscape, be it on tree trunks or rocks.

The new knowledge and insight gained about the Brontë family itself offers further rewards in this project, which includes empathetic understanding of these independent, creative and radical women. For example, it was discovered that the researcher, like Charlotte Brontë was single for much of her early life, married in her late thirties and became pregnant soon after. That each of the sisters are

memorialised in cloth and stitch is a further unexpected benefit of this enquiry and one that afforded the opportunity to see and handle some of the siblings' homemade textile artefacts in the Parsonage Museum archives. This included the close inspection of several objects such as a tiny needle-case worked by Charlotte, a patchwork quilt stitched by all three sisters and poignant stitched samplers worked by all five sisters including Maria and Elizabeth Brontë. These later objects being especially precious and poignant, they are the only remaining artefacts known to be made by these two older siblings, who died aged 10 and 11 respectively.

Points of tension

The points of tension uncovered in *Sew Near – Sew Far* present a number of new obstacles not experienced in the previous studies. In particular, the outdoor challenges highlight a number of new and unanticipated dilemmas. For example, the weather which presented a considerable hurdle in the final study, in terms of uncertainties when making, testing and fixing work outdoors. The notorious, shifting and changeable weather conditions on the moors of Haworth is highlighted by local historian Frank Thompson, when he warns: 'Be prepared for mists and dangerous boggy undergrowth and remember also that the weather can change so drastically that it has to be seen and endured to be believed' (1978, cited in Ellis 2017:65). In fact, the strong winds on the moors did impact on the artwork when part of the Ellis signature was temporarily dislocated in its second week on site, leading to an extra unplanned visit to repair the damage.

The remote site, without normal vehicle access, also meant new conundrums were encountered in exhibiting the work, for example, equipment had to be carried on foot over long distances. Likewise, the exposed site was a challenge for those placing and documenting the work, with a lack of shelter in adverse weather conditions. There was also the unusual scenario which occurred in *Sew Near – Sew Far* when roaming cattle or sheep chewed into the white nylon cloth which made up a major constituent of the artwork.

Another tension that arose in this study related to the location of the artwork and its impact on one of the data collection strategies. This was because, unlike a museum or gallery in an enclosed space with set opening hours, it was difficult in

this unfettered site to accurately gauge visitor numbers. For example, the social media platform Twitter was utilised to share information on the project and Twitter analytics was initially explored as form of data collection. However, this proved not to a reliable method, given that a number of (older) people, approached informally on the hills, stated that they did not use social media, and would not, therefore, feature in this type of data collection. It was also problematic planning ahead and assessing viewing figures on the moors, as the changes in the weather impacting significantly on this on any one day and at short notice.

This outdoor environment also uncovered a number of unforeseen hurdles when siting the work, in that the three locations selected for the sisters' signatures each presented new challenges. Not only did each setting vary in size and proportions, but also the terrain was different for each of the installations. This can be seen in this image showing the steep slope in the field in which Ellis Bell was positioned. (Figure 5.10.)



Figure 5.10 The field containing the signature of Ellis Bell (October 2017).

Moving away from the land-based conundrums, a problem highlighted in this chapter that echoes across the thesis, is the dilemma of how to reflect the flow and

freedoms of an inclusive art project, whilst conducting rigorous academic research. This includes the minefield of ethical consent, privilege and power relations which are all part and parcel of working with others. Pink's suggestion that ethics '...involves going beyond the simple process of having a form signed off' and may require '...further and careful explanation and negotiation' (2013:62) is apposite, particularly in *Sew Near – Sew Far*, with the chance methods employed, especially in the Haworth workshops.

Two examples highlight this conundrum. The first involved those taking part in the drop-in workshops in the Old School Room in Haworth, the second relates to a series of drop-in sessions in Bradford with a group of women. The Haworth workshops took place in the Old School Room, a building important for Brontë followers as the site of Charlotte Brontë's wedding and not normally open to the public. These workshops were configured so that anyone passing by could come into the building and see what was happening and take part if they wished. However, they were also free to look at the interior of the building undisturbed. The result was that a number of people joined in the sewing, a few engaged in discussion about the project but did not want to take part, and others did not engage in discussion with anyone involved in the workshops. From the outset, it seemed inappropriate and intrusive to ask everyone entering the building to sign and agree a consent form. Instead, people who showed interest in the project and stayed to sew were invited to leave their email address. In a few cases, where in-depth conversation was possible, information about the research agenda was discussed. This method of collecting details proved helpful as it allowed information and dates to be shared and it also enabled a rough approximation of numbers involved in the sessions to be gathered. The list also enabled consent to be sought from those involved in the research process. In this wide-ranging study, data collection methods are varied, and the stitch-based information comprises only one strand and in fact, only a small percentage of the 150 contributions would play any part in the research analysis.

The second example involved the stitch-focused sessions in Bradford and the encounters with the participants whose spoken English ability varied enormously. In the fourth week of workshops, as a way of capturing the stitched activities, it was agreed that the Meeting Point2 film maker would come to document the

workshop. This took place without incident, and once the filming was over the researcher, having gained verbal approval the week before, asked if the women would be happy to sign the consent form agreeing to their image being used, however indeterminate. With the help of the volunteer tutor who spoke Urdu and English this was achieved. However, there was a feeling of unease once it was done, wondering whether the women were totally aware of what they were signing. Did the women sign because they were used to form filling in, in order to attend the classes and could the latest signature be interpreted as more of the same. So, although all the consent forms were signed from this group, and not for the Haworth participants, was the Bradford paperwork more binding and watertight ethically? Whilst this may sound somewhat dubious, it was felt that the correct protocols were followed, such as informing the manager/gatekeeper at the Centre of the researcher's intentions at every stage. The researcher was also mindful that in editing the film she would ensure that the group was not compromised in any way and she would adhere to their requests of anonymity.

The summer timing of the workshops during *Sew Near – Sew Far* proved to be an unexpected handicap in this project in a number of ways. Firstly, it was more difficult to recruit students to help on the initiative in the summer vacation period, as many had holidays or paid work and others had returned home for the vacation so were no longer in the area. Secondly, in scheduling the workshops in the summer holidays, a first for the researcher, there was a feeling that this was less conducive to this type of indoor-based work. Probably because most people do not want to take part in indoor activities at this time of year, especially if the weather is good.

Something which proved to be both a hurdle and of benefit in *Sew Near – Sew Far* relates to place and the feeling of belonging and connectedness which evolves during a project. Travelling to and from the site, given the journey time of around an hour and a half, over varied and sometimes uncertain terrain, presented a frustration, in that short or spontaneous meetings were impossible. Yet, over time, getting to know Haworth and experiencing life there on a day-to-day basis, led to empathetic understanding and deeper awareness of what it feels like to live in such an iconic location. This developing insider viewpoint was followed abruptly by a sense of loss, given the withdrawal from place when the project ended. This

dichotomy leads to mixed emotions and a sense of unease and even disloyalty, resulting from this form of fleeting, migratory practice. It could be argued that this feeling is due to an artistic rather than ethnographic stance being privileged.

Another factor that impacted on this study, although to a lesser extent, was the way this initiative worked within the bigger Meeting Point2 agenda. On the positive side, this afforded specialist help, including a press officer, photographer and project co-ordinator, yet a negative aspect was the burden of information sharing, given the number of interested parties, especially in the early stages of the project. It is however likely that these tensions were felt more acutely in *Sew Near – Sew Far*, where, by necessity, a large amount of correspondence went back and forth in the early stages of the project, and was challenging within the overall commissioning framework, something which could be taken into consideration in future planning regarding this intense and complex way of working.

Another issue in this project which had both benefits and dilemmas was one connected to the format of the Bradford stitch workshops. It was (wrongly) assumed by the researcher, that each week different women of varying nationalities would join in to create their individual sewn signature. Instead, a regular group from South East Asia took part, some returning each week. This then required an alternative workshop strategy which could be incorporated into the sessions, mindful of the needs to maintain the Brontë and hand-stitch links. Fortunately, experience and ability to think around a problem meant an appropriate solution was forthcoming: something that was important given the limited and fixed time frame. The idea that was put in place was for the group to work on creating a series of embroidered blue plaques. This subject matter not only opened up new ways of exploring British culture and history, it also provided a different way of getting to know the women, through discussions of who they wished to commemorate in their stitched plaque. The most poignant commemoration was that of a widow, who designed her embroidery in memory of her late husband, killed in Syria. This additional strategy involved more work and planning and testing and also brought into focus the dilemma of that to do with this work once the sessions were finished, something which has not been resolved.

The Parsonage Museum website also presented something of a handicap in this initiative. This was because this platform was the main vehicle for sharing details about the project, such as the times and location of workshops and the position of the sewn outcome. However, this information was somewhat lost on the website amongst all the other events taking place around that time. The remit of the museum to continually re-imagine and reinvent the Brontë legacy in order to entice new and returning visitors, is on the whole positive, but it can also mean that, at times, important initiatives or features can get lost, either because they are overlooked or not given room or air. The fact that this iconic artwork was not included in the website's Contemporary Arts section until three months after its completion, due to separate funding streams, highlights this issue.

Findings of the study

That this commission-based project was a success is evident in that it achieved all of its aims, from testing ways of working in the environment, to looking afresh at the Brontë sisters' legacy, to drawing in new and diverse audiences. This was acknowledged by Judith King, a Director of Arts and Heritage when she commented: 'the Meeting Point2 commission for the Parsonage Museum is brilliant and I know that everyone is so pleased with it. *Sew Near – Sew Far* addressed the brief exceptionally well' (King, 2017). This positivity is echoed by partners at the Museum who reflected: '*Sew Near – Sew Far* took us out of the Museum itself and placed the Brontë's in the landscape, inviting an entirely new perspective in an entirely new location' (Livesey, 2017).

The fact that the project could be interpreted and valued on many levels adds to the sense of achievement, for not only was the artwork accessible to the general public, it was appreciated by those well versed in the arts. This is corroborated by the fact that there was a wide-ranging audience, encompassing not only different cultures such as the women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, who knew nothing of the Brontë sisters' story, but also the walking groups who came into contact with the work unexpectedly, as well as those who encountered the signatures through various digital platforms. Indeed, the project's broad appeal is highlighted in the publications which featured *Sew Near – Sew Far*, from the Dalesman, Radio Leeds and the Brontë Society newsletter, to social media

platforms such as Twitter and websites including the Parsonage Museum, Manchester Metropolitan University and Meeting Point².

A number of new and unexpected hidden values and points of tension are also revealed in this transitory, environmentally-based, case study. The outdoor approach adopted literally takes the signature cloth somewhere new, moving it from an intimate, domestic, hand-sewn artefact, to a site-specific installation. Moreover, this final interdisciplinary enquiry highlights the fluidity of stitch, in which, by combining embroidery processes with a sense of place and the signatures of three influential female authors, the project was able to look afresh at the sisters' creative legacy. That *Sew Near – Sew Far* also resonates with the linear forms worked into a number of English chalk landscapes over the centuries is an additional, significant outcome of this commission, building on the legacy of the iconic *White Horse at Westbury* in Wiltshire, the *Cerne Abbas Giant* and the *Fovant Badges*. The latter which comprise a set of regimental badges first cut into the chalk hillside of Fovant Down, Wiltshire, in WWI. However, this commission also brings something new. Instead of commemorating masculine symbols in which power and strength are privileged, this artwork foregrounds a different, female perspective, embedded with empathetic, stitched-focused knowledge.

Sew Near – Sew Far also moves the signature cloth in a different direction in that, unlike the other two projects, it did not leave a physical lasting tactile artefact. Instead, a digital archive is the continuum, something that can be shared on screen with many audiences, near and far. Although the stability and longevity of this method it is acknowledged is still not secure. Such an immaterial legacy can be seen as positive, in that this outcome will not take up space in a museum archive and takes into consideration the overfilled storerooms and decrease in museum funding. An issue raised by Vanessa Thorpe^{xci} who cites *Museums Association*' statistics which indicate a £236 million decrease in spending on culture since 2010 (Thorpe, 2017).

^{xci} Arts and media correspondent.

This transportable digital resource can be also be stored and saved with relatively little monetary outlay, an issue underlined by Simon Knell^{xcii}. He acknowledges, '[as] a collection grows, the amount of resource available for each object – such as staff time – diminishes' (2004:32). Cultural geographer Caitlin DeSilvey looks at this increasing worldwide dilemma with a different lens, conceding '...the transformation of our relation to the material past is both a necessity and an opportunity'. She goes further, connecting to the legacy of *Sew Near – Sew Far*, stating that: 'We need ways of valuing the material past that do not necessarily involve accumulation and preservation' (2017: 17).

The short film documenting the project suggests another positive outcome, one with potential in and beyond the textile arena. Following the successful completion of *Sew Near – Sew Far* and positive feedback, the film was given a dedicated space on the Brontë Parsonage website in the Contemporary Art section. This digital outcome can also be duplicated many times, enabling this form of knowledge exchange and interdisciplinary practice to be shared. In addition, students across diverse subjects such as English Literature, Women's Studies, Textile Design, Museum and Heritage Studies, Human Geography and Tourism, Installation, Environmental and Land Art can engage with the film/project's aims and intentions. Furthermore, this method highlights the values of this craft-driven way of working and supports Harper's suggestion 'that different models of research need to be evolved so that practice can be made accessible to the researcher' (2013:146).

Examples of the short-term impact of the research are, once more, excavated in this final study whilst its long-term effects, given the doctoral time-frame, remain to be seen. It is, for example, hard to know yet who may be inspired by the film or enjoy revisiting stitch in the workshop setting, and what effect witnessing the signatures on the hills had on unknown outdoor enthusiasts. In the same vein, will Liggins' teaching of *Wuthering Heights* has new potency as a result of her involvement in this project? For the Bradford women, their involvement in *Sew Near – Sew Far* presented something of a different type of hidden value, in that

^{xcii} Professor of Museum Studies.

the Brontë sisters' story exposed the group to an unknown aspect of British women's history and enabled them to experience a new and different place. Gata Aura, the coordinator acknowledged:

'Talk English Bradford was happy to work with the *Sew Near – Sew Far* Project and our ESOL learners thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The project allowed the ESOL learners ... to explore the rich heritage of the Brontë Sisters and to integrate with other communities and allowed them to discover Haworth and the Parsonage for the first time despite them living in Bradford' (Gata Aura, 2017).

The fact that 150 people donated their sewn signatures to the project is a further positive outcome. Coincidentally, this is the optimum number of individuals with whom any one person can maintain stable relationships with. This is what Robin Dunbar^{xciii}, refers to as the Dunbar number.

Although it was not possible for all those involved in this project to come together at its launch, seeing all the signatures stretched on the moors together facilitated a sense of joint endeavour and belonging, for as Gauntlett suggests, creativity 'forms bridges between people and communities' (2011: 245). (Figure 5.12.)

^{xciii} Anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist.



Figure 5.11 The sewn names making up the Currer Bell's signature (October 2017).

That *Sew Near – Sew Far* created a transitory culture of encounter is a further benefit of this project. The term 'culture of encounter' is apposite and was coined by Pope Francis. It is also the title of Douglas Alexander's^{xciv} Radio 4 programme about ways of bringing disparate communities together. The comments of two family groups involved in the initiative highlight these encounters, along with the inclusive nature of this stitch-driven way of working:

'On behalf of [my daughter] and myself as her Nana I would like to thank you for giving her the chance to be part of your Brontë project. [My daughter] thoroughly enjoyed taking part and was so proud on Sunday when we visited the moor to see the finished work in situ, we managed to find [her] contribution straight away which was a bonus. Thanks, and a big pat on the back to all concerned' (Marchant, 2017).

^{xciv} Former Scottish Labour MP.

'The signatures engraved on the Yorkshire hills with fabric and yarn are simply amazing. I love that the heather was out - the hills were glorious as a background to the signatures. Congratulations, Lynn - and thank you for letting us be a part of this' (De Napoli, 2017).

This final case study adds further evidence regarding the hidden values and points of tension in shared embroidery practice. It elucidates how, in this commission-driven iteration, the hand-stitched signature cloth was able to cross disciplines and present a new way of experiencing the Brontë sisters' legacy. The intertwining of literary, site specific and crafts knowledge opens up new and innovative ways of working and pushes the boundaries of epistemology, 'that we might integrate other ways of knowing, remembering and imagining into academic practice' (Pink 2009:41).

6. Conclusion

This research interrogates three practice-based stitch projects to reveal the hidden values and points of tension in this form of shared working, including the interdependence of the aesthetic, the political and the ethical (Kester, 2004: xvii). Presenting the viewpoint of a professional embroiderer immersed in this way of working contributes to knowledge, given this is an academic perspective little examined to date. Similarly, the self-reflexive methodology provides a transparent model for those in connected fields of study and supports Bazalgette's view that '[a]ctivities which make meaningful contact between different groups and slices of society should be pursued more actively' (2017:302).

The varied projects investigated highlight the breadth and scope of the enquiry, incorporating as they do, universal themes including identity, gender, heritage, power, culture and belonging. The study also highlights the accessibility of this method and makes clear its ability as a contemporary method to move across and between agendas, disciplines and cultures to come together, to acknowledge community and friendship. The research also sheds light on the contemporary relevance of the signature cloth as a strategy for engagement, which in turn will foster greater recognition of this area of hand-stitched social history. The wide-range of partner organisations too elucidates the elasticity of these methods in which the act of making is but one interlinked element. This echoes with Ravetz's findings who asserts that crafts through collaboration can be 'wide reaching, forward facing, flexible, relational, pedagogically up to date, technologically innovative, socially engaged and politically charged' (2012: 2).

Drawing on the researcher's embedded knowledge, intimately connected to stitch-based ways of working, some of the hidden values and tensions in this iteration of socially engaged art practice are exposed. This includes the challenging, and at times, contentious terrain in which ethical protocols and aesthetic awareness overlap, an area little explored to date. A hidden value prevalent in each study is dialogical exchange. This ranges from cross-cultural, intergenerational, subject specific, local and familial. The three studies yielded a wide range of conversations, from those with seven elderly local residents of Robin Hood's Bay,

to the sideways talking with fifteen inner city boys, mostly of Asian descent; to the varied communications with over 100 people in and around Haworth, the home of the Brontë sisters. This way of working also helps to facilitate real, face-to-face dialogues, and ameliorate isolation, as highlighted by journalist Karen Kay. Kay points out Ofcom statistics which suggest that British adults now spend an average of nine hours a day online (Kay, 2017: 23). It is also an important asset which enables and activates information sharing and debate of many types, for as Kikoski and Kikoski make clear, ‘Conversation has been and will continue to be centrally important to transmit knowledge’ (2004:8).

Another benefit emerging from this study that has rewards for wider society are the new ‘communities of practice’ (Etienne Wenger^{xcv} 1998) that result from this type of shared working. This is akin to the tradition of quilting bees and sewing circles where women worked on sewing projects together and shared stories, gossip and created a safe communal space. These new communities are diverse and take different embodiments including new friendship networks, a benefit that is particularly important in today’s increasingly digital age in that face-to-face contact may help to break down isolation and fear. Susan Cain^{xcvi} acknowledges this, pointing out that ‘studies show that face to face interactions create trust in a way that online interactions can’t’ (2012:93). Gauntlett also highlights the value of social capital, a term where community and shared enterprise make for a richer environment and way of life, something that can be exploited in these collaborative embroidery projects. Harper goes further, arguing that:

‘...the intellectual potential that is embedded in craft knowledge and the individual and communal benefits that stem from the experience of craft need to be recognized, valued and exploited as we ...engage with the problems of modernity’ (2013:7-8)

The transportability of the embroidery workshop and the flexibility of such a way of working is another overlooked asset made known in this practice-based enquiry. Such a tactile way of working does not require a fixed environment and the

^{xcv} Educational theorist and practitioner.

^{xcvi} Author and campaigner.

workspace itself can be moved, re-arranged and repositioned in any number of configurations, something which, in each of the varied case studies, is elucidated. Knott highlights this positive attribute when he suggests that ‘impermanent and convertible workstations’ are conduits of expression that allow production that is ‘mobile and idiosyncratic’. (2015:60)

The value and significance of the small museum /archive as diverse and meaningful resources to be maintained and nourished for the benefit of all, echoes across the case studies, some of which are under threat. For as Paul Connerton^{xcvii} argues ‘Knowledge of all human activities in the past is possible only through a knowledge of their traces’ (1989:13). That the museum/archives each had different agendas, funding streams and reached out to both global and local audiences, demonstrates the flexibility of the stitch-driven approach to engage with diverse communities. It is also significant that the sites are in the north of England, away from ‘the concentration of cultural power,’ (Hewison, 2014:230) and are connected in a celebration of the immense and often untapped, value of regional heritage. This method demonstrates how it is possible for museums and communities to risk-take and work together creatively and respectfully and at the same time provide ‘potent means of building bridges and even overcoming divisions among disparate groups’ (Golding 2013:1). Something that is highlighted in the image below taken in the Parsonage Museum where two women, ESOL learners in the Talk-English group, experience at first hand and blend into the Brontë interior, rather than stand out, as different. (Figure 6.1.)

^{xcvii} Social anthropologist.



Figure 6.1 The Talk-English group's visit to the Brontë Parsonage Museum (September 2017).

The fact that the case studies in this research produced meaningful lasting and transitory artefacts that are accessible to the participants, researcher and funders is a major achievement. In the first case study, a spotlight was shone on a physical memorial, created in the 1930's in a Yorkshire coastal village. This finely worked signature cloth not only provided an elegy for a past life, but brought its maker, Rachel Scales, out from the shadows. Where-as the stitched textile made in Burnage Academy in 2016, commemorates the short life of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah and its display in the school presents a physical reminder of those involved in the creation. The final study, *Sew Near – Sew Far*, draws on an internationally renowned literary family in which a fleeting memorial, created from composite sewn signatures was placed in an evocative landscape. These widely accessible projects also put into doubt the notion that in SEA, the avant-garde must always be difficult to understand (Kester, 2004:9).

That the three case studies produced different outcomes which are remembered in

both physical and digital form brings to light another complexity in this enquiry. Does artist, Jeremy Deller's, assertion that an artwork can exist in your mind (Front Row, 29.06.18) provide enough of a meaningful legacy in this way of working? Or is Susan Pearce's^{xcviii} note a word of caution more apposite in the context of this study, in that she ponders what might be lost in the 'rush to digitise and make museums ever more interactive' (cited in Golding and Modest 2013:8). For without the opportunity to see, handle and appreciate the 'awe and wonder' (Greenblatt 1991, cited in Golding and Modest 2013:8) of real artefacts, this research would not have taken flight. Given the rapid rise in distant, screen-based forms of communication, is not the value and significance of real and tangible objects, even more precious and something which should be cherished, savoured and relished? Although anecdotal, the fact that people visit the archives at the Imperial War Museum to see for themselves, evidence of their deceased relatives in WWII signature cloths, acknowledges the continuing value of these tangible objects.

As with the hidden values, several points of tension echo across the projects and resonate beyond the confines of this study. The issue of consent is one such example, for ethics remains a contentious and uncertain subject. The complex issue of is highlighted by Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson^{xcix} who argue:

'We are in danger of allowing ethical concerns that are quite proper in general terms to transform the entire research process into a formulaic one, such that there are only a very limited number of permissible research designs, determined not by their validity but by their capacity to yield research protocols that can be checked against a set of simple (but often inappropriate) criteria' (2007:227).

The findings of this study signpost the need for more nuanced approaches to ethical issues, mindful of the fact that representing others is as Anthony Cohen and Nigel Rapport^c (1995) suggest an 'expression of our own consciousness' (Pink, 2013:36). Consent forms for example can be onerous and often use alien

^{xcviii} Emeritus Professor of Museum Studies.

^{xcix} Sociologists.

^c Anthropologists.

academic language, which can be both off putting and removed from the lives of the non-academic participants, contributors or collaborators Anthony Downey's^{ci} argument that 'we need... an ethics of engagement, not as an afterthought ... (2009:603) is also apposite.

In relation to the above, a dilemma unique to this thesis is that of exposing anonymity, given that at the centre of this investigation is the hand drawn signature. This conundrum was exemplified in the enquiry into Rachel Scales signature cloth. In highlighting the Thompson family autographs on the cloth Yvonne Clarke's (nee Thompson) place in the Robin Hood's Bay community is visualised and verified, yet, her anonymity, as a result of this is also compromised (Figure 6.2.)

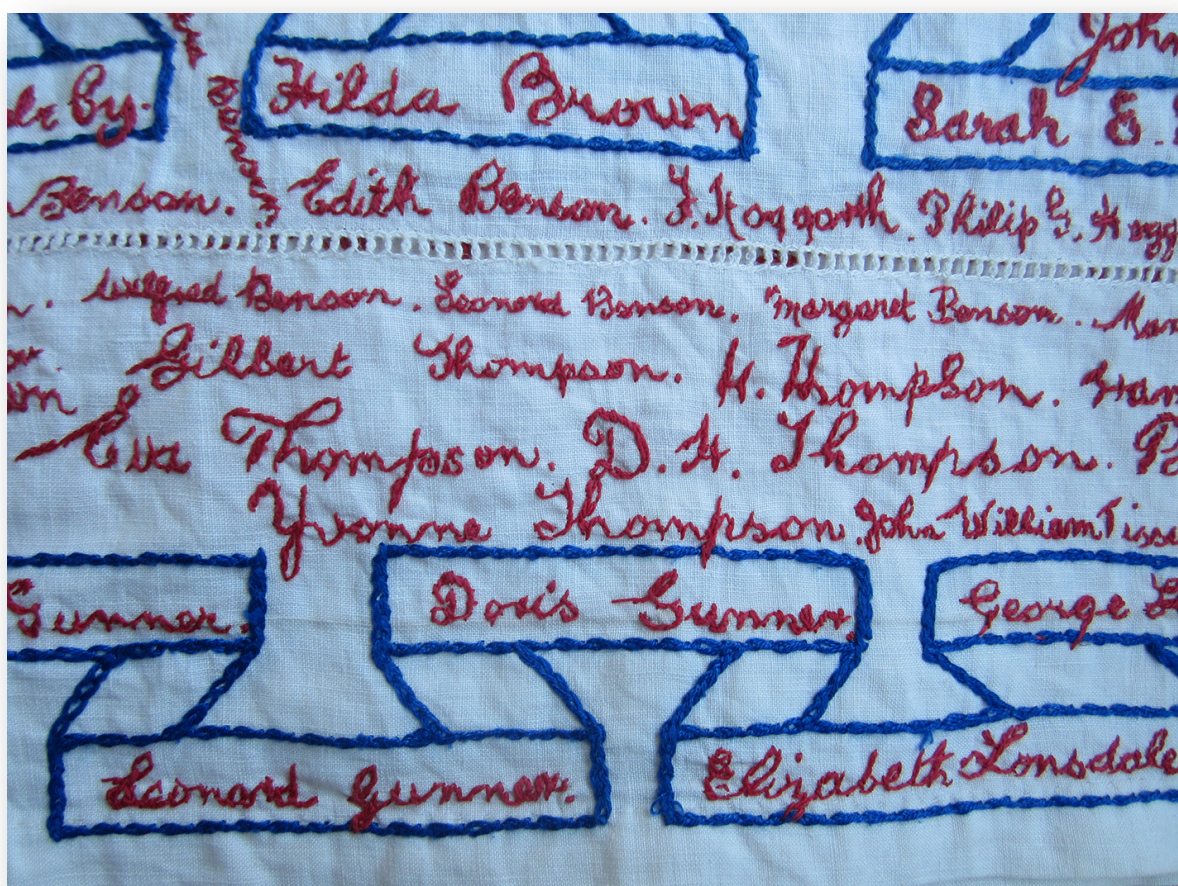


Figure 6.2 Detail of Rachel Scales 1930's signature cloth showing a number of grouped, Thompson family signatures (June 2015).

Measuring value in arts-based projects is a further tension brought to light in this

^{ci} Professor of Visual Culture.

study, for as Belfoire^{cii} and Bennett^{ciii} suggest, 'The aesthetic encounter ... is an individual subjective experience'. However, the additional consent forms created late in this research process, although time consuming in nature, did in fact have hidden value (see Appendix 3 p.159). This was because they led to a reconnection and a gathering of new data sometime after the projects' completion. For example, on returning to Burnage Academy in June 2018 to obtain Spencely signature for a final time, it was possible to see the banner was on display in her classroom. She also talked about why it was not the main corridor of the school. This was because a member of the Burnage staff had been with Ullah, thirty years ago when he died, and said seeing the sewn autograph on a daily basis proved too painful a memory. This acknowledges embroidery's ability to act as a form of non-verbal communication and also as a powerful, tactile memorial.

Something which may be perceived as a tension in this study is the 'grab it and run methodology' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:11). This occurs when the researcher quickly disappears from site once the data is gathered. This is an issue which occurs in each of the projects interrogated. However, it can also have positive benefits in that the embedded stance of the researcher means becoming closely involved in a place with privileged access to new information. There is nevertheless, also the withdrawal from site once the initiative is complete and the negative emotions this brings. This is exemplified in *Threads of Identity* (2016), where getting to know the teacher and pupils at Burnage was a rewarding, positive experience but naturally limited in its life span. The celebration event highlights this in that seeing the boys share stories of the project was a positive experience but sad as it also marked the end of the partnership. (Figure 6.3.)

^{cii} Professor in Cultural Studies.

^{ciii} Professor in Cultural Studies.



Figure 6.3 The presentation event at Burnage Academy (December 2016).

This in-depth and wide-ranging study offers ‘an enriched view’ (Robinson 2012:39) of embroidery practice as a form of social engagement. It shines a light on the complexities in this way of shared working and explores how the aesthetic and ethical come together in meaningful stitched-based outcomes. The study also provides evidence of how these alternative methods can move across and between borders, encompassing subjects including anthropology, women’s studies, history, geography, literature, cultural studies, sociology and education; for as Pink advocates, [b]y pushing at the boundaries of the modern western paradigm that we are set in as academics we might integrate other ways of knowing, remembering and imagining into academic practice’ (2009:41).

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Examples of email correspondence re signature cloths (A-D)

A, Bentley Priory, Hertfordshire.

Your name *

Your email address *

collectionsproject@bentleypriorymuseum.org

Subject (optional)

Signature Cloths

Add me to Lynn's mailing list

Yes

Your message *

Hi Lynn,

I am currently working at Bentley Priory Museum in Stanmore

researching the collection, which is predominantly material relating to the Battle of

Britain. The RAF were stationed here from 1924-2008 and the site was integral to the

Battle of Britain.

We have an embroidered signature cloth in our collection but absolutely no information

about it whatsoever! I am struggling to find out much about them. I am aware that the

IWM have a couple which relate to the war

but I noticed that you have come across a few and wondered if you could offer me any

advice on researching it further?

Many thanks,

B. Email re signature cloths discovered in Dalkeith, Scotland.

Dear Lynn

I'm contacting you following the discovery of 2 signature quilts in our local museum collection – I'm trying to do a bit of research into their history and the wider context of these textiles. The museum is moving to new premises in an historic building and we are embarking on a 2015 signature cloth project to mark the move. The two cloths are in very good condition – one was created in 1917 as a fundraiser for the war effort – we've just finished collating all the names and are starting to research them, the other was, we think a similar fundraising cloth, for a local cricket club (of which there are not many up here).

I've attached 2-part images of these for your interest.

Part of my job involves community engagement and I was wondering if you would be interested in coming North to do a talk /workshop at some point?

The cloths have sparked quite a bit of interest – the 1st world war cloth was discovered in a local charity shop and purchased for £2.50 by an eagle-eyed member of the public who handed it into our museum.

Anyway I won't take up any more of your time at the moment but would be delighted to hear back from you.

Melville Housing Association

7 Eskdail Court

Dalkeith

Midlothian

EH22 1AG

C. Email from Pat Staniforth re Rachel Mills.

Hello Lynn,

I haven't forgotten you! Here at last are photographs of the two tablecloths in the Museum store, one made as a fundraiser for the Methodist Church in 1909, and the other made in 1913 to celebrate Robert Jermyn Cooper having been the Vicar here for 55 years. The other tablecloth, the one in the Museum that you saw, was also a fundraiser for the Methodist Church made in 1936 - it has an incredible number of names on it! There is a note in our acquisitions book that says it was embroidered by Rachel Mills. When the Museum closes at the end of the month, we'll bring it up and photograph the whole thing, if you like (we saw the photograph on your website).

Another tablecloth that was made in the village was for the Guides and this one was sent to Guide Headquarters we borrowed it back for Centenary celebrations in 2010. don't think there's a date on it but looking at the names, it could date back to around 1920. How did they get the signatures of Olave and Agnes Baden Powell?!

I hope the photos are of interest to you.

Best wishes,

Pat Staniforth, Robin Hood's Bay

D. Emails from two *Sew Near – Sew Far* participants. (October 2017)

Hi Lynn,

On behalf of C and myself as her Nana I would like to thank you for giving her the chance to be part of your Bronte project C thoroughly enjoyed taking part and was so proud on Sunday when we visited the moor to see the finished work in situ, we managed to find C's contribution straight away which was a bonus. Thanks and a big pat on the back to all concerned.

Kind Regards. Sue Marchant

Many many thanks!

My sister and I are so grateful for these amazing pictures. The signatures engraved on the Yorkshire hills with fabric and yarn are simply amazing. I love that the heather was out - the hills were glorious as a background to the signatures. Congratulations, Lynn - and thank you for letting us be a part of this.

all the very best –

Judy DeNapoli and her dear sister Patricia Lynch

Appendix 2

CD of short films - *Threads of Identity* and *Sew Near - Sew Far*.

Appendix 3

Examples of the consent forms used.

a. Anonymous consent form (adult).

UCA
university for the creative arts

Ethics Committee

Consent Form

Project title: Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice

Data Controller: Lynn Settrington, MPhil/PhD Researcher, University for the Creative Arts
Supervisors: Professor Lesley Millar and Professor Simon Olding

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the study on Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice.
- I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided explaining by the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study and what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.
- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice and all records of my participation will be destroyed.
- In consideration for the research nature of the study, participants shall not receive any reimbursement, payment or rewards.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Signature of participant [redacted]

Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) [redacted]

Date 29.11.16

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS) LYNN SETTERINGTON

Signed [signature]

Date 29/11/2016

If you have any queries contact - lynn@lynnsettrington.co.uk or roffice@ucreative.ac.uk
Thank you for your time in completing this form. Lynn Settrington (PhD Researcher)

1

b. Anonymous consent form (under 16).

Threads of Identity - Filming Agreement

Thank you for agreeing to be filmed as part of the Threads of Identity project.

..... ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ (Please Print Name)

I give permission for:

Copies to be made for educational purposes by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust and Race Relations Resource Centre

Copies to be used in publications produced and used by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust

Copies to be used on the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Education Trust Web page and blog

Other conditions

I wish to remain anonymous

Any other condition.....

Full Name in block capitals
..... ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Signed by parent or carer of child named
..... ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

(Please sign above)

Please also provide full contact details:

Address:..... ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

..... Post Code..... ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Telephone..... Mobile..... ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Thank you for your time in completing this form.
Julie Devonald (Project Manager) email - julie.devonald@manchester.ac.uk


Anonymous consent form (under 16). Part

Address: [REDACTED]
Post Code: [REDACTED]
Telephone: [REDACTED] Mobile: [REDACTED]

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS) LYNN SETTERINGTON
Signed [Signature]
Date 29/11/2016

Thank you for your time in completing this form.
Any queries please do not hesitate to contact lynn@lynnsettingington.co.uk or roffice@ucreative.ac.uk

c. Interviews and photographic consent.



Interview and Photographic Consent and Copyright Release

Project title: Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice

PhD Researcher : Lynn Setterington
Supervisors: Professors Lesley Millar and Simon Olding, University for the Creative Arts

- I, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{AS/17} hereby give Lynn Setterington the right to use the photographs and film taken or provided for educational and research purpose and for the publication as a PHD thesis and dissemination through the British Library electronic thesis on-line service (ETHOS)
- The moral rights of the interviewee are as to be identified with the artefacts and ideas and are asserted under Chapter IV of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.
- The PhD subject matter may subsequently be published as a book, please tick below to release data/photographs/film for this further purpose.
Please specify the release conditions below:
I agree to the further use of data/photographs for publication in a book
 YES NO
- I agree to the archiving of an interview transcript / photographs
 YES NO

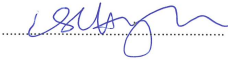
Please specify any particular release conditions or further permissions required for example – if photographs were taken by a third party

.....

Parent or Carer signature (on behalf of a child under 16) ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Name (block capitals) * ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Date and venue 16-2-17

Researcher signature 

d. Interviews and photographic consent (under16)

[Handwritten signature]



Interview and Photographic Consent and Copyright Release

Project title: Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice

PhD Researcher : Lynn Setterington

Supervisors: Professors Lesley Millar and Simon Olding, University for the Creative Arts

- I ~~.....~~ ~~.....~~ *Asm* hereby give Lynn Setterington the right to use the photographs and film taken or provided for educational and research purpose and for the publication as a PHD thesis and dissemination through the British Library electronic thesis on-line service (ETHOS)
- The moral rights of the interviewee are as to be identified with the artefacts and ideas and are asserted under Chapter IV of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.
- The PhD subject matter may subsequently be published as a book, please tick below to release data/photographs/film for this further purpose. Please specify the release conditions below:

I agree to the further use of data/photographs for publication in a book

YES NO

I agree to the archiving of an interview transcript / photographs

YES NO

Please specify any particular release conditions or further permissions required for example – if photographs were taken by a third party

Parent or Carer signature (on behalf of a child under 16) * *[Handwritten signature]*

Name (block capitals) * ~~.....~~

Date and venue * 16-2-17

Researcher signature *[Handwritten signature]*

e. Participant information.



Ethics Committee

Project title: Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice

Data Controller: Lynn Setterington, MPhil/PhD Researcher, University for the Creative Arts
Supervisors: Professor Lesley Millar and Professor Simon Olding

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree that I give permission for the child named below to take part in the study on Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice.
- I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigators of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.
- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice and all records of my participation will be destroyed.
- In consideration for the research nature of the study, participants shall not receive any reimbursement, payment or rewards.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Child's Name and Age (BLOCK CAPITALS): ~~.....~~

Signature of parent or carer ~~.....~~

Name of parent/carer (BLOCK CAPITALS) ~~.....~~

Date: 17/02/2017

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS) LYNN SETTERINGTON

Signed: *LSUA*

Date: 17/2/2017

If you have any queries contact - lynn@lynnsetterington.co.uk or office@ucreative.ac.uk
Thank you for your time in completing this form. Lynn Setterington (PhD Researcher)

- f. Anonymous consent form - electronic version.

SEW NEAR - SEW FAR

Dear

Thank you so much for your participation in our recent workshop in Haworth with Lynn Settrington, one of the ten MeetingPoint2 initiatives. All those who took part in the donation of sewn autographs will be included in the final artwork in commemoration and you should have now received an invitation to attend the launch at the Old School Room in Haworth on Sunday 1st October from 12pm to 3pm.

As well as the artwork being displayed on the moors above Haworth from 1st to 14th October, Lynn is hoping to write about the project part of her PhD, exploring stitch-based methods in collaborative working. However, in order to do that, she needs to have your permission for your anonymous stitched contribution to be included in the project. Unfortunately, given the high volume of participants and, and the drop-in nature of the sessions, it was not practical or possible to speak to everyone about the research on the day. Nevertheless, all of the forms are attached and can be saved for future reference, but in order to make things simpler, instead of signing each form, if you [Click Here](#) you will be agreeing to your consent.

If you are able to come along on 1st October, or have any queries, you could speak to Lynn on the day or email her at lynn@lynnsettrington.co.uk.

Finally, we very much welcome your comments and feedback on the project, so please follow links on the Bronte Parsonage website or tweet at #SewNear-SewFar.

g. Named consent form.

UCA
university for the creative arts

Ethics Committee

Sample Form
Project title: Hidden Values and Points of Tension in Shared Embroidery Practice

Data Controller: Lynn Setterington, MPhil/PhD Researcher, University for the Creative Arts
Supervisors: Professor Lesley Millar and Professor Simon Olding

Participant Name:

Participant Location:

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the study on Embroidery Practices in Socially Engaged Art.
- I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigators of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.
- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study and I am happy for my name to be used in the thesis.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice. In case of withdrawal of consent any data collected will be removed and not used in the study and no further data regarding their participation should be added to the project.
- In consideration for the research nature of the study, participants shall not receive any reimbursement, payment or rewards.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS) ANDREW WOOD

Signed [Signature]

Date 2/7/20

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signed

Date

h. Photographic and interview consent form.

Threads of Identity - Filming Agreement

Thank you for agreeing to be filmed as part of the Threads of Identity project.

..... **[Redacted Name]** (Please Print Name)

I give permission for:

- Copies to be made for educational purposes by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust and Race Relations Resource Centre
- Copies to be used in publications produced and used by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust
- Copies to be used on the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Education Trust Web page and blog

Other conditions

- I wish to remain anonymous
- Any other condition.....

Full Name in block capitals

..... **[Redacted Name]**

Signed by parent or carer of child named

..... **[Redacted Signature]**
(Please sign above)

Please also provide full contact details:

Address:..... **[Redacted Address]**

..... Post Code..... **[Redacted Post Code]**

Telephone..... Mobile..... **[Redacted Phone Numbers]**

Thank you for your time in completing this form.
Julie Devonald (Project Manager) email - julie.devonald@manchester.ac.uk

Film consent form. (under 16s)

Threads of Identity - Filming Agreement

Thank you for agreeing to be filmed as part of the Threads of Identity project.

..... **[Redacted Name]** (Please Print Name)

I give permission for:

- Copies to be made for educational purposes by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust and Race Relations Resource Centre
- Copies to be used in publications produced and used by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust
- Copies to be used on the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Education Trust Web page and blog

Other conditions

- I wish to remain anonymous
- Any other condition.....

Full Name in block capitals

..... **[Redacted Name]**

Signed by parent or carer of child named

..... **[Redacted Signature]**

(Please sign above)

Please also provide full contact details:

Address:..... **[Redacted Address]**

..... Post Code..... **[Redacted Post Code]**

Telephone..... Mobile..... **[Redacted Phone Numbers]**

Thank you for your time in completing this form.
Julie Devonald (Project Manager) email - julie.devonald@manchester.ac.uk

