
The ship *Rajah* arrived in Hobart in 1841 with a cargo of female prisoners, and the patchwork quilt made by some of them. This book tells their story, and the authors, both well-known historians, have left no stone unturned to cover every aspect of it. In doing so, they have skilfully set the voyage, the quilt and the women in the context of their times.

There is fascinating information about the quilt, with excellent material about Elizabeth Fry and her Ladies’ Committee, who provided not only materials for the quilt, but a matron (Keziah Hayter) to supervise making it. The authors suggest identifications of quilters among the convicts, with those who acknowledged sewing skills more likely.

All convicts on board are described: their crimes, their native places, their descriptions, ages, height and background, for example whether they were ‘on the town’. The trip out is also described, and what happened to the women when they arrived: where and to whom they were assigned, their experiences, any further offences. Many lived in institutions, such as female factories, hiring depots and hospitals.

Many women married, and this is covered in detail: how many were already married in Britain, colonial marriages, children – and those who did not marry, and who had same-sex relationships. Women’s lives after sentence are described – their jobs, their marriages, family life, in chapters entitled ‘Freedom’ and ‘Surviving’. Then comes death, which is analysed in detail: the cause, age, place, and memorials for the women.

Trudy Cowley and Dianne Snowden, both thorough researchers who know their topics well, have produced a wonderful book which answers every question the reader could have about the *Rajah*, the convicts and the quilt – in very readable prose, which encourages the reader to continue. The book is lavishly illustrated and has analysis with plentiful tables and figures. A supporting website includes biographies of all the convicts.

As Lucy Frost writes in her preface, during years of research, the authors ‘have had to go looking for each and every piece of the story’, and consulted an astonishing range of records. ‘My overwhelming impression in reading *Patchwork Prisoners* was of an admirable thoroughness created by attention to detail.’ This book is a must for anyone interested in female convicts and quilting, and also wider questions of female transportation and nineteenth-century Tasmanian history as a whole.

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