Scottish tapestry tradition, technique, narrative and innovation: its influence on Australian woven tapestry 1976-1996

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SCOTTISH TAPESTRY TRADITION, TECHNIQUE,
NARRATIVE AND INNOVATION:
ITS INFLUENCE ON AUSTRALIAN WOVEN TAPESTRY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree
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Certification

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference has been made in the text.

Valerie Kirk
August 24 1999.
Abstract

This thesis researches the history and traditions of Scottish tapestry from its roots in the Arts and Crafts Movement when the Edinburgh Tapestry Company was set up in 1912, through the depressed war years to a flourishing in the 1960s and 1970s.

It examines technique and a narrative approach to the medium which was developed by William Morris from his study of medieval tapestries. Morris emphasised the importance of the craft skills and demanded dedication to the detail of technique through application and rigour on the part of the weaver. This way of working in tapestry was carried on through the Edinburgh studio, not as a static methodology, but as a carefully considered and flexible way of working, open to change and innovation.

The thesis argues that innovative and narrative traits of Scottish tapestry provided an ideal model for the development of tapestry in Australia; firstly through the initial work of Archie Brennan, tapestry artist and artistic director of The Edinburgh Tapestry Company 1962 - 1978 and secondly through Belinda Ramson, tapestry artist. A strong alliance was formed between Scotland and Australia.

Tapestry in Australia has been acknowledged world wide as a vital area of the arts with leading practitioners contributing excellent work to this field and I shall argue in this thesis that some of the distinct qualities of Australian tapestry are derived from the exchanges between the two countries.
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Introduction

Tapestry is a relatively new area of the arts in Australia, an area which has grown dramatically over the past thirty years. In Australia in the 1960s there was no formal education or training in woven tapestry. There were no workshops set up to train apprentices, there were no courses at colleges or universities dedicated to tapestry and limited technical guidance was available from books and individual craftspeople.

In 1979 when I first came to Australia, fresh out of Edinburgh College of Art, I was aware that as a weaver in The Victorian Tapestry Workshop I was part of a fledgling industry. There was an air of optimism amongst the weavers, enthusiasm for the medium and the challenge of new horizons. A new tapestry course was being set up at Prahran Technical and Further Education college and there was a groundswell of interest in the community.

Twenty years later I became fascinated by the people and events which brought about a period of rapid change and growth in tapestry, a key question being why tapestry in Australia has developed substantially in a relatively short period of time. This thesis investigates the tapestry connection between Scotland and Australia and the people who have exchanged information, given of their knowledge and passed on skills. The documentation of this recent history is scattered in ephemeral catalogues and magazine articles plus brief mention in books on Australian Craft or international tapestry. The lack of documentation of what I see as founding influences represents a serious gap in the literature available to tapestry weavers and the wider public.

Thus, the aim of the thesis is to research the links in tapestry during the 1970s between Australia and Scotland and consider the Scottish influences in relation to the groundswell of interest in tapestry in Australia and consequent development of Australian tapestry.

In order to understand the Scotland-Australia connection I will research the historical background which provides a context for contemporary Australian tapestry with a particular lineage going back to European medieval tapestry. Although other parallel histories and cultural influences exist, this thesis concentrates on the Australia-Scotland connection and the resulting characteristics in Australian tapestry.
I will explore Australian tapestry, through Archie Brennan, the Director of Weaving at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company (1964-1978) and Belinda Ramson, who studied with him, by investigating aspects of traditions of craftsmanship, technical skill, narrative and creative development in the medium. This thesis demonstrates the translocation of European tapestry to Australia and the revitalisation of the medium during the period 1970-1999 through the Scottish model.

**Historical Background**

Chapter one begins with William Morris (1834-96) who spearheaded the Arts and Crafts Movement in the second half of the nineteenth century and championed a new approach to tapestry which did not follow the trend of the European workshops, slavishly copying brushstrokes in paintings. Weavers and designers worked cooperatively changing the style and techniques of weaving in relation to an aesthetic and narrative content inspired by tapestries of the Middle Ages. The thinking behind the works from Morris and Company was innovative in its time, a turning point for European tapestry in the twentieth century - particularly in Scotland. The Edinburgh Tapestry Company opened in 1912 fully embracing Arts and Crafts principles.

Chapter two explores the influence of William Morris through examination of the first tapestries woven in the Scottish workshop which I researched through a field trip to Scotland. Looking at and documenting the tapestries provided information about the detail/technical quality of these works that can not be gained from reproductions.

In Chapter three there is an evaluation of the war years and post war changes at The Edinburgh Tapestry Company Limited. World War 1 and World War 2 slowed down production, brought about economic changes and provided time for reflection in the doldrums of post war Britain. A mural tapestry *Prince of the Gael* started in 1938 and not completed, remained on the loom providing technical training ground. However, lack of patronage, new thinking in art and demand for more cost effective smaller works challenged the pre-war ideas and brought about a period of change. These were the formative years for Archie Brennan, a young apprentice who learned the technical skills weaving *Prince of the Gael* but looked outwards to France and the realm of contemporary art for inspiration. I investigate how this laid the foundation for contemporary tapestry, carrying forward the traditional skills with changes in warp and weft settings and technique to suit the aesthetics, content and ideals of contemporary art.

Chapter four considers the success and popularity of Scottish tapestry with Archie Brennan as artistic director of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company from 1962 - 1978. The company became known for its innovative collaborations between artists and weavers and enjoyed an international reputation for its conceptual approach which made tapestry an acceptable and exciting area of contemporary art.
Brennan was also in charge of a new department of tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art which for the first time provided training for women and closed the gap between artist and maker. He was recognised as a dedicated and tireless teacher promoting the work of his students and the workshop weavers through national and international exhibitions. Archie Brennan and the small group of tapestry weavers in Edinburgh achieved international recognition through commissions for public and private collections and by the collaboration with Gloria F. Ross, American tapestry editeur, making Scottish tapestry an obvious model for advancement of tapestry in Australia.

Scotland - Australia Connections

Chapter 5 discusses the Scotland - Australia connection, describing the relationship between Archie Brennan and Australia.

To better understand the characteristics of Brennan's work a small tapestry woven by Archie Brennan in Australia is analysed. It encapsulates his technical and conceptual approach and the detailed examination of this work makes his dedication and understanding of the medium clear. This knowledge was passed on through his teaching and the work of Belinda Ramson.

Brennan's ability, as a teacher engaging with individual students, questioning their ideas and refining their technique is pointed out through examples from the workshop held at Steiglitz, Australia documented by the Crafts Council of Australia on video.

This was cross referenced with direct observation of his teaching in field work at "Convergence", Handspinners and Weavers conference in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. in July 1996. There I held discussions with Brennan and participated in a basic tapestry workshop as an observer of his teaching methods and philosophy.

In the U.S.A. I was also able to draw comparisons between Brennan's methodology and philosophy and that of Jean Pierre Larochette, trained in the Aubusson style of French tapestry, as both Brennan and Larochette were teaching in the same workshop. This pointed to distinct qualities in Brennan's work and teaching that have been widely accepted in Australia.

Chapter 6 considers the importance of Belinda Ramson and the training she provided at The Victorian Tapestry Workshop with the first apprentices: Marie Cook, Sara Lindsay, Meryl Dumbrell, Liz Nettleton and Cresside Colette. It is obvious that Brennan's skills, ideas and commitment to tapestry were passed on through Ramson and the apprentices as there are clear relationships between Brennan’s tapestries and the work woven by Ramson and the first apprentices in the workshop.
This period of training was vital to the success of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop yet Belinda Ramson's name does not appear in the first catalogue published by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

I discuss the development of tapestry in Australia from the 1970s through to the 1990s, charting the rise in national and international recognition of Australian tapestry and argue that the acclaim is due to the strong foundation of technique, image and content from a tradition of narrative combined with a lively, experimental approach.
Chapter 1

THE PRECURSOR OF CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH TAPESTRY - WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

To understand the current position of Australian tapestry and its relationship with Scottish tapestry it is necessary to go back to visionary British designer, and man of practical talents, William Morris (1834-1896) and the Arts and Crafts Movement which began in late Victorian England with ideologies dating back to the 1830s (Naylor 11-13).

Morris was influenced and inspired by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, (1812-1852), a devotee of Gothic art and John Ruskin, (1819-1900), art, social and economic theorist. He became a pioneer socialist who put forward ideas for radical reform of the British capitalist society. His main concerns were with equality, preserving the natural environment through an alternative to mass industrialisation and giving people control of their lives through cooperative systems, the satisfaction of manual labour, education, leisure and a productive, rewarding lifestyle. Like many medievalists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Morris, looked to the Middle Ages for inspiration and solutions to the onslaught of industrialism. His views are extensively documented through his lectures and writing and they have been criticised as idealistic, as Paul Greenhalgh’s article “The Trouble with Utopia” points out “It is hard not to view this vision of humankind as being a paternalistic, arrogant vision of what he felt the masses ought to be” (24-25) but he concedes in the essay “Morris After Morris” that “Morris’s greatest contribution to the twentieth century has undoubtedly been in the visual arts and related areas” (Parry William Morris 362). He is known as the leading figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement which began in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The movement grew from social and moral considerations championing handmade craft and an alternative lifestyle. This philosophy was widely accepted throughout Britain and overseas, placing great importance on well made and designed craft objects. In
Australia, the wealthy business man Robert Barr Smith (1824-1915) and his wife Joanna (1835-1919) were recognised during the 1880s and 1890s as Morris and Company's most significant international clients (Menz 42). The ideas and teachings of the British Arts and Crafts Movement were incorporated into the Design Schools in Adelaide and in Perth and Arts and Crafts Societies were established in this country at the beginning of the century, firstly in Tasmania in 1903, then New South Wales in 1906, Victoria in 1908 and Brisbane in 1912 (Cochrane 17).

It is through the influence of William Morris and the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement that tapestry was revitalised in an industrialised time and period of recession in the major tapestry workshops of Europe, with simplified techniques and an approach to the medium modelled on the simpler fourteenth and fifteenth century tapestries of Europe.

This chapter examines the nineteenth century tapestry workshop context and traces the move away from the stagnant hierarchy of the European workshops to a more cooperative relationship between artist/designer and maker, technique and image making, men and women, through William Morris's own work, Morris and Co. and the tapestry workshop established at Merton Abbey. It looks at the works woven under Morris's direction and how they differed significantly in their concept, technical production, design and aesthetic from the tapestries made in the other major tapestry centres at that time.

Pedagogy will be considered in relation to Morris's ideas as a teacher who passed on the practical skills acquired through his own experimentation to his pupil Henry Dearle and through him to the tapestry apprentices. His theories were conveyed to the wider public through over sixty lectures he delivered, his prolific writing in prose, poetry, political material, a play, two books and many pamphlets/journal articles and diaries. Examples of his work and work by the company were on display in exhibitions and in a London showroom.

In chapter 2 I will go on to discuss how the tapestry techniques, production methods and aspects of William Morris's philosophy formed the basis of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company.

The Nineteenth Century Tapestry Context

The nineteenth century approach to making tapestries directly from fully painted cartoons dates back to the early sixteenth century. Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio) (1483-1520) transformed the conventions of medieval tapestry design in the cartoons commissioned by the Medici Pope, Leo X, in 1515. In these large cartoons he introduced fully painted images
with the qualities valued in painting - modulated colour, the illusion of three dimensions and the integration of figure and ground (Fermor 94). John Pope-Hennessy states that the Raphael cartoons for tapestry are among the most influential works of art ever produced, as, unlike static frescoes, the cartoons and copies of the cartoons were transported and the ideas diffused over the whole of Europe (10). The artists took control of the tapestry image and the weavers invented ways of replicating the blends of colour, perspective and a more naturalistic relationship of the figure to background.

Such devotion to naturalism continued in European tapestry through to the nineteenth century. Mural scale works were produced in vast quantities, by long established and well recognised workshops, but by the middle of the nineteenth century had reached a state of stagnation or even decline. Weaving in these European workshops had become a mere substitute for painting - a softer, more luxurious copy with every mark in the tapestry carefully replicating paint surfaces. Jules Guiffrey, administrator and artistic director of the Gobelins from 1885 to 1908 believed that the malaise in the tapestry industry of the nineteenth century was induced by this insistence on trying to recreate every brush stroke of a painting, instead of translating a design into something appropriate to wool (Phillips 114). There was an extreme division between the artist working in paint and the weaver trying harder and harder to get the effects with yarn.

Pres de la Fontaine, (Phillips 112) is an example of a nineteenth century painted canvas cartoon which has very fine colour modulation easily achieved with skilful brushwork and subtle paint mixtures, typical of the complicated cartoons presented to weavers. Translating this image literally into the grid structure of a tapestry involved painstaking replication of the qualities intrinsic to paint and foreign to weaving.

Such painstaking translation meant that tapestry had become prohibitively expensive for all but the extremely wealthy. Production of the raw weft material was costly as a vast range of colours had to be dyed to match every colour in the painted cartoon. The chemists in the dye works of the Gobelins tapestry workshops, Paris, France, between 1803 and 1824 produced a range of 30,000 dyes distributed into a thousand ranges of 36 hues (Les Manufacturers Royales n. pag.). Each separate colour required skill, precision in working out the dye recipe and long periods of time stirring the dye pot and washing out yarn. The time to carry out this work had to be paid for and a large quantity of stock weft yarn needed to be kept on the shelves as the palette for the weavers.

The weaving process was also time consuming and costly. The weaver had to spend hours exactly matching the wool colour to the colour of the paint in the cartoon, then had to work with many hues, tints and shades in fine wefts, making the entire weaving process complicated and lengthy.
Although tapestry more closely replicated painting, arts patrons were jaded by the boring tapestries produced. The same designs appeared time and again, from pattern books used throughout the nineteenth century. Although these were pretty and popular they did not have any originality, content of ideas or narrative (Phillips 112).

Well-established artists of the time were no longer interested in designing original artworks for translation into tapestry as cartoons were used many times and the quality of the tapestries suffered. Many of these tapestries were known by their style of design, Arabesque, Floral design or Verdure, rather than by the name of the artist or designer, showing a trend towards reproduction rather than individually commissioned artworks. Morris wrote off all tapestry from the seventeenth century saying it was not even equal to the cheap paint used in stables for horses “The following period saw the execution of works at an enormous expense which were a very bad substitute for the yellow-wash of a stable” (Morris W Collected Works 287).

At the same time that tapestry was becoming more laborious, costly and repetitive, new manufactured forms of wall coverings were becoming available. The Industrial Revolution in Great Britain brought about enormous changes in material culture. Mass-produced goods became available, design was related to mechanical process and the character of commodities was determined by materials and processes in production (Cochrane, The Crafts 7). Machine woven cloths could be purchased at reasonable prices and wallpapers were being produced in profusion. People were excited by the novelty and freshness of the machine made products which made the lack of creativity and inspiration in tapestry even more apparent.

However, by the middle of the nineteenth century there was increasing criticism of the manufactured products and reaction against mechanisation and the effects of the factory on the social structure and working conditions of the population. Pugin stressed the supremacy of nature and a moral force in objects to change the condition of society and Ruskin fought against the, “evils of the machine” to secure original works, which need not have machine precision in their finish but reflect the honesty of working with materials by hand (Lucie-Smith, 11). Through this, the Arts and Crafts Movement developed towards the end of the nineteenth century with an emphasis on hand making, moral values and social conditions. The material quality of objects was of great concern along with design and the processes of craft as part of everyday life. Morris held a broad view of art as it related to labour, goods produced by hand and quality of life:

..by art, I do not mean only pictures and sculpture, nor only these and architecture, that is beautiful building properly ornamented; these are only a portion of art.
which comprises, as I understand the word a great deal more; beauty produced by
the labour of man both mental and bodily, the expression of the interest man takes
in the life of man upon the earth with all its surroundings, in other words the human
pleasure of life is what I mean by art. (Morris, The Unpublished Lectures, 94)

These concerns underpinned Morris’s reassessment of tapestry in the nineteenth
century and have continued in various forms as the Art v. Craft debate through the
twentieth century parallel to the technological revolution. The catalogue from the exhibition
Bauhaus, 1919-1928 states “There is no essential difference between the artist and the
craftsman... Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which
raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist” (16). Morris's endorsement of
objects as the equals of paintings or sculptures has continued to be argued by men and
women in the crafts this century (Harrod 21).

William Morris looked at the approach to tapestry in the major workshops and
found it distasteful and lacking integrity. In 1878 he visited the Royal Windsor Tapestry
Manufactory, set up in Windsor in 1876, the Gobelins in Paris and other French workshops.
He expressed the view that the manufacturers were “prostituting the potentials of the art”
(Theophilus 5).

At the tapestry workshop in Aubusson he commented on, “a decaying commercial
industry of.....rubbish” (Phillips 120) but noted the potential of the medium and thought
there was nothing to prevent the revival of tapestry, “since the technique of it is easy to the
last degree” (Morris William, Collected Works 255).

He talked about all European workshop tapestry since the seventeenth century as
“the mud of degredation” saying “But from the times of the Grand Monarque and the
establishment of that hatchin-nest of stupidity, the Gobelins, all that was changed, and
tapestry was now no longer a fine art, but an upholsterer’s toy” (Morris William, Collected
Works 287).

William Morris the Artist-Weaver

Morris began his career in architecture, going on to paint at the suggestion of Dante
Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882), but it was between 1856 and 1859 that he first explored the
crafts, going on to teach himself earthenware tile painting, embroidery, book design,
illustration and production, stained glass, dyeing, weaving, tapestry and other crafts relating
to interior design. He learned through reading, studying collections and practical experiments (Banham and Harris 10).

Of tapestry he said "it requires but a very small amount of technical, though often much artistic, skill" (Morris William, Collected Works 272). The basic technique of tapestry weaving is essentially simple - like darning - so William Morris taught himself to weave from an old French textbook which provided information on a simple high warp loom, similar to wooden frames in use today, and the basic methods of woven tapestry. In this way he avoided the traditional, apprenticeship training of the large commercial workshops and focussed on his own aims to develop a way of working that was closer to Medieval tapestry. May Morris described sitting, watching her father weave:

> It was pleasant to sit at one end of the long form he worked at and watch the great curling leaves with broadly treated shadings of grey, blue and green growing on the warp-threads under the nervous swift moving fingers, and the worker stooping his head every while to peer between the threads at the looking-glass which reflected the right side of the web. (Morris, M 373) 

Sitting alone, weaving, he had time to think and develop his own personal approach without the pressure to conform to current ways of copying paint in tapestry. His own particular areas of interest, selective use of colour and flat representation of flora and fauna as well as ideas from medieval art came through in the designs for tapestry and in his technical approach. The scale and ideas on the use of tapestry may also have been inspired by medieval tapestries which often had religious subjects and were intended for use in churches, but sometimes were small and intended for domestic or private devotional use. Morris talked about "certain cloths made in Germany on a small scale, not above four feet high or so..... and have a domestic sort of look about them" (Morris William, Textile Fabrics 285).The Flemish tapestry The Mystical Grapes ca 1500 measures 103 cm square, a human scale work, and would have been used as a personal object of devotion (Martin 28). I will in later chapters discuss smaller scale tapestries in relation to the artist weaver.

He worked extremely hard, inspired by Ruskin’s vision of a society enjoying creative labour, where no one was too proud to work manually. "As a friend observed, 'his chief recreation was only another kind of work'" (Tames 20). Morris disciplined himself to work on his tapestry each morning in his bedroom at Kelmscott House before continuing with other pursuits throughout the day. A notebook, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, details the number of hours he worked each day on the tapestry, 516 in all between May 10 1879 and 17 September 1879 (Parry William Morris Textiles 102).
This practice of daily weaving, I will demonstrate later, is an important part of the disciplined way that British tapestry weaver Archie Brennan and Australian tapestry weaver Belinda Ramson work.

In 1879 Morris designed and wove Vine and Acanthus (called Cabbage and Vine by Morris). It is the only large piece woven by Morris himself (1.9 x 2.4m) and it now hangs in Kelmscott Manor, Oxfordshire. In design it is typical of his style with flat, repeating elements from nature, moving in controlled flowing patterns. Birds, flowers and leaves are combined as in medieval Mille Fleur tapestries, but in Vine and Acanthus there is a knowing sense in the realistic representation. Morris clearly understood the weaving process “the weft is put in so loosely, driven home so carefully, that the warp is entirely hidden by the weft” (Morris, Collected Works 271) and his thoughts on the medium of tapestry stem directly from a knowledge of the structure of weaving. There can be nothing half hearted about placing weft between warp - it is there or not there, unlike in painting where the softest suggestion can be made with lightness of brushstroke. The technique of hatching lines of colour together to create graduations of tints was revived from Medieval tapestries. It is a precise and weaverly solution to creating the effect of shading using a limited colour / tonal range.

Strong parallels can be drawn between tapestries designed by Morris and Company and tapestries from the Medieval Age. Flora and Pomona designed by William Morris and Edward Burne Jones and woven by William Knight, William Sleath and John Martin each have a single figure on a decorative background of flora and fauna with narrative text woven into the image. They can be compared with Mille-Fleur and Verdure tapestries which were common in the sixteenth century. Rene Planchenault describes a Verdure tapestry from the end of the sixteenth century in The Angers Tapestries booklet:

“This tapestry may be considered one of the best examples that exist of purely decorative art, with its skilful combination of branches of lilies and broad twisting leaves of aloe, and its lustrous blue-green colour. Birds perch on the leaves, and butterflies or dragonflies flit here and there. On a balustrade divided in the middle, which shows what might be a Chinese influence, pheasants show off the bright colours of their plumage” “The other tapestry from these workshops employs the same motif of huge leaves with wide spirals, where birds perch,....” (Planchenault n.pag)
The above description of much earlier works could be applied to the Morris tapestries. They both have wide spirals of foliage in green-blues with birds and flowers. Flora has two decorative pheasants in the top corners.

Flora and Pomona, personifications of summer and autumn, have ribbons of writing at the top and bottom of each image. Penthesilea, a tapestry woven in the sixteenth century, is similar in many ways to these tapestries with the same composition of a single figure surrounded by foliage, animals and text.

Morris would have known the "Banderole" as a common device in the fifteenth to seventeenth century, particularly in German and Swiss tapestries. As a lover of words, poetry, reading and writing he incorporated text into his tapestries through this convention. Using words as an integral part of the image emphasised the narrative content of the work and the tradition of narrative or storytelling in tapestry - a vital element which has been carried through to contemporary tapestry in Australia. An example of this is Kay Lawrence’s Mother 1994 discussed in detail in chapter 3.1.

The design or image was of great importance to Morris, both in the composition and content. *"Without order your work cannot exist; without meaning, it were better not to exist"* (Morris William Hopes and Fears 106). Order is an important aspect of tapestry as the work has to progress from the bottom to the top or side to side in a logical sequence dictated by the image. A certain order is also integral to the warp and weft structure. I will discuss structure further as an important element of Archie Brennan’s work in 2.4.

The inspiration for the content of his own work and the tapestries produced in the Merton Abbey Tapestry Workshop came from nature and his interests in literature, poetry, myths, legends, allegory and medieval art. Morris says of content or what he calls ‘imagination’ in the work:

> The necessity of that may not be so clear to you, considering the humble nature of our art; yet you will probably admit, when you come to think of it, that every work of man which has beauty in it must have some meaning in it also; that a presence of any beauty in a piece of handicraft implies that the mind of the man who made it was more or less excited at the time, was lifted somewhat above the commonplace; that he had something to communicate to his fellows that they did not know or feel before, and which they would never have known or felt if he had not been there to force them to do it. (Morris William Complete Works 179-180).
He initially avoided the commercial approach to tapestry which churned out hangings and seat coverings, like upholstery fabric, from copies of poor designs, although in the later stages of Morris and Co. copies and furnishings were made. He said:

*The noblest of the weaving acts is tapestry: in which there is nothing mechanical: it may be looked upon as a mosaic of pieces of colour made up of dyed threads, and is capable of producing wall ornament of any degree of elaboration within the proper limits of duly considered decorative work.* (Parry William Morris Textiles 100)

Tapestry fitted well with Morris’s ideals of glory and satisfaction from manual labour as original tapestries, to this date, can not be produced by “*mere machine*” (Morris William Collected Works 272). Weaving tapestries involves dedicated work, “*the blessing of labour*” to produce a piece of high artistic standard or “*beauty*” (Morris, Hopes and Fears, 6). Morris designed for the medium himself so understood both the processes of making and design, taking neither for granted. He championed a new approach to tapestry as artist-weaver with his ideas on the value of craftsmanship, skill and creative innovation in the process of making. His philosophy formed the foundation of the twentieth century craft movement.

**Pedagogy**

After teaching himself to weave, Morris proceeded to pass on the skills to others, his principal formal pupil being John Henry Dearle (Marillier 16). Dearle acknowledged the work of his teacher in a letter to May Morris saying “*Any success I had was accomplished under your father’s kind and indulgent supervision and help, all of which is a memory which I shall cherish to the end*” (Morris May 374). Morris’s wife, Jane and daughters, Mary (May) and Jane Alice (Jenny) also learned from William Morris through involvement with his passions, primarily in embroidery, but also in other areas, as May Morris recalls “*Even we children were presented with a set of dye-stuffs - and how well I remembered the look of the broad-stoppered bottles*” (Morris M 304).

As a teacher and lecturer he had definite views or rules, summed up in a lecture he gave to design students and artists in Birmingham in 1879 “*follow nature, study antiquity, make your own art, and do not steal it, grudge no expense of trouble, patience, or courage, in the striving to accomplish the hard thing you have set yourself to do*” (Morris, Hopes and Fears, 28).
He insisted on good design and draughtsmanship and detailed the following qualities that a designer for tapestry should have, in a letter to Thomas Wardle in 1877:

1. A general feeling for art, especially for its decorative side.
2. He must be a good colourist.
3. He must be able to draw well; he must be able to draw the human figure, especially hands and feet.
4. Of course he must know how to use the stitch of the work. (Morris M 372)

Plant drawing continues to be a part of many British textile courses and drawing from the life model was an important part of my training in Edinburgh and has been preserved where I teach at Canberra School of Art, inspite of major budget cuts. Patrick Snelling, Lecturer Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology stressed the importance of drawing and not just markmaking for textile designers in the Hand to Cloth - Origins textile exhibition catalogue:

The starting point for many of the makers is not, surprisingly, drawing but the creating of textures and marks as technique. Is the observation of landscape and form the domain of fine art training, or are textile courses neglecting the teaching of drawing and design due to the shortfalls in University funding of courses? Good drawing is a prerequisite for good textile design. (5).

Morris urged his students to study the history of art and ancient art in particular, through visiting museums, historical monuments, churches and older buildings tucked away in the country. He wanted them to see alternatives to the smoke filled towns of bricks and mortar:

If you can really fill your minds with memories of great works of art, and great times of art, you will, I think, be able to a certain extent to look through the aforesaid ugly surroundings, and will be moved to discontent of what is careless and brutal now, and will, I hope, at last be so much discontented with what is bad, that you will determine to bear no longer that short-sighted, reckless brutality of squalor that so disgraces our intricate civilization.(Morris, Hopes and Fears, 16)

Formally, he had set ideas on design, “As to purple, no one in his senses would think of using it bright in masses” (Morris Hopes and Fears 99), “No pattern should be
without some sort of meaning” (Morris Hopes and Fears 111) and “That every line in a pattern should have its due growth” (Morris, Hopes and Fears 109).

He said, “Every one who has followed a craft for long has such rules in his mind, and cannot help following them practically in dealing with his pupils” and he believed that as the “rules” or “impulses” became widely accepted and firmly applied, the more vigorously alive would become the art they produced (Morris, Hopes and Fears, 81). Later I will discuss the “rules” that Scottish tapestry weaver Archie Brennan and Australian weaver Belinda Ramson worked by and gave their students, as it is the strong framework and insistence on a particular way of working that produced a discrete form of tapestry.

The practical aspects of Morris’s teaching came from social and cultural concerns with issues of labour, the environment and quality of life in society which are still of concern today. He believed in experiential and lifelong learning, finding out through practical engagement in craftwork. Colin Ward describes him as an “Anarchist Educator” who thought he was taught nothing in school but projected a model for learning through experience and throughout life in News from Nowhere (Ward 126). The need for experiential/independent learning has been discussed in recent research on craft education in Independent learning in the Crafts (Ball 3).

Merton Abbey Tapestry Workshop - A Co-operative Relationship between Designer and Maker

As discussed on the previous pages, Morris himself explored the possibilities of the designer as weaver, and through this experience gained knowledge of the relationship between design and making. From this personal involvement in all stages of the process he was able to bridge the gap, which existed in the tapestry workshops, between the highly regarded artists and lowly weavers. Previously the artist designed the cartoon and the weavers made the tapestry. There was a definite hierarchy in the workshops with designing as a separate and higher paid profession than weaving (Larochette). By doing both processes himself Morris acquired a new understanding of their relationship which he promoted through Morris and Company. He could design with the medium in mind and work with the weavers to build the structure of the image. This principle was fundamental to the revival of tapestry in post war Scotland.

With his experience in design and practical aspects of making, Morris set up the Merton Abbey tapestry workshop in Surrey, England in 1881, starting high warp tapestry production in 1883 (Clark 95). Morris and Dearle trained all the weavers with the exception
of two experienced weavers who had worked at the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works (Parry William Morris Textiles 105).

The Morris tapestry philosophy developed at Merton Abbey, influenced the guidelines of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company. This represented a move away from the traditional European workshop approach of the time. Morris looked back to the fourteenth century and the craft guilds for the ideal organization of labour in systems which freed the individual from power hierarchies:

For a short time, only too short a time, the constitution of these guilds was thoroughly democratic: every worker apprenticed to a craft was sure if he could satisfy the due standard of excellence to become a master; there were no mere journeymen. (Morris, The Unpublished Lectures, 103)

He cultivated a co-operative relationship in the workshop promoting mutual understanding of process and design rather than the traditional hierarchical approach of the artist as the supreme creator of the image and the weavers as slavish copyists.

The emphasis was on self learning through experience of the medium. Morris himself was not given instructions to follow, but learned through working directly with the warp and weft. He had to understand the structure of the medium and work with this to make the image. Morris and Company apprentices began by weaving sample pieces and graduated onto simple areas of background and border in commissioned works. This differs from the standard apprenticeship training at that time, where the trainee was given precise instructions, a cartoon to follow carefully and a set of techniques/working methods to use unquestioningly. The apprentices in the large workshops tried to fit the image to the structure as best they could, with a primary focus on replicating the image as closely as possible. The weavers at Merton Abbey were given a certain amount of freedom to make decisions in the weaving within the guidelines provided by Morris and the information supplied on the cartoons.

There is debate about the contradictions between Morris’s theory and practice and how much freedom the weavers were actually given (Thompson P R 101-103 and Fairclough and Leary 55). However, a French visitor to Merton Abbey, viewing the process in the context of the time described the designer weaver relationship:
The predominant feature is that the artisan is allowed almost perfect liberty of talent and imagination in the development of his work. This is specially the case in the tapestry and glasswork studios. (Phillips 120)

In a publication from 1897 Aymer Vallance wrote “considerable latitude in the choice and arrangement of tints in shading &c, was, and is, invariably allowed to the executamts themselves” (Vallance 92).

In viewing the Raphael cartoon for The Miraculous Draught of Fishes in the Victoria and Albert museum in London I observed that the cartoon is fully worked in transparent through to opaque paint by the artist, consideration given to every centimetre of the surface. By contrast, the cartoon for Adoration was worked on by William Morris, Edward Burne Jones and Henry Dearle collaboratively with some areas, particularly hands and feet, fully worked but many areas lightly sketched or left blank (Parry William Morris 292). From my experience of working as a weaver in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, translating from photographically reproduced cartoons, I was intrigued by the cartoon and the lack of specific information for the weavers. It is more like a key of symbols - lines suggesting hatched areas, outlines pointing to flat shapes of foliage. The missing information could in part have come from Burne-Jones’s small watercolour, from Morris and Dearle’s verbal instruction and from tried and tested ways of interpreting the suggestions sketched on the cartoon. This would still not provide the answers to all the decisions that have to be made every minute in the process of tapestry weaving, so the weavers would have to have used their own judgement about the detail of the work as it progressed. Although it might not now be seen as equal to the artistic freedom of contemporary tapestry weavers working on their own designs, it was a major move away from the style of replicating fully worked cartoons introduced by Raphael.
The Adoration of the Magi

Designed by Edward Burne-Jones in 1887. The cartoon was also worked on by Henry Dearle and William Morris.
Made by Morris and Company.
Weavers: Robert Ellis, John Keich, John Martin and Walter Taylor.
Materials: Wool and Silk.
Dimensions: 251.2 x 372.5 cm.

Description and Subject

In a landscape carpeted with flowers, the Virgin and Child sit in a thatched hut with Joseph. The angel hovers in the centre of the tapestry, illuminating the foreground scene and on the right the three Magi offer their exotic gifts. The clothing of Mary and Joseph is plain, reflecting their material poverty, while by contrast the angel and the three Magi are dressed in sumptuous patterned fabrics. As in medieval tapestries objects in the tapestry can be read symbolically. The crown under the angel’s feet symbolises temporal rule placed before spiritual and the water in the pond symbolises baptism, the washing away of sin. They give visual clues to the larger picture of the narrative.

Design

The subject of the Adoration of the Magi had previously been explored by Burne-Jones in his first major painting commission in 1861, an alter piece for St. Paul’s, Brighton, England. His sketchbook shows that he made at least four drawings of possible compositions for the tapestry design before settling on the final version. This has the angel forming the vertical of a cross with the other figures lower and heads making the horizontal of the cross. The figures occupy one plane in the foreground with an unrealistic figure-ground relationship.

The foreground is light and highly patterned with Madonna lilies and other flowers typically found in an English garden - out of context with the subject of the tapestry but true to Morris’s passion for the English vernacular. This detail with the fabric patterns is lightly sketched in the cartoon.

The work has borders along three edges and a banderole at the top with the text, "THE ‘ADORATION’ DESIGNED BY SIR E. BURNE JONES AND EXECUTED BY MORRIS AND COMPANY AT MERTON ABBEY IN SURREY, ENGLAND".
Technique and Condition

The tapestry was woven on its side with a limited palette of weft colours. Hatching is used to describe light and shade in the fabric and describe three dimensional qualities of the foliage. The Arras technique is used whereby a brown outline describes the main shapes in the composition and separates the figures from the background.

Areas such as the halo over Mary’s head superimposing the background and the linear pattern of the wheat sheafs under the Virgin’s feet are complex images which have been well resolved in the tapestry through simplifying and working with the structure of warp and weft. The condition of the tapestry is very good as it has been in museum care since 1917.

Provenance

The Hon. George Brookman (1850-1927) commissioned the tapestry after seeing a version on the loom at Merton Abbey. The work was delivered to Adelaide in 1902 and was displayed publicly at Unley Town Hall. In 1917 Brookman sold the tapestry to the then National Gallery of South Australia for five hundred and fifty pounds. The tapestry remains in the Art Gallery of South Australia collection where I viewed the work on public display.

(Menz 55-57 + 108 )
The collaborative process allowed Morris to achieve his ideals, not through possessing all of the required talents himself, but through team roles bringing skills together to achieve goals. Edward Burne-Jones was employed as an artist and he provided the original artwork in freely drawn small watercolours or chalk compositions. His sketchbooks show that he had studied historical tapestry and made drawings from figures and fabric (Parry William Morris Textiles 103) but he did not weave and the information required by the weavers for tapestry was prepared by Morris and Dearle in the making of the cartoons. The cartoons were prepared by photographing the artwork then scaling up to the actual size of the tapestry. These were then worked on by Burne-Jones to modify the figures and composition and by Morris and Dearle who worked on the background and detail of the clothing providing just enough information for the weavers, but allowing them artistic freedom in the weaving of the detail. Morris stated about his weavers, “both in nature and training artists, not merely animated machines” (Banham and Harris 189). This type of artistic freedom was further explored in the Edinburgh Tapestry Company decades later under the artistic directorship of Archie Brennan.

Originality was encouraged in the Merton Abbey workshop where a strong influence was the set of rules put forward by Ruskin, “Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving records of great works” (Lucie-Smith 209). This rule prefigures Craft Movements in the 1960s and was closely adhered to by many artist-weavers from the 1960s to the 1990s who designed and wove their own original works as personal forms of expression. Elsje King(Van Keppel), Curator of Weaving, a travelling exhibition wrote, “All people represented in this exhibition are weaving essentially to satisfy their needs of creativity and independence” (King, 3). Sue Walker, director of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, stated that “the VTW employs weavers who are not merely technicians but who are artists in their own right” emphasising the interpretation from the painting into the tapestry as the original work of the weavers who were all trained as artists (Pitt 112).

The issue of originality in Art has been strongly debated between 1980 and 2000. During this period the Arts and Crafts Movement ideas on the importance of the original were overturned by post-modernism. British tapestry weaver, Christopher M Sanders (1983-), in line with post-modernist thinking weaves images collaged from ephemeral printed material, press and T.V. images, nineteenth century textile designs and portraits of famous people, to name only a few of his sources.

The drawings and designs from Morris and Burne-Jones built on studies of past works of art - inspired by them and learning from them but never imitating, creating new
forms in their own right, hybrids of styles and artistic conventions as in many forms of contemporary art.

Nature and the physical environment were extremely important to Morris, who selected a location on the outskirts of London for the craft workshops at Merton Abbey. H.C. Marillier emphasised the rural and spacious location, opposite to the dirty, congested cities Morris so detested:

The buildings are old and picturesque. Here, in what was practically open country in those days, Morris carried out his long-desired scheme of reforming the public taste; for Queen Square, which served as its nucleus, was merely a preliminary experiment. In the spacious grounds at Merton Morris could dig out his indigo vats, set up his Jacquard looms for the weaving of gorgeous materials, lay out the long stone tables for printing his chintzes, install his stained-glass painters, and finally erect the great hand-looms for tapestry weaving and for carpets. (15)

The Edinburgh Tapestry Company was later built in a similar location at Corstorphine on the outskirts of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Morris urged workers to claim such an environment in the face of industrialisation:

....he must claim to live in a pleasant house and a pleasant place; a claim which I daresay many people would be inclined to allow for him - till they found out what he meant by it, and how impossible it would be to satisfy it under the profit grinding system: until for example we consider what time, money and trouble it would take to turn Glasgow into a pleasant place (Morris, The Unpublished Lectures, 114).

This was a reaction against the growing number of noisy, crowded industrial spaces in smoke filled towns where people went to work under strict supervision with machines. It was part of a belief that workers should find pleasure in their daily toil and that the surroundings for work and living, through their beauty, contributed to a better way of life - thoughts echoed in the 1960s as people formed alternative lifestyles away from the cities and consumerism.

The last design produced by Burne-Jones and completed by Henry Dearie was for the tapestry The Passing of Venus, first woven in 1907. Of all the Morris and Co. tapestries, this bears the closest resemblance to the first tapestry woven at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company Lord of the Hunt 1912 -16 1919-24, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
They are both romanticised, narrative scenes set in idealised rural settings with a great deal of attention given to the detail of foliage and figures. The main scenes are set on a foreground plane with major groupings of figures to the right of the tapestries, plus Venus/Huntsmen entering from the left and subsidiary groupings in the bottom left hand corners. Formally both tapestries have decorative borders with scrolls.

They differ in their choice of subject matter and the intention of the work. The Passing of Venus, a mythical narrative is full of floral patterning and soft drapery of costume on tall, Pre-Raphaelite, female, figures while Lord of the Hunt glorifies a tale of deerstalking with elaborate costumes of Highland dress and is more extensive in its subsets of figures going into the distance, giving a greater sense of perspective.

The tapestries from the Merton Abbey workshop were acclaimed in Britain and abroad, building a reputation which sustained the workshop for sixty years. During the later years of the workshop in difficult financial times, despite Morris detesting the idea of copying paintings to create tapestries, several reproduction tapestries were woven from paintings, painted fourteenth century panels, Coptic tapestries and a fifteenth century South German panel (Parry 120). However, the original Morris tapestry philosophies were readily accepted and adapted in Scotland, and another strand of tapestry developed and flourished in Edinburgh from 1912.

Changes in Technique

William Morris resurrected past ways of working in tapestry to eliminate the detailed reproduction of paintings carried out in the European workshops. This did not involve a complete change in technique as the basic structure remained the same, but entailed modifications to warp and weft settings, reduced colour and tonal range and the revival of outlining and shading methods.

Warps were thicker and spaced out more, set between 13 and 18 warps per 2.5 cm with a 14 warps per 2.5 cm setting most commonly used (Fairclough 105). This made a thicker texture and more obvious woven structure in the finished tapestry, emphasising the handmade quality and making sure there could be no mistake that it was a painting or other machine made reproduction.

Thicker weft yarns were used on the coarser warp settings requiring fewer passes in the weaving and producing simplified, clear design elements.

Single strand weft yarns were initially used but later blended yarns made up the weft, producing many more tones. The thicker weft, in theory, makes the weaving quicker.
and less expensive, but tapestry never became an art for the people - it continued to depend on generous patrons.

The emphasis was on flat areas of rich, woven colour and patterned areas without complicated illusions of perspective. Solid outlines were again woven around figures to separate them from the background, as in pre-Raphael tapestries, and "Hachure", the convention from Medieval tapestry, was re-instated as a way of creating light and shade, alluding to 3D forms. This way of weaving interposes two weft colours or shades to graduate colour or tone. It was used to create an illusion of many colours or tones with a small palette of dyed yarns before Raphael and the preoccupation with copying paint. L'Histoire de Jacob - Laban Poursuivant Jacob woven between 1528 and 1539 (D'Hulst n. pag) shows the distinct contrasting lines of weft yarn making the light and shade of the dress fabric. The same method is used in the fabric of the drapery in Adoration designed by Burne-Jones and woven eight times between 1890 and 1907. When I viewed a version of this design in the Art Gallery of South Australia I was struck by the precise quality of the hatching, strong and graphic when looked at from a metre or less away but beautifully describing form through blended light and shade as distance from the tapestry increases. This method of using light and shade to blend adjacent weft colours, although like forms of shading in drawing (also referred to as hatching) is unique to tapestry giving the work a distinctive woven character.

In practical terms it also avoids vertical gaps in the weaving between adjacent colours as the lines of hatching interlock as they cross over each other. Vertical gaps or slits in tapestry were sewn with cotton or silk which tended to perish quickly, particularly with tapestries hanging with the warp horizontal to the floor and the full weight of the work on the sewing thread. Marillier claims that "the one real improvement made upon ancient work consists in interlocking the weaving at the back so that no long slits occur which need to be sewn up by hand" (28). Interlocking with hatching made a more enduring fabric.

Morris changed marking onto the warps with charcoal to inking on with Indian ink for a more permanent guide on the warp for the weavers to use as a guide, emphasising the mosaic nature of building up shapes in weaving rather than suggesting the modulations of paint.

The attention Morris paid to technique demonstrates the importance he placed on craftsmanship, which he then considered extinct in the production of "market wares". He said "Let us do our very best to become as good craftsmen as possible" (Morris William Collected Works 373).

Although Morris spent a great deal of time considering and perfecting a set of techniques in tapestry, sound technique was not his only criteria for quality. He was
extremely critical of the tapestry weaving in the French workshops where he could see the traditional skills but said:

*Well, their ingenuity is put to the greatest pains for the least results; it would be a mild word to say that what they make is worthless; it is more than that; it has a corrupting and deadening influence upon all the Lesser Arts of France, since it is always put forward as the very standard and crown of all that those arts can do at their best: a more idiotic waste of human labour and skill it is impossible to conceive.*

(Morris William Collected Works 253).

Before he began his ventures into tapestry weaving Morris had researched and started a business in carpet weaving and through this he became dissatisfied with commercial materials. Because he found the aniline dyes, then commonly used, to be “tricky”, fugitive and liable to fade, he determined to research the old methods using natural dyes to produce durable colours. He studied with Thomas Wardle, a recognised expert, at his Leek dye-shops and his letters from this time show how he literally immersed himself in the subject:

*I am withal in the thick of paltry blue-vats.* (Morris May 307)

*Please I shall want a bath when I come home: you may imagine that I shall not be very presentable as to colour: I have been dyeing in the blue-vat today.........I have been red-dyeing also, but have not tackled the greens and yellows yet.* (Morris May 309)

The changes in technique introduced by Morris were carried through to the first tapestries woven at the Edinburgh tapestry workshop.

**Roles of Men and Women in Design and Making**

Through his socialist beliefs, Morris hoped for a society of equals but lived in the Victorian era of strictly defined male and female roles. He encouraged the participation of women in design and making, working along with them in research and exploratory projects. “The Female Side of the Firm” in *Crafts* by Jane Marsh examines the pattern for women's participation in the Arts and Crafts Movement and her book *Jane and May Morris*
presents her research on the lives of Jane and May Morris detailing their involvement with William Morris in the crafts.

Through Morris’s recognition of older structures of craft production, cottage industry and work within the family group, female skills were once more recognised within the Arts and Crafts Movement and women within the circle of friends were involved in art and craft, made work for sale and took on roles within the company. Marsh describes William and Jane as a young married couple working together on projects for Red House, discovering together forgotten embroidery stitches and experimenting with them on rough Indigo dyed cloth (Marsh Jane and May 40) and visits to Kate and Lucy Faulkner, designers employed by the Firm (Marsh Jane and May 58). Although the women were not partners they did work as painters, decorators and designers in their own right, parallel to taking care of household duties and child rearing. The embroidery workshop was staffed by women and from 1880 was run by Morris's daughter May Morris. However Morris preferred to train young boys as tapestry weavers, believing that they were easier to train and more dexterous. He said, “The work of weaving is a kind which experience proves to be best done by boys. It involves little muscular efforts and is best carried on by small flexible fingers” (Parry 106).

Mrs Orage and Miss B. Marillier are noted exceptions in the list of tapestry weavers employed by Morris and Co. They worked at 449 Oxford St. and wove tapestries for the Arts and Crafts exhibitions of 1915 - 1916 (Parry 177). Mrs Adrian Stokes is the only female tapestry designer noted and she was commissioned to contribute a cartoon based on medieval traditions and a Schiller verse (Marillier 23).

This gendered division of labour reflects Victorian values and although Morris experimented with Stem and Satin stitch, embroidery then was mainly worked by women and the tradition of men working in the major tapestry workshops of Europe supported his thinking on men as the best weavers of tapestry. The two were clearly seen as separate - embroidery the realm of Victorian women (Parker 182) and tapestry a trade activity with a long and hard apprenticeship.

The differentiation of tapestry as ‘patriarchal’ and textiles as ‘feminine’ is extensively researched and discussed in Diana Wood Conroy’s doctoral thesis “An Archaeology of Tapestry: Contexts, Signs and Histories of Contemporary Practice”.

The other major impetus for women's involvement in arts and crafts was training alongside men at Art Schools, largely replacing the earlier system of apprenticeship which had excluded women. These changes benefited women by giving status to female skills which were previously regarded as inferior as they were not recognised within an institution. In 1907, May Morris established the Women’s Guild of Arts, as other guilds of
the time such as The Art Worker's Guild, The Century Guild and Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft did not admit women members. The changes in gender participation in guilds and societies is reflected in the figures of 1996 for the Society of Designer Craftsmen which had a membership made up of two thirds women (Marsh, The Female Side, 45).

Although embroidery as an artform was widely taught in British Art Schools from the end of the nineteenth century, tapestry was less popular, experimented with in the Bauhaus and by other individual tapestry weavers who taught in guilds and schools in Europe and Scandinavia. Tapestry artists such as Hannah Ryggen, Norway, Noemi Ferenczy, Hungary, Marta Maas-Fjetterstrom, Sweden, and Gunta Stolzl with the Bauhaus pupils explored the potential of the medium through design and making in the early to mid twentieth century. Woven tapestry gained recognition in British art schools in the 1950s, after World War II when there was less emphasis on mural scale weaving/ a more experimental approach and tapestries for domestic interiors were commissioned.

Conclusion

William Morris taught himself to weave tapestry and espoused the merits of knowing the technique in order to design for the medium or create in the medium. He celebrated the virtues of individualism and the artist's right to explore the possibilities of materials and technique and this laid the foundation for the artist-weaver of the twentieth century. As the number of artist-weavers has continued to grow in this century we now take this approach for granted as it is so common in the contemporary field that the weaver both creates the image and makes the tapestry without delineation of the activities.

Through studying the history of art and tapestry, looking at the work produced in the commercial tapestry workshops and developing a simplified approach to technique, materials and image, Morris championed a style which was radically different to the complex copying of paint in the major European manufacturers.

Although not interested in formal schooling Morris willingly taught his immediate family craft skills and through Dearle he trained the tapestry apprentices in the firm. There was a strong emphasis on technique and craftsmanship. He passed on information both practically and through his discussion, lectures and writing. His model, as practising artist and teacher, is still regarded as the ideal in many art institutions today.

He challenged the processes of apprenticeship training and the hierarchical artist weaver relationship accepted in the major tapestry workshops of Europe in the nineteenth century. Morris developed a distinctly different approach to tapestry at Merton Abbey.
There he championed a more co-operative relationship between artist/designers and weavers which valued the strengths of the individuals.

Technique and image came together to form a new aesthetic inspired by the simpler methods, flat imagery and narratives of the Middle Ages. Through stressing the importance of content, quality design and drawing fresh images in tapestry was made available to a public largely jaded by old-fashioned reproductions. Morris's insistence on drawing and content and craftsmanship, I will demonstrate in later chapters, is now vital to the success of contemporary tapestry.

Women were involved in art and craft and encouraged to work as designers and makers in some areas and in a limited capacity. The tapestry studio, however, remained a predominantly male domain.
Chapter 2

THE DOVECOT STUDIOS
TAPESTRY IN THE SCOTTISH IDIOM - 1912-1940.

This chapter explores the movement of ideas and techniques from William Morris and the Merton Abbey tapestry workshop to The Dovecot Studios, established in Scotland in 1912 and renamed after World War II as The Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd., commonly known as the Dovecot.

Through examination of the inaugural tapestries woven at the Dovecot Studios, it considers aspects of the characteristics of the Morris and Company tapestries - the vernacular, narrative, craftsmanship and meaning in the work - which were translated into a Scottish idiom through the first tapestries produced on the Edinburgh looms.

Through case studies of crucial tapestries made by the Studios, the relationship between designers and weavers is made clear in the context of the Merton Abbey workshop developments at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Dovecot Studios opened in 1912 in the context of a rising Scottish nationalist movement (Cummings 149) influenced by the writer Sir Walter Scott and the painter, Henry Raeburn. Edinburgh design embraced Arts and Crafts principles with predominantly narrative themes:

*The city's dramatic medieval and renaissance townscape and its colourful romantic history, so vividly described by Scott, Stevenson and many others over the previous century, provided the inspiration for a detailed, figural art. A combination of human and animal forms, strong colour, an interest in texture and sometimes new materials ......epitomizes the new art.*

(Cummings 156).

At the same time the Glasgow avant garde movement flourished with Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and many other painters, designers and craftspeople. Their conceptual base came from the Arts and Crafts Movement but the design was characterised by stylised, elongated, organic motifs including geometrised birds and plant forms (Burkhauser 81).
The first tapestries from the Dovecot Studios show a direct line of connection with the Arts and Crafts Movement works from Merton Abbey and they fit within the Edinburgh context of art at the turn of the century, but differ in style-(figurative, narrative) and intent (large scale scenes for stately interior) from the work of the Glasgow movement.

The Dovecot was established at a village called Corstorphine, on the outskirts of Edinburgh, Scotland, by the 4th Marquess of Bute. The new Scottish studios, which still exist, were purpose built in a rural setting similar to Merton Abbey. They are in a country cottage style stone building on one floor with large windows providing natural light and high ceilings in the weaving rooms allowing for the upright tapestry looms. Greenery surrounds the building and a large dovecot dominates the front entrance. This is in keeping with Morris's ideal working environment "The last claim I make for my work is that the places I worked in, factories or workshops, should be pleasant, just as the fields where our most necessary work is done are pleasant" (Morris, Signs of Change 21).

The 4th Marquess of Bute carried out the wishes of his late father, to set up a Scottish tapestry studio to weave large scale hangings exclusively for the family home, Mount Stuart, on the Isle of Bute. His father, John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, 3rd Marquess of Bute, was one of the greatest patrons of the arts of his time, working with architect William Burges on the ethereal and wondrous Cardiff Castle, and over sixty other building projects. He was a scholar, historian, archaeologist, romantic, mystic, and Arts and Crafts enthusiast who commissioned the Edinburgh Gothicist, Sir Robert Rowland Anderson, to build a new Mount Stuart House on the site of the old one which had burned down. He employed craftsmen - decorative painters, sculptors and glass artists, who had previously worked on Cardiff Castle, to contribute their fine skills to the house. The interior decoration of the new house was personally supervised by the Marquess, with great attention to detail, "But why should I hurry over what is my chief pleasure I have comparatively little interest in a thing after it is finished" (Stamp 7).

In 1900, the 3rd Marquess of Bute died, before Mount Stuart was finished and before all the projects for the interior were put in place. He had been very interested in tapestry as part of the Arts and Crafts concept for interiors and had spoken to William Morris about the establishment of a tapestry workshop in Scotland, to weave panels for Mount Stuart House (Stamp 18). The task of setting up the tapestry studio fell to his son and the daybook for the Edinburgh Tapestry Company recorded the start of the new workshop on January 4th 1912 "Took up residence at 1, Sycamore Terrace (now Dovecot Rd.) and the next day noted the arrival of John Glassbrook and shortly afterwards Gordon Berry" (Hodge 39).
Edinburgh imported the philosophy and also the tapestry weavers from Merton Abbey to carry on the Morris traditions directly. The first two weavers employed at the Dovecot, John Glassbrook and Gordon Berry, came from Merton Abbey bringing the weaving skills and approach developed at Morris's workshop to Scotland. Berry and Glassbrook are noted as weavers in Marillier's chronological list of works produced at Merton Abbey. They both worked on designs by Edward Burne-Jones and eight other tapestries listed by Marillier (34-35). Part of their brief was to train local young men as apprentices (in keeping with Morris's belief that boys had more nimble fingers and thus made better weavers), teaching them weaving skills, ideas and attitudes developed in their previous positions.

William George Thomson - artist, weaver, writer and first director of the Dovecot.

William George Thomson (1865-1942), known as a tapestry expert in Europe, was the first director of the workshop. Initially he studied art, then he travelled to Europe and became fascinated by Gothic tapestries. This inspired him to write *A History of Tapestry*, first published in 1906. In order to do this he took up a position at the South Kensington Museum drawing the tapestries in the collection, where, his son Francis Paul Thompson says "*A meeting with Morris was inevitable*" as Morris frequently visited the tapestry collection at the museum and they were both art examiners with the board of education (Thomson F.P. 162). W.G. Thompson refers to William Morris as "*that remarkable genius*" and says "*No praise can be too high in describing the Merton Abbey tapestries executed under William Morris*" (W.G.Thomson 499). As such an admirer of Morris, he was instrumental in perpetuating many of the Morris and Company's ideals and in 1933 he was awarded a Civil List Pension "*for contributions to the study of textiles, especially of tapestries*" (W.G. Thomson cover).

Although he is not known for his own work as an artist, designer or weaver, he did have some skills in all of these areas. Working as an organiser and director in the tapestry studio with some input to the drawing of cartoons he followed Morris's model in relation to tapestry.

The Inaugural Dovecot Tapestries

The first tapestries woven at the Dovecot were designed specifically for Mount Stuart House, the Scottish showpiece of Arts and Crafts ideals. They closely adhere to William Morris's concept of tapestry, as Maureen Hodge states "*we do know that Morris was the principle influence and the whole history of the Dovecot is imbued with*
the attitudes of the Arts and Crafts Movement - the realisation of Morris' thought for co-operation between artists and craftsmen” (Hodge 39).

The co-operation between the first resident designer, William Skeoch Cummings 1864-1929, who designed five tapestries for the Dovecot, and the weavers at the Dovecot is described in the exhibition catalogue, Master Weavers:

**Careful attention was given to detail with the weavers and staff of the studios at times modelling the characters in the panel. (44)**

**After much study and research the painting would be completed and then the designer would draw it up to scale in sections across the panel. The scaled up drawing was then reversed, as the cartoon was placed in front of the warps with the weavers working from the back of the loom, watching their work in the mirrors placed before it. (Hodge 39)**

By scaling up in a line drawing from the painting, a guide was made for the weavers to keep proportion in the work. They retained the designer’s concept, but the detail of the image had to be worked out by the weavers with William Thomson, in solutions appropriate to tapestry techniques. The weavers had the freedom to be creatively involved in the production of the tapestry without the restriction of colour coded cartoons or paint surfaces to copy strictly, as in the European workshops.

Skeoch Cummings was recognised as a painter of military subjects who served in the Boer War and made watercolours of incidents during the campaign (Harris and Halsby 43). He had no practical experience of weaving. F.P. Thomson suggests that there were difficulties working with the paintings produced by Cummings and his father painted a version of Lord of the Hunt which was probably used as the cartoon by the weavers. He said “There is evidence that William Thomson who was both a qualified artist and tapissier, was obliged to undertake considerable redesign in order to translate Cummings's ideas into a weavable form” (Thomson F. P. 169).

This process has parallels with the preparing of cartoons undertaken by Burne-Jones, Morris and Dearle, discussed in chapter 1. However at the Dovecot there seems to have been a perceived lack of comprehension of design for tapestry in Cummings’s work, without a willing engagement in a truly collaborative process.

Three tapestries designed by Cummings demonstrate their relationship to the tapestries from the early period of Morris and Co.; The Lord of the Hunt (1912-1916 and 1919-1924), The Time of the Meeting (1933-1938) and Prince of the Gael (1938-incomplete).
The Lord of the Hunt

Designer: Skeoch Cummings
Made at the Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, Scotland.
Date woven: 1912-1916 and 1919-1924
Materials: Wool and Silk.
Size: 4.11 metres x 10.02 metres

Description and Subject

The subject of the tapestry shows nostalgia for an idealised past, a common theme in Arts and Crafts Movement images. Pre-industrial times, when people lived closer to nature and without the need for machines were viewed by medievalists as preferable to the lifestyle and ugliness generated by the factory system.

The tapestry image is like a stage set, with layers of Highland mountains and Glens suggesting perspective. The figures are like cut-outs from the original drawings of the models who posed for the design, placed on the landscape in awkward and stiff poses, without a convincing figure/ground relationship. This is similar to the figure ground relationship in the Merton Abbey tapestries where the figures appear to float on the backgrounds. There was no attempt to create a realistic effect of figures firmly standing on the ground as the designs were more influenced by the simplicity of Gothic compositions and their symbolism.

Men gaze off at tangents, as if absorbed by activities not obvious to the viewer or out of the space of the tapestry. The figures in The Orchard designed by William Morris and Henry Dearle have the same unfocused gazes which could have come about through the collaborative design process, drawing separate components then putting them together in the design and by the deliberate rejection of illusionistic effects.

As a narrative Lord of the Hunt has many scenes and areas of interest when the eye moves around the image. A boy holds a brace of pheasants while a large, hunting dog gazes up at him; an older man holds a gun over his shoulder and another a good sized salmon. Plants are depicted in fine detail: Brambles in fruit, Heather, Bracken, a Rowan tree with red berries - all botanically correct, as the Marquess was a botanist and Thomson grew up on a country estate. The border is a complicated pattern of robins and finches among fruits over a ribbon of repeating thistles.

It is a very romanticised view with a lone bagpiper on the distant hill and the stag nestled into a decorative arrangement of plants reminiscent of the Mille Fleur tapestries of earlier centuries. The sheer volume of finely woven tapestry with careful detail in every square inch is outstanding and in keeping with Morris's ideal of beautiful detail in abundance. He said of early sixteenth century tapestry "The figures are arranged in planes close up to one another, and the cloth is pretty much filled with them, a manner which gives a peculiar richness to the designs of this period" (Morris W The Collected Works 287).
Lord of the Hunt has a particular and even cliched Scottish quality with its most colourful display of tartan and Highland dress. The way the checked patterns are woven to give the illusion of the three dimensional form of the figure under the fabric reflects back to the clever use of florals in the garments of the Morris tapestries. This illusion of form through pattern in clothing and fascination with reweaving in the detail of fabric is later used as a convention in many works by Archie Brennan.

The tartans and epic scenes reflect the turn of the century fervour to create art of international significance with romantic nationalism striking a Scottish identity. In 1897 a Scottish critic, Margaret Armour wrote in the London Art journal The Studio about the mural work by John Duncan and Charles Mackie:

*Using tales from Scottish history and legend as their subjects, these artists and their assistants created work which ranks as a major example of fin-de-siecle British painting. They responded to European symbolism but achieved even more: they forged an alternative art for Scotland built on a surge of romantic Scottish nationalism within the city (Edinburgh) and a desire to contribute positively to British Art.* (Cummings 149)

**Design**

The design was influenced by the national pride in the romantic best sellers of Sir Walter Scott and the thinking of Patrick Geddes, a botanist and sociologist who in the face of the grey, industrialised cities of the time, envisaged a resuscitation of past pre-industrial culture, and in the words of Armour imagined “chaotic ugliness” of Scotland’s industrial cities becoming “ordered loveliness”. He had formed the Edinburgh Social Union in 1884 with a group of architects and designers who employed local artists to improve the surroundings of working class people by decorating the interiors of hospitals, schools and halls. They later went on to train professionals in art and design in liaison with London designers but were ever careful to translate English Arts and Crafts practice into a local idiom. In 1889 The National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, a society of British artists, sculptors, architects and design reformers, held its second congress in Edinburgh and speakers such as William Morris helped to formulate and disseminate Arts and Crafts principles in Edinburgh and throughout Britain (Cummings 149-151). Morris spoke at the meeting about being “in sympathy with that appreciation of history which is a genuine growth of the times, and a compensation to some of us for the vulgarity and brutality which beset our lives; and it is through this sense of history that we are united to the past tradition of our times” (Morris W The Collected Works 370) thus giving credibility to the nationalistic passion for Scottish history, imagery and design at that time.

**Technique and Condition**

In the materials and techniques used the work is similar to Morris and Company tapestries.

*Lord of the Hunt* was woven on a woollen warp, set at 18 ends per 2.5cm. This is almost the same warp setting as that used in the Merton Abbey tapestry *Moses* woven in 1912 on wool warp at 17 warps to 2.5 cm (Four Hundred Years 60).

Mainly wool from France in sixty shades and some silk, particularly in the border of fruit and flowers, is used as weft. This choice of materials is the same as that
in the Morris and Co. tapestry Adoration I observed in the Adelaide Art Gallery, where the light reflecting quality of silk was set against wool to produce highlights.

The technique of hatching is used throughout the tapestry to suggest form through light and shade. A fine example is the modelling of the horse which without the hatching would appear flat and two dimensional.

All the main features of the tapestry are outlined in a dark brown which is only noticeable when the viewer is close up to the tapestry. This Arras technique was used to make the figures stand out from the background. It was also used in Morris and Company tapestries, particularly to define hands and feet or figures against background pattern.

The tapestry is in excellent condition.

Provenance

This is the first tapestry woven at the Dovecot and it hangs at Mount Stuart House where I visited it in August 1996. I had previously viewed the tapestry when I was a student at Edinburgh College of Art, in Master Weavers-Tapestries from the Dovecot Studios 1912-1980, an Edinburgh Festival exhibition held in 1980. In the exhibition it seemed archaic against the white gallery walls and surrounded by contemporary tapestries. Seeing it at Mount Stuart restored its context - it sits beautifully in the Arts and Crafts interior of the Marble Hall with its decorative masonry, stained glass windows and solid wooden furniture.

About one metre was woven before the war, during which the two original weavers from Merton Abbey were killed. The initials woven into the tapestry above the border: RC RG GC JL were said by the guide at Mount Stuart to represent the weavers killed in the war, but according to Master Weavers the two weavers who died were Gordon Berry and John Glassbrook, and their death is marked by a shuttle and spindle with thread cut by scissors (11).

W.G. Thomson left Edinburgh in 1916 to manage a weaving project started by Sir George Frampton for ex-officers at Sevenoaks in the south of England, so in 1919 when the workshop re-opened David Lindsey Anderson became head weaver in charge of Lord of the Hunt, with original and new apprentices (Hodge 39).

In 1923 Dovecot weavers spent a week at the Gobelins Tapestry Manufacturers in Paris exchanging ideas with the weavers and dyers. David Anderson wrote in a letter to Captain Alexander Rawlinson, secretary to the Marquess of Bute:

"They, of course, have hundreds of years of tradition behind them, and the process now is just the same as it was in the seventeenth century, but the designs are comparatively poor and in most cases not suited to tapestry....... I am glad to say that neither historically or in grandeur, can any of the Gobelins designs, approach our Lord of the Hunt, and with a continuance of those fine historical cartoons we should soon be on the way to becoming foremost in the tapestry world. (F.P.Thompson 169-170)"

No doubt the Marquess was reassured that his money was being well spent in his patronage of Scottish tapestry, as a contemporary artform, superior to the oldfashioned French tapestry, but Anderson's prediction that the grand Scottish mural
tapestries would build a world reputation was not to come true, but an international reputation for the Dovecot did emerge in the 1970s, as I will discuss in chapter 4.

The tapestry is still owned by the Marquess of Bute at Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute.
**The Time of the Meeting**

Designer: Skeoch Cummings  
Made at the Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, Scotland.  
Date woven: 1933 - 1938  
Materials: Wool and Silk.  
Size: 9.92 metres x 4.185 metres

**Description and Subject**

This tapestry is based on an early eighteenth century Highland Fair and shows men drinking in a beer tent, a wrestler tackling a Highland cow, lads chatting-up lasses, a man learning to play the bagpipes, fox skins being sold for making sporrans and in the distance boys compete in a foot race. Men wear a wide variety of checks and combinations of tartans while the women are in plain solid colours. Local plants and flowers are easily recognisable - primroses, wild strawberries, thistles and Oak trees.

**Design**

Overall it is brighter and more naturalistic than the first tapestry produced at the Dovecot. The figures sit well against the background, not so much like cut-outs pasted onto a pattern of foliage. The perspective is more convincing as the eye moves around the figures which get smaller in their groups towards the top of the tapestry.

**Technique and Condition**

An article in *The Scotsman* newspaper stated that *The Time of the Meeting* measured 32 feet x 13.5 feet weighed over two hundredweights (over 101.6 kg) and contained over 46 miles (74.03 kms) of warp set at 18 warps per inch (2.5 cm.). The weft was of Scottish wool which was sent to the Gobelin manufacturers in France to be chemically dyed in over a hundred colours. The tapestry took five years to complete at a production cost of 20,000 British pounds. The “Cutting-off Ceremony” was described where the countess of Dumfries used a large skean dhu of carved silver, held by both hands, to cut through the warp threads attaching the tapestry to the loom. It was then hung in the studio, “in order to allow the colours to fade, before being taken to Mount Stuart” (perhaps to make the work sit better with the softer colouring in Lord of the Hunt which was woven in natural dyed yarn) (13).

During this time, after cutting-off the tapestry, the weavers decided that the legs of the strong, brawny Highlanders were too skinny. Their solution was to stretch a fine warp over the lower legs and reweave them slightly thicker. This would have entailed a considerable amount of detailed work as the tartan stockings are extremely intricate. However this critical appraisal of the work by the designer and weavers and vast undertaking to correct the problem through re-weaving points to a strong dedication to getting the tapestry right. It was not enough that the image was woven - it had to work
aesthetically and technically. This also reflects a fascination with reproducing woven fabric in tapestry, later pursued by Archie Brennan.

One figure in the tapestry today, at the bottom left hand side, for reasons unknown, still has the original skinny legs (Mason Interview).

Hachure can easily be seen from up to four meters away and is used as a form of shading throughout the tapestry, plus, lustrous silk is used as a highlight in parts. Brown outlines separate the figures from the ground and green outlines define the vegetation.

It is coarser that the first tapestry but is woven with more experience and confidence. The story telling element is rich with detail as the vignettes carry the narrative.

Provenance

The tapestry hangs opposite Lord of the Hunt at Mount Stuart House, Isle of Bute, Scotland.

Above: The Time of the Meeting (from The Scotsman Newspaper, Tuesday March 29 1938)
Prince of the Gael

Designer: Skeoch Cummings
Made at the Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, Scotland.
Date woven: 1938 - incomplete
Materials: Wool and Silk.
Size: 375 x 562 cm

Description and Subject

In 1938 Prince of the Gael, or as it is also known, The Raising of the Standard at Glenfinnan was warped up on a loom and weaving commenced, but once again war broke out and in 1940 the weavers went to the battlefields (Hodge 40). After the war apprentices did some further work on the tapestry, as training, but it has never been completed and remains on the loom at The Edinburgh Tapestry Company, half finished. The benefit of it being like this is that it can be studied easily, unlike Lord of the Hunt and The Time of the Meeting which hang above eye level.

As the tapestry was woven it was rolled onto the bottom beam so that when I was at the Dovecot I could only see a section across the middle of the tapestry. In this section there are a group of figures in Highland Dress, a man playing bagpipes and the Prince of the Gael. The border has a precise scroll which belies the ease of weaving and a plaque-like image with the words “Prince of the Gael Glenfinnan 1745”.

Technique and Condition

The tapestry was woven on its side and the weaving process is apparent as there are still bobbins in place with a section of the line drawing behind the warps and areas inked on ready for weaving. Harry Wright, Head Weaver at the Dovecot told me about his early apprenticeship days when work was scarce. He and fellow apprentice, Archie Brennan would fill in the time between commissions practising on Prince of the Gael. This gave them an intimate knowledge of techniques carried through from the William Morris workshop.

Hatching in the tapestry is bold and confident. Shapes are defined by clear outlines. Overall there is a mastery of illusion as the flat tapestry weaving techniques evoke the three dimensional forms of people, objects or plants.

The work appears to be in good condition but as the majority of the woven area is rolled around the bottom beam the overall state of the tapestry can not be determined (unless the tapestry is unrolled). As the section on view is continually exposed to light their is the possibility that it may have faded. Insect infestation in the rolled area is also another possibility.
Provenance

Prince of the Gael marked the end of an era of extremely generous and dedicated patronage by the Marquess of Bute and in the tapestry’s unfinished state it is a symbol of the dramatic change that took place at the Dovecot with new management, changed financial arrangements, artistic direction and weavers.

Outside influences also impacted on the Studios as after the Second World War there was a fresh outlook and influence from France where the painter Jean Lurcat became interested in tapestry and worked with the weavers at Aubusson, reducing the colour palette and insisting on a coarser texture.

In the 1980s, a rich and keen American visitor to the Edinburgh studios wanted to know how much it would cost to buy the tapestry if it was finished, thinking he would purchase the completed work for his collection. The cost of weaving the tapestry in the methods used earlier this century, at a relatively fine scale proved to be prohibitively expensive and so it remains unfinished in the studio as a museum piece and monument to the William Morris legacy at the Dovecot (Wright Interview).
Works designed by Alfred Priest - *The Admirable Crichton* 1927-1930 and *Verdure Piece* 1938

Alfred Priest designed two tapestries which were more naturalistic than the Cummings works and in many ways relate to the Merton Abbey tapestries.

*The Admirable Crichton*, is 1.86 metres high (smaller than the previous works) and a finer warp setting of 18 warps per 2.5 cm. was used to allow for the detail of the design within a smaller size (slightly coarser than the first two tapestries woven at the Dovecot Studios). This warp setting provides for smoother stepped lines. As discussed in *Master Weavers* this tapestry:

*Conforms to all William Morris' tenets as to what makes a good gobelin.*

*The weaving of the velvets and brocades is really quite exceptional but it is the glass on the tray in the far left of the panel that stands out as a minor masterpiece. As can be seen from the detail, the glinting reflections of light from the jug and the lip and stems of the glasses have been captured and beautifully reproduced.* (46)

This tapestry is similar in format to *The Beckoning*, from *The Holy Grail* series woven at Merton Abbey.

*Verdure Piece* is a naturalistic work based on the Lily pond at Mount Stuart. Although its title relates the tapestry to the form commonly woven throughout Europe from the Middle Ages, this work is a much richer and more keenly perceived rendition of nature. In viewing the tapestry I was aware of the accuracy of observation and drawing, as in the Morris and Co. design, *The Forest* designed by Philip Webb and Henry Dearle.

Both tapestries were commissioned by the Marquess of Bute and remain in the Mount Stuart collection.

**Conclusion**

Tapestry at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company was a direct continuation of the technical style of weaving developed at Merton Abbey. The methods of weaving, using natural dyed yarns initially, and ways of interpreting from a cartoon were brought to Edinburgh by the Merton Abbey weavers who trained the first apprentices.

The Arts and Crafts Movement principles and the ideas of William Morris had been readily accepted in Scotland but the other influences of Scottish history, literature, painting and nationalistic pride can be seen in the content of the Edinburgh tapestries.
The first tapestries produced at the Dovecot Studios were well handcrafted, interpreting the designs in techniques that emphasised the woven quality of the tapestry. The artists, designers and weavers worked together, although not always harmoniously, with discussion about the relationship of the technical aspects and image. William Thomson respected Morris and had an extensive knowledge of tapestry so continued the model for tapestry established at Merton Abbey.

Skeoch Cummings was the main person employed as an artist and his role was responsibility for some of the tapestry designs. This is similar to the role of Burne-Jones at Morris and Company, however Burne-Jones, Morris and Dearle worked on the same projects to produce the cartoons for tapestry with the input of weaving knowledge from Morris and Dearle, as described in the previous chapter. At the Dovecot Thompson reworked the designs into cartoons appropriate to tapestry.

As such, this meant that there were no new developments in tapestry, William Thomson and the Edinburgh weavers maintained the approach established by William Morris at Merton Abbey.

The firm tradition of the tapestry workshop as a male domain continued. No women were employed at the Dovecot in this time as designers or weavers.

The patronage of the workshop was extremely generous with all the work commissioned by the Marquess of Bute. Without commercial pressures the time-consuming tapestries were well considered, mural scale narratives woven with skill and attention to every technical detail. The commissions were specifically made for the elaborate decorative arts interior of Mount Stuart, where the tapestries can be seen today as evidence of the Arts and Crafts Movement style and William Morris's influence. Mount Stuart continues the Arts and Crafts traditions with commissions of contemporary crafts in the 1990s.

The importance of these early Scottish tapestries, in respect of this thesis, is that they make a link back to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement and forward to Archie Brennan 1931 -, who is the essential connection between the traditions of Scottish tapestry and Australian tapestry. Brennan began his career in tapestry as an apprentice at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and worked on the tapestry Prince of the Gael 1938 -, which was the last in the tapestry company's leading series of mural scale narrative works.
This chapter examines how tapestry at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company survived in the difficult post-War years and moved further in the technical direction begun by William Morris, away from detailed copying of paintings to coarser weaving which could not be mistaken for any other medium.

It considers the economic circumstances which changed the focus of production at the Dovecot away from the vast labour intensive murals, patronised by the Marquess of Bute, towards smaller, domestic scale works woven on commission or woven speculatively for sale. This put tapestry within reach of people with smaller amounts of disposable income and allowed individual weavers to design and create their own works.

The innovations in Scotland were influenced by financial constraints but inspired by modern art and the work of Jean Lurçat (1892-1966) in France. The detailed patterning of the Arts and Crafts Movement imagery gave way to abstraction, emphasis on colour, form, and the analytical reduction of Modern Art. Tapestry at the Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. continued due to the adaptability, dedication and skill of the weavers which sustained the workshop through a transition period of exploration and change.

These factors laid the foundations for contemporary tapestry and were vital in carrying tapestry through from the approach developed by Morris and Company to a form relevant to a new era.

Financial constraints

The post war period at the Dovecot was marked by financial difficulties. The workshop reopened after the war with a commercial brief, incorporated by the Bute Family as, “The Edinburgh Tapestry Company Ltd.”, under the direction of Lady Jean Bertie (Our History n. pag.). Financial concerns were given priority as the direct patronage of the Marques of Bute had come to an end and the economy in Britain was
depressed. The Merton Abbey Tapestry Works had not survived this depression and the business was placed in the hands of receivers in 1940 after years of financial struggle. H.C. Marillier, a director of the firm, wrote: "The war has killed Morris and Co. and at the age of 75 I find myself feeling like Tithonus with all his youth in ashes" (Parry, William Morris Textiles 127).

There was discussion in The Times and other newspapers about the difficulties facing the tapestry workshops in Britain with suggestions that the British government should act like the French government to subsidise the workshops (Hodge 40). This did not happen and the Edinburgh workshop struggled through the following years, searching for financial security. Its continued existence as a small workshop producing expensive luxury items at this time was uncertain, so smaller speculative works were woven. The tactic was to make works suitable for domestic interiors and sell them to new clients who would be attracted by the calibre of the tapestry designers.

Madame Marie Cuttoli had conducted a similar project in Paris in the 1930s with Picasso, Rouault, Braque, Derain, Dufy, Le Corbusier, Miro and others (Phillips 136). Artists were carefully selected to prepare cartoons for the Dovecot and tapestries were made from designs by: Jankel Adler, Edward Bawden, Louis Le Brocquy, Cecil Collins, Henry Moore, Ronald Searle, Stanley Spencer and Graham Sutherland. Only two women are recorded as artists designing tapestries in this period: Lady Jean Bertie and Princess Zeid-el-Hussein (Master Weavers 138).

Another way of making money was to weave practical items such as carpets, rugs, chairbacks, seat covers and a stool cover. One heraldic tapestry Arms of H.M. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother 1950 was also woven for the Queen Mother, from a cartoon by Sir Stephen Gooden.

The Edinburgh weavers looked with envy to the French tapestry workshops which enjoyed government patronage and subsidy allowing bold, new experimental works to be made. The Times newspaper printed many letters of support for the British weavers decrying the British Labour Government tax on tapestry, exacerbating the demise of the Dovecot (Hodge 40).

A brave attempt was made from 1945-1960 to market the tapestries and move forward into a more viable mode of production aligned with contemporary art, by adapting the fine techniques to accommodate a changing public perception.

Changes in materials and technique

At The Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd, in the 1940s new technical approaches to tapestry were explored. The emphasis was on a coarser warp setting and a restricted palette of colours, about thirty, rather than sixty, due partly to post-war restrictions and
through choice, to increase the vitality of the work (Hodge 40). It also, more importantly for the Dovecot's survival, reduced the time needed to weave the tapestries and lowered the cost of production.

Hachure was used extensively until the 1950s. It had been successful in the mural scale tapestries, viewed from a distance where the hatched colour blended visually, but in the smaller scale tapestries with coarser weaving, the crossing lines of colour were more obtrusive. Hatching is also a time consuming way of mixing colour or tone as it involves two or more bobbins worked together. Other means of creating shading had to be explored to find a method which was less obtrusive and less time consuming. Mixing several strands of yarn on one bobbin was possible with the thicker warp settings and this allowed for mixing weft colours or tones on the bobbin and speeded up the weaving. Hachure is still used selectively in tapestry.

The Arras or outline technique also went out of style and The Wine Press (1946) is noted as the last tapestry woven at the Dovecot using this technique. In its composition of figures and backdrop of foliage, The Wine Press continued the narrative quality of the first tapestries woven in Edinburgh but measuring 1.65 metres x 1.39 metres, it is domestic rather than mural in scale (Master Weavers 50).

In subsequent tapestries it was no longer necessary to separate figure from patterned background by a line as the new works used tone/colour difference between shapes to make the image. This style was the essence of work by Jean Lurçat, relating to the simplified forms of modern art.

Narrative in the tapestries continued with A Man with Cabbages (The Gardener) (1949) designed by Sir Stanley Spencer and Farming (1950), designed by Edward Bawden, Cycle of Life (1958) designed by Sax Shaw and Phases of the Moon (1958) designed by John Maxwell. Maxwell researched the history of tapestry and looked at Lurçat’s work and as a result Phases of the Moon bears a direct resemblance to the Lurçat tapestries by its strong contrast of background to symbols, simplified design in the animals, fishes, birds and stars and overall theme of life cycles (Master Weavers 64).

Archie Brennan - Skill building apprenticeship years

During the post war years seven young men started apprenticeships at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company including the sixteen year old Archie Brennan who joined the Dovecot in 1948.

Brennan was born in 1931 near Edinburgh and from an early age showed a talent for drawing, which he pursued in the later years of school at Art College evening classes. There he met apprentice weavers from the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and
when he was 16, went to join them at the weaving studio. He spent five years learning the methods and skills of the trade, in a traditional, orthodox and thorough way, working from cartoons by British artists. He said in the catalogue essay “World Tapestry Today”:

_"I had been taught that a proper weft was an unbleached worsted yarn of a 3/20 count which had been professionally dyed in 3 or 4 shades of some 15 light fast colours; and that the right warp material was wool. Over a seven year apprenticeship I had spent long months practising hatching techniques, open and closed sheds, slit sewing and linking, mathematically graded curves and shapes, stepping lines, knotting and all the requirements of 'good' tapestry. We were advised too, that tapestry was a mural art, essentially flat in design with no perspective, a bias of vertical movements, and ought to have some kind of protective border"_ (Brennan, World Tapestry, 9).

Harry Wright, who started his apprenticeship at the same time as Brennan talked about working on Prince of the Gael during the slack times in the workshop to practise weaving techniques and build a strong skills base (Wright Interview).

Both Brennan and Wright's comments show that at this time William Morris's insistence on craftsmanship was maintained and the weavers' engagement in drawing classes points to a continuation of Morris's philosophy and belief that the weavers should be involved in the entire artistic process, rather than work as slavish nineteenth century style copiers. It was Brennan's interest in drawing which lead him to art college and it was this connection to drawing that was extremely important for the flourishing of the Dovecot in the 1960s, the establishment of the tapestry course at Edinburgh College of Art and the future development of contemporary Australian tapestry.

**Inspiration from France**

A major exhibition of French tapestries, including works designed by Lean Lurçat, “French Tapestries from the Middle Ages to the Present Day”, shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1948 inspired Scottish tapestry weavers who visited the show. (Waller 16).

The Scottish weavers looked to France where there had been a revival in tapestry through the work of Jean Lurçat. He had experimented with designs for tapestry from 1916 and, as a young man unable to attract tapestry commissions, he sought his mother's help to embroider his designs. They proved to be costly in materials and time consuming for his mother, making Lurçat reconsider his approach in pragmatic terms:
Had I been obliged to pay my needlewoman, my experiments would have stopped short there and then. I soon understood that I must readjust my sights and above all cut expenditure. Any works of art, whatever it may be and whatever may be thought of it, starts from a budget. (Verlet 118)

Lurçat tried thickening the stitches and reducing the colours, with mixed results. As the works grew larger he was convinced he was on the right track and a study of fifteenth century tapestries provided a model for warp to weft balance. His experimental work continued and by 1930 several hundred square metres of his work had been woven in a number of tapestries. In 1938 Lurçat visited the Apocalypse tapestries at Angers, France. This visit affirmed his belief in the coarser warp and weft setting and the relationship of tapestry to architecture. He stressed the mural function of tapestry, "Tapestry is an essentially mural object, going hand in hand with architecture" (Verlet 117).

In 1939 Lurçat went to work at Aubusson where he developed a close relationship with the weavers and together they composed a reduced palette of colours. This was not a new idea as William Morris and Marius Martin, Director of the School of Decorative Arts, Aubusson, had previously advocated a reduction in the number of colours available to the weaver. Lurçat was able to put the ideas into practice at Aubusson, one of the world's major tapestry workshops and through his influence the concepts were widely accepted. The figures comparing the range of colours used in the middle of the eighteenth century with those used by Lurçat show the drastic reduction over a period of time:

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, tapestry weavers used some 30,000 colours. These in turn were divided up into nearly a thousand variations on each of 36 tones, shading from light to dark.......A series of tapestries by Lurçat, for example, totalling around 270 square yards in area, required less than 50 colours (six yellows, five greys, two blacks, five ochres, two whites, five reds, five greens, five salmon pinks, five blues and two background tones). (Verlet 118)

Jean Lurçat's palette was stored as a "rosary" of numbered yarn samples and this was used to translate the new broader images inspired by fourteenth and fifteenth century tapestries.

The tapestry designs were drawn up as clearly marked cartoons for the weavers to follow, not imitating the fully painted Raphael style cartoons, but using codes as a
guide for tapestry. Lurçat preferred to make cartoons which were line drawings with the numbers on them corresponding to a colour and shade of yarn (Giraud and de Lamaestre 83). This avoided the danger of misinterpretation of colour by the weaver as, for example, in Lurçat's system the number 50, 51, 52 or 53 would distinguish the shade of blue.

These changes increased the rate of production to that typical of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries - i.e. about two metres square of weaving per worker per month. This is a far greater output that that of the classical tapestry weaver who could expect to produce only 15 - 20 cm square per month. The faster rate of the modern tapestry had a direct correlation with the volume of tapestry produced: Lurçat's output has been colossal. About one thousand of his cartoons were woven and exhibited in Europe and America (Verlet 127).

He also promoted tapestry tirelessly and one of his major achievements was the launch of the international tapestry Biennale exhibitions at Lausanne in the early 1960s (Philips 142).

A significant work by Jean Lurçat is on display at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and the following description details the distinguishing features of this work which is representative of the Australian interest in European tapestry.
Australia

Designer: Jean Lurçat
Made at Aubusson, France.
Weaver: Suzanne Conbely-Gatien, Aubusson.
Date woven: 1960
Materials: Wool and Cotton
Size: 3480mm x 6875mm

Description and Subject

The tapestry was commissioned as a memorial to those who fought in World War II. Images of birds in the sky were symbols of the airforce, animals and flowers the army and fish the navy. It is one of many tapestries imported into Australia before there was a tapestry workshop in this country and it marked the beginning of a modern artist-weaver relationship. Notes from the Powerhouse state:

*The gift of the Australia tapestry is a major acquisition for the museum. It is significant for several reasons: firstly, “Australia” represents the enormous sacrifices made by the men and women of New South Wales during the second world war. Secondly as a fine example of the work of Jean Lurçat, who is recognised as the leader of the twentieth century revival of the tapestry tradition of France, and finally, the tapestry was woven at the famous Aubusson factory in France. (Powerhouse n.pag.)*

Design

The design is a formal and balanced composition. With the exception of the central area the shapes sit flat on the tapestry without the suggestion of depth. The leaves and wattle in the central form relate to medieval rendering of volume through overlapping shapes in a range of tonal values. Dense, matt black of the background is a powerful backdrop to the symbols and in this contrasting format and in the allegory the work relates strongly to medieval works such as the Apocalypse tapestries and to Lurçat’s major suite of ten tapestries *Le Chant du Monde* conceived by Lurçat in 1957 and produced until his death in 1966.

Technique and Condition

In viewing the tapestry in the Powerhouse museum, Sydney, I noted that the warp is set at twelve warps per 2.5 cm and this looks fine by contemporary standards because of the mural scale of the tapestry. The weft is fine and mainly a single colour on the bobbin, but with some areas of mixed weft thread. Hachure is used around the star
the bobbin, but with some areas of mixed weft thread. Hachure is used around the star shapes to give a bold halo effect and the outline technique is used around the fish and flames to make them stand out.

The tapestry hangs beside a walkway near the theatrette and is away from the main traffic areas of the museum. It has controlled artificial lighting and is in good condition.

**Provenance**

The tapestry was commissioned by The Anzac House Trust in 1960 for the people of N.S.W., and it hangs in The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Above: Australia (from a Powerhouse Museum postcard)
The influence of the Lurçat model was pervasive so during the 1950s the Dovècot employees Ronald Cruikshank, Harry Wright, Sax Shaw, Fred Mann, Archie Brennan and John Loutitt worked both as designers and tapestry weavers, simplifying the weave structure and the designs. The Dovecot weavers worked together on commissioned works and as individual artists on their own designs. They were part of an increasing number of artist weavers in Europe and Scandinavia, Noemi Ferenczy, Marta Maas-Fjetterstrom, Hannah Ryggen and many others, who explored the tapestry medium using images they had designed, often in a smaller format suitable for domestic use (Phillips 136). Ronald Cruickshank, at the Dovecot, believed that a tapestry should average about 152 x 183 cm. or not be larger than a weaver could complete in fifteen weeks, to prevent boredom and exhaustion of the initial enthusiasm to weave the tapestry (Shaw 195). This way of working as artist and designer on a lesser scale formed the basis of contemporary tapestry produced by artist-weavers in the second half of this century.

Although it was a difficult time for the Dovecot with the purchase tax of sixty-six and two thirds imposed on tapestry in Britain in 1951, three apprentices did carry on - Archie Brennan, Fred Mann and Harry Wright. They worked under the Master Weaver Ronald Cruikshank who left the Edinburgh Tapestry Company in 1952 to set up his own studio, “The Golden Targe”. Archie Brennan joined him for two years before they went their separate ways - Cruikshank to U.S.A. to set up another workshop and Brennan to France, the mecca of tapestry in the early 50s.

The Dovecot passed to John Noble and H. Jefferson Barnes, (later Sir Harry), Director of Glasgow School of Art, in 1954. The support of these two notable men helped the workshop through a difficult decade (Buchanan n.pag). It was agreed that a resident Artistic Director should be appointed at the Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. and the position was given to Sax Shaw in 1954. This was a major shift from Director of Weaving and acknowledges the role of the artist-weaver.

Sax Shaw

Shaw was born in Yorkshire in 1916 and moved to Edinburgh in 1946. He had studied Art and travelled on a post-graduate scholarship, to the Gobelins Manufactory in Paris to learn tapestry. There a dyer had given him the advice to “Hold the wool in your hands and then think with your heart” (Master Weavers 50). His work reflects this directive in its sensual textures and passionate colour. On completion of his study, he immediately became a lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art, teaching drawing and stained glass in the Department of Architecture and Interior Design. He designed and
stained glass in the Department of Architecture and Interior Design. He designed and
assisted Ronald Cruikshank as director of weaving on The Lion and the Oak Tree
(1948), his first tapestry woven at the studio. It was commissioned by Lord Colum
Crichton Stuart, along with two other tapestries, Fighting Cocks (1950) and Butterflies
(1950) (Master Weavers 50).

Shaw's brief as Artistic Director, was to commission the best of contemporary
artists to work with the weavers and he worked in this position till 1960 (Our history,
n.pag). However it is obvious from the catalogue of tapestries woven at the Dovecot
between 1954 and 1960 that the majority of the works produced were designed by
Shaw. Forty four of the sixty four tapestries documented for this period of time were
designed by him (Master Weavers 139 - 140).

While at The Edinburgh Tapestry Company Ltd., Shaw split his time between
teaching and the workshop, making the first substantial links between the art school and
the Dovecot. This was an important connection for the development of contemporary
tapestry, providing training for the artist-weaver and a pathway into tapestry for women
via training at Edinburgh College of Art.

Teaching, drawing, filling many sketchbooks and creating designs for tapestry
and stained glass occupied Shaw twentytwo hours each day between the ages of
seventeen and seventy. His prolific output was influenced by Jean Lurcat towards the
end of the 1950s when his work was “semi religious, semi-pagan” (Waller 113).

Apart from a small tapestry woven in 1967 which was designed in the mid-
fifties, but shelved because of lack of funding, Cycle of Life (1958) was the last tapestry
designed by Sax Shaw to be woven at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company Ltd. and it is a
complex image representing the theme of birth, growth, fruition, death, decay and
regeneration (Master Weavers 62). Visually and conceptually it relates to the work of
Jean Lurcat.

Above: detail of Cycle of Life (1958) (From Master Weavers p63)
Shaw brought about fundamental changes when he worked in the studio. One fundamental change was making the weavers work at the front of the tapestry, unlike the Morris weavers who worked at the back with a mirror to view the weaving in reverse. It was thought that the working process would damage the surface of the tapestry. Dovecot weavers were persuaded to work from the front and the weaving time was cut in half. Weaving from the front means that the weaver is looking directly at the work as it grows and can more easily make visual judgements about the work at every stage. This way of weaving is much more appropriate to the artist-weaver who is continually making aesthetic decisions in the weaving process because the weaver can continually see the image as it develops rather than be looking at the back of the tapestry where the surface is obscured by weft ends.

Experimentation with warp setting was another part of Shaw’s contribution and *The Foxes* 1954, 150cm x 120cm is a good example of his style of design woven on the coarse warp setting of 6 warps per 2.5 cm. Part of the drive for coarser warp settings continued to be budget, attempting to speed up the weaving and reduce the costs (Dovecot Tapestries n. pag.).

Throughout his career Sax Shaw has worked between the areas of tapestry and stained glass with a clear relationship between the mediums. He often uses the term “building a tapestry” which indicates a similar process to the building of a stained glass window (Coates 51). It emphasises the process of tapestry, working with flat shapes, as distinct from painting or drawing. The tapestries share a richness of colour and floating quality of shapes with his stained glass and the works in both mediums show an understanding of technique and its relationship to image.

Sax Shaw taught me stained glass in my first year at art school in 1974. He was consumed by his work and attentive to his students, making sure we completely understood the techniques as we worked with glass and solder. He continues to live and work as an artist-weaver in a ground floor studio at his Edinburgh home, surrounded by his many shelves of sketchbooks, drawings, designs, tapestries and paintings.

**Archie Brennan**

One of Shaw's students was Archie Brennan who studied full-time at Edinburgh College of Art, working in painting and stained glass with Shaw. Through Shaw's involvement with tapestry, Brennan was able to continue weaving and was awarded the first Diploma in Tapestry from Edinburgh College of Art. He went on to study tapestry exclusively with an Andrew Grant Postgraduate Scholarship for one year at Edinburgh College of Art. This Art School training encouraged the creative development which was missing in the Dovecot apprenticeship.
After seven years of workshop training in Scotland, Brennan wanted to broaden his knowledge and experience of tapestry. In France he met Pierre Baudouin, a well known cartonnier, promoter and tapestry enthusiast and Pierre Pauli, the mind behind the Lausanne Tapestry Biennales. Their wide appreciation and broad views led him to believe, as he still does today, that there is no right way in tapestry, no formula, finite rules, set systems or attitudes: "Each of us moves through our experience, our examination of work from the past and that of our contemporaries and settle for our own values and priorities as long as we hold them" (Waller 30).

Brennan has continually questioned the approach set out in his apprenticeship but also says "Time may show that what seems to be major developments are in fact mere falters" (Brennan, World Tapestry, 8). The strict methodology of his apprenticeship years provided a thorough understanding of tapestry techniques which were tried and tested methods to use where appropriate in the work, and as a springboard for experimentation.

At “Convergence” 1996, a handspinners and weavers conference in Portland, U.S.A. Brennan reiterated the same ideas, emphasising that everything was provisional and subject to change depending on the experiences, information and changes in thinking. However, the basic technique of tapestry weaving as taught at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company has remained his principal way of working for over forty years. Brennan did not pick up the French weaving techniques but continued with the ways of working he was taught as an apprentice, experimenting briefly with texture but returning to the flat woven image.

When I visited the Edinburgh Tapestry Company in August 1996 I was struck by the sound of the bobbins beating the weft down between the warps. It was exactly this sound that Brennan's bobbins made while demonstrating to students in the tapestry workshop at Convergence, and most probably the sound that would have been heard in the Morris workshop at Merton Abbey. It is completely different from the French method using fingers and a heavy wooden beater as demonstrated by Jean Pierre Larouchette in the same workshop at Convergence.

Brennan’s work in Edinburgh is further discussed in chapter 4 in relation to tapestry of the period 1960-1980.

The New Role of Tapestry

As well as Lurçat’s work, the tapestries designed by the French artist Le Corbusier during the 1950s and 1960s were also influential. Maureen Hodge, in an interview at her home in 1996, talked about a trip to London with Archie Brennan in her student days to see an exhibition of the artist/architect, Le Corbusier's work. She said
this was a strong influence for herself and Archie Brennan, although she said that he probably would not admit it (Hodge, Interview).

Le Corbusier had worked with Marie Cuttoli, the director of Aubusson’s School of Decorative Arts, in the 1930s when Cuttoli made an attempt to revive the flagging tapestry industry by commissioning contemporary artists to design for tapestry (Taylor 21). The results were costly reproductions of paintings, but she did pave the way for the more exciting developments of the 1950s and 1960s. Through his experience in designing for tapestry, Le Corbusier thought of tapestry in its earlier function as a moveable art:

*The destiny of modern tapestry is clear - it is the 'mural' of our times. We are 'nomads' living in communally-serviced apartment blocks and we change apartments as our family requirements change.... We cannot have a mural painted on the walls of our apartment. However, a woollen wall of tapestry can at any time be taken down carried away and put in place elsewhere. This is why I have called my tapestries 'muralnomads'.* (Verlet 117)

Concepts such as the moveable form of wallcovering designed for the modern interior challenged the French workshops at Aubusson, making them look to contemporary architecture for their context.

Images such as *Canape* (1934-1949) worked in gouache by Le Corbusier and translated into tapestry were bold and dramatic, almost devoid of the decoration and detail so common in tapestry during the previous centuries (Le Corbusier n. pag.). Tapestry was moving away from the reproductive, decorative form and into a realm of contemporary art. The narrative changed from literal storytelling to a more abstract form. Dr. Alice Zrebiec describes this:

*Narrative today is evident not only when an artist describes a scene in literal terms, but is perhaps most potent when the image provokes a psychological interpretation. It is indicative of our times that an abstract image can elicit reactions expressed in a narrative manner to the interplay of lines, forms and colors. (Zrebiec 3)*

**Conclusion**

After World War 11, the jaded tapestry industry searched for a new direction away from the expensive and over elaborate traditions of the past. A revitalisation was
needed to rekindle interest in the medium, cut down costs and make it relevant to the twentieth century.

In France, Jean Lurçat worked with the tapestry manufacturers at Aubusson designed bringing fresh images and changes of concept to the medium. The workshops there were able to forge ahead with bold commissioned works embracing modern art, subsidised by the government. Through this new work, the previous conventions were questioned, but the technical changes were not completely original innovations as they continued the thinking of Morris and other French tapestry weavers who pursued a reduced palette of colours and thicker warp/weft structure. The works from this period which were successful achieved a translation from original artwork into tapestry, which was not a laboured copy of the original but works enhanced by the qualities of the tapestry medium and woven as artworks in their own right.

In Scotland, although the weavers were aware of the dramatic changes in French tapestry and the impact of Lurçat on the industry, their situation was different. Driven by the struggle of the workshop to survive financially when its patronage by the Marquess of Bute came to an end, they dealt with a depressed economy which did not foster a demand for luxury goods such as tapestry.

The Dovecot weavers pursued another line of thinking. Their challenge was to make tapestry affordable by cutting down the costs (mainly the time to make the work), and to attract another form of patronage. Cost cutting happened through the production of smaller tapestries, the simplification of the range of materials used and the thickening of both warp and weft, reducing the weaving time. The individual weavers worked as artists and designers on the smaller commissions producing over one hundred and fifteen tapestries between 1950 and 1960. They were mainly designed as works for private, domestic interiors with the discerning art-buying public in mind as the new patrons.

The Edinburgh Tapestry Company pushed the line of the artist-weaver who could design and weave a unique piece himself or work in close collaboration with a contemporary artist to create an individual artwork in tapestry. The weavers were well equipped to work in this way with the ideas passed down from Morris about drawing and insistence on ideas and content in the work. Although it was a time of struggle with a great deal of 'bread and butter' work to keep the company financially afloat, it laid the ground for further development of one-off artworks in tapestry and artist-weaver collaborations in the affluent times ahead.

Sax Shaw introduced tapestry to the curriculum at Edinburgh College of Art, aligning tapestry with architecture and interiors, and made the links between the Art School and the Dovecot. This opened the way for the contemporary art-trained tapestry weaver, closer links with art and architecture and also allowed a place for women in
tapestry. Women could see tapestry as an art medium rather than a male dominated trade practised in the confines of workshops. The Art School provided an educational and creative basis for tapestry that was not previously provided in the tapestry workshops and apprenticeship training.

Tapestry found a new place in contemporary society, simplified in technique to speed up production and make the works affordable to a new art-buying clientele. The imagery was refined, in keeping with modern art and the best of the tapestries produced were celebrated for their inspired, meaningful, imagery and relationship with the architecture of the time.
Chapter
4
SUCCESS AND POPULARITY OF SCOTTISH TAPESTRY;
EXUBERANCE AND INNOVATION
1960 - 1980

After the depressed post-War years there was an upturn in the British economy and a climate of national optimism which brought about major changes in art, design and craft. The Dovecot was well placed at this time to take advantage of the growing art market and interest in new forms of art.

This chapter argues that Archie Brennan was vital to the success of the Dovecot and popularity of Scottish tapestry in the 1960s and early 1970s. His deep understanding of the tapestry medium acquired through the rigour of his apprenticeship, his willingness to experiment and ability to transfer his ideas became evident through teaching, collaboration with artists and weavers, exhibitions and promotion of contemporary tapestry.

An exploration of tapestries woven at this time will demonstrate the insight that Brennan brought to tapestry as an artist-weaver and the innovation and true collaboration which existed between artist, weaving director and weavers at the Dovecot. This relationship and the experimental work of students in the tapestry department at Edinburgh College of Art were crucial to the emergence of tapestry as a recognised contemporary art form and they brought world recognition to the Dovecot, Edinburgh College of Art and Archie Brennan.

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s, although close in terms of our history, have been extensively analysed as periods of major change. Britain at the beginning of the 1960s had recovered from the Second World War and was becoming more prosperous with increasing optimism and change. In a speech at Scarborough in 1960 Harold Wilson heralded a new decade “This is our message for the Sixties. A socialist scientific and technological revolution releasing energy on an enormous scale” (Harris, Hyde and Smith 8-9).

After World War II there was rapid development of technology. In the building industry prefabrication changed construction time and expenditure and low-cost, high-rise housing complexes were built in New Towns, often on the outskirts of cities, to
accommodate the rising populations. Many houses (including my family’s) were connected to an electricity supply and with that came the T.V. and a fridge.

Consumerism was promoted through the media and reacted against by the ‘drop outs’. The period is remembered for its youth culture with the Beatles, Mini cars, Cliff in Summer Holiday and the fashions of Mary Quant, Biba, floral Kipper ties and Union Jack socks. With a greater proportion of the population enjoying a higher disposable income there was an emphasis on leisure and pleasure activities, holidays (Billy Butlins holiday camps) and home decorating with designer shops (Habitat, Danish Design Centre). It was a time for experimentation and rulebreaking across the culture: food, drugs, lifestyle, gender stereotype, politics, unionism, communal living and art.

The major concerns in art in the 1960s and 1970s were Abstract Expressionism, Conceptual Art, Op, Pop, Hard Edge, Video and Kinetic Art. Among the major artists working in Britain at the time were Tom Philips b. 1937, Ian Hamilton Finlay b. 1924, Howard Hodgkin b. 1932 and Bridget Riley b. 1931. Eduardo Paolozzi, b. 1924 pioneered interest in popular culture in the late 1940s, collaging images from advertising, magazine covers and packaging. He was followed by Richard Hamilton who played an important role in defining Pop art. Patrick Caulfield’s work was both figative and abstract - a play on the real object and the illusion created in painting (Wilson, British Art 184 - 197). David Hockney b.1937 in the early sixties worked from graffiti of the urban environment and went on to produce figative, compositions of interiors or outdoor settings, sometimes including people and with selective detail. Hockney’s work had wide appeal and reached a public beyond the art scene (Livingstone 10).

The crafts revival began in earnest and facilities were opened up for learning in community classes and formal education, building a momentum of public patronage. There were arts patrons buying from exhibitions and galleries or commissioning artworks for homes, work places and modern public buildings. Jack Lenor Larsen said of the “beige decade”, the 1970s “Art Fabrics - sometimes tapestries, but more often bold experiments wall hung, ceiling hung, or supported on pedestals became important elements in public spaces” (Larsen 178). Textiles were thought to provide “relief from austerity of standardised interiors or from the hard-surfaced, unrelieved facades of our topless buildings” (Constantine and Larsen The Art Fabric 22).

New Opportunities

In this context, in 1962, Archie Brennan, aged 31, was appointed as a weaver at the Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. and before the end of the year he became the Weaving Director. The same year, he was employed part time by Edinburgh College of Art to set up a discrete tapestry department.
He was in the right place at the right time. Edinburgh already had the well established tapestry workshop, which Brennan was familiar with, and the Edinburgh College of Art offered the chance to build on the work of Sax Shaw and set up a tapestry course within an art context. Maureen Hodge, one of Brennan’s students, became the first woman and first entirely college trained employee at the Dovecot in 1964. The extreme hardships of the post war period were in the past and it was a new, buoyant, optimistic era. Brennan says of this time and the opportunities:

_I was already prepared to set up as a solo tapestry weaver but these two opportunities offered other possibilities. I had no great ambition to be a successful artist-weaver but did want to help further establish tapestry as a worthwhile, if minor, medium. I wanted to see in Edinburgh, because I was there, a healthy thriving situation where experience, facilities, materials, equipment and enthusiasm was on a large scale. The established workshop had the basis, the new department the possibility (Waller 31)._ 

In the context of the time and with these opportunities the scene was set for experimentation and change in tapestry.

**Experimentation and change**

Many experimental methods were developed in 1960s textiles through the Fiberart Movement which emphasised new ways of using traditional techniques and material qualities.

Theo Moorman developed her inlay weaving technique (Moorman 20), had major solo shows in 1963 and 1967 and was part of the group exhibition, *Weaving for Walls* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in 1965 (Sutton 166). Constance Howard and Kathleen Whyte inspired embroiderers to explore materials and stitches in design motifs drawn from natural forms. Maggie Riegler, Tadek Beutlich, Bobby Cox, Myriam Gilby, Irene Waller, Peter Collingwood and many others evolved highly individual working techniques.

Maureen Hodge considered that Brennan had always been open to change, being able to sum up available information and be decisive, but able to change his mind when new information came to light. She quotes his favourite saying as, "'Once I've made up my mind that's it', and then he hurriedly adds, 'on the other hand ....'" (Whitelaw n.pag.).

Brennan's willingness to consider options and make changes is evident in his technical approach at that time. Although he had a thorough and traditional training equipping him for the job, he continued to re-evaluate ways of working within the parameters of flat woven tapestry. The quality of materials and the surface textures they could make, so important in the Fibre Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was explored in tapestries such as Aberdeen Art Gallery Tapestry (1964) (which looks graphic in reproduction but has a stronger textural quality in reality) and to a greater extent in Man in the Moon 11 (1965). Brennan and the Dovecot weavers embraced experimentation within the parameters of flat woven tapestry and commissioned work, by changing the weft from mainly wool to materials selected for their surface qualities - linen, cotton, silk and wool with various textures. Archie Brennan describes the experimentation with materials:

At the Dovecot we have for some years concerned ourselves with the textural aspects of weaving, using surface variations as something to juggle with along with colour and tone. We had collected together a range of materials of different qualities which were dyed to our requirements, but I had always been guarding some undyed materials in this range with a view to weaving a white tapestry. The design had to be able to accept the range of textures and weaves and when Hans Tisdall's "Man in the Moon " came along, I made one or two experimental fragments and went ahead. This meant replacing all the colour in the original design with an equivalent value in surface weave. (Mc Farlane 16)

This tactile approach reversed the composition of values in the work and through the contrasting surface textures, the tapestry changes with light conditions. It was carried out without consultation with the artist, Hans Tisdall, who had no say in the interpretation of the work and did not see the tapestry until it was complete. The final work in many ways is different to Tisdall’s original and marks a shift in the power relationship between weavers and artist - the weavers having final control of the image. This suggests that Tisdall had confidence in the weavers and their interpretive skills and that he was open to an experimental approach.

Maureen Hodge worked with Archie Brennan on Man in the Moon 11 and shared his interest in the contemporary Fibre movement. She was the single weaver who worked on the commission from artist/textile designer Bernat Klein to translate a three
inch square colour transparency into three foot square tapestries. The original artwork was in very thick paint worked with a palette knife and to achieve the same sense of texture in tapestry Hodge had to use a wide range of techniques in an inventive way. The description of this weaving approach in Master Weavers reads like a complete catalogue of textile methods: Turkish, Persian double hitch and half hitch knots; thick and thin warp in various warp settings layered over each other and making holes by adding extra warps or cutting and sewing back warps.

This approach exemplifies the extremes of the period when a common slogan was “anything goes” and demonstrates the extent that the Dovecot went to, in relation to experimental Fibre Art. Although there was a significant shift away from weaving only with wool, using hachure and the arras outline style, there still remained a deep concern for craftsmanship - obvious in the way Hodge considered every possible method and selected the most appropriate techniques to weave the tapestry.

However, at this time, the work produced in workshops with traditional techniques was criticised for its lack of invention, and for its collaborative process. Constantine and Larsen criticised tapestry saying "The brilliant colors and simple composition of the modern painter are merely substituted for the woven pictures of pageantry, allegory, and history of the past". They stressed that an Art Fabric was "conceived and created by one artist" (Constantine and Larsen, Beyond Craft 7).

**Rule breaking**

It was a time of rule breaking - daring fashion, the pill and sexual freedom - and Maureen Hodge broke two rules by becoming the first female weaver and first art school trained weaver, employed at the Dovecot. She talked about arguments with "the boys" who had set ways, which she challenged. One tradition was to warp up with one cop at a time. Hodge started warping using multiple cops and enjoyed sitting in the garden while "the boys" continued with the one cop method (Hodge, Interview).

She brought a particular sensibility to the workshop through her own creative approach developed by experimentation at art school and through looking at other works in books such as The New American Tapestry (1968). The maquettes for tapestry with varied surface textures in a Le Corbussier exhibition in London were an early inspiration. Other European influences included textile artists Peter and Ritzi Jacobi, who exhibited and lectured at Edinburgh College of Art in 1987.

Hodge’s work had a raw, sensual quality with surface texture developed from two dimensional tapestry into three dimensional woven forms, with a particular tactile sensibility achieved through the use of black jute, sisal and linens. Her tapestries From Her Tower Whilst Half Awake He Answers (1970), A Hill for My Friend (1976) and Forever is not a word but a number VI / I (1980) are poetic and sensual.
Archie Brennan commented "I risk some wrath (from either or both the sexes) but I contend that women have opened up a greater tactile sensitivity and have a greater digital dexterity on the whole, and that is all good" (World Tapestry 10). His comment can be disputed as many men such as Tadek Beutlich were noted for their tactile work or weavers such as Peter Collingwood and Alec Pearson recognised for their dexterity. The comment may, however, reflect an attribute that Hodge brought to the Dovecot that had not previously been there. It may also have been a reaction to the entrenched belief that young boys were best suited to tapestry as they had nimble fingers.

However women in many cultures and throughout history have lifelong experience of working in textiles, as thoroughly researched and documented by Elizabeth Barber in *Women's work: The First 20000 Years*. Particularly from the Victorian times through to the mid-twentieth century, women were involved in fine hand embroidery for their homes and families (Isaacs 6) In the 1960s embroidery and other forms of textiles were reclaimed through the feminist movement to acknowledge their skill and to express their creativity and freedom.

So, in the wider community it was accepted that women had an affinity with textiles in the form of needlework, but until this time tapestry, through the European workshops, was not thought of as a female occupation. William Morris had in his lectures often remarked on carpet-making (in the male trade) as the congener of tapestry rather than embroidery (Morris Collected Works 287) and Dirk Holger later quoted Jean Lurçat, "When young ladies weave their own works, the work is Home-Sweet-Home needlework" (Brennan, I. T.J. June 99, 11).

Hodge and subsequent graduates from Edinburgh School of Art were considered avant-garde by the weavers and apprentices at the Dovecot and because of this, the interaction between college and apprentice trained weavers was not always smooth. Visits to the college degree shows would bring about great arguments (Hodge, Interview). Although weavers and apprentices from the time of Morris had been encouraged to draw and participate in tapestry production in a creative way - the extent that this new generation of weavers went to, far exceeded the previous limits.

**Archie Brennan - Artist-Weaver.**

Archie Brennan, from his student days at Edinburgh College of Art, continued to work in tapestry and drawing. His individual approach and personal philosophy are revealed by examination of his tapestries which I have looked at in exhibitions, collections and at a workshop he gave in Portland, Oregon, in 1996.
Drawing

Brennan studied drawing from his early teenage years through his apprenticeship at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and education at Edinburgh College of Art. He said “The process of looking, seeing, questioning, selecting and rejecting is the basis of all the work I carry out. I draw in order to learn to look, to see.” (Waller 36). These thoughts echo William Morris’s insistence on observational drawing to develop images “that it does not excuse want of observation of nature, or laziness of drawing” (Morris, W. Hopes and Fears, 107).

Archie Brennan has continued to draw and in a lecture given in 1996 he stated “To work in a graphic way you need exceptional drawing skills...... value is important.......” and talked about dedicating Friday of every week to drawing in his New York Studio (Convergence).

Techniques

Archie Brennan learned technique initially by a set of workshop rules derived from the work of William Morris and the Merton Abbey weavers. These ways of working were questioned and experimented with in the 1960s and 1970s, but the rigour, knowledge and attention to the detail of technique has remained with him.

Archie Brennan’s tapestries have no plain areas but have pattern or texture over every centimetre of the work. There are no plain passages of weft as my analysis of the tapestry Studio Window in chapter 6 demonstrates. This system of working only across a few warps at any given time technically benefits the overall tension of the weft and this method is common in tapestry historically and in many cultures. At Convergence in 1996, Brennan said “the biggest skill required by a tapestry weaver is weft tension”. He also said that thinking of the idea of plain weaving for one hour was enough to make him take up ice hockey! Ironically Brennan's daughter Sarah Brennan enjoys the discipline of plain weaving and produces highly refined minimal tapestries. Therefore fragmentation of the weft structure is a personal choice of the artist-weaver who fully understands technique, his or her own approach to tapestry and designs with this knowledge in mind.

Brennan believes the success of tapestries depends on the direct approach of the weaver working with the strength and integrity of the tapestry medium:

*Early tapestry, Syrian, so-called Coptic, Peruvian, Alsation/Swiss/German, Scandinavian and both early and late Gothic tapestries all have a common characteristic beyond technical structure, that of directness of execution and a*
freshness of conception and discovery that is common to all the best art expressions. (Brennan, Master Weavers 33)

This comes from the weaver working with the tapestry medium, knowing the angles that work in tapestry and using them, mixing colour in ways appropriate to tapestry and not trying to contrive an image in weaving - drawing in tapestry "a creative and very personal graphic language in woven drawing, that is, tapestry" (Martin n. pag.). Pat Taylor commented "He's a draftsman who drafts in weft" (Knowles 32).

The precise detail of Brennan's working techniques, as I observed in his tapestries and through his teaching, is in Appendix A. Artist-weavers today do not usually experience the same intensity of technical training in tapestry and as Lawrence Knowles says "Few, if any, of these descendants can approach Brennan's technical facility" (32).

The work does not rely entirely on technique for its inventiveness. Maureen Hodge said:

He (Archie Brennan) has felt that the rigorousness of his training could have been a disadvantage in some spheres and in teaching now he always stresses that techniques are only a means to an end and not an end in themselves.

(Whitelaw n.pag.)

Brennan's tapestries are never dependant visually on technique for its own sake, and although there are often passages of great weaving complexity, they come as a result of a close look at the image.

In his own weaving Archie Brennan allows no place for either self-consciousness or virtuosity. The techniques are the vehicle of the conception and as such ought usually, but not always, to be relatively unobtrusive.

(Hodge, Archie Brennan, A Profile n. pag.).

This unobtrusive quality is apparent to the trained eye where a seemingly simple and effortless piece of weaving on closer scrutiny has been achieved by exact and carefully considered means. William Morris also expounded using technique in a considered way towards an appropriate end:

Up to a certain point you must be the master of your own material, but you should never be so much the master as to turn it surly, so to say. You must not make it your slave, or presently you will be a slave also. You must master it so far as to make it express a meaning, and to serve your aim in beauty. You may
go beyond that point for your own pleasure and amusement, and still be in the right way; but if you go on after that merely to make people stare at your dexterity in dealing with a difficult thing, you have forgotten art along with the right of your material..... (Morris, W. Hopes and Fears 108)

Structure

Archie Brennan is fascinated with the structure of tapestry:

*His attention rests with the structure and ordering of the process itself rather than in the materials used though these are always considered. This along with his acceptance that one of weavings basic qualities is the growth of a panel from one edge upwards can be traced in his work from the early post graduate pieces such as “Textures on Black” (1961) and “Revolutions” (1962) through “Doodle” (1965) into the geometric tapestries “Off-Square “ 1 and 11 in 1967 and the woven chair seats of 1968. (Hodge, Archie Brennan, A Profile n.pag.)

His article “The Sequential Nature of Tapestry Weaving” clearly demonstrates his view of tapestry as “a creative journey up the warp. Structurally, progressively and creatively it is based on making consecutive decisions” (Brennan 9).

In conversation he often uses the word “building” in relation to working in tapestry, referring to the process of starting at the bottom of the tapestry, putting in shapes over each other, working up to the top and finish of the tapestry. Buildings are the subject for strip samplers in his teaching, playing on the process of building and the visual imagery of buildings.

As Maureen Hodge says in British Craft Textiles, tapestry can be considered a building or construction process in two ways:

* A tapestry is a construction of warp and weft where the image is not of the surface as in drawing and painting but exists from the front to the back of the structure.  
* Construction is also involved in the act of organising the idea in the piece; the building up of the concept into a tangible image. (Sutton 125).

Eighteen tapestries in a series *At a Window* have been woven by Brennan.
At a Window 111

Designer: Archie Brennan
Weavers: Fred Mann and Douglas Grierson
Woven at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company, Scotland
Date: 1974
Materials: Wool and Cotton
Size: 186 x 100 cm

Description and Subject

The subject is a wine cask in a woven basket container, sitting on a cloth draped table in front of an open window which has checked drapes. There is a view of landscape through the window. Although the objects and scene are common there is a sense of something unexpected or unexplained as the table looks like it is hovering in space and the distant view of fields bounds into the foremost plane through the use of strong bright yellow-greens.

Design

The composition and placement of the objects is formal with a careful selection of each component and its placement. Strong textile pattern in the curtains, tablecloth and rug fill most of the image. Colour and tonal changes suggest some perspective but overall there is an impression of flatness. Strong primary colours bounce against each other and the source of light is unclear as the interior appears lit from within, but shadows cast on the table and the floor suggest the daylight coming through the window as the light source.

Technique and Condition

Although the image and weaving appears simple the detail of the work attests to the supreme skill and technical understanding of the weavers. The basketry of the cask is a regular pattern of shapes which is handled with complete mastery, similar to the skill demonstrated in the weaving of tartans in Lord of the Hunt.

The architectural feature of the window refers to the building, as well as the process of building by the vertical format and weaving process. Brennan said "This is a favourite shape, it really hangs and grows sequentially from the base, one element at a time. each element contributing to the building-up and hanging-down quality" (Frajndlich 25).
Provenance

Themes in Archie Brennan’s tapestries

Looking back at Brennan’s work over the last forty years, there are obvious recurring themes. He says “There have been endless directions I’ve worked through - more whimsical, humorous, narrative, pictorial works. I tend to have three or four different approaches that I keep topping up” (Frajndlich 25).

Letters and words are used in many of Brennan’s tapestries from the early tapestries for St Cuthbert’s Roman Catholic Church, 1971, where the image is almost entirely made up of words, to later images incorporating text (as in the works from Morris and Co. and earlier Medieval tapestries) and tapestries woven to replicate postcards and packages.

Brennan says “I’m still using a lot of words. I love weaving words. The words grow on the loom, one letter after the next, one word out of the next word” (Frajndlich 25). The sequential nature of tapestry in this way is like writing, an ordered process.

Another constant theme is the representation of textiles in tapestry. The early work Dark Island (k.2.tog.), (1971) shows the structure of knitted cables, as in a jumper, woven with soumak. Playing with technique the tapestry imitates another form of textiles, a theme which has continued in Brennan’s work from his apprenticeship days weaving the tartan fabrics in Prince of the Gael to the present day.

The historical tradition of emphasising the decoration and textures of textiles can clearly be seen in medieval tapestries such as The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries (c.1430) and in the tapestries from Merton Abbey The Orchard (1860) and Primavera (1896), where flat pattern and elements of adornment were valued.

Textiles in the form of lace, rugs, clothing, and interior fabrics were woven in Brennan’s tapestries, often with strong graphic patterning. Lace Curtain (1975) exhibited in Australia in 1976 and purchased by the National Gallery of Australia is an example of this interest.

A Portrait of John Noble designed by Archie Brennan and woven at the Dovecot in 1979 shows textiles in an interior setting with exaggerated detail of the fabrics. The pattern of the tablecloth suggests pulled thread work, but the spacing of the holes in the fabric is much greater than it would be in reality. Also the organic motif on the upholstery fabric is exaggerated and a dramatic geometric rug pattern frames the subject.

This interpretation of cloth in weaving emphasised the tension between tapestry as a Fine Art and tapestry as textile. William Buchanan commented:

One characteristic of the tapestries in this exhibition is that they are basically pieces of woven cloth. Tapestry, like the other arts, has had (or is still having)
heady excursions into other arts. Some interesting offsprings have resulted as well as some unfortunate ones. (Buchanan, Tapestries, n. pag.).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Brennan designed a number of tapestries creating spatial illusions. They were visual tricks of the eye but also played with the notion of tapestry as flat surface/three dimensional fabric and tapestry as a graphic medium able to render an image through the three dimensional structure of the fabric. These themes were not new in tapestry, as Brennan was well aware of through his study of Medieval tapestries and the works of Morris and Co.

Ideas about the real and creating illusion in art were explored by contemporary artists including British painter Patrick Caulfield.

Maureen Hodge wrote:

About 1968 he thought he was in danger of making tapestries to a given set of rules - to the classic concept in fact of large rectangular, two dimensional patterned hangings in which the weft covered the warp. He said then 'To weave a real rug, a real coat, or a curtain, yet to add to its illusory aspects.... (Hodge, Archie Brennan, A Profile n.pag.)

My Victorian Aunt, was woven at the Dovecot in 1968 and depicts an old woman surrounded by textiles. The tribal rug at her feet is shown vertical to the viewer and emphasises the flat nature of the rug. The figure and a flatly represented chair float in front of the background curtain, woven with illusionary shading suggesting the folds in the fabric. The curtaining hangs from a rod which stretches right across the top of the tapestry further emphasising the fabric/curtain quality of the tapestry. It makes the viewer question illusion/reality moving between the image and the tactile, woven quality of the tapestry. It is at once a strong deception and unmistakable woven tapestry.
MY VICTORIAN AUNT WHO REALLY KNEW A THING OR TWO
At a time when weavers were using their medium as an artform to create three dimensional works, Brennan was weaving the illusion of three dimensions.

"The Kitchen Range and Hearth Rug", (1973 - 74), shows an old-fashioned kitchen range and rug. It was designed to fit into an old fireplace in a Georgian Edinburgh house - a visual pun of making an image of an object which is used all the time, with a medium used for the making of 'useless' objects. (Waller 31).

The imagery in Brennan's work comes from the everyday visual surroundings of contemporary life. These encompass familiar and pervasive objects: T.V. newspapers, tyre tread marks, postcards and the patterns of textiles.

There are a number of themes that run consistently through my work...........I seek to establish and pinpoint the extraordinary qualities of the most everyday things of our time. I find so much in everyday living, in the commonplace, that I cannot envisage moving far from this. I work graphically, using drawing, photography or 'ready-made' imagery because I hold a belief that, at best, the world outside should find its way into tapestry as a language to be learned, but above all to use and to further develop the language only when the work in question requires such. (Waller 36).

Brennan shared his interest in the everyday world around him with artists Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton of the British Pop Art Movement. Roy Lichtenstein describes an aspect of Pop art "Outside is the world; its there. Pop art looks out into the world" (Wilson 5). Brennan constantly drew from his immediate surroundings.

A fascination for Brennan was making permanent the fleeting images we see through the media - the news shot or the sports photograph. Runner (1977), woven by Archie Brennan is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria and shows the runner Brendan Foster, as he was captured in a newspaper shot. It contrasts the permanency of tapestry with the impermanency of the daily newspaper. The marathon runner also has commonalities with the weaver of large scale tapestries - commitment, endurance and dedication. This conceptual link between the subject of the tapestry and the process of weaving the tapestry could only have been made by an artist-weaver.

As in the Pop Movement where elements of fun came into depictions of the banal, Brennan's work often challenges our presumptions with amusing qualities. Steak and Sausages (1972) was displayed on a meat tray, convincingly lifelike, with the humour of a ladder in the knitting suggesting a split in the sausage. This joke was used
to poke fun at the weaver and the serious history of the medium. The tapestry jokes contrast with grand historical tapestries known for their solemn depiction of hunts, battles, myths or legends. Brennan says of this aspect of his work:

Humour, wit and whimsy regularly occur in my work. I suspect, but don't wish to examine too closely, that this is a reaction to the long days and weeks required to produce a work that is non-utility, even useless, a pretend throwaway attitude that, when the joke is over, there is underlying another structure and form that is the real basis of the tapestry. (Waller 36).

This aspect of amusement in the work also makes the tapestries accessible to a wide range of people. Not designed for an elite, like the early Dovecot murals, the tapestries, through the humour and content drawn from everyday life, reach a wider public audience.

The themes in Brennan’s work reflect some of the popular concerns of the British public in the 1960s and 1970s when television sets were coming into peoples homes and advertising pushed the new plethora of consumer goods. Exaggerated patterns and textural fabrics were worn as fashion statements and British wit and humour were enjoyed in many T.V. and radio programs and comedy films (the Goons, Carry On films, Monty Python) reflecting a period of optimism and fun.

The elements of realism and narrative in Brennan’s work have aspects in common with David Hockney’s work. However these elements set Brennan’s work apart from the predominant non-figurative, non-naturalistic and non-representational arifoms of the time such as Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism post-object Art and Conceptual artist.

Approach to teaching

The position which Brennan took up at Edinburgh College of Art involved setting up, teaching and running a new department, further developing the work done by Sax Shaw. As the founder of the Tapestry Department, Brennan put in place a set of attitudes and expectations, some of which continue today.

A student of Brennan’s, Fiona Mathison, recounted her experience in the tapestry department between the years 1966-71:

That time was about structure......weaving on nails, improvising loom structures, realising that there was no set way of having equipment. Materials available were mainly wool in a large range of greys (probably reflecting production in the Scottish Textile Industry at the time) and a few bright colours
- orange, green, violet, which were seen to relate to fashion of the time so were not considered entirely appropriate for tapestry which was not aligned with fashion. (Mathison, Interview).

The scaffolding loom with acro-props, now popularly used by tapestry weavers emerged out of this experimentation with equipment. Compared to the traditional, heavy wooden looms used at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company - it is cheap to make out of readily available materials and comes apart to pack down into a number of horizontal bars and was produced for the Dovecot and individual weavers by Mr Brennan, Archie Brennan's father.

Experimentation with structures and materials is one of the traits that the Edinburgh Tapestry Department is now best known for. During visits to Edinburgh I viewed radical departures from the traditional woollen tapestry in the works of Mathew Inglis, coal dust installations 1989-1992; Katie Bruce, images in chocolate 1992-1994 and Gordon Brennan, cloth wrapped and painted wooden structures 1996-1998.

In working with art students Archie Brennan perceived that he had to minimise the amount of time dedicated to technical training, knowing that students would tire of the labours of sampling which apprentices had spent years working through. His approach was to emphasise the creative potential of the medium from the very beginning, concentrating on the subject of the weaving, why a particular image was selected and how this could be treated. The skills of tapestry weaving grew alongside the creative work.

In 1996 Maureen Hodge talked about a few years previously doing away with weaving samples to learn technique, but had second year students interpret a square of a Matisse or other artist's work. She said that students rise to the challenge and find their own solutions to the problem of visually translating from the image "they do not need to be shown a way to do it, but devise their own ways of working and develop their sensibilities to materials, various types of yarn and the ways they are combined" (Hodge Interview). The project seems a contradiction to the direction away from copying paint but the intention is not to learn to copy but to learn to invent.

Tapestry is demanding as a medium and Brennan expected single-minded commitment and long hours of work to achieve goals in drawing and tapestry. As students we would work full days in the studio, then go home to work on projects. The process of learning, as in Morris's studio was through experience and complete immersion in the subject. The students thrived under Brennan’s enthusiastic teaching and perceptive tutorials. Each was treated as an individual and encouraged to bring their own view of the world to their tapestry. Fiona Mathison said of teaching "(It) should be like watering plants and seeing them grow - its all there..... not like planting the seeds and watching the predictable develop" (Mathison, Interview).
Students were encouraged to exhibit their work from early in their study. Each year an exhibition of small tapestries by students was arranged and a prize given to the best exhibit. The work in exhibitions attracted new students to the area. One show which had a great deal of impact was Tapestry and Ceramics Today, (1969), with Archie Brennan, Maureen Hodge and James Langan showing tapestries. Fiona Mathison, who was a first year student at the time said she was both “impressed and depressed” by the exhibition (Whitelaw n. pag). The exhibits were unlike anything she had seen before and they inspired her, but she felt she could never attain such a high standard.

Students have continually been encouraged to exhibit, often in the same exhibitions as the staff of the tapestry department. A major retrospective, in which my student work was included, was held in 1977 Scottish Tapestry - Loose Ends, Close Ties and Other Structures - The Way Ahead. After this the Scottish Tapestry Artists Group (STAG) was set up to tour exhibitions in Great Britain and to New Zealand in 1977, 1979 and 1980. Since then there have been many exhibitions giving students experience in the professional field, part of a practical education with staff acting as mentors of students in a way that relates back to apprenticeship and guild training - the master working alongside the trainees.

Many of the students from the tapestry department including Maureen Hodge, Fiona Mathison, Janette Wilson, Gordon Brennan, Shirley Gatt and John Brennan went on to work at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company bringing less orthodox and experimental approaches to the workshop. As workshop weavers they went on to acquire the indepth skills of professional tapestry technique used in the Edinburgh Tapestry Company commissions.

Collaboration with artists

A questioning mind, ability to work conceptually and an understanding of contemporary art enabled Brennan to work with artists on an equal level with them. He shared interests with many of the artists involved in Dovecot projects at that time: images fragmented by new media, as in Eduardo Paolozzi's work with colour xerox and computer screen images; graphic patterning explored by Harold Cohen in a way that relates to textile design/concerns of everyday life and love of postcards that Tom Phillips drew from in his art.

A mutual respect and understanding between Brennan, the artist and the weavers allowed a team approach to the design and weaving process to evolve. Archie Brennan encouraged everyone involved in a project to be committed to the creation of a tapestry. As Director, he brought a clear vision of collaboration between artist and weavers.
Barty Phillips notes that: "He placed a special emphasis on developing a close, more informed working relationship between painters and weavers" (142).

Artists and weavers worked towards the same goal of creating tapestries which were self referential and not to be valued by their comparison to painting. The process of collaboration is described by Harold Cohen in Master Weavers when the discussion at the first meeting between Cohen, Brennan and the weavers set the scene for the rest of the project. Cohen came to the studio with a coloured drawing which had been selected as a commission for British Petroleum.

_Archie looked at the design for some time in silence, the other weavers grouped around him. Running halfway across the top of the drawing, perhaps four inches deep, was a band of uniform red. Finally Archie took a ruler from his pocket and measured the band.

"That's going to be about fourteen feet long in the final piece", he said quietly. "About fourteen inches deep. It's going to take one of my weavers about six weeks to do that, weaving the same solid colour every day. If you think he is going to have any interest in your design by the time he's finished doing that, you're quite mistaken". (13)

Collaboration meant that the artist had to understand more about tapestry so that the weavers would become more involved in the design.

The weavers were no longer the slavish copiers of paintings - but vital to the tapestry production and integral to the whole process. In _After Benches_ (1973) designed by Tom Phillips, the weavers were involved in an experimental approach to interpretation. The image was divided into four sections and each of the four weavers, Fred Mann, Douglas Grierson, Neil Mc Donald and Jean Taylor treated a section in a different way. Mixed thread work, linear patterning, half pass technique and a diamond grid were used with the original image, making four distinct sections in the tapestry.

This way of working is completely opposite to the conventional team work on a large tapestry. Usually the weavers follow a pre-determined weaving style, change places along the length of the tapestry and allow the weaving of the individuals to merge so that there are no distinct areas apparent in the finished tapestry. The approach in _After Benches_ acknowledges individual weavers and exposes the process of team weaving. The work of the weavers as well as the artist is visible in the finished tapestry and was given recognition. Madeleine Jarry wrote in 1980:

_One of the great achievements of the Dovecot is the ability with which its weavers are able to translate the works of artists who are mainly British or American. Masters of their trade like Archie Brennan and Fiona Mathison_
possess remarkable skill to guide this delicate operation and allow the creativity of the weaver to find the best solution (11).

The weavers were allowed and indeed encouraged to think as part of the team and not accept that the artist had done all the thinking in the making of the artwork. Thinking and working out solutions was part of the team approach on every level. This made the Dovocott distinctly different to other traditional European workshops. Belinda Ramson commented:

... that all were encouraged to think beyond the basic skills of the craft indicates the essential difference between the practice of the Dovocott and that of the traditional French tapestry workshops, where weaving is quite strictly the craft of reproducing an artist’s design in a different medium (25).

Weavers were encouraged to work creatively, designing for commissions and designing and making their own tapestries. Archie Brennan, Harry Wright, Maureen Hodge, Fiona Mathison and Fred Mann, all had tapestries woven in the workshop when they were employed as weavers. Many of the weavers have also woven and exhibited their own works.

When I went to the Edinburgh Tapestry Company in 1996, Sir Eduardo Paolozzi was paying a visit to discuss the commission for the Pearson Group Headquarters in London. I was struck by his ease and rapport with the weavers, a relationship which had been built up over the previous thirty years since his first sample and later commissioned weaving Mickey Mouse (1967) and The Whitworth Tapestry (1967). He went out to do some “Op” shopping in the secondhand clothes shops of Corstorphine and came back laden with bags. Everyone shared in “Sir Eduardo”’s finds of suits and jackets. Watching with fascination I tried to imagine Raphael engaged with weavers in this activity and realised how far the power relationship between artist and weavers had changed.

Promotion of Edinburgh Tapestry

Brennan promoted tapestry through exhibitions of his own work, work from the Edinburgh Tapestry Company Ltd. and tapestries by other Edinburgh students and weavers. This gave public exposure to the work carried out in Corstorphine or private studios, destined through commission or purchase for private venues.

Between 1962 and 1977 Brennan held seven solo exhibitions and had work in forty five major group shows. These were held in Britain, United States of America, Australia, Europe and Canada. A major exhibition was held at the Talbot Rice Arts
Centre in the University of Edinburgh in 1962 for the Jubilee of the studio 'Dovecot Tapestries' The Jubilee of the Dovecot Tapestries 1912 - 62. This was supported by the Scottish Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

The Society of Scottish Artists holds an annual exhibition each autumn in Edinburgh and this is regarded as a major event in the arts calendar. Archie Brennan first exhibited in this show in 1966 and since 1970 tapestries have continued to be a major part of the submissions. Rosalind Whitelaw wrote that tapestries made up twenty five per cent of the submissions and each year more and better work is hung with the paintings and sculpture (n.pag). Both tapestries from the Dovecot and by individual weavers have been included in this exhibition.

In 1972 Archie Brennan organised a major exhibition of tapestry that was held at the Mac Robert Centre in Stirling. A large number of Edinburgh tapestry weavers exhibited alongside works woven at the Dovecot in collaboration with Eduardo Paolozzi and Harold Cohen. Exposure was also provided through the media and Brennan appeared twice on the national T.V. program, Scope. He was filmed by Films of Scotland in 1970 when he was weaving a commission for the Scottish Arts Council and in 1974 when he held the Scottish Arts Council Award, an entire program was dedicated to him.

In 1970 Modern British Hangings was shown at the Scottish Arts Council Gallery in Edinburgh. Archie Brennan, Maureen Hodge and Sax Shaw were the Edinburgh weavers included. A press release from the Scottish Arts Council read:

Encouragingly many of the finest works are by Scotsmen; and there does indeed seem to be a strong school of tapestry and weaving in Scotland at the moment; and it is said that more and more buyers are coming to Scotland with their commissions rather than go to the more traditional places such as France and Belgium. (Whitelaw n. pag)

Scottish tapestry was included in many publications such as Decorative Art and Modern Interiors (Schofield 15-151) linking tapestry with interior design and architecture. Gloria Ross collaborated with the Dovecot to promote Scottish tapestry in the United States of America, placing works in public and private collections.

The large number of exhibitions and other forms of exposure provided a public showcase for this new form of tapestry and both encouraged students to work in this area and developed a national and international market for the work.
National and international recognition

The Scottish Arts Council's first major Art prize was given to Archie Brennan in 1974. The Council supports Fine Art, so at that time Brennan's work was recognised on the same level as the more traditional Fine Art forms of painting and sculpture and his contribution to the arts was given national recognition.

In 1975, he was awarded the Creative Arts Fellowship, Australian National University. This award recognises Brennan's international status as an artist.

Other evidence of international status is that in 1977 Brennan and the Dovecot weavers were selected to exhibited in the prestigious Lausanne Biennial and Archie Brennan was awarded the Lord Mayor of London's Award to Artists and the Society of Letters, Switzerland. The silver medal at the Lodz International Tapestry Biennial, Poland, was presented to Brennan in 1980.

His achievements as an artist working internationally and the significant work he undertook at the Dovecot as Director were marked by his appointment Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in 1981.

Conclusion

The 1960s and 1970s in Britain were decades of exuberance, growing affluence and popular interest in the new forms of art and craft. Pop art embraced the everyday with an explosion of images from the street, entertainment and commercial graphics. Against a background of North American experimental weavers and East European tapestry innovators Archie Brennan and the Edinburgh tapestry weavers pushed the boundaries of flat woven tapestry and emphasised a relationship with contemporary art. Brennan set himself a limit of ten years undertaking three demanding roles as artist, lecturer and director of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company, and worked with continued dedication, energy and enthusiasm in all capacities. He built on the work of Sax Shaw and the Dovecot weavers and with the students and graduates from the tapestry department, Edinburgh College of Art to change the image of tapestry in Scotland from that of a traditional reproductive artform, struggling to survive after the war years, to an exciting, desirable, new art attracting patronage and publicity.

As director of tapestry at the Dovecot, Brennan moved the relationship between artist and weavers forward again, insisting on a true collaboration based on understanding of the medium and mutual respect. He had an affinity with the artists selected to work on projects and through their shared interests, questioning minds and excitement about new possibilities, they sparked life into the new works.

In designing and weaving his own tapestries Brennan was a role model for the students of the tapestry department at Edinburgh College of Art, the Dovecot weavers
and later, as explored in the following chapters, artist-weavers in Australia. His work was technically competent, driven by ideas about images transferred through the media and the detail of the world around him. The grand mural narratives gave way to snapshot vignettes of everyday life which, being smaller in scale and softer in material, fitted with modern design for hard-surfaced interiors.

The links forged between the Edinburgh School of Art Tapestry Department and the Dovecot changed the gender bias of the Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd and brought art school trained weavers to the workshop, challenging traditions and encouraging experimentation. Women gained positions as workshop weavers and built reputations as artist-weavers in their own right.

Tapestry was sought after by contemporary art dealers, collectors and architects, as part of the wide range of contemporary art forms embracing materiality and technique. Archie Brennan and Scottish tapestry weavers gained a dynamic profile and an international reputation through their vision, understanding of the medium and its place in the contemporary art field during the 1970s.
Chapter
5

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SCOTLAND AND AUSTRALIA THROUGH ARCHIE BRENNAN

As discussed in 2.4, The Edinburgh Tapestry Company with Archie Brennan as Artistic Director enjoyed success and popularity in Britain and had built up an international reputation for innovative collaboration with contemporary artists in the 1970s. Brennan was known for his original, graphic works incorporating ideas of the everyday - often with wit and humour. He was recognised as a leading figure in contemporary tapestry and respected as an artist. This chapter explores the important work that he did in Australia promoting the contemporary tapestry methodology developed in Edinburgh from traditions dating back to William Morris - through his teaching, lectures, demonstrations and exhibitions. It outlines the passing on of ideas and traditions looking at Brennan’s influence on the people he directly worked with and the repercussions for Australian tapestry. This new development in Australian tapestry built on the work of an established field of individual practitioners working in various forms of tapestry.

Belinda Ramson b. 1935, a New Zealand born textile artist, living in Australia who studied tapestry in Edinburgh with Brennan is equally important in the history of exchange with Scotland and this will be discussed in chapter six along with the setting up of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, where Ramson and Brennan worked as consultants.

The work of Kay Lawrence (b. 1947) will be examined in relation to her study with Archie Brennan and at Edinburgh College of Art.

Ongoing links between Australia and Scotland are also considered in relation to individual learning techniques and a particular approach to tapestry.

Early tapestry in Australia

Tapestry weaving existed in Australia in a variety of forms influenced by North American and European artists and traditions, before Archie Brennan came to Australia.
in 1975. The Craft Movement in Australia had grown rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s with people pursuing craft as a hobby, as a means of self expression, as part of an alternative lifestyle and as a vocation. Tapestry was practiced with great enthusiasm on all of these levels.

This has been documented by Grace Cochrane in The Crafts Movement in Australia, commissioned by the Craft Board of the Australia Council, the Federal Government’s arts funding and advisory body. The book is, as Pamille Berg says in her introduction “a comprehensive chronological record of the events, influences and development of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia from 1945 to 1988”. It charts a chronology of names and dates, briefly noting the contributions made by individuals and groups to the movement.

Dr. Diana Wood Conroy has also extensively researched the history of tapestry in Australia and discussed this in her doctoral thesis An Archaeology of Tapestry: Contexts, Signs and Histories of Contemporary Practice and says that “Although tapestry existed in Australia before the establishment of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1976, it was a loosely defined technique that was allied to the textile movement” (5). Through her personal experience, knowledge and ability to situate the history of tapestry practice within a wider context, she provides an insight into early Australian tapestry.

I first came to Australia in 1979, so do not have first hand experience of the earlier developments in tapestry, but publications such as Crafts Council newsletters, Craft Australia, Fibre Forum and the Handweavers and Spinners Journal, as well as exhibition catalogues, viewing works in collections and discussing tapestry with practitioners have provided valuable information.

Individual tapestry weavers

As an itinerant tapestry weaver on my first trip to Australia I was fortunate to meet many weavers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In Melbourne I visited the studio of Sonia Carrington - Zakrzewska b. 1910 who came to Australia in 1949 bringing the specialised Polish Kilim (slit tapestry) technique learned during a five year course at the Poznan Institute of Applied Art. In Australia she worked at many jobs to make an income to support herself and her son, but kept weaving. Over time she set up a studio at home with a large loom and dyehouse. She worked on commissions and was eventually able to retire from her job in teaching to weave full time.

The Polish Kilim technique is carried out on a low warp, horizontal loom and the tapestry is worked exactly from a design on graph paper. Each square on the graph represents the weft over one warp. The weaving is worked one line at a time from left to right, with many weft threads each weaving their section in one pass, then right to left in
the next. To avoid the long vertical slits of Kilim weaving a pass of fine silk is woven across the full width of the tapestry every three passes to bind the weaving together (Mac Donald 32-33).

When I observed her detailed “cartoon” on graph paper and the translation into the woven tapestry, the importance of the initial design process struck me, as the weaving followed the coloured squares pick for pick. Compared to the Edinburgh style of tapestry, which I had studied, I considered this a very rigid way of making images with the resulting effect based on geometric form directly related to warp and weft. Carrington’s work and that of others who had trained in traditions far from my own education broadened my perspective of tapestry.

I worked with Marie Cook (b. 1950) at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and she explained how she had learned from books such as, Tapestry Weaving (1975) by Jess Brooke, and from classes taught by Brooke in her home, as many weavers had when no formal tapestry education was available. The books and classes concentrated on techniques of flat tapestry weaving and ways of creating surface interest through knotting, looping, adding beads and wrapping. Brooke provided some simple design strategies such as “With or without a cartoon, weave a face using as many techniques as possible, such as tufting for hair and eyelashes” and “Weave a free tapestry, designing as you go “(50 - 51).

I was confronted by many such tapestries designed and made with great enthusiasm by people in textile groups in every state of Australia. There was a tremendous energy and spontaneity in grass roots textiles / tapestry making here, which I had not experienced in Britain. In this type of work there was not the emphasis on drawing and ideas development which had been part of my training and is at the core of the Edinburgh approach. Peter Collingwood’s book The Techniques of Rug Weaving (1968) also provided extensive information on the techniques of weft-face plain weave through detailed sequences of ‘picks’ or rows (126 - 182).

Many immigrants such as Margaret Grafton (b. 1930), who trained in Wolverhampton (Cochrane 171), Solvig Baas Becking (b. 1928) trained as a weaver in Sweden and Holland and Jutta Feddersen (b. 1931), trained in handweaving in Germany (Bottrell 74-79), had brought weaving skills from their countries of origin and passed on the techniques through informal teaching. They thought of tapestry as another structure in the repertoire of weaving techniques and Baas Becking recalled that when she said she was a weaver people looked at her in disbelief thinking that weaving was something associated with kindergarten or the Red Cross. Australians then thought of tapestry as a very different and difficult way of working (interview).

Belinda Ramson was one of Bass Becking’s students, learning weaving techniques from her before she went to study in Edinburgh. In Baas Becking’s article “Weaving” she described her approach to tapestry as part of a category which included
wall hangings, three dimensional works and floor rugs. Her emphasis was on the structure of weaving, as she said "It is important to realise from the outset that all weaving is three dimensional and that the elements of design at the weaver's disposal have to be considered in that light". She stressed three basic elements in her teaching - texture, structure and colour. (Baas Becking 24).

Some weavers, like Mary Beeston (b. 1917), who studied at the Frederika Wetterhof School in Finland (weaving design 1973) (Young n. pag.), had travelled overseas and learned tapestry weaving.

The methods of weaving and equipment used differed depending on the original model that had been studied. Tapestry was often made on a horizontal cloth weaving loom as it was regarded as a weaving technique. While travelling in Australia in 1979 I came across a myriad of improvised tapestry looms, made from disused bedframes (Wilson-Roberts 25) warps strung between trees, frames with nails or serrated edges, sophisticated looms produced by engineers and amateur constructions of waterpipe. People copied designs from books or made do with materials around them. All served the purpose of tensioning warp, but some functioned better than others, cost less and took up less space.

Tapestry education in Australia was mainly through associations, guilds, craft groups, learning from practitioners who had trained overseas, studying instructions in books, travelling overseas to learn tapestry, looking at work in collections and exhibitions, working with visiting artists and craft education as part of teacher training courses. (Williams n.pag.). There were no apprenticeships available in tapestry workshops and no tertiary courses teaching tapestry full time at degree level, however, after the formation of Crafts Councils in 1972 prominent international weavers were brought to Australia and they had a major impact on textile artists and the wider community, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

All of the tapestry weavers working in Australia before the Victorian Tapestry Workshop worked independently as there were no workshops of a European to employ weavers in the country.

There was, however a demand for tapestry to complement architecture and interiors of the time. Bill Buchanan in his introduction to the Scottish Tapestry Artists Group exhibition wrote:

Tapestry does have its own unique qualities. Among those is the fact that it is usually woven by hand and that it is often of natural materials. Perhaps this is why tapestry looks so well in so many modern buildings which are sometimes fairly bleak; impersonal, and mass-produced places to inhabit. A tapestry is quite literally a comfort, a neo-medieval artefact. (Buchanan STAG n.pag.)
In Australia many individual weavers including Mary and Larry Beeston (b. 1915), Diana Wood Conroy (b. 1944), Ian Arcus (b. 1943) (Cochrane Craft Movement 218) Rinske Carr (b. 1944), and Robert Bell (b. 1946) (Craft Australia Vol 3 No 1 1973 30) were commissioned to weave major works for public buildings. Ian Arcus said “the field was remarkably strong before he (Archie Brennan) came to Australia......Tapestry was concerned with large scale work........Tapestry considered to be a status symbol in board rooms, company offices......a tremendous amount of tapestry was produced, especially in New South Wales” (Interview).

Diana Wood Conroy wrote in her thesis “Parallel to avantegarde art movements such as conceptual art, or minimalism, there was a growing interest in tapestry, seemingly at the opposite spectrum” (157).

**Workshop Tapestry**

Large scale tapestries were also designed by Australian artists and woven overseas. The artists were not trained as weavers and were only responsible for the original artwork carried out in painting or drawing. John Coburn (b. 1923), John Olsen (b. 1928), Arthur Boyd (1920 - 1999) and others had works produced in European tapestry workshops (Cochrane 171). These artists had no part in the weaving process and continued the traditions of the European workshops producing large scale tapestries for public and private prestigious collections.

Boyd designed twenty two tapestries in a series *Life of St Francis* (1967 - 1974), each about 2.5 x 3.5m, which were produced by the tapestry workshop, Tapecarias de Portalegre, Portugal. Two of the tapestries were included in the Arthur Boyd Gift to the National Gallery of Australia and the other twenty tapestries were bought by the gallery. *St. Francis when young turning aside* (1972) 261.0 x 341 0 cm was on display in the National Gallery of Australia as the Director’s Choice between 10 February and 26 May 1996. The tapestry depicts the young Francis deep in thought as he decides to turn from a worldly life, (represented by two embracing lovers), to his chosen holy vocation. The lovers have merging faces reminiscent of Boyd’s earlier imagery of the mid 1940s. The work is part of a large body of work which encompasses conte sketches, ink sketches, pastels and lithographs (Avente n.pag.).

The tapestry is made by a wrapped warp technique (Roberts n.pag.) which gives a distinct character to the surface of the weaving, differing from Edinburgh Tapestry Company weaving in its tight wrapping of weft around the warp thread rather than weaving of weft between the warp. The mood suggested by the image is intensified through the colour and softness of the medium, an appropriate translation from the original pastel drawing.
This collaboration between Australian artists and European workshops, with the commissions from architects, designers and galleries proved that there was a demand for tapestry in this country and pointed out the need for an Australian workshop capable of producing large scale tapestries to complement the already existing individual studios. Sue Walker articulated these ideas:

*When our State Government decided to set up a tapestry workshop one of its objectives was to provide employment opportunities for weavers and another was to make it possible for Australian artists to have their designs translated into tapestry in Australia instead of needing to travel to Europe* (Walker 15).

**The Selection of the Edinburgh workshop Model for Australia: The Victorian Tapestry Workshop**

After the exuberance in the crafts of the 1960s in Australia there was discussion about the needs of practitioners and a focus on education and training. In 1973 the first Curriculum Development Centre was established in Canberra and The Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education sponsored a national seminar on tertiary art education and art teacher training in 1974 (Cochrane Crafts Movement 203).

A Committee of Enquiry into the Crafts was set up by the Federal Government commencing work in 1973 and a report published in 1975. “The Crafts in Australia” reported on ways that craftspeople could be assisted through development of programs and education (Williams 28). David Williams, presently director of Canberra School of Art, spent one year as an education adviser to the Crafts Board of the Australia Council writing the report “Crafts Education and Training” published in 1978 (Cochrane 203). Specialists were brought from the United States of America, Europe and Japan to teach master classes and exhibitions were imported through the Exhibitions and International Visitors Office at the Crafts Council of Australia. Seminal shows during this time were the exhibitions of work by Magdalena Abakanowicz (Cochrane Crafts Movement 263) and Olga de Amaral (Craft Australia Vol 5 No 2 1975 21 and 28).

In 1973 a small committee established by the Victorian State Government was set up under the chairmanship of Lady Delacombe, and later, Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, to look at the feasibility of setting up a tapestry workshop (Australian Tapestries 43).

Following this, in 1975 Archie Brennan was invited to the Australian National University as the Creative Arts Fellow to be part of the cultural life of the University and create an awareness and understanding of contemporary tapestry. He said “*My responsibility was only to create an awareness of tapestry wherever I might be* -
because I did not feel I was to be restricted in any way to the ANU” (Craft Australia August 1975 30).

In the article “Arrogant’ thoughts of a visiting craftsman” he observed the predominant tapestry form of fibre art:

> Like the rest of the world, heavy textile wall hangings abound; a repercussion from the healthy movement in the early 60’s. Fibre constructions too, and again like the rest of the world, the best are honest examinations and expression, and the bulk is the usual confectionery”. He goes on to comment “Craftsmen are labelled such because they manipulate materials usually with their hands, but the tapestry weaver has more in common with the painter” (Craft Australia 14).

This comment is telling in the light of the history of the early commissioned works by Australian artists/European workshops and the development of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop which disassociated itself from the Fibre Art Movement and insisted on alliance with painting. I will discuss this further in chapter six.

While Brennan was Creative Arts Fellow, Jan Senbergs (b. 1939) was also an Artist-in-Residence at the Australian National University and Belinda Ramson remembers how well they got on together. She said that Senbergs developed a deep respect for Brennan as an artist and came to realise that tapestry could be art in the same way as painting or sculpture (Ramson, Interview).

At the same time a study, commissioned by the Victorian Government, was undertaken to further research the feasibility of an Australian tapestry workshop and Mr John Blanche was appointed to research tapestry workshops worldwide. He visited the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and the Edinburgh College of Art Tapestry Department when I was a student there. On the basis of the information provided by Mr Blanche the Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. was selected as a model and Archie Brennan was asked to advise on the setting up of a workshop in Australia. As a result of this, the Victorian Government through the Ministry for the Arts established the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1976 in South Melbourne(Victorian Tapestry Workshop brochure n. pag.), along similar lines to the Dovecot in Edinburgh with Belinda Ramson training five weavers she had selected and Sue Walker appointed as director. Archie Brennan was adviser to the workshop.

This decision provided a focus for tapestry in Australia within a workshop structure and for individual tapestry weavers. Archie Brennan working with Belinda Ramson and the trainees of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop established particular Edinburgh workshop ways of working in tapestry technically and conceptually in
Australia. They also taught individual tapestry weavers, passing on technical skills and a conceptual approach to the medium.

**Workshops with Archie Brennan**

While in Australia Brennan taught two workshops at Armidale, New South Wales and Stieglitz in Victoria, which Grace Cochrane says "influenced a considerable number of weavers to continue to work in this way" (Cochrane 219). Through the workshops with his teaching and influence many weavers learned the precise techniques of flat woven tapestry incorporating imagery along with a conceptual and innovative approach to the medium.

The workshops were carefully planned to maximise Brennan’s influence. There were twenty places in the class at Stieglitz and a selection had to be made of the many applicants. Participants were chosen for their open mindedness, inventiveness and ability to use and pass on the knowledge and techniques they had gained. Skills or experience in tapestry were not essential as Archie Brennan taught the basic techniques in the workshop. Some students had no weaving skills and other participants came with different levels and kinds of weaving experience. They came from several states of Australia with different backgrounds and areas of interest. Kay Lawrence trained in Sculpture at Art School, Garry Benson worked in TV and Media and Sue Walker had exhibited as a Fibre Artist. The selection of participants ensured that the skills and information learned in the workshops was passed on to other people. (Brennan Video).

Elsje van Keppel(King), Western Australia, talked about her involvement in the Archie Brennan workshop. She took part primarily to broaden her knowledge of textile construction techniques and to be able to pass on the skills through her teaching. She had just started lecturing at Edith Cowan University (Western Australia College of Advanced Education) and as the only textiles lecturer she felt responsible for giving the students a breadth of textile experience. She kept tapestry going as a component of the course teaching the same techniques and approach that she learned from Archie Brennan.

In Western Australia, enough of a groundswell of interest in tapestry grew so that between 1994 and 1996 Leonie Bessant, who trained in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, taught tapestry at Edith Cowan University.

Antoinette Carrier is a recent graduate of the course at Edith Cowan University who has exhibited in group shows and had a solo exhibition in the Warrnambool Regional Art Gallery in 1997.

Elsje van Keppel said that the recent developments in tapestry in Western Australia all go back to the workshop with Archie Brennan (van Keppel Interview).
Content of the workshops for individual weavers

Individual weavers were encouraged to draw as a link between the inspiration and the tapestry design. The drawings were not intended to be cartoons to be copied but allowed for reflection and thinking time between the idea and the weaving. This process of working from inspiration through drawing to tapestry differed greatly from the main teachings of tapestry in Australia which came from predominantly European/Scandinavian origins with an emphasis on pattern or image coming from the structure of the weaving or from a fully resolved cartoon/pattern on graph paper.

Ian Arcus described his approach as allowing designs to emerge from the weaving as the weaving technique itself dictates the form of the tapestry, an approach established by the Bauhaus (Conroy 127). By contrast to this intuitive approach, Sonia Carrington showed me her carefully coloured graph image, each square a vital part of the key to the weaving.

The techniques of tapestry were presented in a simple, straightforward way with the main emphasis being on the creative use of the medium. In the two week workshop there was initially some grounding work on weaving shapes and making marks in tapestry. This was quickly followed by an emphasis on ideas development in the medium of tapestry. Brennan talked about the problem of tapestry being a technical area and students wanting to learn as many technical skills as possible, but he demanded that there must be a purpose in using the techniques - tapestry should not just demonstrate technical virtuosity. His insistence on purpose required a conceptual approach focussing on ideas, content, relationship of image with technique and dialogue with the viewer.

As the students began weaving their own ideas and designs, Brennan worked on the finer technical points. He explained the way that warps can move in the weaving, coming closer together when the weft is tighter, and moving apart where there is more weft. This causes problems in the weft as the weaving sags where warps are spread apart and the weaving rises where the warps are close together. Getting a straight line in the weft becomes impossible through the distortion. Brennan sat down at the loom and demonstrated the solution to this problem.

Another problem identified was ribbing where the weft in the open shed is tighter than the weft in the closed shed. As this sequence is repeated a ribbed surface builds up in the weaving. Again Brennan resolved the problem that had occurred in the weaving. By this approach to teaching, the finer points of technique are covered in the process of weaving individual designs, thereby emphasising content over technique.

This contrasts with the approach of Professor Marin Vabanov, Professor of Art in Sofia, Bulgaria who conducted one of the first formal tapestry courses in New South Wales (Craft Australia Vol 5 No 3 1975 18). Dr Diana Wood Conroy said that:
His role was to convey the old traditions of Bulgaria and the inviolability of the tapestry technique even in the face of the radical materiality of textiles” and she quotes a comment by Ross Griffith “whilst he has given considerable emphasis to the teaching of design principles, he has equally been concerned that the discipline of the weaving technique be thoroughly mastered” (166).

Brennan’s teaching methodology is completely different to that of the Gobelins tapestry workshop in Paris, which I visited in 1980. I was astounded to see apprentice weavers spending three months replicating a section of painting depicting an arm. Their entire focus was on the technique of hachure and rendering the form of the arm through light and shade. Radically different from the learning experience of the students in Brennan’s workshop, who were still encouraged to achieve a high standard of weaving ability and craftsmanship, the Gobelin approach demanded time dedicated to technique.

The medium in its own right, was emphasised by Brennan so that students learned the intrinsic qualities of tapestry. One exercise was set up to stress this point. Seven warps were wound onto a loom and the weaver had to work within the restriction of this narrow width. Brennan said that anything that had restrictions also had potential and that limitations can make strengths. The marks of the weft have to be broad and as such, mistakes can be seen quickly and clearly and the weaver can learn from the experience and address the problems. This approach tackles the essential differences between tapestry and many other mediums.

Most people when thinking of images have pictures in their minds which are not related to structures or grids. Painting, T.V. and Photography can all present this kind of image. However tapestry, although it has been used to replicate all of these mediums, needs to work within the confines of warp and weft. The exercise presented by Brennan, by narrowing the width of weaving and limiting the number of warps made the students concentrate on making an image within the structure of weaving. The idea of working with the structure of the medium has been an area of focus for exploration from William Morris through the Dovecot to Archie Brennan as each generation has restricted further the number of warps used and moved away from laboriously copying paint.

Participants were encouraged to simplify their ideas, and tackle small achievable projects. Brennan talked about the difficulties people come up against when they are intellectually very capable and skilful, but begin weaving like children. He pointed out the strengths in children's drawings and the parallel strengths that could be achieved in weaving if complex ideas were refined to make simple applications and simple works in tapestry.

Kay Lawrence focused her attention on a window, a detail of a building, working through the problems and trying to make a few aspects work well. She began
by drawing, "not a drawing drawing" as Archie Brennan said, "but a working drawing that was thinking in tapestry, considering how the image could be a weaving" (Brennan video).

The tapestry did not include everything to do with windows but concentrated on the details of surfaces exploring glass against wood, building up the image steadily. This approach is about working in and with the medium, not making a photographic image or trying to reproduce paint or drawing. I will discuss this aspect in relation to Lawrence’s work *Spill* (1998) later in this chapter.

These ideas about refinement and working with the structure of the medium can be seen clearly in Brennan’s own work. *Runner* (1976) 200cm x 81cm woven by Brennan and now in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, takes the idea of a media image of the marathon runner Brendan Foster and weaves it with the emphasis of the lines in the direction of the weft in varying thicknesses to create light and shade. It reduces the image to a simple weaving format that is highly successful. Conceptually Brennan alludes to the parallels between long distance running and tapestry weaving in the time involved, the endurance and commitment required.

Archie Brennan’s approach was based on every aspect of the process being worked out by the weaver with no reliance on a formula, a fully worked cartoon or pattern to be followed doggedly. It demonstrates flexibility and vigour not possible in the French workshops where the artists and weavers have segregated roles.

**Example of Brennan’s own work**

Brennan used his own work to illustrate the way he refined his subject matter to be appropriate to tapestry. He discussed how he looks to everyday objects for inspiration, describing this as no different, in a broad sense to Medieval tapestry which reflected everyday events, politics and social activity. He encouraged students to find inspiration in their everyday surroundings, to observe closely, explore through drawing and refine in the tapestry.

Following his example, a student made drawings of her bobbins and the next day explored the shadows cast by a strong sun. The time spent on the drawings was used to consider ways of weaving. This way of looking at everyday objects and drawing from surroundings reflected an approach explored by the Pop Art Movement and many artists of the time, discussed in chapter four, and gave a simple solution to the inevitable question, "What to do with the weaving skills ."

Brennan talked about the danger of people looking to him for a magic philosophy to provide solutions to everything. He said that people had to sit down and get on with it, a bit at a time and it was mostly hard work. This reflects his discipline of regularly spending time weaving. His goal in coming to Australia to do the Creative
Arts Fellowship "to be weaving 48 hours after arrival and establish an early routine" (Brennan Crafts 14) demonstrates this. Through his practice he engendered a strong, self disciplined work ethic which was about working at the loom, not talking about it, but actually sitting weaving, as he said "Maybe we should be rationed - fifty words about our craft for every hour getting on with it" (Crafts 14). This attitude is reminiscent of William Morris's dedication to practise and his routine of early morning tapestry weaving sessions when he was learning the craft. Brennan's discipline is combined with highly developed critical skills to carefully analyse the work, make decisions and move on. (Brennan Video)

The rigour, questioning/provocative approach that Brennan instilled has been a key factor in the success of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and individual weavers who worked with Brennan and Ramson.

In World Tapestry Today he wrote "I work in a minor art form. Tapestry is an indulgent, elitist, economically farcical and frequently boring 20th century activity" (54). This notion of tapestry was challenged by Ann Newdigate Mills who pointed out the provocative nature of the comment and Brennan's wit and humour. In an economic rationalist world Brennan's statement may be on face value true, but by his exaggerated statement he emphasises a counter part of our culture which continues to value tradition, and the time involved in craft production. Newdigate concluded "in the 20th century, Tapestry is a most sane activity because it defies the forces that gave us fast food" (8).
**Studio Window - Childers Street Canberra - Two Views**

Designer: Archie Brennan  
Woven by Archie Brennan  
Date: 1985  
Materials: Cotton and Wool  
Size: 30 x 42cm

**Description and Subject**

Studio Window was woven after the Creative Arts Fellowship residency at the Australian National University, (1975) and as such gives a greater insight into the skills and knowledge that Brennan brought to this country, providing a basis for understanding the following development of this style of tapestry in Australia.

The image in the tapestry is an abstraction of a window covered in flyscreen making a composition of frames and grids. The grid relates to the basic warp and weft structure of tapestry and to the wider concerns of contemporary art of the 1970s when artists explored ‘systematic painting’, ‘Op’ art and mechanical processes relating to print media and computers.

The subject reflects his interest in everyday objects and surroundings. The commonplace flyscreen, which Australians have on doors and windows and take for granted, became the main feature of this work. Brennan said “Nobody told me to expect flyscreens in Australia and yet to look through them and to see everything sub-divided into squares is a very stimulating experience” (Brennan, ANU Reporter 3).

**Design**

The image is pictorial, a graphic abstraction of the studio window where Brennan worked in Canberra during his residency. He said in an interview for the university publication, the ANU Reporter "I suppose my work is figurative but I don't like labels too much. Although they are very convenient for critics and historians to use or misuse, labels can become too restrictive, like a prison’’(3).

The size chosen for the tapestry, 30 x 42cm is important as it invites the viewer to look closely, as Brennan must have when he first came across flyscreen. From a distance flywire becomes a slight blur when looking at it or through it - close up it is a distinct pattern over the image behind it. Brennan selected the scale to show the nature of flywire and the distorted pattern we get looking through it.

A small scale, in being opposite to the vast mural scale of historical tapestries which were about grandeur, power and authority, also suggests the everyday by its size. The tapestry is an object designed to relate to the scale of the body - like many common objects.
It does not demand the time and attention required to produce a mural so can incorporate more elements of risk and exploration in the design. Brennan said of small format tapestries:

Subject matter can be lighter, more personal, less portentous (or pretentious) and I revel in the risk and unknown factors that can be readily undertaken in small tapestries. There can be real adventure where the greatest disaster is no more than scrapping of a day's work and re-trying again - and again.

(ITNET Vol 1 No 2 54).

Jack Lenor Larsen thinks of this way of working in smaller textiles in terms of "sketch techniques", important to hone the craft:

Sample making works well for those of us who design. The Scots tapestry weaver Archie Brennan, now working in New York City, achieves something similar with woven miniatures only a few inches on a side. In this way he can perfect form as well as attempt changes in yarn surface or color value. He learns in the process. (Larsen 36)

Techniques and condition

The technical challenge of weaving the pattern of flyscreen and image seen through a screen is resolved in the tapestry by scaling up the mesh to a size appropriate to the warp and weft structure and overall complete dimensions of the tapestry. In this way it is an abstraction of flyscreen, not an accurate rendition. The enlarged grid allows for the translation into material form while still keeping the graphic quality of the image.

This work is typical of Brennan's precise weaving style with techniques carefully selected for their particular effects. The following analysis refers to the numbered illustration and further detail of Brennan's technical approach is in Appendix A “Techniques of woven tapestry used by Archie Brennan” which is intended as a reference and further explanation of the techniques described below.
The tapestry is woven at 16 warps per 4 cm on cotton Seine twine and at this warp setting and scale of tapestry the structure of the weaving is obvious from a normal viewing distance i.e. it could not be mistaken for any other medium. At a coarser warp/weft setting it would have been impossible to get the detail of the image at this. So the choice of warp and weft setting is appropriate to the detail of the image and scale of the work allowing the viewer to recognise it as a weaving.

This tapestry was woven on its side making the warp horizontal when the finished work hangs on the wall. The only advantage of weaving the work this way is that in section 4 on the photocopy, if the image was woven in the opposite direction this section would have had more vertical slits overall.

1. The finest line worked vertically in the tapestry is made by firmly wrapping around one warp. The wrapped warp is stitched to the shape at each side. On one side it is sewn with the yarn of the wrapped warp and on the other with the yarn of the adjoining shape. The colour used in the stitching material plays a part in the overall image.

2. Some areas are woven around two or three warps. These areas are woven slightly tighter than broader shapes with the weft turning neatly at the edges to prevent buckling. Across one area of the 30 cm wide tapestry there are 53 separate shapes requiring skill to keep the surface flat.

3. A dovetail joint holds two sections of the weaving together and visually works to define the top of a picket fence. No other joining technique could have both joined the two areas together and made the image of the tops of the fence posts.

4. The half pass technique is used to graduate the values in this area and create a sense of depth. It gives a precise, graphic quality and fits well with the overall style of the image.

5. A dark grey wool is used to sew this slit between two shapes. By using the dark grey, a shadow line is made, creating a visual effect through the sewing rather than the weaving.

6. Light grey wool sews the grey shape to the blue shape. They have similar tonal values so the stitching is not obvious.

7. A coarse blue wool is used in a thicker weight than that used in the rest of the tapestry. The solid light colour and thicker yarn emphasise the bead or grain of the tapestry. The light and shade on the shape of one weft over one warp is easily picked up by the eye so it reads strongly as a woven area.

8. The yarns in the tapestry range from white to black with two greys and blue. The grey yarns are fine with modulation of tone within the colour. They are carefully selected as Brennan points out:

   The fact that I might spend 3 to 4 days worrying about the interaction of 2 shades of grey is not a matter of any relevance to other people and is hardly likely to affect their lives unlike other issues of the day, such as the fall of
Vietnam. But to me, as an artist, the two shades of grey and their interaction are of great significance. (Brennan ANU Reporter 3)

Every mark in the tapestry is considered and deliberate. Deborah Hickman, a tapestry weaver living in Nova Scotia who studied with Brennan commented that “His years of experience taught him that every square inch counts and must not be wasted” (Hickman 10).

The techniques used are selected for a specific purpose that relates to construction and the visual image. There is a mastery of the medium so that to the untrained eye the end product can look simple, like a very easy piece of weaving, with no signs of struggle or difficulty with the way warp and weft sit together. Through my experience, I can see the hours of labour involved carefully avoiding tension problems, managing a number of bobbins at one time and keeping check of slits and sewing.

The tapestry embodies the dedication to the medium which allows the artist to make the decisions which mean the longest route to a desired effect, rather than a shortcut that would give slightly less than satisfactory results. It is about knowing the medium so well that the technique becomes transparent to the viewer who is seduced into the image.

The work is in good condition and is in the care of the Australian National University art collection.

Context of the work

Studio Window is an overall pattern of checks and squares of closely related colour and contrasting tone. In earlier works such as Portraits (1971) Brennan had woven images fragmented into squares, interested in how far he could abstract an image and still make it recognisable. He had studied patterning in The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries (c. 1425-1450) and was inspired by the spotted costume of the turbaned man to design the woman in the spotted dress in At a Window 1 (1973, version 2 1980) (Master Weavers 112). A garment with a pattern of circles is also on one of the figures in Adoration (1890) produced by Morris and Co. (Menz 57).

Since 1973 Brennan has continued to use the theme of looking out through the frame of a window. In these works he often emphasises the interior through the detail of textiles, figures in the foreground or objects set beside the window and the outside world is given less significance, suggested rather than fully described.

Two of Brennan’s students further explored the theme of windows in their own individual ways. In 1978-1979 Belinda Ramson exhibited a tapestry Stained Glass Window (1978) 153 x 63 cm woven in her studio at Red Hill, Canberra in Contemporary Tapestry in Australia at the Crafts Council of Australia gallery in Sydney and at the Meat Market Easter Purchase Exhibition, Melbourne. It was purchased in 1978 for the Victorian State Craft Collection (Catalogue Vic. State n. pag.).

Kay Lawrence first explored the theme in tapestry when she wove a sample at the Masterclass with Archie Brennan in Australia 1976. Later at Edinburgh College of Art Lawrence wove Untitled (STAG 2 catalogue n.pag.) or Windows Edinburgh (Queensland Art Gallery filenotes) (1977-1978) further developing the window theme. On her return to Australia she produced the series of five panels A Walk Around on the Inside Looking Out (1981) 4m square. They were woven in her Adelaide studio and purchased in 1982 from The Survey of Australian Craft exhibition, for the Queensland Art Gallery collection.
The theme of windows continued in the next generation with Cheryl Clark Thornton, a student of Ramson’s *Windows* (1978) 70 x 44 cm, acquired 1978 for the Victorian State Craft Collection (catalogue n.pag.) and *Inside, Outside* (1996) 16 x 35 cm, an image of a window viewed from the inside with a decorative pattern element suggesting textiles.

In a conceptual way this focus on the interior as a theme could relate to the time taken to weave tapestries and by this the time spent indoors at the loom - a preoccupation in Brennan’s thinking. He is noted for saying “Some years ago, I was weaving a quite large area of plain black when some men set off for the moon. They got there before I was finished” (World Tapestry 54).

Pop artists understood that “Pop art looks out at the world” (Wilson 5) and were concerned with the everyday. Studio Window presents the frame we look through to the world and by using the flywire emphasises the ordinary aspects of our lives.

In the late 1960s and 1970s the grid was commonly used in art as part of Modernist reduction, abstraction and minimalism. Brennan would have been aware of the works of Canadian/American Agnes Martin (b. 1912) and many British artists working with the grid including Bridget Riley (b. 1931), Henry Mundy (b. 1919) and Fiona Geddes (b. 1949). The grid was commonly used in Edinburgh tapestry in the late 1970s by Linda Green Untitled 1 (1980), Maureen Hodge Forever is not a Word but a number V1/1 (1980) and Mathew Inglis Stack (1980) and the Scottish Tapestry Artists Group (S.T.A.G.) exhibition catalogue of 1980-1981 had a grid superimposed on the cover image.

**Provenance**

The tapestry was woven in Brennan’s studio in Hawaii and presented to the Australian National University when he visited Australia in 1991. It remains in the university art collection.
Developments from Brennan's teaching/exchange with Australian tapestry weavers

Grace Cochrane, Curator at The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, said that “Archie Brennan was very important to the development of tapestry in Australia, inspiring students such as Nicole Johnson and Kay Lawrence, who still talk about him. They responded to his intellect, wit, charm and body of a weight lifter” (Cochrane interview).

In the article “Tapestry and Textiles in Australia” Dr Diana Wood Conroy noted that “Archie Brennan gave several intensive tapestry workshops around Australia in the mid 1970s. These strongly affected, even awakened, individual tapestry weavers to new possibilities. Those weavers themselves became noted artists and teachers in the medium” (ITNET 6).

Australian students of Archie Brennan's went on to build careers across the breadth of the country. They include Sue Walker, Director of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, Garry Benson, tapestry-weaver, teacher and media consultant, Nicole Johnson, tapestry weaver and teacher, Elsje Van Keppel (King), textile artist and Kay Lawrence, tapestry artist.

Their personal understandings of tapestry evolved in individual ways as they worked in their own studios and professions in different parts of the country. The skills and knowledge they acquired have been used in direct and tangential ways.

Sue Walker

Prior to becoming director of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1976, Walker began her textiles career in fibre art as pictured with Pru Medlin in Craft Australia, constructing with fleece, jute and branches, “Total effect a shaggy, woolly, 'tribal hut'” (mid year 1972 11). Walker is known for her strong direction, ability to secure major tapestry commissions and manage the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and this will be further discussed in chapter six.
Garry Benson

Enthusiastically, Garry Benson did both the workshops at Steiglitz and Armidale after seeing Brennan’s work in a 1975 edition of *Craft Australia*. He said “*I was just amazed at the man’s ingenuity, design sense, and sense of humour*” (Fibre Forum Vol 3 No 1 1984 29). Benson exhibited in twenty two group exhibitions and two solo exhibitions between 1978 and 1985 (Benson n.pag.). In 1979 he submitted his work and was selected for the Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne in Switzerland (Cochrane Crafts 219). Benson and Brennan shared an interest in using images from the media in their tapestries. Garry Benson said “*I usually work on images derived from different media - television, newspapers, magazines and film. I like the impact of a ‘freeze-frame’ of an image in woven tapestry*” (Benson n.pag.). From the 1970s to present he has continued to teach saying “*One thing that I do attempt with missionary-like zeal is teaching people about tapestry weaving.....I love doing workshops...*” (Fibre Forum Vol 3 No 1 1984 29). He has also worked and taught in new media, the area he originally linked to tapestry.

Nicole Johnson

Nicole Johnson developed a career as a tapestry weaver and in 1978 exhibited in “Australian Crafts” Adelaide and national tour. The tapestry she exhibited *And Beyond* 1977 101 x 76 cm pays homage to Brennan through the text and image ( Craft Australia 1978 / 1 15 ). She has worked as a teacher and has encouraged many students through informal classes and tapestry groups.

Elsje Van Keppel

Elsje Van Keppel is known for her pieced and stitched work, rather than tapestry, but Philippa O’Brien noted Van Keppel’s workshop experience with Brennan in the exhibition catalogue *Fragile Objects*:

>In the early days of the Australia Council several crucial workshops offered her contact with important international artists. She attended workshops with Archie


Brennan, Magdalena Abacanowicz and David Green. Her work was not so much directly influenced by these experiences as it was energised and focussed. (O’Brien 6)

Kay Lawrence

Kay Lawrence (b. 1947) trained as a secondary school art teacher in South Australia 1965-1967, completed a Postgraduate year in painting and printmaking at Western Teachers College in 1968, enrolled in Belinda Ramson’s class at the Tatachilla Summer School in 1975 and 1976, participated in the Stieglitz workshop with Archie Brennan in December 1976 then followed up with four months of study at Edinburgh College of Art in 1977/78 (Cochrane Crafts Movement 219).

Garry Benson described Lawrence as “a major figure in the explosion of tapestry skills that followed the workshops of Archie Brennan in Australia” and her work as “Clear personal statements in fibre, they are the product of her training as a painter and printmaker, and her exposure to such established tapestry weavers as Belinda Ramson and the indefatigable Archie Brennan” (QAG filenotes).

Lawrence said that Brennan “made weaving seem exciting, made me discover I could express in weaving the kinds of things I sought to express in paint” and that the difference between tapestry in Australia and Scotland then was whether ideas or technique was emphasised “At Edinburgh I learned to look at tapestry in terms of the ideas being expressed rather than the technique.... In Australia everybody approaches it from the other way around” (Ward n.pag.).

Since the early 1980s Lawrence has been instrumental in the development of tapestry in Australia through the example of her own work, her teaching and involvement in community tapestry projects. The work she has done as an artist-weaver has provided an alternative to the strict discipline and confines of commissioned weaving in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and the community projects involved a wider cross-section of the public in workshops and weaving the community tapestries.

Drawing forms the basis of Lawrence’s work and she shares Brennan’s passion for exploring ideas and images through this means. She said:

When I learnt tapestry weaving at workshops with Belinda Ramson and Archie Brennan in 1975 and 1976 I was able to transfer many of the skills and attitudes
I had developed as a painter, to tapestry, particularly the use of drawing as a way of experimenting with and developing ideas. (QAG Biography).

She said of her study in Edinburgh:

They put great emphasis on drawing and thinking on paper, before you actually get to the loom. I found this very exciting, and I also worked much harder. I feel that I was a bit lazy previously, as I hadn’t gone through the working out process on paper before I began weaving on the loom. (Benson QAG filenotes)

In the tapestry summer school held at Monash University in 1989 I observed Lawrence working on a series of drawings of her daughter. The figure was drawn repeatedly with various materials and changes in composition were made to refine the form. One of the drawings was selected as the starting point for the work commissioned by the Art Gallery of South Australia, Daughter (1995-1996). It has a strong graphic quality developed in scaling up from the small drawing to a larger image in tapestry. The sharpness in the tapestry image comes from a surety and knowledge developed in the drawing. By scaling up the image, the marks in weaving have obvious stepped edges emphasising the underlying structure rather than copying the original drawn marks on paper. Lawrence feels that drawn marks “when you recreate them through tapestry, you are giving significance to casual, ordinary marks that you don’t even notice when you’re making them (in other media). When you’re weaving them you have time to sit and ponder about them. That difference actually comes out when people view the work” (Hutchins 30).

The relationship of drawing to tapestry is important in Lawrence’s practice. This could be seen in Lawrence’s work exhibited in Threefold: An Exhibition in Three Parts for Shift, Canberra School of Art Gallery 3 July-2 August 1998. The nineteen woven tapestries Spill (1998) 18 x 18 cm each, demonstrate how the selected aspect of half pass in grey against white, using the cutback lines in the weaving can draw the objects. They work well because they are understated and use the selected marks made in tapestry. Anne Brennan wrote:

Small, monochrome images of conical sieves and funnels, meticulously woven, some of them depicted miraculously filled with water, in spite of the regular grid
of punctures which Kay Lawrence has woven into their sides. There is something voluptuous about these images, in spite of the austere forms and the withholding of colour; they seem to be about holding back, about retaining, like the moment before a wave of pleasure breaks. (n.pag.)

Above: Kay Lawrence Spill 18 x 18 cm (from A.N.U. exhibition catalogue)

Lawrence's work as an artist has been widely recognised and highly acclaimed. The major tapestry Red Gorge/Two Views (1987-1988) 359 x 193 cm was commissioned for the Prime Minister's Suite in Parliament House, Canberra and was on public display for the first time in July 1998 in the Presiding Offices Exhibitions area of Parliament House, Canberra. It demonstrates complete technical mastery of the medium in its weaverly surface of half passes and mixed weft colour/tone. This confident use of the medium gives an illusion which belies the relatively coarse weave texture. The decision to work with thicker rather than finer warp and weft has parallels with Archie Brennan and William Morris's work. Lawrence's tapestries are immaculately woven with care and attention given to every bead of the tapestry.
Her work practice is rigorous and self-disciplined. In Edinburgh she had looked to Maureen Hodge and Fiona Mathison and been impressed with their determination and long hours working at the loom (Benson QAG filenotes). She attests to a "'standard of work and level of commitment' in the college (Edinburgh) rarely seen in Australia" (Ward n.pag.).

During a six week residency in 1998 at Canberra School of Art, Lawrence wove fifteen fine, detailed tapestries as part of the series Spill. In observing Lawrence in her daily studio routine I was reminded of Morris in his habit of getting up early to weave each morning or Brennan’s insistence on daily weaving as a professional commitment.

After her Artforum lecture at Canberra School of Art on June 3 1998 discussion arose with a student from the painting workshop. He was incredulous that Lawrence could commit herself to the one piece of art for a year. I could see his mind trying to fathom the hours involved and not quite believing it was possible. (Artforum)

Time at the loom is not the only factor in the success of Lawrence’s work as there is an emphasis on content, with deep consideration of the ideas involved in the image. The tapestry Gender (1993) 139 x 157 cm with Lawrence’s daughter, Ellie Wood’s drawings superimposed over a shadowy larger body image has many layers of meaning. Sue Rowley analysed the work in Crossing Borders saying: “The Gender tapestry and the Untitled drawing explore the mother-daughter relationship from a number of perspectives”. She goes on to explore the ideas of a daughter’s journey to maturity, the mother’s separation from her own mother and the loss experienced by the mother when the daughter matures. (60-61)

Lawrence draws on literature, art history and theory and personal experience in her art. The private work is autobiographical reflecting immediate concerns of place and family, relating these to the wider concerns of contemporary life.

Teaching has been an important way of passing on the skills and approach to tapestry and Lawrence is known as a dedicated teacher informally with community classes and tapestries and formally in tertiary education.

Kay Lawrence was employed as an artist working on several community tapestry projects in South Australia including Salisbury Community Tapestry (1981) 200 x 100cm, The Hills Community Tapestry (1981-1982) 200 x 106 cm Crafers Primary School Tapestry (with Mark Le Messurier) (1983) 200 x 100 and the Millicent Community Tapestry (1984-1985) 244cm x 122cm. Discussion held in relation to the Crafers tapestry shows that Brennan’s ideas on subjects for tapestry were passed on:
They (the children) regarded their collaborative tapestry to be ‘important’ and therefore deserving a grand theme. This reaction led to very creative discussions between the children and Kay, about why artists choose certain images and how “they generally make art about things that they know best”. This brought about the realisation that profound and important ideas can be expressed in quite ordinary images. (2000 Bobbins 7)

It is clear from the community tapestries that the process of weaving is all important and intrinsically linked to image and concept. Elaine Gardner describes the kind of rigour involved in the community tapestries A Woman's Place is in the House:

The pillar in Votes for Women was very difficult and after several attempts we spent a tense morning taking out and then several equally tense days weaving it in again (successfully this time) to everyone's great relief. The range of sampling for Votes for Women was considerable. (Gardner 18)

Elaine Gardner, Shirley Benlow, Gayle Mason, Mark Le Messurier and Lucia Pichler all worked with Kay Lawrence on community tapestries and have gone on to lead other tapestry projects.

Although most community tapestries have been directed by one or two artists the main emphasis in the projects is collaboration, often from the initial brainstorming about the ideas for the work, through the design stage to the final production of the tapestry. The collaborations between artists and weavers at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company in the 1970s were partly responsible for the success and international reputation of the workshop but this community model of collaboration is actually much closer to William Morris’s ideal “this crown of labour of the Middle Ages”, a society of workers cooperating in a guild system. He lectured about:

freedom of hand and thought during his working hours, and interest in the welfare of his work itself; and further, that the collective genius of a people working in free but harmonious co-operation is far more powerful for the production of architectural art than the spasmodic efforts of the greatest individual genius. (Morris William Collected Works 346)
However in the 1980s, although community arts were popular, collaboration was not part of Fine art ideals with modernism insisting on the artist as a creative individual and the community work was often disregarded in terms of art. Kathie Muir said:

*All too frequently such projects do not receive informed reviews, discussion or exposure. Instead the limited critical attention is inappropriately concentrated on comparing, often unfavourably, the end product to similar work by individual artists engaged in studio based practise.* (2000 Bobbins 3)

From 1971 to 1994 Lawrence taught full time and part time at the South Australian School of Art in painting, printmaking and sculpture. She is at present the coordinator of the Textiles studio which runs a broadly based multi disciplinary course. "The emphasis is on textiles as an expressive medium in the visual arts and students are encouraged to develop a strong conceptual basis for their work, to be experimental and to work across traditional boundaries" (Lawrence SAS of A, n.pag.) Several students have majored in tapestry and gone on to exhibit including Brenda Goggs, Kirsty Darlaston and Karen Russell. Their work demonstrates the strong conceptual basis.

Kay Lawrence's ability to work creatively with the wider community, passing on knowledge and skills, as a highly regarded artist and teacher, was acknowledged when she was made a member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1989 after the Parliament House embroidery project. She has received a number of other prizes, grants and awards including the H C Coombs Creative Arts Fellowship 1998 - a residency at the Australian National University (of which Archie Brennan was the first) given to leading practitioners in the arts.

**Continued exchange between Scotland and Australia**

From the 1970s through to the present time there has been a movement of weavers between Australia and Scotland.

Tapestry weavers from Australia have gone to Edinburgh to further develop their skills and ideas as a direct result of their contact with Archie Brennan - Belinda Ramson
(who had worked with Brennan before he came to Australia), Kay Lawrence, Winnie Pelz, Garry Benson and Nicole Johnson. Many others including Sue Carstairs and Rosemary Whitehead who learned of Edinburgh through their teachers or the Victorian Tapestry Workshop also went to Scotland to study. Their understanding of the techniques and approach to tapestry was reinforced through contact with the Edinburgh College of Art Tapestry Department, The Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. and other Scottish weavers. Rosemary Whitehead said:

_The Edinburgh School of Art was a weaver's Mecca. It's the only place in the world that has a post-graduate course in tapestry.....the only Department in Tapestry in the world......a place to go to. So I went._ (Moult 100)

There has also been a constant flow of weavers from Scotland to Australia to work in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop or wider community. I was the first Edinburgh trained weaver to work in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1979 and was followed by Joan Baxter, Carole Dunbar, Elizabeth Lipscombe, Dot Calander, Sara Brennan and Lindsay Dunbar.

Tass Mavrogordato (b. 1962) also worked in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, at Canberra School of Art 1990-1991, Monash University 1991-1993 and in her own studio producing tapestries for group and solo exhibitions. Mavrogordato learned the Edinburgh style of weaving from English tapestry weaver Joanna Buxton who had refined her weaving skills with Brennan’s student and later director of The Edinburgh Tapestry Co., Fiona Mathison, while they were both students at the Royal College of Art, London.

**Conclusion**

The field of tapestry in Australia before Brennan came to the country had many lines of thinking, approaches from diverse cultural backgrounds and philosophies from diverse schools of thought.

The Crafts Council of Australia invited Archie Brennan to Australia to teach two tapestry workshops which laid the basic foundations for a new strand of contemporary tapestry in Australia with teaching methods and philosophies that have continued through individuals and the students they have taught.

Brennan, with Belinda Ramson also taught workshop methods based on Dovecot principles and Brennan’s personal philosophy at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.
Archie Brennan was an influential and charismatic tutor and role model who worked with the students on their level, giving technical information and challenging people intellectually. The ideas he presented differed from previous ways of working in tapestry practiced in Australia which related more to cloth weaving, experimental Fibre Art or insisted on close adherence to a cartoon or pattern. Archie Brennan presented a clearly defined approach to tapestry weaving using drawing as a tool to develop ideas, technique coming from the traditions of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and an insistence on content, ideas and meaning in the work. The discipline of weaving, working in a focussed and regular way at the craft, was extremely important - a factor handed down from William Morris.

The collaborative nature of workshop weaving was translated into a community perspective in Australia with an emphasis on sharing information, working cooperatively on projects and passing on skills.

Many of the people who worked with Brennan, and later Ramson also taught, taking on important pedagogical roles. It is through this lineage of teaching that the logical yet experimental way of working in tapestry has been passed on.

Archie Brennan’s ideas were reinforced through the teaching of Belinda Ramson and her role and that of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop will be further discussed in chapter six.
Belinda Ramson, Apprentices and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop

Archie Brennan’s contact with tapestry students in Australia from 1975 was limited to workshops and advisory sessions, but in these he passed on the skills and philosophy to individuals. He was also consulted about the setting up of a tapestry workshop in Australia, based on the model of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company.

This chapter examines how the Edinburgh technical approach to tapestry and Brennan’s ideas about the medium were transferred practically, through the work of Belinda Ramson, her students and the apprentices she trained at The Victorian Tapestry Workshop from 1976. It goes on to explore the connections between the Australian workshop and Edinburgh and the impact of the interpretative tapestries woven at the workshop on the Australian Tapestry field.

These threads of connection are the vital links between Scotland and Australia. They also make a strong foundation or “floor” in tapestry terms which has enabled a particular strand of tapestry to develop and flourish in Australia during the thirty year period between 1969 and 1999.

Belinda Ramson - building foundation skills in Australia

Belinda Ramson (b. 1935), Wellington, New Zealand, first learned weaving with Solvig Baas Becking in 1965-1966 (Cochrane Crafts Movement 171). She said that although Baas Becking worked in tapestry herself from her husband’s designs, she did not teach her the tapestry technique, only cloth weaving techniques. Ramson was dissatisfied with cloth weaving and was looking for something more.

An opportunity arose when her husband was offered a position in Edinburgh. She had heard about Scottish tapestry, so applied and was accepted as a special student to study for one year in the Tapestry Department, Edinburgh College of Art with Archie Brennan in 1967. The time there was precious, so Ramson worked through lunch hours,
eager to learn as much as she could (Ramson Interview). In 1973 she went back to Edinburgh to work as a weaver at the Dovecot (Texts from the Edge 22) learning the precise methods used in Scotland which she describes as “solidly based in a traditional discipline”. She pursued a way of thinking in weaving developed by Archie Brennan which she considered to be “constantly innovative” and about “using the medium of tapestry to elucidate a conceptually difficult problem”. (25)

The small tapestry, Made to Measure (1976), through the inch by inch woven marks relates Brennan’s philosophy and ideas on the consecutive building process in the weaving.

Above: Made to Measure, 1976 Belinda Ramson 25x8cm

Ramson described her experience as a workshop weaver in “The year at the Dovecot” pointing out the difference between the Dovecot and French workshops:

*The fact that three of us at the Dovecot had been Brennan’s students at the Edinburgh College of art and that all were encouraged to think beyond the basic skills of their craft, indicates the essential difference between the practice of the Dovecot and that of the traditional French tapestry workshops, where weaving is quite strictly the craft of reproducing an artist’s design in a different medium.* (25)

The idea that weavers should be trained in art schools was later taken up by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop when the first weavers selected had art qualifications. Later, Sue Walker, director from 1976, worked towards having a tertiary level art
course with tapestry as a major in Melbourne, first at Prahran Technical and Further Education College where a two year certificate course was offered between 1984 and 1986, then tapestry was offered as part of the BA at Monash University, Caulfield from 1990 onwards.

Ramson stressed the cooperative nature of the work at the Dovecot:

Again, what was important was the sharing of resources: two people co-operating.........This was my strongest impression of the Dovecot; the feeling of community, of an unselfish pooling of resources, combined with the delight of sharing in a creative process. (25)

These observations reflect Morris’s ideal for a guild type community of workers (Collected Works Vol XXI 345) and his aspiration that people should find satisfaction and creativity in their work “art is the expression by man of his pleasure in labour” (Collected Works 42)

Ramson’s work was vital to the later establishment of The Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, as she was the only person in Australia at that time who had trained at Edinburgh College of Art and the Dovecot in Edinburgh. She had a complete understanding and mastery of the particular techniques developed at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and knew the workshop methodology. Ramson's ideas are very closely aligned with those of Archie Brennan, as I will demonstrate in discussion about her own personal work.

Belinda Ramson - individual tapestries

In 1976 Ramson held a solo exhibition at Narek Galleries, Canberra and exhibited with Archie Brennan in Tapestries by Archie Brennan and Belinda Ramson at the Gryphon Gallery, Melbourne. The work was well received and Ted Greenwood wrote in a review in The Age of Belinda Ramson’s work:

These take on the appearance of tapestry theatrical flats. Window openings are the dominant motif in the top layer which is richly ornamented with geometric patterns and an under layer, generally quite plain (n.pag.)

and of Brennan’s work:

There is nothing small or limited in Archie Brennan’s vision (n.pag.)
Alan Mc Culloch wrote in the Melbourne Herald about “the refinement of the style that distinguished the work of the two weavers”(40) and Ramson thought that at that time there was no-one showing work in Australia that was like their work, “the Scottish way”(Ramson, Interview). Mc Culloch went on to say “It can with truth be said that what Lurçat meant to weaving in France in the 1940s Brennan means to weaving in Britain in the 1970s”(40).

The National Gallery of Victoria reserved a tapestry by each artist, but due to budget constraints only bought Runner (1976) 200cm x 81cm (Ramson, Interview).


She has held four solo exhibitions including Postcards from Life (1996) at a Girls Own Gallery (aGoG), Canberra. All the tapestries in this exhibition were woven at twenty two warps per 4 cm in fine, single and mixed thread wefts on a number 6 (very fine) warp. Vertical lines in the tapestries were stitched and angles carefully calculated to work with the image. There were no plain areas of weaving and cutback lines breaking up areas of one colour are obvious.

The images in the tapestries were sharp and graphic, built with the grid structure of warp and weft. They do not try to replicate any other medium such as painting or drawing but confidently expose the medium of tapestry through the strong bead and weaverly qualities.

The themes are from everyday life and surroundings - garden implements against a fence, books on shelves, pears in a dish (coincidentally Archie Brennan wove a series on pears) and a kettle on a stove. The postcard also featured in Brennan’s work and that of Tom Philips, as previously discussed. It was used as a symbol of the ordinary and popular culture.
Belinda Ramson
POSTCARDS FROM A LIFE

Opening at aGOG Saturday 26 October 3—5pm
Exhibition continues until 13 November

aGOG austalian Girls Own Gallery
71 Leichhardt Street Kingston ACT. Tel: 06 295 3180 Fax: 06 241 3531
Hours: Wed-Sun Noon-5pm. Postal: PO Box 4376 Kingston ACT 2604

Above: Belinda Ramson, Exhibition invitation.
Glimpses of Tanja

Designer: Belinda Ramson
Woven by Belinda Ramson
Date: 1994
Materials: Cotton and Wool
Size: 3 sections, whole work 50 x 270 cm

Description and Subject

Views of land, sky and water are framed in sequences like a film strip. The detail of the scenes is hidden within the restricted tonal palette giving silhouette impressions of the predominant features as at certain times of day when the sun sets or rises. The image has been pared back to give a poetic composition of the elements evoking quietness, calm or meditation, as she says “for my contemplation, for the viewer’s contemplation” (Interview).

Ramson lives on the New South Wales coast near Tanja so the subject is familiar to her, part of her everyday existence, as she says “holding a moment in life” (Interview) - themes shared with Brennan in his work.

Design

The design is formal in the composition of elements within the visual grid structure which parallels the tapestry structure of warp and weft. A warm, neutral tonal range is used throughout with attention paid to the contrasts of light and dark. The element of line is carefully considered as broad marks are placed in relation to fine lines. The tapestry is woven on its side with the warp running horizontally through the work.

Technique and Condition

Precise, controlled weaving as described in the following table. The tapestry is in good condition.

Provenance

The tapestry was exhibited in Texts from the Edge, Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre, Adelaide and tour 1994-1995.
Comparison between Belinda Ramson and Archie Brennan's work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Belinda Ramson</th>
<th>Archie Brennan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warp / Weft ratio</td>
<td>varies according to the scale of the work but usually selects a warp and weft setting which is fine in relation to the scale of the work. Now only uses No 6 warp.</td>
<td>uses warp and weft at the coarsest setting possible so pushing the use of warp and weft to depict images with the minimum number of warps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepping</td>
<td>precise stepping giving accurate angles and graphic quality</td>
<td>stepping fully considered and used with thorough knowledge and to great effect, as in Defining Tapestry (Its About Time 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut-back lines</td>
<td>used in areas of self colour</td>
<td>used in areas of self colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed weft thread</td>
<td>precise and small amounts of mixed weft thread</td>
<td>controlled use of mixed thread. Aversion to overuse described by Brennan as &quot;porridge&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hachure / Half pass</td>
<td>selected as part of a repertoire of techniques for shading and pattern effect</td>
<td>used to graduate tonal areas and as a graphic part of image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining methods</td>
<td>selection of ways of linking wefts and sewing</td>
<td>Selection of ways of linking wefts and sewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building technique</td>
<td>thinks of process as building/grids the image. Tapestry Kelso a visual pun on this idea (Australian Crafts n.pag.)</td>
<td>emphasises the concept of building/grids a tapestry with designs broken into blocks of colour or pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject / Themes in work</td>
<td>self portrait, landscape, seascape, objects and scenes from everyday life</td>
<td>media images, objects from everyday life, postcards, textiles, narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall approach</td>
<td>graphic, acute attention to detail, skilful, refined, fine, delicate, poetic quality</td>
<td>graphic, accurate, restrained, considered, deliberate, coarse weave, bold effects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Beginning of workshop tapestry in Australia

As a dedicated student of Brennan’s and astute artist in her own right, Ramson was well placed to lay the foundation of Edinburgh style weaving in Australia. Diana Wood Conroy said “The influence of her meticulous technique, her graphic discrimination and devotion to the medium for its power of representation is at the heart of tapestry in Australia” (Texts from the Edge 17).

In her trunk, Ramson has stored exhibition files and newspaper clippings. An unsourced cutting described the circumstance that set in motion the train of events which lead to the opening of a tapestry workshop in Australia. In “Transforming a dream into tangible reality” Sally White wrote:

It started with a remark by Lady Delacombe, wife of the then governor of Victoria to Eric Westbrook then director of the National Gallery of Victoria as they surveyed a visiting collection of French tapestries. Why couldn’t Australia, land of fine wool and fine painters produce its own tapestries? Why should the Leonard French tapestry in the Adelaide Festival Centre be woven in Japan? Why should the Sydney Opera House curtains be designed by John Coburn and woven at Aubusson? Simply because there was no professional pool of craftsmen trained in using traditional weaving techniques in 20th Century artistic terms. (n.pag.).

Belinda Ramson said it was “The beginning of the Scotland Australia connections that set us all up” (Interview).

John Blanch was paid as a consultant for the Victorian Ministry for the Arts to do a feasibility study and Ramson and Brennan were employed by the Victorian Ministry for the Arts as consultants. Blanch wrote in a letter to Belinda Ramson dated 21/5/75 “We are fortunate to have a sympathetic and enthusiastic Government in support of the project and the Ministry for the Arts is guiding the project”.

Selecting and training the first apprentices was Ramson’s responsibility and this was important because at that time there was no tertiary course in tapestry, no comprehensive manual to follow on this interpretative style and no institution dedicated to training tapestry weavers who could work as part of a workshop team, in Australia.

The final letter from John Blanch (at the end of his consultancy) to Belinda Ramson on 23/10/1975 shows that designs were well underway for the Victorian Tapestry Workshop as it stated that the committee had developed a plan, had a large loom and several training looms built, premises were in sight and they were awaiting the publication of an advert for a director of the workshop. During the six month period
prior to the opening of the workshop, Ramson and the apprentices worked in the foyer of the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.

Teaching Approach

The video *Woven Tapestry Demonstration* (no date c.1980) documented Belinda Ramson's approach to tapestry at this key time in the establishment of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. She delivered definite and precise information and gave clear, practical demonstrations emphasising the subtlety of technique. An example of this is her discussion on slits in the tapestry and ways of joining the vertical edges of woven shapes. Her decision in the particular area, a "*clean vertical*", was based on aesthetic and technical considerations. This approach contrasts with that put forward by Peter Collingwood where he gives the detail of how to work the joining methods but does not discuss them visually.  

An obvious respect for the medium is apparent as Ramson demonstrates and shows delight in the finer points of tapestry. The information is always provided in a completely accessible way and matter of fact tone. This is what you do and it works. She reveals all, making it seem easy - anyone could pick up a bobbin and weave. This no nonsense approach implies that tapestry is not about textile trickery or novel, new invention in the technique. She provides a context that affirms tapestry as part of well respected traditions.

Ramson talked about feeling the surface of the weaving to check for ribbing and correct tension and explained that an understanding of the techniques,

"*comes with time.......It goes into the hands and out of the mind*”.

"*After two years of fulltime weaving it is just in the hands...the mind is free to concentrate solely on the design.*”

Shunyam Smith confirmed Ramson 's rigour as a teacher, insisting on correct technique:

*Belinda taught us the basics, just the technical skills necessary to weave a basic sampler, triangles, squares etc. etc., and of course a circle. The emphasis was on getting things straight, both horizontally and vertically. I remember being very confused about the “passes”, both open and closed.* (Letter)
Smith related this style of weaving to Edinburgh and believes it has continued in Australia through the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

*However I get the impression, wrongly or rightly, that the way tapestry was taught in Edinburgh at the time we are speaking of was fairly strict and most people with the experience of working in Edinburgh weave in a similar style. That is, in essence, with much emphasis on keeping the weaving very regular and even, very horizontal and vertical, with no wandering or undulating wefts. This style seems to have continued to be used in the VTW until today. (Interview)*

The tapestry woven by Belinda Ramson Kelso (1975) illustrates the mastery of horizontals and verticals that Smith talked about.
Belinda Ramson taught workshops and summer schools, did blocks of teaching at tertiary institutions including the Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart and Riverina College, Wagga Wagga and trained the first apprentices at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. (Ramson, Interview).

**Victorian Tapestry Workshop training sessions**

Ramson worked with the first group of fourteen trainees, selected from one hundred and fifty applicants, who learned tapestry with her every second weekend over an eight week period in 1976 when she commuted from Canberra. In between her visits the trainees worked on their own tapestries. They were assessed under three categories - design skills, weaving ability and personality. Personality was important for the weavers to be able to work together as a team (Interview).

Five trainee weavers were selected to go on and weave samples with assistance from Ramson. "The girls", as Ramson calls them with great affection and respect, were Sara Lindsay (b. 1951), Marie Cook (b. 1950), Meryl Dumbrell (b. 1945), Liz Nettleton (b. 1952) and Cresside (Jolles) Collette (b. 1950). They each had prior experience in visual art/graphic design/fashion/textiles and sculpture (Collette Interview). The Fine Art training of the apprentices has always been emphasised by Sue Walker, as stated in *Australian Tapestries* (1976) "Five weavers with Fine Arts backgrounds appointed after preliminary training" (43). In stating "Fine Art" Walker allies tapestry with painting and sculpture and disassociates tapestry from textiles and craft.

Belinda Ramson trained two further groups at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and she came down to Melbourne from Canberra to help warp up a large loom for the first major tapestry. Many more people learned tapestry from her through private classes.

Marie Cook said Archie Brennan was always treated as "a bit special" so that she and the other trainees for the Victorian Tapestry Workshop did not get to know him personally or have the direct influence of his ideas. Ramson taught the weaving techniques and Cook says that she had definite rules about how tapestries should be made, eg. background areas should be broken up into smaller shapes, cutback lines should be of a certain length. (Interview)

Sara Lindsay, tapestry artist, also said that she thought the greatest influence on the trainees was Ramson. As trainees they rarely had contact with Brennan and spent their time working with Belinda Ramson. (Interview)

Cresside Collette also remembered Ramson's "fabulous, thorough grounding in technique" but recalled that Brennan came back to the workshop when they warped up the first large tapestry and that "he would correct you on technical points as he knew it backwards", but he did not just grapple with minor issues of technique, there was
"a richness in the way he talks about tapestry ..... he focussed on the bigger picture, set things in context.... the sum total of his life was more interesting.....he had travelled, he had more to give, looked at the medium in a different way...and of course there was his humour". Collette said they would ring Brennan in Papua New Guinea if there was a technical problem, if something was not right. Brennan and Collette worked on an interpretation of the Jan Senbergs work *West Melbourne* (1979) 1.67 x 2.43m. This is a strong, graphic work with shading created by the half pass technique.

However, Ramson’s major contribution to the setting up of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop has been given very little credit. It was not acknowledged in the catalogue of the first major exhibition Tapestry and the Australian Painter - Two years of work by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. Belinda Ramson's name is not mentioned once. Credit is given to all the artists who designed tapestries. This is a regressive European workshop tradition placing the artist above the craftsperson.

Tapestry weaver, Shunyam Smith who did a one week workshop on the South Coast of New South Wales with Ramson pointed out the lack of acknowledgment given to her. During 1994 in the final year of a Bachelor of Art at Canberra School of Art, Smith did work experience at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and stated “However, it is unfortunate that as the person who trained the original weavers for the workshop, she has been almost written out of its history and most of the people I spoke to there have no idea who she is” (3).

**Marie Cook - a founding workshop weaver.**

Marie Cook, one of the five inaugural apprentices, completed a Diploma of Graphic Design at RMIT (1967-1970) then did a Technical Teachers Certificate at Hawthorn Teachers College (1972) before joining the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

She first began weaving in classes with Jess Brooke, a skilled weaver involved in the Handweaving and Spinning Guild in Melbourne in the early 1970s (Cochrane 168). Also she worked from Brooke’s publication *Tapestry Weaving* which had an approach to the tapestry medium somewhere between rug weaving and Fibreart. The introduction in the book gives an insight to Brooke’s approach to tapestry “any heavy woven material, even one which has been embroidered”(2).

Cook said that they, the trainee weavers at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, learned everything from Ramson. She provided strict ways of working with warp and weft, authoritative instruction on passes and regulations on the span of weaving a bobbin should cover. Brennan sometimes intervened with finer points, as in an Alun Leach Jones tapestry where the weavers struggled with high and low turns (Interview).

*Tapestry and the Australian Painter* documents the works produced in the first two years of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and the steep learning curve the weavers
went through is obvious as they tackled a variety of projects with varying degrees of technical difficulty from the precise geometry of the Mike Brown Untitled (1977) 121 x 103 cm to the painterly test pieces from Charles Blackman’s pen, ink and wash Overground and Underground (1975). This catalogue only lists the weavers as “staff” and Cook is included in this. The tapestries have the details of each artist printed beside them but no names of the weavers who worked on each tapestry are given. Indeed the title Tapestry and the Australian Painter names the medium of tapestry and the artist - “painter” but does not mention the weavers. By contrast the Dovecot catalogue Master Weavers produced in 1980 does list the weavers who worked on each tapestry.

Cook worked on several major projects at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop between 1976 and 1981 including the two tapestries she designed, Pink Heath and Wattle (1979) 365 x 609 cm each, commissioned by the Australian Mutual Provident Society for the Wentworth Hotel, Melbourne and The Charter Room Tapestry (1979-1981) 213 x 1175 cm designed by Cook and Murray Walker for ANZ Banking Group World Headquarters, Melbourne. There are few tapestries designed by the weavers of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop produced there and Cook’s work shows that she was regarded as a weaver and designer. In Tapestry.....invites the senses as well as the mind to delight there are many quotes from architects, artists, commissioning bodies and critics, but only one snippet of a quote from a weaver and this is from Marie Cook, noted as “artist”.

**Pedagogy**

Cook went on to set up the Applied Art, weaving course 1981 and later Diploma of Tapestry 1985 at the South West College of Technical and Further Education (S. W. Tafe), Warrnambool with an emphasis on studio or small business practice. The tapestry course included practical weaving, drawing and design.

“Warp Works”, a tapestry business, was established in 1984 by three graduates from the course, Jude Stewart, Heather Walker and Winnie Lui. They followed a workshop model, weaving What a Stupid Sport (1984) 200 x 140 cm designed by Glen Morgan. This tapestry was exhibited in the Tamworth National Fibre Exhibition, (1984) (Tamworth 28). In 1989-1990 the Maritime Museum in Warrnambool commissioned The Flagstaff Hill Tapestry which was designed and woven by three graduates from the tapestry course, Beryl Conlin, Gerda Shanley and Jude Stewart (Textile Fibre Forum No 26 1989 49).

Off-campus mode of study was offered in 1988 allowing people to work in their own home and learn through correspondence and intensive workshops. Cook described this as “An Educational Breakthrough in Australia” and had an overwhelming response
as the mode of study is ideally suited to the educational situation in Australia (ITN Vol 1 No 2 1990 9).

Marie Cook is a thorough, enthusiastic teacher and many of her students have gone on to work professionally - Jennifer Sharp, Joy Smith, Cathie Hoffman and Dorothy Ridsdale.

**Individual artist weaver**

Cook is also known for her own work in tapestry. She developed a broad approach to the tapestry medium emphasising stepping as a technique and using materials in a dynamic way, often including lurex. These aspects do not come from drawing or painting but from her knowledge of the tapestry medium. Julie Montgarrett commented on her work “The tapestries here fly in the face of painting for their sound understanding of the potential of the tapestry media, retaining a warmth and human scale accessible by way of its everyday associations” (n.pag.).

Brennan’s ideas of the everyday as subject matter for tapestry are translated into the realm of Cook’s day to day domestic/work/family world. The tapestries reflect the issues and frustrations facing many women who grew up with feminism and were lead to believe they could do it all but find themselves juggling work, family and personal development.

She wrote in an artists statement:

> Currently I have been weaving a series of smaller tapestries based around the theme of domestic life. These tapestries are an attempt to come to terms with my experience of birth, motherhood and being a working mother. Each piece is completed quickly and exploits the tension created by the stepped, woven edge. (Fibre and Text 18)


As an artist in the community, Cook has also worked with groups on tapestry projects such as *Womens View on Peace* (1986-1987) 300x 150 cm and with graduates from the S.W. TAFE course on *The Tower Hill Tapestry* (1982) 236 x 392cm.
Description and Subject

This is one of two tapestries woven as self portraits against the Western District landscape. The female figure is wielding an axe, lopping off the tops of Pine trees. Her expression is manic and the exploding volcano in the background reflects her inner state. There is a raw energy in the vigour of the tapestry begging questions about the explosion. The boldness of imagination and fusion with the Australian landscape compare with Sidney Nolan’s Ned Kelly works of 1946 in terms of the narrative and direct quality of the image. Barbed wire borders the tapestry.

Design

The image is deliberately simplified with only a few coloured lines marking the features on the face. This heightens the impact of the image providing no soft areas of decoration or intricate pattern as diversion. The colour is bold and dynamic and the lines deliberately jagged.

Technique and Condition

Cook described these tapestries as “As rough as guts” - as if the time to add detail would interfere with the urgency to capture the mood. The weaving is inspired by the Norwegian artist-weaver Hannah Ryggen (1874-1970) (Interview). The simplicity of the approach could appear crude but the solid technical training with Belinda Ramson, experience of over twenty years of weaving and a well trained graphic eye ensures that any amateur pitfalls are avoided.

The tapestry is in good condition.

Provenance

The work is in the collection of the artist.
Sara Lindsay
Workshop weaving

Sara Lindsay was born in England and migrated to Australia in 1966. She began her training with a Diploma of Art in Fashion Design at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (1972-1974), followed by a Diploma in Education and Handloom Weaving Certificate at Melbourne State College (1975). With these qualifications she was selected as one of the first apprentices at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop where she worked from 1976-1990 (c.v.).

At the Victorian Tapestry Workshop Lindsay was responsible for the interpretation and weaving of many commissioned works. Summer in the South (1978) 1000 x 120cm was designed by Alun Leach-Jones and woven by Lindsay and Iain Young. The tapestry was set up on an unusual loom designed by Brennan with scaffolding arranged in the form of a box to accommodate the long length of the warp. The design for the tapestry appears relatively simple - large flat areas of colour in an abstract form but as Jenny Zimmer points out:

>The immediate simplicity of this colour is probably not so simple..... To create a strong gestalt, where colour and form mutually reinforce each other and collectively overcome the seductive qualities of woollen texture is no simple matter. (Tapestry.....invites 23)

Pedagogy

Lindsay taught new trainees in the workshop and held classes for the wider community. Between 1991 and 1993 she was Lecturer in Charge of Textiles at the Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart and in 1994 was artist-in-residence and guest lecturer at Canberra School of Art.

Individual weaving

In 1981 Lindsay spent six months studying at the Kawashima Textiles School in Japan. She later said "At that time I had no particular direction in my work. When I returned to Australia I was humbled and overwhelmed by the experience I had had, although it was quite clear that I had started to view things quite differently" (Lindsay ITJ June 98 24). On her return from this trip she began weaving with shredded fabric and exhibited a series of fabric woven tapestries in 1988 at the Warrnambool Regional Art Gallery. These tapestries prefigure the body of work developed with gingham fabric which Lindsay is now known for.
The Roundedness of Return

Designer: Sara Lindsay
Woven by Sara Lindsay
Date: 1996
Materials: Cotton warp and silk, cotton and rayon weft
Size: 110 x 192 cm

Description and Subject

The series of works the Roundedness of Return (1995-1996) conceptually link layers of memory and place, “gathering up fragments of the past and putting them in order” (Carter 111) and shredding and restructuring gingham fabric (Lindsay ITJ Winter 97 43). This work comprises of a child’s dress and a woven tapestry placed side by side. They are both in black and white gingham with highlights of red.

Design

The work is precise and carefully composed in a balanced, formal arrangement. There is a sense of restraint or understatement in the design with strategic placement of red marks in the tapestry echoing the red in the dress.

Technique and Condition

Through fifteen years of experience at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, sitting weaving at the loom each day, as Brennan prescribes, Lindsay built up an outstanding level of technical skill and artistic sensibility. The work is meticulously woven using two warp settings, as in the workshop tapestry designed by Murray Walker Port Reflections (1983), to create fine and thicker areas of weaving in the same piece.

The black and white cotton gingham fabrics are interspersed with finely woven detail in cotton, silk and rayon.

The work is in good condition.

Provenance

The Roundedness of Return toured Australia in the 12th Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial, (1996) and was exhibited at the 5th International Textile Competition (1997) Kyoto, where it was given the “Outstanding Award”. It remains in the collection of the artist.

Next Page: The Roundness of Return (1996) 100x165x20cm (5th Int.Tex. Comp.catalogue 4)
Elizabeth (Liz) Nettleton and Tapestry Studios of Australia
Workshop weaving pedagogy and individual weaving combined

Elizabeth (Liz) Nettleton initially trained as a teacher at Sturt College, Flinders University, South Australia (1972). She then did part of the Studio Textiles Certificate at Melbourne College of Textiles (1976), a Diploma of Art at Philip Institute of Technology (1977) and Master of Art at Monash University (1995).

At the Victorian Tapestry Workshop she worked for eleven months as a weaver and one of the pieces she worked on was Try Tapes (1976) designed by Richard Larter.

In 1985 she set up her own studio “Tapestry Studios of Australia” and had many apprentices learn from her while working on commissions. During 1985-88 the studio employed five weavers working on thirteen rugs designed by Nettleton, Lesley Dumbrell, Jenny Kee, Alun Leach-Jones, John Firth-Smith and Nola Jones, commissioned for Parliament House, Canberra. In the studio, works were designed by Nettleton and other artists and were woven individually by Nettleton or by other weavers in the studio.

Tapestry Studios of Australia completed operation in 1996 but the business name has been retained by Nettleton. She has turned her attention to gardening which she thinks of as three dimensional tapestry. Many of her skills have been transferred to her new business - interpreting client needs, managing projects, working with many bosses and using a spirit level to build walls (Nettleton, Interview).

Merrill Dumbrell
Sustained workshop practice

Merrill Dumbrell is the only one of the initial five trainees at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop who had a Diploma of Fine Art (Sculpture) (1963-1965) when she started there and she is the only original weavers who is still working there, although she has spent periods away from the workshop.

Dumbrell has worked on a large number of commissions and been in charge of interpreting many designs including, Desert Carnival (1982) 1.50 x 2.40m designed by John Coburn, A Moment in the Great Game (1982) 1.85 x 2.73m designed by Roy Churcher and Walter Burley Griffin Tapestry (1980) 2.40 x 2.40m, design concept by Daryl Jackson.

In 1984 she designed Clouds, two tapestries 3.5 x 3.5m each for architect Bruce Henderson Pty. Ltd. and Jetset Tours Pty. Ltd., Melbourne. This work was woven in the tapestry workshop by Dumbrell, Joan Baxter and Kate Hutchinson (Australian Tapestries). Dumbrell exhibited in Diamond Valley Art Award (1976 and 1977), the Rug Event (1978) and Australian Weavers in Wool (1980).
Pedagogy

Dumbrell has taught many apprentices at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and taught tapestry as a casual lecturer at Melbourne College of Textiles.

Individual weaving

In her own work Dumbrell is interested in forms of tapestry unrelated to interpretation from painting and as such she looks towards traditional forms of weaving - kilims and South American tapestry. The tapestry Congo (1985) 120 x 120cm acquired by the Ararat Regional Gallery in 1986, reflects this fascination with traditional weaving and the precise geometry of the work demonstrates her skill (Craft Victoria No 8 1986 4).

Cresside (Jolles) Collette

Workshop practice

Cresside (Jolles) Collette initially trained in Graphic Design at RMIT (1967-1970), worked as a book illustrator, for an advertising studio and did agency work. She was interested in embroidery and made embroidered hangings which she exhibited at Realities Gallery, Melbourne (1971), then took a year off work to further develop in 1975. At this time she realised that she wanted to make the whole fabric and so applied and was selected for the traineeship at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

Belinda Ramson provided a strong, concise technical base but Collette remembers trying to nut out her own designs at home.

The first workshop translations from paintings were carried out without Ramson's direct supervision and Collette described the process as an evolution from the translations in the beginning, sticking closely to the painting to the more confident, bolder approach developed in the 1980s. Artists who had worked on several projects with the workshop, such as Richard Larter and John Olsen, were prepared to have their work considered in less literal ways by the weavers. At that time Collette says there was a good input of the weavers, their work was valued and acknowledged in publications and there was "not one rigid way of doing one particular painter".

Collette believes this changed when Chris Pyett, a painter, was appointed Assistant Director of the workshop in 1990 and tried to have control over the work of
the weavers. She recalls his disparaging comment to her on viewing her work "a little more Burnt Sienna".

**Pedagogy**

Collette has taught on a casual basis at Melbourne College of Textiles and worked as an artist on community projects. She has designed and woven tapestries to be used as illustrations in a children's book referencing *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1490-1500) tapestries.

**Individual work**

After fifteen years as an employee, Cresside Collette finished work at the workshop in 1990. She completed a Bachelor of Art Honours year in 1998 and is working on a Master of Arts (1999-2000) at Monash University. She has exhibited her own work and undertaken private commissions.

**The Victorian Tapestry Workshop**

The Victorian Tapestry Workshop, fully operational from 1976, has been extensively written about in publications such as *Tapestry... Invites the Senses as Well as the Mind to Delight*, *Australian Tapestries: Complete Works 1976 - 1988*, *Australian Tapestries* and publicity brochures generated by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. It has also featured in magazines such as *Belle*, *Design World*, *Vogue Living*, *Asian Art News*, *Malaysian Airlines’ Wings of Gold*, and *Japanese Better Homes and Gardens* (Australian Tapestries 48) and on the popular home show *Our House*. Textile and Craft publications have featured the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in many articles discussing the work and critically examining the relationship between textiles, craft and art in a contemporary context. These publications include *Craft Victoria*, *Craft Australia*, *International Tapestry Journal*, *Craft Arts*, *Object* and *Craft Australia*. The workshop has also been the subject of a fourth year thesis written by Susan Lauder, University of Melbourne *The Victorian Tapestry Workshop*.

It is not the intention of this thesis to fully cover the tapestry workshop, but to look at it in relation to the history of connections with Edinburgh and the traditions
dating back to William Morris through Archie Brennan, Belinda Ramson and other weavers who have gone between the two countries.

The Victorian Tapestry Workshop acknowledges its links to European tapestry and positions itself within a long, rich history of tapestry (Manion Interpretations n.pag.). Margaret Manion wrote about “medieval splendour”, “great visionary text of the Apocalypse” and “celebrated Gobelins” in Australian Tapestries. This adds to the credibility and prestige of the workshop and can appeal to prospective clients through the authority of past tapestries connected with courts, nobility, wealth and power.

William Morris and Jean Lurçat are also acknowledged as the founding fathers of the tapestry movement this century (Australian Tapestries 5).

Archie Brennan is often mentioned briefly in the literature, noted as making recommendations (Tapestry and the Australian Painter n.pag.) and cited in the article “The Tapestry Workshop Getting off the Ground”:

*Mr Archie Brennan has acted as a consultant for the scheme and his opinion is greatly valued by all those associated with the scheme because of his experience at the similar Dovecote Tapestry Workshop in Edinburgh.* (Craft Australia August 1975 31).

Margaret Manion said:

*The key figure in late twentieth century tapestry was Archie Brennan who at the time of the foundation of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop was director of the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh....... It was Brennan’s philosophy of the art of tapestry and the sensibility which characterised its practical application that fired the imaginings of the Victorian Workshop and helped to shape the direction of the Australian undertaking.* (Interpretations n. pag.).

However the context described by the workshop publications is always short as part of brief catalogue introductions and does not elaborate on the implications of the associations it makes.
The workshop weavers - art training, skill and craftsmanship

Sue Walker has always been emphatic that the weavers are artists and that this factor differentiates the Victorian Tapestry Workshop from other European workshops.

In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition in 1997 at the Australian Galleries, Sydney, Walker said “But all expressed enthusiasm for the experience of working with weavers who are themselves trained artists. It is this characteristic of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, which is different from traditional European workshops “ (n.pag.). Walker talks about selecting weavers from art backgrounds and in conversations when I worked at the workshop she would cite the relationship between the tapestry department at Edinburgh College of Art and the Dovecot as the desired model for educating weavers to work in a workshop. In the article “Australian Tapestry - The British Model” she wrote:

For a start, the new opportunities for art school students in Australia to study tapestry as a legitimate fine art study will build on the existing and well established programs at TAFE level, and hopefully these opportunities will offer something of the spirit of the tapestry department in the Edinburgh College of Art. Our visit to the college in Edinburgh and our meeting with Maureen Hodge once again confirmed the vitality of the experience that Edinburgh offers. The graduates from Edinburgh contribute some of the most committed and far reaching work in contemporary tapestry. (49)

In an interview with Diana Wood Conroy Sue Walker said “its very easy to go over and under - its the sensibility of what you do with it. You need to draw...” (An Archaeology 327).

Margaret Manion noted the push to establish a link with a tertiary art institution where the students would learn through art practice and drawing and Sue Walker’s desire to develop an academic context for tapestry in Australia:

The exhibition also coincides with educational initiatives of the workshop on two other fronts. Recently it has supported and encouraged the introduction of tapestry into the practical art programme of the School of Art and Design, Monash University, and it has also sought to foster the study of tapestry within a scholarly discipline of art history, so that this branch of art may be located and understood within the wider framework which every discipline and specialisation needs to make an effective and lasting contribution to culture.

(Interpretations n.pag.)
Tertiary tapestry education at Monash University

A tapestry course was set up at Monash University in 1990 with Ann Newdigate Mills as the inaugural lecturer. She had the right credentials for the job in Sue Walker's eyes having completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at Saskatchewan (1975) and studied tapestry for one year at Edinburgh College of Art. However, her personal interests and research were quite opposed to the focus of the workshop. She was interested in the work of feminist writers and artists, exploring the history of hierarchy in the arts, attitudes towards women artists and the positioning of textiles (Bell 17). The Victorian Tapestry Workshop employs mainly male artists and female weavers and the work produced is generally credited to the artist in the public domain. The Victorian Tapestry Workshop associates itself with Fine Art in a hierarchical way. In writing about the course Newdigate noted that Chisholm was breaking down the hierarchies in the arts but stressed tapestry as part of the Fine Art context:

*Chisholm's Department of Fine Art has taken the important step of breaking down the hierarchy in the arts. By not separating the teaching of tapestry, and by requiring tapestry students to demonstrate the same level of artistic competence that is a pre-requisite for all media, tapestry is not marginalised or given a lower status.* (Textile Fibre Forum 49)

She also emphasised drawing as an important part of the course, "*Drawing is an integral part of the overall programme at Chisholm. All students, at all levels participate in drawing courses which are taught by lecturers from all areas of the Department - including tapestry*" (Textile Fibre Forum 49).

Prior to going to Edinburgh, Newdigate had worked directly in tapestry without a drawing or cartoon. After spending time drawing and weaving in Scotland, she said about the relationship of drawing and tapestry in 1990:

*There is a danger in doing a drawing with a tapestry in mind. There is also a danger in not having the freedom, while doing the tapestry, to move away from the drawing. It is as unproductive to compare the drawing with the tapestry as it is, for instance, in a portrait to compare the exact length of a nose or the colour of the hair. One has to search for the spirit or essence.* (Gustafson 39)
This attitude is reflected in the process of interpretation at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

Graduates, trained as artists, from the Monash course have worked in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, but as I have discussed with Kate Derum, lecturer in charge of tapestry since 1993, graduates from art schools do not always have the mastery of technique demanded by the workshop for large scale commissioned weaving.

In their art courses students are concerned with developing their own ideas, experimenting with technique, combining tapestry with other mediums and working in tapestry alongside film, computer art, or other disciplines. There is not the insistence on technique that there was in apprenticeship training and with diminished hours in university courses and many subjects, students do not generally have the number of hours at the loom required to become completely familiar with the medium. Some graduates need further technical training to be able to work as part of a team interpreting someone else’s design in the workshop situation.

Kevin Murray, Melbourne writer and curator argues that the weavers are not artists “But are weavers who interpret another’s design still artists? Bricklayers may as well be considered architects..... To consider oneself an “artist” shouldn’t be the only form of recognition available for people who work in colour and image” (The Age 12).

This comment indicates a lack of comprehension of the tapestry craft. Working in colour and image is a simplistic view of tapestry weaving. Even from a detailed cartoon, weavers individually have to make decisions about every pass they put in - looking, thinking, weaving. John Coburn describes this process “A mix of eye and mind and hand that will lead to a work of art which is unique: which must be considered in its own right” (Interpretations n.pag.).

The work produced by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop is recognised technically for its immaculate, flat weaving, skilful blending of colour, straight edges and even surface. A particular way of working in tapestry has been mastered to meet the required standards demanded by architects, designers and clients in commissioned tapestry. The works completed for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra Rising Suns over Australia Felix (1997), by Ginger Riley and Wamunga - My Mother’s Country (1998) by John Olsen testify to the skill and craftsmanship of the workshop weavers.
The technical achievement and artistic sensibility required to make a creative translation from artwork to tapestry is seldom mentioned in Victorian Tapestry Workshop publications - the emphasis is on the finished artwork and the artist's image.

**Design/Content in workshop tapestries**

William Morris insisted on purpose and meaning in the work and Archie Brennan also lectured on not just weaving for the sake of weaving but having ideas develop in the work. In Australia in the 1990s a debate has raged around the issue of content/meaning in workshop tapestry and whether this matches the content and meaning in original artworks by artists. I will briefly cover some of the points in relation to this area of contention.

Sue Walker maintains the ideal of Morris and Brennan:

*The main objective of the exhibition is to place tapestry in a contemporary art context and alert artists in other media to the potential of tapestry as a vehicle for communication and developing their ideas.* (ITN Vol 2 No 2 1991 10)

The ideas and images for the tapestries, with some exceptions, are initiated by visual artists, usually painters. Jan Senbergs said "They need our (the artists') input for the idea and part of the form" (Tapestry... Invites 27). The weavers work with the artists to develop the form or content and this can be seen in *Untitled* (1990) 2 x 2.3m designed by Garry Carsley where samples and test strips were made to work on ideas of movement, speed and zest (Interpretations n. pag.).

The tapestries produced at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop are rich in content and have conveyed ideas about: the Australian environment, *Ring of Grass Trees* (1978) 2.70 x 1.47m designed by Robert Juniper and *Paradise* (1977) 1.42 x 2.67m designed by Henri Bastin; history, *Early Days in the Goldfields* (1982) 5.00 x 2.4m designed by Albert Tucker; industry, *Riding on the Sheep's Back* (1984) 1.73 x 2.28m designed by Leonie Bessant.

Kevin Murray stated that the artist, Christopher Pyett who worked at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop as Assistant Director "is sensitive to the relationship between message and medium. The medium of tapestry is particularly good in creating a monumental effect, but not in dealing with intimate subjects which are more suitable to painted media, such as watercolour" (Craft Vic. July / Aug 1991 6).
The tapestries from the workshop have been criticised as lacking in content through a watering down of the ideas in the interpretation from painting to tapestry. Kevin Murray described a loss of meaning in the translation:

...breaking down the mystery of the brushstroke to a series of itemised actions. This is a kind of reductionism. As such its simplicity also involves a loss of meaning....Though it claims to be an art form it is largely dependent on painting for inspiration. (Craft Vic. July/Aug 1991 6-7)

Meaning does not just abide in paint and can successfully dwell in tapestry. Robert Nelson defended tapestry and its content saying “the alleged loss of meaning in the process of painting becoming tapestries does not occur in much tapestry-making” and he goes on to list characteristics of tapestry and tapestry making suggesting that meaning can be developed in the work through the particular qualities of tapestry (Craft Victoria Aug/Sept 1991 3).

This is a debate which has been fuelled this century as individuals and more women weavers have challenged the workshop traditions exploring alternatives in scale and content. Archie Brennan, admitting to a gender biased perspective, brought up the question of appropriateness of medium in his article “Jottings on Gender”:

..there seem to be a lot of tapestries that are introspective/self examining in nature. I am not convinced that tapestry is a good medium for such personal exposure. Somehow a magazine illustration, a poster or a diary seem more appropriate. (IT June 99 11.)

The work of British tapestry weaver Lynne Curran proves this statement wrong in that her work is all about her intimate world and woven on a small scale. Her work has been purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Burrell Collection, Glasgow. Content does not equate with size. Pyett’s view may come from a contemporary painting perspective where large canvases of the 1970s and 1980s were valued above miniature works or from a lack of knowledge of tapestry beyond European workshop tapestry and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.
Collaboration

Anna Burch credited Archie Brennan with his initial input to the style of collaboration in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, saying:

*His attitude to the collaborative/interpretive role of studio weavers have certainly shaped the VTW’s direction. Under his artistic direction (1963-1978), in Edinburgh, Scotland, the Dovecot Studio’s weavers worked in increasing collaboration with some artists, notably Eduardo Paolozzi, and developed considerable freedom of interpretation.... Having determined an approach to the interpretation of artworks emphasising the weaver’s contribution, their status as artist/craftsperson rather than ‘artisan’ was established.* (12)

Sue Walker confirms this collaborative approach "*The exhibition will show work from a wide range of contemporary Australian artists who have all worked collaboratively with the Workshop to produce tapestries*" (ITN Vol 2 No 2 1991 10).

Simeon Kroenenberg said "*Ross Moore’s recently completed tapestry is the result of a genuine dialogue between himself and the two weavers involved, Tim Gresham and Joy Smith*" (Interpretations n.pag.).

Many of the artists comment on the collaborative process as a change from working on their own in their studios. They welcome the exchange of ideas. Alun Leach-Jones said "*Working collectively is important to me*" (Tapestry...Invites 23).

Architects, designers and private clients note the collaboration involved. A private client said "*Warmest congratulations to all the team who were involved in the design, planning and production of this beautiful tapestry*" (Interpretations n.pag.).

Interpretation

As discussed in chapter one, William Morris moved tapestry workshop practice away from the European model which was concerned with exactly replicating paint marks and colours in tapestry. Whether the Victorian Tapestry Workshop copies paint in wool or arrives at a highly individual artwork in tapestry has been the subject of considerable debate within the arts community and in articles published in Craft
The Victorian Tapestry Workshop insists on interpretation or translation from paint into tapestry, not mere copying. Sue Walker said “Tapestry has something unique to offer. Not as an adaption of something, but as an art form in its own right” (Tapestry.Invites 5) and “The 1988 survey exhibition of Australian Tapestries at the National Gallery demonstrated the great value that would come from an exhibition that specifically focused on the way visual ideas are transformed through interpretation” (ITN Vol 2 No 2 1991 10).

Sue Walker often compares the process of interpretation from painting to tapestry to that of music and translation by musicians. She said:

*One of the things we do is to draw comparison with the performing arts - a concerto can be done in so many different ways. People who listen to music understand and I suppose people who really look understand what is happening in interpretive tapestry.* (Conroy Archaeologies of Tapestry 329)

Many statements by artists who have worked with the workshop support this view of interpretation. William Robinbson, in a workshop promotional publication *Interpretations*, said:

*You (the weavers) will have to feel it is a tree rather than follow the cartoon which in itself tends to simplify, because it’s a tracing. It could too easily become just decorative if you follow it. I don’t think it’s important to follow every little (brush) stroke as much as the spirit of the trees.* (n.pag.)

Artist, Mary MacQueen commented “*My watercolour was interpreted in a very interesting manner by Chris and Tim*” (Interpretations n.pag.) and Jan Senbergs, painter, said “*The weaver’s function is not that of the printer of prints... the weavers are not simply trying to reproduce a particular work as faithfully as possible. Their task is to re-create it*” (Tapestry...Invites 27).

Andrea May pointed out the weaver’s perspective “*You have to know how far you can go with an artist. It’s about getting the artist to trust your judgement, because you are not just copying but developing in a different way*” (Lancashire 12).
However, many critics do not hold the same view of the translation from painting into tapestry. Kevin Murray wrote “Unlike painters, though, there is little sign that the weavers are encouraged to create original works themselves. Rather, weavers appear to be concerned with matching colors and textures of preconceived works” (The Age 12).

From my experience of working at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, I support the argument that the works are an interpretation from the original artwork. There is not a standard formula for translation as there was in nineteenth century Gobelin tapestry. Many varied and experimental approaches have been used, from the textural weaving of John Olsen’s *Rising Sun* (1987) 1.82 x 3.06m to the graphic translation of Les Kossatz’s *Untitled* (1984) 2.40 x 3.00m.

Artists do not always supply a fully painted cartoon to be copied, but sometimes present collages, photographs or sketch ideas. One of the most striking and dramatic changes between artwork and finished tapestry I have seen at the workshop is *Melbourne* (1990) 5 x 5.6m designed by Murray Walker and interpreted by Andrea May. The original artwork was a suggestion of an image, a composition and colour. The majority of the decisions for the finished tapestry had to be made by May and the team of weavers. There was not enough information in the art work to weave a fully resolved tapestry.

In *Craft Victoria* Anna Griffiths pointed out that the question ‘is it art or is it craft’ tied up with the question of whether it is interpretation/original or copying/not original is linked to the perceptions of contemporary art as immediate, as in modern painting and some other media (Aug/Sept. 1991 10).

Also at this time, art following modernist traditions could only be made by a solo artist with their own original ideas. In 1989 I visited Kintore Aboriginal Community and watched groups of artists working on canvases. When Papunya Tula Arts picked up the works for distribution on the world market they were signed by one important (usually male) artist and there was no credit given to the family and friends who had also worked on the painting. In a similar way the tapestries at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop are produced by a group of people but only the artist who originated the idea has their signature woven into the tapestry. This differs from the practice described in chapter one of putting weavers’ initials into the tapestry.

Archie Brennan on a visit to Australia in 1992 was critical of the predominant way of working in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop with a number of plies of fine yarn
on the bobbin, mixing the weft colour with few areas of solid, flat colour in the work. He described this way of interpreting colour as "porridge" and pushed the weavers to consider other approaches, including half pass or hatchure to blend colours. Both these methods have been used in several tapestries produced in the workshop since his visit in 1992.

The weavers do have freedom in the translation process, as William Morris desired. The great period of experimentation in the 1960s and 1970s provided many more ways of interpreting, as the weavers at the Dovecot in Edinburgh discovered in their collaborations with contemporary artists. The Victorian Tapestry workshop has carried on this model of interpretation building on the range of techniques available to Morris and Company weavers and using knotting, wrapping and various warp settings in the one tapestry. Such techniques were experimented with at the Dovecot in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Victorian Tapestry Workshop’s role in the development of tapestry in Australia

The Victorian Tapestry Workshop has carried out major commissions during the boom period of corporate art and private venture of the late 1970s and 1980s and continues to attract major commissions within Australia and internationally in the 1990s.

Tapestry was viewed as complementary to the hard surfaces of new buildings and it was used to provide a visual focus in receptions, board rooms, on yachts or planes, in theatres and in private dwellings. Through its cost and visible signs of labour in the weaving, it displayed wealth, prestige and power, as in many historic tapestries. By the involvement of well known contemporary artists the work gained value on the art market and as an investment item. In practical terms tapestry is durable, sound absorbing and easy to look after.

One of the major challenges for the Victorian Tapestry Workshop was the Arthur Boyd Reception Hall Tapestry (1985-1988) for the new Parliament House, Canberra. It measures 9.18 x 19.9 m and took a group of thirteen weavers two and a half years to complete. This captured the public imagination and in Britain I heard through the media about the production of the world’s largest tapestry “the size of four gable ends”.
This outpouring of monumental tapestries combined with the public relations and marketing arm of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop provided a focus for interpretive tapestry, increasing public awareness and understanding of the medium, in Australia and Victoria in particular. Individual weavers could both benefit from the high profile of tapestry developed by the workshop and suffer from misunderstandings of the difference between workshop weaving and tapestry by the individual artist-weaver.

Grace Cochrane said "the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, through its professional commissions and dealings, provided a focal point of high standard, giving legitimacy to others" (The Crafts Movement 363).

Dr Diana Wood Conroy pointed out the possibilities that opened up for individual weavers moving on from the workshop to develop careers of their own or set up small businesses "the Victorian Tapestry Workshop has given this extraordinary impetus to the interpretative side of tapestry weaving, and from this workshop independent weavers have gone off to establish other workshops and develop their own art" (An archaeology of tapestry 326).

Nine independent artist-weavers who trained at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop formed a group called The Tapestry Weavers to work collaboratively on commissions and marketing their work. They held a product launch at the Craft Victoria Gallery in April 1994 (Zimmer The Age n.pag.) and have continued to work as a support group.

Margaret Grafton, individual artist weaver noted the domination of the media by the workshop and pointed out:

*We should remember that just prior to the setting up of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1975 there had been the most fruitful upsurge of all types of 'art' weaving, tapestry, sculptural weaving, and so on, in Australia. The interest and the skills were there in abundance.....Tapestry in the public eye in 1988 in Australia is by the marketing policy of the V.T.W. , firmly channelled into a baroque European stereotype that brings only the one aspect of tapestry weaving to the forefront, that of servicing the painter.* (48)

**The International Tapestry Symposium**

The International Tapestry Symposium, Melbourne, Australia (1988) was a major event in Australia’s Bicentennial year organised by the Victorian Tapestry
Workshop and a Tapestry Symposium Committee. It was a landmark event with exhibitions, full programme of lectures, panel presentations, group discussions and master classes. It was the first of its kind in Australia and a signal to the world that tapestry was well established in this country.

By linking with the Bicentennial celebrations it also secured wider political and public recognition of tapestry as an instituted part of the nation’s heritage and culture. Sue Walker said:

Our challenge was to introduce tapestry to a community in which tapestry was almost unknown. First of all we had to explore the medium ourselves, then we needed to gain the confidence of artists and the business world, and lastly we needed to maintain the confidence and support of government.

To date we have survived and succeeded. (Int. Tap. Symp. 4)

A major concern was the internationalisation of Australian tapestry - placing Australian tapestry on the global map. Exhibition titles such as World Weavers Wall and World Tapestry Today reflect this concern. It was about placing Australian tapestry in a wider context by the inclusion of peer workshops: Scheuer Studios New York, United States of America; Ivory Tapestries, Edinburgh, Scotland and West Dean Tapestry Studio, England and by inviting a wide range of tapestry artists from other countries and cultures including Marcel Marois, Canada, Fenny Nijman, Holland, Alexandra Manczak, Poland, Renate and Memo Maak, Austria, to name a few. There was also an attempt to place Australian tapestry in a historical contiguity with lectures on Coptic tapestry, the history of tapestry in America, Germany, France, China and Mexico, plus direct lines of connection were made back to European Medieval tapestry:

The twentieth century is witnessing the rebirth of tapestry as a legitimate art form. It is once again achieving the vitality and spontaneity that were its hallmarks at the height of its glory during the medieval period.

(Int. Tap. Symp. 48)

In the artists profiles Archie Brennan is linked to the medieval period of tapestry “Through his own weaving, his teaching and lecturing, and his leadership of the Dovecot Studios he has encouraged an approach to tapestry that returns to the vitality
and spontaneity of medieval times” and he is also given recognition for his contribution to contemporary tapestry “Archie Brennan has been one of the greatest influences on twentieth century tapestry” (Int. Tap. Symp 35).

Following this milestone in Australian tapestry events, there was an important artists’ initiative Distant Lives: Shared Voices (1992), Lodz, Poland, which built on contacts between individual artists established at the symposium in Melbourne.

Discussion focussed attention on the narrative qualities of contemporary Australian tapestry and posed the question, “Why?”. The line of connections can be traced through Archie Brennan to the earlier Scottish narrative tapestries, William Morris and his fascination with the medieval tapestries. Diana Wood Conroy in the Texts from the Edge catalogue essay refers to the importance of historical context:

“Yet the ‘symbolic’ aura of tapestry, with its weight of power and history is acknowledged as fundamental by these contemporary tapestry weavers. This is why it is essential that these weavers retain the framework of traditional techniques. This tapestry ‘language’ is used in conjunction with provocative and confronting images - the unpredictable images work because of the contrast with the disciplined and historic language.” (4)

In Canada Making a Place for Tapestry (1993) addressed the themes of “Critical Thinking”, “Process and Product” and “Making a Place” (Heller, Mallinson, Scheuing ed.).

An artists’ camp took place at Lake Mungo (1997) with thirty two artists meeting at the inland location to work, discuss ideas and share information (A Response to Lake Mungo).

These key events are vital to the ongoing exchange between tapestry weavers, the questioning of the position of tapestry in a wider context and building of confidence to move forward.

**Continued exchange between Scotland and Australia**

There has been a constant flow of weavers from Scotland to Australia to work in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop or wider community. I was the first Edinburgh trained weaver to work in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1979 and was followed by Joan
Baxter, Carole Dunbar, Elizabeth Lipscombe, Dot Calander, Sara Brennan and Lindsay Dunbar. Tass Mavrogordato also came from London to work in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. Scottish tapestry weaver, Liz Duvill visited Australia in 1988 tracing one of the original Dovecot apprentices John (Jock) Loutitt who immigrated to Australia in the 1950s (Textile Fibre Forum No 25 1989 53).

Weavers from Australia went to Edinburgh to further develop their skills and ideas: Belinda Ramson, Kay Lawrence, Winnie Pelz, Garry Benson, Cresside (Jolles) Collette, Nicole Johnson, Sue Carstairs and Rosemary Whitehead. Their understanding of the techniques and approach to tapestry was reinforced through contact with the Edinburgh College of Art Tapestry Department, The Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. and other Scottish weavers.

**Australian identity - the new voice in tapestry**

Both Archie Brennan and Belinda Ramson stressed the importance of fresh ideas and content in tapestry, whether it was through translating from the works of artists at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop or in individual work. Brennan wished for a new Australian identity in tapestry saying:

> I would hate to see the Australian workshop attempt to follow what has been done in Edinburgh. It must be uniquely Australian. It would be the worst thing to do to emulate the European workshops. What I feel is needed is a good climate to be established in which the Australian weavers can create the possibilities, make their own mistakes, create their own identity. (Craft Aus. Vol 5 No 2 1975 31)

He wanted the Victorian Tapestry Workshop apprentices to come from a diversity of backgrounds to broaden the experimentation with the tapestry medium. Brennan said “I would like to see people from different fields but with a common enthusiasm to try out this thing” (Craft Aus. Vol 5 No 2 1975 31).

Indeed the original weavers in The Victorian Tapestry Workshop did have diverse backgrounds and Sara Lindsay demonstrates how her sensibilities developed through fashion design, cloth weaving and travel. Early in her tapestry career Sara Lindsay experimented with making clothing in the form of woven waistcoats combining her interests and newly acquired skills in weaving.

Students emerging from Australian art school education in the 1990s use the tapestry medium in highly original ways. They explore new tapestry materials (wire,
monofilament, paper and plastic), alternative forms (installation, chemical treatments new media, interdisciplinary formats) and contemporary themes (migration, identity, gender issues, relationship to land) (Unfolding, n.pag.).

The contemporary works by emerging artists do not copy anything European but live up to Brennan's expectation that the Australian weavers would be a new breed who would push the possibilities, integrating concept and working method.

The Conclusions

The thesis concludes that the connections between Scotland and Australia through Archie Brennan, Belinda Ramson and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop were crucial to the development of a particular strand of contemporary workshop and individual tapestry in Australia.

This form of Australian tapestry is clearly linked back through the tradition of The Edinburgh Tapestry Company Limited to William Morris and the Merton Abbey tapestry workshop.

William Morris through his own innovations in tapestry, moved away from the European workshop traditions and pursued a simplified approach to technique, materials and image. He valued the collaboration of artists and weavers working together to create works which combined ideas and content, artistic skill in developing the image and technical/creative expertise in the production of the tapestry. Through his interest in literature, Pre-Raphaelite painting and Medieval tapestry, the works produced at Merton Abbey had strong narrative themes which reinvigorated public interest in the medium.

Through the patronage of the 4th Marquess of Bute these ideals were directly transferred to the Edinburgh Tapestry Company Limited via the two weavers, John Glassbrook and Gordon Berry and indirectly through William George Thompson who respected Morris and shared his interest in education and the history of tapestry.

The first tapestries woven in Edinburgh between 1912 and 1940 continued the technical style of weaving developed at Merton Abbey in murals with Scottish narrative themes. The workshop team tried to maintain the collaborative approach, but this was not entirely successful and further financial problems arose when the patronage of the 4th Marquess of Bute came to an end leaving the tapestry, Prince of the Gael, unfinished on the loom. However, the work during this period had established tapestry in Scotland with a disciplined approach to the technique of weaving, concern for the intrinsic qualities of tapestry and an emphasis on translation rather than copying designs.

From 1940-1960 the Dovecot struggled with the lack of financial support and the change in direction from working totally to commission to producing works speculatively for an uncertain art market. The weavers looked to France with envy at the
work of Jean Lurçat, heavily subsidised by the French government, but through their own very different circumstances had to take another tack. The Dovecot policy was to produce smaller tapestries in collaboration with well-known artists to sell. Sax Shaw embraced this new environment in the first collaborations with artists and produced many of his own designs for commercial outlets. He brought notions of education and training closer together through establishing links between the Dovecot and Edinburgh College of Art. The art school training provided a route for women to enter a career in tapestry.

Archie Brennan began his career in this environment, learning the techniques and approach handed down from Morris through his association with the master weavers and by practising tapestry on Prince of the Gael. His education at Edinburgh College of Art, interest in contemporary art and travel in Europe broadened his ideas on tapestry and prepared him for the appointment as Director in 1962.

In this position, Brennan built on the strengths of the workshop, working tactfully with artists and winning their trust to produce innovative tapestries, which were successful through embodying the spirit of the original, not by copying the design mark for mark. He encouraged true collaboration and understanding between the artists and weavers, with freedom to experiment in the weaving. The risks he took paid off and the Dovecot became financially viable with a reputation for innovative work. The Edinburgh Tapestry Company works were accepted as contemporary art and were sought after by collectors. Archie Brennan’s own work also achieved considerable acclaim, aligned to Pop art, drawing on accessible images of everyday objects and woven with consideration of materials and technique. Brennan’s ideas were readily accepted in Australia where the Crafts Movement had grown rapidly in the 1960s and there was a basis of interest in European tapestry and experimental textile forms.

Archie Brennan worked as an artist-in-residence, teacher and consultant at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and as such was a catalyst for new developments in Australian tapestry. He was influential through his work, recommendations for the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and the role model of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company. His visits focused media and public interest on tapestry creating a high profile for the medium in Australia. His ideas on looking at common objects and circumstances have translated into personal issues in the works of Australian individual weavers. Ideas from the vernacular mural narratives of early this century have evolved into vignettes of family, place, relationship and identity.

However, vital to the acceptance and acquisition of his ideas was the work of Belinda Ramson. As the first weaver from Australia to to learn tapestry through Archie Brennan, The Edinburgh College of Art and the Dovecot Studio, Edinburgh she brought vital skills and knowledge to this country. It is through Belinda Ramson’s willingness
and ability to pass on the technical skills and a particular approach derived via Edinburgh from William Morris, that tapestry weaving gained proficiency at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

The first apprentices in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop were extremely important, as without their wholehearted endeavour the venture could have been a complete flop. They were carefully selected from many applicants according to the criteria set by Brennan and Ramson and this proved to be important in the establishment of Australian individuality in tapestry. As trainees they had experience in the visual arts, were excited about tapestry and had the freedom to experiment in samplers from a strong technical foundation. They worked incredibly hard in the workshop and on their own tapestries in the evenings, gaining the confidence needed to tackle major works. A sense of rigour, required in the production of commissioned works for an international market, developed. Although this technical mastery of the medium is seldom mentioned in the Victorian Tapestry Workshop literature there is an emphasis on craftsmanship in the work.

Belinda Ramson and the first apprentices have contributed considerably to the creation of a solid, enduring context for Australian tapestry through their dedication and willingness to explore unchartered territory. The initial weavers became teachers, mentors, writers of tapestry manuals, leaders of community projects, models by example of their own work and administrators of projects that have set precedents for following generations.

Distinctions were made in the workshop between the French style of reproducing the works of artists and the Dovecot/Victorian Tapestry Workshop way of interpreting - with the emphasis on the weavers as trained artists who could use their artistic sensibilities in the weaving. The weavers are not expected to follow a prescribed method, but tackle each project individually, in a rigorous, self-disciplined way. However there are parameters and restraints, given that the work is usually commissioned.

Director, Sue Walker stressed that the workshop weavers are trained artists and that it was important for them to draw. This was the case at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company when Archie Brennan was artistic director, as the weavers were all encouraged to exhibit their own work. William Morris would have supported this idea of educated weavers involved in the entire creative process, with his concerns about educating the workforce and the importance he placed on drawing. However, workshop weavers are seldom employed as the designers of commissioned works at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, but many have gone on to establish careers as individual artists/weavers designing for commissioned work or exhibiting drawing, painting, tapestry, computer images, installation and mixed media.
The importance of education and training was carried over from Scotland and the Edinburgh College of Art was the role model Sue Walker used in working towards the tapestry course at Monash University. Employing weavers with art and tapestry education is seen as vital to the reputation of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. In the late 1990s there are many informal tapestry courses available and also courses at tertiary level in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. This insistence on education and training in both a formal and informal way is a strand that goes back to William Morris. Through the provision of a high standard of education and training, graduates are now recognised world wide as leading practitioners contributing excellent work to this field. The works of individual tapestry weavers and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop have represented Australia in major international exhibitions and weavers have participated in conferences, workshops and symposiums.

During the period 1980-1999, interest within Australia in tapestry grew steadily. Connections between Australia and Scotland continued and strengthened with many individuals travelling from Australia to Edinburgh College of Art and The Edinburgh Tapestry Co. Ltd. and from Scotland to the Victorian Tapestry Company and the wider tapestry community. This ongoing communication has provided support, stimulation and a strengthening of commitment.

The political climate now has changed from the past economic buoyancy and generous support to the Arts of the 1970s to cutbacks in education and decreased Arts funding in the late 90s. This research and documentation points to the value of fostering well planned international exchange and cultural programs with key practitioners. The series of events allowed Australia to build on previous traditions, skills and knowledge in an innovative way to form a new identity. Australia now reaps the benefits of its well-established tapestry professionals attracting commissions internationally, winning competitions and setting precedents for technical excellence and innovation.
Exhibition

ROCK AND A PLACE BETWEEN-1999

WOVEN TAPESTRIES AND DRAWINGS REFLECTING ON MOVING BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES - SCOTLAND AND AUSTRALIA.

This exhibition of drawings and tapestries is a culmination of four years research and studio work. It explores the theme of my personal migration - reflecting on moving between two countries, Scotland and Australia.

Now I have lived for almost equal parts of my life in these countries and I see them as solid grounded points which in my psyche I move between in a free and illogical way.

The images are derived from a particular form of sandstone gatepost used in Southwest Scotland - solid, firmly implanted in the ground, permanent ....and the salmon, known for its journey upstream, a symbol of my physical movement and psychological travel through time and between places.

Dwelling - lingering over in thought / making one's home in a particular place

The beginning of a tapestry is exciting but daunting - the decisions made in the first few centimetres are crucial to the success of the work as tapestry weaving is a regular orderly procedure working from the floor of the tapestry to the final row of knots.

Many weavers refer to "building" the tapestry and Archie Brennan says:

simply put, tapestry weaving is a sequential process - a creative journey up the warp. Structurally, progressively and creatively it is based on making consecutive decisions. Accepting this reality can open doors to a different way of thinking, a different way of designing and a different way of seeing that can seem odd at first, but in fact has unconditional acceptance in other creative activities. That it grows from one edge, usually in an erratic manner, completing each shape, incident, passage, or mark, then moves up and on, accepting these
earlier decisions and building on them, has much in common with a musical performance. In music, rhythm, pitch and tempo are established when the first phrase is played; they are accepted unconditionally then built upon. (Itnet Fall '94,9)

In tapestry, the order of questions, decisions and steps in the process cannot be changed. The process is like travelling from one place to another and I have thought about this in relation to my life's journey through time and as a migrant moving between Scotland and Australia. Paul Carter describes migration as a mode of being in the world, not an awkward interval between fixed points but a state of movement:

The question would be not how to arrive but how to move, how to identify convergent and divergent movements; and the challenge would be how to notate such events, how to give them a historical and social value. (101)

Now I have lived for almost equal periods of my life in Scotland and Australia and in my psyche they intertwine as points of reference. Submersion in tapestry is a way of distilling the journey, working through the past to integrate it into the present.

Tapestry has many rituals - bobbin winding, plying yarns, winding threads - all provide valuable thinking time in the way that for artist Alan Davie making his own paint, the mixing and stirring time, prepares the mind for painting. The routine tasks can give time to reflect, dwell on current concerns or project into the future.

Time is a major consideration as tapestry demands an investment of time and concentration, spending the time familiarising with the medium and dedicating time to the production of work. It is about taking the time in a world that is moving fast, "quicktime", practically more to do each day and less time to do it in. Computers challenge our sense of time - prophesied as our salvation, the key to unlimited leisure time - but the reality is that we continue to have less spare time. Speed is the essence of late twentieth century life and the reason many weavers, including myself, work on a smaller scale rather than the classic mural tapestry. Ideas can turn over quickly, experience can be gained from successes and failures and progress can be made in the work.
In thinking about the orderly habits of tapestry, I was fascinated by Ghassan Hage's discussion on how migrants develop a feeling of being at home in Australia, as I found his answers, for me, are in tapestry:

**Familiarity** - the order and habit of tapestry, a routine way of working where I know the environment, knowledge has been absorbed and I no longer have to work out every basic function.

**Community** - using tapestry to feel a sense of belonging to a community through shared understanding and experience.

**Opportunity** - always knowing that there is opportunity to extend, to go further and develop critically within and through the medium.

**Security** through commitment, viability and familiarity and the confidence to make mistakes and move on.

Tapestry psychologically is my haven, not simply a warm fuzzy place of comfort, often a place of frustration, gruelling discipline and physical discomfort - but it is compulsive, totally absorbing and essential to a complex resolution of ideas only achievable in tapestry through process, time and total involvement.

The works in this exhibition draw on traditional textiles from Scotland and Australia: Sanquhar weaving and later knitting patterns; Ayrshire Needlework, a form of embroidered whitework; hexagon and crazy patchwork. The textiles are depicted with sketches of the natural environment to talk about place and movement between places. I draw parallels between the history of textiles as trade, exchange and migration objects and my own migration.

The tapestries refer to travel through the salmon, known for its journey upstream, a symbol of physical movement and psychological travel through time and between places.

Dwelling is the condition of the journey.

Valerie Kirk, May 1999
LIST OF WORKS
SPARK GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

1. Title: *Crosses and Plaid*
   7 small unframed drawings
   Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
   Date: 1999
   Size: 50 x 25cm
   Price: $190

2. Title: *Sanquhar Pattern Knitting and Crosses*
   7 unframed drawings
   Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
   Date: 1999
   Size: 70 x 25cm
   Price: $290

3. Title: *Sandstone Gateposts*
   4 unframed drawings
   Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
   Date: 1999
   Size: 120 x 40cm
   Price: $265

4. Title: *Ayrshire Needlework*
   framed drawing
   Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
   Date: 1999
   Size: 108 x 30cm
   Price: $350
5. Title: *Salmon*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 30 x 20cm
Price: $180

6. Title: *Bonnet*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 27 x 30cm
Price: $180

7. Title: *Letters*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 25 x 32cm
Price: $180

8. Title: *White Needlework*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 25 x 15cm
Price: $120

9. Title: *Flowerers*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 25 x 25cm Price: $150
10. Title: *Spriggin*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size 25 x 28cm
Price: $190

11. Title: *Pricking*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 25 x 30cm
Price: $190

12. Title: *Floo’erin*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 25 x 30cm
Price: $190

13. Title: *Saint Andrew’s Cross*
unframed drawings
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 107 x 180cm each
Price: $120 each unframed

14. Title: *A Place Between*
6 unframed drawings
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 107 x 180cm each  Price: $120 each unframed
15. Title: *Christening Robe*
framed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 108 x 30cm
Price: $350

16. Title: *Ayrshire*
unframed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 108 x 30cm
Price: $250

17. Title: *Sampler*
unframed drawing
Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel
Date: 1999
Size: 108 x 30cm
Price: $250

18. Title: *Dwelling*
2 tapestries and a drawing
Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp tapestry and acrylic with chalk drawing on MDF.
Date: 1998
Size: 4.2m x 40cm
Price: $2500

19. Title: *Croxxing*
tapestry
Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp
Date: 1999
Size: 97 x 180cm Price: $5600
20. Title: *Looking Forward - Looking Back*

6 tapestries in box frames
Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp
Date: 1997 - 1998
Size: 30 x 30cm each
Price: $250 each

21. Title: *Cross*
tapestry in box frame
Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp
Date: 1998
Size: 50 x 50cm
Price: $450

22. Title: *Ayrshire Bonnet*
tapestry in box frame
Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp
Date: 1998
Size: 50 x 50cm
Price: $450
Drawing for tapestry “Ayrshire Bonnet” 20 x 20cm 1998
Installation view of two tapestries and drawing “Dwelling”. Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp tapestry and acrylic with chalk drawing on MDF. Date: 1998. Size: 4.2m x 40cm.

Detail of tapestry from “Dwelling”.
Sketchbook drawing of gateposts and gate, to scale. 1997

**Relationship of drawing to tapestry**

Drawing is the exploration of ideas and image. I begin by drawing on paper or in a sketchbook, often working in an intuitive way with methods and materials. Tapestry is the distillation and refinement of selected drawing. They are linked conceptually but are opposites in their physical and mental processes.
Section of cartoon for tapestry “Croxxing”, to scale.
Tapestry “Crossing”. Materials: mixed weft and cotton warp. Date: 1999. Size: 97 x 180cm

Tapestry

Tapestry is exciting but daunting. The decisions made in the first few centimetres are crucial to the success of the work as tapestry weaving is a regular orderly medium worked from the base to the final row of knots. The image is of the salmon in a net of crossing lines symbolising movement between places.
Detail of tapestry “Croxxing” to scale.
Detail of tapestry “Croxxing” to scale.
Installation view of framed drawings.
Framed drawing “Salmon”. Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel. Date: 1999. Size: 30 x 20cm
Framed drawing "Bonnet". Materials: paper, indian ink, pastel. Date: 1999. Size: 27 x 30cm
Detail of paper pricking as the basis of the pricked drawings, to scale.

Exploring ideas on paper

Thinking about the Ayrshire lace suggested the way of making an image in drawing by piercing the paper and in doing this I thought of the many textile forms which use pricking to transfer designs onto fabric. Also historically in European tapestry workshops, cartoons or designs were pricked to make copies as designs were often woven several times in different countries.

**Drawing**

Drawing is a vigorous process. I work over paper, blackening with Indian ink, making marks, drawing over them, rubbing out, smudging, cutting up, re-working, pricking or piercing with holes, covering with soft chalk. My eye moves rapidly around the composition - making connections, judgements, triggering intuitive responses.

**Traditions and Rituals**

The works in this exhibition draw on a form of traditional textiles from Scotland, Ayrshire Needlework, known as ‘floo'erin' (flowering) or 'spriggin' (sprigging). This embroidered whitework is made by pushing a stiletto into fine cotton to make holes which are stitched around with cotton thread in designs from nature. The embroidery was worked into undergarments, bonnets and christening gowns for babies, robes, capes and handkerchiefs etc.
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Glossary

Arras
A style of weaving where the main objects or people are outlined in a dark colour to separate them from the background.

Banderole
The scroll, ribbon or flat area of the tapestry with a narration on it related to the image is called "Banderole", and this was a common device in the fifteenth to seventeenth century, particularly in German and Swiss tapestries.

Bead
One weft over one warp in the tapestry. "The bead of the tapestry" refers to the surface texture made up of the marks of weft over warp.

Bobbin
Tool used to carry the weft yarn and beat down the weaving.

Cartoon
The full size image made from the original design or artwork used by the weavers to ink the design onto the warps and refer to for information about the image. This can be a line drawing, it may have visual information about colour or technique and it can be a photographic enlargement of the artist’s design.

Cut back lines
A line made of small gaps in the tapestry where two wefts of the same colour meet and turn in opposite directions without linking. They are used extensively in medieval tapestries to suggest the detail of hair or features and in contemporary tapestry for visual effect or practically to aid the overall tension in a self-coloured area of weaving.

Gobelin
Often used to describe flat, untextured weaving or high warp weaving as carried out at the Gobelin Tapestry Manufacturers in Paris, France.

Hatching
As in hachure, used in drawing to create light and shade of shifts in colour using interlocking lines. Two or more colours dovetail together in stripes or elongated triangles to create a mid tone or shade where the two areas cross. Often used to create folds in drapery or a sense of form in objects.
**Inking-on**
Marking the image from the cartoon onto the warps with a pen and Indian ink to provide a guide for the weavers.

**Kilimn/Kilim**
Flat woven tapestry with vertical slits between adjoining shapes in the weft. Kilimn rugs used as floor coverings.

**Leashes/Heddles**
Threads which wrap around the back warps and attach to a bar above the weaving. These can be grasped in handfuls and pulled forward to allow the bobbin to pass behind a number of warps, speeding up the weaving.

**Mille-Fleur**
Literally a thousand flowers but used to describe medieval tapestries with allover designs of flowers or with a background like a carpet of flowers on which objects/people/animals are displayed.

**Open shed**
The natural shed in the warp created by the top bar of the loom. The shed is closed when the back warps are pulled forward.

**Pass**
Two rows of weaving where the weft travels along and back covering every warp. A half pass is a row of weaving in one direction covering every second warp.

**Shed**
The space between warp threads through which the weft passes.

**Verdure**
Literally greenery. Tapestries with designs mainly comprising of foliage or plants Common in the 16th century.

**Warp**
Vertical strong thread which is completely covered by the weft. It can be wound around the tapestry loom to make a circular warp.

**Weft**
The material woven horizontally into the warp and beaten down to cover the warp.
Appendix

TECHNIQUES OF WOVEN TAPESTRY
AS USED BY ARCHIE BRENNAN

There is no written guide to the techniques and ways of working that Archie Brennan uses and teaches. In his class at "Convergence", Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. in 1996, a participant asked for a handout, a sheet of instructions, to which Brennan replied that there was no handout and proceeded to talk, demonstrate and show examples of work. His understanding of technique has been passed on verbally and through demonstration.

The books which are available on tapestry weaving have brief descriptions of technique from various styles of tapestry. The Technique of Woven Tapestry, by Tadek Beutlich is commonly used as a basic technical reference. This has instructions for basic samplers and illustrations of tapestries.

The Tapestry Handbook by Carol K. Russell described on the cover as "An Illustrated Manual of Traditional Techniques", covers a wide range of styles of tapestry from Kilimn weaving to Navajo rug weaving. The technical information is mainly derived from a cloth weaving approach. In "Getting Started" the author recommends using a floor loom, a sturdy table loom or a vertical tapestry loom" (illustrated on page 13 with a "cloth beam", "Reed", "Beater" and "Treadles"). The terminology used also comes directly from cloth weaving: "The reed controls the spacing of the warps as you dress the loom and advance the fell of the sampler. And the beater expedites the packing of rows woven across the full width of the warp." This cloth weaving approach fails to explain how to take the next step from techniques sampler into pictorial weaving with the details of technique required to do this.
The South West College of T.A.F.E. has prepared notes for teaching by correspondence. They are designed to be used in conjunction with practical demonstration sessions with a tutor in a workshop situation.

This chapter will cover, in detail, the equipment, methods and materials used by Archie Brennan as they form the basis of a distinct style of tapestry weaving which Brennan brought to Australia, which has not previously been documented.

This information is not recorded in any other publication, probably because the subtleties of technique are much easier to grasp through demonstration than through written instruction or diagrams. The way the bobbin is held in the hand and passes between the warps could be a long tedious page of instructions but can easily be grasped when a tutor demonstrates the way this is done.

Students need to practice and often can only learn through trial, error and experience. Weft tension is an example of this. Notes can explain what the correct tension should be, how to achieve this and what to do about tension problems. However, students usually learn through making mistakes, trying to correct the tension and continued practice.

In demonstration and practice the senses come into play: the sound of the bobbin beating against the warp, the feel of the texture of the yarn, the look of the warp spacing or the edges of the tapestry. Clues come from one or all of these sources at any time.

EQUIPMENT

The Loom

Archie Brennan is an advocate of simple, basic and economical equipment. His father was a loom maker and supplied many Edinburgh College of Art graduates with scaffolding tapestry looms. Brennan has worked on designs for small, portable looms and gave the following guidelines for loom making to Fiberarts magazine readers:

"This loom was the outcome of an exercise: to go into any hardware store and come out with a simple portable tapestry frame loom suitable for group workshops that
1) could be dismantled into a light, small package when not in use, and
2) could easily be carried when assembled and in use."
It uses standard (3/4 inch in diameter) plumbing parts as well as 3/4 inch threaded rod and nuts. The tools required are a metal hacksaw, a drill, and a 1/8 inch drill bit, plus a file for rough edges.

The cheapest (hardest and lightest) grade of copper tube is preferable. The copper "elbows" should be fitted (to the top and bottom 12 inch tubes only!) by drilling and bolting and soldering (even by super glue) if properly cleaned. Whatever means used, it is important for the "open" ends of the elbows to be in line so the assembled frame is properly square.

Two standard (10 ft) lengths of copper pipe, one standard (3 ft) length of threaded rod, 12 nuts, 12 right angle elbows and 12 1-1/4 inch nuts and bolts make up three basic frames, approximately 32 x 14 inches in size.

By using different lengths of pipe, the loom can be satisfactorily enlarged to a maximum of 40 by 20 inches (at 8 warps per inch) to weave a tapestry 16 inches wide by 24 inches high.

By using other basic copper fittings (T pieces and various lengths and elbows) the loom can be easily developed to be free standing with slot-away legs and leashing bar. It can even be a low loom structure or tilt at any angle with a single shed making pedal. In 1993, the materials for this basic frame loom as illustrated cost $10 to $15. (“How to Build a Basic Loom” Fiberarts Nov/Dec. 1993 p34 and 35)

This basic, small loom was adapted and used by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop for workshops and simpler wooden frames are also used.

Larger looms need to be stronger and scaffolding pipes with acro props have been used by Archie and students he has taught. This loom follows the same principles as the small loom above; it can be taken apart for storage or transport, is made from materials readily available in a builder's yard, the cost is kept to a minimum and it is easily constructed.

The scaffolding loom is made of 2 acro props which stand upright at each end. They have an area of threaded rod which is used for tensioning. 2 Horizontal bars are attached to the acro props with couplings, one at the bottom and one at the top. The acro props need a base plate fitted to make them stand upright. This is the basic scaffolding frame which can have an additional leashing bar at the top or double beams for extra
strength. This type of loom is adequate for tapestries up to three metres in width and twice the height of the loom.

Larger tapestries require stronger horizontal beams and uprights to support them. Traditionally these were made of wood with a beam approx. 30 cm across the top and bottom supported by a wooden frame at each end. Now metal beams are used in a solid form or as a combination of pipes braced together. These types of looms are used at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and The Victorian Tapestry Workshop and by a few individuals who weave larger commissioned works.

In Australia a system for adjusting the warp tension is vital as temperature and humidity changes can affect the warp, making it slack in hot weather or tight in cold weather.

BOBBINS

Bobbins are the main tool of the trade and the style that Archie uses is made of wood, turned by a craftsman to a standard shape which fits easily in the hand, carries the yarn and has a point at one end to beat down the weaving.

Variations of this bobbin have been made in Australia by wood turners to specific requirements. Small bobbins are useful for work on small, finer tapestries, where short lengths of yarn are carried on the bobbin. Larger bobbins have been made and used for thicker and heavier work on large tapestries and rugs. Metal tipped bobbins were introduced by Michael Perry, Victoria, slightly larger than the standard Edinburgh bobbin with a turned brass tip shaped to follow the contour of the bobbin. The metal makes them heavier to use, which some weavers see as an advantage for beating down the weft - others think the weight could cause wrist problems if used for long periods of time and adversely affect the quality of the tapestry. The metal tipped bobbin is more expensive because of the cost of materials and labour but it is more durable than the wooden bobbin; the tip does not break.

WARP

The warp used is a cotton "Seine Twine" which was originally used as a fishing twine for net making. This warp is strong and comes in several thicknesses for finer or coarser tapestry. In Scotland the thicknesses of warp are named by the number of
standard warps per inch e.g. "10 to the inch warp ", and Archie still uses this terminology, but in Australia the warp is commonly know by the standard number of warps per 4 cm e.g. "12 per 4cm ".

The warp is ordered in Australia by the number which relates to the strands of cotton making up the warp thread, e.g. NO. 12 warp when unplied has 12 strands of cotton twisted together to make the warp.

A chart gives the warp number and the setting of warps per 4 cm

Warp is made in high, medium and low twist. The medium twist is best for tapestry as the twist gives enough strength in the warp and enough elasticity to pull the warp forward and let it spring back to its original position.

The cotton warp has a smooth surface so the weft is easily packed down.

Other warp materials can be used for special purposes. These include wool (used in France but not available in Australia), animal hair warps and plant material warps - linen, jute and sisal. Usually the cotton warp is white and is completely covered by the weft but it can be dyed to give a special effect or coloured line of knots at start and finish of the tapestry. Imported, dyed warp materials can be bought from the "Downunda " weaving studio, Geelong, Victoria.

Archie Brennan used both cotton and wool warp at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company. His own works are usually woven on cotton Seine twine.

WEFT MATERIALS

Archie Brennan uses a wide selection of weft materials, choosing them deliberately for their texture, light reflective or absorbent properties, colour and tone. In Scotland there are many producers and suppliers of yarn so weft materials can be bought through shops, mills or selected from shade cards and purchased by mail order.

The Edinburgh Tapestry Company Ltd. stocks a wide range of yarns - Brora, Anchor, Rug yarns etc, mainly produced in Britain. Many of the Scottish yarns have specific qualities - soft blended or "Heathered " colourings and / or a coarse or hairy quality from the type of wool used.

Brennan's tapestry Studio Window - Childers Street, Canberra - Two Views is woven with a strong, hairy yarn with blended tones in the grey yarn.
The illustration of a sampler woven with Scottish yarns from the wool store at Glasgow School of Art also shows the qualities of blended colour in the yarn and hairy surface.

Australia does not process the same volume or diversity of yarn produced in Britain, so when the Victorian Tapestry Workshop was set up extensive research was undertaken to work out the best yarn that could be produced for tapestry weaving in Australia. The fleece type chosen was 28 micron from a Corriedale crossbred sheep - fine, long wool. This was spun to the workshop requirements, 3/20 worsted, by Bunge Worsted Mills, and dyed in their own workshop to a range of colours. This has been refined to produce a standard set of 370 colours which is available for sale to the public.

Other types of yarns can be purchased through many shops, craft suppliers, warehouses and from mills direct. The Australian yarns are usually softer in texture than the Scottish yarns, pack down more in the weaving and give a softer surface to the finished tapestry.

OTHER EQUIPMENT

A ruler or tape measure and marker pen are needed for marking the spacing on the frame. The measure is also used to check the width of the weaving as the work progresses and for marking a horizontal line across the weaving before larger works are rolled on.

A spirit level is used to check that the frame is straight and that the weaving starts and finishes parallel to the horizontal beams. A plumb line, heavy weight at the end of a line, can hang on the loom to check verticals in the tapestry and the loom.

Indian Ink and a pen are used for "inking on" to the warps - transferring the information from the cartoon to the warp. The ink must be thoroughly dry before the weaving commences and care needs to be taken when a light coloured weft is being woven as the ink can rub off onto the yarn. A waterproof and permanent marker pen (laundry marker) can be used. This is fast drying and easy to use but as there are many brands and no guarantee of their long term properties care must be taken. A normal texta must never be used as this can bleed through the weft, spoiling the tapestry.

Scissors, needles and thread are also required. A bobbin winder speeds up the process of winding bobbins when large quantities of weft are used.
CARTOON

A cartoon is made from the original artwork with information to be used by the weaver. This can be as precise as a photographic enlargement of the artwork or simply a line drawing of key shapes to keep the proportions in the work. It is placed behind the warps when weaving takes place.

SETTING UP THE LOOM (Dressing the loom)

1. The loom must be square with top and bottom beams parallel to the floor. The frame can be checked with a spirit level and plumb line.

2. Tension adjustments should be made on the sides of the loom to allow room to tighten or slacken off the warp.

3. Spacing is marked on the bottom and top bars, in Scotland - inches, in Australia - every 4 cm. The markings must be in line top and bottom to ensure that the tapestry is square.

4. Warp is selected considering the quality of the tapestry to be woven. Fine tapestries with detail need fine warp set close together - coarser tapestries with broad marks need thicker warp. Experience of sampling with different warps helps the weaver understand these considerations and make the right choice. A sampler can be set up with two or more thicknesses of warp across the width and a section of the tapestry to be woven can be tested on the warps. The warp is wound onto the loom as:

   a. A continuous warp. This is first tied securely to a horizontal beam, then wrapped continuously around the outside of the frame, with no crossing between the back and front of the bars. It is put onto the loom with tension that allows the back and front warps to come together in the middle of the beam. The warp should not be slack as this can create tension problems in the weaving. The spacing of the warp is as set out in the chart above or with variations to change the quality of the finished tapestry - tapestry with warp spaced further
apart will be more pliable and softer, tapestry with warps set closer together will be firmer and less pliable.

When the warp is wound onto the loom the spacing is checked at top and bottom and must be absolutely even across the width. Uneven spacing makes weft rise and fall and produces softer and firmer areas of weaving. The tension must also be checked and this has to be the same across the width of the warp. If there is any unevenness the entire warp has to be re-tensioned by pulling each warp in turn from right to left, picking up any slack or loosening off.

b. A warp can be wound, as it is normally made for cloth weaving and drawn through a reed onto the loom. This method is used for large tapestries, or a series of tapestries woven on one warp, which are wound on around the bottom beam. Warp is wound on for the width of the tapestry. Many tapestries are woven on their sides to better execute the designs or prevent the weft slipping down the warp in very large tapestries.

Time and care need to be taken to put the warp on the loom precisely. If during weaving and area of warp becomes slack it can be packed at the top with paper or dowel to correct the tension.

5. "Putting in the Floor" This term describes the process of bringing the back and front warps together with 3 rows of weaving into one plane. A length of warp (or doubled up warp where extra strength is needed) is cut 3 times the width of the loom plus extra to tie to the frame. It is knotted to the side of the frame and worked across the warp picking up every second warp from the back, making the "closed shed". This is pulled tight around the frame then worked back across under the front warps in the "open shed" (made by the bar at top and bottom of the frame). Again this is pulled tight and wound around the frame then the first row is repeated under the back warps and tied off on the frame. These 3 rows of weaving must be tight to make a firm base for the weaving. Check and adjust the warp spacing if it has moved.

6. Six rows of weaving are made with yarn that will fall away when the tapestry is cut from the loom. This holds the warps in place for knotting.
7. A row of double half hitches is worked from left to right continuously along the warp. The knots are tied firmly and evenly in a straight line. They can be worked with the warp thread, with a strong buttonhole thread, or in a yarn colour to blend in with the tapestry. These knots look different on the back and front side. If the flat side of the knot is on the right side of the weaving it looks like the weaving and blends in with the tapestry. The opposite side of the knot makes a ridge and stands out from the tapestry. Consideration should be made of how the tapestry will be finished off, whether the knots will be turned to the back with a hem or seen at the top and bottom of the tapestry.

"INKING ON"

Indian ink with a pen or a permanent marker is used to transfer the main features of an image from a cartoon to the warps. This is done with the cartoon held in place against warps in the closed shed. A small and accurate mark is made on the top surface of the warp where a line on the cartoon passes underneath. Verticals are marked by a spiral down the warp. When all the information is transferred from the cartoon the marks are worked around each warp so that when the warps twist around during weaving, the marks can still be seen by the weaver.

At this stage the loom is set up ready for weaving to commence.

THE BASIC WEAVING PROCESS

Tapestry is a plain weave, discontinuous, weft faced, fabric worked from the right side of the tapestry.

Plain Weave

The basic pattern of the weft is under one, over one, repeated along the row with the same pattern over and under opposite warps on the way back.

Weft Faced

The weft is firmly beaten down to cover the warp completely.
Discontinuous Weft

Shapes are built up with separate wefts across the tapestry, rather than one weft on a shuttle travelling from selvedge to selvedge.

Starting and finishing ends

At the side of the work the weft starts 2-3 cm in from the edge, over one warp, skips behind warps to the edge and begins weaving back along the row. This keeps the tail at the back and stops it showing at the edge of the tapestry.

Ends can finish and start anywhere in the work by simply twisting the end round one warp under the weaving to the back. This is done so that the order of the weaving pattern is maintained. See below:

Weft tension

The weft is wound onto the bobbin shank by hand or with the aid of a bobbin winder ready for weaving.

"Tension is the most important thing. After a while your fingers do the thinking - not your head. Right handed people hold the bobbin in their right hand but the left hand does the important work."


The weft tension is much slacker than the first three rows of warp that were pulled through tightly. The weft needs to sit around the warp threads, without pulling them. This is achieved by working across the warp in small sections, making a hill shape with the weft between the warps and beating that slack down into the tapestry, working towards the bobbin. The amount of weft in the hill shape depends on the type and thickness of the yarn and the width of the shape being woven - narrow shapes have less weft, broader shapes more weft. The weft must wrap neatly around the warps at the edges of shapes and at the outside edges of the tapestry.
Weft Tension Problem Solving

If there is a tension problem the area which is not right should be taken out as soon as it is noticed and rewoven. A single warp left unwoven at each side of the tapestry is a good guide to check the edges of a tapestry against.

1. Edges of the tapestry are coming in - the tapestry is getting narrower. This is a sign that the weft is too tight and more weft needs to be put into the weaving. A common misconception is that more weft is needed at the edges and doing this results in slack edges. The size of the hill shapes made by the weft must be increased across the weaving and weft at the edges must be kept firm. Warps coming closer together in one area can be a sign that the weft is tight there.

2. Surface of the tapestry is rippling or bubbling. This means there is too much weft tension. A simple aid to making the tapestry flat to proceed with the correct tension is to thread a fine, long, sewing needle along the top surface of the tapestry near the next line of weaving. Leave this in place while continuing to weave and take out when the problem is resolved.

3. Ribbing. The tension problem makes the weaving look like a knitted rib with every second warp coming forward. The problem is caused by the weft continually pulling tighter in one shed, usually the open shed as it passes easily through this space. The problem is overcome by making sure that the same quantity of weft goes in the open and closed shed to make an even weave. A narrow shed is less likely to produce ribbing problems and because of this space should be left on the warp at the top of a tapestry so the weaving stops away from the beam. The closer the weaving goes to the beam, the more likely it is to rib.

Beating Technique

The bobbin is used to beat down the weft with a flexible wrist action in short, swift movements, after passing each weft through. The beating process has an accumulative effect making a firm, dense fabric.
Correct Passes

"Pass" is a weaving term that means two rows of weaving, along and back, covering every second warp on the way along and the opposite warps on the way back. "Half Pass" is one row of weaving in one direction covering every second warp or half the warps.

The golden rule of tapestry is that shapes beside each other must be woven in opposite directions in the same shed. This allows the weft from one shape to travel over the neighbouring shape in the correct shed. When a new shape is introduced between two shapes the direction of the passes in the original shapes has to change to keep the golden rule.

"Ends have Friends" is a way of remembering that two shapes starting beside each other will be in the right pass if the tails of weft start beside each other and weave in opposite directions in the same shed.

Slits

Vertical slits form in this style of tapestry and they are sewn up to keep the image in place and make a stable fabric. The sewing is done as the weaving progresses with a fine yarn that matches the weaving or a strong sewing thread. The sewing can be done in several ways depending on the strength required in the final work. Sewing in a figure eight around the warp threads at both edges of the shapes makes the strongest join and can be invisible. Sewing directly over the edges of the two shapes, catching around a warp on each shape makes a strong join but the stitching is more obvious in the finished work. In The Victorian Tapestry Workshop a Guttermen sewing thread is used and if the thread is pulled slightly it sinks into the weaving and becomes invisible.

"Dovetails" are joints made in the weaving with the weft of the two adjacent shapes sharing one warp, overlapping single, double or triple rows of weaving. They are an integral part of the weaving, not added separately, make secure, strong joints and because of this, they are commonly used in rugs. A disadvantage in pictorial weaving is that the pattern created by the dovetail can visually interfere with the image.

As Brennan works from the front of the tapestry and builds up the shapes as the design requires, not working in horizontal lines, interlocking wefts are usually not an appropriate joining technique.
Covering one warp

The finest vertical woven line is a wrapped warp where the weft is continually wrapped around the warp and stitched in place. The wrapping needs to be firm but not too tight so that the wrapped warp is the same width as the weft over one warp in a larger section of weaving. The single wrapped warp must be stitched to the shapes at each side to hold in place and prevent the wrapping from unwinding.

Making a Fine Horizontal Line

As the weaving approaches the fine line the weft should be unplied and the last few passes woven with the fine weft. The fine horizontal line is woven in a fine weft then the next colour woven in a fine weft before returning to a thicker weft. This method makes a fine, smooth line and stops it disappearing into a thicker weft.

Another way to achieve a smooth line is to weave along 4 warps (4th warp is under) back 2 warps and forward 4 warps; repeat to end of the pass.

Making Smooth or Jagged edges on shapes

An uncovered warp in a row of weaving makes a dent down and a covered warp makes a raised bump. This may seem insignificant looking at a row of weaving but it can affect the quality of a diagonal line or stepped shape. A smooth line is made by the most gradual increases in stepping e.g. a triangle cutting back 2 warps at the end of each left side , making a low turn. A corrugated line would come about through a similar triangle being woven with high turns at the left edge

Cut Back Lines

An area of solid colour can be woven in separate shapes of the same colour against each other. The shapes need stepped edges to avoid slits in the weaving and if stepping is irregular the cut backs are not easily detected. Regular cutbacks make a shadow line in the weaving. Breaking a large shape into smaller components builds an elasticity into the tapestry giving a better tension overall.
Cutback lines are also woven for visual effect. In 15th century tapestries they were commonly used in hair and faces to suggest detail without working in an additional colour. In the tapestry "At a Window 1" designed by Archie Brennan and woven at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company the large, brimmed hat has distinct cutback lines suggesting a pattern through the structure of the weaving.

The shadows made by cutback lines are more obvious if the tapestry is hung with the warps horizontal. The weight of the tapestry opens up the small slits creating more of a shadow.

**Eccentric Weaving**

In eccentric weaving the weft is woven at angles to the warp. It still covers the warp and follows the basic weaving structure. The result has a flowing look and can suggest movement in the tapestry. This technique can also smooth off stepped edges of shapes.

The tension must be changed in relation to the angle being woven - steeper angles need more weft. Often tension problems with eccentric weaving are not obvious till the weaving puckers when cut from the loom.

Eccentric weaving works well upto a 45 degree angle. Above this the weaving becomes distorted with long floats and structurally weak.

Most of Archie Brennan's tapestries have horizontal weft at a right angle to the warp. "Man in the Moon 11" designed by Hans Tisdall and woven by Archie Brennan and Maureen Hodge has areas of loose, eccentric weaving.

**Shading and Colour Mixing Techniques.**

Colours and tones can be mixed or blended on the bobbin as fine strands of weft are plied together. This mixed weft gives a different effect to a solid colour weft. It has depth and vitality and can have a textured appearance if the strands used are contrasting in colour or value. Close up the woven mixed yarn looks like a pointillist painting with flecks of colour or tone visible. From a distance the colours or values can blend visually.

If the blends change across the tapestry, graduations of colour and value can be achieved. This technique was commonly used at the Edinburgh Tapestry Company in
tapestries directed by Archie Brennan, particularly those translating the qualities of mixed colour in painting.

The gradation of dots or "half pass" technique can be used to suggest changes in tone or colour. Two bobbins are used with a solid colour on each. A half pass of one colour followed by a pass of the next makes a row of dots in the weaving. By using contrasting colours or values and changing the proportion of dots to background transitions of colour and tone can be woven. This technique gives a harsher, more graphic quality than mixed thread work and is often used by Brennan in his own work.

"Hachure" or "Hatching" is a technique used to create light and shade or blend colour visually through passes of solid colour crossing over each other. It was the predominant technique used in the pre-war Dovecot tapestries and Archie Brennan learned this way of working as an apprentice. It is a time consuming method as two or more bobbins are used alternately and after the war when consideration was given to speeding up the process, hatching almost disappeared from the repertoire of techniques used at the Dovecot.

FINISHING OFF TAPESTRIES

Double Half Hitches

A row of double half hitches is worked along the top of the tapestry, as at the beginning of the work.

All the slits should be sewn up and tails at the back of the work trimmed to approximately 3cm. When the tapestry has been checked the tension is released at the sides of the loom to allow the work to relax before cutting from the loom. Enough warp above and below the weaving needs to be left for plaiting back the ends - approx. 8cm.

Plaiting Back Ends

Finishing the warp ends in a continuous plait holds them out of sight at the back of the tapestry and makes a firm edge. It leaves a white plaited line on the right side of the work and a plaited tail at the edge of the weaving. Archie Brennan commented at
Convergence 1996 that he liked this device because it read as, "This is the beginning of the tapestry and this is the end."

The plaited edge can be disguised with acrylic paint in colours matching the weft.

The warp ends can also be folded and sewn to the back so that no line of warp is visible at the start and finish of the work.