

**HANDOVER OF AN ART TEXTILE BEING DONATED TO
THE ST HELENS HISTORY ROOM
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
MATHINNA COMMUNITY HALL, WEDNESDAY 11 AUGUST 2021**

Good morning everyone and thank you Mayor Tucker for that welcome and also for your unforgettable hospitality. It has been a terrific visit to Break O'Day, our first official municipal tour of the 29 municipalities that we are to visit over the coming five years.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land – to those who have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.

We are here today to acknowledge the handover of a beautiful quilt artwork of Mathinna to the St Helens History Room, where it will be displayed. I had the privilege of visiting the History Room yesterday and was impressed with the range and number of items displayed and curated by Kym Matthews for the benefit of the municipality.

Mathinna was born on Flinders Island. She was the daughter of Towterer (Romeo), chief of the Lowreenne people of south-west Tasmania, and Wongerneep (Evelyne). They had both been captured and sent to Flinders Island in 1833. Their first-born daughter, aged about 4, was captured separately and sent to Hobart. She was admitted to the Orphan School and died of measles in 1835. Their second child, born on Flinders Island, baptised as Mary, was born possibly in 1835. Towterer died in 1837 and Wongerneep in 1839. Before Wongerneep died, her only surviving daughter was renamed Mathinna, and was sent to live with Governor and Lady Franklin.¹

The Franklins educated Mathinna with their daughter until their recall to England in 1843. They left her behind at the Queen's Orphan School. She found it difficult to adjust to her new surroundings. After a year, at the age of nine, Mathinna was sent back to Flinders Island. She was readmitted to the Orphan School in 1847 until 1851, when she was discharged to Oyster Cove.² She died a year later at just 17 years of age.³

¹ C Pybus *Truganini* Allen and Unwin 2020 at 286-7

Barbara Mellor is a noted quilt maker and has won many awards at the local level, in Island Quilts Tasmania and in 2013 she won the Rotary Challenge at the Deloraine Craft Fair. She has been a finalist and represented Tasmania at the Australasian Quilt Convention in Melbourne. One of her art quilts has been selected to tour the USA representing Australia at the World Quilt Show.

In 2020, her quilt 'Winter Weeping' was selected for the Festival of Quilts in Birmingham. Barbara's work has been featured in Australian textile magazines. She was a finalist in the Bay of Fires Art Prize in 2018 with 'Mathinna'.

Barbara decided to reproduce the painting of Mathinna by Thomas Bock (a convict painter) in an art quilt because she wanted Mathinna's story to be told. The quilt is entitled *Mathinna – between two worlds: abandoned: broken* portraying Mathinna 'between two worlds'. The background consists of painted scenes of early aboriginal life. The foreground has an open book with a picture of sailing ships to symbolise Mathinna's new life. Mathinna is pictured in her red dress with her pet possum.⁴

Amongst the fine collection of local history, the St Helens History Room is a fitting place for a work that challenges us to think about truth-telling,⁵ about our past and its impact on the present and how we recognise and shape our future Tasmanian community.

Thank you, Barbara, for your generous donation. Thank you to all for being a part of this ceremony to handover the quilt.

² C Pybus *Truganini* Allen and Unwin 2020 at 286-7

³ <https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion-to-tasmanian-history/M/Mathinna.htm> accessed 6 Aug 21

⁴ Email Kym Matthewson / David Hughes 5 Aug 21

⁵ See H Reynolds *Truth-Telling: History, sovereignty and the Uluru Statement* 2021