Criminal Quilts Collaborative Quilt

Row 1 from left

1/1 Lucie Bea Dutton. Seven women were convicted of stealing shawls. I used their first initials and then added their sentences together making 990 days.

1/2 Alice Guthrie. By studying the data and counting eye colours of the prisoners, I found a marked variation in the eye colour numbers. Using the given colour palette I chose threads to represent each eye colour number total. Each stitched circle represents the number of prisoners with a particular eye colour.

1/3 EB. One woman stole an apron and received a 270 day sentence. Did that apron mean work? I used worn fabrics to represent an apron needing to be replaced. The edge of an apron on a grey dress.

1/4 Vicky Bilton. My square is crazy patchwork, a technique common at the period of these photos. Inspired by the 10 widows; using different colours to represent them; using 9 different stitches to symbolise their different crimes. Brought the whole piece together using seed stitch to represent all 99 women.

1/5 Charlotte Bilby. I looked at the number of women who were imprisoned for stealing clothing or linen (28), and used this as the number of pieces in the block. The number of women who were photographed wearing their prison number (43) is represented by the circles and knots.

1/6 Rosie Eley. I noticed that 7 women were convicted for stealing shawls. A shawl is used for comfort, protection and warmth, represented in my square by blanket hexagons joined and embroidered. The embroidery is inspired by the shawl patterns.

Row 2 from left

2/1 Cheryl Hewitt. Using hand dyed fabrics, I responded to the more unusual minor crimes by hand stitching a patchwork square. The chequered design is intended to suggest the visual qualities of the women's shawls. I also responded to the ages of the women, the youngest being 12 and the oldest being 60, along with the number of days sentenced.

2/2 Gill. I saw there were 3 women who had a number of similarities; residence, age, name, crime and occupation.

2/3 Mandypandy. I wanted to represent all the women. Each piece of shawl represents an individual, the different coloured threads represent the year they went to prison.

2/4 Lesley Wood. I wove together strips of calico to echo the women's shawls. Each woman's first name initials were embroidered onto the strips. Surprisingly some initials formed words around the edges of the squares. Are these words valid descriptions of the women?

2/5 Cathryn Brown. I chose four young women who were identified as nailers. This was hard, dirty, poorly-paid work, employing many women and children. Prints from the period show grim, drab, miserable working conditions. I rust dyed fabric with (four) nails and pieced the scraps together, reflecting their clothing, conditions and occupation.

2/6 Tracy Fox. I manipulated the data in Excel then selected one of the categories of information. Using the specified colour palette, I created a background with my handwriting repeating the words 'youngest, oldest, average'. I then printed the numbers over the top. Youngest = 12. Oldest = 60. Average = 28.

Row 3 from left

3/1 Alison Jackson-Bass. Nearly 12% of the women were convicted for stealing coal, a necessity in winter. I created a mono print of the main roads of late 19th century Staffordshire using ink made from coal and stitched lines to show the distances between the women's homes and the jail in Stafford.

3/2 Lynn Hall. Stolen Time, Doing Time. Using the data for the four women who stole watches, I made a stitch for each day they were imprisoned in a five bar gate style resembling how you would mark days on a prison cell wall. The threads I used corresponded to their hair colour.

3/3 Grace White. I divided the crimes into categories and colour-coded them: theft of clothes (blue/grey), theft of valuables (beige), theft of other property (brown), other crimes (green) and food or drink-related crimes (cream). I also added the ID medallion with my own initials and date because I identify with those women.

3/4 Nigel Cheney. I found it hard to reconcile the statistical data without the photographic images. Working with abstracted details and dots I codified the given palette with specific eye colour.

3/5 Jamie Vowell. I focussed on the ages of the women, dividing them into age groups which gave me 6 groupings. I made a mark and used a different colour for each age grouping. The one woman in her 60s I represented with a dark brown square mark, 4 women in their 50s have a grey swirl mark, for example. I also stitched vertical black lines to represent the jail cell bars.

3/6 Sallytaylor543. I chose 29 women who were wearing hats and striped or checked shawls. The design was developed using a large central square as the shawl with 29 circles as hats, separated by 29 lines for the pattern. The 4 corners echoing this with circles, small squares and lines.

Row 4 from left

4/1 Liz Boulton. I used the crimes of which the women were convicted to divide the background into areas of different colours. I embroidered heavy lines (prison bars) and heavy text (judgement) and a portrait of the convict I felt most connection to. She was Elizabeth Yates, born in Stone, age 52, height 5'0". Same name, age and height as me. Same surname as maternal grandmother, same birthplace as paternal grandfather.

4/2 Dizzyducky1. I went with a kaleidoscope eye-colour design, these women's lives were turned upside down like when you use a kaleidoscope. The eyes struck me the most, sad, shocked, haunted, relieved, almost. I used the more unique crimes for the background quilting, fork, fish, rabbit, horseshoe, money and alcohol being common.

4/3 Ruth Garner. There are 26 women (25%) called Mary from 16-46 years old and they are represented by the rectangles of fabric in the centre. Mary is a biblical name represented by a stitched cross. Within the cross there are 293 white stitches which is the average sentence imposed on these women called Mary.

4/4 Faye Waple. Initially I was drawn to the offences carried out by the women, especially the items stolen; this data forms the border in brown cross stitch. Trade is show with grey cross stitch, marital status referenced by white running stitch – the single thread depicting the single women, double thread married and 3 threads show widowed women. Eye and hair colour are shown and the overall number of women is reflected by the French knots in the middle of my piece.

4/5 Maureen Evans. I chose Hannah Taylor, dressmaker, who stole a skirt. My square is made of woven stripes of cotton, silk and lace. I aged them by eco dyeing with tea and rust. The key is a symbol of the constant sound of locking doors.

4/6 Emma Branch. My block is based on the data relating to hair colour of the women convicted between 1878-1880. I imagined looking down from the gallery to see them all lined up in date order of their court appearance, seeing, not their faces, but the tops of their heads.

Row 5 from left

5/1 Julie Orford. I used maps from around 1880 to represent the birth places of women aged 40-49. As I stitched I thought about the journeys the women had made. Did their paths ever cross? What made them stray from the path? Will prison put them back on the straight and narrow?

5/2 Angela Richardson. I counted the eye colours. 41 grey, 30 brown, 15 blue and 8 hazel. I stitched the eyes from large to small to represent the ratios. The chains keep them enclosed representing the loss of freedom.

5/3 Hazel Vickers. I decided on ages and marital status. The square is divided into 7 stripes, one for each decade. Using various fabrics these stripes were divided into marital status in a rough approximation of the number in the group. Sharp stitches used to signify their imprisonment and harsh lives.

5/4 Lynda Dobson. As a former mathematics teacher the data jumped out at me – particularly the reasons for the crime. I converted the data into a pie-chart.

5/5 Flea Cooke. I responded most to the detail of distinguishing marks, cuts and bruises. This linked to an existing interest in mending and darning, so I used these techniques to suggest pain and abuse suffered by these women prior to imprisonment, even ideas of self harm as a release from turmoil.

5/6 Karen Apps. I focussed on the 34 women who were documented as having cuts as 'distinguishing marks'. I wondered why so many had such injuries and how and when these were inflicted? Can only imagine the difficult lives these women lived. Each roughly stitched cut represents one woman.

Row 6 from left

6/1 Kay Steven. I focussed on the references to distinguishing marks (scars, moles etc) clustering stitches to roughly represent the location of the marks on the body. Those with 'no marks' (-) and those with moles (x) hold the piece and the women together. A code emerges.

6/2 Laura Mabbutt. Felt bobbles indicate the number of women showing their hands. Each woman is represented by 99 weathered sequins, mimicking the prison numbers they wear. Each white line represents a woman wearing check fabric. Blue cross stitches represent the number of women who were married, the beige stitches the single women and the white cross stitches the number of widows.

6/3 Rachael O'Brien. Ninety-eight women sentenced to a total of 15,593 days imprisonment. This equates to nearly 43 years. The number coincidentally reflects the average life expectancy at birth for women at that time in history equating to in total one life's worth of incarceration. Stitches represent notches of count of time passed.

6/4 Tanya Rogers. Brown-eyed, fresh-faced thieves. The number of days spent in prison and what they stole. One hexagon per thief, each hexagon has number of prison days printed on it as well as a stitch pattern according to what they stole eg IIII = clothing, II = coal.

6/5 Nigel Cheney (see 3/4) Working with visible mending techniques I hoped to echo the way we construct narrative from such historical clues.

6/6 Megan Byrne. The focus was eye colour. Four eye colours identified: brown, grey, hazel and blue. I wove the colours together in strips. Majority of eyes grey (42), then brown (31), then blue (15) and hazel (10). Weaving the colours I hoped to integrate this data into the overall narrative.