

**Glory Boxes: Femininity, Domestic Consumption
and Material Culture in Australia, 1930-1960**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates glory boxes as cultural sites of consumption, production, femininity, sexuality, economy and transnationalism between 1930 and 1960 in Australia, a period of considerable economic and social change. Glory boxes were the containers and collections kept and accumulated by many young single women in anticipation of their future married and domestic lives. The nature and manifestations of the glory box tradition have uniquely Australian qualities, which had its roots in many European and British customs of marriage preparation and female property. This study explores a number of facets of women's industrial, communal, creative and sexual lives within Australian and international historical contexts. These contexts influenced glory box traditions in terms of industrialisation, changing consumer practices, the economics of depression and war, and evolving social definitions of femininity and female sexuality.

Glory boxes provide an effective prism through which to scrutinise these broad social and economic developments during a thirty year period, and to highlight the participation of young women in cultural practices relating to glory box production in preparation for marriage. Oral testimony from migrant and Australian-born women, the material culture of glory boxes and the objects collected, and popular contemporary magazines and newspapers provide important documentation of the significance of glory box practices for many Australian women in the mid-twentieth century.

Glory boxes track twentieth-century shifts in Australia in terms of a producer and consumer economy at both collective and individual levels. They reveal the enduring social expectations until at least the 1960s that the role of women was seen as primarily that of wives, mothers and domestic household managers.

Nonetheless, a close investigation of the meanings of glory box collections for women has uncovered simultaneous and contradictory social values that recognised the sexual potential of women, while shrouding their bodies in secrecy. This thesis suggests that a community of glory box practitioners worked through a variety of collective female environments which crossed time, place, generation and culture. It demonstrates the impact of the act of migrating on glory box practices which were brought in the luggage and memories of many post-war migrant women to Australia. These practices were maintained, adapted and lost through the pragmatics of separation, relocation and acts of cultural integration.

This research has identified the experiences of young single women as critical to expanding understandings of the history of domestic consumption in Australia, and the gendered associations it was accorded within popular culture. It has also repositioned the glory box tradition as an important, widely practised female activity within feminist historiography, by recognising its legitimacy as female experience, and as a complex and ambivalent symbol which defies simplistic interpretations.

Declaration

This is to certify that

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
- (iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Signed:

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When Collecting For Their Glory Boxes, 1930s-1950s

Introduction

I just loved gathering up my glory box, my collection...I totally enjoyed it. I saved and I used to be thinking about the home I might have one day, that's what it was for. It wasn't the thought of a glory box as such, it was more the homemaker part of it that I loved the thought of...I loved the thought of having a home...always loved looking at what I've got, and where I'd put it and what I'd use it for. (Marjorie Cope, collecting for her glory box, early 1950s)¹

I Aim and Scope

Lifting the lid off the glory box, a deceptively simple symbol of Australian female marriage preparation, uncovers complex economic, sexual, consumer, and cultural meanings, and provides new ways to explore and interpret Australian women's mid-twentieth century experiences. The glory box, encompassing the container, the collections and the cultural practices associated with the gathering of items for the marital home, was at its most visible during the 1930s-1950s in Australia, a period of significant economic and social upheaval and change. This temporal frame commences during the 1930s Depression, with low marriage rates and a high visibility of glory box references in print media. The period shifts to World War II, with high marriage rates, growing economic prosperity and an increase in female employment. It concludes at the close of the 1950s, with unprecedented levels of migration and an acceleration of consumer activity, and evidence of a waning interest in glory boxes and their associated cultural practices. The study of the material culture

¹ Interview with Marjorie Cope (nee Skate) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Coldstream, Victoria, 2003.

and memories of glory boxes during these decades in Australia enables the tracking of cultural and artistic change and maintenance; economic developments and the evolution of twentieth-century consumer culture; notions of modernity, women and work, sexuality and marriage; and the pervasiveness since the nineteenth century of the links between femininity, domesticity and consumption.

More specifically, glory boxes provide an opportunity to explore some infrequently documented aspects of unmarried women's experiences as consumers, demonstrating patterns and experiences of domestic consumer practices long before women assumed publicly assigned role of arbiters of taste and acquisition within the marital household. The glory box practice was maintained primarily by working- and lower middle-class Australian-born women of British ancestry.² It was also reinforced, adapted and even preserved by migrant women of many European cultures who arrived in Australia in unprecedented numbers after World War II. For many of these women, both local and overseas-born, glory boxes represented a process of self-actualisation. They imagined their own future domestic spaces, in which they would fulfil roles as wives, mothers and domestic managers; they moved through the 'public' steps in the collecting ritual, including the engagement party, the kitchen tea and the wedding itself. Throughout, they also progressed through their own process of 'becoming' as women, workers, consumers, wives, and citizens. This study focuses on the time in women's lives leading up to a wedded domestic future. For some women, many dreams of marriage, or domestic happiness within marriage, were indeed unrealised.

² 'At 30 June, 1954...95.5 per cent of the Australian population were of British nationality (85.7 per cent born in Australia and 9.8 per cent born outside).' *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, No.46, 1960), 309. 'British' includes people of Irish descent.

The practice of collecting property for the marital state dates back centuries to a variety of European dowry and marriage chest traditions. Australian women were part of an international tradition of creativity, property accumulation, economic management, social prescription and gender role enforcement. Nevertheless, particular methodologies of accumulating glory box goods, as well as their collective visibility during the 1930s-1950s, are uniquely Australian. Despite the commonality of the custom, Australian glory box experiences have been preserved mainly in women's memories, in popular literary culture and in the material culture of the boxes and their contents, rather than in historiographical inquiry – even when that inquiry has explored related subjects such as shopping and constructions of femininity.³ Nevertheless, there have been exceptions. Beverley Kingston drew on glory boxes practices of production to discuss single women's potential marital value through domestic skills and property between the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Jennifer Isaacs referred to glory box practices through examples of needlecraft and references to personal stories. Diane Bell quoted oral testimony relating to glory box experiences in her cross-generational study of Australian women.⁴

³ Subject-relevant texts in which references to glory boxes are absent include: Gail Reekie, *Temptations. Sex, Selling and the Department Store* (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, Pty., Ltd., 1993); Jill Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia* (North Sydney, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin Australia, Pty., Ltd., 1984); Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley. A History of Shopping in Australia* (West Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴ Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann. Women and Work in Australia* (West Melbourne, Victoria: Thomas Nelson Australia, Pty, Ltd., 1977 [first published 1975]), 102-104; Jennifer Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts. 200 Years of Australian Women's Domestic and Decorative Arts* (Willoughby, New South Wales: Ure Smith Press, Second Edition, 1991), 46-49; Diane Bell, *Generations. Grandmothers, mothers and daughters* (Fitzroy and Ringwood, Victoria: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1987).

Glory boxes have rich potential for complex readings which can contribute to understandings of this generation of Australian women and the economic and social environments in which they were operating. While glory boxes may represent a channelled domestic vision for young women, this is also accompanied by a subtle element of domestic and economic agency. Social constriction can be re-examined to reveal social activity, with communities of women sharing a collective custom. There is no one interpretation of the glory box, its symbolism shifts, as we read these objects and their associated practices as symbolic of both constancy and change.

My interest in the glory box was first sparked during the development of a small community exhibition in 1992 which I curated at a local history museum in Lilydale, on the eastern outskirts of Melbourne.⁵ It was clear that the rudimentary documenting of women's glory box experiences and the display of their boxes and contents had only skimmed the surface of what was obviously a subject brimming with promise. A subsequent Masters thesis, focusing on the local and international origins of glory boxes as well as the potential of memory and material culture to be read as historical texts, extended the potential of the glory box and its social, cultural and economic significance.⁶ The packaging of the Lilydale exhibition into a national touring exhibition which travelled to eight venues over three states further demonstrated the national breadth of a generation of glory box experiences, as similar local stories and objects were told and displayed.⁷ The tour resulted in a number of communities conducting

⁵ *The Glory Box: a Chest Full of Hopes and Dreams*, Museum of Lillydale, Lilydale, Victoria, 1992.

⁶ Moya McFadzean, "The Glory Box: Origins, Symbols and Experiences," (MA, The University of Melbourne, 1996).

⁷ Between 1992 and 1995, the exhibition toured to the following venues: Woorayl Shire Historical Society, Leongatha, Victoria; Echuca Wharf Museum, Echuca, New South Wales; Springvale Heritage Centre, Melbourne; East Gippsland Historical Society Museum, Bairnsdale, Victoria; Stanton Library Don Bank Museum, Sydney; City of

their own local research and interviews, and locating and exhibiting objects from local collections. Since then, exhibitions relating to glory boxes have been developed by other Australian museums, historical societies and community groups, demonstrating the enduring interest and affection for this cross-cultural female tradition. These have also created an informal quantitative survey of collective glory box artefacts and memories across Australia.⁸ While the research in this thesis is focused on glory box collecting practices in Melbourne and its surrounding semi-rural areas, it is thus positioned within a national context.

II Historical Background: the Origins of the Glory Box

The Container and its Contents:

The glory box – both container and contents – has been part of a long tradition of portable marital settlements which dates back at least as far as ancient Mesopotamia, 2,000-1,000BC.⁹ Varying cultural influences have determined whether a woman's property has consisted of money, land or domestic goods; whether it has been settled upon her by her father, produced by her own hands or both; and whether the property was controlled by her after marriage. Bridal customs and laws have evolved, dissolved and survived throughout Europe. Form and value have varied significantly, but the social expectation, even requirement, that a woman's personal value is increased by material property,

Unley Museum, Adelaide; Buda Historic Home and Garden, Castlemaine, Victoria; Eden Killer Whale Museum, New South Wales.

⁸ Rockhampton and District Historical Society, Queensland (2004); Redcliffe Museum, Queensland (2005-2006); Kyneton Museum, Victoria (2007-2008); and the Italian collective women's FILEF group exhibition 'Hands and Heart, Stitches of Love', at CO.AS.IT, Carlton, Victoria, 2008 (curator: Celia Beeton).

⁹ H.F.W. Saags, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1962), 203.

has been perhaps the one constant through time and place.

The use of chests as domestic storage furniture has an ancient history which evolved across most continents, as did their popularity as containers for marital goods.¹⁰ By the mid-seventeenth century, cabinets, commodes, cupboards and chests-of-drawers were replacing chests in Europe and North America as the principal items of domestic furniture.¹¹ By the twentieth century, custom-made furniture was supplanted by the mass-produced chests, cupboards and cabinets that many Australian women owned and filled.

Of particular interest to this study is the tradition of the trousseau,¹² from which were derived the hand-production traditions of the Australian glory box. This was the part of the dowry usually consisting of linen, clothing and domestic goods, which the daughter, through heirlooms and the produce of her own hands, or the hands of her mother and other female relatives and community members, built into property to contribute to a prospective marriage. In general, regardless of country or culture, the greater the quality and quantity of a woman's trousseau and dowry, the greater her chances of securing a desirable husband (or even a husband at all). The gathering of a trousseau and dowry was an activity at the cornerstone of universal social expectations for women,

¹⁰ For a history of chests, cupboards and chests-of-drawers as furniture, and bridal containers in particular, see Noel Riley, *World Furniture* (Great Britain: Octopus Books, Ltd., 1980); Helena Hayward, *World Furniture* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965); *A Short History of English Furniture* (London: Victorian and Albert Museum, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966); on the broad functionality of chests, see also Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things. The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 176; Lon Schleining, *Treasure Chests. The Legacy of Extraordinary Boxes* (Connecticut: The Taunton Press, Inc., 2001), including a chapter on 'Bridal Chests,' 43-61; John Shea, *Antique Country Furniture of North America* (Great Britain: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1976).

¹¹ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 186.

¹² Derived from the French word 'trousse' or 'bundle.'

along with domestic home duties and raising a family. The work of Rozsika Parker, Agnes Fine and Jane Schneider on the evolution of embroidery and femininity, and trousseau production in England, Sicily and France, have been important in helping to frame my discussions of the sexualisation of needlecraft in later chapters.¹³

In most European countries, the trousseau (the domestic goods) was either one component of the father's dowry provision, the sum total of that provision or seen as compensation to the prospective husband's family for the payment of the 'bridewealth.'¹⁴ It was portable property, and as Laurel Ulrich observes, 'cupboards and textiles belonged to a category of household goods called 'movables.' Unlike real estate, which was typically transmitted from father to son, movables formed the core of a female inheritance.'¹⁵ In many cultures, the dowry and trousseau were seen as the woman's property, regardless of any future separation, and marriage contracts listing the articles were often drawn up to that effect.¹⁶ This gendered division of property had not changed well into

¹³ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch. Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1984); Agnes Fine, "A Consideration of the Trousseau" in *Writing Women's History*, ed. Michelle Perrot (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 118-145; Jane Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure: Some Contradictions of Late Nineteenth Century Change in Sicily" in *The Marriage Bargain: Women and Dowries in European History*, ed. Marion A. Kaplan (USA: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1985), 81-119.

¹⁴ For definitions of dowry, 'bridewealth,' and other wedding customs, see Margaret Baker, *Wedding Customs and Folklore* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977); Jack Goody and S.J. Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Lucy Mair, *Marriage* (London: The Scholar Press Ltd., 1977 [first published Penguin Books, Ltd., 1971]).

¹⁵ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun. Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 2002), 111.

¹⁶ This was the case in eighteenth and nineteenth century Morocco, Malaysia, Turkey, Tibet, India and also in parts of Italy. Theophilus Moore, *Marriage Customs, Modes of Courtship and Singular Propensities of the Various Notions of the Universe* (London: John Bumpus, 1814), 100; Louise Miln, *Wooings and Weddings in Many Climes* (London: Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1900), 13 and 354; Henry Neville Hutchinson, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands* (London: n.p., 1897), 270; Mair, *Marriage*, 20-21 and 62.

the mid-twentieth century when women were still primarily responsible for the 'portables.'

The contents of the marriage chest primarily consisted of the spun, woven, sewn and embroidered labour of great grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, daughters and their sisters. Regardless of the nature of the dowry or the particular cultural ritual, the work of women was integral to the process of increasing a young unmarried woman's personal value. In many eighteenth and nineteenth century European countries, women commenced work on the trousseau as soon as their first daughter was born and daughters quickly learnt the needlecraft skills required from an early age.¹⁷ Such traditions were maintained throughout Europe until the twentieth century when the hand-made was supplemented and, after the 1950s, often supplanted by the mass-produced. Moreover, with the availability of ready-made fabrics, less time was needed for spinning and weaving, and more emphasis placed upon embellishments such as lacework and embroidery, which in many cultures had previously been the prerogative of wealthy women of leisure.¹⁸

Consequently, depending on social and economic circumstances, urban or rural location, women were simultaneously creating collections for marriage from the total or partial work of their own hands. And this trend continued into the mid-twentieth century, for while Australian women were generally not weaving their own cloth, they were combining hand production and consumer activity in the building of their collections. After the industrial revolution, developments in waged labour and secondary production allowed many

¹⁷ Ethel Urlin, *A Short History of Marriage* (Detroit, USA: Singing Tree Press, 1969 [first published 1913]), 11; also Hutchinson, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands*, 182 and 190; on Greek customs, Miln, *Woollings and Weddings*, 335.

¹⁸ Schneider argues this case convincingly in the Sicilian context in Schneider, Jane, "Trousseau as Treasure," 87-96.

women with the means and the choice of goods to independently supply their trousseaux.

Why Glory?:

She pulled a leather trunk from under the bed. It was her glory box, containing all her treasures that she had gathered together against such a day as this. And now she must leave it behind. With a serious, absorbed look, she turned over its contents. There were d'oyleys, pieces of Maltese lace, remnants of silk bought at a bargain, odd lengths of embroidery, silver buckles for her shoes no longer in fashion, table centres, quaint trinkets from bazaars, birthday presents from her friends, and heaps of odds and ends, each of peculiar value or rarity, which she had hoarded for years, more from instinct than from a conscious purpose. Each article, however insignificant, had its history, and as she lovingly fingered them her resolution nearly gave way. It dawned on her that she was parting from her home, for her father would never forgive her marriage, and the tears came into her eyes. She selected a few trifles at random, and locking the box pushed it under the bed again.¹⁹ (Louis Stone, *Betty Wayside*, 1915)

This poignant passage provides an early Australian literary reference to a glory box. Its expression of a glory box as an instinctive practice of collecting material goods along with their associated memories and meanings sets the scene for the post-1920s practices that were to follow. No matter whether a woman had a commercial piece of furniture, an old crate, a drawer or a cardboard box, the container was almost without exception, referred to in Australia as a 'glory box' and, more familiarly as just 'your box.' Even if women did not have the actual

¹⁹ Louis Stone, *Betty Wayside* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 244-245.

container, they viewed their collection as a glory box – more often than not, it was the collection, rather than the box, that was most valued.

‘Glory box’ is defined by the *Macquarie Dictionary* as ‘a chest in which young women store clothes, linen, etc. in expectation of being married; bottom drawer, hope chest.’²⁰ The American, British and Irish equivalents, the ‘hope chest’ and ‘the bottom drawer’ were also used in the 1930s to 1950s period, although some Australian-born women described the ‘bottom drawer’ as old fashioned and before their time.²¹ Nevertheless, more than one woman interviewed recalled using both the terms ‘hope chest’ and ‘glory box’ depending on where a woman was in her life cycle. Beth Taws observes: ‘It was a hope chest when you weren’t engaged, you were just hoping that these things would be used, and the glory box was when you were actually engaged saving up for your own married life.’²²

I have only been able to speculate as to the first application of the word ‘glory’ to describe Australian marriage chests, but there are obvious conclusions that may be reached in consideration of the word’s loaded cultural and religious meanings as well as the gendered context in which it was applied. The word ‘glory’ is defined by the *Macquarie Dictionary* as, amongst other definitions ‘exalted praise, honour, or distinction, accorded by common consent...a distinguished ornament...a state of contentment, as one resulting from a

²⁰ *Macquarie Dictionary* (New South Wales: The Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd., Fourth Edition, 2005), 603.

²¹ Interview with Gwenda Mutimer (nee Goode) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003; interview with Betty Phillips (nee Price) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003; interview with Nancy Briggs (nee Reed) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003.

²² Interview with Beth Taws (nee Brooke) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003.

triumphant achievement.'²³ In terms of the glory box, the distinction lay in the quality of the collection; the triumph was marriage. There are also explicit Christian overtones in the word 'glory' which heighten the implied meanings of striving towards a set goal, succeeding in its attainment, and reaping the rewards. It is also revealing that some women comment that serious collecting for glory boxes really only commenced after becoming engaged – with uncertainty removed, the road to triumph was generally assured.

Another clue in the search for the origins of the term 'glory box' may be found in the more peculiar word 'glory-hole.' The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists one definition for 'glory-hole' as 'A receptacle (as a drawer, room, etc) in which things are heaped together without any attempt at order or tidiness.'²⁴ A reference in a nineteenth-century publication demonstrates the use of 'glory-hole' as a colloquial term and refers to female storage areas as 'your old ribbon box...It's a charity to clear out your glory-holes once in a while.'²⁵ Glory boxes and glory holes were small private spaces used to store an assortment of items, although glory hole descriptions suggest chaotic junk spaces, which held no sentimental or pragmatic purpose. Whereas in contrast, descriptions of glory boxes collections suggest storage systems which were neat, ordered, and carefully maintained.

I anticipated that a search through various Australian women's magazines from the 1880s through to the 1950s might assist in pinpointing when the term 'glory box' first entered the Australian vernacular.²⁶ For example, 1883 and 1884 editions of the *Australian Women's Magazine and Domestic Journal* are full of

²³ *Macquarie Dictionary*, 603.

²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Second Edition, 1989), 591.

²⁵ Mrs Whitney, *We Girls* iii., 1871, 62 quoted in *Ibid*.

²⁶ This search included: *Australian Women's Magazine and Domestic Journal*, 1883-1884, *New Idea*, 1902, 1911 and *Everylady's Journal*, 1930.

serial stories about romance, courtship, engagement and marriage. Yet glory box activity is never mentioned in this journal, nor in the stories, editorial advice columns and advertising of other Australian magazines such as *New Idea* during 1902 and 1911 and *Everylady's Journal* (*New Idea's* successor) in 1930. Rather than conclude that the glory box was a term not yet in use in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I would suggest that the target audience for these publications were married, rather than unmarried women, for whom discussions about glory boxes had become redundant. The emphasis on domestic concerns in the *New Idea* and *Everylady's Journal* reinforces this market focus. This conclusion is also drawn by Annette Kuhn of the popular press in England during the 1930s, whereby titles such as *Woman's Weekly* conveyed a femininity which 'is constructed in terms of a comfortable, but far from affluent, domesticity. The implied reader is married, and her main concerns are her husband and children in general.'²⁷ Indeed, many magazines, and some material within Australian publications, were imported from Britain and the United States, further explaining the absence of an Australian vernacular term.

By the 1930s glory box references frequently appeared in popular Australian magazines and newspapers, particularly in the Melbourne newspaper, the *Sun News Pictorial* and the national magazine the *Australian Women's Weekly*, and this will be explored in subsequent chapters. These references confirm the use of the term 'glory box' by this time, as well as the evolving market nature of the traditions of collecting and storing. **(Figure 1)** The *Australian Women's Weekly*, first published in 1933 and Australia's longest continuously running magazine,

²⁷ Annette Kuhn, "Cinema Culture and Femininity in the 1930s" in *Nationalising Femininity. Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 185.

provides a useful gauge of female interests across class and time. Its circulation rates were extremely high during the 1930s and 1940s, increasing from over 400,000 in 1939 to 650,000 by 1945.²⁸ References to glory boxes in twentieth-century Australian novels also illustrate that glory box activity had become so much a part of Australian community life as to be featured in meaningful ways in numerous works of fiction. These references also complement the stories shared by women themselves. They demonstrate that glory boxes could represent for women escape or captivity, pleasure or sorrow, choice or duty, failure or success. They show that not only women themselves were involved in the ritual, but mothers, fathers, boyfriends and entire communities also participated, in both urban and rural settings. In this way, literature enhances oral testimony in bringing glory box experiences to life, and maintains the essential personal voice within the complex sometimes dehumanising web of historical and cultural theory.

III Key Theoretical Concepts

The many and often contradictory array of objects and stories contained in glory boxes provide the foundation for a cross-disciplinary, theoretical framework which both draws upon, and contributes new understandings to, histories of gender, economy, consumption, migration and material culture. In particular, the material culture of glory boxes reveals a number of complex dynamics relating to consumer culture, including the interplay between the hand-made and mass-produced; issues of taste, tradition, nostalgia, and

²⁸ Dennis O'Brien, *The Weekly. A lively and nostalgic celebration of Australia through 50 years of its most popular magazine* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia Ltd., 1982), 79 and 93. *The Weekly* was also popular with men, particularly during World War II. Vane Lindesay, *The Way We Were. Australian Popular Magazines 1856-1969* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983), 135.

emulation; the impact of labour and wages; shifting personal and public values; and the entwining over time of femininity, domesticity and consumerism. All of these elements come together to enable the examination of the economic daily behaviours of young single women in Australia between 1930 and 1960 – behaviours informed by personal attitudes which, while the decades ticked over, changed relatively little. The glory box is an ambivalent signifier of modernity, femininity and consumption, and reading it in this way reveals complex layers of cultural and economic meaning, and provides a new opportunity to discuss histories and theories of consumerism.

An Ambivalent Signifier:

The ambivalent nature of the glory box for women is a recurring theme throughout this study. This is evident, in the first instance, through gendered readings of glory boxes in terms of femininity, sexuality and identity, ideas which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. For example, glory boxes can contribute to Marilyn Lake's work on constructions of femininity from the 1920s to 1950s.²⁹ Oral testimony gathered for this thesis reinforces Lake's portrayal of a society sending contradictory messages to women regarding romance, sexuality and workplace and domestic roles. Indeed, ideas relating to femininity, marriage and family were changing throughout these decades, which simultaneously reinforced and undermined glory box practices by 'modern' female consumers across public and private spheres. Glory boxes can also be inserted into discussions had by historians such as Lake, Kate Darian-Smith, Joy Damousi, Reekie, Kingston, Lisa Featherstone, Kay Saunders and Geoffrey Bolton around conflicting notions during World War II of 'true

²⁹ Marilyn Lake, "Female desires: the meaning of World War II" in *Memories and Dreams. Reflections on Twentieth-century Australia* in eds. Richard White and Penny Russell (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, Pty., Ltd., 1997), 117-136.

womanhood.’³⁰ These social debates in Australia were being conducted widely by feminists, magazine columnists and the military hierarchy.

Secondly, the ambivalent nature of the glory box is also evident when it is analysed as an object of modern economic and social consumption in the twentieth century. Don Slater argues that the 1920s was ‘probably the first decade to proclaim a generalised ideology of affluence’ and that ‘it promoted a powerful link between everyday consumption and modernisation.’³¹ Yet while on the cusp of this new modern age, the glory box as a symbol of consumer culture both embraced and rejected the ‘modern.’ Glory boxes were modern and yet ‘anti-modern’ in terms of the goods they held, the methodologies of acquisition and the reasons why they were collected. Glory box collecting practices embraced modernity through an attachment to goods accumulation, the purchase of some new materials, the cementing of the connection between consumerism, domesticity and femininity, and a symbolic post-war focus on home, suburbia and woman as central to family and domesticity. Even handcraft activity fed commerce through the purchase of materials, patterns, and equipment.³² But, as explored in subsequent chapters, modernity was also rejected by glory box practices in terms of its maintenance of traditions, its

³⁰ Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront. Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990); Joy Damousi, “Marching to Different Drums. Women’s Mobilisations 1914-1939” in *Gender Relations in Australia. Domination and Negotiation*, eds. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Australia: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1992), 350-275; Reekie, *Temptations*; Kingston. *Basket, Bag and Trolley*; Lisa Featherstone, “Sexy Mamas? Women, Sexuality and Reproduction in Australia in the 1940s.” *Australian Historical Studies Special Issue: Histories of Sexuality* Vol.6, No.126, Oct (2005): 234-252; Kay Saunders and Geoffrey Bolton, “Girdled for War. Women’s Mobilisations in World War Two” in Saunders and Evans *Gender Relations in Australia*, 376-397.

³¹ Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, Oxford & Massachusetts: Polity Press & Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 1997), 12.

³² Modern consumerism in post-war America and its attachment to home and family is discussed by Elaine Tyler May, “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home” in *Consumer Society in American History. A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 300-301.

continuation of hand-production, and its rejection of purchase on credit. Glory boxes contained a mix of traditional and 'modern' objects but were hardly beacons of post-war modernity. By the 1950s, portable modern commodities were available and affordable, yet glory boxes were still overwhelmingly conservative, even old-fashioned in terms of their contents. For example there were no references to appliances in glory box collections, just simple kitchen items and varying degrees of linen and fancywork.³³ Yet Australian women were explicitly looking forward to modern homes and marriages while they collected for their glory boxes, and the glory box ritual was, up until the 1950s, still incorporated into these evolving definitions.

By the 1950s, the glory box represented a desire for the new, nostalgia for the familiar and a respect for the hand-made. It demonstrates a fine balance between what Jackson Lears calls 'the tension between authenticity and artifice.'³⁴ This could also be described as the tension between the mass-produced and the hand-made, necessity and luxury, depending upon the individual meanings ascribed to glory box objects by the women themselves, as well as meanings imposed from without. Glory boxes contained the outputs of both production and consumption. There was no simple linear progression of industrial development from one to the other. Mass and individual production and consumption were entwined within glory boxes, the emphasis shifting from woman to woman, culture to culture and decade to decade, and these attributes will be explored further in Chapter Two. As consumer goods, glory

³³ As there is little data on the activities of previous generations (that is, mothers), I can't comment on any possible shift in the spirit in which the glory box tradition evolved from the very early, through to the mid-twentieth century.

³⁴ Jackson Lears, "Beyond Veblen. Rethinking Consumer Culture in America" in *Consuming Visions. Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon, J. Bronner (Delaware, New York & London: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1989), 97.

boxes were desired and purchased but for delayed rather than immediate gratification, which is usually the hallmark of consumer culture. As a form of cultural commodity, they embodied consumerism as well as defied it. Consequently, the production and consumption of glory boxes can be analysed through these paradigms of gender and consumerism. While developed in more specific detail in Chapters Two to Five through an examination of acquisition, community, individual production and sexuality, it is necessary to outline some broad dimensions of women's participation in post-industrial consumer culture in order to provide a more general context.

Women and Post-Industrial Consumer Culture:

The impact of industrialisation upon the accumulation of objects highlights the potential for glory boxes to be illustrative of the process of industrialisation, the objects reflecting changes in materials, forms, production methods, trade and acquisition.³⁵ Of relevance to this study are what women purchased, how these purchases varied at different points in time, why these variations occurred, and how this affected the changing nature of the glory box. Women who owned glory boxes were simultaneously producers and consumers, they provided the labour for the things they made that they later consumed; they consumed the produce of others (both the mass-produced and the handmade produce of other women) and they provided the labour to pay for the items they purchased – labour to produce and labour to earn and consume.³⁶ As consumerism increased during the 1950s, so did its impact upon glory box collections, further emphasising the purchased and machine produced over the hand-made. As

³⁵ A similar project which assesses museum and retail collections to explore the impact of industrialisation on goods accumulation and valuing has been undertaken by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, *The Value of Things* (Switzerland: Birkhauser – Publishers for Architecture, 2000).

³⁶ Similar issues are explored by Ben Fine, *The World of Consumption. The Material and Cultural Revisited* (London & New York: Routledge, Second Edition, 2002), 83.

Stella Lees and June Senyard have observed, acquisitive practices in Australia reflected 'modern' shifts away from self-sufficiency and towards new materials, commodities and consumer trends,³⁷ and this is reflected in post-war glory boxes and is supported by oral testimony.

The seeds of change that would influence the ways in which women developed their glory boxes in Australia in the 1950s, had been sown in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in industrialised England and North America, which were the key economic and cultural influences on Australia as sites of consumption.³⁸

Peter Stearns argues that 'the arrival of consumption in Western Europe involved truly revolutionary change in the ways goods were sold, in the array of goods available and cherished, and in the goals people defined for their daily lives.'³⁹ The relevant primary changes include the evolution of the mass production of affordable domestic goods, the intertwining of women with domesticity and the consumption of those goods, and the role of women both as the producers and consumers of those goods. These concepts will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

These trends were intimately connected to the rise of a middle class during the nineteenth century, living above the basic requirements for survival, with a desire to demonstrate their gentility through the material culture of modest luxury and leisure. Thanks to mass production, goods such as textiles, metals and furniture were less expensive, more available and being made from

³⁷ Paraphrased from Stella Lees and June Senyard, *The 1950s...how Australia became a modern society and everyone got a house and car* (South Yarra, Victoria: Hyland House Publishing Pty Ltd, 1987), 76.

³⁸ Slater provides a useful overview of the evolution of consumerism in western Europe in Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 13, 15 and 18.

³⁹ Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History. The global transformation of desire* (London & New York: Routledge, Second Edition, 2001), 25.

cheaper materials, making domestic goods affordable for even the working poor.⁴⁰ Changes in the ways in which women shopped, the increasing availability of portable domestic goods and the subsequent linking of women to domestic material culture, resulted in a consumer ideology that, as Maggie Andrews and Mary Talbot argue, are 'tied up with the emergence of the new domestic ideology of middle-classness, which was pivoted upon the notion of women in the home but, as time progressed, on the necessity for women to go outside the home to purchase for the home.'⁴¹

This new middle class had means and aspirations, and the newly available goods were primarily portable domestic items, such as chinaware, cutlery, and household linen, which were all goods found in twentieth-century glory boxes. Having the means was also due to the numbers of women working prior to marriage, and Stearns notes of eighteenth-century, western European women of gentility that 'many women in this class now worked for a time before marriage, thus gaining direct access to money and some experiences with new levels of consumption.'⁴² This little-recognised point is directly applicable to many post-1930s glory box collectors in Australia who had (especially with the higher wages of the war period) a small disposable income for glory box purchases. This also gave women who were working before marriage access to experience in consumption practices which they would continue after marriage. Consequently domestic goods were accessible, and they were also feminised. And glory boxes can be read as female not only in their domesticity, but also as

⁴⁰ Discussed in Linda Young, *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century. America, Australia and Britain* (Basingstoke, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 159.

⁴¹ Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot, "Introduction: women in consumer culture" in *All the World and Her Husband. Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture*, eds. Maggie Andrews and Mary, M. Talbot (London & New York: Cassell), 2000, 3.

⁴² Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 61.

objects loaded with sexual symbolism, an idea which will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Matter of 'Need' and 'Want':

Within this evolving democratic environment of more goods available to more people, definitions of luxury and what might be considered as an essential item remained connected to a persistent Victorian morality and work ethic of saving, frugality, caution, patience, and planning. It was an ethic that had an important conscious and subconscious influence on women's acquisitive attitudes and practices in relation to glory boxes, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. As Colin Campbell has observed in the context of the United States, the Puritan inheritance 'encouraged successive generations to place work above leisure, thrift above spending, and deferred above immediate gratification.'⁴³ Hugh McKay makes similar observations about the social attitudes of Australians born during the 1920s and early 1930s who 'embraced the so-called (Protestant, non-conformist) "work ethic" with a vengeance...(having) seen what unemployment could do either to their own fathers or to relatives, friends and neighbours.'⁴⁴

These values were reflected in the very nature of glory box collecting, which required planning, saving, and the deferral of pleasure. Many domestic items which were once defined as 'luxuries,' became 'decencies' and then 'necessities.'⁴⁵ They were designed to embellish a 'civilised' domestic

⁴³ Colin Campbell, "Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming" in Glickman, *Consumer Society in American History*, 19. Also referred to in Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 25.

⁴⁴ Hugh McKay, *Generations. Baby Boomers, their parents and their children* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Ltd, 1997), 18.

⁴⁵ Progression outlined in Neil Brewer, John McKendrick and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 1.

environment, including the kitchen, living room and bedroom which were the key furnishing spaces for glory boxes. In fact, glory boxes can be seen as an act of 'basic provisioning' by women as they accumulated portable property for married domestic life. Even the more 'luxury' items, such as fine needlework, were the labour of the hand, while crystal and fine china were the result of rational selection, careful saving and planning. Thus Thorstein Veblen's theory of 'conspicuous consumption,'⁴⁶ whereby domestic goods were accumulated for their own sake rather than for need, is made complicated by how glory box goods are defined. Women talked about essentials, but also articulated the process as an opportunity to acquire what they may not have the means to later: the 'nice things,' such as nightwear which were items of deferred desire rather than a requirement.

Consequently, the concept of 'desire' is applicable to glory boxes. The planning, saving, selecting, storing, and viewing of the objects, as well as their projection into their future domestic environment, were all as pleasurable, if not more so, than the actual use of the object itself. As Campbell argues 'the illusion is always better than the reality, the promise more interesting than the actuality...the true focus of desire is less the object itself than the experience the consumer anticipates possessing it will bring.'⁴⁷ Glory boxes were indeed a mix of pragmatism and wish-fulfilment, the material representations of hopes, plans and desires, which matched societal preferences at the time for women as wives, mothers and homemakers.

Glory Box as Cultural Commodity:

⁴⁶ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York & London: The MacMillan Company, 1899), 68-101.

⁴⁷ Campbell, "Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming," 26.

Glory boxes, which from the 1930s to 1960s contained a changing mix of goods – purchases, gifts and the hand-made – were ultimately produced for the Australian marriage market. They included mass-produced commodities, which through careful selection acquired a personal meaning to the owner. For example, a crystal vase seen in a Bevilles' department store advertisement and purchased at the store was assigned more generalised market meanings, but the acquirer still imbued the vase with her own cultural meanings associated with box-building. There were the products of individual production which held intrinsic value as creative and memory objects, as well as collective market value in innumerable households (such as needlework made by women for their boxes, a personal and specific act). There were gifts, inalienable objects attached to cross-generational memories, as well as items purchased (and therefore part of the commodity marketplace), or made (and therefore part of the collectivity of female household production). All these objects were infused with meaning, no matter how they were exchanged or acquired, although some had more layers of personal and cultural meaning than others. Inventories of particular collections will be provided in Chapter Two, and the specifics of these meanings will be explored through the stories of interviewed women throughout the chapters to follow.

The significance of these commodities was underpinned by the social, cultural and economic contexts in which they were produced. As Fine argues, 'each commodity or commodity group is best understood in terms of a unity of economic and social processes which vary significantly from one commodity to another, each creating and reflecting upon what (can) be referred to as its own system of provision.'⁴⁸ Such processes resulted in the commodification of the

⁴⁸ Fine, *The World of Consumption*, 82. By a 'system of provision' Fine means 'the relationship between production, design, retailing and ultimately, consumption itself,' 85.

glory box, whereby multiple values (such as fashion, tradition, availability and affordability) were constructed and assigned by mothers, manufacturers, distributors, advertisers, and the women themselves. Moreover, for glory boxes, their meaning and value lay as much in the collective as in the individual nature of the objects. Their power was in the mix of production and consumption, tradition and modernity. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood in their anthropological approach to consumption argue that 'goods assembled together in ownership make physical, visible statements about the hierarchy of values to which their chooser subscribes.'⁴⁹

Thus seemingly ordinary objects of consumption can be extremely revealing, with glory boxes the embodiment of both the mundane and intimate nature of collectives of objects, of the personal choices involved in acquisition, the way they were possessed and the broader social doctrines they could represent. It was a two-way transfer of ascribing meaning between the creations and the creators of the world they inhabited. Women placed meanings on their glory boxes and the goods placed meanings on the women themselves – meanings which then have meaning ascribed to them. A mass-produced, impersonal item which was turned into a possession that belonged to someone resulted in that person creating, as Grant McCracken expresses it, 'a personal 'world of goods' which reflected their own experience and concepts of self and world.'⁵⁰ A glory box was indeed a 'world of goods.' It contained objects of material and metaphorical, individual and collective, meanings which enable a breadth of challenging cross-disciplinary interpretations.

⁴⁹ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods. Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996 [first published 1979]), ix.

⁵⁰ Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption. New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 86. This argument is sympathetic with the anthropological approach taken by Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods*.

IV Methodology and Sources

The history of the glory box is rich in memory and material culture and it is from these tangible and intangible sources that my research has primarily been drawn. This project has been a process of creating a glory box archive of testimony and artefacts, an archive which could easily be expanded over time by families, local communities, and museums. It has also proven to be a cross-disciplinary endeavour, drawing upon consumer and gender historical and cultural theory, material culture and memory theory, and transnational theories of migration. But ultimately it is in the objects and personal testimony that the stories lie, and the meanings are embedded.

Oral Sources:

Glory boxes are part of what Deborah Ryan describes as ‘the neglected history of the hopes, dreams and aspirations of lower middle-class women.’⁵¹ Oral testimony is critical to the research methodology of this thesis. This project is part of a tradition since the 1970s of documenting working and lower middle-class women’s experiences in Australia through memory, such as that undertaken in a variety of ways by Bell, Janet McCalman, Darian-Smith, Wendy Lowenstein, and Claire Wright.⁵² Without oral history, the significance of women’s experiences relating to glory boxes would be lost as the material evidence of the boxes and their contents cannot speak for themselves. This generation of women are now aged in their seventies, eighties and nineties so

⁵¹ Deborah S. Ryan, “All the World and Her Husband’: The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, 1908-39” in eds. Andrews and Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband*, 11.

⁵² Bell, *Generations*; Janet McCalman, *Journeyings. The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920-1990* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1993); Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*; Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour. An Oral Record of the 1930s Depression in Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House Publishing Pty., Ltd., 1978); Claire Wright. *Beyond the Ladies’ Lounge: Australian female publicans* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2003).

the collective memory needed to be documented before their generation disappeared. Individual and collective interview formats have been used, enabling the interweaving of individual and collective memories, as well as the opportunity for women to challenge and reflect on past social mores with the benefit of experience and hindsight. This is important to recognise, as women's reflections about their glory box collecting has occurred some 50 years later, and time and experience can change, re-interpret and erase memories. As Luisa Passerini has argued,

Oral testimonies also bring into the open already existing areas of particularly feminine social life involving the passing of experiences and stories, from mother to daughter, grandmother to grandchild, and between neighbours, friends, and relations. In this context the areas of discourse are distinctive in nature and value – they constitute family stories, conventionalised traditions of long standing, personal narratives. These three levels, and perhaps other ones, interplay with each other. Areas of women's discourse are discernible and seem endowed with cultural and symbolic autonomy.⁵³

There is much interplay within and between these memories, with collective agreement and reinforcement, as well as some divergence and difference. Women interviewed about acquiring and making items for their glory boxes, spoke with enthusiasm, humour and great enjoyment. There was generally pride in the quality of their work, its variety, the skills required, and the prudence and patience demanded. The group interview format encouraged the women to exchange experiences and give meanings to their lives they may

⁵³ Luisa Passerini, "Women's Personal Narratives. Myths, Experiences and Emotions" in *Interpreting People's Lives. Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, eds. The Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 193.

otherwise have denied or ignored. It is a process that, as Bettina Aptheker has observed, 'allows us to take the patterns women create and the meanings women invent and learn from them. If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning or invention to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality.'⁵⁴

The sharing of experiences which these women had 'forgotten' has resulted in the creation of patterns and connections for them personally, and allowed the weaving of narratives that could be then underpinned by larger economic and cultural contexts and influences. It was a privilege to be allowed to engage with these often very intimate experiences, and to nurture generous relationships of trust and respect, despite our differences in age, education, and ethnicity in some cases. We were able to establish cross-generational conversations during the interviews that were moving, humorous and endlessly rich in their historical potential. The willingness of these women to reflect on the past in both its promise and limitations, and to make that public, has offered this study an invaluable body of evidence and its critical human dimension. The process has been a revelation of female experience, previously hidden by the hierarchies of historical value, and the sheer seeming ordinariness of the subject. In a sense, the commonality of the glory box experience had secured its historical absence.

The glory box tradition was indeed a cross-cultural practice belonging to Australian women of a particular generation, and its practice initiated women into a broad community of glory box practitioners. This concept of a 'community' of glory box women is developed in Chapter Three, with the assistance of writers such as Graham Day, William Vitek, Andrew Mason and

⁵⁴ Bettina Aptheker, *Tapestries of Life. Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meanings of Daily Experience* (Amherst, USA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 39.

Anne-Marie Fortier. In particular, their discussions of the definitions, meanings and organic nature of communities have helped me to work through whether glory box practitioners, regardless of ethnicity, class or locality, can indeed be regarded as a community. That so many women were collecting for their glory boxes during these decades, maintained an environment in which a feminised domestic consumption was legitimised and reinforced, safe in the social acceptability of this cultural practice by 'communities' of women.

The framework for my narrative was established by the 17 interviews I conducted in the Lilydale district on the outskirts of Melbourne's east in 1992 and 2003. All but two of the women were living in the district when collecting for their boxes, and all but one woman had a glory box. All the women have English, Scottish and/or Irish ancestry and all but one are at least two generations removed from the first generation migrant descendant. They were raised in Christian, primarily Protestant, churches. These interviews (which include anecdotal accounts about sisters and mothers), plus interviews with other Australian-born Melbourne women in individual and group formats, have resulted in the documenting of around 35 personal stories of varying degrees of depth. A number of radio interviews conducted in 2003 and 2004 which involved listeners calling in to share their own memories,⁵⁵ as well as the many small community exhibitions across Australia since the Lilydale exhibition in 1992, have constantly reinforced many of the stories told. Moreover, for her study of the domestic craft produced by women from the Geelong region in Victoria, Ruth Lee interviewed 28 women of varying economic and cultural backgrounds, most of whom collected for glory boxes in

⁵⁵ Radio interview: Derek Guile with Claire Wright (including talkback), 774 ABC Radio, Melbourne, 13/11/2003; radio interview: Denis Walter (including talkback), 3AW, Melbourne, 23/6/2003; radio interview: Jennifer Fleming, ABC Regional Radio, Melbourne, 22/6/2004; radio interview: Lyn Haultain (including talkback), 774 ABC Radio, Melbourne, 23/7/2004.

Australia and overseas during the 1930s-1950s period.⁵⁶ All these stories have acted as an informal quantitative, and at times qualitative, survey sample, incorporating numerous capital cities and regional towns across four Australian states. (See **Appendix I: Sample Interview Questions**)

Moreover, the women interviewed for this study have come from working or lower middle-class backgrounds, so that while the glory box tradition seems to cut across class, ethnicity and urban and regional locality, there may be distinctions resulting from socio-economic background which have not been reflected either in my sample or in many of the stories recorded across the country. Nevertheless, I have no hesitation in asserting that these stories reflect broad national trends and experiences during the 1930s to 1950s, and a number of conclusions may be drawn from these interconnections. There was no one type of glory box, no uniform list of objects that were collected, no standard rule for maternal and fraternal involvement, no inherited code of practice to which everyone adhered. Yet overwhelmingly, women collected for their boxes with a view (whether active or subconscious) to marriage, and this sample provides a representative snapshot of Australian-born women and their glory box activities at this time.

The project has been further enriched by the case studies of 23 women from selected cultural backgrounds who migrated to Australia, primarily in the twenty years following World War II. Oral testimony can be of particular importance in documenting the experiences of migrant women, for whom there is often no other avenue for public expression. Oral history collections relating to Australian migrant histories have been under development at cultural

⁵⁶ Ruth Lorna Lee, "Our Fingers Were Never Idle: Women and Domestic Craft in the Geelong Region, 1900-1960" (MA, Deakin University, Victoria, 1993), 120-124.

institutions such as Museum Victoria and the Italian Historical Society CO.AS.IT (Melbourne), the National Library of Australia and the National Museum of Australia (Canberra), the migration Museum (Adelaide) and the Powerhouse Museum (Sydney). These trends are also reflected in the recent scholarship of Australian historians such as Sara Wills, Giulia Ciccone, Nathalie Nguyen and Alistair Thomson.⁵⁷ The women interviewed for this study are from Italian, Greek, Irish, Maltese and Dutch backgrounds but the small sample prevents this from being a quantitative or comprehensive survey, although cultural regional and religious variations within groups of women from the same country have been recognised where possible. Any number of other cultural groups could have been selected – this modest sample contained the project, and focused on women who migrated to Australia in significant numbers, some well-known for their glory box traditions, such as Greek and Italian women. Women were sourced through community connections developed during my role as Senior Curator of Migration at Museum Victoria, as well as from referrals from the radio appearances. (See **Appendix II: Summary Biographies of Interviewed Women**)

Consequently, while my methodology is to create a broader historical narrative through the connecting and diverging patterns illustrated by stories and objects, I hope not to lose the inherent value of the personal story, the humanity of the women themselves and their objects, in the quest for establishing a

⁵⁷ Sara Wills, "Passengers of Memory: Constructions of British Immigrants in Post-Imperial Australia." *Australian Journal of Politics and History*. Vol.51 No.1 (2005): 94-107; Giulia Ciccone, "Meeting a marriage partner in a new land: South Australian Calabria-born women tell their story." *Italian Historical Society Journal* Vol.14 No.2 (2006): 2-8; Nathalie Nguyen, *Voyage of Hope: Vietnamese Australian Women's Narratives* (Altona, Victoria: Common Ground, 2005); Alistair Thomson, "Le storie di vita nello studio dell'emigrazione femminile" ("What was really going on! Illuminating migrant women's experience through the comparative study of contemporary and retrospective life stories"). *Quaderni Storici*, Vol.120 No.3 (2005): 685-708.

collective history. These are the stories of the creators, collectors, users and savers of domestic goods, and like the work of British historian Carolyn Steedman, this study is 'about stories; and it is a book about things (objects, entities, relationships, people), and the way in which we talk and write about them: about the difficulties of metaphor.'⁵⁸ Glory boxes created and maintained relationships between people, and between people and objects. They invite the telling of personal stories which can surprise in their simplicity and in the complexity of their broader implications and revelations about the society in which they were collected. They are, by nature, metaphorical, and demand a digging beneath the personal narratives to uncover economic, sexual, and cultural meanings.

The representation of absence has proven a particular challenge for this project, such as the women who did not have glory boxes, and the women who did but who did not marry. For women of this generation, this can be a sensitive area and at present I am dependent upon only two stories, as well as anecdotal evidence, about unmarried women and glory boxes. Oral testimony has also demanded conclusions which have run counter to the assumptions with which I had already approached the subject. For example, the interviews reveal a general lack of conscious ritual in the collecting process, an absence of a ritualistic handing down of traditions from mother to daughter. The collecting activity was surprisingly individual in nature, and there was less of the romance of 'secret women's business' than I had anticipated. Collecting for glory boxes was pragmatic, it was automatic, it was, as many women observed, 'what you did.'

⁵⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape of a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1986), 23.

Objects as Evidence:

Material culture also offers an essential form of evidence for analysing the glory box. By its very nature it is about the collection and production of things in a tangible container. As a curator, the power and potential of objects as a form of historical evidence never ceases to excite and engage me. Frequently, memory and object go hand in hand – the woman telling a particular story can point to her box or draw attention to a particular piece of embroidery to illustrate her point. Objects can further be utilised to illustrate the collective narratives, as most glory box collections resonate with most women. Even where women no longer have their boxes or their collections, they often illustrate their stories via artefacts belonging to other people. The objects under discussion are often commonplace, ordinary, even mundane – mass-produced canisters, glassware, and towels, embroidered items where the quality of the needlecraft may vary, but the patterns, colours and fabrics appear over and over again. As Slater argues, ‘even (especially?) the most trivial objects of consumption both make up the fabric of our meaningful life and connect this intimate and mundane world to great fields of social contestation.’⁵⁹ Objects can also represent cultural and regional specificity, including traditional costumes, hand- woven rugs and embroidered linen,⁶⁰ thereby acting as material documents of patterns, styles, materials and techniques which can become frozen in time here, and no longer produced in the country of origin.

As purveyors of personal and domestic meanings, glory boxes provide a vehicle for analysing the symbols and personal relativities behind domestic objects.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton have observed that ‘the

⁵⁹ Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 3.

⁶⁰ Such items are held in the Museum's migration collection or have been recorded as held in private family collections, see Deborah Tout-Smith, *Contemporary Craft and Cultural Identity Project Report* (Melbourne: Museum of Victoria, 1992).

transactions between people and the things they create constitute a central aspect of the human condition. Past memories, present experiences, and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment.⁶¹ Domestic objects can have attached a significance that reveals their power beyond the ordinary and gives them a higher value because of their domestic nature, rather than in spite of it, so that 'the home contains the most special objects: those that were selected by the person to attend to regularly or to have close at hand, that create permanence in the intimate life of a person, and therefore that are most involved in making up his or her identity.'⁶² Glory boxes and the often ordinary objects they contain, must not be dismissed for their gendered, domestic materiality. A crocheted doily or china milk jug has been selected, made, kept, and used in an evolving process of the individual creation of identity.

Furthermore, the material culture of domesticity, which is overwhelmingly the material culture of women, enables the exploration of the formation of identities, aspirations and behaviours through personal engagement with things. As Emma Casey and Lydia Martens argue, 'domestic material culture...shows how femininity is negotiated and constructed via material culture and how women operate within the domestic sphere with the resources available to them to use material culture to stimulate, enhance and enrich the everyday routines of the domestic sphere.'⁶³ Glory boxes and their varied contents provided a tangible means by which young women of modest means

⁶¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things. Domestic symbols and the self* (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ix.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶³ Lydia Martens and Emma Casey, "Gender, Consumer Culture and Promises of Betterment in Late Modernity" in *Gender and Consumption. Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life*, eds. Emma Casey and Lydia Martens (England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2007), 235.

planned, saved for and aspired to influence their future domestic environment within a broad community of glory box practitioners.

Let us take as examples three glory boxes, each from a slightly different time and owned and filled by three different women. One was created during the 1930s, in the middle of the Depression, made for a woman by her father out of kerosene packaging and lined with butcher's paper. She filled it almost entirely with the needlecraft of her own hands. The second was purchased during World War II by a young woman with her boyfriend, selected and paid for together. It was a veneer sideboard, not branded as a glory box and she filled it with her needlework as well as purchased manchester and other household goods. The third was purchased around 1950 by the young woman herself; it was a veneer glory box with sections to store linen and breakables. She filled it with a mix of purchased kitchenware and linen, gifts and inherited items, but little needlecraft.

Without making sweeping generalisations, there are already evident here revealing patterns regarding the decline over time in handmade production, and the impact of economic climates on the boxes obtained. The artefacts reveal changing styles and popularity of types of glory boxes, or techniques of making do for those who could not afford a 'proper' box. They illustrate which items were fashionable to collect and items that, when compared to a number of collections, may be regarded as more unusual or peculiar to a particular collector. They demonstrate wartime rationing, income frugality, the decline of handmade production, and increasing mass production and consumerism. They reveal future hopes for a home, and hint at the promise of sexual activity. This approach to the hidden meanings of objects is in sympathy with Ulrich's

work in the context of the United States in *The Age of Homespun*.⁶⁴ She uses objects to tell both personal and collective narratives, and connects the 'study of household production with the study of expanding commerce.' Ulrich also aims to challenge the 'linear narrative of new England's transition from household to factory.'⁶⁵ This is fundamental to my own analysis of the impact of a rising post-Depression consumer economy on glory box production.

The material culture of the glory box extends past the box and its contents to also include the tools of production, such as sewing machines and sewing, knitting and crochet kits, and purchased goods. These document the methods which produced hand-made goods and how these methods and practices changed. It also includes related ephemera, although this is very difficult to find as it rarely survives – although a receipt of purchase for a glory box has surfaced, recording how much was paid for a box, who purchased it and when and from which store. Sewing books, patterns and stamped patterned fabrics demonstrate popular patterns at a particular time, and document shifts in the type of needlework that was produced, and the adapting of output due to wartime restrictions on fabrics and colours.

Consequently, the material culture of the glory box, from the humble cheque stub to the grandest of chests, can assist in the charting of the social, economic and cultural shifts of the 1930s to 1950s period and the experiences of women within this framework. As Roche has argued,

a body of knowledge and a surplus of meanings are attached to all objects. We grasp this in the way they are acquired, in which morality,

⁶⁴ Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

distinctive principles and personal choices play their parts in deciding how much of one's budget is to be devoted to them; in the way they are used in which there are manifested a doctrine and a morality of use within the norms and rules of propriety; and in the way they are possessed.⁶⁶

Glory boxes give materiality to the stories, while the stories give meaning to the objects. Yet for the women themselves, these artefacts, with all their layers of meaning, appear to have coexisted in comfort. Oral testimonies demonstrate that women who had glory boxes see them as a significant part of their lives, without necessarily attaching the myriad of meanings to them that this study will.

Archival and Literary Sources:

Beyond the core oral and material sources, primary research has been supplemented by a wide variety of literature contemporary to the period. This includes magazines and newspapers, particularly advertisements for glory boxes and their contents; needlecraft publications; instructional articles and books for young women on marriage preparation protocols; and fiction where it refers to glory boxes, establishing a parallel narrative reflecting glory box customs and changing trends. The occasional luggage lists of migrant women have provided a few insights into dowry items brought out to Australia, as well as the luggage itself, which frequently doubled as a marriage chest.

Photography collections have proven useful in contextualising women's activities, such as shopping. For example, Mark Strizic's evocative images of Melbourne street life during the mid to late 1950s include young women

⁶⁶ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 7.

window shopping and couples looking at store displays of engagement rings.⁶⁷ The Coles Myer archive includes many images of department store interiors and lingerie window displays.⁶⁸ Women's glory box experiences are also contextualised through the imagery of their personal lives, such as photographs of families and friends, wedding portraits, and images of the local environments in which they lived, worked and shopped.

V Chapter Summary

Chapters in this thesis have been divided thematically, and are overlaid with the cross-cultural experiences of the women interviewed and objects drawn from their collections. Chapter One establishes and investigates the social, economic, cultural and gendered contexts in which glory box activity operated from 1930 to 1960. It was a period of massive change and upheaval, encompassing the Depression, World War II, and post-war migration and economic booms, all of which affected glory box activity. Chapter Two explores the impact of the intersection of production, consumption and femininity on the glory box tradition, with the Depression, World War II and post-war years providing the backdrop for women's testimony and collections. Within the context of an evolving modern consumer society, glory boxes practices do not reflect a simple linear development, with many women during these decades continuing as both producers and consumers, according to income, inclination and ethnicity.

⁶⁷ Published in Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*.

⁶⁸ Held by the State Library of Victoria.

Chapter Three looks at the notion of ‘communities’ of women – geographical, migrant, family, workplace and peer – and how these varying relationships and interactions influenced, and have been influenced by, glory box traditions, and associated rituals and activities. Chapter Four explores the central needlecraft traditions at the heart of the glory box which crossed time and culture. Only in the latter years of the period in question did the emphasis on the hand-made and related skills lessen. Chapter Five examines the many and contradictory layers of sexual meanings embedded in the glory box practice, a practice which simultaneously embraced virginity, sex, and domesticity. This discussion occurs within the context of the social debates regarding sex and femininity-related issues during the 1930s-1950s period, as well as more recent feminist historical analysis of this era.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I offer some observations about the demise of the glory box tradition in Australia in the years immediately following the 1960s. This will include a reflection on the absence of glory boxes from women’s historiographies in Australia, as well as a discussion of the fate of the glory boxes and related cultural practices represented in this thesis.

Chapter One: Decades of Change: 1930-1960

1.1 Introduction

The thirty years from 1930 to 1960 were decades of significant social, cultural and economic change in Australia. Within this short period, the nation experienced a chronic economic depression, a world war, an economic recovery, a massive migration boom, the entrenchment of a modern consumer economy, and shifting notions of femininity and the home. All of these had a dramatic impact upon Australian society, and upon glory box culture. Indeed, the women who are the key subjects of this study grew up during the first half of the twentieth century, in what Eric Hobsbawm has called the 'Age of Catastrophe.'⁶⁹ This is the social, cultural and economic backdrop for the evolution of the glory box tradition in Australia. It shaped the new directions the tradition took, continuing to embody societal expectations and prescriptions for young women.

World War II influenced the way people worked, what was manufactured and imported, what people purchased, and when and how many people married. It affected the number and types of homes that were built, and subsequent labour and population shortages triggered an enormous migration program from the United Kingdom and Europe. At the end of the war, people desired domestic security, stability in times of uncertainty, be it as a result of economic depression, war or post-war reconstruction and the growing fears instilled by the new threat of the Cold War. While the 1950s are often assumed to be a period of untroubled prosperity, it was not until halfway through the decade

⁶⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, the Penguin Group, 1994), 6.

that economic and consumer security stabilised and appeared assured. Throughout the ebbs and flows of the 1930-1960 period in Australia, the glory box tradition found ways, if not always to thrive, to certainly survive. It adapted according to commodity availability, evolved with consumer trends and influenced and embraced incoming European traditions.

This chapter will present an overview of some of the major social, cultural and economic changes of the period. It will establish the framework by which these contexts are connected to the glory box tradition – its maintenance, evolution, high visibility and telling absences – which will be explored thematically in the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Migration: Transmission of Women and Glory Box Practices

When we came to Australia we didn't have a lot of money, what my mum did was she left everything behind, she was convinced she was going back...she left the two trunks behind and just came with the bare essentials because she thought she was going to make her money and go back. She didn't ...(so) some of her precious things she left there.

(Carmel Tata, migrated with her parents as a child from Italy, 1968)⁷⁰

In their small way, glory boxes and their contents embodied global motivations for migrating, gendered cultural practices, social and economic conditions of both home and host countries, and the repercussions and experiences of migrating upon migrant and receiving populations. Migration is a continuum,

⁷⁰ Interview with Carmel Tata (nee Catalani) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Strathmore, Victoria, 2006.

resonating across familial, community, national and international boundaries. As Stephen Castles and Mark Miller argue, the 'migratory process' is 'the complex set of factors and interactions which lead to international migration and influence its course. Migration is a process which affects every dimension of social existence, and which develops its own complex dynamics.'⁷¹ As people migrated to Australia over two centuries, so did the primarily British and European traditions of the glory box. With the overwhelming predominance of migrants from England, followed by Scotland and Ireland from earliest non-indigenous settlement, the marriage chest customs of generations of Australian-born residents evolved primarily from these cultural groups.

Whether the predominantly British and Irish women migrating to Australia during the nineteenth century brought with them dowry or trousseau items would have depended upon their cultural background, marital circumstances, socio-economic background, and even the practical consideration of how much luggage they could transport. It would not have been till the rise of a locally-born generation of women in the second half of the nineteenth century that glory box traditions had a real opportunity to emerge and thrive within settled urban and rural communities. In terms of the box or chest itself, there is no evidence of a strong chest or cabinet-making tradition being imported from Europe to a predominantly British Australia in the nineteenth century, as it was, for example, to North America, where immigration from strong marriage chest-making cultures such as Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia and the Netherlands was well underway from the seventeenth century.⁷² Indeed, there remained a large market for imported English furniture until the 1890s, while

⁷¹ Stephen Castles and Mark J., Miller, *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Third Edition, 2002), 21.

⁷² Schleining, *Treasure Chests*, 44-45.

more affordable colonial Australian furniture was modelled almost entirely on contemporary English designs.⁷³ Numerous inventories of colonial and international exhibitions, private home fitouts, and Kevin Fahy et al's review of colonial Australian furniture in private and public collections, reveal hardly any chests, although many wardrobes with bottom drawers.⁷⁴ In England, chests were no longer essential domestic furniture items.

For those women bringing their dowries, their trunks and suitcases doubled as their glory boxes, a custom of necessity that continued until after World War II. Young women of British and European descent who may have been building their trousseaux during the nineteenth century probably made do with a wardrobe drawer. But it was the post-World War II migration boom that saw an influx of migrants from Europe, with many of the women bringing their own glory box traditions with them. Between 1947 and 1961, net migration figures in Australia reached almost 1.3 million. Almost one third of these were from Britain and Ireland, one quarter from southern Europe (especially Italy and Greece), one fifth from eastern Europe (mainly Poland and the Baltic states), and almost another fifth from northern Europe, especially Germany and Netherlands.⁷⁵ Of particular interest to this study are the large numbers of Italian and Greek immigrants, who arrived in Australia during the 1950s. By 1960, 36,200 Italians, 25,400 Maltese, and 23,700 Greeks had migrated under the assisted passage programs. Many more Italians arrived independently, with 150,000 Italians, mostly from the impoverished rural south, coming via family

⁷³ Kevin Fahy, Christina Simpson and Andrew Simpson, *Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture* (New South Wales: David Ell Press, 1985), 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Figures quoted in John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties. Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2000), 156.

and community sponsorships, many paying their own fares often with sponsor assistance.⁷⁶

Italy and Greece have strong marriage chest traditions and marriage provided the motivation for many women to come to Australia. Thus marriage provides an effective framework for exploring the maintenance of their glory box practices. The early 1950s exposed an imbalance of male/female ratios in Australia that policy makers moved to address – ironic considering the restrictions at the time on southern European family migration and the deliberate selection of single men for labour provision.⁷⁷ Greek and Italian women were particularly targeted, as they were at that time cultural groups with low inter-marriage activity. Nevertheless, the Greek government's reluctance to enable large scale migration of unmarried women persisted until 1961.⁷⁸ During the mid 1950s, some assisted passage programs for single Italian and Greek women were established, although sponsorship remained the primary method by which southern Europeans migrated.⁷⁹ These programs were not simply for the provision of wives for single men but also to meet demand for female workers in both domestic and factory jobs.⁸⁰ The Commonwealth Department of Immigration, churches, and community immigration support groups such as the Good Neighbour Council collaborated to encourage and process arranged and proxy marriages (whereby a substitute groom stood in for a ceremony in the home country so that girls could come out safely married). They arrived on what were known as 'bride ships' in their

⁷⁶ Bob Birrell, "Chapter 2 1945-1972" in *Building a New Community: Immigration and the Victoria Economy*, ed. Andrew Markus (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty., Ltd., 2001), 30.

⁷⁷ Srebrenka Kunek, *The Brides. A Multimedia Installation*, exhibition catalogue (Melbourne: n.p., 1993), 9.

⁷⁸ Anastasios Myrodis Tamos, *The Greeks in Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.

⁷⁹ Kunek, *The Brides*, 42.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

thousands, although exact numbers are impossible to determine.⁸¹ These assistance programs which focused on facilitating marriages aligned public and private spheres. As Murphy has observed, 'through changing the gender balance of migration intakes, through trying to ensure the 'marriageability' of migrant groups, and through marriage brokering, policy attempted to intervene quite directly in managing the realm of intimacy.'⁸² Glory box traditions were one element of this private female sphere, and a direct beneficiary of this increase in young female migration from southern Europe, many of whom brought their boxes and customs with them.

Women are central to any discussion about immigration, although this has not always been acknowledged in historical and social discourses. Rita Simon and Caroline Brettell have argued that

women have essentially been left out of theoretical thinking about migration, whether internal or international, until quite recently. When they have been considered, they have generally been perceived either as non-migrants who wait in the sending areas for their spouses to return or as passive reactors who simply follow a male migrant.⁸³

Castles and Miller have referred to a 'feminisation of migration' since the 1960s, observing that 'gender variables have always been significant in global

⁸¹ On Italian proxy brides see Susi Bella Wardrop, *By Proxy. A Study of Italian Proxy Brides in Australia* (Carlton, Victoria: Italian Historical Society Co.As.It, 1996), 2.

⁸² Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*. 164.

⁸³ Rita James Simon and Caroline B. Brettell, *International Migration: the Female Experience* (New Jersey: Rowman and Allenheld, 1986), 3. A useful overview of women as immigrants (motivations to migrate and settlement issues) in 19th and 20th century North America is explored in *Immigrant Women*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Albany: State University of New York Press, revised second edition, 1994).

migration history, but awareness of the specificity of women in contemporary migrations has grown.⁸⁴ Glory boxes provide one way through which the specificity of women's migration experiences can be explored, experiences of vast validity whether connected to labour, marriage or family reunion.

In this study, migrant women have often been 'reactors' – to families arranging marriages, to Australian Government policy seeking them out as migrant prospects, to the opportunistic desires of fathers, brothers and husbands. James Jupp has reinforced this point, stating that women have assumed a secondary role as migrants, being classified as dependents, be they wives or domestics.⁸⁵ This does not lessen the importance of their experience nor its impact on social developments at family, community and broader public levels. Matthews and Kunek have argued that such a limited interpretation can simplify the female migration experience and disguise government motivations for gender selection in policy making.⁸⁶ Matthews states that immigration policy makers in Australia assumed women

to be adjunctive to male migration. They came as members of families headed by men. Or they followed, once their menfolk had established a measure of security and prosperity...The women arrived in Australia as mothers, brides, wives, daughters, cousins of male migrants. Their movement was subordinate, not independent.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 9.

⁸⁵ James Jupp, *Immigration* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1998), 23. A point also made by Jeannie Martin, "Non-English-Speaking Migrant Women in Australia" in *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, Fourth Reprint, 1990), 234.

⁸⁶ Kunek, 12.

⁸⁷ Matthews, *Good and Mad Women*, 40.

But women have also been active, decisive and brave, creating their own opportunities and futures even within these constructs. A 1965 study reported that some Greek women migrated in order to escape the traditional dowry system; for many a dowry could not even be provided due to the new industrial economy decreasing agricultural land values.⁸⁸

Anne-Marie Fortier also refers to the traditionally masculinised notion of migration, where women have been brought as ‘cultural baggage’ and associated with settlement – and thereby ‘feminised representations of stability, sedentariness and continuity’⁸⁹ – rather than instigators of the migration process itself. She states:

Though (women) circulate within an emphatically patriarchal framework...the migration of women is a vector of transition. As they move through historical moments and geographical spaces, they mark out the thresholds of identity and difference, being and becoming, migrancy and settlement, past times and new times. Women, here, are not simply stationary border figures who enable the male plot, but move through and produce the very thresholds of belonging: a belonging grounded in both migration and settlement, movement and sedentariness.⁹⁰

Moreover, many women left behind were not simply waiting either to be sent for, or to be sent home an income. As Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta observe in the nineteenth century Italian context, ‘in many parts of Italy, men

⁸⁸ R.T. Appleyard, *Motivations of ICEM-Sponsored Emigrants from Southern Europe 1964-65*, Report No.1: Greece (Canberra: Australian National University, 1965), 26-27.

⁸⁹ Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings. Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), 48.

⁹⁰ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*. 49.

could migrate in large numbers only because women could feed their families themselves.⁹¹ Thus mothers, wives, fiancées, sisters and daughters were frequently contributing to the migratory process, by keeping the household economy afloat.⁹² Women have invariably been defined by the family and cultural community through and in which they migrate and settle, and collect their glory boxes. But over time, women have also been agents of their own destiny, actively asserting their relocation, selecting their partner and choosing to follow him, and opting for work recruitment. They also have had motivations, such as the Greek women rejecting traditional landed dowry arrangements, which have remained hidden and unrecognised. It was a female migration beyond simply following men, but it was, argues Andreina De Clementi in the post-World War I Italian context, 'a migration of women expecting to establish new families without the direct intervention of their parents, and without dowries, with no expectation of return to southern Italy or to...plots of land, inheritance patterns, and family structures.'⁹³

The glory box however, remains a potent symbol of their ethnic and gender identity, their shifting through time and space (through the relocation and adaptation of tangible rituals), and their joining of a new community of glory box practitioners in Australia (the customs of which have their own transnational connections). For some migrating women, particularly Mediterranean mothers of unmarried daughters, these equivalent glory box traditions have enabled the continuity of a tangible custom. A connection to

⁹¹ Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, eds, *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives. Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 11.

⁹² This point regarding southern Italian women is discussed in detail in Andreina De Clementi, "Gender Relations and Migration Strategies in the Rural South: Land, Inheritance and the Marriage Market" in Gabaccia and Iacovetta, *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives*, 96-101.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

homeland has been maintained through the ritual of collecting, even if adapted in the new environment. As Fortier has observed, 'anxieties of loss are comforted by gendered displays of generational continuity.'⁹⁴ Glory boxes can be interpreted as one way in which female cultural identity has been transported and adapted through the process of migration. But as will be seen in subsequent chapters, glory boxes also expose the impact of separation and loss caused by displacement, and the diluting of cultural traditions in the transplanted environment. Whatever the case, the personal narratives of women remain valid, albeit diverse, both within and between cultures, revealing patterns of collective experiences of immigration and settlement which also shed light on glory box traditions.

Marriage chests, dowries, and trousseaux were all traditions already alive and well in Australia, brought by women from a myriad of migrating cultures and practised, in population terms, primarily by women of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh descent. After the war, with the increase in numbers of European migrants, and from the 1950s, with a targeted increase in female (and especially young single female) migration, these young unattached, engaged, and proxy married women could tap into and augment a tradition already active in Australia.

1.3 Glory Boxes in the Depression: Means, Motivation and Moderation

It wasn't an official glory box, it was a box which used to hold kerosene in those days. And my father put a lid on it, hinges and a lid, and that was my box. He painted it and lined it...with packing paper. It was in

⁹⁴ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 154.

the thirties. I never went to work. I worked at home so I didn't have a regular income or anything like that. (Ester Rose, collecting for her glory box, 1930s)⁹⁵

What sort of Australia were women living in from 1930-1960 when they were collecting for their glory boxes? What impact did the changing economic conditions have on what, how and why they collected? Domestic circumstances, employments and wages, goods pricing, availability and quality, as well as marital trends all affected the glory box tradition, and this economic landscape was in turn reflected in glory box collections and practices.

The majority of the Australian-born women interviewed for this study were born in the 1920s and early 1930s, part of what McKay has defined as the 'lucky generation.'⁹⁶ Lucky, according to McKay, because they considered themselves fortunate to be able to learn the moral and financial lessons of the Depression while too young to suffer too dramatically from its consequences. He observes that 'as children, they had to endure the hardships of the Depression – hardships which, in retrospect, they see as having been a wonderful preparation for their subsequent, more comfortable existence.'⁹⁷ Moreover, they were able to reap the benefits of the post-war economic and social expansion. They were luckier, therefore, than their parents. Nevertheless they witnessed and felt to varying degrees the deprivations of economic hardship. The Depression provided a formative backdrop for many women, imbuing them with attitudes towards work, saving, and spending which informed, amongst other things, the ways in which they collected for their glory boxes.

⁹⁵ Interview with Ester Rose (nee Wallace) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Seville, Victoria, 1992.

⁹⁶ McKay, *Generations*, 14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

The 1930s Depression was operating within the context of an international economic downturn.⁹⁸ It took hold in Australia due to circumstances such as international debt, a vulnerable economy dependent on international investment and primary exports, and reactionary recovery strategies which only undermined the workforce. Manufacturing slowed, house building stalled and property values declined. There was an acute shortage of inner city rental accommodation for the worst off.⁹⁹ Unemployment escalated and most commentators agree that official figures, incomplete and unreliable, belie the true gravity of the situation. Trade union statistics are the most reliable source (although limited, of course, to workers who were union members), and these indicate that the worst years were 1931-34 when unemployment hovered between one quarter and one third of the union working population. In Victoria, these statistics indicate that unemployment was around 25 per cent from 1931-33.¹⁰⁰

This was the economic environment in which Australian women were (or were not) creating their glory boxes. For single women in truly destitute circumstances (none of whom have been interviewed for this study), their glory box would not have been a priority or even a possibility. They would not have had the space, resources, or the inclination. Judy MacKinolty claims that, for women out of work, 'even the accumulation of the traditional "glory box" was

⁹⁸ See David Clark, "A closed book? The debate on causes" in *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression*, ed. Judy MacKinolty (North Sydney, New South Wales: George Allen & Unwin Australia, Pty., Ltd., 1981), 10-26.

⁹⁹ Janet McCalman, *Struggletown. Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900-1965* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1984), 172.

¹⁰⁰ L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, eds, *The Depression of the 1930s* (North Melbourne, Victoria: Cassell Australia, Ltd., 1968), 89-90, quoting Commonwealth Year Books.

an impossibility.’¹⁰¹ For women just getting by, many would have been occupied with maintaining the house in the absence of working parents, sewing to make or mend clothes rather than fancywork, or giving their small earnings if employed to the family household income rather than making domestic purchases. Of those women describing themselves as unemployed in the 1933 Census, 89.3 per cent were single, over 60 per cent were under 25 years of age and 73 per cent were under 30.¹⁰² Oral testimony has shown that women who remained relatively secure, although still living frugally (the majority of my informants), continued to produce items for their glory boxes.¹⁰³ Where purchases may have been made, the reduction of the basic wage in 1930 (in theory in line with reduction in retail prices) resulted in people limiting retail spending to necessity purchases, a category into which glory box items may not necessarily have fallen.¹⁰⁴

The Australian-born women interviewed for this study were nearly all children or teenagers of the Depression, growing up in frugal circumstances, and these experiences and values stayed with them as they grew to working age. For the sample of Lilydale district women, most of their families had vegetable gardens, some had cows and produce and were often living within a family or community network whereby produce was exchanged. Cave Hill and Black’s quarries, as well as the railways were the common source of employment for many of their fathers. Only two of all women interviewed had fathers out of work for extended periods and the parents of two others were taking in boarders. The impression is that family life for these women was running close

¹⁰¹ Judy MacKinolty, ‘Woman’s place...’ in MacKinolty, *The Wasted Years*, 104. Another rare glory box reference.

¹⁰² Figures based on the 1933 census, quoted in *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰³ This point will be explored through testimony in later chapters.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Cannon, *The Human Face of the Great Depression* (Victoria: Michael Cannon, self published, 1996), 31-32.

to the edge of poverty. In fact Ruby Kwijas' family lived in John Street, Lilydale, known as 'Gun Alley.' It was the poor end of town, resulting in a very close knit community. For Val Sheehan, who was from a large family of few means, money went into family needs, so her glory box was not a priority.¹⁰⁵ In terms of spending money on glory box items, it was, as Gwenda Mutimer observes, 'always little things, not a great deal of money was spent, money just wasn't around. We were conditioned to live rather frugally, that's the way things were.'¹⁰⁶ When they did purchase things for their box, it was usually carefully done, whereby the women had either saved until they could make the purchase outright, or, more commonly, paid off the goods week by week, often over a period of months. BS remembers that 'eventually I bought one lovely handmade cloth and serviettes, took me ages to pay for that.'¹⁰⁷

By the late 1930s, some conditions were improving. Unemployment (again, based on the trade union statistics) was back almost to its pre-Depression state of around 11 per cent.¹⁰⁸ The manufacturing industry was resurging and began to offer some relief to industrial suburbs in Melbourne, although it took World War II to end unemployment.¹⁰⁹ McCalman has argued that 'the Depression had in fact accelerated the replacement of labour by mechanisation,'¹¹⁰ and this certainly set the scene for the massive industrial boom set off by the war.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Val Sheehan (nee Skate) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Coldstream, Victoria, 2003.

¹⁰⁶ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with BS (request to remain anonymous), recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Louis and Turner, *The Depression of the 1930s*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ Tony Dingle, "Depressions" in *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, eds. Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206.

¹¹⁰ McCalman, *Struggletown*, 171.

1.4 A Little Money of One's Own: Women, Salaries and Portable Property

As soon as you started work, your girlfriends would be...when are you going to start collecting for your glory box? (Kath Davis, collecting for her glory box, late 1930s-early 1940s) ¹¹¹

By 1939, Australia was at war, altering the environment in which, as well as the means by which, women collected for their glory boxes. One key shift was in the nature of women's employment as the war gobbled up labour, particularly as part of the homefront war machine. Between 1939 and 1944, the number of women in the workforce rose by around 200,000 to 855,000 in paid employment.¹¹² While Darian-Smith has cautioned against overstating the real impact of war on women in the workforce,¹¹³ there was a societal shift which recognised women's potential in the labour market, and awakened some middle-class women to working opportunities and benefits.¹¹⁴ Even with women leaving or being pushed out of traditionally 'male' jobs once demobilisation began,¹¹⁵ and the slight decline in working women's numbers between the end of the war and 1954,¹¹⁶ between 1947 and 1961 the female

¹¹¹ Interview with Kath Davis (nee Hayes) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Chirnside Park, Victoria, 2003.

¹¹² This wartime peak constituted about ¼ of total workforce and about one in three of all women aged between 15-65 years. Statistics quoted from Darian-Smith, "War and Australian Society" in *Australia's War 1939-45*, ed. Joan Beaumont (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin Pty., Ltd., 1996), 63-64.

¹¹³ 'While there was a numerical increase of 200,000 women in the wartime workforce, only five per cent more women of working age were employed in 1944 than in 1939.' Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 58.

¹¹⁴ This point is made by Darian-Smith, "War and Australian Society" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 64.

¹¹⁵ Marnie Haig-Muir and Roy Hay, "The Economy at War" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 131.

¹¹⁶ The numbers of women in the paid work force declined after peaking in 1943 until 1951; the trend then continued to decline until 1954 when the figures commenced a continuous escalation: (thousands) 1939 – 643.6; 1941 – 734.8; 1943 – 800.3; 1945 – 795.6;

workforce actually increased at a greater rate than the male workforce.¹¹⁷

Moreover, much of the so-called unskilled labour needs created by burgeoning local industry, as well as the shifts of men and some women into white collar work, were met by the new post-war migrant workforce. This was particularly true of the textile industry (both factory floor and outwork) and the percentage of migrant women in the paid workforce was actually higher than that of Australian-born women. From 1947-61, female immigrants, particularly Greek and Italian women, took 55.3% of the new jobs in the female workforce, with the highest number residing in the manufacturing sector.¹¹⁸

The changes to women's employment are relevant for a number of reasons. More women working resulted in more women with incomes to spend on their glory boxes. Even while contributing part of their pay to the family household, more women found they had a little something to put aside for themselves. During the war many women's salaries rose beyond 50 per cent of the male wage (often up to 90 per cent depending on the job and whether women and men were in direct competition),¹¹⁹ so that they had more to spend and save (particularly with rationing imposing enforced saving for many). In 1950, the female wage was set across the board by the Arbitration Court at 75 per cent of their male counterparts.¹²⁰ Women had also during the 1930s begun shifting out

1946 – 753.5; 1947 – 738.4; 1950 – 688.2; 1951 – 718.8; 1952 – 679.4; 1953 – 673.7; 1954 – 707.5; 1955 – 738.5 (Note: the 1950s figures do not include rural industry workers and female domestics in private homes). *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1946/7 and 1956), No.37, 1946/7, 488 and No.42, 1956, 195.

¹¹⁷ Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 74.

¹¹⁸ Birrell in Markus, *Building a New Community*, 44.

¹¹⁹ See Butlin for statistics on percentage of male wage earned by women in specific jobs, S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1977), 33; and Darian-Smith for an overview of the income review process during the war, "War and Australian Society" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 65.

¹²⁰ Melbourne Trade Union Equal Pay Committee, Papers, quoted in Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 78.

of the poorly paid and labour intensive domestic work into the better paid, better hours and more regulated conditions of factory and office positions. Between 1939 and 1945, the numbers of women working in domestic service fell from 18 to six percent, having commenced the century in Victoria at just over 40 percent of the female workforce.¹²¹ This trend is certainly reflected in the employment breakdown of the women interviewed for this study.

Nineteen Australian-born women were interviewed about their employment prior to marriage. Five women were working during the 1930s, 11 women commenced employment during or just after World War II, and three women were working during the 1950s. Only one did not work at all. They all left school at 14 or 15, reflecting the national early school-leaving trends. It was not until the 1950s that post-primary school and university enrolments increased, with just over 60% remaining at school beyond their fifteenth birthdays by 1959.¹²² Of the interviewed sample, six women had factory floor jobs, and eight worked in clerical or office-related work (such as the local telephone exchange). One woman was in sales (and three of the office/clerical women had started in sales), while two women were in live-in domestic employment (one doing laundry work). Only one woman was training and working in a profession (nursing). Some women had store dressmaking as their first job; another started as a cook in the navy. Over half the jobs were located in the city of Melbourne or the inner suburbs; the rest around the outer eastern Lilydale district where many of the women had grown up, and there were a couple of Victorian rural

¹²¹ In 1901, 41.9% women were domestic servants, figures from Raelene Frances, *The Politics of Work. Gender and Labour in Victoria 1880-1939* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18. By World War II, domestic servants in the work force decreased from 18.3 per cent in 1939 to 13.2 per cent in 1941 to 4.4 per cent in 1943, rising slightly in 1945 to six per cent, Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 96.

¹²² Johnson, Lesley, *The Modern Girl. Girlhood and Growing Up* (Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty., Ltd., 1993), 70.

localities. Five of the women were in 'live-in' or boarding situations for at least part of their working lives. All but one had a glory box of some description and all but one married. Consequently, salaries had to stretch a long way, once women had paid board and often a train/tram fare, yet from these modest incomes, many Australian women put something aside for their glory boxes. Even though Lesley Johnson has argued that by the late 1950s there was a boom in teenage consumerism through an increased disposable income, this did not necessarily translate into glory box purchasing.¹²³ Ruby Kwijas recalls even of the early 1950s that

we got paid once a fortnight at the telephone exchange and firstly it was straight into the State Savings Bank next door as soon as you got your wages, put your board money aside because that was for Mum and that would help the rest of the family as well, and then it was your lay-bys or whatever else you wanted to get.¹²⁴

Complete independence was not possible as most women lived at home until they married, and their working income remained moderate. While paying board, they still relied upon the existing domestic and economic structure of the family household. During the Depression, daughters often entered the workforce (whether in the workplace or in domestic duties at home) in order to help keep families afloat. A proportion of most women's income went back to the family household; for example, the family of BS was absolutely dependent on what she sent home from her live-in laundry work during the Depression.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 88.

¹²⁴ Interview with Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003.

¹²⁵ BS, 2003.

Moreover, there continued to be a whole body of unrecognised work being undertaken by young women who left school and stayed home to run households, and maintain livestock and produce, while some mothers were still bearing children. Gwenda Mutimer recalls daughters having to help out at home, especially in large families some older girls put their lives on hold to help with younger children. This would have affected both their ability to build glory boxes in terms of time and money and perhaps even how they came to view some of the lesser attractions of the realities of married life. Gwenda wonders if 'maybe some girls caught a glimpse of married life and decided didn't want a part of it.'¹²⁶

Having a little money of one's own offered women material options. BS and Ester Rose were collecting during the Depression, with little to no income. Their boxes consisted almost entirely of needlework, with few domestic goods purchases as all. This was not solely due to income, as this was also the period in which needlecraft was highly valued and prolifically produced. Thelma Drummond worked at this time in sales and the textile industry but her box was still predominantly hand-made. By the war and post-war years, the greater economic emphasis on mass production of consumer goods, as well as the increase in numbers of women working and what they were being paid, resulted in shifts in the nature of women's accumulated property. Either way, there was here a degree of limited autonomy for these women as they collected domestic goods for their future homes by way of their own funds, manual skills and discernment as consumers. It was limited, as they were operating within social constructs which encouraged glory box activity for a particular domestic future, as well as market trends which targeted women as the primary domestic decision-makers on consumption. Nevertheless, this amassing of glory box

¹²⁶ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

contents depended largely upon the women themselves. Gifts were received, items passed down through generations, but much of the production and purchase of their collection was the result of their own earned incomes and their creative skills. There was an opportunity for many women, between financial dependence upon their parents and financial dependence upon their husbands (primarily after childbirth), when they had a small degree of financial autonomy. It was during this time that they saved, purchased, created and put aside their own portable property.

The women themselves have a variety of perspectives on this notion of property. For Daisy Chapman collecting in the 1940s, her equity was literally in her box and she states that 'I didn't have much money, but I certainly had it in a glory box, with linen and stuff, I had plenty...(the box) is your start for your home...you're starting off with something and you're contributing.'¹²⁷ BS viewed her box as her property, the more precious for having grown from relatively meagre means.¹²⁸ For Thelma Drummond collecting in the 1930s, it was the woman's responsibility to amass the domestic materials, and contribute that to the household and she states that 'your husband had enough to buy, and you had to provide so much...you had to provide the sheets and towels and all the bits and pieces. It was just natural that we did that really. And have lots of underwear and nighties.'¹²⁹ Kath Davis viewed her late 1930s-early 1940s box as representing escape and independence through marriage from the parental home. She describes how she had 'lived a charmed life...' but '...I still wanted to escape...It was going to be marvellous to have my own house, well it was

¹²⁷ Interview with Daisy Chapman (nee Goodall) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Chirnside Park, Victoria, 2003.

¹²⁸ BS, 2003.

¹²⁹ Interview with Thelma Drummond (nee Campbell) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003.

only a flat really, and be able to use all my own things.’¹³⁰ For Gwenda Mutimer, on the other hand, the symbol of her 1940s box as representing her future home was a distant one, as her circumstances rendered the immediate use of her box contents after marriage as very remote. She recalls:

I knew it didn’t matter when we got married, the idea of being actually able to go in to your own home, or even finding a flat was pretty remote...all these hundreds of men coming back from the war and getting married at the same time, so I sort of knew that if Wal and I got married, we probably would live at home, which we did.¹³¹

Spending the first year of marriage with the bride’s own parents or her in-laws was common, due to the post-war housing shortages. Whether the property was utilised immediately, or put aside until an independent household could be achieved, this window of limited financial autonomy was closed for some women after marriage and for nearly all after bearing their first child.¹³²

Within this process of assigning meaning to the objects they acquire, such as future marriage, home and personal property, women were participating in a form of ‘possession ritual.’ According to McCracken

the individual successfully deploys possession rituals and manages to extract the meaningful properties that have been invested in the consumer good. When this occurs they are able to use the goods as

¹³⁰ Kath Davis, 2003.

¹³¹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

¹³² In 1933, 12.5 per cent of women employed were married; by 1947, after the changes induced by World War II, the proportion of married women working was 37.8 per cent. S. Encel, N. MacKenzie, and M. Tebbutt, *Women and Society, An Australian Study* (Melbourne: Cheshire Publishing, Pty., Ltd., 1974), 74-75.

markers of time and space and occasion...Possession rituals allow the consumer to lay claim and assume a kind of ownership of the meaning of his or her consumer goods.¹³³

These meanings they learned from family, friends, and popular culture. Glory boxes were very much about personal, independent possession, and women usually identified even basic commodity items with information which accorded it value: when and from where they acquired an object; what they paid for it, how long they had saved for it; what role it fulfilled within the collection. They took ownership of it, stored it, and took pleasure from it. Thus, glory box items have personal and public meanings entwined, from the possession meanings assigned objects of consumption to personal memories attaching meanings of sentiment.

It can be seen here that labour, income and property were directly connected to the shifting social constructs of femininity and definitions of 'home' in public and private spheres. During World War II, women's participation in homefront activities served to expand the definition of domestic environment beyond the home to factory, farm, community hall, retail store and city street – in a way that had not occurred during World War I. Then during the 1950s, many women retuned to their roles as purveyors of the private domestic environment. While war had delineated male and female roles within active and homefront services,¹³⁴ it had also blurred them, as women moved into traditionally male jobs, usually requiring improved, if rarely equal, pay. During the immediate post-war years, it could be argued that those roles became more clearly defined, with many women returning to home duties and of the

¹³³ McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*. 85.

¹³⁴ See Darian-Smith, "War and Australian Society" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 61.

majority of those remaining or entering the paid workforce, employment remained traditionally gendered. The service trades and unskilled process work which were expanding after the war employed many women, but typically they were still shop assistants, waitresses, typists, clothing industry workers, nurses or teachers.¹³⁵

The recognition of the potential of a female paid workforce (resulting in the continuance of some limited employment opportunities), the introduction of middle-class women in particular to the advantages of work beyond the home, and the advances made as a result of the war in workplace conditions and female rates of pay, all contributed to a sense that women's industrial options had been improved and expanded. Nevertheless, the situation was described in government wartime rhetoric as temporary, critical and in the national interest, after which women were required to return to their domestic sphere, although not everyone did.¹³⁶ As Darian-Smith argues, government propaganda during the war through newsreels, newspapers, radio and magazines acted to 'legitimise the paid labour of women and their movement into new areas of employment.'¹³⁷ Single women were still encouraged to continue seeing domesticity as their primary future function, which glory box activity complemented, and by its very nature, promoted very effectively. And some women had a little more to spend on their boxes. Consequently, throughout the changing emphasis in the definitions and expressions of domesticity, glory boxes retained their social relevance, mediated by economic constraints, product availability and women's changing individual production and consumption practices.

¹³⁵ Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 74.

¹³⁶ Between 1944 and 1947, 4.9 per cent of women aged between 15 and 65 left the work force (most voluntarily). By 1947, the proportion of women in the work force was at its 1939 level of just over 23 per cent. Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 67.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

1.5 Supply and Demand: Impact of World War II on Goods

It was wartime and there wasn't anything around.¹³⁸

(Nancy Briggs, collecting for her glory box, 1940s)

Women's glory box collecting practices were also affected by the wartime context of goods production. Consumer activity in Australia was on a rollercoaster ride from the Depression to the post-war decade. Kingston has observed that 'the Depression of the 1930s instilled cautious buying habits and a wariness of waste among shoppers. They were only beginning to regain confidence when war enforced even greater restraints.'¹³⁹ During the war, women both desired and frequently had the means to purchase goods but the quality, quantity and range of goods available limited their choices. Consumer activity plummeted, and Haig-Muir and Hay state that 'in the Second World War private consumption plummeted from around 70 per cent of GDP to 40 per cent.'¹⁴⁰ During the war, manufacturing boomed, but was mostly channelled into war production. Goods were scarce and rationed, while at the same time, people had greater disposable income. Weddings increased but houses were hard to get. As post-war reconstruction moved into full gear, these conflicting circumstances began to fall into line, with improved incomes, mass production of domestic consumables, and improved housing availability. Haig-Muir and Hay observe that 'the Second World War marks a transition in the development of the Australian economy, from a phase in which primary industry was the "engine of growth," to an era in which capital-intensive manufacturing industries played a greater role.'¹⁴¹ Consequently, the war and its industrial

¹³⁸ Nancy Briggs, 2003.

¹³⁹ Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Haig-Muir and Hay in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 111. Also Butlin and Schedvin, *War Economy*, 346.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

aftermath had a significant impact on the goods women collected for their glory boxes and the way in which they were collected.

As the war dragged on, imports dried up and restrictions were placed on which materials could be utilised in the manufacture of domestic products and the redirecting of materials into the production of items for the war effort. For women whose collecting activity commenced prior to the war, the change was very evident. Kath Davis did most of her collecting before the war in the late 1930s and even in a large country town in Victoria like Traralgon there was adequate choice in the stores. She recalls that 'I considered myself lucky because I got most of my things before things became scarce. In the first year or so during the war you could still get things but then gradually they became harder to get. And by that time I'd got everything I wanted.'¹⁴² But for women who started collecting well into the war, building glory box collections was more difficult; ironic considering this coincided with a dramatic increase in marriages, an issue which will be explored later in this chapter. Australians generally remained fed, clothed and housed but, states Butlin, in 'almost all other areas consumption was curtailed by the disappearance of many articles of peacetime use, by rationing, permits to buy, by limited range of choice. Austerity, the word so favoured by (Prime Minister John) Curtin, rather than hardship described the situation.'¹⁴³ By 1942, rationing was comprehensive, responding to disrupted import shipping and, argues Butlin, the perceived need to make everything available for the war effort. Thus,

the demands of 1942 meant that everything (above all, labour) was in short supply and emphasis shifted to a general attack on non-essential

¹⁴² Kath Davis, 2003.

¹⁴³ Butlin and Schedvin, *War Economy*, 342.

activities, as a means of releasing labour and other resources, not because this or that material or skill had an immediately identifiable war use, but because everything was needed; what was relevant was the degree to which a non-war activity could be regarded as unnecessary, not the urgency of the war need for the specific resources involved.¹⁴⁴

Consequently, during the war and in the immediate post-war years, glory box production was to some degree thwarted by restricted supply due to disrupted imports and redirected wartime manufacture. Domestic products such as cutlery, crockery, plastic and metal ware were affected with the Department of Supply introducing utensils control in December 1943.¹⁴⁵ Manchester too was affected, with home-produced needlework affected by limited availability of mass-produced textile products and fabric for finishing and embroidery. Darian-Smith observes that 'changes to shopping habits were visible, as home deliveries were curtailed and queues became commonplace,'¹⁴⁶ and Nancy Briggs' account brings this image to life, remembering:

It was wartime and there wasn't anything around, there wasn't even material that you could make things...you were just lucky to buy something if you could...We used to stand in every queue there was in our lunchtime...and there used to be Wests manchester in Flinders Lane, and we'd hop in there and...if we brought home a pair of towels from Wests it was like bringing gold home...it wouldn't matter what colour, it was a pair of towels.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 437.

¹⁴⁶ Darian-Smith, "Rationing" in Brown-May and Swain, *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, 591.

¹⁴⁷ Nancy Briggs, 2003.

Another woman recalled that the box her brother made for her just before the war stood 'empty right over the war and (I) filled it after the war.'¹⁴⁸ Betty Goldsmith and Beryl Sandford record the testimonies of single and newlywed women during the war who describe the challenges of gathering together their trousseaux, with 'Georgette evening frocks cut up to make underwear, a dressing gown made from a blanket'¹⁴⁹ while 'dress materials, clothing, linen, everything in that line required coupons.'¹⁵⁰ **(Figure 1)**

Quality, and well as quantity, was also at issue and cotton is perhaps the most relevant example. Cotton was mostly imported to Australia from Great Britain, as indicated in a Federal Government report relating to Australian textile industries in 1949, with 'over 80 per cent of the estimated Australian demand for woven cotton textiles...imported from overseas, as domestic manufacturers have not found the fine spinning and weaving field economically attractive.'¹⁵¹ Quality cotton products became a rare commodity, even into the immediate post-war years, with United States cotton commandeered for military use and the Indian piece-good imports to which Australia turned, being generally of high cost and inferior quality.¹⁵² The large department stores, many with buying offices in London and their own buyers whom they sent overseas, found

¹⁴⁸ Group interview with Woman 1, Wahrenonga Friendship Village recorded by Moya McFadzean, Glen Waverley, Victoria, 2005. Advertising campaigns often contained messages to defer spending or buy whatever was available, discussed in the United States' context by Tawnya Adkins Covert, "Consumption and Citizenship during the Second World War. Product advertising in women's magazines." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 3 (2003): 315-342.

¹⁴⁹ Betty Goldsmith and Beryl Sandford, *The Girls They Left Behind* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1990), 40.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁵¹ *Brief Review of the Australian Textile, Dyeing, Printing and Finishing Industries* (Melbourne: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Post-War Reconstruction, August, 1949), 6.

¹⁵² Butlin and Schedvin, *War Economy*, 439.

themselves unable to meet the demand for British goods so evident between the wars. Howard Wolfers argues that, 'their buyers bought goods which enabled the big stores to exploit Australians' preferences for overseas fashion goods, particularly English textile goods, which were considered to be the finest.'¹⁵³

Thus the raw and manufactured textiles which provided the staple of most women's glory box production, including cotton, cotton and silk threads, and ready-made manchester, had become hard to acquire. In 1942, restrictions were imposed on weekly manchester and other textiles' retail sales,¹⁵⁴ and Butlin observes that 'in 1943 and 1944 civilian cotton-goods consumption was down to about one-third of its pre-war level.'¹⁵⁵ There was also a reduction of detailing on underwear such as embroidery, tucking and motifs,¹⁵⁶ making glamour a hard-won feature of the wartime wedding trousseau.

All women interviewed who were collecting for glory boxes at this time comment on the reduced quality of the materials available. Nancy Briggs, Daisy Chapman and Gwenda Mutimer all speak of the limited availability of fabrics at this time. Lace was hard to get, as were white fabrics. Many women bought stamped ready fabrics, with patterns stamped on to the material to be embroidered, but brown material was replacing white; a development not much appreciated. Gwenda Mutimer recalls that 'not everyone did fancywork...don't forget, during the war that lovely quality of linen you couldn't even buy...they started printing (patterns) on a soft sort of fawn type of

¹⁵³ Howard Wolfers, "The Big Stores between the Wars" in *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in urban and social history*, ed. Jill Roe (New South Wales: Hale & Ironmonger in association with The Sydney History Group, 1980), 21. By this time there was also strong support for Australian-made products.

¹⁵⁴ Butlin and Schedvin, *War Economy*, 292.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 439.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 441.

material. It didn't have half the charm of the other stuff.'¹⁵⁷ The principal way the purchase of goods was managed and restricted was through the introduction of the coupons system, whereby people were given an allotted number of coupons for purchasing select items for which there was a competing military need. As mentioned earlier, the rationing of household drapery had been introduced in 1942, making the accumulation of quality sheets, tablecloths and other such items extremely difficult. Nance McKay observes that 'it was very hard to get things then because that was 1942. We were engaged and married in the same year because he was going overseas and we were on coupons by then...the china was hard to get...the cotton was commandeered for the army.'¹⁵⁸ All the women have coupon stories to tell. All who were building glory box collections, particularly during the latter years of the war and the immediate post-war years, recall that the amount and range of items they could purchase was limited. Nancy A. remembers 'during the war years you couldn't get anything nice to put in the glory box...because you had coupons and the sheets were yellow twill, horrible...you couldn't buy anything.'¹⁵⁹ Daisy Chapman states 'we were at a bad time because it was wartime and things were hard to get. If you wanted sheets or anything like that you had to have coupons...And I knew a lady in Lilydale who had quite a few children and I used to buy coupons from her and buy stuff.'¹⁶⁰ **(Figure 2)**

Nor did the situation change as soon as the war ended. It took time for goods to come back into the stores, for the import trade to get back on its feet. As

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Gwenda Mutimer (nee Goode) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Chirnside Park, Victoria, 1992. The collective interview at Wahroonga Friendship Village documented how difficult it was to build a glory box during the war.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Nance McKay (nee McReady) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 1992.

¹⁵⁹ Group interview with Nancy A. (no surname disclosed), Wahroonga Friendship Village, 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

Gwenda Mutimer recalls 'the stuff just wasn't in the shops the minute the war ended...All the metal that would have been turned into household goods had been used for munitions so they had to start all that up again.'¹⁶¹ As time went on and store shelves were restocked, it must have been a pleasurable time for women who were collecting for their boxes, and who still had the incomes with which to purchase. Gwenda adds that 'as the years progressed and stuff started coming back out from England...all of a sudden the stuff was there after years of nothingness...it was an exciting time.'¹⁶² Ruby Kwijas, who was collecting during the early 1950s, doesn't recall goods being difficult to get, although she did remember that just after the war there 'was not much pretty stuff about.'¹⁶³

Nevertheless, as oral testimony demonstrates, war did not deter many women from continuing to gather, craft and hoard what they could. The pragmatics of acquisition were being challenged, but the intrinsic position of the glory box in women's rite of passage were not. In fact, it is possible that accumulating glory box goods enabled a way of retaining a personal and private space within a wartime social environment that valorised collectivity within the public realm. Glory box activity played a subconscious part in aiding women to create order within the chaos, maintain normality, and small degree of control. It was a time when, as Darian-Smith has argued, 'civilians were subjected to the most comprehensive set of government controls over consumerism, employment, leisure, travel, housing, and access to information ever experienced before or since.'¹⁶⁴ A glory box could represent a little something of one's own – a little property, a little production for personal gain, a little privacy, and a little of the mundane in the madness.

¹⁶¹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

¹⁶⁴ Darian-Smith, "War and Australian Society" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 54.

1.6 Imagining the Home during the War and Post-war Years

I do recall that from time to time, I'd get these two boxes out and I'd put them on the bed and things were all wrapped in tissue paper and I'd get them out and I'd think I'll be able to use this one day. (Ruby Kwijas, collecting for her glory box, early 1950s)¹⁶⁵

Portable property such as a glory box was intimately tied to assumptions and imaginings about a marital home of one's own. However, during the first ten years after the war, only 45 per cent of Australians owned their home in 1954. As domestic goods were scarce, so were building materials, continuing the housing shortages which were so evident during the pre-war years and which continued well after the war was over with demand heightened by increased birth rates and migration.¹⁶⁶ The Commonwealth Housing Commission, appointed in 1943 to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Australia's post-war housing requirements, found an estimated shortage of around 300,000 houses. Despite an accelerated building program, the government failed to meet its annual target of 60,000 dwellings by 1950.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, during these housing shortage years, new brides frequently found themselves back in the parental home, boarding or renting, and unable to unpack and use the fruits of their glory boxes in their own domestic space. Migrants were particularly affected; even in the 1960s for example, over one quarter of Greek migrants were living in shared accommodation.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Butlin and Schedvin, *War Economy*, 318 and 790-91.

¹⁶⁷ Figures quoted in Alastair Greig, *The Stuff Dreams are Made Of. Housing Provision in Australia 1945-1960* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 35-36.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

The Commonwealth Housing Commission, women's groups, popular media and public opinion held that adequate housing in post-war Australia was not a privilege but a right, and Darian-Smith argues that 'this perceived necessity for an improved physical environment was as intricately bound up with the discourses of femininity and the family in Australian society as were the issues of employment or sexuality.'¹⁶⁹ Glory boxes by their very nature fed into this contemporary rhetoric, because the activity focused women on homemaking, marital preparations and creating comfortable domestic and family environments as 'modern' pursuits; and also into the gendered discourse because glory boxes symbolised in many ways the notions of modern femininity of the time. By 1959, even advertisements for glory boxes reinforced a connection between 'modernity' and domesticity. The following advertisement for a sophisticated Swedish-designed glory box promoted the item as durable, beautiful and adaptable to the 'modern' home for the 'modern' girl:

This delightful piece of furniture has been designed by Swedish furniture experts to fulfil the heart's desire of the modern girl who wishes to have a Glory Box to keep the treasures in before marriage, but who also wishes to use it after marriage as part of the modern furniture planned to go into the new home...If you like modern things you will be delighted with this doubly useful Glory Box, later to become your sideboard.¹⁷⁰ **(Figure 3)**

There is here, in the late 1950s, an attempt almost to reinvent the glory box within a more contemporary mould. Modern life in the 1950s had become

¹⁶⁹ Darian-Smith discusses this point in more detail, "War and Australian Society" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 71.

¹⁷⁰ For Sampsons Mail Order, Sydney in *Australian Home Journal*, October 1959, 16.

equated with a home and family life, and the glory box symbolised the limitations, as well as the possibilities, of this domestic focus. Nevertheless, there was a degree of agency in both the act of glory box collecting and the associated broader activity of creating a home, which should not be dismissed, nor underestimated as part of modern life. As Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd have argued, home

constituted the sphere of everyday life which they were actively involved in making...Home was not a bounded space, a fortress into which the individual could withdraw...Their modernity was about actively creating a place called home, securing a future for their children and an everyday life in which personal and intimate bodily relations could be properly looked after.¹⁷¹

It was within the sphere of the home that the post-war return to clearly delineated gendered divisions of labour and individual autonomy could be played out most effectively. A home represented dream fulfilment (whether realised or not), security and prosperity. It was used as the key site for the conservative social agenda of then Prime Minister Robert Menzies (1939-41; 1949-66), to make the domestic sphere of Australian women and men the focus of their individual and political identities. Judith Brett argues that from the 1940s, Menzies exhorted his 'forgotten' middle class 'to make their private and domestic experiences the basis of their political identification, rather than their experiences as workers or as members of an economically-defined class...(the lounge-room or kitchen)...should be the site of their political identity.'¹⁷² Glory

¹⁷¹ Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life. Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford and New York: Berg, Oxford International Publishers Ltd, 2004), 38-39.

¹⁷² Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2007 [first published 1992]), 40.

boxes as feminine identifiers and a form of pre- marital domestic activity could co-exist comfortably within this framework.

Glory box culture itself carried with it assumptions of achieving a home of one's own. Glory boxes literally contained objects to furnish the key domestic living spaces (kitchen, living room and bedroom) on which women would assert their own taste, hand-made production and possessions. These anticipated homes were overwhelmingly suburban (urban or regional) and suburbia by this time in Australia equated with female domesticity. Deborah Chambers observes that 'the suburban lifestyle was not simply a response to the rising patterns of consumption of an expanding economy. It was also a material and cultural expression of the ideology of feminine domesticity: woman as homemaker.'¹⁷³ Kerreen Reiger has argued convincingly about the social shifts in approaches to domestic economy in Australia, such as the evolution of the scientific household, and the establishment of domestic environments that girls live in and aspire to; as well as demonstrating the influences on these trends from Great Britain and the United States.¹⁷⁴ Unacknowledged however, is that this expression of material domesticity began for many young women between 1930 and 1960 with their glory boxes. The suburban domestic dream was also synonymous with traditional values of thrift, saving, hard work, responsibility, marriage and family – all values wrapped up in the glory box tradition, and values which as was seen earlier, were instilled in the children of the Depression. These values and ideas were all made manifest through the home, or in the case of the glory box, in the 'idea' of the home; it is domestic consumption which has become, according to Daniel Miller, 'the pivotal arena

¹⁷³ Deborah Chambers, "A Stake in the Country: Women's Experiences of Suburban Development" in *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 87.

¹⁷⁴ Kerreen M. Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home. Modernising the Australian family 1880-1940* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 40.

of modern life.’¹⁷⁵ The process of objectification involved in creating a home actually began for many women with their glory box.

Within this site of homemaking, glory box goods contributed to the process of home ownership and appropriation by women. The very act of collecting for a glory box, whether consciously or unconsciously, created and reinforced a certain female identity. Each time a woman bought a set of sheets, put a piece of crystal on lay-by or embroidered a supper cloth, she was furnishing her glory box in the present, and her marital home in the future with portable goods she (or relatives and friends) had made or acquired to fill a projected domestic space. As Jean-Christophe Agnew has argued,

a commodity aesthetic may be defined as a way of seeing the world in general, and the self and society in particular, as so much raw space to be furnished with mobile, detachable, and transactionable goods. A commodity aesthetic is a point of view when the very boundaries between the self and the commodity world collapse in the act of purchase.¹⁷⁶

Imposing an identity in this way varied between glory box women from forecasting colour preferences through purchases (such as Ester Rose and her desire for cream and green kitchenware in the 1930s) to producing goods for use but never actually using them (Gwen Langford whose fiancé never returned from the war).¹⁷⁷ It was even common for young women to open the

¹⁷⁵Daniel Miller, “Consumption and Its Consequences” in *Consumption and Everyday Life*, ed. Hugh MacKay (London: SAGE Publications Ltd and The Open University, 1997), 19.

¹⁷⁶ Jean-Christophe Agnew, “A House of Fiction. Domestic Interiors and the Commodity Aesthetic” in Bronner, *Consuming Visions*, 135.

¹⁷⁷ All of these stories will be told in more detail in later chapters.

lids and drawers of their collections, or pull their boxes from under the bed, in order to unwrap, finger and lay out all their things, and watch the collection grow. Ruby Kwijas remembers unwrapping her things and imagining their use. Kath Davis recalls: 'I used to get my big tablecloth out and set the table with all the crystal and my dinner set and my cutlery and just look at it...and I suppose I thought I eventually would be using it, and I would be using it every day.'¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, it must be said that glory box collections tended not to be deeply revelatory of the individual collector (as opposed to revealing economic, cultural and social values which they clearly illuminate). The objects are generic, needlecraft created from mass-produced embroidery patterns and pragmatic ordinary domestic ware, with the same materials, colours and designs appearing again and again. While reflecting collective tastes, they do not illuminate individual women to any large degree. There are moments of individuality, since the particular proficiency evident in the needlecraft can be a personal signature. Occasional purchases can reveal a peculiar taste, brand-preference, or a desire for quality. They may even make a broader statement of desire for familial independence. Goods can make a claim of possession and taste on a home, even if projected by young women years before a home of their own was any more than a vague prospect for the future. Ian Woodward cites a contemporary study of working and lower middle-class British homes which he states found that 'rather than being a site for the expression of finely-tuned aesthetic choices and modes of self-expression, notions of etiquette, comfortability and welcoming were centrally important in framing the home.'¹⁷⁹ Certainly, the numerous types of doilies, supper and tray cloths, and duchesse

¹⁷⁸ Ruby Kwijas and Kath Davis, 2003.

¹⁷⁹ Ian Woodward, "Domestic Objects and the Taste Epiphany." *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol.6, No.2 (2001), 121.

sets produced for glory boxes all fulfilled domestic protocols of adornment understood by the myriad women who produced them.

Most significantly perhaps, in this notion of an evolving domestic identity through the selection and collection of domestic goods, is that glory box collecting can be read as a symbol of the preliminary lifecycle of women. Their collecting in stages is a process of 'becoming,' rather than simple acquisitiveness. The graduated collecting practices, the lay-by purchasing methodology, even fancywork production, were all about gradual accumulation and putting things aside for a prescribed future with a known outcome. Glory boxes also represent projections of spatial 'becomings:' kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms to be fitted out with the hand-made and purchased material culture of imagined domestic spheres, drawn from memory, experience and desire. Thus the domestic environment was projected through consumerism, handcrafts and new notions of modernity. In this process of imagining future domestic spaces, in which many women would invariably preside as wives, mothers and domestic managers during these decades, they also progressed through their own process of 'becoming.' This involved a series of sequential and overlapping identities, including the single woman, the salaried worker, the shopper, the portable property owner, the wife, and the Australian citizen (for migrant women). Glory boxes track this process of self-actualisation. Their collecting was at a time in their lives too, when thoughts turned to separation from family, a degree of independence through work (especially if living away from home), and even differentiating themselves from their mothers. Glory boxes represented another life, independent from familial ties, a household of their own. It was a gradual evolution of self and identity, a process of individualisation, within primarily domestic parameters.

1.7 Putting the Glory in Box: Marriage Trends and Implications

Marriage was way in the distance, it wasn't anything in the near future, it was just in case you got married you had to have a glory box.' (Kath Davis, married in 1944)¹⁸⁰

During the Depression, marriage and birth rates declined, with hard times encouraging long engagements and a fear of innumerable expensive mouths to feed. Marriage and birth rates dropped to the lowest known levels since white settlement – 25,000 in 1927 to 19,000 in 1931.¹⁸¹ The marriage rate recovered only slightly from six people per 1000 of population in 1931 to nine per 1000 in 1938.¹⁸² Marriage rates would not recover until the early 1940s. McCalman has observed that in a time of insecurity and deprivation, engagements were broken off, marriages were delayed, some never married at all. She states that 'at the 1961 Census a depression generation of people (in Richmond) who had never married was still discernible.'¹⁸³ Australian women were traditionally accumulating goods long before they entered the marriage market so not marrying did not negatively affect glory box practices. Marriage delays may even have extended collecting while engaged women waited for circumstances to improve. Some glory boxes, for those able to produce and acquire, may even have been larger than those of some wartime girls who married swiftly after short engagements. Delayed marriages also affected when collections were actually able to be used, particularly given the housing shortage which was to continue well after the war was over. Fewer marriages affected whether those

¹⁸⁰ Kath Davis, 2003.

¹⁸¹ Cannon, *The Human Face*, 142.

¹⁸² Ibid., 233. Quoting from the *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1940, 579.

¹⁸³ McCalman, *Struggletown*, 200.

collections could be used at all, if, like the widowed fiancées of the war years, marriages did not take place.

However, during World War II, marriage rates rose and remained high for the next thirty years.¹⁸⁴ By the end of the 1950s, only one in eight women had never been married; of women in their late thirties, only one in fifteen. Of women born between 1920 and 1950, only 4-6 per cent had never married.¹⁸⁵ Of course there were the uncounted women who, but for the war, would have married, whose glory boxes remained unused, as will be seen in Chapter Five. This was due to boyfriends and fiancés not returning home, or even due to some injured soldiers, who removed themselves from the marriage market.¹⁸⁶ And the uncertainty of the war years, whether or not fiancés would even return home, did also have an impact on some glory boxes, as much as rationing had done. One interviewed woman recalls:

I had a sister-in-law that collected a box before the war, she was a lot older than me. During the war years they altered and I think girls didn't think about glory boxes then because they didn't know what was going to happen...I wasn't engaged to my husband then he was just a boyfriend but I didn't collect anything then until well after he came back. Coz I wasn't sure if he was going to come back!¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ 'In 1939 the average age at marriage was 25 years for men and 22 years for women; by 1944, it was 23 years for men and 21 years for women.' Darian-Smith, "War and Australian Society" in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, 70.

¹⁸⁵ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 21.

¹⁸⁶ Richard White, "War and Australian Society" in *Australia. Two Centuries of War and Peace*, eds. M. McKernan, and M. Browne (Australia: Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin Pty., Ltd., 1988), 416.

¹⁸⁷ Group interview with Woman 4, Wahroonga Friendship Village, 2005.

Moreover, the post-war immigration boom saw activity which only complemented this marital emphasis, such as through more culturally-specific activities of pre-arranged marriages and the arrival of proxy bride ships from Europe which were discussed earlier; courtships mediated by churches, Good Neighbour Council community branches and the Commonwealth Department of Immigration schemes which targeted young single women to provide wives for their lonely countrymen who had already arrived.

Marriage itself was undergoing redefinition with a growing emphasis on the institution as a partnership between husband and wife (financial, sexual, social) although the gendered roles and private and public spheres in which they operated remained as steadfast as ever. It was part of the evolution of a domestically defined 'modernity' in the 1950s, where husbands and wives had equal entitlement to happiness, although from whence that happiness was drawn was delineated by gender. The glory box tradition still fitted into this domestic definition of 'modern,' within a strongly individualised domestic framework. This framework contained two different spheres, whereby single women collected goods, while single men saved for the house deposit; and whereby married women shaped and managed their private sphere, while married men operated as employee and citizen in the public sphere to return to the private sphere as family man. In all this the nuclear family unit was paramount, the cornerstone of suburban post-war reconstruction, and glory boxes slotted naturally into the progression of feminine domesticity, from single woman to married wife with children.

This social environment in the 1950s which promoted the separate male/female, father/mother roles, was partly encouraged by contemporary social commentators concerned about the increased divorce rate, drop in birth rate, and increased youth delinquency. They argued that the maintenance of women

in domestic roles would offset these trends.¹⁸⁸ Even if women were not consciously grappling with these issues (and oral histories conducted for this study would suggest they were not), there was a climate, implicit and pervasive, which must have influenced women's attitudes, even if subconsciously absorbed. This could help to explain how interviewed women repeatedly describe glory box collecting as 'what you did,' an automatic function, because they were not operating in an environment which encouraged them to question these assumptions and activities. Glory box collecting was a symbol of women's acceptance of their domestic role in the critical lead up time to marriage, thereby setting the tenor for their married lives. While many women may not have been reading such literature as *Marriage and the Family in Australia* (1957), the essays reveal an anxiety about the perceived threat to traditional family life and values, including assumptions regarding women's natural and preferred maternal and domestic functions: 'Whenever they can, Australian women mostly revert happily to their favoured roles of full-time wives and mothers.'¹⁸⁹

Within this climate in which marriage was common and achieved early in life, and private sphere and domesticity prized, glory boxes, in the 1940s and 1950s, remained a highly relevant tradition for many women. Subsequent chapters will discuss in more detail the connecting of femininity and domesticity, as well as sexuality and identity as expressed through glory boxes. Because young women continued to get married, young women continued to collect, although this activity was severely curtailed during the war. Marriage rates declined

¹⁸⁸ Lees and Senyard refer to academic studies at the time which theorised about the strains of urban living, and women's responsibility to deal with these issues. Lees and Senyard, *The fifties*, 83.

¹⁸⁹ M.S. Brown, "Changing Functions of the Australian Family" in *Marriage and the Family in Australia*, ed. Adolphus Peter Elkin (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957), 113.

during the Depression for mainly economic reasons, thereby extending collecting periods, particularly for the production of needlework items. With the war came more marriages, shorter engagements, younger brides, and therefore, shorter collecting timeframes. Consequently, for many women, there was desire, motivation, even pressure due to the short engagements, to accumulate glory box collections. Only economic circumstances challenged their endeavour.

1.8 Conclusion

Through glory box collections, key social, cultural and economic developments between 1930 and 1960 can be identified and explored. The glory box and its collections are both metaphor and material artefact. A brown doily speaks of the cotton shortages of wartime. An intricately embroidered tablecloth demonstrates the needlework skills of the Depression. A plastic canister reveals the new domestic materials of the 1950s. A woven hemp cloth represents the old customs of southern European village life. A double bed sheet suggests the expectations of married life. Through glory boxes and their collections of needlecraft, manchester, kitchenware and undergarments, as well as the memories of the women who created them, a historical era can be re-examined.

This thirty year period was one of profound and complex change: of economic bust and boom, consumer famine and feast, migration restriction and welcome, female constraint and emancipation. But it was not until the 1950s that all the social and economic ingredients combined to ensure the entrenchment of a female consumer culture, which will be explored in the next chapter. These

ingredients included continuing high voluntary employment,¹⁹⁰ increasing marriage rates, the maintenance of pre and early war numbers of women in the paid work force, and an ever increasing range of goods and technologies. Throughout the period the glory box tradition evolved, its thread weaving unbroken, binding a tumultuous era via its quiet activity.

¹⁹⁰ 1.8 per cent unemployed in 1954. *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, No.44, 1958, 193.

Chapter Two: Fulfilling the Dream, Filling the Box: Memories and Material Cultures of Collecting

2.1 Introduction

When you had a birthday or something, you got a little butter dish or something like that. (Daisy Chapman, collecting for her glory box during the 1940s)¹⁹¹

Glory boxes were as much about economy as skill and creativity; the work of manual labour and hard-earned cash. Women collecting during the pre-war, wartime and post-war years grew up in times of restriction and regulation. They were informed by a life ethic of work, thrift and the value of domestic security. But they also witnessed, and to varying degrees, participated in, a new culture of consumerism, a wave of commodity production which had gathered momentum in nineteenth-century industrialised Europe and flourished in a post-war environment of burgeoning manufacturing, new materials and gendered marketing strategies. Women were accumulating domestic property, encouraged by manufacturers and retailers who identified them as the key future arbiters of taste and spending in the family household. Glory boxes were coming to represent a cult of conservative consumerism – considered, careful and contained – as the nature of collecting gradually shifted from an emphasis on women's own hand-made production to the purchase of the ready-made.

This chapter explores the impact of this changing economy on the glory box tradition between 1930 and 1960. It will look at what was made and purchased, how and from where these items were acquired and the ways in which they

¹⁹¹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

were branded, promoted and sold. It will consider how shifting social definitions of modernity were reflected in a changing but not simply linear progression of the individual production and consumption of glory box goods – goods defined as domestic and consequently feminine. At the same time, post-war migrant women were arriving with their own collections and traditions which were being used and adapted in this changing environment. Glory boxes represented for most women many of their dreams (or at least their projected realities): a husband, a family, and a home filled at least initially, with the combined work of a woman's hands and her pay packet. It is a tangible expression of female transition, from single to married state, and all that entailed. These experiences will be explored primarily through the stories and collections of a sample of these women, and Ulrich seems to have this study in mind when she observes that

old baskets, twined bags, embroidered bed rugs and blankets, cotton counterpanes, painted chests and cupboards, spinning wheels, reels, pictorial embroideries, and ordinary stockings document forgotten forms of work, enduring habits of possession, and the mnemonic power of goods.¹⁹²

The boxes, needlecraft and domestic goods provide a tangible grounding for the economic, social and cultural arguments being made, and offer material evidence for the shifts in individual production and consumption, shopping habits, and the transported customs of migration. When women refer to their 'glory box,' the term is invariably a loose definition which always includes a collection of items, and frequently encompasses the container itself. The variations in glory boxes, both the container and the inventory of items, were

¹⁹² Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 418.

influenced during the three decades by personal inclination, economic circumstances, and even male intervention.

The oral testimony drawn upon for this discussion reflects the glory box experiences of over 50 women, including the core Lilydale district sample and 23 women from selected cultural backgrounds who migrated to Australia, primarily in the 20 years following World War II. All but two women had a glory box (the box, a collection or both) and all but two of the women later married. They collected either during the 1930s, during and just after the war, or into the 1950s. They all come from working class or lower middle-class families, having experienced degrees of struggle during the Depression. Most left school around the age of 14 or 15 to work in mostly clerical, sales and/or factory jobs, with a few exceptions, primarily amongst the migrant women, of remaining at home. All the Australian-born women have English, Scottish and/or Irish ancestry and all but one are at least two generations removed from the first generation migrant descendant. The migrant women are Italian, Greek, Irish, Maltese and Dutch and the regional specificity of their cultural practices has been recognised where possible. As the collecting experiences of migrant women occurred either in their homelands or from the late 1950s in Australia, and consequently are somewhat separate from much of the Australian economic context under discussion, their stories have been explored in a separate section of this chapter.

2.2 Production, Consumption and the Feminisation of Domestic Consumerism

Glory boxes contain the consumption and production by women, of women, by other women on a small local scale (eg gifts, heirlooms) and by other workers in

terms of the mass-produced goods (individual and mass production). There is no simple linear progression from one to the other. Glory boxes are simultaneously the products of creation and purchase, although one can dominate the other depending on the moment in time, or the inclination, finances or abilities of the women themselves. This complex nature of glory box production within the context of a rising post-Depression consumer economy illustrates Fine's argument that 'the life of a commodity can be traced in two directions, either forward to the buyer and an act of consumption, or backward through the seller to the commodity's origin in production.'¹⁹³ Women were producers and consumers, buyers and even sometimes sellers (such as commissioned needlecraft women), creating and acquiring commodities as an act of property accumulation as well as value assignment. Moreover, with the entwining of work and leisure and popular culture during the twentieth century, the lines between necessity and luxury, work and leisure, and production and consumption became increasingly blurred, and this is evident in glory box activity. Women worked in stores and factories, and made and purchased the goods supplied, for their boxes and for their leisure. As Matthews argues in the context of early-twentieth century Sydney, 'a modern social economy of pleasure and necessity established itself in the new public sphere of popular culture where the threads of production, service and consumption were woven together to form a fabric in which the modern girl wrapped herself.'¹⁹⁴

This relationship between production and consumption, such as the determination of which came first, which creates which, and which is the more valuable, has been widely disputed and largely unresolved by scholars. Lendol

¹⁹³ Fine, *The World of Consumption*, 80.

¹⁹⁴ Jill Julius Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace. Sydney's Romance With Modernity* (New South Wales: Currency Press, Pty Ltd, 2005), 88.

Calder has observed that in the United States 'the assumption that production and consumption were distinguishable spheres of activity, and that it was better to produce than consume, lay at the heart of Victorian moral thinking on economics and its proscription of consumptive debt.'¹⁹⁵ Indeed, I have caught myself starting to valorise the needlecraft produced by glory box women, and mourn this transition from personal production to more mass consumption. But for glory box practitioners, this transition was never absolute, and its degree varied from woman to woman even within the periods of depression, wartime and post-war collecting. Establishing convenient linear patterns of development is made more complex by post-war migration and the incoming traditions particularly of Mediterranean women. Moreover, mass production sits behind every glory box purchase of ready-made textiles, glass, plastics and metals. Consequently, any arbitrary division between production and consumption is simplistic.

Furthermore, it has been argued by William Leach that American consumer practice took women away from productive activities by asserting it 'drew women deeply into a new individualism founded on commodity consumption, not on the production of goods or on the individual ownership of property.'¹⁹⁶ This is pertinent in the context of Australian glory boxes. While the activity of creation and acquisition was deeply individual and personal and, with salaries to spend, relatively independent, yet it also still encompassed production and a deep-rooted sense of property ownership, as well as a desire for another future, even if socially pre-ordained.

¹⁹⁵ Lendol Calder, *Financing the American Dream. A Cultural History of Consumer Credit* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 246. Campbell, "Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming" in Glickman, 19 makes a similar argument.

¹⁹⁶ William R. Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925." *The Journal of American History* Vol.71, No.2, September (1984), 336.

Women, increasingly promoted by Victorian Christian morality as the centre of hearth and home, as society's moral barometers, and as the purveyors of taste, modesty and restraint, became the lynchpin of the new domestic consumerism of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷ The new department stores of late nineteenth-century England, France, North America, and indeed Australia, also played a key role in this gendering of consumption. This increasing attention on the home as a gendered space with enormous consumer potential, and with women as the target market for advertisers, will be discussed later in this chapter. These social developments gathered apace in the twentieth century and contributed to an environment in which glory box activity could flourish. They occurred within the context of an emerging middle class in England and the availability, and affordability, of a new range of manufactured domestic goods. As Young has argued,

the domain of such consumption was unprecedentedly domestic, thus casting women as the prime practitioners of tasteful choice...In this way, the home as women's sphere was further differentiated from the sphere of men's productivity as the major site of the new consumerism.¹⁹⁸

By the twentieth century, advertisers had latched on to the market potential of feminised consumption, promoting women as responsible, efficient and valued consumers. This further cemented the popular gendered identity of

¹⁹⁷ The connection between women, domesticity and puritan moral ideals during the Victorian era in Great Britain is discussed by Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London & Canberra: Croom Helm Ltd., 1982).

¹⁹⁸ Young, *Middle Class Culture*, 91. The French context is discussed by Judith G. Cohen, "Consumption, Production, and Gender: The Sewing Machine in Nineteenth Century France" in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, eds. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 111-141.

domesticity, as Fine demonstrates when discussing the conflation of the consumer and domestic revolutions in creating the modern home:

With the major exception of the motor car, consumerism has always been heavily associated with the female, particularly in its early forms when tied to luxury, display and distinction. The gendering of consumerism has also occurred in the modern period but, for quite the opposite reason, ie because of the close identification of women in the household, serving as mundane and unobserved providers (and purchasers).¹⁹⁹

The glory box tradition brings a unique perspective to this evolving picture of women as domestic consumers by demonstrating how this domestic identification commenced even before women had entered their marital homes. The women of the consumption debate were overwhelming married mothers, which glory box collectors were not, but these developments in consumer society were still instrumental in creating environments of feminised consumerism in which single women collecting their pre-marital domestic goods were operating. As girls and young women they were already learning how to save and spend, produce and consume for the married domestic state, well before they actually married and set up a home. An advertisement for Feltex flooring in 1945 positions the glory box and wedding trousseau as the young woman's domain, while projecting her towards her future marital

¹⁹⁹ Fine, *The World of Consumption*, 171. A similar point is made about the United States in Charles McGovern, "Consumption and Citizenship in the United States, 1900-1940" in *Getting and Spending. European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 45; as does Robert Crawford, *But Wait, There's More...A History of Australian Advertising, 1900-2000* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 154.

domestic environment where consumer practice will be shaped by the married couple (**Figure 1**).

Consequently, the scene was set and this triumvirate of social values – femininity, domesticity and consumerism – were merged. It was an evolution that was at once empowering and disempowering for twentieth-century women. Slater effectively brings all the elements of this process together by observing that

as consumer culture and commodification gather pace and structures in the twentieth century, the woman's responsibility for domestic reproduction is increasingly defined, through advertising, home economics and other educational discourses, state policy and media portrayals, as a responsibility to manage consumption. As domestic consumption increasingly comes to mean building a home by commodities, women are increasingly defined as 'experts in consumption.'²⁰⁰

There was a degree of empowerment taking place, with women out in the marketplace, independently patronising the new department stores and controlling the nature and aesthetic of their domestic spaces according to their financial means. It was a limited agency that was enacted on a smaller more contained scale by women collecting for their glory boxes. This notion is reinforced by John Benson's observation of women in Britain's evolving consumer culture in the twentieth century that

although changes in consumption offered women new economic power, new social possibilities, and new opportunities for improving their social

²⁰⁰ Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 56-57.

status, it did so within limits that confirmed and reinforced, rather than challenged and undermined women's conventional role and status.²⁰¹

In the same way, the glory boxes being developed in Australia from the 1930s, and in particular from the 1940s, represented wages earned, property accumulated and efficient consumer practices, within the confines of a domestic marital future which maintained the social values of the post-war status quo of the 1950s.

Thus, glory box women were creating identities, as discussed in the previous chapter, although it is hard to pinpoint how conscious that act was – identities as future wives and homemakers, sexual partners, and crafters. Needlecrafting created a 'producer' identity, purchasing goods created a 'consumer' identity. As Joyce Appleby argues, 'consumption offers people objects to incorporate into their lives, and their presentation of self...for this reason, consumption opened up new avenues for rebellion.'²⁰² In terms of glory box practices, with acquisition reinforcing prescribed feminine identity, as well as creating space for personalised identities in terms of production and selection, the glory box was an avenue to conformity.

The glory box is an ambivalent symbol in its role of individual and collective identity-building for women; at once tradition and modernity, private and public, autonomy and dependence. Ordinary domestic objects of consumption can be used to demonstrate negotiations of inter-generational relationships through gift-giving, the appropriation of domestic space through furnishing,

²⁰¹ John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980*, (London & New York: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1994), 181.

²⁰² Joyce Appleby, "Consumption in early modern social thought" in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 172.

and the evolution of female identities through modern consumer practices. In Alison Clarke's discussion of the role of mass-produced, domestic material culture in women's negotiation of social relationships and identities, she uses the history of the production, distribution and consumption of Tupperware to explore these complex concepts, and her own frame of femininity, consumption and modernity provides a valuable touchstone for my study of glory boxes:

Mass consumption and commodity forms are used in countering alienation and constructing meaning in contemporary social life. The sociality of the gift, the nuances of household provisioning, and the complexity of social identities are pursued through, as much as jeopardized by, mass consumption. Objects of everyday life are thus meaningfully put to use in developing sociality, kinship, and identity in modern industrial societies.²⁰³

Identity, choice and autonomy for women were wrapped up in consumption; consumption for women was primarily about domesticity, and domesticity was ultimately female. Through the memories and material culture of women, this entwining of femininity and domesticity through the production and consumption of glory boxes can be explored and illuminated.

²⁰³ Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware. The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 174.

2.3 The Box: Containing the Collection

Of the 37 personal stories documented regarding Australian-born glory box collecting experiences, all but three (Judith Howard, Evelyn Tull and Joan Skate's sister Pat) had a glory box collection whether large or small, and most had a container of some description. This notion of containment is important as there were no stories in the interviews of women scattering glory box items throughout their parents' homes; watching a collection of individual property grow was part of the ritual and its satisfaction. A container reinforced the feeling of possession and value of the property. As Roche has observed, the storing of objects in designated furniture, 'expresses a spontaneous theory of needs of classification, of the orderly organisation of the undifferentiated into rationality, which involves the powers of memory and awareness of comparisons and similarities.'²⁰⁴

In my analysis, I have categorised glory box containers as the following: store-purchased glory boxes (both items branded as 'glory boxes,' and pieces of furniture bought and utilised as glory boxes); hand-made or hand-adapted glory boxes (including items created from scratch and those fashioned into glory boxes from existing materials); 'making-do' glory boxes (found objects); and 'bottom drawers' (literally a section of existing bedroom furniture set aside, very much in the Irish tradition). But these categories reveal a variety of individual motivations and circumstances, and generalisations can be made only with caution. For example, the use of a makeshift crate can reflect the straitened economic situation of a woman during the Depression who was determined nevertheless to have a formal box; it can also simply reflect another

²⁰⁴ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things* 170.

woman's degree of interest or financial prioritising whereby 'anything will do.' Nevertheless, some interesting trends do emerge.

The sample taken for this study shows that over a third of women purchased (or had purchased on their behalf) a formal glory box. This includes glory boxes in both wardrobe and chest styles which were officially branded by stores as 'glory boxes' and were clearly expressed as such in newspaper and magazine advertisements. These boxes were bought by women independently, with their boyfriends or fiancés, and even solely by the men themselves for their girlfriends. It also includes cabinet and buffet-style furniture that women selected to utilise as glory boxes but which they had also identified for future use in their marital homes. Such purchases were often made in conjunction with fiancés; they could be significant pieces of furniture and consequently were investments of some substance. In fact, the very nature of glory box design enabled their multi-functionality. Many women selected glory boxes which would have an ongoing practical domestic use in the future marital home. This was a pragmatic approach which demonstrates how women of this time were imbued with principles of reusing, recycling and reconfiguring so that nothing ever went to waste.

These glory boxes came in a variety of styles. Daisy Chapman selected her tailor-made box herself in the 1940s. As she was under 21, her fiancé's mother had to act as guarantor while Daisy made the repayments. She recalls that 'mine was a buffet (in walnut veneer). It had three doors in the centre and it had two glass doors with frosted glass design on it... When I saw it I thought if I got a buffet, I can get a table and chairs to match it, and that would be the dining room suite.'²⁰⁵ **(Figure 2)** Marjorie Cope remembers going in to town with her

²⁰⁵ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

sister Val in the late 1940s to buy a bookcase (with a mirrored back and glass doors) to act first as glory box, and later as marital furniture. She had saved to buy it herself.²⁰⁶ Betty Phillips also purchased her glory box outright, probably with her mother, in the late 1940s – a veneer cabinet with two glass doors, a drop-down lower part and lift-up top. She put mainly linen in the top, and the most expensive things such as crystal behind the glass.²⁰⁷ **(Figure 3)** Dora Wallis was collecting in Brighton during the Depression and recalls spotting her camphor wood chest in a small shop in Commercial Road, Prahran. She states: 'I saw it in the window and I thought, 'that's mine'...I must have had the money...I didn't put it on the lay-by, I bought it then...I had it in the sitting room and we used it as a seat ...it was about as wide as two chairs together and as high as a chair... no drawer...just a lift-out tray.'²⁰⁸

Men frequently played a role in the purchase of glory boxes, entering into what was overwhelmingly a female activity and domain. Nancy A. has an amusing recollection of the day her boyfriend brought her glory box home to her around the late 1930s in Melbourne:

It was hand carved, with very big oval, deep hand carving all around...(I got it) when I was 18...My boyfriend bought it for me and the funny thing was, he got a friend of his to help him carry it up the street. And all the local ladies were peering through the curtains and they thought someone had died...they thought it was a coffin!²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Marjorie Cope, 2003.

²⁰⁷ Betty Phillips, 2003.

²⁰⁸ Dora Wallis, Wahroonga Friendship Village, 2005.

²⁰⁹ Nancy A., Wahroonga Friendship Village, 2005.

Amongst the interviewed women residing in and around Lilydale at the time of collecting, there was a mix of gender participation. Three boxes were made or adapted by fathers, three boxes were purchased by boyfriends, one box was a joint selection and purchase, while four boxes were purchased by the women themselves. Dorothy Phillips and her boyfriend purchased the box together in 1946 when she was 18 during a trip to town, especially for the occasion. The selection of a veneer sideboard which would have long term domestic use was a joint decision and they paid for it together. The boyfriend of BS purchased her veneer chest in the 1930s, probably with the advice of his mother. She recalls that it 'was a gift and I always thought it was nice... (He) just appeared and said I've bought you a present.'²¹⁰ **(Figures 4A & 4B)** Gwenda Mutimer's box came at the sole impetus of her mother-in-law to-be in the 1940s and she remembers:

I'm sure she insisted that Wal bought me a glory box which he did...and I think it probably was at Clausen's...we chose it but he bought it...it was what they would call a traditional glory box of the time...it was veneer...let's say walnut and you lifted up the top, that's where all your flat things, like supper cloths and all those sort of things...and then there was the two glass doors that you opened up and they had a little sandblasted something...and that was probably for things like blankets, heavier things, and then there was another drawer at the bottom for...bits and pieces...but it was a glory box, called a glory box.²¹¹

²¹⁰ BS, 2003.

²¹¹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

Kath Davis, in late 1930s Traralgon in regional Victoria, learned the hard way how tenuous property ownership could be, with her glory box repossessed by an ex-boyfriend:

The first box I had, I'd been collecting things but just putting them in a cupboard, but then I had this boyfriend which was an on and off affair for about five years. At one stage, I don't even remember him proposing, but we got round to talking about marriage...and his uncle had a furniture shop and he bought me this magnificent glory box which was magnificent in those days. And so I had somewhere to put my things. ...I liked it very much and as the years went on the romance faded and he asked me for the glory box back...I gave it back to him and I thought well, if this is the way things go I'll buy my own and then I'll have it. So I went to town and I bought one, an identical one, so that's how I came to get my glory box.²¹²

In this example, the purchasing of the glory box by a boyfriend threatened the notion of glory box as female property, which is at the heart of the entire tradition. It became vulnerable to male repossession, a situation which Kath determined would not occur again by the act of purchasing a glory box for herself. For Kath the container was just as significant as the collection, highly prized and enjoyed, and she describes it as,

a glory box because it had compartments in it and trays and shelves and a big drawer at the bottom...wood veneer, divided into four sections, the top was two compartments, with one big shelf for all sorts of things and

²¹² Interview with Kath Davis (nee Hayes) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Chirnside Park, Victoria, 1992; Kath Davis, 2003.

then there were two trays which I used for embroidery and linen and stuff like that. Then there was a space lower down. It had two big doors that opened out and then right at the bottom was a big drawer which I suppose would have been for blankets and things like that.²¹³

It cost around 13 pounds and she knew no one else with one quite like it.

(Figures 5A & 5B)

Then there are the women for whom boxes were made or adapted, a process in which men frequently participated. One fifth of the stories gathered for this study from Australian-born women fall into this category. This ranges from women for whom glory boxes were made from scratch by fathers, brothers, boyfriends, even male workmates; to women who had anything from travel chests to tea chests converted into glory boxes. Australian literary fiction also documents the domestic production of glory boxes. For example, Henrietta Drake-Brockman's *The Fatal Days* (1947), set in the regional Victorian town of Ballarat during World War II, has a young man, Arthur Marr, initiate a marriage proposal by suggesting he make his girlfriend Shirley a glory box to fill while he increases his savings:

Remember that glory-chest you admired down the furniture store?...It wasn't much, that box! I reckoned I could do better. So Saturdays I got the loan of a cobber's joinery bench, and I been making one meself. It's all but done, Shirl, and when it was finished I reckoned to give it to you – if you wanted it – and say what about filling it up while I fetched me bank balance up to a couple of hundred quid, and what do you say you and

²¹³ Kath Davis, 2003.

me instead of just mugging round like we been – fixed ourselves up partners for good?²¹⁴

This passage also demonstrates a typical division of labour and responsibility. The couple are to be thrifty, productive and skilful; Arthur through saving for the house deposit and making the box, and Shirley through accumulating the contents and fitting out the interior domestic domain.

A couple of the interviewed women held their boxes very dear throughout their lives. May Vertigan's box was the creation and gift from her workplace in Shepparton in northern regional Victoria in the early 1930s, and her daughter Judith Howard retells the story:

She was private secretary to the owner of the timber yard, E.J. Vibert in Shepparton and of course (there were) lots of men in the timber yard and when my mother was engaged, they said they would make her glory box. And they jolly well did...it's quite a big box...pine, panelled pine box. Stained to a really dark reddish colour, with a...lifted lid. It doesn't have a lock on it and it has a handle each end...I think there was a shelf in it.²¹⁵ **(Figure 6)**

On the other hand, the glory box belonging to Loris Peggie in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Forest Hill, is a family heirloom, passed down through generations since its arrival from England with her migrating family in 1839. Loris reflects:

²¹⁴ Henrietta Drake-Brockman, *The Fatal Days* (Sydney & London: Angus & Robertson, 1947), 299.

²¹⁵ Interview with Judith Howard (nee Vertigan) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Balwyn, Victoria, 2005.

I'm very lucky that (my glory box) is the cedar chest that was brought to Australia by my mother's great great grandfather in 1839 on the ship... it was in its raw condition until I turned 18 when the family decided to have it repaired and polished...It still has the original brass handles on it... it has a lift-up lid and a drawer at the bottom...When you lift up the lid it was a very deep cavity so my mother had a (tray) made to fit in that cavity...You lift it completely out...It was more or less done up by the family and given to me as a glory box.²¹⁶ **(Figure 7)**

These were formal pieces of furniture, made and adapted to be glory boxes. There was a degree of ritual about both these boxes. These women were presented by a group (in one case a workplace, in the other a family) with something quite special and valuable. It was an item to be kept and treasured, which both of these women have done.

There are also glory boxes made with equal care, but with few resources. Both Thelma Drummond and Ester Rose from the Lilydale district had boxes made for them by their fathers during the Depression. Thelma's describes her box as 'a plain old wooden box, probably used for a wood box or shoe box afterwards...enough to put everything out of the road, because everything had to be tidy...didn't have any money to go buying it, did as much as you could yourself in those days.'²¹⁷ While Thelma's mother instructed her father to make a box for her, Ester made the request of her father herself in a determined effort to fulfil the glory box tradition in straitened circumstances. She recalls:

²¹⁶ Interview with Loris Peggie recorded by Moya McFadzean, Forest Hill, Victoria, 2005.

²¹⁷ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

It wasn't an official glory box, it was a box which used to hold kerosene in those days. And my father put a lid on it, hinges and a lid, and that was my box. He painted it and lined it...with packing paper. It was in the thirties...I worked at home so I didn't have a regular income or anything like that.²¹⁸

Neither woman referred directly to their boxes (as opposed to their collections) as glory boxes, self conscious of their simplicity and lack of formality, although in terms of form and function, their boxes were as much glory boxes as the most expensive store-purchased unit. The fact that Ester's box survived at all is a miracle. For many years, her husband utilised the box to contain his fishing tackle. A plain old box is brought to life by the story woven around it. Its capacity to be both personal and moving memory object, as well as evocative symbol of economic circumstance and the persistence of a significant Australian female ritual, is writ large across its painted lid with the rusty hinges. **(Figures 8A & 8B)**

The remaining women documented had the most informal of containers for their glory box collections: cardboard cartons, tea chests and the bottom drawer of the bedroom wardrobe. These women either could not afford to buy a glory box, or for some, their domestic or working environment had not the space to accommodate one. Or they simply weren't particularly interested. None of these women expressed or recalled any regret, disappointment or feelings of inadequacy that they did not have 'proper' boxes (and nor did the women whose fathers had made 'makeshift' glory boxes for them). For them the collection was the key, and the box purely and simply a container. Ruby Kwijas, from the very poor section of Lilydale township, simply had a couple of

²¹⁸ Ester Rose, 1992.

cardboard cartons pushed under her bed in the early 1950s. She recalls that there would have been little room for a glory box at home, as with a large family and just four rooms, there was no space for extra furniture. She states 'to me a glory box was more the items rather than the receptacle you kept them in.'²¹⁹ In Coldstream on the eastern edge of Melbourne, Dot Mitchell's 1940s box was 'just a box that belonged to the house that I threw things in.'²²⁰ Her sister Val Sheehan's box was a tea chest, probably picked up from the local general store where she worked during the 1940s and Val states that she would never have spent money on a formal glory box.²²¹ Loris Peggie summarises the experiences of many of these women as she talks about her own peers during the 1950s:

Mostly I think they had a suitcase or just a bottom drawer in a cupboard or something like that. Not many of them had glory boxes...(the contents) went into suitcases or probably cardboard cartons in some instances, because most of the girls here were in the same sort of circumstances as us, the families probably lived reasonably comfortably but never ever had much to spare.²²²

Seven women describe using the bottom drawer of the wardrobe or chest of drawers in their bedrooms, such as Joan Skate and her sister Bett in Melbourne's outer east,²²³ while Beth Taws filled her drawer and then left her collection behind in her parents' home in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Glen

²¹⁹ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

²²⁰ Interview with Dot Mitchell (nee Skate) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Coldstream, Victoria, 2003.

²²¹ Val Sheehan, 2003.

²²² Loris Peggie, 2005.

²²³ Interview with Joan Skate (nee Silby) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Coldstream, Victoria, 2003.

Iris when she left to study nursing in the early 1950s.²²⁴ Esther A. was collecting in Williamstown during the Depression and states that 'when I was getting a glory box ready, it was just a little corner in the bottom drawer of the wardrobe...partly because I couldn't afford it and partly because I didn't have much to put in it.'²²⁵

²²⁴ Beth Taws, 2003.

²²⁵ Esther A (no surname disclosed), Wahroonga Friendship Village, 2005.

There are always exceptions to the norm. Evelyn Tull lived away from home when she was working in domestic service, boarding in a small room at Ivanhoe Grammar in Yea in Melbourne's outer east, and she made a conscious decision to purchase a block of land in Gippsland (south-eastern Victoria) in the 1940s instead of a glory box. She recalls:

I was living away from home...in a very small room. I lived in and worked at the same place...I saved my money and bought ten acres of land...it was sixty pounds...in Gippsland...I started off with ten shillings a week, then I went to one pound ten shillings and then to two pound ten shillings and the two pound ten shillings was a live-in job so really I could save then...I didn't have room for glory boxes or anything like that so it was a natural option to save money.²²⁶ **(Figure 9)**

When Evelyn married, her block of land was used as the deposit on the marital house. It is tempting to view Evelyn's actions as socially rebellious, a deliberate choice away from the glory box trend and towards another form of property. However, Evelyn's statement implies that she probably would have owned a glory box if she could have accommodated it within the confines of her live-in work lodgings. It is not clear whether, given the choice, Evelyn would have saved for her land and her box. In view of her small income and the way other women had little incidental money to spare beyond their glory box purchases, it would likely have been one or the other. This notion that the size and even existence of a glory box was dictated by a woman's private living space was not uncommon. Bottom drawers were ultimately making use of space that already existed, frequently in the parental home and also in live-in work situations.

²²⁶ Interview with Evelyn Tull (nee Goodall) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 1992.

The point of connection in this myriad of experiences is that nearly all women had a glory box of some description. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, even the experiences between sisters could vary. Within one family, three sisters collecting during the 1940s had an old 'found' box, a tea chest and a purchased bookcase.²²⁷ In Daisy Chapman's family during the 1940s, Daisy purchased her own 'buffet,' her sister Lena purchased a cabinet and their sister Wyn utilised an old cabin chest that had been lying around the house.²²⁸ The three Goode girls had a purchased cabinet, used an existing bedroom wardrobe, and a collection with no formal box at all.²²⁹ The reasons for difference both within and between families were a mix of economic circumstances, personal inclination, and the impact of external forces (such as male family members, boyfriends and work colleagues). But for most women, it appears that something, whether a veneer cabinet or a kerosene box, was better – and more practical – than nothing.

2.4 Under the Lid: the Contents

Glory boxes and their contents reflect key changes occurring in the process of industrialisation, specifically in terms of form, materials, production methods, trade and acquisition.²³⁰ During the 1930s to 1950s, these changes are particularly evident, as will also be discussed in Chapter Four, in the gradual shift in the nature of glory box collections, from an emphasis on the hand-made to the purchase of the mass-produced. That is, women continued to sew and

²²⁷ The Skate sisters: Dorothy Mitchell, Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope, 2003.

²²⁸ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

²²⁹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003. These sibling relationships in terms of glory box collecting will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

²³⁰ The use of material culture to investigate these changes undertaken by Cummings and Lewandowska, *The Value of Things*.

embroider, but the quantity lessened, pre-stamped fabrics increased, and other domestic objects were acquired. As was discussed in Chapter One, World War II affected the availability and quality of goods for purchase. But with the exception of this period of austerity, there were more goods, and more salaried women to buy them. Many women used the 'lay-by' as their method of acquisition, rather than outright or credit purchase (this will be explored further later in this chapter). However, this generation of women were never going to be extravagant spenders. They were still frugal and anti-credit, and probably did not fit the retailing and advertising hope for a female-led, barrier-free culture of consumption.²³¹

Glory box contents were a mix of purchases, gifts, handmade items and a few heirlooms. Chapter Three will explore ways in which mothers, sisters, friends, work colleagues and even local communities contributed to glory box collections, through birthday gifts, kitchen teas and engagement parties. Chapter Four will focus on needlecraft and its production as a critical component of the glory box. Of particular interest here are the items women purchased for themselves for their boxes, as well as items others bought for them, both activities contributing to, and influenced by, the growing consumerism of the post-war era.

Glory box collections reflected women's economic and cultural priorities, their skills, their ability to save and select wisely. They maintained women's identified ultimate destiny as inextricably connected to a domestic marital environment. It was their property, over which they had ultimate control, but with a socially promoted, defined and approved outcome. These social

²³¹ There appears to have been a general trend towards slow spending in Australia once the essentials had been fulfilled, before a rapid increase as the 1950s progressed. Discussed in Crawford, *But Wait, There's More*, 21-122.

expectations often commenced when women were teenagers, before marriage had even become a consideration. Daisy Chapman describes this progressive glory box rite of passage commencing from 'about 14 when I had my first pepper and salt shakers and then as we got older, when you had a birthday or something, you got a little butter dish or something like that.'²³²

Many Australian-born women started collecting for their glory boxes prior to becoming engaged, or even before having a boyfriend. Fancywork was learned from an early age and small domestic gifts were received for teenage birthdays, all which gradually set in motion a collecting, though not necessarily marrying, mentality. Most interviewed women state that they didn't have marriage in mind when they commenced collecting, or that it was way off in the future. Kath Davis started collecting when she was about 16, around the time when she started work, had an income and a casual boyfriend. She states that she was not thinking about getting married at the time and that she would have started collecting for her box with or without the boyfriend, because 'marriage was way in the distance, it wasn't anything in the near future, it was just in case you got married you had to have a glory box.'²³³

But once women became engaged, collecting became more vigorous and more focused – in a sense, the end was in sight. It was often at this point that women actually received their glory box furniture, to contain their collections and give form and formality to the process. BS started collecting in Yarra Glen on the outer eastern Melbourne fringe during the 1930s after she met her husband-to-be at about 17 years of age (she married at 21). Her objective was to gather things for the marital house. As was seen earlier, her fiancé gave her the box,

²³² Daisy Chapman, 2003

²³³ Kath Davis, 2003.

and his family gave her gifts including handcrafts made by his mother and sister who were expert needlewomen.²³⁴ Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips comment that collecting in the 1940s sped up when they became engaged and as things became more available after the war. With marriage in sight, states Nancy, 'you planned for your box.'²³⁵ **(Figure 10)** Betty Phillips was about 16 when her grandmother gave her the first things for her box in 1947, about 18-19 when she purchased her box. She says collecting accelerated when you got engaged and 'in the last 12 months or so, you'd buy more things.'²³⁶

There are occasional exceptions to this more common rite of passage. Beth Taws did not marry till later in life in 1961; she had left home in 1952 at the age of 22. She thinks that may be why she did not have an actual glory box, although she enjoyed collecting useful things for whether she married or not. Beth married a man who had been married before so she had an established house to move into. Consequently, there was no impetus for accelerated collecting once engaged, like other girls. Her marital house was already established.²³⁷

Aside from needlework, what were women putting in those boxes? Interviews reveal that women placed different emphases on their collections which directed what they purchased, made, even what they were given. The choosing of these items for the glory box was an assertion of taste, of ownership and autonomy. For some women it represented the betterment of their lives, the conscious improvement of standard of living from their mother's generation to their own. It was an expression of aspirational projection, articulated through material objects, and as Judy Giles argues

²³⁴ BS, 2003.

²³⁵ Nancy Briggs, 2003 and interview with Dorothy Phillips (nee Reakes) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 2003.

²³⁶ Betty Phillips, 2003. .

²³⁷ Beth Taws, 2003.

the women who dreamt of a better life running their own homes, with a companionable and caring husband, in a pleasant environment...were as 'modern' in their way as the flapper...These women saw in the realisation of their material aspirations a sense of self-worth and dignity.²³⁸

Thus Ruby Kwijas, in selecting more luxurious and less practical items for her box, consciously collected with the aim to improve her lot, believing that these items would influence her future home life, and create a place where her own children would want to bring friends home. She reflects:

For me it was probably to have pretty things that I hadn't seen through my early life and at the same time I was going to use those things for me... Looking back on my life at home, with collecting all those sorts of things...I was doing this in view of escaping from all of those things that (I) had to do from an early age, not that I worried about them at the time...it was sort of like I'm not going to live like this all of my life, there's going to be something a little better at the end of the tunnel.²³⁹

(Figure 11)

Australian fiction also provides a telling example of a glory box, meagre in its contents, yet representing one young woman's desperate desire for flight from her straitened family circumstances in country New South Wales. Grace, in Bruce Beaver's novel *You Can't Come Back* (1966), shows her glory box to a young man she sees as a way out:

²³⁸ Judy Giles, "Class, Gender and Domestic Consumption in Great Britain 1920-1950," in Casey and Martens, *Gender and Consumption*, 26-27.

²³⁹ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

She knelt down and started to tug open a drawer of the cupboard... 'I'm going to show you something special, Bernie' she said, tugging away...I looked into the drawer and saw a couple of towels coloured yellow, red and blue; what looked like an old window curtain, and a couple of big pottery dolls...And probably a couple of cockroaches underneath the lot. Grace looked up at me as though I was expected to say something so I said, 'They're very nice', and left it at that. 'That's my glory box', said Grace. She really meant it. 'I'm saving up things so I can get married and get away from here.'²⁴⁰

This pathetic hoard, tragically exposed, only magnifies Grace's desperation and the unlikeliness of her dream fulfilment. It is as though the very existence of a glory box will somehow translate into marriage and escape. Thus the very act of collecting for a glory box reveals a space between the actual and the ideal. Women coveted, saved, planned, selected and often finally purchased (whether outright or through repayment plans such as lay-by). This was all in the hope of a future marital state and a home of their own. These purchases and the storing of those purchases was a rehearsal for another life, what McCracken has defined as the 'displacement of meaning' by which an object acts as a bridge between a projected ideal future, and the actual realisation of that future in the present.²⁴¹

Some women took the approach that they would collect more luxurious items, such as special crystal, Carltonware, or a prized damask cloth, simply because

²⁴⁰ Bruce Beaver, *You Can't Come Back* (Adelaide: Rigby Ltd., 1966), 118.

²⁴¹ McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 110.

they believed they would not have the opportunity to obtain such things after they married. **(Figure 12)** Gwenda Mutimer observes:

I got all the glamorous things, didn't worry about the mundane things as I knew they would come eventually... It was nearly always something fancy, you didn't go in for mundane things like sheets or things...it had to be something that was probably entirely inappropriate. That was just the excitement of starting to get things together.²⁴² **(Figure 13)**

Bell also cites an example of a woman collecting around 1939, and her desire for beautiful things, which she painstakingly paid off on the lay-by from her modest wage:

I had a beautiful piece of china on the lay-by for some time. I had seen it on display at Buckley's in Melbourne during one of my lunch-times. It cost 60 pounds, and I paid it off at ten shillings a week. My wages were 19 and sixpence a week. It was just as well my mother supplied the sheets and other essentials. I was interested in the beautiful items.²⁴³

More common are the stories of women who prioritised the practical items. Daisy Chapman, unlike her friend Gwenda Mutimer, was keen to gather practical bed sheets and other manchester items during the 1940s and she states that 'I concentrated on linen, I had sheets...towels... they've never been used...tea towels because I used to love working them.'²⁴⁴ **(Figures 14 & 15)** Few of the women were particularly strategic about their purchases – they tended to buy something they liked or needed when they saw it. Kath Davis

²⁴² Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

²⁴³ Bell, *Generations*. 148.

²⁴⁴ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

recalls: 'Nothing was really planned. If I saw something in a shop that I fancied, if there'd be a doily or tablecloth or whatever, if I liked it I just bought it and did the fancywork on it. I had no plans...I had no system, no colour scheme.'²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Kath did buy aluminium saucepans just prior to the war, in case they became difficult to get, an example of both pragmatism and planning ahead.

Yet even if the women were not always strategic about their selections, they were still determining the nature of their future domestic sphere and private space. The glory box was at once a women's outward public expression of property (saving, discernment, and creativity), yet also of her private hopes and dreams, sexual desires, and even also her disappointments. A few women even visualised their homes and what they would need to fit out the domestic environment, discussed in the previous chapter. These items tended towards the manchester, linens, and kitchenware. Betty Phillips comments that she had always wanted a cherry and cream kitchen and remembers one day when in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Box Hill with her fiancé in the mid 1950s, he bought her a biscuit barrel, cream with a cherry lid.²⁴⁶ For Ester in the 1930s, it was green, she loved green kitchenware and for her kitchen tea, everyone gave her green items.²⁴⁷

Appendix III is a brief inventory of the contents purchased by the sample of 13 women interviewed who were collecting for their glory boxes in the Lilydale district over a thirty year period, from the earliest to the latest collector. The list for each woman is by no means exhaustive but provides an insight into what

²⁴⁵ Kath Davis, 2003.

²⁴⁶ Betty Phillips, 2003.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Ester Rose (nee Wallace) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Ringwood, Victoria, 2003.

these women were purchasing for themselves, or having purchased for them, with many items repeatedly mentioned. The list does not include needlecraft which all of the women had in their glory boxes to greater and lesser extents and which is outlined in detail in the next chapter. An occasional quirk of taste appears, such as Nancy Briggs' polished wooden mulgoa wood ornaments.

(Figure 16) But otherwise, this is a standard overview of working-class women's glory box purchases across the decades. Nevertheless, no matter when collecting began and no matter what other motivations stirred behind it being 'the thing to do,' most women took enormous pride and received enormous joy from their boxes. There was the thrill of collecting, and Nancy Briggs recalls that 'it was a big thing in our lives, something to look forward to,' while her friend Dorothy Phillips remembers that 'it was fun, ooh I've got this, I'm going to put it in my box.'²⁴⁸ Marjorie Cope has been quoted previously, but her statement really does capture the essence of the pleasure of glory box collecting, and brings together some of the common threads of this pleasure – ownership, saving, satisfaction, future home, and dreams for the future:

I just loved gathering up my glory box, my collection...I totally enjoyed it. I saved and I used to be thinking about the home I might have one day, that's what it was for. It wasn't the thought of a glory box as such, it was more the homemaker part of it, that I loved the thought of...I loved the thought of having a home...always loved looking at what I've got, and where I'd put it and what I'd use it for.²⁴⁹

This statement is reinforced by a letter written in 1937 to the *Australian Women's Weekly*, as part of a glory box debate. The author, a Mrs A. Ellard, from

²⁴⁸ Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

²⁴⁹ Marjorie Cope, 2003 (this quote appears in the Introduction).

Brisbane, writes passionately that 'glory boxes are important. The girl who does not intend preparing a glory box is depriving herself of a lot of pleasure. I consider the happiest moments spent prior to marriage are in the preparation of a 'box.'²⁵⁰

These women filled their boxes with patience, thrift and pragmatism, with an occasional dash of extravagance. They were consumers in a society which was increasingly looking to credit to satisfy acquisitive desires, but they were not aspiring to a world of instant gratification. They desired their portable property, they took pleasure in its accumulation via their own selection and saving. But they rarely wanted for more than they could buy or make themselves, or that which was given to them. These collections were the work of time, taste and practicality. Pleasure was taken in their formulation; satisfaction garnered from them being the work of their own hands and pay packets.

2.5 Shopping: Stores, Advertising and Methods of Payment

Australia, like England, North America and parts of western Europe, was evolving as one of the world's most industrialised and consuming countries, developments which would have an impact on the nature of glory boxes in terms of the buying, selling and making of goods, as well as their gendered condition. The changing nature of the production of domestic goods, the way in which they were sold, and the feminisation of the targeted consumer, was a process in train in Australia during the decades prior to World War II. The role of 'shopper' entered the English vernacular during the mid-nineteenth century,

²⁵⁰ 'So They Say,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 6 March 1937, 19.

as well as the 'extension of the art of shopping,'²⁵¹ between the 1860s and 1920s. Shopping became a feminised leisure activity of the middle and upper classes, having moved beyond mere acquisition of essential goods. Mica Nava points to the early twentieth century as a confluence of influences all contributing to an evolving western female identity, whereby 'stores and shopping (can) be recognised as one of the main contexts in which women developed a new consciousness of the possibilities and entitlements that modern life was able to offer.'²⁵² In Australia, first-wave feminist Louisa Lawson, editor of the radical *The Dawn* journal for women, wrote in 1893 of the importance for women of shopping as a skill. She demanded 'it ought to be recognised as a part of a girl's education to shop wisely and well...that she will look upon a thrifty management of her purse as an accomplishment and not a bore.'²⁵³

This trend required new shopping spaces, primarily arcades and department stores, which sprang up in and around Melbourne from the 1850s.²⁵⁴ Bill Lancaster argues that 'the department store was the pioneer of mass consumption; it had long learnt the lesson of the necessity of combining an alluring environment with choice, and the economic rationale of a bargain price.'²⁵⁵ Arcades targeted discerning shoppers of select and expensive

²⁵¹ Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 25.

²⁵² Mica Nava, "Modernity's Disavowal. Women, the city and the department store" in *Modern Times. Reflections on a century of English modernity*, eds. Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 53.

²⁵³ Louisa Lawson, "Teach Girls How to Shop." *The Dawn. A Journal for the Household*, Vol. 5, No. 12, 1 April (1893): 16.

²⁵⁴ Kingston, *Basket Bag and Trolley*, 26-27.

²⁵⁵ Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store. A Social History* (London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), 105. Other useful histories of shopping and retailing include: David Alexander, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1970); Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914. Where, and in What Manner The Well-dressed Englishwoman Bought Her Clothes* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964); Dorothy Davis, *A History of Shopping* (London & Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., & University of Toronto Press, 1966).

merchandise, while department stores, extensions of the general store, supplied convenience, quality and quantity. As Lawson demanded earlier, Australian women were learning the art of shopping whereby, Giles observes in Great Britain, 'the emergence of department and chain stores...enabled women of all classes to practise skills of financial management and aesthetic expertise as they compared prices, assessed quality, and made judgements about style.'²⁵⁶ These stores also followed the inner suburban spread, creating shopping hubs in Richmond, Collingwood, Brunswick and Prahran. Nevertheless, the city remained the consumer heartland, even as Australian suburbs pushed ever increasingly outward, and innumerable women from the 1930s onwards recount their experiences of shopping for their glory boxes 'in town.'

Women shopping for their glory boxes between 1930 and 1960 ranged between the large department stores to the smaller shops which specialised in a particular line such as manchester or glass and crystal.²⁵⁷ Melbourne's retail spine had been formed partly by the establishment in Bourke Street of Myer in 1911 (replacing this store with the much larger building in 1933 which became and remains a Melbourne shopping icon). Consequently, the shopping hub shifted from Flinders Street (Mutual Store and Ball & Welch) to Bourke Street and southward to Collins Street via the arcade network (London Stores, Leviathan, Coles, Foy & Gibson's, and Manton's).²⁵⁸ Interviewed women recalled a variety of city stores, with some stores referred to frequently. BS reels them off like a shopping list:

²⁵⁶ Giles, "Class, Gender and Domestic Consumption" in Casey and Martens, *Gender and Consumption*, 19.

²⁵⁷ In the 1948 retail census, 'the 130 shops (in Victoria) defined as department stores accounted for 10.3% of retail sales. In money terms they sold 30.3% of drapery, clothing and soft furnishings, 18.1 % of hardware, ironmongery and crockery and 15.4% of furniture and floor coverings.' John Young and Peter Spearitt, "Department Stores" in Brown-May and Swain, *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, 203.

²⁵⁸ John Young and Peter Spearitt, "Retailing" in *Ibid.*, 602.

Paynes...Treadway's...Manton's...Edmunsons and Bevilles for china and crystal...you always steered your fiancé towards Dunklings because they had the vast array of diamonds...if you didn't buy anything you always went to Myer...Ball and Welch had beautiful china and manchester.²⁵⁹

(Figure 17)

Consequently, despite the varied challenges during the 1930-1960 period of limited funds and goods and a residual emphasis on needlecraft, shopping was a part of building the glory boxes, and becoming increasingly important as the decades progressed. There were other ways of shopping for the glory box aside from frequenting stores. Kath Davis describes a firm called British Products, a kind of lottery system whereby girls paid off selected items on a monthly basis. Names were drawn out each month and the 'lucky' girls would receive their goods with no further payments required. Kath recalls that they were 'firms that had china, linen cutlery and...went around conning girls like me into buying these things on a 12 month term, no interest, two pounds a month...(They) had a draw every month so if you got drawn out, you didn't have to pay anymore.'²⁶⁰ BS also belonged to British Products and kept the canteen of cutlery and Royal Doulton dinner set she acquired through the system throughout her life.²⁶¹

Other women recall the Lan-Choo tea coupons, which could be exchanged at a small shop in the city for a variety of domestic items – the more coupons, the larger or more expensive the goods. Joan Cox who arrived from Ireland in 1957

²⁵⁹ BS, 2003.

²⁶⁰ Kath Davis, 2003.

²⁶¹ BS, 2003.

remembers collecting these coupons after she was married, and other women pooling coupons to purchase gifts for kitchen teas, engagements and weddings:

There was a place in the city and you would have all your coupons with you...it was a lovely shop...you could have...all kinds of knick-knacks for your house...(girls) would have their aunts saving for them, if they were getting married, and their mothers and their grandparents, and they'd put them...all together...The more you had, the bigger the item you could get, you had a brochure and you could see all these different things, tea sets and dinner sets and anything...I just thought: 'this is a great idea, we never had anything like that at home.'²⁶²

Ellen Smoorenburg from Holland also remembers the tea coupons but, as the Dutch preferred coffee to tea, it took her a long time just to save enough coupons for a small butter knife.²⁶³

Another supplier of glory box goods were the travelling salesmen who worked their way through towns selling their wares door-to-door. These vendors were the remnant of the long tradition of the hawkers and itinerant salesman who had been plying their wares across the country since the mid nineteenth century. It was a trade that been in decline since World War II and Kingston suggests that

the combination of wives who go out to work – no-one at home when the salesperson calls – and the general efficiency and relative cheapness of

²⁶² Interview with Joan Cox (nee Ryan) recorded by Moya McFadzean, North Croydon, Victoria, 2008.

²⁶³ Ellen Smoorenburg (nee Muller), recorded by Moya McFadzean, North Croydon, Victoria, 2008.

mass-produced and mass-marketed fruit and vegetable (and it could be argued other goods) make door-to-door sales in the suburbs hardly worth the effort.²⁶⁴

Ruby Kwijas remembers 'Mr Mickey' who came around to the Lilydale homes. She purchased her saucepans from him during the 1950s which she paid off in monthly instalments via a hire purchase rather than lay-by system, but without the interest; that is, you had the goods while paying them off. Judith Howard recounts the story her mother May Vertigan told her about how she acquired her dinner set during the early 1930s in Beaufort, Victoria, stating that 'while she was working for Viberts, there was a travelling salesman who came round for Royal Doulton and she bought her dinner set on time payment, from this man who used to come around.'²⁶⁵

Nevertheless, travelling salesmen and lottery systems were increasingly less common ways of purchasing items for glory boxes as the decades passed. What young women weren't making and sewing themselves, they were saving for and acquiring from department and specialty stores.

Shopping for the Box:

A 'trip into town' was a full day expedition, a social occasion, particularly for women living in the outer Melbourne suburbs.²⁶⁶ Daisy Chapman recalls: 'It was a day out to go to Melbourne to do that (shop for the glory box). And you specifically went to do that.'²⁶⁷ Some girls were accompanied by their mothers on glory-box specific shopping expeditions into town. Of course for many women the city was also synonymous with the workplace. For women

²⁶⁴ Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 23.

²⁶⁵ Judith Howard, 2005.

²⁶⁶ A similar observation is made by Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 80.

²⁶⁷ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

collecting for their glory boxes, often during their lunch break, leisure was inseparable from work and shopping was a swift, purposeful dash for a purchase during a short lunch break. But window shopping, whether leisurely or rushed, was an activity enjoyed for sighing over the unattainable, or for the satisfaction of securing the best deal. As Lancaster observes, 'window shopping has always been a popular pastime for women which may well be a form of escape into a phantasmagorical dream world, but almost certainly encompasses the highly rational activity of comparing prices and quality.'²⁶⁸

The 14 women interviewed who were living in the Lilydale district while of collecting age, either travelled into town for glory box items, or were working in the city and used their lunchtimes to pick up a bargain. Lilydale had little to offer girls desiring a variety of choices of items for their boxes. During the thirty year period, there was really only Claude Burrows for hardware and haberdashery, Mrs Blundell and Goode's (which became Crellin's) store for haberdashery and Hutchinson's store for hardware items. Ruby Kwijas comments that Lilydale was a small country town with limited shopping where you couldn't buy a dinner set, just a bread knife and board and a few kitchen things.²⁶⁹ **(Figure 18)** Nevertheless, some local purchases were made and Daisy Chapman recalls that 'every pay day...coming home from work we'd either call into Hutchinson's store or Claude Burrows store (in Lilydale) and buy kitchen stuff and bits and pieces.'²⁷⁰ Jewellery stores were popular glory box suppliers, stocking crockery, glassware, crystal and silver. Some of the women also shopped in the inner suburbs such as Carlton and Prahran. Kath Davis, who was collecting while living in Traralgon in regional Victoria, shopped and

²⁶⁸ Lancaster, *The Department Store*, 174-175. See also Frances Pollon, *Shopkeepers and Shoppers. A Social History of Retailing in New South Wales from 1788* (Sydney: The Retail Traders' Association of New South Wales, 2000), 338-339.

²⁶⁹ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

²⁷⁰ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

purchased most of her things at a well stocked jeweller's there. But she too, when her family took short vacations in Melbourne, would usually take the opportunity to pick up something for her box.²⁷¹ For these, and other women interviewed, who worked in or near town, a lunch break represented a brief and usually targeted shopping opportunity, as did window shopping along the route to and from the train station.

Women were particular and targeted in their selection of stores to patronise and the goods and even brands they purchased. Wartime rationing resulted in the limited availability of many of the recognised products, but goods gradually returned to the shelves. American sociologist Sharon Zukin states that

with new products multiplying in number, format, size and style, the task of shopping became more complicated. Brand names served as landmarks in uncharted seas; they signalled a product's consistency and integrity, and that mysterious ration of price and quality which indicates a good value.²⁷²

In Australia, the local preference for British-made goods during these decades was strong. Although availability had been compromised during the war, according to Lancaster the large stores with London buying offices had 'their buyers (buy) goods which enabled the big stores to exploit Australians' preference for overseas fashion goods, particularly English textile goods, which were considered to be the finest.'²⁷³ Nevertheless, Actil (Australian Cotton Textile Industries) considers itself to be the first company to produce

²⁷¹ Kath Davis, 2003.

²⁷² Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 211.

²⁷³ Lancaster, *The Department Store*, 21.

Australian-made bed linen during the late 1940s,²⁷⁴ and the quality of Actil sheets was mentioned by many women. BS remembers that 'sheets were only white, not floral...just white...Actil was always white...and stiff as a board...didn't they last?...I've still got one.'²⁷⁵

In terms of how the actual stores were branded by the women themselves, Bevilles was described as stocking quality china and crystal, more affordable than Dunklings and Buckley & Nunn. Kath Davis observes that 'everyone went to Bevilles.'²⁷⁶ A couple of women commented that Myer was too expensive and for browsing only, but Loris Peggie, shopping in the 1940s and 1950s, patronised Myer, as well as other perennial favourites like Ball and Welch:

In those days we did shop a lot at Myer and Ball and Welch. I spent a lot of time in Wests linen store because they had a lot of the embroidery things and there was another chap called Geoff Reilly and I've got some of his bits and pieces...He had a big influence both on what Mum did and what I did over the years...Georges and the other places were out of our reach...They were exclusive as far as we were concerned, not our area for shopping at all. Mind you we did wander through occasionally.²⁷⁷

Like Loris, other women remember Wests fondly for quality linen, located on the corner of Swanston Street by Coles in a little arcade. BS recalls:

²⁷⁴ Actil (trademark of Pacific Brands Group, Ultimo, New South Wales), www.actil.com.au, date accessed, 2008.

²⁷⁵ Interview with BS (request to remain anonymous) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Lilydale, Victoria, 1992.

²⁷⁶ Kath Davis, 2003.

²⁷⁷ Loris Peggie, 2005.

As you walked down to the railway train you always went in to see what Wests had...They had fabulous imported stuff...If you were looking for cheaper things you went to Treadway's or Paynes but (Wests) was very good quality, the brands were good...Raltex, Horrocks, Osman. They were all from England I would say.²⁷⁸

Wests represented quality imported British goods while stores such as Treadway's attracted women after affordable bulk buys. Treadway's promoted gimmicks such as their 'utility Manchester parcels,' which contained multiples of finished sheets, pillowcases, towels and tea towels. They could boast in one purchase the contents of glory boxes. Ester Rose recalls that in the 1930s her parents,

must have given me some money because I went down to Melbourne on the train, and that was a big thing on my own. We used to go to Treadway's and Paynes Bond Marsh and I had a housewife ticket and you got a discount...that's where we shopped, Myer was too dear.²⁷⁹

An advertisement for Treadway's 'famous seven guinea glory box' demonstrates how advertising could transform the mundane and, as Leach argues, 'endow the goods with transformative messages and associations that the goods did not objectively possess.'²⁸⁰

Treadway's manchester values have reached new peaks of popularity with the Housewife who knows real value by long experience and the

²⁷⁸ BS, 1992.

²⁷⁹ Ester Rose, 2003.

²⁸⁰ Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption," 327.

young 'Housewife to be' enjoying the thrill of gathering together the best of all glory boxes – 'her own' – finds that she has been wise in accepting the advice of her elders – to buy with confidence at Treadway's.²⁸¹ **(Figure 19)**

In another example, a newspaper advertisement for glory boxes for sale at Patersons (which had 13 stores across inner Melbourne and throughout Victoria), features an array of boxes in all their local forms, from chests to cabinets and cupboards, and all sporting the names of Hollywood actresses of the day: the 'Priscilla Lane,' the 'Ginger Rogers,' the 'Betty Grable' and the 'Judy Garland.'²⁸² **(Figure 20)** This strategy played to young women's interest in images of feminine glamour and sexuality portrayed in the cinema.

Furniture stores such as Clausen's, Davis' and Steele's all produced newspaper advertising promoting glory boxes as essential glamour items within their furniture departments. As was seen earlier, the Actil brand is remembered by many women as manufacturing durable sheets that lasted over time and the company's advertising in 1950 targeting 'Easter Brides' pronounces that 'Actil Guaranteed Quality Sheets and Pillowcases will add lustre to a 'glory box' you will treasure throughout a lifetime of happiness.'²⁸³ This image of luxurious quality is reinforced in Actil's logo, in the packaging of the sheets, and in the style of the advertisement; all ooze sophistication and prestige as they appeal directly to brides-to-be to include Actil sheets in a glory box of value. Thus, a simple bed sheet could come to represent a set of new values; not those of the maker's skills, but rather the manufacturer's brand, the particular store from

²⁸¹ Treadways 'Utility Manchester Parcel' advertisement, *Sun News Pictorial*, 3 October 1940, 7.

²⁸² Patersons 'Hope Chests' advertisement, *Sun News Pictorial*, 4 October 1940, 13.

²⁸³ Actil Sheets 'Easter Brides' advertisement, *Sun News Pictorial*, 23 February 1950, 18.

which it was purchased, and the monetary investment the sheet represented. **(Figure 21)** Women were valuing brands, and simultaneously, were being valued as consumers within a critical domestic niche market. Matthews observes in Australia that,

in the post-war world, the rapid expansion of the marketplace, and its turning of virtually everything into a saleable commodity, created a new context and meaning for women's work, and hence, for femininity. Women's production of goods and services at home, for private or local consumption, was appropriated by the marketplace.²⁸⁴

All these objects were being given a desirability which may otherwise only inspire a passing interest (particularly true of some glory box items which could be quite mundane). Of course during World War II the scarcity of goods lessened these experiences of abundance, with women much more motivated by pragmatic desperation and grabbing whatever they could find (such as Dorothy and Nancy and their tea towels in the previous chapter). Nevertheless, advertisements worked hard to catch the eye of young women with a little money to spare for personal purchases, and these only increased in number and variety of goods paraded in the post-war years.

Advertising the Box:

Advertising as a dominant market force with a strong, industry-coordinated, visible, professionalised presence did not take off until after 1901.²⁸⁵ The growth in manufacturing, particularly in Victoria during the 1920s, impacted upon the

²⁸⁴ Matthews, *Good and Mad Women*, 64-65.

²⁸⁵ Crawford, *But Wait, There's More*, 10-11.

advertising industry, and Crawford argues that in Australia 'increased competition among manufacturers created a greater need for advertising and, more importantly, a greater dependence on advertising to maintain sales.'²⁸⁶ Advertisements were more abundant and, as has been previously discussed, more targeted towards women as the principal domestic consumer. Even during the 1930s Depression, when advertising reduced in parallel with reduced consumer spending, 'the advertising industry adroitly continued to kindle short- and long-term desires to consume.'²⁸⁷ This increasing commercial visibility of glory boxes was inextricably connected to the growing consumerism of the period and the commodification of the glory box which was gradually changing the nature of its collections to incorporate more mass-produced goods after the war.

By the 1930s and 1940s, glory boxes and their contents were featuring in newspaper and magazine advertising as highly marketable commodities.²⁸⁸

(Figure 22) As Kingston has demonstrated in the Australian context:

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s newspapers began actively to court female readers with special pages, features and even a new editorial slant because they were the real target of their increasingly valuable advertising columns...By the 1930s it was known in the trade as catalogue advertising, that is, plain black and white sketches with prices and other details, was being used extensively in the daily press.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 85.

²⁸⁸ Various issues of *The Age*, *Sun News Pictorial*, *Australian Women's Weekly*, *Australian Furnisher*, *Home* and *Australian Home Beautiful* from the 1930s and 1940s all feature advertisements, many with images, for glory boxes and trousseau items.

²⁸⁹ Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 66.

Much of the glory box-related advertising appears in the *Australian Women's Weekly*, which was first published in 1933 and is considered to have set the standard for product advertising in general during the 1940s and 1950s.²⁹⁰ This is evident in the stunning front cover of a 1935 issue, which features a full colour tribute to the glory box, accompanied by the following verse:

Glory-box girl, you're planning, I think,/ For more than your glad today:
You're counting the milestones of the years/ That shall line your happy
way...

Glory-box girl, with linen and lace,/ A heart that has learned to sing,
You will open the strongroom door of life:/ The key is your wedding
ring.²⁹¹ **(Figure 23)**

Nevertheless, the war years, like the Depression years, were a challenge for advertisers. The 1930s saw a lack of spending ability and the 1940s a lack of things to buy, so that consumer desires were being fuelled by the sale of 'hopes and dreams' for a future consumer way of life.²⁹² Ironically, this delaying of gratification for a future married state is at the very essence of the glory box as commodity, and has been discussed in previous chapters. The presence of glory boxes in newspapers is also telling as the broader readership also reached fathers and boyfriends who commonly purchased glory boxes for their daughters and girlfriends. Related glory box items included sales of domestic goods, and needlework patterns and designs, and 'the young woman stocking her glory box will also find these suggestions (for embroidery designs) of real

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 68.

²⁹¹ *Australian Women's Weekly*, 16 November 1935, front cover.

²⁹² Crawford, *But Wait, There's More*, 124.

value.'²⁹³ Advertisements were becoming larger, more frequent, informative and sophisticated and were strategically positioned in newspapers within features and special pages where they might most likely gain the attention of the female readership.²⁹⁴ Advertisements also appeared in local newspapers. The *Lilydale Express* features an opinion piece in 1930 by a 'mother of twelve girls' espousing the virtues of H.J. Bently's furniture store in Ringwood in Melbourne's outer east for his innovative glory box display:

Now he presents the public with 'Glory Boxes' suitable for brides to be...if a young lady buys one and fills it with nice things she gets a thrill worth having on her wedding eve. No money wanted for linen and underwear for three years! What a lucky bride, and how happy Mr ____ to get such a thrifty wife...Just have a look at H.J. Bently's display window and show rooms in Ringwood; you'll find exactly what you are looking for. A glory box to hoard up all your knick-knacks, clothes, etc., that accumulate ready for the greatest day in your life.²⁹⁵

Yet in spite of all this domestic advertising directed at single and married women, the selection of stores patronised by women interviewed for this study was guided primarily through word-of-mouth recommendations by family, friends and peers. Newspaper advertisements and women's magazines played only a minor role in directing their collecting. Women interviewed had few memories of consulting magazines or noting sales and advertisements in newspapers. Thelma Drummond's mother had an eye for a bargain and consulted advertisements in the evening newspaper *Herald* during the 1930s.

²⁹³ *Australian Women's Weekly*, 21 October 1933, 19.

²⁹⁴ Argued by Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 66.

²⁹⁵ *Lilydale Express*, 2 May 1930, no page numbers.

Betty Phillips remembers advertisements for sales in papers, such as 'Myer star bargains,' and Daisy Chapman recalls store advertising on trams. Magazines such as the English and Australian *Women's Weekly*, *Women's Mirror*, and *New Idea* were consulted more for knitting patterns and some of the girls did not have access to magazines and newspapers at all. The main inspiration for purchases was through window shopping and store browsing. The women tended to see something, like it and put in on lay-by. The excursion itself may have been planned and girls often kept an eye on a favourite shop window for a bargain or a specific item, but the purchases tended to be impulsive rather than strategic.

Put it on the Lay-by:

Regardless of what spurred on the desire to buy, some women purchased their goods outright, but most patiently utilised a system of non-credit periodic payment that was available in stores across Australia. 'I'll put it on the lay-by' has been a common refrain of countless Australian women since at least the 1930s, and still survives as a form of goods purchase today. The lay-by enabled women on modest incomes to put aside items for their glory boxes when they spotted them, and then make small repayments in instalments until the item was fully paid for and they could take it home.²⁹⁶ This process could spread over weeks and months. It was the perfect system for women without ready cash who wished to buy, and feel that they were able to make headway with their glory box collections. Kingston has suggested that 'lay-by' grew out of the depressed conditions of the 1930s, probably commencing with Anthony Hordens (Sydney) D-P-S scheme (leave a deposit, pay as it suits you) and Lay By Service, both advertised in 1930.²⁹⁷ The system was probably imported from

²⁹⁶ See for definitions, *Macquarie Dictionary*, 811. The American version was known as the 'lay-away.'

²⁹⁷ Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 63.

the United States but was adopted in Australia with great success. Lay-by was unlike the hire purchase and credit systems, which enabled customers to take goods away prior to payment but which could also result in stores repossessing goods if mandatory and regular repayments were not met. The 'lay-by' was flexible with generous repayment schedules. You just had to wait until the final payment was made before the item could be enjoyed. However, since glory box collections were by nature items put aside for future use, this was rarely a hardship. Moreover, the lay-by provided an element of ritual, incorporating the satisfaction of making repayments and the thrill of paying off the precious items and taking it back to the workplace or home. Then the process would begin all over again with another sought-after object.

During the 1880s and 1890s there had been a move away from traditional practices of credit (such as pawn-brokers, illegal small-loan lenders, retailers with their 'instalment plans,' family, and friends, and mortgage lenders),²⁹⁸ towards cash trading, particularly by the onset of the chain store. This suited middle and working classes accustomed to saving and desiring security.²⁹⁹ As Calder observes in the American context:

The cash ideal was, of course, a cherished principle in the Victorian money management ethic...for most of the money-starved nineteenth century, the cash ideal was hard to live up to so long as cash itself was hard to come by. But in the 1880s and 1890s, some middle class households who wanted to were able to finance their lives on nearly a cash basis.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Calder, *Financing the American Dream*, 37.

²⁹⁹ Point explored in more detail by Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 62-63.

³⁰⁰ Calder, *Financing the American Dream*, 69-70.

This ideal ran in parallel with the persistent cultural ideals of thrift, frugality, and the delay of gratification which have been discussed in the Introduction. Furthermore, there was a concurrent shift in morality from the mid-nineteenth century which viewed money management as a moral, sober and Christian responsibility, an argument taken up by the women's movement who promoted women as the superior money managers.³⁰¹ Calder identifies, however, an increasing difficulty by 1930 in discerning between productive (positive and acceptable) and consumptive (negative and unacceptable) debt, as the array of goods expanded and the lines between what is essential and what is simply desirable are increasingly hazy:

Productive and consumptive debts were more easily distinguished in 1860 than they could be in 1930, when a flood of mass-produced durable goods defied easy categorisation in those terms...The ethic gave high priority to delay of gratification as a kind of spiritual exercise for building the muscles of character.³⁰²

By the 1950s, the use of credit was again on the rise, with post-war consumer confidence a likely contributor, and Lees and Senyard track its rapid national acceleration, noting that 'the hire-purchase debt of six million pounds in 1945 had leaped to 100 million pounds by mid-1952 and 200 million pounds by the end of 1955. In 1959 it had reached 350 million pounds.'³⁰³ But most of the women interviewed for this study – collecting during the 1930s, 1940s and even the 1950s – had little interest in the new spending methods. Indeed most pre-dated this period of rapid credit acceleration, which was probably aimed at family rather than single female incomes. Crawford points to a general

³⁰¹ Ibid., 86.

³⁰² Ibid., 107.

³⁰³ Lees and Senyard, *The Fifties*, 66.

acceptance of credit for household family necessities in Australia but disapproval of credit for luxury items.³⁰⁴ Glory box collectors were patient consumers, children and teenagers of the Depression, who had experienced economic hardship as well as wartime austerity. These women only spent what they had. McKay identifies the Depression generation as

the generation who, having observed the crippling effect of debt, came to believe that saving is a virtue and debt a dangerous burden....the view that 'you shouldn't buy something unless you have the money to pay for it' was strongly inculcated in them by their parents and, indeed, by the direct evidence of their own formative years.³⁰⁵

Hence, glory box collectors of the Depression, war and post-war era overwhelmingly rejected this modern development of credit as a method of acquisition, and were much more likely to adhere to the aforementioned Victorian ideals, as well as the late nineteenth century propensity of some middle-class families to pay with cash (hence the popularity of lay-by as a compromise between cash and credit). Many of the interviewees articulated the virtues of saving and thrift, and the notion of 'delayed gratification' is the very definition of a glory box.

Nearly all the women interviewed referred to the 'lay-by,' with only Thelma Drummond using the term 'lay-aside.' For the post-war migrant women interviewed, lay-by was a foreign concept – a system not in use in Ireland, Italy, Greece or Holland. But they all agreed it was a good system and some used it

³⁰⁴ Crawford, *But Wait, There's More*, 123.

³⁰⁵ McKay, *Generations*, 18.

after settling in Australia. The lay-by process is most evocatively explained by Kath Davis:

I purchased the crystal (and such) on the lay-by, that was the idea. As soon as you started working you started collecting...Every pay-day you'd see something nice and you'd think 'I'll have that' so you'd pay a few shillings a week until it was paid for and then you'd take it home and look at it and find something else to buy and so it went on, all through the years.³⁰⁶ **(Figure 24)**

One disadvantage of the system could be that if repayment timelines were extensive, goods could actually be outmoded by the time they were collected. BS, who believes it was unusual to buy things outright, recalls that often by the time it was paid for, it was not always as fashionable or as desired as it had been.³⁰⁷ Plain linen collections could avoid this problem. During an ongoing series of letters regarding the glory box tradition in the *Australian Women's Weekly* in 1937, the following letter questioned the gradual accumulation of goods for a glory box for this very reason:

It is better to bank a certain amount each week towards a possible trousseau, and get everything in one 'big bite' when you know the 'great day' is drawing close, thus having everything in the fashion – not outmoded or soiled. (Miss Ruth Tibbs, Moree, New South Wales)³⁰⁸

It was possible for some women to take 12-18 months to pay off larger items. No wonder women describe the final payment and pick-up day as being one of

³⁰⁶ Kath Davis, 1992.

³⁰⁷ BS, 2003.

³⁰⁸ 'So They Say,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 6 March 1937, 19.

excitement and pride. However Ester Rose and Betty Phillips, from earlier and later generations, both state that they never lay-byed, with Ester stipulating 'if I haven't got the money, I don't get it.'³⁰⁹ Consequently, this process of earning, saving, and accumulating, resulted in a material outcome – a collection of domestic goods, often in a box, which was to be transported into the next stage of the female life cycle.

2.6 Importing the Dream – Migrating Customs

Many European cultures have terms to describe the approximate equivalent of a glory box. In Greece, it is the 'prika,' which can also include property and a father's dowry for his daughter. In Holland it is the 'uitzet,' and a 'corredo' in Italy which refers to the traditional trousseau (as well as numerous dialectic variations), a 'cassone' is the actual marriage chest and a 'dote' describes all components of a woman's dowry. In Ireland, the term is 'bottom drawer,' a word also used by locally-born women in Australia. These are terms which describe all inherited and accumulated goods, including property collected and produced by women, as well as a father's contribution. Occasionally there is a word specific to the container itself. The term 'glory box' tends to refer to the collection accumulated by women, and to the actual container. It was these various versions of the glory box that migrating women either brought with them to Australia after World War II, or left them behind.

Transporting Traditions – Cultural Meanings in a Trunk:

Glenda Sluga has observed:

³⁰⁹ Ester Rose, 2003.

The subject of immigration has always held fascination as an experience of uprooting, of exile from habitual orientation of culture and social meaning that might constitute forms of dreaming, of imagining communities delineated deep in time as well as in space, but without specific chronological or territorial markings.³¹⁰

Within this context of separation from cultural ritual, the physical act of migrating certainly had a profound impact on what women collected, made and transported in relation to their glory box collections. Pragmatic decisions had to be made about how much you could carry and bring, what you were given, and what could survive a journey. Many migrants had few dilemmas on this point, although this in itself could be a cause for pain. They were frequently coming from the straitened circumstances of post-war dislocation and loss, or from economic poverty such as the thousands of Italians who migrated from the poorer southern regions. Nevertheless, whether women's portable property was meagre or abundant, those objects became significant in their role of taking ownership of a new home. As Jean-Sebastien Marcoux has argued, they were creating 'their sense of place with their possessions.'³¹¹ Objects in this way were used 'as mediator in a context of loss.'³¹² While Marcoux is referring to the divulging of possessions by relocating elderly people in Canada, the notion applies equally to women migrating to Australia, who were relocating, separating from family and homeland often reluctantly, to an alien environment frequently bereft of familiar people and way of life. These women's glory box collections could act as touchstones with distant families

³¹⁰ Glenda Sluga, "Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming" in *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, eds. Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, 1994), 195.

³¹¹ Jean-Sebastien Marcoux, "The 'Casser Maison' Ritual. Constructing the Self by Emptying the Home." *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol.6, No.2 (2001): 215.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 214.

and culture, and a material means of surrounding themselves with the artefacts of home – often literally embedded with the intimacy of their mother’s own hands. In this way, as David Parkin observes of the forcibly displaced, the individual may ‘invest emotionally...in accessible objects, ideas and dreams rather than in the living people around one.’³¹³

For other women, while viewing their collections quite pragmatically and with little sentiment, the impact of migration in terms of selection and loss of certain rituals was certainly present. Maureen King and Joan Cox, who both migrated from Ireland in 1956, did not collect much in the way of ‘breakables’ such as glassware and crystal. Maureen was anticipating the practicalities of packing, transporting and relocating fragile objects, as well as the transport limitations on space and cost:

Because I was coming such a distance...my mother-in-law built up some blankets and some linen for me. A lot of people gave me presents of tablecloths, I had more tablecloths than I knew what to do with when I came to Australia...I didn’t get things like saucepans, I would have had to buy those. Those sort of heavier things I didn’t get those...Others would have got them, definitely. I missed out on a lot of that because they would have had to come with me...Because you were limited, you had a certain space on the ship and that was it, you couldn’t take up any more.³¹⁴

³¹³ David Parkin, “Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement.” *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol.4, No.3 (1999): 308.

³¹⁴ Interviews with Maureen King (nee O’Keefe) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Ringwood, 2006 and Joan Cox, 2008.

Moreover, both Maureen and Joan missed out on a traditional Irish custom of receiving a room setting for the new marital home because they were leaving the country and Maureen recalls

there was a custom in Dublin when you got married, a family would give you a dining room suite, another family a bedroom suite or whatever, a lounge suite. So when you set up house you did have a certain number of things given to you...We missed out on a few things because of (migrating).³¹⁵

Irene Soumilas who migrated from Greece in 1958, also remembers the restrictions imposed by the practicalities of transportation on a limited budget: 'Blankets it was...no saucepans, vases, no...but if I was married there I would get those as well but you can't bring saucepans or heavy things in Australia.'³¹⁶ On the other hand, Margot Veltkamp, who migrated from Holland in 1958, managed to bring all her things with her – she was fortunate to have access to large containers and the funds to do so. She recalls that 'I had so much stuff. And when we migrated I wanted to take everything with me. And that's why we had an enormous big case with all this stuff in it. Everything, we took everything with us...it was a full container'³¹⁷

Then there were the people who travelled light, thinking that their migration was a short-term relocation and that they would be returning home. Carmel Tata's mother Dominica believed she would establish in Australia the business skills that had prospered for her in Italy and then return home to re-establish

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Interview with Irene Soumilas (maiden name unknown) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Melbourne, 2005.

³¹⁷ Interview with Margot Veltkamp (nee Van Der Drift) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Research, Victoria, 2006.

her life there. Consequently, she deliberately left behind many precious glory box belongings, only some of which subsequently followed her. Carmel recalls

when we came to Australia (in 1968) we didn't have a lot of money, what my mum did was...she left the two trunks behind and just came with the bare essentials because she thought she was going to make her money and go back. She didn't and then the trunks came in 1976 by ship all by themselves...Dad came here in 65 so she sent a few things with Dad. But the rest, some of her precious things she left there.³¹⁸

Tonina Farrugia, who migrated from Malta as a proxy bride in 1956, only brought enough items to make a start, knowing that, like many Australian-born newly weds, she would have to live with her in-laws first, before settling in a house of her own. She states:

I was going to come here, I didn't want to get too much, you know, just ...enough to start...I didn't know if my mother-in-law gonna give me a room and a kitchen, you know...at that time, I didn't have a kitchen, not, for my own, so we used to eat with them, so, I didn't start to use (my things) from the beginning.³¹⁹ **(Figures 25 & 26)**

Dina Sartinas experienced internal migration in northern Greece, and external migration to Australia in 1962. She comments that she had to keep belongings down to highly portable items.³²⁰ In this way, years of distance between family

³¹⁸ Interview with Carmel Tata, 2006. Ciccione provides useful background on Calabrian migration to Australia in Ciccione, "Meeting a marriage partner in a new land."

³¹⁹ Interview with Tonina Farrugia (nee Pace) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Avondale Heights, Victoria, 2007.

³²⁰ Interview with Dina Sartinas (nee Iliadis) notes only taken by Moya McFadzean, Carlton, Victoria, 2007.

members, as well as multiple movements, must have affected the 'prika' tradition, in Greece and elsewhere. Women could not create large amounts of portable property, in particular needlework, which could not be transported. Furthermore, Dina's brother-in-law in Australia advised her not to worry about bringing too much, such as domestic items, because everything could be bought here, further reducing the amount of glory box-related goods that she may otherwise have had.³²¹ Kleoniki Gregory has similar memories, and although her mother had managed to buy her some household furniture, she had to leave it behind, including her precious sewing machine. Indeed Kleoniki observes that many fiancés and husbands already in Australia advised women not to bring anything, concerned that any implication that Australia was not a land of consumer abundance might frighten their women away!³²² Betty McWade had relocated from Ireland to England and then to Australia in 1963. While her collecting activity had been minimal anyway, the fact that she married away from her home country, without friends and family, meant that she received no gifts to bolster her box. She reflects with a small degree of sadness that 'I got married with nobody around, never got any wedding presents or anything...Had it in a registry office and got married in a church later on.'³²³ Yet, for Italian child-migrant Josephine Carey, the experience worked in reverse, believing her mother Francesca was producing hand-made goods at an accelerated rate, including engaging the assistance of commissioned needlewomen, because she knew that they would be migrating in the near future:

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Interview with Kleoniki Gregory (nee Petrou) and daughter Rose Gray recorded by Moya McFadzean, Pascoe Vale South, Victoria, 2008.

³²³ Interview with Betty McWade (nee Gallagher) recorded by Moya McFadzean, North Ringwood, Victoria, 2006.

She may have been in a hurry, because when she knew she was coming to Australia (in 1956) she would have wanted as much done as possible so I think, and I'm pretty sure I'm correct in this, she would have had some sheets made by one of the girls in the town who did this as her sort of life's work I suppose.³²⁴

Other mothers abandoned traditional glory box preparation altogether, in their haste to gather collections for young daughters departing for Australia and arranged marriages. Carmela Palermo migrated from Calabria, Italy as a proxy bride in 1957 and recalls her mother purchasing everything from sheets, towels and tablecloths to saucepans and a dinner set:

They used to do the sheets from linen...and they handworked all these things... but I never, I never had that type of material, you know? (My mother) didn't have time really to prepare because I was (so) young...she said that: 'You go to Australia...Don't worry, I can buy already from the shop' and she bought it for me then, from the shop.³²⁵

(Figures 27 & 28)

Relocation also resulted in the gradual loss of traditional skills such as needlecraft, as women were inserted into a new culture. For example, by the late 1950s, European women with strong needlecraft traditions were confronted with glory box conventions in Australia which emphasised the purchased over

³²⁴ Interview with Josephine Carey (nee Gargano) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Hawthorn, Victoria, 2005.

³²⁵ Interview with Carmela Palermo (nee Rocca) recorded by Moya McFadzean, East Keilor, Victoria, 2007.

the hand-made. For some of these women, this may well have been a relief! Furthermore, the frequent separation of many mothers from their daughters, and granddaughters, broke the chain of skill transferral from one generation to the next, whether separation was occurring within or beyond country borders. Nevertheless, Carmel Tata's mother continued to rigorously teach her daughter needlework skills in Australia, a story explored in more detail in Chapter Four. Josephine Carey remained with her mother throughout the migration and settlement experience, but the skill of weaving was not passed on from mother to daughter, nor even continued by Francesca upon arrival in Australia. Josephine recalls that the loom

is difficult to describe, all I could hear was the clunking noise...it was fairly large, full frame, wooden frame that she used to fill up with all the different bobbins and things and what have you. I was only about three, four and five so I could hear the noises of it endlessly...she didn't (bring the loom with her) and I regret that in a way because it would have been good to have as...something to remember, because she did spend so much time on it and she loved it...everything she made, she made before coming here.³²⁶

This is also a story of a lost memory object, an artefact symbolising a lost craft, and a connection to childhood and homeland. Embedded in some objects are the special traditions of production which were left behind, so that only the object remains to reflect these traditions, transposed in an unfamiliar land. For example, Josephine's sheets were made from hemp and woven on the home loom and she states 'I've still got two or three sheets that are actually made of hemp or flax I'm not too sure, that were grown by her mother and grandmother

³²⁶ Josephine Carey, 2005.

and then they spun that by hand and then it was woven on the loom.’³²⁷ In this case, the sheets also represent a lost skill in its country of origin, with domestic spinning and weaving in southern mainland Italy disappearing since the early twentieth century with the forces of industrialisation and migration, leaving many women with other tasks to perform.³²⁸ A simple mattress provides another example of the cultural meanings embedded in material culture; a symbol of monetary value and prestige in southern Italy. Carmel Tata recalls of her mother Dominica Tripodi’s mattress that ‘Mum was so proud of this woollen mattress that she brought that over to Australia. Even though we didn’t need that here...But my dad was always boasting that he married a woman who had a woollen mattress.’³²⁹

A wooden loom, a hemp sheet and a woollen mattress. Ordinary natural materials turned into ordinary cultural objects. Yet these storytellers have been able to reveal stories and memories so deeply embedded, so invisible to the naked uninformed eye, that the objects are transformed. For these objects, there is also the new layer of the meanings of association, connections to current owners and, in this case, holders of the family lore. For Josephine, the sheets are vital connections to cultural identity, transplanted in Australia, and now maintained through the practice of traditional Italian cuisine. For the next generation, these objects are now more valued, and more idealised, than they ever probably were by the original creators. The loom and the mattress are lost artefacts, one left behind in the old country, and one discarded in the new – with only the stories remaining. Henry Glassie observes that ‘all objects exist in context. There is no such thing as an object out of context. But contexts differ greatly in their ability to help us understand the artefact in question. In some

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Clementi in Gabacca and Iacovetta, *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives*, 98.

³²⁹ Carmel Tata, 2006.

contexts, objects beam us deep meanings from other human beings.’³³⁰ In these objects we find the coming together of past and present contexts, to create multiple layers of meanings which have crossed the globe.

The Box:

Unlike many Australian-born women, for whom the box was an intrinsic part of the collection and the collecting ritual, most of the post-war migrant women and/or their daughters interviewed, had no purpose-built container for their collections: theirs was a makeshift box, or their travelling chest. For these women, their glory box became inextricably linked to the very act of migration. The luggage itself assumes a dual symbolic meaning – that of journey, risk and change, and that of settlement, security and femininity. The trunks have become containers of miniature dreams of utopia, encompassing simultaneously the universal hopes of the migrant, and the specific dreams of the wife and homemaker. Edda Azzola’s box was really a homemade travel trunk for her things, glory box and otherwise, which followed Edda later from Italy once she was reunited with her husband and settled in Australia in 1955. She describes it as ‘a normal chest, nothing special (wooden), it was green I think...I think my husband’s cousin made (it) for me...(a) big one for me to take everything down.’³³¹

So too, Irene Soumilas’ trunks, which contained most if not all her glory box collection, came to Australia by boat and arrived a month or so later and had been purchased especially for her journey in Athens by her parents; her suitcases came with her by plane. She recalls that her trunks were ‘not very

³³⁰ Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 59.

³³¹ Interview with Edda Azzola (nee Pugnetti) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Reservoir, Victoria, 2006.

fancy, just wooden trunks you know that people had there to put all this heavy blankets and all this stuff.’³³² Carmela Palermo had a similar experience, with her two metal travelling trunks, which she describes as ‘practical, nothing fancy,’ loaded with glory box items following her plane from Calabria by ship.³³³ **(Figure 29)** Josephine Carey recalls her mother having more luggage than many other women, as ‘a lot of people just came with suitcases but I have to say we had more than suitcases...two olive trunks but she also had a couple of the trunks that she just kept blankets and sheets and things like that in.’³³⁴

Neither Margot Veltkamp nor Ellen Smoorenburg ever had a box although there was a strong dowry chest tradition in Holland, with ‘kasts’ (large, free-standing two-door wardrobes with internal shelving) often used to store a women’s linen-based trousseau. They were made for portability and could be disassembled.³³⁵ Margot had a collection of substance, but puts the absence of an actual container down to a lack of space for extraneous furniture in the family home, the commodity restrictions in post-war Holland, as well as a lack of such a tradition in urban Holland. She remembers:

We didn’t have room for that in my family home...(we stored things)...in a cupboard, in paper bags...in my own room, I shared a room with my two sisters...wherever I could put it...I think in the olden days, like my mother had a box which she put for her glory box.....Just a wooden box, like a travel box...But it was different in the country, we lived in the city, and it must have been different because of the war, everything was taken away because of the war.’³³⁶

³³² Irene Soumilas, 2005.

³³³ Carmela Palermo, 2007.

³³⁴ Josephine Carey, 2005.

³³⁵ Schleining, *Treasure Chests*, 44.

³³⁶ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

All Margot's things came in extensive freighted luggage. Nor could Maureen King or Joan Cox from Ireland recall young women owning purpose-built or manufactured furniture for their collections, which were frequently, and literally, stored in the 'bottom drawer.' Joan states that 'we didn't really have a big box or anything, it was more like a bottom drawer.'³³⁷ Maureen's glory box collection was transported to Australia in her travel luggage:

I brought four tea chests with me and two trunks...It was all spread through (the luggage)...It was a fairly short time span, I would have kept them in my bedroom I guess...As I say we called it the bottom drawer, quite often it was the bottom drawer of a chest of drawers. I didn't collect an awful lot. If you were collecting blankets...some people had trunks to put them in or just a box...I wasn't aware of anything like (commercially produced glory boxes) in Ireland.³³⁸

Dina Sartinas brought what she had collected with her from Greece to Australia in a marriage chest – all her sisters had one, purchased probably by her parents. It was a simple box, with a hinged, domed lid, which then became her migration luggage.³³⁹

Consequently, few migrant women from Europe seemed to own containers dedicated to glory box collections; such containers appearing to be far less common than the manufactured trade of them in twentieth-century Australia. However two women share stories that reveal glory boxes loaded with cultural meanings which are strongly connected to a sense of place. Dominica Tripodi's

³³⁷ Joan Cox, 2008.

³³⁸ Maureen King, 2006.

³³⁹ Dina Sartinas, 2007.

chest was made from timber harvested from her family's property in Calabria. Her daughter Carmel Tata remembers:

In the fields they had big walnut trees...and her cousin who was a carpenter, he actually sawed down a tree and created these two boxes for my mum, from that. And she had them ever since...but only one was filled! And the other one, she filled for me.³⁴⁰

The family donated one of these precious objects to Museum Victoria in Melbourne. **(Figure 30)** This chest was built from produce of the land that Dominica had toiled so hard to make profitable, and that she had to fill without the help of her father, with her deceased mother's needlecraft and her own purchases. Considering that she left Italy always with the intention to return, Dominica's life became one of frustration and disappointment. Consequently, this chest is a poignant literal embodiment of homeland and home lost. The travelling chest which contained Gaetana Lazzara's glory box collection which she transported to Australia, remains for her daughter Rose Patti a cherished symbol of her parents' love, pragmatism, migration, and property:

Mum actually brought (her collection) out in a trunk which I still have which is very special to the family...it's a timber trunk. You see...mum and dad got married and they'd had their marital bed and they wasted nothing. So when it was evident that dad had left and she was going to follow, they actually got a carpenter to break up the bed and make the trunk. So the trunk is a timber trunk, made out of their bed, so it's so special, I think if there was a fire, that's what I'd go for.³⁴¹ **(Figure 31)**

³⁴⁰ Carmel Tata, 2006.

³⁴¹ Interview with Rose Patti (nee Ranno) recorded by Moya McFadzean, Carlton, Victoria, 2005.

This glory box emerged literally from the marital bed. It is at once an artefact pragmatic and sensual, built to contain marital items such as bed linen from the wedding bed timber itself. Whereas most glory boxes strain under the conflicting tensions of virginity and sexuality (to be discussed in Chapter Five), this glory box is the embodiment of post-marital intimacy.

Under the Lid – the Contents:

The nature of collections between and even within migrating cultures is varied. Nevertheless, oral history interviews point to a couple of collective experiences. Greek and Italian women usually focused on handcrafted and purchased textiles, although a few collections reveal the presence of hard domestic goods. These were accumulated primarily by mothers. Urban Dutch and Irish women's collections seem more akin to those of Australian-born women in that collections contain both the textiles and purchased domestic goods and they were primarily the work of the young women themselves. However, while the Irish custom was mainly activated once a woman was engaged or at least seriously dating, the Australian and Dutch women were usually undertaking some collecting (making and buying items) prior to an engagement.³⁴² Ellen Smoorenburg from a small Dutch village commenced sewing and embroidering bed linens at the age of 18 when dating a local boy. But she purchased no domestic goods, relying on birthday, engagement and wedding gifts to round out her 'uitzet.'³⁴³

³⁴² The role of mothers in glory box collecting and the nature of hand-made articles are discussed in greater detail in Chapters Three and Four.

³⁴³ Ellen Smoorenburg, 2008.

Margot Veltkamp from Holland describes the non-textile part of her glory box, finding that her Dutch saucepans were not able to withstand the heat of Australian stove burners:

I had my crockery, cups and saucers as well, and my knives and forks and all that, my cutlery. And (enamel) saucepans! Of course! ...And I wanted all the best quality and that's why I saved and saved and we took them with us to Australia. But by the time I used the gas here which was very high, much hotter than we were used to in Holland and everything was burning. So I had to buy saucepans, the stainless steel ones.³⁴⁴

Margot demonstrates a similar attitude to Kath Davis and other Australian-born women quoted previously, who saw collecting for their glory boxes as the sole opportunity to get nice things, that once married, these opportunities would be over. She reflects:

I always want quality, I still do but especially with all those important things, like linenware and cutlery and all that. Because my thinking was when you've got children I can't buy that anymore, that was the whole attitude you know? When you got married, you got down on your money, and women didn't work when they were married.³⁴⁵

The goods shortages during and after World War II had an impact on what young women collected, not only in Australia which was explored in the

³⁴⁴ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

previous chapter, but even more dramatically in Europe. A more light-hearted example of this situation in Holland is described by Margot who remembers:

There was so little you could buy, what you could buy was a kind of jam jars. That might sound funny, and when I think of it, it was. And that was the only thing, the only present practically that you could buy for somebody during the war, and just after the war...There was nothing in the shops and then all of a sudden somebody made a lot of jam jars...kind of decorated ones, not very nicely decorated, fairly roughly done, painted, rough earthenware...I had maybe 12 or 15 of those things and when we left Holland we left them all there because I didn't even want to pay for the freight to bring it here!³⁴⁶

Maureen King from Ireland depended a great deal on wedding gifts, only buying some practical items upon arrival in Australia and she states:

My mother gave me a dinner set, my sister gave me a tea set, and a friend gave me a tea set....Little things like butter dishes, jam things, specific cute little things that people thought might be nice...So I did get some breakables. But for the most part it was unbreakable things...I brought some of that Cornish ware with me but they were all presents, that was something my sister gave me for my birthday, a full set you know bowls and jugs and all that sort of thing, rolling pin all in the Cornish ware...my brother-in-law bought a big box of cutlery...things you could put aside and keep.³⁴⁷ **(Figures 32 & 33)**

³⁴⁶ The story of Margot and her two sisters, showing how their collecting was influenced depending upon when they were collecting during and after the war, will be told in Chapter Four.

³⁴⁷ Maureen King, 2006.

This was focused collecting, activated by the commitment to marry, and influenced by the plan to migrate. Joan Cox brought with her from Ireland her own needlecraft and a few engagement gifts from family, including a canteen of cutlery that her mother gave to her before she died (which had belonged to Joan's grandmother). She had not purchased any domestic goods before migrating to Australia to meet her Irish fiancé in 1957, and relied on wedding gifts received from Ireland and from new friends in Melbourne a year later.³⁴⁸ However, Tonina Farrugia, even in the absence of her deceased mother, was aware enough of the tradition in Malta to instigate her own collecting at 14. She saved her salary as many Australian women were doing:

Actually I started collecting, maybe when I was 14 years old, I was working, and...I used to have two pounds, ten shillings, those days I used to give one pound to my father, and I used to have one pound ten shillings for myself, and whatever I see I buy it, I paid 50 shillings a week those days. But there was this man where I used to buy all my stuff, and he was good, he let me have my things, and I (paid for) them when I've got them.³⁴⁹ **(Figure 34 & 35)**

In Italy, while the bulk of the glory box consisted of domestic textiles, a few practical goods were also accumulated. Edda Azzola remembers:

I think a set of...dishes and plates...we had a silver set of knives...the coffee set it comes from my grandmother...a wedding present from my

³⁴⁸ Joan Cox, 2008.

³⁴⁹ Tonina Farrugia, 2007.

grandmother... everything was six by six...six pair of sheets for my bed, then two bedspreads I think, two blankets, one doona...all the sets (pillowcases) all together.³⁵⁰

Rose Patti's mother Gaetana, in preparation for her migrant journey, listed all the contents of her marriage chest on the inside of the lid, demonstrating how the pragmatics of migration required the combining of glory box and other personal family goods in travelling trunks. Rose observes that 'what makes the trunk even more special, is that in her handwriting, and still surviving, is a list of what she put in it... and that's still in her handwriting on that chequered paper...This wasn't a dowry document as such, this was just Mum listing what was in the box.'³⁵¹ The list (translated from Italian by Rose, with a couple of words illegible now) reads as follows:

This trunk contains manchester and pottery, ceramics objects for the personal use of Lazzara Gaetana Ranno.

4 mattresses	2 picture frames
1 brazier	1 pair of shoes
1 cotton eiderdown	'un corpripieve' (little pillow)
1 colander	a frame
15 pairs of socks	rug
5 tablecloths	shirts for men
--- jumpers	2 tablecloths
1 pair of pillowcases	1 tray
3 pairs of -----	1 iron (coal iron)

³⁵⁰ Edda Azzola, 2006.

³⁵¹ Rose Patti, 2005.

----- shirts?	1 pair of pillows
4 pairs of underpants	
head scarfs	
table service	
coffee set (tablecloth or coffee cups)	

(Figures 36A & 36B)

Carmel Tata's collection commenced when she was a child in Italy, and continued in Australia, and it reveals the extraordinary dedication of her mother to developing her daughter's collection. Carmel describes the non-textile contents of her glory box, the extent of which was not evident amongst the other Italian women interviewed:

Everything was twelves – there was nothing for six or for four. So one dinner set for 12 people, when I say dinner sets they were never in dinner sets, there would be 12 bowls and 12 of everything. And the same with the tablecloths and napkins. And then you'd have glassware. But the pots and pans again there was a level of quality amongst those... in my village we didn't have any of those so they'd go to other cities to purchase them.³⁵²

Thus while some stories have described collections women brought with them (or left behind) when they migrated to Australia, some of these women were also mothers, bringing young daughters with them. This act of transition did indeed influence the ways glory box collecting continued in the new environment.

³⁵² Carmel Tata, 2006.

Old Traditions in a New Environment:

Glory box collections arrived in Australia, transported by migrating women, some with their daughters. For the first generation married (or about to be married) women, synergies and differences between their collections and those of local women became evident. For the daughters, whose mothers continued to actively collect in Australia, some contrasts became even more pronounced. As has been seen, the act of migration affected glory box collecting – its material culture, its transport, its cultural valuing and its transposing in a new environment. As Roslyn Pesman observes in the context of post-war Italian migrant women in Australia:

Culture is not some timeless tradition but a process in the making. And the act of migration itself brings changes and adaptations. Culture is transmuted and adapted in the new world, so that what may appear to the outsider to be traditional is something already transformed in response to the migration experience.³⁵³

Thus traditional cultural practices such as glory box acquisition may already have been in a process of transformation before arriving in Australia, such as due to the very act of separation from family, selecting, packing and relocation. These practices continued to adapt to a new social and economic environment of different consumer practices, peer pressures and forms of social exchange (such as the kitchen tea which will be explored in the next chapter).

For Margot Veltkamp from Holland, and Rose Patti and Carmela Palermo from Italy, the European tradition of producing glory box items in sets was a

³⁵³ Roslyn Pesman, "Italian Women and Work in Post-Second World War Australia: Representation and Experience" in Gabaccia and Iacovetta, *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives*, 394-395.

memorable, transnational tradition that was imported, so that the larger the set, the greater the prestige as a symbol of wealth (in terms of the leisure time available to produce and the financial investment). In Italy, Holland and other countries, quantity continued to be extremely important, for it represented status and prosperity. For example, Italian girls commenced their 'corredo' as children and underclothes, sheets and other items were counted in sixes and dozens. Only the very poor were unable to meet the customary quantities.³⁵⁴ Margot recalls that 'I know I had 12 towels, 12 tea towels, 12, especially cleaning cloths... you had to have 12 of those of course and 12 dust cloths and things like that, everything.'³⁵⁵ **(Figure 37)** And Rose comments 'I do know that they had a custom that depending on how wealthy you were, you did things either by sixes, by twelves or however you could afford.'³⁵⁶ However these customs, which did not seem to exist amongst the Australian-born women of Anglo-Celtic ancestry, did not co-exist very comfortably for migrants in a new environment increasingly heading towards time efficiency and labour-saving consumables. Rose Patti observes of her mother's collection that 'a few things she did (use)...but you don't need 24 or 12, maybe six...but you don't need the huge numbers. And then you see they're very hard to iron.'³⁵⁷

Other examples of the challenges in applying culturally-specific customs and ways of life in a new landscape were also evident in the simple differences in bed sizes which, at least in Greece and Italy, were smaller than beds in Australia. Consequently, sheets accumulated over time, would not always fit marital beds. Dina Sartinias remembers her sheets from Greece being too small for double beds in Australia; hers were later used for children's bed linen.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Baker, *Wedding Customs and Folklore*, 42; also Miln, *Wooings and Weddings*, 226.

³⁵⁵ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

³⁵⁶ Rose Patti, 2005.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Dina Sartinias, 2007.

Ellen Smoorenburg, who migrated from Holland in 1958, remembers having to extend her hand-sewn sheets and alter her embroidered pillowcases, which were square in shape and did not fit the rectangular-shaped Australian pillows.³⁵⁹ Perhaps more significantly, was the fact that many collections, which had been instigated by mothers in the 1940s and 1950s, prior to migrating and when daughters were in their infancy, were by the time daughters were ready to marry, full of outdated artefacts. Carmel Tata's mother had to take radical action to update her glory box and since 'this sort of thing wasn't fashionable in the seventies when I married...my mother made another dowry box for me, she took me into Myers and other shops.'³⁶⁰

Consequently, the traditional village collection was being updated in the styles of the time (an activity that may well have occurred if mother and daughter had not migrated), but the contrast of which was perhaps more heightened in the Australian environment. Again Carmel Tata recalls that 'there was a lot of continental shops, they used to call them in Sydney Road, and they had a lot of polyester...and even though she thought it was trash because I liked that, she bought more things for me.'³⁶¹ Carmel observes that she probably only used 50% of her glory box collection, as so much of it was old-fashioned or impractical. Carmel's mother was a particularly traditional mother, whose customs from homeland failed to evolve in the new country, as perhaps they would have in the originating cultural environment itself. This was most dramatically played out in the attempt by Carmel's parents to arrange her marriage during the late 1970s, the significance of the glory box as property in the negotiation, and the refusal of the daughter to comply:

³⁵⁹ Ellen Smoorenburg, 2008.

³⁶⁰ Carmel Tata, 2006.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

I was betrothed to someone else but I didn't want that person ...this other man whom they'd already arranged for me to marry, the glory box was a big thing for his mother...what I was bringing into the marriage...But when I said no, even though (my mother) wanted to kill me, she stood by me which was hard in those days for a woman to do.³⁶²

Carmel went on to marry an Australian-born Sicilian boy, which for her Calabrian parents, was further salt rubbed into the wound.

Like Carmel's mother Dominica, other migrant mothers continued to collect for their young daughters' glory boxes in Australia. This included the continuation of sewing and purchasing linen and manchester well into the 1960s and 1970s, when such activity appeared to be declining amongst the daughters of the Australian-born women interviewed for this study. Josephine Carey's Calabrian mother Francesca, made sheets from lengths of fabric sent over by her father, as well as finishing off blankets brought over from Italy – all to furnish her daughters' boxes. Josephine remembers:

After we arrived, grandfather was still (in Italy), any opportunity he had he would send sheets or material that wasn't actually sewn up yet...lengths of material for sheets and then Mum would finish them here...She (mother) was very active and very very busy of course because she had three more children in four years...She always had the pedal machine she still has and she would finish off the lengths of material...the other thing that she did because the blankets that arrived weren't...totally finished so in Australia she spent a lot of her free time at

³⁶² Ibid.

night I suppose and in the winter by the fire making the fringes to finish off the blankets.³⁶³

The impact of a new consumer environment was to some extent reflected in migrant collections. Calder has observed that ‘immigration vastly enlarged the domestic market for goods, as each pot and pan left behind in the old country had to be replaced.’³⁶⁴ And if not replaced, augmented and updated, and there can be no doubt that post-war migration in Australia contributed to the boom in both production and consumption. Mothers shopped in both local stores run by members of their own communities, as well as the large department stores.

Maria Tence and Elizabeth Triarico state that,

From the 1950s to the 1980s, a demand for high-quality imported Italian linen ware and manchester resulted in the establishment of specialist retailers known as emporiums. These large stores sold a wide array of ‘biancheria’ – linen ware – from personal undergarments to elaborate and highly decorative lace ware for the bath, bed and table.’³⁶⁵

One such store was Costanzo Emporium in Sydney Road, Coburg in Melbourne’s inner north. It was opened by an Italian family in 1960 and became a popular place for Italian women purchasing glory box goods for themselves and their daughters.³⁶⁶ **(Figure 38)**

³⁶³ Josephine Carey, 2005.

³⁶⁴ Calder, *Financing the American Dream*, 167.

³⁶⁵ Maria Tence and Elizabeth Triarico, “La Dote: preparing for a family,” in *The Australian Family. Images and Essays*, ed. Anna Epstein (Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe Publications, 1998), 80.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 81.

Josephine Carey recalls that, from the late 1950s through to the late 1960s, her mother Francesca,

went to Dimmeys because they used to have fantastic manchester sales and she bought heaps of stuff there I know and Foy's, shops down in Fitzroy (in inner Melbourne), I mean we lived in Gore Street, and Smith Street was the main shopping street and...my parents never had a car, so that's where she mainly did her shopping at the time, during the first 11 years that we lived in Australia.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ Josephine Carey, 2005.

For Rose Patti's Sicilian mother Gaetana,

Buckley and Nunn was another favourite...she would go into town, Buckley and Nunn, Milburns was also in Northcote, that had nightwear...just I think she shopped locally...I know Mrs Canatella...a 'paesana' from the same village that mum and dad were from, they had a store, but it was, when you didn't have a car, going to Sydney Road was quite awkward whereas shopping along the Thornbury Northcote line into town was much more convenient.³⁶⁸

The deprivations of the war, particularly for the poorer southern Italian communities, continued to influence even glory box collecting within the relatively removed environment of Australia. Rose Patti remembers her mother persistently stocking up on domestic goods, just in case war broke out again, recalling:

haberdashery shops were wool shops then and she said there could be another war and I don't want to run out of material so go down and get this cotton...so dad had to go on the tram to get this huge parcel...and she also bought some damask...to make tablecloths cos she thought at least I've got it in the house...because they'd been through the war where you ran out of material.³⁶⁹

However, it was becoming evident that all this glory box activity undertaken by the migrant mothers was viewed as strange, even bizarre by the daughters of the Australian-born women of the generation interviewed for this study. It is a

³⁶⁸ Rose Patti, 2005.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

common element of inter-generational migrant family relationships that Ellie Vasta refers to as 'cultural ambivalence' which 'during the uncertainties of adolescence, can provide the basis for severe conflicts between parents and children.'³⁷⁰ This point is most evocatively made by Carmel Tata, whose mother tenaciously hung on to her Calabrian dowry traditions, frequently leaving Carmel feeling herself to be stuck in a time-warp of the 1940s, rather than in Australia in the 1970s. She reflects that 'my girlfriends' parents...were a lot younger, no they didn't do the same. And I don't have any friends who've got what I've got. They tended to buy things just before they got married.'³⁷¹ Carmel recalls the amusement of her Australian school friends, trying to understand the need for Carmel and her other migrant friends to have towels and sheets stashed away for some distant domestic use:

The Australian girls they used to just laugh. They found it funny that we needed sheets. Or pots and pans...When we got to about Form IV we would occasionally sit together and laugh, they'd see what my mum wanted me to buy today and the Aussie girls would think we were mad, 'What do you need blankets for?' 'What towels, haven't you got towels at home?!' But they were going for their tennis lessons, we weren't given tennis lessons, we weren't given dancing lessons, we weren't given what these other girls were doing...Weekends for us was doing housework for our mothers, or if you had siblings you looked after them...I looked after my little cousins.³⁷² **(Figure 39)**

³⁷⁰ Ellie Vasta, "Italian Migrant Women" in *Australia's Italians. Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, eds. Stephen Castles, Caroline Alcorso, Gaetano Rando and Ellie Vasta (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin Pty., Ltd., 1992), 155.

³⁷¹ Carmel Tata, 2006.

³⁷² Ibid.

Carmel's experiences are full of contradictions. Her mother maintained the dowry property tradition, but wanted her daughter to assimilate, and had her remove her earrings, avoided putting salami in her sandwiches and paid for elocution lessons. While pushing Carmel to conform to a society which still in many ways subjugated women at home and in the workplace, Dominica herself had to endure the misery associated with her own loss of identity and lack of opportunity to apply her own formidable business skills. For many such women, their 'belongings' were wrapped up in their memory bearing and ritual activities and the transition could be anything but smooth. Fortier argues in her discussion of Italian identity in Britain that:

Generations, in migration, are the living embodiment of continuity and change, mediating memories of the past with the present living conditions, bringing the past into the present and charged with the responsibility of keeping some form of ethnic identity alive into the future. Called upon as bearers of an 'original,' and an 'adopted' one, they embody both continuity and change, culture-as-conjecture and culture-as-essence that decant into each other and combine in the formation of a distinct émigré culture and identity.³⁷³

For Dominica, this 'decanting' process was painful and remained unresolved, with her daughter's glory box just one material form through which the battles were had, and cultural adoption untenable. By the 1970s, the feminist movement was on the rise, young women were remaining in school longer and were marrying later. These were all ingredients for creating an environment in which the glory box tradition could hardly continue to prosper.

³⁷³ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 150.

2.7 Conclusion

Economy is inextricably linked to materiality – the objects that are created, bought, sold, accumulated, used, treasured and discarded. Glory boxes were by their very nature material, they reflected mass and individual production and consumption, as well as social, and cultural change, all of which continued to develop within the thirty years between 1930 and 1960. In particular, the linking of consumerism, domesticity and femininity from the late nineteenth century, had a lasting impact upon the way in which women shopped, what they were encouraged to buy, and the nature of a modern identity for women wrapped up in an actual or projected home. It was an environment in which the glory box tradition flourished.

Glory boxes and the associated cultural practices embodied these public and private experiences of a generation of Australian-born and migrant women who, no matter what they made or purchased, or what they put it in, have this rite of passage in common. Glory boxes did vary in significance between individual women, but the interview sample for this study alone demonstrates that most women believed in putting a little, or a lot, of something aside for marriage. Their portable property represented their savings, skills, pleasure and financial contribution to a future home; a process in which men occasionally participated. There are parallel and occasionally intersecting stories of post-war migrant women, on whose cultural traditions the very act of migration had a significant impact, both prior to leaving, as well as once in Australia. Old traditions were played out in the new environment, visible through shopping methods and items selected, handcraft activity and non-activity, and the ongoing connections and tensions between migrant women and their daughters.

Chapter Three: Women's Business: Communities of Glory Box Practitioners

3.1 Introduction

It was enjoyable, we used to just absolutely love to sit down and do something and achieve something...we all enjoyed seeing each other's things too, and there was a certain amount of, I don't know what you call it, camaraderie...we enjoyed being together and doing things together...and give things to one another. (Loris Peggie, collecting for her glory box, 1950s)³⁷⁴

Glory boxes were the business of women. Men sometimes made or purchased the box, or contributed a gift, and there have been occasional stories of Australian-born and migrant mothers creating a glory box for sons. But overwhelmingly, women kept them, maintained them, filled them, talked about them, and enjoyed them. As many testimonies illustrate, it was a rite of passage, although often one commencing without formal initiation. It was a rite filled with creativity and pleasure, often appreciated within a communal environment, whether between mothers and daughters, the extended family, girlfriends or an entire rural community. Glory boxes accommodated both the private space of women and the public space of the broader community. The glory box is a material symbol of a woman reaching a life milestone, and a sign that she had entered the next critical stage of her life cycle, preparation for marriage, children and domestic life. As Gwenda Mutimer recalls, 'most girls

³⁷⁴ Loris Peggie, 2005.

got excited about getting married...something you would never normally buy, you really felt it was all part of getting married and starting a new life.'³⁷⁵

This chapter will explore glory box activity in Australia through notions of 'communities of women' within different types of collective female environments. This will include interactions between mothers and daughters, between sisters, girlfriends, and workmates, and within geographic environments such as neighbourhoods, rural villages and townships. A notion of various interconnected communities of glory box practitioners offers an effective approach to explore the layers of individual and collective glory box activities which cross time, generation, place and culture. The 'mainstream' Australian experience of glory box community practice will provide the foundations for the discussion, the majority experience being that of Australian-born women of Anglo-Celtic descent. Comparative experiences of post-war European migrant women, experiences both in countries of origin and in Australia, will provide counterpoints within the context of each type of 'community' to reveal points of similarity and difference in the glory box ritual. These experiences were brought to Australia and complemented, expanded and even challenged dominant conventions of Australian glory box cultural practice.

3.2 Glory Box Practice: a Patchwork of Communities?

'Community' has been described by Graham Day as referring 'to those things which people have in common, which bind them together, and give them a

³⁷⁵ Gwenda Mutimer, 1992.

sense of belonging with each other.’³⁷⁶ It should be noted here that the term ‘community’ can be overworked and commentators have suggested that misuse can render it redundant.³⁷⁷ However, as an organising principle, ‘community’ provides an effective starting point from which to analyse the traditional practices of a variety of groups of women, based on shared activity, values, place and time. Much of the recent writing about community usually defines it as connections between people, memory and place.³⁷⁸ In the context of this particular study, it is the tradition of glory box collecting, of material marriage preparation, which connects women and crosses time, place and culture. It creates a web of shared values, aspirations and skills which encouraged inter- and cross-generational exchanges. It is a broad community formed, as Philip Selznick describes it, ‘on the basis of concerted activity and shared belief.’³⁷⁹ For women collecting for their glory boxes during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, these values remained fairly constant, including planning, saving, frugality, duty, skill, and domesticity. These were broad life-informing values for these women, but they were practised and given a collective material form through their glory boxes.

Consequently, this project attempts to both define an existing community of women, and also to *create* one, given that glory boxes have been broadly omitted from the historical record and recovered through memories and artefacts. As William Vitek has argued, ‘with time and the right conditions,

³⁷⁶ Graham Day, *Community and Everyday Life* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

³⁷⁷ An observation made by Day, *Ibid.*, 1 and 14.

³⁷⁸ Examples include: Franklin A. Kalinowski, “Aldo Leopold as Hunter and Communitarian,” 140-149, John A. Livingston, “Other Selves,” 132-139 and Carl D. Esbjornson, “Does Community have a Value? – a reply,” 85-92, all in *Rooted in the Land. Essays on Community and Place*, eds. William Vitek and Wes Jackson (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996).

³⁷⁹ Philip Selznick, “In Search of Community” in *Ibid.*, 196.

practices and customs arise that celebrate this theretofore instrumental gathering. Stories are told, memories are formed and revered, a community is defined.³⁸⁰ This is the process via which a 'community of glory box practitioners' in Australia has emerged and which I have named; and within which a number of sub-communities exist, connected by familial relationships, locality, ethnicity and workplace. A notion of a 'women's glory box culture' finds space in Susan Benson's concept of an endlessly diverse 'women's culture,' with glory boxes as one cultural connector for women:

Refracted through the prism of class and ethnicity, women's culture emerged in countless varieties which nonetheless shared a core of outlook and action...this core consisted of three elements: first, a consciousness that there were still physical and psychic women's spaces where men were aliens; second, a socialisation which fostered cooperative and empathetic traits and the ability to function through influence rather than authority; and third, parallel if not identical experiences of domestic and family life, of the making and management of a home, and of the rhythms and rituals of the life cycle.³⁸¹

Women's glory box culture is indeed one such 'variety.' It created, influenced and maintained female spaces, empathetic activity and parallel domestic and lifecycle experiences (although the space of glory boxes was not as 'alien' to men as one might think, with men on occasion making or buying glory boxes as was discussed in the previous chapter). Glory boxes were also tangible and

³⁸⁰ William Vitek, "Community and the Virtue of Necessity" in *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁸¹ Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures. Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 3-4.

contained interior female spaces, housing objects collected as part of a single women's life cycle for married home life, and thus defined as female.

Moreover, the formation of a community through a shared locality can be applied to glory box practice in terms of where the tradition took place (Australia), what was collected (for example the shops that were patronised), and how the tradition was made culturally manifest (particularly in terms of migrant women). However, this notion of geographical boundaries for glory box activity is fluid, and crosses suburban, rural and even national boundaries. There can exist sub-communities connected by place, such as all the glory box exhibitions across Australia (referred to in the Introduction), each concentrating on a slice of glory box life within one regional or urban locality. The women interviewed for this study from the Lilydale township and environs were clearly linked by birthplace and memories. They grew up in the same place, with the same friends, of the same class, and sharing their methodology of collecting. As Lowenstein has observed in regards to Depression communities:

The children of Australia's much larger working class were often born, went to school, married, worked and lived in the same rented houses, or in the same street or district all their lives. Parents and grandparents lived nearby. The sense of community was strong. You belonged to a suburb...rather than to a great city.³⁸²

For many women in this period, their ties to place were generational (with parents and grandparents having lived in the locality), and the opportunities to relocate often restricted by limited physical and even social mobility (these women often worked locally and married local men). Steedman argues that

³⁸² Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, 10.

'specificity of place and politics has to be reckoned with in making an account of anybody's life, and their use of their own past.'³⁸³ Yet the collecting habits of working-class, Australian-born women of British ancestry living in the outer and inner Melbourne suburbs of Lilydale and South Yarra, and the regional Victorian towns of Kyneton and Traralgon, intersect more than they diverge. Then there are the communities of women transplanted and even created as a result of the act of migration. These involve the localities of origin and re-settlement, which may also contain layers of the real and imagined, as time passes and forms of cultural expression both persevere and change. As Fortier observes, 'imagining a community...is both about that which is created as a common history, experience or culture of a group – a group's belongings – and about how the 'community' is attached to places, imaginary or real.'³⁸⁴

Women were also connected by the notion of the glory box tradition as being 'what you did.' It was a female rite of passage, in which many women automatically participated. These women were creating a degree of social order, futures to a degree predetermined, a communal activity grounding the broader society. Again Vitek's theory is relevant here when he argues that 'necessity holds us together; ...through diligence, discipline, and practice, we are enabled to practice virtue and achieve wellbeing...the necessity of rootedness brings forth the fruit of community.'³⁸⁵ It is almost an unspoken community, complicit in channelling women into a particular future and form of self-definition. Indeed, the glory box is a code for femininity and responsible consumerism; a code of domestic consumables that Slater describes as 'natural rather than cultural because...they appear to be natural properties of the object.'³⁸⁶ Having a

³⁸³ Steedman, *Landscape of a Good Woman*, 6.

³⁸⁴ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 1.

³⁸⁵ Vitek, "Community and the Virtue of Necessity," 180.

³⁸⁶ Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 139.

glory box was part of the natural order of things, and the objects it contained were encoded with innate domesticity. Thus, women can also be seen here as a collective of production and consumption, connected by activities of creating, saving, acquiring, producing, purchasing – community of economic and creative female production that crossed culture and locality.

Overwhelmingly, women commenced collecting for glory boxes without a conscious weighing up of whether to collect or not to collect. Usually the activity was initiated for them by a relative and the gift of a butter dish, which initiated them into the collective tradition. There was little reverence for the custom and this idea that glory box collecting was just something you did, following accepted social conventions and expectations, is echoed time and again by the women interviewed:

Because it was the thing to do, I just did it.³⁸⁷

Everyone was doing it, you didn't ask why, it was the thing that was done.³⁸⁸

That was the natural thing to do... It was just natural that we did that really.³⁸⁹

It was the done thing, everyone seemed to do it...It was the thing to do.³⁹⁰

It was our age, the age group, which...you started collecting for your box.³⁹¹

(It was) just what you did.³⁹²

³⁸⁷ Kath Davis, 2003.

³⁸⁸ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

³⁸⁹ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

³⁹⁰ Betty Phillips, 2003.

³⁹¹ Nancy Briggs, 2003.

³⁹² Val Sheehan, 2003.

If you were going to hope to have a boyfriend, subsequently get engaged and then married, well of course you started collecting things. It was just the natural thing to do.³⁹³

Most of my girlfriends were getting bits and pieces too so you followed suit.³⁹⁴

It was something everybody did...everybody had one.³⁹⁵

There is a general pattern that emerges when studying the building of women's glory boxes, a point also explored in the previous chapter. Most girls received a couple of small domestic gifts when in their early to mid teens, and then they started to purchase a few things once they commenced working at around 14 or 15. At this point many young women were becoming a little more financially and socially independent, and accumulating property may be viewed as part of this shift for many away from the family home and looking towards the next stage in their life cycle. Collecting then accelerated once they were engaged or had a steady boyfriend, usually culminating in the communal gift-giving events of kitchen teas and engagement parties. Consequently, small early gifts from aunts planted the seeds for putting away household goods; the acquisition of a personal income made more active collecting both a possibility and a desirable symbolic step towards independence; associating with girls of collecting and marrying age created a peer group of collectors; the securing of a future marital partner motivated and directed cumulative collecting. It was almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Thus, the glory box 'community' needs also to be acknowledged as an ambivalent notion of 'community' for women, simultaneously positive and

³⁹³ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

³⁹⁴ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

³⁹⁵ Ester Rose, 2003.

negative, affirming for the participants and alienating for those who could not or would not participate (the unmarried, perhaps lesbian women, even young women rejecting such traditions). It is a form of community that was narrow in focus and opportunity for some, contracting personal and professional development, while for others a new life of married domesticity offered autonomy and the pleasures of independent family life. Either way, there was a convenient social order at work, with women fulfilling gendered social and economic expectations. And that so many women were collecting for their glory boxes during these decades, helped maintain an environment in which a feminised domestic consumption was legitimised and reinforced, safe in the social acceptability of this cultural practice by 'communities' of women.

Indeed, glory box women were participating in what Andrews and Talbot refer to as a 'consumption community' which can have a 'perceivable spatial dimension – when women or girls are found together in one place.'³⁹⁶ In the context of glory boxes, this could have been a store, a sewing group, or a tea break in the workplace where goods were discussed and compared, and some of these communal environments for women will be explored later in this chapter. It could also be found within a shared readership of women's magazines, which Marjorie Ferguson suggests form a female community through its promulgation of a cult of femininity, 'manifested both as a social group to which all those born female can belong, and as a set of practices and beliefs: rites and rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies, whose periodic performance reaffirms a common femininity and shared group membership.'³⁹⁷ As sites of identity creation such as beauty, domesticity, sexuality, magazines also added

³⁹⁶ Andrews and Talbot, "Introduction" in Andrews and Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband*, 3.

³⁹⁷ Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine. Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London & Exeter: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983), 184.

to this cultural landscape in which young women evolved, interacted and operated as they headed towards a domestic marital future. This point will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Consequently, my use of the term community has most in common with Mason's category of community as 'ordinary,' a somewhat vague concept interpreted by degrees: degrees of shared values, sharing in way of life, individual identification with a group, and mutual agreement as to who belongs to the group.³⁹⁸ The glory box community identified in this thesis is defined primarily by degrees of shared values and way of life, identification with cultural practices and even a broad, multi-cultural group of women, during a particular period in time. It is a diverse collective, united by gender, time, sometimes place, and a particular social and cultural practice, and not limited by geography, class, or even to any great degree, ethnicity.

3.3 Family

Mothers, Grandmothers and In-laws:

In Australian-born families of Anglo-Celtic descent, mothers seemed to play a surprisingly minimal role in the glory box activities of their daughters. There is little evidence of a conscious handing down of the tradition from mother to daughter. Some women remember their mothers' glory boxes, others don't or are not even sure they had one at all. Few items from glory boxes were passed down from mothers to daughters with any ceremony or sense that the glory box

³⁹⁸ Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging. Levels of Community and Their Normative Significance* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

tradition is consciously activated with each generation. In many cases there was little to hand over.

The infrequent participation of mothers in their daughters' glory boxes extended to an absence of mother-daughter shopping expeditions. The women interviewed felt their mothers would have been too busy with young families; two were widowed, further constricting time available for participating in glory box rituals. The mother of Dorothy Phillips (Dorothy was born in 1928 in Lilydale) died when she was 18, the prime collecting age.³⁹⁹ Sisters Dorothy (Dot), Val, and Marjorie Skate were born in 1925, 1927 and 1933 and grew up in Barham on the Murray River on the Victoria-New South Wales border. They state that their mother had little to no involvement in their collecting, observing their family was too large, and their mother too busy with child rearing and domestic chores.⁴⁰⁰ BS, born in 1916 in Yarra Glen, only saw her family one weekend a month as she had a live-in job in Lilydale.⁴⁰¹ Nevertheless, they must have enjoyed at least one trip 'into town' as she and her mother were captured by a street photographer shopping together in Melbourne in the 1930s. **(Figure 1)** However, as mentioned earlier, the possibility that glory box collecting was also an act of independence as part of the life cycle of young women, may take the lack of much involvement by mothers beyond simple family priorities. Certainly their daughters made no judgements or complaints in interviews for being left to manage their collections themselves, no matter how large or small. On the contrary, they took pleasure in their autonomy of earning, saving, selecting and building their collections.

³⁹⁹ Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

⁴⁰⁰ Skate sisters: Val Sheehan, Dorothy (Dot) Mitchell and Marjorie Cope, 2003.

⁴⁰¹ BS, 2003.

Thelma Drummond, born in 1917 in Lilydale, is the exception within the locally-born interview sample. Her mother had a box, which contained lots of needlework and clothes, all made by her (she was married in 1913 at 23). Thelma is a rare example amongst the 35 Australian-born women interviewed whose mother did play a significant role in influencing her box, what she made and bought, how she selected and shopped and generally engendering an attitude about importance of quality. She did take Thelma shopping when Thelma had saved enough from her salary for her mother had an eye for a bargain. In fact Thelma's box was indeed a family affair, with her father making it and her mother guiding the collection. Her highly skilled mother also taught her how to sew, as well as teaching the daughters of her friends.⁴⁰² This involvement reflects both this particular mother-daughter relationship, but also the very particular way Mrs Drummond defined the glory box tradition via her own experiences and interpreted her maternal role in its continuation through her daughter.

The social recognition of a girl's inevitable marital future, whether at the age of 12 or 18, was frequently marked by the giving of a domestic gift which initiated or added to the glory box collection. As Bell has observed, 'Turning points in our lives are marked by the presentation of items of symbolic or economic importance.'⁴⁰³ As mentioned earlier, these gifts, usually small and of little monetary value, came from female family members, including mothers, as well as female relatives and neighbours. This ritual is what David Cheal has called the particularly female 'ritualisation of giving' which, he observes in the Canadian context, 'can become the basis for female communities that link large numbers of women from many different families...the consequence of female

⁴⁰² Thelma Drummond, 2003.

⁴⁰³ Bell, *Generations*, 248.

solidarity is to constitute women in their private, domestic roles.⁴⁰⁴ This will be seen later as culminating in the celebration of the event known as the kitchen tea. Thus, Daisy Chapman, born in 1926 in Lilydale, recalls that 'I was fourteen when I started my box. Either Miss Tait or Mrs Kingshot gave me these little glasses shaped like a clover and you'd put them on a butter dish and I just put them in a drawer in my dressing table.'⁴⁰⁵

Occasionally the gifts symbolised the continuation of a female tradition, being handed from one generation to the next. BS recalls that 'my grandmother gave me the only little piece of Spode that I have, a blue and white butter dish and (she) gave me that when I was about twelve...I hung on to that and I've still got it but I've never used it, it was always too good to use.'⁴⁰⁶ Ruby Kwijas was aware of glory boxes as something everyone did from the age of 14 or even earlier, due to gifts received from her grandmother and other relatives, such as cream jugs.⁴⁰⁷ Gwenda Mutimer describes the nature of gifts as being 'always little things, not a great deal of money was spent, money just wasn't around.'⁴⁰⁸ This creation of a female domestic identity from an early age can be seen through this equating of a woman's property with domesticity. Clothing and jewellery aside, women frequently did not have personal items of property separate from the household goods. For unmarried women, these household goods were their glory boxes; for married women their glory boxes were usually subsumed into the household environment. This process resulted in women being seen as inseparable from their domestic role and this is reflected

⁴⁰⁴ David, J. Cheal, "Women Together: Bridal Showers and Gender Membership," in *Gender in Intimate Relationships. A Microstructural Approach*, eds. Barbara J. Risman and Pepper Schwartz (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), 92.

⁴⁰⁵ Daisy Chapman, 1992.

⁴⁰⁶ BS, 1992. Similar examples cited in Bell, *Generations*, 148.

⁴⁰⁷ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁴⁰⁸ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

through material culture, such as the gift she received. Domestic items for example were never given as gifts to men.⁴⁰⁹ The giving of domestic gifts to teenage girls demonstrates how early this process of domestic identification could begin.

⁴⁰⁹ This observation was made by Pauline Hunt, "Gender and the construction of home life" in *The Politics of Domestic Consumption. Critical Readings*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Shawn Moores (London & New York: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheasheaf, 1995), 305.

Moreover, there is an interesting element of exchange ritual here, whereby meaning is assigned to an item by others on behalf of the recipient. McCracken argues that exchange ritual is:

The choice, purchase, and presentation of consumer goods by one party and their receipt by another...Often the gift-giver chooses a gift because it possesses the meaningful properties he or she wishes to see transferred to the gift-taker. Indeed, in much gift exchange the recipient of a gift is also the intended recipient of the symbolic properties that the gift contains.⁴¹⁰

This is very potent in terms of the glory box. Mothers, grandmothers and aunts gave young women items for their glory box. These items, whether a simple vase or piece of china, were loaded with meaning in terms of the symbol of the act of giving (a ritualistic, rite of passage moment), and the nature of the object itself (intended for a domestic marital future).

It was common for mothers to buy their daughters a little something if they were out and about and spotted a bargain, which may have been given immediately or put aside for a birthday or Christmas present. During the war, Daisy Chapman recalls:

If Mum went into Melbourne she'd always buy us (sisters) the same, different colours or something...but mainly you could only get glassware in those days...Mum was pretty fair to the lot of us...I think

⁴¹⁰ McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 84.

our mothers may have encouraged us (to collect) a little bit so we'd have something behind us.⁴¹¹ **(Figure 2 & 3)**

Joan Skate (nee Silby and sister-in-law of Val, Dorothy and Marjorie), was born in 1930 in Sale in regional Victoria, and recalls her mother putting things in her older sister's box – practical things like linen and towels, and she gave all three daughters a canteen of cutlery.⁴¹² Betty Phillips, born in 1931 in Lilydale, had a mother who encouraged saving rather than spending, and she remembers how she used to say, 'you don't buy too much, your money is your best friend.'⁴¹³

Kath Davis, born in 1921 in Bairnsdale and then moved to Traralgon, both regional Victorian towns, believes that a competitiveness was known to exist between the mothers and that they would buy their daughters things so they would have something better than someone else had.⁴¹⁴ There was even a sense, and this certainly comes out in literary fiction, if not the oral histories, that this might improve their chances of marrying.

For example, in Rodney Hall's novel *A Place Among People* (1975), the glory box is viewed in purely pragmatic terms. A mother in a bayside fishing settlement near Brisbane in Queensland wishes to secure respectability and property for her son through marriage to a girl with a well-stocked glory box: 'Though she's a plain little thing, she is hard working. And they say she saves. And she looks after her mother. What's more she has been buying quite good quality things for her glory box. I know, she has been in to get them off me at the shop.'⁴¹⁵ The girl and the box are objectified here, without sentiment, and as likely to jump at

⁴¹¹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁴¹² Joan Skate, 2003.

⁴¹³ Betty Phillips, 2003.

⁴¹⁴ Kath Davis, 2003.

⁴¹⁵ Rodney Hall, *A Place Among People* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1975), 149-150.

any chance of marriage which her quality glory box may help secure. She has been assessed by the local community as dutiful, sensible, frugal – all values of a persistent Victorian morality and work ethic still held dear by McKay's 'lucky generation,' discussed in Chapter One. Consequently, once again the maternal contribution was less ritualistic and more pragmatic, through augmenting a daughter's existing collection with an occasional gift or natty purchase.

In terms of the instruction of daughters in needlecraft skills, which could then be applied to glory box production, mothers of Australian-born daughters played varying roles. Most taught at least a few fundamentals, and a couple passed on a range of creative needlecraft forms. Frequently grandmothers, workplaces, and always schools, also provided instruction. Bell reinforces this, observing that 'often we learned from our grandmothers, or aunts, the older generation who had more patience, who could wait till we conquered the moves, and who would delight in our mistakes and revel in our successes. These were the women who had time to supervise our sewing.'⁴¹⁶ As noted earlier, mothers were often too busy with managing the family and house to find the time to teach more than the basics, and perhaps for some, the fancywork at least was no longer a priority skill for their daughters to have. Gwenda Mutimer, born in 1927 in Lilydale, recalls she and her sister doing fancywork in the evening for their boxes and that 'certainly Mum then took up sewing again, fancywork, and she crocheted around all the doilies, we never mastered that...she was very helpful...and whatever she did for one she did for the other...we were grateful for anything she did for us.'⁴¹⁷ For Ruby Kwijas, born in 1927 in Lilydale, and Judith Howard born in 1937 in Beaufort in regional Victoria, their grandmothers were the key female figures in their early

⁴¹⁶ Mary Ann Jebb in Bell, *Generations*, 76.

⁴¹⁷ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

lives. Ruby fondly remembers her grandmother teaching her sewing, fancywork, and about fabrics; taking her shopping and instigating her box by giving her a few things early on:

Grannie and I used to often go to the Croydon Market (not far from Lilydale). She was a great sewer, so she would tell me about the different materials that your tablecloths and that were made out of, the damask tablecloths and the tea cloths, because when you had afternoon tea there was always a little cloth, so those were the sorts of things that I bought for the box.⁴¹⁸ **(Figure 4)**

Ester Rose, born in 1914 in country Seville on Melbourne's outer fringe, also recalls her grandmother being the one to teach her how to sew and embroider, resulting in the impressive array of fancywork that Ester produced for her box during the Depression years.⁴¹⁹ The subject of women's needlework activity will be explored in much greater detail in the next chapter.

Needlework could provide a point of connection for young women being initiated into their prospective husbands' female communities. A piece of fancywork, as demonstrated here by Nance McKay, born around 1921 and growing up in inner Melbourne South Yarra, could act as both literal and metaphorical shared experience:

The first bit of needlework I really did was when Jack's sister gave me this great big linen cloth, hem stitched round the edges and it had nasturtiums on it...His mother had started it and then she became ill and

⁴¹⁸ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁴¹⁹ Ester Rose, 2003.

then his sister started it in a whole lot of other colours that didn't go with the nasturtiums. And then it was given to me...It took me ages to do it.⁴²⁰

(Figure 5)

Daisy Chapman too recalls the production of fancywork as a way of bringing her closer to her fiancé's mother, stating that 'I liked the fancywork and Pat's mother was good at the fancywork too so we used to sit for hours and we'd both be doing that.'⁴²¹ **(Figure 6)** On the other hand, Judith Howard, who married in 1961 at the age of 21, and at the end of this study's timeframe, did not have a glory box, despite her grandmother and mother before her having done so. Her mother-in-law, with no daughters and only one son of her own, found this situation shameful. She married in 1923 and had a glory box full of linen and fancywork and Judith remembers her lamenting 'what about your box Jude?...what am I going to say to my friends, what can I tell people when they say when are we going to see the box?'⁴²² For Judith, training to be a nurse during the late 1950s, a glory box was not a priority. Within one family, attitudes and cultural practices shifted within one generation.

Consequently, mothers of Australian-born women seem to be, overwhelmingly, a background presence in terms of the glory box. Where then did the glory box impetus come from with each generation, if not pushed by the maternal line? It must be enough, that the glory box tradition was so socially entrenched, that the custom insinuated itself at an individual, family or community level, without fanfare, and without advocate.

⁴²⁰ Nance McKay, 1992.

⁴²¹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁴²² Judith Howard, 2005.

For European migrant women, the experience was both similar, and very different. Interviews with Greek, Cypriot and Italian women reveal a uniformity in the heavy involvement of mothers in their daughters' glory box collections. Usually, it was primarily the work of the mothers, whether weaving, sewing, embroidering, purchasing or commissioning items. For Dutch and Irish women, the onus seemed to be more on the daughters, similar to the Australian situation. However, like Australian women, the Dutch women took it more seriously while for Irish women it was more a pragmatic response to engagement. Indeed, Maureen King who migrated from Ireland, states that Irish migrant women observed that glory box collecting seemed more serious in Australia, that it was discussed and collecting commenced earlier. In Ireland it was predominantly a post-engagement activity. However, Linda Ballard suggests that in early twentieth-century Ireland, collecting for the personal trousseau garments could indeed commence well before an engagement:

A girl might begin very early to acquire the domestic skills and material possessions essential to her capacity to set up home. These activities, while they could act as a focus for aspirations to the married state, long predated any actual expectation to marry a specific individual. Once she became committed to marry, a young woman might turn her attentions from preparations for her household to preparations for herself.⁴²³

I wonder too if there was a degree of cross-generational difference in the impact of the migration experience, whereby the maintenance of the tradition in country of origin and country of resettlement was expressed differently by

⁴²³ Linda May Ballard, *Forgetting Frolic. Marriage Traditions in Ireland* (Belfast and London: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University, Belfast in association with The Folklore Society, University College London, 1998), 5.

mothers and daughters. Fortier talks about an 'oppositional tendency that has developed between homeland as object of longing (in nostalgic remembrances, the myth of return, political commitment), and hostland as the object of efforts to belong (integrating, fitting in, politics of difference).'⁴²⁴ Depending upon who was traditionally responsible for building the glory box in a given culture, the older women may have been more likely to look to homeland for customary practices while the younger generation looked forward to assimilating and fitting in. This had an impact on how glory box practices were maintained in a new environment.

In Greece, the box of Irene Soumilas, born in 1939 on Lefkas, was primarily the work of her mother. During the 1940s and 1950s, her mother produced some items herself, passed on to Irene some of her own items, and commissioned specialist women to complete the collection. **(Figure 7)** Irene recalls:

My mother started this, because when you had girls you start when they are eight or seven, you start collecting...I inherited some of her stuff that she inherited from her own mother...There are women in the town that you hire...and they do these beautiful things for you. And over the years she collected all these things...this is for my first daughter, this is for my second daughter...And she had them ready...just in case.⁴²⁵

Dina Sartinas, born in 1940 in northern Greece, recalls that the 'prika' was an assumed tradition, there was no formal commencement of collecting or mothers explaining the custom. Her mother collected items and made things for all the daughters' collections. She wove blankets, and purchased sheets and rugs. Like

⁴²⁴ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 163.

⁴²⁵ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

Irene's mother, Dina's mother made the same things for all the daughters; there was no hierarchy or favouritism according to age.⁴²⁶ For Kleoniki Gregory in Cyprus, being the youngest of six daughters meant that resources were lean and the heirlooms already distributed, by the time she reached marrying age. Her Greek family were poorer after the war, but her mother still provided a few manchester items, supplemented by the work of Kleoniki's own hands and pay packet.⁴²⁷

In Italy at the same time, the traditions were very similar. The glory box of Josephine Carey, born in 1950 in Calabria in southern Italy, and the boxes of all her sisters, were entirely the work of her mother, which seems to be typical of the region. She states that boxes were,

absolutely the work of the mother. And sometimes when the time for marriage came, the in-laws would contribute too, maybe you know one or two things...Dad was already in Australia and so she spent a lot of time weaving blankets for the daughters that she had and the daughters she was going to have...(a lot of mothers) if not weaving they were preparing their glory boxes from when they were born I think...I think it was probably happening across Italy, but definitely in southern Italy, definitely in Calabria.⁴²⁸ **(Figure 8)**

Josephine's mother continued to build her daughters' boxes after she migrated to Australia in 1956, as she continued to give birth to more daughters. This was achieved with her father sending material over from Italy:

⁴²⁶ Dina Sartinas, 2007.

⁴²⁷ Kleoniki Gregory and Rose Gray, 2008.

⁴²⁸ Josephine Carey, 2005.

After we arrived, grandfather was still there (in Italy), any opportunity he had he would send sheets or material that wasn't actually sewn up yet...then Mum would finish them here...the blankets...weren't totally finished so in Australia she spent a lot of her free time at night...making the fringes to finish off the blankets...She believed each time she finished a fringe one of her daughters would get married.⁴²⁹

For the Italian women who migrated with young daughters, it was common for this collecting activity to have continued in the new country. Due to the early death of her mother, Dominica Tripodi had to build her box in 1940s Calabria later in life, without help from her father or needlecraft skills, in order to have a collection of substance when she got married. This in turn seems to have made her very sensitive about making sure Carmel had a substantial collection of quality, started from the time of her birth:

Mum was handed her own mother's linen, her own mother's blankets and things in that box. And she had two (boxes) but only one was filled! And the other one, she filled for me. From the time I was born and even before I was born. She had lost four children full term before she had me and she was always devastated that she wasn't given anything, her fear was she may die and her child would end up with hand-me-downs. So she started literally building the glory box from the time she got married. And she would buy the most beautiful linens.⁴³⁰ **(Figure 9)**

In nearby Malta, the early loss of a mother also affected Tonina Farrugia and her sisters, who had to develop their collections by themselves. Tonina states

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Carmel Tata, 2006.

that 'usually the mothers prepare for them, but because we didn't have a mother, we had to do it ourselves.'⁴³¹

There are some collections that were the work of generations of women. Rose Patti's mother Gaetana migrated from Sicily to Australia in 1950 and Rose's box was,

partly made up of things that were Mum's dowry, that her mother had given her and also made up of things that Mum would buy for me....Mum would have been collecting probably late fifties and into the sixties I'd say as soon as it became evident that I was growing and they wanted me to be a little Italian girl and get married and make sure I had all the sheets and whatever that I needed...Mum because she worked full time would buy sheet sets that she didn't hand embroider or hand sew herself because there wasn't time.⁴³²

In contrast, as was illustrated in the previous chapter, the nature and methodology of Carmela Palermo's collection from 1950s Calabria was determined by the swiftness of her proxy marriage. Carmela's mother purchased everything, from linen to other domestic goods within the six months before her departure.⁴³³ In northern Italy at the same time, Edda Azzola's mother had a different role in her daughter's glory boxes, which required a financial arrangement with her daughters in order to build their collections. Edda, born in 1927, and her two sisters, worked a knitting machine, the paltry income from which they gave to their mother: 'So the little money we got we gave it to Mum and Mum she was fixing things up, preparing the glory

⁴³¹ Tonina Farrugia, 2007.

⁴³² Rose Patti, 2005.

⁴³³ Carmela Palermo, 2007.

box...la dote.'⁴³⁴ Her mother would buy fabric for them to make up and she herself would finish and embroider the same for all three daughters:

One day I remember (my mother) come home with this big bundle of material and she said, look what I bought today, a few metres of fine linen and a few of soft light cotton, enough maybe for three pairs of sheets and matching pillowcases. We had to hemstitch all around the edges plus the embroidery on the top part of the sheet...All this work kept us occupied for months and months so Mum decided, from now on, I will buy more items already made, at least you'll have a bit of time to rest.⁴³⁵

In Greece and Italy there were women who could be commissioned to make items for glory boxes, for mothers who could not, or had not the time. Moreover, the practice of needlecraft was a public activity with women sitting outside their houses. Josephine Carey reflects that her mother,

would have had some sheets made by one of the girls in the town who did this as her sort of life's work I suppose...people would just put their little chairs outside...and they'd be embroidering their sheets and their pillowslips...making things for other people who couldn't do it for themselves or were too busy, some of the women actually worked in the fields so they may not have had as much time on their hands.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Edda Azzola, 2006.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Josephine Carey, 2005.

Carmel Tata, also from Calabria, describes a similar procedure as her mother prepared her own and then her daughter's collection:

There was this one lady that (Mum) paid to do mine...she didn't have the skill and it was very important to her that I had the best linen...She decided that she liked the fabrics in Sicily so she would go there every couple of months and she would buy this sort of linen. And then she would give it to the ladies and they would select the colours and the pattern and they would cut it and finish it off...and turn it into pillowcases, cot sheets, single bed sheets.⁴³⁷

Irene Soumilas recalls such skilled women on Lefkas in Greece who were commissioned to supply their fine work for young women's dowries: 'The mothers do prepare the glory box and tuck them away so they can have them ready...and the last minute of course they paid some of these workers...to make some extra ones.'⁴³⁸ This custom of commissioned skills was even occurring in Australia. May Vertigan (Judith Howard's mother in regional Victoria) commissioned some pieces for her own box recalling: 'I've got some magnificent pieces of crochet that a lady in Shepparton made for my mother for her box...anyone who's come from that district at that time would know about this woman...She was known to be available for commissions and her work is just sensational.'⁴³⁹

In the case of Dutch and Irish women, the emphases appear more in line with the activities of the existing traditions in Australia. Margot Veltkamp, born in 1925 in The Hague, Holland and who migrated in 1958, recalls her mother

⁴³⁷ Carmel Tata, 2006.

⁴³⁸ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

⁴³⁹ Judith Howard, 2005.

being little involved in her collection, beyond talking about 'what I needed, and she made sure I had 12 of everything.' Margot recalls her mother's own box but the acquiring of her own was up to her so 'I thought well, I have to prepare myself, and that's what happened.'⁴⁴⁰ A survey of five other Dutch women who migrated to Australia and who married in Holland during the 1930s and 1940s revealed that they all did their own collecting and that their collections, whether substantial or modest, had little to do with their mothers.⁴⁴¹ For Irish women, like the Dutch women, a glory box or 'bottom drawer' was not a maternal activity. It was commenced after an engagement, or at least once serious dating was underway, and was viewed in pragmatic terms, not a gradual evolution but a swift reaction to an immediate need to establish a house. Maureen King was born in Dublin in 1933 and migrated to Australia in 1956. She received domestic items in Ireland as gifts upon announcing her engagement and later wedding presents sent from Ireland as well as those received from new friends in Australia. Her mother-in-law put together some linen and blankets for her, particularly in light of her migration plans; her mother gave her a dinner set. Maureen recalls no needlecraft being done by any of the women in the city and any embroidered items she had had been purchased. So Maureen's collection had no element of ritual, accumulation over time or a shared activity. Joan Cox, however, did set aside a few of her own embroidered items for her 'bottom drawer' in Dublin during the 1950s. Her mother had passed on a few skills but made no other contribution to her collection.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁴⁴¹ Group interview with DutchCare residents recorded by Moya McFadzean, Carrum Downs, Victoria, 2006; Ellen Smoorenburg, 2008.

⁴⁴² Joan Cox, 2008.

Consequently, Greek and Italian mothers, both prior to, and after migrating to Australia, were intimately involved in their daughters' 'prika' and 'corredo.' In some cases, it was a shared activity, in others they instigated and undertook the collecting activity so that it was more like a finished gift to their daughters.

Dutch women collected for their 'uitzet' but, like most Australian-born women of Anglo-Celtic descent, it was primarily their own responsibility. Urban Irish women were collecting primarily through engagement and post-engagement gifts, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that needlework was more common in the country areas. Nevertheless, there is also interview evidence of Dublin women embroidering linen as well. Perhaps, similarly to Australian-born women, these glory boxes also represented one step in a shift away from parental home and authority to a little more independence and autonomy. This appears to be less likely in the case of the Greek and Italian women, who often remained more closely tied to parental authority while their glory boxes were rarely their sole responsibility.

Sisters:

It may be assumed that building a glory box, if not a mother-daughter affair, would certainly be an interest shared by sisters. Of the Australian-born women interviewed, three are sisters, four had older sisters, six had one or more younger sisters and three had no sisters at all. Another's mother was one of eight sisters. However, once again, there is no evidence that the glory box was a joint preoccupation between sisters, nor is there any consistency within or between families as to how, when and if sisters had glory boxes at all.

Sibling collective activity seemed to be greatly influenced by the age differences between sisters; and this did not seem to change whether the women were building glory boxes in the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s. With almost half the women interviewed there was a sizeable difference in age between them and the next

sister in line, whether younger or older. Often the older sister had left home to marry or work by the time the next sister started collecting so there was no glory box interaction between them. Two women had younger sisters who had no glory box at all. BS put that down to her sister marrying during the war when goods were scarce;⁴⁴³ the sister of Beth Taws, born in 1930 in Kerang in regional Victoria, stayed home to care for their ailing mother and never collected or married (a not uncommon occurrence).⁴⁴⁴ Gwenda Mutimer remembers many oldest daughters having to stay home to look after elderly parents, observing that 'many had hopes of marrying and suddenly turned out they were over the hill, on the shelf by the age of 30.'⁴⁴⁵ Consequently, where sisters were separated by age and distance, the opportunity and inclination to share their glory box collecting was reduced.

However, this is not to say there was no camaraderie between sisters about their glory boxes at all. It depended on the closeness of the relationship. Gwenda Mutimer and her older sister Shirley, who used an existing built-in wardrobe for her box, shopped and sewed together. Gwenda states that 'we stuck together right through the years and we'd go shopping together and sit and do fancywork of a night time, if we weren't going out dancing...we were collecting things.'⁴⁴⁶ Daisy Chapman had three older sisters, two of whom had glory boxes. While Daisy and Lena purchased boxes for themselves, sister Wyn just used an old box, saved her money and had plenty of linen. Daisy recalls: 'Lena's (box) was different, hers was...about the same colour as mine but hers was a more squarish thing, with a big cupboard on one side and drawers down one side. Wyn just had a big box...just an old cabin trunk type of thing.'⁴⁴⁷ There

⁴⁴³ BS, 2003.

⁴⁴⁴ Beth Taws, 2003.

⁴⁴⁵ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

was an element of competitiveness between these three sisters, mainly relating to the sewing of their trousseaux and how much time each could spend on the sewing machine. This inconsistency within families about attitudes towards collecting is a recurring theme. As previously mentioned, there were families in which some sisters had a box, or at least a collection, and others did not. One sister may be very focused on their collecting while another is more casual. But any kind of exchange seemed to depend on sisters being near in age and living together in the family home.

This was only partly the case for Dot (born 1923), Val (born 1927) and Marjorie (born 1933), where the variation between sisters within one family in their approaches to their boxes is very evident. **(Figures 10, 11 & 12)** The girls' early years were spent in Barham on the New South Wales/Victorian border before the family moved to Coldstream in Melbourne's outer east in 1943. Dot, the oldest sister, collected very little for her box and many of her pre-marriage years were spent working away from the family home. While she describes the glory box as having held little interest for her, Val and Marjorie, the remaining sisters at home, did share some enjoyment of each other's collections despite their six year age difference, without any sense of sibling rivalry. Val recalls that 'we were just thrilled if you got anything nice and that you wanted it, that was lovely.'⁴⁴⁸ Yet Val utilised a makeshift tea chest for her box while Marjorie purchased a bookcase for her collection. For Val it was a secondary activity, making and purchasing a few things, while for Marjorie it was an absorbing preoccupation. She was very conscious of the whole idea of homemaking and often looked at the items she had purchased: 'I loved the thought of having a home...always loved looking at what I've got, and where I'd put it and what I'd

⁴⁴⁸ Skate sisters: Dot Mitchell, Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope, 2003.

use it for.’⁴⁴⁹ The two sisters did a little sewing together in bed by lamplight but both agreed that much more emphasis and time was spent on contributing to the farm, working, and undertaking their domestic chores. There was a definite sense that there was not much time or money for ‘box building.’

Judith Howard’s mother May Vertigan was one of eight sisters (and five brothers) all born near Shepparton in regional Victoria between 1897 and 1917. Those sisters who married did so between 1930 and 1945, with May marrying in 1934. Judith believes the sisters contributed to each other’s boxes:

I know they made pillowcases and things like that themselves and embroidered them and so on. They were very keen embroiderers. And of course there was huge competition between them, eight of them all trying to be better than the one beforethere was definitely competition, who had the best, who got the guy with the most... Several of them did (have boxes).⁴⁵⁰

There seem to have been varying degrees of boxes, from one sister who had everything to other more modest boxes; and two sisters did not marry at all. It was a highly charged environment of achievement, ambition and competition, and the glory box ritual was part of this collective effort to create, produce and present a united front of success.

Another family dynamic is where large families resulted in the earlier generation being close in age to the next. Loris Peggie did not have sisters of her own but was close in age to her mother’s younger sisters, and this resulted in an

⁴⁴⁹ Marjorie Cope, 2003.

⁴⁵⁰ Judith Howard, 2005.

interplay of glory box sewing activity. It was a large family of women, and Loris recalls these aunts being more like sisters due to their closeness in age, and that they were all sewing and making things for themselves, and each other:

I did most of the embroidery and crochet that they had in their glory boxes...I did things as gifts, as a child we didn't get much in the way of pocket money or anything like that, the family just couldn't afford it...in some instances the two younger aunts anyway gave me the Semco (pre-stamped fabric) designs and I just embroidered them.⁴⁵¹

So not only was Loris producing needlework for her own glory box, she was an important supplier of items for the collections of her aunts as well. And she alone did not marry. **(Figures 13A & 13B)**

Consequently, within and between families, there existed varying attitudes and collecting techniques throughout the pre- and post-war period. Differences in age between sisters, the closeness of their relationships, their own economic and working circumstances, and simply individual tastes and attitudes, all influenced the ways in which sisters interacted with each other during the building (or not) of their glory boxes. For sisters in European migrant families, before and after coming to Australia, the relationships and interactions were not dissimilar.

Rose Patti's mother Gaetana Lazzara was from a village in Sicily, and one of three children. During the 1930s and 1940s, her family were relatively comfortable as her father successfully farmed goats for cheese. The daughters

⁴⁵¹ Loris Peggie, 2005.

had a basic education and, significantly, were able to stay home and do their needlework together rather than having to work the land as the daughters of other, less well-off families would have done.⁴⁵² The situation was similar in Rose's father's family, less affluent but in the same village with lots of brothers to carry the workload. Rose observes:

The five boys would do that and the girls would stay at home. Now I guess once all the chores were done they would sit down with their needle and thread...and you would just sit and prepare these articles, you know in the hope that you would one day have them for your own home.⁴⁵³

Rose's mother-in-law's situation was similar, yet different in that she had no sisters. Born in 1925, she too would have been making things during the 1940s and Rose states 'she talks about being very lonely because she was an only child and you know, did a lot of embroidery as well that she has too at home, you know, beautiful things.'⁴⁵⁴

Edda Azzola's experience in northern Italy during the 1940s and 1950s was not quite so romantic. She and her two sisters spent their time at a knitting machine, and the tiny income raised from making clothes was given to their mother to provide materials for their glory boxes. They then sewed and embroidered the items, along with their mother in a very insular environment, run by a strict father. **(Figure 14)** The sisters would have been intimately aware of what they were earning, what their mother was buying and what they were all producing. Edda observes:

⁴⁵² Rose Patti, 2005.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

What she did for me she did for the other ones...she said, I have to do the same, so she was buying more or less for three...what she was giving to the first one she was giving the same ...slowly slowly, she was putting a deposit...and then what she had paid off she brought home.⁴⁵⁵

However, where mothers had sole responsibility for building the collections, sibling interaction was irrelevant, or at least certainly not commented upon. Josephine Carey's mother built glory boxes for five daughters during the 1950s and 1960s in Italy, and in Australia. As the daughters were not contributing to the process, it was not a shared experience between sisters.⁴⁵⁶

Where large age differences between sisters existed, interaction regarding glory boxes was limited. Dina Sartinis, born in 1940 in a small rural village in northern Greece, had similar experiences to the Australian-born women. She was the youngest of three daughters, and there was a ten year age difference between herself and her eldest sister; and five years between herself and her middle sister. This, and the fact that Dina worked away from home in her father's business from around the age of 12, resulted in little interaction between the sisters about their collections. In fact Dina was unable to comment whether her sisters had 'prika' at all but assumes that since she did, they must have had something also.⁴⁵⁷ For Maureen King in Dublin, there was no sense of a shared activity with her sister. Her sister was five years older and married after Maureen; she simply gave her a tea set as a wedding present.⁴⁵⁸ Joan Cox in Dublin had two older and one younger sister and was taught to embroider

⁴⁵⁵ Edda Azzola, 2006.

⁴⁵⁶ Josephine Carey, 2005.

⁴⁵⁷ Dina Sartinis, 2007.

⁴⁵⁸ Maureen King, 2006.

by her older sister Doreen. But there was no sense of a shared activity towards embroidering for the 'bottom drawer.' However, this lack of exchange must also be put down to an urban Irish experience whereby 'bottom drawers' were really only gathered as a response to an engagement announcement or at least serious dating. There was no strong ritual of collecting over time in which sisters participated as there was in the Australian context.

In The Hague in Holland, Margot Veltkamp and her two sisters had very different glory boxes as a result of the timing and impact of war. **(Figure 15)** Her older sister Henny, born in 1917, married in 1946, a year after the war ended:

She didn't have a glory box at all, because there was nothing during the war. And my mother's sister lived in America. And she sent her glory box over from America, no box there was no box, but she sent sheets and pillowcases and tablecloths and towels and everything, it was terrific...(Henny) had nothing and she wanted to get married. She was older than I was and she was in her thirties when she got married... (the war)...was a disaster for those girls who were saving, they couldn't save because the coupons we needed were so few, the coupons we got, you needed that for renewing another dress or a pair of stockings...they couldn't use them for a glory box...so (Henny's) glory box was sent via Switzerland...the very necessities... just the linen goods...but she was so happy with it, it was really great.⁴⁵⁹

On the other hand, Margot, the middle sister, did not collect in earnest until after 1948, when goods became more available. As she did not marry until 1953,

⁴⁵⁹ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

she had time to collect in these immediate post-war years. Then there was Margot's younger sister Riet by two years, who married a couple of years after Margot in the mid 1950s and Margot states that 'she had the best of everything, and she had a lot of everything. She spent a lot of money on her stuff, lot of money. She had good wages, she earned a lot of money....(so her box was)...beautiful.⁴⁶⁰ The experiences of the sisters demonstrate the impact of the war on women's glory boxes, from wartime austerity, to immediate post-war gradual rebuilding of commodities, to the relative prosperity of the 1950s.

Whether in Australia, Greece, Italy, Holland or Ireland, the shared experiences of sisters in accumulating glory boxes varied across time, culture and place, according to age differences, co-habitation, maternal involvement, and external factors such as war and domestic economic circumstances. It also depended upon personal inclination, whether needlework skills were shared, and the importance placed upon collecting by each sister. Oral testimony reveals that glory box activity was the norm, but how it was undertaken and the nature of the sibling relationships in building those collections, defies generalisation.

3.4 Friends and Neighbours

Girlfriends:

A sense of female community reveals itself most strongly at the peer level amongst Australian-born girls. Yet collecting for the glory box does remain a predominantly singular activity, even if it was being undertaken by many women in one small locality, such as Lilydale. From the 1930s to 1950s, women's descriptions of their contemporaries also reveal that they mixed

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

mainly with other Australian-born girls of Anglo-Celtic background. The Lilydale sample had little recollection of girls from diverse cultural backgrounds; Daisy Chapman recalls Italian immigrant families in Lilydale but that they didn't socialise with them. The Italian girls went to the Catholic school, their parents were more strict so they did not attend dances, and social functions.⁴⁶¹ Only Kath Davis in Traralgon in regional Victoria refers to having a migrant friend, an Italian girl whose family had a fruit shop.⁴⁶² The sites of peer exchange occurred primarily while commuting to work, during shopping expeditions, and in the more formal situations of kitchen teas and glory box 'displays.' The workplace was the other key site of interactivity which will be explored in the next section.

There was a sense amongst local women that everyone was making or collecting something for their box, no matter how modest, or ad hoc the activity. Kath Davis recalls that all her girlfriends in Traralgon had boxes and that older girls taught the younger ones that collecting for the box was the thing to do within a competitive environment: 'As soon as you started work, your girlfriends would be...when are you going to start collecting for your glory box?'⁴⁶³ Loris Peggie in Blackburn in Melbourne's east remembers less competitiveness and more genuine sharing and assisting and enjoyment in what friends were producing:

We did things for each other...not all the girls crocheted so I often ended up by doing the crocheted edges on things for them.It was enjoyable, we used to just absolutely love to sit down and do something and achieve something and you know, really I suppose, we all enjoyed seeing

⁴⁶¹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁴⁶² Kath Davis, 2003.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

each other's things too, and there was a certain amount of, I don't know what you call it, camaraderie, or, we enjoyed being together and doing things together...We'd be only too pleased to help one another out and show one another what we're, you know, doing and give things to one another.⁴⁶⁴

These discussions, comparisons and opportunities to sew and embroider occurred in particular on train journeys to and from work. For young women travelling from the eastern suburbs to the city such exchanges could be of some duration. Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips remember their train journey to work in the city, which from Lilydale took an hour each way – plenty of time for sewing and discussing their glory boxes with each other and other girls making the same journey. Nancy recalls how 'we all used to travel in the train to work...and we'd all be 'I've got this, or I've got that' if we were lucky to get something,'⁴⁶⁵ while Dorothy states 'we used to do (fancywork) together in the train, there were others too in the train doing them.'⁴⁶⁶ Loris Peggie also recalls the creative industry which occurred on the train trip from Blackburn into town:

There was a group of girls...all the girls did knitting or crochet or embroidery or something and we all travelled, it was quite a trip to town, you could do quite a lot in the half to three quarters of an hour we were travelling so that was how we filled in our time in those days...we

⁴⁶⁴ Loris Peggie, 2005.

⁴⁶⁵ Nancy Briggs, 2003.

⁴⁶⁶ Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

were often embroidering or crocheting or doing something that was either for a gift or something that we were going to keep ourselves.⁴⁶⁷

A couple of the Australian-born women interviewed referred to shopping expeditions with friends, and Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips from Lilydale epitomise this image of two good friends immersed together in the whole glory box tradition. They did most things together, they grew up together, worked together and consequently, collected together. They shopped in their lunch break and recall one occasion during the war when they bought a tea set together while in Coles in Swanston Street. Spotting the cups, saucers and plates, they grabbed six each and 'thought we had a bundle of gold in our hands.'⁴⁶⁸ **(Figures 16A & 16B)**

For many collecting was an individual pursuit and ultimately, women generally shopped on their own. Furthermore, a number of women state that they hardly discussed their boxes with friends. Dot Mitchell, Val Sheehan, Joan Skate and Thelma Drummond rarely, if ever, talked about their boxes. Nevertheless, Thelma received birthday gifts from girlfriends from around the age of 16, such as vases and crystal, items that prolific needleworker Thelma could not make herself.⁴⁶⁹ Some women remember sewing with a friend and Dot recalls doing a little fancywork with a girlfriend on the back verandah.⁴⁷⁰ They were all conscious that other girls were collecting, especially if they were part of a regular social activity, such as Thelma Drummond who belonged to the local Presbyterian Girls Association. Consequently, the collective influence of this unstructured (and sometimes highly structured) community of women

⁴⁶⁷ Loris Pegg, 2005.

⁴⁶⁸ Nancy Briggs, 2003.

⁴⁶⁹ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

⁴⁷⁰ Dorothy Mitchell, 2003.

preparing glory boxes, even if subliminal, was certainly there. As Daisy Chapman observes, 'most of my girlfriends were getting bits and pieces too so you followed suit.'⁴⁷¹

Dutch women's experiences were similar to those of Australian-born women. Margot Veltkamp was aware that everyone, sisters and friends, were collecting for married life, noting 'I always had lots of girlfriends and they all did exactly the same thing. And we went to each other's weddings and then we saw what they had and I thought that would be nice.'⁴⁷² However, for Irish women, there was less of a sense of ritual and practice over an extended period, as occurred with women from Australia, Holland, Italy and Greece. It was this collecting, exchanging and comparing over time that lent itself to a more collective female experience. When collecting occurred just prior to marriage, primarily through gifts, the result was pragmatic, practical and without a sense of cultural, female exchange. Maureen King from Dublin recalls that 'a lot of people didn't do it until the eleventh hour, and then it was mainly things that you were given, so and so would be getting married so I'll give you a tablecloth or a set of sheets or whatever.'⁴⁷³ Italian and Greek stories imply that collecting was a primarily family-oriented activity. Driven by mothers, with input from daughters and some sister interaction, there was little exchange between girlfriends.

Kitchen Teas:

The kitchen tea was (and indeed still is) a formal occasion in Australia organised by family, friends, organisations or entire communities. The equivalent tradition is the 'bridal shower,' a North American term, and similar

⁴⁷¹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁴⁷² Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁴⁷³ Maureen King, 2006. There is a tradition of collective female bottom drawer production in the nineteenth century, as described in Ballard, *Forgetting Frolic*, 3.

customs have been documented in various countries, including folk stories which had the 'shower' originate in Holland and transported to Britain.⁴⁷⁴ Kitchen teas were held in the period leading up to the wedding, assisting young women to 'stock up' on domestic items for their glory boxes and marital life. The kitchen tea is defined by the *Australian Oxford Dictionary* as an Australian term describing 'a party held for the bride before a wedding to which female guests bring items of kitchen equipment as presents.'⁴⁷⁵ The term allows no ambiguity in the types of gifts presented and, even if the event was thrown for the couple rather than just the bride-to-be, the ritual is firmly positioned within the conventional female domain (that is, the kitchen). In general, these gatherings were held for and by women. BS recalls:

Before you were married your best friend gave you a kitchen tea or a shower tea...and that was where you got a lot of things from. That's the way I had to cook two dozen scones for a woman whose daughter was having a kitchen tea...they still do it.'⁴⁷⁶

Kitchen teas, along with glory box collecting, 21st birthday and engagement parties, and wedding present/glory box displays, were all part of a ritual of public and private female solidarity rituals in the lead-up to marriage. Women were the primary, if not sole participants, the goods were overwhelmingly domestic and, as Cheal argues in relation to Canadian bridal showers, they 'unequivocally demonstrate the importance of marriage for women's gender

⁴⁷⁴ George P. Monger, *Marriage Customs of the World. From Henna to Honeymoons* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 252-253.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Australian Oxford Dictionary* (South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 2004), 697.

⁴⁷⁶ BS, 1992.

membership, and the collusion of women in reproducing the domestic system that has traditionally defined female gender identity.⁴⁷⁷

Between the 1930s and 1950s experiences varied as to whether the event was organised by a mother, friend or an association to which a girl might belong. For example, Nancy Briggs' kitchen tea was organised by the Lilydale RSL (Returned & Services League) Ladies Auxiliary.⁴⁷⁸ Thelma Drummond's kitchen tea was arranged by her mother at home and she remembers receiving such items as a flour sieve, cake tins, and a rolling pin.⁴⁷⁹ Thelma also comments that her tea was held after the display of her glory box to give people an idea of what she needed and that this was quite a common thing to do. There were girls who did not have a kitchen tea at all and others, like Ruby Kwijas, who had to marry 'in a hurry' due to a pre-marital pregnancy, had no time, or inclination, for a kitchen tea. Loris Peggie did not herself marry but organised a number of kitchen teas for her friends at the local church during the 1950s, and she describes the standard format vividly:

I ran several kitchen teas for friends...we often had the chance to use the church hall...we had mainly afternoon teas, they weren't night things... Rarely did we have the parents or any of the older aunts... it was mainly...friends and cousins or relatives of that age group...sometimes there was only perhaps a dozen or so of us there. Often other members of the family did give gifts for kitchen teas even though they didn't come along...They did get sometimes towels...but mainly kitchen items, sometimes cups, perhaps as much as a four placing utility set, or some

⁴⁷⁷ Cheal, "Women Together" in Risman and Schwartz, *Gender in Intimate Relationships*, 90.

⁴⁷⁸ Nancy Briggs, 2003.

⁴⁷⁹ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

cutlery or saucepans or basins, even down to egg cups and lemon squeezers and you know, little things.⁴⁸⁰ **(Figure 17)**

Oral histories indicate that in rural areas the ritual was embraced by entire communities. Kath Davis from Traralgon recalls that 'my kitchen tea was during the war of course (she married in 1944) and in a country town you couldn't buy nice gifts so everybody put in some money and gave me a cheque.'⁴⁸¹ For Ester Rose in semi-rural, outer Melbourne Seville, the kitchen tea was held for her and her fiancé in 1938 and she remembers that 'when we were getting married, the church gave us a kitchen tea so that supplied a lot of bits and pieces.'⁴⁸² Ester's event was held in the evening at the local Methodist church and people were very generous considering it was the Depression. She recalls: 'The powers that be got to know I liked green and everything I got for the kitchen was green. It was just such a lovely surprise and just what I wanted.'⁴⁸³ **(Figure 18)** BS, Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope, from outer Melbourne Seville, Coldstream and Yarra Glen, were all thrown kitchen teas by the local community, while the Lilydale township girls did not receive this kind of collective attention. The country kitchen teas were primarily organised by the local church, in the local church hall. BS recalls that the Yarra Glen community always gave kitchen teas to every girl in the district.⁴⁸⁴

These events were a very important part of the process of building up the box just prior to the wedding. Some women were building collections with small or no incomes, in families with few resources, and during straitened economic times such as the Depression. Ester Rose was one such woman, and this almost

⁴⁸⁰ Loris Peggie, 2005.

⁴⁸¹ Kath Davis, 1992.

⁴⁸² Ester Rose, 1992.

⁴⁸³ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁴⁸⁴ BS, 2003.

‘instant’ method of collecting which augmented her substantial output of needlework was critical for her efforts to gather the materials of domesticity without a personal income during the 1930s. This must have been a common experience during the Depression and Thelma Drummond, Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope all comment on the generosity of people at the time who had little money to spare.⁴⁸⁵

Women interviewed who migrated to Australia from Ireland, Holland, Italy and Greece had never experienced the kitchen tea custom before. It was something they soon came into contact with, were even invited to and which they observed with curiosity, interest and even admiration. Maureen King from Dublin arrived in Melbourne in 1956 to meet and marry her fiancé who had come out earlier. She recalls:

⁴⁸⁵ Thelma Drummond, Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope, 2003.

I'd only been working in the office a couple of weeks...and I got my invitation for the kitchen tea...I hadn't a clue what I was going to and I was fascinated, I thought what a great idea!...Well we had lashings of the most gorgeous food! And everybody brought a present. And because it was a kitchen tea it had to be a kitchen item...Brooms, dustpans, bowls and all sorts of kitchen things...I was clued up before I went... I think we all put in and brought a collection of brushes and mops and that sort of stuff...it was a fantastic way of getting all your little bits and pieces for the kitchen.⁴⁸⁶

Joan Cox, who did not marry her Irish fiancé until a year after she arrived from Dublin, was thrown a kitchen tea by her workmates in Melbourne. Like Maureen, she had never heard of the custom, but was most appreciative of the generous attention and gifts.⁴⁸⁷ Whereas Margot Veltkamp arrived from Holland in Melbourne in 1958 and found kitchen teas to be a little disconcerting:

No we didn't have kitchen teas, no, no, that was an eye opener when I came here... I remember (my Australian sister-in-law) had a kitchen tea. And I've never seen anything like it! And all the girlfriends were there and I felt so insecure, I didn't know what I was doing. I could speak English but it was a couple of months after we arrived here and I couldn't follow everything and who was who and they all wanted to talk to me... they brought all stuff for a kitchen of course ...Never seen anything like it. Never, ever. And the cakes and the stuff they had. Well,

⁴⁸⁶ Maureen King, 2006.

⁴⁸⁷ Joan Cox, 2008.

it is hard to tell you what I felt... I found it out of place, do you know, I found it like begging.⁴⁸⁸

Consequently, there was in Australia a particular custom intimately tied to the practice of building the glory box which was known, recognised and undertaken by various communities – whether communities of girlfriends, workmates, families, church groups or localities. Kitchen teas actively aimed to build pre-marital domestic property and were primarily held in the female domain (although rural and semi-rural communities frequently involved the broader population) and consisted of the material culture of the kitchen. As such, they represented a moment when the glory box shifted from the private female domain to the public, even cross-gender, domain, and heralded, along with the engagement, the final ritualistic steps before the actual wedding and physical relocation of women into their own domestic sphere.

Displaying the Box:

The other stage in this shift of the glory box from private to public space involved public displays of the glory box contents; a custom which had been practised throughout Europe for centuries. The displaying of bridal goods appears in Australian fiction, particularly novels set in country towns. F.S. Hibble's *Karangi* (1934) provides a vivid illustration of the custom, and captures the myriad of inter-generational emotions it created: 'All the women of the district found the MacReady house a Mecca. They came to gossip and to rave over the glory-box, being frank in their envy.'⁴⁸⁹ This marriage, glory box and its display are all the work of the mother, who is taking vicarious pleasure in the trappings of the wedding through her daughter.

⁴⁸⁸ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁴⁸⁹ F.S. Hibble, *Karangi* (Sydney: Endeavour Press, 1934), 110.

In contrast, for Australian-born women who had grown up in urban and even semi-rural areas such as Lilydale, the custom was familiar yet untried. Most had heard of girls displaying the contents of their boxes but did not believe it was a common practice. Few had arranged such an event themselves, with the sharing of their glory box items primarily remaining a private or at most spontaneous activity amongst family and friends. Four women interviewed had attended at least one. Kath Davis, who grew up in Traralgon in regional Victoria, recalls that 'some women before they married had an open house to show off their glory box but I never bothered about that...I went to a couple.'⁴⁹⁰ It seemed to be an event that was particularly the domain of the mothers. The women interviewed agreed that only mothers with daughters with really impressive boxes would have done it! Kath Davis remembers that 'mothers were competitive. When a girl became engaged or just before she was married, the mothers would invite other people to come and see the glory box...but I didn't fall for that.'⁴⁹¹ BS believes the concentration of numerous relatives in close-knit districts bred competitiveness.⁴⁹² This may help to explain why it seems that the custom was more common in country than urban areas which were often made up of communities of a couple of extended families.

Formal viewings were invariably the reserve of the girls with something substantial to show. Gwenda Mutimer recalls with amusement one family who took it all extremely seriously: 'One Lilydale lass that we were invited to. All her stuff was cordoned off, it was a wonder there wasn't a catalogue handed to you!'⁴⁹³ BS describes going to Wandin in Melbourne's outer east to view the glory box of a girl who was the youngest of three sisters, the older two not

⁴⁹⁰ Kath Davis, 2003.

⁴⁹¹ Kath Davis, 1992.

⁴⁹² BS, 2003.

⁴⁹³ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

having married: 'So we went out to see (her) glory box and this was a very glamorous one, it had everything...a lot would have been inherited...she invited all the girls she knew around.' BS remembers that 'there was a great sense of...she was doing very well for herself that lass' and that on the way home there was much discussion, even some envy, but that she and her friends knew it wasn't for them, that such a box was another world.⁴⁹⁴ **(Figure 19)**

These events were primarily a women's domain eliciting a variety of responses: amusement, competition, envy, and support. There was a generational transferral of experience and wisdom, between those who had tread this ground before and those who had yet to do so. Gwenda Mutimer recalls attending quite a few wedding present displays around the Lilydale district and describes the segregation of the men and women, where 'the men sat in the lounge and talked and the women 'oohed and aahed' over the trousseau and everything.'⁴⁹⁵ The displays could also consist of the actual wedding presents, as etiquette was that gifts were delivered to the family home prior to the wedding. Gwenda states that 'when the engagement was settled and indeed from then on...leading up to the time you were getting married...those days wedding presents were supposed to be delivered for weeks before (the wedding)'.⁴⁹⁶ **(Figure 20)** Displays would always include fine arrays of fancywork and even undergarments, if particularly impressive.

Thelma Drummond is the only one of the women interviewed who actually displayed her glory box and, like the fictional example, the event was all arranged by her mother. She recalls that when the wedding invitations went out, the custom was to display what you already had. Her box contents were

⁴⁹⁴ BS, 2003.

⁴⁹⁵ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

displayed in her mother's best sitting room for friends and neighbours. Special invitations were sent out by her mother, who cooked a substantial afternoon tea. Thelma's mother was certainly driven by etiquette and tradition, and is described by Thelma as having been 'a very proper person.'⁴⁹⁷ She believes that these events were mainly held in the afternoon, and that she alone of all her girlfriends had one, as her mother was very keen on form and appearances.

Consequently, glory boxes tended to be quite private during accumulation and understated once installed in the home. There was little overt or ostentatious display for the purposes of emulation, aside from the occasional glory box display. During the accumulation process, glory boxes were usually inconspicuous, even tucked away under beds or in drawers. Later on, collections were used completely, partially or even not at all (particularly where marriages do not take place), and with the exception of items described as 'for good,' with little show or display. The best supper cloth for the best tea set on special occasions may have made a conspicuous statement of skill, quality and taste. Some collecting was deemed necessitous, some more flights of fancy but the emphasis was on collecting as an act of personal enjoyment and satisfaction.

Collection displays were part of many European dowry traditions and the migrant women interviewed were familiar with the custom, even if they had not participated themselves. The production of the trousseau during the nineteenth century was usually a communal affair, involving women within the immediate and extended families, and throughout villages and towns, particularly in rural areas. Displays of trousseaux prior to wedding ceremonies were common across Europe and from Bulgaria to Sicily, Romania to Bosnia and Turkey, families exhibited trousseaux within and on the walls and

⁴⁹⁷ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

balconies of the bride's and bridegroom's houses.⁴⁹⁸ Common too were wedding processions, with the trousseaux transported through the town by people, horses and carts, displaying the contents as they were carried triumphantly to the house of the bridegroom.⁴⁹⁹ This public nature of the trousseau roused competitive emotions, particularly in close-knit country towns, for at stake were the futures of daughters and the status and financial security of their families.

The Greek and Italian women interviewed could recollect such activities but, once again, they tended to be primarily the domain of mothers rather than the peers of the girls themselves. Irene Soumilas married in Australia but she recalled such displays occurring on her Greek island of Lefkas: 'In the villages a lot, I think because everybody has to see it...where we were there were some, if you were invited to go.'⁵⁰⁰ There seems to have been a palpable air of competition amongst the mothers with daughters of marriageable age. Irene describes a secretive process where dowries were ferreted away from public view while the girls were growing up and an emphasis on size and quality for attracting a good match: 'I think it's secret, I think the mothers keep it secret...I remember my mother was hidden things so when she bought them from that woman that she paid for...(she) put them away you know?'⁵⁰¹

In Calabria in Italy, such displays could become the backdrop to street festivals. Dominica Tripodi, who married in 1947, was collecting for her only child's box

⁴⁹⁸ Urlin, *A Short History of Marriage*, 114; Hutchinson, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands*, 190; Baker, *Wedding Customs and Folklore*, 44.

⁴⁹⁹ Hutchinson, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands*, 270 (Italy), 45 (Scotland and Italy); Miln, *Wooings and Weddings*, 226; Urlin, *A Short History of Marriage*, 63 (rural Germany), 112 (Morocco), 150 (Hungary).

⁵⁰⁰ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

throughout the 1950s and 1960s in the small town of Sinopoli. Born in 1960, Carmel describes what she knows of the range of ways her mother promoted her marriage eligibility from street displays to home viewings:

Every year it was a custom for Mum to air all the goods that were mine. So from the tender age of, I think I was about six, she'd spread everything. And she'd ask the ladies in the village to come and help her air the (linen), because it was like opening presents, it was a little bit of showing off really, that's what it was. And people would be 'oh look at this' and 'oh look at that'...Mothers there had a big say on who their sons married... 'so and so's got a beautiful glory box, so imagine what the dowry's going to be, what else she's going to inherit. So she's a good catch'. So in a way my Mum was selling me!⁵⁰²

Also at work here is Fortier's notion of 'group identity formation as sites for the display of cultural identity.' Through the informal exhibition of dowry textiles, and thereby quality, skill and marriageability, a community of Calabrian village women demonstrated how the 'centrality of the visual...sustains a significant definitional status in identity formation.'⁵⁰³

For urban Irish women, the informality of their collecting activity extended to the other rituals surrounding the 'bottom drawer.' Maureen King, who really only gathered items after her engagement, held a casual viewing for a few friends: 'What we did, before I left home, all my friends came round and they had a look at what I had, so they virtually had a look at your bottom drawer kind of thing...very informal.'⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Carmel Tata, 2006.

⁵⁰³ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 6.

⁵⁰⁴ Maureen King, 2006.

Once again, there was no rule of thumb, no series of compulsory steps and practices that young women undertook in conjunction with their girlfriends while preparing their collections. On the contrary, in the case of southern European migrant women, the private collecting and public demonstration of the fruits of this activity very much resided in the maternal sphere of responsibility. In Australia, women shared their collecting labours with their girlfriends, to varying degrees. They shopped, they showed, they sewed and they held soirees – all in pursuit of a modest domestic property.

3.5 Workplace

The workplace was the other significant environment which created communities of women, often of different ages and from different localities, and fostered the sharing of glory box activities. They had in common, at least within the sample taken for this study, their working-class background, their degree of education (most having left school at around 14 or 15), and their generational connection to war and depression through direct or parental experiences. The workplace was also a site where newly arrived migrant women could witness Australian glory box traditions and, as was seen previously with the kitchen tea, become active participants in a new cultural environment.

Women who were working in female-dominated industrial environments, such as factories, telephone exchanges and offices, remember some glory box discussion and certainly some influencing of the younger by older women who were engaged. Ruby Kwijas started work at the Lilydale telephone exchange in 1951 at the age of 14, and she recalls that most of the girls there were locals and of varying ages: 'The older girls, they were always talking about bits and pieces they'd picked up for their glory boxes. Because Grandma had already started

me at 14, I knew what they were about...whatever they did, I did as well.'⁵⁰⁵ The women varied in age between 14 and 21, and all were collecting. **(Figure 21)** Ruby remembers them comparing purchases and if you liked something you might get something similar. There was the ritual of making lay-by payments during the lunch break on a treasured item and the excitement of making the final payment and bringing the purchase into work. Ruby remembers her workmates saying 'I can get my lay-by today, they'd get it and bring it back and open it up and we'd all be ooh aahing about what it was.'⁵⁰⁶ Yet Ruby's experience was not one of envy or competitiveness, but of mutual enjoyment and the sharing of ideas and pointers, and she observes that 'I don't think any of us really felt we had to get that because Mary had it, it was just an idea of showing off whatever because you'd worked for it, you'd got your money, you'd paid it off, this is the pick-up day and it was quite exciting to be picking stuff up.'⁵⁰⁷

Beth Taws was also working and mixing with older girls, some engaged, and they went out shopping together at lunchtime in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton for china and needlework patterns. She recalls one group of young women who were interested in each other's purchases, showing each other their fancy patterns; glory box collecting was very much a shared interest in the work environment, with the older girls influencing the younger.⁵⁰⁸ The work environment was a significant part of this explicit sense of collective female activity and, as was demonstrated earlier, it was frequently the work colleagues that organised the kitchen teas. Ruby Kwijas states:

⁵⁰⁵ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Beth Taws, 2003.

You did have this feeling that everyone was collecting for their glory box...There were probably two or three girls who didn't give a hoot about the glory box, they just wanted to come into work and get ready for Saturday night dances and they were more interested in buying the handbag and the dancing shoes and getting their nails done and their hair done, some of the girls were like that. But the majority of them would have been collecting.⁵⁰⁹

Australian novels can mirror oral histories by revealing the importance of a female workplace collective where glory boxes were discussed, purchases shown, needlecraft admired, and shopping tips shared. For example, Mena Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* (1964) uses an office as a backdrop to portray the pressing need of women workers for love and fulfilment through marriage. Other novels present offices as places where women cultivate, plan, discuss and play at marriage.⁵¹⁰

For young women working in more solitary or male dominated employment, or at home, the experiences were quite different. Kath Davis worked in Traralgon as a book keeper in a garage and then in a bank and found there were few opportunities for camaraderie with women. She drew on her own ideas, rather than being influenced by what others were collecting and only if she was walking to work with girls, might she mention picking up a lay-by or show the purchase to friends on the way home.⁵¹¹ BS also recalls collecting as an independent activity, and states she was not really aware of other girls collecting, as she was too busy working. She states that most other girls were in wartime jobs but as a live-in domestic in Lilydale she wasn't associating with

⁵⁰⁹ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁵¹⁰ This point is made in Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 92-93.

⁵¹¹ Kath Davis, 2003.

other female workers.⁵¹² Consequently, in this more isolated working environment, BS was not part of a peer environment, mixing and sharing like other girls. Ester Rose was the only girl in her district around outer Melbourne Seville who stayed home, with her peers off working at the Princess Mary Club Methodist Home. So, like BS, she had no 'collective' experience. The girls would come home on the weekend and Ester recalls them all having opal rings and things for their boxes while she, with little income and no opportunity, could not be part of their shared experiences.⁵¹³ Similarly, for Greek and Italian migrants, their experiences in their home countries during the period suggest that girls were not often working in public environments. They tended to work at home or in the family business; if well-off, they didn't work at all but remained close to the domestic sphere. Consequently, this and the fact that mothers really dominated the glory box pursuit, suggests why for these women, the activity was not one they shared with their peers.

Migrant women provide a perspective on how glory boxes inhabited the workplace, as observers looking in. Betty McWade was born in 1929 and grew up in Belfast, and comments on how glory box activity entered the workplace in Ireland, as well as what she observed when she migrated to Australia. She recalls the other factory girls in Belfast talking about their 'bottom drawers' in the 1940s, what they were gathering and what they were making:

They used to talk about table linen, bed linen, one set of white sheets...and that sort of thing. And they'd talk about cups and saucers, different names of different china...Lots of people used to do embroidery, make tablecloths and things like that (in their tea breaks).⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² BS, 2003.

⁵¹³ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁵¹⁴ Betty McWade, 2006.

The workplace in Betty's experience even provided materials for making some glory box items and she recalls that 'the factory where we made the underwear, sometimes there were pieces over, and I know ladies used to, if they could borrow the pieces, they'd make little tray cloths and things out of the silk, because they were like silky stuff and things like that.'⁵¹⁵

On arriving in Melbourne in 1963, Betty observed at an industrial parts factory in the eastern suburb of Mitcham, not only the traditions of the Australian-born girls of Anglo-Celtic background, but that of the intermingling of cultural practices of newly-arrived women from numerous cultural backgrounds which had been well underway during the post-war migration boom of the 1950s:

When I worked in the factory, there'd be a lot of young girls...saying, 'I'm buying this and I'm buying that'. And I'd say 'What are you buying all that for?' 'Oh I might get married one day...' There was all different nationalities, especially the Italians and the Greeks, 'Oh Mum's made me a nice tablecloth' and I'd think oh I wish I could do that...we had French, we had Yugoslav ladies, we had Italians, we even had a couple of Spanish...Irish, English, Scotch. German, Dutch...mix of married and non-married...Talking about glory boxes, and trying to get things and putting them on lay-by.⁵¹⁶

Evident here is the surprise of Irish women that other women were building collections prior to engagement, when marriage was merely an idea, an assumption but not yet a reality. Joan Cox from Dublin also expressed wonderment at the preoccupation of her Australian-born workmates with their

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

glory box collections,⁵¹⁷ and Maureen King expresses this view clearly, as well as that sense of it being a collective pursuit in Australia, rather than the more individual emphasis in Ireland:

When I was working in the office in Melbourne, one of the girls was getting married and they all had glory boxes, even though none of the others were engaged or ready to get married. But they all had them and they discussed them at length. I was quite fascinated by it all!...When I was growing up, you know, we didn't necessarily see marriage as the only alternative...and we didn't think about it, you grew up, you went to dances, you had a good time, you didn't think about that until you got serious about someone...further down the track yes there was (an assumption that you would get married), that's what people did.⁵¹⁸

Consequently, for girls between the ages of 14 or 15 (when most left school) and their early twenties (when most were marrying), there was a window – particularly during the war – when they frequently worked away from home and formed independent female communities. These communities were temporary and most women relinquished salaried working life once they married or at least once they had children. But often these social environments fostered the learning of the glory box tradition and the exchange of collecting methodologies. It was an interactivity that young women working at home or in more solitary or male-dominated environments missed out on. It was an interactivity that newly-arriving migrant women entering the workforce observed and, if not yet married themselves, participated in.

⁵¹⁷ Joan Cox, 2008.

⁵¹⁸ Maureen King, 2006.

3.6 Conclusion

During the 1930s-1950s, the practice of glory box collecting, and its associated rituals, united innumerable Australian-born women as part of an unnamed club. It also connected women across the globe as elements of similar traditions were applied, both in countries of origin and in Australia. Within this amorphous club were associations of sub-communities – mothers and daughters, sisters, friends, work colleagues, and local neighbours and residents – all participants in glory box practices to varying degrees of involvement, influence and impact. Even where women acted as individual agents, and as has been seen, they frequently did, this did not undermine a sense of a collective endeavour relating to property accumulation and creative production for a married domestic future.

While similarities in cultural practices strengthen this sense of a universal female community, differences – particular between cultures – simply demonstrate the complexities involved in attempting to define and classify a collective pursuit. Interviews reveal that mothers played a dominant role in regional Italy and Greece and a secondary role in Australia. Friends and work colleagues figured strongly in Australia but little in regional Italy and Greece. Australian girls commenced boxes even prior to engagement (although collecting became more serious and focused upon engagement) while in urban Ireland, collecting was linked more closely to a secured marital future. Australian, Dutch and Irish girls had a strong individual component to their activity while Greek and Italian girls were often secondary participants. Consequently, the glory box community was a broad community, one which ebbed and flowed, which connected and diverged, which complemented and contrasted. But rarely did it contradict, rarely was there a discordant note.

Chapter Four: Learning the Craft

4.1 Introduction

I found there was more emphasis in Australia on the hand-worked things, the embroidered tablecloths and pillowcases and that sort of thing than there was in Dublin... these girls I worked with talked about it, what they were doing and what they were making...I thought they were mad! You could be out having a good time, instead of sitting home embroidering! (Maureen King migrated from Ireland in 1956)⁵¹⁹

In the period spanning from the 1930s to the 1950s, there occurred significant changes in the instruction, purpose, technology, production and output of women's domestic needlecraft. As has been previously discussed, there was a shift from a general pre-war emphasis on hand skills and production by women for their glory boxes, to a gradual emphasis on purchased goods and a de-emphasis on labour-intensive embroidery. There were no precise beginning and end dates for these shifts and the trends also overlap. These changes had a fundamental impact on the way glory boxes were built, what was collected, how time was allocated and the extent to which skills were passed on to future generations of women. These shifts were bound up in larger societal developments which have been discussed in previous chapters: increasing consumerism, technological changes, and new notions of modern womanhood.

This chapter will explore the nature of women's hand production during this period, focusing upon their output specific to their glory boxes. While the breadth of needlecraft types is vast, glory box needlework can be defined by its

⁵¹⁹ Maureen King, 2006.

domestic nature – plain and fancywork for practical and decorative use throughout the planned-for marital home. As a general rule, women learned these skills as part of their general education both at home and at school, with the aim for these skills to have broad application, not just specific to building a glory box. Consequently, separating what women were taught in order to make and mend clothes or embroider household linens into glory box and non-glory box categories would be arbitrary and artificial. Women learnt the skills and applied them to wherever interest or necessity required; this included for many producing items for glory boxes. The changes in the production of hand needlecraft in Australia occurred within the broader context of international industrial and consumer developments in the production, sale and feminisation of the commercial and domestic textile industries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From this point of reference I will explore the goods Australian women made and how and when they made them; the level of skill applied and from where women gain these skills; and how what was produced reflects the social and economic shifts in Australia over these three decades. Moreover, the transported needlecraft practices of post-war migrant women contribute another layer, and comparisons will be drawn between local needlework production and the production of women in their countries of origin, their brought goods and impact of migration on their own cultural practices at this time.

4.2 Hand-woven, Hand-sewn, Hand-picked: Shifting Trends in Australian Domestic Needlecraft Production

The changes in the way textiles were mass-produced, marketed, and sold from the nineteenth century determined the nature of glory box collections for decades to come. These changes affected the nature of domestic hand

production, the role and application of fine needlecraft such as embroidery, the increasing significance of retail and women's own buying power, as well as implicit notions of class and leisure. By the nineteenth century in Great Britain enormous textile mills were mass-producing affordable woven fabrics ready to be made up into household linens, a proportion of which was exported to the colonies. These industrial developments were reproduced in Victoria by the late 1800s, through the mechanisation of spinning and weaving, and establishment of large-scale clothing factories.⁵²⁰ While industrialisation was well advanced in countries such as England and France, rural peasant societies in southern Italy and Greece were slower to feel the impact. Although, as Schneider has argued, such cultures whose domestic textile production was prolific and of a high standard, felt the decline of home spinning and weaving perhaps even more dramatically.⁵²¹ Industrial changes did gradually remove weaving from domestic production across Europe (a trend not dramatically felt in Australia, which did not have the same traditions of small-scale, domestically-based, textile production), focusing women's labour on sewing and embroidery. The evolution continued into the manufacture of ready-made linens, so that much domestic textile production was reduced to embellishment, as will be seen later in this chapter in the glory box textiles brought to Australia.

Industrial change in Melbourne did not result in women abandoning their looms for the department store to fill their glory boxes. Nevertheless, the nature of supply and demand – now trends in production and consumption – inevitably had an impact on the activities of glory box collectors. For example, Frances has referred to a growth in underclothing and whitewear production in

⁵²⁰ These factories were employing more than 200 women operating sewing machines. Frances, *The Politics of Work*, 16.

⁵²¹ Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure" in Kaplan, *The Marriage Bargain*, 110-111.

1901 (products frequently part of glory box collections), and her argument reveals the impact of mass-production upon traditionally home-made goods:

Cheaper production methods led to cheaper goods which in turn increased the demand for factory-made products. Within a decade the purchase of ready-made underwear had been established as the norm in Australian households, and the homemade article increasingly became a Victorian anachronism.⁵²²

By the 1920s, technological advancements led to a greater variety of improved and specialist machines so that embroidery machines were replacing hand labour at an industrial level.⁵²³ Nevertheless, at the small scale, glory box level, these developments in mass embroidery production did not have a discernible impact; women were still embroidering for their glory boxes at home well into the 1930s and 1940s.

Consequently, the traditional values of time and skill were being augmented by the quantity and expediency of the mass-produced. By the late nineteenth century, store manchester departments had evolved in Australia, which stocked ready-made bulk goods to be transformed into household linen items. By 1900, the next step in the commodity process was underway with small items on the shelves, as if almost ready-made for the glory box market. Reekie observes that 'manchester departments were increasingly selling small manufactured items such as tablecloths, napkins, table centres and runners, pillowslips and doilies.'⁵²⁴ Reekie has argued that the transforming of woven textiles, first into bulk fabrics for home production, and then into ready-made manchester items,

⁵²² Frances, *The Politics of Work*, 83.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵²⁴ Reekie, *Temptations*, 68.

were a part of the new twentieth-century department store which 'sold bulk goods such as sheeting, towelling, cottons and other materials which women would make up into household articles either themselves, or have made for them.'⁵²⁵ By the conclusion of World War II, a reinvigorated and expanded manufacturing sector, as well as the resumption of wide scale imports, gradually filled store shelves with domestic products in an ever increasing range of types and materials.

Within this context of the ever-increasing mass production of consumables, the way in which needlework was produced, and the quantities in which it was produced, changed from the 1930s to the 1950s. In the *Australian Women's Weekly*, patterns for fine needlework, as opposed to dressmaking patterns, declined in number after World War II. Even in the 1930s, publications such as *The Bride Book of Useful Information*, referred to outfitting the new marital home in purchased household linen and alluded to the shift from the hand-made:

From very early times it was customary for little maidens to be set to work to spin and weave, to sew and embroider the precious woollen and linen stuffs which were to stock their dower chests for marriage.

Although such a dowry is no longer regarded as an essential part of a bride's equipment...yet most girls will like to provide some part at least of their house linen, and, in any case, they will probably be entrusted with the selection, and should therefore be experienced enough to know what to buy and the amount required.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ *The Bride's Book of Useful Information* (Melbourne: *The Argus* and *The Australasian*, n.d., circa 1930s), 7.

Women's sewing became less intricate and therefore less time consuming. Their artistic skills were being gradually downgraded, while at the same time they were purchasing more manufactured goods. These goods both supplemented and even replaced the textiles they were making and expanded the type of items they collected for their boxes, thereby shifting the emphasis during this period to varying degrees from the hand to the ready-made. This new market of goods also created an entire advertising and branding philosophy which positioned women centrally as powerful domestic consumers, as discussed previously, particularly in Chapter Two.

Thus, definitions of femininity which had traditionally embraced domestic production such as needlecraft, broadened with the continuing rise of consumer culture after World War II, to embrace discerning commodity selection. This partial change in skills was visible prior to marriage in the way glory box goods were acquired and the gradual loss of the finer decorative needlework skills in the process. Game and Pringle observe that 'many of the more creative housewifery skills disappeared as the housewife became increasingly a consumer.'⁵²⁷ This reduced emphasis on the hand-made in relation to the glory box was part of a broader trend which carried over from the single woman consumer to the married woman consumer. One significant difference in these two types of female consumer is that glory box consumption depended much upon women as wage earners; household consumption depended partly, often entirely, upon men as wage earner.

⁵²⁷ Anne Game and Rosemary Pringle, "Sexuality and the suburban dream," in *Memories and Dreams. Reflections on Twentieth-century Australia*, eds. Richard White and Penny Russell (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, Pty., Ltd., 1997), 200. These issues were also explored in Chapters Two.

The hand-production and purchased goods of glory box collectors were imbued with multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings over the 1930s-1950s period. Their needlecraft was inscribed with a persistent valuing of fine embroidery, the women's own pride in their skill, and the implicit meanings of embroidery pattern and design conventions. Their purchased goods symbolised the values of a modern consumer society with new materials and production methods which were then layered by the women according to their choices, method of purchase and their desires for use fulfilment. Yet Mediterranean cultures brought to Australia glory boxes that represented a continuing value for the hand-embroidered which extended, for some second generation young migrant women, even longer than their Australian-born counterparts. But as will be seen later, the ready availability of machine cloth in southern Italy, for example, as well as the need to build boxes quickly due to pressing migrant departures, saw hand-woven cloth relegated to rare and precious and family heirlooms.

Running in parallel to the industrial changes which encouraged increasing mass textile production in the twentieth century, was the rise in the public recognition of women's arts and crafts. This suggests perhaps, that as fine needlecraft became less an essential art for women, it became more closely defined with the finer arts and specialised practitioners. Arts and crafts societies were established in every Australian state by 1910, often selling women's crafts through exhibitions. The Australian Exhibition of Women's Work occurred at the Exhibition Building in Melbourne in 1907 and included needlework as a key category for entries.⁵²⁸ By 1922, the first branch of the Country Women's Association, for whom needlecraft was a skill valued at subsequent agricultural shows and fundraising events, had formed in New South Wales.

⁵²⁸ This history of formalised women's craft activity in early twentieth century Australia is outlined by Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 170-172.

There are particular connections to be made between agricultural show exhibitions of women's domestic labours and glory box activity. The former was production for public edification and recognition of diverse female skills, while the latter was for private motivations and use in the domestic sphere. Items created for show were treated as art pieces, prize-winning examples frequently shown and re-shown. Museum Victoria in Melbourne holds a well-known collection of one woman's creative output for agricultural shows which span the 1920s-1950s. Violet May Wilson's needlecraft was shown all over Australia, some pieces receiving multiple awards as they were re-submitted at various shows. While glory box items were created for use and frequently for enjoyment, in terms of the highly skilled needlecraft, many of the items were the same as those produced for exhibition in competitive classes at agricultural shows. This crossover is evident in a *Home Maker* magazine article (1938) featuring designs for doilies which states that 'home lovers as well as those who seek impressive designs for show entries will not be able to resist these!...Will also intrigue the girl who is getting her glory box together.'⁵²⁹ Isaacs records the categories that existed in Country Women's Association exhibitions during the 1940s and 1950s, including those which have particular relevance for glory box production at this time: crochet, embroidery, knitting and lace making.⁵³⁰ Presumably these skills were honed during the production of many a glory box over this period.

⁵²⁹ *Home Maker*, 25 November 1938, 7. Other examples include references to 'Enchanting new linens for show work, home, glory box,' *Home Maker*, 1 January 1938, 4 and 'Dressing Table Enchantment...This new and lovely three-piece set has been designed for your room, for the Glory-Box and for spectacular Show Work,' *Home Maker*, 5 February 1938, 3.

⁵³⁰ Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 196.

Consequently, agricultural shows, as well as other public outlets such as fetes and bazaars, provided an important forum for the public display and recognition of women's craft.⁵³¹ Although most items produced for glory boxes remained in the pre- and post- marital private sphere, for the enjoyment of friends and family, these exhibitions encouraged a community of needleworkers, whose industry was receiving a public airing and broad recognition, even if ultimately, this acknowledgement remained primarily amongst other women.

By the war and post-war period, many single women were still producing goods at home, but most were also making mass-produced purchases. Some welcomed the shift away from labour-intensive elaborate needlecraft. While most women still learnt basic needlecraft skills at this time, they increasingly valued purchased commodities; while women still admired needlecraft skills in others, the emphasis on the more elaborate abilities was lessening. Newspapers indicate that manchester advertisements and sewing patterns, so plentiful in the 1930s and 1940s, had become more scarce by the 1950s. Advertisements that did feature were invariably for ready-made manchester items, highlighting a decreasing market emphasis on the hand-made.⁵³² Lees and Senyard have argued that, in the 1950s, 'machine-made rather than hand-made became the hallmark of status in the decade.'⁵³³ However, in the case of glory boxes, the trend is more complex. As was argued in Chapter Two, the progression from production to consumption was not a straightforward or linear one, and glory

⁵³¹ A short history and survey of agricultural shows in Australia in Kate Darian-Smith and Sara Wills. *Agricultural Shows in Australia. A Survey* (Melbourne: The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, 1999).

⁵³² This conclusion has been reached by scanning the *Sun News Pictorial*, 1952 and 1955, the newspaper which featured so many manchester and sewing patterns, particularly in the 1930s.

⁵³³ Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 76; Fine makes a similar point, *The World of Consumption*, 171.

boxes contained a comfortable mix of both manufactured and hand-made, with the emphasis varying from box to box. Even within a thirty year period the shifts in production and consumption trends in Australia were making themselves felt in the way women filled their glory boxes – in terms of the items they sewed, how much they embroidered, and the extent to which these skills were nurtured and valued in public and private domains.

4.3 Fancywork: Acquiring and Applying the Skills

‘Fancywork’ was the catch-all description of much of the handcraft produced by Australian women for their glory boxes between the 1930s and 1950s.⁵³⁴ Isaacs defines plain sewing as ‘the essential basis of needlecraft. It includes hemming, tucking, darning, basting and gathering;’ that is skills that provide the foundation for all needlecraft which could be applied to making, mending and altering primarily clothing and manchester. Fancywork she defines as including ‘all the laces, crochet, knitted lace, Berlin wool work, embroidery, tatting, netting, appliqué on net, and d’oyleys and tablecloths.’⁵³⁵ These were skills primarily for decorative effect, demonstrating needle skills in public displays in homes and shows, and adding aesthetic value to the items and the homes they adorned. By the 1930s, fancywork was the commonly used term employed by women to describe their glory box production. Their learned skills of plain and fancy sewing, passed on through generations of mothers, grandmothers, and teachers (including nuns), were being produced and appraised within formal environments such as craft exhibitions, as well as

⁵³⁴ In March 1810, an article in the *Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions and Politics*, approved a mixed media embroidery known as ‘fancy work.’ Cited in Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 169.

⁵³⁵ Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 114. Isaacs provides a useful overview of needlecraft traditions in Australia and will be referenced frequently throughout this chapter.

remaining an entrenched part of female school curricula. Yet within the average domestic private sphere, those skills gradually reduced in breadth by the 1950s, and it was this trend that altered glory box production.

During the 1930-1960 period, all the Australian-born women interviewed were still taught needlecraft skills. Throughout these three decades, women continued to be taught to sew, embroider and knit⁵³⁶ by mothers, grandmothers, and at school. But over time, less emphasis was placed in general on fancywork and crochet. There were also the degrees of pleasure, opportunity and motivation in the producing of needlework which varied from woman to woman, and which dictated what was included in their glory boxes, and the meaning the glory box ultimately had for them. A decade by decade analysis of the testimony of a sample of Australian-born women, as well as reference to school curricula and popular media, reveals how these trends shifted over thirty years. The focus here is on handcrafts, rather than items made on a sewing machine. The women interviewed reflected little on their sewing machine production, and according to Gwenda Mutimer, 'a lot of girls' mothers didn't have a machine.'⁵³⁷ But presumably much home clothing production was being done on home sewing machines.⁵³⁸

During the 1930s there was a greater emphasis on attaining a variety of expertise with a needle, whether it was sewing, crochet or knitting, and the

⁵³⁶ As knitted goods were not central to glory box production, knitting will not be explored further here.

⁵³⁷ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁵³⁸ In France sales of sewing machines peaked in the 1950s and dropped sharply in the 1960s; the Singer Company put this down to the decline women's sewing skills, with similar trends in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Judith G. Coffin, "Consumption, Production, and Gender: The Sewing Machine in Nineteenth Century France" in Frader and Rose, *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, 139-140. The importing of cheaper ready-made clothing may also have contributed.

parallel emphasis on hand-made items for the glory box at this time. Ester Rose, BS, Thelma Drummond and May Vertigan all collected for their boxes during the 1930s, and concur that they focused more on their fancywork and less on purchased goods. Certainly they had little disposable income and they took great pride in their sewing achievements. Mothers and grandmothers also featured in the teaching of these skills.

Ester Rose learned how to sew and embroider from her grandmother, with simple sewing also taught at school. Ester started making items in her mid teens for about two years before getting engaged. She recalls that 'her grandmother was clever with her hands and I think she nudged me on a little bit.'⁵³⁹ She knitted, crocheted, and only never learnt tatting (shuttle lace) because she had no one to teach her. **(Figure 1)** Ester's mother's minimal involvement in her instruction was due to her lack of time, which was frequently spent patching the men's work trousers.⁵⁴⁰ This inability of mothers to give their daughters focused attention in relation to their glory boxes, and needlework skills in particular, is a common observation and was discussed in Chapter Three. Judith Howard's mother May Vertigan was also taught sewing by her grandmother but gained her embroidery skills elsewhere, probably at school and from amongst the skill pool of her numerous sisters: 'Mother's box (was) a mix of things she made and bought...or her sisters had helped her make. I know they made pillowcases and things like that themselves and embroidered them and so on. They were very keen embroiderers.'⁵⁴¹ May displayed a real aptitude for needlework and took pleasure in producing and occasionally experimenting with styles. **(Figure 2)** Her daughter Judith recalls:

⁵³⁹ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Judith Howard, 2005.

My mother was very good at handcrafts and she did a lot of embroidery and that sort of thing and I've got most of a duchesse set...she's crocheted around one and tatted around the next one! But that would be her, that would be what she would do, just a little variety you know?⁵⁴²

Thelma Drummond, on the other hand, was taught to sew by her highly skilled mother, who also taught the daughters of her friends. She learnt sewing, embroidery, and knitting, and commented that she received little useful instruction at school. Thelma also learnt sewing skills from her time as a tailoring apprentice.⁵⁴³ **(Figure 3)** BS learnt the basics at school and taught herself the rest as, like Ester, her mother was too busy to teach her. BS could sew, embroider, and knit, but not crochet. She remembers her mother bemoaning that the seams on the flannel shirt she made for her father as a young girl would give him blisters they were so rough.⁵⁴⁴ Mothers certainly demanded a basic competence in their daughters' needlework skills – it was a requisite female skill for all young women throughout these decades. Another Melbourne woman, Esther A., learnt her fine skills from an aunt and remembers:

Some of my work... if I do say so myself was beautiful because it was almost the same on the reverse side as it was on the front...I did some French knots to make roses...I don't think Mum could do fancywork to save her life...I did learn to crochet, an aunt taught me and another aunt taught me how to knit.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

⁵⁴⁴ BS, 2003.

⁵⁴⁵ Esther A. (no surname disclosed), 2005.

While all these women agreed that they were not being taught to sew specifically for their glory boxes, certainly much of their energy went into producing items for this purpose. This was the Depression when a little money had to go a long way. It was also the period before ready-to-wear when it became cheaper after the 1950s to buy clothes than make them. For these women of the 1930s, producing clothing and other textile items themselves was the viable option, fostering a climate of sewing, embroidering, reworking and reusing.

Kath Davis, a little younger than these women, acts as a bridge between the two generations, collecting and embroidering from the late 1930s till 1944. She still fits within the mould of highly skilled, highly productive women who emphasised the hand-made as part of her box, but she also enjoyed accumulating the purchased goods. Her grandmother started her off on hand sewing while she learnt the rest from the nuns at school. Kath could crochet, embroider, knit, sew, everything except tatting (her grandfather gave her a shuttle but, like Ester Rose, she had no one to teach her). Her mother played no role in her sewing instruction, and Kath describes her as 'useless' at those things. Moreover, the nuns (traditionally highly proficient and often prolific needleworkers) instructed the girls in fancywork, not simply for their own edification but also to produce wares throughout the year for the annual fundraising fete. According to Kath, they encouraged and extended those girls, like her, who were keen to learn and demonstrated particular aptitude, 'so I was allowed to sew petticoats and nighties and that, all sewn by hand, all the seams and hems and everything and I didn't have to tack a lot of my things...because I could do it, I could go ahead at my own pace.'⁵⁴⁶ **(Figure 4)**

⁵⁴⁶ Kath Davis, 2003.

The next group of women were collecting during the 1940s and marrying in the late 1940s, and the changing trends were becoming evident. While all were taught to sew, the learning of the finer points of embroidery and other needlework skills varied from woman to woman, but all with a lessening in its importance. Only one of the Australian-born women interviewed was taught to crochet for example. Gwenda Mutimer was taught to knit, sew and embroider by her mother, whom she describes as good at sewing, and at school.⁵⁴⁷ Gwenda recalls her first knitting lesson with her mother, revealing her own early abilities as well as a mother's patience and pride:

First (knitting) lesson was some wool and two pencils and...when I got to the end of the line I didn't know how to turn around...Mum must have nearly wanted to kill me but she was very patient and I mastered it. But I can remember a little frock...and I turned up the hem around it and I might have been five or six...and I can remember her showing it to her friends and saying 'Look what Gwenda's done at the age of five!'⁵⁴⁸

Nevertheless, Gwenda's aptitude faded a little as she grew older. Her inability to crochet and perhaps a little lack of interest, resulted in her mother finishing many a supper cloth for her.⁵⁴⁹ Daisy Chapman mostly learnt her skills at school, by watching her mother and later by sewing with her fiancé's mother. Her skills included fancywork, sewing, mending, and darning, an emphasis on the more pragmatic aspects of needlecraft. Needlework skills and interests varied within and between families, as did how skills were learned. There was no rule that if one sister crocheted, all did. For example, Daisy enjoyed

⁵⁴⁷ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

fancywork, her sister Wyn liked to knit, while sister Lena produced no needlework at all: 'I did more fancywork and things like that than Lena or Wyn. Wyn was more for knitting which I didn't like knitting very much in those days. I'd rather do the needlework. I don't think Lena did any needlework.'⁵⁵⁰ Unusually, Daisy's brother taught her to knit.⁵⁵¹ Dot Mitchell was taught the basics by a neighbour, primarily to make her own clothes and she also knitted a great deal; but she did not produce any fancywork.⁵⁵² Val Sheehan, one of Dot's younger sisters, learnt basic sewing and knitting at school and did a little fancywork, demonstrating the absence of any consistency in sibling needlecraft competence.⁵⁵³ Close friends Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips did learn to sew, embroider and knit and produced a substantial amount of fancywork for their glory boxes. Nancy was taught at Box Hill Technical College in Melbourne's east and by a neighbouring dressmaker, while Dorothy learnt fancywork from her aunt (a dressmaker) and at college with Nancy.⁵⁵⁴ **(Figure 5)**

The final group of Australian-born women were those who married in the 1950s and the cultural shifts continued. Fancywork was in decline and crochet continued to be a waning skill (although patterns in magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* indicate that crochet regained some popularity in the 1960s as a dressmaking skill). Joan Skate's mother taught her to knit and darn and she attended night classes to learn to sew. She produced only a little fancywork,⁵⁵⁵ as did Marjorie Cope, younger sister of Dot Mitchell and Val Sheehan, who learnt basic sewing at school and knitting from a local gardener

⁵⁵⁰ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Dot Mitchell, 2003.

⁵⁵³ Val Sheehan, 2003.

⁵⁵⁴ Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

⁵⁵⁵ Joan Skate, 2003.

in Coldstream.⁵⁵⁶ Marjorie's fancywork collection consisted mainly of pieces given to her by her fiancé's sister (who was almost 20 years older than Marjorie and a prolific embroiderer). Betty Phillips and Ruby Kwijas were taught embroidery and sewing at school, although Ruby describes herself as being poor at it and she did not produce any fancywork. They both learnt to knit from their mothers.⁵⁵⁷ Ruby confesses that she sewed mainly to adjust the clothes she had purchased, or to hem tablecloths: 'I could straight sew but useless with a pattern...I wasn't good at it (embroidery). I could never get it nice and neat like it ought to be.'⁵⁵⁸ Beth Taw's mother did teach her daughter embroidery and drawn thread work as well as knitting, but by this time it was more unusual. She learnt sewing at school and finer work at technical college.⁵⁵⁹ Loris Peggie, producing for her own and her aunts' glory boxes throughout the late 1940s and 1950s believes that her desire and aptitude to sew probably evolved from a domestic environment which was full of needlecraft: 'My mother was always a knitter and sewer, she more or less made clothing for all of her sisters' kids...I think she belonged to Red Cross too, where women were always knitting or working for disadvantaged families or during the war for the soldiers.'⁵⁶⁰

(Figure 6)

Women in the mid-twentieth century were at the tail-end of an evolution of domestic embroidery which had seen it evolve over centuries from a public, non-gendered and artistic pursuit to a domesticated female leisured activity by the end of the nineteenth century. Victorian morality required that such work be also useful, creating an environment of comfort and stability for the family, or it would be derided as simply busywork. Parker has argued in her study of

⁵⁵⁶ Marjorie Cope, 2003.

⁵⁵⁷ Betty Phillips and Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁵⁵⁸ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁵⁵⁹ Beth Taws, 2003.

⁵⁶⁰ Loris Peggie, 2005.

the historical connection between embroidery and femininity, that by the nineteenth century 'embroidery and femininity were entirely fused, and the connection was deemed to be natural. Women embroidered because they were naturally feminine and were feminine because they naturally embroidered.'⁵⁶¹ The ongoing encouragement of needle skills in women is evident with schools consistently remaining the key sites for needlework education for girls. In 1913, the Victorian Education Department's *Education Gazette* noted that 'the foundations of Needlecraft are still established in the Primary School,'⁵⁶² a situation which seemed to have changed little by the 1930s. Around the same time in England, Parker argues that curriculum projects and teacher training continued to designate embroidery as a girls' activity,⁵⁶³ thus making embroidery one 'signifier of sexual difference.'⁵⁶⁴ This connecting of girls and domestic skills such as sewing was certainly the case in Australia well into the 1950s and even 1960s, where the increasing post-war demand on secondary education resulted in the traditional streaming of girls into domestic and commercial classes, as had been the case in pre-war primary education. Johnson refers to a 1956 Australian Council of Education Research study to illustrate this point, which focused on the educational requirements of an outer eastern Melbourne suburb. The report states that domestic education was essential for girls in order to 'give all of them as high a level of skill as possible in homemaking.'⁵⁶⁵ She argues in a point that crosses public and private education:

⁵⁶¹ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 11.

⁵⁶² "Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid," April, 1913, quoted in Home Economics Teachers' Group, *Retrospect. Home Economics 1899-1974* (Melbourne: n.p., 1974), 8.

⁵⁶³ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 202.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁶⁵ "The Shire of Ferntree Gully and its Educational Future," Australian Council of Education Research (Melbourne: 1956), 44-45, quoted in Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, 70.

The report reflected community expectations about the gendered nature of the vocational destinies of young people in the early 1950s. Yet, at the same time, in their proposals about the education of young women, such documents need to be seen as productive of precisely those gendered patterns of achievement, needs and interests.⁵⁶⁶

By the 1950s, domestic education for all girls was part of an ideology of a modern domesticity for young women who would become wives and mothers.⁵⁶⁷ Thus girls received basic needlework training before 'leaving' age to arm them with the fundamentals, while domestic art schools, home economics colleges and private dressmaking classes catered for the girls of families who could afford private tuition fees, who had completed at least their leaving certificate, and who were being trained for domestic life or genteel employment.⁵⁶⁸ For example, by 1931, the premier domestic college for young women in Melbourne, Emily McPherson College (1906-1979), had broadened its traditional pool of more well-off students to offer more short sewing courses. The fee was a more affordable ten or 15 shillings and courses offered a range of subjects which covered, describes James Docherty, 'almost every aspect of clothing, ranging from a bride's trousseau to garments for children.'⁵⁶⁹ A couple of the women interviewed refer to attending dressmaking classes after leaving school at 15, and such courses only increased in general popularity during the 1940s (Emily McPherson College recording nearly one thousand evening dressmaking class enrolments in 1947⁵⁷⁰). However, many young women made

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁶⁷ Argument made by Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, 82-83.

⁵⁶⁸ See James Docherty, 'The Emily Mac.' *The Story of the Emily McPherson College 1906-1979* (Melbourne: Ormond Book & Educational Supplies, Pty., Ltd., 1981) and Lyndsay Gardiner, *A Woman's Place. A History of the Homecraft Hostel* (South Melbourne, Victoria: Hyland House Publishing Pty., Ltd., 1993).

⁵⁶⁹ Docherty, *The Emily Mac*, 14.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 157.

do with the primary and lower secondary school instruction, which they frequently describe as 'the basics,' for their private domestic production. The other important distinction to be made here is that all the aforementioned post-secondary school needlecraft training tended to focus on sewing, dressmaking and mending, rather than fancywork, which was not listed amongst the curricula.

Kath Davis, at school during the late 1920s to mid 1930s, remembers that the nuns taught embroidery at lunchtime for those Grade Five students who were ready. Kath made piles of doilies, duchesse sets and tablecloths for raising funds at her convent. Catholic school convents, such as the Loreto order, had a long history of instructing their female pupils in domestic arts such as needlework.⁵⁷¹ So from an early age, Kath was learning to make traditional glory box items even before the idea of the glory box was in her consciousness.⁵⁷² **(Figure 7)** In this instance, needlecraft production was also a symbol of good works and citizenship, a common activity at innumerable fetes and bazaars being run by churches and denominational schools.

Loris Peggie, who commenced needlecraft at home from the late 1940s, was pushed to extend herself academically by her mother. Mrs Peggie therefore limited the domestic classes Loris was allowed to take at school:

I was really cross at school, I was really keen to do decorative embroidery at school and she would never let me do it, I had to do French and Mathematics...At school we did a bit (of embroidery) in the early years but in the later years the girls did quite a lot of different

⁵⁷¹ Gardener, *A Woman's Place*, 3-4.

⁵⁷² Kath Davis, 2003.

things that I'd loved to have had a go at but of course I was doing a professional course instead of a domestic course.⁵⁷³

Loris' enthusiasm and application was, in comparison to the stories told by other women, becoming more the exception than the rule by the 1950s and it is perhaps ironic, that after all the work she put into her own glory box and those of her young aunts, she was the one never to marry.

Women who migrated to Australia after World War II brought a range of experiences that both complemented and contrasted with the experiences of the dominant Anglo-Celtic cultural population. As has been seen in previous chapters, Greek and Italian mothers played a vital role in their daughters' glory boxes and, in some cases, the attaining of their needlecraft skills. Irene Soumilas from Lefkas in Greece learned her skills from her mother as well as receiving more formal training. In the 1950s, she did a pattern-making and sewing course in Athens. Irene made a few embroidered items for her glory box but most of the items were either made by her mother or were commissioned from the expert needlecraft women in the town:

I learnt to do skirts, to make skirts and some dresses for my little cousin, even a coat...but I went to Athens when I was 15 I think and I learnt...pattern-making and some sewing and then when I went back, with the help of my mother, I was sewing. But she was a dressmaker you see, she was a dressmaker and if I was stuck she was helping me you see.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ Loris Peggie, 2005.

⁵⁷⁴ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

Like many women in Australia and overseas, Irene's needlework skills leaned towards the practical rather than the decorative. Dina Sartinas from northern Greece started collecting for her glory box in the early 1950s at around 12 years of age. She learned sewing and embroidery at school, continued to teach herself and was a member of a local embroiderers' guild. She also extended her skills through working for her father in the family tailoring business. Her mother was a weaver but did not pass on the skill to her daughter.⁵⁷⁵ Nor did Josephine Carey's mother Francesca, who was also a self-taught weaver in her Calabrian village in southern Italy. It was a skill that does not appear frequently amongst the women interviewed but which played an important role in the glory boxes of some regional areas in Greece and Italy.⁵⁷⁶ **(Figures 8A & 8B)**

Edda Azzola in northern Italy spent much of her time during the 1940s and 1950s producing clothes on the family knitting machine, but she still managed to squeeze in time to produce a few embroidered items, using the skills her mother had taught her. Aside from time, it was also a matter of individual taste and ability and she comments:

That depends on the person, somebody likes knitting, crochet...embroidering, depends but it was all basic stuff for all the girls at that time. Because... in my family my mother teach us a bit of everything you know...In the family mums mostly doing those things.⁵⁷⁷

While Margot Veltkamp's early sewing skills were learned at school in The Hague during the 1930s, her dressmaking skills were taught on the job when she worked for a dressmaker after leaving school in 1940 at the standard age of

⁵⁷⁵ Dina Sartinas, 2007.

⁵⁷⁶ Josephine Carey, 2005.

⁵⁷⁷ Edda Azzola, 2006.

15: 'I was 12 years when I finished primary school and I went three (more) years to school and I learnt cooking and washing and embroidering and sewing. And I liked sewing...I was always sewing.' Margot also learned embroidery:

I mainly embroidered tablecloths...Most of the time it was like printed on it...I have matching small serviettes...You did mainly cross-stitch...And fairly often if there was no lace on the edges I would put lace...I'm not fiddly you know, I like straightforward. I had a girlfriend who had little roses on all her underwear and I really could not be bothered.⁵⁷⁸

Most of the Australian-born and migrant women interviewed speak of garnering their needlework skills as an automatic process involving varying degrees of enjoyment and artistry. In Ireland, this assumption of knowledge in domestic crafts harks back at least to the mid-nineteenth century when formal education in the National Schools system emphasised domestic skills for girls who were trained in various types of plain sewing and making clothes. This often complemented what they were taught at home, some with the aim to supplement the family income through decorative embroidery, and certainly for the accumulation of items for the 'bottom drawer.'⁵⁷⁹ By the 1950s, the emphasis had shifted at least for many Irish girls in urban centres and Maureen King, who migrated from Dublin, Ireland in 1956, describes her complete lack of interest in sewing skills that were not for pragmatic purposes:

⁵⁷⁸ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁵⁷⁹ The development of women's needlecraft skills and their application to the glory box throughout the nineteenth century is discussed in Ballard, *Forgetting Frolic*, 2-3.

I didn't learn how to embroider or crochet...The basic things, you did sewing classes at primary school and you learned how to do top stitch, back stitch, tucking stitch...You always find there were some people who were creative minded and wanted to go on and produce beautiful things but I think a lot didn't...You see I was a city girl and you can buy anything you want in the city can't you?⁵⁸⁰

Similarly, Betty McWade from Belfast never learned to embroider, her skills were practical sewing skills but she regretted her lack of creative ability. She reflects that 'I often wished I could do that...I'd say one of these days I'll get round to doing embroidery...We learnt to sew at school...very practical.'⁵⁸¹ However, Joan Cox learnt both basic sewing, darning and knitting skills at school in Dublin and also embroidery from her sister which she took up with great enthusiasm: 'I made lots of tray cloths and tea cosies and tablecloths and little items like that...I'd have been about 14 I think when I started knitting and then I started the embroidery and I just loved it.'⁵⁸² **(Figure 9)**

Consequently, there are no hard and fast rules about the degree of needlecraft skills women acquired and demonstrated both in Australia and in migrant countries of origin. School was the common denominator in needlecraft instruction. Mothers frequently taught the basics and occasionally, where they had their own particular expertise and interest, passed on more advanced embroidering skills. But a common observation was that mothers were too busy running households, raising children, making ends meet and giving their daughters other domestic duties, to have the time or inclination for instruction. Italian and Greek mothers were busy accumulating glory box collections along

⁵⁸⁰ Maureen King, 2006.

⁵⁸¹ Betty McWade, 2006.

⁵⁸² Joan Cox, 2008.

with their myriad household or other work duties, but not necessarily passing on needlework skills to their daughters. Also, sewing and knitting skills were generic and applied to making, altering and repairing clothes, during a time when it was still cheaper to make than to purchase. But embroidery and crochet had a more specific application, and this is where glory box activity particularly came into its own (true also of the Dutch and Irish women interviewed). Yet it was these fancywork skills that were on the wane in Australia into the 1950s, signalling, at least amongst women of Anglo-Celtic descent, the gradual decline of the hand-made glory box tradition.

4.4 'All Girls Should Sew:' Needlecraft and Social Expectations

Any girl who couldn't run up a couple of doilies, she was not going to be a good housewife. (Gwenda Mutimer, sewing for her glory box during the 1940s)⁵⁸³

The ambivalent nature of the glory box tradition (seen previously while discussing notions of femininity, modernity and consumption), is also evident when discussing needlecraft practices at this time. Magazines continued to laud the hand-made, while encouraging consumer activity. Both hand-production and consumption remained tied to female identity, with consumption in the ascendancy into the 1950s, yet the two values coexisted quite comfortably within the glory box tradition. Primary and lower secondary school curricula maintained needlecraft as an essential female skill throughout the period. Yet even with the increasing sophistication of domestic technologies, women's leisure time was actually decreasing, particularly as numbers of women in paid employment increased, reducing time for needlecraft. Within this environment of changing and mixed social messages, glory box practices persevered.

While the trends gradually changed, this 1930s-1950s period still held that at the very least, basic needlecraft skills for women were fundamental, whether for their glory box or for general domestic life skills. But as far as the glory box went, women were sewing ultimately to wed. As Gwenda Mutimer comments, 'you only did it because of the expectations of getting married, there had to be an incentive...it was the nesting instinct to start up your own home, have your own things...it didn't last long but it was nice while it lasted...Everyone did

⁵⁸³ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

it.’⁵⁸⁴ It was this preoccupation with building highly crafted needlework for glory box collections that puzzled some recent migrants such as Maureen King from Dublin, who arrived in Melbourne in 1956: ‘I found there was more emphasis in Australia on the hand-worked things, the embroidered tablecloths and pillowcases and that sort of thing than there was in Dublin.’⁵⁸⁵ There is no doubt that social expectation was placed upon Irish women to marry, but their young adulthood in urban Ireland does not appear to have been preoccupied with that future through producing needlework for married domesticity.

On the other hand, as has been demonstrated, the mothers of girls in Italy and Greece were focused on glory box building on their daughters’ behalf, with fine embroidery being acquired from an early age via the work of their own hands or that of women commissioned for the task. These women sewed and knitted to clothe themselves and others, and they sewed and embroidered for their daughters’ glory boxes. Both undertakings were necessary to save money and to accumulate quality property. For some women, there was also a display of pleasure and creativity in the artistry of their fine stitching, complexity of the designs, and the time expended to produce expert results.

When to Sew:

Class and fine needlecraft have been linked frequently over the centuries in Europe, whereby the quantity of embroidery a woman could produce was inextricably connected to the amount of leisure time she had, and frequently, her marital value. If economic circumstances necessitated that a woman had to work for a living to support herself and/or her family, or to undertake domestic household chores, then her leisure time must have been severely restricted.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Maureen King, 2006.

Only the wealthy or at least, the genteel, could afford such a luxury. European traditions of the quantity and quality of collections and their absolute connection to a woman's marriageability were discussed in the Introduction. In nineteenth-century England, it has been argued that a growth of gentility was linked in part to an increase in the middle classes, where people were living 'genteely' on small incomes just above the survival threshold. This in turn led to expenditure on modest luxury items such as linen and manchester, one of the boom manufacturing products of the industrial era in England. Young has argued:

The material world was a critical element of genteel practice. Gentility stimulated the power of the Industrial Revolution, with its immense extension of goods to people who could not previously afford such items as individual china tablewares, fabrics for domestic use and decoration, and small metalwares like cutlery and jewellery.⁵⁸⁶

As discussed earlier, there is a connection here between the development of the glory box tradition in Australia, and industrialisation influencing the nature of the contents of Australian glory box contents. A high quality glory box could represent gentility as there was the time and the means to create it. Fancywork was just that – a time consuming, skilled embellishment which provided evidence of both expertise and leisure. This was in contrast to spinning and weaving the basic cloth or sewing for utilitarian outputs such as clothing. New middle-class definitions of home, family and the associated gendered value system surrounding domesticity which evolved in England during the

⁵⁸⁶ Young, *Middle Class Culture*, 88.

nineteenth century, may indeed have influenced the nature of dowry development. Fletcher observes:

Most women in affluent circumstances in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century were fairly accomplished needlewomen and with time on their hands white work provided them with occupation – tea cloths, tea cosies, pillow shams and counterpanes all received their enthusiastic efforts, though with varying degrees of success.⁵⁸⁷

As the focus of women's lives became increasingly focused on the home, this may have indirectly created a culture of glory box production as an individual female pursuit, requiring some leisure time, domestic skills and a focus on homemaking. These were all values which were transported to Australia throughout the nineteenth century.⁵⁸⁸

By the 1930s, oral history testimony indicates that the Australian-born, working and lower middle-class, unmarried women who could find private time, did certainly produce more embroidered goods if they were so inclined. Yet most were producing their fancywork despite a lack of leisure time. While women's testimonies constantly allude to the limitations on their spare time, there are references in women's magazines to leisure available to women and how they could fill it. On pages filled with stamped patterns for supper cloths and tablecloths are article titles such as 'Holiday Needlework for Your Box. In those leisure hours to come make yourself this enchanting set.'⁵⁸⁹ **(Figure 10)** These

⁵⁸⁷ Marion Fletcher, *Needlework in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49.

⁵⁸⁸ A discussion of the evolution of middle-class morality and the positioning of women occurs throughout Young, Linda, *Middle Class Culture*. This notion of a new consumerism in the nineteenth century which entrenched the gender domestic divide was discussed further in Chapter Two.

⁵⁸⁹ *Australian Women's Weekly*, 'Home Maker Section,' 16 November 1935, 41.

articles and many others which do not specifically refer to the glory box, were clearly appealing, not just to single girls building boxes, but also to married women still beautifying their homes or creating pieces for shows. For example: 'so that your home will grow more charming – your 'box' for the home-to-be, more beautiful!'⁵⁹⁰ Yet oral testimony spanning the three decades has reflected on mothers producing little if any fancywork. Informants in Bell's *Generations* describe the constant activity of rural women in the first decades of the twentieth century in terms of needlecraft, but the outputs were more staple than fancy: 'They were always sewing, knitting, crocheting or making something for the family. They made for themselves and were so self-sufficient. They made their own clothes, tea-towels, curtains, hemmed up the sheets, pot-holders and tea-cosies.'⁵⁹¹ Undoubtedly, class, family income, size of family, skill and inclination all influenced the continuation of fancywork production post-marriage, but amongst the families of the working class women interviewed, it was uncommon.

In terms of the quality and quantity of needlework produced to fill glory boxes, interviews suggest little social pressure on this front. Young women seemed to make what they could with the skills they had. Nevertheless, there are references to mothers displaying boxes which certainly implies a degree of pride, status and confidence in the goods on show.⁵⁹² Moreover, there is at least one example of a degree of implied gentility and status in one of the Italian cases where the daughters of a more well-off family were 'privileged' enough not to have to work on the farm, freeing up time for producing items for the

⁵⁹⁰ *Australian Women's Weekly*, 16 February 1935, 31. Other examples are given in the next section in reference to the overlap of needlework produced for private and public purposes.

⁵⁹¹ Emmeline Lahey quoted in Bell, *Generations*, 76-77.

⁵⁹² Thelma Drummond, BS, Gwenda Mutimer and Kath Davis all refer to such displays, 2003.

'dote.'⁵⁹³ Also described by some women was the European tradition of producing items in set amounts (such as sixes or twelves), which some women suggest reflected a family's economic circumstances.⁵⁹⁴

So for many working class and lower middle-class women of this generation, leisure time was limited and snatching a moment to sew for their boxes could be challenging. This was also due to the fact that leisure options were increasing and time and funds for popular pastimes such as going to the pictures and to dances were competing with time to sew and embroider. The most commonly referred to opportunities for needlecraft were on the train to and from work, and while listening to the radio in the evening at home. As Melbourne's suburbs spread, rail routes extended, and increasing numbers of working women commuted, train travel became a significant opportunity for leisure activities. Thelma Drummond, Loris Peggie, Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips all recall the two hours spent on the train every day to and from work from Melbourne's outer east as an important time for getting fancywork or knitting done, as well as comparing work and exchanging patterns. This point was also discussed in Chapter Three. Loris Peggie describes a substantial piece which took years to complete, mainly produced on the train:

I started on a big project then, I made a cloth, a crochet cloth for a full size table when I was going to work in Melbourne. In the train I just crocheted medallions that made up a cloth...I still have that too...It was a big project, that probably took me five or six years...I did do small things (fancywork items) in between.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ This story is described later in this section, Rose Patti, 2005.

⁵⁹⁴ This custom was cited by Dutch and Italian women, and is referred to in the Sicilian context by Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure" in Kaplan, *The Marriage Bargain*, 83.

⁵⁹⁵ Loris Peggie, 2005.

Moreover, this was the era of radio in Australia, a key domestic pastime, with its purely audio nature enabling women to sew, knit and embroider while they listened with the family to the evening programs. Australia first began radio broadcasting in 1923, and the large furniture-like radio sets quickly became the focal point of the living room.⁵⁹⁶ During the 1940s and 1950s, the popularity of radio soared.⁵⁹⁷ Programming targeting women increased after the war, including cookery and 'women's interest' shows, as well as the extremely popular soap operas, radio plays and audience participation programs.⁵⁹⁸ This private, individual and domestic nature of radio as leisure pursuit (prior to the portable transistors of the 1950s) suited the very nature of glory box needlework production, as sitting indoors, listening and sewing were a string of complementary activities. Daisy Chapman recalls of the 1940s:

We didn't go out much of a night neither, went out weekends perhaps or something, but during the week you're home so you had to do something, and you'd listen to the radio, so while you're listening to a radio you're sewing...I didn't sew at night with the machine because Dad used to like to listen to the radio.⁵⁹⁹

During the war young women were also sewing and knitting for the relief effort, yet another task competing for glory box production time. Darian-Smith observes that 'in general, working-class voluntary contributions were structured around the workplace as women knitted during lunch-breaks or

⁵⁹⁶ Rob Lynch and A. J. Veal, *Australian Leisure* (South Melbourne, Victoria: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty., Ltd., 1996), 74.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78

⁵⁹⁸ Colin Jones, *Something in the Air. A History of Radio in Australia* (Kenthurst, New South Wales: Kangaroo Press Ltd, 1995), 52 and 109.

⁵⁹⁹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

held competitions to raise war donations.’⁶⁰⁰ The activity was encouraged by the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, which by 1945 enjoyed a circulation rate of 650,000,⁶⁰¹ and strongly promoted knitting for the front even when frontline feedback indicated that innumerable socks were not proving useful to the soldiers. Dennis O’Brien notes:

The Weekly was almost obsessively preoccupied with hand-knitted socks as a war weapon. Even after a Comforts Fund official returned from a visit to the troops in the Middle East and told the magazine that Australian women were wasting their time hand-knitting socks...it continued carrying patterns for socks, scarves and balaclavas and trying to spearhead a phalange of needles.⁶⁰²

Nevertheless, the *Weekly* persevered with its equating of knitting with women’s critical role as national morale booster and patriot by exclaiming:

How about the knitting standard you set yourself of one pair of socks a week? There’s been a suspicious slither of silk and satin behind the clatter of the knitting needles lately...New underwear you must have. You’ll feel last year’s winter suit looks less shabby if you know it covers something new and exotic in peach satin and lace. But don’t put so much handwork into them and don’t steal your knitting time for your personal sewing...You may only be an obscure, unheard-of worker, but if you’re doing it well you are, metaphorically, draped in the Union Jack and the Australian flag with a gleaming sword in hand – a true patriot.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 56.

⁶⁰¹ O’Brien, *The Weekly*, 93.

⁶⁰² O’Brien, *The Weekly*, 81.

⁶⁰³ ‘What Sort of Patriot Are You?’ *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 27 July, 1940, 2.

Such advice, apparently directed at all women, was almost a request for young single women to pare back their glory box needlecrafting in favour of homefront knitting production. It may well have been a minor influence at this time, along with the scarcity of materials, on the gradual shift away from the hand-made to the more time-efficient ready-made goods. Crocheting a doily may have been regarded as frivolous when there were socks to knit, and a shortage of materials. What this also illustrates is the ongoing intertwining of plain and fancy sewing skills, both of which contributed to glory box production. But whether wartime demand, or the home economics courses discussed earlier, it was the plain sewing that proved the hardier survivor, at least into the 1950s.

Live-in work situations were another particular challenge for women trying to find time for themselves. BS tried to find time to sew in the 1930s, but her live-in laundry position meant that constant demands were made on her personal time. She states that the majority of her glory box needlework was done in the years on either side of this job which saw her working from dawn till dusk, well above and beyond the call of duty. But sometimes, if home minding her employers' children, she could do some sewing.⁶⁰⁴ For Ester Rose, at around the same time, glory box needlework required sewing at night by kerosene lamp. It was her only time to do it, she reflects, her only private time.⁶⁰⁵

Considering that Margot Veltkamp from Holland loved to sew and embroider, it is a miracle that she found time to undertake any needlework for her own pleasure and her glory box as she was the primary clothing supplier for her entire family in straitened circumstances after the war:

⁶⁰⁴ BS, 2003.

⁶⁰⁵ Ester Rose, 2003.

When I came home from work my mother had the sewing machine ready and I could start straightaway for the family. For five kids there was a lot of sewing to be done...But that was just after the war, that I started sewing for the whole family with the little material that we could get.⁶⁰⁶

Other migrant women, like their Australian-born counterparts, found that the convention for women to acquire skills to prepare glory box collections could be made difficult by conflicting pressures to work which restricted time available to produce fine needlework. It was a pressure not unfelt by other young women across cultural and national boundaries, to varying degrees. For example, Dina Sartinas in Greece made items for herself until she started working for her father and then she had no time at all, and her eyes were too tired for further sewing. She did make herself tablecloths, pillowcases, sheets, and jar covers by purchasing the items ready-made and then embroidered them herself from patterns, using different coloured threads and various stitches. Dina also did a little crochet but she found it was too time consuming when her own personal time was so limited. She believes that girls who were at home with their mothers and not working would have been producing a lot more for their 'prika.'⁶⁰⁷

These conflicting personal, social and familial expectations are nowhere demonstrated more powerfully than in the case of Carmel Tata's mother, growing up in Calabria in southern Italy during the 1930s and 1940s. Dominica Tripodi was given neither a glory box collection by her father (her mother died

⁶⁰⁶ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁶⁰⁷ Dina Sartinas, 2007.

when she was very young), nor the time and means to produce one for herself, until just before marrying in 1946. Carmel recounts:

My mother never learnt to embroider...the other girls in the village would be sent to the nuns and they'd do all their dowry, sew it all up but my grandpa wanted her to work so she didn't do it...(had her mother not died) she would have been sent to the nuns, (and) had a magnificent dowry. But my mother never learnt to embroider.⁶⁰⁸

Instead she had to augment the few items passed down to her from her mother's collection by commissioning an array of items. The business of her life was focused upon managing the family business and without a mother to play the traditional role of taking responsibility for her daughter's 'corredo,' Dominica's fell by the wayside.

On the other hand, Rose Patti's mother had a very different experience. As the daughter of a relatively affluent family, Gaetana Lazzara and her sisters in Sicily had the leisure time to focus on needlework production. Moreover, this was the gendered expectation that they remained at home undertaking domestic tasks while the men of the family conducted the business of working the farm. Rose states:

They had wonderful skills because what you can see here they have done themselves. They stayed at home, the girls, there was no social life, they certainly didn't work out of the home...because her dad ran this other cheese making firm, but they didn't have to go and work on the land as some women had to do, so they were considered privileged in that.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁸ Carmel Tata, 2006.

⁶⁰⁹ Rose Patti, 2005.

However, Carmela Palermo from Calabria describes having learned only rudimentary sewing skills, as she and her sisters were encouraged by her parents to complete their education. Whereas other girls who left school received sewing and embroidering tuition from the local nuns: 'The people who...no go to school, they go no further, they teaching embroidering and these things, but because I was studying (they) didn't teach us these things.'⁶¹⁰ This education was interrupted when Carmela suddenly accepted an arranged marriage offer at the age of 16.

Maureen King and Joan Cox suggest that in Ireland, urban living offered a plethora of leisure options as well as more ready-made items for the 'bottom drawer' which resulted in undermining the need for decorative needlework skills as well as tempting women to select alternative recreational options. Maureen observes:

I think perhaps people in the country (in Ireland) did it (needlework) because my friend Elizabeth (from Wexford), she is wonderful at crochet and embroidering and all that sort of thing...I think sometimes in the city things are so readily available to buy that you tend to put your time to different uses, you've got more entertainment and more different types of entertainment in the city than you would in the country.⁶¹¹

Her observation that more needlework seemed to be produced in regional areas is supported by examples of such an emphasis in regional Holland and even regional Victoria. Maureen's friend in Wexford had a substantial, embroidered collection, while Margot Veltkamp recalled her mother, who was from a rural

⁶¹⁰ Carmela Palermo, 2007.

⁶¹¹ Maureen King, 2006 and Joan Cox, 2008.

Dutch village, producing many traditional embroidered items, folk costumes in particular.⁶¹² Ellen Smoorenburg, also from a small Dutch village, produced a substantial amount of sewn and embroidered linens – she was a trained dressmaker but also, she recalls, there wasn't much else to do.⁶¹³ **(Figure 11)**

Nearly all the Australian-born and migrant women worked from the age of 14 or 15 (in Italy and Greece even earlier), in either salaried jobs, for family businesses, or on family properties. Leisure time was therefore limited, and some women's working day also extended into the evenings. For others, this was prime embroidering time, especially for those for whom social engagements were occasional, whether for financial, geographical or reasons of social restriction. Commuting to work, especially for women with some distance to travel, provided another critical space for women to sew, knit, embroider and crochet. The emerging pattern was that glory box production was generally inserted into the small spaces remaining after work, domestic and even wartime knitting demands. The more extensive and highly-worked a woman wished her collection to be, the more spaces she needed to find. In this, there lingered the nineteenth century cult of 'gentility' whereby premium leisure time was the preserve of the 'better off,' although by the 1950s, some of these women were also choosing recreational activities other than needlework. A review of more educated, middle-class women may even reveal a conscious rejection of fancywork production altogether in favour of other professional and social pursuits.

Nevertheless, there did exist contradictions in terms of notions of leisure time and the type and amount of needlework that was produced both before and

⁶¹² Maureen King and Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁶¹³ Ellen Smoorenburg, 2008.

after marriage. As has been seen, oral testimony mostly refers to limited spare time due to work and domestic commitments, while also describing their mothers as producing little needlework and often with no time to even teach their daughters the skills. Yet there were innumerable magazine articles published during these decades which promoted embroidery skills and supplied designs for glory boxes items, the marital home and for shows. **(Figure 12)** Obviously there were women producing quality needlework for suburban competitions and agricultural shows, as well as for fundraisers at fetes and bazaars. It was often serious business, and perhaps at times prioritised over household duties. But time was scarce for many working-class, single women, who left school at the age of 14, worked full-time, including on Saturdays, and assisted with home duties and child rearing. Still, the glory box collectors of the 1930s in particular were managing to produce extensive and highly- worked glory box goods. It comes down to a complex weaving of threads, involving class, female shifts in skills, interests and priorities, and consumer trends, the emphases of which changed from decade to decade.

Fancywork: Delight or Duress?:

Needlecraft, for women producing for their glory boxes, could mean artistry or utility, it could be central or peripheral to female identity, it could be representative of a collective community of female production, or an individual act of necessity. In general, the Australian-born women interviewed seemed to enjoy needlework and frequently speak of pleasure, pride and satisfaction in the work they produced for their boxes. This was particularly the case for the women undertaking fancywork during the 1930s. BS describes 'a great sense of achievement' when she finished a piece of fancywork.⁶¹⁴ The pure enjoyment of creating things could even mean not completing the item currently in progress.

⁶¹⁴ BS, 2003.

Kath Davis recalls when she was listening to the radio, she always wanted to be doing something with her hands: 'Every new piece of fancywork I bought I couldn't wait to get started on it, and couldn't wait to see it finished, and I'd perhaps buy something else before I'd finished one article and so it went on. It was just in me.'⁶¹⁵ Similarly, Ester Rose states that 'I've always loved sewing, using my hands' and remembers that she spent as much time as she could making things, and making them well: 'We were taught the back had to be as neat as the front.'⁶¹⁶ **(Figure 13)** Thelma Drummond embroidered a lot of pre-stamped cloths and took much pride in her work and she comments, as do many of the others, that 'Mum had a look at the back always to make sure the back looked as good as the front.'⁶¹⁷ This was the universal test of the proficiency of a piece of needlework.

Sisters Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope worked hard on the family farms in Barham (on the Victorian/New South Wales border) and Coldstream (outer eastern Melbourne) during the 1940s and 1950s. For them, sewing and knitting were a form of relaxation, an activity both for building their glory boxes, and for household sewing and mending. Val even took simple satisfaction in the creation of a doorstep for her box, a brick with a sewn cover: 'It wouldn't matter where you lived, you'd need a doorstep, there'd be a door that would need to be held in place. I made that early in the piece...that was in my glory box.'⁶¹⁸ For others at this time, the interest waned. Gwenda Mutimer recalls that when she was young her mother tried strategies to encourage completion, such as putting 'a threepence in the middle of the ball of wool...and that was how we got our threepence...in other words teaching us to start something, (and) to

⁶¹⁵ Kath Davis, 2003.

⁶¹⁶ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁶¹⁷ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

⁶¹⁸ Val Sheehan and Marjorie Cope, 2003.

finish it.’⁶¹⁹ This interest, or at least an attitude that needlecraft was an important skill to have and needlecraft an important creative product, could be instilled to more or lesser degrees by the mothers themselves. Again Gwenda provides an interesting observation about single young women in the 1940s:

I think most girls those days were more or less influenced by their mothers. If their mothers were needlewomen and did all those things and crocheted and made tea cosies and things, that’s where you got the inspiration, from your mother...you followed your mother’s lead up to a point and if your mother said to you ‘Don’t bother about those things, it’s a lot of wasted time’ you’d tend to think perhaps she’s right.⁶²⁰

Migrant women have similar experiences of likes and dislikes, pride and apathy. Irene Soumilas from Greek Lefkas took pleasure in producing simple embroidered items: ‘Oh yes, I can do that (embroidery). I used to do, you know because I liked it, I liked it but I didn’t have time to stay longer and do better. But I did cross stitches.’⁶²¹ On the other hand, Maureen King from Dublin found embroidery held no pleasure or satisfaction at all. What skills she had she applied to more practical outcomes such as dressmaking:

A lot of people did embroidery, they embroidered tablecloths and pillowcases but that wasn’t my bag at all!...You learnt sewing at school...you had to master all those stitches...And I did know how to do that...But I really wasn’t interested in sitting down at night embroidering. We did make our own clothes, if you were going to a dance, you’d buy a piece of material and run up a dress! ...And a lot of

⁶¹⁹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

women in Dublin were like that and they wouldn't have been happy to be sitting at home embroidering!⁶²²

However, fellow Dubliner Joan Cox did enjoy embroidering, sewing and knitting, and found time to embroider items of pre-stamped fancywork in between her greatest pleasure – ballroom dancing evenings.⁶²³ Margot Veltkamp from Le Hague also took great pleasure in the work she produced; while she enjoyed embroidery and did less knitting and crochet, her girlfriends far preferred to work with wool: 'I loved the needlework, I really did...(girlfriends) did more knitting...and crochet, I've never been good in crochet...jumpers, and tea cosies, things like that...even pot holders, they are crocheted, they did things like that. But not so much embroidering.'⁶²⁴

The vast majority of women interviewed took some degree of pleasure and satisfaction in the handcrafts in their glory boxes. For some it was a consuming pursuit, less about property accumulation for marriage and more about the genuine enjoyment of an artistic pursuit at which they excelled. For others, there was satisfaction in their skill and completing projects, a necessary pursuit enjoyed but hardly a preoccupation. And yet for the remaining few, it was a task undertaken under sufferance, with other social pursuits holding more attraction. But whether in Australia or elsewhere, these women seem to be in the minority. Needlework could be enjoyed, appreciated, valued, and of course required, and the glory box provided an outlet, a motivation for the pursuit, at least until the 1950s, when ready-made goods were in the ascendancy.

⁶²² Maureen King, 2006.

⁶²³ Joan Cox, 2008.

⁶²⁴ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

4.5 Patterns of Development: Styles, Designs and Delivery

Ready-to-Go Designs and Fabrics:

During the early nineteenth century, manufacturers began cashing in on the expanding domestic, amateur, female embroidering market. As Parker argues, there was an

unprecedented boom in mass-produced embroidery patterns in the early nineteenth century. Magazines, printers and craft suppliers exploited the place of embroidery in the creation of femininity and promoted particularly lucrative styles of embroidery; lucrative in the sense that they demanded lavish materials and patterns.⁶²⁵

Pattern books, published in England and Australia throughout the early twentieth century, continued to be popular, and included such titles as *Good Needlework*, *Australian Needlework* and *Needlecraft*. There were also the embroidery, knitting and crochet patterns and instructions available in the various women's magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly*, *Home Maker*, *New Idea* and *Australian Woman's Mirror* as well as English publications like *The English Women's Weekly*. Kingston observes that 'at any time from the 1870s right through to the 1930s, the women's magazines carried selections of patterns and advice for the manufacture of underwear and table linen in particular.'⁶²⁶ The Australian publications borrowed heavily from English and American designs, which emphasised designs for crochet and filet crochet work, but were distinctive in their frequent use of Australian native flora and fauna motifs. **(Figure 14)**

⁶²⁵ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 169.

⁶²⁶ Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann*, 102.

It was the 1930s that signalled the dramatic growth in production and availability of a product which simplified needlecraft and probably thereby broadened its reach to women with even the most rudimentary skills: fabric ready-stamped with designs. Isaacs states that 'the decades from 1930 on were marked with the free availability of mass-produced patterns from companies such as Semco and Myart and Madame Weigel's, with a vast array of humorous and ingeniously constructed woollen tea-cosies which could be crocheted or knitted.'⁶²⁷ Women then only needed to select their colours, for while the Semco cottons and calicos often suggested colours, women frequently experimented with their own palette according to taste, and master any stitches with which they were not familiar. Certainly, the doilies, table and supper cloths produced by the Australian-born women interviewed consisted primarily of such worked fabrics in coloured cottons.⁶²⁸

The convenience of these products allowed women to produce more, and more quickly, across the thirty year period. Loris Peggie describes her skills as competent but not original, and refers to her reliance on patterns in an almost self-critical way, as it did not require any individual creativity: 'I didn't do anything really creative that I designed myself...I did mainly Semco patterns.'⁶²⁹ Gwenda Mutimer, Thelma Drummond and Daisy Chapman also refer to the Semco 'transfers' they used to produce much of their fancywork.⁶³⁰ Some of the women interviewed, including Thelma Drummond, Loris Peggie and Joan Skate still have stamped fabrics which were only partially completed, or not started at all, as well as some coloured threads.⁶³¹ **(Figures 15A & 15B)** Semco

⁶²⁷ Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 53.

⁶²⁸ Isaacs suggests that this proliferation of traced cloths contributed to the decline in crochet fancywork, *The Gentle Arts*, 124.

⁶²⁹ Loris Peggie, 2005.

⁶³⁰ Gwenda Mutimer and Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁶³¹ Thelma Drummond and Joan Skate, 2003.

was a Melbourne company which produced its own threads as well as transfer designs (on paper and fabric), supplying them to drapery stores throughout Australia and New Zealand. It also published a series of instruction books, one of which assures that

‘Semco’ Art Needlework Books are like having a Needlework expert in your home, every stitch being clearly illustrated and explained fully. By means of Illustrated Instruction Sheets attached to our traced linen, we are endeavouring to guide Art Needleworkers in the completion of their work, and are ever ready to give further assistance, or advice, if so desired.⁶³²

The advent of these products, and the frequent reissuing of popular designs over the decades, may also explain the negligible change in designs evident in the women’s work over the thirty year period.⁶³³ Flower designs remained extremely popular, with frequent references to rose and lily designs. The native flora and fauna motifs and other more individual designs featured little amongst the work of the women interviewed, and the dominance of the stamped fabrics probably resulted in standardised designs. Nevertheless, not everyone was confined to the traced fabrics and some women also experimented with their own designs. Kath Davis, for example, was voracious in her enthusiasm and output and speaks of trying out her own patterns and colours.⁶³⁴ Nor should the ready-to-make evolution be interpreted as heralding

⁶³² ‘Semco’ *Art Needlework Instruction Book*, Revised Book No. 5 (Black Rock, Victoria: Semco Art Needlework Pty Ltd, Third Edition, 1950), 1.

⁶³³ This observation about the reuse of designs and patterns by companies such as Semco and Patons is made by Lee, “Our Fingers Were Never Idle,” 12. Lee provides a short overview of the history and production practices of Semco, 134-141.

⁶³⁴ Kath Davis, 2003.

a decline in skills or a lesser art form. But it does announce a shift in the nature of women's production, which would become increasingly evident after World War II, as the changing economy saw women start to purchase as much, if not more, than they made, and ready-to-wear became more popular than ready-to-sew.⁶³⁵

Types of stitches also seemed to change little over the thirty year period of this study. The following stitches, gleaned from the *Australian Women's Weekly* articles from the 1930s, are mentioned again and again by Australian women who were sewing and embroidering during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s: stem-stitch, satin stitch, spoke-stitch, cross-stitch, long-and-short-stitch, and crochet, buttonhole and lace edgings. These stitches were used to create and embellish a remarkable array of domestic textile ware, all which appear repeatedly throughout the period: duchesse sets (three-piece for dressing tables), doilies, tea and supper cloths, tablecloths, tea cosies, pot holders, jug covers, tray cloths, serviettes, luncheon sets, table centres, pillow shams, and aprons.

Many of these items relate to the English tradition of serving morning and afternoon tea which was brought to Australia and maintained with ceremony by serving refreshments on a backdrop of embroidered, crocheted and knitted handcrafts. Isaacs states that 'as the twentieth century progressed the most common 'kitchen craft' still practised by women was the ritual of making tea, which could well be described as the Australian Tea Ceremony.'⁶³⁶ Every cloth had a purpose, from providing a cover for a table, to a cover for a serving plate; from a cosy to keep the teapot warm, to napkins and even tiny finger cloths for dabbing at crumbs. All in anticipation of the tea rituals that would be carried

⁶³⁵ This theory was explored in Chapter Three.

⁶³⁶ Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 52.

out once these young women had their own kitchens and parlours. **(Figure 16)** Kath Davis had a piece of fancywork for every occasion and every possible use, worked in an array of coloured threads, in mostly floral designs. A whimsical blue and white checked scone holder demonstrates the degree to which the ritual of adornment extended – a piece of three dimensionality sitting proud amongst the flat table pieces, ready to be inserted into a bread basket. **(Figures 17 & 18)** Moreover, in a study of domestic interiors in northern New Mexico, Jean Hess discovered a well established set of aesthetic practices and values, the production of items of which is highly applicable to glory box material culture. Hess observes that

women often purchase or make decorations in twos or threes so that they can be arranged symmetrically...The balancing and clustering of objects seems to help control clutter, imposing order or potential chaos...doilies and cloths serve to mediate between objects, protecting one object (a table or cabinet) from another (a plant or lamp). The theme of mediation or protection is in turn elaborated into a theme of covering.⁶³⁷

These forms of adornment were also influenced by time, taste and skills. This notion that domestic textiles, even the simplest supper cloth, could mediate between objects, and even identify and unify a glory box collection once distributed throughout the marital home, does demonstrate the simultaneous ritualistic and pragmatic power of the domestic embroidery which persisted into the 1950s.

⁶³⁷ Jean E. Hess, "Domestic Interiors in Northern New Mexico." *Heresies*, 3: 30-3 (1981), quoted in Hunt, "Gender and the construction of home life" in Jackson and Moores, *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*, 308

Unlike patterns, fabrics did vary, primarily due to wartime rationing and the 1950s increase in synthetic materials. Quality white linens and cottons with embroidery worked in white (such as Mountmellick) remained highly prized and were deemed special occasion pieces.⁶³⁸ They were becoming less common as colour became the fashion, but women interviewed still produced such work occasionally and certainly continued to admire its beauty. References to 'working on white, cream, blue, yellow, pink or green linen' appear frequently in the *Australian Women's Weekly* during the 1930s,⁶³⁹ a trend which continues over the next two decades. Isaacs refers to 'the craze for colourful needlework and embroidery popularised in the Semco stamped d'oyleys, white embroidery and lace being regarded in the thirties as dull Victorian relics.'⁶⁴⁰ Wartime restrictions did limit the quality of fabric women could obtain. Nancy Briggs, Daisy Chapman and Gwenda Mutimer all remember that lace and white fabrics were hard to get and that white stamped ready fabrics were replaced with brown material, a most unpopular development. Gwenda presented her brown embroidered tablecloth during the interview with some reluctance.⁶⁴¹ **(Figure 19)**

Migrating Needlecraft Styles:

In terms of imported customs, migration to Australia resulted in the transporting of many centuries-old styles of needlecraft since the nineteenth century, frequently with similarities of technique across cultures. Traditions of bobbin, needle and crochet-hook lace-making, for example, were brought by English, Irish, Greek, Italian, Maltese, Spanish and French women.⁶⁴² With the

⁶³⁸ More on the development of domestic white-on-white work can be found in Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 174-75.

⁶³⁹ Such as *Australian Women's Weekly*, 'The Homemaker Section,' 28 January 1939, 6.

⁶⁴⁰ Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 90.

⁶⁴¹ Nancy Briggs, Gwenda Mutimer and Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁶⁴² This point is described in further detail by Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 99-103.

advent of machine-made lace, this intricate, time-consuming and highly skilled form of needlework was not making it into the glory boxes of Australian-born women of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Nor is there much evidence of mothers and daughters who migrated after World War II reproducing in Australia the work that was being traditionally produced in southern European villages. A combination of time-poverty, the disinclination of the daughters themselves in a 1950s Australian environment in which the intricate decorative hand skills were declining, and even the limitations of their mothers' own skills, saw their glory boxes as almost time capsules of cultural skills. The glory box collections brought to Australia, particularly from Italy, Greece and Malta, did contain the needlecraft work of generations, the styles of which could vary between regions within countries as well as across borders. It was the material culture preserving the traditions, rather than the ongoing activity itself.

These regional styles appeared in embroidery, weaving and other needlecraft forms. Irene Soumilas recalled that there were regional variations in needlework styles in Greece which would have influenced and identified the dowries produced. For example, according to Irene, the village women in the mountainous areas of Lefkas produced a particular type of embroidery and more traditional style of clothing: 'This kind of work (embroidery) they do it up in the villages...Up there...they used to wear different dresses, heavy, sort of their own outfits. But...we were brought up very modern, all sorts of things you know.'⁶⁴³ Margot Veltkamp remembers examples of regional needlecraft differences, particularly evident in regional folk costumes, the colours, stitches and techniques of which echoed in other forms of needlework as well:

⁶⁴³ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

You recognise a lot of the styles in paintings, in embroideries. They all have different costumes...People in the southern part of Holland...have carnivals and all that; they are different to the people in the north – in the south they are Catholic and in the north they are Protestant. Well not any more but it used to be like that. And I think it is kind of demonstrated in the costumes. More elaborate with lace...in the south...My mother came from (a fishing village in the south) but she never wore the costume. Her mother did.⁶⁴⁴

In Italy, regional areas are noted for particular techniques, styles and stitches, often reflecting the ancient history of the area. Examples of regional specialty included Sardinian appliqué work, Assisi work, Sicilian drawn threadwork and Venetian laces.⁶⁴⁵ Cross-stitch, a common stitch in Australia, was also popular across throughout mainland Italy. In southern Italy, regional needlecraft production extended to the whole process by which goods were purchased, embroidered and the skills passed on. Carmel Tata from a village in Calabria reflects:

Usually if you came from a line of a good embroiderer, then the grandmother would embroider...it was a family thing. And there were women (for whom) that was their livelihood, embroidering, and they had quite a reputation...But then it became something to be proud of that your daughter would be taught by these people. So you could either go to the little old lady that everyone admired or you could go to the

⁶⁴⁴ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁶⁴⁵ *La Dote: Preparing for a Family. The Importance of the dowry in Australian Italian life*, exhibition catalogue (Melbourne: Immigration Museum, Museum Victoria, 1998), no page numbers.

nuns who came with other experience...Nuns didn't stay in our village for long so they'd come with new ideas...It took the sixties to accept the different colours. But usually everything was...white.⁶⁴⁶ **(Figure 20)**

⁶⁴⁶ Carmel Tata, 2006.

In general, the differences in the overall maintenance of glory box traditions in Italy were most evident between the northern, more industrialised towns and the southern more rural areas. The poorer south which was in general slower to industrialise, often maintained longer the old ways, including great emphasis on the hand-made.⁶⁴⁷ Nevertheless, by the 1950s, Josephine Carey had not been taught her mother's Calabrian weaving skills. These skills now survive only in the hand-woven blankets Francesca wove for her daughters' 'dote' and which are still used to warm their beds in Australia. For Josephine, they are precious symbols of her mother's skill, industry and affection.⁶⁴⁸

Irish women have strong traditions of needlework, in particular the Irish crochet which evolved during the Potato Famine of the mid 1840s. By the mid 1940s, interviews suggest that many urban Irish women lost interest and aptitude for such fine work. Maureen King from Dublin has demonstrated that her needlework interests focused on plain sewing (and believes it was similar for many of her friends); nor were the finer skills passed on to her by her mother and consequently, were not brought to Australia when she migrated.⁶⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Maureen also refers to other young women who were embroidering, in the city but especially in regional areas, and Joan Cox certainly produced fancywork using pre-stamped fabrics for her 'bottom drawer' in Dublin.⁶⁵⁰

Threading Together Sexual Symbols:

Most of the women interviewed for this study would probably consider any notion that they consciously sewed and embroidered to remain innocently

⁶⁴⁷ *La Dote*, no page numbers.

⁶⁴⁸ Josephine Carey, 2005.

⁶⁴⁹ Maureen King, 2006.

⁶⁵⁰ Joan Cox, 2008.

occupied and sexually pure to be amusing and fanciful. Nevertheless, their activities can be interpreted as part of a feminine tradition of needlecraft, encouraged as an essential part of womanhood. Glory boxes played a particular role in this tradition, and it was an activity assumed to be a virginal one. As Parker states:

Domestic arts were equated with virtue because they ensured that women remain at home and refrain from book learning. Ignorance was equated with innocence; domesticity was a defence against promiscuity. By the nineteenth century embroidery was to become synonymous with chastity.⁶⁵¹

Complex needlecraft styles such as drawn threadwork and lacework represented the skill and domestic potential of a woman; but it also symbolised purity in her immersion in her activity. She was focused, busy, and passive, solitary or in the company of other women, and removed from the dangers and distractions of idleness. It is work also frequently associated with nuns – and therefore chastity – who for centuries have been responsible for the production of church vestments in many countries.

Furthermore, whitewear ('biancheria' in Italian) maintained its popularity well into the twentieth century. Although coloured fabrics and threads grew increasingly common in Australia from the 1930s, the symbolic power of pure whiteness in terms of female sexuality remained strong and much of the bed linen continued to be white in the 1950s in Australia and elsewhere. Schneider argues in reference to the trousseau that 'embroidery was above all an activity

⁶⁵¹ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 75.

and symbol of virgin girlhood, the more so as it was usually white on white.⁶⁵²

(Figures 21 & 22) The religious symbolism of floral embroidered designs also has a long history, with roses representing the female gender and femininity, and lilies and white roses symbolising purity and virginity. Isaacs observes that 'because of its connection with the Virgin Mary the lily has appeared regularly in religious paintings and continues to have an association with purity in Australian symbolic embroidery.'⁶⁵³ Lily and rose patterns commonly appeared on the stamped and magazine patterns completed by Australian women from the 1930s, and there are examples of these motifs amongst the work of the Australian-born women. **(Figure 23)**

While embroidery was a creative activity which added aesthetic and monetary value to the trousseau, it also distracted women from what was the intended use of many of the items. Margot Veltkamp from Holland describes a girlfriend going to extraordinary lengths to embroider her underwear.⁶⁵⁴ Maureen King from Ireland describes the intricate nightgown she created which unwittingly performed the duties of a chastity belt.⁶⁵⁵ There are anecdotal stories of women including baby wear in their trousseaux, while remaining uninstructed in sex, pregnancy and childbirth. This theme will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. Most telling of all is Schneider's example of a wealthy peasant girl in a small Spanish village in the 1960s whose trousseau included six monogrammed sanitary napkins.⁶⁵⁶ Embroidery has traditionally fed ideals of romance as women have stitched at home either in the hope of attaining love, or, at least

⁶⁵² Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure" in Kaplan, *The Marriage Bargain*, 99.

⁶⁵³ Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts*, 39. The historical origins of the symbolic meanings of flowers is also explored by Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 71-2 and Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure" in Kaplan, *The Marriage Bargain*, who refers to the lily as 'the flower of virgins,' 107.

⁶⁵⁴ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁶⁵⁵ Maureen King, 2006.

⁶⁵⁶ Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure" in Kaplan, *The Marriage Bargain*, 88.

according to the Victorian moral, in the hope of retaining it: Parker observes that 'clearly the motives behind embroidery were many and mixed. Some stitched to elicit love, some to manifest the love they believed they ought to feel, and others embroidered to declare their love in as decorous a way as possible.'⁶⁵⁷ One overt example of this is the lovers' knot marriage symbol (a tied bow), which appeared as embroidered motifs on fancywork, and as ornaments on wedding bouquets, dresses and cakes. It is from these cultural traditions that the glory box evolved and the residual meanings connecting embroidery to female virginity lingered.

Consequently, there is a long tradition in western societies which has linked virginity, sexuality and marriage to women; and needlecraft, and in particular, the production of the trousseau, became gradually inserted into this mix. Of course, it would be overstating the case to argue that Australian and European-born women sewing and embroidering for their glory boxes between 1930 and 1960 were conscious of the virginal symbolism of the lilies they embroidered, recognised sexual purity in their white work, or identified as chaste, virtuous and productive as they hemmed their sheets and embroidered their doilies. Nor could such activity be argued to be socially interpreted in those ways as it was in the previous century. It was, however, from this historical evolution of creating and promoting types of femininity that glory box production in Australia emerged. Glory boxes are complex because they combine the symbolic and the functional, the ideals and the realities, and moral, aesthetic and property values. Needlecraft served both the symbolic end of linking women's sexual purity to the production of needlework and the practical end of tying their labour to the domestic world.

⁶⁵⁷ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 157.

4.6 Conclusion

By the mid-twentieth century, forces were at work which contributed to the decrease in fine needlework activity in Australia, glory box and non-glory box related. Oral testimony suggests that once women married, fancywork and any sewing and knitting that was not purely pragmatic, largely disappeared. Some did engage in hand production for competition, exhibition and fundraising activities. But in general, the memories of working and lower middle-class women indicate that few had the time or inclination to be producing highly worked items – that was what the glory box lead-up time was for.

This might also explain why many Australian mothers are not often described as producing fancywork and leading by example. This also places the glory box within a European tradition where such fine work was the domain of the wealthy leisured, and single women creating their trousseaux. For the Greek and Italian women interviewed, their memories are dominated by mothers either producing needlework for their daughters' collections and/or commissioning other women to build up the quantities with their particular skills. Thelma Drummond's observation that fancywork was a pre-marriage activity, 'for your box, in preparation for married life,'⁶⁵⁸ seems a fair summation of all the Australian-born women interviewed. After they were married, they presumably had enough pieces and didn't have time to make more anyway. Needlework became a primarily practical activity for making, altering and repairing clothes.

Furthermore, women had been introduced to a new workforce, they were increasingly gaining new interests and opportunities and were prioritising their

⁶⁵⁸ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

time. Beth Taws believes that after the war fancywork was not such a priority as women had done men's work during the war and weren't going back.⁶⁵⁹ By the mid 1950s, there was more to purchase, and incomes with which to purchase, although many women were still sewing and knitting clothes for themselves, children, and later grandchildren. By the 1960s, the domestic rituals which required an array of fancywork to adorn teapots, trays, plates and tables, were waning, which resulted in the relegation of these works of women's hands, to linen presses, or, sadly as time went by, the local opportunity shop.

⁶⁵⁹ Beth Taws, 2003.

Chapter Five: Between the Sheets: the Romance and the Reality of the Trousseau

5.1 Introduction

Jerry talked to me, he is a very gentle man sexually with me and that's exactly what I needed because it was an enormous shock, my wedding night...it was shock after shock. (Margot Veltkamp migrated from Holland in 1958)⁶⁶⁰

The glory box can be seen a metaphor for sex: the promise of sex to come, the reward for sex denied, and the silence surrounding women's sexuality and reproductive biology. Glory boxes contained not just domestic goods, but bed linen, nightwear, undergarments, even occasionally baby clothes and menstrual cloths. Such a reading is to acknowledge where the glory box exists not just as an object and metaphor in the public and domestic realms but in more private and intimate spaces and related forms of consumption. Glory box items therefore, were often shrouded in romance, and sometimes not much reality. They reflected the prevailing morality of the day, whereby glory boxes were not to be opened for use until after the wedding day (and if there was no wedding day, the glory box often remained closed and its contents untouched). The general collusion of silence that surrounded female sexuality, from menstruation to sex to childbirth, often found an ally in glory box activity. For glory boxes represented all of these realities, yet they disguised them with needlecraft, romance and a focus on a married future. Consequently, within all these complex sexual meanings for glory boxes are a range of tensions and

⁶⁶⁰ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

juxtapositions, in terms of what young Australian-born and migrant women did, made, knew and desired.

This chapter will attempt to investigate some of these meanings by looking at the more intimate material culture contained in glory boxes and the stories women tell about their experiences. This will be done within the context of social debates amongst women's groups, educators, religious and government representatives regarding sex-related issues during the 1930s-1950s period, as well as more recent feminist historical analysis of this era. It was a time when sex education, contraception, venereal disease, and marriage were subjects of intensive discussion and contention and the backdrop against which women accumulated marital property, and imagined themselves as wives and mothers. It was also a period when notions of femininity were evolving, presented most persuasively through the popular culture of magazines and American cinema. Ultimately, whether consciously or not, many women who made and purchased bed linen, nightwear and undergarments, were preparing for sexually active lives – to commence ideally after marriage and the metaphoric opening of their glory boxes.

5.2 Lifting the Lid: Collections of Intimacy

The Trousseaux: its Meanings and Contradictions:

The trousseau had nothing to do with tea towels!

(Gwenda Mutimer, collecting in Lilydale, 1940s) ⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶¹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

Most women interviewed for this study understood the trousseau to refer to underclothes, nightwear, housecoats and bed linen – the more personal part of the household goods collection for the glory box. Some women acquired bed linen, along with needlework and other domestic items, early in their glory box collecting. All Australian-born women agreed that most of the trousseau-specific acquisition was definitely a post-engagement activity, with a specific man in mind. 'Essential' trousseau items were listed in the 1930s *The Bride's Book of Useful Information*, as 'a warm dressing-gown, a summery dressing-gown, a pretty dressing-jacket and a pair of silken bedroom slippers.'⁶⁶² Kath Davis states that 'you didn't start getting your trousseau, or I didn't, until I became engaged,'⁶⁶³ a comment confirmed by Gwenda Mutimer who observed that 'that ring had to be on your finger!'⁶⁶⁴ Most of the women had at least a nightgown and sheets, a couple had more elaborate trousseaux. Regardless of how many personal items were gathered, it was a public and private ritual, which implicitly acknowledged the conclusion of courtship, the securing of the engagement, and the commencement of the series of customs in the lead-up to the wedding, such as engagement parties, kitchen teas, displays of glory box collections and wedding gifts (customs which were discussed in Chapter Three).

This material culture of the wedding night demonstrates what Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton have argued to be the social and cultural symbolism of the artefact: 'In almost every culture, objects are chosen to represent the power of the bearer...for women, power is expressed in the equally stereotyped forms of seductiveness, fertility and nurturance.'⁶⁶⁵ The nature of trousseau objects in

⁶⁶² *The Bride's Book of Useful Information*, 6.

⁶⁶³ Kath Davis, 2003.

⁶⁶⁴ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁶⁶⁵ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 26.

representing sex, childbirth and homemaking, and even the community status of a quality and extensive collection is present and powerful. However, this female power was limited in the context of glory boxes, for it came without the associated empowerment of sexual knowledge, experience or understanding. More often, glory boxes came with sexual ignorance and inexperience. Thus the trousseau illustrates the paradoxical nature of the glory box as female experience. It represents the dreams of romance and the often variant realities of married life. There was the novelty of flimsy sexy underwear, and the pragmatism of bed sheets and pillowcases, which still belied a sexual use. And there was the naïve delicacy of chiffon, satin and lace, and the physicality of sex and childbirth. Mothers tacitly approved the gathering of intimate items for the first sexual encounter. But the activity was undertaken within a haze of naiveté on the part of the daughters, and a discomfort regarding sexuality as subject on the part of the mothers.

The trousseau brings together in one container implicitly sexual items, such as nightwear and bed linen, and domestic linens and kitchenware, mixing the metaphors of sexuality and domesticity. As Tessie Liu has argued, the trousseau,

has always included the intimate clothing and household items...Closely identified with the woman herself, the unity of *linge de corps* and *linge de maison* expressed the merging of her personal body with her social, domestic, body.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁶ Tessie P. Liu, "The Commercialization of Trousseau Work: Female Homeworkers in the French Lingerie Trade," in *European Women and Preindustrial Craft*, ed. Daryl M. Hafer (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 180.

There is little more 'everyday' than a glory box collection, and little more feminised and even sexual than a trousseau. With many women collecting for glory boxes partaking in little sexual activity, the box becomes a symbol of the domestic and sexual fulfilment to come upon marriage.

Consequently, while acquiring garments for sexual activity, it was the romance of marriage and domesticity rather than any real consciousness or projection into the actual moment of sexual intercourse, that seemed to preoccupy the interviewed women collecting for their boxes. None seemed to have made the connection at the time between trousseau items and the sexual act. For most, their imaginations had leapt straight to their future new domestic situation. It was part of the mystery and excitement of the unknown. Nance McKay recalls that 'I know I had a pair of pink pyjamas. When I was packing my case to go away and Mum said, 'You're not putting those in are you? I don't think Jack would like that,' I couldn't understand what she meant!'⁶⁶⁷ Kath Davis appears a little more worldly than Nance, although her motivation was more glamour than overt seduction:

I remember one (nightdress) I made, it was a chiffony type thing with a floral design on it. I was boarding at the time and...the ladies who ran the boarding house, were two old spinsters, and I showed them this one day. It was very fancy, had lace over it, a very glamorous affair and they looked at it and they said, 'Of course you wear something underneath it' and I said 'No.' And I think they nearly fainted so I didn't show them anything else I made.⁶⁶⁸ **(Figure 1)**

⁶⁶⁷ Nance McKay, 1992.

⁶⁶⁸ Kath Davis, 2003.

Maureen King from Ireland made her own nightgowns and her experience, which like Kath's, was a mix of naiveté and expectation:

We used to say, 'just a few things!' I made some night dresses, I made a dressing gown. And I horrified my mother-in-law because it was black satin. She wanted me to make it in pink satin!...It was a very sensible one believe me!...When I think back now I have a little giggle. Because the nightdress I made it was all embroidery anglaise, it had little shoulder straps with ribbon through them. There was no opening whatever, it would have been a hell of a job, it would be like having a chastity belt! So we were terribly naïve.⁶⁶⁹

Indeed, the excitement and novelty of special, often impractical nightwear for the wedding night could be dulled by the pragmatics of actually wearing the garment! Gwenda Mutimer remembers 'the satin nighties that were cut on the cross with the bow at the back were so uncomfortable,' while BS recalls that her 'very best dressing gown was pink satin with swan's down round the ankles...it was horrible...it made you shudder to wear it.'⁶⁷⁰ For Margot Veltkamp from Holland, her special nightgowns serve as a reminder of the ignorance which proved to be such a rude awakening on her wedding night: 'I had a special couple of nighties and I kept them for when I was married...I was thinking it was very special and it's my wedding night, (but) it was nothing like it.... I was not prepared.'⁶⁷¹ For Margot, her nightgown was a symbol of her imagined romance of marriage and not the reality of what her first sexual experience would be like.

⁶⁶⁹ Maureen King, 2006.

⁶⁷⁰ Gwenda Mutimer and BS, 1992.

⁶⁷¹ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

Making, Buying and Selling the Trousseau:

Trousseau items were both made and purchased by women, depending on economic circumstances, timing, skill and aptitude. Kath Davis recalls: 'I didn't have much in my trousseau because it was during the war and you couldn't get much. Even though I had an uncle who gave me the coupons...I made two nighties...I think that was all I had in my trousseau.'⁶⁷² Wartime rationing limited what was available, both in terms of ready-made linen, and supplies of natural and new synthetic materials for intimate apparel, and this restricted what some women could procure. **(Figure 2)** The synthetic fabrics which, according to Kingston had begun to appear before the war, also influenced the trousseau products women purchased:

Before the war, rayon and other cellulose fibres developed by German chemists had produced a minor revolution in women's underwear – 'lingerie' as it was delicately called in the department stores. The sensible warm or washable wool and cotton underwear preferred by earlier generations gave way to modern constructions in Lustreloc and Interloc...The synthetic silks, like Swami and Milanese which appeared in the late 1930s, were ideal for underwear...nightwear, and lounging pyjamas.⁶⁷³

For some women, the glamour lay in being able to purchase off the rack and Thelma Drummond was explicit in not wanting anything that looked home-made.⁶⁷⁴ Betty Phillips purchased her white satin underwear and blue nightdress for her box from Mr Swinton the commercial traveller who used to

⁶⁷² Kath Davis, 1992.

⁶⁷³ Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, 83.

⁶⁷⁴ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

come through Lilydale every month during the 1950s.⁶⁷⁵ Gwenda Mutimer recalls:

I guess it was an excuse to suddenly go out and buy nice underwear and actually let someone see it...Of course there would have been some impractical things that you bought, you couldn't not, but at the time you didn't think they were going to be impractical...It was a once in a lifetime to buy something frivolous and lacy that under normal circumstances you wouldn't bother.⁶⁷⁶

Indeed, the absence of lingerie in a glory box could be seen as an absence of an acceptable sexualised femininity, both delicate and sexually alluring, so that wartime austerity challenged more than the materiality of a woman's personal property.⁶⁷⁷ The new 'modern' materials were quite seductive, especially as the scarcity of products during the war opened up to the commodity boom in the 1950s. The ready-made trousseau was a modern commodity, identified both with the new notions of a sexualised married female adorning herself with seductive undergarments, and the domestic consumer, identified through these commodities with wifehood, motherhood, and the home environment.⁶⁷⁸ As Game and Pringle argue,

the ideal of femininity is promised not only through commodities related to self-adornment (clothes, cosmetics, hairstyles) but also through those

⁶⁷⁵ Betty Phillips, 2003.

⁶⁷⁶ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁶⁷⁷ A point made in the British wartime context by Pat Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine: Dress, Appearance and Femininity in Wartime Britain" in Gledhill and Swanson, *Nationalising Femininity*, 164-165.

⁶⁷⁸ Discussion of commercialisation of trousseau products in 19th century France, in Liu, "The Commercialization of Trousseau Work" in Hafter, *European Women and Preindustrial Craft*, 180.

connected with the care of home and family. All these commodities take on an erotic significance connected with her sexual identity.⁶⁷⁹

Many women were content to make their own nightgowns and there is no consistency throughout the three decades between the women who produced large quantities of needlework and those that made their own trousseaux. Beth Taws recalls taking sewing classes during the late 1940s and early 1950s where some girls were engaged and sewing specifically for their trousseaux, proudly making well-sewn and edged petticoats, bras, panties, and special nightwear.⁶⁸⁰ Dorothy Phillips made her underwear in the 1940s on the Singer treadle at home from satin left over from making her wedding dress.⁶⁸¹ Daisy Chapman and her sister also made nightgowns at this time with square collars and revealing lace necklines. Whether made or bought, the novelty was the key to the excitement: 'You didn't have all these fancy things so when you're going to get married you lashed out, because you wanted to look glamorous...It was a good time getting all this stuff together.'⁶⁸² Judith Howard's mother May Vertigan had a trousseau, made in the early 1930s and Judith 'can remember one nightie she had which was sort of a pale salmony pink crepe de chine, it was absolutely gorgeous.'⁶⁸³

Women's magazines from the 1930s were encouraging young brides-to-be to obtain their patterns for lingerie and linen for their boxes. The *Australian Women's Weekly* featured the following article in 1938: 'Every girl will want this slim and figure-fitting set, with bias-cut tops, comprising nightgown, slip, and panties. If you are destined to be an Easter bride, this is the ideal set to grace

⁶⁷⁹ Game and Pringle, 204-5.

⁶⁸⁰ Beth Taws, 2003.

⁶⁸¹ Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

⁶⁸² Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁶⁸³ Judith Howard, 2005.

your box.’⁶⁸⁴ Another in-house design also refers to the ‘Easter bride’s glory box,’ describing a ‘charming set of lingerie, including three pieces, nightgown, slip, and scanties, is ever so easy to make in ivory or pastel-toned silks or cottons.’⁶⁸⁵ **(Figures 3 & 4)** Nevertheless, not every publication encouraged the production of extensive trousseau at this time, with the *Ladies’ Handbook of Home Treatment* (1939 and 1949) suggesting that a large trousseau could actually be a health risk for young women:

It is no doubt necessary that the bride-elect provide herself with suitable clothing and household linen, but that she should sacrifice her health and buoyancy of spirits in so doing is quite unnecessary. It were far better that the bride enter upon life with a plain and scanty outfit and blooming health than with an extensive and elaborate wardrobe and shattered nerves.⁶⁸⁶

By the late 1950s, the trousseau was still appearing in magazines as a ‘must-have’ component of the wedding preparation ritual. The *Australian Home Beautiful* serial ‘Guide for young homemakers’ referred to earlier, included a checklist for brides-to-be for a competent trousseau. The piece, by Ada Ford, both highlights the romance while pointing to the practicalities as she warns against excessive spending, the vagaries of changing fashions and the benefits of making items. Her list, for a ‘Melbourne climate’ reads as follows:

4 pairs of pantees (silk or nylon) 4 nightgowns or 4 pairs pyjamas

⁶⁸⁴ *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 15 January 1938, 4.

⁶⁸⁵ *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 13 February 1937, 7.

⁶⁸⁶ Eulalia S. Richards, *Ladies’ Handbook of Home Treatment* (Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Company, Second Edition, 1949), 27.

3 pairs cotton briefs	1 warm dressing gown (Angora or padded satin)
3 cotton brassiere	1 summer dressing gown
2 girdles	1 pair warm slippers
1 dance belt or 1 Corselette	1 pair summer slippers
2 full slips (nylon)	1 warm dressing jacket
1 half slip (nylon)	1 frilly dressing jacket, Nylon
1 stiffened half slip	Vests, if worn ⁶⁸⁷

This was 1957, goods were readily available and materials increasingly affordable with an emphasis on the ready-made. Most of the women interviewed for this study had married prior to the late 1950s, and they described simple trousseaux, some made by hand, and put together without reference to a formal guide. Nevertheless, this demonstrates that the tradition was alive and well in a climate of continuing high marriage rates. But how many young women followed Ford's advice is impossible to determine.

Between the Sheets:

Bed linen was another component of the trousseau, which some women started collecting prior to the engagement, but many waited until the wedding was secure. Daisy Chapman concentrated on bed linen – her fiancé bought her four pairs of blankets, two pairs of single and two pairs of double sheets.⁶⁸⁸ Daisy and Gwenda Mutimer agreed that there was a tradition that the fiancés bought the blankets.⁶⁸⁹ Marjorie Cope collected many sets,⁶⁹⁰ but for Loris Peggie who did not marry, bed linen did not feature in her collection: 'Mainly it was only

⁶⁸⁷ Ada Ford, "Guide for young homemakers – Part 1," *Australian Home Beautiful*, April 1957, 57.

⁶⁸⁸ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁶⁸⁹ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

⁶⁹⁰ Marjorie Cope, 2003.

supper cloths, doilies, dressing table sets. I didn't go into buying linen and towels and that sort of thing. **(Figure 5)** Most of us didn't start to buy linen and towels until we were more or less engaged.'⁶⁹¹ Maureen King from Ireland believes that collecting bed linen just prior to marriage was expected and that she and most girls in Dublin did so: 'Because I was coming such a distance...my mother-in-law built up some blankets and some linen for me... you're expected to build up your linen and your blankets and all that sort of thing.'⁶⁹² However, Joan Cox, also living in Dublin, neither made nor purchased bed linen for herself, but her family sent linen over to her prior to her marriage in Melbourne in 1958.⁶⁹³ In a small village in Holland, Ellen Smoorenburg skilfully made her white bed linen, embroidered in Richelieu work, and hand-sewed the buttonholes. **(Figure 6)**

Southern European collections were dominated by bed and other linen, known in Sicily as 'letti' (beds), until at least the 1960s. According to Schneider, a 'bed,' the contents of which were displayed for guests on the bedroom furniture, referred to 'two sheets, four pillowcases, a bedspread, and lingerie for the bride. Indeed, each bed was a cluster of whitewear ('biancheria') that could include tablecloths, napkins, towels, doilies, pillowcases, and intimate apparel, as well as sheets.'⁶⁹⁴ However, it is a common theme that the items made and bought for daughters by Italian women did not translate comfortably into the new post 1950s environment. Josephine Carey's Calabrian collection contained many sheets and pillow slips, some woven and sewn from hemp by her mother before they migrated from Italy in 1956. **(Figure 7)** Josephine later purchased her own

⁶⁹¹ Loris Peggie, 2005.

⁶⁹² Maureen King, 2006.

⁶⁹³ Joan Cox, 2008.

⁶⁹⁴ Schneider, "Trousseau as Treasure" in Kaplan, *The Marriage Bargain*, 81. Schneider goes on to cite other Italian studies which have revealed similar customs and objects, 83.

nightgowns for her wedding night in Australia – they were not part of the glory box her mother produced for her, nor did she see what she acquired herself as being part of her box, but quite separate.⁶⁹⁵ Rose Patti's Sicilian mother too created a collection for her daughter that didn't really make the transition across time and culture, consisting of volumes of stiff sheets that were impossible to iron, and dated nightwear: 'These things were pretty much left in (the trunk)...and because what was made for one lifestyle, back in the 1940s when she was doing this...wasn't obviously practical, for 1960 or 1970.'⁶⁹⁶

Carmel Tata had bed linen that her mother had made and purchased for her and five bed sets which her mother had inherited from her own mother's collection. Carmel describes the Calabrian village tradition of hanging the bedspread out the window as an overt display of quality, a daughter's value and marriageability and, more tacitly, of a girl's potential as a sexual and reproductive partner:

In the village...when we had festivals of saints, we would parade these statues all around the village. And what you did is you threw over the balcony your most treasured bedspread. Now if you didn't have a beautiful bedspread to throw over, that was an indication of (a lack of) wealth and what that woman has and class and even taste you know?⁶⁹⁷

Even a mattress could be part of the collection, for it was a sign of wealth if you had a woollen mattress rather than one filled with corn husks. Carmel continues: 'Mum was so proud of this woollen mattress that she brought that over to Australia...it actually broke her heart when dad said it's time to get rid

⁶⁹⁵ Josephine Carey, 2005.

⁶⁹⁶ Rose Patti, 2005.

⁶⁹⁷ Carmel Tata, 2006.

of this thing. But my dad was always boasting that he married a woman who had a woollen mattress.’⁶⁹⁸

Carmel’s experience highlights the vagaries of transporting and transplanting customs in a new environment, even when the customs have some synergy with those already here. She was born in 1960, at the end of the focus period for this study, but her experience is one of her mother creating a time capsule of rural Italian traditions. Carmel herself says that while it was 1960s-1970s Moonee Ponds it might as well have been 1940s Calabria. Her mother Dominica invited an Italian woman, who had been rejected by her proxy husband upon arrival in Australia, to stay with them. Finishing the trousseau would be her household contribution:

So she pulled out all the linen in the boxes, exactly as it was bought from all those years. And this lady cut it out and stitched it up and taught me and I was doing it with her. But it was very hard for me because in Australia, girls played but Mum didn’t feel there was a need for playing, it wasn’t important...In three months this lady did all of my sheets...about 30 top sheets all embroidered and then single bed sheets, about six of those.⁶⁹⁹ **(Figure 8)**

Carmel’s mother had put aside a whole section of the glory box that she never showed Carmel, that which related to the wedding night and having children. It included a wedding night sheet, which, according to tradition, was used to capture a virgin’s blood after sexual intercourse, as proof of her virginity. Carmel recalls:

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

And neither was that part of the glory box, the dowry, ever, ever discussed. My mother would say this is a very special sheet and when you get married we'll put this on the bed... And that was the most beautiful sheet...And they actually put that on my bed because I didn't make my bed....I didn't know anything about it.⁷⁰⁰

This was more symbolic than genuine but it is the archetypal example of a trousseau containing sexually-oriented objects which are neither shown nor explained to the daughter. Rose Patti alludes to a similar custom, which still persevered into the 1970s: 'Because my Mum had passed away, my mother in law, the day before the wedding...gave me a towel and...said, 'You might need this dear. The towel for the first night!''⁷⁰¹ Edda Azzola from northern Italy also recalls her wedding night outfit and another custom relating to early married life:

I still have my set in silk bought by my mother for the box for the wedding night! A petticoat, a nightgown that for me at that time, looked more a dress for a night out than a night in bed!...I recall, when we got back from the honeymoon we found the bedroom all tidy up and the bed made with the nice things from the glory box. Was an old custom that (the mother) and sisters of the bride had to prepare for the return of the newlyweds.⁷⁰²

The checklist of trousseau items for Edda Azzola and her sisters in northern Italy was as follows: six pairs of sheets, 12 pillowcases, three bedspreads, two

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Rose Patti, 2005.

⁷⁰² Josephine Carey, 2005.

woollen blankets, one doona, four long nightgowns, a few shorter nightgowns and other personal underwear.

There was no set inventory for what women collected for their trousseaux, and as a term, it was not even universally applied. A special nightgown for the wedding night was the basic item and then many women acquired more, some adding bed linen to the collection as well. Some made their items, others purchased, some had a mixture of both. Magazines and newspaper advertisements promoted the acquisition of a trousseau, couched in phrases of romance. However, the common thread, without exception, is that whatever women collected, their ignorance meant that they were often unable to make any real connection between seductive lingerie and marital bed linen, and sex. And, as will be seen, ignorance was not always bliss.

Hope Without Glory:

The glory box represented for women an element of dream fulfilment and a degree of independence – love, romance, marriage, a home, even children. However, for some women, glory boxes could symbolise disappointment, sadness, pain, and a life unfulfilled. As has been previously discussed, a simple nightgown could prove to be an artefact of shock, even humiliation which could take time to recover from long after the wedding night. But the glory box could also stand as a constant reminder of disappointed hopes for the unmarried woman, and the woman trapped in an unhappy marriage. Such stories are extremely difficult to extract but anecdotes and quiet hints allude to what must be myriad untold examples of compromised hopes and unrealised expectations; expectations which had often been raised by the very act of glory box collecting.

In a society which determined during these decades that women's primary social role was wife and mother, the lot of the unmarried woman was not an

easy one. For the women whose fiancés and husbands did not come home from the war, there was at least an identity as widow or near-widow. Australia suffered 39,366 military deaths during World War II – amongst those figures were many boyfriends, fiancés and newly-wedded husbands.⁷⁰³ Nance McKay remembers such women in her office:

In the Second World War there were women in our office, they were lovely women...and I'd say 'How is it they're not married, what's wrong with the men?' And (I was told) 'They had fiancés and they didn't come back...They've got the most beautiful glory boxes, had them for years.'⁷⁰⁴

Kyneton Museum has recorded the story of Gwendoline Langford, born in Brunswick in inner city Melbourne in 1913. She met Clyde when she was 16 years old and after courting for a few years they became engaged. Clyde enlisted in the army during World War II, only to be lost at sea when his ship was bombed. Gwen never married and her glory box, which she had accumulated and left unopened and unused, was discovered after her death in 2007, still completely intact. The chest contained bed linen and undergarments still in their original packaging and nightgowns never worn.⁷⁰⁵ **(Figures 9A & 9B)**

For women who chose not to marry, due to lifestyle choice or sexual orientation, the pressure must have been very difficult. But for unmarried

⁷⁰³ Statistics from Australian War Memorial website: www.awm.gov.au/atwar/statistics/ww2.asp/, accessed 2008.

⁷⁰⁴ Nance McKay, 1992.

⁷⁰⁵ Gwendoline Langford's story reproduced with the permission of Kyneton Museum from their exhibition *The Glory Box: A chest gathering hopes and dreams*, 2007-2008. Gwen Langford went on to forge an independent life, working, volunteering and receiving an award from the Victorian governor for her services to the community.

women who had glory boxes, and planned to marry and have children, and with family and community expectation that they would, their perceived 'failure' must have been a challenge to bear. Their glory boxes came to represent all that ought to be, and never would be. In terms of the Lilydale district sample, all of the women did marry, but a couple of women remembered instances of those who did not. Nance McKay recalls:

My aunt went with a fellow for years and years when I was a small child till just before I was married and she had the most gorgeous glory box...And she just kept it and every now and again she'd open it and bring the things out and look at them and then put them back again.⁷⁰⁶

It is not clear why this relationship, which extended across the 1930s and early 1940s, did not result in marriage, but this image of a woman privately exploring the contents of her box which she would never use, is not unique (although it is not out of the question of course, that this relationship was a sexual one). But the implication is that Nance's aunt was abandoned and a similar picture is drawn by Dorothy Hewett in her novel *Susannah's Dreaming. The Golden Oldies* (1976). A woman is prepared and ready to marry, only to be discarded and her hopes shattered: 'He jilted my Ellie, her glory box ready, doilies and supper cloths, embroidered shams.'⁷⁰⁷ There is a sense of very public shame and humiliation in this story, which the woman must bear along with her own personal emotions. Here women have become local objects of curiosity and probably ridicule. Their failure to become sexual marital partners and child bearers also lies exposed, as the glory box becomes a potent symbol of sexual inactivity. As Kingston has argued:

⁷⁰⁶ Nance McKay, 1992.

⁷⁰⁷ Dorothy Hewett, *Susannah's Dreaming. The Golden Oldies* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1981 [first published 1976]), 40.

Marriage also meant sex and sexuality, and to remain unmarried as a woman was a public admission of inherent inferiority and incompleteness. The unmarried woman who had once been classed as a social failure could be seen to be also a psychological cripple.⁷⁰⁸

The final point may be somewhat extreme, but certainly occasional references to 'old spinsters' even by interviewed women demonstrates a lack of sympathy for those seen to have failed at female fundamentals, (for unmarried professional women such as teachers, there may have been more respect). Married women, on the other hand, represented sexuality fulfilled, opened and activated like their glory boxes.

Loris Peggie did not marry and the reasons why remain unclear, although she certainly bore the bulk of responsibility for supporting her parents' orchard business during the 1940s and 1950s, as well as later caring for her mother after her father's death. The contents of her glory box were not really used since she continued to live with her mother, and consequently there was no need for them. After her mother died (in the 1990s) she began to bring some items out and she still has her wedding nightgown – a garment evidently purchased for a particular purpose and which therefore remained unworn: 'I did have one nightie which I bought when nylon first came on to the market...it was just something that went into the box at one stage that I liked and I then never ever wore it and it doesn't fit anymore.'⁷⁰⁹ This garment is now in the collection of Museum Victoria. **(Figure 10)** Nevertheless, Loris found other avenues for fulfilment, through work and through becoming one of the stream of young

⁷⁰⁸ Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter*, 136.

⁷⁰⁹ Loris Peggie, 2005.

Australians who undertook the extended voyage of discovery to London from the 1950s.

Then there were women who did marry, but for whom the expectations embedded in their glory boxes were never met. For Ruby Kwijas, it was a matter of the immediate loss of ritual and ceremony which generally accompanied the period between engagement and the wedding. **(Figure 11)** She was forced to marry her fiancé swiftly in 1955 due to pregnancy, without any of the opportunities to enjoy the standard pre-wedding rituals – engagement party, kitchen tea, and public celebrations. Ruby, who had enjoyed collecting what she had accumulated, was in no position to supplement her glory box as women generally did. Her box closed abruptly before her wedding, to be re-opened later, during a long and happy marriage. This is a rare example of pre-marital sexual activity amongst the interview sample and the disapproving response of the local community demonstrates how a break from the conventional order of things from courtship to marriage was deemed unacceptable. Ruby recollects this time with great pain and emotion, for in a small town, her situation was treated as a thing of shame, and celebration was seen as inappropriate.⁷¹⁰

For other women, the glory box consciously or unconsciously became an ongoing symbol of marital dreams unfulfilled as hopes, saving, planning and ceremony shifted into the realities of married life. Kath Davis, who produced a glory box of substance to furnish her marital home, and who viewed marriage partly as a means to escape the parental home, found herself in a marriage which was not to last.⁷¹¹ Dorothy Hewett captures post-marriage shattered

⁷¹⁰ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁷¹¹ Annual divorce rates in Australia increased from an average of 6187 between 1941-1950, to 6973 between 1951-1960 to around 10,000 between 1966-1970. Statistics quoted

hopes in her novel *Bobbin' Up* (1959), when a woman's epileptic son destroys one of the precious items from her glory box: 'Johnny had...broken all her glory box utility set'.⁷¹² Home life breaking down, alienated from husband and friends, and domestic income dwindling, Julie's loss of a key item for her original collection symbolises the dream that was, and her harsh reality. A story in Diane Bell's *Generations* reveals that recurring chasm between expectation and actuality as a woman describes finding her mother's nightgown:

It's an embroidered nightgown from her trousseau, but it was never worn. I found it folded in the original tissue paper, out of sight, under a number of heavier clothes in the bottom drawer...Now I realise marriage for Mum was not very romantic. It was about scarcity, violence and neglect.⁷¹³

There is such poignancy and sadness behind these stories, which can be wrapped up and hidden away in the guise of a simple nightgown.

For migrant women, such life expectations were further heightened, with all the added pressures of relocation, alienation, and loneliness. Irene Soumilas brought a substantial trousseau from Greece to Australia, beautiful night and dressing gowns that appear hardly worn. Young and naïve, her arranged marriage to a man she did not know living in regional Victoria, left her isolated and homesick. **(Figure 12)** Carmel Tata's mother, a successful business woman in southern Italy, had to pull together her glory box without assistance as a gesture of respectability; then put enormous effort into making sure her

from *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, No.53, 1967, 530 and No.57, 1971, 436.

⁷¹² Dorothy Hewett, *Bobbin' Up* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1959), 167.

⁷¹³ Bell, *Generations*, 91.

daughter would never be in a similar situation. But migration for Dominica was a crushing experience from which she could not extract herself, and her daughter's glory box came to symbolise her hopes for the next generation. As mentioned earlier, Dominica employed a newly arrived Italian woman from Calabria to complete her daughter's glory box – a woman who migrated as a proxy bride but was abandoned by the husband who had changed his mind. It is a poignant irony that this woman, whose own hopes for marital security were shattered, found herself producing items to assist another to realise those same expectations.

Carmela Palermo migrated to Australia in 1957 at the age of 16. She married a man from her village whom she had not seen for some years, by proxy as arriving in Australia unmarried was not an option. At such a young age, Carmela was completely unprepared for the seriousness and finality of her decision and reflects that she was 'too young...to be prepared for a future, you know, I didn't know what I was doing, I just said yes, sort of like an adventure more than anything else.'⁷¹⁴ The whole notion of proxy weddings as part of many young women's joint experience of marriage and migration, is powerful in this context. They were based upon hopes for domestic happiness and security, with some glory box collections brought, and others left behind. Some hopes were realised and others had hopes dashed from the moment the ship docked.⁷¹⁵ **(Figures 13 & 14)**

What the trousseau actually was, what it represented for the women who collected one, and what it came to mean for women in later years, varies dramatically depending on their personal experiences. As material culture,

⁷¹⁴ Carmela Palermo, 2007.

⁷¹⁵ See Wardrop, *By Proxy*, for more stories of the positive and negative experiences of proxy bride migration.

trousseau items embody at once the hopes, desires, romance and yet naiveté of young women who purchased and made nightgowns and lingerie, and sewed and embroidered bed linen for a sexually active life for which many were unprepared. A simple nightgown can remind one woman of sexual excitement and pleasure, another of horror; one woman of the rare indulgence of a luxury item; another of the frugality of wartime rationing; one woman of a long and happy marriage; others of disappointment, entrapment, or divorce. But for most, it also symbolised a naiveté that they could have done without.

5.3 Constructions of Femininity

If you were going to hope to have a boyfriend, subsequently get engaged and then married, well of course you started collecting things. It was just the natural thing to do. (Gwenda Mutimer)⁷¹⁶

The glory box, and the trousseau it contained, was a marital symbol, embodying courtship, wedding, domesticity, sex, and procreation. There was the hint of sex everywhere in Australia during and after World War II – in the wartime wedding rush, and public concerns about female promiscuity; in the rising marriage rates, baby boom and emphasis on nuclear family of the post-war era; as well as the popular post-war notions of women as sexual agents within marriage. Within this highly charged environment of simultaneous sexual encouragement and suppression, many Australian-born and migrant women collected domestic and intimate items for their glory boxes, in preparation for this socially acceptable, sexually-active state (that is, married). Yet many were not only sexually inactive, but sexually uninformed, let alone

⁷¹⁶ Gwenda Mutimer, 2003.

able to make any conscious link between their collections and the joys and difficulties of sex, pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing to follow. The glory box was a key social ritual leading up to a socially legitimised, sexualised state, shared by women across cultures during the pre-, during and post-war period. Yet these meanings appear to have been sanitised, reduced to domestic rather than sexual activity. At the same time, particular notions of femininity and womanhood were being revised, reviewed and reinforced.

Debating Sex:

One contextual frame for the seemingly ordinary ritual of women accumulating a trousseau for a sexualised future, were the debates regarding women and sexual behaviour which were well underway from the 1920s to 1950s. These ranged across issues such as sex education, venereal disease, reproduction, and contraception; the wartime hysteria regarding female sexual promiscuity; and the post-war shift in definitions of wife as sexual partner. As Darian-Smith has observed:

The sudden preoccupation with moral issues, and in particular female sexuality, must be examined within the wider context of Australian society in the throes of crisis, and the visible transition of females to social and economic independence.⁷¹⁷

These debates create a backdrop for considering the glory box as a symbol of women's sexuality, and the inherent contradictions that lie both within glory box collecting activity and between representations of women's sexuality and the reality of the women themselves. The women interviewed for this study

⁷¹⁷ Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 176. Darian-Smith provides here a useful overview of contraception, birth and abortion rates, and illegitimacy during the 1930s and 1940s, 193-202.

were growing up in an era of heightened interest in woman's role in society, debates about which interviewed women seemed unaware.⁷¹⁸ They were the recipients of contradictory social messages through popular culture regarding romance, and sexuality, workplace and domestic roles; as well as newly formulating images in the 1940s and 1950s of married women and their sexual agency.⁷¹⁹ These perceptions may have added to women's conscious or sub-conscious assumptions about their future life roles and their dedication to the glory box activity, which represented that domestic future.

A number of historians have considered these conflicting notions of 'true womanhood' in Australia before, during and after World War II, as well as the social discussions being conducted by everyone from female activists, to columnists in women's magazines, to the military hierarchy. Saunders and Bolton have argued:

Dominant notions of true womanhood resisted the challenge presented by generational changes in actual sexual practices, instituted by young enthusiastic women as well as men. Fundamentally, the relations of power between men and women during the Second World War were broached but never transformed.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁸ See Damousi, "Marching to Different Drums" in Saunders and Evans, 364-365 and Liz Ross, "Escaping the Well of Loneliness" in *Staining the Wattle. A People's History of Australia since 1788*, eds. Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (Fitzroy, Victoria: McPhee Gribble Publishers Pty Ltd in association with Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1988), 276.

⁷¹⁹ Lake, "Female desires" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, 132-133.

⁷²⁰ Saunders and Bolton, "Girdled for War" in Saunders and Evans, *Gender Relations*, 395. Other exponents of this view include: Lake, "Female desires" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*; Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*; Reekie, *Temptations* and Katie Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day. Australian Women's Diaries 1920s-1930s* (St Leonards New South Wales: Allen & Unwin Pty., Ltd., 1995).

Thus, concerns regarding female sexual promiscuity during World War II (most notably the so-called 'amateur' who particularly targeted American soldiers)⁷²¹ focused upon the perceived, inevitable consequences of venereal disease, prostitution and contraception, and prompted contradictory responses from women's groups. Restrictions on the sale of early forms of contraceptives were opposed by some groups and supported by others, who argued that it gave men too much access to sexual adventures free from consequences of pregnancy or disease.⁷²² While campaigning for equal pay in armed and civilian services, childcare provision and a moral and sexual code prescribing equality for men and women, female activists ultimately endorsed conservative social definitions for women. This partly grew out of concerns about the exploitation of women and promoted chastity and the importance of economic independence in freeing women from their condition as sexual objects. Since the 1920s, women's reform groups such as the Women's Reform League were eager to protect the 'modern girl,' who was perceived as vulnerable. According to Matthews, they focused their calls for reform on alcohol, places of public entertainment, conditions of employment, children's moral and physical safety, cheap literature, plays and moving pictures.⁷²³ However, while these debates regarding female sexuality were underway during the subsequent decades, the women interviewed for this study appear quite removed as they got on with working, saving, sewing, courting and marrying. The discussions do not appear to have penetrated these working and lower middle class homes.

Moreover, sexual morality for the first half of the twentieth century in Australia was guided by the dominant Protestant and Catholic religions. As Matthews has argued, Protestants and Catholics

⁷²¹ Damousi, "Marching to Different Drums" in Saunders and Evans, *Ibid.*, 366.

⁷²² Saunders and Bolton, "Girdled for War" in Saunders and Evans, *Ibid.*, 394.

⁷²³ Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*, 218.

effectively produced a monolithic standard of sexual morality that survived, embodied in legislation backed up by prudish silence and shrouded euphemism, until the 1950s. Repression and priggery became, for this period, the hallmarks of official Australian moral standards, and within their limits the standards of femininity were confined...The family was central to both of their dogmas.⁷²⁴

This is certainly born out in the oral testimonies of both Australian-born (most of whom were of Protestant faith) and the migrant (who were predominantly Catholic and Orthodox Christian) women. Without exception they all remarked that menstruation, sex and childbirth were little discussed and that their mothers told them 'nothing,' an issue which will be explored later in this chapter. Bell's oral testimonies support most of the stories told by women interviewed for this study. She quotes many stories from the 1920s-1960s period, regarding the absence of maternal and more formal sex education regarding menstruation, sex, and childbirth; and the silence on the subject at home, school and amongst peers.⁷²⁵ McCalman's study of the middle class in inner eastern suburban Melbourne also suggests that this permeation of an environment of sexual ignorance was not restricted to class boundaries, and was firmly promoted by Catholic and Methodist private schools. The female models for girls were either nuns or predominantly single female teachers (with the consequent presumption of their sexual inactivity) and the attitude was that,

⁷²⁴ Matthews, *Good and Mad Women*, 80.

⁷²⁵ Bell, *Generations*, 204-210.

Women's true destiny was sexual, and yet respectable young women were expected to make the right choice on the basis of chaste ignorance. There was no equivocation in the churches' standards: sexual intercourse was only moral within marriage and, while a blessed expression of physical love between a man and a woman, its grander purpose was procreation.⁷²⁶

McCalman's survey of girls at the elite Melbourne Genazzano (Catholic) and Methodist Ladies Colleges between 1939 and 1945, revealed that a median 75% believed their parents had provided them with an inadequate sex education. McCalman observes that 'Many young people were astonishingly chaste and their chastity was easy because their sexual desires were do contained by fear, ignorance and convention.'⁷²⁷ Thus virginity in unmarried women was highly prized and materially valued across many cultures – in terms of the trousseau it was part of, and embedded within, the material goods themselves. In Christianity, this desire for women to strive for purity and chastity was symbolised in the form of the Virgin Mary, the female ideal. It is no great wonder then, that as embroidery increasingly became the domain of domestic women (as briefly discussed in the previous chapter), that for the unmarried, and especially those working on their trousseaux, needlecraft came to symbolise virtue of mind, body and activity.

The notion of a developing femininity during the pre-, during and post-war years, which saw a more sexualised woman, in line with an increased economic, social and sexual independence, is an interesting and complex one. Before World War II, Damousi argues that discussions on sex and morality,

⁷²⁶ McCalman, *Journeyings*, 91.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

took place in the context of conventional views regarding marriage and the family, the emergence of a scientific approach to domestic labour and maternity, and the construction of the housewife. Nevertheless, there did gingerly emerge a discourse which recognised sex as pleasure and legitimate desire.⁷²⁸

While women's sexuality certainly became a dominant social talking point, it was occurring during a period when the marriage rate was swiftly accelerating, the age at marriage was dropping and that perhaps public concerns regarding some women's behaviour actually created a type of 'femininity' that was neither desired nor which probably matched the majority of women. As Featherstone argues, 'Whether or not individual women participated in this perceived whirlwind of sexual activity is still questionable, but representations of femininity increasingly constructed women as both sexual agents and sexual subjects.'⁷²⁹ For much of the twentieth century, marriage represented the legitimate expression of feminine sexuality in a heterosexual monogamous relationship; this will be illustrated shortly through the sex instruction books of the 1930s-1950s.

For Australian women, it was an almost universal experience. Whereas around 15% of women born during the 1880s-90s never married, less than five per cent of women born after 1930 remained single.⁷³⁰ As was discussed in Chapter One, women married younger as the century progressed. Contemporary commentators argued that sexual expression was crucial to a stable and happy marriage, and there emerged marital and sexual guidance in both men's and women's magazines, and by councillors.⁷³¹ The critical point was not that

⁷²⁸ Damousi, "Marching to Different Drums" in Saunders and Evans, *Gender Relations*, 366.

⁷²⁹ Featherstone, "Sexy Mamas?" 236.

⁷³⁰ Matthews, *Good and Mad Women*, 112.

⁷³¹ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 57-58.

marriage was 'desexualised' but that, as Murphy observes, 'marriage was the sole means of sexual identity and expression.'⁷³² Oral testimonies conducted for this study indicate that many single women remained sexually inactive and that they were desirous of, and generally obtained, a married life which would enable sexual activity. As Featherstone argues, 'while 'modern' conceptualisations of sexuality, glamour and pleasure are of concern to some women, for the vast majority of women femininity and sexuality were still constructed and defined by reproduction and childrearing.'⁷³³ To this should be added domesticity. Consequently, marriage was the gateway to sexual fulfilment, as indeed was the glory box. Marriage provided the structure in which women could legitimise sexual activity and glory box production reinforced this attitude.

Thus, there does seem to be a discrepancy between the general concerns about wartime female promiscuity, the glamour and overt sexuality portrayed in advertising and films, the anxiety about the possible consequences of sex education, and the women themselves. Many women were still operating within a family environment from which they went out to work, and often were helping financially or via 'in-kind' to support. They invariably socialised within their own communities. They assumed a married and domestic future through their glory box collecting activity. However, as Lake has suggested, these women did see marriage as the place where they could be sexually active and possibly even explore their desires (a subject difficult to explore with women of that generation).⁷³⁴ World War II was also an environment in which women were still constructed as 'maternal subjects,' with the homefront a feminised space in which women were acting as guardians, sustainers and nurturers of

⁷³² Ibid., 56.

⁷³³ Featherstone, "Sexy Mamas?" *Australian Historical Studies*, 248.

⁷³⁴ Lake, "Female desires" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, 132.

their men, the economy and social structures.⁷³⁵ This makes even more complex the definitions of womanhood and femininity at this time, with the maternal taking as much of the stage as the sexual. What remained constant was that marriage and, for that matter, maternity remained the defining points of women's lives.

Images of Femininity in Popular Culture:

The creation and promotion of a preferred sexuality and social role for women by popular media, social analysts and religious and even political commentators, all fed into a broader notion of what was meant by the 'feminine' at any given time. Women themselves were both active and passive participants in these shifting gender definitions and roles; but throughout, the glory box remains relatively constant. Lake has traced the evolving definitions of female attributes through magazine advertisements, with products and advertising copy from the 1920s demonstrating shifts from refinement to sex appeal, from class orientation to everywoman, and from female to male gaze played out in the cinema, advertising and social settings such as on the dance floor.⁷³⁶ She concludes that there was an 'emergence in the 1930s, of a new understanding of femininity, one which revolved around sexuality, sexual attractiveness and youthfulness....this reconceptualisation of femininity was reinforced by women's experiences of World War II.'⁷³⁷ Reiger too has pursued this argument, discussing how American cinema and Australian women's magazines, most particularly *New Idea/The Everylady's Journal*, were instrumental in creating new models for female sexuality and beauty. These

⁷³⁵ Argued by Darian-Smith, "Remembering Romance: Memory, Gender and World War II" in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 120.

⁷³⁶ Lake, "Female desires" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, 121.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

models undermined the push across social and religious groups for controlled, procreation-focused sex within marriage, the contradictory social messages which have been frequently highlighted.⁷³⁸ In her study of English women's magazines, Ferguson also argues for the significant role women's magazines played in promulgating a 'cult of femininity,' observing that these publications offered a 'very potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity, and a particular female world view of the desirable, the possible and the purchasable.'⁷³⁹

Whether or not popular culture was creating or reflecting the images of the time, it is impossible to tell if women were consciously or subconsciously absorbing these images and influences. Indeed, Diane Collins cautions against assuming how much cinema informed people's moral and social behaviour, stating that it is 'important not to exaggerate the possible influence of moving pictures.'⁷⁴⁰ Women interviewed for this study did not seem to be interacting with much of this market culture, even though their awareness was heightened due to their active and conscious marital preparation activity such as glory box collecting. The glory box women align more closely with Featherstone who also questions whether women 'were indeed internalising the stylised, idealised images presented in advertising and cinema'⁷⁴¹ and I would agree with her suggestion that 'this theory of sexualisation has its limits: for most women, the experience of marriage, family and children remained the foundation of their lives.'⁷⁴² This is certainly reflected in the attitudes and activities of the

⁷³⁸ Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home*, 208. Featherstone provides a useful summary of these arguments made by Lake and Reiger in Featherstone, "Sexy Mamas?" *Australian Historical Studies*, 235.

⁷³⁹ Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, 2.

⁷⁴⁰ Diane Collins, *Hollywood Down Under. Australians at the Movies 1896 to the Present* (North Ryde, New South Wales & London: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1987), 76.

⁷⁴¹ Featherstone, "Sexy Mamas?" *Australian Historical Studies*, 234.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 252.

interviewed women, whose consumer endeavours and image-making focused on thrift, domestic collecting and mostly innocent dating practices.

Most of the Australian-born women interviewed were living relatively closeted lives. However, their key social activities were reflected in the shifting nature of leisure at this time, as people moved beyond domestic spaces and into public ones such as picture theatres, dance halls, and fun parks; women interviewed refer to dances and the cinema with great frequency.⁷⁴³ Nevertheless, Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips reflect that the 1940s were strict times and respect for parents was paramount. They were only allowed to local dances or dances where their mothers were present to chaperone and play cards.⁷⁴⁴ They did go to the pictures, and the 1940s witnessed the largest cinema attendances in the history of the Australian film industry.⁷⁴⁵ However, for all its sexual suggestiveness, much of the popular cinema and literature culture of the time did not provide many pragmatic clues for young women curious about their bodies and their sexuality. The Australasian Exhibitor's regular buying guide in the 1940s was extremely conservative.⁷⁴⁶ Hollywood's stringent production code which had been lobbied for by the Catholic Legion of Decency in the 1930s, states Collins, 'prohibited films dealing openly with virtually any aspect of sexuality.' Consequently, films were in no position to provide an A to Z guide to sex for young women and were more often than not just bland escapism.

However, cinema tended to reinforce the values of marriage and domesticity promoted by glory box activity, which complemented and reinforced ultimate desires for love, marriage and a home. As Jackie Stacey observes, 'the cinema

⁷⁴³ This idea of a private to public leisure shift as a significant element of modernity is discussed in Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*, 84.

⁷⁴⁴ Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

⁷⁴⁵ Collins, *Hollywood Down Under*, 17.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

space has been...a key site for heterosexual courtship and romance, reinforced by the Hollywood message that happiness for women lay in catching a man and keeping him.⁷⁴⁷ Indeed, American cinema, or what Jeanine Basinger has more specifically termed 'women's film' of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, provided a myriad of contradictory messages for young women, whereby virginity, sexual prowess, career, homemaking, strength and weakness were all simultaneously valued.⁷⁴⁸ **(Figure 15)**

The sexual confidence of Hollywood's leading women on screen may have been broadly appreciated but was certainly not to be emulated by young single Australian women. Tessa Perkins makes a similar point in her study of the portrayal of women in a selection of immediate post-war British films whereby, 'each woman's desire for something which places her outside the home is transformed into a desire for a man, and by inference, domesticity.'⁷⁴⁹ While few dispute the ultimate message of many films to be home-centredness for women, Johnson and Lloyd make the important suggestion that this message was not a simple one and that, 'popular films of the period (1940s and 1950s) demonstrate that there was no straightforward ideology of domesticity dominating the messages conveyed to women by various means at this time about what a meaningful life should involve.'⁷⁵⁰

In terms of the influences of literature, the women interviewed for this study were not avid readers, but they occasionally picked up a book which offered

⁷⁴⁷ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing. Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 218.

⁷⁴⁸ Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman's View. How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (New York & Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), 5.

⁷⁴⁹ Tessa Perkins, "Two Weddings and Two Funerals: the Problem of the Post-war Woman," Gledhill and Swanson, *Nationalising Femininity*, 280.

⁷⁵⁰ Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, 151.

instruction in romance or even sex. Kath Davis recalls learning a lot about sex from a US publication called *True Stories* magazine which contained love stories: she states it had to be read in secret and kept under the mattress. Moreover, Kath and her husband bought a book about sex when they married.⁷⁵¹ Ruby Kwijas, who was sexually active with her fiancé, remembers reading a book set in the old American South called *Foxes of Harrow* by Frank Yewby, which she described as exciting and that it raised her awareness that there was more to romance than she realised.⁷⁵² In general, aside from an occasional coy description of early passion, women's active sexuality as represented in popular fiction was a virtual irrelevancy, thus offering few sexual clues or pointers for young women.

In an overview of 1950s Australian fiction, Lees and Senyard observe that where female protagonists were faced with life choices, they mostly chose the home (while men were presented as active outback adventurers, embodying the Australian ethos).⁷⁵³ Older women were presented as 'happy and satisfied models for the younger generation' especially for girls in their late teenage years, perceived to be open to superficial distractions. Lees and Senyard point to Helen Fowler's *The Family at Willow Bend* (1955), Keane Wilson's *Look After Arthur* (1955) and Nourma Handford's *Carcoola* series (1950s) as examples which featured girls who dabbled in flightiness but who then settled down, got engaged and projected themselves towards their future domestic environments.⁷⁵⁴ This imagining of future domestic spaces is often mentioned by the interviewed women, as they project the environments into which their glory box contents would be inserted. A more unusual, alternate perspective on

⁷⁵¹ Kath Davis, 2003.

⁷⁵² Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁷⁵³ Refer to a gendered reading of Australian fiction of the period in Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 88-93.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 90-91.

domestic 'bliss' is presented in *Karang*i by F.S. Hibble (1934), where the production of a trousseau for an arranged marriage is described, the preparations for which are punctuated by the unhappy bride's pre-marital affair. The author alludes to the sexual tension of the situation and the superficial and false distraction of the romance of lingerie: 'It was really her busy hands which kept her bound to her promise. There was so much to do in preparing her trousseau, and she was a girl, with a girl's delight of making and meddling with fine, fluffy, pretty things.'⁷⁵⁵ Meanwhile, neighbours secretly ridicule the bride's mother for 'arraying Mary in such lovely things for such an old, played-out man.'⁷⁵⁶ Here illicit sexual activity is presented and hovers in the wings of the preparations for legitimised marital sex, more unusually portrayed as an undesirable woman's fate.

In novels written for a young female audience, most fictional role models promoted domesticity, stability and security. Nevertheless, even a touch of mild gothic horror could be applied to the symbol of safe feminine domesticity, such as is supplied in a murder mystery novel set in Melbourne in the 1930s, *The Glory Box Mystery* (1937).⁷⁵⁷ Here, the glory box itself becomes the focus for sensationalism – a rare spotlight for this most conventional of objects – when a man's body is found hidden in a glory box in a furniture emporium while being shown off to a recently engaged young woman. Within the safe and conservative environment of a department store, the familiar, feminine glory box is given centre stage in the delicious horror as the lid is raised, the male shop assistant turns pale and the pretty young lady quite appropriately faints.⁷⁵⁸ The glory box has been redefined, having been shifted by the male gaze of

⁷⁵⁵ Hibble, *Karang*i, 109.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁵⁷ G.W. Wicking, *The Glory Box Mystery* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1937).

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 2-3.

author, store staff and police, from the mysteries of the feminine trousseau to the mystery of murder.

By the 1950s, new notions of a sexualised woman set up a femininity which attempted to unite woman as wife and sexual partner, with woman as homemaker. Game and Pringle have suggested that these roles conflicted with the 'entrenchment of role as wife and mother, with role of wife secondary; yet pressure to be husband's companion and exciting sexual partner.'⁷⁵⁹ Within this context, the glory box tradition was able to remain consistent, because the feminine role of wife and mother, albeit with shifts in emphases, continued as a constant thread in definitions of femininity. After the war many women returned to domesticity as their primary working and defining role, and Lake suggests that this return may be understood 'as the triumph of modern femininity, youthful adventurism and a path embarked on by women attempting to live as female sexual subjects and explore the possibilities of sexual pleasure.'⁷⁶⁰ There is a degree of female empowerment in this argument which complements the interpretation of the glory box as an activity created, controlled and enjoyed by the women themselves. But like marriage and domesticity, it operated within a prescribed social framework for a prescribed marital future. It is possible to overstate women's personal agency within this framework, a framework which came more into question by the women's movement as the century's decades rolled on.

⁷⁵⁹ Game and Pringle, "Sexuality and the suburban dream" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, 199.

⁷⁶⁰ Lake, "Female desires" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, 132.

5.4 Mentioning the Unmentionable: Sexuality and the Shroud of Secrecy

It'll be Right on the (Wedding) Night:

Interviews with Australian-born and migrant women who married during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, suggest that they were overwhelmingly virgins when they wed. Not only that, but most were sexually naïve, with mothers passing on little wisdom on such matters to their daughters, sex education not yet on the curriculum, and magazines and cinema presenting often sexy, suggestive images in line with this new sexual femininity, but hardly useful for practical instruction. This is not to suggest that these young women were not keen, but their attitudes were overwhelmingly romantic, and this simply amplifies the lack of synergy between the romance of trousseau accumulation, and the reality of its intended application. Many of the women had been socially active with men, attending dances, films and church groups. Some were dating, in a form of male/female interactivity that Hsu-Ming Teo has argued emerged in Australia in the early twentieth century – a public male-controlled sphere in contrast to the traditions of courtship which took place in the female-controlled private sphere.⁷⁶¹ Teo states that,

dating inverted the understanding and goals of nineteenth-century romantic love, which was experienced through the rituals of courtship and which viewed marriage as its inevitable goal. Where courtship encouraged patience and a focus on the future and surveillance by others...dating was immediate, focused on the present and comparatively free of social surveillance and control.⁷⁶²

⁷⁶¹ Hsu-Ming Teo, "The Americanisation of romantic love in Australia" in *Connected Worlds. History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU E Press, The Australian National University, 2005), 174.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 175.

The glory box tradition sat firmly within the courtship model of the delay of gratification for one particular outcome. But it also complemented the new dating practices, which involved forms of modern consumption such as cinemas, dance halls, gifts and even later cars (by the 1950s a young man with a car was often considered highly desirable, offering greater freedom of movement and private space). For most women interviewed for this study, courtship and dating were intertwined, relatively controlled, and instant sexual gratification not an option.

Most of these women considered sex to be definitely reserved for the marital domain. Romance was more a fever of innocent excitement in social settings that were not taken too far. Much of the 'sexual activity' was most likely kissing, which was frequently regarded as a consummation of young single female sexual desire. As Lake states, 'experienced in kissing and 'petting,' the majority of young unmarried women were still, it would seem from surveys conducted by Dr Lotte Fink in the early 1950s, strangers to sexual intercourse: this was the novelty of marriage.'⁷⁶³

The women interviewed were generally educated to the minimum school-leaving age, were mostly working class, and those dating during World War II enjoyed social outings without ever challenging accepted social moral mores of the time. The immigrant women came from European cultural backgrounds (frequently Catholic or Orthodox religious) which had strict opinions about pre-marital sex. Of course, some unmarried women were sexually active, and many probably with the men they were intending to marry (such as Ruby Kwijas). During the Depression, 31% of all brides were pregnant, to which the long

⁷⁶³ Lake, "Female desires" in White and Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, 133.

engagements at the time may have contributed. By the end of World War II it was half that rate but rising, with 20% of brides pregnant in 1955.⁷⁶⁴ But the negative community response to Ruby Kwijas who experienced pre-marital pregnancy⁷⁶⁵ highlights how sexual activity prior to marriage was considered unacceptable, and illegitimacy and unwedded motherhood immoral and a maternal character flaw.⁷⁶⁶ The women interviewed were not aware of the social debates alluded to earlier in this chapter, and for almost all of them, contraception and venereal disease were for them irrelevancies as they were not having sexual intercourse.

Of course, oral history is a subjective process, one of remembering, forgetting and reinvention. Susannah Radstone has observed that the charter for memory research and oral history is

to understand how experience is lived and remembered – and how that remembering contributes to the formation of senses of self, or of identity, which in turn give shape to the broader contours of influential narratives of events, of nations, and so on.’⁷⁶⁷

Here, it is the sense of self as female sexual being, and constructions of that being by external social forces, that can illuminate Australian social and economic historical narratives during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. For this particular generation of women, the subject of sexuality can be confronting and may have resulted in the suppressing or reworking of particular memories. My sense has been though, that responses regarding pre-marital sexual activity were straightforward and honest, and provide a reliable barometer for many

⁷⁶⁴ Figures quoted in Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 61.

⁷⁶⁵ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

⁷⁶⁶ Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 198

⁷⁶⁷ Susannah Radstone, “Reconceiving Binaries: the Limits of Memory.” *History Workshop Journal* Issue 59 (2005): 139.

women's attitudes at this time. Women who were not comfortable to discuss the issue simply nodded their agreement to their naiveté and said no more. These women worked, they went to dances and occasionally the cinema, and they assisted their parents in the home and on farms, including raising younger siblings. They dated, kissed and cuddled their boyfriends, and they sewed and collected for their boxes, and they married. Within such a restrictive environment, it is no wonder that many women's pre-marital sexual knowledge, let alone experiences, were minimal, if not non-existent; although I also have no doubt that many went on to enjoy healthy active sex lives with their husbands. These testimonies bear out what Sally Alexander refers to as 'the trials of living in an unenlightened post-Victorian age...It was not possible to articulate in a language of legitimacy, compassion or pleasure – without prurience – women's bodily or sexual needs or wants.'⁷⁶⁸

In terms of the migrant women, without exception, the Greek, Italian, Maltese, Dutch and Irish women interviewed were all kept in 'blissful' sexual ignorance by their parents, their schools and their communities. In Italy and Greece, where glory boxes were frequently the work of the mothers, a daughter's sexuality was kept as separate from her, as was her glory box – to be presented for use at the point of marriage. For others who collected for themselves, the connection between their domestic and intimate goods and the looming realities of a sexualised life through marriage were never made. The point is particularly strong in relation to the hundreds of Italian and Greek proxy brides who migrated to Australia during the 1950s. As McCalman observed of these women in her study of the Royal Women's Hospital, these women 'had scarcely, if at all, seen their future husbands before arriving in Australia. They

⁷⁶⁸ Sally Alexander, "The Mysteries and Secrets of Women's Bodies. Sexual knowledge in the first half of the twentieth century' in Nava and O'Shea, *Modern Times*, 163.

emigrated without their families; many had little schooling because of the war. They were young, sexually ignorant, alone and terribly frightened.'⁷⁶⁹ **(Figures 16 & 17)**

Irene Soumilas from Lefkas was extremely young and naïve when she married. She had lived a simple life in a small Greek village, keeping to herself, an innocent romantic existence. Her mother 'didn't tell me anything about the birds and the bees, nothing, she didn't tell me nothing.' She obeyed her strict parents and when told at the age of 19 that she would be travelling to Australia to marry a Greek man there in 1958, she complied, as did so many of her compatriots:

Yes, I thought that was what I was supposed to do, I always did what I was told...you do obey your parents and obey your husband...When I was 18 I think, my father kept mentioning that there's relatives in Australia, and there's someone who wants a decent woman to marry, someone from one of his relative's friends, and he thought that's a good opportunity...and I was told fantastic things, of course Australia is fantastic... I got engaged and he brought me out here.⁷⁷⁰

For Italian women, whether their adolescent years were spent in Italy or Australia, the story of ignorance is very much the same, and Catholic attitudes towards pre-marital sex would have been influential here. McCalman quotes Liliana Ferrara, the first interpreter employed at the Royal Women's Hospital (herself a proxy bride), in order to address the desperate needs of these women. She recalled their reticence to discuss sexual problems and their scant knowledge of their bodies: 'The girls in Italy were sheltered: they don't know

⁷⁶⁹ Janet McCalman, *Sex and Suffering. Women's Health and a Women's Hospital* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 262.

⁷⁷⁰ Irene Soumilas, 2005.

about anything, they don't know what's going to happen when they get married. They were terrified.'⁷⁷¹ This sexual ignorance can also be considered in the context of Australian government policy relating to southern European immigration during the 1950s and 1960s. With the issue of gender imbalance officially acknowledged, women from countries such as Italy were sought as brides, for their compatriots, in order to quell a perceived social instability. Thus, as Vasta proposes, 'women were needed as sexual partners to contain their male nationals. Clearly, through cultural explanations, the women were being defined into racially constructed gender roles.'⁷⁷² There was, in a sense, a degree of government manipulation of these women, utilising their sexuality which for many was untested and even unacknowledged.

⁷⁷¹ McCalman, *Sex and Suffering*, 264.

⁷⁷² Vasta, "Italian Migrant Women" in Castles et al, *Australia's Italians*, 145.

Edda Azzola grew up in northern Italy and received no sex education at all:

My mother she never even mentioned sex, probably because her mum did the same to her but in those years talking sex was forbidden... when we were entering the room, silent, nobody talks, everybody stops. It was something that was not for us...It was really bad...Because I wasn't prepared or anything...I remember my sister, the second one, she was two years from me... and she said 'How was it?'...You know, I couldn't even answer...A year after she got married, she said 'Now I understand!'⁷⁷³ **(Figure 18)**

For Margot Veltkamp from Holland, her naiveté led to a wedding night full of the shock of the unknown: 'It was an enormous shock, my wedding night nothing like, it was shock after shock, it was horrible really, it was horrible, and it took a long time to really enjoy it.'⁷⁷⁴ Margot was a long way from the illusions created by her trousseau, but these ill-effects of her ignorance did heal over time. **(Figure 19)**

For Irish women the symbolic tension embedded within the glory box is not as overt as with Australian-born girls. In Dublin, they generally collected only when they were courting and just before the wedding, so they weren't going through adolescent years collecting and embroidering and being sexually naïve at same time, as some Australian-born and other European girls were. The focus was rapid accumulation of property with less of the extended ritual of local traditions. Maureen King from Dublin observes that she was sexually inexperienced, but not completely ignorant:

⁷⁷³ Edda Azzola, 2006.

⁷⁷⁴ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

My mother didn't even tell me about periods, I thought I was bleeding to death when I got my first period... And most of the things I learnt, I learnt from the other kids on the street. Certainly we were sexually naïve, we went and did a pre-Cana conference (Catholic church-run sex and marriage instruction for engaged couples) before we got married and...it nearly put me off, to be quite honest! ...I read books but that wasn't the reality. The reality has to be experienced I think.⁷⁷⁵

Maureen also recalls the strict protocols surrounding relationships between young men and women during the 1940s and 1950s in Ireland:

Certainly (there) was an emphasis on you didn't touch a girl before you were married and we certainly didn't allow it...Marriage...was more get married and have a family than just get married. And the priests gave their sermons on that and we had retreats...and the fellas would even be too scared to stand next to a girl sometimes...the guys had to respect you and that was expected and if they didn't you had nothing to do with them.⁷⁷⁶ **(Figure 20)**

Joan Cox's fiancé Joe migrated to Australia before her, so they were separated for a year before being reunited at Station Pier in 1957. He was 34, she was 22. They had exchanged many letters, all of which were viewed by Joan's mother in Ireland, suggesting that there was little private space for intimacy: 'He did (write) lots of letters...and I showed every one of them to my mother...and he always had a little 'x' up in the corner in a little square, and

⁷⁷⁵ Maureen King, 2006.

⁷⁷⁶ Maureen King, 2006.

Mum used to say, “What’s that?” and I said “That’s for his kiss to send to me.”⁷⁷⁷ Even the universal code for a kiss was scrutinised, regardless of the extremely safe distance between the couple. **(Figure 21)**

Consequently, there existed a chasm in the imaginative leap for young unmarried women between collecting domestic and personal items for marriage, including garments for the wedding night, and any real comprehension of some of the realities of the married state. There were a couple of exceptions amongst the interview pool of locally-born women who married during the 1950s. Beth Taws married relatively late in life for the time (at 31) and was a nurse so she hinted she was probably more ‘knowledgeable’ than other girls. **(Figure 22)** Ruby Kwijas fell pregnant to the man she was in love with and whom she subsequently married, and Dot Mitchell implied that navy life had taught her a little, but all the other Australian-born women little idea about what to expect on their wedding nights.⁷⁷⁸ Their mothers had not educated them about menstruation, sex, pregnancy or childbirth. It was simply not talked about – the girls had to work it out on their own. The glory box represented, and in fact publicly defined, one particular identity for women – married with domestic and sexual responsibilities. Fundamental components of female identity, such as menstruation, and the potential to have and enjoy sex and bear children, were not discussed.⁷⁷⁹ Single young women worked away at their boxes without really seeing the contents as more than the dream of setting

⁷⁷⁷ Joan Cox, 2008.

⁷⁷⁸ Beth Taws, Ruby Kwijas and Dot Mitchell, 2003.

⁷⁷⁹ On mother and daughter relationships and the absence of sex discussions in the United States, refer to Linda W. Rosenzweig, *The Anchor of My Life. Middle-Class American Mothers and Daughters, 1880-1920* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1993).

up house. As Dot Mitchell reflected, the glory box 'is the romantic side of it, where the day to day things you don't really know about.'⁷⁸⁰

Such paradoxes highlight the glory box – container, collection and cultural practice – as a simultaneous symbol of the productivity and reproductivity of women. The glory box overtly speaks of women's productivity – a public expression of skill, thrift and creativity for utilitarian purposes. But it also subtly alludes to women's reproductivity, with the implicit connections between sexuality (trousseau), marital domesticity (goods), and child rearing. This conflation of production and reproduction, romance and reality, is also illustrated in the persistence of wedding preparation advice in magazines. Mrs Ada Ford, in her serial 'Guide for Young Homemakers' in the *Australian Home Beautiful* (1957), describes a fantasy transition from girlhood to womanhood with marriage the longed-for conclusion:

Do you remember, when you were a very little girl, how you loved to play with your doll's teaset and entertain your playmates at afternoon tea? Always in your young mind was the thought that when you grew up, you would have a home of your own and, of course, lots of babies. As the years went by, your day-dreams went on – you could see yourself, the most ravishing beautiful bride ever, walking up the aisle with the man of your dreams. Suddenly and gloriously, this dream has been realised. YOU ARE ENGAGED!⁷⁸¹

She goes on to describe the importance of a sensible trousseau, and thus creates an idealised evolution of women from 'pretend' domesticity, to dreaming of

⁷⁸⁰ Dot Mitchell, 2003.

⁷⁸¹ Ford, "Guide for young homemakers," *Australian Home Beautiful*, 35.

home and motherhood, to fulfilment in the wedding. This fantasy of course is totally removed both from the reality of marriage and the reality of many women's formative experiences. Even while collecting glory boxes, this total preoccupation with marriage and home-making was not evident amongst any of the women interviewed for this study. Nevertheless, their naiveté was. Moreover, this article suggestively describes a so-called lifelong dream of marriage, creates an idealised physical and attitudinal femininity, and lauds the practical trappings (the trousseau) which makes all this achievable. It is just one example of how, from World War II, 'modern' women were exhorted to be domestically proficient, yet individually interesting and improved. But they were also, as Reiger argues,

increasingly advised on how to produce (themselves) as a physical object, as an item of exchange in a system of heterosexual attraction, the marriage market-place. In both respects, through the hints on how to be an interesting 'person', and on how to be desirable and to win and keep a mate, women were being exhorted to produce themselves as a mass commodity.⁷⁸²

In this way, women and their glory boxes can be seen as the complete feminine commodity, ready for the marriage market. Nevertheless, despite arguments made by historians such as Lake and Reiger regarding the effective selling by popular culture of sexualised domesticated women, my testimonial evidence points to its failure to educate these women as sexually aware beings. It is an example of how visual forms of evidence can benefit from augmentation by oral history to offer more complex historical interpretations.

⁷⁸² Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home*, 81.

Ignorance is Bliss? Sex Education, 1930s-1950s:

Our parents didn't talk to us about that...Mum never told us a thing.⁷⁸³

(Daisy Chapman, growing up in the 1930s and 1940s)

The mothers and schools of many young women surrounded issues relating to sex and reproduction by an impenetrable wall of silence. As has already been indicated, this silence had uncomfortable, if not catastrophic implications for young brides making the transition from maid to married woman in a fog of ignorance and a disguise of sheets and nightgowns. Even though the issue of sex education in the home and the classroom was under intensive community discussion at this time, and numerous instructional texts for parents, teachers and even the children themselves were published in Australia and many imported from overseas, little appears to have filtered through to many of the young women themselves. From the 1920s to 1950s, sex education school courses emerged which focused on hygiene and cleanliness and, according to Tricia Szirom, were directed by school medical officers but they avoided controversial topics (presumably such as contraception, masturbation and same-sex relationships).⁷⁸⁴ Educational booklets, what Johnson calls 'conduct books',⁷⁸⁵ were offered by various organisations to provide what they believed to be important advice on the instruction of children and young adults on sexual biology and behaviour, within a Christian moral framework.⁷⁸⁶ However, perhaps like the rare sexual manuals for married couples, they were excluded

⁷⁸³ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

⁷⁸⁴ Tricia Szirom, *Teaching Gender? Sex Education and Sexual Stereotypes* (North Sydney, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 75.

⁷⁸⁵ Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, 135.

⁷⁸⁶ The role of churchwomen's groups in promoting sex education for children is discussed in Ellen Warne, "Sex Education Debates and the Modest Mother in Australia, 1890s to the 1930s." *Women's History Review* Vol.8, No.2 (1999): 311-327.

from local libraries, limiting their accessibility to working-class women, if they even knew to search for them.⁷⁸⁷

The Father and Son Welfare Movement (formed in New South Wales in 1926 and which had a Mother and Daughter section) was one such group which nevertheless received mixed even hostile community reactions for its trouble.⁷⁸⁸ They produced *The Guide Through Girlhood* (1945) by Florence Kenny, strong on messages of purity of mind and body, but also on the importance of educating girls by stating that 'it is a birthright of every Australian girl to pass from infancy to womanhood with wide-open eyes.'⁷⁸⁹ Another example is Florence Grylls's *Life and Growth. Hygiene for Girls* (no date, circa 1940s), which outlines in eight pages the stages of female biological and reproductive development, focusing primarily on menstruation. In presenting sexual attraction between males and females as natural, Grylls firmly positioned the fulfilment of these feelings as only acceptable after marriage and within the rubric of woman as wife, mother and homemaker: 'Women find that it is best to defer marriage until about 21, so that they can be educated, learn to manage a home, and care for children, and have time to meet and learn to understand young people of the other sex.'⁷⁹⁰

The overall messages about the naturalness of the menstrual cycle, the human body and even lovemaking (within marriage) had become more positive and

⁷⁸⁷ The frequent banning of sex manuals from libraries is referred to in Darian-Smith, *On the Homefront*, 194.

⁷⁸⁸ Szirom, *Teaching Gender?*, 75. One publication example is Karl de Schweinitz, *Growing Up* (New South Wales: Father and Son Welfare Movement of Australia, 1956).

⁷⁸⁹ Florence Kenny, *The Guide Through Girlhood* (New South Wales: Father and Son Welfare Movement and League of Youth and Honour, 1945). A very similar statement is made in *The Digest of Hygiene for Mother and Daughter. A Digest for Women and Growing Girls, which Completely Covers the Field of Sex Hygiene*, ed. M.A. Horn (USA: Hallmark Productions, Inc, 1947 and printed in Australia), 4.

⁷⁹⁰ Florence Grylls, *Life and Growth. Hygiene for Girls* (Melbourne: n.d., n.p., circa 1940s).

reassuring. However, Victorian ethical mores remained prevalent, with abstinence the dominant message, the unpleasant potential consequences emphasised (venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy), and a biological focus on procreation and childbirth, rather than the sexual act. Nevertheless, American author Frances Bruce Strain provided positive, reassuring, if moralising, information for girls about menstruation, and for girls and boys on sex within marriage as an act of love as well as for procreation: 'Because mating is not only a way to start one's family, but is also a way of expressing their love, husbands and wives unite when no baby is to be started...Mate loving is a very special part of marriage and makes for happiness.'⁷⁹¹ By the 1940s, fewer books on sex education appeared, partly due to the wartime paper shortages. They continued with the conventional prevention messages⁷⁹² as did the writers of the 1950s and 1960s who, as Wyndham argues, 'tried to re-establish the pre-war sexual mores in elaborate dating manuals outlining sexual etiquette.'⁷⁹³

This notion of proper etiquette was also evident in attitudes towards menstruation, whereby home education by many mothers – a reactive response, after a girl started her period – focused on what to do and how to disguise the fact, rather than any pre-emptive information about why it occurred and what to expect. Suellen Murray's study of Australian women's menstrual history revealed through numerous oral histories these common patterns of silence and secrecy and she observes that,

⁷⁹¹ Frances Bruce Strain, *Being Born. A Book of Facts for Boys and Girls* (London: Arthur Barron, 1951; first published London: D Appleton-Century Company Inc, 1936), 32-33.

⁷⁹² Diana Wyndham, "No news and bad news: A brief history of sex education for children" in *Teaching About Sex. The Australian Experience*, ed. Wendy McCarthy (North Sydney, New South Wales: Australian Federation of Family Planning Association Inc., George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty., Ltd., 1983), 9.

⁷⁹³ Wyndham, "No news and bad news" in McCarthy, *Teaching About Sex*, 10.

despite recommendations by medical and popular health writers that girls should be educated about menstruation prior to menarche, many Australian girls and young women growing up in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century received little information prior to or at menarche.⁷⁹⁴

None of the women interviewed had menstruation explained to them by their mothers before or even when they had their first period. No doubt this was a continuation of their own mothers' approaches to their sex education.

Instruction focused on how to deal with the monthly ritual – using and washing the cloths, hanging them on the line behind the sheets – but not what it meant. Yet even at this age, some girls had already commenced collecting items for a marital, domesticated and sexualised state, in complete isolation from the development of their bodies.

By the 1930s, menstrual products were much more frequently visible in advertising, operating, argues Alia Al-Khalidi, 'within the discourses of hygiene, freedom and concealment.'⁷⁹⁵ During this period, manufacturers of the new disposable menstrual products also released advice booklets for teenagers about managing menstruation, but as the women interviewed for this study continued using home-produced protection, they did not come into contact with these publications.⁷⁹⁶ Murray confirms this trend from her own interviews

⁷⁹⁴ Suellen Murray, "'Keeping Their Secret Safe': Menstrual Etiquette in Australia, 1900-1960." *Hecate* 24, no.1 (1998) no page numbers on e-journal.

⁷⁹⁵ Alia Al-Khalidi, "'The greatest invention of the century': menstruation in visual and material culture" in Andrews and Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband*, 76.

⁷⁹⁶ An overview of menstrual products manufacturers advice booklets and print advertising is discussed in Carla Pascoe, "The Bleeding Obvious: a Secret History of Menstruation in Australia, 1880-1990" (BA Hons, The University of Melbourne, 2005). See also Debra L. Merskin, "What Every Girl Should Know: An Analysis of Feminine Hygiene Advertising" in *Growing Up Girls. Popular Culture and the Construction of*

with women, observing that, 'many of the women I interviewed commenced using cloths at menarche and only later in life used pads, fewer again used tampons. These women continued to use homemade menstrual cloths well into the 1940s and 1950s.' She cites one of the main reasons as cost and certainly, amongst women interviewed for my study, this was most likely the case.⁷⁹⁷

There was a little discussion amongst girlfriends, although often, predictably, ill informed, and the boys were frequently as naïve as the girls. Some girls at least had an awareness of childbirth as, with large families, older girls were still at home when their mothers were producing their last children. Yet Marjorie Cope states she was oblivious to her mother's final pregnancy and that when she started to menstruate she 'thought she was dying.'⁷⁹⁸ It is extraordinary that her older sisters did not think to relieve her of this trauma. This was exactly the situation that The Father and Son Welfare Movement were keen to avoid, observing that,

unfortunately some girls to whom this natural happening has not been explained beforehand, when they see the stain on their garments, think that some dreadful thing has occurred and they become frightened...they are afraid to speak to their mother about it as they really believe they are bleeding to death, as so they worry and worry for three or four days or perhaps longer, until the bleeding stops, and after a few weeks, when they have just recovered from the fright, it commences again!⁷⁹⁹

Identity, eds. Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999), 113-132.

⁷⁹⁷ Murray, "Keeping Their Secret Safe," *Hecate*, (no page numbers on e-journal).

⁷⁹⁸ Marjorie Cope, 2003.

⁷⁹⁹ Florence Kenny, *The Guide Through Girlhood*, 6-7.

Some of the girls who grew up on farms such as Joan Skate and Ester Rose state that they learnt a little from the cows but that they didn't really make the leap to the human condition.⁸⁰⁰ Thelma Drummond's ignorance is perhaps the most appalling – she states that when she went to hospital to have her first baby after she married in 1939, that she still didn't have a clue: 'I thought it would come out my belly button! Sex, menstruation, and childbirth were 'all hush hush in those days...sex was a dirty word.'⁸⁰¹ This 'belly-button theory of birth' was not unique to Thelma and is referred to by Alexander as common amongst working-class women growing up in England in the inter-war years.⁸⁰² McCalman too describes the pre-marital and pre-pregnancy sexual ignorance of many women during the Depression years in her study of the working-class, inner-Melbourne suburb of Richmond.⁸⁰³

Kath Davis recalls being told nothing by her mother when she was growing up during the 1930s and 1940s. She dealt with her first period herself, but by the second she decided to tell her mother, who advised 'don't wash your hair and don't wash your feet when you're having your period.' Everything else she learnt from her school friends during Mass, which can't have been much since she says she thought if you kissed a boy you got pregnant. So alien was the subject that Kath remembers she was afraid to tell her mother she was pregnant even after five years of marriage.⁸⁰⁴ Nor did Loris Peggie's mother or school enlighten her in the 1950s:

⁸⁰⁰ Joan Skate and Ester Rose, 2003. Gleaning a few rudimentary lessons about sex and birthing from farm animals is raised in Bell, *Generations*, 205.

⁸⁰¹ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

⁸⁰² Alexander, "The Mysteries and Secrets" in Nava and O'Shea, *Modern Times*, 166.

⁸⁰³ McCalman, *Struggletown*, 202-206.

⁸⁰⁴ Kath Davis, 2003. This notion about not washing while menstruating is also described by women in Bell, *Generations*, 209.

No I didn't receive very much training at all, just very basic...I suppose it wasn't that long after I started to have a period, my aunt was married and she started to have children and I think, maybe, it was through experiences that I had with my mother's younger sisters that I really learnt more than I did through the family...I think most of us knew a little bit but it was never, ever discussed...most of us wouldn't have even divulged when we were having a period or anything like that, it was just not done.⁸⁰⁵

Josephine Carey and Carmel Tata, who migrated from southern Italy to Australia as children during the 1950s and 1960s, were surrounded by the same shroud of secrecy by their mothers in Australia as they would have been in Italy – and as their mothers themselves had been. Josephine recalls:

I remember when I got my period, I was quite, I mean I didn't know what was going on, I was upset, and I went in to tell her and, there was a term that was used in the Italian community, ...you were now a 'signorina' but with that came, it was like, a curse, you know, 'oh you poor thing' you know....even though it was good on one side that I was signorina and that I was probably...getting my body ready for marriage, she never never went into any detail you know, she didn't give me a lot of sex talk.⁸⁰⁶

For Carmel Tata, it was a similar story: 'Menstruation, even that was disastrous. She was so behind the times, she just wrapped up two big nappies. But lucky for me I had this beautiful modern Italian family who lived one street

⁸⁰⁵ Loris Peggie, 2005.

⁸⁰⁶ Josephine Carey, 2005.

away...and she (the mother) told me everything I needed to know.'⁸⁰⁷ **(Figure 23)** Rose Patti, the daughter of a small Sicilian village mother, recalls her first period and school sex education in Melbourne during the 1960s:

I used to hear...my mum and her friends and my aunty talking about in dialect, it translates to 'those things.'...And the period, back then, they used to have cloths which they'd then boil and put it in White King or whatever and try and keep clean. ...So I knew about the 'cose,' those things, and when I got my first period, my mum said... here I was all of 12 or 13 and I had no control of what was happening, she says to me, 'Oh I thought you might have waited a bit longer.' And so she then proceeded to show me how with a pin I would use this bit of material...Thank goodness I was in secondary school, I was in Santa Maria College in Northcote and...we had some sort of sex education there. That was a classic, because a nun came in with a tape recorder, told us all to face the front and keep quiet. Put a tape in, walked out, when the tape finished walked back in, turned the tape over.'⁸⁰⁸

In Holland, the taboos were very similar. Margot Veltkamp, who grew up in The Hague during the 1940s describes the enforced secrecy in her family home:

We never dared to talk about it. I lived in a house with two brothers and two sisters. Talking about menstruation, I found it, it was there one day, I didn't know what it was, I thought there was something wrong with me, that's what I thought, it was horrible discovering. I showed (my

⁸⁰⁷ Carmel Tata, 2006.

⁸⁰⁸ Rose Patti, 2005.

mother) and all she said was, here is an old pair of underpants and that's what's happening every month.⁸⁰⁹

The piecing together of bodily and sexual knowledge like a jigsaw puzzle is a recurring theme, with pieces gleaned from the school grounds, sisters, cinema, books and magazines, but rarely the obvious source of knowledge – the mothers – for reasons of embarrassment, and perhaps fear of the perceived consequences of knowledge.⁸¹⁰ Moreover, these women may not have had the biological understanding, nor at that time the female biological vocabulary, to be able to competently instruct their daughters. This contradicts some of the prevailing wisdom of the time which insisted that mothers were primarily responsible for educating their young daughters early about these matters. Richards writes that 'during this time the true mother will watch her daughter's development with loving interest, striving to guide young feet safely over the threshold from childhood into the realm of womanhood.'⁸¹¹ Reiger argues that 'despite such developments, oral as well as literary evidence tends to suggest that children continued to receive most of their sexual knowledge from their peers'⁸¹² This observation is born out in the testimonies detailed above. Even a conservative tract, such as Enid Smith's *Telling Your Children*, published by the Alliance of Honour which espoused a Christian morality base on moral purity, might have saved some of these women from complete ignorance and its frequently negative effects. The booklet promoted menstrual knowledge for girls prior to its commencement, and sexual knowledge in readiness for marriage. She argues that, if she has not been taught,

⁸⁰⁹ Margot Veltkamp, 2006.

⁸¹⁰ Discussed further in the English context by Alexander, "The Mysteries and Secrets" in Nava and O'Shea, *Modern Times*, 166.

⁸¹¹ Richards, *Ladies' Handbook of Home Treatment*, 687.

⁸¹² Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home*, 188, and explored further, 178-189.

the girl comes to as much harm as the boy; though there is just this difference between boy and girl: every boy finds out the truth, but some girls never do, not even when they are going to be married. An ignorant girl may be scared out of her wits on her wedding night.⁸¹³

And so some were.

⁸¹³ Enid M. Smith, *Telling Your Children. Part I. For Mothers of Little Children* (Melbourne: The Alliance of Honour, n.d.,)

5.5 Conclusion

There exists a strong collective experience of sexual naiveté amongst Australian-born and European migrant women from this period. Families and local communities were silent regarding the bodies and desires of young women who were at the time developing collections of both domestic goods and intimate apparel for married life. This imposition of control, shame and ignorance evolved, at least in part, from a long history of Christian religious morality, which accelerated in terms of the division of male and female roles and identities during the Victorian era. By the early twentieth century, female biological functions such as menstruation and childbirth were taboo; into the 1950s and beyond, Catholic couples were still required to view sex as an act primarily for procreation, as well as pleasure. Yet women were also being encouraged in popular media to emerge as active sexual marital partners, desiring and desirable, acquiring the material culture to match. It was a process of femininity fulfilment that actually began prior to marriage through the activity of building a glory box, but a 'sexualisation' that many pre-marital women did not really comprehend. It was an astonishing plethora of mixed messages. For the women interviewed for this study, their lives tended to be a progression from the shock of menstruation, to the romantic hopes of the glory box, the surprise, pleasure and sometimes shock of marital sex, and frequently, on to the shock of childbirth. In this environment of maternal knowledge withheld and public knowledge not filtering through to a large group of women, glory box collections stand as strange symbols of both innocence and pragmatism, of virginity and sexuality, of romance and abrupt reality – an embodiment of romantic sexuality.

Moreover, it is evident that, until relatively recently, women in Australia (Australian and migrant born) continued to accumulate their trousseaux as a

public act, but under a shroud of sexual secrecy. They purchased bed sheets, embroidered pillow shams and selected nightgowns with little knowledge, let alone experience, of the realities of sex, pregnancy and childbirth. During the thirty-year period in question, debates regarding abstinence, promiscuity, contraception, and sexual pleasure raged while shifts in the definition of femininity occurred. Yet overwhelmingly, the women interviewed sewed their glory boxes (to varying degrees), danced with and kissed their boyfriends but remained virgins, while their mothers allowed them to remain sexually unenlightened. Parker's description of the tensions inherent in the female experience of embroidery, might just as well be describing the glory box as an ambivalent sexual signifier:

The manner in which embroidery signifies both self-containment and submission is the key to understanding women's relation to the art. Embroidery has provided a source of pleasure and power for women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness. Paradoxically, while embroidery was employed to inculcate femininity in women, it also enabled them to negotiate the constraints of femininity.⁸¹⁴

Women were active creators and producers; they were also consumers and reproducers. Their potential power was restricted by the knowledge that was withheld from them; their female roles shaped by social, political and economic forces that encouraged women to be married, domesticated and child-bearing. Glory boxes are containers crammed full of sexual meanings. Some of these meanings became more than apparent for the women who owned and eventually opened their glory boxes for active use. Some of these meanings lay concealed and latent in glory box collections that never saw the light of day.

⁸¹⁴ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 11.

Conclusion

Glory boxes, those often sad reminders of things that might have been...

Girls accumulate too much rubbish and duplicate on things absurdly.

(Valerie Smith, South Perth, Western Australia, 'So They Say,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 1937)⁸¹⁵

As early as the 1930s, glory boxes were viewed by some women as receptacles for rampant consumerism and wasted production, as well as hollow vessels for dreams unfulfilled. I wish I could have talked to Valerie Smith, encouraged her to expand upon her opinion and her own personal circumstances. But Valerie differs from many women of her generation – the women I interviewed, those who shared anecdotes with me on talkback radio and those whose stories have been repeated over the years in numerous exhibitions about glory boxes throughout Australia. The collecting practices of these women reflected a generation who produced and purchased with care. Their glory boxes demonstrated their thrift and their willingness to delay both consumptive and sexual gratification until marriage. They took pleasure in the practice, but were not preoccupied with it. They viewed it as an automatic part of their evolving womanhood, which encompassed work, parental support, dating, courtship, marriage, home and children.

Where did this leave the glory box tradition, this complex and ambivalent female object, collective of goods, and cultural practice, in 1960? This was a decade on the cusp of radical feminism, evolving modern domestic aesthetics and teen identities for girls, and continued mass consumption. Did the glory

⁸¹⁵"So They Say," *Australian Women's Weekly*, 6 March 1937, 19.

box women of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s pass on the tradition to their daughters? Did migrating customs survive? Did the artefacts themselves retain any personal and cultural meanings for those women? Did the glory box maintain a material domestic presence in their homes? This conclusion will consider these questions, focusing on the years immediately following the period of this study. I will draw together key concepts which have offered unique perspectives on histories of consumption, production, femininity, sexuality, economy and transnationalism. And I will reflect upon the scholarly oversight of glory boxes, which has broader implications by historians for the treatment of domestic consumption and production, especially that of women. This study has been a historically revisionist exercise which has rediscovered an important part of Australian women's experience. But it has also offered a new interpretation of themes of production and consumption which may generate similar studies steeped in memory and material culture.

Historical Absence:

In numerous studies on marriage, sexuality, consumerism, domesticity and gendered labour division in Australia written since the 1970s – many of which have been cited throughout this study – glory boxes have rarely rated a mention. Histories of women and gender published in the 1970s and 1980s were politically motivated and focused primarily on historical and contemporary issues relating to work, class, political representation, social equality and female sexuality.⁸¹⁶ But the absence of glory boxes from most social history writings is

⁸¹⁶ Such key works include: Margaret Bevege, Margaret James and Carmel Shute, eds, *Worth Her Salt. Women at Work in Australia* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982); Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia, 1788 to 1975* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1976); Jill Matthews, *Good and Mad Women*; Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home*; Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work, 1888-1974* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1975); Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, revised edition, 1994, first published 1975); Elizabeth Windschuttle, ed,

related also, I believe, to its representation as a conservative practice and thus a symbol of all that the feminist movement of the 1970s aspired to leave behind. The late twentieth century women's movement, women's history and the apparent decline of the glory box tradition all coincided in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹⁷ At this time many women were questioning marriage as an ultimate goal in itself, and full time domesticity as a fulfilling existence. These women would have been shedding many of the material trappings of social prescription, and undoubtedly glory boxes would have fallen within this category. In his discussion about how consumer goods can act as instruments of change in terms of cultural re-definition, McCracken observes that a group such as women may

dispense with the consumer goods that carries their conventional definition...(so that)...radical feminists of the 1960s deliberately disassociated themselves from the clothing that gave voice to conventional cultural categories of gender and the cultural principles on which this distinction was founded.⁸¹⁸

It is not surprising then that the glory box, representing the desire for married, domestic life, became for many women an ambivalent symbol in this climate and context. For my own mother, a glory box symbolised all the gendered constrictions she was straining against in the 1970s, while she took advantage of free university education, obtained her driver's licence and consciously

Women, Class and History. Feminist Perspectives on Australia, 1788-1978 (Sydney: Fontana/Collins, 1980).

⁸¹⁷ A useful overview of the evolution of women's history and feminism in the 1960s and 1970s is provided in Mary Spongberg, *Writing Women's History since the Renaissance* (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 172-208. See also Marilyn Lake. *Getting Equal. The history of Australian feminism* (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 214-276.

⁸¹⁸ McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 135.

declined to pass on her own highly competent sewing and knitting skills to her daughters. My sister and I did not have glory boxes, and nor can we sew or knit. The social and economic positioning of Australian women was changing. Wages improved, secondary school completion and university enrolments increased and single women moved out of the family home into independent situations. Mass-produced domestic and textile goods continued to become cheaper, and suited immediate, and even disposable, rather than delayed and prolonged use. None of these developments complemented or nurtured glory box practices. By the mid 1980s, the cardboard box of second-hand domestic items under my bed was being filled for an independent rather than a married relocation once I reached young adulthood.

During the 1970s and 1980s, issues such as emancipation and social and industrial change were the preoccupations of feminist historians. But why has the absence of glory boxes continued within Australian historiography since the 1990s? As this thesis has demonstrated, the breadth and reach of the glory box tradition offers new insights into historical work undertaken in relevant areas such as sexuality, femininity, marriage and the growing interest in consumer culture. Indeed, although historians have skirted around the subject of the glory box, rarely has it been directly addressed.⁸¹⁹ Recent writings in feminist scholarship have pointed to an irreconcilable difference that has led to the ongoing absence in gender histories of the subject of domesticity (embodied in the housewife). For example, Joanne Hollows has suggested that 'the reasons for feminism's neglect of domestic consumption needs not only to be

⁸¹⁹ For example: Game and Pringle, "Sexuality and the suburban dream" in White and Russell (1997); Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley* (1994); Lake, "Female desires: the meaning of World War II" in White and Russell (1997); Reekie, *Temptations* (1993); Darian-Smith, "Remembering Romance: Memory, Gender and World War II" in Damousi and Lake (1995); Finch, "Consuming passions: Romance and consumerism during World War II" in Damousi and Lake (1995).

understood in relation to feminism's flight from the home, but also feminism's need to keep a distance from the woman who inhabits the home, the housewife.⁸²⁰ Glory boxes symbolise domesticity and traditional forms of production (fancywork) and consumption (household goods). This epitomises for many feminist historians an unsalvageable materiality of housewives-in-waiting. In reflecting upon why feminist histories have omitted housewives' associations from its own narrative, Johnson and Lloyd observe that,

The problem seems to be more to be a question of what is seen as feminist. Women arguing for and promoting their needs as managers of domesticity and consumers would appear to fail to register as such. They bring with them the whiff of a world that is still perhaps to be denied by feminism, or at least one with which we remain uncomfortable.⁸²¹

Perhaps glory boxes have created a level of discomfort which has seen them overlooked? Inserting them into Australian history in general, and women's history in particular, has required a new perspective on domestic female consumption, which has attempted to separate out women as producers, consumers, future homemakers, property accumulators, and preparatory household managers. This approach, while in some ways narrowly focused (as were the lives of many young single women), has also had an expansive outcome. It has rediscovered silent (even silenced) female experiences, reinterpreted the narrow interpretations of their consumer activity, while exposing glory boxes as counterbalance to more radical feminist activity. This has resulted in a more complete picture of the lives of female domestic consumer lives between the 1930s and 1950s. This thesis enriches the critical

⁸²⁰ Joanne Hollows, "The Feminist and the Cook: Julia Child, Betty Friedan and Domestic Femininity," Casey and Martens, *Gender and Consumption*, 35.

⁸²¹ Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, 27.

theoretical frameworks relating to femininity, domesticity and consumption established by the many Australian historians whose work has been invaluable to this study. But it has needed the memories of women growing up during the 1930s-1950s, and associated material culture, to rediscover this wide-ranging female experience and its broader social, cultural and economic signifiers. Consequently, this study has demonstrated the value of multiple layers of evidence, and also suggested tensions between the historian and the historical subject.

Thematic Summary:

A group of connected domestic objects, and the memories of those who accumulated them, have provided the basis for exploring a period of significant economic, cultural and social change in Australia. This has been also a process of collecting individual narratives in order to formulate a collective memory of glory boxes, while connecting family and community activities with national events and trends. In a similar way, Darian-Smith has commented regarding the testimony of young women in wartime that 'in these memory narratives, each individual placed herself between a spectrum of past and present, forging links between and identifying with personal, community and national events. Individual memories interacted with collective ones.'⁸²² Moreover, I have simultaneously revealed the potential of the glory box as a vehicle for cultural analysis, as well as deepening the field of study of two historical methodologies – gender and consumption. Thus, glory boxes have been positioned within Australian women's histories as a significant part of the experiences of innumerable Australian-born and migrating women. And histories of

⁸²² Darian-Smith, "War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War" in *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, eds. Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, 1994), 141.

consumerism, femininity, sexuality, economy and migration have been enriched. As with any history-writing which relies upon living memory and material culture, it has indeed been a matter of 'seizing the day' before the stories were gone, and only a few chests and doilies remained.

An important theme that has run through this study is the nature of the glory box as an ambivalent signifier for women, in terms of modernity, consumption and femininity. Glory boxes have represented a degree of social constriction to a married, domestic future, although a future by no means unwelcome for many. Yet they have also represented social and economic agency, as single women accumulated personal property, selected for a future home, and generated from their own savings and their own needlecraft skills. In terms of consumer practice, glory boxes at once embraced and rejected modernity. Some boxes reflected new modern designs, but contents invariably remained traditional and conservative. Glory boxes epitomised the 1950s return to the focus on home and family, while still in sympathy with the modern trend to purchase and accumulate increasingly mass-produced goods. As a form of cultural commodity, glory boxes embodied consumerism, as well as defied it. In terms of women's sexuality, glory boxes were potent symbols of both sexual naivete, and sexual promise. Women purchased and made items relating to a future sexualised married life, frequently without sexual knowledge or experience, during a period when ideas about femininity were under debate and popular culture promoted a glamorised sexual confidence for women. Glory boxes were loaded with mixed messages for single women, yet they persevered as transitional objects throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, retaining the old and incorporating the new, until even they were left behind.

In Chapter One I established the social and economic context for this tumultuous three decades in Australian history, which incorporated a

depression, a world war, and migration, economic and consumer booms. Those living in these decades witnessed goods rationing, increases in marriage rates, a changing and increasing salaried female workforce, and shifts in definitions of femininity and modernity. Throughout this upheaval, the practice of accumulating domestic goods for marriage remained a constant for many women. They adjusted the practice according to economic lean times, scarcity of goods, shortened engagement periods, imported cultural traditions, and the evolution from hand-made to ready-made purchased goods.

Of particular significance is that glory boxes have enabled the documentation of single women's experiences of domestic consumption, which has generally only been explored (and even so rather sparingly) in relation to married women with children. The expression of material domesticity so frequently discussed within the context of married women establishing homes, actually began for many young women between 1930 and 1960 with their glory boxes. In this way, I have argued that glory boxes represent projections of spatial 'becomings,' imagined domestic spheres for which women planned, saved and accumulated goods. During this process of imagining the future domestic spaces in which many women would ultimately play roles of wives, mothers and domestic managers, they also enacted their own process of self-actualisation – as salaried workers, consumers, sexual beings, and, for migrant women, ethnic and social identities.

In Chapter Two, I focused on the material culture of glory box consumption in order to document and interpret the methodology of acquisition, and the personal and cultural meanings the objects held for local and migrant women, all within the social and economic context of post-industrialisation. In many ways, glory box production and consumption flourished due to the linking of consumerism, domesticity and femininity from the late nineteenth century,

which had a lasting impact upon the way in which women shopped, what they were encouraged to buy, and the manifesting of a modern identity for women wrapped up in creating a home. Indeed, applying the rich scholarship on the history of consumption as an interpretive tool has been one of the most rewarding outcomes of this investigation.

Moreover, advertising and branding, which accelerated from the 1920s, embraced glory boxes and their goods. They were promoted as ‘must-have’ items which, depending on the object, embodied style, romance, durability, beauty, tradition or value for money. Advertising and special features in magazines and newspapers have provided an invaluable secondary layer of evidence, demonstrating the resilience of the glory box tradition as it both consolidated and reinvented itself. Finally, the experiences of post-war migrant women (fiancées, brides, mothers and daughters) were explored as a separate but connected parallel case study, comparing transported objects and customs with those already here. I found that domestic collections accumulated prior to marriage were brought by migrating women, with the degree and nature of hand-worked goods differing across cultures. Consumer practices in Australia through large department stores, as well as small often migrant-owned stores, suited this growing market. Nevertheless, some women hung on tightly to needlecraft and dowry conventions for their daughters, highlighting significant intergenerational differences between the traditions of the birth country and a new life in Australia by the 1960s.

In Chapter Three, I identified a *community* of glory box practitioners between the 1930s and 1950s. Connected through such variables as place, time, values and ethnicity, and underpinned by class allegiances, the defining of a glory box community has assisted in the analysis of the activities and inter-relationships (within and between generations) of smaller collectives. These communities

included family units (with mother-daughter and sibling interaction of particular significance), neighbourhoods (including girlfriends and neighbours) and workplaces. They all fed into the maintenance of the glory box tradition in Australia and overseas, with varying degrees of involvement, influence and impact. It was an informal collective endeavour, within which women acted as individual agents, as they participated in property accumulation and creative production for a married domestic future. Within this framework I also explored female gatherings such as kitchen teas and glory box displays, which were organised explicitly for glory box acquisition and public admiration. I found through oral testimony that within glory box practices there was a degree of ritual, of domestic gifts received from a young age, of needlework skills passed from one generation to another, of saving, and savouring each purchase. It was primarily a pragmatic exercise. For many it was simply, 'what you did.'

In Chapter Four, I focused on the needlecraft component of glory box production, as it most clearly reflected changes to the tradition wrought by consumption and even social attitudes. The dramatic industrial changes underway in Great Britain, Europe and the United States from the late nineteenth century were being reflected by the 1930s in women's glory box production in Australia. Ready-made fabrics increased, needlecraft focused on embellishment, and pre-stamped fabrics dominated women's embroidery practices. Nevertheless, throughout the three decades, needlework continued to be part of primary and lower secondary school curricula for girls. But hand-worked goods gradually became the least dominant component of glory box collections as the decades wore on. Oral testimony revealed that by the 1950s, some single women were losing interest in, or had no time for, fancywork skills. Having always disliked needlework myself (dressmaking and embroidery were still taught during my school years in the 1970s), I found myself mildly regretting this cumulative decline in hand skills, and nostalgic for traditional

craft. Moreover, parallel trends across emigrant countries revealed both similarities and differences with Australian traditions and developments, in terms of the role of mothers in production and accumulation, the timing of commencing collections, the autonomy of young female collectors themselves, and the public nature of collection contribution and display.

In Chapter Five, I exposed the plethora of mixed sexual metaphors and messages buried deep under the lid of glory boxes, which at first glance projected simple domestic aspirations. In actuality, glory boxes symbolise sex as promise and reward, as well as a collective silence which surrounded women's sexuality and reproductive biology. They are objects straining with tensions – between the material culture of the wedding night, and the naivete of young women that was allowed by their mothers; between contemporary debates regarding contraception, promiscuity, venereal disease and sex education, and many women's persistent ignorance regarding menstruation, sex and childbirth; between new popular images of woman as sexually confident and competent, and young women not deconstructing the contrasting implications behind a bed sheet, a tablecloth and lingerie. Glory box collections stand as strange symbols of both innocence and pragmatism, of virginity and sexuality, of romance and reality, as well as the unbreakable link between female identity, sexuality, and female practices of consumption and production.

Thus glory boxes are highly complex cultural artefacts. There is an apparently simple layer of stories and objects which reflect a collective practice of producing and purchasing domestic goods, putting them aside and bringing them out in marital homes. Literally and metaphorically I have been opening cabinet doors, unfolding sheets, and lifting canister and saucepan lids. I have poked around under piles of linen, sorted through layers of fancywork and

tried to fill the absences through memories where the material objects have been long gone. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have observed,

one of the great silences about women's lives was undoubtedly filled with needlework...middle-class women were constantly sewing, and their daughters were taught to do so from the age when they could grasp a needle. The 'work boxes' and sewing chests listed in local inventories, and the samplers, quilts and other surviving artefacts speak forcefully for what is seldom said in words.⁸²³

When subjects have been sensitive for my interviewees (for instance, in relation to sexual activity), I have tried to read between the lines. There have been many laughs shared, and a few tears, as I have aired the scent of mothballs from both the collections and the narratives often never before told. Glory boxes may first appear simple, old-fashioned and easily dismissed. It is a signifier of how powerful memory and material culture can be that a glory box can be used to explore so many facets of a period of such significant social, cultural and economic change.

From Glory Box to Toy Box: Where are They Now?:

What happened to glory boxes, once opened, and the contents distributed and utilised? At this point the pre-marital meanings became diluted as the material culture of the glory box simply became part of the household furniture. While women were sentimental about their memories, they were not, with a couple of exceptions, about the boxes themselves. Glory boxes were made or purchased for a specific reason; once women married the purpose of the glory boxes

⁸²³ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, "My own fireside: the creation of the middle-class home" in *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*, eds. Jackson and Moores, 287.

changed and they were transformed, sold or given away. The majority of women interviewed no longer had their glory boxes and those who did, no longer used them as such. They commonly became children's toy boxes, storage for baby clothes or were simply disposed of as furniture tastes changed over the years. For it was, ultimately for most, a practical furniture item, not a focus of sentiment. There is also the possibility that for some women, glory boxes and their contents came to represent disappointed hopes, domestic drudgery and isolation, or feelings of inadequacy. Therefore, they were not objects to be celebrated. Nevertheless, Kath Davis, who divorced, kept and cared for her box until she donated it to Museum Victoria; Loris Peggie who never married, remains the proud keeper of a precious family heirloom; and Carmel Tata, whose glory box partially contains the pain and difficulties of the migrant experience, donated her box to Museum Victoria in recognition of its cultural and personal value.

Ester Rose's Depression box was claimed by men after her wedding. It travelled as a tackle box to fishing spots all over Victoria, and was used as a camping storage box on family holidays. In later years it became a tool box, which saved it from being discarded.⁸²⁴ Thelma Drummond, whose box was also home-made around the same time, dismissed it completely, recalling it 'got left at home. We didn't want that old junk.'⁸²⁵ Daisy Chapman, motivated by pure pragmatism in the selection and disposal of her box, had little room for sentiment:

When I saw (the box) I thought if I got a buffet, I can get a table and chairs to match it, and that would be the dining room suite. But then by the time we got the house, I'd changed my mind to Queen Anne sort of

⁸²⁴ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁸²⁵ Thelma Drummond, 2003.

stuff, so I sold it to my brother-in-law, and he paid me 20 pounds for it and I bought the crystal cabinet that's in the dining room.⁸²⁶

The ongoing narrative of Gwenda Mutimer's glory box reveals the common pragmatism of most of the women who lived through the Depression and World War II and who were programmed to reuse and recycle:

The room we were living in, it was a big room because it was built as a boarding house, very high ceilings and the possums used to make a lot of noise, and one particular night it was extremely noisy and it was all too much for my husband and he bent over the side of the bed and picked up one of his shoes and threw it as hard as he could at the ceiling. It...ricocheted off the ceiling and went straight through the glass door of the glory box. So the glass was removed and he put a panel of masonite in and painted that the same colour, primrose...(and) nursery motifs were put on the door and that's where all the baby's trousseau (went), all the nappies and everything knitted and layettes.'⁸²⁷

The glory boxes that did retain a sincere cultural and emotional value were those attached to experiences of migration, whether long ago (such as the mid-nineteenth century trunk passed down to Loris Peggie), and the trunks belonging to the mothers of Italian migrant daughters Carmel Tata and Josephine Carey. For all three the meanings lie in their connections to personal migration narratives, rather than the specific attachment to a glory box heritage – these sentiments were presented in Chapter Two.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁶ Daisy Chapman 2003.

⁸²⁷ Gwenda Mutimer 2003.

⁸²⁸ Loris Peggie, 2005, Carmel Tata, 2006 and Josephine Carey, 2005.

The Glory Box – a Fading Tradition:

Glory boxes were ultimately and inextricably connected to marriage. Serious collecting accelerated once an engagement was announced, mothers embroidered and purchased goods and put them away for daughters for use in their own marital homes, and the glory boxes of unmarried women frequently remained closed and unused. There was no subtlety and little ambiguity about what a glory box was for, nor about the particular feminine domestic skills (such as sewing, embroidery and shopping), that were required to create one.

However, interviews suggested that by the time these women were having their own daughters in Australia (who would have been in their late teens and early twenties in the 1960s and 1970s), the glory box tradition had started to fade. Of all the women interviewed only one actively passed on the custom to her daughter as a natural part of her maturation. Ester Rose bought her daughter Dorothy a large sideboard as her box. Dorothy was born in 1940, engaged at 19 in 1959 and married at 21. Ester taught her sewing and embroidery and gave her many things from her own box. However, Dorothy has not passed the tradition on to her own daughters.⁸²⁹ Other women passed on elementary sewing and knitting skills but fancywork was also on the decline. Ruby Kwijas and Dorothy Phillips had a granddaughter and a daughter who had boxes but they weren't identified as glory boxes. One was an informal box in which were stored special items passed on from mother and aunts; the other a 21st birthday present viewed as relating to leaving home rather than marriage.⁸³⁰ The remainder of the women who had daughters all refer to a 'lack of interest' on the part of their children, believing that glory boxes had 'gone out of fashion.' Kath Davis recalls her daughter, who married in the late 1960s, taking a more

⁸²⁹ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁸³⁰ Ruby Kwijas and Dorothy Phillips, 2003.

pragmatic view: 'She was not interested in having a glory box because she decided if she got married, she'd get them (household goods) all anyway.'⁸³¹

Nor did many migrant women interviewed pass on glory box traditions to their daughters. There was a general sense that they were a new generation with different priorities and interests. Indeed, Carmel Tata, whose stories have been recorded throughout this study, and whose mother hung on to Italian glory box conventions, was unlikely to have enforced these suffocating customs on the next generation.⁸³² She also described in previous chapters the amused astonishment of her Australian-born school friends unable to comprehend the gathering of towels, sheets and tea towels for a 16 year old girl. Kleoniki Gregory did continue to keep her Cypriot traditions alive in Australia, setting aside domestic goods for her daughter during the 1970s, as well as saving with her husband for a house for her (which Rose did not accept). Rose went on to accumulate purchased domestic goods for her own daughter during the 1980s, which she observes was common amongst her peers.⁸³³ Josephine Carey also appreciated her mother's adapting of the glory box tradition, as she continued making and saving things for her grandchildren:

Now she's collecting for her granddaughters, so on granddaughters' birthdays...she still makes sheets and she still finishes off towels and she gives these things for presents...they appreciate it...one is in her early thirties and another one is in her early twenties...Every birthday this is her present to them, she might make a couple of serviettes...she'll embroider an initial on them... She buys not just manchester, she

⁸³¹ Kath Davis 2003.

⁸³² Carmel Tata, 2006.

⁸³³ Kleoniki Gregory and Rose Gray, 2008.

probably has adapted to our circumstance here. She buys kitchen utensils, like a set of pots for all of them.⁸³⁴

In 1996, a wedding supplement in the Italian-Australian newspaper *Il Globo* suggested that 'women no longer accumulate (high quality linen) for the purpose of marriage but to acquire beautiful items, especially for the home.'⁸³⁵ And my sister-in-law, the only daughter of Irish migrant Joan Cox, did have a glory box in the 1980s. It was a plain cane chest that her mother encouraged her to purchase and Joan contributed manchester and kitchenware from amongst her own possessions. But her daughter never used it and it remained at the parental home, long after she had moved out into independent accommodation.

I am not suggesting that glory boxes disappeared completely (and obviously did not particularly amongst some cultural groups) but they certainly seemed to rapidly slip from prominence. This cannot be put down to any substantive decline in marriage rates, indeed Peter McDonald refers to the proportion of marriages increasing after 1955 and levelling out from 1965-1971.⁸³⁶ In 1966, only 8.4% of Australian-born women aged 30 had never been married, and 7.2% UK-born, 3.6% Dutch-born, 0.8% Greek-born and 1.6% Italian-born.⁸³⁷ The average marriage age remained stable around 21.5 from 1961-1975.⁸³⁸ However, the glory box retreat is strongly reflected in newspapers and magazines, once a rich source of glory box-related advertising. A survey of advertising and sewing

⁸³⁴ Josephine Carey, 2005.

⁸³⁵ *Il Globo*, 16 September 1996, quoted in Tence and Triarico, 'La Dote,' 80.

⁸³⁶ Peter F. McDonald, *Marriage in Australia. Age at first Marriage and Proportions Marrying, 1860-1971* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1975), 192.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁸³⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics figures from 1982 quoted in Ailsa Burns, "Why Do Women Continue to Marry?" in *Australian Women New Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, 1990, first published 1986), 220.

features in the Melbourne *Sun* newspaper in 1963 and 1966 revealed a complete absence of glory box references. Advertisements for stores selling furniture, domestic goods and lingerie, such as Patersons, Maples, Clauscens and Steeles, had no reference to them after the 1950s. By the 1960s, a china cabinet in a Maples' advertisement is just a china cabinet, whereas once it had featured glory boxes amongst its products.⁸³⁹ An Actil advertisement still promotes the quality and durability of its sheets, but not for the glory box.⁸⁴⁰ A Bevilles' advertisement for cutlery does not try to appeal to women collecting for their boxes.⁸⁴¹ Needlecraft instructions are primarily for knits and no fancywork, and the recurring special 'Pages for Women' in 1963, 1966 and 1969 contain no glory box references at all.

The *Australian Women's Weekly* had in the thirty years prior to the 1960s been replete with references to glory boxes through their fancywork patterns. By 1963, its 'Needlework Notions' page (which had existed in the 1940s and 1950s) contained only one sample of domestic embroidery, such as a tablecloth, tea towel, or duchesse set, but these were never contextualised as potential glory box items. By 1966, this segment disappeared all together, although sewing and knitting patterns for men's, women's and children's clothing continued to flourish in most of the family-oriented women's magazines. Anne Summers analysed various women's magazines published in the early 1970s, from the family-oriented (*Australian Women's Weekly*, *Australian Woman's World* and *New Idea*) to the more so-called 'modern' in outlook (such as *Belle*, *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan*). She found that they all had in common the credos of romance,

⁸³⁹ *Sun News Pictorial*, 10 April 1963, 10.

⁸⁴⁰ *Sun News Pictorial*, 9 April 1963, 34.

⁸⁴¹ *Sun News Pictorial*, 18 April 1963, p.4.

marriage and children as central preoccupations for most women.⁸⁴² But not by preparing through a glory box.

Perhaps this was in part due to the emergence from the 1940s of a new modern domestic aesthetic, in which glory box crystal and embroidery may not have comfortably cohabitated. For example, in Margaret Lord's popular interior decorating guide (1944 and three subsequent editions),⁸⁴³ she describes all manner of architectural features, furnishings, furniture, fabric, colour, lighting and accessories. Yet there is no mention anywhere of the glory box as furniture to be accommodated, or of embroidered furniture coverings as required decorative elements. Moreover, home magazines such as *Australian House and Garden* provided an accessible viewpoint on modernist design philosophy and offered, argues Greig, 'advice on house design and rather heavy-handed didactic efforts to purge Australian homemakers of their 'stuffy' conservatism.'⁸⁴⁴ Yet as Peter Cuffley points out, while popular literature lauded modern functionalism, people's interior design tastes remained eclectic between 1945 and 1960, including 'Queen Anne, Georgian, Moderne, Colonial and even Jacobean.'⁸⁴⁵ His description of the conventional interior style includes a reference to the 'glory chest' for the standard display of crystal and china.⁸⁴⁶ Nevertheless, doilies, supper cloths, and pillow shams, all once automatically part of a 1930s and 1940s glory box and any household of the period, were declining as essential domestic accessories after 1960.

⁸⁴² Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 482-487.

⁸⁴³ Margaret Lord, *Interior Decoration. A Guide to Furnishing the Home* (Sydney: Ure Smith Pty Ltd, 1944).

⁸⁴⁴ Greig, *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of*, 161.

⁸⁴⁵ Peter Cuffley, *Australian Houses of the Forties and Fifties* (Knoxfield, Victoria: The Five Mile Press Pty., Ltd., 1993), 174.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

What has appeared in the *Australian Women's Weekly* by 1963 is a 'Teenagers' Weekly' supplement full of fashion, romance advice, Hollywood actor features and teenage letters to the editor. And not a glory box in sight. Johnson and Lloyd point to this evolution of the female teenager, now reflected in her own magazines, arguing 'no longer could such cultural forms claim to speak to and for all women, because magazines appeared such as those directed specifically at teenage girls, thus creating highly differentiated female markets.'⁸⁴⁷ In this way the 1960s teenage girl was marketed to quite differently from the 1930s glory box girl whom she seemed to be replacing. Amongst the new leisure-based consumables, the domestic contents of a glory box would have been strangely out of place.⁸⁴⁸

Finally, as previously argued, there emerged at this time the post-1950s feminist movement, for which glory boxes must have been a beacon of female domestic constraint and predetermined marital destiny. By the 1970s, many Australian women were increasingly preoccupied with securing equal pay, taking advantage of free higher education opportunities, divorcing husbands, using new modern forms of contraception, and having fewer children. In such a climate, glory boxes were an anachronism for many women, who were not likely to pass on (if they'd had a glory box) or revive (if they hadn't) the glory box tradition, nor the associated handcraft skills such as embroidery and crochet (although practical knitting and sewing endured much longer). These skills and the whole glory box tradition would have been in some conflict with

⁸⁴⁷ Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, 152.

⁸⁴⁸ For discussions regarding the evolution of teenagers, refer to: Lucy Rollin, *Twentieth-Century Teen Culture by the Decades. A Reference Guide* (Westport Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1999); Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox. The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York & Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); John Savage, *Teenage. The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking Penguin, Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2007).

new feminist ideals, as they represented the tying of women to dependent, domestically-bound lives.

The glory box is a perfect vehicle for exploring issues relating to femininity, sexuality, economy and consumerism, and for monitoring social, cultural and economic shifts and constants. Perhaps space and time has been needed to embrace the more traditional, even conservative, elements of female experiences in order to see more clearly the historical potential and even some of the inherent value of glory boxes, such as creativity, pleasure, female camaraderie and property ownership. There is no doubt that the glory box is an ambivalent signifier for women, yet therein lies its complexity and interest. Its sheer commonality during the immediate pre-, during and post-war years has probably contributed to its historical absence. Women had glory boxes, but they were so ordinary that they did not require comment. Glory boxes have existed in the multiple memories of private lives, assumed to be mundane in their ordinariness. As Jean Duruz has suggested in terms of suburban houses: 'The critical path to these meanings, desires and dreams is through memory and women's storytelling...The suburban house [or in my case, the glory box] is both a site of desires invested in it, and a symbol of specific political and emotional economies.'⁸⁴⁹ Women's stories and memories – their desires and 'political and emotional economies' – also animate our understanding of the glory box and its contents such that they no longer appear merely as symbols of restriction, convention and domesticity. Read this way, glory boxes provide an invaluable insight into the lives of young women during critical decades of change in twentieth-century Australia.

⁸⁴⁹ Jean Duruz "Suburban Houses Revisited" in Darian-Smith and Hamilton, *Memory and History*, 176 and 177.

Appendix I: Sample Interview Questions

Introduction

- Name and current address
- Did you/your mother have a glory box?
- When were you born?
- Where were you born?
- Where were you living when you were collecting for your glory box?
- What is your cultural background?
- Did you marry?

Migration and Cultural Traditions

- Provide a brief background to your migration experience (when you came, why, from where, who came with you, where you settled, etc).
- Do you see a difference between dowry (being the total property a daughter took into marriage) and the glory box/trousseau and other items which were produced/collected/ handed down etc by daughters and mothers?
- Did you or your mother bring a box and/or trousseau with you or start collecting/continue collecting here? Or did you or your mother have to leave the box behind?
- How did you or your mother collect in your country of origin? Describe the particular customs and emphases. Are there aspects of your activities that

were influenced by your cultural background? Such as emphasis on needlework, the nature of the box itself, types and numbers of items collected, the style of your needlework (regional differences).

- If you left family behind when you migrated, did this impact upon your collecting, in terms of that break from home, town, mother and sisters, etc?
- Did family back home send you things?
- Were you a proxy bride? How did this impact on how you collected for your box?
- If you were collecting in Australia as an migrant teenager, were you aware of other girls collecting, of similarities and differences in the process, etc?
- Do you think migration affected traditional generational handing down of customs, skills and heirlooms?
- Has being in Australia had an influence on the maintenance of customs and how they have evolved and mingled with other cultural traditions? Did you have a sense that your own or your daughters' activities were different from the way girls were creating glory boxes back at home?
- To what extent was needlework in particular seen as a way of preserving cultural traditions and therefore the role of the glory box in providing the vehicle for the maintenance of this activity? What impact did the decline of the glory box tradition have on the survival of these skills and customs?
- Did religion play any part in how you collected for your box?

Generations

- Did your mother/grandmother/sister have one?
- Where are you in the family (oldest daughter, youngest, etc)?
- Did this impact upon your collecting eg was the oldest privileged, given more assistance, attention, heirlooms?
- Did you have any sense of being part of a female and cultural tradition?
- Did you pass on the traditions and skills to your daughters?
- Were you always aware of the idea of a glory box? When did it become part of your consciousness?

Process/Methodology of Collecting

- What did you call your box? Did people use other terms?
- Describe your box – style, materials, purchased ‘off the rack’, custom-made or made by a relative/boyfriend?
- Who instigated acquiring the box? You, mother, father, boyfriend?
- Did you produce the contents, purchase them, receive them as gifts or heirlooms or mixture of all three?

- Did you consult store catalogues, magazines, newspaper advertisements, during your collecting activity? What were they? Were you influenced by articles on romance, marriage, etc?
- Was the box itself ever passed on from mother to daughter?
- What did you collect for your box? Itemise its contents. Was it primarily needlework and manchester or did it include other domestic items as well?
- How old were you when you started collecting for your box? As a young girl, teenager, or not until you were engaged?
- What was your mother's role in the process? Your grandmothers'? father's? sisters'? Did you have a sense of traditions being passed down?

Collective Activity

- Was there any peer or community involvement in the activity? Such as sharing sewing patterns, collective shopping trips, community presentation of the box, comparisons of contents, envy and admiration, advice on the best shops, sewing afternoons, etc?
- Were all the girls you knew collecting for glory boxes?
- Do you feel there is more community involvement in regional areas?

- Did you become part of a cultural collective if you were an migrant or child of migrants? eg associating with girls from your country/region, shopping at stores owned by people from your country, etc.
- Were you aware of the collecting activity of girls from cultures other than your own – were the traditions similar?

Economy

- What were your economic circumstances? Were you working? Did the Depression/ War/ post-war period impact on the way you collected, what you collected, how much you collected?
- How did you feel about acquiring your box, collecting etc? Did you view the activity as preparing for marriage? Did you view the box and contents as property, your property, your investment?
- Where did you shop? Which stores were considered to have best quality or best prices for glory box goods? Which brands were considered preferable? Did you lay-by?
- If you worked, what percentage of your salary was spent on glory box items?
- If you didn't work, how did you collect?

Artistry

- Did you sew, crochet, knit, embroider, etc?
- How did you acquire these skills?
- How were these skills viewed by you, your mother, friends, teachers, etc? eg as essential skills, automatically transferred? Glory box specific? Was the emphasis declining during and after the war?
- How much time did you spend needleworking? Was it primarily to make items for your box and/or other utilitarian purposes (dressmaking, darning, etc)?
- How did you view the activity? (important, essential, with pride, boredom, dislike, competitively, enjoyment, etc)
- Does your collection illustrate specific national or regional cultural styles of needlework?

Sexuality

- Did your box include collecting a trousseau? What kinds of items did you acquire?
- How prepared were you for sex and childbirth? Did your mother explain sex to you, were you sexually active before marriage?
- How did you view your trousseau items? (pragmatically, romantically, etc)

After the Wedding

- Did you use the glory box contents?
- How did you view your box once married?
- If you never married, what did the box symbolise for you? Did you keep it, use it, hand it on to nieces, etc?
- Do you still have your glory box? What is it being used for?
- What happened to the contents of your box?
- Do you still have any other material connected with your box? eg purchase receipts, relevant photos, letters or diaries referencing your activity, needlecraft patterns, books, magazines, needlecraft tools and materials, sewing machines, luggage contents listings, etc.

No Box?

- Why didn't you have a box? Financial, philosophical, other circumstances, alternative type of property, etc?
- Did you feel this was unusual? How did it affect you? Did you feel peer pressure, left out, etc?
- Did you know other girls who didn't have a box and why?

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Developed by Moya McFadzean

March 2003

Appendix II: Summary Biographies of Interviewed Women

All interviews recorded by the author unless otherwise specified.

Australian-born (Anglo-Celtic descent) women:

Nancy Briggs, nee Reed, was born in 1928 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale. She has lived there all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked as a dressmaker in Lilydale, then at Georges store in Collins Street Melbourne with Dorothy Phillips. Nancy married in 1949. She purchased her glory box at the Davis' furniture store in Melbourne. It had two glass doors, two drawers and two cupboard doors at the bottom. Her sister also had a glory box collection, stored in a box or drawer during World War II.

Daisy Chapman, nee Goodall, was born in 1926 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale. She has lived there all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked at the Naval Inspection Branch in the inner western suburb of Footscray (where she boarded), moving to branches in the inner Melbourne suburb of Moonee Ponds, and in Williams Street in the city. She then worked at the Spicers shoe factory in Lilydale from 1945-1960. Daisy married in 1949. She purchased a buffet unit for her glory box (on a periodic payment arrangement) at Clausens furniture store in Melbourne. It was veneer with two glass doors. Her sister Lena had purchased a box with a big cupboard on one side and drawers down the other. Her sister Wyn used an old cabin trunk for her collection.

Marjorie Cope, nee Skate, was born in 1933 in Koondrook Hospital but lived in Barham, a town on the Murray River in northern Victoria. She and her family (including her sisters Dot and Val) moved to the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Coldstream in 1943. She left school at around 14 years of age and

worked part time at the Coldstream general store for three years. Marjorie then worked at the Spicers shoe factory in Lilydale from 1948 until she married in 1954. She purchased a bookcase for her glory box, dark timber with a mirrored back.

Kath Davis, nee Hayes, was born in 1921 in the eastern regional Victorian town of Bairnsdale. She and her family moved to the south-eastern regional Victorian town of Traralgon. She completed a commercial book keeping course, then working in a garage for five and a half years before moving to a bank in Traralgon for three years. Kath married in 1944. Kath was given a glory box purchased by a boyfriend. When he requested its return she purchased her own in a similar wardrobe-style. It was timber veneer, with two doors, shelves at the top and a series of drawers and bottom cupboard doors.

Thelma Drummond, nee Campbell, was born in 1917 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale and has lived there all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked on the lay-by counter at Dimmeys variety store in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond for two years. Thelma then worked as a tailoress at Cohen's tailors factory in the inner suburb of Carlton until she married in 1939. Her glory box was made for her by her father from a wooden box. It was quite plain with a hinged lid.

Judith Howard, nee Vertigan, was born in 1937 in the northern regional Victoria town of Beaufort. She attended boarding school in Melbourne in 1952 and trained as a live-in nurse at Price Henry's Hospital for five years, moving to Geelong Hospital prior to marrying in 1961. She did not have a glory box. Her mother May Vertigan, nee Ford, collected for her glory box during the late 1920s and early 1930s. She was one of eight sisters, most of whom married between 1930 and 1945. May worked as a private secretary in timber yard in

Shepparton until she married in 1934. Her box was made for her as a gift by the timber yard staff. It was a large stained timber box with a hinged lid. Judith's mother-in-law Hazel Howard also had a glory box, a wooden chest with drawers, which she purchased prior to marrying in 1926.

Ruby Kwijas, nee Humphries, was born in 1937 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale and has lived there all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked at the Lilydale telephone exchange until she married in 1955. Ruby's wedding was precipitated by her becoming pregnant, a situation which proved difficult at that time and in a small town. Ruby's glory box consisted of items stored in two cardboard cartons kept under her bed.

Gwendoline Langford was born in the inner northern Melbourne suburb of Brunswick in 1913. She met Clyde when she was 16 and after courting for a few years they became engaged. Clyde was lost at sea during World War II. Gwen never married. Her glory box was a wooden chest, and stored a large, but unused, collection. (Story made available courtesy Kyneton Museum, Victoria).

Nance McKay, nee McReady, was born around 1921. She grew up in the inner Melbourne suburb of South Yarra. She worked in the office at Myer department store in Melbourne until she married in 1942. Nance then moved to the outer Melbourne southern suburb of Red Hill with husband, and then to Lilydale in the mid 1950s. Nance purchased her glory box, a chest with shelves for crockery.

Dorothy (Dot) Mitchell, nee Skate, was born in 1925 in Koondrook Hospital but lived in Barham, a town on the Murray River in northern Victoria. She and her family (including her sisters Marjorie and Val) moved to the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Coldstream in 1943. She left school at around 14 years of

age and from 1944 spent two years in the navy. She then worked at the Lilydale telephone exchange before and after she married in 1948. Dot's glory box was a plain pine box that had been used by her grandmother. It was about one metre long and half a metre high, with a hinged lid, and lined with paper.

Gwenda Mutimer, nee Goode, was born in 1927 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale and has lived there all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked at a tobacco factory office in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond, moving after the war to work behind the counter in her father's drapery store in Lilydale. Gwenda married in 1949. Her glory box was purchased by her fiancé. They chose it together. It was a cabinet with a hinged lid at top, two glass cabinet doors and a pull-down panel with a drawer at the bottom. Gwenda's older sister Shirley used the built-in wardrobe in their shared bedroom to store her collection, and her middle sister Merle had a collection but no formal box, having left home during World War II to join the land army.

Loris Peggie was born in 1936 in the Melbourne eastern suburb of Blackburn and has lived on the same property all her life. She attended Stott's Business College in Melbourne, and then worked in accountancy firms in the city for about 14 years. Loris then travelled overseas for 12 months before working in a Melbourne high school office for many years. Loris did not marry. Her glory box was a cedar chest with a bottom drawer brought out to Australia from England by her ancestors during the 1850s. Her family had it polished, and a lift-out drawer made and presented it to Loris as her glory box.

Betty Phillips, nee Price, was born in 1931 in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Camberwell. She and her family moved to Lilydale where she collected for her glory box. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked as a dressmaker

(finishing work) in a small shop in the inner eastern Melbourne suburb of Glenferrie for four months. She then worked as a machinist at the Spicers shoe factory in Lilydale for nine years. Betty married in 1956. Her glory box was purchased by herself or her mother. It was a cabinet-style, timber veneer with two glass doors and a drop-down door at the bottom.

Dorothy Phillips, nee Reakes, born in 1928 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale and has lived there all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked as a trainee dressmaker at Georges store in Collins Street Melbourne for four years with Nancy Briggs. She then worked as a machinist in factories in the inner Melbourne suburb of South Yarra and in the city. Dorothy married in 1948. Her glory box was purchased with her boyfriend with plans for its future household use. It was a sideboard with glass doors on each side and three drawers at the centre.

Ester Rose, nee Wallace, was born in 1914 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Seville and lived there for most of her life. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked for a month picking passionfruit on uncle's farm near Leongatha in southern regional Victoria. She then undertook domestic duties at home until she married in 1938. Ester's glory box was made at her request by her father from kerosene packaging. It had a hinged lid, was painted and lined with paper.

BS (request to remain anonymous), was born in 1916 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Yarra Glen and lived there and in nearby Lilydale for all her life. She left school at around 14 years of age, having worked in a shop in Yarra Glen on weekends when she was 13. At 15, she had a live-in laundry position with a family in Lilydale for seven years. BS married in 1938. Her glory

box was a gift purchased by her boyfriend. It was a standard veneer chest with a hinged lid and a top lift-out tray.

Val Sheehan, nee Skate, born in 1927 in Koondrook Hospital but lived in Barham, a town on the Murray River in northern Victoria. She and her family (including her sisters Dot and Marjorie) moved to the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Coldstream in 1943. She left school at around 14 years of age and commenced night classes at Melbourne business college. She left there to work at the Coldstream general store. Val married in 1948. Her glory box was a converted tea chest.

Joan Skate, nee Silby, was born in 1930 in the eastern regional Victoria town of Sale and was living in Boronia and Coldstream in Melbourne's outer east when she was collecting for her glory box. She is the sister-in-law of Val, Dot and Marjorie. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked in the office at Ball & Welch department store in Melbourne for three years. Joan married in 1952. Her glory box collection was stored in a drawer at the bottom of her wardrobe, as was the collection of her older sister Bett. Her sister Pat did not have a collection at all.

Beth Taws, nee Brooke, was born in 1930 in Kerang. She was living in the south-eastern and eastern Melbourne suburbs of Glen Iris and Blackburn when she was collecting for her glory box and moved with her husband to Lilydale later in life. Beth worked as a secretary in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton until she was 22, and then left home to train as a nurse in 1952. After working as a nurse in Edinburgh, she married in 1961. Beth's glory box collection was stored in a drawer at the bottom of her bedroom wardrobe, and she left it there when she moved out of her parents' home.

Evelyn Tull, nee Goodall, was born in 1927 in the outer eastern Melbourne suburb of Lilydale, moving to a property further east near Yea when she was 12. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked in domestic service at Ivanhoe Grammar in Yea before moving with her family to the south-eastern regional town of Trafalgar in 1945. Evelyn married a boy from Yea in 1946. She did not have a glory box, purchasing ten acres of land in Trafalgar instead. It would eventually become the deposit on her marital home in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Burwood. Evelyn moved back to Lilydale in the mid 1970s.

Group Interview: Wahroonga Friendship Village, Glen Waverley, Melbourne.

This interview resulted in the documenting of nine short descriptions of glory boxes collected by the respondents during the 1930s and 1940s in Victoria.

(1) Woman 1's glory box was a chest made for her by her brother just before World War II but remained virtually empty until the war was over.

(2) Woman 2's glory box was a box made for her by her father, who made boxes for her two sisters as well.

(3) Woman 3's glory box was a chest, but it was not clear if it was purchased or made.

(4) Woman 4's had a glory box collection but it was not clear if it was stored in a glory box. Her sister-in-law had a box that she filled prior to World War II.

(5) Anne's glory box was a cupboard-style box purchased for her by her fiancé in Melbourne.

(6) Dora was born in 1913 and was living in the bayside suburb of Brighton when she commenced nursing when she was 18 at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne. She married a doctor in 1936. Her glory box was a camphorwood chest with a lift-out tray, which she purchased for herself at a small shop in the inner Melbourne suburb of Prahran.

(7) Eileen's glory box was one of six timber trunks purchased by her father from India (where her family had spent her childhood). There was one for herself and each of her sisters.

(8) Esther was born in 1913 and was living in the inner bayside suburb of Williamstown when she commenced collecting at 16. She was married in 1935. Her glory box collection was stored in a corner in the drawer at the bottom of her wardrobe.

(9) Nancy's glory box was a hand-carved camphorwood chest purchased for her by her boyfriend in the late 1930s.

Dutch women:

Ellen Smoorenburg, nee Muller was born in 1930 in Spanbroek, a village in north-west Holland. She was the second oldest of seven children and five daughters. She completed a four-year dressmaking course from around the age of 14 and then worked in a draper's store until she married in 1958. Margot migrated to Australia about a month later in 1958 and settled in Nunawading in Melbourne's east where she established a home dressmaking business. Ellen's glory box collection was transported amongst her other luggage when she migrated.

Margot Veltkamp, nee Van Der Drift was born in 1925 in The Hague, Holland. She was one of five children, two brothers and three sisters. She left school at around the age of 15 and trained as a dressmaker and lived through the trauma and frugalities of World War II. Margot married her Dutch boyfriend in 1953 and after a three year separation while he worked overseas, they migrated to Australia in 1958. Margot's glory box collection was transported amongst her other belongings in large shipping containers. They settled for many years in Geelong, a large regional city to the west of Melbourne. Her older sister Henny was unable to collect for her glory box due to the war in Holland but a relative

overseas sent her some household linen. Her younger sister Riet was able to accumulate a generous collection in Holland in the 1950s.

Group interview: DutchCare retirement home, Carrum Downs, Melbourne.

This interview resulted in the documenting of five short descriptions of glory boxes collected by the respondents during the 1930s and 1940s in Holland. All migrated to Australia after World War II.

(1) Anika was born in the 1920s in Brumen, Holland. She was from a large family of 14. Anika was engaged for two years and married before World War II. She had a glory box, which was a chest containing sheets, pillowcases, and embroidered gifts from relatives and also built with the assistance of a wealthy employer.

(2) Jackie grew up in east Holland and married in 1939. She had a glory box, storing goods in the attic until her parents purchased a box for her. Jackie collected cups, saucers, a dinner set, and linen – towels, tea towels, sheets, and blankets. She made many items herself and also produced goods to sell to raise money.

(3) Marie grew up in Rosendale, Holland. Her mother died when she was young. She married in 1947 at the age of 30. Marie had a glory box, but as she worked on the family farm, her time and income was limited, so her collection was modest.

(4) Min was born in Enschede, a large town in east Holland. She married in 1941. She had a glory box, and sewed and embroidered all the contents herself. Min collected sheets, pillowslips, tea towels, and hand towels, until the war hit and supplies dried up.

(5) Riek grew up on an island in the north of Holland. She did not have a glory box although she wanted one, except for some bedspreads, as her collecting years were during the war when goods were scarce. Her married sisters gave

her a few things and she did a little needlework. She married in 1946 and migrated to Australia in 1952.

Greek women:

Kleoniki Gregory, nee Petrou, was born in Pano Kivides, a village near the city of Limassol in Cyprus around 1924. She identifies as Greek. She was one of eight children and the youngest of six daughters. She completed primary school and although a very bright child, was unable to receive further education. She moved to Limassol to live with her married sister, learnt dressmaking and at 18, worked as a partner in a wedding supplies shop. She migrated to Australia in 1950 and married her boyfriend in Melbourne who had arrived two years earlier. Kleoniki found settling in Australia difficult and missed her homeland for many years. Her glory box collection travelled in a large metal trunk, a mix of her mother's hand-made and purchased contributions, and the work of her own hands and pay packet. Her daughter Rose Gray was born in 1951 and her mother passed on the 'prika' tradition to her and her sister. This included hand-made and purchased items and Rose also brought back items for her collection from Cyprus when she visited. Rose married in 1974 and she put aside purchased domestic goods for her own daughters.

Dina Sartinas, nee Iliadis, was born in 1940 in Konstandina Iliadis, a small village in northern Greece. She was the youngest of three daughters and worked with her father in his tailoring workshop for nine years since she was 12. Dina migrated alone and single in 1962, sponsored by her sister and her brother-in-law who had arrived in Australia in 1960. She married a Greek migrant from the Pellas region in 1965. Dina's glory box was a simple wooden box with a hinged, slightly domed lid. All her sisters had one. She brought it with her to Australia, a mix of her mother's hand-made and purchased contributions and the work of her own hands.

Irene Soumilas, (maiden name unknown) was born in 1939 on island of Lefkas in Greece. She completed primary school but then remained at home, helping with the housework undertaking a little needlework. Her father negotiated her marriage to a Greek man already in Australia with his family. Irene agreed to the marriage, migrated to Melbourne in 1958 and settled in Shepparton in central regional Victoria. It was a difficult life, isolated and separated from family at a young age. Irene's glory box collection travelled to Australia in travelling trunks and suitcases.

Irish women:

Joan Cox, nee Ryan, was born in 1934 in Dublin, Ireland, the middle child of six children (four sisters). She left school around the age of 15 after completing a commercial course, and worked in the office of a commercial photographer. Her mother died in 1956. Joan migrated to Australia in 1957, following her fiancé who had arrived a year earlier. They married in Melbourne some months later in 1958 and settled in Nunawading in Melbourne's east.

Maureen King, nee O'Keefe, was born in 1933 in Dublin, Ireland. She was the youngest of three children. She attended secondary school until her scholarship ran out and then worked in a large bookshop in Dublin until leaving Ireland. Her father died in 1953, and her mother, who did not want her to leave, died in 1961. Maureen migrated to Australia in 1956, following her fiancé who came six months earlier, and they married soon after her arrival. She had not planned a permanent stay, but after a couple of moves, they purchased a house in the eastern Melbourne of suburb of Nunawading, had children and Maureen found herself permanently in Australia. Her glory box collection, which she had collected herself after her engagement, was packed in the crates transporting all her possessions to Australia.

Betty McWade, nee Gallagher, was born in 1929 in Omar, County Tyrone, Ireland and was then relocated to a foster family in Belfast. She left school at around 14 years of age and worked in a spinning mill in Belfast and other factories as well as starting a nursing degree in England. She married an Irishman in England in 1950 and they migrated with their three children to Australia in 1963, joining a sister who had already migrated. She has worked primarily as a housecleaner. Betty did not have a glory box, never having had the opportunity to accumulate one due to lack of resources, opportunity and needlecraft skills. But she was very aware of the tradition, in Ireland and in Australia.

Italian women:

Edda Azzola, nee Pugnetti, was born in 1927 in Moggio Udinese in the Friuli region, northern Italy and the family moved to nearby Pontebba four years later. After their early schooling, Edda and her two sisters worked as knitting machinists from the family home, at which time they also produced their trousseaux which was stored in a chest. She married a young man from her village. Searching for change, adventure and a better life, Edda persuaded her husband to migrate to Australia in 1954 and Edda followed a year later in 1955. Her glory box followed her later. They lived in Carlton and Fitzroy in inner Melbourne during the early years and Edda purchased a knitting machine and worked as a textile factory outworker for about 20 years.

Josephine Carey, nee Gargano, was born in 1950 in a small town in Calabria, Italy. Her mother Francesca Dimasi completed primary school but then remained at home undertaking domestic and sewing duties. She wove sheets and blankets in Italy for her daughters' trousseaux but the loom was left behind in Italy. Josephine's father migrated to Australia in 1951 and Francesca, Josephine and her sister followed in 1956. The glory box collections were

transported in two timber trunks. They settled in Fitzroy and Francesca continued to purchase goods for all five of her daughters' glory boxes, each having their own chest which was obtained and then stocked with the accumulated goods in the lead-up to the wedding. Josephine married in 1976.

Carmela Palermo, nee Rocca, was born in 1940 in Sambiasi, a town in Calabria, Italy. She was the oldest of four sisters and she had an older brother. She attended school until the age of 16 when she suddenly decided to marry and migrate to Australia. She migrated as a proxy bride in 1957 to marry a young man from her town that she hardly knew. Carmela's glory box collection was contained in two metal trunks, full of goods that her mother had gathered together in a hurry before her departure. They settled in Keilor in Melbourne's west but Carmela found re-settlement difficult and missed her family and homeland for many years.

Rose Patti, nee Ranno, was born in 1952 in the northern Melbourne suburb of Thornbury. Her mother Gaetana Lazzara was born in 1928 in Licodia Eubea, a village in Sicily in Italy. She was one of three children, and her father ran a profitable goat farm. She and her sister remained at home undertaking domestic and sewing duties. Gaetana married into a poorer family 1948 and migrated to Australia in 1950 (her husband having already left in 1949). Gaetana's glory box was a trunk made from the timber from her marital bed and was brought with her when she migrated. Gaetana purchased and put aside a glory box collection for Rose during the 1960s, until she died in 1973. Rose married in 1975. Rose's mother-in-law from the same village was born in 1925 and also produced a glory box collection which she brought to Australia.

Carmel Tata, nee Catalani, was born in 1960 in Calabria. Her mother Dominica Tripodi, was born in 1923, in the small town of Sinopoli in Calabria, Italy. She

was one of eight children and the oldest daughter, and her mother died in 1931 when she was eight. Her father took her out of school to work the olive farm and eventually run the family olive mill business. She married in 1946 but did not receive the dowry, including land, that she had been promised. However, she established her own business and after the death of her father, received the property she deserved. Despite her success, her brothers in Australia encouraged the couple to migrate, which they did, her husband leaving in 1965 and Carmel and Dominica following in 1968. They settled in Moonee Ponds. For Dominica, who had never planned to stay permanently, it was a mistake from which she never really recovered, working in factories for the rest of her life. Dominica's glory boxes were made from the walnut trees on her father's property and she filled one swiftly before marrying with her own goods and linen which had belonged to her mother. The other she filled over time for her daughter Carmel, in Italy and in Australia. Carmel grew up torn between two cultures. She married a Sicilian boy in 1978.

Maltese women:

Tonina Farrugia, nee Pace, was born in Floriana in Malta in 1938. She was one of six children, three sisters and two brothers. Her father was an engineer who travelled a great deal and soon after her mother died in 1949, her father remarried a much younger woman. She worked for a time as a hotel cleaner. Her fiancé migrated to Australia in 1954 with his family, and she followed in 1956 as a proxy bride. Tonina moved in with the family in Coburg and lived there happily for seven years before moving to other properties in the vicinity. Tonina's glory box was a large box painted and fixed with a hinged lid for her by her father, and filled with goods she had been accumulating on her own in the absence of her mother. It also carried other travel luggage. At least two of her four sisters-in-law also had glory boxes in Australia.

**Appendix III: Inventory of Glory Box Purchases, Women Living in Lilydale
When Collecting For Their Glory Boxes, 1930s-1950s**

Name	Collecting Years	Purchases made by Women for their Glory Boxes	Purchases Received by Women as Gifts for their Glory Boxes
Thelma Drummond	1930s	Sheets, pillowcases, blankets, towels, nightgowns, canteen of cutlery, saucepans, dinner set.	Flour sieve, cake tins, rolling pin (kitchen tea gifts).
Ester Rose	1930s	Towels, manchester. 'If I had a bit of money I'd come home with a beautiful fine china cup, saucer and plate.' ⁸⁵⁰	China, vase, towels, manchester, knife; pair blankets (gift from fiancé); set of canisters, flour sieve, tea towels with green borders (kitchen tea gifts).
BS	1930s	Mainly manchester.	China.
Gwenda Mutimer	1940s	Dinner set.	Crystal, silver, towels; tea set (engagement present).
Daisy Chapman	1940s	Linen, towels, supper and tray cloths, kitchenware.	Piece of glassware (family heirloom); dinner set and blankets (gifts from fiancé). 'I had a dinner set, I've still got that, Pat gave me one for my 21 st birthday. ...And I can remember (he) bought me four pairs of blankets, two pairs single bed and two pairs double bed...from Patterson Lang and Bruce...I think it cost 12 pounds for the four pair.' ⁸⁵¹
Dorothy Phillips	1940s	Glass dishes, dinner set, tea set of six cups, saucers and plates, tea towels, towels, mulgoa wood set.	

⁸⁵⁰ Ester Rose, 2003.

⁸⁵¹ Daisy Chapman, 2003.

Name	Collecting Years	Purchases made by Women for their Glory Boxes	Purchases Received by Women as Gifts for their Glory Boxes
Nancy Briggs	1940s	Linen, glass dishes, tea set of six cups, saucers and plates.	Supper cloth (engagement gift commission); set of canisters, enamel pie dishes and plates, salt and pepper shakers (kitchen tea gifts).
Val Sheehan	Mid-late 1940s	Damask tablecloth and six napkins. 'That (damask tablecloth) was one of my luxuries...it didn't do me any good whatsoever...I never used it personally but lent it to be head of the table for weddings.' ⁸⁵²	Tea set, milk jug, sugar bowl; canteen of cutlery (21 st birthday gift); jam dishes, teaspoons, cake forks, ornamental items (wedding gifts).
Marjorie Cope	Late 1940s-early 1950s	Towels, pillowcases, sheets, tea towels; china jugs, cups, saucers and plates; Carltonware.	Cup, saucer and plate sets, towels and face washers; fruit bowl, six dish set, saucepans, crystal bowl (wedding gifts).
Dorothy Mitchell	Mid 1940s	Sheets and towels.	
Joan Skate	Late 1940s-early 1950s	Sheets, towels, damask tablecloth.	Canteen of cutlery, green utility set, dinner set.
Betty Phillips	Late 1940s-mid 1950s	Manchester parcel (consisted of sheets, tea towels, pillowslips, tablecloths); cups and saucers; Carltonware. 'You're interested in what was around and you wanted some of that but...I didn't lash out on it... I had a mania for cups and saucers, I used to buy a few things like that.' ⁸⁵³	Biscuit barrel (gift from fiancé), small family heirloom items.

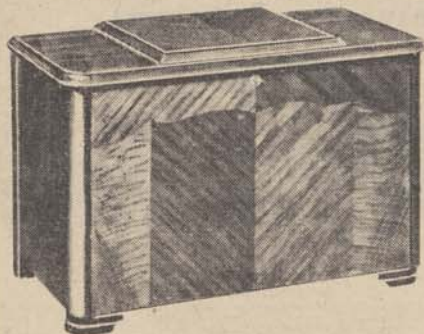
⁸⁵² Val Sheehan, 2003.

⁸⁵³ Betty Phillips, 2003.

Name	Collecting Years	Purchases made by Women for their Glory Boxes	Purchases Received by Women as Gifts for their Glory Boxes
Ruby Kwijas	1950-55	Carltonware, Anesley dinner set, Dickey's towels, Actil sheets, bread knife and board, aluminium saucepans. 'Carltonware which I really love. But it was basically the Dickey's towels and the Actil sheets and face washers.' ⁸⁵⁴	Doilies, glassware.

⁸⁵⁴ Ruby Kwijas, 2003.

Trousseau chests



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Chest
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Usually
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Full size Walnut Veneer Glory Chest. Its ample proportions—24in high, 19in. deep, 36in. wide — ensure accommodation for all your treasures. Price with raised centre on lid, as shown 49/6.

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Chest
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This Chest will instantly appeal to every woman. Its two lock-fitted drawers and extra large storage compartment make it an indispensable in any home. Height 27½in., depth 19in., width 36in. Price with raised centre on lid, as shown 75/-.

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Figure 1 Advertisement for Kiernan & Co. in Melbourne, 'Trousseau Chests,' *Sun News Pictorial*, 25 October 1940, 10. Source: State Library of Victoria.

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Glory Box



*Glory-box girl, you're planning, I think,
 For more than your glad to-day;
 You're counting the milestones of the years
 That shall line your happy way.*

*The years unknown and still unlived
 Are promises yet in store,
 Like gems of living rich and sweet
 Lying past life's strongroom door.*

*Glory-box girl, with linen and lace,
 A heart that has learned to sing,
 You will open the strongroom door of life;
 The key is your wedding-ring.*

—PHYLLIS DUNCAN-BROWN.

'Glory-box girl,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, front cover, 16 November 1935.
 Source: State Library of Victoria.

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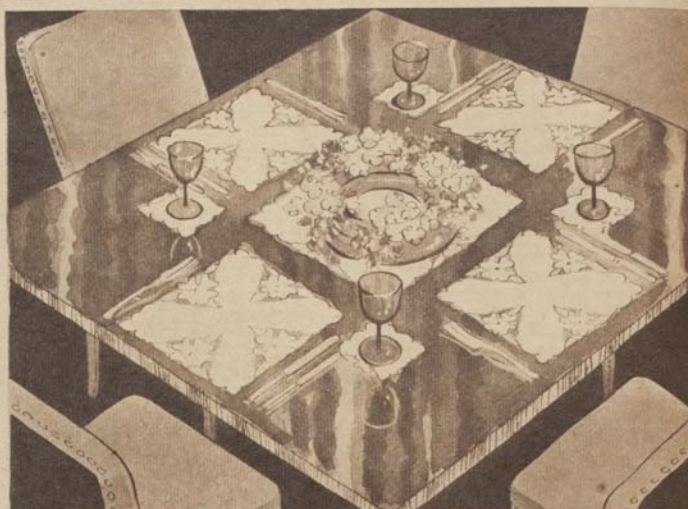
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THIS SKETCH of a table set for four will give you some idea how lovely this wild-rose linen set will look on your table. Read all about it below.

Make your selection from these!

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They are available in blue, lemon, pink, green, and white sheer linen of the finest pre-war quality.

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No. 245: Here you see the neat frock designed for girls 4 to 10 years of age. Full particulars are given on this page.

Figure 1 Article promoting pre-stamped tableware which did not require coupons, available in 'the finest pre-war quality.' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 11 July 1942, 28. Source: State Library of Victoria.

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with pieces from old
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grams show how pixie hood was
made. Why not copy it?

● Scrap of charm in the form of a hat shown at right was made by a reader for a few pence; wins first prize this week in our coupon-saving contest.

ON a shopping tour Mrs. K. Milline, of Campsie, N.S.W., saw what she considered to be the loveliest of hats. She wanted a spring and summer hat, but, of course, she wouldn't pay three guineas, the price marked on the hat.

"I'll make a hat like it from my old ones and save coupons, too," thought Mrs. Milline. And here is the way she made it:

The sparterie crown from an old hat was removed. (Before joining, the sparterie crown piece would measure 5 x 6½ ins., and sparterie band for crown side, cut on cross, 19½ x 4 ins.). This formed foundation; the black brim was taken from another old hat.

From a piece of heavy dusty-pink material the home milliner cut a circular piece 5½ x 6 ins., and also cut a 19½ x 4 in. strip on the cross. The "circular" piece went on top of sparterie foundation, and edges were sewn together.

Next taking the 19½ in. strip she made a 4 in. turning all along top edge, and then attached this to the top, making invisible stitches. This gives a rolled edge to top of crown.

Now, with damp cloth and hot iron, she pressed this rolled edge flat. To do this it is best to insert a wad of cloth inside crown and hold it there against iron.

Lower edge of crown band was then turned in.

The old brim was ironed out flat, using a damp cloth and a very hot iron. The back was cut to bring the brim into 19½ ins., then joined and pressed, the side edges turned up and again pressed.

Mrs. Milline cut front brim 2½ ins., left side 2½ ins., right side 2½ ins., back 1½ ins. Edges were wired, easing sides in a little to give a slightly rolled edge, and then bound with 4 in. ribbon. Now crown was sewn on to brim with invisible stitches, and flowers (costing 3d.) were arranged and stitched on. Each side of crown was caught in, head strap attached and then vell.



SCANTIES made from oatmeal bags. See article.

Scanties from bags

ALL sorts of entries have poured in from readers, telling how they made this and that from flour bags, "mealie" bags, and the like, but the prize in the "bag" class this week goes to Mrs. Holdsworth, of Tumut, N.S.W., for the scanties, pictured above.

These made from bags (which once held rolled oats) are as soft as voile. They were skilfully cut, well made and trimmed as the sketch shows. Mrs. Holdsworth sent us the scanties for inspection. She also collects a 5/- prize for this entry.

Made-over frock

THE very sweet frock you see at top left was the work of Mrs. Mitchell, of Belmore, N.S.W. She utilised the best parts of a finely-knitted cardigan, and allied them with a frock, and the result you see. Sleeves of cardigan were shrunken so strips of material were cleverly introduced.

Mrs. Mitchell collects 5/- for this coupon-saving idea.

Coat and pixie bonnet from slacks

THE final award of 5/- this week goes to Mrs. Wharton, North Unley, S.A., for the bright coupon-saving idea—little girl's coat and pixie hood—illustrated on this page.

Mrs. Wharton sent a full description of how she made coat and bonnet from an old pair of slacks.

Now, send in your coupon-saving idea. It may win you honors, cash, and will certainly inspire other readers to make-over or transform garments, etc., that would otherwise be relegated to the rag-bag.

Address your coupon-saving idea, together with full description of article, sketch, or photograph and negative, to Eve Gye, Editor of The Australian Women's Weekly Home-maker Department.



THIS is the hat that was copied from a 3-guinea model by a reader at a cost of threepence.

GLARE AND GLASSES

● Glare will hurt the eyes, but defective lenses of cheap sun-glasses can damage your sight—says MEDICO.

"DOCTOR, as I will not be wearing a hat very much this summer, I was wondering if I should get a pair of sun-glasses. I find that the glare hurts my eyes when I'm out of doors."

Well, that isn't surprising, Miss Jones. You must remember that as your daily work keeps you indoors in subdued daylight your eyes have grown accustomed to a less intense light than daylight, so that you really need some protection.

There are many types of glare, but those which usually affect the eyes are reflected and direct. Reflected glare comes from the sea, the beach, the roads, or the sun shining on metal objects, and can cause quite a lot of eye-strain.

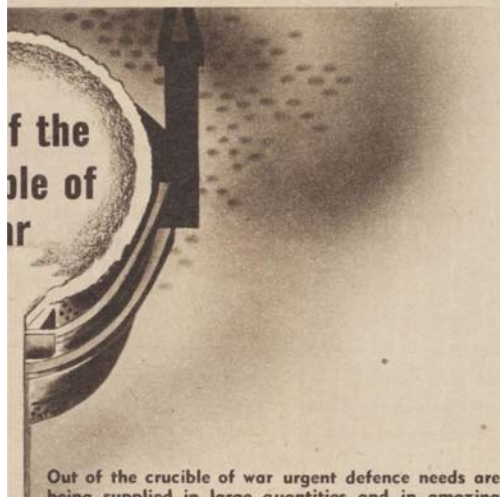
Direct glare comes from the sun. People only look at the sun when there's an eclipse. The danger of looking at the sun is shown by the number of cases of eclipse blindness which fortunately only lasts an hour or so.

It is advisable to buy a good pair of sun-glasses, as the cheap ones can cause more harm than good. They are stamped out by the thousand, and are frequently imperfect.

Pick up a pair and hold them six inches away from your eyes, and if they are faulty you will be surprised at the distortion they cause. They are blown glass instead of glass that is optically ground and polished, and they often contain bubbles, scratches, or other defects.

Even worse, they may not be quite flat, so that a person who has normal sight may suffer a strain.

Cheap, unbranded sun-glasses are poor economy. If you must buy them, try to obtain a pair with lenses that are flat rather than curved.



Out of the crucible of war urgent defence needs are being supplied in large quantities and in amazing

Figure 2 Advice page on making underwear from 'mealie' bags, *Australian Women's Weekly*, 7 November 1942, 20. Source: State Library of Victoria.

Classic

CRAFTSMANSHIP



Swedish

DESIGN

Contemporary
GLORY BOX



Overall
Measurements
are:

Length 48ins.

Height 30½ins.

Depth 18½ins.

Sent RAIL FREE
on our 7-Day
Examination Plan.

**SAMPSONS
BUDGET PRICE:**
£45/12/6.

**FINISHED BY
HAND.**

This delightful piece of furniture has been designed by Swedish furniture experts to fulfil the heart's desire of the modern girl who wishes to have a Glory Box to keep the treasures in before marriage, but who also wishes to use it after marriage as part of the modern furniture planned to go into the new home. This modern Glory Box contains ample space in the 3 deep drawers and the full-sized cupboard (with a removable shelf) to store all the bigger treasures such as sheets and blankets, etc. When the top is lifted (as shown in the small sketch at right, a 2½in. recess is revealed for the smaller things, such as cutlery, cloths, mats, etc. After marriage, being of modern design, well constructed and highly polished in today's Ribbon Maple, natural finish, you will have a most useful Sideboard that will fit in with your dining-room furniture. If you like modern things you will be delighted with this doubly useful Glory Box, later to become your sideboard.

£45.12.6

Unlike today's trend in furniture manufacture, where usually ½in. ply is used, this magnificent chest is constructed of ¾in. laminated ribbon grained, Queensland Maple, the back of solid Yellow Bean. All joints glued. A chest that will last from generation to generation.



Available on our Special
12 months' terms.

CLIP AND POST
SAMPSONS ENTERPRISES PTY.
LTD., Dept. X4, 481 Kent Street,
Box 4184, G.P.O., Sydney.

☐ I enclose £45/12/6 for immediate Delivery of my Swedish Glory Box.

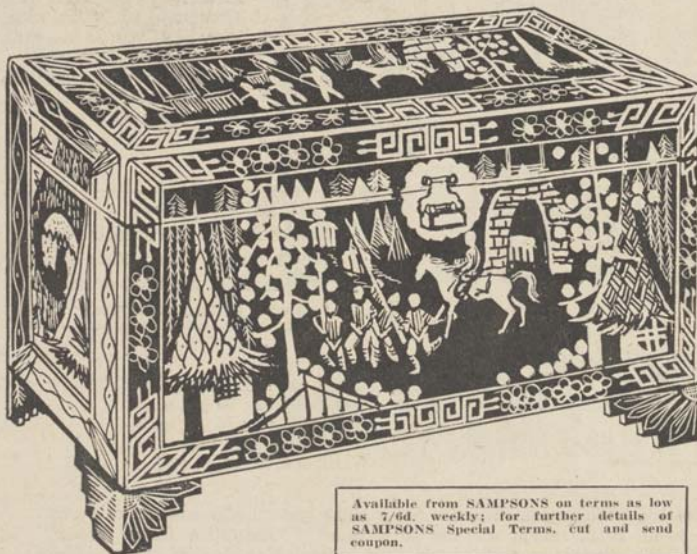
☐ I enclose £4/12/6 as deposit on Swedish Glory Box.

☐ Please send Order Form and full details about your Swedish Glory Box.

NAME

ADDRESS

STATE



Available from SAMPSONS on terms as low as 7/6d. weekly; for further details of SAMPSONS Special Terms, cut and send coupon.

chinese
HAND-CARVED
camphorwood
CHESTS
£24.0.0

Here is your chance to own one of these exquisite Glory Boxes in which to store your valuable woollen garments, blankets, furs, etc. These chests are superbly hand-carved from solid Camphorwood and are moth and silverfish proof. They are world renowned for their usefulness and prized for their decorative furnishing value from generation to generation. And no matter where you live you can own one providing you send now, TODAY. Returnable and money refunded if you are not delighted with your chest on arrival. Sent 'RAIL FREE on our 7-Day Examination Plan.

SAMPSON BUDGET PRICES:

Small Chest (30½in. x 14in. x 14in.): £24

Compact Chest (36½in. x 17in. x 17in.): £35/15/-

Full Size Chest (40½in. x 20in. x 20in.): £47/17/6

CLIP AND POST
COUPON SAMPSONS, Dept. X5,
Box 4184, SYDNEY.

Please send further details of your Chests/Glory Boxes; also your Special Payment Plan to:—

NAME

ADDRESS

STATE

Figure 3 Advertisement for Sampsons Mail Order, 'Swedish Contemporary and Chinese Camphorwood Glory Boxes,' *Australian Home Journal*, October 1959, 16. Source: State Library of Victoria.

*John and I are not dreaming
about the future—*

WE HAVE A PLAN



Every young couple's plan for the future centres inevitably round a home . . . equipped with new labour-saving devices, artistic furnishings. . . .

And on all the floors
FELTEX *Insist on
Genuine Feltex
Look for the name*

FELT & TEXTILES OF AUSTRALIA LTD.
Manufacturers of Plain and Marbled Feltex

INVEST IN COMMONWEALTH VICTORY LOANS

Figure 1 Advertisement for Feltex flooring, featuring a glory box and wedding trousseau, *Man*, Vol. 8. No. 4, October 1945, 89. Source: the author.



Figure 3 Betty Phillips' (nee Price) glory box, late 1940s. Object source and photographer: Betty Phillips.



Figure 4A BS glory box, 1930s (closed). Object source: BS (request to remain anonymous).



Figure 4B BS glory box, 1930s (open). Object source: BS (request to remain anonymous).



Figure 5A Kath Davis' glory box, the one she purchased for herself, late 1930s.
Collection: Museum Victoria. Photographer: Jon Augier.



Figure 5B Kath Davis' glory box, the one she purchased for herself, late 1930s (drawer detail).
Collection: Museum Victoria. Photographer: Jon Augier.



Figure 6 May Ford's (nee Vertigan) glory box, early 1930s. Object source: Judith Howard.



Figure 7 Loris Peggie's glory box, created mid 19th century, and restored and adapted 1954. Object source: Loris Peggie.



Figure 8A Ester Rose's (nee Wallace) glory box, 1930s (closed). Object source: Ester Rose.



Figure 8B Ester Rose's (nee Wallace) glory box, 1930s (open). Object source: Ester Rose.



Figure 9 Portrait of Evelyn Tull (nee Goodall), 1940s. Source: Evelyn Tull.



Figure 10 Carltonware and decorative pieces collected by Nancy Briggs (nee Reed) for her glory box, 1940s. Objects source: Nancy Briggs.



Figure 11 Tablecloth and Carltonware purchased by Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) for her glory box, 1950s. Object source: Ruby Kwijas.



Figure 12 Damask tablecloth and napkins purchased by Val Sheehan (nee Skate) for her glory box, 1940s. Object source: Val Sheehan.



Figure 13 Items from tea sets collected by Gwenda Mutimer (nee Goode) for her glory box, 1940s. Object source: Gwenda Mutimer. Photographer: Sandy Ross.



Figure 14 Towels purchased by Daisy Chapman (nee Goodall) for her glory box, 1940s. Object source: Daisy Chapman.



Figure 15 'Days of the week' tea towels embroidered by Daisy Chapman (nee Goodall) for her glory box, 1940s. Object source: Daisy Chapman.




Figure 16 Mulgoa wood items purchased by Nancy Briggs (nee Reed) for her glory box, 1940s.
Object source: Nancy Briggs.

MANTON'S

WINTER SALE

Offers Exceptional Values In Imported Crystal!




45/-
37/6
G.220




6/4
4/11 1/2
G.218




6/6
5/6
G.221



5/4
4/11 1/2
G.222



16/6
14/6
G.223




4/4
3/11 1/2
G.224



32/6
29/11
G.225



7/6
5/11
G.226



37/6
32/6
G.227



37/6
32/6
G.228



27/6
24/6
G.229




3/6
2/11 1/2
G.230



2/11 1/2
2/9
G.231



2/11 1/2
2/9
G.232 WINE



2/11 1/2
2/9
G.233 SHERRY



3/6
3/3
G.234

No Mail or Phone Orders Please

MANTON'S MANTON & SONS
PTY. LTD. Bourke Street Central, C.I.

Figure 17 Advertisement for Manton's crystal, *Sun News Pictorial*, 15 July 1935, 7.
Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 18 Bread knife and other kitchenware collected by Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) for her glory box, 1950s. Object source: Ruby Kwijas.

FOR SPECTACULAR VALUE!!!

THE STORES OF ECONOMY & SERVICE

Treadway's

FAMOUS FOR OVER HALF A CENTURY — Treadway's Manchester values have reached new peaks of popularity with the Housewife who knows real value by long experience and the young "Housewife to be" enjoying the thrill of gathering together the best of all glory boxes—"her own"—finds that she has been wise in accepting the advice of her elders—to buy with confidence at Treadway's. Comparison always confirms that Treadway's values are unbeatable and the prices always Melbourne's keenest.

**CASH
ORDERS
ACCEPTED**

"UTILITY" Manchester Parcel



**HERE ARE THE CONTENTS
OF THIS GREAT TREADWAY'S
MANCHESTER PARCEL OFFER**

2 DOUBLE BED size 80 x 90 READY
HEMMED WHITE SHEETS, EXCELLENT
QUALITY, GUARANTEED NO FILLING
AVAILABLE IN BOTH TWILL OR PLAIN.

2 HEMSTITCHED HORROCKSES LINEN
FINISH PILLOW CASES.

2 HORROCKSES LINEN FINISH PLAIN
PILLOW CASES.

2 LINEN FORFAR TEA TOWELS NICELY
FINISHED WITH TWO TONE COLORED
BORDERS.

2 COLORED TURKISH TOWELS IN NEW
ASSORTED DESIGNS IN FANCY COLORS.

2 COLORED TURKISH EXTRA LARGE
BATH TOWELS IN SMART COLORS AND
DESIGNS.

1 FANCY BORDERED BREAKFAST
CLOTH, SIZE 54 x 54 INCHES, FLORAL
CENTRES WITH SMART TWO TONE
BORDERS.

55'

OUR "HOUSEHOLD" PARCEL

Contains—

2 Double Bed size, 80 x 90 inches,
ready hemmed white sheets, excellent
quality, guaranteed no filling, in both
twill and plain.

1 Hemstitched drawn thread white
damask dinner cloth, size 24 x 24
yds. A guaranteed pure quality
damask showing in beautiful de-
signs.

1 Colored Turkish extra large size
towel in smart design and colour.

1 Colored Turkish face towel show-
ing in new fancy designs and colour.

4 Forfar tea towels, good quality,
with smart two-tone borders.

1 Fancy bordered damask break-
fast cloth, size 54 x 54 inches, floral
centres with smart two-tone border.

1 All-over check colored Bangalore
cloth, size 48 x 48 inches, avail-
able in Blue, Green or Gold.

1 Horrockses plain linen finish
pillow case, full size and finished
with taped ends.

*all
These
for*
95'

OUR FAMOUS "GLORY-BOX"

1 double bed size 80 x 90 inches
ready hemmed white sheets, excel-
lent quality, guaranteed no filling,
in either twill or plain.

1 Hemstitched drawn thread
white damask dinner cloth, size 24
x 24 yds. A guaranteed pure quality
damask in beautiful design.

1 Colored Turkish bath towel,
large size, guaranteed quality, showing
in new fancy and designs.

2 Horrockses linen finish pillow
cases, full size, and finished with
taped ends.

2 linen forfar tea towels, good
quality, with smart two-tone border.

1 All-over check Bangalore cloth,
size 48 x 48 inches, in blue, green,
or gold.

*all
These
for*
7 GNS

All These For

55'

MAKE A LAY-BY

MAIL YOUR ORDERS — FREIGHT FREE

BOURKE ST
CHAPEL ST

TREADWAY'S

SMITH ST
SYDNEY RD

Figure 19 Advertisement for Treadway's 'Utility Manchester Parcel,' *Sun News Pictorial*, 3 October 1940, 7. Source: State Library of Victoria.

17 Sun News-Pictorial, Friday, October 4, 1940 Page 13

HOPE CHESTS at

PATERSONS *Pty. Ltd.*

BOURKE ST.

..the entire stock selling at a sensational price reduction



£5/15/-
79'6

THE "Deanna Durbin"
Handsomely veneered with selected walnut. Height 38 in., width 30 in. Fitted with shelf, lock and key, with a handy top drawer included.



THE "BETTY GRABLE"
Another attractively designed style, featuring handsome walnut double doors and three roll-front drawers.

£6/17/6 Value
£5/12/6



THE "GINGER ROGERS"
Very elaborately fitted with excellent drawer accommodation. Height 33 in., width 30 in. Beautifully veneered with rich walnut.

£6/19/6 Value
5 GNS.



THE "DOROTHY LAMOUR"
With lots up for preserving a well-known key. Height 33 in., width 30 in. An extremely modern design with the handsome finishing of walnut, allowing no advantage.

£7/15/- Value **£5/12/6**



THE "PRISCILLA LANE"
This has a drawer and sliding glass doors to the crystal cabinet. Beautifully veneered in selected Walnut.

£7/15/- Value
£5/8/6



THE "Judy Garland"
In selected Walnut Veneer. A specially veneered style with sliding glass doors, with lock and key. Height 33 in., width 30 in.

£6/15/- Value
5 Guineas



GENUINE IMPORTED CHINESE CAMPHORWOOD CHESTS — ALL SIZES
This offer cannot be repeated. All sizes are available, including an assortment with a pleasing blonde lacquer finish. From

£6/19/6



VICTORIA'S GREATEST RANGE PRESENTED FOR YOUR SELECTION

Every Chest is fascinatingly Beautiful with Richly Figured Walnut Veneers



THE "JOAN BLONDELL"
A beautifully veneered chest in Walnut. Handy drawers include one specially placed inside cupboard and three deep drawers.

£7/15/- Value
£5/12/6



THE "ALICE FAYE"
With beautiful well-made Veneer and painted walnut trim. Height 40 in., width 30 in.

£8/19/6 Value
£10/15/-

GET YOUR HOPE CHEST FREE BY DOING THIS
Mention this Hope Chest from us, and we will include your Home Furnishing order at no extra charge. We will refund the price of the latter article to you.

CREDIT READILY AVAILABLE OF COURSE!

at PATERSONS *Pty. Ltd.*
BOURKE STREET

152-158 BOURKE STREET, MELB. (Phone: Cent. 2500—6 lines)
284-300 Chapel St., Prahran — 173-181 Smith St., Fitzroy—144-150 Nicholson St., Footscray
And at Ballarat, Colac, Echuca, Horsham, Swan Hill, Wangaratta, Warragul, Benalla, Ararat.

Figure 20 Advertisement for Patersons' 'Hope chests,' featuring the names of Hollywood actresses. *Sun News Pictorial*, 4 October 1940, 13. Source: State Library of Victoria.

ACTIL SENDS A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO

Easter Brides

To those radiant brides who brighten Easter altars, Actil sends sincere wishes that the future will strengthen and make even more beautiful, the sacred vows of that day of days. And, Actil Guaranteed Quality Sheets and Pillow Cases will add lustre to a 'glory box' you will treasure through a lifetime of happiness.

AUSTRALIAN COTTON TEXTILE INDUSTRIES LIMITED,
Actil Avenue, Woodville, South Australia

AN ACTIL PRODUCT

GUARANTEE
 Should these Actil Products prove unsatisfactory in wear, they will be replaced by the Sole Manufacturers.

If you are unable to purchase these Actil Products, please communicate with the Sole Manufacturers at Box 52A, G.P.O., Melbourne, who will advise you of your nearest stockist.

ACT 27

Figure 21 Advertisement for Actil sheets, 'Easter Brides,' *Sun News Pictorial*, 23 February 1950, 18. Source: State Library of Victoria.

*For Value that appeals
Furnish at*

Steele's

Where Every Month is Home Month!

OF SWANSTON ST.

STEELE'S PACK FREE
AND PAY FREIGHT
to any railway station in Victoria or
the Riverina on all orders over £1.

AND HAS BEEN FOR THE LAST SIXTY YEARS /

STEELE'S MAIL
ORDER DEPT.
If it's impossible for you
to shop in person, write
your requirements.

*Famous for
Consistent Value
and Quality
...COMPARE
THESE PRICES!*

SHEETS

IDEAL FOR
GLORY BOX

Full size 99 in.
x 80 in. Pure
cotton with rich
lawn finish by
the famous House
of Horrockses.

62'5
PAIR

"STEELWEAR" PILLOW CASES
Full size in the popular envelope style. Well
made of pure cloth these carry Steele's usual
guarantee of value. 2/6 each.

3'6

JACQUARD TOWELS

Superior quality in lovely pastel shades of
pink, green and blue. Made from selected
absorbent yarn. 8/9 each.

8'9

"HORROCKSES' B'FAST CLOTHS

Famous for long life and style these all
worsted cloths are available in neat floral
designs in pastel shades. 43 in. x 40 in.

11'6

"STEELWEAR" PASTEL SHEETS

Full double-bed size, 90 in. x 80 in.
Neatly hemmed ready for use. Shades
of green, primrose and rose. 5 year
guarantee.

61'6

BORDERED TEA TOWELS

In generous size — splendid assortment of
fine linen towels with attractive borders in
shades of blue, cherry and green. 8/2 each.

4'2

MANCHESTER DEPT., 269 POST OFFICE PLACE . . . FB2138

WALNUT VENEER GLORY CHESTS

36 inch wide — as illustrated
on left with lingerie compart-
ment on top, two useful
drawers and spacious cup-
boards. (One door has glass
panel).

£9'12'6

WALNUT VENEER GLORY CHESTS

As illustrated on right, these
have two spacious drawers
and two roomy cupboards.
(Top cupboard has mirror
back and ends, and glass
doors.)

£14'8'6

4 DRAWER CHESTS

36 inch wide with solid top
and ends, fitted with four
drawers. Richly polished in
blonde, walnut or mahogany
finish.

£11'19'6

WALNUT VENEER GLORY CHESTS

36 inch wide,
fitted with roomy
drawer lingerie
compartment at
top, spacious cup-
board and drop-
flap blanket
storage.

£13'12'6

★ **STEELE & CO. PTY. LTD.** ★ 191-203 SWANSTON ST., MELBOURNE... PHONE FB 2111 ★

Figure 22 Advertisement for Steele's glory boxes, *Sun News Pictorial*, 16 February 1950, 13.
Source: State Library of Victoria.

THE AUSTRALIAN OVER 290,000* COPIES Sold Every Week FREE NOVEL
WOMEN'S WEEKLY

Vol. III. No. 24. Registered at the General Post Office, Sydney, for transmission by post as a newspaper. SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1935. 48 PAGES PRICE 4d. MELBOURNE

Glory Box



Glory-box girl, you're planning, I think,
 For more than your glad to-day;
 You're counting the milestones of the years
 That shall line your happy way.

The years unknown and still unlived
 Are promises yet in store,
 Like gems of living rich and sweet
 Lying past life's strongroom door.

Glory-box girl, with linen and lace,
 A heart that has learned to sing,
 You will open the strongroom door of life;
 The key is your wedding-ring.

—PHYLLIS DUNCAN-BROWN.

Figure 23 'Glory-box girl,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 16 November 1935, front cover. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 24 Crystal and glassware collected by Kath Davis (nee Hayes) for her glory box, late 1930s-early 1940s. Object source: Kath Davis.



Figure 25 Tonina Farrugia (nee Pace) celebrating her wedding day, Melbourne, 1956. Source: Tonina Farrugia.



Figure 26 Cookware brought to Australia from Malta by Tonina Farrugia (nee Pace) as part of her glory box, 1956. Object source: Tonina Farrugia.



Figure 27 Bed linen brought to Australia from Italy by Carmela Palermo (nee Rocca) as part of her glory box, 1957. Object source: Carmela Palermo.



Figure 28 Coffee set brought to Australia from Italy by Carmela Palermo (nee Rocca) as part of her glory box, 1957. Object source: Carmela Palermo.



Figure 29 Carmela Palermo's (nee Rocca) travelling trunk which transported her glory box collection, 1957. Object source: Carmela Palermo.



Figure 30 Carmel Tata's (nee Catalani) trunk, made from timber harvested from the family property in Italy and brought to Australia by her mother Dominica Catalani (nee Tripodi) to transport her daughter's glory box collection, 1968. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figures 31 Gaetana Lazzara's trunk, made from timber from her marital bed and brought to Australia from Italy to transport her glory box collection, 1950. Object source: Rose Patti. Photographer: Peter Patti.



Figure 32 Bed linen brought to Australia from Ireland by Maureen King (nee O'Keefe) as part of her glory box, 1956. Object source: Maureen King.



Figure 33 Tea set brought to Australia from Ireland by Maureen King (nee O'Keefe) as part of her glory box, 1956. Object source: Maureen King.



Figure 34 Cutlery brought to Australia from Malta by Tonina Farrugia (nee Pace) as part of her glory box, 1956. Object source: Tonina Farrugia.



Figure 35 Silver tea service brought to Australia from Malta by Tonina Farrugia (nee Pace) as part of her glory box, 1956. Object source: Tonina Farrugia.



Figure 36A Gaetana Lazzara's trunk, made from timber from her marital bed and brought to Australia from Italy to transport her glory box collection, 1950 (trunk open). Object source: Rose Patti. Photographer: Peter Patti.

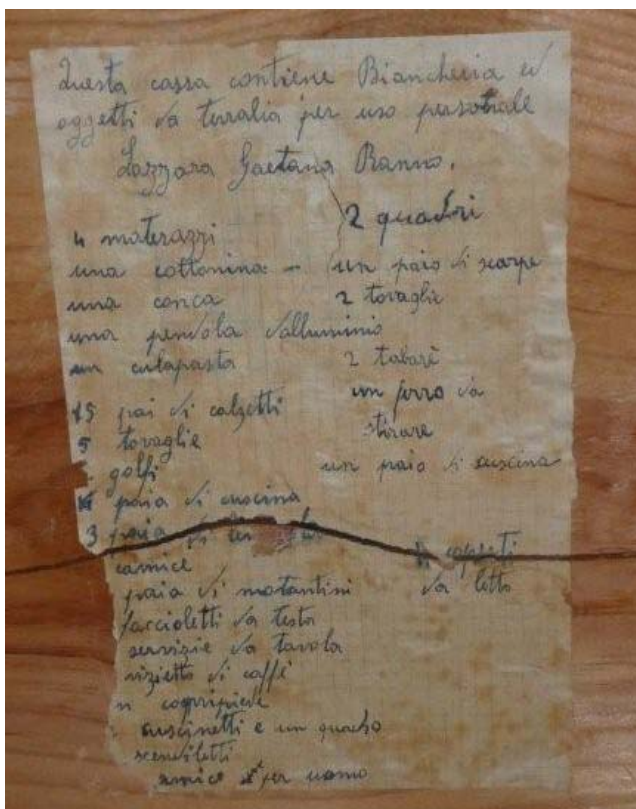


Figure 36B Detail of list of contents on inside lid of Gaetana Lazzara's trunk, made from timber from her marital bed and brought to Australia from Italy to transport her glory box collection, 1950. Object source: Rose Patti. Photographer: Peter Patti.



Figure 37 Bed linen brought to Australia from Holland by Margot Veltkamp (nee Van Der Drift) as part of her glory box, 1958. Object source: Margot Veltkamp.



Figure 38 Costanzo Emporium, Sydney Road, Coburg, Melbourne. It was opened by an Italian family in 1960 and was very popular with Italian women purchasing glory box goods for themselves and their daughters. Source: Italian Historical Society CO.AS.IT.



Figure 39 Carmel Tata (nee Catalani) with her girlfriends, Melbourne, 1970s (Carmel back row centre).



Figure 1 BS and her mother photographed during a shopping trip in town, Melbourne, 1930s.
Source: BS (request to remain anonymous).



Figure 2 Small gifts given to Daisy Chapman (nee Goodall) for her glory box, 1940s. Object source: Daisy Chapman.



Figure 3 Portrait of Daisy Chapman (nee Goodall), 1940s. Source: Daisy Chapman.



Figure 4 Crochet work by the grandmother of Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) for Ruby's glory box, 1940s-1950s. Object source: Ruby Kwijas.



Figure 5 Portrait of Nance McKay (nee McReady), late 1930s. Source: Nance McKay.



Figure 6 Examples of Daisy Chapman's (nee Goodall) fancywork, produced for her glory box, 1940s. Object source: Daisy Chapman.



Figure 7 Examples of fancywork produced for Irene Soumilas' glory box, and brought with her to Australia from Greece, 1958. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figure 8 Portrait of Francesca Gargano (nee Dimasi) (seated) with her family (daughter Josephine front row, right), Italy, about 1950. Source: Josephine Carey.



Figure 9 Portrait of Dominica Tripodi with her husband and daughter Carmel, Italy, about 1965. Source: Carmel Tata.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

Figures 10-12 (Figure 10) Dorothy Mitchell (nee Skate), about 1944; (Figure 11) Val Sheehan (nee Skate), about 1945; (Figure 12) Marjorie Cope (nee Skate), about 1953. Source: Val Sheehan.



Figure 13A Examples of Loris Peggie's fancywork, produced for her glory box, 1950s.
Object source: Loris Peggie.



Figure 13B Examples of Loris Peggie's fancywork, produced for her glory box, 1950s.
Object source: Loris Peggie.



Figure 14 Portrait of Edda Azzola (nee Pugnetti) and her mother and sisters, Italy, 1940s (Edda second from right). Source: Edda Azzola.



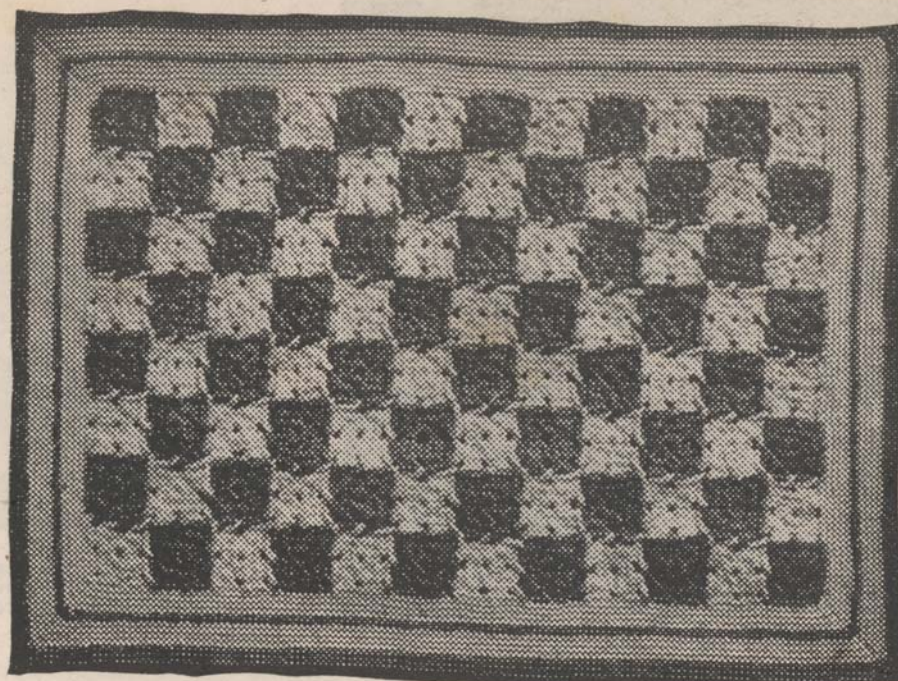
Figure 15 Portrait of Margot Veltkamp (nee Van Der Drift) and her sisters Riet and Henny, Holland, 1940s (Margot far right). Source: Margot Veltkamp.



Figures 16A Dorothy Phillips (nee Reakes), Lilydale, Victoria, 1940s. Source: Nancy Briggs.



Figure 16B Nancy Briggs (nee Reed), Lilydale, Victoria, 1940s. Source: Nancy Briggs.



★ Crochet this cotton BATHMAT

A GAY accessory for your bathroom is this two-tone bath mat crocheted in thick cotton. The work is simple to do, even for beginners in crochet-work, and the result—a mat of life-long durability. The neat check pattern can be adapted to any colour scheme to go with your bathroom colour scheme: pink and white is cool-looking, or pink and blue, green and white, blue and grey; all make a happy contrast. An ideal gift to take along to a kitchen-tea!

Materials: 12 oz. Astor "Duchess" White, 10 oz. Astor "Duchess" Blue; Stratnold crochet hook, size 10 or equivalent size in another brand.

Tension: 1 treble, $\frac{5}{8}$ in. in height.

Measurements: Complete motif approx. 2 in. square. Finished mat approx. 31 in. x 23 in.

The cotton is used double throughout mat.

With white, and crochet hook, begin with 6 chain. Join in a circle with a slip stitch.

Round 1: 3 chain to stand for 1st treble. Now work 11 treble into circle, join with a slip stitch.

Round 2: 3 chain to stand for 1st treble, (2 treble, 2 chain, 3 treble) worked into same stitch, * skip 2 sts. 2 ch. (3 treble 2 chain, 3 treble) worked into 3rd st. Rept. from * twice more. 2 chain. Join with a slip stitch. Darn end in neatly. With blue, begin a second motif and continue until 2 corners have been worked then in the 3rd corner, work 3 treble, 1 chain, remove hook and insert it through the 2 chain at corner of previous motif, 1 chain, 3 treble to finish corner, 1 chain, remove hook and insert it in the 2 chain at side of previous motif, 1 chain, finish other corner joining as in the 3rd corner.

Darn end in neatly.

Continue along row in this manner alternately joining white and blue until there are 12 in the row. To add the second and following rows the 1st of the row will be joined as in the 1st row then the next one will be worked to the middle of the 2nd corner, joining to the lowest corner of the previous motif then along its side, continuing along the lower edge of the motif in the previous row. When there are 8 motifs in the row, work a border of double crochet into the back of the sts. turning the corners with 3 double crochet into one stitch. 4 rows white, 1 row blue, 4 rows white, 3 rows blue.

Press carefully.

Figure 17 Instructions for a crochet bath mat, 'An ideal gift to take along to a kitchen tea.' *Australian Woman's World*, Vol. 30, No. 358, May 1950, 19. Source: the author.



Figure 18 Portrait of Ester Rose (nee Wallace), 1930s. Source: Ester Rose.

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FOR YOUR HOME Or GLORY BOX

Needlework Notions

Item one is a three-piece Duchesse Set, traced in exquisite butterfly design for swift embroidery.

ENCHANTING linen duchesse set for your own home or for your representation at linen tea or trousseau showing. Traced in a lovely butterfly design for embroidery, on oblong centre and circular mats, it will repay you handsomely for the very short time it will take to work.

Centre mat measures 12 x 18 inches, and the side mats 8 x 8 inches.

Obtainable in best quality Irish linen, in white, cream, blue, pink, yellow, or green, from our Needlework Department, for 2/6 the set, post free. We regret no C.O.D. orders can be taken for traced linen articles.

AT LEFT: Illustration of the charming three-piece butterfly duchesse set for dressing-table or sideboard.

SKETCH to show how attractive the butterfly duchesse set looks laid upon a table.

To work, butterflies should be satin-stitched, with the centres worked in a darker shade. The lines are in stem-stitch and the spots either french knots or eyelid holes.

She Wears Such Lovely Clothes

You'd never guess she dyed them herself . . . with Fairy Dyes, of course. They're so easy to use, and give new life and freshness to clothes and household furnishings.

7½ Fairy Dyes

ALL CHEMISTS AND STORES

For Brighter Bathrooms

Item Two: Individual guest towels, traced for Roman cutwork in delightful flower designs.

No more rubbing and long boiling on washing day!

Don't do this!

Don't do this!

Figure 19 Design for a duchesse set 'For Your Home or Glory Box,' suggesting that it will impress 'for your representation at linen (kitchen) tea or trousseau showing.' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 'Homemaker Section,' 9 April 1938, 7. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 20 Portrait of Gwenda Mutimer (nee Goode), 1940s. Source: Gwenda Mutimer.



Figure 21 Telephonists at Lilydale Post Office, Victoria, early 1950s. Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) fourth from left. Source: Ruby Kwijas.



Figure 1 Examples of Ester Rose's (nee Wallace) crochet work, produced for her glory box, 1930s. Object source: Ester Rose.



Figure 2 Two pieces from a three-piece duchesse set, embroidered and edged by May Vertigan (nee Ford) for her glory box, 1930s. Object source: Judith Howard.



Figure 3 Examples of Thelma Drummond's (nee Campbell) fancywork produced for her glory box, 1930s. Object source: Thelma Drummond.



Figure 4 Examples of Kath Davis' (nee Hayes) fancywork and her dinner set, late 1930s-early 1940s. Object source: Kath Davis.



Figure 5 Examples of Nancy Briggs' (nee Reed) and Dorothy Phillips' (nee Reakes) fancywork, 1940s. Objects sources: Nancy Briggs and Dorothy Phillips.



Figure 6 Examples of Loris Peggie's lace crochet work produced for her glory box, 1950s.
Object source: Loris Peggie.



Figure 7 Detail of Kath Davis' (nee Hayes) fancywork produced for her glory box, late 1930s-early 1940s. Collection: Museum Victoria. Photographer: Benjamin Healley.



Figures 8A Blanket spun, woven and finished by Francesca Gargano (nee Dimasi) and her mother, Italy, 1940s and brought to Australia as part of Francesca's daughter Josephine's glory box, 1956. Object source: Josephine Carey.



Figures 8B Sheets spun, woven and finished by Francesca Gargano (nee Dimasi) and her mother, Italy, 1940s and brought to Australia as part of Francesca's daughter Josephine's glory box, 1956. Object source: Josephine Carey.



Figure 9 Examples of Joan Cox's (nee Ryan) fancywork, brought to Australia from Ireland as part of her glory box, 1956. Object source: Joan Cox.

HOLIDAY NEEDLEWORK FOR YOUR BOX!

In those leisure hours to come make yourself this enchanting set

This week Bertha Maxwell chooses gardenias, adorably lovely and fragrant, for you to immortalise in simple, rapid stitchery. And what more beautiful decoration for a trousseau set?

Hand-cut patterns of this slim and figure-fitting 3-piece set (note the new bias-cut top) and exquisitely-designed transfer available immediately on application to our offices.

THE long lazy days of summer are here again! Perhaps you are making ready for the beach, the bush, the camp, the country cottage. If so, pack a little needle-pastime into your suitcase for your rest hours. You will never regret it.

If you are to be an Easter bride, now is the time to start your chief sets of underwear, and this is the design you will want for the prettiest outfit. Even if you are not interested in trousseaus you can always use a lovely new slip or nightdress, especially on holidays.

yards, and for the scanties 1½ yards. Allow for seams when cutting. All notches match.

Cutting and Making

TO cut out: Lay centre-front and back skirt and bodice of nightie to the fold of material. Lay centre-front and back skirt and bodice of slip to the fold of the material. Cut scantie pattern double. Cut back and front yoke double.

Gather top of slip and nightie to fit skirt. Turn in top edge of skirt and machine close to the edge on the right

Have You Patterns of These?

BERTHA MAXWELL'S summery three-way frock pattern for four-year-olds, price 1/-, matching hat 8d (featured in our home of May 18).

REAL Eastern-style kimono pattern, price 1/-, HB/sex transfer for rich embroidery, Price, 1/6 (featured in June 8 issue).

TWO-WAY tunic or blouse pattern, price, 1/-, Cross-stitch transfer for embroidery, price 1/6 (featured June 15).



MOST adorable of trousseau sets designed by Bertha Maxwell. Exclusive hand-cut patterns cost 2/6 the set; the generous gardenia transfer, carrying its exquisite design, costs 1/6.

to keep them sharp and pointed. A design very sweetly for those who have touch of satin-stitch will finish the centres. Where the bud-tips show double lines, satin-stitch these places, and taper away into fine lines to the base.

Little bits of stem and calyx which support the buds can be satin-stitch with green. The leaves can be buttonholed or satin-stitch all round.

Small pieces of cutwork may be omitted or worked over one thread; eyelets are open, or satin-stitched spots.

Simple outlining will express the

Other Purposes

THE design is suitable also for frocks or other crafts such as china-painting and leather-tooling.



SHOWING PORTION of the lovely and generous gardenia transfer, which measures 20 x 30 inches. It carries enough design for two V-necks and over 2 yards of bordering. This design is suitable also for frocks or hand-crafts such as china-painting and leather-tooling. Price, 1/6.

Gardenias, cousins to orange blossom, are worth their weight in gold in cold countries. Here in sunny Australia they bloom luxuriously in the open garden with a minimum of attention.

The clusters in this design are natural size, bold and simple, and have been drawn so that the spirit of the flower is retained and all troublesome details eliminated. Even if you are a novice at needlework, and have never seen these blossoms, you may set to work and achieve a wonderfully good result with simple stitches.

The transfer is a very generous one, measuring 20 x 30 inches, and giving enough design for two V-necks, and over two yards of bordering, the clusters in the latter being so distinct that they may be cut apart and spread out as scattered groups if preferred that way. This transfer costs 1/6 posted.

The three-piece set has nightdress and slip with the new bias-cut tops, slim and figure-fitting, yet just as easy to make as any other shapes if you follow these directions after cutting out. By buying the right quantities of materials there is no waste, and even the best fabric can be made to work out very economically. All washing silks and satin may be used, also sheer linen, cambric, muslin and other fine cottons.

Hand-cut patterns of this exclusive three-piece set cost 2/6, or they may be purchased separately, price 1/- each.

FOR the set you will require seven yards, of 36-inch material. For the nightdress, 3 yards, for the slip 2½

side. Join back yokes. Join shoulder and side seams of nightdress and side seams of slip. Then join top edge of back and front yoke, and join right-hand side seam.

Machine back and front seam of scanties. Slip left side of scanties for about four inches from top. Bind all round edge with a crossway strip of material. Turn a narrow edge at lower edge of yoke. Slip the scanties between edge of yoke. Make two buttonholes at left side of yoke. Sew two buttons at other side to correspond. Make shoulder straps from material and sew to slip.

If lace is used, sew all round edges and whip neatly at the back. If a plain edge is required, either face or hind the edges with a crossway strip of material.

The Colors

THESE flowers are a rich soft cream, the petals being thick in texture so that they are strong and firm. They are tubular at the base, the petals curving over at the top. There is often a trace of pink in the throat of the flower, but that may be omitted. The pointed pistil stands out a little from the centre, and is also soft cream. The flowers are richly fragrant, resembling orange blossom. The leaves are dark, glossy green.

Suitable colors for the materials on which the design is to be worked are cream, white, pale green, pale blue, pale yellow and the salmon shades of pink. The whole of the work may be stitched in one color, either white, or cream,

or green used for the leaves to give a realistic effect.

Methods of Work

THIS design is particularly suited to 'set' applique, a method which gives a very lovely effect of richness and elaborate work without really very much effort. It seems well also, and is as practical as it is pretty. Folded net is tacked at the back of the cut edges of the garments. The design is stamped on the material of which they are being made, and, after the pattern is worked, the spare silk or cotton is cut away, leaving the net fold to form the edge united to the cloth by the embroidery. Satin outlining over a little padding is the stitch most used for this work.

A method which resembles the above, but which is even stronger, is to turn back a fold or single hem along the edges to the right side, stamp the work a little way beneath the edge, and work through both thicknesses, trimming afterwards at the back.

If the garments are to be edged with lace, a dainty little pattern about half an inch wide is very good. And if it can be whipped on by hand, the appearance is much improved. The flower design can then be set about an inch beneath the lace.

Lovely Stitches

BUTTONHOLING over one or two running threads will express those flowers very handsomely. Particular care should be given to the petal points,

INTENSIFY Natural COLOR for Alluring Lips NEVER COARSEN WITH PAINT

NOW it is possible to give lips the youthful color men admire without risking that repulsive painted appearance of ordinary lipsticks. . . This is the Tangee way. Unlike ordinary lipsticks, Tangee isn't paint! Instead it contains a color-change principle which enables it to intensify your natural coloring.

In the stick Tangee looks orange. But on your lips it changes to blush rose! It becomes a part of your lips . . . not a greasy coating. Tangee can never give your lips a hard painted look. Moreover, Tangee's special cream base soothes and softens. Stays on all day.

Also Tangee Theatrical, a deeper shade, for evening use.

TANGEE COSMETIC beautifies eyelashes and eyebrows. Waterproof. Does not irritate or smudge.

World's Most Famous Lipstick

TANGEE
ENDS THAT PAINTED LOOK

Sole Distributors for Australia, R. G. TURNLEY & SON, MELBOURNE.



UNTOUCHED—Lips left untouched are apt to have a faded look . . . make the face seem older. PAINTED—Don't risk that painted look. It's coarsening and men don't like it. TANGEE—Intensifies natural color, restores youthful appearance that painted look.

Figure 10 Designs for lingerie to make 'For Your Box in those leisure hours,' Australian Women's Weekly, 'Home Maker Section,' 16 November 1935, 41. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 11 White cotton tablecloth embroidered by Ellen Smoorenburg (nee Muller) and brought with her to Australia from Holland as part of her glory box, 1958. Object source: Ellen Smoorenburg.

THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WEEKLY HOMEMAKER

July 11, 1936.

A special section devoted to the interests of home-lovers

41

For Your Glory Box or Linen Cupboard

Three little guest-towels made dainty and charming with these garden-favorite motifs.

Bertha
Maxwell
Designs

TRACED ready for embroidery you may have them in white huckaback, in cream, or pastel-colored linen, or in Cesarine. See list below.

THE well-kept home is always distinguished by a plentiful supply of spotless house linen, ready for use at a moment's notice. This is the bride's contribution to the new house; when well chosen and of good quality, these things last for many years and need only occasional renewal.

Small hand-towels are a very important item in the bride's linen list, so many are necessary, and their prices are really high; to the needleworker they present no difficulty, rather they are a pleasant pastime both before and after marriage.

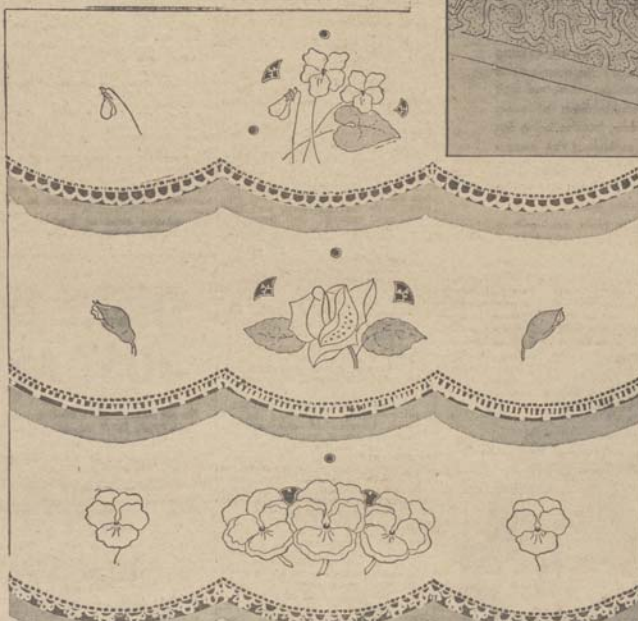
A QUARTER of a dozen made now and again will give a variety and quality not often obtainable by purchase. Here are three of the newest.

Quickly made and not exacting in its demand on one's skill, towel needlework is among those delightful pieces we can keep almost ready in our workbox; a stitch now and then while waiting for something in the kitchen, an odd half-hour of relaxation, and the work is over in no time. And then add it to your guest-box.

If you do not keep one, you will want



DON'T YOU think them charming, too? Any one of these towels may be yours. Run through the list and make your choice immediately.



HERE YOU SEE a close-up of the three towel designs which Bertha Maxwell presents for housewives and bride-maids.

to start one at once when you hear of it. Just a pretty cretonne-covered box, or small basket handy to the bathroom, containing half-a-dozen brightly-embroidered little towels for the guest who comes to lunch or to spend a day with you. Your friends will soon know where they can help themselves; later it takes only a few minutes to launder and return each towel to the box.

Quickly Made

THREE towels need not be large; they are made more quickly when small, cost less and are easier to wash and iron. The ones we offer you here are 15 inches wide by 22 inches long, a little of the length probably being absorbed by the working of the ends. This is a very useful size.

Here are the materials you may choose, and you will notice that the ends are curved in three large scallop effects, which may be obtained spoketitched for your quick crochet needle, or left plainly stamped in curves, so that you may either pad and buttonhole the edge or bind with bias binding.

a very satisfactory and gay method of finishing. Bias bindings are obtainable in lovely fast colors and make a delightful piece of work, especially easy to sew round curves.

While huckaback guest-towels traced with group design in pinks, violets, or rosebuds. 15 x 22 inches, stamped with curved scallop lines for binding. Price, 1/6.

With ends spoketitched in scallops for crochet. Price, 1/3.

Best quality linen guest-towels, 15 x 22 inches. In cream or pastel-green, yellow, blue, or pink linen, traced with

violets, pinks, or rosebuds, scallop lines for binding. Price, 2/3.

With ends spoketitched in scallops for crochet. Price, 2/6.

Guest-towels, 15 x 22 inches, in pink, yellow, green, or blue Cesarine traced with violets, pinks, or rosebuds, and with scallop lines for binding. Price, 1/3.

With spoketitched ends in scallops for crochet. Price, 2/6.

If your towels are spoketitched when you get them, you may proceed at once to the embroidery and finish the

edge afterwards, but if they are not so stitched it is better to complete the edge first to prevent fraying. If you are using binding, select a color which matches either the flowers in the towels, or use one green for the set of three, thus keeping them uniform. Be sure to sew binding on by hand.

Buttonholing

THIS is always a charming finish to all needlework, and is one of the strongest and most durable of edges. Run in two or three rows of padding stitches inside the curves, then buttonhole very neatly. Make a picoted loop between the scallops if you wish, or add a picot here and there along the edge. Mark the places with a pencil before starting to work.

Pinks: Lovely blues, purples, browns, yellows, and black may be used on these fascinating flowers. The centres are yellow dots. The double lines round some of the petals may be buttonholed or satin-stitched in black, and the centres of the petals filled in with yellow or brown. The short stems are green. Applique onto these blossoms perfectly.

Rosebud: The effect of this bud is noticeable only after you have finished working it in color, the double lines of

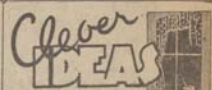


SMALL HAND-TOWELS are a very important item in the bride's linen list—and here is your opportunity to add to your box or chest the sweetest towels you've ever set eyes upon.

the curled petals being lovely in soft satin-stitching or buttonholing over a thread or two. Use any pink, yellow, or red tone which you prefer, and watch the flower come to life under your needle. Notice the little fully-petal encasing from the closed bud on either side of the main panel; pack it in with color, and work the surrounding calyx in green.

Violets: These dainty little favorites are usually worked in a medium-purple; light shades of the same color or deep-blue may be used. A rather broad satin outline effect will express them quickly, with a satined spot in the centre. Medium-green stems and leaf.

Cut pieces: Outline, buttonhole with the edge inwards and clip carefully. If you do not wish to make them as shown, fill in thickly with massed green dots to match the leaves, making little decorative patches of stitching which are very pleasing and very quickly done.



FOR CURLING-TONGS: If you find your curling-tongs are wearing-out, and take a long time to heat-up, this means the iron has lost its "temper." To remedy this, make the tongs as hot as possible without actually red hot, and plunge them into a basin of cold water. This will revive the temper of the iron, and sure to sew binding on by hand.

DRIVING IN NAILS: If you want to drive a nail into a wall, first make a hole for the nail in the plaster, and then fill with liquid glue. While the glue is still unset, drive the nail in and leave it there until the glue hardens. In a couple of hours the nail will be firmly fixed in the glue, and strong enough to support a picture or any considerable weight.

GOOD FLOOR POLISHER: Don't throw your old, worn-out broom away. Cover the head with a piece of felt or an old rug, and tack down firmly. You will have an excellent floor polisher, and you will not have to kneel down to work.

RESTORING FEATHERS: If your ornamental feathers look bedraggled, sprinkle a little salt in a tin, and place over the gas ring, holding the plumes over the smoke for a few minutes, when they will lose their faded appearance.

Figure 12 Embroidery designs for guest towels 'For Your Glory Box or Linen Cupboard,' featuring an image of a woman embroidering at her open glory box. *Australian Women's Weekly*, 'Homemaker Section,' 11 July 1936, 41. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 13 Examples of Ester Rose's (nee Wallace) fancywork and doily press, 1930s.
Object source: Ester Rose.

THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WEEKLY HOME MAKER

November 9, 1935.

A special section devoted to the interests of home-lovers.

29



TIME to Catch the Christmas Mail with These!

BERTHA MAXWELL designs six Australian wildflower d'oyleys and a lovely d'oyley case to match. Expert directions, given hereunder, will enable you to complete them swiftly—so make your choice to-day!



THE very spirit of the bush for your home or for your friend overseas—there is just time to stitch one or two of these dainty Australian gifts for the last Christmas mail. If ever you have longed to show the beauty of our wildflowers to people in other lands, this is your opportunity to express your wish.

THERE are three 8-inch d'oyleys, the most useful of all sizes, and three sandwich d'oyleys measuring 4½ inches by 11 inches, a very generous size. All have been designed for neatly-buttonholed edges, quick and straight for time-saving work, with a plot here and there to brighten them up and if you wish you may have all these edges hemstitched for your crochet or lace. These are the lovely linens available, and their prices:

Round Christmas Bell, Flannel Flower, and Gummut d'oyleys, also sandwich d'oyleys, in white and cream linens; and also in pastel-blue, pink, primrose, or green. Price, 1/- each. Blue, green, pink, or primrose Censarine, 9d. each. Hemstitched edges to carry lace or crochet cost 3d extra for each d'oyley ordered.

D'oyley Case or Blotter

THERE is also a very amply-cut d'oyley case, stamped with a group embracing all the wildflowers which appear on the separate d'oyleys—a perfect idea for a set such as this. This is stamped on linen measuring 12in. x 12in., which allows plenty for turnings or bindings, and is also large enough to make a small blotter. This costs, including back pieces, 2/- in linen and 1/9 in Censarine. If you require hemstitched edges, add 3d extra for each case ordered.

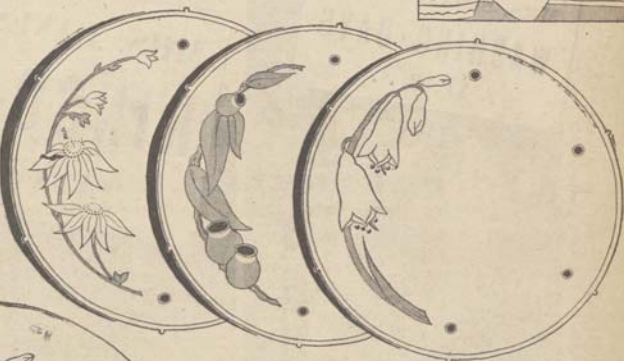
This 12 x 12-inch size is also suitable for centre-pieces, or small circular tray-cloths. In linen (white, cream, or pastel-blue, pink, green, or primrose), 1/-; in blue, pink, green, or primrose Censarine, 1/-.

The d'oyley case is stamped without any ring or mark, so that you may use it to cover cardboard cut to your own liking.

Gumnuts are not flowers, but they

bers of the lily family, and have the same long knife-like leaves as many of the lilies bear. The dainty, mysterious flannel flowers, the lovely white daisies of the eastern States, are widely known for their ethereal beauty and soft, strange texture. These three plants are typically Australian, and are all immensely popular with flower-lovers.

THE GUMNUTS: These quaint sprigs are best worked in shades of brown and



BERTHA MAXWELL offers dainty Australian motifs on useful linens for the home and designed for swift stitching to enable you to conveniently catch the overseas Christmas mail. Note: The last Christmas mail for Great Britain closes round about November 18 in Brisbane, November 19 in Sydney, a day or so later in Melbourne and Adelaide, earlier in Tasmania. You can, of course, take advantage of air mail for your belated overseas gifts.

wonderful flowers are incredibly beautiful in a jar of black pottery. Stitch in rather flat satin-stitch by dividing the ray petals into two parts down the centre-line, and form the centres either by a padded round of satin work, or by a mass of tiny dots. Softly satin-stitch the long stems and oddly-shaped leaves.

ALL these designs look very well on blue, green, or pale pink linen or Censarine. Brown or green gumnuts, with edge to match all in the one color, are very handsome on the cream linen, while white on white for all the patterns is always correct for cake mats. The bells are very striking on yellow backgrounds.

CLEVER IDEAS

PAINT STAINS: For paint stains on white fabrics, cover the stain with lard and leave for a day or two; then wash with white soap.

STALE SMOKE: Burn a few drops of vinegar on a hot shovel for a quick way of clearing the smell of stale smoke out of a room.

COOKING TIP: A little flour sprinkled over the fruit, before adding the top layer of pastry to pies, tarts, etc., will not only thicken the syrup, but prevent the juice from boiling over and soaking into the crust.

CLEANING POTS: If soap is rubbed on your scouring cloth before the cleanser is put on the soot on the bottom of a pan will be instantly removed, and the cloth will be free from the black soot on rinsing.

OILSKIN COAT: To renovate an oilskin coat, obtain 1 pint double-boiled linseed oil, 1oz. patent paint driers, and 1oz. black ground in oil. All obtainable from paint stores. Thoroughly mix and strain through coarse cloth, then brush all over as evenly as possible. Allow to dry one week before wearing.

USE FOR COFFEE GROUNDS: A good housekeeper will always empty the coffee grounds down the kitchen sink, as this keeps it free from clogging with grease, and the water will always run away freely.

TO HOLD SPICES: A ten or twelve-inch round cake-tin is a splendid convenience to hold spices and flavoring bottles, etc., in the kitchen cupboard. It revolves easily and gives one the chance to select with ease the exact thing needed. Place the tall bottles in the centre. Another round dish in the bottom or refrigerator will conveniently hold an opened jar of mayonnaise, sauce, jelly, or preserves, and small quantities of leftovers.

IODINE STAINS: Iodine stains on any washable material can be removed by soaking in a solution of ammonia. Wash afterwards in warm soapsuds.

TEA AND COFFEE STAINS: Glycerine will remove tea and coffee stains from white or colored table-linens. Apply with a soft, clean cloth, leave for an hour or so, then wash the article in the usual way.

CLEANING ELECTRIC IRONS: Electric irons can be kept smooth and clean if they are rubbed over occasionally with a rag soaked in kerosene. If marked, or rough, clean with whiting and kerosene, taking care to rub thoroughly with a soft, dry cloth afterwards.

GOLF STICKS: If the business ends of golf sticks have become rusty, they can be restored to their pristine brightness by a vigorous rubbing with kerosene, benzine, and castor oil prepared in equal proportions.

AUSTRALIAN wildflowers on a pretty linen d'oyley case or blotter-cover. See article.

nuts are always brown, except when they are very young, when they are dark green. The long leaves are deep bronze green, with an Indian-red tip. Stems are brown or green.

Colorful Favorites

THE CHRISTMAS BELLS: Bright scarlet bells, shading to yellow at the lower part where the lobes branch out, with yellow stamens dots. The long leaves are light green, and very smooth. They are effective in outlining or satin-stitching over a trace of padding with the stitches lying diagonally across the leaves. The bells look well in button-holing, which becomes deeper about the lower parts of each flower, but firm outlining is also satisfactory.

THE FLANNEL FLOWERS: These are a soft white, with white centres. The rather meagre leaves and thin stems are pale soft green. A large bunch of these



SANDWICH D'OYLES, measuring 4½ inches by 11 inches, carry these Australian wildflower designs at each end. You can use for yourself that very little work is required for pleasing effect. In white, cream, pastel-blue, green, pink, or primrose linen. Price, 1/- each; in pink, primrose, green, or blue Censarine, 9d. each.

are so decorative, and are used so much in place of flowers, that they have become part of our floral needlework and interior decoration. They are always beautifully brown and quaint, and are very effective in stitching. The tall Christmas Bells are num-

Figure 14 Bertha Maxwell Australian wildflower designs for doilies and doily presses, Australian Women's Weekly, 'Home Maker Section,' 9 November 1935, 29. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 15A Pre-stamped linen designs, including 'Semco,' which remain uncompleted by Thelma Drummond (nee Campbell), 1930s. Object source: Thelma Drummond.



Figure 15B Pre-stamped linen designs, including 'Semco' and 'Myart' which remain uncompleted by Loris Peggie, 1950s. Object source: Loris Peggie.

FOR the BRIDE'S LINEN CHEST

Specially designed dinner set traced ready for embroidery; also pretty and practical aprons for house wear.

THE well-kept house is always distinguished by a good supply of spotless and beautifully embroidered linen ready for use at a moment's notice. This is the bride's contribution to the new home.

Needlework
Notions

TABLE linen is a most important item on the linen list of the young bride-to-be. For, naturally, she is desirous of having things "just right" when friends come to dine when she settles down.

Lovely table linen is, of course, the foundation for an attractive and inviting meal. Every hostess knows that the simplest appointments look twice as nice set upon an exquisitely embroidered cloth. Here, then, is your golden opportunity to secure a most delightful set.

There's an old-fashioned charm about this zinnia design. We feel quite sure that no homemaker will be able to resist its appeal.

This set is obtainable in pure quality linen in white, cream, blue, pink, or green.

Here are the sizes and prices:—

CLOTH, 36 inches x 36 inches. Price 7/6.

CLOTH, 45 inches x 45 inches. Price 8/9.

CLOTH, 54 inches x 54 inches. Price 11/6.

CLOTH, 72 inches x 72 inches. Price 17/6.

SERVLETTE, 11 inches x 11 inches. Price 1/-.

DOYLEY, 9 inches x 9 inches. Price 1/-.

SANDWICH DOYLEY, 5 inches x 11 inches. Price 1/-.

TEA-COSY, 13 inches x 10 inches. Price 2/6.

Postage is free.

The whole design is very simple to embroider. Button-

hole the outline of the flowers, and satin-stitch the petals.

These may be done in the natural shades of the flowers,

or in extra broder cotton.

The stamens are satin-stitched, and the outline of the

leaves buttonholed with the stems stem-stitched. The

spots may be worked as eyelet holes or French knots.

If you feel you cannot cope with a luncheon or supper

set, send for an afternoon tea-cloth, matching serviettes

and doyleys.

Do a little bit a day, or an hour or two a week, and before you realise

how the time has gone you will find yourself putting in the last stitches of

the most glorious and decorative of all sets for the new home.



A WELL-TURNED-OUT table is the natural aim of every hostess. More than half the battle is won if you possess a strikingly lovely set such as is shown above. You may obtain this exclusive set carrying the decorative zinnia design all in readiness for hand embroidery. Just send in to the Needlework Department of The Australian Women's Weekly. See prices on this page. We regret that no C.O.D. orders can be accepted.

Figure 16 Pre-stamped embroidery designs for table linen 'For the Bride's Linen Chest,' emphasising the importance of quality table linen and featuring a very formal dinner party! *Australian Women's Weekly*, 'Home Maker Section,' 19 February 1938, 15.
Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 17 Examples of Kath Davis' (nee Hayes) fancywork, including her blue and white checked scone holder, produced for her glory box, late 1930s-early 1940s. Objects source: Kath Davis.



Figure 18 Tea-cosy knitted by Kath Davis (nee Hayes) for her glory box, late 1930s-early 1940s. Collection: Museum Victoria. Photographer: Benjamin Healley.



Figure 19 Gwenda Mutimer's (nee Goode) brown fabric tablecloth, produced for her glory box during the textile restrictions of wartime, 1940s. Object source: Gwenda Mutimer.



Figure 20 White-on-white embroidery brought by Dominica Tripodi to Australia from Italy as part of her daughter Carmel's glory box, 1968. Object source: Carmel Tata.



Figure 21 Pillowcases, examples of white-on-white work, brought by Irene Soumilas to Australia from Greece as part of her glory box, 1958. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figure 22 Bed linen, examples of white-on-white work, brought by Francesca Gargano (nee Dimasi) to Australia from Italy as part of her daughter Josephine's glory box, 1956. Object source: Josephine Carey.



Figure 23 Table centre embroidered in popular lily design by Kath Davis (nee Hayes) for her glory box, late 1930s-early 1940s. Object source: Kath Davis.



Figure 1 Portrait of Kath Davis (nee Hayes), Traralgon, Victoria, 1930s. Source: Kath Davis.

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The Australian Women's Weekly

June 27, 1942

You simply must make foundations last nowadays

Corsets and girdles are getting scarce. Be very sure to get every bit of wear from yours. Wash them often and wash them with gentle Persil. Those thorough oxygen-charged suds are kindness itself to delicate broché, satin and fine voile. For Persil believes in persuasion. It coaxes out the dirt and perspiration—and that's the way to make a corset wear and wear and keep its firm fit. So just remember, Persil for your foundations—and why not follow Mrs. Holiday's friendly tips down below?

Mrs. Holiday,
washing expert,
gives some friendly
hints on laun-
dery corsets.

LONGER WEAR FROM CORSETS IF YOU WASH THEM LIKE THIS—

WASHING. 1. Open metal clips and suspenders and close any zippers.
2. Wash in lukewarm suds. Please don't rub with cake soap, as particles get right into the weave and are difficult to rinse out.
3. Squeeze the suds through and through. If necessary, take the corset out and lay flat on a table while you gently brush extra soiled parts with a soft nail brush. Brush only one way.
4. Rinse many times, as dirty suds tend to lodge in the seams.

DRYING. 1. Remove as much moisture as possible by rolling the corset in a towel. Keep it as uncreased as possible.
2. Dry away from artificial heat or bright sunshine. Either hang the garment up or lay flat on a towel with a second towel inside. Wipe any rubber parts dry.

IRONING. Press the fabric while still slightly damp on the wrong side. Use a moderate iron. Never press rubber or elastic.

**War-time
cut on corsets**

Figure 2 Advertisement for Persil, 'War-time cut on corsets,' promoting the washing agent as a preserver of war-restricted undergarments. *Australian Women's Weekly*, 27 June 1942, 24.



CHARMING LINGERIE SET, consisting of three pieces—nightgown, slip, and scanties. Paper patterns for making, together with transfer of the exotic orchid design, can be obtained from our Needlework Department.

Designed for the EASTER BRIDE

An Exquisite Lingerie Set
Adorned with Exotic
Orchids.

DESIGNED for the Easter bride's glory box, this charming set of lingerie, including three pieces, nightgown, slip, and scanties, is ever so easy to make in ivory or pastel-toned silks or cottons.

THE exotic orchid design for the embroidery is an exclusive one and looks simply delightful when worked. It is not at all difficult to do, yet it adds that touch of luxury that is so attractive for trousseau lingerie.

The paper patterns for making the three-piece set, together with the transfer of the orchid design, are obtainable from our Needlework Department. (Postal address will be found on our pattern page.)

The prices and sizes of the patterns are as follows: Sizes 32 to 38 inches, 2/6 the set, or each garment separately 1/1 each. Complete instructions for cutting and making the garments are enclosed with each pattern.

The transfer of the orchid design is 1/6.

Finishing Edges: If lace is used, sew all round edges and whip neatly at the back. If a plain edge is required, either face or bind the edges with a crossway strip of material.

Mauve, Purple, and Gold: Delicate mauve has so long been associated with these plants that it is sometimes itself called "orchid." It is highly suitable for working the flowers, with a deeper shade right down to purple on the bell-shaped part of the bloom, the same deep tone being used also on the tiny spots on the other petals. Gold can be used for the centre shading.

Other orchid colors are pinks and rose shades, pale greens and gold, soft purple-brown and gold, cream and yellow; while, of course, all cream or white is always good taste in embroidery.

Simple Stitchery: The open part of the bell petal may be worked in buttonholing, with satin-stitching and light outlining in other parts of the flowers. The work should be delicate in those parts which are lightly drawn, and heavier where the lines are blacker.

Satin-stitch the leaves with a very little padding underneath, and if the satin is slightly sloped it will look better than straight across.

Colored Guest Towels

THESE guest towels are not only useful but decidedly attractive. They are all ready traced for working with effective designs and come packed in a cellophane bag in sets of two.

The colors are green and yellow,



SET OF two colored guest towels.

or blue and pink. The price from our Needlework Department is 2/3 for a packet of two towels, plus 2d. postage.

Needlework
& Notions

She Wears Such
Lovely Clothes

You'd never guess she dyed them herself... with Fairy Dyes, of course. They're so easy to use, and give new life and freshness to clothes and household furnishings.

Fairy Dyes
RE-SHEDS AND STORES

LOSES HUSBAND
WHEN FAIR BLOND
HAIR TURNS BROWN

Near Tragedy—Ends Happily

THE following letter was recently received by the manufacturers of Sta-Blond Shampoo:—
"Dear Sirs, I am writing to tell you how much happier I have obtained through your Sta-Blond Shampoo. Six months ago my husband and I parted and he was sent along with a beautiful blonde. After seeing your advertisement, I decided to try Sta-Blond. After using it twice I saw my husband and he took me to a change. A month later, after using it twice more, I saw him again and I am very happy to say that we made it up. All the thanks are due to Sta-Blond; the best shampoo in the world."

I remain,
Yours truly "B. B."

This woman knew why her husband left her, but how few women know that when their sweethearts or husbands tire of them it is because, in his eyes, they are losing their looks. When a man marries a blonde, it is because he likes blond types, but when her hair turns brown or rusty she loses that blond glamour and ceases to be his type; invariably he will be attracted by another blonde. If you are a natural fair blonde you can always stay blond—aluring—if you use STA-BLOND, that wonderful shampoo-dye combination. It has the same lightening effect as the sun but without streaking.

If you have already turned into a brown or auburn shade you can get back the beautiful golden tresses of your girlhood by using this wonderful shampoo. Sta-Blond, the blonde-restorer, makes your hair 2 to 4 shades lighter without lathering. It makes your hair look better and gives it a soft, wavy, and a natural shine. It is the only shampoo that is really a shampoo of beauty—restores no dye or artificial coloring. Try it today. Sta-Blond is available in all chemists, hairdressers, and druggists. Write to Sta-Blond, Ltd., 10, New York St., London, E.C.4, for a free trial sample.

Wash Natural Blond Hair
2-4 SHADES LIGHTER with
STA-BLOND LIGHTENERS

Dainty Lace-
Edged Apron
Ready Traced with attractive
design for working.

HOW neat and dainty you will look in this pretty apron. It is just the thing to protect your frock when making the afternoon tea.

It is made of British bleached calico which will launder perfectly.

The design for embroidery is an unusually attractive one and is not at all difficult to follow, while the



dainty lace edge on the hem, top, and on the pockets adds an extra touch of feminine daintiness.

The price of the apron, ready traced for embroidery is 2/3, plus 3d. postage, from Needlework Department, The Australian Women's Weekly. (Postal addresses will be found on pattern page.)

A PERMANENT PRESCRIPTION MAKES PERMANENT CURE!

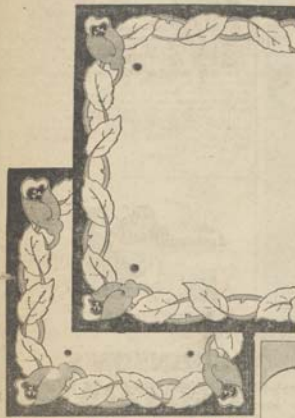


Modern housewives who use PERSIL can look at the biggest wash without a frown. When PERSIL is dissolved in the water millions of oxygen bubbles are released to force the rich suds through the fabric. Dirt is carried away and without any rubbing or scrubbing. That is why a PERSIL wash is such an easy wash. Use PERSIL alone. BEWARE OF IMITATIONS. Good Housekeeping Institute. J. KITCHEN & SONS PTY. LTD. #242-25

USE PERSIL FOR ALL YOUR WASH

Figure 3 Designs for lingerie for the glory box of the 'Easter Bride,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 'Homemaker Section,' 13 February 1937, 7. Source: State Library of Victoria.

For the GLORY-BOX GIRL and Needle-Lovers Everywhere!



3-pce. Rosebud Set

For Sideboard or Dressing-Table

(Featured in our issue of April 6.)
THIS quality-pretty three-piece set of embroidered linen brings the queen of flowers to your dressing-table. Quickly applied in your spare time, they will remind you of summer, and these mats are as strong as they are beautiful, worthy of your time and skill. The entire mat measures 11 x 17 inches, the small square mats measure 8 x 8 inches. White or cream sets cost 3/6; blue, brown, or green linen sets cost 2/6.

Limited quantities of these popular Bertha Maxwell designs now available... Please make your immediate choice!

These exquisite Traced Linens, Trousseau Patterns, and Transfer Designs, created by Australia's foremost needlecraft expert, were featured in earlier issues of The Australian Women's Weekly.

Wouldn't you like this 4-piece Lingerie or Trousseau Set?

Large Pansy Transfer and Paper Patterns available, as featured in our issue of April 20... Exclusive paper patterns to enable you to make the whole lovely set (embracing nightdress, slip, panties, and brassiere) in any desired fabric are obtainable for 3/6, post free.

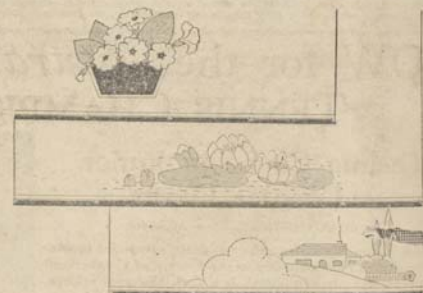
The charming Pansy Transfer, measuring 20 x 30 inches, will give you enough flowers for two V-necks, with a single flower for the back of the nightdress, pointed pieces for the panties, and about 48 inches of pansy border for placing round armholes, necks, etc. Price 1/6.



Embroider the Sweetest Guest Towels You've Ever Seen!

They were designed specially for you by Bertha Maxwell.

(These were featured in our issue of April 27.)
PRIMROSES, water-lilies, and a country cottage are traced on to these exquisite guest towels. White or cream linen, cost 2/6 each; white buckram, 2/3 each; colored linen or buckram, 2/11 each; with hemstitched ends, 3d. each extra. Here is your opportunity to acquire the loveliest towels for your bathroom—size 11!



LOVELINESS of SIMPLE GARDEN FLOWERS

Captured by Bertha Maxwell in this 15 x 20 transfer.

Price 9d. These were featured in our issue of February 23.

CHARMING motifs may be freely used for frocks, what joy for the young girl! And note: 68 x 90 bed-spread, in imported British unbleached calico, carrying the twelve motifs, can be had for 12/6. Postage, 1/6.

Koala Transfer

(Featured in our issue of March 2.)
DECORATE the loveliest of wee folk's rooms—cushions, curtains, cot-covers, folders, rompers, etc.

This transfer will also solve your problems of what to send overseas as souvenir Christmas gifts. Embroider our little native bears on to tray cloths, d'vies, guest towels, etc. Price 1/6.



Here's Australia's whimsical family! Amusing life-like koalas, gum-nuts and leaves included, decorate a 20 x 20 transfer. Price 1/6.

COUPON

Here's an easy way to secure any of the articles on this page. Just fill in this coupon, enclose postal note or stamps for the amount stated, and post to—

The Australian Women's Weekly

ADELAIDE: Shell House, North Terrace, Adelaide.
BRISBANE: Shell House, 281 Ann Street, Brisbane.
MELBOURNE: "The Age" Chambers, 229 Collins Street, Melbourne CL
SYDNEY: Box 412X, G.P.O. Sydney.
TASMANIA: C/o Andrew Mather & Co. Pty., Ltd., 189-112 Liverpool Street, Hobart.

Name.....
Address.....
Article.....

Figure 4 Designs for lingerie 'For the Glory-Box Girl,' Australian Women's Weekly, 18 January 1936, 44. Source: State Library of Victoria.



A TROUSSEAU TO LAST A LIFETIME

Irish Linen

Irish Linen is something to be proud of, for the heirloom quality reflects your own good sense and appreciation of true value. Your friends will envy your trousseau, for Irish Linen has been famed for generations. The crisp coolness, the wonderful sheen that's so smooth to touch, so lovely to see and above all the everlasting quality that washes and irons so easily. These you will find only in pure Irish Linen.



Exquisite Damask —
No other table linen can compare with Irish Linen for loveliness and years of service.



Pillowcases and Sheets of Irish Linen are so luxurious... but so practical and economical, too—the longest wearing money can buy!



Tea Towels of super-absorbent, lint-free Irish Linen quickly give your glasses, china, silverware a wonderfully clear, brilliant sparkle.



**If it's Irish Linen
it should say so...**



Irish Linen Association
Box 3988, G.P.O., Sydney

Please send free copy of booklet "Irish Linen in the Home."

Name

Address

ILG.20

Figure 5 Advertisement for Irish linen for 'A Trousseau To Last A Lifetime.' *Australian Women's Weekly*, 31 March 1954, 4. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 6 Pillowcases, examples of white-on-white Richelieu embroidery, produced by Ellen Smoorenburg (nee Muller) and brought to Australia from Holland as part of her glory box, 1958. Ellen had to alter these pillowcases which would not fit standard Australian pillows. Objects source: Ellen Smoorenburg.



Figure 7 Sheets hand-woven by Francesca Gargano (nee Dimasi) and brought to Australia from Italy as part of her daughter Josephine's glory box, 1956. Object source: Josephine Carey.



Figure 8 Carmel Tata's (nee Catalani) embroidered bed linen, 1950s-1960s. Object source: Carmel Tata.



Figure 9A Gwendoline Langford's unused trousseau from the 1940s, on display at Kyneton Museum, Victoria, 2007. It includes Manton's sheets still in their packaging.



Figure 9B Gwendoline Langford's unused trousseau from the 1940s, on display at Kyneton Museum, Victoria, 2007.



Figure 10 Loris Peggie's nylon nightgown, purchased for her trousseau but never worn, 1950s. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figure 11 Portrait of Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) in the backyard of her home in John Street, Lilydale, about 1952. Source: Ruby Kwijas.



Figure 12 Nightgown and dressing gown from Irene Soumilas' extensive trousseau, purchased by her mother in Greece and brought by Irene to Australia, 1958. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figure 13 Portrait of the proxy wedding of Carmela Palermo (nee Rocca), Italy, 1957. Source: Italian Historical Society CO.AS.IT.



Figure 14 Portrait of Carmela Palermo (nee Rocca), just prior to migrating to Australia from Italy, 1957. Source: Italian Historical Society CO.AS.IT.



Figure 15 'Film Star,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, front cover, 22 August 1936. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 16 Wedding crowns made by Kleoniki Gregory (nee Petrou) in Greece and brought with her for her wedding ceremony in Australia, 1950. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figure 17 Nightgown made by Kleoniki Gregory (nee Petrou) and brought with her to Australia from Greece as part of her trousseau, 1950. Collection: Museum Victoria.



Figure 18 Portrait of Edda Azzola (nee Pugnetti) and her fiancé, northern Italy, 1950s.
Source: Edda Azzola.



Figure 19 Wedding portrait, Margot Veltkamp (nee Van Der Drift), Holland, 1953.
Source: Margot Veltkamp.



Figure 20 Portrait of Maureen King (nee O'Keefe) with her fiancé, Ireland, 1950s.
Source: Maureen King.



Figure 21 Portrait of Joan Cox (nee Ryan), Dublin, Ireland, 1954. She is wearing a coat made for her by her fiancé Joe and a brooch he gave her before migrating to Australia. Source: Joan Cox.



Figure 22 Portrait of Beth Taws (nee Brooke) at age 22, Melbourne, 1922. Source: Beth Taws.



Figure 23 Essendon High School, Victoria, Form 1 Class B, 1974. Carmel Tata (nee Catalani) front row, third from left. Source: Carmel Tata.