

Helen Draper and the Kangaroo Banner

100 years ago, a group of men and boys made their way from Wagga Wagga NSW to Campbelltown in Sydney's west, to sign up for a war that was to end all wars. This year, a re-enactment will be held to remember their sacrifices and the long and continuing fight for freedom.

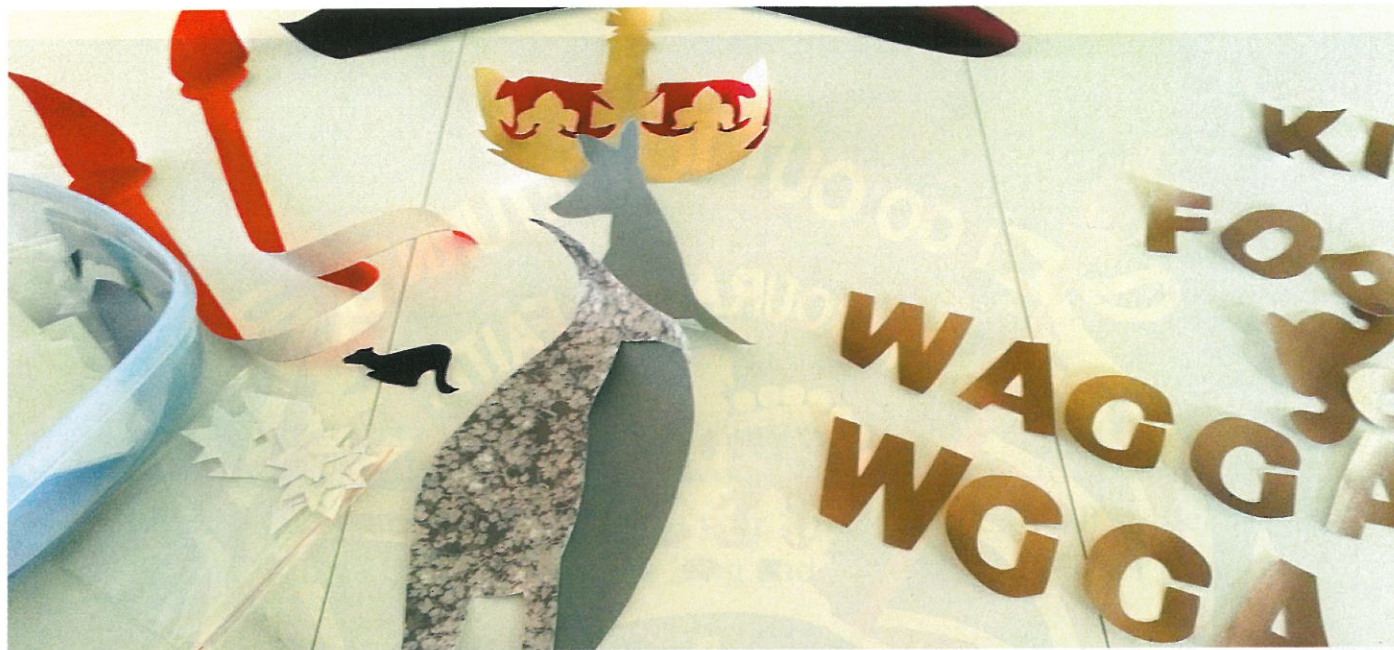
By Hayley Penrose

Eighty-eight men began the 520km march at Wagga Wagga, standing proudly behind the Kangaroo Banner as they were known as the 'Kangaroos'. As they marched, they were joined by others who said goodbye to the mothers, wives, daughters, and friends for what was then known as King, Country and Empire to fight for the Australian way of life.

To commemorate this event and honour the sacrifices made, a re-enactment of the march is going to be held, organised by the Kangaroo March Committee. Those taking part in the march will leave Wagga Wagga on Saturday 5th September and make their way through the NSW countryside stopping in places like Cootamundra, Goulburn and Mittagong before concluding in Campbelltown on Saturday 10th October. Accounting for changes in traffic, the marchers will follow as closely as possible the route taken by the Kangaroos all that time ago and take part in many of the same activities including camping and singing the same songs that would have accompanied the men on the road.

An important part of this occasion will be a replica of the Kangaroo Banner, made by talented quilter





Helen Draper.

Helen was approached in 2012 to reproduce the banner for this year's event. "[At first] I was quite daunted by such a huge responsibility but felt strongly that it was important to commemorate the centenary of the First World War," she explains. Both her grandfathers served at the time so there is a personal connection to this project for Helen. "Although neither of them were involved in the Kangaroo March, I felt this was my way of honouring their memory and the sacrifices that they made," she says.

It was an enormous commitment for Helen, taking up lots of time with over 100 hours dedicated to the banner's creation. As a quilter first and foremost, Helen's conditions for taking on this project were that she was able to make it using cottons and quilt-making techniques. "Banner-making is way outside my comfort zone," she admits, "but, by making it this way, I knew how the construction would unfold and I had a reasonable idea of the outcome and how the finished banner would look."

There was not a lot of material for

Helen to base her design on; in fact there was only one photograph as the current location of the original banner is unknown. "Luckily for me my past three years of studying digital design and Photoshop at TAFE has really paid off," she says. "I was able to use some 'jiggery-pokery' to create a giant poster of the banner. I then found a great online program that printed my poster onto 54 A4 sheets. After gluing all these sheets together I was able to outline the design onto tracing paper."

The process was made easier thanks to fusible webbing products that fuse to fabrics together when appliquéing. Helen used this method when creating all the pieces needed for the banner. She traced from the 'wrong' side of the tracing paper sheets onto the fusible webbing and then roughly cut out each of the shapes. The next step was to iron each piece onto the appropriate fabric and then fastidiously cut them all out.

"By this stage I had a huge pile of appliqué pieces and was starting to get nervous about what I had let myself in for," Helen recalls. "It took two eight-hour days to position each of the appliqué pieces. It was like a giant jigsaw puzzle."

Once she was happy with the placement, all of the pieces were ironed into place on the black background. Then began the next part



Kangaroos at Yass image from Yass Historical Society.

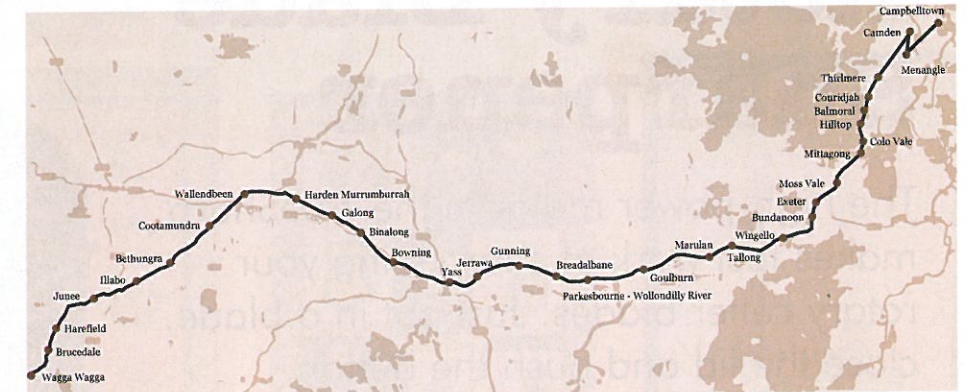
of her work – stitching.

"Almost every day for the next nine weeks I sat at the sewing machine and stitched a tight, wide buttonhole stitch around each of the pieces. It was incredibly time consuming and exhausting," Helen says. "My eyes wobbled after about two hours of such close work."

The stitching was challenging, especially trying to get the bulky banner through the throat of her sewing machine while stitching around the curved edges, but gradually it all came together. Once the appliqué was completed, the backing, rod pockets and a label were added.

In May 2013 Helen presented her hard work to the Kangaroo March committee and since then it has been used to promote the upcoming re-enactment. It will be carried by those who take part in the march later in the year making the journey from Wagga Wagga to Campbelltown.

The impressive banner made good use of Helen's 25 years of quilting experience with its extensive use of appliqué, although the final product isn't actually quilted. Having been a passionate sewer as a small child, quilting didn't really capture Helen's attention until the 1990's when she saw a hand-quilted quilt for the first time. "The quilt was in the window of a patchwork shop that I walked past



Map detailing the route of the Kangaroo March.

every day on the way to work," she remembers. "The lure was too great and I was smitten with the idea of making my own quilt. It wasn't long before I was in the shop buying fabric."

From that moment, Helen fell in love with the craft. "There are a number of reasons why I love quilting," she begins. "Firstly, hand stitching is my passion and quilting is the perfect way to feed my obsession. For me, sewing is both calming and therapeutic. Secondly, I love fabric and designing. Being able to design a quilt to enhance the fabric and then write the pattern is very rewarding. Lastly, quilting is very sociable. Sharing time, ideas and inspiration with others is a delight."

With that enthusiasm, Helen has no plans of slowing down any time soon,

with her website, www.patchworkbliss.com, full of patterns to inspire as well as blogging regularly and teaching classes in Exeter in the Southern Highlands of NSW where she resides with her husband. Now that the banner is complete, Helen is getting ready for her next community project, an appliqué alter cloth for a local church that is celebrating 120 years.

To find out more about Helen Draper visit www.patchworkbliss.com or you can email her at helen@patchworkbliss.com.au

For more information on the 2015 Kangaroo March, or to get involved, visit www.kangaroomarch.org.au