

# HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland



*This month, Louise focuses on some of her more precious items and the memories of people dear to her that they evoke.*

The non-work highlight of a recent trip to England was a small group tour of Buckingham Palace. We entered via the Ambassador's Entrance then through the Grand Entrance, feeling a little self-conscious as the tourists at the gates stared at us – unsuccessfully – for any hint of possible celebrity.

More elegant, more exquisitely decorated, more stylish and more dramatic than I had envisaged, the quality and quantity of the contents was one of the more mind-boggling aspects. Everywhere there were priceless and irreplaceable pictures, furniture, tapestries, fittings, silk hangings and porcelain; and an enthralling history could be told about each piece. The Rubens! The Rembrandts! I could go on, but it's not the point here.

Despite Buckingham Palace housing the history of a nation, it also holds what is very much the history of a family. Special wedding gifts, commissioned pieces for certain occasions (a relative's promotion for example), favourite objects unashamedly showing their age and even signs of use, various family members' collections, presents from friends – even if some of those 'friends' are nations. For all that, it was the personal atmosphere that took me entirely by surprise. Extended family members aren't overlooked, nor are those with slightly less licit

connections to the family. For instance, in the Picture Gallery Annexe there's even an almost Madonna-like sculpture of Mrs Jordan, a comic actress and mistress of William, Duke of Clarence. She had five sons and five daughters to the future King William IV.

For some reason, rather than make me want a house filled with beautiful and special things, Buckingham Palace made me think about what we treasure, and why.

Lately I have been gazing at a crewel table centre, initially bought with little thought other than supportiveness at a guild exhibition. It was stitched by a friend of many years, who now lives in Europe. We meet rarely, but she is in my mind daily as I see her love of colour, recall our oh-so-serious debates over the merits of wool versus silk and admire her skill at combining stitches to create simplicity of style out of complex stitchery.

Another small piece of Irish crochet in my favourite shade of oil silk was a birthday surprise from a friend taken by breast cancer; rightly or wrongly, that piece soared in its significance after her passing.

The beautiful quilt on my bed was hand-stitched by my mother and each winter night it covers me with maternal care and it serves as a daily reminder to be grateful.

A hand-worked inheritance or a simple everyday item from our family or friends passes on more love



and care than any other gift – an acknowledgement of the priceless value of family, friendship and commitment to each other.

My father moved house recently and passed to me an old tin cash box from my great grandfather's garage. It contains priceless documents, such as my grandfather's mechanic apprenticeship papers from 1913 and my grandmother's botanical drawings from her schooldays in Levuka, family letters from last century and the century before. These endowments are at least as precious to me as George IV's dinner service and Charles I's art collection may be to the Royal Family.

Until next month,

*Louise*