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The Birdwood Flag – From Confetti to A Cherished Icon

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ABSTRACT

Upon presentation of a box labelled 'Birdwood Flag' from storage in Newcastle, thousands of tiny fragments of silk were discovered inside. These pieces are the remains of the Birdwood Flag, presented to General Birdwood by the Field Forces Fund in 1917. While some thought we were mad even considering to recreate the flag, its importance, both military and social, was evident and our assistance in funding was sought. This paper explores the almost two-year long treatment to recreate the flag, piece by piece for display. In consultation with the University of Newcastle, Christchurch Cathedral Newcastle, Military Historians, Flag Makers, Archivists and Tashco Showcases, we were able to accurately patchwork the flag back together. A further complication was the requirement for the flag, in its showcase, to be moved from venue to venue, and thus an appropriate showcase was carefully designed, towards the end of the treatment. While a number of problems were posed by the recreation process itself, mostly due to the sheer size of the flag and the fragility of the 1000's of pieces, we were able to overcome most of these with often unconventional, but successful, solutions.

BIOGRAPHY

Skye Firth is the head of Textiles Conservation at International Conservation Services. After study at the University of Melbourne she has worked for International Conservation Services in both Sydney and Melbourne as well as the National Gallery of Victoria. She has worked extensively on War related memorabilia as well as costume based collections and has designed conservation programs for the vast array of textiles in House Museums.