

Sampler

COBBLE PODCAST, EPISODE 1, STITCHER, 2019

‘It all started with a sampler, the handiwork of my great grandmother. I took it to be framed, praying for something of a makeover. From Cruden to California, this centenarian plus sure had seen better days. My eye was drawn to the cute cross-stitch pictures. Hens, crowns and hearts – just like emojis! Each stitch spelt out my great granny’s name, Ann Annand. Ann, without the Scottish ‘e’ – just like my name, Tara Ann’

I pressed ‘pause’. Any sense of whimsy was undercut by the sampler’s main embroidered message:

The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good.’

I felt seen.

ANN ANNAND’S DIARY

Aa’hiv jist pit the feenishin touches tae ma sampler: Coldwells School, Cruden, 1871-1888. I must hiv bin gweed at mair than needlework tae stay oan at the squeel that lang. Aa left plinty o room oan ma sampler far mair as life unfoldit. Syne, I addit the initials, ‘AW’ far ma sweethert, Alex Watt. He’s n apprentice souter. He wirks n a bonnie craftie wi flooers a roon the shoppie. I add a posie tae ma sampler. There’s a muckle gless windae, the pane etcht wi reid fleur-de-lis. I copy the pattrin intae ma border.

LETTER, WILHELMINA WATT TO ROBERT WATT

Aberdeen, 9 October 1944

Dear Bob,

I hiv been hain a rake n unearht mither’s sampler. It wis fair crumplt n bitties o the embroidry worn awa. I gied it a dook, gie gentle lik but the dye stairit tae run so I nippit it up n oot o the watter! Smack bang n the middle is a fine quinie n bloo sheen wi a doggie at her feet. I thocht tae gie it tae yer dochter, Lizzie, as it pit me in mind o her n her Scottie.

Your loving sister,

Wilhelmina

ANN ANNAND'S DIARY

Noo Alex n I r merrit, I gie him a haun in the shop fan I'm nae up at the Kilmarnock Arms hotel. Customers drap in wi sheen n beets far repair. I scribev their names in the ledger as Alex thinks I hae a rare haun fir sic things.

Janet Reid, Auchiries, sandals

J Cruickshank, Teuchan, boots size 2

We hae affa fancy sheen far sale. Boxies pilt high wi spleet labels:

Ladies Gaiters Stockinette

Blue Glace Tie Medium width

Converse Coronet Leather Heel

Syne Alex is n charge, I pit up posters. Ane far *Nugget Boot Polish* wi a lady in a fite frock n hair aa swept up wi floors. She his a choice o twa pairs o sheen, baith shiny, blaik or gold.

LETTER, WILHELMINA WATT TO ROBERT WATT

Aberdeen, 9 October 1946

Dearest Bob,

Oor faither's shoppie is shuttin doon. Fit n affa shame. Yon mannie fa took ower wis up tae nae gweed n cam tae a sticky end. We wint up tae hae a last lookie. We keekt intae faither's wirkshop. A'thin left, as if he'd jist doont tools. Boxes o matches, his cast-iron firie n bass, sheen wi nae soles. Yon muckle press loomt ower the room A *Singer* sewing machine wi pedals n the windae.

We swung by the Kilmarnock Arms for a fly cuppie. I got newsin tae an aller couple. Aye, they mint faither weel – caad him a 'skeely chiel'. Faither wis the beadle n the souter n the Castle's heyday. The Hays being the gentry fa oant Slains. There wis a sorts o cairry-ons up there, pairties n politicians. It wis Annie fa designt sheen fit she spied up at the Castle. Please tell Lizzie she'll be following n her grannie's fitsteps studying Design at Art College.

Your loving sister,

Wilma

COBBLE PODCAST, EPISODE 2, STITCHER, 2019

‘I took a trip to Scotland to find out more about my mother’s people. I started at the Old Kirkyard in Cruden and sure enough found Annand headstones. The resting place of my great grandparents: Alex and Ann Watt, died 1939 and 1941. I got chatting to a local woman who told me that the souter’s place was still standing, a time capsule as it were.

We drew up at a sweet larch-clad building with rosehips and rowans. Inside it was pretty foosty but still my kinda shoe heaven! Boxes were piled high on shelves. I spotted a Converse label! How cool was that? I was wearing their sneakers! I posted a photo on my socials #Converseforever. Another box contained a pair of ladies shoes, pretty battered, clearly in for repair. Perhaps the customer had left on a giant liner like my grandfather never to return?

They still had the original ledgers on the counter. The pages were yellowed and fragile but you couldn’t fail to admire the fine penmanship. I snapped a page at random.

Peter Clark, Bogbrae, football boots

Mrs Forbes, Port Erroll, felt slippers

Florence Stoker, London, blue shoes, size 3’

ANN ANNAND’S DIARY

4 July 1897

We hiv a train station! The toon is verity wi fowk fae London takin the air. Sum evenings, I help oot at Castle Balls. The evenin goons n masks r oot o this wurd! Gentleman n opera cloaks and Balmoral beets. Ane bonnie lady bidin at the hotel is cried Florence. Her man is n the theatre doon n London. The Lyceum. Fan her sheenbuckle snappit n I telt her, Alex wid fix it easy. I scrievit her name in the ledger: Florence Stoker, London, blue shoes. I fair covetit these rare sheen so ane nicht I sat n drew oot the pattrn by candlelicht. Alex stitchit the peecies thigither. I got that mony compliments. Folk asked Alex tae mak them a pair to boot. I added bloo sheen tae ma sampler.

LETTER, ROBERT WATT TO WILHELMINA WATT

16 November 1965

Dear Wilma

Wi Lizzie expecting a bairn she's keen to ken mair about her grunnie. I foont mither's al diary, faimily bibles and a photie o the hale faimily up at Kinmuck. Min, it wis a fair steen fermhoose wi byres. Weel dresst n oor Sundae claes. Quines n fite blooses, lang skirts n buttont sheen. Loons n suits n beets, gie weel heelt. Nae a case o the souter's bairns being the peerest shod!

I dinna hae ony regrets leavin Scotland ifter the war. Life oan the croft wis hard ga'in, n it wis the same far the fisher fowk fan the trawlers cam in about. The Brethern n Buchan were God-fearing, baith fisher n fairmers. Prayin far a gweed crop or catch. Aye, evil at its maist banal, nae joabs n moos tae feed.

I telt her about oor mither's fine een. Mither made gweed freens wi the Irishman Stoker who she met doon the rack by the sandhills walkin oor tyke, Laddie. Mither kept in touch with his wife by letter till the end. We still mak Florence's 'Dracula Salad' – tomatoes and plums – here in La Jolla.

Aye yours,

Bob

COBBLE PODCAST, EPISODE 3, STITCHER, 2019

'That's how Cobble came about. I'd been in the Valley since the Search Engine's, 'Don't be Evil' days. Gazing at my great grannie's sampler, I thought finally the chance to do something fun! Basically, it's the global customisation model where you design your own shoes using 3-D visualisation software and cutting-edge holograms. Anyone can take a photo of their feet, ankle and lower leg for boots. Then select features from a wide palette from heels, uppers, rubbers, tongues, laces, flashes, buckles, zips, whatever. It's all ethically sourced and made from vegan friendly 'leather' to hemp. We are the ultimate Fairy Godmother to make your Cinders dream come true without the pesky Prince. As our tagline says: If the Shoe fits – Wear It!

The real secret to our success is in Fashion Merchandising. Our bestselling range is our iconic *Vlad Line*. Starting with the original *Florence* based on my great granny's blue suede shoes as

featured on the sampler which is of course our brand logo. Then we have a partnership with Converse where you can get your own blood splattered sneakers. There's *Bram Brogues* which are awesome with kilts! But my personal favourite is of course *The Count*. Black shiny Balmoral boots with the ankle tag, Made in Transylvania. For a premium, they come packaged in earth in their very own coffin shaped box.'