

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FACT FILE

EMILY ROSE TWYNAM

1845–1910

Artist and Craftswoman

1845	Born Emily Rose Bolton in Hexham, near Newcastle, NSW
1866	Married Edward Twynam of Goulburn in Sydney. He later became Surveyor General of NSW
1867–1882	Gave birth to eight children
1893	Won a prize for her embroidery at the Chicago International Exhibition
1907	Her elaborately carved chair was shown at the first Australian Exhibition of Women's Work in Melbourne
1910	Died in Goulburn

Emily Rose Twynam was born into an intellectual and artistic family. She was the ninth of eleven children of Robert Bolton, an Anglican minister and his wife, Jane. One sister, Anne, became the first woman to graduate from a university in the British Empire and later studied under colonial artist Louis Buvelot in Melbourne. Another sister, Mary, who married William Charles Windeyer, was a noted philanthropist and was active in the suffragette movement.

Twynam's vast range of work crosses and combines several genres: woodcarving, embroidery, drawing. Seven of her sketchbooks survive and include more than 130 drawings of plants, birds and lizards. These were used as patterns for her woodcarving and her flamboyant embroidery. She carved furniture and picture frames with botanical motifs, executed magnificent needlework and left an extensive collection of drawings of exotic and native flora, including flannel flowers, eucalyptus and the Sturt desert pea.

It is interesting to reflect that her work dates from about 1890, when her youngest child reached school age. Her earliest known botanical drawing is dated 1894 and from 1898 to 1900, when she was most prolific, she executed sixty images. Many women of this period were obliged to choose between marriage and a career. Twynam was fortunate that she eventually achieved both, although her work was intended mostly for private use.

Much of Twynam's work was inspired by her own garden at Riversdale on the outskirts of Goulburn. Riversdale, built about 1840 as a coaching inn and residence, was purchased in 1875 by Edward Twynam, and remained in this family until acquired by the National Trust in 1967. Other inspiration came from the gardens of her sister Mary at Tomago House in Raymond Terrace, NSW and of her daughter Mary Cunningham at Tuggeranong Homestead in ACT.

Emily Rose Twynam was typical of the countless Australian women whose creativity blossomed during the Federation period. Less typically, her work was treasured within the family and examples of her woodcarving and embroidery designs can be seen at Riversdale, the National Trust's Goulburn property in Maude Street.

Sources

The Art of Emily Rose Twynam on show at Lanyon Homestead ACT, April–May 2004
NSW National Trust Properties www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au/riv.html

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