

# Sussex heritage



BY RUPERT TOOVEY | visit [www.tooveys.com](http://www.tooveys.com)

## Seeking remembrance through making

**'S**ignificant Figures: remembrance through making' is an intimate and poignant exhibition which seeks to articulate remembrance through the making of art, is currently on show at the Oxmarket Gallery in Chichester.

It tells the story of Cecil, caught in a photograph in his Royal Warwickshire Regiment uniform, following his relationship with Elsie and his role in the Great War through a series of conceptual objects.

Sussex artisan artist, Mary Crabb, is a member of the Basketmakers' Association, a Yeoman Member of the Worshipful Company of

Basketmakers, a mathematician and an educator. Mary brings together these creative threads in her work.

I ask Mary about the inspiration behind the exceptional narrative of the exhibition. She replies "The story isn't mine, it belonged to my grandmother, Elsie, who was born in 1898. She handed it down to me and it has become part of my own journey. It began with a photograph shared with loved ones as an act of remembrance or perhaps as a means not to forget. Elsie met Cecil after her family moved to Birmingham in 1907, her father had won a building contract to work on the Birmingham University. Cecil left school in December 1915 to go to war. In July 1916 Elsie received word from Cecil's

parents that he had been killed in action in France and they gave her the photograph to remember him by."

I remark that shared stories - memories - of both joys and sorrows unite us as families and communities and Mary agrees.

The exhibition features small intricate work whose simple concepts belie the complexity in the making. There are also examples of more traditional basketwork of the period including a pair of facsimile artillery shell baskets also made by Mary.

Many of the conceptual pieces are mounted on khaki fabric boards. My eye is taken by an installation titled 'I Will Remember Him'.

Mary explains "I Will Remember Him' is an attempt to quantify the

time Elsie maintained her act of remembrance for Cecil.

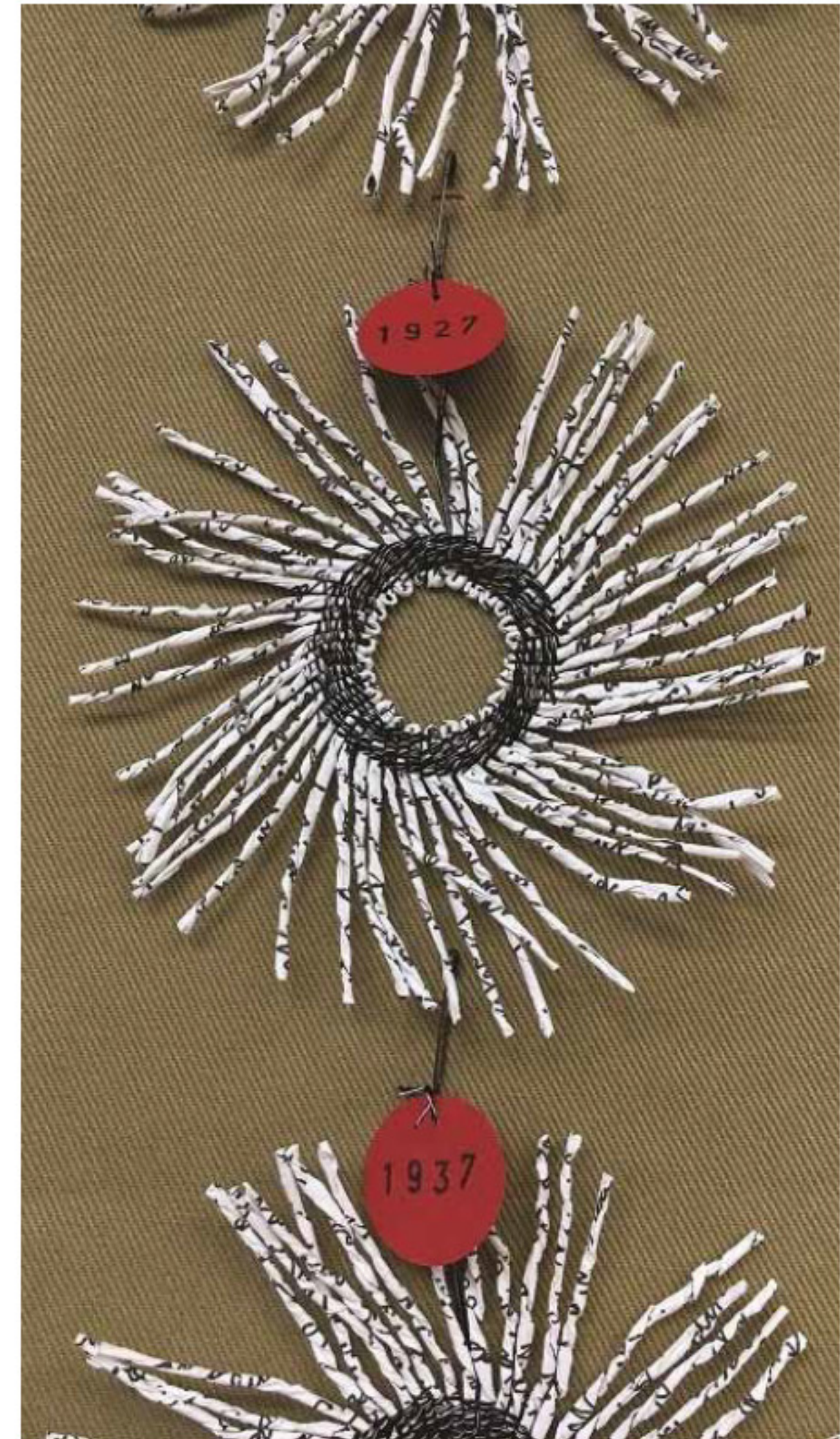
My Grandmother met my Grandad in Lincoln and they were married in 1934. Their marriage was filled with love, laughter and affection. They were married for more than fifty years. Like many in their generation they shared an understanding of the need to remember those who fought and died, especially those they had loved and lost. Elsie kept the photograph of Cecil from 1916 until her own death in 1992."

Mary's mathematical skills become apparent as she continues, "Each motif in this piece has a red tag with a year stamped on it and fifty-two twisted strips of blank paper for Bibles each with a handwritten text copying what Elsie wrote on the back of the photograph about Cecil. These strips are held with twining in a circle of seven turns at the centre. Each day between 1916 and 1992 is represented so that each motif mathematically represents a year  $7 \times 52 + 1 = 365$ ."

As I stand amongst Mary's remarkable work it strikes me that Elsie's act of remembrance for Cecil has a resonance for each of us in our own lives - our joys and our sorrows. But it also powerfully connects and unites us with a particular moment in history and the procession of love and remembrance which flows from it. Mary reflects "Is this Elsie's story or mine? Through the making of this work it has become both hers and mine, a collaboration."

'Significant Figures: remembrance through making' is at the Oxmarket Gallery, Chichester. PO19 1YH until this Sunday, October 7 and entry is free. Visit [www.marycrabb.co.uk](http://www.marycrabb.co.uk) or [www.oxmarket.com](http://www.oxmarket.com).

Rupert Toovey is a senior director of Toovey's, the leading fine art auction house in West Sussex, based on the A24 at Washington - [www.tooveys.com](http://www.tooveys.com) - and a priest in the Church of England Diocese of Chichester.



'I Will Remember Him' © the artist.



Sussex artist Mary Crabb