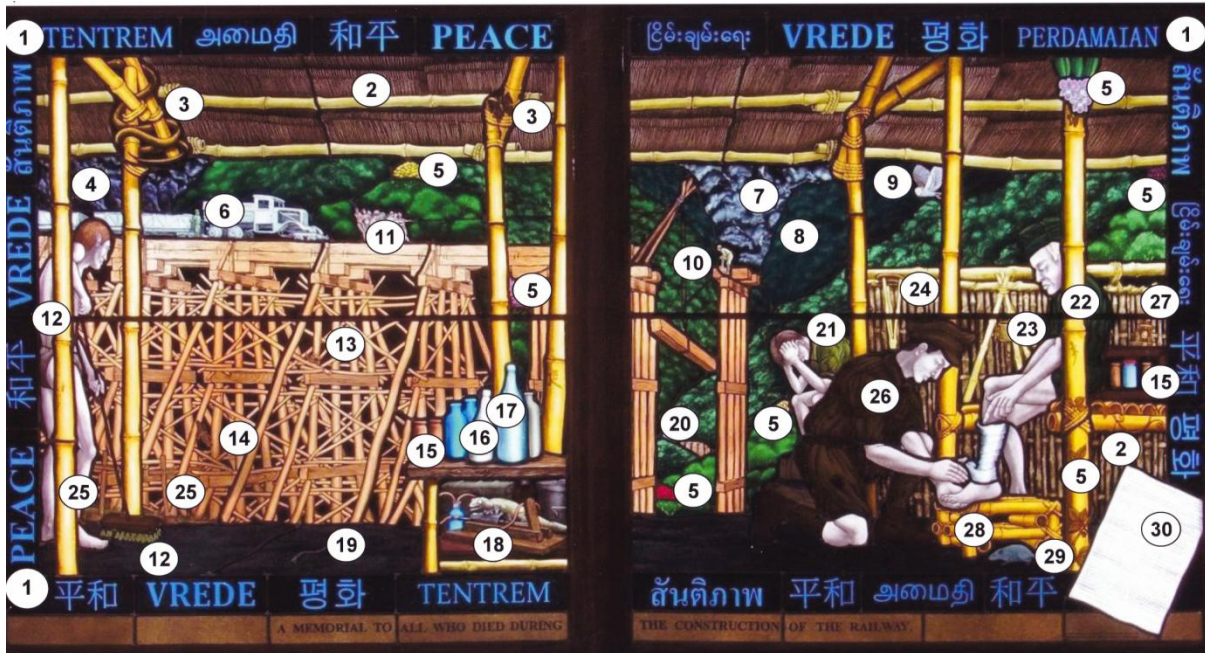


**“THE BRIDGE” WINDOW,
THE “DEATH RAILWAY” MUSEUM, KANCHANABURI, THAILAND**
1.3 metres high x 2.4 metres wide

Windows imagined, designed, made and donated by Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn 2016

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“The Bridge” window depicts the bridge building aspect of the railway. The prospect of drawing and painting such a bridge was an irresistible artistic challenge.

A triple tiered wooden trestle bridge is rising from the valley below. It is viewed through a makeshift camp hospital perched on a ridge. The background is a formidable landscape and impenetrable jungle.

Compositionally the top of the trestle bridge and the top of the woven bamboo wall of the hospital form a straight line across the middle of the window. We intended the left hand part of that line to represent the amazing engineering accomplishment of building the railway line, and the right hand side the human cost of doing so.

1	The “Peace” Border. The word “Peace” is written in the ten languages of the nations most involved with the building of the railway – Burmese, Chinese, Dutch, English, Japanese, Javanese, Korean, Malay, Tamil, and Thai.
2	It is a bamboo world! We wanted to express how alien South East Asia was to Europeans. No steel and concrete here! The somewhat rickety bamboo hospital with its atap roof is dominant in the composition. There is a humorous comment here. The POWs have made the woven bamboo wall of the hospital as best they could, but by Thai standards it is a very poor piece of weaving indeed!

3	There is a sub-theme in the window – that of the comparative indestructability of nature. There are 18 animals in the window, including a snake, a butterfly, three geckos, one Tokay, and eight vultures (now extinct in Thailand) riding the thermals in the gorge.
4	This actual forbidding limestone landscape is a formation near Three Pagodas Pass, which was the highest point of the railway.
5	The vegetable kingdom thrives in this climate. A beautiful orchid, the symbolic flower of Thailand, is growing on bamboo under the atap roof, and a vigorous creeper has already started to grow up the bamboo bench and will quickly reclaim the site. Five trees thrust their colourful flowers up through the jungle canopy as they have done for 80 million years. By comparison the Thai-Burma railway under Japanese control ran for only 22 months.
6	This is an enterprising piece of Japanese adaptation. A road truck has been modified for use on the railway. The front wheels have been removed and replaced with a railway bogey. The back wheels have been removed and the truck is driven on its brake drums. There is provision on the side of the truck to store the wheels so that the vehicle can be readily adapted for road or rail, but there is no need to bring the wheels – there are no roads here.
7	... and on top of everything else, the monsoonal rains are about to arrive.
8	No need for prison bars here! The difficulty of the terrain and the impenetrability of the jungle become the prison itself. This gorge is west of Ban Hin Laem village.
9	There is a widespread superstition that seeing an owl in flight in daylight means that somebody has died – we think it more likely that somebody has chopped down the tree the owl was asleep in! However, if the superstition is true then there should have been 100,000 sightings during the building of the railway.....
10	A Japanese engineer confidently stands on the top of a pier overseeing the construction of the bridge, supervising everything. A team of ten POWs and Asian labourers (11) is lifting the next teak beam into position using a series of pulleys. It will fit nicely into position between the two piers. We have made this into a humorous comment about the war. The confident engineer is looking down at the beam. The gang is walking backwards trying to keep their footing on the sleepers with a yawning chasm beneath them. The mechanic who drives the truck is fixing a latch on the wagon. The engineer has not realised that the gang is going to back into the front of the truck before the beam reaches its position. What then?!
12	An emaciated POW is innocently sweeping the dirt floor of the hospital, but the head of the broom conceals an ingeniously concealed radio receiver.
13	The bridge, with its structure of interweaving posts, sills, numerous cross-bracings and supporting stays.
14	If eagles think like humans this serpent headed eagle may be thinking “How kind of these busy bipeds to build this huge structure just for me to build my nest in!”
15	An array of bottles sits on top of the meagre medicine bench, including medicines smuggled by Boon Pong (15) as seen hidden in the companion “The Cutting” window at the other end of the cafe.
16	One unevenly cut bottle made with a hot wire has been turned into a funnel.
17	Another is a converted sake bottle.
18	On the shelf below is an ingeniously fashioned suction pump which a Tokay gecko has claimed as its home.
19	A centipede represents all those jungle creatures which sting, itch and bite, including the malarial anopheles mosquito.
20	On the other side of the valley another work camp is building another part of the

	railway: yet another cutting giving way immediately to yet another bridge.
21	An Australian soldier, who is sitting on the steps outside the hospital, is in despair. For the second time in twenty years many Australians went to war on behalf of the British Empire. He thought he was enlisting to fight the Germans in Europe but instead, after the fall of “Fortress Singapore”, finds himself a prisoner of the Imperial Japanese Army and being forced to build a railway from Thailand to Burma. He echoes the similarly posed Tamil woman nicknamed “Despair” in the companion “The Cutting” window at the other end of the cafe.
22	The Dutch POW has cut his leg on a thorn while clearing bamboo. His face expresses both disappointment and anxiety. If his wound does not heal and becomes a tropical ulcer it will need to be cleaned using the improvised saline drip.
24	If this fails his leg may need to be amputated and he will need the bamboo prosthesis.
25	If this fails he will die and will be buried in another fresh grave immediately outside the hospital. We deliberately composed the window so that the two crosses of recently buried patients face those of the 7,000 graves in the cemetery opposite the Museum.
26	A British Medical Officer in his torn and oversized uniform is a picture of concentration as he dresses the Dutchman’s wound.
27	Necessity is the mother of invention. A microscope has been improvised out of a bamboo tube and the eyepiece of a broken binocular.
28	A sturdy footstool indeed! In fact hidden batteries for the secret radios can be seen stored in the stool. These batteries can also be seen being smuggled into the POW camps in the companion “The Cutting” window at the other end of the cafe.
29	A rat, as the traditional carrier of plagues, represents infectious diseases such as cholera and dysentery.
30	We chose to quote from Eric Lomax’ book “The Railway Man” because it was published fifty years after the war and it portrays his railroad experiences, post-war torment, and the ultimate achievement of reconciliation and peace.
	Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn 2016.