



A Critical Edition of William  
Cawthorne's *The Kangaroo Islanders*.

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## Abstract

William Anderson Cawthorne (1824-1897) was a remarkable Australian: a teacher, diarist, poet, ethnographer, biographer, traveller, artist and, towards the end of his life, businessman. He kept a detailed diary from 1842 until the 1870s which contains some of the most vivid writing we have about daily life in colonial Adelaide and also about the Kurna people of the region. He completed hundreds of watercolours of colonial life, many of them representing the Kurna. He published a number of pieces in the Adelaide papers, some of the liveliest colonial travel writing about the colony. He became one of the best-known educators in South Australia, running schools with his mother and (for a while) was principal of Pulteney Grammar.

Cawthorne published one of the first poems to represent an Aboriginal Dreaming, 'The Legend of Kuperee: or, the Red Kangaroo' in 1858. In c. 1870 published one of the first children's books in Australia to represent indigenous flora and fauna. He wrote a quirky biography called *Menge, the Mineralogist*. In 1854 he also wrote one of the earliest works of fiction attempted in the colony, *The Kangaroo Islanders*, which first appeared in serial form in *The Illustrated Melbourne Post* through 1865-6. It later appeared in book form in 1926, published by Rigbys.

*The Kangaroo Islanders* presents unique insights into Australia's maritime history, a subject rarely tackled by colonial writers. Among other things, it is a rich repository of nineteenth century sailors' slang. It is set in 1823 on Kangaroo Island, at that stage the 'Ultima Thule' of the British Empire, and represents the 'Islanders', the sealers and their Aboriginal women who lived there as Robinson Crusoes and Fridays. The plot has some historical significance, as it describes the murder by Indigenous people of a 'Captain Meredith', in reality George Meredith, the son of one of the most powerful of the free settlers in Van Diemen's Land in the 1820s and the brother-in-law of the writer Louisa Anne Meredith. The novel also portrays a number of Indigenous women, mostly from Van Diemen's Land, including Trukanini's sister Maggerlede, here called 'Bumblefoot', the representations some of the most detailed and complex in colonial Australian fiction.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

19 June 2003.

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I read a pre-publication copy of Rebe Taylor's splendid *Unearthed: the Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002) when the draft of this edition was mostly completed. I am pleased to acknowledge a couple of long and animated discussions with Rebe, who is responsible for much of the curatorial work at the Penneshaw Museum.

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Finally, to Michael Deves, for editorial assistance.

## A Note on the Text

There is something of a puzzle about the history of *The [Kangaroo] Islanders*, given that a number of sources assert it was first *published* in 1854. In a Publisher's Note to the 1926 Rigby Edition, it is claimed that the manuscript was '*written* about the year 1854' [my emphasis]. Cawthorne's daughter, Miss F.W. Cawthorne, of Manly NSW, gave the manuscript to Rigbys, so it is likely that this date (1854) reflects a Cawthorne family history about the *writing* of the manuscript. There is reasonable circumstantial evidence that Cawthorne might first have heard stories about Islanders like Nathaniel Walles Thomas and their lifestyles around that time, in that he traveled to Kangaroo Island with Nat Thomas for the 1852–3 Christmas holidays. This it is quite likely that Cawthorne wrote a first draft of the novel between 1853 and 1854, entitling his manuscript 'The Islanders'.<sup>1</sup> There are one or two topical references in the text that circumstantially support this assertion: for example, on page 11 Cawthorne mentions the 'Vaterland' expatriation, referring to the large numbers of Germans who left Germany—most to the United States, some to South Australia—after the collapse of the Märzrevolution (the March Revolution) of 1848. Numbers peaked in 1854 when a quarter of a million Germans migrated.

In 1858 Cawthorne's son published the second edition of his father's poem *The Legend of Kuperree; or, The Red Kangaroo. An Aboriginal Tradition of the Port Lincoln Tribe* (Adelaide: Alfred Cawthorne, 1858), on the title page of which it is claimed that William Cawthorne is "THE AUTHOR OF "THE ISLANDERS"". No library in Australia holds such a copy, suggesting that in 1858 the text existed only in manuscript. Curiously, there are no extended references to the writing of the novella in his remarkable diary which he kept for over twenty years, save for details about various trips to the island through the 1850s and one or two glancing allusions to people who are the models for some of the characters.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I, 'Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island', *Observer*, 15 January 1853.

'The Islanders' was eventually published in serial form in 1865–6 when it appeared in *The Illustrated Melbourne Post* under that title. The first issue appeared on page 14 of number 70, dated 25 January 1865; the serial ran for a little over a year and ended in number 83, 23 February 1866. Each issue was introduced with the note: "The Islanders': a South Australian tale of the year 1823.' Written expressly for 'The Post.' Founded on fact, and illustrative of the wild life and barbarous exploits of the first white settlers on Kangaroo Island. By William Anderson Cawthorne.' The first serial numbers appeared alongside articles about children lost in the bush in the Wimmera, about the Maori Wars in New Zealand and about shipwrecks and bushrangers, suggesting a sensational, popular, mainstream and middle-brow publishing context for its appearance. Interestingly, #85, the March issue for 1866, had an article about Point McLeay Aboriginal Mission after *The Islanders* run had finished.

There is a small detail in Chapter XVIII that suggests that the original manuscript may have been longer than survives in the published version. A character called 'Black Dick' is introduced: he is mentioned again in the last chapter as one of the two 'blacks [who] were rolling about in the sea like two porpoises'. This is the only time in the novel that Cawthorne uses this name, and his appearance presents something of a puzzle, in that nothing is given earlier to explain his sudden appearance on Meredith's ship. Cawthorne may have intended that readers imagine this character as an Islander of African-American or West Indian background. There are a number of Islanders with such backgrounds: three of George Meredith's associates were 'men of colour': the carpenter George Brown, John (Black Jack) Anderson<sup>2</sup> and John Bathurst. Perhaps he heard a detail or two about Meredith's companions from one of his informants, George Bates, William Walker, Henry Wallen and Nat Thomas, all of whom were present when Meredith's body was discovered at Yankalilla. On the other hand, the context suggests that Dick

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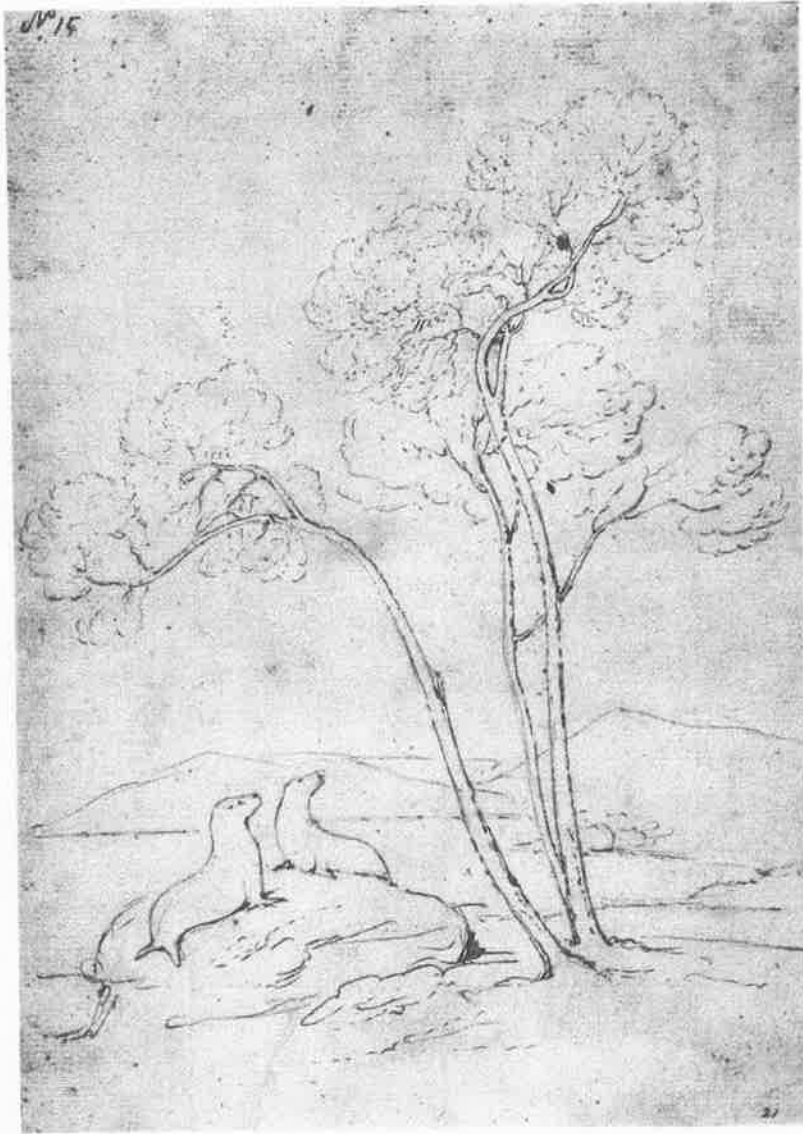
<sup>2</sup> This is not John 'Abyssinia Jack' Anderson, who was an Englishman.

should be understood to be an Indigenous *man*, an equally intriguing detail, in that this novel then provides some verification for the assertion that Indigenous men worked in some of the sealing gangs. Whoever Dick is meant to be, his presence either reveals carelessness on Cawthorne's part or 'Dick' allows us to speculate that there were other chapters to the novel that were not included in the 1865–6 serial version, possibly because Cawthorne wrote more than could be included in a year's publication of serial numbers.

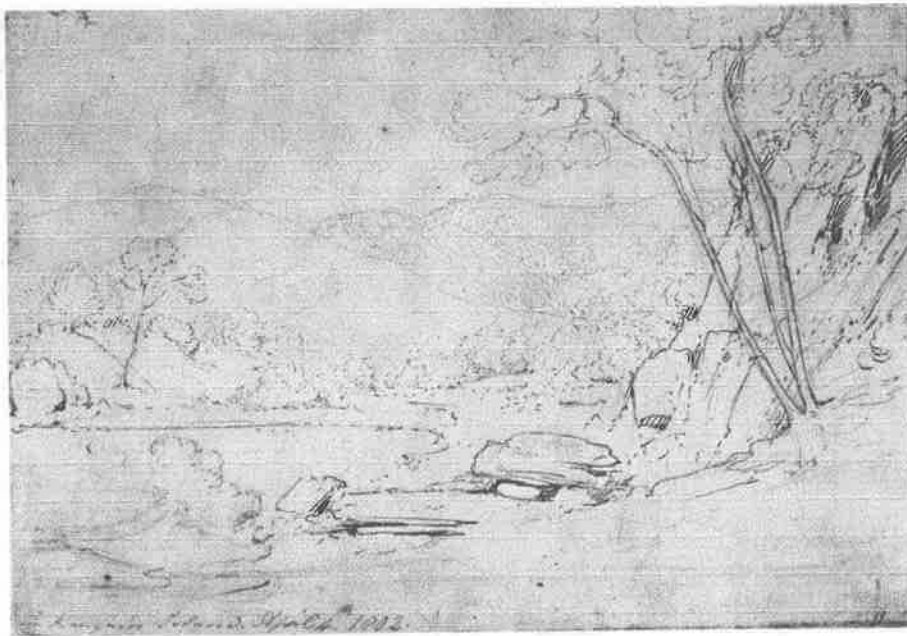
As its title suggests, *The Illustrated Melbourne Post* was one of the first in Australia to use the latest technologies for publishing illustrations. In spite of a number of assertions to the contrary, unfortunately none of the serial numbers was illustrated by Cawthorne, although some issues do contain elsewhere staff artists' reworkings of his original drawings and watercolours, some from the 1840s and 1850s.

The Preface to the 1926 Rigby edition insists that the novella was also published in *The Illustrated Adelaide Post*, date not given. This is unlikely. The microfilm of the journal in the Mortlock Library of South Australiana does not contain the novella. The confusion may have arisen from the fact that between 1871 and 1874 Cawthorne published and sold an Adelaide version of *The Illustrated Melbourne Post*, retitled *The Illustrated Adelaide Post*, with his own editorial pieces and occasional drawings reworked by staff artists.

In 1926 Rigby's in Adelaide published the novel as *The Kangaroo Islanders*, noting that Cawthorne's original title had already been taken. In 1996 it was republished by Island Newspapers at Kingscote in a facsimile reprint of the 1926 edition with a brief introduction.



**William Westall, 'Kangaroo Island, seals', 1802. Kangaroo Island, South Australia, pencil on paper, 24.8 x 17.5 cm, National Library of Australia, Canberra.**



**William Westall, 'Kangaroo Island, a bay on the north-east coast', 1802, Nepean Bay, Kangaroo Island, South Australia, pencil on paper, 18.8 x 26.7 cm; National Library of Australia, Canberra.**



## **'beyond the pale': William Cawthorne's *The Kangaroo Islanders***

On 8 April 1802, Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders had their well-known encounter five miles off the main in what is now known as Encounter Bay. Between then and the winter of 1836, when the *Duke of York* disembarked the first boatload of settlers at the Bay of Shoals to set up the South Australian colony, a fascinating interregnum prevailed along the southern coast. This was a twilight time in a contact zone between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. For thirty years dozens of vessels and hundreds of sealers and whalers sailed the coastline of southern Australia, using both French and British charts to find and exploit the bounty of the south coast: fur seals and later whales. In the process the littoral and the offshore islands became far better known than the mysterious interior. While some gangs came ashore on the islands to spend just a season or two sealing and bay whaling, other individuals and small parties settled down for longer periods. Many lived with Indigenous women from either 'New Holland' or Van Diemen's Land, building houses, clearing land, gardening, running stock and raising families. Numbers of them settled down for good, living 'beyond the pale'<sup>1</sup> on the edges of the British Empire.

On their arrival in 1836 the South Australian colonists were fascinated with these men whom they called the Islanders.<sup>2</sup> While they were seen variously as runaway convicts, pirates, wreckers, savages, wild men, natural men and Robinson Crusoes, now and again one or two observers noticed that

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<sup>1</sup> Cawthorne uses this expression in his novel on p. 9 to mean 'outside the limits', 'the other side of the fence'. The phrase 'fence paling' still preserves a little of this meaning. In Ireland 'the pale' refers to those territories over which the British had jurisdiction after 1547. Cawthorne is not alone in deploying the term about the Islanders or Straitsmen. See Stephen Murray-Smith's study of the Straitsmen of Bass Strait, 'Beyond the Pale: The Islander Community of Bass Strait in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (December 1973): 167–200.

<sup>2</sup> This name for the inhabitants of Kangaroo Island, the 'Islanders', which Cawthorne used as title for his 1854 novel, is to be found in many places in the earliest written descriptions of the arrival of the colonists in South Australia in 1836. See, for example, a letter from William Giles to George Fife Angas, noting that the scrub on Kangaroo Island is very dense: 'I would not go a Mile into this dense mass of Underwood, on any account: the native women lead the Islanders through this bush for many miles, but no one else would venture into the Interior' (PRG 174/1/1377, the Mortlock Library of South Australia).



William Westall, 'View on the north side of Kangaroo Island, in Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, Vol. I, opp. p. 185.

the Islander lifestyles, experiences and histories offered a further radical model for settlement in the Antipodes at a time when theories about systematic colonisation were very much in vogue.

The first literary representation of the ‘Hemprors of Kangaroo Island’ and of this fascinating period of Australian history is William Cawthorne’s historical novel *The Islanders*, which was probably written in 1854. It first appeared in serial form in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post* over 1865–6 and much later in book form as *The Kangaroo Islanders* in 1926 more than two decades after Cawthorne had died. It ran some two decades before the publishing boom in the 1880s and 1890s when the majority of the South Australian ‘foundation memoirs’ and colonial histories first appeared, and fifty years before the first book on Kangaroo Island was published.<sup>3</sup> Today there is an archive of dozens of books about Islander history, including four novels: Vernon Williams *The Straitsmen: a Romance* (1929); Robert Drewe’s *The Savage Crows* (1976); Ann Clancy’s *Rebel Girl* (1999); and Sarah Hay’s *Skins* (2002).<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century Australian colonies, those writers interested in local subjects mostly turned to Bush experience for inspiration. Cawthorne himself published an early essay in 1848 on this matter, arguing for a magazine devoted to encouraging the writing of Australian literature:

We may be deemed enthusiastic, but we cannot resist asking—Are there no new associations in colonial life? Does the far-off dweller in his rude log hut, the hutkeeper, the lonely overseer, the rude bushman, the splitter, the out-station, the stealthy savage, the overlander—are they all lifeless realities? Unconnected, tame concomitants, emotionless? When on the weary journey in the backwoods of Australia, as the twinkling light of some unexpected settler comes flickering through the gloom of night, can we—as we pause at the sight—be uninfluenced with the hopes, the fears, the difficulties, the struggles of this early and solitary pioneer? Is there a heart so callous to all that age looks back to with delight, and

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<sup>3</sup> E.H. Hallack, *Kangaroo Island: Adelaide sanatorium, with map and illustrations by ‘a native’* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas 1905).

<sup>4</sup> Vernon Williams, *The Straitsmen: a Romance* (London: Cassell, 1929), Robert Drewe, *The Savage Crows* (Sydney: William Collins, 1976), Ann Clancy, *Rebel Girl* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1999) and Sarah Hay, *Skins* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2002).

which pre-eminently forms the poetry of life? That poetry, the foundation of all nationality, and the mystic union of millions. The cold dialectician may easily fathom the false philosophy of the sentiment, and smile with ineffable contempt at the baseless passion, the pseudo-yearnings of imagination; but if there be one object over which we may legitimately indulge our sentimentalisms, it is that of the Australian settler—the emigrant.<sup>5</sup>

When Cawthorne came to attempt fiction some six years after writing this essay, it was not in ‘the backwoods of Australia’ that he indulged his sentimentalisms, but along the littoral, the southern coast of Australia. In this sense *The Kangaroo Islanders* is a unique work for its representations of Australia’s maritime heritage in a period when, as Cawthorne himself observes, most writers were turning inland for the ‘new associations of colonial life’. There is a great deal in this novel about the sea, from details about coastal trading in seal skins and salt to descriptions of ship handling to fine descriptive seascapes. This is a typical passage from early in the work, no doubt based on Cawthorne’s own observations while crossing Backstairs Passage in a whaleboat on a summer’s morning:

It was early morn, and such a morn as only Australia can boast, a clear, pellucid morn with not a cloud to mar the sky, not the faintest mist, nor any visible thing to blemish the unrivalled beauty of the early day. Looking up into the heavens the eye could perceive unfathomable depths; gazing upon the land, could realise its uttermost distances; and, scanning the sea beneath, could see as in a looking glass. There, at the very bottom, on a floor of pure white sand, the hungry shark was rising and falling or pausing as he watched the huge ship darkening his pathway. There, again, was the ill-shapen ‘stingerree,’ flapping its huge sides, as a bird does its wings when, hastening on some furtive expedition, it is driven like a small cloud across the expanse of heaven, or with marvellous deception covering itself with the sand until invisible to all eyes. There were the voracious schnapper in countless numbers, moving rapidly along in all the glory of purple and gold in their search for new marine pastures. The supernatural clearness of the atmosphere caused the neighbouring highlands, the distant capes, and the range of mountains in the vicinity of what is now called Cape Jervis, to appear singularly close. On the black

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Zyne’ [William Anderson Cawthorne], ‘Colonial Literature’, *The South Australian* 16 May 1848: 3b. This essay anticipates similar pronouncements to be made in the decade ahead by writers and essayists like Catherine Helen Spence and Frederick Sinnett, both, incidentally, with strong South Australian connections.

rocks, black as ink, that lined some parts of the bay, sat a mass of wild sea fowl, contrastingly white. A little higher up, on another ledge of jutting rocks sat another group of white birds, and higher still a third. In the calm morning, though so far off, their solemn chattering, their spiteful pecking, their clamorous disputing, could be distinctly heard, tipping, tripping, and modulating with the gentle swell of the sea. Anon one of them would rise in order to visit some more favourite spot, and, clattering and spattering upon the water with outstretched wings, would leave behind, straight as the flight of an arrow, an agitated pathway, gradually melting to the finest line; or one would slyly pounce upon an unwary fish, and enjoy the whole relish without a squabble with his brethren as to the lion's share. High in the air could be seen a line of birds, with very long necks and very short bodies, but with flight even and swift. They were black swans making a beeline across the straits to the lakes and islands of the Lower Murray. Over the island could be seen several hundreds of unwieldy pelican flying in their peculiar way, and marking on the blue expanse as far as the eye could follow, the singular outline of the letter 'W.' They were winging their way to the seat of the primeval haunts of their race—the inland lagoons of the island (pp. 12–13).

Given that this is a novel about seamen, there are also many nineteenth-century nautical expressions in this novel. Cawthorne notes in his diary that when he arrived on the *Amelia* in South Australia in May 1841 he 'was a black skinned sailor boy full of the sayings and habits of the boatmen'.<sup>6</sup> A decade or so later, when he came to write his novel, he was able to make good use of those sayings, no doubt helped along by his father's knowledge and experience, once Captain Cawthorne rejoined his wife and son in Adelaide in 1845 after half a decade at sea. As a result one of the small pleasures on offer in *The Kangaroo Islanders* is its display of colourful nautical slang and quotations from various chanteys. Given that so few colonial Australian novels refer to maritime experience, this feature is memorable. One or two examples will suffice. At one point a character is described as a 'son of a gun'. This is a British naval expression for an illegitimate child, originating on the West Indies station. On some ships on blockade duty women were allowed on board; if children were born (the father unknown), then the entry 'son of a gun' would be made in the ship's

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<sup>6</sup> William Cawthorne kept a log during the voyage: 'Log of the brig *Amelia*, kept by W.A.C. on journey from Table Bay to Adelaide, March–May 1841'. Mitchell Library Acc. No. A434.



Charles-Alexander Lesueur, '*Mirounga leionina*' (Southern Elephant Seal), c. 1804, Paris, watercolour, ink on vellum, 25.0 x 40.0 cm; Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre. Copied from Sarah Thomas, ed., *The Encounter, 1802 Art of the Flinders and Baudin Voyages* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002), opp. p. 30.

log. At another point one of the ship's company is lost in the scrub and later rescued; this is how he is addressed by one of the Islanders after he is found, in Cawthorne's approximation of working-class and regional dialectal English in the style of Dickens and, earlier, of Sir Walter Scott:

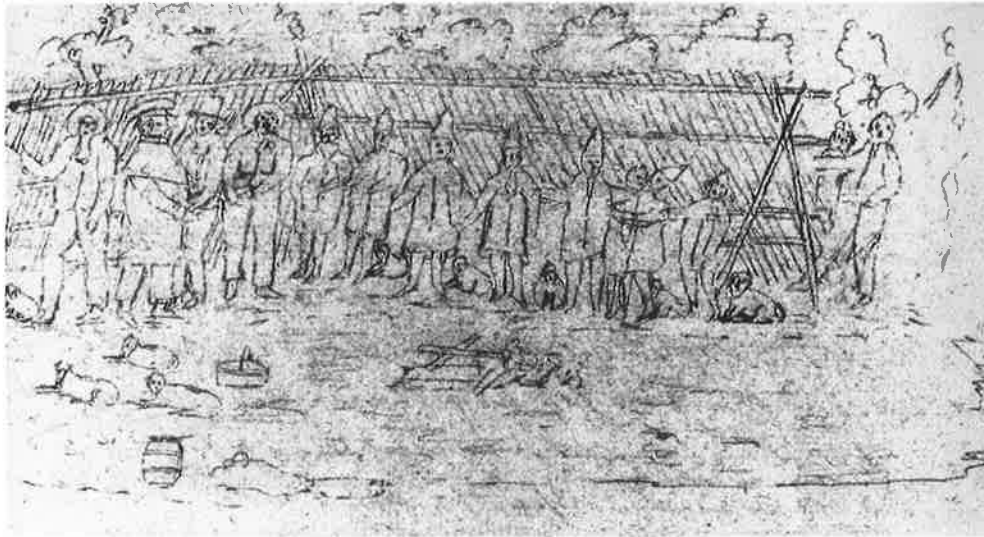
'And here, you bale away cold water on his nob; we'll soon set yer up all a-taunt-o; but I hopes yer will be werry pertickler arter this how yer goes toddling about in this garden o' ours, which is summet like oursels, werry poorty in some places, and werry ugly in t'other.' (p. 60)

*Websters Dictionary* helps us discover that the expression 'all a-taunt-o' means 'fully rigged, as a vessel; with all sails set; set on end or set right. Origin: French, *Autant* as much (as possible)'.<sup>7</sup> The novel has many such examples.

In Chapter XIII of *The Kangaroo Islanders*, Cawthorne claims that his novel 'is a narrative of fact to a very large extent'. Where did a young Adelaide teacher and *littérateur* discover the colourful histories of the Islanders? Who told this 'townie' stories about Kangaroo Island, the *Ultima Thule* of the British Empire, in the period between Matthew Flinders' charting of the coastline in 1802 and the arrival of the first boatloads of settlers in Nepean Bay in 1836? Cawthorne's *The Kangaroo Islanders* is an important source of information about Australia's maritime history in general and sealing history in particular because it draws on stories collected from several of the old sealers whom Cawthorne met on Kangaroo Island during several visits during the 1850s. *The Kangaroo Islanders* does allude to historical episodes, if only in passing and in sketchy detail, probably because his sources were not only oral accounts collected from some of the people involved or their associates, but also because his informants may not have been willing to divulge too-detailed versions of some of the stories that they might have told.

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Dickens used the term in *Bleak House* (1852–3), in Chapter XIII, Esther's Narrative: 'The dear old Crippler!' said Mrs. Badger, shaking her head. 'She was a noble vessel. Trim, ship-shape, all a taunto, as Captain Swosser used to say. You must excuse me if I occasionally introduce a nautical expression; I was quite a sailor once.'



'The sealers' camp on the main near Robbins Island'. George Robinson's Journal, 20 June 1830. Original in Mitchell Library, SLNSW. This copy taken from Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996) p. 139.



As late as 1844 the South Australian police were still interested in a particular murder that occurred just months before the arrival of the colonists and which is represented in Cawthorne's novel.

There are a number of points of detail in *The Kangaroo Islanders* that suggest that Cawthorne did have access to reasonably specific information about people and events from Islander informants.<sup>8</sup> Although he invents names for the majority of his Islander characters, he does use three names—'Georgy,' 'Worley' and 'Pork[e]y'—suggesting the historical characters George 'Fireball' Bates, 'Governor' Henry Wallen and [?] Pirkey, the first two of whom at least are well known. He records that most of his characters had sea-going backgrounds while others had been convicts. He mentions Sydney as a port of origin, and represents in some detail the business of sealing, Australia's first export industry. He describes the Islanders trading salt, seal, wallaby and kangaroo skins with the masters of the 'hookers', the small coastal vessels from Sydney, Port Dalrymple or Hobart Town that visited Kangaroo Island at regular intervals. He describes at length a 'menagerie' inland from Creek (Antechamber) Bay, where a group of Islanders, their Indigenous women and children lived like Robinson Crusoes and assorted Fridays. Making much of Islander clothing and diet, Cawthorne notes the quaintness of their unique lifestyle, which he suggests owes as much if not more to Indigenous as to European ways. He suggests that the Indigenous women lived in separate wurleys, that they maintained many 'traditional' Indigenous hunting methods, that they spoke in language and preserved a number of other traditional beliefs and practices, bringing up their children as Indigenous.

Cawthorne names one Indigenous man—Conday—and five Indigenous women in his novel: Bet, Bumblefoot, Brown Sal, Pussy and Suky, all of whom are historical characters either from Tasmania or from 'the main'—Bumblefoot (or Maggerlede) was Trukanini's tribal sister. He notes that the Tasmanian or Palawa women preferred the company of other Tasmanians,

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<sup>8</sup> For a full discussion of Cawthorne's sources see p. 164.

insisting that the Palawa were more highly skilled hunters than their 'New Holland' sisters. He very briefly alludes to at least one Indigenous man working as a sealer on Kangaroo Island.

Cawthorne also represents some of the more unedifying practices of the Islanders. He uses the word 'slave' twice to describe the relationships between men and women, which were often marked by violence. Cawthorne also records quite a number of details about the women's active involvement in sealing and wallaby snaring, reinforcing the perception that they played crucial roles in adapting traditional Indigenous hunting practices to the demands of their 'lords o' creation'. There is also a lively representation of a 'Sabine expedition', a raid on the coastline near present-day Rapid Bay in which Kaurna women are abducted. The reference to the capture of a woman known to the Islanders as 'Puss' on an earlier raid is significant. The murder of Captain [George] Meredith is the culminating episode of the novel, given with sufficient detail to suggest Cawthorne must have heard a little of the story, perhaps even from one of the group of Islanders who found Meredith's body in late 1836.

One or two of these details are of considerable significance for the record we have of the Islanders and their lives. An obvious example is the reference to their cropping the ears of the Indigenous women they lived with as a form of punishment, which is mentioned in chapter twelve in an exchange between a couple of the Islanders—one of them Old Sam, based loosely on Nat Thomas. Here it is clearly suggested that the men are very aware of the need to keep the women subjugated, under control, and also aware that the women still preserve a secret and inaccessible world of 'women's business' that the men cannot easily enter, the gateway to which was knowledge of 'Hobart-Town' language, 'caterwauling' or singing in language.

'I say, Porky, the women smell a rat, aye! whose a been and split? this caterwauling means summut.'

'Give 'em a tarnation hiding all around,' suggested another, 'that'l keep 'em quiet while we's away; or slit their ears?'

‘Yes,’ said Porky, ‘that might do some good; letting blood is fust rate. I know’s it mysell; when I gets drunk, and gets knocked about, it’s the bleeding that does me good; I feels all the better arter.’

The name Porky is of interest.<sup>9</sup> This may refer to a ‘runaway whaler’ called Pirkey, a man known to Mary Seymour, the daughter of Nat Thomas and Old Bet, who told her doctor Herbert Basedow that (in the 1820s and early 1830s?) Pirkey was living on Kangaroo Island with a number of Aboriginal women who had been stolen from Cape Jervis. ‘Quite a number of children are said to have been brought to the world as a result of this importation, but according to Mrs. Seymour, they either died from natural causes or were knocked on the head directly they were born’.<sup>10</sup> There are few published references to Pirkey/Porky; he is not named by ‘the Conciliator’ George Augustus Robinson, whose records kept while Protector of Aborigines in Van Diemen’s Land remain the most comprehensive account of the sealers. Neither does Pirkey’s name appear in any of the shipping lists. Phillip Clarke suggests that Porky is another name for Henry Wallen, which does not seem likely, given Cawthorne also has a character named ‘Governor’ Worley.<sup>11</sup> It is just as likely that Porky is based on Henry ‘Fireball’ Bates, whom Cawthorne probably met in Hog Bay on one of his visits, and who is still remembered for running pigs there.

The ear cropping. There is no doubt that Cawthorne here records in shadowy outline something of the violence used to keep the Indigenous women in subjugation to the Islanders. In fact he may refer to a particular episode, details of which have survived in other places. An Indigenous woman named Charlotte was one of George Robinson’s sources for information about the sealers on Kangaroo Island: as Tasmanian Protector of

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<sup>9</sup> Cawthorne uses the spelling ‘Pirkey’ only once in *The Kangaroo Islanders*: elsewhere it is given as Porky.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Basedow, ‘Relic of the lost Tasmanian race—obituary notice of Mary Seymour.’ *Man* 81 (1914): 161.

<sup>11</sup> See Philip A. Clarke, ‘The Aboriginal Presence on Kangaroo Island, South Australia,’ *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* (Eds. Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus, Aboriginal History Monograph 6, Sydney: Aboriginal History, 1998) 19.

Aborigines he gives her various names as KAL.LOON.GOO, COW.WER.PITE.YER, WIN.DEER.RER and Sarah. Robinson recorded the following information after speaking with Kallongoo after she joined the Aboriginal Settlement 1 June 1837:

Interrogated the woman who arrived last night from Woody Island; result as follows (1) KAL.LOON.GOO, (2) COW.WERTITE.YER, (3) WIN.DEER.RER alias Sarah an aboriginal female of New Holland, the point opposite to Kangaroo Island, the west point of Port Lincoln. Was forcibly taken from her country by a sealer named James Allan who in company with another sealer Bill Johnson (this man was drowned subsequent to my visit to Port Phillip) conveyed her across to Kangaroo Island ... Said the sealers beat the black women plenty; they cut a piece of flesh off a woman's buttock; cut off a boy's ear, Emue's boy. This woman is now on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. The boy died in consequence of his wounds. They cut them with broad sealer's knives. Said they tied them up and beat them and beat them with ropes. Bill Dutton beat her plenty. Said the sealers got drunk plenty and women get drunk too. Said the country where she came from was called BAT.BUN.GER.YANG.GAL.LALE.LAR. It is situate at the west point of St. Vincents Gulf. Said that Emue's brother was her husband. It is on the sea coast; there is a long sandy beach with three rivers. MAN.NUNE.GAR is the name of the country where she was born. Kangaroo Island is called DIRK.I.YER.TUN.GER.YER.TER; WAT.ER.KER.TER, an island.<sup>12</sup>

Rob Amery has established that Robinson is in error: Kallongoo was a woman from the BAT.BUN.GER (Rapid Bay) district, not from Port Lincoln.<sup>13</sup> Robinson reports elsewhere the story told to him by John Anderson<sup>14</sup> that another sealer named James Allen had tied a Van Diemen's

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<sup>12</sup> Brian N.J. Plomley, ed. *Weep in silence: A history of the Flinders Island Aboriginal settlement* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987): 445–6. This report demonstrates the complex inter-connections that bound together the various communities of Islanders from Bass Strait to Kangaroo Island and beyond: the same names keep appearing. Women were traded from sealer to sealer: Kallongoo was even abducted from her first abductor. On 5 June 1836 Robinson wrote to the Colonial Secretary informing him that Kallongoo wished to return to her country in South Australia, but there is no evidence that she ever came home.

<sup>13</sup> Rob Amery, 'Kaurina in Tasmania: A case of mistaken identity', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 20 (1996): 24–50. YANG.GAL.LALE.LAR is obviously present-day 'Yankalilla', while 'long sandy beach with three rivers' refers to the coastline around present-day Normanville: there are no 'rivers' at Port Lincoln.

<sup>14</sup> This John Anderson is 'Abyssinia Jack', who was born in England, served in the Royal Navy at Trafalgar and arrived in Australia in 1813. He moved back to Woody Island in Bass Strait after living on Kangaroo Island for a number of years—he was there in 1826. G.A.

Land woman called Lar.roon.er to a tree ‘at American Wharf Lagoon’ (American River? American Beach?). He then slashed her buttocks with his sealer’s knife and cut off part of her ear. Anderson also reported to Robinson that Nat Thomas had cut off the ears of a seven-year-old ‘New Holland’ boy, cutting so close to the head that a piece of the cheek was also removed. This story emerges in fragmentary form in Kalloongoo’s account quoted above. After lingering for several weeks the lad died.<sup>15</sup> Robinson reports such details about the brutality of the sealers with considerable relish. He was, after all, charged by Governor George Arthur to establish contacts with the surviving Palawa people and to settle them at the Wybaleena settlement on Flinders Island, so any evidence he might collect of the barbarity and inhumanity of the sealers gave his task an added moral imperative.<sup>16</sup>

Cawthorne uses some other interesting names for his sealers, some of whom are named in other sources, one or two not. The 1865–6 serial version of the novel refers to a sealer named ‘Shaw’ for the first reference, ‘Straw’ thereafter. William Shaw was an early visitor to Kangaroo Island, sailing in 1816 on the *Rosetta* that took 2000 skins and 50 tons of salt back to Sydney for Jonathan Griffiths.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Cawthorne heard the name from one of his informants.

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Robinson records a number of his anecdotes about sealers and their lifestyles. He is remembered as a family man, who had his daughter Mary’s banns published in 1842. Stephen Murray-Smith, ‘Beyond the Pale: The Islander community of Bass Strait in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,’ *Tasmanian Historical Research Association* 20.4 (1973): 179. See Brian N.J. Plomley and Kristen Anne Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1990) 34–5.

<sup>15</sup> N.J.B. Plomley, *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829–1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 327, 335, 360, 479, 1010, 1016. It may be that the boy in question was Pra.re, the son of James Allen and Emue. Emue (or Emma) later lived with John Anderson; she may have been originally a Kurna woman who knew Kalloongoo. Anderson handed Emma and her son over to Robinson 29 March 1831, who interrogated her at length, recording a great deal of information about the women living with sealers on Kangaroo Island. In 1836 Emma was living with James Munro on a Bass Strait island where it seems she died shortly after

<sup>16</sup> This point has emerged as a significant one in recent debates about Tasmanian History. See Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History. Volume One Van Diemen’s Land 1803–1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> John Stanley Cumpston, *Kangaroo Island 1800–1836* (3rd ed. Canberra: Roebuck Society Publication no. 1, 1986) 42–3.

While some of the characters named in the novel are known to history, others are not. The novel refers at length to the marooning of a sealer named ‘Grip Hard’ on the Althorpe Islands in Investigator Strait. The story is given in sufficient detail to suggest that Cawthorne heard it from one of his informants. The quiriness of the name suggests that this novel may be the only published reference to this individual including a yarn about his fate.

Another character who appears in the novel on page 141 is called ‘Black Dick’; the name is used only once, perhaps intending that readers imagine Dick as an African-American or West Indian. There were a number of Islanders with such backgrounds: two of George Meredith’s associates were ‘men of colour’: the carpenter and whaler George Brown and John ‘Black Jack’ Williams. Several lines on, however, Cawthorne refers to ‘the two blacks, man and woman’, which suggests that Dick is a sealer of Indigenous background living on Kangaroo Island before settlement. Elsewhere in the novel he refers to a boy living with the sealer ‘Flash Tom’. While the evidence is very slight, this is a significant moment, suggesting that while we are very familiar with the involvement of Indigenous women in the sealing industry, there is much less evidence of the participation of Aboriginal men.<sup>18</sup> In passing, it is reasonable to suspect that there may have been other chapters to the novel that were not included in the 1865–6 serial version, possibly because Cawthorne wrote more than could be included in a year’s publication of serial numbers. Missing chapters may explain the sudden appearance of the enigmatic Black Dick and his companion.

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<sup>18</sup> While Indigenous women (and especially Palawa women) seemed to have been skilled sealers in pre-contact society, the evidence for the involvement of men is scanty. Quoting Ryan 1981, Kostoglou notes that Mannalargenna, a well-known individual from the north-east of Van Diemen’s Land, made several sealing voyages. In 1813 when James Kelly took the *Brothers* sealing in Bass Strait there were two Aboriginal men aboard. George Augustus Robinson only refers to one or two in his dairies: a young ‘North west of New Holland’ boy named Praree lived and worked with John ‘Abyssinia Jack’ Anderson, but whether he was taken as a worker or as a sexual partner is not clear. See Parry Kostoglou, *Sealing in Tasmania: Historical Research Project A Report for the Parks and Wildlife Service* (Hobart: Department of Environment and Land Management, 1996) 38. Another Indigenous man is mentioned as a member of a sealing gang left on Solander Island for three years, living with his fellow-castaways on ‘terms of perfect amity and understanding’. See Thomas Dunbadin, *Sailing the World’s Edge: Sea Stories from Old Sydney* (London: Newnes, [1937]) 119.

The plot of *The Kangaroo Islanders* represents the murder of a man named 'Captain Meredith' at Yankalilla. This detail is of considerable historical interest, referring to a real character and a series of events that, in spite of Cawthorne's subtitle of 1823, actually occurred in South Australian waters some time in the mid-1830s and possibly as late as 1836. In the novel 'Captain Meredith' (his first name not given) is represented as a melancholy, introverted and fastidious master of an unnamed sealing and trading vessel. He sails to Kangaroo Island from Sydney to buy skins and load salt. Most of his crew desert to join the Islanders, and after the ship is wrecked on Troubridge Shoals the remaining crew sail south for Kangaroo Island in a whaleboat. They anchor off Yankalilla and Meredith goes ashore to read his Bible. There, on a conical hill near a river, while deep in Psalms, Meredith is inexplicably murdered by two Kurna men whom he has never met before. They strike him down with a *kutta*, a digging stick, having mistaken him for an Islander who had recently raided their country on a 'Sabine expedition', abducting women.

Has Cawthorne's version of 'poor Meredith's' murder any historical basis? The writer was certainly familiar with some of the details of the Meredith story; he had been shown the murder site by Nat Thomas on his 1852 Christmas trip to Kangaroo Island (Thomas was one of the group of Islanders who had found Meredith's body and buried it).<sup>19</sup> The novel is just one of several published versions of this killing which, although it occurred before settlement, came to resonate in colonial imaginations in the first decades of the colony. The murders of Captain Collet Barker at the Murray Mouth in 1831 and George Meredith at Yankalilla in 1836 were seen as defining moments in race relations by many South Australians. The shadow of both events lay over the early years of race relations in the colony in South Australia; these murders were interpreted as telling examples of the inexplicably violent and unpredictable behaviour of Indigenous people.

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<sup>19</sup> Cawthorne also mentions 'poor' Meredith's murder in a 1883 manuscript poem 'A Midnight Reverie in the Bush' which can be found in the Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/11, Mortlock Library of South Australiana. The lines are given on page 234-5.



**Reputed grave of Little Sal, dusky heroine of the Meredith murder, in the scrub country between Stokes Bay and Middle River.**



These days we know that the brutality of the sealers on their raids of mainland communities may well have given Indigenous people motives for both murders, but at the time little was known (or understood) about why Indigenous people had acted as they did. In the early years in colonial South Australia stories circulated about these murders, told partly as a response to what was perceived as the brutality and savagery of the Aborigines, told to justify the appropriation of Aboriginal lands as an inevitable consequence of the arrival of European civilization.

Versions of Meredith's murder can be found in a significant number of the travel books and histories that constitute the early attempts at history-making in South Australia. Here is William Leigh's meeting with one of the alleged perpetrators of 'poor Meredith's' murder from an 1839 publication:

One day, while dissecting a young seal at Kangaroo Island, a black woman came up at the time, and stood gazing, with apparent wonder, at my operation. I continued the dissection, and offered her the blubber. This established a friendly feeling between us, and she became very communicative. I remarked that her countenance was as expressive and pleasing as any I had met with. A friend came up at the time, and when she had departed, informed me that the woman, in whom I had felt so much interest, was no other than the murderer of poor Meredith. I stared at this information, and regretted I had not examined her cranium'.<sup>20</sup>

Although Leigh does not name this woman, she is Maggerlede, Trukinini's tribal sister, appearing in Cawthorne's novel as 'Bumblefoot' and well known on Kangaroo Island as 'Old Sal'. Leigh goes on to tell quite a story about George Meredith, given in sufficient detail to suggest that he had met individuals on Kangaroo Island who knew him and his story. A young man of twenty-one or twenty-two and unlucky in business, Meredith had fled society and settled for some time on Kangaroo Island, later moving to Yankylilly,<sup>21</sup> where according to Leigh he had built a hut and established good

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<sup>20</sup> W. H. Leigh, *Reconnoitering voyages and travels with adventures in the new colonies of South Australia, during the years 1836, 1837, 1838* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839) 155.

<sup>21</sup> Good evidence that Leigh heard Meredith's story from the Islanders, in that this is the old sealers' spelling of Yankalilla. The name survives because of their usage. Leigh is probably wrong in this detail: Meredith and his associates built a hut and established a garden at Middle River, Kangaroo Island.

relationships with the Aboriginal people of the district. He had both a boy and a woman living with him, and after disciplining the youth for not saying grace over his food, he was then murdered with an axe by the woman in his hut while reading his prayer-book. The boy and the woman then stole his whaleboat. After some time his associates on Kangaroo Island came to search for him, located his body (the prayer-book still clutched in his hand) and buried him. The whaleboat was later found wrecked at Encounter Bay, the rudder discovered in the possession of Aboriginal people camped inland.<sup>22</sup>

Leigh's version of events was published in 1839. Perhaps the most intriguing of the various versions of the George Meredith story was collected by Kangaroo Island resident H.C. Barrett, who wrote to Norman Tindale at the South Australian Museum recounting a story told to him by J.P. Gell, who had known Maggerlede as an old woman in the 1860s or 1870s and from whom he had collected an account of Meredith's murder. Meredith is remembered here as 'Marion' and Maggerlede as Sal: she told Gell that the Captain was a Bible-reading man who was killed near Second Valley by the blacks who crept on him as he was sitting on the beach reading the Bible. She had escaped by swimming out to sea. Gell recorded that Sal used to weep when telling the story, and that she still remembered the Lord's Prayer which 'Marion' had taught her.<sup>23</sup> Again there are certain details repeated: 'Marion' reading his Bible; his murder on a beach at a mainland site 'near Second Valley'; Sal's involvement.

There was obviously quite a strong tradition on Kangaroo Island that remembered Meredith as 'Marion'. Roland Snelling, a son of Henry Snelling who distributed rations to the Indigenous women on the island and after whom the beach is named, wrote to the Adelaide paper the *News* with another tiny vignette about Meredith and Maggerlede:

There was another black woman named Big Sal. She was brought over from the mainland by whalers also. She was a fine-looking, big black. But

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<sup>22</sup> Leigh 1839: 156–57.

<sup>23</sup> Norman Tindale, 'Kangaroo Island loose notes', AA/338/1/32, South Australian Museum.

she was bumble-footed. She lost two of her toes through getting burned while drunk. She lived with a man named Marion, who had a large whaling boat ... I was about 13 years old when they disappeared from Middle River. They always called my dad 'The Governor'.<sup>24</sup>

It is evident from such accounts that versions of the story about the Meredith murder were circulating not just on Kangaroo Island but also on the mainland: the fact that several published accounts exist says something about the significance of the event in the colony and the shadow it cast. An anonymous 1880 newspaper version was written by a member of a party that had travelled to Kangaroo Island. The party included such distinguished company as Commissioner of Crown Lands T. Playford, Surveyor-General G.W. Goyder and historian J.P. Stow, strongly suggesting that the Meredith story was known to many colonial South Australians and told especially when visiting the island.<sup>25</sup>

Two of the best-known early histories of South Australia are Alexander Tolmer's *Reminiscences of an adventurous and chequered career at home and at the Antipodes* (1882) and John Wrathal Bull's *Early experiences of life in South Australia and an extended colonial history* (1884); each mentions Meredith's murder in detail sufficient to indicate that numbers of colonial South Australians possessed relatively detailed versions of the story.

Tolmer was South Australia's most famous colonial policeman. In 1844 he led a police party to Kangaroo Island to round up escaped prisoners, and while there arrested Sal and her friend Suke as suspects for Meredith's murder. The woman he knew as 'Sal' was Maggerlede.<sup>26</sup> Tolmer seems to have written three versions of the Meredith story: two newspaper accounts in

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Tindale, 'Kangaroo Island loose notes', AA/338/1/32, South Australian Museum, including this cutting from the *News* 19 March 1932.

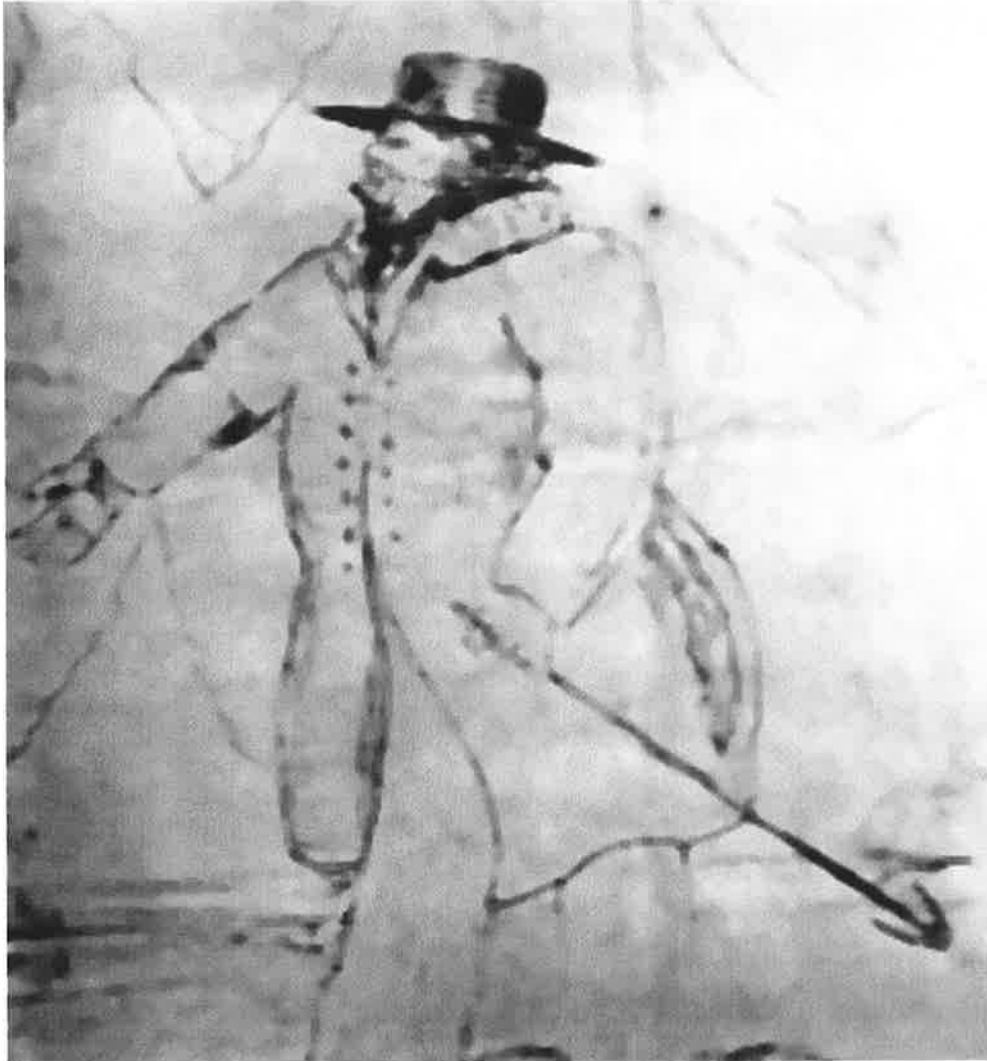
<sup>25</sup> 'A Week on Kangaroo Island,' *Register* 8 March 1880: 5f. This brief reference to Meredith is as follows: 'Meredith ... met a violent death at the hands of the blacks on the mainland for having assisted in abducting the wife of a chief.'

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an adventurous and chequered career at home and at the Antipodes* (2 vols. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882). John Wrathal Bull *Early experiences of life in South Australia and an extended colonial history* (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg, 1884).



Theresa Walker, 'The Aboriginal Encounter Bay Bob'. 1838, Adelaide. Wax, 10.6 cm diameter. Australian National Gallery, Canberra.

A suspect in the murder of George Meredith Jr.



George Meredith Senior, drawing c. 1830, Northern Regional Library, Launceston. This copy from Vivienne Rae Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: a Tigress in Exile* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1979) 50. He is holding a harpoon.

1844 and 1866, and the extended description in his 1882 *Reminiscences*.<sup>27</sup> Tolmer insists that Meredith was the son of a wealthy Tasmanian settler; that he was an ‘outcast through profligacy and crime’; that he was murdered with a tomahawk while reading his Bible on board his boat in Yankalilla Bay, the motive theft. His killers were said to be ‘Encounter Bay’ men, one named as ‘Encounter Bay Bob’. Bob’s real name was Tammuruwe Nankere or Parru Paicha; he was a well-known figure in Adelaide in the early years of the colony and known to Cawthorne.

Bull’s 1884 history is also based on sealers’ testimony and that of ‘a Tasmanian black woman, called Sal, who had lost one of her feet when young by sleeping with them too near the fire’—Maggerlede again. She seems to have told her version of the Meredith story to anyone who would listen. Bull identifies Meredith’s killers as two young men abducted from ‘the mainland’, precisely where is not given. He claims Meredith was eating porridge by his campfire when he was attacked, but he does not mention the murder weapon.

Who was George Meredith? He was born in 1806, the eldest son of the Tasmanian landowner and former Royal Marine officer George Meredith<sup>28</sup> (1877–1856), best-known before his arrival in Van Diemen’s land for removing Napoleon’s ‘Cap of Liberty’ in 1801 from the top of Pompey’s Pillar in Alexandria, Egypt. Meredith Senior was then a young lieutenant on HMS *Hinde*.<sup>29</sup>

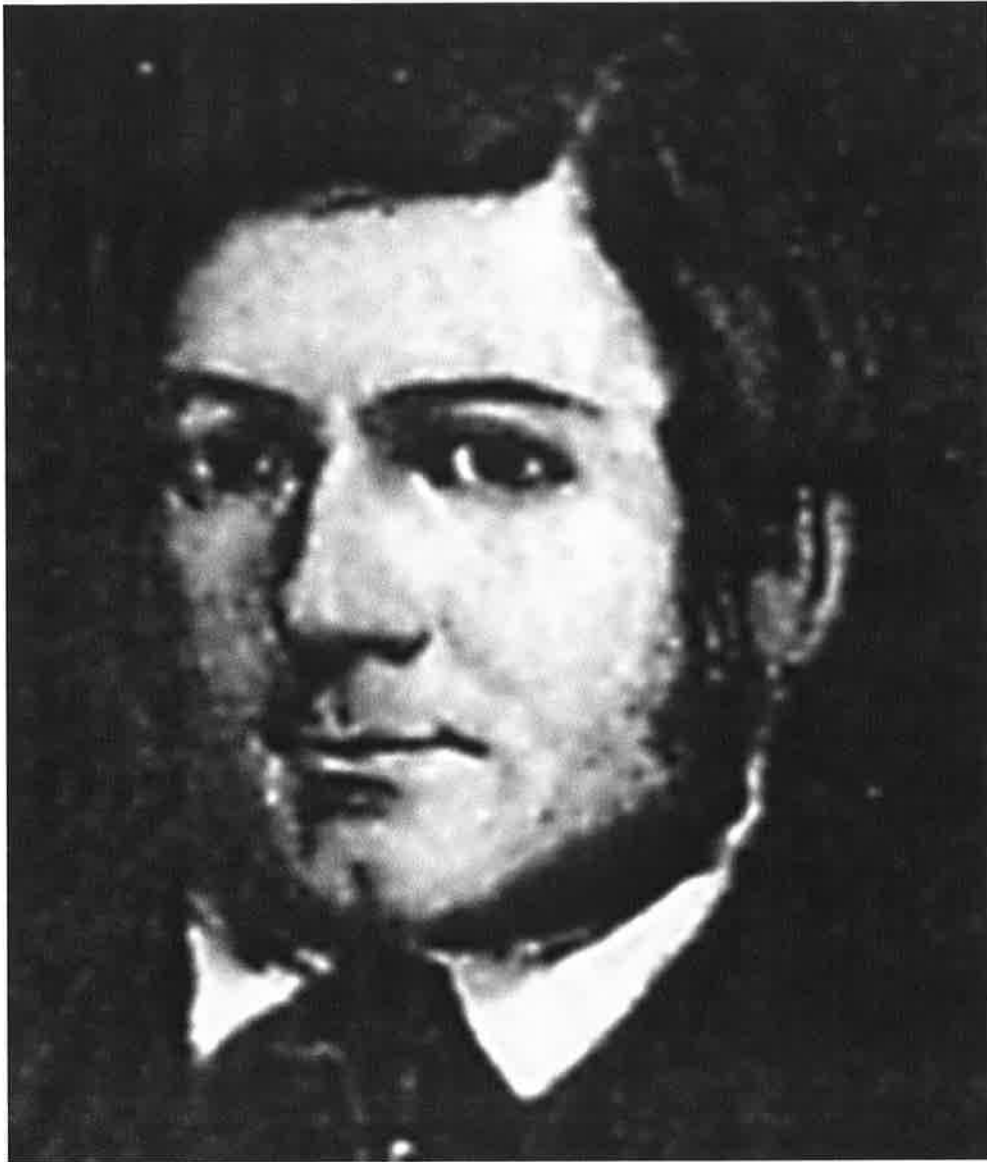
In 1821 the Meredith family settled as free settlers at Great Swanport at the northwest end of Fleurieu Bay in Van Diemen’s Land, on what is now

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<sup>27</sup> ‘A Bundle of Stories: No. 3—The Old Settler’s Story’, *Register* 4 May 1886: 3a.

<sup>28</sup> As far as I can determine, the Tasmanian Merediths were not related to the British novelist George Meredith (1828–1909), although both families may have shared Welsh antecedents.

<sup>29</sup> Karl von Stieglitz, *Pioneers of the East Coast from 1642: Swansea–Bicheno* (Hobart: OBM, 1978) 34–35.



Charles Meredith, miniature c. 1839, believed to be by his wife Louisa Anne Meredith. Private Collection. This copy from Vivienne Rae Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: a Tigress in Exile* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1979) 50.

called the Meredith River in the Oyster Bay area.<sup>30</sup> There George Meredith established a pastoral empire and became involved in shipbuilding, coastal trading, sealing and bay whaling. In later life the 'King of Swanport' became a powerful member of the Tasmanian establishment, sitting in the Legislative Council.

The celebrated colonial travel writer and novelist Louisa Anne Meredith was the murdered man's cousin. His brother Charles married her on 18 April 1839: if George had lived Louisa would have been his sister-in-law. Their eldest son was named George Campbell Meredith, but whether after the father or the deceased brother is not clear.<sup>31</sup> From the pages of several of Louisa's writings emerges a shadowy figure: George as his brother Charles remembered him in sanitised family reminiscence. There is the young man on the point of emigrating to Australia copying engravings of Aborigines; a kind young man; the author of a play in which his cousin Louisa had a small part; a student at Dr Lindsay's school at Bow; the young man sleeping on the floor of the cabin to toughen himself up for life in the Bush. George comes into sharper focus after arriving in Tasmania. Louisa Anne Meredith describes events that took place in 1824, when George was eighteen and Charles thirteen. The two brothers were overlanding sheep to Hobart under very difficult conditions without proper food or shelter. George had taken up a land grant of 1500 acres at Anson's Creek, seventy miles from his father's station and the two brothers walked there to take possession. Louisa Anne Meredith records her husband's memories of the experience:

Our entire joint equipment consisted of one knapsack, in which we carried a little flour, tea, and sugar; and we had a tin 'billy,' or small can,

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<sup>30</sup> These days the traveller can stay at Meredith House, 15 Noyes Street Swansea, with views over Great Oyster Bay and Freycinet Peninsular. Bookings can be made at <http://babs.com.au/meredith/>

<sup>31</sup> See Vivienne Rae Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1979) 21, 25, 26, 27, 51, 55, 56–9, 122. See also Louisa Anne Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes Feathered, Furred and Finned* (Hobart: J. Walch & Sons, 1880) in which her deceased brother-in-law George is represented in a number of episodes. See pages 88, 91, 93–96 and 99.



to boil our tea in; and one single-barrelled flint-lock gun. Two kangaroo dogs accompanied us, whose game was to be our food.<sup>32</sup>

The brothers are described enduring the vicissitudes of Bush life: Charles nearly drowned crossing a flooded creek; George became violently ill; both managed to cope.

Louisa Meredith also gives one or two glimpses of the Meredith family's involvement in the sealing and bay-whaling industries.<sup>33</sup> Between 1824 and 1832 the Meredith brothers worked in several of the family businesses, including pastoral activities: George Meredith Senior won a lucrative government contract to supply the convict settlement on Maria Island, and in 1826 he applied successfully for a lease for exclusive rights to seal on Isle du Phoques, the first such commercial agreement between the Crown and a settler.<sup>34</sup> In the same year he began building the *Black Swan*, a 50-ton 'colonial' schooner at Great Swanport to service the family's growing sealing business. She was launched in 1829 and went sealing out of Swanport. In February 1830 she ran up on Prime Seal Island, to the west of Flinders Island in the Furneaux Group in Bass Strait. Charles was certainly aboard when she ran aground; George Jr. is not mentioned as being present, but it is likely he was also there.<sup>35</sup> Several of Charles Meredith's anecdotes about the wreck were recorded by his wife Louisa Anne Meredith:

I have heard Mr. Meredith recount his great delight at having once, some years ago, killed nine [seagulls] with one shot, when he had been shipwrecked on an island in Bass's Straits, and had lived for some days on a miserable sort of porridge or burgoo, made of flour recovered from the wreck, and so damaged by salt water it would not bake, mixed with water so strongly impregnated with alum that it could scarcely be drunk. After this diet, meat, even though that of a sea-bird, became valuable, and the nine gulls were a most precious acquisition; but being shot at dusk, they

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<sup>32</sup> Meredith 1880: 99.

<sup>33</sup> Meredith 1880: 217, 230–1. See especially Chapters XXXVI and XXXVII, describing the Meredith bay-whaling activities.

<sup>34</sup> Parry Kostoglou, *Sealing in Tasmania: Historical Research Project A Report for the Parks and Wildlife Service* (Hobart: Parks and Wildlife Service, 1996) 73.

<sup>35</sup> The island is named by Charles Meredith in a story told to his family about shooting Cape Barren Geese. 'Mrs. Charles Meredith' [Louisa Anne Meredith], *My Home in Tasmania: during a residence of nine years* (London: John Murray, 1852) 114.

were put aside until dawn, to be prepared for breakfast; and then, woeful to relate, all that remained of them were two legs, the rest having been devoured during the night by rats.<sup>36</sup>

The *Black Swan* was repaired, refloated and then resumed sealing.<sup>37</sup>

Given his involvement in the family sealing business, Meredith may well have made more than one trip to South Australian waters between 1829 and 1832. After a violent quarrel with his father in 1832, he stole the family's 25-ton *Defiance* and sailed to Port Jackson, intending to go sealing in his own name either in New Zealand waters or through Bass Strait, perhaps even as far west as King George's Sound. However, *Defiance* was wrecked in October 1833 (all hands saved), either fifteen miles south of Twofold Bay, Eden, New South Wales, or in Bass Strait near Howe Island.<sup>38</sup> Given Meredith's associate James Manning's testimony, the last-named seems more likely, in that Manning also reports the loss of the vessel at 'Cape Howe Island'. Cumpston quotes the *Sydney Gazette* account:

We are concerned to hear that the *Defiance* of this port [Sydney] belonging to Mr. Chapman, of Darling Harbour, was wrecked in Bass's Straits, near Howe Island some weeks ago. The captain, it appears was engaged on a sealing trip, and having anchored under the lee of a light ridge, took to his boat with six men, to proceed and engage some hands at a certain place some distance off. In the meantime a severe gale blew from the sea and drove the schooner from her anchorage upon the beach where she became a wreck. The greater part of the cargo will be saved, but still the loss of the vessel is severe. It ought, however, to operate as a caution

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<sup>36</sup> Meredith 1852: 113.

<sup>37</sup> The wreck is mentioned in a number of sources. See John Stanley Cumpston, *Kangaroo Island 1800–1836* (3rd ed. Canberra: Roebuck Society Publication no. 1, 1986) 131, citing reports in the *Hobart Town Courier* 6 February 1830 and *Colonial Times* 12 March 1830. See also Ian Hawkins Nicholson, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures Tasmania. Volume 1 1803–1833* (Canberra: Roebuck Publications, 1983) 116, 124, 157; and Ronald Parsons, *Tasmanian Ships Registered 1826–1850* (Magill, SA: The Author, 1980) 5. Parsons claims the vessel was wrecked on Kangaroo Island.

<sup>38</sup> Cumpston 1986: 131–32. Cumpston quotes confusing reports about the loss of the *Defiance* in the *Sydney Herald* 24 October 1833, from the *Sydney Gazette* date not given, and the *Launceston Advertiser* 15 August 1833. Three different wreck sites are given, and three different captains' names.

to those “penny wise and pound foolish” gentlemen, who enter into such speculation without protecting themselves by insurance.<sup>39</sup>

The vessel was salvaged: the *Blackbird* returned to Sydney 2 November 1833 with ‘part of the wreck’. No doubt the ‘Mr. Chapman, of Darling Harbour’ was Meredith’s business partner who had put up the money to pay for the trade goods that the *Defiance* was carrying.

George Meredith then made his way to the Port Phillip area in late 1833, where he joined the *Independent*, another Meredith family sealing vessel, skippered by an American named James ‘Little’ West.<sup>40</sup> There Meredith and his associates were directly involved in an episode that would have resonating consequences, abducting four (and possibly more) Aboriginal women and several young men from Point Nepean just inside the heads at Port Phillip—one possibly a Bunurong man named Yonki Yonka<sup>41</sup>—shooting several other Aboriginal men in the process.

During his time as Commandant of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement, George Robinson recorded several accounts of this sealers’ raid at Point Nepean in 1833, even preparing a report for the Van Diemen’s Land Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur about the events that (Robinson thought) led directly to Meredith’s murder. In his Journals dated 9 May 1836 Robinson records the following, which makes it clear that not only had he

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<sup>39</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, date not given, quoted Cumpston 1986: 132. Cumpston also does not provide the publication details for the 2 November 1833 account of the salvage of the *Defiance*.

<sup>40</sup> Plomley and Henley 1990: 69.

<sup>41</sup> Diane Barwick notes that this date is ‘independently confirmed by the Bunurong man Yonki Yonka. On 6 June 1841 William Thomas noted in his journal that Yonki Yonka had rejoined the Bunurong after “eight” years as a captive of the sealers. Yonki Yonka was obviously the unnamed Bunurong youth described in the diary of Thomas’s colleague Dredge on 16 June 1841: he, another lad and “nine” women, one of whom afterwards escaped, had been seen near Arthur’s Seat (north of Point Nepean) about “five” years before when a sealing crew induced them into a boat, forced them aboard ship and put to sea. This lad was taken to Preservation Island but later boarded a ship at Launceston hoping to get home. Instead he was taken to Western Australia, where he was hired as a stockkeeper; he purchased a fare to Adelaide with his savings and then worked his passage to Melbourne and then rejoined his relatives’. Diane Barwick, “This most resolute lady’: a Biographical Puzzle’, *Metaphors of Interpretation: Essays in Honours of W.E.H. Stanner* (edited by Diane E. Barwick, Jeremy Beckett & Marie Reay, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1985) 212. Thus Yonki Yonka *may* have been one of the young men accused of Meredith’s murder.

heard about the murder while visiting Hobart Town (or read about it in the papers), but that the authorities there were well aware of what Meredith had done:

Saw the Colonial Secretary [in Hobart] ... Proctor informed me that the New Holland women was brought to the islands by George Meredith, that Munro has one, Baily has one and the other sealer the last. George Meredith was speared by the natives on the coast of New Holland, no doubt in retaliation for the injuries he has done to them. This was a just retribution. Many aggressions had been committed by the Merediths on the natives at Oyster Bay [in Tasmania].<sup>42</sup>

Then later in the same year, 26 December 1836, Robinson records what he had been told by 'Matilda the VDL native woman' about Meredith's behaviour:

Point Nepean is on the eastern side of the entrance [to Port Phillip]. Matilda ... pointed out the spot a few miles down the harbour at Point Nepean where she said George Meredith and his crew of sealers stole the native women. The men's names were Brown, Mr West the master of the schooner, a man named Billy.<sup>43</sup> Said the schooner anchored off, the sealers went on shore. Said there was plenty of forest boomer kangaroo at the point. Said they deceived the people; gammoned them. Said the native men upset the boat and the men were all wet and fell into the water. Said there was plenty of black fellows, some on the Port Phillip side, some outside, sea coast. Said the sealers were afraid of the Port Phillip natives. Said they employed her to entice them. George Meredith stole the, I think she said, four women, took them in the schooner first to Kings Island and

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<sup>42</sup> Plomley 1987: 353. No doubt the news traveled to Hobart Town on a sealing vessel returning from Kangaroo Island, in that the earliest published reference to the murder is in the *Hobart Town Courier* 22 April 1826, 2d. The date is too early for the news to have been carried there on a South Australian Company vessel, the first of which, the *Duke of York*, arrived at Nepean Bay in July 1836.

<sup>43</sup> Did these companions of Meredith's make it to Kangaroo Island? Given that other sources insist that Bumblefoot Sal was with Meredith when they arrived at Middle River on the north shore in February 1834, it seems likely that after he had sold the abducted women to the various sealers named by Robinson, he disposed of or sold the schooner *Independent* (or simply left it?) and purchased the 'fine ten-oared sealing-boat' mentioned below, sailing for Kangaroo Island with Sal, Jacob Seaman and an American 'named Bathurst'. Ship's carpenter George Brown is named in some versions as not only accompanying them but also building the hut at Middle River: he was an African American. Plomley and Henley name James 'Little' West as the American master of George Meredith's schooner *Independent* and who later lived at Kangaroo Island with TIN.NER.MUCK, a VDL woman. Perhaps he also pulled on one of those ten oars. It is not known who the 'Billy' named by Matilda was. See Brian N.J. Plomley and Kristen Anne Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1990): 38, 39, 41, 54.

then to Hunter and Clarks and Gun Carriage Islands, and then sold them to the sealers there. I am informed that [Jimmy] Munro bought one.<sup>44</sup>

Robinson also collected another account of the raid, which filled in some of the details about the abduction, and how only the best-looking women and girls were enticed aboard and restrained, and, after sealing on King Island, they were taken to the Furneaux Islands and disposed of there.<sup>45</sup>

There are several other official reports and correspondence about Meredith's role in the abductions and murders, suggesting the events were well known not only to the early settlers of the Melbourne district (or Bearpurt, as it was then known) but also to the authorities in both Hobart and Sydney. John H. Wedge on behalf of the Port Phillip Association wrote to Van Diemen's Land Colonial Secretary John Montagu 15 March 1836 reporting that a 'flagrant outrage' had been committed upon the Aborigines some eighteen months earlier and four women abducted, and that the settlers in the new colony at Port Phillip were well aware that:

unless some measures be adopted to protect the Natives, a spirit of hostility will be created against the whites, which in all probability will lead to a state of warfare between them and the Aborigines, which will only terminate when the black man will cease to exist.<sup>46</sup>

On 2 June 1836 John H. Wedge responded to New South Wales Police Magistrate George Stewart's request for the 'Names of individuals who perpetrated the outrage upon the Natives at Western Port about eighteen months ago?' with '— — — —, since killed by the Natives on the South Coast of New Holland, in the vicinity of Spencer's Gulf.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Plomley 1987: 405.

<sup>45</sup> Plomley 1987: 677.

<sup>46</sup> *Historical Records of Victoria: Foundation Series. Volume One: Beginnings of Permanent Government*. Edited by Pauline Jones. Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981): 34–5, 39.

<sup>47</sup> *Journals and Printed Papers of the Parliament of Tasmania 1885*. Vol. V, no. 44, 'Expedition from Van Diemen's land to Port Phillip in 1835': 15. In the collection of documents about the origins of Melbourne published by the Tasmanian Government in 1885, half a century later, George Meredith's name is not given, no doubt in deference to the family. His brother Charles had died in 1880, just five years before this was published: he had been a distinguished member of Tasmania's Legislative Council. The family was

A week or so later George Stewart wrote to John Montagu 10 June 1836 about the same 'outrage'. Again Meredith is not named; his death is described as occurring 'in the neighbourhood of Spencer's Gulf' and it is mentioned that one of the abducted women was with him when he was murdered.<sup>48</sup> This is an intriguing detail, implying that that Maggerlede was one of the women abducted from Point Nepean, which seems unlikely.

Meredith's abduction of the Port Phillip women would have longer-term repercussions. J.H. Wedge wrote to John Montagu requesting that the Protector George Robinson be instructed to find the four women abducted from Point Nepean on the Bass Strait islands and restore them to their families as an act of justice. Wedge obviously considered that relationships between the settlers and the Aborigines in the new settlements around Port Phillip would be improved if the women were to be returned.<sup>49</sup>

Meredith then sold the abducted 'New Holland' women to sealers on the Furneaux Islands: it seems he got £7 for at least one of them.<sup>50</sup> He then either bought (or bartered for) Maggerlede, although one account says she was one of the women abducted from Point Nepean. What happened to their vessel the *Independent* is not clear, for most of the gang then sailed on in a ten-oared sealing boat to Kangaroo Island, arriving February 1834,<sup>51</sup> the party including Maggerlede, James Manning, George Brown and a Dutch sailor named Jacob Seaman. Bull claims two young Aboriginal boys were aboard, abducted in the raid from Point Nepean.

Meredith's gang settled at Western River on the north shore of Kangaroo Island where a house was built and a garden established: Brown was an African American ship's carpenter who later became a well-known tradesman in the new South Australian colony after a stint as a headsman at the Encounter Bay whale fishery. Two other 'men of colour', both African

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obviously deeply ambivalent about his memory even fifty years on, as George Jr's shadowy representations in several of Louisa Anne Meredith's works reveal.

<sup>48</sup> Jones 1981: 39.

<sup>49</sup> CSO 5/19/384, cited Plomley: 1966: 938.

<sup>50</sup> Plomley 1987: 414–5.

<sup>51</sup> R.T. Sexton, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures South Australia 1627–1850: A guide for Genealogists and Maritime Historians* (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1990) 25.

Americans, John (Black Jack) Anderson<sup>52</sup> and John Bathurst, joined the sealing gang at Western River in September 1834. They made sealing trips to the nearby Althorpe Islands and joined up with another sealing party on 'Long Island' [Thistle Island?].

Some of the party then raided the Port Lincoln district, again attempting to capture Indigenous women either to work for them or to be sold to other sealers. The *Perth Gazette*, 3 October 1835 has James Manning's report of the raid that he gave to authorities in Western Australia:

In November [1834], on Boston Island, the people in this latter boat caught five native women from the neighbourhood of Port Lincoln; they enticed two of their husbands into the boat, and carried them off to the island, where, in spite of all remonstrance on the part of Manning, they took the native men in Anderson's boat round a point a short distance off, there they shot them and knocked their brains out with clubs. Manning believes they still have the women in their possession, with the exception of Forbes, whose woman ran away from him shortly after they were taken to the island. Two of the women had infants at their breasts at the time their husbands were murdered; an old woman was compelled to take them away, and carried them into the bush. Another native endeavoured to swim to the island to recover his wife, but was drowned in the attempt.<sup>53</sup>

One of the women abducted on this raid would later be known on Kangaroo Island as Sal or 'Brown Sal': she appears in Cawthorne's *The Kangaroo Islanders*. It is not clear if Meredith himself was present on this raid; his associates were certainly involved, as Manning's report makes clear. In November 1834 Meredith and 'Black Jack' Anderson were also involved in a disagreement with Manning on 'a bird island' [the Althorpes?] during which loaded pistols were flourished, Meredith taking £4/10/- from Manning.<sup>54</sup>

Accompanied by Maggerlede ('Bumblefoot Sal') and either one or two young men, Meredith then sailed to Yankalilla on the mainland, either on a sealing expedition or with the intention of settling there. By 1836 the sealing

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<sup>52</sup> This is not John 'Abyssinia Jack' Anderson, who was English.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted by H.P. Moore, 'Notes on the early settlers in South Australia prior to 1836', in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, Session 1923-4, 25 (1925): 115.

<sup>54</sup> Moore 1925: 115.

industry was in decline, and there would have been very few if any seals on the beaches of the Fleurieu Peninsula, aside from occasional visitors from the offshore rookeries. One report even has Meredith building a hut there and living in close contact with the local Aboriginal people. This is unlikely, as relationships between the sealers and Indigenous people were not at all cordial, most sealers living on the offshore islands and only occasionally visiting the mainland in armed parties.

There are four locations suggested for the site of Meredith's murder. An 1870s Kangaroo Island source gives the place as the Yankalilla Gorge inland from Lady Bay; another states that he was murdered while on the deck of his vessel which was anchored off what is now Normanville Beach; a third names Second Valley. Cawthorne's location in this novel describes a small conical hill near a creek, possibly Haycock Point at Carrickalinga. Given that the site where 'poor Meredith' was murdered and later buried was pointed out to him by Nat Thomas, one of the islanders who found his body, Haycock Point is the most probable site.

When was Meredith killed? While Cawthorne says in the late summer of 1823, his death must have occurred between some time between November 1835, when Meredith was reported to be on a 'bird island' [the Althorpes?] and taking £4/10/- at gunpoint from his former associate James Manning,<sup>55</sup> and 22 April 1836, when his death was announced in the *Hobart Town Courier*. The wording is interesting: 'We have the pain to announce the premature death of Mr. Meredith, junior, son of George Meredith esq. of Oyster Bay who we learn was barbarously murdered by the savages on the north coast of New Holland while on a fishing expedition'.<sup>56</sup> It seems likely that the news had arrived in Hobart Town from Kangaroo Island, for Yankalilla is on the coast of 'New Holland' to the north of the island. A couple of weeks later, 9 May 1836, George Robinson recorded the death in his

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<sup>55</sup> Cumpston 1980: 131, quoting an account in the *Perth Gazette*, 3 October 1835, the trial of John 'Black Jack' Anderson. This is a source for the story told in Sarah Hay's *Australian/Vogel Winner Skins* (2002).

<sup>56</sup> *Hobart Town Courier* 22 April 1836, 2d.



diary.<sup>57</sup> On balance late summer 1836 seems the most likely time for his death. It is interesting to note that when the serial version was running in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 'Our Correspondent in Kangaroo Island' reported from Hog Bay to the Adelaide paper the *Observer* that 'some of our old islanders' thought Cawthorne's novel a 'queer yarn ... [and] not very complimentary to them. They suggest the dates should be altered.'<sup>58</sup> Obviously there were readers on Kangaroo Island with memories long enough to challenge the novel's title page date of 1823. It is a shame that the *Observer's* correspondent in Hog Bay did not have more to say about other historical events represented in the novel.

What happened after Meredith's death? Concerned about his disappearance—and about the threat posed by mainland Aboriginal men having access to his whaleboat—the Islanders Nat Thomas, 'Governor' Henry Wallen, William Walker, Jacob Seaman and George 'Fireball' Bates sailed a whaleboat to Yankalilla during the winter of 1836, just months—perhaps even weeks—before the arrival of the *Duke of York*, the first of the South Australian Company ships to drop anchor in South Australian waters. They rescued Maggerlede and found and buried Meredith's body. There is some doubt about whether his whaleboat was recovered: one version has the wreckage at Encounter Bay and the rudder in the possession of Aboriginal people somewhere inland.

The murder weapon, a tomahawk, with his blood and hair still attached, was found between 9 and 15 September 1836 by Captain George Martin, of the South Australian Company vessel *John Pirie*. Martin had been exploring the shores of St Vincent's Gulf in a whaleboat owned by the sealer William Walker, one of the Islanders who had found and buried Meredith's body. It is likely that Walker took Martin to the place because the early colonists were fascinated by the circumstances surrounding Meredith's death. Martin then sailed with the *John Pirie* to Hobart Town, carrying not only Colonel William

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<sup>57</sup> Plomley 1987: 353.

<sup>58</sup> *Observer*, 3 June 1865, Suppl. 1g. It is likely that George 'Fireball' Bates had been chatting with the Hog Bay correspondent.

Light's report for the South Australian Company Commissioners about the proposed site for Adelaide but also the affidavit referred to in a *Register* piece 28 September 1844 which confirmed the news of George Meredith's murder for his family in Tasmania.<sup>59</sup>

We will never know the full story about Meredith's death. It is reasonable to assume—given his past behaviour at both Point Nepean and Port Lincoln—that when he was murdered he was involved in some way with Indigenous people, perhaps even up to his old tricks of raiding the coast for women to sell to his associates. But the South Australian histories do not record any stories about the gentleman's son George Meredith as murderer and abductor of Indigenous women. Instead the major published accounts represent him as a melancholy wanderer, wantonly slain one morning by his Aboriginal companions while eating his porridge. Drawn no doubt to the oft-repeated detail about his murder occurring while he was reading the Bible, colonial writers allowed the irony of the detail to reinforce the prevailing view that Indigenous people could not be trusted, that they were so bewilderingly and inexplicably violent that after settlement the colonial government was entitled to take stern measures to ensure the safety of the colonists. Reports of Meredith's death played some part in reinforcing this perception. We wonder today if 'poor' Meredith's story would have been told so often if his full history had been better known.

*The Kangaroo Islanders* was written by a young schoolteacher who occasionally wrote to the Adelaide papers using the pseudonym 'Ami des Noirs', the friend of the blacks.<sup>60</sup> He was an amateur ethnographer, a man

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<sup>59</sup> John Woodforde's diary records Captain George Martin of the *John Pirie* at Rapid Bay 8 September 1836, sailing in a whaleboat on a tour of Saint Vincent's Gulf. Sexton records him leaving Nepean Bay 7 September 1836 on William Walker's whaleboat. Walker undoubtedly showed Martin the site at Yankalilla (the nearest landing to the north of Rapid Bay) where Meredith was murdered: Walker was paid £2 for his services. See R.T. Sexton, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures South Australia 1627–1850* (Ridgehaven, SA, Canberra: Gould Books, Roebuck Books, 1990): 29. See also Plomley 1987: 353.

<sup>60</sup> See Cawthorne's Letter to the *Observer*, 9 December 1843, expressing his concern at the wholesale clearing of wattle, given its seeds were a staple food for the Kurna. He signs the letter 'Ami des Noirs'.



A NIGHT SCENE IN THE BUSH.  
KANGAROO ISLAND.

'A night scene in the bush'. W.H. Leigh, *Reconnoitering Voyages and Travels, with Adventures in the New Colonies of South Australia*, 1839; opp. Page 105. This is the only known illustration of members of the Kangaroo Islander community.

who often speculated in his diary about applying for the position of Protector of Aborigines, a man who gave two of his children Kaurna names. It is hardly surprising then that Cawthorne should have been interested in representing the experiences of the Indigenous women taken to Kangaroo Island. His novel names five of them, and as a consequence is one of the earliest fictions that attempts to represent Indigenous people as individuals with remarkable skills and with complex and private belief systems, confidently dealing with the complicated processes of cross-cultural exchange brought about by their contact with the sealers.<sup>61</sup>

An early insight into the Islanders and their relationships with Indigenous women is that represented in W. H. Leigh's *Reconnoitering voyages and travels with adventures in the new colonies of South Australia* (1839), which includes the only known visual representation of a Kangaroo Islander camp.<sup>62</sup> Leigh makes much of the Robinson Crusoe archetype as a way of helping him make sense of the Islander lifestyle 'beyond the pale', characterized as it was for him by associations drawn from Defoe's famous narrative: the island setting; freedom from social restraints; Crusoe's animal skin clothing; exotic fare at table.

Cawthorne was also much taken by the Crusoe analogy: there are eight references in his novel to Defoe's work. Such associations are immediate but superficial, as revealed in Leigh's famous drawing of a night scene on Kangaroo Island, in which it is difficult to pick Crusoe from Friday, European men from Indigenous women. Islander fashion and domestic realities meant that both men and women dressed in a hybrid assortment of Indigenous and

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<sup>61</sup> While there are just one or two references to Indigenous *men* in the sealing camps, there seem to have been a few boys present: after 1830 there are many more references to Aboriginal men playing leading roles either at bay-whaling stations or on blue-water whaling ships.

<sup>62</sup> Chapter XIII describes an 'Expedition into the Interior' when Leigh and a friend set off to meet 'Governor Wallen' who is described as 'the august Robinson Crusoe (an excellent personification)' (126) on his "Island home," his three wives, his two friends—man Fridays, his pigs, his some hundred and odd fowls' (124). In his journal Captain Robert Morgan from the immigrant ship *Duke of York*, also recorded meeting Wallen: 'I saw a man some what like when a boy I have seen Robinson cruso with long hair and beard a stick in his hand and verry little apperil' (Morgan's spelling, 2 August 1836, 'Journal of the *Duke of York*, 25 February 1836—10 February 1838', Mitchell Library A270: 36).

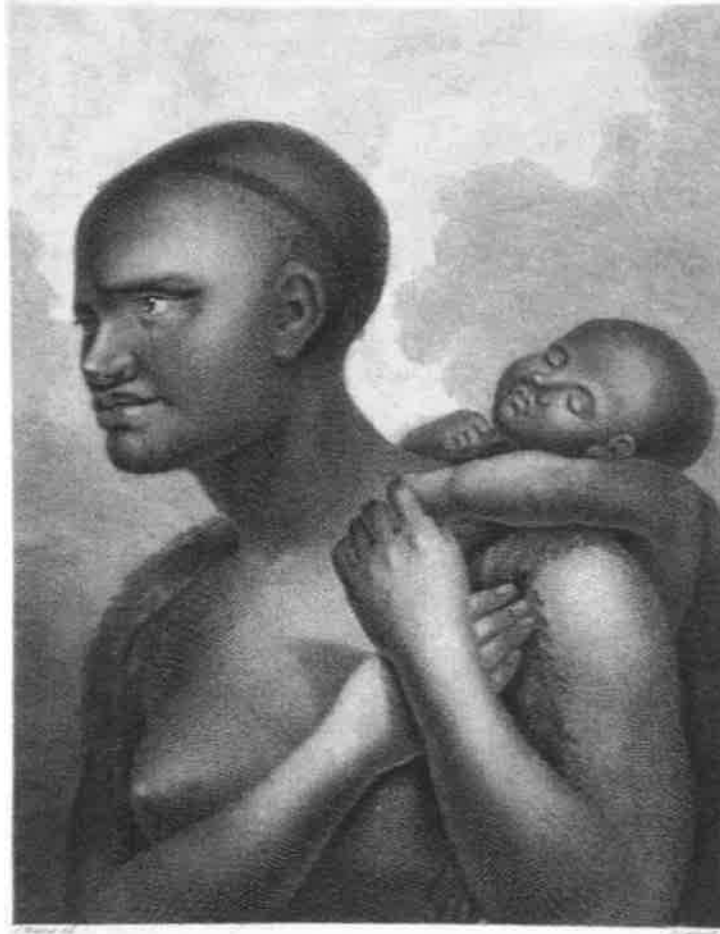


Nicolas-Martin Petit. 'Portrait of an Aboriginal woman standing', 1802, South Cape, Tasmania, watercolour, gouache, ink and pencil on paper, 30.0 x 17.5 cm; Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre. Copied from Sarah Thomas, ed., *The Encounter, 1802 Art of the Flinders and Baudin Voyages* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002), p. 171.

non-Indigenous items of apparel, footwear and headgear, typically made from various animal skins and capped off with various items of 'slop clothing', sea-faring garb. While the finer points are not often made about who was responsible for the needlework in the camps, it is more than likely that Indigenous traditions for treating animals skins and preparing clothing suitable for colder climates were followed. Certainly Cawthorne makes much of the animal skin clothing of his characters in this novel. This is the first description in Chapter IV of *Old Sam*, loosely based on Nat Thomas, which stresses not only the remoteness of Kangaroo Island but also the fact that men such as Sam might have been escaped convicts, living beyond the pale of Empire, not building a colony for the Crown, as Crusoe eventually manages on his island:

This man was as singular a specimen of humanity of the Kangaroo Island species as could be found. His outward appearance was exceedingly strange. He was naturally a man of large build, and hairy, so much so, that it was at times difficult to distinguish his natural hair from the hair of the skins he wore as clothes; he was a veritable Esau; he was clad in leggings made of wallaby skins, a waistcoat of skins, and a cap of wild cat skins—he was his own tailor, and, of course, the fit was not nice to a shade—his arms and neck were bare; he had no underlinen, for the simple reason that the nearest shop was some 1,000 miles away, and then it might not be convenient if one could call and buy, with a peering constable watching one at every step, as if he had some suspicions of having once seen the gentleman purchaser. Hence it was better to wear skin clothes without linen than certain other clothes with linen, and absurdly marked with broad A's. Well, the fit was not the best, but the odour of the suit was marvellous. It was this that gave the Islanders their unenviable notoriety. Many years afterwards, before a grave committee of Parliament, a gentleman was examined who gave it in evidence 'that they stank like foxes. (p. 37)

Recalling the Robinson Crusoe archetype, were the women submissive 'girl Fridays' who prostrated themselves before their masters, witnessing their own cultures beset by European ways and customs? There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that quite the reverse happened. Many of the abducted women may have begun as very unwilling participants in these early nineteenth century small business ventures, but the nature of that industry—



James Caldwell (Great Britain 1739–1793), 'A Woman of Van Diemen's Land'. From James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (London: 1784), plate 7. Engraving on paper, 28.1 x 22.1 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. South Australian Government Grant, 1975, 752G18.

and where it was practised—meant that Indigenous skills of many kinds, hunting methods, bushcraft, culinary knowledge and many other kinds of expertise were very highly valued; they were, indeed, crucial to survival. Rather than Girl Friday becoming like her master, on islands like Kangaroo Island it seems that at least some of the Robinson Crusoes learned more from their Fridays than they were even able to remember from their own cultural backgrounds. Some of the fascination with the Islanders seems to have been prompted by their wildness, their living ‘beyond the pale’, their seeming rejection of those lifestyles offered by the British Empire, captured comically but effectively in Chapter XI, entitled ‘A Kangaroo Island Dinner.—Baked Wild Dog.—Roasted Iguano.—Ant Eggs.—Wakeries, etc.’ in which Cawthorne makes much of the Kangaroo Island diet, manifestly based on Indigenous foodstuffs, still eaten by Kangaroo Islanders in the 1850s when the writer made his several trips across Backstairs Passage. Cawthorne’s is one of the more benign representations of the Islanders, offering insights into a lifestyle that had evolved on a number of the islands along the southern coastline of Australia, a lifestyle very close in some respects to that enjoyed by many contemporary Australians on those same islands, suggestive of post-Romantic notions about the attractions of ‘natural’ or ‘wild’ living that still have a deep appeal.

*The Kangaroo Islanders* also represents the most obvious and most dramatic form of transculturation, what has been called miscegenation, the most feared consequence of Englishmen living ‘beyond the pale’ and a taboo subject in most colonial fiction. There are two tiny fragments in this novel that show us the children of the sealers and their Indigenous women; although such moments are all too few in this novel, it is remarkable that they are there at all for a work written in 1854 in the shadow of the Indian Mutiny, a defining moment in race relations in the British Empire. It should be pointed out that many Indigenous Australians are descended from the originals of the children mentioned ever so briefly here, as Lester Irabinna



Rigney reveals in his 'Foreword' to *Alas, for the Pelicans! Flinders, Baudin and Beyond*.<sup>63</sup>

The precise nature of the status of the relationships between the Islanders and Indigenous women (and some men and boys) is difficult to determine and remains controversial. There is an on-going debate about how to interpret the fact that numbers of the Indigenous women were forcibly removed by sealers and whalers, made to work and even traded as commodities. Captain Robert Morgan records the following resonating anecdote that reveals much about at least one of the Islander's attitudes to his Indigenous companions. The captain of the *Duke of York*, the first South Australian Company vessel to make landfall in South Australia, Morgan accompanied Edward Stephens on a visit to 'Governor' Henry Wallen's and Robert Day's farm several miles upstream on the Three Wells (Cygnet) River: 'Mr. Stephens invited them [Wallen and Day] to come with their wives to see him on Sunday and have a religious service but says the men to introduce our wives was to be like introducing a dog to your presence'.<sup>64</sup> While the remark is recorded *verbatim*, Morgan provides no context for understanding its significance. To put the best gloss on it is to note that Wallen may have intended his observation to describe a class as much as a racial divide.

A significant aspect of Cawthorne's novel is that he represents the relationships between the sealers and Indigenous women as sometimes more intricate than master-slave, representing instead associations that bound together the lives of Indigenous women and the sealers based on complicated processes of give and take.

Given Cawthorne knew and interviewed some of the old sealers (who were men in their fifties and sixties when he met them), and given he made several visits to Nat Thomas's remarkable establishment at Freshfields at Creek or Antechamber Bay, where he met a number of the surviving women

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<sup>63</sup> Lester Irabinna Rigney, 'Foreword,' *Alas, for the Pelicans! Flinders, Baudin and Beyond, Essays and Poems* eds. Anne Chittleborough, Gillian Dooley, Brenda Glover and Rick Hosking, (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002) ix–xiv.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Morgan, Entry 2 August 1836, 'Journal of the *Duke of York*, 25 February 1836–10 February 1838', Mitchell Library A270: 36.

and their children, he was in a unique position to make judgments about the kinds of relationships that brought and held together individuals like Nat Thomas and his wife Bet. Like the pastoral industries of the 1840s and after, the sealing and later the whaling industries offered some opportunities for Indigenous people through seasonal work to participate in the wider economic life of the various colonies. While Michael Pearson notes that while the Two-Fold Bay whaling industry in later decades was to depend upon the labour of Indigenous people, it was the sealing industry in southern Australia that first considered Indigenous work as economically valuable, their skills essential.<sup>65</sup> The distances from Sydney or Hobart Town to their island homes were such as to require the Islanders to lead self-sufficient, subsistence lifestyles which were seasonally dependent upon Indigenous hunting, foraging and fishing skills that were crucial to their collective survival. Cawthorne's novel makes it very clear that the women's talents (and especially those of the Palawa) were highly regarded, suggesting that their status as mere slaves, sexual partners or chattels may have changed after the initial period when the seals were plentiful. After about 1810 some of the sealers began to settle down with Indigenous women on the various islands of the southern coastline. The demand for the women's special skills at seal, kangaroo and wallaby hunting and mutton-birding must have enhanced the sense in which at least some of them felt themselves to be partners with the men, which is certainly the way Old Sam's relationship with Bet is represented in *The Kangaroo Islanders*.

In *The Kangaroo Islanders* Cawthorne describes other behaviours of the Indigenous characters that have an ambivalent significance. On the one hand there is the kind of language used by the Islanders when addressing their Indigenous companions suggested by the epithet 'black crow' (p. 87), a pejorative used often enough in colonial Australia for Robert Drewe to allude to such practice in the title of his 1976 novel, *The Savage Crows*. On another

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Pearson, 'Shore-based whaling at Twofold Bay: One Hundred Years of Enterprise,' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 71.1 (1985): 19.

occasion an un-named woman remembers her lost home, singing ‘in a loud wail, a monotone of lamentations’ (p. 100). When Bet tells Sally that the men intend to raid the mainland for more women, they curse the Islanders: ‘May their kidney fat be taken! May the sorcerers turn them into trees, and may they be smitten with the sacred girdle and the tuft of eagle feathers!’ (pp. 101–102)<sup>66</sup> And when the men hear this song, they know the women ‘smell a rat’, that this ‘caterwauling means summut’, threatening them with violence if they do not desist (p. 102). Such moments in the novel hardly encourage readers to imagine these ‘singular domestic arrangements’ (p. 40) as based on love, affection, trust and mutual exchange, so later on when Suky and Brown Sal cut Flash Tom’s throat it might seem that Cawthorne’s views on relationships between the Islanders and their women were entirely negative, where the cultural and racial distinctions that separate Crusoe and his Friday yawn wide. But this murder is not presented as we might have expected, as a telling moment of self-defence or an act of resistance, for Suky is described as acting as she did because Long Tom had marooned ‘Grip Hard’ on the Althorpes, implying that she had a strong attachment to ‘Grip Hard’ and had taken revenge for her lover’s death.

There are other complicated moments in the text. When Handspike is lost in the scrub, wandering delirious around the shores of Pelican Lagoon, Bumblefoot is sent to look for him. On the one hand her skills as bushwoman are well established, but on the other hand she does her master’s bidding in leaving to search for the lost man, departing the camp ‘like a hound’. When she finds him by tracking him down, she cares for the stricken man:

‘Come long,’ said Bumblefoot, ‘boat bime-by.’ Retracing her steps, she halted by the way, and from a little native well, supplied the mate with sweet, fresh water, sat him down in the shade, and kept applying grass pads soaked in cold water to his head. The mate recovered his consciousness, and thought that Bumblefoot, though a black gin, with a halt in her leg, kindly bestowed upon her by her white lord and husband, as pretty a creature he had ever seen. Holding on by her arm, she led him through a shady but devious footpath straight to the huts.

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<sup>66</sup> All these imprecations have meaning: see the appropriate footnotes in Chapter XII.



Photograph of Mary Seymour (?), Kangaroo Island, late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Original photograph held in the Penneshaw Folk and Maritime Museum.

‘Wal,’ said Sam, ‘yer look as if all the bounce was taken out of yer, anyhow, mister.’

‘Cocoa-nut too tin, lauty sun knock ’im down,’ said Bumblefoot by way of explanation (p. 58).

The representation of a skilled and caring woman is extended by her final joke at the mate’s expense, that his skull is too thin for the Antipodean sun, which can be read as a confident assertion of her sense of being at home in a country where even a crippled woman can find a lost Englishman. This must be one of the earliest moments in Australian fiction when an Aboriginal character is described as cracking a joke.

Betty Thomas, variously known as Polecat, Old Bet and Black Bet, is the best-known of all the Indigenous women taken to Kangaroo Island: Rebe Taylor’s *Unearthed: the Aboriginal Tasmanians on Kangaroo Island* (2002) tells the fascinating and revealing story of Betty Thomas and her descendants.<sup>67</sup> Her daughter Mary is often described as the first child of a non-Indigenous parent born in South Australia.<sup>68</sup> Bet happens to be the Indigenous character represented in the greatest detail in *The Kangaroo Islanders*. In Chapter XXIII she is seen initially as an object of sexual desire, the stereotypical Aboriginal woman of colonial fiction, but even here while her attractiveness is suggested, her wildness is also recognized. Her curly hair is very typical of descriptions of Palawa women:

‘I say, Bill,’ said one, ‘do yer twig that black gal among ’em?’

‘No.’

‘Why, the bowman in old Robinson Crusoe’s boat. Don’t yer see her black curly wool? Well, I’m danged if these coves is not rum ’uns; see how she handles that boat-hook as a nat’ral born sailor.’

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<sup>67</sup> Rebe Taylor, *Unearthed: the Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002).

<sup>68</sup> While Mary Thomas may be remembered as the first child born in South Australia of a non-Indigenous parent whose birth is documented, it is very likely that there were children from earlier relationships who either did not survive until 1836 or who moved back to Bass Strait or even Van Diemen’s Land with their parents. Plomley and Henley note that in 1836 Nancy Allen was described as ‘native of Kangaroo Island’: she was believed to have been born in 1822. (Plomley and Henley 1990: 26).



TERRE DE DIÈMEN.  
PARABÈRI.



TERRE DE DIÈMEN.  
OURLAGA.

Tasmanian Aborigines: Parabèri and Ourlaga. From Péron, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes*.

‘She’s jolly fat, too, isn’t she?’ said the other, ‘and blowed if she isn’t purty; I likes the wild look o’ hern eyes. What say yer, Jim, let us go ashore, and live as they do?’

A later passage in the same chapter is just as revealing. Here Bet is again seen as a skilled boatswoman, body surfer and diver for crayfish. It should be noted that Cawthorne reinforces what can be found in other sources, that the Palawa were very skilled in various forms of hunting. Of considerable interest in the text is this authorial aside about Bet, which suggests that her status in the Islander community was certainly not justifiably described as merely that of a chattel:

Sam was proud of his wife, and she had so appropriately proved her high talent, in the Kangaroo Island sense, for to row, to fish, to swim, to fight, to endure, to devise, these were Kangaroo Island abilities, the proofs of genius, the steps of rank, the very LL.D.’s and M.A.’s of their social status. After all, of what merit are the graces of civilisation? They are only relative. It is most unphilosophical to attribute merit to the polish of polite society, for beyond its sphere it is useless. Place a civilised lady on Kangaroo Island, and she be an absolute nonentity—nay, further, she would be a hindrance. The very thing that elevated her in the one case would be her curse in the other. No, Sam was right. Black Bet pulling the bow oar, was the talented, educated, and, in relation to her sisters, the refined lady of the peculiar society of her adopted home.

As this is a narrative of fact to a very large extent, it may be here mentioned that many years after, when her island home had become known to throngs of vessels that passed and re-passed from the colony of South Australia to Port Phillip, a vessel was wrecked, and the crew and passengers got on the shore, on a wild part of the coast. They were nearly famished for water, and this same Black Bet, now an old woman, became the means of their rescue, leading them to a native well, and guiding them to a place of safety.

‘When I saw her figure,’ feelingly remarked one of the passengers, ‘coming over the sandhills, and we all rushed up to her, and she, in her quiet but still active manner led us to the native well, I could almost have worshipped her!’

Black Bet is dead now, and she lies in a spot in a small clearing of the scrub on the hillside that overlooks the very inlet of the great lagoon, where poor Handspike lost himself, and received the sun stroke that nearly killed him, as described in the early part of this tale (p. 109–10).

It is useful to see how much of what we know about Bet is suggested in this passage. She was originally from Tasmania; her birth name and date have



*Le Chien du Kangaroo.*

Louis de Sainson. Kangaroo Hunt from Dumont D'Urville, *Voyage pittoresque*, Paris, Vol. 2, opp. p. 278.



not survived, although it is believed she was born around the turn of the nineteenth century. Several stories survive of how she reached Kangaroo Island: one version has her arriving with Henry Wallen in 1819, while her daughter Mary Seymour told Herbert Basedow she was kidnapped by whalers (one of them Nat Thomas) and brought to the island in a whaleboat with other women in about 1828. She was with Thomas at Creek Bay for much of the 1830s: their three children were born in that decade. While Alexander Tolmer's 1844 letter to the *Southern Australian* does not name the 'native woman who catches wallaby' for Nat Thomas, the individual mentioned clearly is Bet, as their 'three very interesting little children' are mentioned (24 September 1844, 2c). Tolmer's 1882 book version of the same police expedition to Kangaroo Island again mentions 'old Bet', who is described as present at [William] 'Cooper's camp' in August 1844: she was obviously employed to run the wallaby snares at that time, clearly suggesting her economic independence and her value to the Islanders as a skilled worker. Tolmer describes how she and 'Old Wauber' were also employed by the South Australian police to track down Sal and Suke, suspects in George Meredith's murder.

There is also evidence from Cawthorne's other writings that he recognized that Bet was something of a free spirit. While he does not record actually meeting her in his two Kangaroo Island travel pieces written in 1853 and 1859, he does mention her daughter Mary in the former. However, Cawthorne must have met Bet in his Christmas 1852/3 visit, or at least heard plenty of stories about her, because 'W.A.C.' wrote a letter to the *Register* about 'Old Bet' in which he presents the following fascinating impression of her powers of imagination, obviously drawn from meeting her or from anecdotes from 'Old Nat' Thomas: 'Old Bet ... is a capital wallaby-hunter, a first-rate hand at the steer-oar of a whaleboat, a good sealer, and the best of bushmen or bush-women, but she has an imagination that surpasses belief'. Cawthorne then recounts several stories about Bet making various discoveries during her rambles (even finding gold) that later proved to be rather more prosaic than her stories might have suggested: she even found

some planking from the wreck of the *Osmanli*. Her husband Nat Thomas is quoted as saying that ‘Old Bet will spin yer yarns that ye never heard afore of’.<sup>69</sup>

Bet died at Antechamber Bay in 1878.<sup>70</sup> The approximate site of her grave near the Chapman River at Antechamber Bay is marked with a stone monument.<sup>71</sup> The ‘Old Bet’ who appears in *The Kangaroo Islanders* bears some similarity to these glimpses we have of her on the historical record.

Finally, a note about the ending to Cawthorne’s *The Kangaroo Islanders*.

‘We must go back, I s’pose,’ said Sam. ‘Yer all adrift here, so let’s be off.’ As the night closes over the scene, so our story draws to an end.  
From the sandhills a native warrior is standing gazing o’er the ocean.

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<sup>69</sup> *Register* 15 September 1856, 3d. Nearly a decade later in a public lecture delivered at the Temperance Hall, North Adelaide on 15 April, 1864, a lecture entitled ‘Aborigines and their Customs’, Cawthorne notes what he calls the ‘anomaly of Tasmania possessing a race of natives that betray every evidence of their Papuan origin’. He attached a parenthesis to this sentence—(Old Bet)—and then goes on to comment on what seems to him to be the fact that the ‘colour, the hair and the form [of the Tasmanian] are more closely allied to the Malay than to the African Negro’. She was obviously a woman in his thoughts. See Foster 1991: 88.  
<sup>70</sup> H.C. Berrett’s 1932 letter to Norman Tindale contains an anecdote about Old Bet’s death. Little Sal is Brown Sal, originally from Port Lincoln, while ‘Old Sal’ is Maggerelede. Suke is the third woman. Little Sal, Betty and Old Sal all appear in *The Kangaroo Islanders*: ‘Previous to Old Sal’s death when the four blacks were together, the Bells were told that there had been a row in the camp at Springy Water and that Little Sal hit Betty over the head with a stick. Betty died some time later as a result of this blow. Old Sal stated that she as buried at Springy Water near the wurlie where she died. Old Sal told this story herself to Mr. Bell of Stokes Bay. The three surviving blacks frequently visited Stokes Bay and were always well behaved’. N.B. Tindale, *Journal of Anthropological Researches on Kangaroo Island, South Australia 1930-1974 and additions AA 338/1/32*, Adelaide Museum. I am grateful to Keryn James for information about this letter.

<sup>71</sup> The plaque on the memorial reads: ‘EARLY SETTLERS IN THIS AREA INCLUDED NAT THOMAS, WHO, WITH HIS TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL WIFE BETTY, ARRIVED ON KANGAROO ISLAND IN 1827 AND FARMED AT THE EASTERN END OF ANTECHAMBER BAY UNTIL 1878. THIS COUPLE HAD THREE CHILDREN, A SON AND 2 DAUGHTERS. THE ELDER DAUGHTER MARY, BORN IN MAY 1833, WAS THE FIRST DOCUMENTED CHILD OF A EUROPEAN BORN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. WHILE NOT ALWAYS WELL TREATED, THE ABORIGINAL COMPANIONS OF THE PRE 1836 SETTLERS MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLAND. SEVERAL WERE BROUGHT FROM TASMANIA AND OTHERS MAINLY FROM NEARBY FLEURIEU PENINSULA. BETTY DIED IN 1878, AND WHILE THE ACTUAL SITE OF HER GRAVE IS UNKNOWN IT IS BELIEVED TO BE IN THIS VICINITY. KANGAROO ISLAND PIONEERS ASSOCIATION. DEPARTMENT OF STATE ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS.’

The sun throws a glare across wave and hill, and then sinks behind a wall of dense cloud and disappears within the deepest shades. Anon, and the sea also becomes swallowed up in advancing blackness.

A speck of white flickers in the thickening gloom—it is the last glimpse of Old Sam—and then it also vanishes for ever.

In the darkness, in the uncertainty, like their lives, wild and weird, so we leave them.

There, on their favourite element, over their vices, over their follies, their heroism and their barbarities, we draw the veil of night, and bid the ‘Islanders’ and their Island home farewell for ever.

Here Cawthorne uses a trope often exploited by colonial writers and painters in the last half of the nineteenth century, that Aboriginal people are in the twilight of their lives. Here, in a neat touch, Old Sam and the Islanders are also associated with that previous day, with a glorious new dawn looming with the coming of the settlers in 1836.<sup>72</sup> However, the sun did not set on the memory of the Islanders. Cawthorne’s own novel has played a role in maintaining a communal memory of the fact that the sealers were hated and feared in the mainland Indigenous communities from which their women had been taken or traded, representing the kind of behaviour that led directly to the murder of George Meredith, the culminating event of the novel.

A number of commentators have speculated that the reasons for some of the conflict in the early decades of the colony’s history may well have been a consequence of the behaviour of some of the Islanders between 1802 and 1836, who lived ‘beyond the pale’ in both senses of the phrase. William Wentworth has left this powerful—and early—journal account of an episode in 1816 at King George’s Sound in Western Australia while on route for Britain. The passengers had gone ashore to stretch their legs and met with some Aboriginal people of the district:

Just as the people were getting into the last boat, the natives, who had been sitting close to the party on shore during the whole day in the most

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<sup>72</sup> The most famous and most copied painting in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Henry James Johnstone’s 1880 painting ‘Evening Shadows’, also uses this trope. Johnstone painted it in London in 1880, and it was the first painting to be purchased by the Art Gallery—it was donated to the Gallery in 1881. The Aboriginal figures were added later: the first version had no human figures.

peaceable manner, suddenly withdrew, and a few moments afterwards there was a general discharge of spears from the direction in which they had retired, although, from the thick brush which covers every part of the bay, none of the natives could be distinguished. Several of these spears passed very close to many of the boat's crew, and one in particular just grazed Mrs. Napper's bonnet. Our people immediately fired in the direction from which the spears had been thrown, but as it was nearly dark, it is not known whether their muskets did any execution. This attack had not been provoked in any way, and it was consequently accounted for on the theory of innate treachery. Comparing the conduct of the natives on the two occasions (1802 and 1816), it is reasonable to suppose that something had occurred in the interval to bring about such a change; and nothing was more likely to bring it about than a visit from the sealers of Kangaroo Island.<sup>73</sup>

In an article published in 1895 in the *Evening News*, 'G.B.B.' quotes Major Lockyer, the first commandant of the settlement at Albany, Western Australia, who in 1827 asserted that many mainland communities were

driven to it [violent resistance] by acts of cruelty committed on them by some gang or gangs of sealers ... it is not to be wondered at that they should, as people in a state of nature, seek revenge ... <sup>74</sup>

At the end of his journey down river in 1828 and very close to the mouth of the Murray, Captain Charles Sturt notes in his *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia* that he and his party were threatened by a 'large body of natives ... fully equipped for battle'. When Sturt raised his gun, the Ngarrindjeri men demonstrated they were 'perfectly aware of the weapon' when they 'dashed out of their hiding place and retreated'.<sup>75</sup> Reflecting later on the death of Captain Collet Barker in 1831, Sturt argues that 'cruelties exercised by the sealers towards the blacks along the south coast, may have instigated ... [them] to take vengeance on the innocent as

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<sup>73</sup> W.C. Wentworth, quoted in G.B.B. 'The Pirates and Wreckers of Kangaroo Island', *Evening News*, 28 September 1895: 8-9. Held in the Mortlock Library of South Australiana, D.5013 (T).

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in G.B.B. 'The Pirates and Wreckers of Kangaroo Island', *Evening News*, 28 September 1895: 3. D.5013 (T), Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Sturt, *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia* Vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1833) 244.

well as on the guilty'.<sup>76</sup> The most enduring legacy of the Islanders may well have been the role they played in the creation and maintenance of mistrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in southern Australia. *The Kangaroo Islanders* certainly makes much of this mistrust.

F.H. Bauer's impression of Cawthorne's stature as an historical novelist is a typical one:

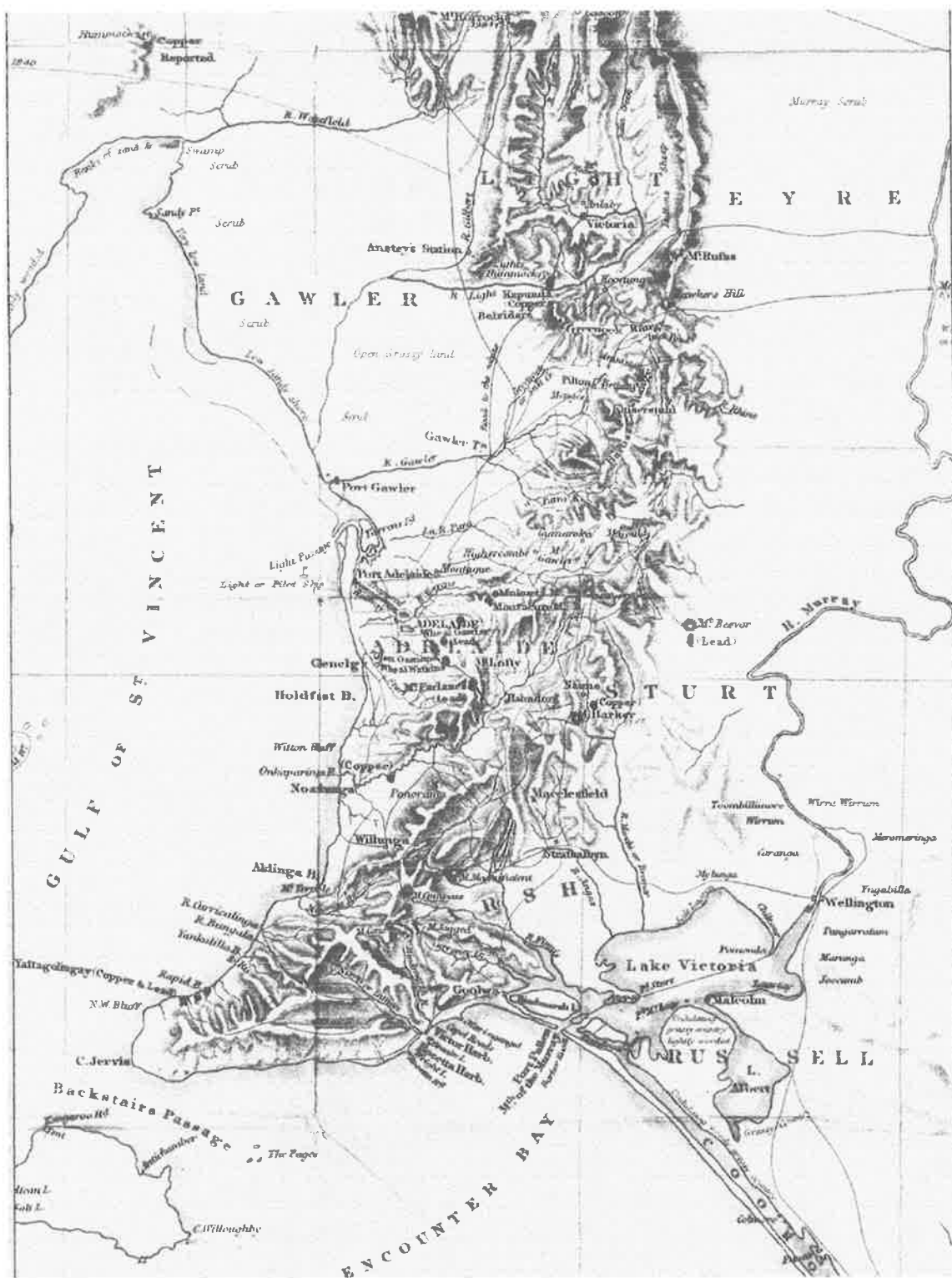
The "yarn" brings together a couple of murders, several beatings and various other outrages, and stages them all on Kangaroo Island. Cawthorne's father was the first keeper of the Cape Willoughby lighthouse ... Cawthorne [Jr] had plenty of opportunity to talk with a number of the old sealers still resident on the island. Their original tales were probably well embroidered and Cawthorne mixes several of them together in a sort of *pot pourri*. It is to be regretted that Cawthorne, in his access to the old sealers, did not write a somewhat more factual account.<sup>77</sup>

A *pot pourri* it may be. Nevertheless, *The Kangaroo Islanders* reflects its disparate sources and betrays its origins in the kinds of yarns and reminiscences that men like Nat Thomas might have taken the chance of telling a young Adelaide schoolmaster while sailing across Backstairs Passage in a whaleboat, or while lumbering up to the Sturt Light at Cape Willoughby on the back of a bullock wagon. The novel reveals the Islanders, their controversial lifestyles and ambivalent histories in glimpses, fragments and vignettes, in stories half told, in narratives in shadowy detail, without endings, in a pungent mix.

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<sup>76</sup> Sturt 1833: Vol. 2: 166.

<sup>77</sup> F.H. Bauer, 'The Regional Geography of Kangaroo Island, South Australia,' diss. Australian National University, 1959: 303.



Detail from a map drawn 'from the Surveys of Captain Frome, Royal Engineers ... 1844', engraved by John Arrowsmith for Francis Dutton's *South Australia and its Mines* (London, 1846), used as a frontispiece in John Tragenza, *George French Angas: Artist, Traveller and Naturalist 1822-1886* rev. ed. (Adelaide: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1982).

## Imperial Measurements

## Metric Measurements

### *Length & Distance*

1 inch	2.54 centimetres
1 foot	30.48 centimetres
1 yard	0.91 metres
1 mile	1.61 kilometres
1 league	5.89 kilometres
1 fathom	1.83 metres

### *Speed*

1 knot = 1 nautical mile per hour 1.852 kilometres per hour

### *Volume*

1 gallon	4.55 litres
1 bushel	36.37 litres

### *Area*

1 acre 0.405 ha

### *Mass*

1 ounce	28.3 gm
1 pound weight	0.45 kilograms (454 gm)
1 ton	1.02 tonnes

### *Temperature*

$$\frac{5}{9} \times ({}^{\circ}\text{F} - 32) \quad {}^{\circ}\text{C}$$
$${}^{\circ}\text{F} \quad \frac{9}{5} {}^{\circ}\text{C} + 32$$

£1 = 240 pence (240d) = 20 shillings (20/-). In 1966, when Australia adopted metric currency, £1 was equivalent to \$2.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Introductory.

On the southern seaboard of the vast continent of Australia, and nearly midway between the two extremes of the east and west coasts, there are two remarkable gulfs penetrating the land to a distance of two hundred miles, and dividing the great colony of South Australia into two unequal portions.

The gulfs lie parallel to each other, and, besides being the only indentations of any magnitude, except the Gulf of Carpentaria, in the whole seacoast of Australia—some 7,000 miles—they make a strong resemblance to each other. Both trend northwards, the eastern shores of both present, half way, extensive sand flats of immense area, while their western shores are bolder, with deeper water and finer harbours. The larger, Spencer Gulf, is double the length and breadth of the smaller, Gulf St. Vincent, being 200 miles by 100, whereas the latter is 100 miles by 50. The French exploring expedition that unexpectedly met Flinders in the Bay now called, from that circumstance, Encounter Bay, named these gulfs Josephine and Napoleon.<sup>1</sup> The peninsula that divides them is some 25 miles

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Flinders gives the following account: '8 April [1802] ~ Before two in the afternoon we stretched eastward again; and at four, a white rock was reported from aloft to be seen ahead. On approaching nearer, it proved to be a ship standing towards us; and we cleared for action, in case of being attacked. The stranger was a heavy-looking ship, without any top-gallant masts up; and our colours being hoisted, she showed a French ensign, and afterwards an English Jack forward, as we did a white flag. At half past five, the land being then five miles distant to the north-eastward, I hove to; and learned, as the stranger passed to leeward with a free wind, that it was the French national ship *Le Géographe*, under the command of Captain Nicolas Baudin. We veered round as *Le Géographe* was passing, so as to keep our broadside to her, lest the flag of truce should be a deception; and having come to the wind on the other tack, a boat was hoisted out, and I went on board the French ship, which had also hove to.

As I did not understand French, Mr Brown, the naturalist, went with me in the boat. We were received by an officer who pointed out the commander, and by him were conducted into the cabin. I requested Captain Baudin to show me his passport from the Admiralty; and when it was found and I had perused it, offered mine from the French marine minister, but he put it back without inspection. He then informed me that he had spent some time in examining the south and east parts of Van Diemen's Land, where his geographical engineer, with the largest boat and a boat's crew, had been left, and probably lost. In Bass' Strait Captain Baudin had encountered a heavy gale, the same we had experienced in a less degree on 21 March, in the Investigator's Strait. He was then separated from his consort, *Le Naturaliste*; but having since had fair winds and fine weather, he had explored the south coast from Western Port to the place of our meeting, without finding any river, inlet, or other shelter which afforded anchorage. I inquired concerning



broad, and is of similar shape to that of Italy. The heads of both the gulfs consist of large mangrove swamps, and for half their length the eastern shores have no definite coastline, but an extended, ill-defined, and exceedingly irregular margin of mangrove swamp from a quarter of a mile to five miles in breadth. Through this swamp, meander to apparently interminable distances deep water channels, which, shaded by the thick foliage of the mangrove, present scenes of unsurpassed exotic beauty.

At the entrance to the smaller gulf—the most easterly of the two, and on the eastern shores of which the capital of the province is now situated—lies a large and most interesting island, named Kangaroo Island<sup>2</sup> in 1802<sup>3</sup> by Captain Flinders, from the numbers of that

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a large island, said to lie in the western entrance of Bass' Strait; but he had not seen it, and seemed to doubt much of its existence.

Captain Baudin was communicative of his discoveries about Van Diemen's Land; as also of his criticisms upon an English chart of Bass' Strait, published in 1800. He found great fault with the north side of the strait, but commended the form given to the south side and to the islands near it. On my pointing out a note upon the chart, explaining that the north side of the strait was seen only in an open boat by Mr Bass, who had no good means of fixing either latitude or longitude, he appeared surprised, not having before paid attention to it. I told him that some other, and more particular charts of the strait and its neighbourhood had been since published; and that if he would keep company until next morning, I would bring him a copy, with a small memoir belonging to them. This was agreed to, and I returned with Mr Brown to the *Investigator*.'

<sup>2</sup> Kangaroo Island has had a number of names. In 1802 Flinders named it *Kanguroo* Island, while Nicolas Baudin's preference was *Île Borda*, after the mathematician and astronomer Jean-Charles de Borda. Louis-Claude de Saulses de Freycinet called it *Île Decrès* after a French admiral of that name. In 1843 the German missionary at Encounter Bay, H.E.A. Meyer, recorded *Kukakungar* as the Ramindjeri name. Norman Tindale claims the Kurna called the island *Karta*, the word meaning 'lap' or female genitalia and also insists that *Kukakungar* has a similar meaning, suggesting that these were recent names for the island given because women had been abducted and taken there. Norman Tindale and B.G. Maegraith, 'Traces of an extinct Aboriginal population on Kangaroo Island', *Records of the South Australian Museum* 4: 285. William Cawthorne also records the name *Kukakum*, A558/A4, Mortlock Library of South Australiana. George Robinson records that the 'Port Lincoln woman' Kallongoo told him that 'Kangaroo Island is called DIRK.I.YER.TUN.GER.YER.TER; WAT.ER.KER.TER, an island'. N.J.B. Plomley, ed, *Weep in Silence: a History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement* (with the Flinders Island Journal of George Augustus Robinson 1835–1839, Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987) 445–6. See, however, Rob Amery, 'Kurna in Tasmania: A case of mistaken identity', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 20, 1996: 24–50, who argues persuasively that DIRK.I.YER.TUN.GER.YER.TER means 'lived on the land'; that is, when Robinson asked Kallongoo where she was from, she replied 'the mainland', meaning not Kangaroo Island. Amery has demonstrated that Kallongoo was a Kurna woman from the Yankalilla district. The American sealing Captain Isaac Pendleton, who spent some months on the island in 1803, called the place 'Baudin's Island', which seems to have been preferred by the sealing and whaling fraternity, with 'Borda's Island' and 'Border's Land' also used until 1836 when Flinders' original name was restored by the colonists, but with changed spelling. See Anthony J. Brown, *Ill-starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000) 333.

<sup>3</sup> The question of who were the first Europeans in South Australian waters—and when—is still open. François Thijssen and Pieter Nuyts sailed the *Gulden Zeepaard* to St Francis and St Peter

animal observed on its shores.<sup>4</sup> It is nearly 120 miles long, and has an average breadth of from 30 to 50 miles, and a uniform coastline for at least two-thirds of its entire seaboard, of bold, perpendicular cliffs that chill the heart of the mariner in calm or storm.<sup>5</sup> A landing place in 30 miles is about the average accommodation, and even then

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Islands off Ceduna in January 1627, but they turned around and sailed back west across the Bight. Lieutenant Grant on the *Lady Nelson* sailed through Bass Strait in 1800, and may have landed on Kangaroo Island. Perhaps it was Grant who left the enigmatic message cut into the bark of a gum tree seen and described by W.H. Leigh in 1836: 'This is the place for fat meat, 1800'. See W. H. Leigh, *Reconnoitering voyages and travels with adventures in the new colonies of South Australia, during the years 1836, 1837, 1838* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839) 126. Cumpston notes the possibility that an American vessel the *Fairy* may have visited Kangaroo Island on a sealing expedition in 1793. He also devotes a chapter to the British whaler *Elligood* that was in King George's Sound in Western Australia in August 1800 and may have visited Kangaroo Island either in that year or the next. Flinders believed that wreckage he found on King Island in 1802 was from the *Elligood*. See J.S. Cumpston *Kangaroo Island 1800–1836* (Third Edition. Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1986) 3–5.

<sup>4</sup> Flinders describes their discoveries of the kangaroo (he spells the word *kanguroo*) as follows: 'Neither smokes, nor other marks of inhabitants had as yet been perceived upon the southern land, although we had passed along seventy miles of its coast. It was too late to go on shore this evening; but every glass in the ship was pointed there, to see what could be discovered. Several black lumps, like rocks, were pretended to have been seen in motion by some of the young gentlemen, which caused the force of their imaginations to be much admired; next morning, however, on going towards the shore, a number of dark-brown kangaroos were seen feeding upon a grass plat by the side of the wood; and our landing gave them no disturbance. I had with me a double-barrelled gun, fitted with a bayonet, and the gentlemen my companions had muskets. It would be difficult to guess how many kangaroos were seen; but I killed ten, and the rest of the party made up the number to thirty-one, taken on board in the course of the day; the least of them weighing sixty-nine, and the largest one hundred and twenty-five pounds. These kangaroos had much resemblance to the large species found in the forest lands of New South Wales; except that their colour was darker, and they were not wholly destitute of fat.

After this butchery, for the poor animals suffered themselves to be shot in the eyes with small shot, and in some cases to be knocked on the head with sticks, I scrambled with difficulty through the brush wood, and over fallen trees, to reach the higher land with the surveying instruments; but the thickness and height of the wood prevented anything else from being distinguished. There was little doubt, however, that this extensive piece of land was separated from the continent; for the extraordinary tameness of the kangaroos and the presence of seals upon the shore, concurred with the absence of all traces of men to show that it was not inhabited.

The whole ship's company was employed this afternoon, in skinning and cleaning the kangaroos; and a delightful regale they afforded, after four months privation from almost any fresh provisions. Half a hundred weight of heads, fore-quarters, and tails were stewed down into soup for dinner on this and the succeeding days; and as much steaks given, moreover, to both officers and men, as they could consume by day and by night. In gratitude for so seasonable a supply, I named this land Kangaroo Island.' The Kangaroo Island Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus fuliginosus*), an island subspecies of the Western Grey Kangaroo, was hunted in great numbers after 1802. See Robert W. Inns, Peter F. Aitken and John K. Ling, 'Mammals', *Natural History of Kangaroo Island* (Editors M.J. Tyler, C.R. Twidale & J.K. Long, Adelaide: Royal Society of South Australia, 1979) 91. However, the island's name took some time to stick. Between 1802 and 1836 many visitors called the island 'Border's land'. See Wynn J. Ruediger, *Border's Land: Kangaroo Island 1802–1836* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1980) 14.

<sup>5</sup> G.D. Chapman *Kangaroo Island Shipwrecks* (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1972) lists the shipwrecks around the shores of the island.

landing is frequently negotiated with extreme difficulty. The island, in a singular manner, is divided into two unequal portions, and so nearly is the one part severed from the other that barely half-a-mile of sand separates the Southern Ocean from the placid waters of a great lagoon<sup>6</sup> that alternately narrows and widens until it reaches the broad waters of its northern boundary, Gulf St. Vincent. The scenery surrounding the shores of this noble inland bay, and its singular termination in the broad expanse of a fine lagoon dotted with small islands, is singularly wild and romantic. In the islets of the lagoon, for countless ages, the pelican and black swan have found a home, as well as a burial place. Masses of pelican bones bear ample testimony to this fact, for it seems that to the still waters of this land-locked lake the pelican has ever turned his head in his last hours, to die in the home of his birth. This trait in the pelican character, as well as the locality we are describing, has been immortalised by the poet Montgomery in his poem, 'The Island.'<sup>7</sup>

The surface of the land is undulating, and is covered with a dense and interminable scrub, exceeding all other scrubs known on the mainland in its closeness and thorny character.<sup>8</sup> As the danger of

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<sup>6</sup> Flinders describes Pelican Lagoon as follows: 'On the 4th, I was accompanied by the naturalist in a boat expedition to the head of the large eastern cove of Nepean Bay; intending if possible to ascend a sandy eminence behind it, from which alone there was any hope of obtaining a view into the interior of the island, all the other hills being thickly covered with wood.

The entrance of the piece of water at the head of Nepean Bay is less than half a mile in width, and mostly shallow; but there is a channel sufficiently deep for all boats near the western shore. After turning two low islets near the east point, the water opens out, becomes deeper, and divides into two branches, each of two or three miles long. Boats can go to the head of the southern branch only at high water; the east branch appeared to be accessible at all times; but as a lead and line were neglected to be put into the boat, I had no opportunity of sounding. There are four small islands in the eastern branch; one of them is moderately high and woody, the others are grassy and lower; and upon two of these we found many young pelicans, unable to fly. Flocks of the old birds were sitting upon the beaches of the lagoon, and it appeared that the islands were their breeding places; not only so, but from the number of skeletons and bones there scattered, it should seem that they had for ages been selected for the closing scene of their existence. Certainly none more likely to be free from disturbance of every kind could have been chosen, than these islets in a hidden lagoon of an uninhabited island, situate upon an unknown coast near the antipodes of Europe; nor can anything be more consonant to the feelings, if pelicans have any, than quietly to resign their breath, whilst surrounded by their progeny, and in the same spot where they first drew it. Alas, for the pelicans! Their golden age is past; but it has much exceeded in duration that of man.

I named this piece of water Pelican Lagoon. It is also frequented by flocks of the pied shag, and by some ducks and gulls; and the shoals supplied us with a few oysters ...'

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery, *The Pelican Island, and Other Poems* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1828). His 'Preface' begins: 'The subject of "The Pelican 'Island" was suggested by a passage in Captain Flinders's Voyage to Terra Australis.' Selections from this rather turgid poem are given in Appendix VII, p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> William Giles wrote to G.F. Angas from Kingscote, 6 March 1839 with the following revealing

being lost on an inland route is very great, owing to the extreme scarcity of fresh water, the only mode of progress from place to place is by whaleboat.<sup>9</sup> In the entire island all the water that can be found is what is known as 'land-soaks,' at or near the coast sandhills.<sup>10</sup> In the deep gullies inland there are many rich patches of soil, but the country is for the most part sandy and sterile.<sup>11</sup> The land, though apparently poor, still nourishes a most luxurious growth of variegated shrubs and trees, the favourite and peculiar habitat of the wallaby and kangaroo. Indeed, it may be said that, at the time of its discovery, the whole island was nothing more nor less than a huge

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description: Kangaroo Island's 'interior is a vast mass of wood, which costs at least £25 per acre to grub up & clear away, before the Plough & spade can be used at all, from what I can see and hear, there are not five hundred acres in the whole Island, that are not more or less over-run with this deadly Foe to the Farmer & Grazier. I would not go a Mile into this dense mass of Underwood, on any account; the native women lead the Islanders through this bush for many Miles, but no one else would venture into the Interior.' PRG 174/1/1377, Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll describes 'Tasmanian whaleboats' as follows: '[they] followed the American pattern, double-ended and up to thirty-five feet long. Five or six feet at the stern was decked to provide storage and offer a firm support for the steersman. The boats had a graceful sheer—that is, their sides dipped smoothly from bow and stern towards the centre—with rowlocks for five or six pulling oars. At the stern, a housing was located for the long steering oar, and a little forward of the boat's centre was a socket for the mast to be stepped when required. ... Constructed of strong light wood often no more than half an inch in thickness, the boats could be carried by their own crews.' Harry O'May adds that they 'were rigged with a spritsail and jib tanned red with wattle bark. The mainsail was like a tent at night, the sprit used as a pole. ... they carried a fire-pot for cooking purposes'. They were ballasted with shingles. J.R. Carroll, *Harpoons to Harvest: The story of Charles and John Mills, Pioneers of Port Fairy* (Warrnambool: Warrnambool Institute Press, 1989) 53–4. Harry O'May *Hobart River Craft* (Hobart: Government Printer, nd) 41.

<sup>10</sup> One of the most famous of these soaks is at Hog Bay, Penneshaw, where Baudin's crew found water and left their famous inscription on what is now known as Frenchman's Rock, now covered with a dome. Baudin records the discovery of water there as follows: 'First thing in the morning on the 23rd [13 January 1803], I sent a boat off under the command of Midshipman Baudin. It was to examine the bay in which we had anchored the first time that we sighted this island and in which we had not remained because our anchor would not hold. As this bay is on the East side of the island, he was gone for the whole day, and on his return, I was informed that one could obtain a little water there by sinking wells. The men from the boat had collected some in this way and had found muddy ground under the shore, from which they had got some that was reasonably good'. Peron and Freycinet record that the place was named *Anse des Sources* (quoted Gill 1909: 127). The inscription on the rock reads: 'EXPEDI/TION DE DE/COUVERTE/PAR LE COMMEND/ANI BAUDIN/SUR LE GEORAPHE 1803. Another well-known 'land-soak' can be found at Cape Rouge, on the northern side of the Bay of Shoals, which was used by sealers from 1803 onwards and then supplied the South Australian Company settlement at what is now known as Reeves Point, Kingscote with drinking water between 1836 and 1838. The water was ferried across the bay at a cost of a half penny to one penny per bucket. 'Well Sites ... Cape Rouge', *Heritage of Kangaroo Island* (Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Like a number of regions of South Australia, farmers on Kangaroo Island much benefited from post-war research that led to the adding of trace elements to soils deficient in cobalt and copper, the seeding of pastures with various clovers and regular topdressings with superphosphate.

wallaby and kangaroo preserve, being totally uninhabited by human beings.<sup>12</sup> The herds of kangaroo were almost incredibly large, and it was for this reason that runaway convicts<sup>13</sup> from Van Diemen's Land and Sydney regarded it as a kind of paradise.<sup>14</sup> It possessed

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<sup>12</sup> In his journal entry for 23 March 1802, Flinders speculates about the possible causes of bushfires on Kangaroo Island, noting that 'there were no inhabitants upon the island, and that the natives of the continent did not visit it, was demonstrated, if not by the want of all signs of such a visit, yet by the tameness of the kangaroo, an animal which, on the continent, resembles the wild deer in timidity'. Baudin also records the tameness of the island kangaroos, noting that members of his crew had reported that they had 'seen such a large number of kangaroos of the big variety that they compared them to flocks of sheep, saying they were no wilder' [6 January 1803].

<sup>13</sup> The first non-Indigenous settlers on Kangaroo Island may have been some of the runaway convicts Nicolas Baudin found on board the *Géographe* after leaving King Island for Kangaroo Island. Baudin certainly mentions 'two Englishmen' sent ashore on Kangaroo Island to hunt kangaroos 'by lying await for them at night, as is their custom', and there are several other references to 'the hunters' (Nicolas Baudin, *The Journal of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin, commander-in-chief of the corvettes Geographe and Naturaliste—assigned by order of the government to a voyage of discovery*, trans. Christine Cornell (Adelaide: Libraries Board of SA, 1974) 464). These shadowy figures thus become the first (temporary?) European residents of South Australia (pers. com. Anthony J. Brown, December 2001). In May 1803 Baudin had written to Governor King naming eight stowaways detected at King Island. Perhaps the first non-Indigenous settlers may have been some of this group, one of who may have been Maori: Charles Williams, George Viller, John Coleman, James Gibone, Mecquete Donniss, John Cavenaze, James Fline and John Honatré (*Historical Records of Australia*, Series I. vol. iv. (Melbourne: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1915) 151). In spite of these beginnings, there is little evidence that the *majority* of the men who lived on Kangaroo Island between 1802 and 1836 were runaway convicts. While a minority were ticket-of-leave men, most were free men with naval, sealing, whaling and other nautical backgrounds. See the sealers' biographies in N.J.B. Plomley, *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829–1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 1021–1047.

<sup>14</sup> In 1854 Captain John Hart recorded some of his experiences as a sealer in a letter to Charles La Trobe, including this influential representation of Islander life: 'These islanders were principally men who had left various sealing vessels when on their homeward voyage, the masters readily agreeing to an arrangement by which they secured for the next season all the skins obtained during their absence, This island-life had a peculiar charm for the sailors, being supplied from the ship with flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, and a few slops, and living generally in pairs on the shore of one of the little bays. They cultivated a small garden to supply them with potatoes, onions, and a small patch of barley for their poultry. They thus led an easy, independent life, as compared with that on board ship. They obtained wives from the mainland; these attended to the wallaby snares, caught fish, and made up the boat's crew when on a sealing excursion to the neighbouring rocks. At Kangaroo Island, there were some sixteen or eighteen of these men. On a certain day, once a year, they assembled from all parts of the island to meet the vessel in Nepean Bay, and dispose of their skins, getting a supply in return for the following year, the only money required being a sovereign or two for making earrings.' (*Letters from Victorian Pioneers: being A Series of Papers on the Early Occupation of the Colony, the Aborigines, etc.* (Ed. Thomas Bride, Melbourne: Public Library, 1898. New edition ed. C.E., Sayers, Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1969) 52). After a successful career as a whaler, sea captain, pastoralist and businessman, Hart entered parliament, became Chief Secretary, Treasurer and three times Premier of South Australia, and was knighted. In 1864 he was driving a coach from Port Willunga to Port Elliott when the coach overturned, fatally injuring Reverend Ridgway William Newland, father of the novelist and politician Simpson Newland. Hart himself died in 1873. See Ruediger 1980: 84–5.

abundance of game, and produced good salt in its lagoons, so that it became of sufficient importance to induce whalers and sealers to call once a year and exchange brandy, tobacco, etc., for the produce of the land.<sup>15</sup>

The coasts of the island and the neighbouring islands abounded in seals, a source of emolument, however, which only served to add to the violence and cruelty of the annual or bi-annual orgies of the Islanders. Thus situated with an impenetrable land of scrub, and a coast surrounded by dangers, the Islanders regarded themselves as in a fortress, and defied any power that could be brought against them.<sup>16</sup> Living beyond the pale<sup>17</sup> of law, they had no other tie to bind

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<sup>15</sup> The following report about the supply of salt from Kangaroo Island appeared in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 12 June 1826: 'A bay, called the Bay of Shoals on the north coast next to the main, is resorted to by the fishermen on account of a salt lagoon, or sea pool, which, when dried up after the rainy season, is filled with excellent salt to the depth of 5 or 6 inches. Near it is a lake of fresh water, both being situated about 2 miles from the beach, which distance the productions [salt] are carried on the back to the boats.' The Heritage Survey Item Identification Sheet for 'Salt Lagoon' has the following: '... the mining and export of salt was one of the earliest industries on the island, with many salt camps erected near salt lakes and lagoons. The site is most likely the "White Lagoon" from which salt was harvested in 1814 by Peter Dillon.' 'Salt Lagoon', Item reference No. 60, *Heritage of Kangaroo Island* 1991. W.H. Leigh visited this lagoon in May 1837 and described it thus: 'The appearance of this lagoon is one level plain of sand, of a mile or a mile and a half in diameter. The white flaky salt which covers its surface, gives it a desolate and wintry appearance, as if it were covered in snow. From the sun's rays shining upon the crystals, it dazzles the eyes so that it is painful to look upon it. On a dull day one might fancy it was a hoar frost on a meadow at home; but this beautiful vision of the traveller is soon changed, if he raise his eye to its borders, and beheld the melancholy looking gum-trees that skirt it. This lagoon is caused by the oozing of the sea-water, which, being dried by the sun, produces the fine cottony salt and crystals that supply the island. Many vessels, in former times, touch here for the article, which was bartered by a few islanders who resided here—runaway convicts from Botany. Here these men lived their solitary Selkirk life. Their huts still remain by the borders of the lagoon, and the site of their garden was still visible' (Leigh 1839: 102). Ruediger suggests that in 1810 Kangaroo Island salt was worth £50 per ton (Ruediger 1980: 28), while G.Hull, Deputy Assistant Commissary General at Hobart Town, reported to Commissioner J.T. Bigge 14 March 1820 that a decade later Kangaroo Island salt was worth £10 a ton. The salt was well regarded for curing seal and kangaroo skins. See Cumpston 1986: 57.

<sup>16</sup> In 1826 the brig *Duke of York* under the command of Captain Thomas Whyte sailed from Hobart with troops from the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment to sail to Bass Strait to apprehend runaway convicts. The *Hobart Town Gazette* 25 March 1826 reports the return of the *Duke of York* with a number of prisoners arrested on a number of Bass Strait islands. Even though Kangaroo Island is named as 'a constant resort of these unprincipled characters', it is not clear if Captain Whyte sailed as far west as Kangaroo Island. In 1825 Van Diemen's Land separated from New South Wales and all the islands of Bass Strait were ceded to the new colony, but Kangaroo Island was not included. It appears from this report that in 1826 some 200 people were living there: 60 women, 40 sealers and 100 children. After taking runaway convicts into custody, numbers of the women and children were taken to the mainland and released. In 1831 Captain George Sutherland wrote an influential (and controversial) report describing his 1819 visit to Kangaroo Island on the brig *Governor Macquarie*. Sutherland mentions the 1826 expedition to arrest runaways and reassert, he claims, the sovereignty of the administration *in Sydney*. He notes that 'when at last some of these marauders were taken off the island, by an expedition from New South Wales, these

them than the necessity for self-preservation.<sup>18</sup> Fearing neither man nor God, they cared little for their present life, and felt not the remotest interest in the life to come, except so far as stray scraps of religious sayings and opinions might add point to a coarse jest, or piquancy to the usual blasphemy of the hour.

Yet amidst this utter abandonment they exhibited traits of heroism, and even of disinterested action. From the very necessity of their position, it was found advisable to bind themselves together in twos and threes, mates, as they termed themselves, and their mutual fidelity was not easily shaken. Such is the brief outline of the Islanders and their home, which, in a measure, will afford a key to the following story, and prepare the reader for a tale that belongs more to the old times of the bold buccaneers<sup>19</sup> than to a period so comparatively recent as that which opens with the events of the next chapter.

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women were landed on the mainland with their children and dogs to procure a subsistence, not knowing how their own people might treat them, after so long an absence.' See Cumpston 1986: 51; Ruediger 1980: 83.

<sup>17</sup> The term 'beyond the pale' means outside the limits, the other side of the fence. The phrase 'fence paling' still preserves a little of this meaning. In Ireland 'the pale' refers to those territories over which the British had jurisdiction after 1547. Cawthorne is not alone in deploying the term. See Stephen Murray-Smith's study of the Straitsmen of Bass Strait, 'Beyond the Pale: The Islander Community of Bass Strait in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (December 1973): 167–200.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Cawthorne had in mind this paragraph from the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 June 1826 which reminds us how remote the south coast of Australia was in the first couple of decades of the nineteenth century: 'It is however, a curse entailed upon the wicked, to be contented in no situation; and these rovers having again set sail, usually follow the coast ... until they reach Kangaroo Island, in latitude 35 1/2. This Island, nearly 300 miles in circumference, is the *Ultima Thule*.'

<sup>19</sup> The phrase 'bold buccaneers' appears as a quotation in the 1865–66 serial version of the novella. It may have been taken from the title of an 1817 poem by Isaac Pocock, 'Robinson Crusoe; or, the Bold Buccaneers'. It is also used in the poem variously called 'The Return of Abdul Abulbul Amir' or 'The Saga Of Abdul Ameer and Ivan Skivar', a popular recitation piece last century and the inspiration for one of the best-known 'dirty ditties' still told in certain disreputable circles today. The phrase also appears in a nautical song 'The Jolly, Jolly Roger'. When removing the inverted commas no doubt the 1926 editor did not wish to draw the reader's attention to the fact that Cawthorne seems to have known a few raunchy songs. The phrase also has another history. Writing to Colonial Secretary Campbell in Sydney 28 September 1815, the sealing master William Stewart refers to 'banditti of Bush Rangers' inhabiting the islands along the southern coast of Australia. *Historical Records of Australia* Series III, vol. II (Melbourne: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1921) 575. The word 'buccaneer' was originally applied to Europeans living rough in the West Indies who smoke-cured meat on a *boucan*. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the buccaneers took to sea and preyed on Spanish colonies and shipping in and around the Caribbean.

## CHAPTER II

### An Australian Morn.—Captain Meredith.—Mr. Ratlin.—The Rescued Sailor.

In the year 1823,<sup>20</sup> many years before the founders of the model colony of South Australia had begun to rack their brains to invent a system of colonisation that should combine all the excellencies of the ancient Greek plan,<sup>21</sup> all the vigour of the old Raleigh scheme,<sup>22</sup> and all the unity of the 'Vaterland' expatriation,<sup>23</sup> long before this period a brig might have been observed quietly anchored in the calm and beautiful waters of Antechamber Bay,<sup>24</sup> Kangaroo Island. Every spar and every rope was reflected with strict fidelity in the still water, and her hull merged so evenly into the reflection beneath that it was difficult to distinguish where the one began and the other ended. Fishes, as they darted out beneath the keel, sparkled for a moment like fiery diamonds, and vanished as quickly as they slid into the

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<sup>20</sup> The murder of Captain George Meredith that concludes this novel occurred in 1836, more than decade *after* Cawthorne gave this date to his tale. 1823 is, however, the year when George 'Fireball' Bates arrived on Kangaroo Island. If Cawthorne met Bates on one of his several trips to the island, then perhaps the date fixed itself in his mind. In a chapter he calls 'Sealing reaches its Climax', J.S. Cumpston records many ships visiting in the period 1823–4, including the *Alligator*, *Minerva*, *Water Mole*, *Perseverance*, *Nereus*, *Belinda*, *Eclipse*, *Liberty*, *Samuel* and the *Governor Brisbane*. See Cumpston 1986: 68–75. Carroll notes that the 'summer of 1820–21 ... saw a final, self-destroying flurry of sealing, "the islands seething with activity". Fifteen to twenty British vessels and about thirty American were working the Islands' (J.R. Carroll, *Harpoons to Harvest: The story of Charles and John Mills, Pioneers of Port Fairy* (Warrnambool: Warrnambool Institute Press, 1989) 44). Cumpston quotes the *Hobart Town Gazette* 10 December 1824: 'an extraordinary number of small Colonial craft are employed this season at the sealing islands in the Straits, where their enterprise has been rewarded with success unusually flattering' (Cumpston 1986: 74).

<sup>21</sup> Cawthorne refers here to the establishment of the many Greek colonies around the shores of the Mediterranean from the ninth to the fifth centuries BC.

<sup>22</sup> In 1585 Sir Walter Raleigh sent an expedition to settle what is now North Carolina, which was named Virginia after Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen. The survivors were taken back to Britain a year later by Sir Francis Drake.

<sup>23</sup> Cawthorne may refer here to the large numbers of Germans who left the 'Vaterland', most to the United States—some to South Australia—after the collapse of the Märzrevolution (the March Revolution) of 1848. Numbers peaked in 1854 when a quarter of a million Germans migrated. If this reference is to this mass movement of immigrants in that year, then the reference is very topical, in that there is some evidence that Cawthorne drafted his novella in that year.

<sup>24</sup> A bay on the north-eastern corner of the island, facing the mainland and 14 km south-east of Penneshaw, named by Matthew Flinders, *Voyage to Terra Australis*, 7 April 1802: 'The small bay where we had anchored is called the Ante-chamber [to Back-Stairs passage]'. The Chapman River enters the sea at Antechamber Bay, hence its older name, Creek Bay. Nathaniel Walles Thomas lived a mile upstream with Old Bet at a property called 'Freshfields'.



deep black shade of the vessel.

It was early morn, and such a morn as only Australia can boast, a clear, pellucid morn with not a cloud to mar the sky, not the faintest mist, nor any visible thing to blemish the unrivalled beauty of the early day. Looking up into the heavens the eye could perceive unfathomable depths; gazing upon the land, could realise its uttermost distances; and, scanning the sea beneath, could see as in a looking glass. There, at the very bottom, on a floor of pure white sand, the hungry shark was rising and falling or pausing as he watched the huge ship darkening his pathway.<sup>25</sup> There, again, was the ill-shapen 'stingerree,'<sup>26</sup> flapping its huge sides, as a bird does its wings when, hastening on some furtive expedition, it is driven like a small cloud across the expanse of heaven, or with marvellous deception covering itself with the sand until invisible to all eyes. There were the voracious schnapper<sup>27</sup> in countless numbers, moving rapidly along in all the glory of purple and gold in their search for new marine pastures. The supernatural clearness of the atmosphere caused the neighbouring highlands, the distant capes, and the range of mountains in the vicinity of what is now called Cape Jervis,<sup>28</sup> to appear singularly close. On the black rocks, black as ink, that lined some parts of the bay, sat a mass of wild sea fowl, contrastingly white.<sup>29</sup> A little higher up, on another ledge of jutting rocks sat another group of white birds, and higher still a third. In the calm

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<sup>25</sup> There are many comments about the large number of sharks, in the Bay of Shoals in particular. 'But of all fish of this island, the most remarkable is a species of shark, which attains 15 to 20 ft. (French) in length and which is very common in Nepean Bay. Day and night many of these monstrous animals were seen, surrounding the vessel in search of food. One of these formidable sharks having hooked itself, we had to reeve some tackle to haul it on board; it measured 5 metres (15 ft. 6 in.), and weighed between 500 and 600 kilos (1,100 to 1,300 Eng. lbs). Its hideous jaw was furnished with seven rows of teeth and measured when open, 74 centimetres (23 inches). There were, however, in the water sharks a great deal larger than this one.' (quoted Thomas Gill, 'A Cruise in the S.S. "Governor Musgrave", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, Session 1907-8, Vol. X, 1909, from Vol. II, 'Voyage de Decouvertes aux Terres Australes' of MM. Peron and Freycinet: 133.

<sup>26</sup> *Myliobatis australis*, the stingray, which can reach 120 cm and weigh more than 100 kg.

<sup>27</sup> *Pagrus auratus*, now spelled snapper, unfortunately declining in numbers and never seen in schools of this size, more's the pity.

<sup>28</sup> Named by Flinders 23 March 1802, after John Jervis, Earl of St. Vincent. Baudin named it *Cap de la Secheresse*, or Cape Barren. Freycinet named it *Cap D'Alembert*. The Ramindjeri called it *Parawa*, possibly meaning 'water'. As Cawthorne's travel piece included as Appendix I (p. 200) reveals, there was a natural small boat harbour there before the present-day ferry terminal was built. See Angas 1847, Plate XLV, 'Cape Jervis with Part of Kangaroo Island' for a contemporary illustration of the Cape. George Fife Angas, *Savage Life and Scenes in Australian and New Zealand* (2 vols. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1847).

<sup>29</sup> Cawthorne probably means the ubiquitous seagull, or silver gull, *Larus novaehollandiae*.

morning, though so far off, their solemn chattering, their spiteful pecking, their clamorous disputing, could be distinctly heard, tipping, tripping, and modulating with the gentle swell of the sea. Anon one of them would rise in order to visit some more favourite spot, and, clattering and spattering upon the water with outstretched wings, would leave behind, straight as the flight of an arrow, an agitated pathway, gradually melting to the finest line; or one would slyly pounce upon an unwary fish, and enjoy the whole relish without a squabble with his brethren as to the lion's share. High in the air could be seen a line of birds, with very long necks and very short bodies, but with flight even and swift. They were black swans<sup>30</sup> making a beeline across the straits to the lakes and islands of the Lower Murray. Over the island could be seen several hundreds of unwieldy pelican<sup>31</sup> flying in their peculiar way, and marking on the blue expanse as far as the eye could follow, the singular outline of the letter 'W.' They were winging their way to the seat of the primeval haunts of their race—the inland lagoons of the island.

On the deck of the brig paced a seaman of a stamp superior to the majority of his class. He had a peculiar expression of face, large and quick eyes, a good forehead, a countenance that betokened energy of purpose, great self-reliance, and acute perception. He was highly adventurous, and, like Lord Byron, who bathed in the very spot in which Shelley was drowned 'to see how it would feel,'<sup>32</sup> he dared the very things before which others had quailed. He could divine intuitively the character of men, and thus gained a strong influence over his lawless set. Although not a strong man, he was lithe and nimble. Added to his strongly marked individuality, to the intrepidity that led him to perform deeds undreamt of by others, and to the strangeness that made him follow the wild and romantic life he had voluntarily adopted, was a deep-seated melancholy, a tone of mind only to be found in the higher races of man, from which are drawn the poet, the painter, and the patriot. Apart from the peril and

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<sup>30</sup> *Cygnus atratus*, common in the sheltered waters along the north coast of Kangaroo Island and in Pelican Lagoon.

<sup>31</sup> *Pelecanus conspicillatus*, very common on the island, as still to be seen as Cawthorne describes them here.

<sup>32</sup> In 1822 Shelley was living with friends at the Bay of Lerici on the Italian Riviera. During a voyage from Leghorn to Lerici, his schooner *Ariel* sank and Shelley drowned 8 July 1822. His body was washed ashore at Viareggio, where, in the presence of his friends Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt, he was cremated on the beach. His heart was given to his wife. Shelley was later buried in Rome.

excitement of his daily life, his spirit would commune in silence with the mystery of Creation. Herein was to be found the apparent anomaly of the man, choosing, as he did, an irregular life that called into full play the qualities of daring and recklessness, yet finding in the solitariness of the midnight watch, the anxiety of the storm, the ever present mystery of the sky, and the loneliness of uninhabited lands, something that ministered to a religious mood, a mood as essential to his mental well-being as food for the nourishment of his body. In the calm of lonely, unnamed bays and islands his spiritual nature found the satisfaction that was denied him amidst the busy throngs of the city, or the worshippers of fashionable Sabbath routine. Often he would spend a moody hour in some sylvan nook, in some out of the way corner of totally unknown land, musing on the mystery of Creation. He would always manage that, at least on Sundays, his vessel should be anchored in some snug cove, in order that he might pursue on shore his Sabbath meditations unobserved. Had he been endowed with a little more of this ‘melancholic passion,’ he would have been a fit devotee in the convents of Athens,<sup>33</sup> or the fortified retreats of ‘Araby the Blest’<sup>34</sup>; with a degree less he would have been a first-class rascal. As it was, he had enough good to prevent him from becoming thoroughly bad, and enough evil to belie the good and cause his actions to appear eccentric. The sailors, who did not understand him, said, ‘He’s a bit cranky.’ His friends shrugged their shoulders, and expressed their pity or their ignorance in the words, ‘strange man.’ But those who understood him pronounced an altogether different verdict. Such was Captain Meredith.<sup>35</sup>

As the man, so was his vessel—not a rope out of order, not a spar but was in its proper place. All the running gear was hauled taut, the slack neatly coiled down in flemish coils,<sup>36</sup> all the yards squared, and the whole trim of the craft betokened a controlling mind that delighted in neatness and the fitness of all things. If he had a falling in this matter, it was with regard to the right-angled position of the yards. To him they were scarcely ever mathematically correct, and

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<sup>33</sup> That is, as an associate of the Greek philosopher Plato (c. 427–348 BC).

<sup>34</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, line 162: ‘Sabeian odours from the spicy shore/Of Araby the Blest’.

<sup>35</sup> See the Introduction for Meredith’s biography.

<sup>36</sup> A special method for coiling rope on a deck so that it might run out freely, especially used in whaleboats.

nothing short of this pleased him.

The captain, after a close survey of the shore, half muttered aloud, 'I see nothing of the boat,' which circumstance seemed somewhat to annoy him. Shutting up his telescope, he lightly ran along the deck and skipped agilely along the bowsprit to the uppermost point. There, standing erect on that slippery spot, he cast his eye aloft.

'A haul on the starboard maintopsail lift there!' he sang out.

'Aye, aye, sir,' sang out three or four hands as they growled to each other, 'What on earth does he want squaring the yards for, when there's no one for to see them, aye Bill?'

'Oh, it's for the ourang-outangs<sup>37</sup> ashore there, I s'pose.'

'Belay there!'

'Topgallant lift—so—steady—belay!'

With the sure foot of a cat he nimbly stepped from his insecure perch, and, reaching the foot of the fore mast, looked straight up to the truck.<sup>38</sup>

'Golly, Jim, if Sam drops his tar brush from the cross-trees on the skipper's mug—ha! ha! Ha! I say, tip Sam a wink,' but before the joke could be carried out they were ordered to the braces, for having squared the yards to a right angle with the masts, it was next necessary to get them in the same plane with each other.

'Port foretopsail brace a bit!' 'Topgallant brace a bit!' 'Belay!' sung out the captain; then, jumping into a boat, he shipped an oar, and quietly sculled out to a position some 100 yards ahead, and in a direct line of the vessel and its masts, so that by his advanced distance he might have the better chance of observing the angles of all the yards and ropes, each to each, and the whole as an entirety.

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<sup>37</sup> The first of a number of references in the novella that present the nineteenth century racist commonplace that Aboriginal Australians in general (and Tasmanian Aboriginal people in particular) might be seen as the 'missing link' in the evolutionary chain linking *Homo sapiens* with the great apes. See, for example, James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co. 1843) 165. In another place Cawthorne notes that 'The natives of Adelaide are very hairy, some of them covered from head to foot with tufts of hair an inch long. These tufts are close together especially on the shoulders, breasts, thighs, etc, in the ears as well as outside the hair is often more than an inch long. To see one of these hairy beings in perfect nudity up a tree resembles a large baboon—exactly—nothing can represent a Cape baboon than one of these natives, and especially if they are sitting on their haunches like a monkey' (Cawthorne 1991: 12). Here, however, Cawthorne suggests that from a distance the Islanders (European men and Aboriginal women) cannot be distinguished from each other, implying that the men have been 'detrified'. See Lyndall Ryan, 'The Extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines: Myth and Reality', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 19, no. 2, June 1972: 61–77.

<sup>38</sup> *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* has 'A wooden disc at the top of the mast with holes for halyards'.

From this position, the vessel looming up against the clear background of the sky, appeared a beautiful complex geometrical problem, a series of isosceles, equilateral, and scalene triangles, whose parts were made up of ropes and spars, one of the most intricate puzzles of human ingenuity, but, to the practised eye of the seamen, one of the simplest imaginable.

‘Mainyard there!’ shouted out the skipper; ‘a haul on the port main-brace—so there—belay!’ ‘A haul on the starboard vang!’ ‘Peak halyards a bit,’ ‘belay!’ In fact, line A was not homologous with line B, nor C with D; hence the pulling and hauling, a particularity that certainly was highly commendable in a harbour, but did appear absurdly superfluous in the wild and unknown waters of Kangaroo Island. Having satisfied himself upon the trim of his craft, he leisurely sculled back, scrutinizing at the same time all the minor details of the brig, the buoy, the stunsail booms, and any ropes that might be straggling overboard, fastened the boat to the main chains, and sprang on deck, and again surveyed the shore for the boat he so anxiously expected. At the same time eight bells rang, out clear and plaintively from the ship’s forecabin, sounding wide and far over the still expanse, and the steward announced breakfast.

The captain put down his telescope with impatience, implying distinctly enough his mortification that time had so quickly fled, leaving nearly half his crew still unaccountably absent ashore. However, there was no help for it at present, and he descended the companion-stairs to breakfast.

‘Mr. Ratlin,<sup>39</sup> what have you for breakfast?’ said the captain to the chief mate as he took his chair at the table, where already the first officer was snugly ensconced, impatiently waiting for the signal to fall to. Next to managing a ship, well he could manage his meals well—in fact, his appetite was his best chronometer on board ship; he could almost work his longitude by it, so regular were its demands.<sup>40</sup> He could anticipate meal times with a wonderful and laughable accuracy.

‘Curried schnapper, broiled barracouta, and mutton-birds,<sup>41</sup> which

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<sup>39</sup> A nautical term for small lines or ropes fastened across a ship’s shrouds like the rungs of a ladder.

<sup>40</sup> Cawthorne here refers to the crucial role played by accurate clocks in determining longitude. See Dava Sobel’s *Longitude: the True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> The Mutton-bird (*Puffinus tenuirostris* or short-tailed shearwater) is Australia’s most abundant seabird. In 1798 Matthew Flinders recorded the following description of ‘sooty petrels’

the sooner we commence upon the better we shall preserve their flavour.’ Saying this, he looked significantly to the captain, and pointed with a kind of flourish to the three dishes at once, as much as to say, ‘of which——’

‘Oh,’ said the captain, taking the hint, ‘I’ll take barracouta; it’s the finest flavoured fish that swims, at least to my taste.’<sup>42</sup>

‘Were you ever at the Cape?’<sup>43</sup> asked the mate.

‘Yes, many times.’

‘Well, that’s the place for fish, every variety, and so cheap, and such rum ways of preparing it by the slams, it makes one’s mouth water to think of *Engelede fisch*.’<sup>44</sup>

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on the wing one December morning: ‘There was a stream from 50 to 80 yards in depth, and of three hundred yards, or more, in breadth; the birds were not scattered but flying as compactly as free movement of their wings seemd to allow; and during a full hour and a half, this stream of petrels continued to pass without interruption, at a rate little inferior to the swiftness of a pigeon. On the lowest computation, I think the number could not have been less than a hundred millions’ (*Terra Australia: Matthew Flinders’ Great Adventures in the Circumnavigation of Australia* Edited by Tim Flannery (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2000) 23. The mutton-bird migrates to southern Australia from the northern Pacific and nests on many islands in Bass Strait and along the coast of Tasmania. It arrives by the end of September and lays one egg in nests in burrows lined with grass, usually on the same day, 21 November each year. It is protected in all states except Tasmania, where there a five-week season for commercial killing of mutton-bird chicks 27 March to 30 April, and a two week season for recreational killing supervised by the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service. The oily stomach contents are used in the making of pharmaceutical products (including a sun-burn lotion), the down collected for sleeping bags, the body fat used as an additive for stock food and the carcasses are brined and smoked for eating, the final product something like red herring. See D.L. Serventy, ‘Mutton-birding’, in *Bass Strait: Australia’s Last Frontier* (Revised Edition Sydney: ABC, 1987): 62–68. See also Mark Howard, ‘Archdeacon Thomas Reiby’s 1862 missionary voyage to the islands of Bass Strait,’ *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings* 38.2 (1991): 80. For two hundred years mutton birding on the Bass Strait islands has been associated with the Palawa people of Tasmania in particular, and traditional methods of catching, salting and drying the birds are still employed. Chappell Island in Bass Strait is where the most densely-populated rookeries can still be found, although numbers have much declined since Flinders saw them flying in in 1798. In South Australia (where they are protected) mutton birds nest on the Althorpes and on St Francis Island off Ceduna. W.H. Leigh observes in 1838 that ‘it requires a desperate stomach to attack such an oily mess’ (Leigh 1839: 109).

<sup>42</sup> In the booklet containing manuscripts of several poems and a small glossary (A558/A4, Mortlock Library of South Australian), Cawthorne defines ‘BARACOUTA’ as: ‘The same as the Snook of the Cape.—a species of Pike and of delicious eating.’ No doubt he has in mind *Thyrsites atun*, caught from ‘couta boats’ for the ‘fish’n’chips trade’ but overfished by the late twentieth century. Another ‘couta-like fish found in southern waters is the snook (*Sphyræna novaehollandiae*), often caught by amateur anglers.

<sup>43</sup> Cawthorne spent much of the first decade of his life in the Cape Province, South Africa, before arriving in South Australia. As Cawthorne’s diaries reveal, he obviously knew Dutch.

<sup>44</sup> In Afrikaans ‘ingele(g)de vis(ch)’ is a kind of pickled fish, such as pickled herring; the 1926 book version of the novella misspells the word, which is given as *Engelede* in the 1865 serial version. I am grateful to Peter Mühlhäusler for this suggestion. Cawthorne may also mean ‘English Fillet’ or smoked fish, well known on South Australian tables. These days Australian ‘English fillet’ is mostly sourced from South Africa.

‘Ah! I dare say it does,’ dryly remarked the captain.

‘Yes, for a skilling—that is, twopence farthing—you can get a blow-out,’ continued the mate, as he spitted a mutton-bird onto his plate.

‘However, Mr. Ratlin, leaving your reminiscences on fish for a moment, and turning to present troubles, what do you think has become of the boat’s crew? Away since yesterday afternoon, and had positive orders to be on board last night,’ rejoined the captain.

‘Drunk!’ replied the mate sententiously, at the same time putting down his second cup of coffee empty and making a kind of miserable pun upon the word as applied both to the cup and the subject under discussion.

‘Where could they get the grog from? Not a drop went ashore yesterday, I am positive.’

‘Get it from? why, lor bless you, didn’t you know of the Sydney schooner<sup>45</sup> that called here last week, and I’ll wager they are all lying drunk in the scrub at this moment.’<sup>46</sup>

‘Hang ’em,’ growled the captain, as he cracked a biscuit<sup>47</sup> across his knee, ‘here we are stuck, with no wind and no sailors, and if it comes on to blow from the N.W. we shall be in a pretty mess.’<sup>48</sup>

‘I tell you what it is,’ resumed the captain, after a long pause, during which the mate made up for leeway, in sundry tit-bits on the table, for the time caring little for the boat’s crew, whether drunk or

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<sup>45</sup> *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* has : ‘a fore-and-aft rigged ship with two or more masts, the foremast being smaller than the other masts’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has this version of the word’s origins: ‘When the first schooner was being launched (at Gloucester, Mass., about 1713), a bystander exclaimed “Oh, how she scoons!” The builder, Capt. Andrew Robinson, replied, “A schooner let her be!”’

<sup>46</sup> There are many references to this practice. In his eightieth year, George ‘Fireball’ Bates told an *Advertiser* journalist ‘strange stories of his experiences in the old days, when vessels used to call and deal with the Islanders and purchase from them at the expense of £10 or £12 property worth £1000. At various points along the coast the islanders had stores of skins of the seal, the wallaby, and the kangaroo, and the traders who dealt with them made the poor fellows drunk, and kept them so while in all the pride of sobriety they drove uncommonly hard bargains, and sold a needle or two or a few fishhooks for a sealskin worth £3. All these times the sealers had with them native women they had taken from Tasmania, or sometimes they stole a few from the mainland opposite to Kangaroo Island, and Mr Bates states that the traders who visited the island occasionally brought them a Tasmanian lubra for consideration’ (*The Advertiser*, 20 March 1880, suppl. 1b).

<sup>47</sup> Ship’s biscuit or hard tack, a kind of dried bread, mass produced by the bake-houses of the Royal Navy’s victualling yards. The normal allowance of biscuit in the navy was one pound for each man per day. See Anne Chotzinoff Grossman and Lisa Grossman Thomas, *Lobscouse and Spotted Dog Which It’s a Gastronomic Companion to the Aubrey/Maturin Novels* (Foreword by Patrick O’Brian, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997) 102–3.

<sup>48</sup> Although the north coast of Kangaroo Island is generally sheltered from the prevailing sou-westerly winds, any north-west change can cause anxiety.

sober, eaten up or drowned, lost in the scrub, or run away. 'I tell you what,' said the captain, 'our men have never been the same since we picked up that blackguard, Long Bill, off the islands;<sup>49</sup> they have been all adrift.'

'Of course they have,' replied the mate; 'and had you taken my advice you'd left Long Bill alone.'<sup>50</sup>

'What! let him starve on a rock?'<sup>51</sup>

'Yes. I tell you what it is, captain, you are too soft; that fellow is a villain, a runaway Vandemonian;<sup>52</sup> his story of starving is all

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<sup>49</sup> It may be that Cawthorne has the Irishman Bill Bryan in mind here, a sealer who lived for a number of years on Flinders Island (and possibly St Peter Island off Ceduna). Unlike most of the other Islanders, he does not seem to have arrived in South Australian waters via Van Diemen's Land or the Bass Strait islands: he is not named by G.A. Robinson (in Plomley 1966). Bryan lived with Sally (Sal, or Brown Sal) and Charlotte, both Nauo women from the Port Lincoln area, on Flinders Island, where they established a large garden and ran stock, selling vegetables and fresh meat to passing ships. Ruediger's version of the story notes that there were a number of children. When Bryan sen. died, Sal and Charlotte were taken to Western Australia by 'Black Jack' Williams, Charlotte returning after some time to live with sealers named Manson and Jackson on St Peter Island. Charlotte was the survivor of a whaleboat mishap: she managed to make it to shore and walked to the nearest settlement at Coffin Bay. Charlotte told her rescuers stories of the cruelties of the sealers. Sal seems then to have moved to Kangaroo Island where she lived variously with Harry Smith and Bob Thompson. See Philip A. Clarke, 'The Aboriginal Presence on Kangaroo Island, South Australia,' *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* (Eds. Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus, Aboriginal History Monograph 6, Sydney: Aboriginal History, 1998) 41 and Cherrie De Leuien, 'The Power of Gender,' A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the BA (Hons) in Archaeology, Flinders University, 1998. Sal may well be a source for the character 'Brown Sal' introduced in Chapter XVI of this text. Bill Brien, the 'human enigma' referred to the Nathaniel Hailes's account, is Bryan's son with Charlotte. Their story seems to have been well known: the earliest account Nathaniel Hailes's, in the *Register* 6 June 1878, reprinted as 'Bill Brien, a Human Enigma' in *Recollections: Nathaniel Hailes' adventurous life in colonial South Australia* (edited by Allan L. Peters, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1998) 129–134, which describes Bill Bryan Jr. arriving in Port Lincoln in 1845. Hailes claims that they had lived on Flinders Island, not St Peter, but it is likely that Bryan and his extended family may have lived on more than one island. See also *The Australian* 8 November 1902.

<sup>50</sup> Numbers of sealers carried the nickname 'Long': Robinson records Long Jack Riddle and Long Tom Thomas (Plomley 1966: 1015, 1016).

<sup>51</sup> Cawthorne may have based this detail on a story told by Captain John Hart about an Englishman who lived apart from his fellows on Thistle Island in the early 1830s: 'There was another class of men ... who had escaped from Van Diemen's Land ... [and who] lived generally on islands apart from the others ... there was one man who had been unvisited for three years when I saw him on this [1831] trip. This man lay under the suspicion of having murdered his original companions. He had two wives, whose woolly heads clearly showed their Van Diemen's Land origin. Although so long without supplies, he had every comfort about him. A convenient stone house, good garden, small wheat and barley paddocks, with pigs, goats, and poultry, made him quite independent, save for tea and tobacco. He had collected 7,000 wallaby skins of a kind peculiar to this island, very small, fine-furred, and beautifully mottled in colour. I sold these in Sydney for the China market' (Hart 1854: 52).

<sup>52</sup> An escaped convict from the penal settlements of Van Diemen's Land, which was renamed Tasmania 1 January 1856 in an attempt to wipe away the convict stain.



gammon.<sup>53</sup> I'd bet ten chaws o' tobacco to one it was a planned scheme, his pals were handy, and he has just persuaded you to take him for his own ends; take my advice, and give him the slip.'

'Oh! nonsense, Ratlin, you have a down upon the fellow; keep your weather eye open, and all will be right.'

'If I had not done so,' remarked the mate somewhat sarcastically, 'the night you took the fellow off you would have never seen daylight again, or I either.'

'Oh! pooh, pooh! it was a rock you mistook for a boat.'

'And pray will you say it was a mistake of mine, when I found the fellow with a lantern and his cap behind it standing on the shank of the anchor? Wasn't that a signal for the blackguards close under the rocks?' asked the mate, with some warmth.

'Why—yes,' stammered the captain, 'that *did* look suspicious, and therefore I hauled up.'

'Yes; and if we don't mind that fellow will have the old brig on the rocks<sup>54</sup> yet with his kind offers to pilot<sup>55</sup> us on this wild coast.'

'Well, well, we shall see. Let's be up, and if we don't see the boat, then send the gig ashore, and you must ferret them out by hook or by crook.'<sup>56</sup>

'Aye, aye!' muttered the mate, as he ascended the companion-way; 'and if I don't give that fellow the slip, I'll eat 'possum<sup>57</sup> for a month.'

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<sup>53</sup> An interesting word, believed to be 18<sup>th</sup> century in origin, meaning pretence, humbug, 'bullshit'; of convict origin. Often used by writers when attempting to represent nineteenth century Indigenous or working class English.

<sup>54</sup> One of the stories that circulated about the Islanders was that they were 'wreckers', although there is little evidence for the practice. While Ruediger records a story about a gang of sealers led by John Williams responsible for murdering an entire ship's crew on the west coast of South Australia (Ruediger 1980: 81), it is more likely Cawthorne heard reports of the loss of the *Britomart* on Preservation Island in Bass Strait in 1840, which some writers assert was wrecked by a gang of sealers. James Munro was charged but not convicted with the possession of salvaged goods. See Stan Blyth, *The Britomart's Gold and Other Stories* (Prospect, Tas.: S. Blyth, 1990) 17–30.

<sup>55</sup> Nat Thomas listed his profession as 'pilot' when applying for work as a light keeper at the Sturt Light, Cape Willoughby. He is also described as a 'pilot' in Captain John Hart's 1836 list of Kangaroo Island residents (Cumpston 1986: 140). Later he worked for Colonel William Light, helping survey the coastline in 1836 (Ruediger 1980: 53–54). In Cawthorne's 1853 travel piece Thomas is quoted as saying he 'went surveying under King', with Phillip Parker King, the 'king' of the Australian coast. No doubt Thomas learned how to use a sextant during his various stints in the Royal Navy and whaling.

<sup>56</sup> This phrase may have a nautical meaning. "Hook" and "Crook" ... [are] the names of headlands on either side of a bay north of Waterford, Ireland, referring to a captain's determination to make the haven of the bay in bad weather using one headland or the other as a guide. <http://alt-usage-english.org/excerpts/txbyhook.html> Accessed 11 November 2002.

<sup>57</sup> This remark is footnoted in the 1865–66 serial version, with the remark 'The flesh of the opossum is very rank and offensive'. It is the only footnote given, anticipating the footnoting in

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such later Australian historical novels as Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1874) and Simpson Newland's *Paving the way: a Romance of the Australian Bush* (1893).

### III.

#### The Hot Wind.—The Lost Boat.

Upon reaching the deck, cat's-paws<sup>58</sup> of wind were visible here and there, scarring the smooth face of the sea; but little other sign of a breeze was abroad. The sun shot down his fervid rays, and the mirage already danced its mystic mazes out and away in the straits—now called Backstairs Passage<sup>59</sup>—commingling with the heave of the waters, and causing the most deceptive and singular phenomena that can well be seen; now sinking the distant capes till barely visible, then elevating and distorting their outline, till it became a difficult matter to retain one's belief that the land was the same as that seen a couple of hours before.

'Signs of hot weather, captain!' remarked the mate, 'and a roaring hot Norther! I always noticed this was the case in my last trip here—though that's many years ago—these Northers give little warning, but come down powerfully strong.<sup>60</sup> On the mainland, the wind is as hot as from an oven; when it sweeps over a gum tree, the leaves fall down in a shower; they are burnt with the heat. I'd advise you to slip and run well under the land, so as to bring the west horn of the Bay<sup>61</sup> nearer to the nor'ard of us; there is good shelter close under the land—close enough to enable you to scrape the barnacles off the ship's bottom, and ride quite snug just outside the surf.'

'I hardly like your advice, to run the brig slap up in that nook. How shall we get out again if a shift of wind comes from the S.E.?'

'Oh! as the night falls the wind dies out,' replied the mate, 'and we can run back off this point.'

'Very well, get the anchor up and let us be off,' said the captain. The vessel soon glided through the glassy, yet singularly perturbed waters. Far and wide—right away to the middle of the passage—the

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<sup>58</sup> A breeze or 'puff' rippling across the surface of a calm sea.

<sup>59</sup> The name of the passage between Cape Jervis and Kangaroo Island, named by Matthew Flinders as it offered a 'private entrance as it were, to the two gulphs; I named it Back-Stairs Passage. The small bay where we had anchored is called the Ante-chamber'. Flinders, *Voyage to Terra Australis*, 7 April 1802. It was named 'the dirty gutter' in some colonial accounts: see *Register* 14 September 1895: 5e.

<sup>60</sup> Cawthorne describes here a distinctive weather phenomenon in southern Australia: the hot wind from the north in summer that precedes a cooler sou'westerly change. Such weather conditions can be deemed 'red alert' when the threat of bushfire is extreme.

<sup>61</sup> Cape Coutts is the headland at the northern end of Antechamber Bay.

waters heaved and blinked and swirled, sank and rose, and here and there danced in gigantic ripples; now bearing the appearance of a mirrored repose, anon assuming the smooth, swollen, glistening of mighty blisters, scalded, as it were, by some fiery blast. Headland and cape and distant mountains, all partook of the mystic forms of some supernatural change. Behind the distant panorama to the northward, a bright glow of red-hot air defined the sharp outline of the break between earth and heaven. All nature seemed troubled, as if it were a living sentient being, instinctively cowering before the dread outpouring of the northern gale—the withering blasts of the terrible hot wind. Higher and higher grew the reddening arch; puffs of contrary and circular currents flew hither and thither; fish leapt from the surface of the water; the vessel moved in an unsteady manner; the sea-birds darted tip and down, seaward and landward, and remained not a minute in one place; the distant patches of tall scrub on the island, ever and anon, shook their heads violently, and then lapsed into immobility. The mirage gambolled abroad in its wild career, revelling in its mad pranks with rock and wave—with a dash sinking the boldest promontory, then lifting up from obscurity the tiniest stone, commingling sky, earth, and sea in a fluid phantasmagoria, and shaping, altering, renewing dissolving, and distorting everything within the range of vision. Now great belts of ripples, miles in extent, barred the ocean in alternate stripes,<sup>62</sup> in mirror-like bands, like a sea of quicksilver relieved by deep scarifications of indigo blue. A distant, though faint roar, came booming seaward; another and a quicker reverberation ran along the cliffs; quicker still and louder came a third thundering over the main. Very thin, but peculiarly distinct, could now be seen on the extreme verge of the horizon a line of the deepest hue, advancing with rapid strides down the gulf, while a continued hum and a deep moaning<sup>63</sup> preceded it.

‘There’s the norther,’ sung out the mate; ‘it will soon be down upon us.’

‘Get a few more fathoms of cable up,’ said the captain, ‘it looks an

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<sup>62</sup> Flinders noticed this phenomenon while sailing along the west coast of South Australia, naming Streaky Bay accordingly.

<sup>63</sup> In a ms. held in the Mortlock Library, Cawthorne records strange sound effects in the gulf waters: ‘On the vast sand flats in the St. Vincent’s Gulf—when the tide rises—one of the most singular and unearthly noises may be heard—on a calm night, caused by the tide—running over these shoals—perhaps an inch requiring probably a couple of hours before it comes to that depth. A558/A4, Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

ugly customer; we must not be caught napping.’

The line came on, now visible in all its fury, a strange wall of tossing, scudding waves rolling over the placid sea, roaring louder and louder, and eating up, as it were, every secondary movement of the mighty waters, scattering the illusory appearances of the air, and absorbing them into its own grand march of power and might. Louder grew the tumult beyond, yet in and around the vessel the water reflected every angle and point of the hull. The bobstay rose and fell, and met another bobstay in the water beneath, and the figure-head, with its scimitar, nearly struck another figure-head with its scimitar below, and the cabin-boy, looking out of the stern windows, saw his own image, and wondered whether his mother would think he had grown. Another vessel, with all its parts and appurtenances complete, was moving along beneath the other, and as the one rolled with the in-shore swell, so the other rolled, bowing to each other in friendly recognition, keel to keel, mast to mast, and rope to rope.

The hot wind swept on in its fury, and as the word was given to let go the anchor, the blast struck the brig with full force and felled her to the very sea, boring her gunwale beneath the waves, and madly wrenching every rope, straining every spar, and trying the vessel to the very last verge of endurance. Had the first gust not abated, neither wood nor iron, however cunningly put together, could have borne that frightful tussle with the giant wind of the North; as it was, she gradually came head to wind, the yards were braced sharp up, more cable paid out, and the vessel was prepared, for some dozen hours, to do battle with the storm and fury of a scorching hot wind, comparatively secure from the favouring shelter of the neighbouring coast, within four hundred yards of which she now lay snugly anchored.

‘That’s a stiff’ner!’ remarked the captain; ‘but we are all safe here. It might as well have spared our jib and topgallant sail; it’s worse than a Sydney brickfielder,<sup>64</sup> confound it!’

‘It’s dreadfully hot!’ said the mate. ‘By heavens, we melt like the

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<sup>64</sup> A hot dry wind, usually carrying dust, coming over Brickfield Hill in Sydney. H. Hussey, *Colonial Life and Christian Experience* (Adelaide: Hussey & Gillingham, 1897) 55, calls the brickfielder ‘a terror to the citizens of Adelaide in the early days of the Colony [and] generally occurred when a fierce hot wind had been blowing in the early part of the day, followed ... by a change of wind from the west, just as cool as it had previously been hot.’

pitch and tar of the deck. Here, boy, bring me a white jacket!<sup>65</sup> It will never do, captain, to go ashore now; we shall be fried alive, or get lost in the scrub, and there'll be old Harry<sup>66</sup> to pay, and not a drop of water to drink.'

'Very well,' replied the captain; 'it is hot. When the rascals get sober they'll come off; but any rate, give them a couple of shots, and hoist a whiff;<sup>67</sup> perhaps that will wake them up.'

This was accordingly done; but, though closely watching every bush and brake, and the white sea beach, nothing was seen—man, bird, nor beast—none daring to venture out in that terrible heat. Nothing was heard, save the roar of the hot blasts of wind and the confused jumble of waves on the rocky reefs.

'I say, Tom,' said one of the foremastmen, 'isn't this as hot as that place the parsons are always preaching about? I remember being in a shepherd's hut, when the cove outs with his frying-pan, claps in his bacon, sticks it in the sun, and fries his rashers for three of us, with nothing else but the blessed sun, and not a stick of fire—sort o' heavenly food, you know.<sup>68</sup> Well, it *was* hot that day; when you lifted the rug that hung over the bunk millions of blow-flies was crawling all about; they couldn't stand the heat nohow.'

'Avast there, Bill! lay your yarn on it as thick as the hawser, but don't make it as big as the mainmast.'

'Hold on, you green 'un. What I'm telling yer, I can take my affydavy on; well, 'pon my soul, there was a deep well near the hut, when yer looked down ye'd see all up the sides every sort of bird—magpies, crows, parrots, all sorts, holding on for life. The poor devils was seeking a bit of cool; and more than this, a great school of martins<sup>69</sup> and them there sort boarded us right slap bang in the hut. Well, the shepherd and me and another chap bolts clean out—do yer see we was taken all aback, so we cut. Well, we gie the birds the hut, and we sits down here and there under a gum tree. Well, I has a pannikin o' water boiling hot for to drink, I'm blessed if the little birds didn't jump on my castor,<sup>70</sup> arms, and flippers; I never seed nor

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<sup>65</sup> Nautical garb for hot climates, still worn by navy personnel. See Herman Melville, *White-Jacket; or, The World in a Man-of-War* (London: Richard Bentley, 1850).

<sup>66</sup> Synonymous for Hell.

<sup>67</sup> *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* has 'flag hoisted as a signal' dating from 1693.

<sup>68</sup> This story about Australian summers was often told to 'new-chums' and is a stock device in colonial fiction.

<sup>69</sup> Probably the common Welcome Swallow, *Hirundo neoxena*.

<sup>70</sup> Salt and pepper shakers.

tell of sot a thing afore.

‘What for, Bill,’ said Tom.

‘For to drink, you lubber. Do ye see there was no water, and they fall down and die all about, and then some twigs the pannikin, and down they jumps and drinks it all up. The shepherd and me caught lots o’ birds that day with our hands.’

‘I say, Bill, did yer put any salt on their tails?’

‘Yes, Jack, we did, and cotched a fine bird.’

‘What was that?’

‘Vy, a laughing-jackass.’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ roared all, ‘that slewed yer, Dick.’

‘Forrard there,’ shouted the mate, ‘and pump some water on the decks to cool ’em a bit.’

‘Aye, aye, sir!’

Near the wheel, and as well under the bulwarks as he could stow himself, squatted the mate, half dead with the heat.

‘Mr. Ratlin,’ sang out the captain, who, with spy-glass in hand, was leaning over the taffrail, alternately watching the beach and the gale, ‘I wish you would just step here and see if you can make out the boat. It was left, you know, near that sand hummock, but it’s gone now.’

The mate tried to rise, but in vain. The pitch of the decks had melted with the great heat, and fixed him to the planks. He tugged and pulled, and at last succeeded, but it was at the expense of his clothes. ‘Well, I be hanged,’ he exclaimed, as he dived down to his cabin.

A roar of laughter from the captain, the steward, and the cabin-boy followed him; but, as the mate was in no humour to be joked with, the cabin-boy and the steward had to stand clear all the remainder of the day.

‘What do you think has become of the boat?’ sang out the captain down the skylight, really alarmed for the safety of his whaleboat that had been visible in the early morning as a black speck on the sandy beach.

‘Melted,’ roared out the mate below, who was too much taken up with his own discomforts to care for ought else.

‘I wish Long Bill, the boat, and the hot wind fifty fathoms in *Hacklebarney*,’<sup>71</sup> growled the mate.

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<sup>71</sup> The *Shorter Oxford* has ‘barney’, a small cart used in underground mining. Does this refer to a

‘I think the tide has washed her away,’ continued the captain.

‘More likely they have stowed her away in the bushes,’ rumbled the mate, ‘they are up to all sorts of devilries in this pirate’s nest.’<sup>72</sup>

‘Well, then, Mr. Ratlin, you had better be getting ready and go ashore as soon as the gale drops and find the boat.’

‘Aye, aye, sir.’

Leaving the vessel for awhile, let us follow the doings of the boat that had caused all this anxiety, and whose absence was so inexplicable.

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deep mine somewhere, close enough to Hell? There is a Hacklebarney State Park in Morris County, New Jersey, USA.

<sup>72</sup> Cawthorne may be referring here to a famous description of the Islanders in a journal by Major Lockyer, ‘Expedition sent from Sydney in 1826 to found a settlement at King George’s Sound, W.A.’ in which he describes them as ‘a complete set of pirates going from island to island along the southern coast of New Holland from Rottneest Island to Bass’s Straits, having their chief resort or den at Kangaroo Island, making occasional descents on the main and carry off by force females, and no doubt when resisted carry their point by superior effect of the firearms with which they are armed with [*sic*], besides which each man has a large knife and a steel along by his side. Being left by vessels on these islands with sometimes a month or two provisions at most and do not call for them again for eight, ten, fourteen months and sometimes longer, from the nauseous food these people make use, and the miserable life they lead, it is no wonder they become actually savages. The great scene of villainy is at Kangaroo Island, where, to use the term of one of them, a great number of graves are to be seen, and where some desperate characters are, many of them runaways from Sydney and Van Dieman’s [*sic*] Land.’ Quoted H.P. Moore, ‘Notes on the Early Settlers in South Australia Prior to 1836’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia South Australian Branch* Session 1923–4, Vol. XXV, 1925: 125. See also *Australian*, 8 November 1902. By 1836 the Islanders seem to have done something about their public image; John Woodforde, surgeon on board Colonel William Light’s *Rapid*, notes that the colonists ‘were given to understand that they were little better than pirates, but were agreeably surprised to find them a civil sort of men’. Diary entry 6 September 1836, ‘Abstract of a voyage to South Australia in the surveying brig “Rapid”—Capt. Light—written by John Woodforde, M.R.S. & L.A.H., surgeon of the surveying party, August 19<sup>th</sup> 1836’, PRG 502/1/2, Mortlock Library of South Australia.



## CHAPTER IV.

The Cruise Ashore.—Long Bill.—Snakes.—Old Sam.

‘Shove off,’ sang out Mr. Handspike,<sup>73</sup> the second mate.

‘Mind,’ said the captain, ‘and be back as soon as possible; and as you don’t know whom you may meet with, keep your powder dry.<sup>74</sup> You understand me? Keep your weather eye open.’<sup>75</sup>

‘All right,’ said the mate, ‘and if you hear any firing, why don’t forget us, that’s all.’

These precautions were not altogether unnecessary, when the unprincipled character of the men they had to deal with is taken into account. Mysterious disappearances had from time to time taken place, as were well known to the one or two traders that came to the island;<sup>76</sup> and although the dense nature of the scrub was such as to lend a touch of probability to the usual explanation of ‘lost in the bush,’ still an uneasy impression was left on the mind that there was peculiar danger in landing on the island.

‘Here you, Long Bill, tell us how to steer, for I know nothing about this blessed island; it seems to me a wild-looking sort of a hole.’

‘Aye, aye, sir!’ said Long Bill, as he gave his dirty opossum-skin cap<sup>77</sup> a pull to starboard, and ran his eye over the distant sandhills to note a slight indenture that served the Islanders as a landmark for the best beaching place on the coast;<sup>78</sup> for, although the bay was smooth, yet there was a nasty ground swell,<sup>79</sup> and at times a stupendous ocean swell set in round the point now known as Cape

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<sup>73</sup> The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* has 1615 for first recording, and ‘wooden bar, used as a lever or crow, especially on shipboard’.

<sup>74</sup> Be prepared, from the days of muzzle-loading weapons, the gunpowder for which was carried in horns or other containers. Damp powder made the weapon useless.

<sup>75</sup> Be prepared. Sailors on watch in the days of sail were charged to look to the weather side, into the wind, watching for signs of squalls.

<sup>76</sup> In fact many ships traded with the Islanders between 1802 and 1836. J.S. Cumpston lists the names of many vessels and their crews. See J.S. Cumpston *Kangaroo Island 1800–1836* (Third Edition. Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1986).

<sup>77</sup> Flinders’ crew was the first to make hats from island marsupials: Flinders informed Baudin ‘as a proof of the refreshments to be obtained at the large island opposite to it [Cape Jervis], pointed out the kangaroo-skin caps worn by my boat’s crew; and told him the name I had affixed to the island in consequence’, *Journal* 8 April 1802.

<sup>78</sup> Probably near to the spot where the Chapman River meets the sea.

<sup>79</sup> A heavy sea usually caused by a distant storm, or a sea still running after heavy weather.

Willoughby,<sup>80</sup> which made it oft a matter of great peril to launch or beach anything.

Briefly indicating the spot to the second mate, Bill resumed his oar, and by his vigorous strokes put all the other men on their mettle.

‘Pull away, ye sons of guns,<sup>81</sup> pull!’ sung out Bill, ‘and let’s see what sort of stuff ye’re made of.’

‘You’re in a hurry to get ashore,’ growled the bowman, as he in vain endeavoured to prevent the boat being altogether pulled round by Long Bill.

‘Why yer see he has four beautiful black gins a-crying for him in the scrub there away,’ remarked the stroke oar, ‘and in course he is pulling like mad for to see the wives of his bussum.’

‘Easy, Bill easy,’ said the mate, as Long Bill in a flurry nearly caught a crab,<sup>82</sup> and sent the water flying over the stern sheets, giving the second mate a good wetting.

‘Honour bright, Long Bill, how many wives have you got just now?’ asked one of the men.

‘Three now, but four a while gone; but all hands are going to get some more soon; then, I’m — if I don’t get six, like old Porkey.’<sup>83</sup>

‘Well, I’m blessed,’ said all hands.

‘When I gets back to Wapping, I’ll tell the Bishop of Lunnun,’ said the bowman.

Long Bill was a remarkable fellow in his way, that is to say he was a remarkable scamp. He ranked high in daring, blackguardism and

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Named by Matthew Flinders 7 April 1802 after a village in Lincolnshire which means ‘at the willows’. Geoffrey Manning, *Manning’s Place Names of South Australia* (Adelaide: the Author, 1990) 336.

<sup>81</sup> A British naval expression, originating on the West Indies station, for a bastard, an illegitimate child. On some ships women were allowed on board, and if children were born (the father unknown) then an entry of ‘son of a gun’ would be made in the ship’s log.

<sup>82</sup> A false or faulty pull at an oar, when the oar is not dug deep enough below the surface.

<sup>83</sup> Cawthorne uses this spelling only once in *The Kangaroo Islanders*; elsewhere it is Porky, which might refer to a ‘runaway whaler’ called *Pirkey*, a man obviously known to Mary Seymour, the daughter of Nat Thomas and Old Bet. She told Herbert Basedow that (in the 1820s and early 1830s?) *Pirkey* was living on Kangaroo Island with a number of Aboriginal women who had been stolen from Cape Jervis. ‘Quite a number of children are said to have been brought to the world as a result of this importation, but according to Mrs. Seymour, they either died from natural causes or were knocked on the head directly they were born’. There does not seem to be any other published reference to *Pirkey/Porky*: he is not named by G.A. Robinson, and does not appear in any of Cumpston’s shipping lists. Phillip Clarke suggests without evidence that *Porky* is another name for Henry Wallen, which does not seem likely, given Cawthorne also has a character named ‘Governor’ Worley. It may be that here *Porky* is based on Henry ‘Fireball’ Bates, who Cawthorne probably met in Hog Bay on one of his visits, and who is still remembered for running pigs there. See Herbert Basedow, ‘Relic of the lost Tasmanian race—obituary notice of Mary Seymour.’ *Man* 81 (1914): 161.

utter lawlessness. Of tall stature and powerful build, stupid in intellect, he had the brute force and instinct of the animal man, allied with some portions of his superior intelligence, but unredeemed by a single trait of his nobler and higher nature. If he killed a man or so, it was not from a particular delight in blood; if he stole, not from a desire exactly to steal; if he betrayed his closest mate or a friend, it was not from a love to act thus; but his whole life was an expression of lawlessness. He had no self-respect, and all his actions could be explained by this utter self-abandonment. In a word, he was the chief of blackguards; even his associates put no faith in him, beyond the hour. Long Bill was a rogue among rogues; he was tolerated for his invaluable aid in being ever ready to be the leader of any daring, treacherous or foul game. Amongst the drunken he was the most drunken; amongst brawlers the most unscrupulous, using not only the fist but the knife. He was dreaded and hated by all, but still they could scarcely do without him. At present we will not further describe him, but let his character develop itself as the story proceeds.

The commission of the second mate was simply to procure the assistance of some of the islanders to get a cargo of salt from the great lagoons in the middle of the island, and to trade for wallaby and kangaroo skins;<sup>84</sup> and it was a matter of astonishment that this visit to the shore should have been rendered necessary, as the custom of the Islanders was to come off in their boats as soon as a vessel dropped anchor. Their not having done so rather led Captain Meredith to suppose that they had moved away, in accordance with their erratic habits; but Long Bill was so positive that he had seen smoke far inland, and had offered to go and see, that the boat was sent ashore to hunt them up.

‘Keep her off a bit,’ sang out Long Bill; ‘now give her stern to it. That’s it!’ The boat rose upon a huge green surf, spun in on its crest at the rate of thirty miles an hour, and was beached at the very top of high-water mark as easily as if carried in the arms. It was highly exciting, that grand sweep in the midst of the boiling soap-suds of

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<sup>84</sup> Even after settlement Kangaroo Island wallaby skins seemed to have enjoyed quite a reputation as high-quality shoe leather. The Islanders made their own versions of colonial ugg boots, no doubt learning from their Indigenous women companions. The skin of a freshly-killed wallaby was tied around the foot—fur in—and left on until it dried, after which the moccasin kept the shape of the foot. Wallaby skins were also sewn together using sinews from the animal’s tail to form rugs which were very popular among the colonists to sleep or sit on. A rug of 40 skins was worth 40 shillings (*Observer* 25 September 1844 6).

the wave and the deafening din of the mad career of the giant roller; the sand was churned up and flew ahead and around, and left large streaks between the timbers of the boat. The smallest deviation from the 'dead on' course<sup>85</sup> and the boat would have been toppled over and over, and every man swept up, like so many corks, to be sucked back with the undertow to inevitable death.

'Beautiful! beautiful!' sang out the mate, as, all jumping out, and with a few tugs placing the boat high, dry and safe above high-water mark, they prepared themselves for their inland expedition.

'Come, look alive, mates,' said Bill, as he eyed with suspicious glances the manner in which the crew were adjusting their pistols, 'we have no robbers here.'

'Maybe you have *hourang houtangs*, Master Bill,' said Jim. 'I was told that hereabouts them sorts o' animals was seen with big woolly heads.'<sup>86</sup>

'Avast, Jim,' said another, 'them sort of critters scud about the Inges, the Dyaks, and those covies.'<sup>87</sup>

'But I say, Bill,' sung out a third tar, 'a mate of mine told me a year gone or so, that chaps in these islands smelt like foxes.'<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> 'Dead on' means holding the boat exactly on line, at right angles to the wave. The word 'dead' is often used in nautical language: 'dead reckoning', 'dead ahead' and so on.

<sup>86</sup> Cawthorne here refers to the characteristic hair of the Palawa, the Indigenous people of Tasmania, a signifying detail found in most colonial representations of these people.

<sup>87</sup> Incas? The Dyaks are the Indigenous people of Borneo and Sarawak, rumoured in the nineteenth century to be headhunters. 'Covy' is convict slang for cove, fellow or bloke, possibly from the Romany *kova* for thing or person, according to *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

<sup>88</sup> This suggests that Cawthorne had access to a copy of *Evidence respecting the Soil, Climate and production of the South Coast of Australia*, a document prepared for the committee formed in London for the purpose of establishing a colony in South Australia. Captain George Sutherland, of the brig *Governor Macquarie*, had visited Kangaroo Island on a salt and seal-skin buying voyage in 1819. In 1831 he reported to the committee about Kangaroo Island in a well-known paragraph about the Islanders: 'There are no harbours on the south side of the Island, but in fine weather a ship may anchor for a few hours in any place along the coast, but must always be ready to slip in case of the appearance of bad weather, It was the case with me at the south-west side of the Island, There are no natives on the Island; several Europeans assembled there; some who have run from ships that traded for salt; others from Sydney and Van Diemen's Land, who were prisoners of the Crown. These gangs joined after a lapse of time, and became the terror of ships going to the Island for salt, etc., being little better than pirates. They are complete savages, living in bark huts like the natives, not cultivating anything, but living entirely on kangaroos, emus, and small porcupines, and getting spirits and tobacco in barter for the skins which they lay up during the sealing season. They dress in kangaroo skins without linen, and wear sandals made of sealskins. *They smell like foxes*, They have carried their daring acts to extreme, venturing on the mainland in their boats, and seizing on the natives, particularly the women, and keeping them in a state of slavery, cruelly beating them on every trifling occasion; and when at last some of the marauders were taken off the island by an expedition from New South Wales, these women were landed on the main with their children and dogs to procure a

‘Go it, Bob. I’ve seen and smelt ’em, for all the world like Robinson Crusoes and Fridays.<sup>89</sup> Look out, and you will smell ’em, too.’

‘I say, Bill, why do you smell like foxes?’

‘Do I smell like a fox, you lubbers?’ sang out Bill in no pleasant humour; but the truth was Bill had taken care to leave his wallaby skin clothes behind.

‘No, of course not, and good reason, too, you’ve got precious little of any sort of clothes.’

‘But,’ persisted one of the speakers, ‘if ye haven’t hourang houtangs you have bunyips<sup>90</sup> and boomer kangaroos<sup>91</sup> as high as the mainmast, haven’t yer?’

‘Go to——; heave ahead, and stick together, or you’ll be lost in the scrub, and then you will be saying we rubbed you out, and be——to you.

‘We’ll keep an eye on you,’ said the mate, significantly. The party now set off in Indian file, Long Bill leading, and the mate bringing up the rear.

‘I tell you what, Mister Bill, your infernal garden here has more thorns than roses. Golly, there goes another bit. All my clothes’ll be gone soon,’ exclaimed Jim, as he tried to disentangle his jacket from

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subsistence, not knowing how their own people might treat them after a long absence. There are a few even still on the island, whom it would be desirable to have removed, if a permanent settlement were established in the neighbourhood’. Sutherland’s report is given in *South Australia Outline of the plan of a proposed colony to be founded on the south coast of Australia, with an account of the soil, climate, rivers &c. with maps 1834* (Hampstead Gardens, SA: Austaprint, 1978) 50–51). My emphasis.

<sup>89</sup> The first of many references to Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* scattered through the novella. Leigh 1839 may well have been a source for Cawthorne’s *The Kangaroo Islanders*. One of the first books published about the new colony, it contains a vivid representation of meetings with a number of the Islanders, and the only known visual representation of the Islanders and their ‘native wives’. Chapter XIII describes an ‘Expedition into the Interior’ when Leigh and a friend set off to meet ‘Governor Wallen’ who is described as ‘the august Robinson Crusoe (an excellent personification)’ (126) on his “‘Island home,” his three wives, his two friends—man Fridays, his pigs, his some hundred and odd fowls’ (124). In his journal Captain Robert Morgan from the immigrant ship *Duke of York*, also recorded meeting Wallen: ‘I saw a man some what like when a boy I have seen Robinson cruso with long hair and beard a stick in his hand and verry little apperil’ (Morgan’s spelling, 2 August 1836, ‘Journal of the *Duke of York*, 25 February 1836–10 February 1838’, Mitchell Library A270: 36).

<sup>90</sup> Mythical water monster, *bunib*, from the Wemba-wemba language from NW Victoria/SW New South Wales. Appended to a manuscript copy of three poems by William Cawthorne held in the Mortlock Library (A558/A4) are several pages of definitions, including one of the bunyip. See Steve Hemming, ‘The Mulgewongk, a Water Monster or “Bunyip” of the Lower Murray River region of South Australia,’ *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia* 23.1 (1985): 11–16. Some believe that seals swimming up rivers along the south coast may have inspired such story-telling.

<sup>91</sup> A ‘boomer’ is large, mature kangaroo.

the dreadful Kangaroo Island thorn, one of the most terrible and impervious thorn bushes in the continent of Australia.<sup>92</sup>

‘Look out, there aft!’ sang out Long Bill, who gave a kind of half jump, ‘there’s a black snake<sup>93</sup> just under this log.’

‘Well, I be hanged, that’s cool,’ replied all hands.

‘I shan’t go a step further.’

‘Nor me.’

‘Nor me.’

‘Nor me.’

‘Bah! go on,’ said the mate.

‘Well, here goes then,’ and away they all cut, each giving a long jump over the log, which probably had no more effect on the snake beneath than a lot of kangaroos flying over. Sweltering for a mile through the heavy scrub of prickly acacia,<sup>94</sup> clothes torn, and hands bleeding, they, suddenly emerged on, and ascended a short, sharp series of low hills, whose rocky ridges ran cross-ways with the path they were travelling.

‘Oh, curse this country! Gad, it’s as bad as walking end on, on top of a wall with glass,’ said the mate.

‘Oh!’ growled another, as he tripped up and lay sprawling on the hard rocks.

‘Broached to?’

‘Aye, Jim, sarves yer right for grinning at me,’ said Bob.

‘Where the——are yer taking us to?’ bellowed out the rest, very cross and very sore. ‘Who can walk on these glass bottles?’

‘Half a mile more,’ replied Bill, ‘and we’ll come to anchor; they are only feather pillows.’

‘Pillows be——’ growled the whole crew.

‘By the holy, if yer don’t we’ll ’bout ship, and send yer to your father, Old Nick.’

‘I say, Bob, wouldn’t “old square-yards” like to be here digging these ere stones? There look at that, now, isn’t it splendacious, like a fine piece of green glass.<sup>95</sup> I’ll bone that.<sup>96</sup> Why, you old sea-horse,

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<sup>92</sup> The Kangaroo Thorn, *Acacia paradoxa*, well known to bushwalkers.

<sup>93</sup> Probably the Black Tiger Snake, *Notechis ater niger*, very common on the island, or the Red-bellied Black Snake, *Pseudechis porphyricus*.

<sup>94</sup> *Acacia paradoxa* again.

<sup>95</sup> Cawthorne seems to be suggesting here that in the future gemstones will be found on Kangaroo Island. If so, this is a very early reference to such deposits, which were not worked until much later in the nineteenth century. Hallack records visiting the gem fields that were situated off the road from Penneshaw to Cape Willoughby, where ‘claims are being worked by an

don't yer see there are plenty of all sorts hereabouts? Put your specks on and look at that, and that; but none of your tricks, if the skipper gets wind of it he'll stick in this snake-trap a week, and I tell ye, I don't half like them hourang outangs, and black lubras.'<sup>97</sup>

The party now descended to a flat as beautiful as the neighbouring hills had been rough and rugged. A small track pursued its devious course through a magnificent patch of splendid grass waist high, which bordered a calm sheet of water hemmed in by tall and graceful trees, a variety of the gum, known on the island by the name of 'narrow leaf,'<sup>98</sup> and the reach of water was fringed with gigantic specimens of the tea-tree,<sup>99</sup> whose singular white and ragged bark hung in deep festoons to the water's edge. The change of scene was so sudden and so pleasant, that it affected everyone.

'Now we'll find their shake down,'<sup>100</sup> said one. 'Here's a place for a cabbage garden,' said another.<sup>101</sup>

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Adelaide syndicate for tourmaline, with a possibility of diamonds and other precious stones' (E.H. Hallack, *Kangaroo Island: Adelaide sanatorium, with map and illustrations by 'a native'* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas. 1905) 8, 42). There seems to be some confusion about when the gems were found, in that E.L. Bates claims that 'Green tourmalines were discovered under a yacka by George Cox in 1906 and proved the genuine article. Great excitement prevailed and many claims were pegged and some good stones procured, but the field soon gave out.' (E.L. Bates, 'History of East End of Kangaroo Island', *Kangaroo Island Past and Present: Being a Short History of the Oldest Settlement in South Australia* (Adelaide: Kingscote Country Women's Association, 1951) 26. Cawthorne was very interested in mineralogy, as his friendship with (and biography of) Johannes Menge indicates. In December 1855, Cawthorne held an exhibition of 200 drawings and watercolours, 'all having a colonial interest attaching to them', together with collections of shells, fossils, minerals and precious stones at his Academy in Victoria Square.

<sup>96</sup> To steal, according to the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*. 'Flash' or convict slang.

<sup>97</sup> Pejorative term for Indigenous women, possibly from a Tasmanian language, according to *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

<sup>98</sup> Kangaroo Island narrow-leafed mallee, *Eucalyptus cneorfolia*, common especially on the eastern end of the island.

<sup>99</sup> Tea-tree, *Melaleuca acuminata*, very common around salt lakes. Numbers of commentators have described how the Islanders made a tea from the leaves (hence its name). The policeman Alexander Tolmer notes that '[t]hey all use it, by boiling the green leaves. It is not unpleasant, particularly with sugar and milk. It acts medicinally and purifies the blood'. (*The Register*, 25 September 1844, 3e)

<sup>100</sup> *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* has "a bed made upon straw loosely disposed upon the floor", any makeshift bed.

<sup>101</sup> It may be that Cawthorne has in mind his friend Johannes Menge's attempts to grow cabbages at Kingscote. W. H. Leigh describes 'Old Mr. M—, the geologist, has been most indefatigable in his attempts to cultivate a few culinary vegetables [at Kingscote]. He has enclosed a small plot of sandy land, the best in the neighbourhood, and may be seen, with his German pipe in his mouth, toiling at it from sunrise until nightfall. He showed me, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April [1837], cabbages just sprung up; he shaded them, faddled with them, and went to look at them every hour; and this day, 30<sup>th</sup> June, they are grown to the enormous height of one inch and three quarters standard measure; so that, if they continue to flourish at the same ratio, they will be fit to be given to the pigs this day in four years!' (Leigh 1839: 113)

‘My eye, Tom, look here, see there’s a mob of black swans, sailing about for all the world as if they were at home.’

‘I say, Jack, why don’t yer get a gin, and come and spend your honeymoon here? And—Snakes!’ roared out Long Bill; away rushed the fellows, right and left, and, of course, met the snake full in the face. Up reared his snakeship in pure self-defence, down tumbled a couple, one against the other, both singing out for help, and cursing their eyes and limbs, Long Bill, the mate, the captain, and everything above the earth and under the earth.

Long Bill ran up. He exclaimed angrily, ‘What a row you kick up, you great lubbers, about a snake; wait till you see them as thick as a stunsail boom, nicely coiled up in bed, with yer catawauling over a eight-footer.’

‘Back your topsail,’<sup>102</sup> sung out one and all, ‘we don’t go a step further in this cursed snake hole. Hallo! there goes another; hear him through the grass, a regular gallinipper;<sup>103</sup> look out, all hands, yer chawed up if he grabs yer.’ This determination was not altogether unreasonable, for as many as one hundred and fifty large deadly black snakes, from four to ten and twelve feet long, have been killed in one season, in a space not exceeding half-a-dozen acres, and the locality where Bill had brought them was remarkably abundant in these venomous reptiles.<sup>104</sup>

To make matters worse, as one of the seamen was hastening along, he unfortunately blundered on top of another snake, but most probably the very one that had already caused so much alarm. The snake, of course, being thus attacked, very naturally returned the compliment, and striking with his head, fixed his fangs firmly in the loose canvas trousers of the sailor, who thereupon dashed right away among his friends calling upon everybody for help. Happily for the man, the habits of the snake are such that, when once fixed on its prey, it does not repeat the bite, but remains fastened until the victim

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<sup>102</sup> Slow down, calm down. ‘When a sailing ship wishes to ‘heave to’ or stop without using her anchor, the sails on the mainmast were trimmed so that the wind would be on the wrong side, working in opposition to the sails on the other two masts, thus causing the vessel’s way to be checked. The manoeuvre was called ‘backing the main-yard’ or ‘backing the main tops’l.’ Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard work-songs and songs used as work-songs from the great days of sail* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) 591.

<sup>103</sup> The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* has early nineteenth century, US, large mosquito.

<sup>104</sup> Cawthorne is here quoting figures about annual snake kills collected from his father at the Sturt Light at Cape Willoughby during his Christmas visit of 1853–4, as his travel piece makes clear. See ‘Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island’ *Observer*, 15 January 1853, Appendix II.



drops or it is itself torn off.<sup>105</sup> Rushing round the sailor, his mates soon killed the snake, and relieved the poor fellow from an overwhelming horror that was partly ludicrous and partly serious.

High words followed this misadventure. All hands were for returning at once to the ship, yet the mate, who was with them in this respect, had some hesitation in doing so, and therefore urged Long Bill in no polite terms to tell them how far they really had yet to go.

While they were wrangling and making the woods resound with their fierce altercation, a man might have been seen quietly seated on the top of a boulder of quartz rock within a couple of hundred feet just over their heads, concealed by a deep screen of bushes on a point of a hill that projected sharply into the small glade below, where the angry seamen were standing. In fact, if the truth must be told, he had dogged their steps from the first moment of their landing; he had seen them leave the brig from a celebrated spot well known to the lawless crew that squatted in this particular part of the island, and known amongst them as the 'look out,'<sup>106</sup> he had kept near them all the way up to where they now were, and had enjoyed their perplexities in his own peculiar manner, and when the last row took place had calmly sat down to see it out without being observed. This man was as singular a specimen of humanity of the Kangaroo Island species as could be found.<sup>107</sup> His outward appearance was exceedingly strange. He was naturally a man of large build,<sup>108</sup> and hairy, so much so, that it was at times difficult to distinguish his

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<sup>105</sup> Cawthorne seems to have had something of a phobia about snakes, as this fanciful comment suggests.

<sup>106</sup> Alex (or Alecs) Lookout, 10 km or so to the north-west of Antechamber Bay, is reputed to have been a whalers' lookout from the days of shore whaling before settlement in 1836. Who 'Alex' was is now not known.

<sup>107</sup> There is circumstantial evidence that this character, Old Sam, is loosely based on Nathaniel Wallis Thomas, one of the most famous of the Islanders. There are at least five stories about how 'Nat' Thomas arrived on Kangaroo Island: his own version of events as told to Cawthorne suggests that he remained behind on the island after absconding from an un-named sealing vessel. However, the Thomas family memory has Thomas and William Everett arriving in 1827 in a whale boat from Tasmania with two Tasmanian women, Sophie and Little Sal. Nunn quotes B.C. Mollison's Notes on the Thomas family from his ms. 'The Tasmanian Aborigines' which contains the story that Thomas was working as a pilot on the Derwent where he heard stories of 'Ultima Thule', absconding in the boat with Everett and the women, landing first at Encounter Bay and then later settling at Antechamber Bay. See Jean M. Nunn, *This Southern Land: Kangaroo Island* (Kingswood, SA: the Author, 1989): 39. In an interview in the *Advertiser* 27 December 1886, George 'Fireball' Bates claimed Thomas jumped ship in 1830 from the *Mary*, a vessel sent from Sydney to search for the Sturt expedition.

<sup>108</sup> Nathaniel Thomas was known as a man of great physical strength. Ruediger quotes Harry Bates describing Thomas as an old man in his eighties using one hand to force an unbroken colt back on its haunches and hold it there. See Ruediger 1980: 54.

natural hair from the hair of the skins he wore as clothes; he was a veritable Esau;<sup>109</sup> he was clad in leggings made of wallaby skins, a waistcoat of skins, and a cap of wild cat skins<sup>110</sup>—he was his own tailor, and, of course, the fit was not nice to a shade—his arms and neck were bare; he had no underlinen, for the simple reason that the nearest shop was some 1,000 miles away, and then it might not be convenient if one could call and buy, with a peering constable watching one at every step, as if he had some suspicions of having once seen the gentleman purchaser.<sup>111</sup> Hence it was better to wear skin clothes without linen than certain other clothes with linen, and absurdly marked with broad A's.<sup>112</sup> Well, the fit was not the best, but the odour of the suit was marvellous. It was this that gave the Islanders their unenviable notoriety. Many years afterwards, before a grave committee of Parliament, a gentleman was examined who gave it in evidence 'that they stank like foxes.'<sup>113</sup>

Old Sam eyed the party below cautiously and carefully. Long habits of suspicion engendered by the wild life he led with some of the worst specimens of vagabonds had made this necessary. This habit, indeed, was of the utmost importance to him in the thousand and one instances of sudden and imminent peril. 'Well,' said old Sam to himself, 'Long Bill will stick some on 'em yet if they don't mind; I'll just give them a bit of a divarsion,' so saying he quietly slid down, and parting a bush or two stood in their midst.

'Hourang! Houtang! by all that's good,' exclaimed all hands, as they uneasily bobbed about, and felt for their pistols. Sam looked on

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<sup>109</sup> *The Bible*, Genesis 27: 10–12: 'And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man', as Monty Python taught us all.

<sup>110</sup> An intriguing detail which at first glance might support the belief that feral cats lived on the island before 1836, where they were hunted by an early 19<sup>th</sup> century Dr John Warmesley. No doubt Cawthorne had the 'native cat' in mind, one of the carnivorous, long-tailed spotted marsupials of the genus *Dasyurus*, possibly *D. viverrinus* or *D. maculatus*, both extinct on the island today. Leigh describes shooting one of these animals that had been raiding their poultry: 'a large wild-cat, half as large again as the domestic one. He had a head resembling the tiger, amazingly long fangs, and was spotted upon a brown ground with raw umber, with a large bushy tail, resembling, in some degree, the lion's, having the bush at the end: though not a very large animal, it must inflict a fearful bite, as its incisive teeth were an inch long. They are very numerous [on Kangaroo Island]. On the last visit he paid us, he slew five fine chickens. Like the fox, he kills more than he wants, and sucks their blood. The fowls appear to be aware of his approach, as chanticleer and his harem crow most lustily—an unusual thing, unless they are disturbed' (Leigh 1839: 96–7).

<sup>111</sup> The implication is, of course, that Old Sam is a runaway convict. There is no evidence that Thomas was ever a convict.

<sup>112</sup> The mark of the convict, the 'broad arrow'.

<sup>113</sup> See note 88.

and said nothing; in fact, he enjoyed the consternation that his unwonted and outrageous dress occasioned.<sup>114</sup> Folding his bare and hairy arms on a rude walking-stick that he, like all the Islanders, carried as a protection against snakes, he calmly surveyed the whole group, while they in return stood gazing in a stupefied fashion at him.

‘Yer have been praying a bit,’ said old Sam, in a slow but distinct utterance.<sup>115</sup> In the language of old Sam ‘praying’ meant cursing and swearing; he never swore, he always ‘prayed.’ He used to say, ‘My father was a Quaker, and them folks never swears, but allers prays; so I prays, and never swears. I am a powerful saint o’ praying; so I just come to lend a hand, for I can do a little in that line myself. But hadn’t you better go ahead, Bill, and let them gemmen have something to scoff?’

‘What have yer got to eat here?’ said Jim.

‘Snakes,’ said old Sam. ‘We roasts them. Now, then, here we are, this is my crib,<sup>116</sup> that’s Bill’s and that’s Porky’s.’<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Cawthorne may be referring here to a number of anecdotes about the impression Nat Thomas and other Islanders made on the colonists when they arrived on Kangaroo Island in 1836. ‘One evening in September [1836] ... Nat Thomas made his appearance in their camp, which was the pitched at Hog Bay River, and excitedly told his mate that a large ship crowded with people had anchored off Kingscote in Nepean Bay. This was the John Pirie, having on board the first instalment of the South Australian Company’s immigrants. The next day at dawn Bates with his mate, three native women, and several dogs started off to welcome the newcomers, but were received with shouts of alarm and a general stampede of men, women, and children up the cliff from the beach. The two islanders—clothed in opossum skin shirts, and with coats, trousers, and boots made of the skin on the red kangaroo—were mistaken for savage inhabitants of the new country.’ *Advertiser* 27 December 1886, 6f. In a letter to the *Advertiser* 27 December 1886, 6f, Henry Alford also recalls the colonists’ alarm when the Islanders (one of them Nat Thomas) appeared in their midst in their animal skin clothing and with their wives in tow. Mary Thomas also met Thomas later in 1836, recording this impression in her diary: ‘a resident on the Island many years but his appearance, I thought, was more like that of a savage than an Englishman. This man by some mischance fell overboard and as the tide was running strongly at the time, he was carried some distance from the vessel before assistance could be rendered, and although he could swim well enough, he was watched with considerable anxiety, on account of the sharks, which were known to be numerous—an oar, however, was thrown to him, on which he got astride, till the Boat reached him, and when he came again on the deck, he shook himself, as a dog does when just out of water and took no more notice of the matter’. *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836–1866* (Ed. Evan Kyffin Thomas, Adelaide: Thomas, 1925) 45.

<sup>115</sup> The speech of some of the Islanders attracted the attention of the colonists in 1836. Captain Robert Morgan noted that ‘Governor’ Wallen’s companion, William Day, ‘appeared to be a rough sailor though left of sea and had bing on the island about        years and had become quite natified his voice appeard to have lost his mother tongue as regards voice’ (Morgan’s spelling, 2 August 1836, ‘Journal of the Duke of York, 25 February 1836–10 February 1838’, Mitchell Library A270: 36).

<sup>116</sup> *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* has ‘Thieves’ slang. A dwelling-house ... berth’.

<sup>117</sup> From here on Cawthorne spells the name ‘Porky’.



Louis de Sainson, 'Sealer's Hut, Westernport'. From *Voyage of the Sloop 'L'Astrolabe' ... under the command of Dumont d'Urville ... 1826-1829* (Paris, 1830-1835) pp. p. 55.

## CHAPTER V.

### The Islanders and their Homes.—A Row.—Caught in a Trap.

Such a scene now presented itself that not only took the mate's party by surprise, but was of a character that excited their curiosity to the utmost. In all their experience they had never seen such singular domestic arrangements.

The huts were built of wattle filled in with clay, their roofs a thatch of broom.<sup>118</sup> On the whole they were tolerably comfortable. About a dozen<sup>119</sup> black women were busily employed in preparing and attending to the preservation of kangaroo and wallaby skins.<sup>120</sup> A host of half-caste children of all ages were wandering about, some busy and some playing.<sup>121</sup> There was an air about the whole place

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<sup>118</sup> W.H. Leigh records the following details about 'Governor' Henry Wallen's 'farm-house' on the Three Wells [Cygnet] River inland from Kingscote: 'we reached the wigwam ... a square some ten feet long by five, the sides resembling the letter A, composed of the bark of a tree; the little fence in front of the same size as the interior, to "keep all vexatious intruders away," and render it snug.' Wallen's farm on the Cygnet River was later taken over by the South Australian Company and Wallen 'became a ruined outcast, and a wandering drunkard' (Leigh 1839: 123-4). A remarkable photograph is now held in the Penneshaw Maritime and Folk Museum on Kangaroo Island, representing a woman with six dogs in front of a wurlie. She is believed to be Mary Seymour, Betty Thomas's daughter. I am grateful to Keryn James for bringing this photograph to my attention.

<sup>119</sup> The figure of a dozen Cawthorne uses here has some historical interest, in that it is clear that between 1802 and 1836 there were many Aboriginal women resident on Kangaroo Island, numbers of them originating from Tasmania. The true figures are impossible to calculate, but given that estimates of 500 Europeans have been made, then it is likely that as many as hundreds of Aboriginal women spent time on the island in the three decades in question.

<sup>120</sup> Alexander Tolmer records the following about the mode of catching the wallaby: 'They get a new piece of canvass, with the threads of which they make a set of strings eighteen inches long, with a noose. The set is three hundred, being the number required to make a profit. The wallabys [*sic*] have numerous established pathways through the scrub, in every part of the island, and across these the snares are placed, so that when the wallaby springs along the path, it is almost sure to be caught. These nooses the black women visit about day-break, and generally return loaded about nine or ten o'clock. Their masters skin the wallabys: the skins are then extended on sticks till they dry, and are afterwards put up in bundles, fifty in each. ... These [skins] are worth sixpence each in Adelaide [in 1844 and] ... suit admirably for upper-leathers of shoes. ... They are also made into rugs and coats, by the Islanders, with sinews drawn from the tail of the wallaby. A rug of forty skins is worth forty shillings.' Alexander Tolmer, *Register*, 25 September 1844, 3e. In many early accounts the word is given as 'wallaba'.

<sup>121</sup> This tiny glimpse of the children of the Islanders and their women is all too brief. Cawthorne may have met or heard about such characters as 'Black Harry' Wallen, son of 'Governor' Henry Wallen, who is mentioned as 'a native of Kangaroo Island' and a cabin-boy in 1839 on the *William* bound for Hobart in a vignette in H. Hussey's *Colonial Life and Christian Experience* (Adelaide: Hussey and Gillingham, 1897) 36-38. Harry Wallen was educated in Hobart and later

that irresistibly conveyed to the mind an impression of gazing at a mode of life unheard of. The wild scenery, the howling dogs,<sup>122</sup> the rough desperadoes, without shoes or hat, clad in skins, their hair on their heads burnt to the colour of hay and matted and tangled to the last degree; the black native women, some quite naked, others dressed like the men, talking and screaming in their savage and unrestrained manner; the uncouth appearance of the swarm of naked children, and the absence of all the usual adjuncts of even the rudest civilised life, formed the strangest picture, unparalleled in the most barbarous tribes of man, or the poorest sections of civilised communities.

The place smacked of the freebooter and the outlaw; the very scent of the locality suggested the lair of the wild beast.<sup>123</sup> The resemblance

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went to sea as a whaler. He is named 'Henry Whalley' as a pall-bearer at the funeral of his ship-mate from the *Runnymede* William Lanney (or Lanne, the last so-called 'full-blood' male Tasmanian) in Hobart in March 1869. Whalley died in the shipwreck of the *Benclough* at Macquarie Island in August 1877. See the appropriate years of B.C. Mollison & Coral Everitt, *A Chronology of Events Affecting Tasmanian Aboriginal People since Contact by Whites* (Hobart: University of Tasmania, 1977). See also Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Second Edition, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996) 214–217, especially the appalling story of the desecration of Lanney's grave and the stealing of his body. Nathaniel Thomas and Old Bet had three children, the second of whom, Mary, Cawthorne obviously knew. Alexander Tolmer also met Mary, her brother and her sister in 1844, describing them as 'three very interesting little children, who combine the intelligence of the white with the activity of the native' (Alexander Tolmer, *The Southern Australian*, 24 September 1844, 2c). The first child was born in 1830, a son, Lorne, also known as Sam. He joined a whaler at Antechamber Bay when he was 14, wrote to his family from Liverpool and was last heard of sailing for China. He never returned to the island. The second child was Mary Seymour, her birth at Wilson's River 13 September 1833 recorded in a birthday book now in the possession of the Golder family, direct descendents. Mary died 9 September 1913. The third child's name was Jenny, born 1839, who married Thomas Simpson, postmaster at Hog Bay. Norman Tindale interviewed Mary's son the 80-year-old Joseph Seymour in 1937, discovering that the family continued to use 'Hobart Town language' into the third generation, some fragments still surviving in 1937. See Norman B. Tindale, 'Tasmanian Aborigines on Kangaroo Island, South Australia', *Records of the South Australian Museum*, Vol. VI, 1937: 36. See also Basedow 1914: 161–162 and Rebe Taylor, *Unearthed: The Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002), especially the section 'The Descendants'.

<sup>122</sup> Dogs played a crucial role in the hunting of wallabies in the island economy. While details are scanty, it appears that these dogs were a mixed breed, with greyhound, staghound and wolfhound predominating. By 1860, decades after settlement, the two Aboriginal women still living on Kangaroo Island travelled the interior of the island with packs of dogs for company: 'They are very seldom seen by any of the white residents, as they are afraid to come near the settlements, having a large pack of dogs (14) with them. Should the lame black woman [Bumblefoot Sal] die first, what a horrid and miserable death the poor blind one [Suke] may expect' (*Observer* 26 May 1860 8b).

<sup>123</sup> It is this combination of lifestyle qualities that fascinated the early arrivals. On the one hand there is the following disapproving and censorious report, published in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 June 1826: '[Carrying water] as well as every other labour is performed by the native women whom these unprincipled men carry off from the main, and compel to hunt, work, and



Sealers' Hut, detail from Louis de Sainson, 'Sealers' Hut, Westernport'. From *Voyage of the sloop 'L'Astrolabe' ... under the command of Dumont d'Urville ... 1826-1829* (Paris, 1830-1835), opp. p. 55.

was complete, and the stories of ourang-outangs capturing women and making them slaves and drudges seemed to be fully realised.<sup>124</sup>

On the party from the ship emerging from the scrub and exposing themselves to full view at the foot of the slope that led to the huts, the native women rose up with one accord, uttered a plaintive wail of warning, and retired to the huts and to the surrounding bushes exclaiming in their native language in tones of anguish, 'Oh! more white devils.' At the same time a legion of dogs came yelling towards the newcomers. A battle royal followed, and many a dog went limping away, receiving the most cruel blows before they would desist from their fierce attack.

'I like this place uncommon,' said Jim, 'first snakes, and then dogs. Look at my trousers?'

'Aye, look at that,' said another, showing, an ugly wound. 'And what's a matter with Jack? Why is he on his beam ends?'<sup>125</sup>

'Oh, he got capsized, and nearly broke his leg.'

'I say,' exclaimed the mate, 'what sort of a place do you call this, Mr. Robinson Crusoe?'

'Why, we calls this ere place a menagerie,' replied old Sam with a leer.<sup>126</sup> 'Ain't we got a fine lot? Can yer see them all? There goes our hourang houtangs,' pointing to the native women that were hiding

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fish, and do every other menial service, while they themselves sit on the beach and smoke, drink, and sleep by turns, occasionally, perhaps, arousing to kill a young seal which is basking on the sunny beach. This food, though far from palatable, is all that their indolence will in general allow them to procure, and they sometimes salt it down for future store. It is much to be lamented that so debased a specimen of the Christian race as these men should be the first to give an impression to the natives [on the mainland], who are there very numerous and of a superior class to those here and in Sydney. ... When the fishing season for seals is over, these men, with the native women and their offspring, amounting to about 40, retire into a valley in the interior of the island, where they have a garden and some huts. One man called Abyssinia ['Abyssinia Jack', John Anderson] has led this life for fourteen years. Are then these men, thus strangers to religion, strangers to principle, among who rapine of every kind, and even murder is not infrequent, are they to be suffered to debase human nature? They are at present supported and encouraged by the Colonial vessels that visit them for the purpose of bartering their skins for rum. Many of them are armed, and in a short time it will not be safe even for a large vessel to go among them' (quoted Cumpston 1986: 85).

<sup>124</sup> This remark makes sense of the earlier references to Hourang Houtangs. Cawthorne refers here to a popular belief (a nineteenth century urban legend) that the ourang-outangs from what was then called Borneo in the East Indies abducted women. Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841) contains such a representation of an ourang-outang.

<sup>125</sup> At the end of his resources.

<sup>126</sup> Reasonable circumstantial evidence that Old Sam is based on Nat Thomas. For Cawthorne's impressions of first visiting Nat Thomas's farm 'Freshfields', see Appendix I. A number of visitors to 'Freshfields' at Creek or Antechamber Bay recorded similar reactions. Alexander Tolmer describes visiting in 1844 'an excellent farm, a good house and dairy. He [Thomas] has a herd of 300 goats, and a great number of fowls.' (*Register*, 25 September 1844, 3d).



and peeping behind the trees and bushes. ‘There is our wallabies and piccaninnies, parrots and pigs, snakes and kangaroos, dogs and guanos.’

‘It must cost you a deal to feed all this lot.’

‘No mister, not a bit on it, yer jist wrong there; they feeds us. We are the lords o’ creation<sup>127</sup> here away: we eats and we drinks, and we cusses and we fights, and we sleeps, and we do jist what we likes, and the women and the dogs hunts for us;<sup>128</sup> and when they sings out and plays old sodger, and won’t work, we ties ’em up, and wollops ’em,<sup>129</sup> and so we lives in a kind of earthly paradise, every man equal to another, and nobody to find fault with his neighbour.’

‘You are a rum lot,’ said the mate, and, in an undertone, ‘an infernal set of blackguards.’

‘Yes,’ said old Sam, ‘we are a rum lot, an unkimmon rum lot, and as for being an infernal set o’ blackguards, as you was saying, well I s’pose we is. Yes, we is an infernal set o’ blackguards,’ soliloquised old Sam, muttering to himself as he strode along towards his hut. Then, turning suddenly round he paused, and tapping the mate on the shoulder said in his usual slow tone,<sup>130</sup> ‘I tell yer what, Mr. Mate, when yer comes to our country yer must keep a civil tongue in your head, for we gemmen gets fits now and again.’

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<sup>127</sup> Probably originally from *Genesis*, suggesting the place of human beings in the great chain of being. The phrase is often used ironically about Victorian men, and about the empire-builders in particular.

<sup>128</sup> See Keryn James, ‘Wife or Slave? Australian Sealing Slavery,’ in *Alas, for the Pelicans! Flinders, Baudin and Beyond. Essays and Poems* Eds. Anne Chittleborough, Gillian Dooley, Brenda Glover and Rick Hosking (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002) 175–85. James argues that the Indigenous women on Kangaroo Island in this period were (with one or two exceptions) treated little better than slaves. Plomley 1966 makes it very clear that Robinson, the main source for much of our information about the sealers, their women and their lifestyles in the early decades of the nineteenth century, also regarded the women as the sealers’ chattels. Many dozens of them were bought and sold in the period 1800–1840, moving from man to man, island to island across southern Australia. However, other commentators have argued recently that the women’s possession of bush and fishing skills meant that many of them were very highly valued by the men, some (like Old Bet) enjoying a degree of both respect and independence that makes the label ‘slave’ inappropriate. Cawthorne’s representation of Old Bet in particular in this novella clearly supports this more recent view.

<sup>129</sup> Cawthorne suggests here that the Islanders were violent and they regularly beat their Aboriginal companions, a detail in the novella supported by George Robinson’s views in his journals. Captain Robert Morgan records the following telling anecdote that speaks volumes about the Islanders’ attitudes to their women: ‘Mr. Stephens invited them [Wallen and Day] to come with their wives to see him on Sunday and have a religious service but says the men to introduce our wives was to be like introducing a dog to your presence’ 2 August 1836, ‘Journal of the Duke of York, 25 February 1836–10 February 1838’, Mitchell Library A270: 36.

<sup>130</sup> Again, circumstantial evidence that Old Sam is based on Nathaniel Thomas, whom Cawthorne represents as deliberate and slow-speaking in a letter to the *Register*, 15 September 1856, 3d.

‘Fits!’ exclaimed the mate.

‘Yes,’ said Sam, ‘rale fits! we first prays, then runs a muck as they do in Borneo;<sup>131</sup> then we don’t know we does, we strikes right and left, and allers use our knives,’ saying which he drew out his knife and gazed at it admiringly, turning it hither and thither in a scientific way, in a manner that showed he was deeply familiar with its use, as well as its abuse.

By this time they had approached the huts; the party divided, and some went into old Sam’s hut, some into Long Bill’s and some into Porky’s, each hut being separated from the other a short distance.

‘I’m blessed if I know a man from a woman here,’ exclaimed the mate in bewilderment, as he surveyed a lot of the Islanders.

‘How’s that, Sam? You are all dressed alike—skin breeches for man, the same for woman, skin jackets for one and skin jackets for the other!’<sup>132</sup>

‘Why, in course! we has no shops here, so we can’t buy bonnets and them toggerly, nor stockings, nor boots; we makes our black ladies dress like we, and they’re not pertikler. How long do yer think now a pair of petticoats would last in this ere land?’

‘Not long,’ said the mate, looking at his own clothes already torn with only the experience of one trip.

‘I tell yer,’ said Sam, ‘jist five minutes. No, no, petticoats won’t do; but here’s something to, scoff, every man helps hisself; pitch in, mate.’ One of the black women—one of old Sam’s wives, brought in a large lump of fat pork, another a number of wallaby tails, and another a lot of potatoes.

‘We never eats bread here.’<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> From the Malay *amok*, to rush about in a frenzy.

<sup>132</sup> This suggests Cawthorne may have had access to W. H. Leigh’s *Reconnoitering voyages and travels with adventures in the new colonies of South Australia, during the years 1836, 1837, 1838*. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839) 104, which contains the only visual representation of the Islanders, an illustration that hardly distinguishes between men and women.

<sup>133</sup> Most visitors to Kangaroo Island between 1802 and 1836 report that numbers of the Islanders grew small winter crops of wheat and barley. In 1836 an anonymous colonist recently arrived at the South Australian Company camp at Kingscote accompanied a couple of other men on a walk upstream along the banks of the ‘Three Wells River’ (now the Cygnet) to Henry Wallen’s farm. The ‘Governor’ welcomed his guests with a leg of pork and ‘some remarkably nice home-baked bread’. After they had eaten, ‘Mr. W. begged we would excuse him while he laid down a “damper”; this is what they called their bread before it is baked, which they make in the following manner:—They mix some flour in a tub, and after well kneading it sprinkle some flour upon a cloth and form the dough into the shape of a cheese, about four inches thick and eight in diameter. Some dry flour is them rubbed over it, and it is ready for baking. The ashes of the wood fire are afterwards removed and the place made suitable to the size of the loaf; it is then put in and the ashes covered over it, where it remains for about an hour, when it is done. The ashes are

‘Why?’ said the mate.

‘Cause yer see we has no mills, no ploughs, and no corn, nor never had none, and I s’pose we never shall. We got taters a year gone, and glad we was; for ten years I never seed nothing else but wallaby and kangaroo, never eats nothing else, never knows nothing else, that’s why we is so hairy. Lor bliss yer, I feels I gets more and more like a kangaroo. We lives like a kangaroo, we eats like ’em, we bites and hugs like ’em, and rips, uses our toes, and jumps like ’em, and when I slips my cable, I believe I shall go sky-larking o’er this ere scrub a boomer.’

Though this was said in a half-joking style, yet it could be distinctly seen that the idea was no new one just started, or suggested by the accidental subject of conversation, though Sam was a most dreadful scoffer at all religion, or at least at the little he knew and recognised as religion. He had his superstitions strongly and irrevocably fixed, and one was the belief in the doctrine of the metamorphosis,<sup>134</sup> one of the earliest and most natural to the human mind under all circumstances of race and climate, and associated as he had been from his youth, with aboriginal thoughts and opinions, enshrined as they are in the fullest degree in this belief.

‘Well, Sam,’ said the mate, ‘my business is to get a lot of you to come and load us with salt, and then we’ll come back and buy your skins.’

‘Werry perlite; but do yer see we are just now laying a strand,<sup>135</sup> parbuckling<sup>136</sup> a little bit o’ fun. We can’t go,’ said Sam, shaking his

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then brushed off, and the loaf is as clean as if baked in an oven, and although no yeast is used it is sufficiently light’ (quoted Moore 1925: 97).

<sup>134</sup> The 1865–6 serial version has ‘metempsychosis’ here, the idea that after death the soul ‘migrates’ to a different body, perhaps even to a different species. It seems Cawthorne’s Rigbys editor in 1926 decided ‘metamorphosis’ was actually what the writer meant.

<sup>135</sup> The lay of rope describes the manner in which the wires in a strand or the strands in a rope are helically laid, or the distance measured parallel to the axis of the rope (or strand) in which a strand (or wire) makes one complete helical convolution about the core (or centre). In this connection, the lay is also referred to as “lay length” or “pitch.” Here a nautical expression, meaning to prepare. <http://www.hanford.gov/docs/r19236/r19236a.htm> accessed 25 May 2002

<sup>136</sup> PARBUCKLE, a contrivance used by sailors to *lower* a cask or bale from any heighth, as the top of a wharf or key, into a boat or lighter, which lies along-side, being chiefly employed where there is no crane or tackle. It is formed by fastening the *bight* of a rope to a post, or ring, upon the wharf, and thence pulling the two parts of the rope under the two quarters of the cast, and bringing them back again over it; so that when the two lower parts remain firmly attached to the post, the two upper parts are gradually slackened together, and the barrel, or bale, suffered to roll easily downward to that place where it is received below. This method is also frequently used by masons, in lifting up or letting down large stones, when they are employed in building; and from them it has probably been adopted by seamen.’ William Falconer’s *Dictionary of the*

head, and then adding, after a long pause, 'if you hadn't hove in sight, we should have been there.'

'Where?' said the mate.

'On the mainland to get some more black empresses. We wants more terribly bad; can't do half the work. Yer see, old Worley<sup>137</sup> got six, Porky has got six, so we is going to haul the seine.<sup>138</sup> No, we can't go with yer this trip.'

The mate looked incredulous.

'What are yer staring at,' mildly remarked Sam. 'Will yer jine us in the spree, and grab two or three for your own property?'

'So you catch them,' at last struck in the mate. 'Catch them like kangaroos.'

'Jist so,' says Sam, 'only more ticklish; catch 'em like fish in a net. Just so, but not so many in a haul. Like bandicoots<sup>139</sup> in a snare. Jist so, but they is harder to hold.<sup>140</sup> Yes,' continued Sam; 'we traps 'em like wallaby; we circumwents 'em.'

'Well, I'm blessed,' said the mate, as he drew a long breath, and involuntarily turned round and gazed at a couple of black women standing at the hut door.

Sam noticed this, and highly amused at the mate's greenness, remarked by way of moral, 'Live and larn, mate; live and larn and as for the manner o' catching 'em, which seems to stick in yer gizzard, tell me, mister, how in arth are we to git 'em otherwise?' Saying this, Sam brought down his fist heavily on the table by way of climax, and

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*Marine*, <http://www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/southseas/refs/falc/0929.html> accessed 2 November 2002. Here the sense is to raise, bring up, organise.

<sup>137</sup> 'Governor' Henry Wallen. Cawthorne also uses this spelling in his 1853 travel piece, 'Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island' *Observer*, 15 January 1853: 3d.

<sup>138</sup> That is, drag the net.

<sup>139</sup> The Short-nosed Bandicoot *Isodon obesulus* is found on Kangaroo Island but rarely seen.

<sup>140</sup> Perhaps Cawthorne had heard some of the stories about how naked Aboriginal men might be physically restrained. Tolmer records the following revealing detail about how the *male* suspects were controlled, in Alexander Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career at Home and at the Antipodes* (2 vols, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882): 'Then quickly, at a given signal we simultaneously rushed into the wurleys, each trooper seizing and firmly holding a black-fellow, which is no easy matter in his state of nudity, when he is as slippery as an eel, and is all the while yelling, struggling, and biting as a savage only can. If the captor is experienced, however, by adroitly adopting a peculiar but indescribable knack, the difficulty is much diminished (Vol. 2: 101). John Wrathall Bull was obviously familiar with this method of restraining Aboriginal suspects, for he alludes discreetly to the practice seemingly pioneered by O'Halloran and Tolmer: 'I have the advantage of the use of the diary of Major O'Halloran during the time he was out in the Port Lincoln district to endeavour to *catch and hold* [Bull's emphasis] natives, naked and greasy'. John Wrathall Bull, *Early experiences of life in South Australia and an extended colonial history* (2nd ed. Adelaide, London: E.S. Wigg & Son; Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1884) 298.

gave the mate a prolonged stare.

Mr. Handspike was unable to suggest a better mode, so he wisely deferred the matter, and at once struck up a fresh topic. 'Well, I must top my boom,<sup>141</sup> and make for the boat. Where are all the chaps? and rising he proceeded to Long Bill's hut, where he found all hands half drunk, and Long Bill leading them in chorus—'I don't care a d---m what the chief mate says; I don't care what the captain says; Hah! Hoorah! Fol de rol de ray!'<sup>142</sup>

'Belay there,' sung out the mate, 'and shape a course for the boat.'

'I will go ashore, and I shall go ashore to see the old commodore—Hah Hoorah! Fol de rol de ray!' roared out all hands, not heeding the mate.

'Cuss me!' sung out Bill, 'we are going to have a free and easy night of it, and if you, Mr. Mate, comes here parlyvouing, why hang me, I'll rip yer up!' So saying, Long Bill seized one of the sailor's tarpaulin hats<sup>143</sup> in his left hand by way of shield, drew a long ugly knife with his right, and made a half-bound to clear the way. 'Come on, you white nigger, I'll cram this down your gills.' The mate moved slightly on one side, drew his pistol, looked to the pruning, and cocked it. The half-drunken mob rose up, too, and instinctively cocked their pistols, to the infinite danger of friend and foe.

The native women, who had been silent spectators all this while, or acting slaves to their white lords,<sup>144</sup> gave an unearthly yell that

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<sup>141</sup> Make a move. *The Oxford English Dictionary* has an entry for 1867, Smyth's *Sailors' Word-Book*, 'to top one's boom' is to start off.

<sup>142</sup> Obviously a song. I have not been able to trace it, although the chorus 'Fol de rol de ray' is very similar to a whistling shanty called 'Fol-de-lol-day', an alternative title for 'The Girl in Portland Street', where the 'Fol-de-lol-day' is a whistle. Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the seven seas: shipboard work-songs and songs used as work-songs from the great days of sail* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961) 54. Hugill also notes it was a song often heard in the south of Britain, a tinkers' song.

<sup>143</sup> Although Cawthorne usually represents the Islanders wearing hats made of animal skins, here he describes a canvas sailor's hat, 'in Nelson's day worn by both naval and merchant seamen. Shaped like a straw-hat and covered with tarred canvas it was an early form of sou'wester. "Tarpaulins" was a name used for both oilskins and naval seamen' (Hugill 1961: 598).

<sup>144</sup> As early as 1815 there were official representations to the Colonial Government in Sydney about the status of Aboriginal women living with sealers to the islands of the southern coastline. William Stewart wrote to Colonial Secretary Campbell 28 September 1815 that the sealers 'mostly obtain by force and keep as slaves or Negroes, hunting and foraging for them'. See *Historical Records of Australia Series III, vol. II* (Melbourne: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1921) 575. G.A. Robinson's Journal records this: 'The aboriginal female Mary informed me that the sealers at the straits carry on a complete system of slavery; that they barter in exchange for women flour and potatoes; that she herself was bought off the black men for a bag of flour and potatoes; that they took her away by force, tied her hands and feet, and put her in the boat; that white man beat black woman with a rope. Fanny, who speaks

foreboded no good, and soon brought to the spot old Porky, Sam, and others who knew well the sign of alarm.

‘Hilloo,’ said Sam, as he burst in among the combatants, ‘going to have a bit of play are yer? Well, just wait awhile, and I’ll jine yer.’

‘I wants none o’ your help,’ bawled out Long Bill, ‘so just steer clear.’

‘Whether yer does or does not.’ calmly replied Sam, ‘I’ll lend a hand,’ not saying however, which side he would espouse.

‘I’ll give in if the mate will leave us alone,’ argued Long Bill, ‘we are going to make a night on it, so stand clear, and no more yarning.’

‘That’s it mate,’ said Porky, ‘here’s enough lickor for all hands—put up your pop-guns and fall to, and—’

‘Come along men,’ said the mate, ‘come along to the boat.’

‘Go to yer mother; go to old Nick,’ shouted all hands in defiant voices, ‘let the brig go to Jericho.<sup>145</sup> We sleeps ashore to-night like gemmen.’

‘It’s no use,’ said Sam to the mate, turning away, ‘you can’t launch the boat yersell, besides I told the women to go down and haul her into the creek.’<sup>146</sup>

‘The devil you have,’ said the mate, ‘this is a strange place. I

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English well and knows not a word of the aboriginal tongue, said there were fifty women at the straits and plenty of children; that the three women from Brune Island who were coercively taken away by a man named Baker, a man of colour, were at Kangaroo Island. The aboriginal female Fanny states that this slave traffic is very common at the straits, and that the women so bartered or sold are subjected to every hardship which their merciless tyrants can think of and that from the time their slavery commences they are habituated to all the fatiguing drudgery which their profitable trade imposes. Surely this is the African slave trade in miniature, and the voice of reason as well as humanity loudly calls for its abolition. This information is further confirmed by the man Baker, who was himself a sealer in Bass’s Straits and had for a considerable length of time cohabited with the female Fanny. He was transported from Launceston to Hobart Town on a charge of having forcibly taken away three native women from Brune Island; but the charges not having been proved he was dismissed, although there was little doubt as to his guilt.’ Elsewhere Robinson noted 17 November 1830 that ‘These miscreants the sealers ought to be forthwith removed. It is a disgrace that those wretched men should have been suffered so long to exist. To abolish the slave trade the government at home has expended millions; and that it should exist in this her colony is certainly improper and disgraceful. These men put the government at defiance’ (Plomley 1966: 82, 279).

<sup>145</sup> ‘And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.’ *Bible*, Luke 10:30.

<sup>146</sup> At Antechamber Bay (or Creek Bay as it was known to the Islanders) there is usually a considerable sand bar at the mouth of the Chapman River, necessitating quite a haul to move a five tonne whaleboat into the security of the creek, which in the early-nineteenth century was navigable upstream for about a kilometre or so. Cawthorne certainly knew this: see his description of hauling Nat Thomas’s boat over the sand in his ‘Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island’, *Observer*, 15 January 1853, 3d–e, Appendix I, p.200.

suppose we are all prisoners.’

‘Hold on a bit, mate, yer a stranger in these parts, and we are pooty set o’ boys. We cuts up rough wery quick, and we cuts up smooth; so mind yer soundings.’

‘It’s like your cursed impudence, Mr. Robinson Crusoe, to touch that boat at all!’

‘Ha! ha! ha! imperance in Kangaroo Island! Wal that chokes me; will yer hail some peelers, and give us in charge?<sup>147</sup> Wal, wal, but I forgive yer, yer knows no better. I took the boat in the creek, ’cause yer are so cussed wise, and leaves it so that the surf call smash it to pieces; we keeps our boats in the creek; but here we are, so come to an anchor. I say, Bet,<sup>148</sup> give us some baccy,’ continued Sam, as they entered his hut.

‘But why,’ replied the mate, more and more astonished at Sam, at his reasoning, and his own strange position, ‘why don’t yer go and drink with the chaps? they have got plenty of grog.’

‘I never drinks,’ said Sam in a subdued voice.

‘Never drinks!’

‘No, I never drinks. I wish all the drink was in the sea. Once—a long time gone—I drank like—’<sup>149</sup>

‘You are a queer un,’ said the mate.

‘Yes,’ replied Sam, ‘I am a queer un, but I never drinks now.’

‘Then you did once,’ but Sam made no reply. It was quite apparent he did not like the topic; there was a mystery about it that made him uneasy—rude and apparently callous as he was—utterly unmodified by the contact of civilisation, and recognising no other moral obligations than the strongest arm and the stoutest heart. No giant

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<sup>147</sup> He means ‘will you call the police, and have us arrested?’ ‘Peelers’ were originally nicknames for members of the Irish constabulary, founded by Sir Robert Peel 1812–1818, and later came to be used for English policemen.

<sup>148</sup> Betty Thomas, variously known as Polecat, Old Bet and Black Bet, is perhaps the best-known of all the Tasmanian Indigenous women taken to Kangaroo Island. See the Introduction for more information about her.

<sup>149</sup> Ruediger records an island legend that ‘Governor’ Henry Wallen was (for some time at least) a teetotalter—not Nat Thomas, whom I think Old Sam is based upon. This suggests that Cawthorne probably drew on stories told about a number of individuals when constructing individual characters in his novella. It seems Wallen took to the bottle in later life, and died in the Gresham Hotel in Adelaide 21 May 1856, aged 71 years (Ruediger 1980: 43–45). There may also be a personal note here. As a young man Cawthorne was a strict teetotalter, and a member of various Temperance societies in Adelaide, although it seems from the evidence of travel pieces written later in the 1850s and 1860s he did drink occasionally. No doubt his motivation was disgust at his father’s alcoholism, culminating in the father’s sacking in 1862 as head light keeper at the Sturt Light, Cape Willoughby, for (among other things) being drunk on duty.

rock on his island home was firmer in his determination when once resolved upon. Leading a life freed from all moral and social control, and surrounded by every form of unbridled license, old Sam exhibited the wonderful virtue of an absolutely sober man.

After a transitory feeling of surprise, and even of involuntary respect at the singular oddity that sat before him, the mate began fully to realise the powerless position he was in, absolutely imprisoned with a set that, for aught he knew, might cut his throat at any moment for any whim or caprice.

'Dash my buttons,' he exclaimed, jumping up and pacing up and down, 'I'm caught in a trap; infernal scoundrels. What'll the skipper say? Hang the lazy dogs.'

'That's right, mate,' said Sam, 'pray away; I allers does. I find it does me good. I know'd a parson aboard a man-o'-war;<sup>150</sup> he used to swear by hissell across the taffrail.<sup>151</sup> One day I cotched him. "It does me good, Sam; it does me good, Sam," says he, and he dives below. I allers follows his example.'

'None of your yarns,' replied the mate; 'come along with me and a couple of women and launch the boat.'

Sam shook his head slowly, and laughed quietly. 'I say, Bet, will yer go down and shove the boat out of the creek.'

'No! No!' screamed Bet, horrified at the idea, 'too much dark, plenty debil, debil.'

'Do yer see,' observed Sam, 'these critters will never go about in the dark; they are sartin the air is chock-o-block full of devils.<sup>152</sup> When they walks at night, they takes a fire stick to keep the devils off, but they never moves more than a hundred yards.<sup>153</sup> No, no, mate, sit

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<sup>150</sup> More circumstantial evidence that Old Sam is based on Nathaniel Thomas, who told Cawthorne he had run away to sea 'during the war'.

<sup>151</sup> 'The rail around the ships poop, to which a piece of canvas called a weather-cloth was fastened, enabling the officer of the watch to have some sort of a 'lee' (Hugill 1966: 596).

<sup>152</sup> If Old Sam is based on Nat Thomas, see an intriguing vignette in Bull's *Early Experiences of Life in South Australia* that reveals something of Nat's understanding of Indigenous culture. The passage represents a search by a party of colonists for missing horses in early 1837. 'Nat, a sealer from the island' led the party south along the coast to what seems to be the mouth of the Onkaparinga River where they came across a camp of people identified by Nat as 'Onkaparinga and Encounter Bay blacks'. He gave the impression to his companions that he was not willing to confront them, explaining that 'the black woman whom he had on the island belonged to one of these tribes, and he was aware that they were not pleased with her absence. He understood a few of their words, but thought it better for him to keep as much out of sight as possible' (Bull 1884: 32-33).

<sup>153</sup> The first example in the novel where Cawthorne puts to use his knowledge of Indigenous (notably Kaurana) belief systems, gained from his time spent at the Native Location on the Torrens and elsewhere in the company of Indigenous people. In a note to his *The Legend of*



down and have a smoke; the women are right, too many devils about.'

'White devils,' remarked the mate bitterly, who could by no means reconcile himself to his forced position of inaction; but there was no remedy, and in no pleasant mood he ultimately consented to the night ashore.

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*Kuperree; or, The Red Kangaroo* (1858), Cawthorne included the following note: 'No native retires to rest without some kind of precaution; their belief is, that evil spirits are busy, in the dark, to kill them. Fire is a sure guardian. The writer once met a native, many miles from his camp, benighted; he carried a large fire-stick for protection'. For a full account of the ethnographical significance of Cawthorne's diaries and other writings, see Foster 1991.

## CHAPTER VI.

### Long Bill's Scheme.—The Mate Lost in the Bush.—All Start for the Beach.—The Plot.

The morning came hot and close, particularly so in the dense scrub, where the huts of the Islanders stood.<sup>154</sup> The drunkards of the previous night were still asleep. During the revelries the native women had taken the precaution to steal away the pistols of the sailors, and throw them in a heap under a tree, knowing from unhappy experience that in these orgies they frequently were the chief sufferers.<sup>155</sup> As the dawn broke Long Bill was up, and in deep conference with a couple of other Islanders who had arrived from some expedition several hours before.

'Well,' said Long Bill, I couldn't do it no how; they were too sharp for me.'

'It was a———near squeak,' said one.

'All right, my lads, we will cook 'em yet.' There's a whole boat's load asleep now,' pointing to his hut.

The truth was, it had been a plot between Mr. Long Bill and his two brothers, on their sighting the brig a couple of days before, to make for a certain islet, and to pretend he was in distress, and so arrange the matter as to wreck the vessel—a scheme very likely to succeed, and of a highly profitable character to all concerned—a plot that had been successful on more occasions than one. In fact, it was

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<sup>154</sup> Cawthorne seems to have had in mind 'Freshfields', Nat Thomas's house at Antechamber Bay. Cawthorne visited this house on a number of occasions while travelling to the Sturt Light to see his father. 'The original four roomed cottage dates from about 1827. Although it was later extended and completely encircled by additions, the dwelling is an extremely rare, intact relic of that period of pre-colonial European contact' (*Heritage of Kangaroo Island* 1991: 8).

<sup>155</sup> Cawthorne's reference here to domestic violence is entirely consistent with the anecdotal evidence collected by G.A. Robinson. His Journal 28 May 1831 records the sealer James Munro's stories as follows: 'Said that the greatest and most barbarous cruelties was practised by the sealers at Kangaroo Island towards the black women; that the sealers cut the flesh off the cheek of a black boy and made him eat it; that [the sealer John] Anderson told him that the sealers tied up a black woman to a tree and then cut the flesh off her thigh and cut her ears and made her eat it (this was because she had run away; the cause of their going away from the sealers was on account of the wanton cruelty which had been inflicted upon them); that when they sent the women after kangaroo, if they should happen to return with a small quantity they would tie them up to a tree and flog them, which treatment induced the women to take to the bush' (Plomley 1966: 357).

one of the *legitimate* sources of income, according to the political and social constitution of the empire of Kangaroo Island.<sup>156</sup> They appointed themselves ‘general receivers of wrecks,’ and were frequently called upon to exercise their office and peculiar functions to the benefit of all concerned. They were a magnificent coast-guard—ever watchful and vigilant. It was singular how frequently they would kindly pilot a ship out of danger of reef and current, and yet by some unlucky chance, make shipwreck of the very object their solicitude. Slandrous tongues would have it that it was designed, a part of their living and of their annual receipts; but the self-appointed pilots of Kangaroo Island could prove by infallible charts, drawn with their fingers on the sand, how it was the skipper’s fault.

‘The skipper would stand on. I tells him to come about, but he wouldn’t. We gets into the tide rips, we heaves about, we wears ship,<sup>157</sup> and then bumps we go on the pint.’ Plain and convincing as this statement was, the ship’s crew would have it it was just the other way. ‘The pilot would stand on, wouldn’t heave about, etc., etc.’ There was also a curious coincidence of the boats of the Islanders being ready to save life; just popping out of some nook or cove just at the precise moment required. The pious would call it providential, but the wicked shook their wicked heads, and had grave doubts as to the miraculous part of the business.

‘How is it,’ said one exasperated and unfortunate captain, ‘that your boats are always handy when craft go ashore?’

‘Oh, they are allers hanging about craw-fishing, do yer see,’ was the reply.<sup>158</sup>

‘Twas most marvellous some were always craw-fishing, when others were always piloting!’

Mr. Handspike rose from his bed of wallaby skins in no enviable mood. He was determined to be off at once. Come what might, off he’d go with them or without them, so he proceeded straight to where his boat’s crew was located. He found them mostly asleep and those awake very sulky, very saucy, and little inclined to make way

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<sup>156</sup> This remark got Cawthorne into some trouble. In the *Observer*, 3 June 1865, Suppl. 1g, ‘Our Correspondent in Kangaroo Island’ reported from Hog Bay that ‘An *Illustrated Melbourne Post* has found its way into the hands of some of our old islanders containing Mr. Cawthorne’s story. They think it a queer yarn, but not very complimentary to them. They suggest the dates should be altered. I dare say that when Mr. C. revisits the island he may find hospitality at a premium.’

<sup>157</sup> To “wear” means to pass the stern of the ship through the wind as opposed to “tacking” in which the bows pass through the wind (Hugill 1966: 597).

<sup>158</sup> These days crayfishing, or even lobstering.

for the beach.

‘Come lads, turn out, and let’s be off. The skipper will be in a pretty pucker when we get on board.’

‘The skipper be hanged,’ growled Jim, ‘who the dickens is going to haul and pull through this here “plains o’ promise”<sup>159</sup> in this hot weather?’

‘Bear a hand,’ said the mate. Reluctantly they rose up and mustered themselves in a dogged and unwilling spirit, in a state nearer mutiny than obedience. Crawling as far as old Sam’s hut, they collected together, ready to follow the leader.

The heat by this time had become frightful. Hemmed in by tall and dense trees, not a breath of air stirred the smallest leaf. Nature seemed in a trance, every leaf, every blade hung listlessly. The birds hopped from one branch to another without a note—merely to find a cooler spot; even the savage dogs didn’t care to move and attack the strangers, but lay sprawling about with legs distended and lolling tongues.

‘Take it easy, mates,’ remarked Sam as they came up, ‘we is going to have a regular buster; if yer can’t see yer will feel bime-bye rale sheets o’ flame; there’s plenty o’ time, and———’

‘No more jawing,’ said the mate in no gentle voice, ‘come along and show us the way to the boats; every minute it’s getting worse.’

‘In course it is, and yer ’spect me to melt all my tallow out for yer brig? No, no, mister, we is never in a hurry here,’ and then, sitting deliberately down on a log of wood in an attitude that denoted a fixed determination to take it easy, he added, ‘none o’ your promenades for the likes of me this morning.’

‘Well done, Robinson Crusoe,’ struck in several voices. The mate was aghast. By this time Long Bill and others had arrived.

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<sup>159</sup> Perhaps Cawthorne had the vexed question of state borders in mind here; if so, he is referring to western Queensland. In 1844 John Stokes was the first European to survey the Gulf country, travelling 80km inland to discover the ‘Plains of Promise’, the rich cattle-grazing the savannah between Burketown and Normanton. ‘When Queensland separated from New South Wales in 1859, the new colony’s western boundary was fixed at 141 degrees east longitude, an extension of South Australia’s eastern boundary northwards to the Gulf of Carpentaria. However, Queensland had its eyes on a potentially rich pastoral area, the ‘Plains of Promise’ bordering the Albert River, and the prospect of a deep water port at Sweer’s Island in the Gulf. The explorer A.C. Gregory proposed that Queensland should push its boundary westward to midway along the shores of the Gulf, and that a new colony, ‘Albert’, be created to the west, with its capital on the Victoria River. Western Australia would have lost its northwest regions, and South Australia was annoyed at the thought of losing lands just explored by John McDouall Stuart.’ If he is referring here to this region of what is now Queensland, then it is likely that this sentence was written in the 1860s rather than 1854. <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/places/qld/qld3i.htm> accessed 1 June 2002.

'You'll come with us,' said the mate, addressing Long Bill.

'No, mister, it's too hot,' and he threw himself full length on the ground.

'You'll go,' sharply spoke the mate, turning to old Porky.

Porky shook his head slowly, and said he was going to have a sleep, as the naughty boys, pointing to the sailors, had kept him awake all night.

'Well, if none of you will go, you set of lazy rascals, I'll go by myself, hail the brig, and if I don't square yards with you, my pretty lads,' shaking his fist at the sailors, 'my name isn't Handspike.' Saying this, he dashed right off, not heeding the various remonstrances addressed to him about the heat, no water, getting lost, snakes, etc. After he had gone some time, old Sam remarked, 'He thinks it all plain sailing. Wal, give 'em plenty of line, and he'll jam hissself somewhere; we'll send the women arter him bime-by.'

The morning wore on, a raging, burning, blast swept over the land; the trees shed their leaves at every fiery squall that sent its withering breath to kill, burn, and destroy; the singing locust, the very child of heat, ceased its song; bird and beast sought refuge from the dread atmosphere; the very snakes lay extended about the margins of the salt lagoons; and so enervated became man and dog, and Black and White, that to lie in a shady spot, and to sip water nearly hot, became the only effort that Nature seemed able to accomplish. Poor Handspike during the while was struggling between life and death in the hopeless scrub of the island. When he dashed away, full of wrath and revenge, he was too angry to reflect and to arrange a course for the beach, which he might have done, though with but a bare chance of ever reaching it.

After penetrating a thick belt of dense tea-tree, whose stems were interlaced and entangled, he suddenly found himself on the muddy margin of a great salt lagoon, of which previously he had not the remotest notion, so hidden was it from view. Cursing his ill luck, he tried to force his way towards a point that he thought indicated the head of the lagoon by climbing up, clambering over, and, for considerable distances at a time, crawling under the confused mass of the densest tea-tree that surrounded the lagoon, growing in, and lying on, the soft, oozy mud, in all stages of growth and decay. It was a primeval forest, the home of the deadly black snake, the tarantula, the scorpion, and the centipede, and bitterly did he regret his obstinacy. His progress was retarded to the last degree of endurance.

He would take long ‘spells’ at a time, pondering how it was possible to get either through, under, above, below, around, or over the next bunch of tea-tree before him, until he gradually forgot the purpose of his going to the beach. The dreadful mud beneath that sucked him fast, the snakes that and hissed about his legs, the horrible thirst he was beginning to experience, and the hopeless position in which he was, absorbed all other thoughts and considerations but the one overpowering wish to save himself from what appeared to be fast approaching—inevitable death. With a gigantic struggle he succeeded in extricating his legs from the dire mud, and breaking and scrambling, he burst through some 100 feet of thicket, and suddenly plumped on to what appeared the sweetest spot under heaven. In a small bend of the lake the line of tea-tree had retreated, and the space was covered with the most vivid green of the samphire plant.<sup>160</sup> How refreshing to his sight was that cool, green, semi-transparent verdure! How crisply it crushed under his feet, suggesting the pleasant ideas of frost and ice. He plucked handfuls, and devoured it eagerly. Bitter and saline as the juice was, it, in a slight degree, refreshed him. Utterly prostrated, he threw himself down and gazed away over the reach of waters before him, so beautifully clear, but so horribly bitter—the Dead Sea itself was not saltier or more forbidding.

Not far from him sat some half-dozen black swans, which were apparently enjoying themselves—for of all happy creatures on earth, ducks and swans must be the happiest. Should it be burning hot they live in cool water; should it rain, it is just the weather they revel in. Near them were two or three rocky islets, on which for ages they had reared their little ones.<sup>161</sup> With outstretched neck they were peering and listening to the intrusion of the mate, and giving vent to their surprise by repeated notes of a musical tone. Beyond these was the irregular outline of the lagoon, showing a densely fringed shore of the horrid tea-tree. Glancing round, he found himself shut in by an impervious hedge—a vegetable wall of the thickest growth. To go forward seemed impossible, and to retreat by the way he came was beyond his strength. He thought of wading and swimming over the lake to the nearest point, making the islets his resting places. Happily, he ultimately decided otherwise. Had he gone, his fossilized

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<sup>160</sup> *Halosarcia pergranulata*, very common succulent prostrate plant growing in country affected by salinity.

<sup>161</sup> Cawthorne is alluding here again to Matthew Flinders’ famous entry about Pelican Lagoon: ‘Alas, for the Pelicans! See Note 6.’

bones would have been the subject of the deepest speculation in future ages as an incontestable proof of the preadamite theory of the human race.<sup>162</sup>

The mate crawled under the deepest shade he could find, and not being particularly afflicted with nerves, commenced in true sailor style to curse island and ship, old Sam and the sailors, the hot day and himself. At times he would jump up and shout with all his might, but it was of no use, as he was to leeward of the huts instead of to windward, and all the reply he got was the musical notes of his not distant companions, the black swans, for they were too wise to take fright and fly about in that burning blast. At length the mate found that shouting only exhausted himself, and made him more unfit to bear his perilous position. Desisting with an oath, he threw himself down, utterly overcome. The rustling of leaves and cracking of dead boughs, and the occasional note of the black swans, startled and harassed him. At times he thought he heard someone breaking through the horrid thicket; the islets became brigs and ships sailing towards him; the black swans, boats racing to be first to relieve him. So his reeling senses excited his poor brain till a merciful exhaustion threw him into a trance of total unconsciousness.

It was an hour or so before this when, as Sam was amusing himself in the shade of the hut with his numerous dogs, he sang out to one of the native women, 'Here, Bumblefoot'<sup>163</sup>—for such was her

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<sup>162</sup> Cawthorne may refer here to the speculation about the human occupation of Kangaroo Island. It was not until the archaeological work of Norman Tindale, Alison Harvey and B.G. Maegraith in the 1920s and 1930s that the first systematic versions of the story of human occupation of the island were published. Cawthorne here refers to the nineteenth century questioning of the Biblical insistence on Adam as the first man. By the 1850s and 1860s many scientists were examining the Biblical explanation for human origins by turning to archaeological evidence.

<sup>163</sup> An historical character. Bumblefoot Sal or Big Sal is an historical character, known as 'Bumblefoot' because she lost two toes while sleeping too close to a fire; W.H. Leigh insists one of her hands was also deformed from the same accident. A sister of Trukanini, Maggerlede was abducted by the sealer John 'Black' Baker from North Bruny Island, Tasmania and taken to Kangaroo Island where she lived with a man named Hephernet [James Everett?]. In 1825 she was taken from King Island to St Paul in the Indian Ocean by James Craig on the *Hunter* with four other Tasmanian women. A year later they were on the Isle of France (Mauritius), returning to Sydney on the *Orpheus* in 1827 before being repatriated to Launceston. According to one source she was back on Kangaroo Island living with William Cooper in 1831. A year or so later she was taken back to the islands of Bass Strait, where she became involved with (or was bought by?) George Meredith, travelling with him and George Brown in a whaleboat from Bass Strait back to Kangaroo Island, where they settled to Middle River. She may have been either a witness or more directly involved in Meredith's murder in 1836: in 1844 she was named by the policeman Alexander Tolmer as a suspect. She was taken to Adelaide but later released because of insufficient evidence, although some sources claim she admitted her guilt. After 1836 Maggerlede lived with William Cooper when the latter worked for Colonel William Light: she

name—‘go and fetch in that lubber of a mate; you’ll soon find him.’ Without a word of reply Bumblefoot went off like a hound. ‘I thinks he’s got enough on it,’ mumbled Sam, as he chuckled to himself, and then went on talking to his dogs.

The woman soon found the direction the mate had taken, and she laughed heartily at the idea of his going direct inland to find the beach. Taking a wide circuit, and judging from time and the rate of progress the mate could make, she determined to strike the lagoon at a point where she would at once find whether the mate had passed, and so save herself a word of toil, a point no other than the identical little bay where the mate was then actually lying! Carefully wading round this point, she knew at once he was not beyond, she had headed him. A few steps further, and she all but stumbled over the poor fellow, who was sitting and gazing at the ships that never came, and the boats ever racing but never getting nearer.

Bumblefoot gave the mate a shake, but noticing his wild stare she quickly took a large bunch of grass, and wetting it well, she put it on his head, to his great relief. He looked at her, but kept pointing to the islets.

‘They are all anchored,’ he cried despairingly, ‘and the boats, too.’

‘Come long,’ said Bumblefoot, ‘boat bime-by.’ Retracing her steps, she halted by the way, and from a little native well, supplied the mate with sweet, fresh water, sat him down in the shade, and kept applying grass pads soaked in cold water to his head. The mate recovered his consciousness, and thought that Bumblefoot, though a black gin, with a halt in her leg, kindly bestowed upon her by her white lord and husband, as pretty a creature he had ever seen.<sup>164</sup>

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may have been one of the ‘native women’ mentioned by Light who cared for his garden at Rapid Bay. She then lived with George Brown when he worked at the whaling station at Encounter Bay, but when he abandoned her she moved back to Kangaroo Island. In her later years she roamed the island with her friend Suke. She died in a gully off to the east from the Middle River in 1874, the blind Suke trying to find her way back to Maggerlede’s body by tracking with her feet. The site still called ‘Sal’s Gully’ in the 1950s: her body was never found. In the 1930s Tindale interviewed islanders who remembered her as a ‘fine-looking big black ... her hair ... wonderfully curly ... dark skin and woolly hair’. See Leigh 1839: 146; *Observer*, 7 October 1871, 7b; *The News*, 19 March 1932; Tindale 1937: 30; Plomley 1966: 246, 336, 981, 1011. Plomley 1966: 246, 336, Norman Tindale, ‘Journal of Anthropological Researches on Kangaroo Island, South Australia 1930-1974 and additions’, South Australian Museum, AA 338/1/32; See especially Brian Plomley and Kristen Anne Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1990) 16–7 and Clarke 1998: 34.



Holding on by her arm, she led him through a shady but devious footpath straight to the huts.

‘Wal,’ said Sam, ‘yer look as if all the bounce was taken out of yer, anyhow, mister.’

‘Cocoa-nut too tin, lauty sun knock ’im down,’ said Bumblefoot by way of explanation.<sup>165</sup>

‘I see,’ said Sam. ‘Cheer up, mate, and here, “Pussy”—another black lady<sup>166</sup>—bring that kangaroo tail soup.<sup>167</sup> Now, mate, stow some

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Aboriginals’, *Observer*, 7 October 1871, 7b; Tindale 1937: 30.

<sup>165</sup> Bumblefoot here makes a joke at the mate’s expense: his skull is too thin, she says, so the sun can knock him down. The word ‘lauty’ (used twice in the novel) is meant to signify the English word ‘plenty’. In his unpublished diary, his ‘Literarium Diarium’, entry 21 October 1843, Cawthorne records the words of an unnamed (Kaurna?) man drawing comparisons between Governors Gawler and Grey: ‘Cockatoo man (former Governor) very good—long time ago came here—give lany tuckout (feast)—lanty blanket—Lanty Bullocky (beef)—lanty sheepy (mutton)—lanty very good. This man (the present Governor) no good, give piccannini meat (and here he hade a contemptuous face) piccanniny bullocky, piccanniny bread, piccanniny blanket, Gubnor Gay (Grey) no good, gubnor Gay bloody rogue!’ (quoted Foster 1991: 25, 27, 42, where the word is also spelled ‘lanty’).

<sup>166</sup> Puss or Pussy is an historical character, probably a Ngarrindjeri woman from the mainland. George ‘Fireball’ Bates told the story of her abduction when interviewed by the *Advertiser* in 1886: ‘the party of five [islanders] ... crossed over to the mainland to undertake this *chasse aux femmes*. They landed at Cape Jervis and walked across country to Lake Alexandrina, having no small difficulty in eluding the natives, who were very numerous. Their method of capturing the women was simple. Waiting until the morning was well advanced, and the men were out hunting, they stole up under cover until close to the camp, when at a signal they rushed forward and secured their prizes before they had time to escape. They made four trips with this object at different times, securing one or two women each time who, when captured, had their hands tied behind their backs, and were made to walk with the their captors in double quick time back to the boat. They were set at liberty on reaching Hog Bay, where they in most cases proved useful and willing slaves. One girl, whom Bates named “Puss,” from her propensity to scratch the face of her owner when in a rage, lived for years afterwards at Hog Bay’ (*Advertiser*, 27 December 1886, 6c–e). If Cawthorne did not meet her in person, he probably heard about her from Bates during his Christmas visit in 1852.

<sup>167</sup> Colonel William Light, in a letter to the Colonization Commissioners dated 10 September 1836, written at anchor at Rapid Bay, Cape Jervis, notes that ‘I have engaged one of the sealers from Kangaroo Island [William Cooper] with his two native wives [Doughboy and Sal], and find them very useful; the women are the hunters, and we have already been the better by their exertions, by the tail and hind quarters of an enormous kangaroo, which is fine food; and to those who are fond of ox-tail soup, I should recommend a trip to South Australia to eat kangaroo-tail soup, which, if made with all the skill that soups in England are, would as far surpass the ox as turtle does the French potage’. *Supplement to the First Report of the Directors of the South Australian Company* (London: William Johnstone, 1837) 23. W.H. Leigh also insists that wallaby tail makes ‘a most delicious soup; and though myself no epicure, I must prefer it to oxtail’ (Leigh 1839: 83). Here’s an updated version of the old recipe, although these days most marsupials are fully protected: skin a kangaroo tail, wash well and joint. Soak the pieces in cold salted water for thirty minutes. Roll the tail pieces in seasoned flour. Then heat some butter and olive oil in a large pan and brown the floured pieces. Remove the tail pieces, and then fry several rashers of bacon, a sliced onion and 3 cloves of garlic until the onion is soft. Spoon out the onion, garlic and bacon and deglaze with a cup of red wine. Return the tail sections and onion, garlic and bacon to the pot. Add 2 sliced carrots, 2 sliced turnips, 2 chopped

of this stick-o'-yer-ribs<sup>168</sup> under hatches.'

'Water, water,' cried the mate.

'And here, you bale away cold water on his nob; we'll soon set yer up all a-taunt-o;<sup>169</sup> but I hopes yer will be werry pertickler arter this how yer goes toddling about in this garden o' ours, which is summet like oursels, werry poorty in some places, and werry ugly in t'other.'<sup>170</sup>

Not very long after this a gun boomed over the island.

'Hello!' cried all hands, 'there she spouts! And there's another!'<sup>171</sup>

'The brig's a firing, and saying why the devil don't yer come,' said Sam.

'They'll shove off next,' said Long Bill, 'so we had better start for the beach. Come, mates, let's have a parting glass.'

But Long Bill had an eye to business. It was by no means his wish that the party should get on board, for his scheme was to retain the men ashore under any pretence by getting them drunk, or getting them lost. So he ordered two or three of his black women to go along with them, and so to manage that at least a couple of sailors should be lost in the bush, which would, of course, cause further delay, reduce the hands on board the brig, and then if a stiff south-easter came to blow—a prevailing wind at that season of the year<sup>172</sup>—the chances were the vessel would be driven ashore. Knowing well that Captain Meredith would despatch another boat as soon as the wind

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sticks celery, thyme, a bay leaf or two, sage and parsley, 6 cloves, 1 tablespoon sugar, the zest and juice of a lemon. Cover everything with water or beef stock. Cook gently for at least three hours.

<sup>168</sup> The soup will be solid, sustaining fare, which will 'stick in your ribs'.

<sup>169</sup> 'Fully rigged, as a vessel; with all sails set; set on end or set right. Origin: French, *Autant* as much (as possible). Source: *Websters Dictionary*'. Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–3), Chapter XIII, Esther's Narrative: 'The dear old Crippler!' said Mrs. Badger, shaking her head. 'She was a noble vessel. Trim, ship-shape, all a taunto, as Captain Swosser used to say. You must excuse me if I occasionally introduce a nautical expression; I was quite a sailor once.'

<sup>170</sup> This realistic estimate of the diversity and utility of Kangaroo Island landscapes can be compared with these enthusiastic and revealing observations made by the colonist John Morphett in 1836: 'the eye is gratified with the sight of beautifully verdant and secluded valleys, well-watered and finely wooded plains, gently undulating and rising towards the range of hills in the background. The heart of the emigrant is filled with joy in gazing on this long sought object of his wishes; and should he have travelled, he compares the scene before him with other countries favoured by nature, and rendered more valuable by art; and he feels that the beneficence of the Great Creator of all things has here furnished him with the means of [realizing] his most cherished schemes for worldly [aggrandizement] or personal comfort'. John Morphett, *South Australia: Latest Information from this colony contained in a letter written by Mr. Morphett dated Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1836*. (Facsimile Editions No. 5, Adelaide: Public Libraries of South Australia) 6.

<sup>171</sup> Cawthorne is obviously attempting to suggest the whaling experience of his characters.

<sup>172</sup> As it still is, through the early months of summer.

fell, to search for the mate's party, he had sent a couple of women to keep a hook-out from the sandhill, with instructions that as soon as they saw a boat put off, they were to walk about the beach to decoy it away from the spot where he had landed the second mate, with the ulterior intention of drawing the men inland, and then abandoning them for the night. Old Sam, though no party to the plot, had, through the usual impulsive habits of a roving life, inadvertently helped the scheme, and the hot day had been exceedingly favourable, not that Sam would have cared much either way, whether the brig went ashore or not. If it had suited his whim and he had known it, he would have probably aided it with all his cunning but as he really knew nothing about it, his waywardness accidentally dove-tailed nicely into Long Bill's plan.

The parting cup was drunk, and the whole party, headed by Sam, and brought up by Long Bill, assisted by a couple of other Islanders, started off to the beach.

## CHAPTER VII.

### Mr. Ratlin Goes Ashore in Search of the Lost Boat.—His Adventures.

The hot wind had worn its fury out, and all Nature seemed relieved from the oppressive heat of the great gale. On board the ship Captain Meredith was waiting impatiently for the moment when he could with safety despatch a second boat in search of the first.

‘Now, Mr. Ratlin,’ said the captain, ‘just get under weigh<sup>173</sup> as soon as you like, and rouse those lazy rascals out of the scrub.’ The mate moved away, and gave the necessary orders to get the boat ready. ‘Ah! there they are at last,’ exclaimed the captain, as he ran his glass over the beach for the five hundredth time. ‘I see one, two, look!’ handing the glass to the mate, who thereupon intently watched the distant figures for some minutes.

‘They are none of our crew,’ said Mr. Ratlin, ‘they are either blacks or some of the islanders. If they are our chaps, why don’t they stand on for the brig? What are they doing so far down the bay? I rather suspect some stratagem.’

‘Well,’ said the captain, ‘I think we have got among the enchanted islands;<sup>174</sup> however, top your boom,<sup>175</sup> and do your best.’

There was still a heavy jumble of a sea left from the norther. The mate did not half like his mission. He had had some slight acquaintance with the Islanders, and knew what slippery customers they were, how utterly beyond all consistent course of action, wayward, sullen, cunning, and unmanageable, difficult to please and dangerous to offend; but his duty was plain, and he set himself manfully to work, though not in the most pleasant mood. He was cross with the absent men, with Mister Bill, with the hot weather, and, coming nearer home, with the boat, and the manner in which the men pulled, though that was unavoidable, as the sea was abeam, and kept unpleasantly, washing over the gunwale and soaking the

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<sup>173</sup> *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* has ‘18<sup>th</sup> c. from an erroneous association with weigh anchor’.

<sup>174</sup> The Galapagos islands, off Chile, and incidentally where Alexander Selkirk was marooned, the original for Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Some sails, mainly the fore and aft ones, need a long spar to spread their foot, a boom. When the boom is topped the vessel is ready to start. Also, to die—when a person starts on the long voyage with no return. <http://www.julianstockwin.com/glossary.htm> accessed 30 June 2002.

mate and the men on the weather side to the skin. The boat was steered straight for the two figures on the beach as seen from the brig, but when within a quarter of a mile they vanished.

‘Ah!’ said the mate, ‘I thought as much. Did you notice, Bob,’ addressing one of the men, ‘the spot where those men or women or animals last stood?’

‘Yes, sir! a little ahead of that heavy lump of black seaweed. Give way, lads, and see if we can’t catch ’em whatever they are.’

Carefully feeling his way, the mate at last found a spot where he thought he might with little danger beach the boat, and when just in the act of doing so a black head popped up behind the sandhills, and gave a prolonged coo-e-e<sup>176</sup> that was distinctly heard by the boat’s crew, though in the midst of the rush and roar of broken water. The boat was not landed so scientifically as when Long Bill beached the second mate’s boat; in fact, it is well known that sailors are very indifferent boatmen. They handle a boat, as they do a ship, which is entirely wrong. They are too slow; too methodical, and too unobservant of the small things that are life and death to boats.<sup>177</sup> Mr. Ratlin found his boat half swamped, but setting to with a will, they soon put it beyond the water’s reach.

‘Now, men,’ said the mate, ‘this island is fully of smart tricks; they are up to anything, so safe bind, safe find,<sup>178</sup> Take these oars, two of them down that way, and two the other way, and just bury them, and do it neatly, for theseimps of Satan<sup>179</sup> ashore, if they come down, they will take away the oars and jam us hard and fast.’ A practical joke of the kind alluded to by the mate, a joke that might entail in the long run the most serious consequences, was one of the

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<sup>176</sup> W.H. Leigh records: ‘a native word signifying “ahoy!”’ (Leigh 1839: 85). The *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* notes that word entered English from the Dharuk *guuu-wi* from the earliest years of the settlement at Sydney Cove.

<sup>177</sup> Cawthorne speaks here with the authority of personal experience. His diary records a number of close-run things in small boats. See *The South Australian*, 1 January 1847, ‘Port Gawler’, describing a miserable Christmas trip in a dingy that ended ignominiously on the sand flats to the north of Adelaide. In the following year he nearly drowned when knocked overboard by the boom when his boat gybed in a squall off Glenelg. See the diary entry 10 December 1848. The entry 8 January 1854 has ‘Just returned from K.Isld.—with my usual luck—nearly got drowned—wife and child with me—besides 3 boarders—& Mrs Fooks—dreadful with thrunderstorms—nearly all wrecked in sight of the Light House—fearful situation ... right glad to get back.’

<sup>178</sup> Proverbial: Thomas Tusser (c. 1515–1580) ‘Dry sun, dry wind;/Safe bind, safe find’, referring to taking care with hanging out the washing in an age where stealing of clothes was commonplace.

<sup>179</sup> Satan’s attendants. Sometimes used for children in the nineteenth century, here used almost as an expletive.

sweetest bits of pleasure that occasionally fell to the lot of the Islanders to enjoy. A freak of this kind, with all its perplexing difficulties, would afford ample scope for endless rows between all hands. Should a ship get lost because the crew could not get off at the proper time to assist her—well, so much the better, the joke would be a profitable one; should it end in blows—well, that was the real bone and sinew of a good lark; and should they wish to revenge an insult, or following the example of the great potentates of the earth to pick a quarrel, no subject was so fruitful of dissension as tampering with the boats of the vessels that visited them. A crew adrift and ashore, and the boat rendered useless on the beach, was an advantage not to be lightly esteemed, and one which gave the enemy nine point points of the law—viz., possession. It was an artful dodge<sup>180</sup> continually resorted to. Had the Islanders done wrong, the crew were virtually prisoners, and could be held as hostages till terms of peace were established, So simple a remedy as knocking a hole in the bottom of the boat or carrying away the oars was continually resorted to for a three-fold purpose—for a lark, for revenge, or for war. Mr. Ratlin had had some previous experience of this sort of scheming, and he therefore wisely buried his oars. He certainly could have stationed a hand to watch the boat, but he wanted every man to assist him in capturing the truant crew.

The long shades of the sandhills began to fleck the white beach, and to warn the first mate of the necessity of haste. Climbing up the steep wall of sand, he cast his eye over one of the most forbidding prospects to be imagined. Looking inland as far as he could see, a broad valley stretched away to some higher ground. On the right and left were massive hills, intersected with ugly-looking, deep gullies.<sup>181</sup> Over the whole, and spread evenly as a carpet, was a dense, impervious scrub, rendered doubly solid and repulsive by the dark shadows that were fast accumulating in heavy belts and streaks, in broad masses and abrupt breaks. In that impervious and inhospitable region lay the Islanders' homes and the lost crew. Mr. Ratlin gave an audible grunt as he surveyed the scene.

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<sup>180</sup> From Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837), the young thief 'the Artful Dodger', Jack Dawkins, pickpocket in Fagin's gang.

<sup>181</sup> Although he does not use the term here, in a booklet containing manuscripts of several poems and a small glossary (A558/A4, Mortlock Library of South Australiana), Cawthorne records the following definition of 'gulches': 'the sealers in Kangaroo Island call the enormous fissures of the rocky coast—gulches—or GULCHWAYS—a word probably corrupted from the Spanish'.

‘Well, I’d rather face a north-wester off the Cape, or a typhoon than that,’ remarked the mate to one of the men, pointing to the frowning scrub. ‘If we get lost there our goose is cooked.’

The mate’s metaphors, whenever he indulged in them, were always culinary (invariably related to the kitchen and to cookery.)

While the small party of seamen were pondering for a minute before they made a dash into the uninviting bush, two native women, lying prone on the ground, might have been noticed behind a clump of bushes within a few yards of the sailors, watching them with the intent and stealthy gaze of the cat. With the habits of their race they were passing signs from one to the other, indicating their wishes or their fears precisely as when they hunted the game of the forest. Not a twig was broken, not a leaf moved. Though armies of ants were to crawl over them, no impatience would betray their presence. Neither snake, nor centipede, nor scorpion could disturb their purpose. As the sailors descended the native women rose, and hastily conferred. ‘To the gullies,’ they whispered and slid away with the rapidity of snakes, disappearing from sight.

Now the gullies lay inland and away from the huts of the Islanders, and were frightful rocky chasms covered with treacherous scrub, and forming a region of interminable difficulties. Once lost in them, the chances were you would <sup>never</sup> extricate yourself. None but the most experienced Islanders went there; and only the black women were able to thread the glens and scrub of that dire district.

As the mate’s party tore through the scrub they soon became separated, each angrily insisting that his way was the best, while the mate besought them to keep together. ‘We are “done brown,”’ said he, pathetically, as he involuntarily associated the state of a joint and their probable condition, ‘if we don’t keep together.’

Instead of walking in Indian file, they would slightly straggle; a back slap in the face from a branch would make one dodge round, another would be deluded by the appearance of a favourable break, a third would explore a route on his own account. It soon happened that they could not see each other, but kept still pretty near by mutual shouting, and in this manner they toiled on, in the direction of the last coo-e-ee they had heard.

Pausing to wipe his brow, the mate remarked to one of the men near him, ‘We can’t be far from where we heard those coo-e-es!’

At the same instant a prolonged coo-e-ee rose upon the evening air, quite from the direction in which they were travelling. Scarcely

had it died down when another pierced the sky.

‘We’ll grab ’em soon,’ said Bob, ‘a little more to the westward, and we’ll find their moorings.’

‘To the eastward, yer mean,’ replied another, ‘yer lost to a dead sartinty if yer go westward.’

Collecting themselves together at the positive injunctions of the mate, they all made a fresh start to the eastward, a direction cunningly contrived by the sly scouts sent by Long Bill to mislead them. Night had now nearly set in. Mr. Ratlin and his men were quite separated, though still keeping up communication by occasional shouting, and so mutually trusting in one of the worst fallacies in bush travelling. The ground became more rough, and the men widened the distance between them more and more. At last the shouting became quicker and more alarming, and gradually fainter, and every effort made to re-unite the party only made matters worse. One or two fell into deep creeks, another wandered towards the beach, and the mate still heard the distant cooing of the decoying blacks, so adroitly managed that it led directly to the terrible country of the gullies.

‘Never mind,’ thought the mate, ‘I hear their coo-e-es and the bark of a dog; I must soon get there, and then I’ll send some one to pick up these lubbers that have strayed away.’

The young moon cast her feeble rays over the wild sea of scrub. There was a great calm, and Nature seemed in a profound repose. The mate climbed a rough tree, and leant over a dead limb—as on a topsail yard—to obtain a look-out. The scene that met his gaze was grand and solemn. His stout heart quailed as he gradually comprehended the extraordinary position he was in. He listened in vain for the shouting of his men, now lost in the great wilderness below. Nought but the piercing shriek of the curlew<sup>182</sup> rent the desolation, with the whistling note of the opossum,<sup>183</sup> and the melancholy wooing of the mawpawk.<sup>184</sup> Oft had he looked upon the

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<sup>182</sup> Bush Stone-curlew, *Burhinus magnirostris*. A ground-nesting bird with a very distinctive mournful call, often heard while camping at night on the island. In the ‘Notes, ETC.’ appended to the second edition of Cawthorne’s *The Legend of Kuperree; or, The Red Kangaroo* (Adelaide: Alfred Cawthorne, 1858), Cawthorne notes that the Curlew (or *Kokunya* (Port Lincoln language?)) ‘is said at times to be inhabited with the spirit of death. If a native dreams of his visitation, he dies’.

<sup>183</sup> The brushtail possum: *Trichosurus vulpecula*, abundant on Kangaroo Island and the mainland, now well adapted to living with humans in suburbia. A pest in New Zealand.

<sup>184</sup> Appended to a manuscript copy of three poems by William Cawthorne held in the Mortlock Library (A558/A4) are several pages of definitions, including this one of a ‘mawpawk’: ‘A species



warring elements of wind and water on the mighty ocean, but there was something inconceivably horrible in that profound, immoveable, and silent waste, in the towering heights rising in successive steps, and clothed with the densest mantle of black scrub, that barred his vision on every side. He descended the tree bewildered. The blacks that had thus far misled him now left, feeling assured that, go which way he would, he was lost for the night. The mate made a desperate effort to recover the beach. Once there he would be safe; within the sound of the breakers he was at home; but in the impenetrable thickets of the island he felt he was impotent and unable to cope with the difficulty. The ground began to rise, and ugly, loose stones impeded his progress and reduced his pace to that of a snail's but still on he went struggling and stumbling, tearing the boughs asunder, wriggling his body through narrow passes. A huge mass of thick bush fairly brought him to a standstill. There appeared no escape but to go through it, over it, or under it. The moon had set, and the bright stars afforded too illusory a light to assist him out of his difficulty. He thought he heard the distant reverberations of the surf, and he felt nerved from this faint strengthening of the only hope that now sustained him. Cheered by this, like another Mungo Park,<sup>185</sup> sustained by the thought that clung around the flower of the desert, he made a bold attempt to push his way to the sea. Scarcely had he gone a dozen paces, than in the twinkling of an eye he felt himself crashing through endless bushes to endless depths below! As he rapidly descended, the leafy canopy closed over him and excluded the stars and light. Down, down he went, bouncing against some hard substance, then rolling over smaller bushes; then sliding, now head first, then feet, accompanied by an avalanche of stones, sticks, gravel, and sand until at last he found himself jammed in a dry water-course, hurt, and utterly stupid. In fact, he had fallen down one of the innumerable gullies that intersected the hilly country he had wandered into, and which gave no warning of their existence, their edges being covered with thick scrub, and in parts reaching across the chasm.

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of turtle-dove. It is named for the cry—'Maw Pawk'—sounds very pleasing in a summer's night—in some copse of wood.'

<sup>185</sup> Mungo Park (1771–1806), the archetypal colonial adventurer. Born in Scotland, he became ship's surgeon in the merchant marine. He was a friend of Sir Walter Scott and is remembered for having explored the course of the Niger. His *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799) is one of the great travel books. He died in Boussa in Africa.

We leave Mr. Ratlin in his unpleasant predicament and follow the fortunes of the first party that was left proceeding to the beach under the guidance of Old Sam and Bill.

## CHAPTER VIII.

The First Party Reach the Beach.—The Invisible Boathouse.—Sam's Anecdote.—The Pull on Board.—The Shark's Fin.

'Mind how yer place yer feet, mate,' said Sam, as he threaded his way carefully through a miry flat covered with a crust of salt. 'We has no bridges here, and if there was, why I'd soon clear out; no! no! I doesn't like yer bridges, and yer streets, and yer fences, and yer gaols, and yer perlice; all wery well for loafers that can't take care of theirselves; but not for the likes o' me.'<sup>186</sup>

Long Bill, having been joined by one of the native women despatched by him to decoy the party that belonged to Mr. Ratlin's boat, and being told how well that plot was progressing, abandoned his present design of dropping one or two of the crew on their march to the beach—in truth he rather expedited their progress. He selected the shortest cuts, and managed matters so well that they soon heard the welcome fall and rush of the breakers.

'My eye, isn't that purty?' said Jim.

'What's purty?' said Bill.

'Why, you old stingaree, can't yer hear the swell thundering on the beach? And it's a fortnight gone since we heard it last!'

'Avast, Jim; it's just nuffing more nor less than forty-eight hours. If yer go on lying in that style, why yer will sink the brig, and send us all to Davy Jones's Locker.'<sup>187</sup>

'But wasn't every hour as long as the middle watch in a calm night?' replied Jim. 'Then yer see it comes about that a fellow feels like a fortnight in two days. This is a onnatural life, yer knows, and onnatural hours, and days, and weeks. Did yer ever hear tell on a lot of fellows having six black wives apiece? This is a queer land, I can't

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<sup>186</sup> Old Sam's speech is reminiscent of the words of a sailor who was very familiar with South Australian waters: Joseph Conrad, master of the *Otago*, which sailed on a regular run between Liverpool and Port Adelaide in the 1880s. Conrad left the sea in 1894. In *Heart of Darkness* the narrator Marlow interrupts his narrative on one occasion to deliver a reminder to his listeners: 'Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end.' Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* [1902] <http://pd.sparknotes.com/conrad/heartofdarkness> accessed 25 May 2002.

<sup>187</sup> The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives 1751 for the first use of this nautical slang for the bottom of the sea.

keep a log<sup>188</sup> no-how! Here, Jack, give us a chaw.<sup>189</sup>

The party now mounted a sandhill that commanded a view of the bay and the beach. On one side was a fine creek, on the other the sea.

‘Where’s the boat?’ shouted the mate.

‘In the creek,’ said Long Bill.

‘Come, none of your gammon; there’s nothing on the creek but a duck or so.’

Like all Australian creeks and, we might add, rivers, there was a great bar in front, several hundred yards in extent of dry sand, and looking up and along the reach of inland water, nought was visible but a couple of ibis<sup>190</sup> sitting upon a protruding branch of a dead stump, a duck just clattering round the distant bend, and a heavy fringe of bushes sweeping the surface of the water in isolated patches. Deeply hidden, and cunningly arranged under one of these patches lay no less than three boats. A man might have travelled up and down the creek the whole day and never discovered them, so admirably were they secured from observation.

‘I s’pose we’ve to stop ashore ’nother night, aye?’

Not heeding the remark, Old Sam beckoned to one of his wives to fetch out the invisible boat. Wading for some considerable distance, she suddenly parted the bushes and disappeared. The seamen thought she had fallen, and was drowning, and were for rendering immediate assistance; but while they were wrangling the boat glided out almost beneath their feet, and the black woman walking alongside, and heading for the bar.

‘Well, I’m blowed!’ cried all hands.

‘Yes, this is the land o’ wonders,<sup>191</sup> and we is the chaps that works ’em,’ chimed in old Sam, relishing their surprise amazingly; ‘that sort o’ boathouse is wery convenient, ain’t it, Bill? We uses it for all sort o’ things. Once a skipper gee us too much jaw, so we hooks his boat in here; down he comes, can’t find his boat, then he prays a bit. “May be,” says I, “the sea have washed the boat away.” He sets to work to find the boat; he hunts all day, and was wery perlite to us, and we helps him; bime-bye he comes down here, and there’s the boat all right and snug, jist where he lefts her. “May be,” says I, “the sea has

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<sup>188</sup> Meaning, this land defies accurate recording, in a ship’s logbook.

<sup>189</sup> Chewing tobacco.

<sup>190</sup> White Ibis, (*Threskiornis aethiopica*), common on Kangaroo Island.

<sup>191</sup> A phrase used by Washington Irving in ‘Rip Van Winkle’, 1820.

washed her up?” The skipper looks queer<sup>192</sup> like, and gives me a squint, and pulls like mad to get on board, ups anchor, and I’d never seed him since.’

The mate and his party were soon afloat, and as they receded from the beach the men began involuntarily to have a feeling of fear for the land they had just left, and its uncouth inhabitants, nor was this feeling in the least degree lessened as they gazed on the figure of Old Sam standing on the beach, with the gloom of evening settling round him, his hairy dress, his hairy face, arms, and legs, his bare feet and bare head, with a great mass of tangled hair, that waved about in the night breeze. In all this there was something peculiarly wild, weird, and devilish. Everything that had been said and done during their short sojourn on the island had been strange and eccentric, and had left an uneasy impression on their minds, a vague and mysterious feeling of dread. A little of the supernatural came by degrees to be associated with their late boat companions, and to superstitious sailors the idea was natural and orthodox.

‘Did yer twig how that old rascal chuckled when we could not find the boat? Isn’t he a regular hourang—Long Bill is nuffing to him. And all those black gins corroborreeing at nights, singing and yarning in their gibberish, and the yeller imps skipping about the fires; but worser and worser, that old Robinson Crusoe never drinks a drop o’ grog. When we gets three sheets in the wind he was sober as a judge, that’s the worstest of all. I likes Long Bill; he can drink like a fish, which I holds is natural like.’

Conversing in this style they soon left the land behind them, which now in the faint light of the young moon assumed an unnatural degree of height and boldness, and cast a deep and over-hanging shade on the sea—in fact, so deceptive was the appearance that the land seemed advancing on the sea, the intervening space being absorbed and confused, and it appeared as if the great protuberant hills were toppling over their heads. In the still air of the night, the shrill melancholic wail of the bittern<sup>193</sup> rose loud and long, and startled the seamen in the boat.

The poor second mate seemed very ill. He scarcely spoke, and as he reclined against the side, his head rolled to and fro with the

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<sup>192</sup> ‘Flash’ language, convict usage for strange.

<sup>193</sup> Hugh Ford lists the Australian Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) as a vagrant on Kangaroo Island. See Hugh Ford, ‘Birds’, in *Natural History of Kangaroo Island* Eds. M.J. Tyler, C.R. Twidale & J.K. Ling (Adelaide: Royal Society of South Australia, 1979) 104.

motion of the waves, and the moon lit up fitfully a face that seemed nearer akin to death than to life. The men became silent. They were oppressed, they felt over-awed, they knew not why exactly; but a gale of wind, a storm, anything would have been a relief. That terrible calmness, with that strange land frowning on them seemed unendurable. Then a new horror was added to their superstitious fear, for right in the boat's wake a triangular black patch could be discerned ever and anon flickering in the moonbeams, and keeping an exact intervening space between itself and the stern of the boat. The sailors knew it well; it was the fin of a shark,<sup>194</sup> and to them a sure warning of some one's death. They shook their heads and glanced at the poor mate. To them his fate was sealed, and they cursed that ominous fin that never swerved to the right nor left, neither retired nor advanced, the fell harbinger of the watery grave. They wanted but this to fill the measure of their fears. The spell was on them, and they pulled in silence and in trepidation, with a dying man in the boat, and death in their wake. In the darkness they had got beyond the brig, but happily the still night had carried the echoes of their oars to the vessel.

'Boat a-hoy!' came faintly over the waters, and guided by this pleasant sound they soon found themselves alongside, though the fin had never left them for an instant.

'Is that you, Mr. Ratlin?' said Captain Meredith.

'No, sir, it's Mr. Handspike's boat.'

'And where's Mr. Ratlin?'

'Don't know, sir; we never seed him, knows nothing about him.'

'Good heavens!' ejaculated the captain, 'and why doesn't the mate speak?'

'Oh! He's very ill, we'll get him up directly; easy, Bill, easy easy there.'

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<sup>194</sup> W.A. Deacon, in a 1836 letter to G.F. Angas, describes sharks in the Bay of Shoals '17' long which come within 20 yards of shore'. PRG 174/1/467, Mortlock Library of South Australia. It seems yarning about the size of sharks was as much feature of colonial life in the 1830s as it is today. Jane Isabella Watts relates one such story with a gusto Baron Munchausen would have been proud of: 'the captain of a whaler, as he was being rowed ashore [at Nepean Bay] came across one of these leviathans of the deep which had the effrontery to seize hold of the boat he was in, shaking and crushing it between his teeth. The party, managing however to escape from its grasp, immediately obtained another, set off in pursuit, and after a fierce struggle the creature was despatched and towed ashore. It was found to measure thirty-five feet in length, and on its head being cut off, so vast was its size that *three full-grown men* stood side by side within its enormous jaws, and the liver produced sixty gallons of oil'. Jane Isabella Watts, *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-three years ago* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1890) 55.

‘Now, take him below,’ said the captain, ‘and come one of you aft, and tell me what’s kept you away like this. What’s the matter with the second mate, where’s Ratlin, and why didn’t you see, him?’

‘Hold on, sir,’ said the carpenter, ‘and I’ll tell yer all about it.’

‘Bear a hand, then, and none of your backing and filling, but a straightforward yarn.’

The carpenter told him all, and left Captain Meredith in a state of rage, fear, and curiosity. He wouldn’t believe half he heard; he visited the second mate, but he was too ill to talk; he walked the deck for hours, and then retired, determined to go ashore himself the very next morning.

## CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Ratlin Survives the Night.—Reaches the Beach.—Jack Straw Saves Him.—Goes on Board.

‘Out of the frying-pan into the fire,’ was the first exclamation Mr. Ratlin made after he recovered consciousness at the bottom of the dry bed of the deep ravine into which he had been so unceremoniously precipitated. ‘The ruling passion strong in death’<sup>195</sup>—the kitchen was not forgotten, though he had just escaped the narrowest chance of becoming food for worms. A schoolmaster in the final hour of life, called for a slate and pencil, and as the film of death closed his eyes he added up an imaginary sum but the total was never recorded, nor the difference found, as the king of terrors solved the problem himself. An undertaker, on the last night of his life, chalked his own funeral procession on a piece of board. ‘In that carriage,’ gasped the dying man, speaking to his friend at his bedside, and tremblingly pointing to it, ‘you must ride’; and it was so! As a man fell mortally wounded by the accidental discharge of his gun, he exclaimed. ‘God save the King, I’m shot.’ It was his habitual expression, and it ushered him from this earthly kingdom to the other. So with the unfortunate mate, his mind intuitively reverted to kitchen experiences. A great danger befalling the body immediately recalled a similar terror to the nervous system, when the omelette fell into the fire, or the ragout was upset. There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

If falling a hundred feet clown the sides of a scrubby and rocky creek startle the body, so did the destruction of the good things of this life shock the appetising and sensitive epigastrium; this parallelism, though the circumstances were so diverse, necessitated the inevitable associations, and caused the man in danger of death to give vent to his sufferings in apostrophes to the kitchen and the frying-pan.

Poor Mr. Ratlin felt dreadfully astray; he did not know what to do; the place he was in was pitchy dark; all kinds of queer noises were

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<sup>195</sup> Much-quoted aphorism, from Alexander Pope’s ‘An Essay on Man in Four Epistles’, Epistle Two, lines 133–38.



around him. If he went down the chasm he knew not where it would lead him; if he went up, it was equally dangerous.

‘What a mess I have got into,’ he soliloquised. ‘What a stew they’ll be in when no boat returns. What a pickle those scamps of blacks have got me in! But it’s no use growling, so here goes!’

After a very long struggle the mate found himself somewhere on the top of a hill, in the midst of a plateau covered with short broom—a most delightful change from the trying bush, stones, and ravines that had hitherto barred his way. The moon had set and the night air breathed sadly through the mournful broom bushes. The mate paused, partly to rest himself, and partly to recover the balance of his mind, which had undergone a severe trial in the events of the past few hours. He rapidly reviewed the singular circumstances that brought him there. Above all, to be deceived by blacks whom he had ever regarded, in whatever part of the world he might be, as no very distant relations of the Evil One. His pious grandmother and nurse had told him that the devil was black; all European theology confirmed the popular opinion; and although he had for years been in daily contact with Lascars,<sup>196</sup> Kroomen,<sup>197</sup> Malabars,<sup>198</sup> Malays, Chinese, and Manilla men, Kanyokas,<sup>199</sup> and Mozambiquers, still the belief of his childhood clung to him, and now in the peculiar position in which he stood he regarded himself more than ever the victim in some way or other of his Satanic majesty. As fire has always been considered an exorcism against man’s mortal enemy, he fumbled for his flint and steel; but, alas! he had lost them! He felt proportionately depressed as the hope of the aid that fire afforded was thus miserably destroyed. Unable to go onward without the risk of another fall, he sat down, determined to await the blessed light of day.

Ye gentlemen of England, who sit at home at ease, contrast your own comfortable position with that of the poor wanderer seated on the lonely heights of an outlandish island, a dreary and weird waste of interminable scrub, around him the moaning and shrieking of strange night creatures, varied with the sounds of moving animals—now creeping, dashing, or leaping in every direction unseen—

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<sup>196</sup> A term applied to any ‘South Asian’ sailors, originally Bengali seamen employed by the East India Company.

<sup>197</sup> The Kru are a West African people from the Liberian coast, sometimes employed on Royal Navy vessels in the nineteenth century.

<sup>198</sup> The Malabar coast is the western coast of south India. The Coromandel coast is the eastern.

<sup>199</sup> Usually Kanakas, Pacific Islanders, the word originally from Hawaii.

through palpably present to the ear. In vain the mate strove to pierce the gloom, to mark his invisible enemies, to defend himself if needs must be, or to allay his fears; fervently did he wish for the dawn of day. At last it came, so faint, however, that nightlight and, daylight were scarcely distinguishable. With it also came a change of wind, which wafted to his ear the pleasant sound of the distant hum of surf.

‘I can hold out another twelve hours,’ thought the mate, ‘then surely I ought to reach the sea’; but a horrible thought struck him—‘suppose I am near the south shore instead of the north, how am I to get back? If it’s the wrong shore, I’m a lost man.’ The fear was not an idle one—many had been lost there, and though all the cunning of the Islanders, were brought to bear, they had never been found.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Cawthorne refers here to attempts made by George Bates, Nat Thomas (Old Sam in this novella) and Thomas’s wife Bet to find the two passengers missing from the *Africaine*. In October 1836 a party of colonists had left their becalmed ship intending to walk from the western end of Kangaroo Island to Nepean Bay. The group included a surgeon, Dr John Slater, and E.W. Osborne, an apprentice printer and four others: Fisher, Nantes, Warner and Baggs. They landed at Harvey’s Return and attempted to walk overland to the South Australian Company camp at Kingscote. After an eight day ordeal in which they trekked for miles through the scrub, five survived, but Osborne and Slater were left behind by the others somewhere near Murray’s Lagoon, too distressed to continue: their remains were not found until much later. Their deaths rocked the small immigrant community, making it apparent that South Australia was not the benign paradise promised by the propagandists for the Company. Mary Thomas describes them as ‘ramblers’ in her diary! Bet spent 16 days searching for the lost men, following their footsteps to Flour Cask Bay and beyond into stony country near Salt Lake when the tracks disappeared (*Register* 8 July 1837). She and Nat earned £6/10/- for their efforts. In 1858 skeletal remains were found twenty miles inland from Cape Borda, and further skeleton, a flask and a knife marked ‘E.O’ were found in 1888. See Alfred Austin Lendon, ‘Kangaroo Island: The Tragedy of Dr Slater and Mr Osborne. A Story of Ninety Years Ago.’ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)*, Vol. XXVI, 1926: 67–84. Cawthorne may also have in mind the death of Joseph Pennington, after whom the bay south of Pelican Lagoon on the south coast is named. Cawthorne names him in a manuscript poem held in the Mortlock Library (Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/7): he obviously knew the story of his disappearance. Hallack describes him as ‘Associate to the late Chief Justice Hanson’ (Hallack 1905: 39). Geoffrey Manning quotes the following account of Pennington’s death, but does not give his source: ‘It was named by Captain Bloomfield Douglas in December 1857 after Joseph Pennington who was lost in the scrub in the vicinity of Prospect Hill (Mount Thisby). ‘On 28 December 1855 the steamer *Young Australian* started from Port Adelaide on an excursion to Kangaroo Island, Mr Pennington, Chief Clerk in R.D. Hanson’s office, being one of the party. ‘The ship went down American River as far as Rabbit Island. when Messrs Heath, Andrews, R. Stuckey, Prankerd, Carruthers, James [sic] Pennington and F.R. Simpson, took the ship’s boat and rowed some distance further on and landed at Mount Tisby [sic], now called Prospect Hill, and walked across to Osmanli Beach. ‘After a short time Pennington remained behind on a sandhill. The others, who were on ahead, waved to him thinking he was tired and would wait their return: that was the last ever seen of him. On their return a few hours afterwards, they made a search for him, in vain, on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, including Buick, a settler on the Island and a native woman. They did find his tracks, but lost them in the sand: the search was continued long after the party returned to Adelaide’ (Manning 1990: 245). Hallack records that skeletal remains and buttons were found at White Lagoon years after his disappearance, the buttons used to identify the remains as those of Pennington (Hallack 1905: 40). See also *Observer*, 26 January 1856,

In a desponding mood the mate followed the distant roar of the measured swell. On the top of a great ridge he faintly beheld the sea. On he struggled through tangled masses of wild vine, creepers, prickly scrub, and lofty Narrow leaf, till he found himself on the edge of high sandy limestone cliffs, at the foot of which lay a broad white beach, but to the farthest limits that his eyes could scan seaward neither boat nor brig was visible. His heart sank as he sat down and gazed upon the cheerless ocean. However, the pangs of hunger admonished him of the desirability of getting a breakfast, so with infinite labour he descended the cliffs, and had the comfort to find on the rocks quantities of huge periwinkles.<sup>201</sup> Gathering a hatful of these, with two stones he commenced cracking them, and in some measure satisfied the cravings of hunger.

While so occupied, a figure so grotesquely attired that it would be difficult to affirm it man or woman, human or monster, angel or fiend, with a black face and shaggy hair, a wallet<sup>202</sup> behind, and a spear in the right hand, suddenly advanced from a neighbouring ravine. On seeing the mate it as quickly withdrew, and intently surveyed the stranger through the cracks of a fretted limestone rock. The figure soon reappeared, and threw a stone at a cluster of seafowl by way of introduction to the mate, who startled by the noise, jumped up and stood face to face with this strange apparition.

'You are one of the Islanders!' said the mate half doubtingly, as he surveyed the grim figure before him.

'Yes, I is; and my name is Jack Straw,<sup>203</sup> at your service; but what are you doing here?'

'After some of your fellows,' replied the mate in no pleasant tone, 'kept a boat's crew ashore for two days, and then getting me lost in this infernal scrub last night, where I nearly broke my neck a dozen times, you want to know what I am doing here? Well, you are pretty cool, Mr. Jack Straw; I should think you could answer that question better than I!'

'I knows nuffing about your boat's crew, and your brig, and your

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<sup>201</sup> Periwinkles, *Littorina Turbo undulatus*, small edible marine gastropod (sea snail) found along rocky and reefy shorelines.

<sup>202</sup> *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* has 'archaic a bag for carrying food etc. on a journey'.

<sup>203</sup> The 1865–6 serial version has 'Shaw' for the first reference, 'Straw' after. William Shaw was an early visitor to Kangaroo Island, sailing on the *Rosetta* in 1816 which took 2000 skins and 50 tons of salt back to Sydney for Jonathan Griffiths. See Cumpston 1986: 42, 43.

wandering about snaring wallabies. I comes south; I bushed it about five miles there-away last night, and this morning I sees you. I knows nuffing what you are yabbering about, mate. I came down here to see Old Sam, and if yer will toddle, why I'll show yer the course.'

Gladly Mr. Ratlin followed the odd creature before him, and on rising on one of the great hills he had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing in the distance the brig. A long pull and a strong pull through the scrub brought them to that point of the beach where the boat had been left the previous night, and no sooner had they reached there than they saw coming down the coast a large straggling party, which proved to be the lost men of the previous night with some of the Islanders, including Old Sam. The mate searched the locker of the boat, and, finding a biscuit and a bit of salt beef, he sat down and did justice to the fare.<sup>204</sup>

Mutual recriminations followed between the sailors and the mate, each accusing the other of purposely going the wrong way, as is always the case when a party divides and gets lost.

'It seems to me,' remarked Old Sam, 'that yer the cleverest lot that I ever seed at playing hide-and-go-seek; we gets one party on board, then another starts and has a game, and now we is just here a whole heap of us to beat up yer tracks, and the women are all away to the south to catch yer there, but yer saved our wind? Where did yer pick him up, Jack?'

'Just inside the Rocky Point where the creek opens out. He never sees me, but I spies him, and brings him on.'

'Wal,' says Sam, addressing the mate, 'yer had some sense in yer yet to make for the beach. We've lost lots of green 'uns in the island and they allers dies in the scrub, where now and agen we finds their bones.'

Mr. Ratlin said little but ate much, and while all the party were preparing to go on board, one of them saw a flash of a gun from the brig, and directly after a whiff<sup>205</sup> was hoisted.

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<sup>204</sup> Charles Napier records the following instructions for preparing salt beef for eating: 'Let it soak in cold water for forty-eight hours, changing the water several times. Then put it into cold water, coming to the boil slowly, and when it boils, throw out the water and again put it into cold water to boil slowly, taking care never to let it boil fast. It should remain at this simmer for as many quarters of an hour as there are pounds of weight in the piece of beef. For ship-use the brisket part is best.' Charles James Napier, *Colonisation: Particularly in South Australia, with some remarks on Small Farms and Over-Population* (London: 1835; New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1969,) 225.

<sup>205</sup> A signal flag.

‘They twigs us,’ said one, ‘and more than that, a boat’s coming ashore.’

‘We’ll have a lark<sup>206</sup> to-day,’ said Jack Straw, ‘got any grog in the huts?’

‘Yes, a toothful. Easy, my lads,’ said Porky, ‘sit down, and let’s wait for the skipper—for I’m blowed but that’s the skipper—and we’ll have a cask o’ brandy, or we’ll sink.’

‘Steady, yer old opossum,’ said Sam, ‘we’s got plenty o’ skins, deal wid ’im, and get as much drink as ’ll keep yer drunk for a week; but leave the skipper to me; if I likes him I’ll take care on ’im, and if I don’t likes ’im, why’ll gee ’im to you; is that fair, Porky?’

Porky gave a significant wink, and the bargain was kept as if it had been signed, sealed, and delivered.

By this time the boat had been launched, and very soon the two boats met midway between ship and beach, and after a conference the brig’s boat headed for the shore, while the mate’s proceeded on board.

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<sup>206</sup> ‘Flash’ language, convict usage for fun.

## CHAPTER X.

Captain Meredith Lands.—Georgy, alias Doctor Parson.—How Sam Lost His Bible.—The Native Oven.

‘I say, Bill, did yer twig how that sulky mate planted the oars? I’ll be down on ’im yet for that,’ remarked Porky, ‘they forgets their manners, and they forgets where they is? Next time that lubber comes here I’ll be even wid ’im, he’ll look a long time afore he finds his oars when I grabs ’em.’

‘That’s right,’ chimed in Jack Straw, ‘I had a jolly lark some two years gone down westward. You see I gets a slant<sup>207</sup> and plants the oars. “The——black gals has got the oars!” swears the crew. I sits down and looks on. “Gee me a bottle of rum,” says I, “and I’ll look for ’em, for I knows the women’s devilries.” “Done,” said the man; so I hunts about and in the a’ternoon I finds ’em. Ha! ha! ha!’

‘The best way is to knock a hole in the bottom, then yer has a chance of the boat,’ remarked another, ‘or get one of the women to swim off and cut the painter, then it drifts natural like on the rocks, and it’s ours.’

‘Yes,’ said Sam, ‘bekase we is Custom-house hofficers hereaway, and seizes everything that comes ashore, and takes care on it for the Hemprors of Kangaroo Island.’

A loud laugh followed this remark, as the idea tickled their fancy and some who had no boats wished to confiscate a boat that very night, for boats were valuable articles to the Islanders. Without them they could not live, they could not seal, nor get to the mainland on Sabine expeditions;<sup>208</sup> hence, if anything under the sun ranked high in the estimation of an Islander, it was his whaleboat. As they lead [sic] the life of a sealer one-half of the year, and that of a hunter the other,<sup>209</sup> the boat became elevated to the highest dignity in the

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<sup>207</sup> Get an opportunity, perhaps from the Dutch *slenter* ‘knavery’, ‘trick’, according to *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

<sup>208</sup> Expeditions to steal Aboriginal women, after the Rape of the Sabine women. The Sabines lived in the central Apennines in ancient Italy. According to the legend, there were no women in Rome when Romulus founded the city, so he asked nearby cities to allow Roman men to choose wives from among their women. When the neighbours refused, Romulus invited them to attend a festival, and during the games, the Romans abducted the young Sabine women.

<sup>209</sup> In January 1819, John Bigge was commissioned by the British Government to examine all the

appreciation of the Islanders—‘Love me, love my boat.’ Any harm done to it was equivalent to a personal injury, and the honour of the boat was as precious in the eyes of the Islanders as the fair fame of ‘ladye love.’ The boat was not regarded as a mere convenience, as a coach or gig, a something that has its turn and is done with. It was more than this. It was his ‘all in all,’ the very type of his life, a sharer in all his dangers, a companion in all his exploits, noble or ignoble. In many a midnight hour in the wild, wild sea, it was his only chance against death, and, thus identified with all the perilous associations of life, his boat became regarded by the Islander with even human affection. With his boat he was a king, a master of all things; without it, a prisoner and a lost being. To estimate the value of a boat, put a man on a lonely rock, and then ask him what he would give for a boat? And this was the everyday experience of the Islanders, and not an exceptional peril. And hence the value they attached to boats was something that verged on the passionate, more than the value to the Arab of his horse.<sup>210</sup>

By this time Captain Meredith was within a short distance of the beach. Though inclined to have a regular ‘row,’ still, when he saw so numerous a group on the shore, he thought it would be foolhardy to provoke a lot of gentlemen so singularly attired and of so wayward a temper. However, he pulled boldly in, and catching the surf just at the nick of time, very neatly landed himself at the very edge of the highest wash of the wave. He could not have done a better thing to ingratiate himself in the good opinion of the Islanders.<sup>211</sup> To them, a

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laws, regulations and usages of the New South Wales colonies. He conducted a number of hearings in Sydney and Hobart, including several into the sealing industry. On 3 May 1820 he interviewed Captain James Kelly, then Harbour Master at Hobart Town, who gave him many insights into the industry, including the information that sealing was conducted in summer. See Cumpston 1986: 56. Mutton birding was an autumn activity, while in the winter months the Islanders moved inland to escape the gales and the cold and trapped wallabies. These seasonal patterns follow those of the Indigenous people of the southern Australian coastlines, the ‘white sand’ peoples.

<sup>210</sup> Proverbial. ‘The poorest Bedouin has his domesticated steed, which shares with him and his wife and children the shelter of his humble tent, his caresses, and his scanty fare’. H.D. Richardson, *The Horse*. London, 1852.

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Estates/3095/ConnTributes51.html> accessed 2 March 2003. The Bedouin believe that the Arab horse was created from a handful of the southern wind.

<sup>211</sup> An interesting detail about Meredith, in that the historical character does not seem to have been such a remarkable seaman, losing at least two and possibly three boats. J.S. Cumpston records the wreck of his father’s ‘beautiful large schooner the *Black Swan* lost off the west coast of King Island’ in 1830, and then in 1833 the *Defiance*, lost ‘on a sealing voyage fifteen miles below Twofold Bay’ (Cumpston 1986: 131). Then there is the mystery of the *Independent*, the Meredith family vessel involved in the raid on Point Nepean in Port Phillip Bay with Meredith

neat handling of the oar, beaching a boat without a drop of water, steering in heavy weather when running without shipping seas, were as the elegant turning of a sentence to a literary man, a sweet smile to a poet, a brilliant touch to a painter.

A dozen willing hands soon placed Captain Meredith's boat under the sandhills.

'Yer have done this thing afore,' said Sam half shyly, not knowing exactly what to say under the circumstances in which all parties were placed, for, strange as it may appear, with all his dare-devilry of character Old Sam had a remarkable degree of shyness.

'Yes, I have,' replied the captain, 'and you chaps seem remarkably clever in hauling boats up, but confoundedly stupid in shoving them off.'

'What do yer mean?' said Jack Straw and one or two others. 'Yer must not be saucy here, you got all yer boats, and that's all yer want, isn't it?'

'But I want to know why you kept my boat's crew ashore all this while?'

'We answers no questions, but if yer want to fight, pick your man and we'll give yer fair play.'

'Belay there,' said Long Bill, 'the captain took me off the rocks; I shall stand by him.'

'Yer better preach us a sarmon, Bill,' said Porky. 'How many more on yer had yer mother? I like yer more and more the longer I lives.'

'Will yer come up to my hut?' said Old Sam, addressing the captain, 'then I'll tell yer all about it.'

'No, no; I merely want to buy your skins, <sup>212</sup> and get half-a-dozen of you to go salt-gathering in the salt lagoons; I have plenty of rum and tobacco.'

'Can't yer wait for a week or so?' said Sam; 'we can't go now, we is going over to the main on pertikler business. If yer'll come up and scoff a bit, I'll tell yer the whole game.'

Curiosity prompted the captain to comply, and so proceeding, attended by several of the men, after a sharp walk arrived at the huts.

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aboard, which his gang did not sail on to Kangaroo Island, coasting instead in a whaleboat. Was the *Independent* also wrecked somewhere in Bass Strait in 1834?

<sup>212</sup> The early years of sealing must have been very lucrative for all concerned. The American sealing vessel the *Union* captained by Captain Pendleton returned to Sydney from Kangaroo Island in 1804 with 12,000 skins. The *Independence*, a 35-ton schooner built on the western shore of American River in 1803, reached Sydney in June 1804 with 14,000 skins that were sold to the merchant Simeon Lord. See Cumpston 1986: 26–29.



'You are the oddest devils I have ever seen,' said Captain Meredith to Old Sam, as he stood at the hut surveying their domestic arrangements.

'There's no devils in the island,' said Sam, 'they lives only war there is books and fellows to yarn about 'em, and draws their pay for the sarvice.'

The captain gave Sam a scrutinising glance. The hidden sarcasm of his speech pleased him, and he found there was a fellow-feeling, a congeniality of sentiment. Outwardly so different, there was between them mentally a close similarity.

'Humph? No pay, no devils, you think?'

'In course. Now do yer see I has lived here a powerful number of years, and I never seed a devil, and I'll tell yer what, I has seen things done here and lent a hand mysell, too, that'd please ten thousand devils, but they never comes; they never says, "Well done, my boys," and that's onnateral, onfatherly-like. It's only in civilised parts that devils lives, hang about churches and preaching shops; but I never seed one in the scrub.'

'Hullo, Georgy!'<sup>213</sup> abruptly exclaimed Sam, addressing a man that had suddenly come out of the neighbouring scrub, carrying a heavy wallet and surrounded by a dozen dogs.

He came rather languidly along. He was tattered and torn in the few skin garments he wore, for or in the matter of dress, even in the Kangaroo Island sense of that word, he was extremely careless. Bare-headed, bare-footed, and nearly naked to his waist, he presented a singular spectacle of humanity; but on a closer inspection a bright eye, a well-developed head, and a good chest betokened a good physical and mental nature. He had not the size nor capacity of Sam,<sup>214</sup> but he had a finer perception of the beautiful in Nature, the goodness of moral beauty, and always held the doctrine of the ever-presence of God. Odd these qualities may sound in one who lived the life of a Kangaroo Islander, in whom high tone was considered to consist of drunkenness in the extreme degree, whenever the chance offered, and other miscellaneous adjuncts, such as a little wrecking,

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<sup>213</sup> Did Cawthorne have George 'Fireball' Bates in mind? Or is 'the Doctor' based on George Horman, a sealer named by Basedow in his obituary of Mary Seymour, Nat Thomas's and Old Bet's daughter? It is obvious from the context that Horman's name was known to members of the family. See Basedow 1914: 161–2.

<sup>214</sup> This suggestion that 'Georgy' was a small man is circumstantial evidence that he is based on George 'Fireball' Bates, who was 5'4 1/4", 'blue eyes, red hair, a fresh freckled complexion', *Sydney Gazette*, 3 January 1822.

stabbing, and black-hunting. And here let me ask, in what way were these gentlemen of Kangaroo Island more immoral than the gentlemen and ladies of the days of Pope Leo X, or the ladies and gentlemen of the times of Louis the Grand, or those of our own nation in the days of Charles II? Murder, rapine, and debauchery were characteristics of those periods, and to such an extent as to cast the wild life of the Islanders into utter shade. Among his mates, Georgy was known by the nickname of the Parson or the Doctor, which is a seaman's term for cook, for he combined these two, shall we say tastes, in an eminent degree. He was perpetually arguing, moralising, and speechifying on religious questions; yet, the truth must be told, he was a miserable sinner, not in the sense in which that phrase is used by Bond Street gentlemen sitting in velvet cushions in cathedral churches, but a real downright sinner of the old Jewish type,<sup>215</sup> and no one was more conscious of his deep errors than himself. He had a kindly disposition that would not hurt a fly, but when the rum was in the wit was out, and woe betide the man that offended him. His next peculiarity was his love of cookery.<sup>216</sup> The French would have styled him a genius; he had a talent for it, he could make wonderful dishes. Give him anything, save stones, and he'd contrive a dish. He acknowledged also that he [would] eat everything; he had no prejudices. Ant eggs, iguanos,<sup>217</sup> lizards, choice parts of snakes, were absolutely delicacies, and he had a way of turning them to account in culinary art that astonished everyone. In a word, his only amusement or relaxation was 'inventing something new,' not in the Athenian sense, but the Roman.<sup>218</sup> It was the custom of the Islanders to select some one as a 'mate,'<sup>219</sup> sharing and faring in all things equally, a relationship rendered necessary in the lawless

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<sup>215</sup> Cawthorne means here the sterner morality of the Old Testament of the Bible.

<sup>216</sup> If 'Georgy' is George 'Fireball' Bates, then this is a detail about Bates not recorded in other accounts. Perhaps Cawthorne had enjoyed the experience of eating 'bush tucker' with Bates as well as with Nat Thomas, as his travel pieces make clear.

<sup>217</sup> Rosenberg's Goanna, *Varanus rosenburgi*, very common on Kangaroo Island, the largest land predator. The name goanna is a corruption of the Spanish *iguana*, or lizard.

<sup>218</sup> Cawthorne may be referring here to the first century Marcus Gavius Apicius, the legendary Roman gourmet who lived at the resort of Minturnae during the reign of Tiberius. Pliny tells us that he invented dishes of flamingos' tongues and mullet livers, and created what we would now call *pâté de foie gras*. He spent so much money on his lavish dinners that when he could not afford to entertain in such style any more, he chose to commit suicide rather than eat ordinary fare. His name is now synonymous with gluttons.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/romanway\\_recipes2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/romanway_recipes2.shtml) accessed 22 December 2002.

<sup>219</sup> Cawthorne uses a traditional argument here in suggesting that the origins of Australian mateship lie in the convict origins of the first British settlements on the main.

state of the place and highly convenient in carrying out their pursuits. Old Sam was Georgy's mate, and as the first was fond of a good meal, but a bad hand in cooking one, Georgy was of no mean consideration. On the other hand, as Georgy lacked the powerful will of Old Sam, there was a mutual accommodation. In a scrimmage Old Sam was to be preferred, but as a companion, Georgy. He was fertile in all resources that pertained to the enjoyments, limited as they were, of a Kangaroo Island life. He had in a measure the gift of language, and could yarn away to the amusement of his comrades. Sam, on the contrary, was an old sceptic, was taciturn, and had a rude, philosophical way of regarding things. He was fond of pondering over the why and the wherefore of the singular phenomena of the vegetable and animal life around him, and with his scant knowledge, his mind had drifted towards pantheism, whereas his mate, Georgy, with a flagrant inconsistency, had the highest reverence for revealed religion, with the greatest practical disregard for its precepts.

'Has yer got anything extra to-day, Georgy? or if yer has will yer turn to and cook us summut out o' yourn cookery book. The skipper will scoff a bit with us bime by.'

'All right, my hearties; but I must have a smoke first. I nearly got beat yesterday, it was so hot I fried a piece of iguano on a stone without fire. Golly it was hot! But what's the brig doing here?'

'Ah! that's just the point,' said Captain Meredith, 'I want you and others to come and help me to get a few tons of salt in American River.'<sup>220</sup>

'Have you got any rum?' asked Georgy.

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<sup>220</sup> Some Salt Lake salt was scraped by the Islanders from salt lakes to the south west of Pelican Lagoon, American River, although most of the salt digging seems to have been done at the salt lake near Bay of Shoals. After settlement salt was gathered from Salt Lake, and a small railway built to the Muston Jetty where small boats like the *Kapoola* and *Karacka* took the salt to Adelaide. See Ivy Buick and Bev Willson, 'Growing up at the Salt Lake', *Colours of Kangaroo Island: 100 Stories of the people and places that make up its history* (Penneshaw: Dudley Writers Group, 1996) 32–3. Geoffrey Manning has the following about the naming of American River: 'Officially named by the first settlers on Kangaroo Island from the fact that an American whaler was wrecked there circa 1816. The marooned crew built a boat from pine trees, etc., and the structure on which the boat was launched was, according to Mr W.L. Beare who arrived on the *Duke of York* in 1836, still visible at the time. This information recorded by H.C. Talbot probably relates to Captain Pendleton of the *Union* and is, in some respects, in contradiction to what is believed to be the facts. ... On Flinders' charts it is known as Pelican Lagoon. ... Baudin called it *Port Dache*. The town [of American River] was laid out by Ludmilla Hughes in 1927' (Manning 1990: 10). Fanning names American River Union Harbour. See Edmund Fanning, *Voyages and Discoveries in the South Seas 1792–1832* (Salem: Marine Research Society, 1924) 232.

'Belay!' bellowed out Sam, 'yer allers arter the rum bottle. I wish all the rum was salt water.'

'And I wish,' said Georgy, 'all the sea was rum.' Saying this, he turned away, and calling some of the black women proceeded to cook a Kangaroo Island dinner.

Captain Meredith stood gazing in silent amazement at the scene before him, and his old habit of reflecting on what he saw furnished ample food for thought. Here a parcel of wild men coming from all parts of the earth, of different countries, whose past history was a mystery, cast together by the fortuitous circumstances of shipwreck, sealing and absconding, associated in twos and threes, with half-a-dozen black women a-piece for wives, leading a wild and lawless life, and this, mode of existence voluntarily adopted and preferred. It was a problem of a most puzzling nature.

'Do you know what day this is, Sam?' said the captain.

'I don't know, but I thinks I heard one o' your men say summut ab'ut Monday. Perhaps it's Thursday. Yer see we keeps no days nor weeks, nor months, nor nuffing. It blows just as hard on Sundays as on Mondays, and it's just as hot one day as t'other; so we does what Nature does. We makes no difference.'

'Was you ever in a church?'

'Yes, once; and that's a long time gone. I walks in, in Sydney, you know. Well, I'm blowed every chap didn't clap his eyes on me, the parson and the whole crew turns their heads and looks at me, so I waits a bit, and I gets a slant, and out I goes devilish quicker than I gets in. No, I can't abear a church.'

'Did you ever read your Bible?'

'Why doesn't yer ask first if we has a Bible?' I have never seed one for many a year, and now I forget all my larning; but yer see I had one, but I lost it all through a ghost! a ghost! yes, a raal live ghost! Yer see, I was trying to spell a bit o' Bible. I had been very wicked, so I thinks a turn or two at the Bible ud do me good, so I sits down for a raal twister. It was bright moonlight. I hears something; I looks up, and there I sees a live ghost. I looks, I jumps up, I coo-e-es, but nuffing would do. The ghost goes straight on end; I gets queer, I pitches the Bible at it and bolts, and I never found it since.'

'You don't believe in devils, but you believe in ghosts. Well, that's funny.'

'Maybe; but what I sees I believes.'

Captain Meredith and Sam were sitting on a large log of wood

outside the hut, four or five black children were playing with the innumerable dogs of the place, Georgy a little way off down on his knees blowing two or three small fires, and in intervals dealing out a cuff or a blow to his assistant cooks.

‘Mind those ant eggs, you black crow.’

He would warn one, a slap to another would rouse his attention to the cooking of a fine iguano, while a word of praise would fall to the lot of Black Bet for her solicitude in the matter of roasting a wild dog. It was done after the native fashion in the native oven—a hole dug in the earth, well heated with fire, and partly filled with stones.<sup>221</sup> These removed and with gum leaves arranged, upon which the animal is placed covered with leaves and hot stones and earth, and the oven is completed, and the roast is turned out with every juice preserved and every particle done.

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<sup>221</sup> In his *Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia* Cawthorne insists that wild dog is food for ‘Burkas’, for full-grown men. ‘The baking process is as follows: a hole is dug in the ground not very deep, and fire thrown therein, together with a quantity of stones which are to be heated. While this is doing they prepare the game or vegetables. This done the stones are larger remains of the wood are remov’d, and if a Kangaroo or dead dog is to be stewed they fill its inside with part of the hot stones and leaves and place it in the oven. After proper time the meat is taken out and served up on Gum leaves, each taking his part, but never more than his allotted quantum, the men always take the best portions, and throw the rest to their favourite wives and children if they have been successful in hunting: the women enjoy the bones, which they are fond of breaking into bits and chewing’ (Foster 1991: 73). The ground oven is called *kanya-yappa* in C.G. Teichelmann and C.W. Schürmann, *Outlines of a grammar, vocabulary, and phraseology of the Aboriginal language of South Australia* (Adelaide: the Authors, 1840) 12. The word is also given in a 1842 report: see Robert Foster, ‘Two early reports on the Aborigines in South Australia,’ *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia* 28.1: 41.

## CHAPTER XI.

A Kangaroo Island Dinner.—Baked Wild Dog.—Roasted Iguano.—  
Ant Eggs.—Wakeries, etc.—Proposed Visit to the Main.

'I smells grub;<sup>222</sup> come, let's go in and stow summut under hatches,' said Sam to the captain.

They found the doctor carefully disposing of the hind leg of a wild dog, the fragrant odours of which were irresistible. Juicy, sweet, and short; such were its characteristics.<sup>223</sup>

'Try a bit of dog, captain?' said Georgy; 'it's a young 'un and wery tender. Veal is nuffing to it.'

With a wooden platter and his own jack-knife, and fingers for forks, the captain tackled the 'dog' and pronounced it delicious.

'What are those things?' said the captain.

'They're ant eggs,'<sup>224</sup> said the doctor, 'and wery nice they is, too. Try some, and call 'em rice, if yer a bit faint-hearted. I eats everything; for, as I reads (for yer see I can read), in the Bible, it says everything was good—that means for to eat—and I knows this much, more nice things are thrown to the dogs or never looked on than there is that people eats. Now, take those ant eggs.' Saying this, he carefully, and with a piece of bark for a spoon, took a good mouthful. 'How sweet they is! How they melts on the tongue! Nuffing like 'em. Many's the time Sam there and me has a good blow-out of them same ant eggs, and we gets fatter arter a week's speel at 'em; don't

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<sup>222</sup> 'Flash' language: a word of convict origins.

<sup>223</sup> A paraphrase of Thomas Hobbes: 'No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worse of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.

<sup>224</sup> W.H. Leigh describes a meeting with 'Governor' Wallen—he calls him 'Robinson Crusoe'—as follows: 'We were overtaken in our march by an Islander and his three black wives, or gins as they are called. He was upon a hunting expedition and having previously set snares in the paths through the woods in which we were travelling he hurried off to examine them. He had been a resident for fifteen years. About these regions we saw innumerable ant hills (termites) of a large size but invariably they were broken open and knocked to pieces, the inhabitants appearing also to be gone. Being surprised at the circumstances I asked Robinson concerning them and he told me we were now upon some of his women's favourite hunting grounds and as they were immoderately fond of ants they had pulled them to pieces to obtain the inhabitants. I afterwards saw them in the act. Taking a large piece of the ant hill they jostled and shook it about till the ants were nearly all out in their hands, then they conveyed the crawling insects in the shape of a ball into their mouths sucking and munching till their hearts content' (Leigh 1839: 129–30).

we, Sam?’

‘Yes, yer cannibal; but yer manages to give me the addled ones, and swears they’re fresh laid.’

‘No, no, Sam, yer is too greedy, and yer eats the little ants wid ’em; that’s what makes ’em mouldy-like. Lor bless yer, they’re like for all the world “caraway cumforts.”<sup>225</sup> Ah! I see, captain, yer doesn’t mouth ’em right well. Will yer try one o’ them roasted iguanos? and stop, let me give yer a little fat.’

‘What fat is it?’ inquired the captain, ‘it looks rather dark; but still—’ tasting a bit—‘it’s very fine.’

‘Why, that’s wallaby fat. Ah!’ said Sam, ‘sometimes Georgy almost cries about wallaby fat, ’cause, he says, if the cooks in England only could get a slant of it they’d give him a fortin.’<sup>226</sup>

‘Yes,’ said the doctor. ‘Lor, bless yer, it beats, all the fats holler—lard or suet. It’s splendid. I once made a pie on board ship with wallaby fat, and the chaps nearly kills theirselves with eating.’

‘Try a little bit o’ wegetable?’ said Sam; ‘we eats it raw; yer can call it turnips, or horse-radish; yer’ll find it purty fair.’

‘It’s a queer-looking vegetable,’ remarked Captain Meredith, ‘very white and crisp, slightly gummy, and in small flakes.’

‘Bite it, captain,’ said the doctor, ‘there now, good, isn’t it, and sweet?’

‘Yes, certainly; something like cocoanut. What’s it?’

‘Well, yer would guess a long time, skipper, afore yer’d guess what that is. I tell yer it’s the heart of the grass tree!<sup>227</sup> Yer chops all the

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<sup>225</sup> Caraway seed is the dried fruit of *Carum carvi* L., a tiny white-flowered umbelliferous annual or biennial of the parsley family. The seeds have an aniseedy, minty flavour. The word caraway originated in Caria, a province of Asia Minor. The seeds are used in many European, Moslem and Asian cuisines as a flavouring, a condiment, a seasoning or a digestive. The seeds also look a little like ant eggs.

<sup>226</sup> See Cawthorne’s travel piece, ‘A Christmas Trip’, first published *Register* 9 February 1859, 3b–c, in which he also sings the praises of wallaby fat.

<sup>227</sup> *Xanthorrhoea tateana*, the grass tree, yakka (or yacca), or blackboy; commonly eaten as a fresh vegetable not only by Indigenous people but by the settlers in the early years of the colony. The word ‘yacca’ is a borrowing from the Kurna language (Rob Amery, ‘Encoding new concepts in old languages: a case study of Kurna, the language of the Adelaide Plains’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No 1, 1993: 40). Leigh records that ‘the beautiful grass-tree ... grows to a height of some twenty feet, on a knotty gummy stem; the head is like long coarse grass; I compare the form of the tree, in the distance, to a gigantic umbrella, on a thick post. It is a beautiful sea-green colour; the natives eat the bark, which is a kind of think gum; and, the “Governor” ate the head of it, which he chopped out and boiled; it tasted like endive: it is also used by the natives, but they roast it. (Leigh 1839: 129). Mollison & Everitt 1977 record the earliest harvesting of the yacca from 1806–9, when Joseph Murrell and ‘Abyssinia Jack’s’ gang were engaged in ‘gumming’ around Harvey’s Return. Since then ‘yacka gum’ or resin was

leaves away and gees it a smart rap, and the heart jumps out beautiful; yer can live upon it by the week.<sup>228</sup> And what can yer do,' said Sam, slyly, putting a large piece of wallaby meat down, and looking Georgy full in the face, 'upon "wakeries?"<sup>229</sup> Ah! How long does yer say a man can live on them things?'

'Why, I suppose, Sam, yer could live for ever; for yer a reg'lar pig at wakeries. I never seed the likes o' yer.'

'What are wakeries?' remarked Captain Meredith.

'Them's them,' said the doctor, pointing to a heap of brown screwed-up pieces of fat, gristle, or meat of the thickness of a finger, and about two inches long; 'and them's them,' pointing his finger to another lot of living, wriggling, furrowed grubs, nearly milk-white or creamy in colour, and to the touch soft as marrow and hairy, though not a caterpillar, still having a strong resemblance, but thicker and with a hard head.

'And this is the way we eats 'em,' said Sam, as he grasped a fist-full of live wakeries or grubs, and commenced eating them one after the

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collected by 'gummers' and sold locally to Fauldings who used it for medicinal purposes and to make glues. For some time Australian postage stamps used 'gum acacia' for glue. It was also exported for a while to Germany where it was used in explosives and varnish manufacture. E.L. Bates records that struggling farmers earned £3 or £4 a ton; in 1951 it was still being gathered, by then worth £25 ton. (Bates 1951: 33). Cawthorne completed a watercolour of the plant, a version of which can be found in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, although he is not acknowledged as the artist.

<sup>228</sup> According to Norman Tindale's informants, twenty years after this sentence was written about the dietary value of the heart of the *Xanthorrhoea tateana*, Suke (who was almost blind) survived for a week on the heart of a yacca after the death of her companion Big Sal at Middle River in 1874. See Clarke 1998: 35.

<sup>229</sup> Cawthorne refers here to what are now more commonly known as witchetty grubs, the large wood-eating larva or pupa of several kinds of moths and beetles. The Kaurna word for similar grubs is *bardy* or *barti*. Cawthorne describes these grubs as follows in his 'Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia': The Grub of which there is a great variety, is the most repulsive dainty to appearance that can be well imagined; its general size two inches, soft, of a brown and whitish color, and composed of rings. It is however described as possessing a flavor superlatively fine. Great sagacity is displayed by the native in discovering the Grub. When seeking after those which inhabit trees he carefully examines the bark with his Wadna till he finds a hole. Then with the Pileyah [a small plaint stick with a hook at one end which is generally carried in their hair] extracts him precisely as a European would extract a periwinkle. The Grub is eaten raw or roasted; but generally alive' (Foster 1991: 72). Witchetty is derived from *wityu*, the equivalent hooked stick used to extract the grubs from their holes in a tree trunk, so named by the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges. 'Wakerie', however, refers to a ground-dwelling grub common along the River Murray. The town of Waikerie is named after the Giant Swift Moth (*Trictenna Argentata*), a food source for the Meru and Barkindji people who dug them from the ground or caught the moth as it flew around their camp fires at night. It is now known more commonly as the Rain Moth because of its habit of emerging from its cocoon in the earth following late autumn rains. <http://www.murray-river.net/regions/waikerie/waikerie.htm> accessed 23 December 2002.



other with the greatest relish.

The captain looked astonished, though, as a sailor, he was not in the least squeamish.

‘Yes,’ said the doctor, interpreting the skipper’s looks, ‘yer think it now queer-like t’ eat them things raw and all alive-o,<sup>230</sup> don’t yer? But yer eats oysters all alive-o! and where’s the difference? And perrywinks? And if a thing is to be judged by its vartue, why all the blue skins on the main<sup>231</sup> gets fat like porpoises when the wakeries there comes on, and they travels everywhere here for to get them. I like wakeries, live wakeries, you know, better than anything,’ and the doctor stuffed his mouth full of the delectable delicacies, and the visitor had nothing else to do but look on and wonder.

Sam pointed to the roasted dainties. ‘Try them,’ said he.

The captain took a couple, felt them, bit them, tasted them, and declared he had never eaten anything so delicious. There was a motley taste in them, with something of the flavour of the finest brain and marrow united; they were decidedly, in the matter of physical taste, bewitching. From a couple the captain took a handful.

‘Yer’s like all the rest,’ said Sam. ‘I never seed a man that onct began to scoff wakeries but he never knowed when to leave off; but take my advice, leave the cooked ones and try the live ’uns; they’re the rale rations, and this is a splendid lot o’ fat ’uns, so lively, too. Now, isn’t it curious?’ taking a large, live, wriggling grub between his fingers, ‘that this here bit o’ worm is the soffest possible,’ giving it a squeeze, ‘and he lives on the hardest wood<sup>232</sup> in the land? Soft as a bit o’ marrow in a bone, but yer’ll find ’em half-way in the hardest gum tree. The blacks has a long thin stick with a hook in the end, and they puts it down and hooks ’em out like yer do perrywinks, only these gum tree perry winks is half a yard in.’<sup>233</sup>

‘Yes, that’s curious, to be sure,’ observed the captain, ‘but hard or

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<sup>230</sup> The doctor is quoting the famous old Irish folk-song here about Molly Malone who sold shell fish for a living ‘In Dublin’s fair city’. The song is now sung to support the Irish rugby team.

<sup>231</sup> He means the Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri people of the mainland.

<sup>232</sup> In the ‘Notes, ETC.’ appended to the second edition of Cawthorne’s *The Legend of Kuperree; or, The Red Kangaroo* (Adelaide: Alfred Cawthorne, 1858), Cawthorne describes the grubs ‘inhabiting gum-trees, grass-sticks, &c.’, called *kupe* by the Nauo of southern Eyre peninsula: ‘Though the softest of creatures, it penetrates the hardest of woods. Its natural history is little known. When *once* eaten by Europeans it is so relished as never after to be despised. The difficulty lies in the *first* attempt.’

<sup>233</sup> Leigh describes the techniques and instruments needed for ‘maggot hunting’, including a stick with a little fish-bone hook on one end used to insert in the holes in tree trunks and then extract the grub, ‘the size of my thumb’ (Leigh 1839: 90).

soft, hairy or smooth, whether they are grubs, caterpillars, or worms, they are splendid. I only wish Mr. Ratlin was here, and he'd clear decks for yer in a trice.'

'Who's that?' said the doctor.

'The first mate,' said Sam. 'He came ashore last night, and goes away and catches wallaby all night, I s'pose. I wonder he didn't break his neck; just pick this here bit o' guano. It's beautiful roasted; nobody can keep the juices in like Georgy.'

The captain took the morsel; it was the hindleg. The meat was whiter than chicken, deliciously flavoured. The skin, of course, was peeled off, being somewhat corrugated and scaly. He pronounced it exquisite.

Georgy was highly delighted. His small blue eyes twinkled. He relished two things—the goodly fare before him, and the captain's appreciation.

'What's that?' asked the skipper, pointing to a couple of round masses of apparently very fat ham lying on some green leaves instead of dishes.

'Ah, now,' said Sam, 'yer'll never guess that grub; we calls 'em "porkies."<sup>234</sup> It's a rummy critter; he lives, yer see, in a sandy country and eats ant eggs. He's full o' quills, and he lays eggs and hatches 'em hissself in his pouch; he stows hissself all day under ground, and o' nights he comes out; but we tracks 'em and digs 'em up as yer do taters. Try a bit, captain?'

'Why the fat is two inches thick, and the colour of boiled ham-fat. However. I'll taste the beast—um! pretty good, but too greasy; I like iguano best.'

'Nuffing like wakeries—live wakeries, I means.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, 'live wakeries, they is good. What wouldn't a Frenchman give for 'em? I tell yer all the kings on earth would be arter 'em when onct they got their bearing. I reads somewhere the Emperoor o' Rame sending for oysters to England;<sup>235</sup> perhaps the King of England will send a seventy-four<sup>236</sup> out hereaway for some

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<sup>234</sup> The echida, *Tachyglossus aculeatus multiaculeatus*, the Australian 'porcupine', one of six recognised subspecies and very common on Kangaroo Island.

<sup>235</sup> The Romans were so impressed with the oysters from around Colchester they sent slaves to work as oyster-gatherers, the oysters transported back to Rome in barrels of brine. The Roman Emperor Vitellius was said to have eaten a thousand oysters at a single sitting.

<sup>236</sup> A 'seventy-four' was a 'third rate' man-of-war carrying seventy-four guns on two gun decks. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, about a third of the British Navy's ships of the line were seventy-fours which were noted for their balance of firepower and seaworthiness. Lord Anson

barrels o' wakeries.'

'Clew up<sup>237</sup>,' said Sam, 'and let's hear what the captain wants us for.'

'I want you,' said Captain Meredith, 'to load with salt in the lagoon, and after that I'll buy your skins—seal, kangaroo, or wallaby, whatever have.'

'Well,' said Sam, "'s'pose it'll do arter we've been on the main. Yer see we're going to catch as many black women as we can grab.'<sup>238</sup>

'And is that the way you chaps get all those black women I see here now?'

'Yes; we cotched 'em all, and rare game it is, too; isn't it, Georgy?'

'Yes,' said Georgy, 'and ain't they sly? Kangaroo, wild duck, porkies, is nuffing to 'em, the black skins! I don't think the Government of Sydney would like to know this.'

'Well,' said Sam, 'perhaps the Governor will tell us how we is to get 'em.'<sup>239</sup>

'And I reads,' chimed in the doctor, 'that it was allers the way to steal women in old times; so we is living in the old times of Australia

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first set up the system by which warships were rated in the middle of the eighteenth century. First rate ships carried 100 or more guns; second rate, 84; third rate, 70; fourth rate, 50; fifth rate, 32; and sixth rate 32 guns or less.

<sup>237</sup> To draw the lower ends of a sail up to a yard or to the mast ready for furling. Sam means 'get ready', listen.

<sup>238</sup> This following revealing observation recorded by Lady Jane Franklin notes the value of the women to the Islanders. She visited Kingscote 15 January 1841; her diary records this fascinating vignette of island life: 'The whole population of Kangaroo Island according to Mr. Woodroffe (South Australian Company agent) is 76, men, women and children, including the sealers with their black wives and mongrel children. These live chiefly in the interior when not engaged in sealing. Their wives who are numerous and whom they interchange are chiefly, if not altogether from V.D.L. We saw one of these women at the settlement (Kingscote). She wore a man's long coat, buttoned down the front. The child had improved features, but more of the mother than the father. It was lighter hued however particularly in face and had curly light, soft hair. The woman said she was from Hobart Town. These black women are essential to men who live chiefly on fishing and hunting. The wallaby which the women are skilful in taking is one of their chief articles of food. Their offspring are very scanty—not above 2 or 3 of the black women of the island have children. The men are of the worst description of character. When they come into town, it is only to get drunk and make broils. The old man, called Governor Waller in Leigh's South Australia is still living on the island. 'Diary of Lady Franklin', copy held at Kingscote National Trust 'Hope' Museum.

<sup>239</sup> The 'Governor' here is Henry Wallen, one of the best-known of the Islanders. W.H. Leigh records his meeting Samuel Stephens, Manager of the South Australian Company, in 1836. 'Mr. S— landed with his cargo, when Wallen went to the beach to know who he was. "Who are you?" quoth S— to W—. "I am the governor," says Wallen. "You are no such thing," retorted the enraged S— to the astonished islander; "I am the governor."—"I tell you I *am*," says Wallen stoutly; and enquired, "Who made you a governor" you a governor? Why you are not even one of King John's men; you don't stand four feet in your stockings.' Stephens was a very small man: an alcoholic and quick to anger. See Leigh 1839: 124.

like, and maybe the time may come when all this land hereaway may be chock-a-block wid settlers, and then they'll yarn about the "old times" and us. Islanders grabbing black women for wives. Ha! ha! ha!

'Avast, Georgy!' exclaimed Sam quite seriously, 'if these darned settlers squat down and build their towns and preaching shops, I shall top my boom and be off. I can't abear a lot o' fellows with their rights o' this and their rights o' that, and their perlice, and their darbies. I hates 'em.'<sup>240</sup>

'Very likely,' remarked the captain, 'that this country will become settled. I suppose there is a bit of good land inland.'

'Yes, splendid,' began the doctor.<sup>241</sup>

'Belay there,' sang out Old Sam, jumping up and thumping the rude table with his fist. 'Tell him nuffing,' roared he, 'tell him nuffing, or he'll tell the Government of Sydney, and then the darned surveying ships will be poking their jib-booms in every hole, and our country will be sold in bits as big as a seal-skin. No, no, Georgy, that big river will bring 'em down soon enuf. Don't yer for to go and tell 'em all yer and me knows.'<sup>242</sup>

'What river?' anxiously inquired Captain Meredith; but both were silent.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Old Sam's speech here is at odds with reports written to the Colonization Commissioners about the sealers of Kangaroo Island. John Morphett's letter 14 September 1836, quoted in *Supplement to the First Report of the Directors of the South Australian Company* (London: William Johnstone, 1837), mentions that the newly-arrived colonists had met six residents and that they were 'intelligent, quiet men ... I have no doubt we shall find these men of great use, and they have all expressed pleasure at the opportunity of entering into the relations of civilized life' (28–29). Lady Jane Franklin thought otherwise. See Note 238.

<sup>241</sup> Circumstantial evidence that 'the Doctor' is based on George 'Fireball' Bates, who spent a considerable period of time living on the mainland. Cawthorne here also alludes to the part played by Islander opinion of the mainland in encouraging Colonel William Light to decide on the present site of Adelaide for the colony's capital.

<sup>242</sup> According to Edith Wells, in *Cradle of a Colony* (Kingscote: Island Press, 1978) 35, a *Register* journalist attempting to interview George 'Fireball' Bates, one of the last of the Islanders but found it difficult to get him to talk about the days before 1836. However, Bates obviously thought more highly of the *Advertiser*, for he gave a long and very detailed interview which forms the basis of a long piece, 'Old George Bates', in the *Advertiser*, 27 December 1886, 6c–f, describing many incidents with the Aboriginal people of the mainland, including what is called *chasse aux femmes*.

<sup>243</sup> Cawthorne's novel is set in 1823, in which year the Murray's mouth was still not known to non-Indigenous people. Matthew Flinders did not see it in 1802, nor Baudin in 1803. In February 1830 Captain Charles Sturt and his party sailed and rowed their whaleboat down the Goolwa channel. They did not actually navigate as far as the Murray mouth, but crossed the coastal dunes and walked east to the mouth. Captain Collet Barker landed at the mouth of the Onkaparinga 17 April 1831, walked overland to Mount Lofty, noted the Port Adelaide inlet, saw the hill which was later to be named after him to the east and then returned to his ship. He then

‘It’s nuffing, nuffing,’ they remarked at last.

Little did the skipper think the big river alluded to was the now famous River Murray, with its steamboats and its towns, villages, and sheep stations on its banks; but the Islanders had been in the habit, for years, of visiting its banks for the various purposes of “wife-hunting,” “visiting the tribes,” or lending a hand in the tribal fights that take place invariably on grand annual occasions.<sup>244</sup> As the Islanders on all occasions evinced the greatest dread at the prospect of a regular settlement, either on the main or on the island, it was impossible for Captain Meredith to obtain any further information of the appearance of the country on the main, so he turned to another subject, upon which they were not so scrupulous as to the information they imparted.

‘I should think it’s sometimes a precious hard job to catch them blacks.’<sup>245</sup>

‘Yes, it is; for the women are so cussed stupid, they thinks we catch ’em to eat ’em! They wouldn’t mind stopping wid us; but they don’t like for we to eat ’em. Last season we goes over and we meets the blacks. Where’s my lubra? where’s my picaninny? they shouts. We tells ’em they’re all right on the island. They says we lies, and we eat em up; in course we can can’t take ’em back to see their grannies; they’d bolt, nuffing would hold ’em, would they, Georgy?’<sup>246</sup>

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landed near Cape Jervis and walked overland to the mouth, swimming the Murray and disappearing in the dunes on the southern side 30 April 1831. It was later discovered he was murdered on the Ninety Mile Beach. A. Grenfell Price, in ‘The Work of Captain Collet Barker in South Australia’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)* 26 (1926): 52–67, suggests that about 1828 ‘some of the sealers discovered Lake Alexandrina, and apparently crossed the Mount Lofty Ranges, since they reported it was three days’ journey from Cape Jervis’ (55). Perhaps one of Cawthorne’s sources had told him the lakes and the Murray mouth had been visited by sealers before 1828. George ‘Fireball’ Bates is not named in Gill’s 1906 article, but it is very likely he was the sealer who had deserted from the *Nereus* in c. 1825 and who had lived variously at Thistle Island, Cape Jervis and Kangaroo Island. See Thomas Gill, ‘Who Discovered Lake Alexandrina?’ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)* 8 (1906): 48–54.

<sup>244</sup> Cawthorne’s diary 24 December 1842 and 2 November 1843 records two such ‘dreadful fights’, the first between the Mount Barker and Encounter Bay blacks, the result of which a few deaths and many wounded and the second between the Encounter Bay and Adelaide people in alliance against the Moorunde and Mount Barker people. Cawthorne also recorded the actions of the police in breaking up a third fight, 22 April 1844. Foster 1991: 9–10, 26, 46. Cawthorne wrote to the *Observer* 24 April 1844 about such native fights.

<sup>245</sup> Cawthorne seems not to have heard stories about George Meredith’s history of abducting Indigenous women. Meredith was directly involved in the abduction of New Holland women from Point Nepean, Port Phillip and may have been involved in a second raid at Port Lincoln in c. 1835. There is no doubt that Nat Thomas knew such stories about Meredith, in that he showed Cawthorne where he was buried.

<sup>246</sup> Note that the Islanders can speak enough of the languages of the main to understand what is

Georgy wagged his head and grinned at the idea of holding any o' these black critters, good gals as they were; but they was worser than eels iled.

'Well,' said the captain, 'I hope you will let me go with you and see the sport.'

'No, no,' said Sam, 'we can't allows that—it would shake yer narves—yer see they is rather wild, and jump about like mad. But, arter all, they does just the same when their own chaps cotches them.'

'What is yer laffing about, yer old Stingeray?' suddenly remarked Sam as he noticed the doctor in a convulsion of laughter.

'Why,' gasped he, 'I was just 'memb'ring how "Pussy," when we cotched her, rolled down the hill, and went plop into the water-hole, and you fell in arter her, and there was the devil to pay—fighting like cats! ha! ha! ha!—that's why we calls her "Pussy," captain, 'cause she's so fierce and scratches terrible bad.'<sup>247</sup>

'Look at that,' said Sam, baring his arm, and showing a tremendous scar, 'that's the way they bites—took the piece clean out—cuss 'em.'

'But we never knocks 'em on the head,' said the doctor; 'that's the way the black chaps do on the main; they skulks about and sees a woman digging roots may be—they rushes up and gees them a knock with a wirri,<sup>248</sup> and then drags 'em along half drunk like. Ah! but "Pussy" is a good gal—she has speret, more than two others—and the other gals stand clear when she gits her flying jib set.'

'I should like to go very much,' said the captain.

'It can't be—yer would tell lots o' lies about us, and then get us into

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said to them. Note too Cawthorne's suggestion that Indigenous people thought that the Europeans were cannibals, an ironic reversal of the more typical view.

<sup>247</sup> Cawthorne probably heard a version of this story from George 'Fireball' Bates, who described a raid on the mainland to an *Advertiser* journalist in 1886 as follows: 'the party of five [islanders] ... crossed over to the mainland to undertake this *chasse aux femmes*. They landed at Cape Jervis and walked across country to Lake Alexandrina, having no small difficulty in eluding the natives, who were very numerous. Their method of capturing the women was simple. Waiting until the morning was well advanced, and the men were out hunting, they stole up under cover until close to the camp, when at a signal they rushed forward and secured their prizes before they had time to escape. They made four trips with this object at different times, securing one or two women each time who, when captured, had their hands tied behind their backs, and were made to walk with the their captors in double quick time back to the boat. They were set at liberty on reaching Hog Bay, where they in most cases proved useful and willing slaves. One girl, whom Bates named "Puss," from her propensity to scratch the face of her owner when in a rage, lived for years afterwards at Hog Bay'. *Advertiser*, 27 December 1886, 6c.

<sup>248</sup> A spear or stick, often mentioned in Cawthorne's diaries. See Foster 1991: 3.

trouble with Sydney<sup>249</sup>—no, no, let us alone, and we lets yer alone, every man to his station and cook to the fore sheet; yer knows, captain. When we is done, and cotched a few or so, we'll lend a hand, and get yer a cargo o' salt; yer had better stand away to the westward, and pick up a few of our chaps on the islands, they has plenty o' skins by this time.'<sup>250</sup>

The captain thought this the best advice also. It would be useless to force himself into their proposed attempt on the main, so he determined to go on board and be off the very next morning.

'Well,' said the skipper, 'I must be off, the sun is nearly set.' Georgy and Sam led the way, and were soon upon the beach.

'We'll give yer a call to-morrow morning,' said Sam, as they turned slowly away and disappeared behind the sandhills.

'It'll never do,' said Georgy, 'to let that covey go wid us a gal-hunting.'

'In course not,' gruffly replied Sam, 'if he comes any o' his tricks, why we'll sarve him out; we'll gee 'im to the blacks. We'll stand no nonsense, and they'll bowse 'im up taut.'<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Cawthorne seems here to make oblique reference to the several expeditions sent from Sydney to round up runaway convicts and reassert the New South Wales Governor's power, at least until 1825 when a separate colony was established in Van Diemen's Land. Details are sketchy; it may be that such vessels did not sail beyond the Bass Strait islands as far as 'Ultima Thule', Kangaroo Island. However, local legends persist that some escaped convicts were rounded up and their Indigenous companions returned to Tasmania. According to W.H. Skelton, in a letter in a Sydney paper *The Australian* 9 March 1826, Captain Thomas Whyte commanded one vessel sent to the straits on a mission to clean-up the islands of the southern coast. In his letter Skelton mentions Whyte's voyage, and reprimands those Sydney businessmen who are in business with the Straitsmen for the 'enticement held out to those wretched men to embark in and continue their abandoned way of life' and goes on later to observe how 'injudicious it would be to permit any settlers on these islands and other remote situations except in numbers and with property sufficient to induce Government to protect it by a detachment of military' (quoted Moore 1925: 106.) See also Thomas Willson's remarks in 'Tasmanian Aborigines', *Observer* 7 October 1871: 7b insisting that 'Captain Duff' took numbers of women back to Tasmania on the *Africaine*. John Duff was master of the *Africaine*, one of the ships that brought immigrants to the colony in 1836, arriving 3 November 1836.

<sup>250</sup> The implication is that the Islanders operated as a loose confederation, sending some of their number sealing on the islands to the west. The Althorpes, Thistle, Flinders, Franklin and St Peters islands were all visited by sealers during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and one or two of them had people living there for a number of years. Archaeological work has been done on several of the sites. See Parry Kostoglou and Justin McCarthy, *Whaling and Sealing Sites in South Australia* Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology Special Publication No. 6. (Adelaide: State Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, 1991).

<sup>251</sup> Tie him up tight.

## CHAPTER XII.

Night.—The Native Women.—Missionaries.—The Pull out of the Creek.—The Midnight Squall.

The night settled down clear and starlight. The transparency of the atmosphere was wonderful, and the magnificent splendours of the starry host exceeded belief. A gaze fixed for a short time on the heavenly bodies became absorbing, and as new glories burst to view, and the eye adapted itself to the effulgence of the scene, the grand panorama of the sky assumed phases of surpassing beauty undreamt of in colder latitudes. Captain Meredith reclined against the taffrail<sup>252</sup> of the ship, and mused on star and constellation; Mr. Ratlin paced the deck slowly, and scanned from time to time the dark ocean and the darker masses of land that lay around him; the poor second mate, Mr. Handspike, sat on the combings of the main hatch, with a sailor attending him. The hallucination of the sunstroke had not yet passed away.

‘I see them coming; they are racing ashore,’ he muttered.

‘What’s racing ashore?’ said Jim.

‘The boats; they are coming to fetch me. I can’t get out of this cussed scrub, and the men are all drunk and won’t go on board.’

The images of that terrible morning were still uppermost in the poor mate’s brain. Then relapsing into a desponding mood, he kept repeating in a despairing tone, that even affected the sailor, ‘They’re all moored, they’re all moored.’

The anchor watch, two men, were pacing up and down the forecastle, four steps one way and four steps the other, the extreme limits of their march.

‘I heard the skipper say,’ remarked Bill, ‘that these Islanders are off to the main tomorrow to catch black women! Isn’t that purty, now? I should like to go wid ’em, for to see the fun. Well, this is a rummy place; everything is topsy-turvy!’<sup>253</sup>

‘I don’t like ’em,’ replied his companion. ‘I don’t like these Robinson Crusoes, with their skin breeches, and smelling like

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<sup>252</sup> The rail around the ship’s stern.

<sup>253</sup> Cawthorne here uses a very familiar trope about Australia as the Antipodes of Europe.





William Anderson Cawthorne, 'Aboriginal Family Travelling'; Mitchell Library, SLNSW, copied from Kathryn Gargett & Susan Marsden, *Adelaide: a brief history* (Adelaide: State History Centre, 1996) p. 4.

foxes;<sup>254</sup> six wives a-piece, and eating all manner o' things. How did they get here?'

'Well, you axes them next time you seed 'em; you'll have a chance tomorrow.'

On shore and huddled together in a wurley<sup>255</sup> or native hut, sat some half-dozen black women, with their half-caste children, talking to each other in a low plaintive voice in their native tongue.<sup>256</sup>

'How big Yuru looks,'<sup>257</sup> remarked one, as she gazed on the Milky Way; 'what a long river that must be; the old men say it is a river, and that Yuru lives in it. I wish I was over there, where it comes out of the mountains; I would then swim down and get to my own country';<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Cawthorne's third reference to Captain Sutherland's Report.

<sup>255</sup> From the Kurna word *warli*, from the Adelaide Plains. In his 'Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia, Their Manners, Customs, ceremonies, etc.' Cawthorne has the following: 'Dwellings. These are the most simple probably ever known merely a few branches placed in a semi-circle during the Summer months, under which they lie with a fire in the middle, in the winter season they are made a little more substantial. The sides are then heightened and supported by a few sticks meeting at the top, cover'd with bark, earth, or grass, forming when finished a domicile in the shape of a half dome. When an encampment takes place the 'Warlies' as they are called are generally made close together and in rows. On a moonlight night the many glimmering lights and Spears stuck all around, with now and then a shrill peal of laughter echoing through the forests present a most wild and striking appearance to the eye and ear of a casual observer (Foster 1991: 74). In the 'Notes, ETC.' appended to the second edition of Cawthorne's *The Legend of Kuperree; or, The Red Kangaroo* Cawthorne has the following: 'Native huts, made of the boughs of trees, and in winter strongly constructed, of a dome shape, and capable of holding from six to a dozen persons. Near whaling stations, the ribs of whales are employed as the frame-work, and the divisions filled up with boughs and sea-weed.'

<sup>256</sup> Part of the interest in this novella is that Cawthorne represents Indigenous culture with some sympathy and awareness. He tried to learn Kurna, gave his children Kurna names and wrote *The Legend of Kuperree* under the influence of the American poet Longfellow, representing a Port Lincoln 'Dreaming'. He was one of the first Australian writers to attempt such a task.

<sup>257</sup> In his 'Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia, Their Manners, Customs, ceremonies, etc.' Cawthorne asserts that the Aborigines 'consider the firmament with its bodies as a land similar to what they live upon: therefore the Milky Way is a large river, say they, along the banks of which reeds are growing. The dark spots in it are water lagoons in which monsters called 'Yuru' are living. The Magellan clouds are the ashes of a species of paraquets which were assembled there by a constellation and afterwards treacherously roasted.' However, in his public lecture 'Aborigines and their Customs', delivered 15 April 1864, he states that 'To them the visible heavens are great hunting plains, the Milky Way a large stream, in which lives one of their most dreaded monsters, Yura, a black snake, the author of the rite of circumcision. The stars, with sun and moon, have all been men once; the moon was the first to leave the earth and enticed all the others; the Pleiades, are girls gathering roots; and the Orion are boys hunting' (Foster 1991: 77, 90). Gell also records the name: 'Yura, who taught circumcision, was changed into a snake, now inhabiting the milky way'. John Philip Gell, 'The Vocabulary of the Adelaide Tribe', *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* 1 (1842): 123. Although neither acknowledges the fact, it is more than likely that their source is Christian Gottlieb Teichelmann, *Aborigines of South Australia, Illustrative and explanatory note of the manners, customs, habits and superstitions of the natives of South Australia* (Adelaide: Committee of the SA Wesleyan Methodist Auxiliary Missionary Society, 1841) 8.

<sup>258</sup> Given the uncharacteristic fluency of expression represented here, it seems Cawthorne might

and unable to control the thoughts that came rushing into her mind of her lost home, she broke forth in a loud wail, a monotone of lamentations, for the aborigines *sing* for all purposes—to cure disease, for joy, to soothe pain, to express sorrow, to assuage the wrath of sorcerers, and to lament for the dead. For what civilised man flees to priest or doctor the native resorts to song; to them it is a universal remedy for sin and sorrow, and for all the diversified experience of life. The expedient is simple and as efficacious as the more costly and varied helps, spiritual, pharmaceutical, and ritual, of their white brethren. The cure follows, and the afflicted, white or black, is restored.

Let us not quarrel with each other. Music is all potent;<sup>259</sup> man walks up to the cannon's mouth at the beat of the drum; music restored religion in the dark ages, when man and his preaching had become the dry bones of the whited sepulchre. Music ushered in the morn of creation, and it is to conclude the end of all things. Orpheus would never have gained Eurydice but for his lyre;<sup>260</sup> so music, barbarous or civilised, works miracles; faith and imagination are the true rulers of humanity.

Another of the native women pointed out to two or three children the group of stars known to whites as the constellation Pleiades. 'Those,' said she, 'are boys; one day they were digging roots on the hills, and the moon saw them, and loved them, and took them up where you see them now.'<sup>261</sup>

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have agreed with Teichelmann: 'I must note that, before the execution of their two brothers the Aborigines were more communicative in language than they now are, and it is now very difficult to get a complete phrase out of them, in that they want to keep Europeans in ignorance of their speech and speak broken language to the Europeans, as the Europeans speak broken language to them.' Teichelmann Papers: Letter to the Brothers 4/7/1839/p. 199, Jane Simpson's translation. Jane Simpson, 'Introduction', *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* (edited by Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus, Aboriginal History Monograph 6, Sydney: Aboriginal History, 1998) 11.

<sup>259</sup> The Cawthorne family is now very known for its contributions to music in South Australia. Cawthorne's eldest son, Charles Witto-Witto Cawthorne (1854–1925), joined his father in the firm Cawthorne & Co. which set up premises in 1884 in the city at the Grenfell Street and Gawler Place corner. Father William retired in 1887, leaving his son Charles to build up what was to become the biggest supplier of sheet music and instruments in Adelaide. In 1911 a prime site in Rundle Street was established, in a building called Cawthorne's. Charles Cawthorne went on to manage orchestras, to work as a musical entrepreneur in Adelaide and to help develop the local musical culture. See the entry for Charles Cawthorne, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7: 1891–1939, A–Ch (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979) 594–5.

<sup>260</sup> Eurydice, a tree nymph, fell in love with Orpheus when she heard him playing his lyre.

<sup>261</sup> In his 'Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia, Their Manners, Customs, ceremonies, etc.' Cawthorne notes that Aboriginal people 'believe all the celestial bodies formerly living upon the earth, partly as Animals, partly as men, and that they quitted the lower regions in exchange for

‘What are they doing?’ said one of the children. ‘Digging roots in the heavenly plains.’<sup>262</sup>

‘They are going to-morrow across the water to catch some of our people,’ remarked Bet to Sally.<sup>263</sup>

‘Ah! exclaimed every one in a subdued breath. ‘May they be cursed! May their kidney fat be taken!<sup>264</sup> May the sorcerers turn them into trees,<sup>265</sup> and may they be smitten with the sacred girdle<sup>266</sup>

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the higher. Therefore all the names which they apply to the beings on earth they give the celestial bodies, believing them to be obnoxious to their influence, and describing to them malformation of the body and other casualties. The first celestial body that left this earth was the Moon, who is considered a Male, he persuaded all the rest to follow that he might have companions. The Sun is his Wife, who beats him every month till he dies, but in dying (Phoenix like) he revives again. Besides this, he keeps a great number of dogs for hunting, which have two heads but no tail. The Pleiades are Girls gathering roots and other vegetables; Orion, boys hunting: so that Celestial bodies are believed to obey the same laws as men and animals below’. The association of the Pleiades with a group of *women* is very common in many cultures around the world: the constellation is often called the Seven Sisters. Cawthorne here seems not to have remembered his own essay. Elsewhere in his ‘Literarium Diarium’, Cawthorne records the Kurna word for the moon: *Cearkera* (Foster 1991: 6, 77).

<sup>262</sup> This is a very interesting moment in the text, in which it is clearly suggested that the children of the relationships between the Islanders and their Indigenous women associated strongly with their mothers, even to the extent of speaking what in this case Cawthorne probably intended to be taken as ‘Hobart Town Language’. Even as late as 1837 one of Nat Thomas’s grandchildren, the eighty-year-old Joseph Seymour, could still remember fragments of the songs sung to him as a child. See Norman B. Tindale, ‘Tasmanian Aborigines on Kangaroo Island, South Australia,’ *Records of the South Australian Museum* 6 (1937): 36, which also records another un-named grandson’s remark that ‘the two families at one time used many words which were not understood by other people, but the children had forgotten most of them’.

<sup>263</sup> Is this ‘Bumblefoot Sal’, or another woman ‘Sally’? Cawthorne uses this name only once, hinting at the much-travelled and well-known Kurna woman Sally, daughter of Conday or Conday, also named later in this novella. See Rob Amery, ‘Sally and Harry: insights into early Kurna contact history,’ *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* eds. Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus, Aboriginal History Monograph 6 (Sydney: Aboriginal History, 1998) 49–87.

<sup>264</sup> Cawthorne refers here to stories alleging controversial Aboriginal practice, that of removing the kidneys and kidney (‘caul’) fat from a victim. Many non-Indigenous commentators asserted that this practice existed. A.W. Howitt asserts that the ‘practice of using human fat as a powerful magical ingredient is widely spread over Australia, and consequently the belief is universal that the medicine-men have the power of abstracting it magically from individuals, or also of actually taking it by violence accompanied by magic. This is usually spoken of by the whites as taking “the kidney fat,” but it appears to be the caul-fat of the omentum.’ A.W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904. Facsimile Edition, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1996) 367. Robert Bruce, pastoralist and author, insists that in 1852 a man named Robert Richardson was murdered on the Aroona run in the Flinders and his caul fat removed, but police records make it clear there was no such mutilation of the corpse. See Robert Bruce, *Recollections of an Old Squatter* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas and Co., 1902) 108.

<sup>265</sup> In Cawthorne’s ‘Rough notes on the manners and customs of the natives’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)*, Vol. 23, no. 6, 1926: 29, an essay probably written in 1845, he records ‘Last year one individual [Warrawarra or sorcerer] transformed himself into a sheoak when pursued by Europeans’. In a public lecture he gave 15 April 1864, Cawthorne also observed that ‘It was devoutly believed that a certain man was transformed into a sheoak tree, the one that stood a little way above the old Frome Bridge’

and the tuft of eagle feathers!’<sup>267</sup>

Uttering these curses in an undertone, they then in one accord sang a low kind of dirge which, like all savage music, was set in the minor key, that extraordinary key that pervades all barbarous races, and is so generally absent from the music of civilised men.

‘What the deuce are yer kicking up this row for?’ said Porky, as he walked off to the wurley, ‘come, just hold yer tongues.’

‘None o’ yer church music,<sup>268</sup> old Bet, said Sam, ‘or I’ll make you sing to another tune; do you hear me?’

Bet said nothing, but rose up and went away.

‘I say, Porky, the women smell a rat, aye! whose a been and split? this caterwauling means summut.’

‘Give ’em a tarnation hiding all around,’ suggested another, ‘that’ll keep ’em quiet while we’s away; or slit their ears?’

‘Yes,’ said Porky, ‘that might do some good; letting blood is fust rate. I know’s it mysell; when I gets drunk, and gets knocked about, it’s the bleeding that does me good; I feels all the better arter.’

As cropping the ears was considered a proper legal punishment a few years back in Christian England, so these Islanders, living a few years after their time, had introduced the English practice of cropping ears as one of their recognised modes of punishment amongst the women.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, one ear, no ears, half an ear, or

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(Foster 1991: 91). This story is also quoted by John Philip Gell in ‘The Vocabulary of the Adelaide Tribe’, *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* 1 (1842): 123. Both are quoting Teichelmann 1841: 10, which is obviously Cawthorne’s source, in that he quotes Tiechelmann word-perfect.

<sup>266</sup> Robert Foster has noticed that a stanza Cawthorne quotes in his ‘Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia’ contains a line referring to both the tuft of eagle feathers and the girdle is taken from G.C. Teichelmann and C.W. Schürmann, *Outline of a Grammar, Vocabulary and Phraseology, of the Aboriginal language of South Australia* (Adelaide: 1840) 73. See Foster 1991: 75. The girdle is called *wilkatja* on p. 72 and *gadlotta* on p. 81.

<sup>267</sup> Cawthorne names the tuft of emu feathers *kariwoppa* or *kari-wappa* (Foster: 1991: 47, 81).

<sup>268</sup> In his ‘Literarium Diarium’, 26 April 1844 Cawthorne recorded the following observation: ‘But hark! The natives are singing and dancing their wild corroboree. There is something ever soothing in that un[nerving] and ferocious song. Ah! oh’ oh’ etc Wail on natives, louder, louder, shriller, deeper, lower. Thou art blessed above us no care, no mental misery to afflict thee. Thy house is the earth and thy home a few branches, thy clothing the opossum’s skin and thy only sorrow a hungry belly occasionally. Little does the savage of Australia [know] the many many causes of trouble and pain that the white man suffers and the 100,000 petty grievances he has to endure, of the difficulties he is often placed in by that unknown thing to thee money. Wail on natives. Your day will come, the next generation of black men will be the servants of the next generation of white man. May they be treated with [levity?] Ah! now then, the deep sounds of the ‘tarpurro’ [possum-skin drum], now the shrill voices of the women and children. The men are striking in, the song is increasing, louder yet There! it ends abruptly with a grand ‘ah!’ Silence reigns as usual, not a voice is heard. Blessed are the natives. No care sits upon the brow, dear sorrow upon their heart’ (Foster 1991: 47).

<sup>269</sup> N.J.B. Plomley records the story told by John Anderson (Abyssinia Jack) to Tasmanian

ears slightly cropped, were not uncommon. No doubt the reader will shudder at such inhumanity, duly forgetting that he speaks the same language in which Blackstone justified this identical mode of suffering as highly proper and Christian-like;<sup>270</sup> and even further,

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Protector of Aborigines G.A. Robinson of a sealer named James Allen who tied a Van Diemen's Land woman called Lar-roon-er to a tree 'at American Wharf Lagoon' (American River? American Beach?). He then slashed her buttocks with his sealer's knife and also cut off part of her ear. This accusation of ear cropping was also levelled against Nat Thomas, Cawthorne's source for many stories about the Islanders. John Anderson also told G.A. Robinson that Thomas had cut off the ears of a seven-year-old 'New Holland' boy, cutting so close to the head that a piece of the cheek was also removed. After lingering for several weeks the lad died. It is not clear if this boy is the lad called Pra-re mentioned by Robinson; he seems to have been the son of James Allen and Emue. Emue (or Emma) later lived with John Anderson's; she was probably of Kaurua or Ramindjeri origin. Anderson handed Emma and her son over to G.A. Robinson 29 March 1831: Robinson interrogated her at length and recorded a great deal of information about the women living with sealers on Kangaroo Island. In 1836 she was living with James Munro on a Bass Strait island where it seems she died shortly after (Plomley 1966: 327, 335, 360, 479, 1010, 1016).

<sup>270</sup> Sir William Blackstone (1723–80), English jurist and academic. After an unsuccessful legal practice, in 1758 Blackstone he became the first Vinerian professor of law at Oxford, where he inaugurated courses in English law. Blackstone published his lectures as *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (4 vol., 1765–69). Blackstone's book exerted tremendous influence on the legal profession and on the teaching of law in England and in the United States. In his later life Blackstone resumed practice, served in Parliament, was solicitor general to the queen, and was a judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Perhaps Cawthorne had the following paragraph in mind: 'If all these resources fail, the court must pronounce that judgment, which the law hath annexed to the crime, and which hath been constantly mentioned, together with the crime itself, in some or other of the former chapters. Of these some are capital, which extend to the life of the offender, and consist generally in being hanged by the neck till dead; though in very atrocious crimes other circumstances of terror, pain or disgrace are superadded: as, in treasons of all kinds, being drawn or dragged to the place of execution; in high treason affecting the king's person or government, embowelling alive, beheading, and quartering; and in murder, a public dissection. And, in case of any treason committed by a female, the judgment is to be burned alive. But the humanity of the English nation has authorized, by a tacit consent, an almost general mitigation of such part of these judgments as favour of torture or cruelty: a sledge of hurdle being usually allowed to such traitors as are condemned to be drawn; and there being very few instances (and those accidental or by negligence) of any person's being embowelled or burned, till previously deprived of sensation by strangling. Some punishments consist in exile or banishment, by abjuration of the realm, or transportation to the American colonies: others in loss of liberty, by perpetual or temporary imprisonment. Some extend to confiscation, by forfeiture of lands, or moveables, or both, or of the profits of lands for life: others induce a disability, of holding offices or employments, being heirs, executors, and the like. Some, though rarely, occasion a mutilation or dismembering, by cutting off the hand or ears: others fix a lasting stigma on the offender, by slitting the nostrils, or branding in the hand or face. Some are merely pecuniary, by slatted or discretionary fines: and lastly there are others, that consist principally in their ignominy, though most of them are mixed with some degree of corporal pain; and these are inflicted chiefly for crimes, which arise from indigence, or which render even opulence disgraceful. Such as whipping, hard labour in the house of correction, the pillory, the stocks, and the ducking-stool. Disgusting as this catalogue may seem, it will afford pleasure to an English reader, and do honour to the English law, to compare it with that shocking apparatus of death and torment, to be met with in the criminal codes of almost every other nation in Europe' William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (A facsimile of the First Edition of 1765–1769. Volume IV, Of Public Wrongs, with an Introduction by Thomas A. Green, Chicago &

could prove by all laws, human and divine, that drowning or burning was the proper course to adopt with wizards and witches. Whatever atrocities the Islanders committed, they never alluded to this, nor did they cover their barbarities with the respectabilities of ermine and lawn, or the holy associations of religion. They were emphatically men, one equal to another, having a salutary dread of each other, as a difference of opinion would at once be settled to conclusions. They had a rough and ready mode of dealing out justice that cut the Gordian knot of difficulty at once, without the intervention of lawyers and judges, the fist or the knife, and the matter was settled.

The native women having the option of living in the huts of their lords and masters, preferred to reside in their own wurleys.<sup>271</sup> They could not endure the close atmosphere. They asserted that the huts made them ill. Wherever the adjuncts of civilisation, the hut or house, and the multiple clothing of the white have been forced on unwilling aborigines, especially by missionaries, there death comes in, and the native dies. This is the history of all missionary attempts to Christianise the blacks; they won't allow a native man to go to heaven in an opossum rug, to live on this earth in a clothing suited to the climate God has put him in. The picturesque dresses of the South Sea Islanders were ignored, and the poke bonnet and the four-and-ninepenny substituted as the proper dress, according to the Gospel. Cole-scuttle bonnets and the Christian verities were identical; the missionary's wife would not call that one sister that was naked to the waist and dressed in a robe adorned with feathers. So it is with the poor Australians; first clothe them, then kill them, that they may give signs of conversion on their deathbed. Oh! missionary zeal, thou art a

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London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 370–1.

<sup>271</sup> For confirmation of this practice, see a letter dated 10 December 1836, describing a visit to 'Governor' Henry Wallen's farm at Three Wells River, Kangaroo Island: 'We then proceeded to the farmyard, where we beheld pigs, poultry, and everything pertaining to a farm. Here was a house in which lived three black women—two natives of the main and one of Van Dieman's [sic] Land' quoted H.P. Moore, 'Notes on the Early Settlers in South Australia prior to 1836,' *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia South Australian Branch*, 25 (1925): 96. George Wilkinson also records a similar observation: 'As to living in the huts built for them, they complied for a short time with the request to do so, but have always quitted these habitations for little *worleys* or shelters of their own, which are soon deserted and others formed. This might be thought an evidence of their wandering and unsettled life, but they have a reason for frequent changes. Ask them why they do not live in such and such a place, where there is a shelter of their own making, and they answer, "No good that one; too much plenty fleas; no sleep; too much bite 'um black fellow;" and at the same time they commence scratching their bodies to exemplify their meaning'. See George Blakiston Wilkinson, *South Australia: its advantages and its resources, being a description of that colony and a manual of information for emigrants* (London: John Murray, 1848) 319.

cruel ass, with all thy philanthropy. It is difficult to say which is greater, thy benevolence or thy inhumanity.<sup>272</sup>

‘Let’s be off,’ said Sam, addressing some three or four hands that stood waiting about.

A little below their huts, the creek was situated, and parting a deep fringe of tea-tree the party stepped into one of their boats. They were off on a night expedition to catch crawfish, as a part of the provisions for the morrow’s adventures on the main. That night’s pull down the placid waters of the creek<sup>273</sup> was of transcendental beauty. So faithfully mirrored were the heavens above, that there was no difference between the luminosity of the stars beneath and those above. As the Islanders gave a long stroke and allowed the boat to shoot ahead, it seemed that she was absolutely cleaving the starry host themselves, as if sailing on and through a bed of stars, thrusting them aside with the dip of the oars, or jostling them together, in long ripples, or sending them dancing in pools and eddies. The high and dense tea-tree assisted this wonderful phenomenon, and gathered the rays of night to a focal point, and the boat with its wild crew skimmed o’er that sheet of reflected light as a cloud o’er the face of heaven. They hauled the boat with the help of skids over the dry bar, launched her through the surf, and boldly made for or one of the distant headlands of the island.

‘That’s a big cloud just creeping over the land,’ remarked Georgy, ‘look at it, Sam.’

‘Aye, it’s a squall.’ By this time they had killicked their boat—that is, anchored it by a couple of stones—just beneath the beetling crags of a point now known as Cape Willoughby, on which the first lighthouse built by South Australia was erected.<sup>274</sup> It seemed the very acme of peril to anchor a boat within a few yards of the boiling surf

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<sup>272</sup> In his ‘Literarium Diarium’, 7 September 1843, Cawthorne records the following: ‘I am an enemy to missionaries generally speaking. I believe little what they say, for I know that they write lies. They gull the people at home, they are obliged to do it.’

<sup>273</sup> The Chapman River.

<sup>274</sup> The building of the Sturt Light commenced in 1849 at Cape Willoughby, and it was finished in 1851. It was constructed of stone quarried from a ravine just to the south of the site—Nat Thomas (‘Old Sam’ here) worked both as a builder and later as third keeper at the light. Between October 1851 and 16 May 1862 Cawthorne’s father, Captain William Cook Cawthorne, was the first head keeper at the Light, earning £100 per annum and later £200. In 1862 the Captain was dismissed from the Service for drunkenness and other offences. He died in 1875 and is buried in Brighton. The lighthouse still stands, and a highlight of a visit to tourist sites on the island is to take a guided tour with a national park guide. One of the light keeper’s cottages there is called ‘Cawthorne’.



that swept up and against that vast mass of rock, and this, too, by night, and there to lie for hours, while they fished for crawfish.<sup>275</sup> A snap of the rope that held them to the stones as anchor would have been death. They were too wary to be indifferent to their position. Oars were laid across, and one man carefully noted by star or dim point of rock, whether their boat forged in with the gigantic swell that rolled in on this point. The night became pitchy dark, a sudden gust blew one of their oars clean overboard and was lost; the lightning played round the headland and the sea rose wild and sent the spray high in the air.

‘Cut the darn’d lines,’ yelled out Old Sam, ‘or we’re doomed.’

So all the nets were lost, and before they could well get their oars shipped, a tremendous swell very nearly finished their earthly career; but Sam was at the steer-oar, and the men met the emergency with the strength of giants. The boat flew to meet the next sea before it could gain its head, and though amidst the roar of elements and a darkness almost palpable, instinctively they headed the seas, and ultimately rounded the Cape, reaching the bar of the creek towards three o’clock in the morning with some fifty crawfish, and the loss of their nets, an oar, and several sealskin hats.

Sam was in a terrible humour; the loss of nets and lines was no mean loss. He prayed—in his style—in a way that even cowed his rough companions. He was a frightful swearer, and when put out he became uncontrollable. Woe unto the poor black women that came across him. Then a stab or worse was no common thing. In a sulky humour the Islanders dragged their boat over the dry bars and launched her on the waters of the creek, and after a silent pull in darkness, intensified by the great tea-tree fringe of the creek, they arrived at the embarking place below their huts.

A mass of dogs yelled a welcome, and the first one that sprang on Sam with a sign of joy was savagely greeted with a deep stab that for ever stopped his boisterous mirth. Sam was in no humour for dogs or men.

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<sup>275</sup> Crayfish, or these days Southern Rock Lobster, *Jasus novæhollandiæ*. W. H. Leigh complains that ‘though good-sized fish, are nothing but shell, and not worth boiling’, although in a footnote he does admit that ‘they may grow thin after spawning’ (Leigh 1839: 134). The man’s dreaming.

### CHAPTER XIII.

The Brig Sails, and Tows the Boats of the Islanders.—Anecdote about Georgy.—Hog Bay.—The Islanders Depart.

The midnight squall had not been without its perils to the brig. Mr Ratlin was more disturbed by the suddenness of the great gust than he was when pitched headlong down the stony gully.

The morning after, as frequently on the Australian coasts during these summer squalls, was beautifully serene, with a light, gentle breeze from the S.E.

‘They are getting ready,’ remarked Captain Meredith to the first officer, as he handed him the glass.

‘Yes; two boats, a heap of dogs, and lots of women,’ enumerated Mr. Ratlin.

Shortly afterwards the boats were launched, and pulled away for the brig. The two whale boats approached the vessel with a spring and a dash that showed the sinewy strength of those wielding the oars, and as they breasted the waves the water was divided, and the forefront of each boat leapt up, showed itself in full view, and then sank and parted the coming wave as keen as a knife. In the stern sheets of the foremost boat and grasping the steer-oar with a light but firm grip, stood Old Sam, his hair streaming in the wind. With his huge beard, whiskers, and moustachios, and his bare bull neck and hairy arms, his skin waistcoat and breeches, he formed a remarkable figure, a very sea-god of the antipodean type, such as peculiarly fitted the scenes and locality of Kangaroo Island, and the geologic era of Australia; such as the poets of Greece, had they lived in this end of the world instead of the other, would have described and immortalised. In the next boat Long Bill was steersman, with Jack Straw as aide-de-camp. That tall, dare-devil had his long, matted locks streaming in the wind, and an old sailor’s shirt barely covering the upper portion of his body. He was violently gesticulating to his crew and throwing his powerful weight on the stroke oar. He wished to overtake Old Sam, and was, in fact, quickly overhauling him. The greatest curiosity, however, was in Sam’s boat. In the bow, and pulling the bow oar, was a woman, ‘Black Bet,’ Sam’s favourite wife. She was a Vandemonian (Tasmanian) black, and exceedingly

expert as a huntress on land or water. As a fisherwoman or sailoress her abilities were unrivalled. No tree was too tall or too straight for her to climb in her native fashion with a circular coil of rope made of bark;<sup>276</sup> no water was too profound for her to reach the bottom, and the mighty waves that dashed on the smooth rounded granite boulders of the coasts were her gracious horsemen. Incredible as it may appear, she would oft in mere sport swim out to sea, and then, with adroit skill, come in riding on the top of a stupendous foaming roller, and land herself on the slippery rocks safe and sound.<sup>277</sup> The peril of such a feat was extreme, hence Black Bet took a high rank in the estimation of the Islanders and Sam declared he would not take six other black women for Bet. She was invaluable.

The crew on board the brig paused in their work as the boats shot up alongside. Two sailors were on the topsail yard loosing the sail.

‘I say, Bill,’ said one, ‘do yer twig that black gal among ’em?’

‘No.’

‘Why, the bowman in old Robinson Crusoe’s boat. Don’t yer see her black curly wool?’<sup>278</sup> Well, I’m danged if these coves is not rum ’uns; see how she handles that boat-hook as a nat’ral born sailor.’

‘She’s jolly fat, too, isn’t she?’<sup>279</sup> said the other, ‘and blowed if she isn’t purty; I likes the wild look o’ hern eyes. What say yer, Jim, let us go ashore, and live as they do?’

At this juncture of the conversation Sam was, handing up to the captain a splendid fresh crayfish.

‘There, captain,’ said he, ‘there’s a raal nipper for yer.’

Mr. Ratlin in haste tried to take the delicious morsel, but somehow being weighty and exceedingly prickly, it slipped through his hands and fell overboard. Black Bet no sooner saw the accident than, throwing off her scant garments, she dived after the fish! The sailors were amazed at the idea of a person trying to out-swim a fish. The water was about five fathoms<sup>280</sup> deep, the bottom white sand,

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<sup>276</sup> Cawthorne illustrated the ‘native method of tree climbing’. See f. 15, ‘Sketches of Aborigines’, PX\*A1409 f. 1–2, Mitchell Library.

<sup>277</sup> This is an early expression of admiration for body surfing, reinforcing a view that the Palawa women in particular were very much at home in the water.

<sup>278</sup> Curly hair is usually given as a signifier of the difference of the Palawa women.

<sup>279</sup> Something Cawthorne observed about Bet’s daughter Mary when he met her just before Christmas 1852. See Appendix I, p. 206.

<sup>280</sup> Therefore, thirty feet, or about ten metres. James Backhouse, the Quaker visitor to the Australian colonies in the 1830s, notes that Tasmanian Aboriginal women were skilled divers: ‘Some of the women went into the water among the large sea-tangle to take Cray-fish. These women seem quite at home in the water, and frequently immerse their faces to enable them to

and now, most grotesquely magnified by the water, could be seen this singular hunt—every movement was visible. The crayfish doubled, and Black Bet doubled hither and thither. Bet rose to the [surface of the] water, took an enormous gulp of air, and down she went the second time. The crayfish made for the shore, Bet after him. He then tried to hide himself in the sand. That was a fatal mistake;<sup>281</sup> Bet seized him by his large feelers, and triumphantly bore him back to the ship.

The crew of the brig could not resist bursting out into a hearty cheer, as Bet climbed over the bow of the boat, and put on her man's dress. She smiled in recognition, and then lapsed into her quiet habit and demeanour.

'There now,' said Sam, addressing the mob of heads leaning over the bulwarks fore and aft; 'can yer show me the white woman that had do it? not one o' them, from the empresses right away forrard till yer get to chimbley sweeps. The raal black skin for me; I wouldn't take six lubras of the main there for one of these Vandiemans.'<sup>282</sup>

Sam was proud of his wife,<sup>283</sup> and she had so appropriately proved her high talent, in the Kangaroo Island sense, for to row, to fish, to swim, to fight, to endure, to devise, these were Kangaroo Island abilities, the proofs of genius, the steps of rank, the very LL.D.'s and M.A.'s of their social status. After all, of what merit are the graces of civilisation? They are only relative. It is most unphilosophical to attribute merit to the polish of polite society, for beyond its sphere it is useless. Place a civilised lady on Kangaroo Island, and she be an absolute nonentity—nay, further, she would be a hindrance.<sup>284</sup> The

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see objects at the bottom. When they discover the object of their search, they dive, often using the long stems of kelp to enable them to reach the bottom; these they handle as dexterously in descending, as a sailor would a rope, in ascending' (Backhouse 1843: 168). This observation in Backhouse may be a source for Cawthorne.

<sup>281</sup> On Cawthorne's part too. Crayfish live on reefs, not over sand.

<sup>282</sup> There is some evidence that the Tasmanian women thought themselves superior to the 'New Holland' women also abducted, and thus stuck together. See Basedow 1914: 161. Cawthorne's father's Journal from the Sturt Light certainly records the circumstantial detail that even as late as the 1850s Bet and Sal were still keeping company, and other Kangaroo Island sources also describe them as a pair.

<sup>283</sup> There are a number of references to Nat Thomas's affection for Old Bet, often represented in such a fashion as to suggest that such emotional attachments between Islanders and their women were rare.

<sup>284</sup> James Backhouse recorded a similar perception when he observes that 'the natives of V.D. Land ... exceeded Europeans in skill, in those things to which their attention had been directed from childhood, just as much as Europeans exceeded them, in the points to which the attention of the former had been turned, under the culture of civilization. There is similar variety of talent and of temper among the Tasmanian Aborigines, to what is to be found among other branches of

very thing that elevated her in the one case would be her curse in the other. No, Sam was right. Black Bet pulling the bow oar, was the talented, educated, and, in relation to her sisters, the refined lady of the peculiar society of her adopted home.

As this is a narrative of fact to a very large extent,<sup>285</sup> it may be here mentioned that many years after, when her island home had become known to throngs of vessels that passed and re-passed from the colony of South Australia to Port Phillip, a vessel was wrecked, and the crew and passengers got on the shore, on a wild part of the coast.<sup>286</sup> They were nearly famished for water, and this same Black Bet, now an old woman, became the means of their rescue, leading them to a native well, and guiding them to a place of safety.

‘When I saw her figure,’ feelingly remarked one of the passengers,

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the human family; and it would not be more erroneous in one of these people, to look upon an English woman as defective in capacity, because she could neither dive into the deep and bring up cray-fish, nor ascend the lofty gum-trees to catch opossums for her family, than it would be for an English woman to look upon the Tasmanian as defective in capacity, because she could neither sew nor read, nor perform the duties of civil, domestic life. Were the two to change stations, it is not too much to assume, that the untutored native of the woods would much sooner learn to obtain her food, by acquiring the arts of civilization, than the woman from civilized society would, by acquiring the arts belonging to savage life’ (Backhouse 1843: 173–4).

<sup>285</sup> See ‘Cawthorne’s Sources’, p. 171.

<sup>286</sup> Cawthorne here refers to the wreck of the *Osmanli*, which ran up on a reef near Cape Linois in D’Estree Bay about midnight on 23 November 1853—George Tinline, an acting manager of the Bank of South Australia was on board, so the nearest feature ashore is now known as Point Tinline. As the National Parks’ signage tells us on the shore, when the ship struck, Captain Corbett’s thumb was split away from his hand with the impact. All of the crew and passengers managed to make it to shore that evening in the ship’s boats. W. Leigh, a passenger, completed at least two well-known drawings of the encampment, which are today in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. Four days later Captain Corbett sent one of the boats for help: it stopped at the Sturt Light, where Captain Cawthorne promised to send assistance. The boat then proceeded to Adelaide to report the wreck. In the meantime Captain Cawthorne sent Nat Thomas and Old Bet to assist the stranded passengers and crew: they carried ship’s biscuit, flour and some eggs with them. Old Bet then led people to a spring some 8 kilometres from the wreck site, a spring still used for stock watering (*Observer* 3 December 1853). It is not clear from some contemporary accounts if the woman in question was Old Bet or her daughter Mary, the first child to be born on Kangaroo Island to a European parent. Given Cawthorne must have heard about the *Osmanli* from his father, it is very likely that this note in his novella proves that it was mother Bet, not daughter Mary. It is something of a coincidence that on the very day of the wreck, 23 November 1853, Captain Cawthorne wrote to the Trinity Board requesting leave of absence in the following January. In the enquiry into the wreck, it was alleged that the Sturt Light was not functioning on the evening in question—or that the glass was dirty and the light thus unable to be seen. See *Register*, 26 July 1853. As it happens, Nat Thomas was on duty that evening. Some time after the wreck Old Bet found some planking from the stern of the *Osmanli* ‘with the usual gilt carving and scroll work’ and returned to Cape Willoughby tremendously excited by her discovery. See *Register* 15 September 1856, 3d. See Cawthorne also wrote about the sinking of the *Golbourn*, which went down just off Cape Willoughby while being towed by the steamer *Melbourne*. Four died. See his formerly unpublished Ms. ‘Lines ... Loss of *Golbourn* ... July 1856’, A/558/A4, State Records, given below in Appendix III, p. 223.

‘coming over the sandhills, and we all rushed up to her, and she, in her quiet but still active manner led us to the native well, I could almost have worshipped her!’

Black Bet is dead now, and she lies in a spot in a small clearing of the scrub on the hillside that overlooks the very inlet of the great lagoon,<sup>287</sup> where poor Handspike lost himself, and received the sun stroke that nearly killed him, as described in the early part of this tale.

‘Where are you bound for?’ asked another of the hands recognising Sam.

‘Fishing,’ replied one of the Islanders.

‘What kind of fish?’

‘Black fish,’ said the Doctor, *alias* Georgy, ‘and wery fine fish they is, too.’

‘He means black women,’ explained a man standing next to the interrogator, who seemed ‘green’ on the whole matter.

‘Will yer give us a tow out about half-way across the straits, and then we’ll cast off, and stand up the Gulf?’ asked Sam.

‘Oh! yes.’

So the boats were duly towed astern—‘Black Bet’ in the one, and Long Bill in the other—the crews of both boats going on board for a yarn with the men. The brig was soon under all her canvas, and as she felt the gentle S.E. breeze, she gracefully bent to the pressure on her canvas, and slipped away over the short, white-crested seas, at the rate of knots. Mr. Ratlin paced the port side of the quarter-deck

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<sup>287</sup> The implication of this remark is that Old Bet is buried near Pelican Lagoon, near American River. She is believed to be buried in a cleared paddock on the west side of the road some 100 metres short of where the main road from Penneshaw to Cape Willoughby runs parallel to the Chapman River, about a kilometre from the sea. It seems that the site of her burial was kept a secret by the family for many years because they feared desecration of the grave by those seeking ‘Tasmanian’ skeletal remains. As recently as the 1950s there were still employees at the South Australian Museum writing memoranda about exhuming those remains. There is a large stone monument there now, erected by the Kangaroo Island Pioneers Association and the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, with a plaque which reads: EARLY SETTLERS IN THIS ARE INCLUDED NAT. THOMAS WHO, WITH HIS TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL WIFE BETTY, ARRIVED ON KANGAROO ISLAND IN 1827 AND FARMED THE AREA AT THE EASTERN END OF ANTECHAMBER BAY UNTIL 1878. THIS COUPLE HAD THREE CHILDREN, A SON AND TWO DAUGHTERS, THE ELDER DAUGHTER, MARY, BORN IN MAY 1833, WAS THE FIRST DOCUMENTED CHILD OF A EUROPEAN BORN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. WHILE NOT ALWAYS WELL TREATED, THE ABORIGINAL COMPANIONS OF THE PRE 1836 SETTLERS MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLAND. SEVEAL WERE BROUGHT FROM TASMANIA AND OTHERS MAINLY FROM NEARBY FLEURIEU PENINSULA. BETTY DIED IN 1878, AND WHILE THE ACTUAL SITE OF HER GRAVE IS UNKNOWN, IT IS BELIEVED TO BE IN THIS VICINITY.

highly satisfied, and could not help remarking that she went through it as smooth as grease. This allusion to culinary matters made him turn white with fear, as he suddenly recollected that he had not given special instruction to the cook about that splendid crayfish. Soon his head was in the galley, and his anxiety relieved.

‘So you are off at last,’ said Captain Meredith to Sam.

‘Yes, we is, and we should have been back again but for yerself.’

‘Well, now, how many do yer think you will catch?’

‘We has been wery unlucky of late, haven’t us,’ said Sam, addressing his mate, Georgy.

‘Wery,’ replied the Doctor, ‘one o’ the best jumped overboard arter all our trouble, and got on the rocks, and then the blacks comes down, and so we loses her.’

‘That was all your’n fault,’ said Sam, ‘yer will be su cussed kind, yer let go her fastenings, and overboard she jumps.’

‘Yes, it was my fault, Sam; I was too kind, too tender-hearted like.’

‘Then, another time,’ continued Sam, ‘one o’ our chaps gets a spear in his ribs, right in his heart and yer see it was jagged; so he dies, and we pitches him overboard the same arternoon. The last time the blacks nearly finished me. Yer see that,’ and Sam showed his brawny arm; ‘there’s a big cut, and here on my truck, yer can see how the black skins loves me, darn ’em; but I knows the big black nigger that did it; I’ll make him sing out; I’ll be even with him.’

‘Yes,’ said Georgy, ‘yer can kill ’em by the law, for he’s a-going to kill yer, and I knows law enough for that matter.’

‘And what’s the law,’ said Captain Meredith, ‘about taking their wives and women?’

‘Why the law of nature, in course?’

‘The strongest holds the hardest,’ replied Georgy, ‘I knows when they grabbed me, some time gone, they never let’s go.’

‘Ah!’ said Sam, ‘that was a devilish hard time. Yer see, captain, we were arter him and the blackimps was a hundred strong; so we were wery cool; they stands just there away on that pint,’ pointing to the place now well known as Cape Jervis; ‘they was singing out in their lingo, “to come on” and fetch him; we draws in, and they thinks we was for landing, and they scatters a bit. Georgy sees this, bolts straight on end for the boat, for yer see we was laying on and off. The blacks doesn’t know what to make of it; then they throws their spears, but we jumps on the rocks, and we gets Georgy, and pulls

right away.’<sup>288</sup>

‘Georgy,’ said Sam turning to him, ‘if yer gets cotched again they’ll smash yer head for yer for that day’s work.’

‘In course they will,’ replied Georgy.

‘But how was he caught?’

‘Why, he is so pertickler,’ said Sam, ‘he was trying for or a better-looking gal than falls to him; so he stops behind a bit waiting for a slant, for we was parlavouing friendly like, do yer see, wid ’em, when Georgy grabs one and makes for the boats; but the blacks was too smart for him, they overhauls him; we rushes in and we fights, but they drives us to the boats, and they takes Georgy.’

By this time the brig had opened the broad waters of the great inlet, now known as Gulf St. Vincent. Kangaroo Island lay on their left. In front was apparently the boundless sea, and on their right a diversified coastline of rock and hill trending sharply to the north.

The Islanders had by this time got into their boats with the exception of Georgy and Sam.

‘How does your course lie now?’ asked the captain.

‘Right away for that pint,’ pointing to a place now well known as N.W. Bluff;<sup>289</sup> we ’spects our friends is lying behind that place fishing this time o’ the year;<sup>290</sup> yer see, they moves about like the birds in the

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<sup>288</sup> This sounds like an anecdote told by George ‘Fireball’ Bates to an *Advertiser* reporter in 1886. Bates may have also told Cawthorne something like the same story thirty years before when they met at Hog Bay. The *Advertiser* version reads as follows: ‘About this time (1830) Bates very foolishly hazarded himself amongst the blacks of Cape Jervis. He had persuaded an old native of that tribe to come over to Hog Bay with his son. The lad died, and Bates accepted the bereaved parents’ invitation to go back with him to his tribe. The men would hunt for him, give him wives, and make him a chief among them. Against the wishes and warnings of his comrades Bates went; and was received at a grand corroboree, where he was presumably made a member of the tribe by being thrown on his back, and having all the males jump on his body in succession. At first the natives treated him as one of themselves, although they never let him out of their sight, and appeared suspicious of him; but when the dogs he had brought over were knocked up by hunting, he was left to shift for himself. He fell ill, and the three natives who remained with him—the old man Condoy, a young girl named Sal, and a boy nicknamed Friday—begrudged him almost any provisions. When he had given up hope and lain down to die in a cave near the shore, he was discovered by his mates, who had crossed over to the mainland to find out what had become of the missing man. As a punishment for their neglect of Bates the three natives mentioned above were carried away into captivity on the Island’. *Advertiser*, 27 December 1886, 6c–e.

<sup>289</sup> Cawthorne refers here to what is known now as Rapid Head, named after the *Rapid*, the surveying brig that brought Colonel William Light to South Australia in 1836. Flinders’ name is no longer used.

<sup>290</sup> In his ‘Literarium Diarium’, 15 February 1844 Cawthorne records his intention to travel to Rapid and Encounter Bays with George French Angas. Interestingly, he does not mention sketching or drawing: ‘We shall both go on horseback. I shall take a gun and bullets, perhaps shoot a kangaroo, or a blackfellow. I don’t care which. I think I should have a better chance at the



rain. They is inland in the summer on the coast, but we shall see their fires.'

'And where is the place yer told me I could pick up a chap that'd pilot me long the island?'

'There,' said Georgy, pointing to a bare high slope on Kangaroo Island; 'that's Hog Bay, as we calls it, bekase some pigs got ashore in a wery mysterious way, do yer mind—so we names it Hog Bay.<sup>291</sup> Ha! ha! ha!' and Georgy laughed at some pleasant tricks and cunning dodges that were deeply associated with this singular euphoniously-named bay, which name, strange to say, is still retained until the present time.<sup>292</sup> Hog Bay now forms a pleasant settlement, and

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latter than the former' (Foster 1991: 38). While Cawthorne's image of a fishing scene at Second Valley is not well known (it is in the Mitchell Library—PXB 213 f.10—a photograph is held in the Mortlock, PRG/489/9/4), Angas produced a much more famous drawing of the same scene, later to be turned into a lithograph, 'Coast Scene near Rapid Bay, Sunset. Natives Fishing with nets, 1844.' which is in the Art Gallery of South Australia, 667G53. John Tregenza has this to say of the scene: 'When Angas sketched this scene in 1844 he was sitting on rocks which now lead to the jetty at Second Valley, beside the mouth of the River Parananacooka. Of the native method of fishing 'at the calm hour of sunset' he writes: "The mode adopted by the tribes inhabiting the vicinity of Rapid Bay, is nearly similar to that of Europeans; they use a seine [net] about twenty or thirty feet in length, stretched upon sticks placed crosswise at intervals; a couple of men will drag this net amongst the rocks and shallows where fish are most abundant, and, gradually getting it closer as they reach the shore, the fish are secured in the folds of the net, and but few moments elapse before they are laid alive upon the embers of the native fires that are blazing ready before the adjoining huts. The nets are composed of chewed fibres of reeds, rolled upon the thigh, and twisted into cord for the purpose'. The cove remains a popular fishing spot to this day. Unfortunately a number of fishing boat sheds now disfigure the rocky promontory' John Tregenza, *George French Angas: Artist, Traveller and Naturalist 1882–1886* (Adelaide: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, Revised Edition, 1982) 47.

<sup>291</sup> This assertion suggests that some of the existing names on the Kangaroo Island map have survived from the Islanders' place-naming over the period 1802–1836. American River, Harveys Return, Smith Bay and Stokes Bay are such survivals, as is Murray's Lagoon, a corruption of Joseph Murrell's name. Harveys Return was earlier known as Murrell's Landing. After being attacked at Jervis Bay on his way to Kangaroo Island in October 1805, Joseph Murrell eventually arrived with a sealing gang in 1806, remaining on the island for three years and then returning for a number of later sealing trips. See Manning 1990: 143.

<sup>292</sup> Hog Bay is the name given to the waters where the ferry docks at Penneshaw. The name Hog Bay also survives as the name of a river on the Dudley Peninsula. Baudin mentions leaving pigs ashore on Kangaroo Island, at the spot where his crew found water, on the eastern end of the beach at Penneshaw: 'The 30<sup>TH</sup>—As the weather was fine on the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> [29<sup>th</sup>—19 January], I had a rooster and two hens put ashore at the place where the water is collected. On this beach I likewise left a boar and sow to multiply and possibly be of use to future navigators in these regions. During the summer this island will be able t to provide good refreshments for ships that want to stop here; and the anchorage seems to me to be sound enough for one to ride securely at it, provided the winds are not strongly from North-East, North or North-West. The sea then is very rough and choppy in it, but one can always set sail easily and return when the bad weather has passed.' On some old maps Hog Bay is named as Freshwater Bay (Hallack 1905: 8.). There seems to be another local legend on the island to the effect that Hog Bay earned its name when 'Governor' Henry Wallen moved there after he had lost his farm in 1836 at Cygnet (or Three Wells) River, allowing his pigs to wallow in the spring where Baudin and his men had

boasts of a post-office.<sup>293</sup>

At last Sam stepped over the gangway, and the tow lines were cast off. The brig headed for Hog Bay, with a flowing sheet, while the boats hauled close to the wind and tried to gain the smooth water under the main land.

Captain Meredith leant upon the taffrail, watching the fast retiring boats till they disappeared, and musing upon the singular characters they contained, their singular destination, and their odd choice of life; 'but the riddle is easily explained,' muttered the captain. The love of liberty, of uncontrolled liberty, is one of our strongest instincts, and in proportion as men are of a bold or timid character will this sentiment be overpowering or weak. After all, the sum total of rascality, or whatever it may be called, is no doubt in a far higher ratio in the crowded city than in this odd fellowship on the Island. With his philosophical conclusion, he turned round and commenced squaring the yards, which to his appreciation were never square. Hog Bay soon began to open out, and ere long the brig lay maintopsail to the mast and hove to, waiting to see if any one was there or would come off.

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watered. 'Penneshaw is a composite name, made up of part of the name of Dr. Pennefather, Secretary to Governor Jervois, and Miss Flora Shaw, later Lady Lugard, wife of the Governor of Hong Kong. It was declared a township in 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1896' (Bates 1951: 32).

<sup>293</sup> The postmaster at Hog Bay was Tom Simpson, 'a fair haired man from Lincolnshire', who married Jenny Thomas, the youngest daughter of Nat Thomas and Old Bet. Their eldest son was Nathaniel Thomas Simpson, born 8 December 1860, who became a JP and a member of local government. His brother was Stamford W. or 'Tiger' Simpson who served in the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the First World War and was responsible for leaving a hat on a corner on the Penneshaw to Kingscote road, now known as Felt Hat Corner. There are a number of anecdotes about 'Tiger' Simpson collected in *Colours of Kangaroo Island: 100 stories of the people and places that make up its history*, including references to his skill on the accordian. He died 21 October 1955, aged 79 years. 'Tiger' Simpson once owned an 1835 Bible inscribed 'George Bates, from S. Stephens, Esq., Kingscote, October 2, 1836' (Bates 1951: 36). The Bible is still in the possession of the Simpson family of Penneshaw (Wells 1978: 33).

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A Singular Harbour.—A Stroll Ashore.—An Islander Joins the Brig.— Althorpe Islands.

Long and carefully did Captain Meredith scrutinise the shore for signs of any human being, but the waves lipped and splashed over the pointed rocks that lined the little bay, or played leap-frog over the larger masses that as yet had not been worn down by the everlasting wear and tear of wave and tide, as they did in the eternity of the past.

Hog Bay, as it was called, could scarcely be designated a bay. It was simply a small indent in the coast, open to all winds S. of S.W. round the compass to S.E.; hence it afforded no shelter to the strong gales from the N. and N.W., and further, the water was very deep. At five fathoms you could almost pitch a biscuit on shore, but the marvel of the place was a circular indentation with a portal entrance of some ten feet, which afforded a boat harbour of unsurpassed security.<sup>294</sup>

‘There’s smoke ashore, sir,’ said one of the men, indicating at the same time a large column of dense smoke that arose out of the scrub some miles or so inland.

‘They see us,’ said the first mate, ‘that’s the way they talk. They make a smoke, and that’s just as good as if they said, “We are coming.”’<sup>295</sup> It’s a capital plan, and as good as bunting nearly.’

‘I can’t make out any boat, though, on the beach,’ remarked the captain, ‘and it seems to me as if all hands were away. Ah! there I see a figure just clearing the scrub that at lines that bare patch. He has a lot of dogs and is standing dead for the beach.’

Owing to the steep rise of the land from the water’s edge, everything could be discerned from the sea with great exactitude.

‘I suppose he’s alone.’

‘Yes, to be sure he is, for he is waving his arm for us to come ashore.’

‘All right, my hearty, but I am up to your tricks now. No duplicate

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<sup>294</sup> Christmas Cove, a few hundred metres to the west of the Penneshaw headland on which stands the hotel, a safe boat haven.

<sup>295</sup> Smoke signalling, learned from the Indigenous people of the mainland.

humbug of the last place. So, Mr. Ratlin, just get the gig lowered, and I'll go ashore this time; a couple of hands will do.'

As the captain approached the shore, the figure on the land went towards a small opening in the rocks, which, under other circumstances, would never have been noticed.

'Why, what does the fellow mean?' ejaculated the skipper. 'Are we to go in there? Why, we shall stove our boat, and yet there seems no other landing place in this queer little bay.'

The mystery was soon explained, and the boat went through a small portal between the rocks, that had been especially cleared by the Islanders, and, as if by enchantment, the boat glided into a huge pond of silent water. The men looked utterly [a]stonished. Involuntarily they laid on their oars and gazed round them on the singular geographical feature that puzzled them. The basin was perfectly circular, and when inside nothing could be discerned but a lofty wall of earth, rock, and sand. The blue sky shone above, and the noise of the wind was heard overhead, but the waters of Lethe<sup>296</sup> were not more still than this peculiar pool.

'We're at the bottom of a well, Jim,' said one of the sailors to the other, 'like the bottom of a funnel. What a capital place to stow away.'

The captain muttered to himself. 'An extinct crater, I suppose, truly a most remarkable formation.'<sup>297</sup>

By this time the boat had reached the ledge where the water met the steep wall. There was, nevertheless, a small abrupt margin, sufficient for boats to be hauled up for repairs, if necessary.

'Well,' said the captain, as the boat grounded, addressing the man they had all along seen, and who stood ready to receive them. 'Where are your mates?'

'They is inland—gone away to the south coast.'

'Are you alone here?'

'No, I has my dogs.'

'Sam, of Creek Bay,<sup>298</sup> told me I could get a hand here to go along

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<sup>296</sup> A river in Hades, producing forgetfulness of the past.

<sup>297</sup> B. Daily *et al.* describe Christmas Cove as revealing 'smoothed and striated glacial pavements cut on Kanmantoo Group metasediments in the partially exhumed Permian glacial depression', which I take to mean that the cove is glacial in origin, not volcanic. B. Daily, A.R. Milnes, C.R. Twidale and Jennifer A. Bourne, 'Geology and Geomorphology', in *Natural History of Kangaroo Island* Eds. M.J. Tyler, C.R. Twidale & J.K. Ling (Adelaide: Royal Society of South Australia, 1979) 26.

<sup>298</sup> Conclusive evidence that Sam is based on Nat Thomas, of 'Freshfields', Creek Bay, now Antechamber Bay. The Gilfillan property is called 'Creek Bay' and contains the site of Nat Thomas's house 'Freshfields' which now forms the inner part of the Gilfillan house, the oldest

with me to the westward; one that knows the islands well. Can you go?’

‘Hold on a bit,’ said the man. ‘Where’s Sam now?’

‘On the main.’

‘Dang him!’ emphatically swore the Islander. ‘And where’s all the rest of the coves of Creek Bay?’<sup>299</sup>

‘I don’t know,’ said the captain, ‘but I towed two boats half way over the straits; they then cast off and stood to the norrard.’

The Islander began to stamp and swear fearfully. He was evidently dreadfully annoyed.

‘Come, mate,’ said one of the men, ‘haul up a bit.’

‘You be blowed,’ replied the man. They were on the eve of a general row.

‘Will you come along with the brig?’ asked Captain Meredith.

‘I don’t know; but if yer likes to hang on till sundown I’ll come back and let yer know. I must go away a bit and take them dogs to my black gal and boy,<sup>300</sup> away back in the scrub, and if I comes back to go wid yer I’ll make a fire, and yer can come ashore and fetch us,’ saying which, this wild man of the woods climbed the steep wall with accelerated step, cursing and swearing, till both his form and his voice died away in the distance.

Captain Meredith had no alternative. To attempt to navigate amongst the islands, and in the manner he intended—sealing on their coast—without a man well versed in all the intricacies of local navigation, would be an act of folly. It was a customary thing for

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European dwelling in South Australia.

<sup>299</sup> A small detail suggesting that Cawthorne did have access to reliable sources of information about the decades before official settlement in 1836, when a number of Islanders lived at Creek Bay.

<sup>300</sup> A tiny fragment of evidence that some Indigenous *men* were also involved in sealing. While Indigenous women (and especially Palawa women) seemed to have been skilled sealers in pre-contact society, the evidence for the involvement of men is scanty, which makes this reference significant. Quoting Ryan 1981, Kostoglou notes that Mannalargenna, a well-known individual from the north-east of Van Diemen’s Land, made several sealing voyages. In 1813 when James Kelly took the *Brothers* sealing in Bass Strait there were two Aboriginal men aboard. George Augustus Robinson only refers to one or two in his dairies: a young ‘North west of New Holland’ boy named Praree lived and worked with John ‘Abyssinia Jack’ Anderson, but whether he was taken as a worker or as a sexual partner is not clear. See Parry Kostoglou, *Sealing in Tasmania: Historical Research Project A Report for the Parks and Wildlife Service* (Hobart: Department of Environment and Land Management, 1996) 38. Another Indigenous man is mentioned as a member of a sealing gang left on Solander Island for three years, living with his fellow-castaways on ‘terms of perfect amity and understanding’ (Thomas Dunbadin, *Sailing the World’s Edge: Sea Stories from Old Sydney* (London: Newnes, [1937]) 119).

vessels to visit the island, and take one of the Islanders as a pilot,<sup>301</sup> but it seemed that Captain Meredith had unfortunately arrived at a time when these wayward men had other objects in view than that of piloting, hence the vexatious delay, and tergiversation.<sup>302</sup> But there was no remedy, so he determined to take things as they were and do the bidding of the man that had just left. To kill time Captain Meredith left the boat and ascended the precipitous cliffs that embayed the little model of a harbour in which he then was. From the summit he found the land gradually and evenly rising towards the interior. Looking seaward, he commanded a view of the high hill range, stretching to the N. and E, that is now so well known to ten thousand voyagers.<sup>303</sup> That was the mainland, in some of the bays of which the Islanders, on their 'wife-catching expeditions,' were no doubt anchored, and carrying out their plots and schemes.

Captain Meredith wandered about enjoying the wild solitude of the place, and musing on the probable destiny of the great land, the present scene of the exploits of the wild desperadoes that he had lately been mingling with. As he gained the top of a ridge of sandhills, contiguous to the beach, he suddenly surprised some half-dozen naked and native children, in full play, dashing and darting in the surf as it broke and rolled upon the beach. They continued their gambols, laughing in their wild and unrestrained manner, when one of them perceived the stranger. A yell of fear and surprise pierced the air, and the troop dashed off and disappeared in the neighbouring scrub.<sup>304</sup> The captain in vain tried to find the hut the children came

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<sup>301</sup> Several of the Islanders worked as pilots and guides when the South Australia Company vessels arrived in 1836. With his companions Doughboy and Sal, Walker worked for Colonel William Light, not only helping with the surveying but also tending the garden Light established at Rapid Bay. In later life Nat Thomas claimed that he had also worked as a 'chainman' for Colonel Light, no doubt because he had served with Phillip Parker King on the *Bathurst* which sailed from Sydney May 1821 to chart the north coast of Australia. The *Bathurst* returned to Sydney in 1822 after circumnavigating the continent. See Marsden Hordern, *King of the Australian Coast: The Work of Phillip Parker King in the Mermaid and Bathurst 1817-1822* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

<sup>302</sup> Equivocation.

<sup>303</sup> From the cliffs above Christmas Cove where now stands the Penneshaw Hotel there are remarkable views of Backstairs Passage, Cape Jervis, Rapid Head and away in the distance on a clear day Mount Lofty, the high hill above the city of Adelaide. Flinders too was much taken with this view, naming Mount Lofty from a little to the west of this point.

<sup>304</sup> An all-too-brief description of the 'mixed race' children of the Islanders and their women. Given the scene is near Hog Bay, it is tempting to suggest represented here are the children of William Wilkins (sometimes Wilkinson) and Mary Manatto or Minato, who lived in a cottage at the eastern end of Hog Bay above Frenchman's Rock on Section 100, called for many years after 'the Aboriginal', now covered with shacks. Ruediger notes that Wilkins and his son both died of

from, so gave up the search and returned, finding the boat riding at her grapnel with a slack line, so imperturbably calm was the pond. As the captain stood on the high brink he looked right into the boat as if one were looking down into a well. A loud coo-e-e reverberated, and woke up the two seamen asleep in the boat. As they pulled out of this remarkable boat harbour, they admired the manner in which the narrow entrance had been cleared, just sufficient to admit one boat at a time, a precaution not wholly unneeded, as civil wars at times prevailed in Kangaroo Island, as well as in Great Britain or France. It is a luxury that is peculiarly indulged in by the human race, in contra-distinction to the animal. Mr. Ratlin no sooner saw the boat creep out of the land, than he squared away and picked her up.

‘Well,’ said the chief mate, ‘what luck?’

‘I hardly know yet, that darn’d son of a gun did nothing but curse and swear about old Sam, when he heard he was off wife-hunting, but he promised to come down to-night and let me know whether he’d go with us or not; so we must look out for a fire after sundown, and go ashore and pick him up; and if he won’t come by fair means he shall by foul.’

‘Dinner is ready!’ announced the steward, as the captain stood leaning against the binnacle, watching the ship’s head.

‘You have a fine spread, Mr. Ratlin,’ remarked the captain, as he took his seat at the cuddy table—‘black swan, Cape Barren goose,<sup>305</sup> crayfish, and a schnapper but,’ looking round the table, ‘you have not “wakeries,” those delicious grubs that are found in the grass tree and gum tree.’

‘No,’ replied Mr. Ratlin sorrowfully, ‘truly they are delicious beyond comparison. I had no chance to get any. There ought to be no dinner considered complete without wakeries.’

The afternoon slipped away in a splendid sunshine, tempered with a cool breeze, the island on one side and the main on the other completing the panorama. Vast schools of native herring<sup>306</sup> and

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pneumonia after sailing to the western end of the island to rescue the crew of the wrecked Finnish barque *Fides*, which went up on the rocks at Snug Cove 22 May 1860. See Ruediger 1980: 100. Cawthorne’s father helped organise food and other support for Mary and her children after Wilkins and his son died in October 1860. Eventually the surviving children were moved to Raukkan: Ruediger insists Mary is buried at Hog Bay. See Appendix XI, p. 267 for the correspondence.

<sup>305</sup> *Cereopsis novaehollandiae*, once threatened with extinction but now secure as a species. The geese were re-introduced to Kangaroo Island in the 1920s and 1930s and are now commonly seen.

<sup>306</sup> The ubiquitous tommy ruff: *Arripis georgianus*, still abundant and excellent eating.

bream<sup>307</sup> floated on the water, and covered it with a mass of air bubbles. At times the brig moved in a field of living creatures—the surface of the water was literally a moving mass of fish, multitudes on multitudes, and as they slowly passed away they made an audible and strange sound, which, when heard at night, was weird and unearthly. No sooner had darkness set in than a fire shone brightly on the land. The captain took a boat, and with four men made for the shore.

‘I’ll go wid yer, pervided yer takes my wife here, and when yer comes back lands us about fifty miles to the westward, where I holds out.’<sup>308</sup>

‘Done!’ said the captain, and the strange man and his black wife stepped into the boat, and all were soon on board.

The brig spun on before the rising south-easter, and before morning dawned the islands, now known as the Althorpe Islands,<sup>309</sup> were on her starboard bow, peaked and only accessible in one small sandy patch. With these islands is associated a terrible tale of horrors, of human suffering and of inhuman barbarity.

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<sup>307</sup> *Acanthopagrus butcheri*. It is hard to imagine vast schools of bream just outside Christmas Cove.

<sup>308</sup> More-or-less fifty miles (eighty kilometres) west of present-day Penneshaw is Snelling Beach and Western River Cove, both places where sealers lived at the time the novella is set. George Meredith and his party arrived at Western River Cove and built a hut in February 1834: no other source agrees with Cawthorne’s insistence here in this novella that George Meredith was in Kangaroo Island waters as early as 1823. See Cumpston 1986: 132.

<sup>309</sup> Manning reports: ‘named by Matthew Flinders on 20 March 1802 supposedly after Lord Spencer’s eldest son and heir. ... Baudin called them *Archip. De L’est* (Eastern Archipelago) while Freycinet’s charts show *Is. Vauban* (Manning 1990: 10).



## CHAPTER XV.

### Love and its Consequences.—Flash Tom's Yarn about the Althorpe Island Tragedy.—Tom Goes Ashore.

One of the fertile sources of disagreement between the Islanders was the continual practice of certain worthies of intriguing, and decoying the native women from their respective lords. It has already been stated that the society in the independent empire of Kangaroo Island<sup>310</sup> was amenable to no law except that of the boldest and the strongest, and that for mutual protection it was divided into sets of twos and threes with their black women, few or many, as the case might be. Hence arose a popular theory well put into practice, that if a black woman could be decoyed away, stolen, bought, or openly robbed, it was perfectly right to do so. Bloody enormities arose from this cause, and very suspicious accidents occurred that removed for ever the Don Juans, those who distinguished themselves for their amorous propensities. In the Island women were at a premium. While the Governor, *alias* Worley,<sup>311</sup> had his six, another three, or another two, some had none. Hence their wife-thieving desires, their plot-planning, their women intrigues, their rows, and their mysterious disappearances. In fact, as in the history of Pitcairn Island,<sup>312</sup> so in Kangaroo Island, the women formed the great bone of contention, and there is scarcely a feature in the terrible tragedies of the one that cannot be paralleled in the other, but with this difference, which undoubtedly modified or intensified the atrocities

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<sup>310</sup> Perhaps Cawthorne had read reports like those of Captain Hammond (or Hammant) of the *Endeavour* who called at Kangaroo Island to load salt in 1817. He found 'thirteen Europeans, most or all of whom have gone from these settlements [at Sydney], are living on Kangaroo Island in a curious state of independence, having nothing to depend on for subsistence but the wild birds that inhabit it' (from the *Sydney Gazette*, 5 April 1817, quoted Cumpston 1986: 107. Nunn notes that the 'notion of "island men" as a group with their own separate identity was accepted and generally used by 1819' (Nunn 1989: 29).

<sup>311</sup> 'Governor' Henry Wallen, one of the most famous of the Islanders. Wallen lived first at Three Well River, where his farm was, later after selling the farm for a barrel of rum, wandered around the island according to Leigh. Later he moved to Hog Bay, building a stone hut not far from Frenchman's Rock, near the spring discovered by the French. His pigs wallowing in the mud around the spring are supposed to be one explanation for why Hog Bay is so called. Wallen is buried at Kingscote in the 'old cemetery'.

<sup>312</sup> Cawthorne refers here to the history of the mutineers from the *Bounty* who settled on Pitcairn with island women after the mutiny in 1787.

of each—in the one, love, jealousy, and murder were active on a spot barely a few acres in extent; in the other, a land half the size of Scotland, covered with a dense vegetation, and affording the most favourable cover for the wiles and schemes, both of the black and the white, for, strange to say, the native women, partly from fear, partly from revenge, and partly from preference, aided and abetted many a desertion, many a capture, and many a murder. Kangaroo Island, at the period we are writing, presented an admirable study for the moralist and the philosopher. The immutable character of the human heart, under the most diverse circumstances, was as clearly portrayed as in the regions of so-called civilisation. The state of society was neither better nor worse than that of the times of Elizabeth, or Catherine of Russia.<sup>313</sup> The only difference was in the language and in the dress—the one used mellifluous words, while noted your fifth rib, the other stabbed you with a blasphemous oath. The first plotted the destruction of the wife of his bosom friend in silk and satin; the other did the same, dressed in skins of wild animals. The custom was the same, though the manner differed. Instead of the dungeon, the castle, the poison, or the hired assassin, there was the lonely cave, the far-off islet, the deep sea, the sharp knife, or the impenetrable scrub.

The brig lay becalmed off the group of barren isles—the Althorpes.<sup>314</sup> The great wall-like coast of Kangaroo Island rose and fell, and vanished into distance on the one side of the straits, and the low land of the main, now known as Yorke's<sup>315</sup> Peninsula, just loomed on the other, while the high-peaked islands cut sharply against the sky, now only some four miles off, as the brig rolled to the swell.

Flash<sup>316</sup> Tom, the Islander, and his black companion sat under the starboard gunwale in moody silence, not far from the forecastle.

'I don't like those islands sucking us in so close,' remarked a seaman, 'I wonder whether there's any anchorage under their lee?'

'Ask this here Robinson Crusoe; he knows, most like.'

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<sup>313</sup> Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603) and Catherine the Great of Russia (1729–96).

<sup>314</sup> 'Named by Matthew Flinders on 20 March 1802 supposedly after Lord Spencer's eldest son and heir. Lord Spencer (an ancestor of Lady Diana Spencer) presided at the Board of Admiralty when Flinders' voyage was planned' (Manning 1990: 10).

<sup>315</sup> 'Named by Matthew Flinders on 30 March 1802. Right Honourable Charles Philip Yorke of the Admiralty. Baudin called it *Cambaceres Peninsula* after Jean Jacques Regis Cambaceres, Duke of Parma' (Manning 1990: 353).

<sup>316</sup> The implication of 'Flash' is that he was an old lag, a convict.

‘I say, Tom, can yer anchor inside the islands to leeward there?’

‘I don’t know,’ gruffly replied Flash Tom, in no pleasant mood, and prepared himself to take a nap; but his questioners were persevering.

‘I have heard,’ said one, ‘that sometimes you chaps forget a fellow on these islands and then he is left to starve—perhaps this is one on ’em, aye, only some four miles off,’ as the brig rolled to the swell.

‘Who told yer that yarn?’ asked Tom, now quite awake.

‘Oh! we hears it about the coast—come now, tell us all about it; we has nothing to do, and I likes a yarn.’

‘Well,’ says Tom, ‘I’ll tell yer ’xactly as all I knows on it; but if yer will take my advice yer will not be yarning it wherever yer goes, ’cause our chaps doesn’t like it, or maybe yer will find them rather smart, and brace yer sharp up. Now do yer see, it fell on this ways. There was a chap, many years gone now, that was werry sulky, but he was werry handy in getting seal-skins, and when the Hookers<sup>317</sup> come down and we has a spell at rum, and gets drunk a bit, this chap allers keeps away, and chops his skins on the coast; so the skippers dang’s him up and down as a close grip, for they couldn’t get so much out of him as they gets out of us fools; for when we gets drunk, yer know, we cares nothing for skins; for where they comes from there’s plenty more—maybe your skipper is one o’ them. I s’pose yer has plenty of rum under hatches.<sup>318</sup> Howsumever, my yarn lies on another tack. Well, this chap has no boat, but has one black woman, and a capital

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<sup>317</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* has ‘a dogger-boat... a fishing-boat, so-called from *hoeck*, Dutch for hook’, also, ‘a one-masted fishing-smack on the Irish coast and south-west of England, similar to a hoy in build’. Here hookers are small coastal vessels sailing out of Hobart for the islands of Bass Strait and beyond to Kangaroo Island, trading rum for seal and wallaby skins, yakka gum, wattle bark and salt. Such vessels were known as Wood Hookers: similar vessels called She Oakers provided Hobart’s wood supply. See Harry O’May, *Wooden Hookers of Hobart Town* (Hobart: L.G. Shea, n.d.). See also D.G. O’May, ‘Sailing Traders of Southern Tasmania’, *Australian and New Zealand Sail Traders* (Garry J. Kerr, ed., Blackwood, SA: Lynton Publications, 1974) 82. I am grateful for Mark Staniforth for making this connection. In the 1950s when I was a child living in Port Lincoln South Australian whiting fishermen were known as ‘hookers’, fishing from small sailing craft from ports like Thevenard, Port Pirie and Port Lincoln. The name is still used.

<sup>318</sup> Ruediger quotes the following newspaper story about the Sydney and Hobart vessels that came to Kangaroo Island to trade for salt and skins: ‘It is said that it was usual to set up a keg of rum upon the deck, directly the anchor was dropped, knock the head out and place plenty of pannikins around. Not a word of business was allowed to be spoken until every visitor had well drunken, and then the captain obtained the most liberal bargains. After the orgie was over the men generally found themselves on shore, with splitting headaches, fevered circulation, a few groceries, perhaps a bottle or so of rum and some tobacco and always a good supply of twine, with which to makes snares to catch more wallabys, or course the vessel was gone and so were all the skins (Ruediger 1980: 81).

hand she was, too, and all hands wants her, but it was no go—one time I offers all my skins I gets in a year, a big heap, too, for his gal; but no go, he was too much of a Jew for me. I then tries to steal the gal—'

'Steal the gal, did yer say!' broke in half-a-dozen voices, in amazement at the unconcerned and matter-of-fact way in which Flash Tom mentioned the incident.

'Yes, in course, how was I to get her, my hearties, in any other way, tell me that? Yer does the same in the old country, but yer calls it by another name. Well, I tries and tries, but he was too sharp for me. Then I lays a trap, and coaxes her away, and I don't know how it is, I allers am a better hand in coaxing the gals away than stealing 'em,' and Flash Tom glanced his eye to the native woman sitting near him. He felt proud at the thought of his successes, and possibly the woman behind him was but another trophy. We shall see.

'I s'pose,' said one of the sailors, 'yer what the fine folks calls "a lady-killer".'

'And a fine 'un, too,' said another, 'with yer kangaroo breeches.'

'Oh! yer be blowed,' replied Tom, 'I never killed a woman in my life. I steals 'em and coaxes 'em away, but I never kills 'em. Well, as I was saying, I coaxes the gal away, and she gets wid me one day's spell away from the cove; but somehow he cotches us the next day. The woman screams, and bolts clean away, and he and I has a set-to; we fights like two bull seals; I gets a big dig with his knife, and I gie him the same. So last he crawls away, and I crawls away. I tells him to look out and so we parts. Some time arter we was sealing in a boat down here, just away there where yer now see a lump of wall like, bigger than the t'others,' and Tom pointed out the place in the dim moonlight. 'Well, as we jumps on the rocks, up jumps old "Grip Hard," for that was his name.<sup>319</sup> "Have yer got plenty skins?" says one, cos we knows his run. "Middling," says he. Then some on 'em in the boat 'gins talking a bit, but I never hears a word on it. "Will yer come wid us, we's going funder on to the pint there, and we'll land yer there, if yer likes." Well, he steps in, and we pulls away; perhaps he was tired, being so lonesome like—perhaps he wanted to lead us chaps away from his nest, as a blind like; howsumever, he comes; we gets about a mile away, when we ups lug and runs to these ere

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<sup>319</sup> This may record a sealer's nickname Cawthorne collected from his informants Nathaniel Thomas and George 'Fireball' Bates', the man's real name lost.

islands to the leeward of us. Old “Grip” springs up and says “dang yer, whe’r going to?” “Nuffing, nuffing,” says everyone, we likes to have a look at these ere islands; we shall get there to-night, and come back to-morrow.’ Well, just as the sun sets we beaches our boat on the biggest one, the high one there. We makes all snug, and we hears plenty of seal all round. Next day we clubs a lot, and fills the boat wid skins, real fur seal.<sup>320</sup> As we shove off, one o’ them says, “hallo! my club’s ashore.” I say, ““Grip Hard,” just jump ashore and get it.” He goes up the beach, and goes over the sandhill to where our fire was, and then my mates pulls like devils as hard as they could. “Grip Hard” comes on top o’ the sandhills and coo-e-es, but we pulls like mad; he coo-e-es and coo-e-es, and runs on the sandhills till he comes to a big pint, and he can’t go no furder. My mates swears and cusses, and pulls like mad; I gets skeered, I talks to ’em, I thinks they are larking. I ’spects them ’bout ship; they cusses each other and everything. We ups lug, and the wind north, we runs dead on for Kangaroo Island. I looks back and sees summut on top o’ the island, but my mates cusses me for looking back, and we soon lose the islands astern. Next day my mates takes “Grip Hard’s” skins, and we never goes to these islands any more, and I does not like ’em at all meeself, though I had no hand in it. They tells me that yer can hear his cooey yet o’ nights and early mornings. I doesn’t like to look at ’em even now, though it’s long years gone.’<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Flash Tom means the New Zealand Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) rather than the Australian Sea Lion (*Neophoca cinerea*), both of which are still found on Kangaroo Island: the former at Admiral’s Arch and the latter at the world-famous Seal Bay.

<sup>321</sup> It is difficult to know if Cawthorne has a specific marooning episode in mind here. Obviously many stories circulated about individuals left on rocky islets and reefs to kill seals and to fend for themselves. George Robinson recorded that following anecdote 18 June 1830: ‘The Pyramid [is] a large rock, from the appearance the altitude two hundred and fifty feet. ... I was informed that a man died on this rock who had been left there by a sealing vessel. He was found in a cave and it was supposed he had been dead eighteen months. The spray of the sea had broke over him and he was as it were cured and looked quite fresh. These men are left by the sealing vessels with so many gallons of water, provision &c, and the vessels then go away to the eastern straits, so that if anything happens to the vessel the man on the rock must perish’ (Plomley 1966: 177). Perhaps the most graphic of the many stories circulating about marooning is that given in the *Sydney Gazette* 18 April 1824: ‘Mr. Dawson, commander of the *Samuel*, has brought with him this voyage a black native woman with a child two years old. She had been taken by the American ship *General Gates* from Kangaroo Island and left on the South Cape of New Zealand with a gang of sealers. After these men had been there some short time, a horde of savages came upon them and nearly massacred all the party. The poor native, with her little one, took shelter under a rock, till the New Zealanders left the spot. For eight months the mother and the child lived, without fire, on birds and seals. They are yet on board the *Samuel*, and were in good health when rescued by Mr. Dawson from danger’ (Quoted Cumpston 1986: 66). A story from South Australian waters is told by John Hart of leaving a man named Bermingham on Baudin Rocks in Guichen Bay to

‘And what did yer do with the lady yer was so particular in love with?’

‘Ah! what comes of her?’ cried all the listeners.

Tom fidgeted about, but at last said, ‘why my mates took the skins, and I took the gal, and now yer knows the whole yarn, strand for strand.’

‘And a purty yarn it is, too.’

‘Yer have two sorts of sealing hereaways, haven’t yer,’ asked one of the men, ‘and yer calls ’em the “wet knock down” and the “dry knock down,” and the yarn yer been telling on us is the last sort.’<sup>322</sup>

But Tom made no sign. He crouched down deeper under the lee of the bulwarks, and it was evident he did not want to talk further about

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skin and dry the skins of thirty seals killed by the crew of Hart’s sealing vessel. See K. Birmingham, *The sixth eleven tales of Robe* (Kingston: J.M. Banks, 1975) 40. See also Hart 1854: 52.

<sup>322</sup> Cawthorne is probably referring here to a seal-killing practice adopted by the Islanders and the Aboriginal women who worked for them, recorded in this remarkable description by James Kelly of an episode in 1816: ‘a Most Singular Mode it is, It is here Described. We gave the Women Each a Club that We had used to Kill Seals” with they went to the Waters Edge and Wet themselves” all over their head and Body as they Said to Prevent the Seals from Smelling them as they Walked along the Rocks they were Verry Cautious not to go to Windward of them as they Said a Seal Would sooner Believe his Nose than his Eyes” When a Man or Woman Came Near him, the Six Women Walked into The Water two and two and Swam to three Rocks about 50 yards from the Shore Each Rock had about 9 or 10 Seals on it they were all Laying aparently asleep, Two Women went to Each Rock with thair Clubs in hand Each of them Crept Slowly Close up to thair Seal and Lay Down with thair Club alongside them Some of the Seals aRose thair heads up to Look at thair New Visitors and Smell them Scratchd themselves and Lay Down again—this Was Done by thair fin or flipper The Women Went Nearly through the Same Motion as the Seal Did by holding up the Left Elbow a little and Scratching themselves with thair Left hands Keeping the Club firm in the Right hand Ready for the attack—the Seals Seemed Verry Cautious” Now and then Lifting up thair heads Looking around Scratching themselves with thair flippers and Laying their heads Down again, the Women went through the Same Motions as Near as possible—after they had been Laying on the Rocks for Nearly an hour the Sea ociationly washing over them and they quite Naked We—Could not tell thair meaning for Remaining So Long all of a Sudden the Women aRose” up on thair Seats thair Clubs up at arms Length—Each Struck a Seal on the Nose Which Killed him, and in an Instant they all Jumped up as if by Magic and Killed one More Each, after giving the the Seals Several Blows on the head and Securing them, they Commenced Loud Laughing and Dancing as if they had gained a great Victory” over the Seals, Each of them Draged a Seal into the Water and Swam with it to the Rock Where we was Standing and then Swam Back to the Rock and Brought one more Each Which made twelve Seals the Skins of Which being worth one pound each in Hobart Town Was not a Bad Begining by the Black Ladies, the Six Women then went to the top of a Small Hill and Made Smoaks to the Natives on the Main that they had been Killing Seals Which was soon answered by Smoaks” on the Beach We Skined the Seals and peged them out to Dry the Women them Commenced—Cooking their Supper Each Cut a Shoulder off a young Seal Weighing three or four pounds and threw them on the fire When they were about Half Done they Commenced Devouring them and Rubing the oil on their Skin Saying they had a Glorious Meal’ (James Kelly, ‘First Discovery of Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour,’ *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 1920: 177–8).

the matter, and, above all, not to be cross-questioned. The sailors rose up, and muttered that he was as deep a villain as the rest, and that they did not believe half what he said. The night wore on, and the tide drew the ship nearer and nearer to the stern and solitary islands, whose peaked and blackened sides now presented mournful associations as the sailors gazed upon them. Flash Tom was asked about the dangers by Mr. Ratlin, about the outlying reefs; but he scarcely replied, so the mate left him with an oath at his obstinacy, and ordered the anchor to be seen to and a boat to be got ready. The turn of the tide rendered these precautions unnecessary, however, the brig gradually drifted away, and as the morning broke the islands with their dread history were many miles away. Soon after a strong southwester came on to blow, and the vessel making no headway, Captain Meredith determined to seek shelter under a low point, now known as Point Marsden.<sup>323</sup>

Flash Tom seemed to revive as the anchor brought the ship up, and as the place was only a few miles from his abode, asked Captain Meredith to let him go ashore, promising to return early next morning.

‘Yes, you may go; but I suppose I’ll never see you again.’

This, though spoken half-jestingly, was literally fulfilled, but in a manner very different from what was anticipated. Flash Tom never lived to see daylight, and the Althorpe Island tragedy was fearfully revenged in the dread murder of the murderer that very night.

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<sup>323</sup> The western end of Shoal Bay, named by Flinders 21 March 1802 after William Marsden, Second Secretary to the Board of the Admiralty, an unlikely anchorage, given the safety provided by the Bay of Shoal just a few kilometres further on to the east (Manning 1990: 195).

## CHAPTER XVI.

### The Murder of Flash Tom.

When Flash Tom left the brig he took with him a couple of good bottles of rum. He and his black woman were soon landed on the white beach at the foot of a dense wall of scrub. The woman, in native fashion, strapped her wallet on her back, and followed her lord and master, walking in Indian file as their figures disappeared in the scrub, the two boatmen remarked that they believed Flash Tom was at the bottom of the whole plot of leaving 'Grip Hard' to die on the island.

'We'll ask the skipper to heave to off them islands, and we'll go ashore and see if we can't find his bones,' said one; 'and a purty way they has of calling this here "the dry knock down."' "

'Well, well, I believe all these islands are full of ghosts,' replied the other. 'I won't go ashore to look for his bones. I tell yer the fellow is a Jonah,<sup>324</sup> and he'll sink the ship yet. I s'pose all these small islands, particular those out o' the way, has ghosts? We will tell the skipper, and see what he says, but I won't go ashore, be darned if I do.'

Flash Tom arrived at his hut about sundown, and was surprised to find a native woman quietly making a fire, when he had supposed he would have been alone; but he was doubly surprised as he recognised the woman he had left days previously at Hog Bay, the place where he had joined the ship. He was incensed at this unlooked-for *rencontre*;<sup>325</sup> for, the truth must be told, Tom had by threats and coaxing induced the native woman he brought with him in the brig to accompany him to his hut, a place that was remote from the ordinary track of the Islanders, and therefore admirably adapted for his peculiar vocation. He and his legitimate wife had been on a tour of wallaby-hunting for several weeks. Camping at Hog Bay he met the other woman, on a similar errand, but from another quarter. The brig heaving in sight, he at once conceived the plan of giving his number one wife the slip, at least for a few weeks, and commanding her to stay and get as many wallaby skins as she could, and not to

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<sup>324</sup> A person who brings bad luck.

<sup>325</sup> French, meeting.



return until two moons' time. She, however, knowing his departure in the brig, determined to start for her home that very night, and she was as much astonished as he was when they encountered each other in the manner already described.

Tom commenced swearing dreadfully at Suky.<sup>326</sup> From swearing he commenced beating, and had it not been for Brown Sal,<sup>327</sup> who threatened to take part with Suky, probably Flash Tom's anger might have led him into dire mischief. He having exhausted his strength, both of tongue and muscle, and tired with his long march, consoled himself with rum, and continued drinking, cursing, and rowing with the women for a long time, until the rum got the upper hand, and he fell into a deep, drunken sleep.

Suky kept up, as she had done ever since her beating, a low native wail, that nothing could induce her to cease, though continually threatened by Tom to have her ears cropped off or her body gashed.

It was a bad sign when native women wail in the particular manner she was expressing her grief. A mother will wail the loss of her murdered son in such language, and taunt her kinsmen till they are goarded [*sic*] to a frenzy, and oft the listening warrior—the next of kin—will jump up, take spear and shield, and dart away, and not return till he shows the kidney fat of his enemy! Suky continued to wail, and Brown Sal joined her; but Tom snored in his drunken sleep. At last the women ceased.

Without preliminary remark, without considering the matter

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<sup>326</sup> An historical character. known variously as Suke, Sal, Sall, Black Sal, Old Suke, Sook and Sukey. She seems to have been born around around 1800: of the dozens of Tasmanian women who lived on Kangaroo Island, she seems to have lived the longest. Like her friend Sal, she was a familiar figure on Kangaroo Island in the decades after settlement until her death around 1880. There is doubt about Suke's home country, some Kangaroo Island sources claiming she was from Cape Portland in Tasmania. Tindale calls her a Tasmanian, but George Robinson's diaries and journals do not mention any woman of this name. Others believe she was abducted by Meredith's party from Port Lincoln in 1834. In 1844 Alexander Tolmer arrested Suke and her friend 'Bumblefoot' Sal for Meredith's murder but they were released: Tolmer insists she was originally from the Port Lincoln district. In the last years of her life she was blind, living with Sal near the Middle River until her companion died in 1874, the poor woman surviving on the heart of a grass tree for the week it took her to feel her way to a neighbouring homestead to report the death. Suke then moved to the Antechamber Bay district, no doubt to be close to Nat Thomas's daughter Mary Seymour and to the rations distributed from the Sturt Light: there is a reference to her present in Nat Thomas's company in 1877. It seems Suke was uneasy in the company of strangers and even though she was blind, she would often disappear into the bush with her dogs for weeks on end. James cites an 1894 Destitute Board Office Docket 280/1894 that states Suke had not received rations for nearly six years, suggesting that Suke died around 1888. See Clarke 1998: 34-5, citing Tindale 1936-65: 311-313; James 2001: 63, citing Tindale AA 338/1/36 301-307, South Australian Museum.

<sup>327</sup> An historical character. See Note 49.

beyond the scope of the hour, without being troubled as to the morality of the action, Suky came at once to the solution of her troubles—‘Let’s kill the wretch,’ and she passed her hand across her throat. ‘He took “Grip Hard” away, and killed him on the island.’

Natives seldom argue; creatures of impulse, they act as they feel.<sup>328</sup> With a knitted brow and face swollen with crying, Suky rose up and motioned to Sal. There was a stern expression of face that peculiarly belongs to the black races of the earth when their feelings are wrought up to the highest endurance, and as Suky stepped past the doorway of the hut, the moon lighted up the face of a demon, and had the whole race of Islanders been before her and in her power she would have cut the throats of each without the slightest compunction. The hatred of the race, arising from the dire wrongs they had suffered, though stilled and suppressed, was never eradicated.

The drunken man was lying down against the side of the hut. There was a scant fire barely glimmering on the hearth. Suky seized Tom and dragged him into the light, and then felt for his knife, which, as a sealer’s, was keen and bright. The poor drunken wretch struggled and swore in an incoherent manner, ordering them to let him alone. Anon he was quieter. Accustomed, as all were, to butchering the seal and the kangaroo, they were adepts in the use of the knife.<sup>329</sup> They handled it skillfully. Brown Sal and Suky scarcely spoke; the latter motioned to a bit of rope, with which she tied the hands of her victim. She then motioned to Sal to keep his head down and back, and then without the slightest tremor she cut Tom’s throat from ear to ear. The wretch struggled in his dying agony, but the cut was by a skilful hand, and it was fatal. The women rose with a wild yell, and seizing a stick of fire started out into the deep scrub, and stayed not till miles intervened between them and the murdered man.

Very many months elapsed before the Islanders discovered that Tom had been murdered; but as it was an understood thing not to hold inquests in Kangaroo Island, little was said or done, and soon

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<sup>328</sup> Note the use of the ‘ethnographic’ or the stereotyping present tense: ‘all natives are ...’.

<sup>329</sup> James Kelly’s famous diary records detailed impressions of the hunting skills of Van Diemen’s Land women, noting that one sealer named Briggs had travelled from the Bass Strait islands to ‘purchase the Young Grown’ up Native females to Keep them as their *Wives* and for Hunting Kangaroos” and Catching Seals, Both for thair Skins they Were Wonderfully Dextrous’. James Kelly, ‘First Discovery of Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour’, *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania for the Year 1920*, 173.

after a great fire swept over that part of the island and consumed both the hut and the murdered remains of Flash Tom.

The tradition of this murder still remains; and one of the deep gullies that debouch on Investigator Straits is still known by the dire appellation of 'Bloody Tom's.'<sup>330</sup>

All savages regard murder no crime, that is to say, if the victim be of another tribe or race; on the contrary, in such a case it is a noble action and something to applaud. Suky and Sal gloried in the deed. They craftily kept the secret from the Islanders, but rejoicingly told it to their sisters. A song of triumph was extemporised on the occasion, and many and many a night the women droned over the camp fire the murder of Flash Tom.

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<sup>330</sup> Alexander Tolmer refers to a 'Bloody Jack's Bay', which he claims is to the west of Point Marsden, where he says 'there is a nice little stream with a constant supply of fresh water. There is also a valley with twenty or thirty acres of good land nearly clear. ... This place is at present unoccupied, Mr Purcell, the last resident, having been drowned, and his widow lately returned to the mainland' (*Register* 25 September 1844: 3d). Ruediger claims that Bloody Jack's is Middle River, and notes that 'It appears the whaler who lay claim to this area, and made his home there seldom spoke, but when he did, his remarks were always prefixed by the great Australian adjective, hence the sobriquet' (Ruediger 1980: 32). Given Middle River is the place where Meredith settled, built a house and established a garden in 1835, Ruediger may record here a local legend about Meredith or about one of the party who lived there with him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Native Signals.—Old Conday.—The Interview—The Rape of the Black Sabines.<sup>331</sup>—The Death of Long Bill.

We left Old Sam and Long Bill in their respective boats closed, hauled, and spinning along the coast north of the point now known as Cape Jervis, with smooth water and a brisk breeze. As they passed point after point dense clouds of smoke suddenly arose, and the Islanders cursed and swore as they recognised the well-known native signal of alarm, clearly indicating the blacks were on the alert, had recognised them, and were then actively engaged in warning and arousing the whole surrounding country.

‘There goes another,’ sung out Sam, ‘and right ahead, too, the sarcy devils; but we’ll take a woman for every smoke they makes.’

‘We shall have hard work, and summun will lose the number of his mess, I thinks,’ chimed in the Doctor.

The other boat sheered alongside, and the crews talked the matter over, the warlike preparations of the natives, and the best plans to adopt.

‘Rush the niggers,’ said Long Bill, ‘and run em through the gills and that’ll stop their jaw,’ and he laughed a loud laugh as he

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<sup>331</sup> The novelist Simpson Newland, in his *Paving the Way: A Romance of the Australian Bush* (London: Gay & Bird, 1893) also refers to the Rape of the Sabines. This is an early description of the Encounter Bay whaling station in the novel: ‘The station itself nestled at the foot of the ridge that connects the Bluff with the hills which form the background of the bay. Protected from the west and south winds, wooden huts had been built to shelter the rude, bold, often lawless men who hunted the monster of the deep. All honour to these men, who were the first, the very first, pioneers of South Australia! In the long and glorious record of British pioneering they surely should find a place. They paved the way, in some sense, for the miner, the squatter, and the tiller of the soil, who followed to conquer and subdue the land, by conquering and making their own the wealth of the seas. But when we inquire into their relations with the wild aboriginal inhabitants of the new land, the merest instinct of justice compels us to condemn much of their conduct. Almost as lawless and unscrupulous as the old sea-kings of the North, they paid small regard to the rights, matrimonial or other, of the unfortunate people amongst whom they dwelt. Modern editions of the Rape of the Sabines were by no means uncommon, though possibly not on so extensive a scale as the original. Individual instances of disregard of the institutions, customs and feelings of the aborigines, where their women were concerned, were still more frequent. The white man, exiled from the society of the women of his own race, coveted the charms of her dusky sisters; and where, when unrestrained by the wholesome influence of law and order or deterred by the force of public opinion, has ‘the European learned to control his passions?’ (31)

anticipated the fun of skewering the natives with his lance. 'I've done it afore, and it's a purty game, too,' and he took up his gleaming lance<sup>332</sup> and held it to view. 'He'll never talk wid his mammy that gets that into him.'

Unmindful for a moment of his steer-oar, the boat broached to, and shipped a tremendous sea that nearly washed the men out. With a powerful effort he brought the boat before the wind, but in so doing he lost his much-prized lance—a lance that had quivered in more than one man's heart, and was a source of dread both to white and black. Long Bill was in a fearful rage, his oaths were frightful, and the only consolation he could find was the vengeance he would take against the blacks at the very first opportunity that very day.

'Bale, every mother's son of yer, or we shall all go to he—l,' yelled Long Bill, as he tugged at the steer oar to keep the boat end on to the seas.

'That's a purty beginning,' roared out Sam. 'Why didn't yer mind yer weather-helm,<sup>333</sup> yer loplolly<sup>334</sup> boy?'

'You go to——,' replied Long Bill.

Georgy was exceedingly disconcerted. 'I never likes to sail on Friday in these 'ere love matches, and I don't like anything to go wrong. It's terribly bad for Bill to lose his lance like that. I must look out for squalls to-day.'

'I tell yer what it is,' said Sam to the Doctor, 'we'll try that 'ere bay inside the bluff, the smokes are all that way. I think there's a powerful number there fishing.'

The boats were soon under the lee of that bold headland of rock now known as the N.W. Bluff, which for some 300 or 400 feet rises

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<sup>332</sup> Long Bill's lance was probably similar to those used to kill the huge sea elephants, now rarely seen in Australian coastal waters. James Bonwick quotes M. Peron, the naturalist to the French expedition of 1802 who was the first to describe how the Bass Strait sealers killed the sea elephants which once came ashore on King Island: 'The sealers, with their lances fifteen feet in length, seized the time when the animal raised its left fore fin, and plunged the weapon to the heart. "As soon as they see themselves attacked, they seek to fly. If their retreat is cut off, they are violently agitated; their looks carry the expression of despair; they shed tears. I have myself seen one of these young females shed them abundantly, whilst one of our sailors, a cruel wicked man, amused himself, every time she opened her mouth, with striking her teeth with the thick end of one of the boat-hooks: this poor animal inspired pity: all its mouth was bloody, and tears ran from its eyes.'" James Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians* (London: Sampson, Low, Son & Marston, 1870) 291.

<sup>333</sup> Weather helm

<sup>334</sup> *Loplolly* or *Loblolly boy* has a number of meanings. A young boy serving in the surgeon's quarters of a warship. Here the meaning is seaman who is fit for no other work than to attend the sick and feed them gruel (*loblolly*).

abruptly from the jetty black waters that lave its cave-worn base. The sea was quite smooth under its gigantic protection. As the wind then blew S.E., the boats slowly slid along within fifty yards of its towering mass. Thousands of birds flew out of the caves at the unwonted visitors, and screamed and swooped round the boats, so near that more than one was knocked down with an oar or a boat-hook. At last the distant little picturesque sandy beach gradually came into view, and the boats took in sail, and pulled the remaining distance. As they approached, the scene became exceedingly beautiful, the valley, the mouth of which formed the bay, was enclosed by high, rolling hills, and the coast presented a broken wall of bold rock. A stream of fresh water issued and ran over the sand, and noisy cockatoos and parrots resounded on every side; the kangaroo grass<sup>335</sup> stood as thick as a hay-field, and as high as a man. Altogether it was a lovely spot, and even now, though denuded of trees, and dotted over with settlers' homes, though the rotund hills are marred with lines of fences, and a jetty stands on the spot where the Islanders were in the habit of landing, still the place is beautiful, and is certainly the most picturesque on the whole coastline of Gulf St. Vincent.<sup>336</sup> The locality is now called Rapid Bay, so named after the brig that brought out the first surveying party, including the Surveyor-General, Colonel Light.<sup>337</sup> It was the first place at which the surveyors landed.<sup>338</sup>

As the boats were creeping in, and every man keeping a sharp lookout, of a sudden a tremendous roaring, clattering noise was

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<sup>335</sup> Kangaroo grass, *Themeda triandra*, a tufty fodder grass that grows in spring and summer, the seeds of which can be collected and ground into a flour. It is one of the most widespread of all Australian native grasses, and is often described in the journals of the early explorers and settlers. Today this grass is found on roadsides or in country which is regularly burned. James Backhouse describes walking in the foothills of the Mount Lofty Ranges in November 1837: 'the Kangaroo-grass was up to our elbows, and resembled two years' seed meadows, in England, in thickness; in many places, three tons of hay per acre, might be mown off it' (Backhouse 1843: 511).

<sup>336</sup> These days the view from the sea has been affected by the scarring of the coastal scarp caused by BHP's dolomite mining. The dumping of unsightly overburden on the beach and over the cliffs has defaced the dramatic line of cliffs along the coast.

<sup>337</sup> The Kurna name for the location was Tankulrawun. See Tindale 1987: 6.

<sup>338</sup> Light employed the Islander William Cooper and two women, Sal and Doughboy to tend a garden he planted at Rapid Bay, describing his first evening ashore there as follows: 'At two, I went on shore, and was enchanted with the appearance of the whole. A fine stream of fresh water ran through the middle of the valley into the sea, and the soil was rich beyond expectation; my hopes were now raised to a pitch I cannot describe. I walked up one of the hills, and was delighted to find, that as far as I could see all around, there was an appearance of fertility, and a total absence of those wastes and barren spots, which the accounts I received in England had led me to expect' (Geoffrey Dutton and David Elder, *Colonel William Light—Founder of a City* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991) 163).

heard almost overhead, and then a huge splash with a thousand smaller ones succeeding.

‘Up to their devilries,’ remarked Sam, as he shoved his boat further away from the coast, but yer see, they can’t ’xactly find our bearings. It’s all chance work, but we’ll keep funder off, and then perhaps we shall see ’em.’

High above some 500 feet of nearly perpendicular altitude, a small band of natives was visible, evidently preparing to hurl down a huge boulder of stone, but on perceiving the boats they at once desisted, and became invisible.

When the boats arrived just beyond a spear’s throw of the beach they killicked. Though not a sound indicated the presence of the natives, nearly fifty were breathlessly watching from the tall kangaroo grass the movements of the Islanders.

‘Let’s go ashore,’ said one of the Islanders. ‘They are not here for sartin.’

‘If yer goes ashore now,’ said Georgy, ‘they’ll take yer kidney-fat out of yer, just there on top of that ere rise, and we shall have the pleasure o’ seeing them doing it, for I spects it’s there they is a looking on us circumspectly like.’

‘None o’ your fine words,’ said Sam, ‘yer talks like a parson. I circumspects yer’ll have a little work in the butchering line today; ’spose we gie ’em a coo-e-e?’ and Sam rose up in the stern sheets of the boat and gave them a prolonged coo-e-e that echoed among the hills. Beyond a solitary scream of a cockatoo not a sound followed. A full hour elapsed; the Islanders availed themselves of the opportunity to look up their weapons, and to have their dinner, being fully persuaded that sooner or later the natives would appear. At this juncture a native stepped out on the white beach. He seemed to be unarmed, with the exception of his waddy.

The Doctor started up—‘Why, that’s “old Conday”<sup>339</sup>—the

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<sup>339</sup> An historical character, aka Condoy, King Con. His name first appears in the report written by Dr Robert Davis in 1831 describing the circumstances of Captain Collet Barker’s disappearance at the Murray Mouth. When looking for Barker, Davis met an Aboriginal woman called Sally whom he took to Kangaroo Island to find George ‘Fireball’ Bates to assist with the search. They returned to the mainland and met Condoy, Sally’s father, who then interrogated Ngarrindjeri people to determine Barker’s fate. Conday is also named by George ‘Fireball’ Bates as a man from the mainland who with his son ‘Friday’ accompanied Bates to Hog Bay on Kangaroo Island. When the son died, Bates returned to the mainland with Conday where both men lived with Conday’s people for some time. Eventually Bates was found ill in a cave by other Islanders and taken back across Backstairs Passage; Conday, Friday and Sal taken with them as punishment for Bates’s treatment. Condoy is also mentioned several times in John Woodforde’s Journal, see

greediest old rascal o' the lot. I'll go ashore and have a yarn.'

'Werry good,' said Sam, get 'em to come down friendly like, with their wives and darters, mind; now yer must parbuckle the thing like the infarnal speerit that yer is allers speaking about in the times o' Adam and Eve. We wants a big haul, Georgy, and if yer lays the strand seamanlike yer shall have the pick between my gal and yourn that we catches.'

Long Bill and all the rest were listening to the advice.

'Round 'em up,' said one, 'don't yer forget to tell 'em we has no guns, and they must leave their spears. Bear a hand, or that blue nigger will bolt.'

Georgy was soon ready. It would have scared the natives to have pulled in, so he slipped quietly overboard and swam ashore. As he neared the beach he spoke to old Conday, who immediately recognised him. A yell of delight brought from rock and rise, bush and brake, some fifty warriors, who with a rush soon joined their companion.<sup>340</sup> Georgy rose from the water, and imitating native etiquette, sat down on the sand in silence.<sup>341</sup> Thereupon, the natives squatted, too. Thus both parties continued for at least ten minutes, then Georgy spoke, and explained their visit. They were friends, fishing and hunting up the Gulf. They had plenty to eat—they wanted to come ashore. The whites would leave their guns, and the blacks were to leave their spears. They were to have a grand dinner, to bring down their wives and daughters, and have a great corroboree. This

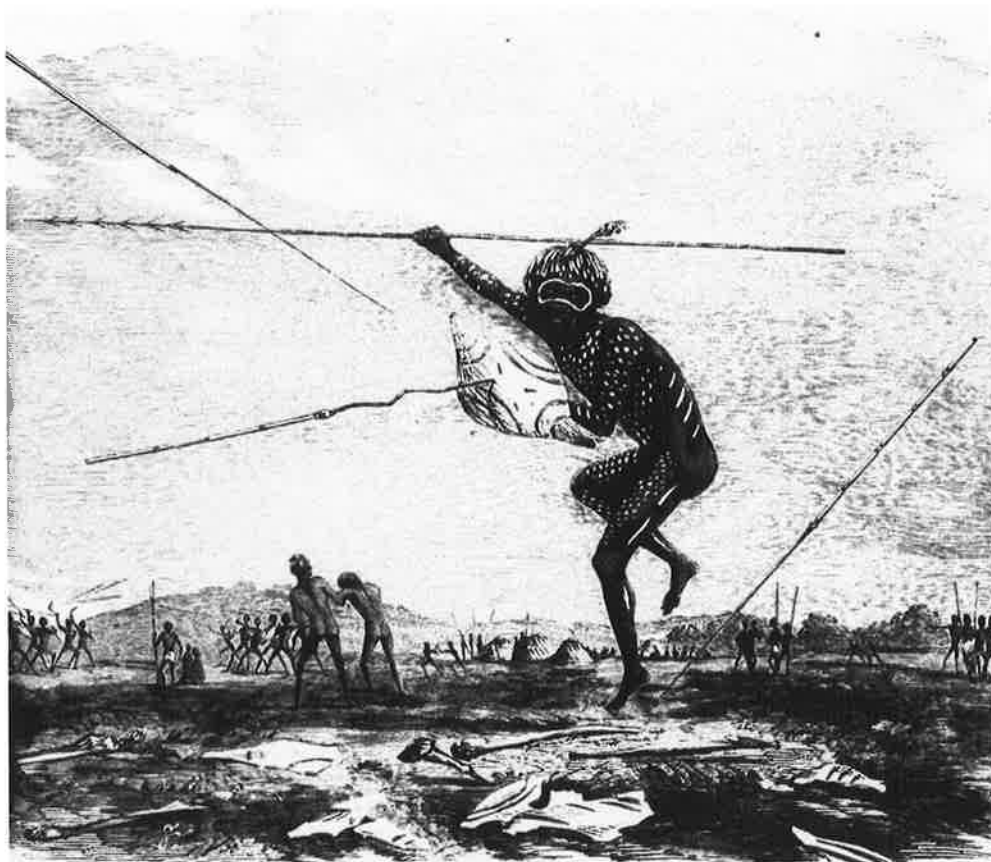
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for example the entry 31 August 1836, PRG 502/1/2, Mortlock Library of South Australiana. It is possible Cawthorne learned of Conday through talking with George Bates at Hog Bay. See *Advertiser* 27 December 1886, 6c; Cumpston 1986: 128, Clarke 1998: 39; Rob Amery, 'Sally and Harry: insights into early Kurna contact history,' *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* Eds. Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus (Aboriginal History Monograph 6. Sydney: Aboriginal History, 1998) 49–87.

<sup>340</sup> Good evidence again that 'Georgie' is based on George 'Fireball' Bates, who seems to have been on rather better terms with the Kurna and the Ngarrindjeri than some of his fellow-Islanders. See the long article *Advertiser* 27 December 1886, 6c–f based on an interview with Bates, then in his eighty-sixth year, which records Bates' participation in ceremonies and even what is described as his initiation into 'the blacks of Cape Jervis', the Ramindjeri clan of the Ngarrindjeri from Encounter Bay. In comparison, Nat Thomas (Old Sam here) seems to have been nervous and unsure of himself in the company of the 'Onkaparinga and Encounter Bay blacks'. See the revealing episode when Thomas led a group of settlers into country around the Onkaparinga searching for lost horses and then tried to prevent their recognizing him as an Islander who had abducted women from their community (Bull 1884: 33).

<sup>341</sup> An interesting moment in the novella, suggesting the extent to which the Islanders had taken on the customs and practices of the Aboriginal people of the region, here respecting the protocols about meetings that still exist in some communities today, the 'sit-down' ceremony. Cawthorne's novella gives some support to the view that the Kurna were affected by contact with the sealers, supporting the views of a number of contemporary historians and anthropologists.





Native Warrior (South Australia), Defending Himself from Three Spears.  
[FROM SKETCH BY W. A. CAWTHORNE—SEE PAGE 5.]

'Native Warrior Defending Himself from Three Spears'. From a sketch by W.A. Cawthorne, *Illustrated Melbourne Post*.

was agreed to, but not without dissent.

'Where's my sister?' asked one; 'why have yer ate her?'<sup>342</sup>

Georgy said it was some other white man that had her, but the last time he saw her she was well and fat.

'You lie!' replied the other, 'you ate her.'

Here old Conday interposed, and the treaty was concluded. Georgy hailed the boats, while some of the natives went to fetch their families camped a mile inland. The boats were cautiously killicked just outside the surf. A grand roasting of fish, wallaby, and kangaroos followed, and as the sun declined some thirty or forty men and women appeared. It was evident several of the warriors were suspicious, and remained away.

It was now quite dark; the fires gleamed up against the black mountains around them, and a corroboree was performed.<sup>343</sup> Ample opportunity had by this time been given to each man to select his favourite lady.

'When they blows a bit, and has a spell arter the next singing,' said Sam, 'then I gees you the signal, and every man takes his woman. So, look out, and get handy each on yer near yer pertickler sweetheart; and then yer rushes for the boats for yer life. Take it quiet, boys, don't yer flurry yersels, and hug the greasy ladies like a bear, cos they is so slippery.'

Another corroboree was sung, and the blacks sat down to rest, or rolled about laughing, quite exhausted with their efforts in the dance and song.

'Now,' roared out Sam, with the voice of a bull, and each Islander seized a women, and hurried her to the waves. A wild yell rent the air, burning brands flew through the darkness, waddies hissed in every direction, the warriors threw a shower of spears, but the night was favourable to the enemy. Shrieks, and wails, and shouts rose loud and long, but the Islanders were victors, though but to a limited

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<sup>342</sup> Here 'Georgie' is clearly represented as speaking language. A number of the Islanders seem to have been familiar with not only some of the languages of the main, but also of Van Diemen's Land. See the Introduction, which makes the point that many of them were living hybrid lives, heavily influenced by Indigenous manners and customs. Note here too that Cawthorne presents an ironic reversal of the nineteenth-century stereotype of Indigenous cannibalism.

<sup>343</sup> In his 'Literarium Diarium', Cawthorne records both hearing and being present at a number of corroborees at the Native Location on the Torrens River. He made available to the artist George French Angas, son of one of the colony's founding fathers, a description and water colours of the Kurna ceremony the Kuri Dance, which Angas later included without full acknowledgement in *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand*: 102–08. Robert Foster includes the relevant pages in Foster 1991: 96–7.

extent. Amongst them all six women only were caught.

'Lash 'em down to the thwarts,' sung out Georgy.

'Ah!' and a fearful oath escaped Sam's lips, 'there's one lost.' Yes, one of the women leapt overboard and so escaped.<sup>344</sup>

When the light broke next morning, their captives were still wailing their sorrowful song. They found Long Bill leaning heavily against the steer oar.

'What, are yer crying for the gal that jumped overboard last night?' jokingly remarked Sam, as the two boats neared each other for a mutual conference on the state of affairs. But Bill replied not. The early morning light was still faint, and things were misty.

'I say, Bill,' sung out Georgy, 'cheer up'; but Bill never cheered up; his body merely rose and fell as the wave washed the steer oar.

Bill was dead! In the scrimmage of the preceding night a spear had entered that callous heart of his, and he died without a murmur. A little while after he was thrown to the fishes.

High up in a cavern containing a singular stalactite, and only visible from the sea, overlooking the spot where this tragedy happened, is yet to be seen the strong resemblance of the skeleton of a man.<sup>345</sup> It is known to all coasters as 'Bill's Ghost.'

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<sup>344</sup> This moment gestures to the still-told story about an Indigenous girl abducted to Kangaroo Island who escapes and manages to swim back across Backstairs Passage to the mainland. In some versions she survives, in others she dies in the attempt, but her child survives. Such stories are told both on Kangaroo Island and in the Ngarrindjeri community. There are dozens of versions of this story: George 'Fireball' Bates told an *Advertiser* journalist about two failed attempts. See *Advertiser* 27 December 1886: 6e.

<sup>345</sup> In his travel piece 'Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island', *Observer*, 15 January 1853, 3d, Cawthorne records this description: 'At 5 p.m. reached Rapid Bay, hauled up the boat; in passing the cliffs a very large niche is observable, about 400 or 500 feet high, and in it a huge white stalactite, and of such a form as to resemble a human skeleton: it is a most singular curiosity'.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### The Wreck of the Brig.—The Desertion of a Boat's Crew.—Captain Meredith Reaches the Mainland.

'There he is at last!' exclaimed Captain Meredith, as he turned away from a close scrutiny of the beach.

Mr. Ratlin, who had been similarly employed, made no answer.

The captain became impatient; his anxiety had disturbed his vision, so he jumped to a hasty conclusion.

'Don't you see him?' inquired the captain in a tone of annoyance.

'I see something like a man, but I don't believe it is a man; it looks more like a kangaroo.'

'Kangaroo! pshaw!' Captain Meredith resumed his telescope, and after a long look he turned sharply round and said, 'Get the anchor up; I'll not stop another minute. It's some trick of these Islanders. There's no way of securing the unprincipled rascals.'

The brig had her topsails soon sheeted home, and made easy way out of her snug anchorage, light winds prevailing during the whole day. The distant blue outline of the highest land, now known as Mount Lofty,<sup>346</sup> bore N.E. by N. as the sun set in the gorgeous splendour of an Australian day. A smart S.W. breeze sprang up, and the brig bowled along under top-gallant canvas. A little after the middle watch had been called, a curious grating sensation was felt, then a succession of bumps, the vessel rolled in a most awkward and unusual manner, gradually heeling over till her gunwale was under water, and then became immovable. The brig had run ashore.<sup>347</sup>

When daylight broke and the tide was down, they saw right under them a small strip of green bushes and a most extensive sand flat, with rocks jutting out in ugly patches. The spot is the well-known

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<sup>346</sup> Named by Matthew Flinders, 23 March 1802, viewed from Kangaroo Head, Kangaroo Island. The hill was climbed by Captain Collet Barker and party 17 March 1831.

<sup>347</sup> Cawthorne may have had in mind the wreck of the *Parsee* on Troubridge Shoal 17 November 1838. The barque had been sailing from Hobart to Adelaide with 28 passengers, one of whom, Mrs C. Boucher, died in the wreck. The *Rapid* was sent to render assistance, taking the passengers off and landing them on Torrens Island, where sealers had been working, leaving rotting carcasses. See C. Bateson, *Australian shipwrecks: including vessels wrecked en route to or from Australia, and some strandings* (Vol. 1 Sydney: Reed 134 and R.T. Sexton, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures South Australia 1627-1850* (Canberra: Gould Books & Roebuck Society, 1990) 41.

‘Trowbridge Shoals,’<sup>348</sup> where more than one ship has laid her bones.<sup>349</sup>

The green bushes turned out to be the herbage of a tiny sand ridge, about as broad as the brig herself, and perhaps three times her length.

Provisions were soon landed, and a tolerable shelter rigged up between the bushes. Two boats were saved and safely beached on the lee of the tiny island.

Land was visible from nearly all points of the compass, and the nearest coast appeared scarcely four or five miles away. Captain Meredith had hopes of warping his brig off the shoals, but his men, not liking the additional labour, planned a little conspiracy, and accordingly in the dead of night crept into one of the boats at anchor, and stole quietly away, intending to make for Kangaroo Island and become, lawful and obedient subjects of that extensive empire. Many of them had become enamoured of the free and jolly life of the Islanders. All they had to get—a matter, by the way, of not easy accomplishment—were two or three black women and then they were provided for life. They could sleep watch in and watch out. Of wallaby there was plenty, fish also was abundant; and for amusement, as well as profit, there was the exciting pastime of sealing. They had made a capital beginning, having a splendid whaleboat, that first and paramount requisite of an Islander’s life.

‘Won’t the skipper growl when he finds his best boat gone?’ remarked one of the hands.

‘Let him growl his ears off; he never more sees her again; we has had enuf of squaring yards, so we wants no wages, but we takes the

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<sup>348</sup> ‘Trowbridge Shoal and Point:—In Saint Vincent Gulf were named by Matthew Flinders on 24 March 1802, Admiral Sir Thomas Troubridge, a close friend of Lord Nelson; a baronetcy was bestowed upon him in 1799 for services in the Mediterranean’ (Manning 1990: 314). Cawthorne’s father, Captain Cawthorne, when applying for the job as head keeper at the Sturt Light, attached to his application a drawing of the Kokskear Light, Gulf of Finland, (probably done by his son), suggesting that something like this structure be erected on the Troubridge Shoal. See State Records, GRG 24/6/1851/1329.

<sup>349</sup> Cawthorne may have seen the wreck of the *Sultana* on Troubridge Shoals. Edward Snell recorded this in November 1849: ‘At 2 o’clock we came in sight of the [Yorke] peninsula dividing Spencer’s Gulf from Gulf St Vincent—low, scrubby and barren, the coast being a perfectly level line ... A little to the Eastward ... we passed the wreck of a large ship apparently of 800 or 1000 tons, lying on Troubridge Shoals. She only had her 3 lower masts, bowsprit and fore yard standing, a sloop was lying about half a mile from her, I suppose rendering assistance, or shifting cargo’. Tom Griffiths, ed. *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell, the Illustrated Diary of an Artist, Engineer and Adventurer in the Australian Colonies 1849 to 1859*, (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1988) 42–3.

boat.'

When Mr. Ratlin rose early to rouse all hands to make further efforts to move the brig from her stranded position, great was his amazement at the desertion of the men and boat.

'I told you so,' said he to the captain; 'ever since that rascal came on board we took off the rocks, shamming Abraham, the crew has never been the same. Here's a pretty mess! and just at the top of spring tides. We'd sure to get the brig off to-night,' and the mate stamped his feet in his vexation.

The captain said nothing. He was beyond talking; but he had a dire feeling of revenge; one day he would square accounts.

'Who's left?' asked the skipper.

'Only poor Handspike and Black Dick<sup>350</sup> and his lubra.'

'Well, we must be off also; it's no use stopping here, so let us rig up the gig and be off. We shall fall in with the Islanders somewhere, and perhaps induce them to come over here, and by the next springs we may get her off.'

'Never,' replied the mate. 'The chaps will never be such fools as to come. They would much prefer seeing her a wreck. No, Captain Meredith, take your last look of her, for you will never see her afloat again.'

The two men paced up and down the little sandy beach as if they were walking the quarterdeck. Gloomy thoughts made them moody and silent. Poor Handspike sat under the lee of a salt bush,<sup>351</sup> mumbling to himself, and gazing seaward, and the two blacks, man and woman, were busying themselves in getting a few things in the boat; but the hot sun killed the little wind that fanned the sea, and a great calm followed.

As night drew in, and the moon rose in her grand glory, Captain Meredith for the last time visited his hapless vessel, and then leaning on the stump of the bowsprit, he indulged in the natural melancholy

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<sup>350</sup> This is the only time in the novel that Cawthorne uses this name, and these characters' sudden appearance presents something of a puzzle. Cawthorne may have intended that readers imagine Dick as an African-American or West Indian. There are a number of Islanders with such backgrounds: two of George Meredith's associates were 'men of colour': the carpenter and whaler George Brown and John 'Black Jack' Williams. Several lines on, however, Cawthorne refers to 'the two blacks, man and woman', which suggests that Dick is an Indigenous man. Whatever Cawthorne's intention, it is reasonable to suspect that there may have been other chapters to the novel that were not included in the 1865–6 serial version, possibly because Cawthorne wrote more than could be included in a year's publication of serial numbers. These missing chapters may explain the sudden appearance of Black Dick and his companion.

<sup>351</sup> Coastal saltbush, *Atriplex cinerea*, very common along South Australian coasts.

reflection that the scene and place inspired—the wreck, the desertion of his crew, the tiny island glittering in the moonbeams, the loud booming of the tide as it rippled over the vast shoals, the shriek of the sea-bird, and the lone grandeur of Nature in her moonlit garniture. Before another hour had elapsed the feeble remnant of the wrecked ship was gradually creeping away under the influence of a light breeze.

Poor Handspike, who had never recovered his senses since his fatal sunstroke, was the only one that seemed merry; he alone, in his perverted faculties, saw cause for being glad. From the tenor of his wanderings: he was evidently under the impression that the boats had come and taken him off, out of that dread scrub on the side the lagoon to which all his thoughts perpetually wandered. Bad and strange was the contrast; the madman merry, and the sane man almost mad. Moon and star vanished, and the pink dawn trembled over the high hills that now lay before them. A smart breeze from the S.W. made the boat jump on her course, which was due for the high land ahead.

‘What are you going to do, captain?’ said Mr. Ratlin.

‘Beat up for the island, if we can, or beach the boat on the coast ahead, and wait a slant of wind to get to the southward. But those confounded blacks on the mainland are as thick as ants; we must be careful.’

‘If you are afraid to land you can anchor the boat off and stop in her; but I shall go ashore. I don’t fear the blacks.’

‘You ought to be careful, you know; the Islanders have been of late somewhere hereaway catching women, and you might be mistaken for one of them and speared.’

‘Well, if I am? I have lost everything.’

‘Don’t despair, captain; something may yet turn up.’

The land was soon neared, and a fine opening to a large inland lake was clearly discernible.<sup>352</sup> The boat was headed for so desirable a spot, and very soon she glided out of the tossing, restless sea, and the forlorn crew found themselves in a lake, surrounded by a vast amphitheatre of hills, the spurs of which were clothed in the peculiar foliage of Australia.

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<sup>352</sup> Given Cawthorne describes the whaleboat running before a sou’westerly from Troubridge Shoals up the gulf, it seems that this ‘lake’ is meant to represent the Port River. See John Jones, ‘Port Adelaide River, Its First Reported Discovery,’ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia South Australian Branch* 22(1923): 73–5.

Warily the boat's crew camped themselves on a sandspit that stretched out into the lake, and the boat was kept at anchor. All hands but one went to sleep, and that one was Captain Meredith. He reclined under a large bush, and gave way sorrowful musings.



## CHAPTER THE LAST.

### The Murder of Captain Meredith.—The Last Glimpse of Old Sam.

For three days the party were kept windbound. At last a change, though a deceitful one, occurred, but their impatience was such that Captain Meredith was determined to risk it; so the boat was duly got out, and with a light breeze they sailed away. Towards the afternoon the wind chopped round, and they were compelled to beach the boat, to their chagrin.

It was a different country from the former. The hills retreated from the coastline, though here and there a kind of conical mound was left. On one of these Captain Meredith determined to camp. Several native fires were seen in the distance. At last piles of smoke rose up as if by enchantment on every side. It was clear the natives had discovered their presence, and were using their bush telegraph.

‘Lauty blackfellow,’ remarked the native of the party, as she pointed out the columns of smoke. ‘Me no stop here; me stop in boat.’

‘Good advice, too,’ said Mr. Ratlin, ‘and I would advise all of us to anchor the boat off shore and sleep in her.’

That night the little shipwrecked crew lay in the boat. As the morning came not a native or a smoke was visible. The stillness of death was on the land; the wind died away, and there was every appearance of a terrific hot day.

‘I shall go ashore,’ said Captain Meredith; ‘it’s frightful to be grilled to death in the boat; might as well be speared to death on shore,’ and he laughed slightly at the alternative. He little thought he would so soon be called upon to accept the dire choice to which he so jokingly alluded.

‘Let me see—it’s Sunday to-day, is it not?’ said the captain.

‘Yes, I think it is,’ replied Mr. Ratlin, who was sitting on the gunwale of the boat with his legs dangling in the water to cool himself, while both the blacks were rolling about in the sea like two porpoises.

‘Well, if it’s Sunday and I must do something, I’ll take my Bible

with me, and do you see that bare knoll with a few bushes?<sup>353</sup> well, I'll go there, perhaps there may be a light air blowing, and I can easily scamper down if the blacks come on too thick so good-bye for a while.'

The boat was pushed astern, and he jumped into the water, mounted over the sandhills, and duly ensconced himself under the bushes.

While these arrangements were being carried out, two native warriors might have been observed crouching behind a deep mass of scrub that commanded the whole view before them.

'We will kill them all,' whispered one; 'the spears first, then the waddies. Ah! look there! one of them is coming ashore and coming this way.'

'Ah!' grunted his companion, 'don't spear him, he'll cry out. We'll go and talk to him, and knock him down with the kutta.<sup>354</sup> I wish those other white thieves would come ashore. They have two of my sisters. They have stolen your wife. Ah! we will take their kidney fat before the sun sets.'

Two or three hours elapsed. Captain Meredith was deeply immersed in reading one of the Psalms,<sup>355</sup> and occasionally wondering whether they were written for life in Australia, as well as in Syria,<sup>356</sup> and while so pondering he cast his eye round and saw to his amazement two painted and naked warriors.<sup>357</sup> One was barred

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<sup>353</sup> Given the context, the knoll in question must be clearly visible from the sea, suggesting that Haycock's Hill at Carrickalinga is the most likely site.

<sup>354</sup> Elsewhere Cawthorne gives this word as *katta*, Kurna, 'an implement for digging, etc' (Foster. 1991: 81).

<sup>355</sup> This is an interesting detail, suggesting that Cawthorne's version of Meredith's murder draws on what Maggerlede or 'Bumblefoot' Sal had told Alexander Tolmer in 1844, in that she records this detail about the attack while Meredith was reading the Bible. Cawthorne may have heard this detail either from Nat Thomas, George Bates or from Sal herself, the latter well known to Cawthorne's father.

<sup>356</sup> While there are specific references in Psalms to Syria (for example, Psalm 60 refers to David's conquests there), Cawthorne probably has the lamentational verses in mind, those that refer to penitence, distress and sorrow, given his character has just lost his ship. Psalm 23 needs no commentary. See <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txs/psalms.htm> accessed 20 December 2002.

<sup>357</sup> In '*Literarium Diarium*', his diary entry dated 12 July 1843, Cawthorne recorded a detailed description of Goroongabeer ('Captain Jack'), a young Kurna man preparing for battle: 'He began first by mixing some red ochre and fat and then making stripes like ribs all across his chest and belly, then he called his wife who made similar stripes across his back and legs. Then he made long perpendicular stripes on his thighs and rings on his arms. After this he oiled his back part and [he] [the] front [part well]. He commenced decorating is face by striping it with red and white, the first in oblique lines as well as the [second] varied white dots which made him look more like a ghost and a devil combined together than a human being ... his lubra (wife) took a bunch of feathers and interwove them in his back hair so that it hung loose on the back part of

and ribbed with red stripes, kangaroo teeth dangled from his front hair, a large bunch of emu feathers<sup>358</sup> hung pendant from his neck and down his back, and he grasped a fighting stick of large proportions. He had no shield. The other warrior was dotted all over with red ochre,<sup>359</sup> his hair was steeped in oil, hung in long ringlets, and shone brilliantly, having been powdered with the fine dust of micaceous ironstone. Through his nose was a long white bone, the fibula of the kangaroo. He wore a girdle of human hair. He had no spears in his hands, but slyly the cunning rascals held between their big toes a jagged spear each, which, in the deep grass in which they stood, were, of course, invisible. As the Irishman hides his 'blackthorn' up his sleeve, so the native, not to alarm his victim, drags along the ground the fatal spear held firmly in the grasp of the big toe.

Captain Meredith jumped up and faced his foes. They waved their hands towards the boat. He retreated, and when he thought a favourable opportunity occurred, turned his head to shout for help. That moment was fatal. A waddy<sup>360</sup> with an unerring aim struck him with dreadful force on his head, and he reeled and fell to the ground. Quick as lightning a spear passed through his body, and with a groan of infinite anguish Captain Meredith gave up the ghost.

Dead or alive, the natives cared not. Quickly stripping the corpse, they cut an incision in the side, extracted the kidneys and the fat of the unhappy man, and then sped away to the hills to boast of their valour and their exceeding great luck.

As the evening closed in, Mr. Ratlin became anxious at the prolonged absence of the captain. He went ashore and coo-e-ed till he was hoarse. At last he mustered all his forces, and marched up to

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his neck. Then a finer and smaller bunch of cockatoo feathers bound on a neat little stick was stuck perpendicularly into his hair in the front part ... After this the 'Wowwoodteyadla' ... was entwined with the front hair ... the 'Moodlata', a nose-stick, was stuck through the cartilage of the nostrils ... the 'yoodna' tied round his loins ... the 'Taara' or net band about 5 feet long was [carried round] the lower part of the belly and tightened ... His body was fully ornamented to his satisfaction and he gave a glance at the bystanders expressive of vanity." (Foster 1991: 13–4).

Cawthorne arranged for Goo-roongabeer to pose for George French Angas: his painting survives.  
<sup>358</sup> In his 'Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia', Cawthorne records *kari-wappa* as 'a tuft of feathers' (Foster 1991: 81).

<sup>359</sup> In his 'Sketch of the Aborigines of South Australia', Cawthorne records the Kurna name for red ochre as *karkoo* (Foster 1991: 46). A Kurna source for ochre is still recorded on contemporary suburban maps of Adelaide: Puturang, or Red Ochre Cove, near Moana, a Tjilbruke Dreaming site, a men's place.

<sup>360</sup> A club, from the Dharuk *wadi* for stick or club, the word entering English in the late eighteenth century collected from the people of the Sydney region.

the hill where the captain had been during the day. Alas! half way up that conical mound they found the mutilated corpse of their friend and commander.

Horror struck, they stood mutely gazing on the body, then mutely turning to the sea as if for help, they descried, in the midst of their bewilderment, a sail, evidently that of a boat, standing up and past them. Their immediate impulse was to raise a smoke to induce the boat to come in. An hour afterwards the boat stood in. It proved to be Old Sam,<sup>361</sup> the doctor, and two of their wives; they were bound north to visit a tribe of blacks that lived on the plains below Mount Lofty,<sup>362</sup> now so well known as the Adelaide Plains, in the midst of which is situated the city of Adelaide, the capital of South Australia.

‘Speared, do yer say,’ said Old Sam, when he heard the full story, ‘and yer got ashore on the shoals to the westward.’

‘Yes, that’s the way in this country, we lives pertickler easy, but it’s a wery oneasy life to such as yer are, yer are too green, mate; but come along; let’s bury the captain like a Christian. I say, doctor, yers allers preaching, now’s the time, and the text I gees yer—kill the—wretches.’

‘Softly, softly,’ replied the doctor, it we kills too much, that’s how they kills us; it’s all our fault.’

‘Bah!’ said Sam, ‘didn’t they kill Long Bill and Harry? didn’t they spear me, and cotch you? I tell yer, Georgy, by that dead carcass there, I’ll kill five for him before I croaks.’

Georgy said nothing, but wagged his head occasionally.

The united party soon stood round the mutilated body.

‘They have taken his fat,’ quietly remarked Georgy, as he pointed to the horrid wound.

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<sup>361</sup> Nat Thomas, Cawthorne’s model for Old Sam, was known to the Kurna. Bull records an episode in 1837, when Thomas had been employed by the overseer of stock of the South Australian Company to help search for two mares that had escaped from pastures at the mouth of the Sturt River. Thomas took the search party south to the mouth of the Onkaparinga River, where he knew were some native wells. There they were surprised by a large party of Aboriginal people. Thomas told his companions they were ‘Onkaparinga and Encounter Bay blacks’ come to the Onkaparinga estuary on the full moon to fish and for ceremonies, further explaining that ‘the black woman whom he had on the island belong to one of these tribes, and he was aware that they were not pleased at her absence. He understood a few of their words, but thought it better for him to keep as much out of sight as possible’ (Bull 1884: 33).

<sup>362</sup> The Kurna people, traditional owners of the Adelaide Plains. Cawthorne defines the territory of the ‘Adelaide tribe, which probably never exceeded 300 souls’ as ‘a tract of country bounded by the hills near Willunga in the South, by Cox’s Creek in the East, and the Gawler River in the North, and the Sea in the West—or a tract of country of about 100 square miles, which covered gives 3 souls to one square mile (Foster 1991: 90).

‘In course,’ replied Sam, ‘they likes our fat uncommon, the black devils; but we’ll serve ’em out<sup>363</sup> for this day’s work.’

The captain was buried as well as it could be done under the circumstances, and Mr. Ratlin read the Psalms, where apparently the captain himself had been reading when murdered. Georgy stood and listened devoutly with his skin hat in his hand.

Old Sam moved silently away, and stood gazing landward, or else carefully noted the shape of the footprints on the soil, muttering the whole time words of dire import.

On the very spot where this tragedy happened, the plough now moves along, and waving cornfields crown the grave of Captain Meredith. Little is this fact known to the settlers of the district, but the conical hill will remain for ever a monument of this murder, another to the long list of those that became sacrifices for the deeply dyed sins of the Kangaroo Islanders.

The spot is near the Yankalilla River and forms now a part of the farm of one of our wealthy colonists.<sup>364</sup>

‘We must go back, I s’pose,’ said Sam. ‘Yer all adrift here, so let’s be off.’ As the night closes over the scene, so our story draws to an end.

From the sandhills a native warrior is standing gazing o’er the ocean. The sun throws a glare across wave and hill, and then sinks behind a wall of dense cloud and disappears within the deepest shades. Anon, and the sea also becomes swallowed up in advancing blackness.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> ‘serve him out’—give a *quid pro quo*. This is the French *server*, to do an ill turn to one. Brewer, E. Cobham. “[serve him out].” *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1898; Bartleby.com, 2000. [www.bartleby.com/81/](http://www.bartleby.com/81/) accessed 26 May 2002.

<sup>364</sup> Cawthorne’s directions are not that precise, but given Nat Thomas showed him where Meredith was buried, this reference to the site of his grave can be considered reliable—Sal had shown Thomas where the spot was which enabled him and his fellow-Islanders to find and bury the body. The most obvious candidate for the ‘conical hill’ is what is now known as Haycock Hill in Carrikalina. The river is now known as the Bangala River, while Carrikalina Creek is a little to the north. The name Yankalilla is now given to a creek that has cut the gorge cuts through which the main road from Normanville to Cape Jervis now passes. People travelling to Kangaroo Island will pass by all these places.

<sup>365</sup> Cawthorne deploys here a commonly deployed trope about Aboriginal people from the last half of the nineteenth century, representing them as in the twilight of their lives. Here, in a neat touch, Old Sam and the Islanders are also associated with that previous day, with a glorious new dawn looming with the coming of the settlers in 1836. Henry James Johnstone’s 1880 painting ‘Evening Shadows’ uses this trope. It is one of the best-known paintings in the South Australian Art Gallery on North Terrace. Johnstone painted it in London in 1880, and it was the first painting to be purchased by the Art Gallery—it was donated to the Gallery in 1881. The Aboriginal figures were added later: the first version had no human figures.

A speck of white flickers in the thickening gloom—it is the last glimpse of Old Sam—and then it also vanishes for ever.

In the darkness, in the uncertainty, like their lives, wild and weird, so we leave them.

There, on their favourite element, over their vices, over their follies, their heroism and their barbarities, we draw the veil of night, and bid the 'Islanders' and their Island home farewell for ever.

FINIS

## **Differences between the 1865–66 serial and the 1926 book.**

There are a few differences between the 1865–66 serial version of ‘The Islanders’ and the 1926 book version, *The Kangaroo Islanders*. It seems that someone at Rigbys was given the job of preparing the 1926 edition but ran out of steam after the first couple of chapters. Only the first serial number has been significantly transformed with a number of editorial changes—almost all for the better. After chapter two there are very few alterations, aside from consistently removing semi-colon splices to shorten Cawthorne’s sentences and a few changes to the wording here and there. I have also made a number of small changes to the text. In two or three places I have corrected some errors by restoring the original wording from the 1865–6 serial. I have also standardized the punctuation, which in the 1926 version is sometimes idiosyncratically deployed.

The first serial number ends with the novella’s only footnote, about unpalatable ‘opossums’, reminding us of the nineteenth century fashion for footnotes in historical novels that often assert the veracity of certain details. Marcus Clarke’s ‘His Natural Life’ began its serial publication—with some footnotes—in 1870, while Simpson Newland’s 1893 historical novel, *Paving the Way: A Romance of the Australian Bush* also has numbers of footnotes.

### **The 1865–66 serial version**

#### **CHAPTER 1.**

##### **Introductory.**

On the southern seaboard of the vast continent of Australia, and nearly midway between the two extremes of the east and west coasts, there are two remarkable gulfs penetrating the land to a distance of two hundred miles, and dividing the great colony of South Australia into two unequal portions.

The gulfs lie parallel to each other, and, besides possessing the singular feature of being the only indents of any

### **The 1926 book version**

#### **CHAPTER 1.**

##### **Introductory.**

On the southern seaboard of the vast continent of Australia, and nearly midway between the two extremes of the east and west coasts, there are two remarkable gulfs penetrating the land to a distance of two hundred miles, and dividing the great colony of South Australia into two unequal portions.

The gulfs lie parallel to each other, and, besides being the only indentations of any magnitude, except

magnitude, except the Gulf of Carpentaria, in the whole seacoast of Australia—some 7,000 miles—they possess also a duplicate resemblance to each other, both wending to the north, their eastern shores, when half way up their length, presenting extensive sand flats of immense area, and both their western shores are bolder, with deeper water and finer harbours. The larger, or Spencer's Gulf, is double the length and breadth of the smaller, Gulf St. Vincent, being 200 miles by 100, whereas the latter is 100 miles by 50. The French Exploring Expedition that unexpectedly met Flinders in the Bay now called, from that circumstance, Encounter Bay, named these gulfs Josephine and Napoleon. The peninsula that divides them is some 25 miles broad, and is of similar form in outline to that of Italy. The heads of both the gulfs consist of large mangrove swamps, and the eastern shores, for half their lengths, have no definite coastline, but an indefinite, prolonged, and exceedingly irregular margin of mangrove swamp from a quarter of a mile to five miles in breadth, through which channels of deep water meander to interminable distances, shaded with the umbrageous foliage of the mangrove, and forming scenes of exotic and unsurpassed beauty.

In the mouth of the smaller gulf—the most easterly of the two, and on the eastern shores of which the capital of the province is now situated—lies a large and highly interesting island, named by Captain Flinders—its discoverer, in 1802—Kangaroo Island, so-called from the quantities of that animal observed on landing on its shores. It is nearly 120 miles long, and has a pretty even breadth of from 30 to

the Gulf of Carpentaria, in the whole seacoast of Australia—some 7,000 miles—they make a strong resemblance to each other. Both trend northwards, the eastern shores of both present, half way, extensive sand flats of immense area, while their western shores are bolder, with deeper water and finer harbours. The larger, Spencer Gulf, is double the length and breadth of the smaller, Gulf St. Vincent, being 200 miles by 100, whereas the latter is 100 miles by 50. The French exploring expedition that unexpectedly met Flinders in the Bay now called, from that circumstance, Encounter Bay, named these gulfs Josephine and Napoleon. The peninsula that divides them is some 25 miles broad, and is of similar shape to that of Italy. The heads of both the gulfs consist of large mangrove swamps, and for half their length the eastern shores have no definite coastline, but an extended, ill-defined, and exceedingly irregular margin of mangrove swamp from a quarter of a mile to five miles in breadth. Through this swamp, meander to apparently interminable distances deep water channels, which, shaded by the thick foliage of the mangrove, present scenes of unsurpassed exotic beauty.

At the entrance to the smaller gulf—the most easterly of the two, and on the eastern shores of which the capital of the province is now situated—lies a large and most interesting island, named Kangaroo Island in 1802 by Captain Flinders, from the numbers of that animal observed on its shores. It is nearly 120 miles long, and has an average breadth of from 30 to 50 miles, and a uniform coastline for at least



50 miles, and a uniform coast for at least two-thirds of its entire seaboard of bold, perpendicular cliffs that chill the heart of the mariner as he hears them in calm or storm. A landing place in 30 miles is about the average accommodation, and even then frequently a matter of extreme difficulty. The island, in a singular manner, is divided into two unequal portions, and so nearly is the one part severed from the other that barely half a mile of sand separates the Southern Ocean from the placid waters of a great lagoon that alternately narrows and widens until it reaches the broad waters of Gulf St. Vincent. The scenery around the shores of this noble inland bay, and its singular termination in the broad expanse of a fine lagoon dotted with small islands, is singularly wild and romantic. In the islets of the lagoon, for countless ages, the pelican and black swan have found a home, as well as a burial place, for here it seems in the still waters of this land-locked lake the pelican has ever turned his head in his last hours to his islet home, the home of his birth, to die—for masses of pelican bones bear ample testimony to this singular habit of the bird. This trait in the pelican character, as well as the locality we are describing, has been immortalised by the poet Montgomery in his poem, 'The Island.'

The surface of the land is of an undulating description, and is covered with a dense and interminable scrub, exceeding all other scrubs known on the mainland in its closeness and thorny character. The only mode of progression from place to place is by whaleboat, as the danger of being lost on an island route is very great, enhanced as that danger is by an extreme scarcity of fresh water. In the

two-thirds of its entire seaboard, of bold, perpendicular cliffs that chill the heart of the mariner in calm or storm. A landing place in 30 miles is about the average accommodation, and even then landing is frequently negotiated with extreme difficulty. The island, in a singular manner, is divided into two unequal portions, and so nearly is the one part severed from the other that barely half-a-mile of sand separates the Southern Ocean from the placid waters of a great lagoon that alternately narrows and widens until it reaches the broad waters of its northern boundary, Gulf St. Vincent. The scenery surrounding the shores of this noble inland bay, and its singular termination in the broad expanse of a fine lagoon dotted with small islands, is singularly wild and romantic. In the islets of the lagoon, for countless ages, the pelican and black swan have found a home, as well as a burial place. Masses of pelican bones bear ample testimony to this fact, for it seems that to the still waters of this land-locked lake the pelican has ever turned his head in his last hours, to die in the home of his birth. This trait in the pelican character, as well as the locality we are describing, has been immortalised by the poet Montgomery in his poem, 'The Island.'

The surface of the land is undulating, and is covered with a dense and interminable scrub, exceeding all other scrubs known on the mainland in its closeness and thorny character. As the danger of being lost on an inland route is very great, owing to the extreme scarcity of fresh water, the only mode of progress from place to place is by whaleboat. In the entire island all the water that can be found is what is known as 'land-soaks,' at or

whole area of the island all the water that can be found is simply what is known by the term of 'land-soaks,' at or near the coast sandhills. In the deep gullies of the country inland there are many rich spots of soil, but the general character is sandy and sterile. The land, though apparently poor, still nourishes a most luxurious growth of variegated shrubs and trees, the favourite and peculiar habitat of the wallaby and kangaroo; indeed, it may be said that, at the time of its discovery, the whole island was nothing more nor less than a huge wallaby and kangaroo preserve, as it had no natives, being totally uninhabited. The herds of kangaroo were so large as almost to be incredible, and it is to this circumstance that runaway convicts from Van Diemen's Land and Sydney regarded it as a paradise; it possessed abundance of game, and produced good salt in its lagoons, so that with the skins of the animals and the collecting of salt it became of sufficient importance to induce whalers and sealers to call once a year and exchange brandy, tobacco, etc., for the produce of the land.

The coasts of the island and the neighbouring islands abounded in seals, a source of emolument, however, which only served to increase the annual or bi-annual orgies of the Islanders with a shorter or longer duration of crime or violence. Thus situated, with an impenetrable land of scrub, and a coast surrounded by dangers, the Islanders regarded themselves as in a fortress, and defied any power that could be brought against them.

Living beyond the pale of law, they exhibited a phase of humanity with no other human tie to bind them other than the strength of their own right

near the coast sandhills. In the deep gullies inland there are many rich patches of soil, but the country is for the most part sandy and sterile. The land, though apparently poor, still nourishes a most luxurious growth of variegated shrubs and trees, the favourite and peculiar habitat of the wallaby and kangaroo. Indeed, it may be said that, at the time of its discovery, the whole island was nothing more nor less than a huge wallaby and kangaroo preserve, being totally uninhabited by human beings. The herds of kangaroo were almost incredibly large, and it was for this reason that runaway convicts from Van Diemen's Land and Sydney regarded it as a kind of paradise. It possessed abundance of game, and produced good salt in its lagoons, so that it became of sufficient importance to induce whalers and sealers to call once a year and exchange brandy, tobacco, etc., for the produce of the land.

The coasts of the island and the neighbouring islands abounded in seals, a source of emolument, however, which only served to add to the violence and cruelty of the annual or bi-annual orgies of the Islanders. Thus situated with an impenetrable land of scrub, and a coast surrounded by dangers, the Islanders regarded themselves as in a fortress, and defied any power that could be brought against them. Living beyond the pale of law, they had no other tie to bind them than the necessity for self-preservation. Fearing neither man nor God, they cared little for their present life, and felt not the remotest interest in the life to come, except so far as stray scraps of

arm, neither fearing man nor God, caring little for the life that now is, and certainly not having the remotest sentimentalism of the life to come, only so far as stray scraps of religious opinions and sayings might add a point to the coarse jest or piquancy to the usual blasphemy of the hour.

Yet amidst this utter abandonment there were traits of heroism, and even of disinterested action. From the very necessity of their position, it was found advisable to bind themselves together in two's and three's, mates as they termed themselves, and their mutual fidelity was not easily shaken. Such is the brief outline of the Islanders and their home, which, in a measure, will afford a key to the following story, and prepare the reader for a tale that belongs more to the old times of the 'Bold Buccaneers' than to a period so comparatively recent as that which opens with the events of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### **An Australian Morn.—Captain Meredith.—Mr. Ratlin.—The Rescued Sailor.**

In the year 1823, many years before any emigrating gentleman had wracked their brains to invent a new system of colonisation that should combine all the excellencies of the ancient Greek plan, all the vigour of the old Raleigh scheme, all the unity of the 'Vaterland' expatriation and which ultimately resulted in the model colony of South Australia—long before this period a brig might have been observed quietly, anchored in the calm and beautiful waters of what is now known by the

religious sayings and opinions might add point to a coarse jest, or piquancy to the usual blasphemy of the hour.

Yet amidst this utter abandonment they exhibited traits of heroism, and even of disinterested action. From the very necessity of their position, it was found advisable to bind themselves together in twos and threes, mates, as they termed themselves, and their mutual fidelity was not easily shaken. Such is the brief outline of the Islanders and their home, which, in a measure, will afford a key to the following story, and prepare the reader for a tale that belongs more to the old times of the bold buccaneers than to a period so comparatively recent as that which opens with the events of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### **An Australian Morn.—Captain Meredith.—Mr. Ratlin.—The Rescued Sailor.**

In the year 1823, many years before the founders of the model colony of South Australia had begun to rack their brains to invent a system of colonisation that should combine all the excellencies of the ancient Greek plan, all the vigour of the old Raleigh scheme, and all the unity of the 'Vaterland' expatriation, long before this period a brig might have been observed quietly, anchored in the calm and beautiful waters of Antechamber Bay, Kangaroo Island. Every spar and every rope was reflected with strict fidelity, in the still water,

name of Antechamber Bay, in Kangaroo Island. Every spar and every rope was reflected with strict fidelity in the still water, her hull mingled with the deep reflection beneath in such a manner that it was difficult to distinguish where the one began and the other ended. Fishes, as they darted out from beneath the keel, sparkled for a moment like fiery diamonds, and vanished as quickly as they slid into the deep black shade of the vessel.

It was early morn, and such a morn as only Australia can lay claim to, a clear, pellucid ambient morn, not a cloud to mar the sky, not the faintest mist to obscure a spot, naught visible to cause a blemish to the unrivalled beauty of the early day. When you looked up into the heavens, you pierced its unfathomable depths; when you gazed upon the land, you realised its far-off distances; when you scanned the sea beneath, it seemed as in a looking glass; there, to the very bottom, on a floor of pure white sand, you saw the hungry shark rising and falling, or pausing as he watched the huge ship darkening his pathway; the ill-shapen 'stingerree,' flapping its huge sides, as a bird does its wings, hastening on some furtive expedition, driven like a small cloud across the expanse of heaven, or with marvellous deception covering itself with the sand, invisible to all eyes; or, the voracious schnapper in countless numbers, moving rapidly along in all the glory of purple and gold searching for new marine pastures. The supernatural clearness of the atmosphere caused the neighbouring highlands, the distant capes, and the range of mountains in the vicinity of what is now called Cape Jervis, to appear singularly delusive proximity. On the black rocks, black as ink, that

and her hull merged so evenly into the reflection beneath that it was difficult to distinguish where the one began and the other ended. Fishes, as they darted out beneath the keel, sparkled for a moment like fiery diamonds, and vanished as quickly, as they slid into the deep black shade of the vessel.

It was early morn, and such a morn as only Australia can boast, a clear, pellucid morn with not a cloud to mar the sky, not the faintest mist, nor any visible thing to blemish the unrivalled beauty of the early day. Looking up into the heavens the eye could perceive unfathomable depths; gazing upon the land, could realise its uttermost distances; and, scanning the sea beneath, could see as in a looking glass. There, at the very bottom, on a floor of pure white sand, the hungry shark was rising and falling or pausing as he watched the huge ship darkening his pathway. There, again, was the ill-shapen 'stingerree,' flapping its huge sides, as a bird does its wings when, hastening on some furtive expedition, it is driven like a small cloud across the expanse of heaven, or with marvellous deception covering itself with the sand until invisible to all eyes. There were the voracious schnapper in countless numbers, moving rapidly along in all the glory of purple and gold in their search for new marine pastures. The supernatural clearness of the atmosphere caused the neighbouring highlands, the distant capes, and the range of mountains in the vicinity of what is now called Cape Jervis, to appear singularly close. On the black rocks, black as ink, that lined some parts of the bay, sat a mass of wild sea

lined some parts of the Bay, sat a mass of wild sea fowl, white; a little higher up, on another ledge of jetty rocks, sat a second wreath of white birds, and higher still a third row. In the calm morning—though so far off—their solemn chattering, their spiteful pecking, their clamorous row could be distinctly heard as it came tipping, tripping, and modulating with the gentle swell of the sea. Anon one of them would rise, and, clattering and spattering upon the water with outstretched wings, would leave behind him, straight as the flight of an arrow, an agitated pathway, gradually melting to the finest line to visit some more favourite spot, or slyly pounce upon an unwary fish, and enjoy the whole relish to himself without a squabble with his brethren as to the lion's share. High in the air could be seen a line of birds, with very long necks and very short bodies, but with flight even and swift. They were black swans making a beeline across the straits for the lakes and islands of the Lower Murray. Over the island could be seen several hundreds of the unwieldy pelican flying in their peculiar way, and marking on the blue expanse as if with the hand of man as far as the eye could follow, the singular outline of the letter 'W;' as far as the eye could follow they maintained this curious alphabetical figure. They were winging their way to the seat of the primeval haunts of their race—the inland lagoons of the island.

On the deck of the brig paced a seaman of a stamp higher than the generality of his class. He had a peculiar expression of face, large and quick eyes, a good forehead, a countenance that betokened energy of purpose, great self-reliance, and acute perceptions. He was highly

fowl, contrastingly white. A little higher up, on another ledge of jutting rocks sat another group of white birds, and higher still a third. In the calm morning, though so far off, their solemn chattering, their spiteful pecking, their clamorous disputing, could be distinctly heard, tipping, tripping, and modulating with the gentle swell of the sea. Anon one of them would rise in order to visit some more favourite spot, and, clattering and spattering upon the water with outstretched wings, would leave behind, straight as the flight of an arrow, an agitated pathway, gradually melting to the finest line; or one would slyly pounce upon an unwary fish, and enjoy the whole relish without a squabble with his brethren as to the lion's share. High in the air could be seen a line of birds, with very long necks and very short bodies, but with flight even and swift. They were black swans making a beeline across the straits to the lakes and islands of the Lower Murray. Over the island could be seen several hundreds of unwieldy pelican flying in their peculiar way, and marking on the blue expanse as far as the eye could follow, the singular outline of the letter 'W.' They were winging their way to the seat of the primeval haunts of their race—the inland lagoons of the island.

On the deck of the brig paced a seaman of a stamp superior to the majority of his class. He had a peculiar expression of face, large and quick eyes, a good forehead, a countenance that betokened energy of purpose, great self-reliance, and acute perception. He was highly adventurous, and, like Lord Byron, who bathed in the very spot in

adventurous, and, like Lord Byron, who bathed in the very spot in which Shelley was drowned 'to see how it would feel,' he dared the very things others had failed in. He could divine the character of men intuitively, and hence his influence over the lawless set he had to deal with. Although not a strong man, he was lithe and nimble. But what gave a marked individuality to his character that spurred him on to do deeds that others never dreamt of, and to live wild romantic life he had voluntarily adopted, was a deep-seated taint of melancholy, a tone of mind only to be found in the higher races of man, and, amongst them in the highest types of the class, the poet, the painter, and the patriot. Apart from the daily routine of daily life, even though a life like his, full of peril and excitement, his spirit communed in silence with the ineffable of Creation, wherein consisted the apparent anomaly of the man, choosing a life, so irregular of its kind, combining all the elements of daring and recklessness, but in its solitariness, in the midnight watch, the anxiety of the storm, the ever-present mystery of the sky, and the loneliness of uninhabited lands, there was withal a something very closely allied to the religious, at least highly favourable to religious reverie, a mood of mind as essential to his mental well-being as food to the nourishment of the body. In the calm, in the lonely bays and islands of unnamed places, his spiritual nature found the satisfaction that was denied him amidst the busy throngs of the city, or the worshippers of fashionable Sabbath routine. Often he would spend a moody hour in some sylvan nook, in some out of the way corner of totally unknown land, musing on the mystery of Creation. He would always manage that, at least on Sundays, his vessel

which Shelley was drowned 'to see how it would feel,' he dared the very things before which others had quailed. He could divine intuitively the character of men, and thus gained a strong influence over his lawless set. Although not a strong man, he was lithe and nimble. Added to his strongly marked individuality, to the intrepidity that led him to perform deeds undreamt of by others, and to the strangeness that made him follow the wild and romantic life he had voluntarily adopted, was a deep-seated melancholy, a tone of mind only to be found in the higher races of man, from which are drawn the poet, the painter, and the patriot. Apart from the peril and excitement of his daily life, his spirit would commune in silence with the mystery of Creation. Herein was to be found the apparent anomaly of the man, choosing, as he did, an irregular life that called into full play the qualities of daring and recklessness, yet finding in the solitariness of the midnight watch, the anxiety of the storm, the ever present mystery of the sky, and the loneliness of uninhabited lands, something that ministered to a religious mood, a mood as essential to his mental well-being as food for the nourishment of his body. In the calm of lonely, unnamed bays and islands his spiritual nature found the satisfaction that was denied him amidst the busy throngs of the city, or the worshippers of fashionable Sabbath routine. Often he would spend a moody hour in some sylvan nook, in some out of the way corner of totally unknown land, musing on the mystery of Creation. He would always manage that, at least on Sundays, his vessel should be anchored in some snug cove, in order that he might pursue on shore his Sabbath meditations unobserved. Had he been endowed with a little

should be anchored in some snug cove, in order that he might pursue on shore his Sabbath meditations unobserved. Had he been endowed with a little more of this 'melancholic passion,' he would have been a fit devotee in the convents of Athens, or the fortified retreats of 'Araby the Blest'; with a degree less he would have been a rascal of the first-class. As it was, he had enough good to prevent him from becoming bad, and enough evil to belie the good and cause his actions to appear highly eccentric. The sailors, who did not understand him, said, 'He's a bit cranky.' His friends shrugged their shoulders, and expressed their pity or their ignorance in the words, 'strange man.' But those who understood him pronounced an altogether different verdict. Such was Captain Meredith.

As the man, so was his vessel—not a rope out of order, not a spar but was in its proper place. All the running gear hauled taut, the slack neatly coiled down in flemish coils, all the yards squared, and the whole trim of the craft betokened a controlling mind that delighted in neatness and the fitness of all things. If he had a falling in this matter it was with regard to the right-angled position of the yards. To him they were scarcely ever mathematically correct, and nothing short of this pleased him.

The captain, after a close survey of the shore, half muttered aloud, 'I see nothing of the boat,' which circumstance seemed somewhat to annoy him. Shutting up his telescope, he lightly tripped along the deck and agilely skipped along the bowsprit to the uppermost point; there, standing erect on that slippery spot, he cast his

more of this 'melancholic passion,' he would have been a fit devotee in the convents of Athens, or the fortified retreats of 'Araby the Blest'; with a degree less he would have been a first-class rascal. As it was, he had enough good to prevent him from becoming thoroughly bad, and enough evil to belie the good and cause his actions to appear eccentric. The sailors, who did not understand him, said, 'He's a bit cranky.' His friends shrugged their shoulders, and expressed their pity or their ignorance in the words, 'strange man.' But those who understood him pronounced an altogether different verdict. Such was Captain Meredith.

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eye aloft. 'A haul on the starboard maintopsail lift there!' he sang out. 'Aye, aye, sir!' sang out three or four hands as they growled to each other, 'What on earth does he want squaring the yards for, when there's no one for to see them, aye Bill?'

'Oh, it's for the ourang-outangs ashore there, I s'pose.'

'Belay there!'

'Topgallant lift—so—steady—belay!'

With the sure foot of a cat he nimbly stepped from his insecure perch, and, reaching the foot of the fore mast, looked straight up to the truck.

'Golly, Jim, if Sam drops his tar brush from the cross-trees on the skipper's mug—ha! ha! Ha! I say, tip Sam a wink;' but before the joke could be carried out they were ordered to the braces; for having squared the yards as to their right angle with the masts, it was next necessary to get them in the same plane with each other.

'Port foretopsail brace a bit!'

'Topgallant brace a bit!' 'Belay!' sung out the captain; then, jumping into a boat, he shipped an oar, and quietly sculled out to a position some 100 yards ahead, and in a direct line of the vessel and its masts, so that by his advanced distance he might have the better chance of observing the angles of all the yards and ropes, each to each, and the whole as an entirety.

From this position, the vessel looming up against the clear background of the sky, appeared a beautiful complex geometrical problem, a series of isosceles, equilateral, and scalene triangles, whose parts were made up of ropes and spars, one of the most intricate puzzles of human ingenuity, but, to the practised eye of the seamen, one of the simplest imaginable.

'Mainyard there!' shouted out the

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skipper; 'a haul on the port main-brace—so there—belay!' 'A haul on the starboard vang!' 'Peak halyards a bit,' 'belay!' In fact, line A was not homologous with line B, nor C with D; hence the pulling and hauling, a particularity that certainly was highly commendable in a harbour, but did appear absurdly superfluous in the wild and unknown waters of Kangaroo Island. Having satisfied himself upon the trim of his craft, he leisurely sculled back, scrutinizing at the same time all the minor details of the brig, the buoy, the stunsail booms, and any stray ropes that might be straggling overboard, fastened the boat to the main chains, and sprang on deck, and again surveyed the shore for the boat he so anxiously expected. At the same time eight bells rung, out clear and plaintively from the ship's fore-castle, sounding wide and far over the still expanse, and the steward announced breakfast.

The captain put down his telescope with impatience, implying distinctly enough his mortification that time had so quickly fled, leaving nearly half his crew still unaccountably absent ashore. However, there was no help for it at present, and he descended the companion-stairs to breakfast.

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'Curried schnapper, broiled

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'Curried schnapper, broiled barracouta, and mutton-birds, which

barracoota, and mutton-birds, which the sooner we commence upon the better we shall preserve their flavour.' Saying this, he looked significantly to the captain, and pointed with a kind of flourish to the three dishes at once, as much as to say, 'of which———'

'Oh,' said the captain, taking the hint, 'I'll take barracouta; it's the finest flavoured fish that swims, at least to my taste.'

'Were you ever at the Cape?' asked the mate.

'Yes, many times.'

'Well, that's the place for fish, every variety, and so cheap, and such ruin ways of preparing it by the slams, it makes one's mouth water to think of *Englede fisch*.'

'Ah! I dare say it does,' dryly remarked the captain.

'Yes, for a skilling—that is, twopence farthing—you can get a blow-out,' continued the mate, as he spitted a mutton-bird onto his plate.

'However, Mr. Ratlin, leaving your reminiscences on fish for a moment, and turning to present troubles, what do you think has become of the boat's crew? Away since yesterday afternoon, and had positive orders to be on board last night,' rejoined the captain.

'Drunk!' replied the mate sententiously, at the same time putting down his second cup of coffee empty and making a kind of miserable pun upon the word as applied both to the cup and the subject under discussion.

'Where could they get the grog from? Not a drop went ashore yesterday, I am positive.'

'Get it from? why, lor bless you, didn't you know of the Sydney schooner that called here last week, and I'll wager they are all lying drunk in the scrub at this moment.'

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'I tell you what it is,' resumed the captain, after a long pause, during which the mate made up for leeway in sundry tit-bits on the table, for the time caring little for the boat's crew, whether drunk or sober, ate up or drowned, lost in the scrub, or run away. 'I tell you what,' said the captain, 'our men have never been the same since we picked up that blackguard, Long Bill, off the islands; they have been all adrift.'

'Of course they have,' replied the mate; 'and had you taken my advice you'd left Long Bill alone.'

'What! let him starve on a rock?'

'Yes. I tell you what it is, captain, you are too soft; that fellow is a villain, a runaway Vandemonian; his story of starving is all gammon. I'd bet ten chaws o' tobacco to one it was a planned scheme, his pals were handy, and he has just persuaded you to take him for his own ends; take my advice, and give him the slip.'

'Oh! nonsense, Ratlin, you have a down upon the fellow; keep your weather eye open, and all will be right.'

'If I had not done so,' remarked the mate somewhat sarcastically, 'the night you took the fellow off you would have never seen daylight again, or I either.'

'Oh! pooh, pooh! it was a rock you mistook for a boat.'

'And pray will you say it was a mistake of mine, when I found the fellow with a lantern and his cap behind it standing on the shank of the anchor? Wasn't that a signal for the blackguards close under the rocks?' asked the mate, with some warmth.

'Why—yes,' stammered the captain, 'that *did* look suspicious, and therefore I hauled up.'

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'Well, well, we shall see. Let's be up, and if we don't see the boat, then send the gig ashore, and you must ferret them out by hook or by crook.'

'Aye, aye!' muttered the mate, as he ascended the companion-way; 'and if I don't give that fellow the slip, I'll eat 'possum for a month.'\*

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\* footnoted: 'The flesh of the opossum is very rank and offensive.'

## Cawthorne's Sources

How did Cawthorne gain access to the mostly hidden history of the Islanders? There is some evidence that some of them who still lived on Kangaroo Island after 1836 were reluctant to 'talk about the doings of the islanders before the arrival of the *Duke of York's* party': as George 'Fireball' Bates put it, he 'could blab if he liked about the old days on Kangaroo Island'.<sup>1</sup> Why should such men have blabbed to a rather pompous young Adelaide schoolteacher?

Cawthorne seems to have had access to several sources, mostly oral and some written. Thomas Gill, Treasurer of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch, made the following remarks in 1907 that suggest not only that he knew Cawthorne but also that he had some knowledge of his possible informants:

the late Mr. W.A. Cawthorne ... "The Islanders", founded on facts and published in "The Illustrated Melbourne Post" in 1865 ... Mr. Cawthorne took a special interest in our early history and in the South Australian aborigines. We can, therefore accept his version, *which he obtained from the sealers*, as reliable [my emphasis].<sup>2</sup>

Cawthorne must have tapped into the flourishing tradition of oral history and local legend about the period in question, an interest that has hardly diminished after two centuries. It is certainly the case that there circulated (and still circulates) on Kangaroo Island a belief that Cawthorne met and conversed with some of the Islanders. His novel concludes with the murder of Meredith. At that time of its writing (c. 1854), four of the Islanders who went searching for Meredith's body or were his associates were still living:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Oldest Surviving Pioneer', *Register* 9 September 1895. A few years earlier, however, Bates had much more to say to an *Advertiser* journalist. See 'Old George Bates', 27 December 1886, 6c-f.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Gill, 'A Cruise in the S.S. "Governor Musgrave"', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch* Session 1907-8, Volume X (1909): 105-6.

'Old' Jacob Seaman at Point Morrison, George 'Fireball' Bates, William Walker at Penneshaw and Nat Thomas at 'Freshfields' at Antechamber Bay.

Cawthorne had several opportunities to meet the surviving Islanders between 1851 and 1862, because in that period his father was the head keeper at the Sturt Light at Cape Willoughby. Captain Cawthorne's Sturt Light Journal still survives, with its flamboyantly idiosyncratic spelling and syntax. In many entries the captain names those Islanders with whom he had dealings: Nat Thomas, William Wilkins and George 'Fireball' Bates all feature. Thomas was Second Keeper at the Light between 1851 and 1857, while Bates worked as Third Keeper for a period in 1861. There must have been plenty of opportunities during long nights on duty to hear stories about the old days. The Log also records Captain Cawthorne distributing rations to the 'Native Women' Betty and Sally of Antechamber Bay and Mary Minato of Blackfellows, Hog Bay, wives and associates of some of the sealers named above.<sup>3</sup> In a monthly report to the Trinity Board dated 23 June 1859, Captain Cawthorne reveals that he had an intimate knowledge not only about some of the Aboriginal women still living on Kangaroo Island but also the circumstances and histories of the men who had brought them there and for whom they had laboured:

Fires are often lighted by the few wandering 'Native' women that still linger on the Island. I [ ] that five of those poor miserable women perished in the Scrub during the winter to the westward. One of them was Totally blind and her companion nearly so. I interogated Old Bet as to the poor creatures fate but I could only elicit from her [']supose dead in scrub to westward no see to catch wallaby[']. I mention this circumstances to show the inhumanity of those Men who formerly had the services of those women when Young now that they are old and blind to abandon them to the fate of starving in the scrub, and whether the[y] could not be made to

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<sup>3</sup> Betty is obviously 'Old Bet' Thomas, while Sally is probably Maggerlede, better known as 'Big Sal' or 'Bumblefoot Sal'. Both women were originally from Tasmania. See 'Sturt Light Journal' entries for 17 September 1860, 15 October 1860, 19 October 1860 and 20 October 1860. William Wilkins's Kaurna wife Mary Manatto's name appears also as 'Minorla' in the Journal: the Captain's handwriting is occasionally difficult to decipher.

provide for them, at all events keep them from wandering and setting fires where ever they camp [Cawthorne's syntax and spelling].<sup>4</sup>

The reference to Old Bet is to Betty Thomas, wife of Nathaniel Thomas. The blind woman is Suke, 'her companion' is Maggerlede, Sally or Bumblefoot. Cawthorne obviously collected stories about the Islanders and their women from his father, who clearly knew enough of the histories and personal circumstances of the Islanders to pass judgment about their behaviour.

Cawthorne made several trips to the island to see his father, possibly as many as six in eleven years.<sup>5</sup> In Appendix One is an anonymous piece of travel writing, 'Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island' published in the *Observer*, 15 January 1853, 3 d–e, which is undeniably by Cawthorne (he mentions its writing in his diary 30 December 1852); he published a second travel piece in three instalments, 'A Christmas Trip' by W[illiam] A[nderson] C[awthorne], in the *Register*, 15 January 1859 3b, 28 January 1859 3b, 9 February 1859, 3b–c, which is given below as Appendix Two. As these two pieces make clear, Cawthorne met and talked at length with Nat Thomas on at least two occasions and reveals that he heard stories about the Islanders and their 'darker sisters'.

Cawthorne's mother was one of the best-known teachers in colonial Adelaide. In 1851 she accompanied her husband to the Sturt Light, where according to a number of informants she taught Mary Seymour and her children, the grandchildren of Nat Thomas and his Tasmanian wife Betty, or Old Bet. Mary Seymour, the second child, was about eighteen in 1851. She had married Joseph Seymour in 1849, the Venerable Archdeacon Morse officiating. They had three children: Joseph Seymour Jr, Jane and Emma, but it is unlikely the children were old enough for instruction in the

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from W.C. Cawthorne to Trinity Board, 23 June 1859, GRG 51/14, State Records, Netley, South Australia. Suke is the blind woman, Sal (Truganini's sister) the second woman mentioned. This is a remarkable letter, if only because it quotes *verbatim* Old Bet. This is one of the very few instances where the voice (however filtered) of the Tasmanian women on Kangaroo Island can be heard.

<sup>5</sup> Drawing on his diary, he travelled to the island December–January 1853/4, January 1855, June 1855, May 1856, September 1858, January 1859 and January 1860.

Cawthornes' first year or two at the Light. Halleck notes that it was 'Mrs. Seymour [herself who] was educated by Mrs. Cawthorne, wife of the first appointed head keeper of the Cape Willoughby lighthouse, notably in writing'.<sup>6</sup> Basedow also knew Mary Seymour; she was his patient, and told him that Mrs Cawthorne taught her to read and write.<sup>7</sup> Thus Cawthorne could have collected stories about the Islanders directly from a daughter of one of them, or from his mother, who over the years must have heard many anecdotes about the old days.

Further sources of information about the Islanders might well have been two of Cawthorne's friends, the geologist Johannes Menge and the businessman Charles Simeon Hare. Hare, the son of a London carpenter, was an accountant and book-keeper in the employ of the South Australian Company in 1836–7. He later became a businessman and Member of Parliament. In a reminiscence published in the *Observer* (3 March 1928), Thomas Neill, a former pupil of Cawthorne's at his Currie Street School in the 1840s, remembered that both Menge and Hare had been invited to speak to the students at the school. Cawthorne was obviously very close to Menge: he wrote a sympathetic biography of the man, and a number of his watercolours of the eccentric German survive. Both Hare and Menge were employees of the South Australian Company in 1836–7 and both lived at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island, where they must have met Islanders like 'Governor' Wallen, William Walker and Nat Thomas. No doubt both might have given Cawthorne versions of the Islander story.

Cawthorne met Dr Matthew Moorhouse, the Protector of Aborigines, in September 1843: his diary 21 September records a 'correct copy' of a letter of introduction written on his behalf by Anthony Forster, George Fife Angas's special agent in South Australia. A day later Cawthorne notes Moorhouse's 'goodness and disinterestedness' in their first meeting when they discussed

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<sup>6</sup> E.H. Halleck, *Kangaroo Island: Adelaide's Sanatorium* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1905), 44.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Basedow, 'Relic of the last Tasmanian Race: Obituary notice of Mary Seymour'. *Man*. 14. (1914): 161–2. Basedow was Mary's doctor.



Aboriginal culture. In 1847 Cawthorne and Moorhouse attended classes in Hebrew and Greek taught by Johannes Menge;<sup>8</sup> in 1848 Cawthorne accompanied Moorhouse on a trip to the south-east to exhume the body of a murdered Aboriginal man. Cawthorne painted a watercolour of the exhumation, now in the Mitchell Library.<sup>9</sup> They obviously met now and again over the next few years, Cawthorne even reflecting on a couple of occasions on the prospect of applying for the position of Protector. He eventually did apply in 1860, citing the now-retired Moorhouse as a referee, in spite of the fact that the protectorate had been abolished in 1856. Furthermore, Cawthorne obviously had access to Moorhouse's published and unpublished reports on Aboriginal matters, claiming in his letter of application for the position of Protector of Aborigines in 1860 that 'the Gov<sup>t</sup> ... gave me permission to have access to [Moorhouse's] notes & records'.<sup>10</sup> As Diane Bell has noticed, Cawthorne certainly 'repeats, without citation' some observations about burial practices which appeared in Moorhouse's 1843 Annual Report (details which the latter had also taken from elsewhere.)<sup>11</sup> Not only contacts with Moorhouse himself but also access to his official reports

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<sup>8</sup> Diary 1846–1848, B229, Mitchell Library, entry for 11 April 1847. See also 9 August and 1 September 1847, when Cawthorne has a real moan about Menge as a teacher.

<sup>9</sup> PX D70 f. 31: titled 'Moorhouse and Cawthorne exhuming a native (speared) to find cause of death.' The watercolour is dated 1864, but Cawthorne's diary indicates they travelled to Rivoli Bay in late February or early March 1848. The entry is ambiguous, suggesting on the one hand that he went and on the other that he could not because both his mother and Annie were ill. See 'Diary 1846–1848', entries for 11 March and 31 March 1848. Almost exactly a year before in the same district Protector Moorhouse had conducted an autopsy on a murdered Aboriginal man named Kingbury which led to the arrest of Thomas Don[n]jelly for the murder of an Aborigine, his conviction and execution—the only European hanged for such a crime in colonial South Australia. See *Register* 31 March 1847 for an editorial about the significance of Thomas Donnelly's hanging, which made many settlers like James Brown take much greater care to hide any evidence of 'fatal collisions' with Aboriginal people. For a full discussion of the James Brown affair see Rob Foster, Rick Hosking and Amanda Nettelbeck, *Fatal Collisions: the South Australian Frontier and the Violence of Memory* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2001) 74–93. See also GRG 24/6/1847/349, State Records of South Australia.

<sup>10</sup> GRG 35/1/1860/1526, State Records of South Australia. Cawthorne's letter is dated 8 December 1860.

<sup>11</sup> Diane Bell, *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin: a World that is, was and will be* (Spinifex: North Melbourne, 1998) 455–56. Moorhouse was quoting the missionary Heinrich Meyer who worked at Encounter Bay.

are both likely sources of information for Cawthorne about Indigenous people.

Cawthorne might have heard stories about the murder of George Meredith from his Aboriginal friends and acquaintances. As his diary reveals, he was friendly with a Kurna man from the Gawler district named Kadlitpinna, also known to Europeans as Captain Jack. Cawthorne took lessons in the Kurna language from him and often invited him home for tea. Kadlitpinna lived at Piltawodli, the 'Native Location' on the banks of the Torrens with another man called 'Encounter Bay Bob' (his real name Tammuruwe Nankere or Parru Paicha), named in some published sources as a suspect for Meredith's murderer. As Bob's European name suggests, his country seems to have been the Encounter Bay area, although William Wyatt names him as a member of the Kurna community.<sup>12</sup> Certainly Inspector Alexander Tolmer thought Encounter Bay Bob guilty of Meredith's murder. Cawthorne may even have heard a version of the story from Tammuruwe Nankere himself.

A further source for stories about the Islanders may have been the artist George French Angas, whom Cawthorne tried to befriend. During his brief stay in South Australia, Angas travelled to Kangaroo Island and met at least one of the Islanders, probably 'Governor' Henry Wallen. Angas's representation of the Islanders and their lifestyles in *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand* contains a number of the details that Cawthorne used in his novel: their names, the skin trade, raiding the mainland for women, and so on.

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<sup>12</sup> William Wyatt, 'Some Account of the Manners and Superstitions of the Adelaide and Encounter Bay Aboriginal Tribes', in J.D. Woods, ed. *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg & Son, 1879, Adelaide: Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 1997) 180. Tammuruwe Nankere was a well-known figure around Adelaide: in 1840 he made what would be called today a native title claim for his country with the support of the Protector of Aborigines Matthew Moorhouse. The land was granted by Governor Gawler, but numbers of colonists then protested about this 'cuckoo notion', claiming the grant was not legal under the 1834 South Australian Act. See Tom Gara, 'The life and times of Mullawirraburka ('King John') of the Adelaide Tribe,' *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* eds. Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus (Aboriginal History Monograph 6, Canberra: Aboriginal History, 1998) 88–132.

Cawthorne's access to *published* sources is difficult to judge. From the evidence of his diaries through the 1840s and 1850s he read widely, as we would expect of a schoolteacher. He was a leading figure in the establishment of the Mechanic's Institute in Adelaide and was involved in ordering books for the library. He published an article on Colonel William Light in 1851 that demonstrates he was familiar with the history of the colony.<sup>13</sup> He probably knew W. H. Leigh's 1839 travel book *Reconnoitering voyages and travels with adventures in the new colonies of South Australia*, which famously describes a sojourn on Kangaroo Island and several meetings with Islanders and their companions. There is also slight and circumstantial evidence that Cawthorne may have read James Backhouse's *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, one of the best-known of the early travel books about the Australian colonies, which describes Aboriginal women diving for crayfish in much the same detail as in Cawthorne's novel.<sup>14</sup>

Cawthorne may also have seen newspaper articles in the Adelaide papers like those written by policeman Alexander Tolmer and published in the *Register* 25 September 1844 about his daring deeds on Kangaroo Island. Tolmer had been sent to the island to arrest a number of notorious convict runaways and 'bushrangers': while there he heard the story of Meredith's murder and even arrested two Aboriginal women Sal and Suke as suspects—they both play bit parts in this novel. Cawthorne's fictional account of Meredith's murder uses some of Tolmer's details.

Cawthorne must have had access to the *Evidence respecting the Soil, Climate and production of the South Coast of Australia*, a document prepared for the committee formed in London for the purpose of establishing a colony in South Australia. On four occasions in the novel he quotes from the report written by Captain George Sutherland, of the brig *Governor Macquarie*, who had visited Kangaroo Island on a salt and seal-skin buying voyage in 1819 and who complained that the Islanders smelled 'like foxes'.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Diary 1849–1859', B230, Mitchell Library. See the entry for 25 June 1851.

<sup>14</sup> James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1843) 168–9.

## William Cawthorne

William Anderson Cawthorne<sup>1</sup> was born in London on the 23 November 1824 and grew up in Scotland. His great-grandfather was a noted MP, ‘the father of the House of Commons’, insists the great-grandson.<sup>2</sup> His father, Captain William Cook Cawthorne, was a master mariner for the East India Company, his mother Georgina Sarah<sup>3</sup> a school teacher. There are family photographs in the Cawthorne Papers held in the Mortlock Library of South Australiana: the strongly-built, coarse-featured seaman photographed with a map of South Australia in one hand; his wife anxious, wan and sickly; their son a solemn, thin man, with long hair, dark eyes and a straggling untidy beard, self-consciously posing with books.<sup>4</sup> In his diary, Cawthorne describes himself at eighteen:

I am now exactly 5 feet 6 in. high, thin & bony—having more strength than flesh. My temper is something like my face—neither good nor bad ... My friends think me rather unsociable, because I love solitude & reading to spending an hour or so to frivolous amusements & unedifying conversation.<sup>5</sup>

In 1832 the Cawthorne family moved from Scotland to the Cape, South Africa, where they remained for nearly a decade before moving on to South Australia. A letter Captain Cawthorne wrote to David McLaren, the Colonial Manager of the South Australian Company suggests that he had been

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this biographical information is drawn from several sources. *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7 (1891–1939) A–Ch, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press) 594–595, the entry for Charles Witto-Witto Cawthorne. Robert K.G. Foster, ‘Introduction: Biographical Sketch,’ *Sketch of the Aborigines in South Australia: References in the Cawthorne Papers* ed. Robert K.G. Foster (Adelaide: Aboriginal Heritage Branch, South Australian Department of Environment and Planning, 1991) iv–ix. Kay Whitehead, ‘Women’s Life-Work’: Teachers in South Australia, 1836–1906’, a thesis submitted for the degree of PhD, Departments of Education and Women’s Studies, University of Adelaide, 1996. Ian Brice, ‘Reluctant Schoolmaster in a Voluntarist Colony: William Cawthorne’s Dairy 1842–1844,’ *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*. No. 25 (1997): 80–93. See also Cawthorne’s obituary, *Observer* 2 October 1897: 35d.

<sup>2</sup> See ‘Diary 1846–1848’, B229, Mitchell Library, entry for 15 December 1847.

<sup>3</sup> Cawthorne’s mother is called Sarah in some places, Georgiana in others. *The South Australian Government Gazette*, 17 January 1850: 49.

<sup>4</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/10, Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Literarium Diarium’, 23 November 1842.



William Anderson Cawthorne. Portrait. Copy held by the Mortlock Library of South Australiana, PRG 489/103. Original photograph held by the Mitchell Library, SLNSW.

engaged in viticulture at the Cape: son William many years later would give public lectures on the potential of the dried fruit industry in South Australia.<sup>6</sup> He was educated at the Cape; he spoke, wrote (and even claims he preferred) Dutch, as numerous asides in his diaries make clear.

It appears that not all members of the family were keen on migrating to South Australia. Cawthorne described their wanderings in his diary:

Since my birth (excepting once in England) we have never been in the same house a year. We are the footballs of fate and adversity, kicked from England to Scotland and to Africa and to Australia. And the next place very likely to Jericho ...<sup>7</sup>

Captain Cawthorne had arrived in Adelaide by August 1840,<sup>8</sup> son William and his mother arrived nearly ten months later 15 May 1841 on the *Amelia*, one of Elder's Line of ships. The son notes that on arriving in Australia he 'was a black skinned sailor boy full of the sayings and habits of the boatmen' which helped him to add verbal colour to his writings about the sea in the decades ahead.<sup>9</sup> By the time his wife and son had arrived in Adelaide, Captain Cawthorne seems to have gone back to sea: he remained out of touch with his family for a couple of years, their last contact a letter from Sydney sent in February 1841.

Cawthorne began writing his 'Literarium Diarium' 22 October 1842, keeping the diary going until the 1860s. It is a remarkable if sometimes self-indulgent informal record of life in and around Adelaide in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the perspective that of the *littérateur*. A browse will find comments on public drunkenness;<sup>10</sup> dingo-hunting;<sup>11</sup> Adelaide's 'bad women';<sup>12</sup> the fact that Adelaide is called 'Town';<sup>13</sup> slums;<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> BRG 42 Series 37 Special List. Letters Received by the Colonial Manager, 1840. Cawthorne is spelled 'Cauthorne' in the Series List.

<sup>7</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 11 November 1842.

<sup>8</sup> BRG 42 Series 37 Special List. Letters Received by the Colonial Manager, 1840.

<sup>9</sup> William Cawthorne kept a log during the voyage: 'Log of the brig *Amelia*, kept by W.A.C. on journey from Table Bay to Adelaide, March–May 1841'. Mitchell Library Acc. No. A434.

<sup>10</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 29 January 1843.

<sup>11</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 18 April 1843.

<sup>12</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 11 August 1843.

<sup>13</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 19 May 1843.



Captain William Cook Cawthorne. Portrait of the writer's father. Copy held by the Mortlock Library of South Australiana, PRG 489/103. Original photograph held by the Mitchell Library, SLNSW.

the quality of Torrens water ('dreadful');<sup>15</sup> drunken whalers on a spree;<sup>16</sup> catching fish and yabbies in the Torrens—and cockles, Cawthorne claims.<sup>17</sup>

The 'Literarium Diarium' contains a number of references to the family's concern for the absent husband and father. It seems that the Captain was often away at sea, at least on one voyage on a whaler out of Hobart. In 1851, when he applied for a job as head keeper at the Sturt Light, his application (which his son illustrated) suggests that the Captain was, variously, engaged in whaling in the South Pacific and working on light ships and light houses in the Baltic and in India.<sup>18</sup> Eventually in 1843 the Captain was tracked down in Calcutta where it seems he was not just working as a light-keeper but also about to marry another woman!<sup>19</sup> Cawthorne observes in his diary that his father had not only 'deceived us with profound dissimulation and hypocrisy into Australia' but that he had lead a 'most profligate life' in India, forfeiting 'every claim as a father'. When he eventually turned up again in Adelaide in 1845, he was 'haggard ... given to drink ... without a single farthing [original emphasis]'.<sup>20</sup> Whitehead has noticed that the Captain's stay in Adelaide was short: he 'accumulated debts, disgraced the family and finally put to sea again in October [1845], leaving Georgina six months pregnant' (Whitehead 1996: 52). Son William records his reactions in his diary:

What a year of trouble! There is a subject that I have especially abstained from alluding to. It is one which from the commencement has been a thorn in my mind and painful to a degree—one of the heavy calamities that have so lately visited us. I allude to the fact that my mother is enciente<sup>21</sup> and has been so since April—this event I view with the most unfavourable eye. It seems to me unnatural that twenty one years should

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<sup>14</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 23 May 1843.

<sup>15</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 25 May 1843.

<sup>16</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 26 September 1843.

<sup>17</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 3 October 1843.

<sup>18</sup> GRG 24/6/1851/1329, State Records of South Australia contains a number of papers that Captain Cawthorne submitted in support of his application for the position of Head Light Keeper at the Sturt Light, Cape Willoughby, in 1851. In several of the letters it is suggested that the Captain was very familiar with a keeper's duties, and that he had Indian experience on a lightship moored in the Hoogly at Calcutta.

<sup>19</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 5 July 1843.

<sup>20</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 1 February, 15 March, 22 April, 12 May, 7 October, 3 November 1845.

<sup>21</sup> The word is Spanish, meaning pregnant.



elapse between my birth and another. As soon as ever this creature is born I depart [Cawthorne's emphasis] (quoted Whitehead 1996: 54).<sup>22</sup>

Whitehead notes that there is no record of the birth of the child. From remarks in his son's diary that on the Captain's return to Adelaide in 1848,<sup>23</sup> the marriage continued to be an unhappy one. His father was still drinking heavily, sometimes dead drunk in public.<sup>24</sup> The Cawthorne family life was obviously very unsettled, and for a young teacher with middle-class aspirations the shadow of his father's example in the streets of such a small town must have been long.

Through the 1840s Cawthorne supplemented his teacher's income by some farm labouring,<sup>25</sup> surveying work and drawing;<sup>26</sup> he often represents himself as a reluctant pedagogue.<sup>27</sup> Hoping for something better, in early 1843 Cawthorne approached Anthony Forster and was offered a job as a clerk for 12 shillings a week with the South Australian Company. He took the job, his mother forced to run their school on her own, but Cawthorne only lasted two months: his handwriting was not suitable, a judgement with which readers of his manuscripts in the twenty-first century will concur.<sup>28</sup> He never actually lived on Kangaroo Island, as a number of histories of the island

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<sup>22</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 3 November 1845.

<sup>23</sup> *Register*, 3 March 1848, in the *Newspaper Cuttings*, Vol. 1: 161, South Australian State Records. He is described as returning to Adelaide from Hobart Town on the *Isabella* 10 March 1848. It may be that he had been whaling. See *Register* 15 March 1848: 4c.

<sup>24</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 11 April 1848.

<sup>25</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 29 November, 1 December, 14 December 1842.

<sup>26</sup> Joan Kerr, ed. *The Dictionary of Australian Artists* (Sydney: Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1984) 139.

<sup>27</sup> See for example 'Literarium Diarium', 29 November 1842, 31 March 1843, 9 June 1843, 20 June 1843. Whitehead notes that he speculated about working as a librarian, newspaper editor, clergyman, marine surveyor and philosopher (Whitehead 1996: 52) and elsewhere he wondered about taking over Dr Matthew Moorhouse's position as the Protector of Aborigines.

<sup>28</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 17 January, 5 February, 20 March, 31 March 1843. See also 27 February 1843, where Cawthorne remarks: 'It was remarked how careless I write my diary—when I can write so well. How much better it would look in a nice, neat hand, instead of a blotty, scrawly, scratchy, ugly, unintelligible manner in which the last vol. was written etc. To these I answer, first, that I cannot spend as much time in making flourishes and that it is of no particular odds in what way it is written as long as the SUBJECT is understood and, secondly, I often don't know how much I am going to write and therefore I write quick, so that I shall not lose any time. And as for the blots and scratches, they originate through the Diary being written Extempore, not allowing, very seldom, a second thought on what I am going to write.

insist, based on a still-active local legend, although through the 1850s he did seriously consider the prospect of buying some land and running cattle there, becoming the successful pastoralist. At one stage he even bought some sheep on credit, anticipating this dramatic career move.<sup>29</sup>

Mother and son lived in Morphett Street until his marriage in 1848, relatively close to the 'Native Location', the site of the Government's earliest 'mission' to the Aborigines, situated on the northern bank of the River Torrens opposite Adelaide Gaol. This proximity may have led to Cawthorne's growing interest in Indigenous culture: by 1843 he was collecting artifacts and drawing 'Native Implements', and in 1844 he learned at least some Kaurna from a Kaurna man named Kadlitpinna (also known as Captain Jack), whom he described as 'very kind-hearted and intelligent. I am greatly indebted to him for most of my information about his tribe'. It seems Captain Jack got on well with the Cawthornes; after each visit Kadlitpinna and his wife would part company by saying 'Good bye, Wilyamse.' 'Good bye Wilyame's mother.'<sup>30</sup>

Another insight into Cawthorne's attitudes to the Kaurna can be determined from this revealing undated diary entry from early October 1844:

The natives often come into our house [in Morphett Street] and I allow them to smoke and do what they like. One particular one always plays a dance to me, singing at the same time and going through all their evolutions. Oh it is a fine play. I like it much, although mother does not. I dress the beggar up in all the finery of the natives (which I have by me) and he becomes so excited and performs beautifully.

Foster speculates that as early as 1843 Cawthorne intended publishing a book on the Aborigines, as numbers of other colonists had done before him and many more would do before the century was over. There was a significant interest in such ethnographical work both in the colonies and back in Britain; one of the distinguishing characteristics of the nineteenth

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<sup>29</sup> He and his wife continued to live in Morphett Street (from where his wife ran her school), while he worked variously in schools at Currie Street, Pulteney Street and later at Victoria Square.

<sup>30</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 18 March 1844.

century gentleman traveller was the ability to produce the essay, the chapter or the book illustrating 'savage life and scenes' on the margins of empire.<sup>31</sup> Cawthorne wrote and illustrated his essay on the Aborigines, 'Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives' in 1844—but it was not published until 1927, when it appeared in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)*.<sup>32</sup> A significant motivation for the writing of his essay came from Cawthorne's contacts with the artist and dilettante George French Angas, who had arrived in Adelaide in January 1844.<sup>33</sup> Angas went on to write the classic gentleman's 'travel narrative' *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand*, which contains at least two watercolours for which Cawthorne copies exist.<sup>34</sup> Cawthorne assisted Angas during his sojourn in Adelaide; he allowed Angas to draw his collection of artefacts; perhaps Angas copied some of Cawthorne's own watercolours. Angas even took Cawthorne for a spin in his Phaeton, the first time in his life he had ever ridden in such a vehicle. Cawthorne also arranged for his Kurna friend Kudlitpinna (Captain Jack) to pose for Angas, and Cawthorne joined Angas on at least one drawing expedition.<sup>35</sup>

Cawthorne was determined to make the most of his brief relationship with Angas, but eventually he found him hard to take, the entries revealing a young man jealous of Angas's social position and connections and aware that

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example: Charles Sturt, *Two expeditions into the interior of Southern Australia* (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1833); Edward J. Eyre, *Journals of expeditions of discovery into Central Australia, and overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound in the Years 1840–41* (London: T. and W. Boone. 1845); George Fife Angas, *Savage Life and Scenes in Australian and New Zealand*, (2 vols. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1847); George Blakiston Wilkinson, *South Australia: Its Advantages and its Resources* (London: John Murray, 1848).

<sup>32</sup> William Cawthorne, 'Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)*. Session 1925–26. Vol. XXVII (1927): 47–77.

<sup>33</sup> George Fife Angas (1789–1879), called the 'father and founder of South Australia' in an 1891 hagiography, was a founding member of the South Australian Company and a major figure in the political and cultural life of the colony. George French Angas (1822–1886) was his eldest son.

<sup>34</sup> Cawthorne's watercolour, Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/9/4, is a copy of the famous Angas watercolour 'Fishing at Second Valley'.

<sup>35</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 29 February, 3 March 1844.

his own writings and paintings might never find an audience as readily as those of his well-connected acquaintance. This entry from 4 March 1844 is revealing:

At the first I could neither make head nor tail of him, but now I begin to see the peculiarities of his particular temperament. Really, it is a pity he is a man, he is feminine in everything but person in all his pursuits, in his thoughts, acts and even deeds. He is vain also of his person, appearance, talents and connections. He has a profound contempt for money, yet rather parsimonious. Hates mercantile people most [cordially] and everyone that makes their talents or their pursuits subservient to the acquisition of money. Possesses a most elevated opinion of the artistical profession, thinks it is the superlative pursuit of all others than man can be engaged. Authorship in writing he esteems next, but the acquiring of money, whether merchant or shopkeeper, he abominates, detests ... But, above all this, shines conspicuously his benevolence. He is pious without cant, generally good natured with a very little variation. Even in temper. Confiding to the extreme, yea, far too much.<sup>36</sup>

Cawthorne also got to know the Protector of Aborigines, Dr Matthew Moorhouse, with whom he also had a rather complicated relationship. The young man was initially very sensitive about Moorhouse's reactions to their early meetings. His diary 8 February 1844 records that he had

[f]ound Mr Moorhouse there with [two] native women [and Angas]. Mr Angas busy sketching them. Sat down, took up a book. Read a piccaninny bit for Mr M. was [communicative]. A little while ago, he knew me not but as soon as he saw that Mr Angas treated me as a companion, he immediately recollected me, such is man, but I am quite persuaded that as soon as Mr A. shall be out of this colony, he will quite forget me again. Such is man. Worshippers of distinction, of rank, of association. Were I is [sic] the greatest blackguard, but acquainted with [...] from that circumstance I should be sought after. No more gammon.

A month later Moorhouse offered Cawthorne and his mother the positions of Schoolmaster and Matron at the new Native School at John Morphett's house at Walkerville.<sup>37</sup> Cawthorne reports that when he was summonsed to Government House to give his decision, he had to borrow a pair of 'briks' for the occasion: acquiring money may not have mattered to Angas, but the

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<sup>36</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 4 March 1844.

<sup>37</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 6 March, 13 March 1844.

young teacher was acutely aware of his situation. He records why he and his mother rejected the offer:

by acceding to the views of the [unpopular] Governor [Grey] we should lose a little of our respectability ... the situation is a laborious one, so much menial labour connected with it and other unpleasantry. It would be a rtying one, in as much as the native children, which would be under our teaching, have never been at school ... The profit would be little. Our time would be constantly employed, we should never and we could never have a moment to spare.<sup>38</sup>

Cawthorne maintained a rather ambivalent relationship with Protector Moorhouse, meeting him occasionally and reading his reports that were published in the pages of the Adelaide papers. By late 1844 Cawthorne even began to imagine himself as the Protector.<sup>39</sup>

The two men continued their association over the next twenty years. In April 1848 Cawthorne accompanied the Protector on a trip to the South-East of the colony, where Moorhouse performed an autopsy on an Indigenous man (Foster 1991: plate 14).<sup>40</sup> As Foster notes,

Cawthorne's association with Moorhouse, and his access to the Protector's notes, are important factors in assessing the veracity of Cawthorne's writings about the Aborigines on subjects other than Adelaide and material culture (Foster 1991: v).

Cawthorne maintained this interest in Indigenous culture well into his life. In the 1860s he was still taking the public stage to speak on such matters. In the Cawthorne Papers is a flyer for a public lecture on the 'Manners and Customs of the Aborigines' given at the Temperance Hall in North Adelaide. The notice contains the following:

If the study the animal creation—from bees to butterflies, from sea eagles to shell fish—is deemed so important that museums are erected for the preservation of specimens, surely the study of the higher animal—man—

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<sup>38</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 6 March 1844.

<sup>39</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 1 November 1844.

<sup>40</sup> The watercolour of the exhumation is held in the Mitchell Library (ML D70). See also 'Literarium Diarium', 11 April 1848.

and, therefore, of the aborigines of this our adopted country, is not beneath our notice.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps in order to attract attention, the flyer notes that the speaker will answer the question: 'Are Australian natives cannibals?' The note suggests something of Cawthorne's sympathy for the 'aborigines' and his sense of his own standing as an 'expert' in the Adelaide community.

On the 24 June 1848 Cawthorne married his cousin Annie (Maryann Georgina Mower)<sup>42</sup> at Holy Trinity Church on North Terrace. He recorded this reaction to his marriage in his diary 11 June 1848:

At last, At last, At last, I have O! horrors O! number O! Liberty O! Joy. O! Life! O soul! I have I have decided to Marry!!!! & who? Ah! No other than my dear Louisa [sic] —It is sacrifice on altar of necessity & Policy. I hate Marriage ... when I do marry there will be an end to all vain thoughts & like a desperate man I'll prepare for the worst. O! ill-fated Cawthorne!— object of necessity—I weep at my lot. Let me sing your death song.

They had at least seven children; Frederick, Charles Witto-Witto,<sup>43</sup> Augustus, Florence Wadhillo, Nhudlo and Ada, at least three of them given Kurna names. The youngest boy, Augustus, died in March 1880 when just 13 years of age.<sup>44</sup> After her son's marriage, Georgina Cawthorne moved from

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<sup>41</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489. The flyer is dated 15 April 1864. See *Advertiser*, 16 April 1864.

<sup>42</sup> See 'Literarium Diarium', 10 June 1844, 22 February 1845, 21 December 1845 for other entries about their relationship. The marriage is described in the 'Diary 1846–1848' entry for 25 June 1848, B229, Mitchell Library.

<sup>43</sup> As some of his children's names demonstrate, Cawthorne obviously had a remarkable interest in Indigenous culture, an interest that even went as far as giving his children Kurna names. His 'Diary 1849–1859', entry 14 September 1854 records that his son had been named Charles Witto-Witto Cawthorne, an entry 25 March 1844 suggesting a meaning: 'The native dress of the aborigines is the large oblong square rug made of opossum skins, worn folding round the body like a cloak. When hot with the fur outside, when cold with the fur inside next to the body. A native looks exceedingly well when thus clothes & his exact stature, his soft and easy step, the settled features, the curled hair with the picturesque 'Wito-Wito' gives an air to his figure that nothing but reality itself will ever be adequate to give a just idea.'

<sup>44</sup> It seems at least three Cawthorne children died young: see *South Australian*, 27 May 1851, 2e, *Register* 20 November 1852, 3a, *Register* 17 August 1861, 5e. His diary Thursday ? May 1851 records the following moving description of his reaction to the death of their daughter: 'In the night baby took ill suddenly—during the day worse—at 1/2 12 am seized with a dreadful convulsion prepared the worse—agitated her brother got the doctor—several fits—sufferings intense—agonising—writhing—Mother & self greatly feeling forth—poor dear—Doctor applications of all sorts—Got Mr Farrell—to baptise it—no hopes—worn ... decided

the city to Glenelg to open another school, allowing Annie to take over her mother-in-law's old school in Morphett Street which was licensed from 1852 to 1865 (Whitehead 1996: 76). William Cawthorne then opened another school in Currie Street, the Adelaide Grammar School, where he taught Greek and Latin to middle-class boys (Whitehead 1996: 76).

As Kay Whitehead (1996, 1999) and Ian Brice (1997) have ably demonstrated, Cawthorne is remembered as a leading colonial educator in South Australia. A revealing little marginal note in the Cawthorne Papers insists that his pupils called him 'Whack', recalling not only his initials but perhaps something of his pedagogical style. He must have taken to school teaching at an early age: he claims to have worked as a tutor in South Africa for six months and then as head teacher of an infant school for another six months before arriving in Adelaide! If he is to be believed, he must have been only fifteen or sixteen at the time.<sup>45</sup>

Until 1848 William Cawthorne and his mother lived on the intersection of Hindley and Morphett Streets in Adelaide, where his mother ran a school in the main upstairs room, which also served as a bedroom by night.<sup>46</sup> As Whitehead makes clear, it was mother Georgina who ran the school, not son William, in spite of the impression given in his diary. The yearly *Almanacks* named the mother as in charge of the establishment (Whitehead 1996: 50). Furthermore, when William was at one stage accused by a pupil with what these days would be called sexual harassment, Georgina dealt with the angry parents while William waited in another room (Whitehead 1996: 50).<sup>47</sup> It seems such behaviour ran in the male side of the family, as the events of 1862 would later prove.

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upon going & fetching Mother from the Bay—& no word—dreadful dark—horrible roads—half frightened—woke mother up & arrived in Adelaide about 1/4 to 1 am—All's Over. The dear little babe—the stray [?] fine child expired only a few minutes before at 1/2 past midnight. Friday May 29 1851 a house of mourning—buried it this afternoon at 4 oclock Mr Farrell & self following—we laid her in the grave in a bright sunny hour. A picture—Life kissing Death. On the coffin—these words. Jan Cawthorne/died May 23 1851/aged 6 days.

<sup>45</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 5 December 1843.

<sup>46</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 8 June 1843. As it happens, the Cawthorne rooms are represented in a S.T. Gill watercolour of Hindley Street and Morphett Street corner.

<sup>47</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 8 June 1843, 27 August 1843. There is also an unsavoury passage 9 December 1846 describing two of his female students 'not [yet] entering their teens'.

Until the 1860s Cawthorne taught in a number of Adelaide schools. He was Superintendent of Trinity Church Sunday School, and for a while ran a day school behind the church on North Terrace.<sup>48</sup> From June 1852 to October 1855 he was headmaster of Pulteney Grammar School, the second to hold that position; he resigned amid controversy when he protested about the school premises being used for church services (Whitehead 1996: 77). One of the houses there is still called Cawthorne. After 1855 Cawthorne ran the Victoria Square Academy, a secondary school, on the western side of the square.

Cawthorne wrote of his schoolteacher's life in Adelaide in the early 1840s as follows:

Rise at 6 AM, get breakfast and then read until school commences, after that have my dinner & then read until 2 PM and then again begin to exhort, entreat, command, forbid, permit, & beat those blessings of marriages, & for what? Why to make them mark, learn, read & inwardly digest all that they do learn. After school is out, I again study philosophy or else write & have my tea, after which I puzzle my brains about Latin verbs, conjugating & translating ... till past ten, when I retire.<sup>49</sup>

His attitudes to teaching working class children can be gauged from this remark in a diary entry from 1843:

A niggardly collection of Butchers, Bakers, public-house keepers, Hostlers, Grocers, watercarriers and Shoemakers' children can be found in our select school. But what can we do? either Starve or teach them. Never mind the money is the same colour as rich people's.<sup>50</sup>

His diary entry 9 December 1846 records the following graphic description of a summer's class in a colonial schoolroom:

Hot as a frying pan ... Thunder & Lightning. It's hot—90 children are sweating around me—we are all breathing the same air—highly rarified—Toes smell delightful the air altogether is a sweet physic. Outside dust higher than the skys thicker than mud through the crevices and keyholes

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<sup>48</sup> Cawthorne papers, PRG 489/11.

<sup>49</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 4 November 1842.

<sup>50</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 25 October 1842, 2 August 1843, 10 November 1843, 29 November 1843.



... closing the nostrils preventing utterance, beyond all endurance, cant learn, cant walk, cant talk,—sick.

By 1851 Cawthorne was a leader in the educational community in South Australia, becoming the Secretary of the South Australian Preceptors Association, and given its address was his own, it is fair to assume he took a leading role in the Association. Later he helped form other schoolmasters' associations, usually taking leadership roles. In 1852 he was appointed to the Central Board of Education, one of only two practising schoolteachers to sit.<sup>51</sup> On one occasion he argued publicly that education policy and practices should be acclimatised to the unique circumstances of the colonial community.<sup>52</sup>

In the mid 1840s William Cawthorne began travelling around South Australia. His unpublished travel journal 'Journal of a Tour in Terra Australia Incognita by MARKUM and SKETCHUM, compiled by the Most Authentic Sources, 1844' shows us that Cawthorne spent such trips walking and riding, collecting shells, mineral specimens and fossils, sketching and shooting with close male friends.<sup>53</sup> From the evidence of his watercolours, his diary, some manuscript essays and poems and one or two published pieces, at various times he visited the Fleurieu Peninsula (1844), the South East (1848), the Aboriginal Station at Moorunde (late 1840s?) and Port Lincoln (twice, it seems: 1848 and 1849). He also visited Kangaroo Island,<sup>54</sup> the Flinders Ranges (1848? there is a watercolour of Mount Surle<sup>55</sup> [*sic*], the Victorian diggings in 1851, the Murray (1853 and 1864), the Barossa (late 1850s?), Victor Harbor (1880s?) and Yorke Peninsula.

One reason for his travels was to paint landscapes: Cawthorne was determined to play the gentleman, and gentlemen made sketches of their

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<sup>51</sup> *South Australian Government Gazette*, 15 April 1852: 228.

<sup>52</sup> *Register* 12 March 1856.

<sup>53</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489.

<sup>54</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/9/9, showing the Sturt Light at Cape Willoughby, with pigs in the foreground.

<sup>55</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/9/5.

rambles. Hundreds of his works survive: interestingly, none in the Art Gallery of South Australia—the Mitchell Library in Sydney holds the great majority. Cawthorne has left a remarkable legacy of visual impressions of the colony in its second, third and fourth decades, notwithstanding their naïvety. These days Cawthorne is known for his artistic efforts (valiant as they are) as much as he is for his literary productions; many of his watercolours have considerable historical interest because of their subject matter, even if they are often amateurish, even inept. After his brief alliance with George French Angas in 1844, Cawthorne became a friend and associate of S.T. Gill, whom he refers to as his ‘painting master’.<sup>56</sup> Cawthorne was represented in South Australia’s first group art exhibition in 1847—several months before Sydney’s first, but ten years after Hobart’s—Gill was one of the organisers of the exhibition.<sup>57</sup> In December 1855, Cawthorne held his own exhibition at his Victoria Square Academy of 200 drawings and watercolours, ‘all having a colonial interest attaching to them’, together with collections of shells, fossils, minerals and precious stones. He sold very few pictures: in his diary he complained that only seven people had attended.<sup>58</sup> A reviewer of the exhibition noted that ‘the greater number of the pictures have not ... in any degree sacrificed truthful depiction to artistic feeling’ and that the greatest interest was ‘excited by the department illustrative of the manners, habits and customs of the aborigines of this country’ (quoted Kerr 1984: 139). Representations of the Flinders Ranges were also praised.<sup>59</sup>

On at least one sketching trip he accompanied George French Angas (1844), on a second (1848?) he travelled north with S.T. Gill. He visited Gill on the latter’s return from the Horrocks Expedition to the north and saw the dramatic pictures Gill had produced of the trip, some of which are now on

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Journal 1846–1848’, ML B229, Mitchell Library, entry for 18 April, 1848.

<sup>57</sup> Ron Radford and Jane Hylton, *Australian Colonial Art, 1800–1900*. (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia) 116. Cawthorne noted in his diary that some of his works had been described as ‘pretty’ ‘Journal 1846–1848’, ML B229, Mitchell Library, entry for 30 January, 1848.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Journal 1849–1859’, ML B230, Mitchell Library, c. 25 December 1855, 5 January 1856.

<sup>59</sup> *Observer*, 29 December 1855: 3.

display in the Art gallery of South Australia ('25 pictures of the same Dreary country. He [Gill] has set up again close by as Artist Laureate').<sup>60</sup>

It may be that a number of the images Cawthorne produced were not based on personal experiences of the country depicted. Some are obviously copies of work of others: Angas, Frome, Gill. Others were simply attempts to produce the kinds of paintings that might attract buyers. He records in his diary [?] June 1845:

let me enumerate my earnings which I am proud to say amounts to the following: Emus, wild dogs, Corrobberee of the natives, Portrait of native, Implements, amounted to 8/- (for Mrs. Bean). A large picture of the Victoria schooner in a gale of wind (in sepia)—8/-. One large picture of the Dorset (Brig) off Sydney heads (watercolour)—15/- View of the Onkaparinga river—5/- One corrobberee 4/- In all £2/0/0. This is the first sum of money I have earnt by my talent!

By 1845 Cawthorne had not been to Sydney, but paintings of vessels like the *Dorset* were stock in trade for the part-time painter: colonists were keen to purchase a representation of the ship that had carried them to the Antipodes. Cawthorne did make at least one sea trip to Sydney via Melbourne, in that numbers of watercolours survive of various seascapes along the way, including several of lighthouses.<sup>61</sup> He also travelled to Port Phillip in 1851: two watercolours of the bay survive. The family also travelled to Britain in 1878 on the *Tanjoue*.

His published account of his 1849 Port Lincoln trip on the *Juno* contains passing reference to both the 'young Hawson's murder' and that of 'poor Biddle and his household' who 'met the same fate seven years before, the remains of the hut still standing', references to a bloody period in West Coast history which culminated in the Army being sent into the field to restore law and order in the district.<sup>62</sup> The references reveal that Cawthorne was well

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<sup>60</sup> 'Journal 1846–1848', ML B229, Mitchell Library, entry for 8 November, 1848. The waspish comment suggests something of Cawthorne's jealousy either about his 'master's' success or his own lack of the same.

<sup>61</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/11.

<sup>62</sup> His travel sketch describing his trip to Port Lincoln is in the *Colonial Argus*, 17 April 1849, entitled 'Port Lincoln: Journal of a Steam Trip by a Recent Visitor'. See also *Register*, 16 December 1848: 4b, *South Australian*, 15 December 1848, 2a. A copy is held in the

acquainted with the history of black-white encounters in South Australia: he even attempted a poem on 'The Wreck of the *Maria*' which he submitted to the papers but which unfortunately seems not to have survived.<sup>63</sup>

Cawthorne has left an invaluable record of his visit to Burra (1850), at the time the seventh biggest township in Australia. The account of his travels was published in the *Register*, 'Journal of a Trip to the North', in early 1851, so it was likely the trip was made late in 1850. Cawthorne caught a boat to Port Wakefield and then travelled to Burra on the mail cart. His diary contains the following remarks about the famous dugouts at Burra:

In passing over the bridge leading to the Smelting Works, a picturesque feature struck upon my astonished gaze, *viz.*, the 'creek habitations', which are nothing more or less than excavations of a small size in the banks of a rivulet, at the present time supplied with water from the engines at the mine. As far as the eye can reach down the creek, these human wombat holes are to be seen—one long hole for a door, and a small square or round one for a window; a perfect street with above 1500 residents. Such is the force of habit, that the miner never thought of *building* a house but *mining* one, and accordingly the Burra Creek is riddled like a honeycomb.<sup>64</sup>

Like many other South Australians, Cawthorne tried his luck at the Victorian Goldfields. He set off in the middle of January 1852, leaving his wife and mother to care for the school. He returned from Victoria some three weeks later, recording this spirited and colourful version of his ill-fated attempt to make his fortune:

Returned—pennyless and ill with rheumatism & dreadfully debilitated—Reported to have been a corpse—my wife and mother came to fetch me [from Port Adelaide] either dead or at the point of death—abandoned all at the Diggings and returned to Adelaide—Abstract

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Cawthorne papers in the Mortlock Library of South Australiana, Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/4/1. There are also several watercolours: for example, Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/8/9 (Mortlock Library of South Australiana), a scene of Port Lincoln, 'Cape Donnington', ZPX\*D30, f 22, Mitchell Library. See also 'Talala, Port Lincoln', PX D42, #45, Mitchell Library, which is particularly interesting. In the 'Literarium Diarium', he refers to the hanging of the convicted murderer of Mrs Stubbs 20 July 1843 and to the hanging of Mr Stubbs' killer 1 August 1843.

<sup>63</sup> Diary 30 January 1847.

<sup>64</sup> W.A. Cawthorne, 'Journal of a Tour to the North', *Register* 13 January 1851.

of the Adventure. 4 days on the voyage—heavy gale all the way—very sick—watched the haze night and day—and nothing to eat but slat horse—& filthy mouths [?] were on shore at Melbourne on Sunday night—at last found a lodging—bed—next day lived upon bread and water—saw a woman exhausted in the streets—slept on wet ground on the Yarra river—next day fared no better—slept do; next day started for the diggings—80 miles away—had to stump it—pushing the cart up the hills—& holding on down the hills—bad roads, worse water—very hot and very cold—rascally company—looseness of life, horrid drunkenness—plenty of revolvers & guns & shooting—got to the diggings such a sight—gold washing and sinking in holes 25 ft–30 ft deep & undermining, get ill, spasms and rheumatism no water—returned, 2 days there, saw enough, 2 days back ... applied for a situation—didn't get it—came back—was 14 days coming—a job of wind driven 100 miles out of the wat—off to the S. Pole—broke sails—bad food—very ill—got to Adelaide very debilitated & very hungry—Mother and wife rushed down to the Port—heard I was dying—Thanked God, I was back—but very ill—head all in a whirl—bad for a week afterwards.

In October 1851, two years after his son's marriage, Captain Cawthorne was appointed the first lighthouse keeper at the Sturt Light near Cape Willoughby on Kangaroo Island (£100 per annum), on the strength of his nautical and seafaring background.<sup>65</sup> In his diary his son threatened to leave South Australia if his father disgraced the family while in the position.<sup>66</sup> The 1850 *South Australian Government Gazette* records Georgina Cawthorne's last year as a licensed school teacher, working from premises in Glenelg.<sup>67</sup> There is no record that she continued to work as a teacher after that year, even though she did not leave for Kangaroo Island until April 1852.<sup>68</sup> Thereafter she committed herself to what must have been the lonely, difficult life as a light keeper's wife at one of the most remote locations in the colony. For a while she managed to practise her profession: there is a still-flourishing local knowledge on the island that she ran a school from the Sturt Light. The

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<sup>65</sup> See GRG 24/6/1851/1329 for the Captain's application for the position. It is obvious that his son William helped him with preparing the application: there are a couple of watercolours of lighthouses that are obviously by William Jr., and some rather fussy design which is very reminiscent of doodlings in the margins of his 'Literarium Diarium'.

<sup>66</sup> 'Diary' 1849–1859, B230, Mitchell Library, entry for 4 November 1851: 'Just heard Gov<sup>t</sup> has appointed Mr. C. Sen<sup>r</sup> to the head Light keeper's Office at the Kangaroo Island called the "Sturt Light"—I tremble and scarce rejoice—he'll never keep it—if he does . . . get to disgraced, I shall leave the colony'.

<sup>67</sup> *South Australian Government Gazette*, 17 January 1850: 49.

<sup>68</sup> *South Australian Government Gazette*, 7 August 1851: 558; 11 November 1852: 683.

earliest known published reference to her having taught the local children from Creek and Antechamber Bays is E.H. Hallack's 1905 *Kangaroo Island: Adelaide's Sanatorium* in which it is stated that she taught Nat Thomas's and 'Old Bet's' daughter Mary Seymour—the informant being Mary herself.<sup>69</sup>

Georgina seems not to have spent all her time on the island with her husband. From the evidence of her son's diaries she spent about eight months each year there. Cawthorne records his mother's departure and arrival dates on many occasions in his diary, always with regret that she should have to endure such a life. On 1 April 1852 he reports that she has just gone

to Kangaroo Island to live with Mr, C rather than to take care of him. I was going, but at the 11 hour—decided not—my school requires nursing and running to and from to Cape Willoughby ... the communication is very little—few and far between—I shall perhaps not see them for months, perhaps a year in all—poor mother she is knocked about.

On at least three occasions Captain Cawthorne applied for special leave from his duties as Head Keeper to return to Adelaide either to take his wife for treatment or to join her there.<sup>70</sup> In 1860 the Captain arrived back in Adelaide to find his wife Georgina was dead, she had died 16 June 1860 at their son's residence.<sup>71</sup>

For the Christmas holidays of 1852 Cawthorne joined his parents, writing at length about his visit in a lively and entertaining travel piece (see Appendix I). His mother came back to Adelaide with him 30 December 1852, and did not return to the island until March 1853: his wife seems not to have made quite as many trips.<sup>72</sup> In the decade to come Cawthorne would make at

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<sup>69</sup> 'A Native', (E.H. Hallack), *Kangaroo Island: Adelaide's Sanatorium*. Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1905: 44. See also Basedow: 1914, 161–2. Obviously Basedow also interviewed Mary Seymour.

<sup>70</sup> 'Sturt Light Journal', Australian Archives D26/1(1–2), 1853–1860. See the entry for 20 June 1860. See also a letter from W.C. Cawthorne to G.W. Tinkler, Secretary Trinity Board, 9 August 1859, GRG 51/14, State Records. He was granted leave and left the Sturt Light with Georgina 17 September 1859: their son records their arrival in Adelaide 28 September 1859, his father returning to the island 2 October.

<sup>71</sup> REGISTER 16 June 1860, 2f, for Georgina Cawthorne's death.

<sup>72</sup> 'Diary' 1849–1859, B230, Mitchell Library, entry for 30 December 1851. There are at least two newspaper references to Cawthorne *and his wife* visiting Kangaroo Island around

least seven trips to the island, where he met some of the Islanders and several Aboriginal women.

Relations at the Sturt Light between the Cawthorne and the Thomas families seem to have become rather strained, especially towards the end of the 1850s. Nat Thomas applied for the position as Second Keeper at the light in 1851, holding the position until he resigned 25 September 1857 when a Court of Inquiry found that he had neglected his duty after complaints by a Captain Black of the steamer *White Swan* of the Sturt Light 'being out'. Thomas's son-in-law William Seymour was Third Keeper until January 27 1858. Back in Adelaide William Cawthorne heard of Nat's sacking, and recorded in his diary 4 October 1857 not only the fact of the dismissal but also that 'things [are] rather [unsettled?] there'. They certainly seem to have been. It must have taken a particular kind of personality to endure life at a lighthouse in the middle of the nineteenth century: Cawthorne records some of his impressions in his travel piece published after his first visit to the Sturt Light: food was short and often augmented by bush tucker, when tobacco stocks ran low they smoked hops and roasted peas for coffee.

Conflicts among the keepers were inevitable. From about 1857 to 1862 Captain Cawthorne seems not only to have made enemies of just about every one around him at Cape Willoughby but also had to deal with the death of his wife and, ultimately, his dismissal as Head Keeper of the Sturt Light. In the two years or three years after Nat Thomas was sacked in 1857, feuding was obviously proceeding between the head keeper and a number of others ranged against him: his new second keeper Donald MacArthur; Nat Thomas and some of his extended family. Some of the Byzantine details survive in the official correspondence. Captain Cawthorne complained to the Trinity Board<sup>73</sup> on a number of occasions about Nat's behaviour: a letter 7 May 1858

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Christmas, in 1853 and 1855, suggesting occasionally they made annual trips together over the holiday period. While there is no newspaper record of this trip with Nat Thomas, the *Register* 31 December 1853, 2e, records both the Cawthorne seniors and juniors returning from Kangaroo Island on the cutter *Breeze*. The *Register* 4 January 1855 2a, records another return of the Cawthorne juniors from the island, on the *Gem*, via Port Elliott.

<sup>73</sup> Trinity House controlled all matters to do with shipping in South Australian waters until October 1860, when the Marine Board was established.

states that 'Mr. N. Thomas persisted that the Light House was situated in his run and that he had been subject to great trouble and annoyance from him'.<sup>74</sup> This colourful letter clearly establishes how far their relationship had deteriorated:

I respectfully beg to call the attention of the Board to a dangerous arrangement we are subjected to by Cattle belong to N. Thomas been constantly on the [Sturt Light] Reserve from 20 to 28 head several of whom are very wild and mischievous. We have repeatedly driven them off but during the night they return again and laze around the fences of the Cottages and in the direct path to the Light. In two instances they charged Mr Tapley and MacArthur's son Collin was driving them away. Added to this nuisance several large Pigs are constantly on the reserve and every few days we are visited by a flock of Sheep and a large flock of Goats 200 in number. As the cattle are never put in a stockyard or herded they Roam at large and become very wild having mostly been reared here they naturally seek their old pasture ... the damage and annoyance of the Cattle is much aggravated by the Brutal insulting and Threatening language of their owner who persists that his Cattle has the right to run on the Govt Reserves.<sup>75</sup>

In October 1859 Captain Cawthorne wrote to the Marine Board informing them that he had sent the third keeper J. Tapley and Collin MacLachlan to find a route between the Sturt Light and Hog Bay that might by-pass Antechamber Bay—where Nat Thomas and his family lived. His stated reasons for his actions again suggest the intensity of the feuding with members of the Thomas family:

in two instances my dispatches were reported lost [by Thomas's son-in-law Thomas Simpson, postmaster at Hog Bay?] Though I have strong suspicions and every reason from what I have learned since then they were not lost, as yet I cannot possibly trace the party correctly who detained them'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> GRG 51/14, State Records, Letter from W.C. Cawthorne to G.W. Tinkler, Secretary Trinity Board, 7 May 1858.

<sup>75</sup> GRG 51/14, State Records, Letter from W.C. Cawthorne to G.W. Tinkler, Secretary Trinity Board, 23 June 1859.

<sup>76</sup> GRG 51/14, State Records, Letter from W.C. Cawthorne to G.W. Tinkler, Secretary Trinity Board, 23 October 1859.



Captain Cawthorne obviously had his suspicions about Thomas's son-in-law Thomas Simpson. In December 1859 he reported in the Sturt Log that 'Collin MacLachlan left the Station for Hog Bay for letters kept by [the postmaster] T. Simpson to bring the dispatches Reported to him by Thomas Simpson'. Collin went to Hog Bay on a hot day and returned to the Sturt Light on the following day without the mail. Cawthorne then logged the following report:

On Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup> 1859 Thomas Simpson saw Collin MacLachlan step Son of D. MacArthur and told him that a Government Despatch and letters were lying at Hog Bay directed to the Light. As Mr Tapley [the third keeper] was absent on leave I Requested MacArthur to allow Collin to go to Hog Bay as I considered it necessary to obtain the Communication and ascertain its import. Early in the Morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Collin set out from the Stat<sup>n</sup> taking one of Mr Tapleys horses (as the distance of 20 miles through dense Scrub and remarkable hot day it was impossible for any person to go the Journey on foot) in the evening he arrived at Hog Bay and having made inquiry for the letters was informed no vessel had been there for some time and had any letters arrived they would sure to have been sent on as they usually have done. Simpson had made the Report Maliciously as he had been forbidden to remain during the Sabbath day in MacArthurs Cottage much to the annoyance of himself and family. Collin returned on the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> quite ill from the exertion and heat of the weather the head was unwell for several days. [As] this person threatens to give the Station as much annoyance as possible I trust the Board will take measures to abate the nuisance. False Reports made to Gov<sup>t</sup> Station are punishable by Law.<sup>77</sup>

As this report makes clear, Captain Cawthorne was also feuding with Donald MacArthur who had replaced Nat Thomas as Second Keeper. Cawthorne had brought disciplinary proceedings against him in July because of the following episode, idiosyncratically logged by the captain as follows:

Capt Tapley and Cap Malcolm [members of the Marine Board] Visit Light on a tour of Inspecting and Investigated Charge made by the Head Keeper Mr. W. Cawthorne against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Keeper MacArthur the Charge was This. When MacArthur finished the lean too attached to his house the head Keeper wished to ascertain what quantity of Material Weather Board and paling was used in the Construction of the Lean to and applyd to MacArthur (who was on the roof of the Lean to) to assist him in

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<sup>77</sup> 'Sturt Light Journal', Australian Archives D26/1(1-2), 1853-1860. See the entry for 20 December 1859.

ascertaining the quantity. MacArthur flew in a great rage and Jumped from the Roof flourishing the hammer in the face of the head Keeper making use of the Most Brutal and Vile Language Stating you Bugger if you think I have Stolen the Palings look in my Arse and see if they are their.<sup>78</sup>

Captain Cawthorne also became involved with the family of another of the Islanders, William Wilkins, who lived at the eastern end of Penneshaw above Frenchman's Rock on land (Section 100) that was to become an Aboriginal Reserve known locally as 'the Aboriginal' and after subdivision into sixty-seven blocks became the main residential area of Penneshaw above Hog Bay where most of the town's houses and beach shacks are.<sup>79</sup> Cawthorne distributed rations to the family, and as a government representative on the island became involved in making arrangements for Mary Manatto and her children after Wilkins died in October 1860. It is clear from several entries in the Sturt Light Log that he knew the family well.<sup>80</sup>

Aside from any intrinsic interest, these various encounters with the old sealers and whalers Nat Thomas, George Bates, William Walker, William Wilkins and with their extended families demonstrate the extent to which Captain Cawthorne was intimately involved with their lives—and deaths, thus providing his son the writer with unique opportunities (even if at second hand) to gather the kind of material he needed for the writing of his novella *The Kangaroo Islanders* and for the watercolours he painted of the island.<sup>81</sup> When he met or heard about the Islanders and their women, the survivors were mostly in their fifties or even older, which perhaps explains why in a novella supposedly set in 1823 a number of the characters are represented as

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<sup>78</sup> 'Sturt Light Journal', Australian Archives D26/1(1-2), 1853-1860, 27 July 1859. The incident happened 8 March 1859. In August Cawthorne applied for leave from the Sturt Light, citing his wife's illness. GRG 51/14, State Records, Letter from W.C. Cawthorne to G.W. Tinkler, Secretary Marine Board, 9 August 1859. Given that he had been fighting with just about everyone around him, it is hardly surprising to find the captain applying for leave.

<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Keryn James 'Wife or slave: the kidnapped Aboriginal women workers and Australian sealing slavery on Kangaroo Island and Bass Strait islands,' (Honours diss., Flinders University, 2001) for this information.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix X for a more detailed account of the fortunes of Mary Manatto and her children.

<sup>81</sup> In his travel piece published in the *Observer* 15 January 1853 Cawthorne mentions attempting a number of drawings and watercolours; in his diary 14 January 1860 he records that he was 'painting my journey to K. Isd'.

men in their middle age, an oversight on Cawthorne's part, in that in reading the various accounts of the sealers and their women who lived on Kangaroo Island in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the reader is struck by how young most of them were. Those ageing Aboriginal women still resident on the island in the 1850s and 1860s were, according to one correspondent to the papers, mostly living 'by their wits and their waddies ... preferring ... the wallaby and other small game'<sup>82</sup> to the Government rations distributed by such government representatives as Captain Cawthorne at the Sturt Light.

After his wife's death in 1860 Captain Cawthorne returned to Cape Willoughby and resumed his duties as head light keeper. His career came to an abrupt and ignominious end on 1 April 1862, when the Marine Board (Captains Douglas, Hall and Smith) met at the Sturt Light to consider charges brought against Captain Cawthorne by the Second Keeper Donald MacArthur.<sup>83</sup> In evidence given to the hearing by the Second Keeper Donald MacArthur, 'Mrs Cawthorne' is named as calling on Mr Tapley, the Third Keeper, to put out the light because her husband was too drunk to fulfill his duties. It seems that Captain Cawthorne had taken a 'housekeeper'; there is no record of any marriage. Many other drunken episodes are described, including one spree lasting nine days when the captain was supposedly on duty. Furthermore, the Captain was also accused of molesting Margaret, MacArthur's thirteen-year-old daughter, who gave damning evidence against him at the hearing. At first the Marine Board decided to 'disrate' Captain Cawthorne from the Sturt Light to the Lightship moored off Port Adelaide, but on 16 May 1862 he was summarily dismissed from the Service.<sup>84</sup> He died 28 September 1875 and is buried in Brighton.

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<sup>82</sup> 'Aborigines of Tasmania', *Register*, 6 April 1869, 2h.

<sup>83</sup> GRG 51/26/3, State Records. See also Cawthorne's own version of the hearing, in the 'Sturt Light Journal', Australian Archives D26/1(1-2), 1853-1860, 1 April 1862: 6, with its grim little marginal note 'This ends Mr Cawthorne's keeping the Journal'.

<sup>84</sup> GRG 51/26/3 and GRG 51/27/4: 234-5, State Records. See also *South Australian Government Gazette*, 29 May 1862: 464.

Cawthorne lived an active social and civil life, involving himself deeply in the cultural and political life of the colony of South Australia. In the mid-1840s, perhaps prompted by his father's alcoholism, he became Secretary of the Total Abstinence Society. Cawthorne was also appointed Secretary of the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, prompted, Foster speculates, by witnessing the hanging of the Aborigine Wira Maldira in 1845. Cawthorne has this to say about the public hanging of the Port Lincoln man convicted of the Stubbs murder in 1843:

Alas, I must tell you a mournful tale—the retrial of human woe. This morning justice demanded the fulfillment of his decree passed a few days ago on the body of a Port Lincoln native for the murder of a Mr Stubbs. He was hung. This morning at 8 o'clock he marched out to the scaffold and in a few minutes was hurried into eternity. Where is his soul?! I did not go to see this heart-rending spectacle and oh how was I not shocked to see men and boys running actually to see this sad spectacle, as if to an Exhibition. Not only these, women went also where are their finer feelings? Oh ye Englishwomen—all seemed quite delighted with what they were going to see or had seen. Instead (as I expected) of seeing the females melt into tears, Alas! laughs resounded from their mouths. Instead of the men turning away with real sorrow, Alas! Swearing, nonsensical remarks and ribaldry formed their conversation. The boys and girls of course followed the elders example. Oh how it shocked my sensibility—to think that they were no more impressed at what they had seen than it been viewing Punch and Judy played. Here is an example that passed before my own observation—'Well Jack' said an inhuman fellow to a lad, 'How did he go off?' 'Oh pretty well' replied the Brute, 'Did not make much of it'. Oh, I thought, I wonder how you would 'go off if placed in the same situation—you unfeeling wretch. I can assure you I feel, I think a good deal on such solemn occasions, but unfortunately I am so [distracted], I mean my attention, that I can hardly recollect any of the many thoughts and reflections that arose in my mind during the day. Alas me—eight horse Police were there with drawn swords•, besides crowds of unfeeling spectators, children the most. O dreadful, may I always profit by such occurrences. May it be the means of estranging me more from the world and all its vanities. May it lead me to contemplate a future existence and prepare for eternity. May the effects be the same on all mankind. Could] see the jail from our upstairs windows. (from Foster 1991: 15)<sup>85</sup>

Cawthorne later records this fascinating conversation about capital punishment:

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<sup>85</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 1 August 1843.

We were talking about hanging the blacks, 'Yes', says one, 'you lanty [plenty] hang black fellow, at big house (jail) but', he said, blackfellow no kick, black fellow go so' and here he shut his eyes and stood still, imitating the calmness which the native maintained when he was hung. 'Another white fellow', he continued with contempt, 'lanty go so' and here he jumped about, 'lanty kicked policeman' (this is true) 'lanty cry', and here they all mimed and then burst out in laughter at the cowardice of the white man. I could not help laughing too to see the grimaces of the fellows and the contempt shown for the white men. [But those] poor devils were not hung outright, the rope gave way or something, I was not in the colony at the time. Well I have spun you a long bad yam. Forgive the same. Read it or not (quoted Foster 1991: 27).<sup>86</sup>

William Cawthorne was something of a *littérateur*: he attended evening classes held by his friend 'Professor' Menge in Hebrew and Greek: later he was to write and publish a sympathetic account of Menge's life entitled *Menge the Mineralogist*, although his diary records some rather unflattering comments about the eccentric scientist. By 1847 Cawthorne was a member of the Committee of the Mechanics Institute and Honorary Secretary of the Philosophical Council. He also gave public lectures on a variety of subjects, including Grammar, Geography, Conchology, History, the Aborigines, astronomy, Longfellow's poetry and acclimatization, often lecturing at his mother's school room in Morphett Street in Adelaide. He published poems (usually satiric) on and for a number of occasions celebrating public events in Adelaide. One typical piece is a poem written for the Proclamation Day ceremony to celebrate the 'majority', South Australia's twenty-first birthday, read at the Old Gum Tree 28 December 1857. Cawthorne's poem is called 'A Lay for the Twenty-Eighth' and contains this characteristic final stanza with its Reconciliation message:

Also—thee, O! native man,  
Black thy skin, same blood we scan;  
Beat the waddy, help the glee,  
Join in our corrobberie.

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<sup>86</sup> 'Literarium Diarium', 2 November 1843.

Cawthorne wrote to the papers on many subjects: education, the Aborigines, Acclimatisation, Dried Fruits, even cricket. A copy of one 1864 letter included in the Cawthorne Papers (cut from an Adelaide newspaper which is not named) argues that the £2500 proposed to bring the English cricket team from Melbourne to Adelaide would be better spent on repairing Adelaide's streets or damming the Torrens. Cawthorne's letter provoked a strong response from the editor of *The Adelaide Express* (Monday 11 January 1864), who argued that 'Amusements are an essential of humanity'.

Cawthorne was also a militia member and a crack shot, winning many prizes. He spent many years in No. 1 Company of the Adelaide Volunteers, the West Adelaide Rifles, where he held the rank of Lieutenant and later Captain. In 1863 he scribbled a few lines about his comrades-in-arms:

The came the knowing "Red ball" boys  
Not your citizen soldier toys—  
With daring,—dash, & lively spring  
To bag a cow—or have a fling.  
And their captain—Captain Tartar  
Who of all their force,—none smarter—  
Writes "pottry" & colonial books  
"Life of Menge"—and "Tom Snooks"  
And so to Guard as stiff as starch.<sup>87</sup>

He could not have been too serious about his duties: in the Cawthorne Papers is a poem 'I, the Volunteer', by C. of the Awkward Squad, which contains the following stanzas in the spirit of Edgar Allen Poe that mention the fear of a French invasion:

In the morning fresh and breezy, when the grass is crisp and freezy,  
Soul of mine is filled with drilling, though my little toes are chilling.  
Hark! Five by the clock is sounding! Quickly out of bed I'm bounding,  
On my belt and *bagnet* clatt'ring, while my wretched teeth are chatt'ring.  
I, the Volunteer.

Down upon the misty Park Lands, with my rigid stiff benumb'd hands,  
Where I meet those "Artful Dodgers," those delightful trimming sodgers.

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<sup>87</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/7/2, Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

Closely ev'ry point observing, thinking proudly praise deserving,  
Never at my feet once peeping, but my eyes on sergeant keeping.  
I, the Volunteer.

Cawthorne seems to have written such poetry all his life, but he published only a handful of works: his diaries contain a number of very rough and mostly unfinished drafts of poems and some manuscripts survive. He spoke at length on the importance of collecting versions of Aboriginal myths, legends and poetry in a public lecture he delivered in 1856 on 'The Song of Hiawatha', given at the Adelaide Philosophical Society:

I allude to the legends and traditions of the aborigines of Australia. ... There is scarcely a constellation in the heavens that has not its appropriate legend and the animals of the land are invested with the supernatural. Capes, promontories, and islands of our shores are transformations, or are otherwise connected with legendary lore. The origins of their own species, and their various ceremonies, abound with singular and exotic ideas, and the wildest fancies. The Australian savage has his myths, legends and poetry, like his brothers in other regions; ... It would be an interesting work, and worthy of the employment of some portion of [the Philosophical Society] ... funds to collect and collate together these treasures, before the race disappears from off the face of the land. <sup>88</sup>

*The Legend of Kuperree: or, the Red Kangaroo* is his best-known poem.<sup>89</sup> Published in a slim volume in 1858, and is written after the style of Longfellow, attempting to 'acclimatise' an Aboriginal legend from the Naou people of southern Eyre Peninsula. It is one of the first attempts to achieve this ambition by a non-Indigenous writer in Australia. Five hundred copies were printed: close to half were sold in the first few weeks and Cawthorne then prepared a second edition, making many corrections. The poem was reviewed badly, which caused Cawthorne considerable pain, but the reviewer's judgment is a reasonable one.

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<sup>88</sup> The lecture by Cawthorne on 'The Song of Hiawatha' is included in the Fourth Annual Report of the Adelaide Philosophical Society. An extract from the lecture can be found in the Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489.

<sup>89</sup> *Diary 1849-c.1859*. Mitchell Library Acc, No. 230, c. 4 November 1858.

Numbers of his poems survive in manuscript. In 1883 he wrote 'A Midnight Reverie in the Bush', a long poem in the style of Longfellow. It is a turgid, undisciplined and unremarkable poem, except that in several places it does record in poetic form random episodes from violent history of conflict between black and white in colonial times: the murder of Magrath, the Rufus River massacres, the murder of Meredith at Yankalilla. Sombre colonial moments are also recorded: 'hapless Pennington lost in the scrub'. 'A Midnight Reverie in the Bush' also represents the 'Paltee' corroboree in verse, which Cawthorne described elsewhere at length and was also used by Angas with grudging acknowledgement in his *Savage Life and Scenes in Australian and New Zealand*.

In 1859 Cawthorne published a biography of the Government Geologist Johann Menge under the title of *Menge the Mineralogist*. In about 1870 he also published a children's book called *Who Killed Cockatoo* (Adelaide, c. 1870), one of Australia's first children's books to feature Indigenous fauna.

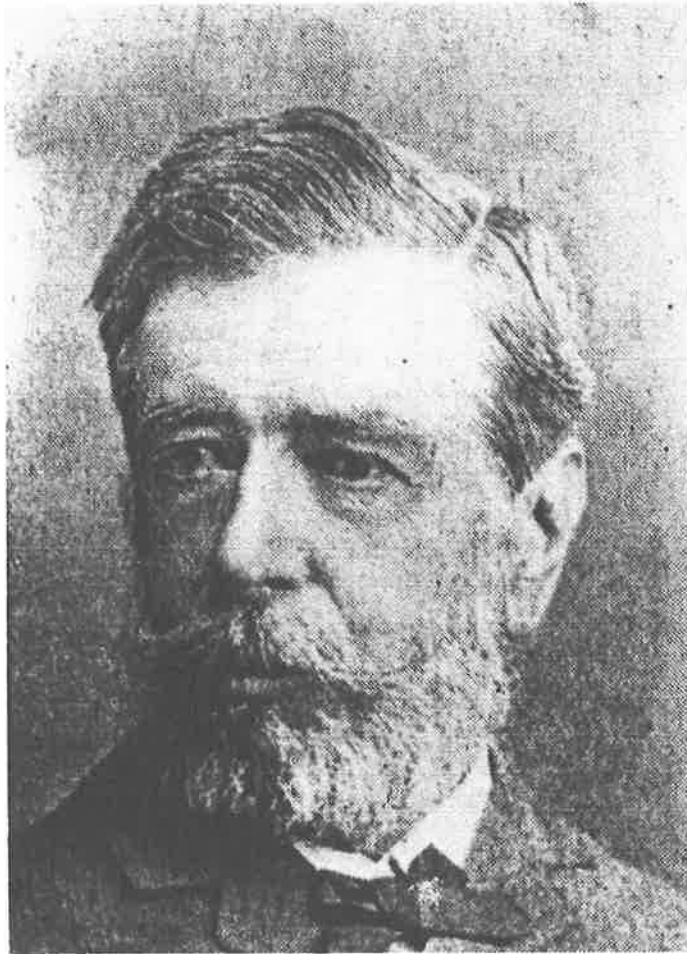
In the 1860s William Cawthorne changed careers, from teaching to business. In 1862 he founded the National Building Society, which he was associated with until his death in 1897, managing real estate developments (including house building) in two of Adelaide's suburbs, Goodwood and Southwark. Ada and Florence Streets in Goodwood are named after Cawthorne's daughters, while Cawthorne Street in Southwark is named after his son.<sup>90</sup> The family lived variously in Melbourne Street, North Adelaide and in Gilbert Street, Goodwood, just behind today's Capri Cinema.

Cawthorne also ran a newsagency in Weymouth Street selling school books, Valentine cards and some sheet music. He next moved into illustrating and then publishing: Stuart suggests that he was one of the first in the colony to sell (and later publish) illustrated newspapers. Cawthorne provided illustrations for *The Illustrated Melbourne Post* (including his own

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<sup>90</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/11.





**William Anderson Cawthorne, photograph, *The Official Civic Record of South Australia: Centenary Year, 1936* (Adelaide, Universal Publicity Company, 1936) p. 101. Cawthorne is remembered as 'Ex-Councillor, Adelaide City Council'.**

works) and in 1867 he published a local version of this paper in Adelaide as a weekly under the masthead of *The Illustrated Adelaide Post*. Between 1870 and 1871 Cawthorne published another newspaper called the *Town and Country Advertiser*.<sup>91</sup>

*Cawthornes*, the family business still remembered by many South Australians, began in 1870 in Morphett Street. Cawthorne's son Charles Witto-Witto, a proficient musician and conductor, became a partner in the business in 1884, moving to a new building in Grenfell Street and Gawler Place.<sup>92</sup> In 1887 father William retired. In 1911 Cawthornes moved to Rundle Street, to Cawthorne's Building. Cawthorne's eventually became one of Adelaide's city's largest music stores, selling sheet music, instruments, and operating a box office for forthcoming musical events. Cawthornes' closed in 1962.

In 1871 Cawthorne was petitioned to run as a Councillor with the Adelaide City Council: he served three years. In his old age Cawthorne lived in Gilbert Street, Goodwood. His wife Annie died 13 July 1884 at her son's house when she was fifty-eight. William Anderson Cawthorne died at the age of 73 on the 25 September 1897.<sup>93</sup> He is buried in the West Terrace Cemetery.

In his later years William Cawthorne became a successful businessman and city councillor. Perhaps he felt disappointed that his early desires to be remembered as an ethnographer, a writer and an artist had come to nothing. These days, however, we turn back to his works to celebrate them for what they offer: unique, lively, sympathetic perceptions of life in the colony in the early decades. Cawthorne's work is remembered not just because it preserves one young man's impressions of contact with the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains, but also because he made a brave attempt to transcend his circumstances and attempt the life of the *littérateur*. The results of his

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<sup>91</sup> See the entries for Cawthorne in Lurline Stuart, *Nineteenth Century Australian Periodicals: An Annotated Bibliography*. (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979).

<sup>92</sup> See *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7 (1891–1939) A–Ch, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press): 594–595. See also Malcolm Fox, 'Music Education in South Australia, 1836–1984', in *From Colonel Light to the Footlights: the Performing Arts in South Australia from 1836 to the Present*. (Adelaide: Pagel Books, 1988) 384.

<sup>93</sup> *The Adelaide Observer*, 2 October, 1897.

endeavours were that wonderful diary, a novella, one or two poems and a children's book, a significant and valuable contribution.



'View on Kangaroo Island'. William Anderson Cawthorne. This watercolour represents Nat Thomas's 'Freshfields' at Antechamber Bay. The small patch of cleared ground where Thomas grew crops is clearly visible, as are the two huts. The track in the foreground led to the Sturt Light at Cape Willoughby, where Captain Cawthorne was head keeper. PXD 42 f.48, Mitchell Library SLNSW.

## Appendix One

### Journal of a Trip to Kangaroo Island

[William Anderson Cawthorne]<sup>1</sup>  
*Observer*, 15 January 1853, 3d–e

Having a couple of weeks to spare, I determined upon paying a visit to the Sturt Lighthouse at Cape Willoughby; and, for the information of any future visitor, I may at once state that the only means of communication between Adelaide and the Light is by means of a whale-boat belonging to one of the old islanders who, for a moderate consideration undertakes to convey you over in one day or six, according to wind and weather.

Saturday.—After a very hasty preparation, was whirled off to Brighton, where our whale-boat lay high and dry upon the beach. The wind being unfavourable, the boat could not go. Slept at the old Thatched Inn, under express orders to rise at daybreak. Accordingly went to sleep with a nightmare of daybreak breaking my rest, and rose some time before it was necessary. Posted down to the beach, and found our friend “Nat” smoking his pipe, and no signs of a fair wind, and of course no prospect of a start that day. Laid down on the beach for a couple of hours, and then sauntered up to breakfast.

Sunday.—Very hot—millions of flies—house full of people—all other accompaniments of a house public. Strolled again to the beach; wind from the south-west; a hopeless case. Had what they expressively term on the island a *yarn* with “Nat”—the man to whom we were about to commit our valuable self upon the treacherous waves. “Nat” was a perfect character; he had been 32<sup>2</sup> years on Kangaroo Island; and as geologists find it difficult to account for the disposition of boulders—those erratic wanderers from respectable strata—so it may be a difficult problem to account for the singular life such a man has led. There is not an island or rock on the shores of our province, or the Australian Bight, nor a bay, creek, river, or lagoon, but he can give you some reminiscence of his visits or residence, of escapes and adventures, and of perils and dangers. He is compound of sailor, sealer, farmer, and wild man. He possesses all the resources of the sailor, combined with the instincts of the aboriginal native. Place him on the western end of Kangaroo Island, with only a dog and a knife, and he will find his way out at

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<sup>1</sup> The piece is obviously by Cawthorne. Aside from the wealth of supporting internal evidence, a copy is pasted into his ‘Diary 1849–1859’, Mitchell Library B230.

<sup>2</sup> Nat Thomas here is quoted by Cawthorne as suggesting he arrived on Kangaroo Island in 1821. He may have first visited the island in that year, but several sources insist he settled in 1827. John Jones’ report dated 1834 and published in part in Charles J. Napier, *Colonization; particularly in South Australia, with some remarks on Small Farms and Over-Population* (London: C.B., 1835): 250–2, ‘Nathaniel Thomas... [has] been there seven years’.

the other—a feat that he has done, I believe, more than once.<sup>3</sup> Nothing comes amiss to him in the way of eating, from a frying pan of young ants to a dish of “wakeries” (grubs);<sup>4</sup> and he truly argues that a man knows not what he will eat until he is tried. For years he has lived upon wallaby and seals, never seeing the sight of flour. Being such a very old settler, he is of course intimately acquainted with every leading colonist who landed in the early days at Kingscote; and some very singular tales he can tell. “Nat” belongs to a respectable family; his father having held a lucrative post in the victualling office at home. In his own emphatic language, out of a large family, he was the only “scabby one,” and as such ran away to sea during the war;<sup>5</sup> then went whaling; was wrecked on the island;<sup>6</sup> got away to Sydney; went surveying under King;<sup>7</sup> then took up the life of an islander;<sup>8</sup> that is, went either singly or in a gang sealing; ships coming at irregular periods, and buying the skins; and so persevering have these men been, that seals are rarely to be met with now on the rocks and islands of our coast; and Kangaroo Island at this time cannot boast of a kangaroo. They are all killed for their skins; the wallaby only remains. “Nat” is now a sort of farmer and

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<sup>3</sup> An oblique reference to Osborne and Slater’s deaths in 1836 while attempting to follow Captain Sutherland’s 1819 tracks across the island, an event which caused great consternation among the settlers. See Alfred Austin Lendon, ‘Kangaroo Island: The Tragedy of Dr Slater and Mr Osborne. A Story of Ninety Years Ago.’ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia South Australian Branch* 26 (1926): 67–84.

<sup>4</sup> The Kaurina word for witchetty grubs is ‘bardy’; this word is probably from one of the River Murray languages.

<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Thomas was born in 1802, which makes it unlikely that he served in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars, although he could have been on a naval vessel in the last years of the war on blockade duties. Plomley has demonstrated that he is first listed in Sydney as a ship’s boy in May 1817 as a member of the *Shipley* bound for Batavia. In May 1819 he is named as seventeen years old when a member of the *Sinbad*, having deserted from the *Shipley*. He sailed on the *Sinbad* in 1819 and 1820, on the *Queen Charlotte* in 1820 and 1821. He is next listed on the *Nereus* which he ‘cleared’ 1 October 1822 and discharged 14 June 1823. On 21 January 1824 Thomas is named as a crew member on the *Water Mole* bound for Bass Strait; on 17 May 1824 he shipped on the *Belinda*. Most of these ships were engaged in whaling or sealing. See Plomley 1971: 27 and Cumpston 1986: 69, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas’s whaling ship the *Belinda* was wrecked on Middle Island, Recherche Archipelago, Western Australia, 19 July 1824. The crew (including Thomas) was rescued by the *Nereus*, which then sailed back to Sydney, calling in on Kangaroo Island on the journey home. See Cumpston 1986: 74 and Nunn 1989: 39.

<sup>7</sup> The hydrographer and explorer Admiral Phillip Parker King, ‘the father of Australian meteorology’, was the son of Lieutenant-Governor Phillip Gidley King and born at Norfolk Island. The *Bathurst* sailed from Sydney May 1821 under his command to chart the north coast of Australia: Thomas was a member of the crew. The *Bathurst* returned to Sydney in 1822 after circumnavigating the continent. See Marsden Hordern, *King of the Australian Coast: The Work of Phillip Parker King in the Mermaid and Bathurst 1817–1822* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> There are several stories about Thomas’s arrival on Kangaroo Island. He may have first visited the island on one of his several sealing voyages: the *Nereus* certainly stopped there in 1824. Another story says he sailed in a longboat from Van Diemen’s Land in 1827 with William Everett and two Tasmanian women, settling at Antechamber Bay. George ‘Fireball’ Bates, however, says Thomas deserted in 1830 from a ship he called the *Mary* but was probably the Colonial Cutter *Dart* sent from Sydney to look for Charles Sturt’s expedition. See *The Advertiser* 20 March 1880, suppl. 1c, Cumpston 1986: 126.

fisherman. "Nat," like all the islanders, has rejoiced in the possession of a couple of our darker sisters for "gins;" he has children and grandchildren—all fine, healthy half-castes, one woman particularly, who cannot be anything under 20 or 25 stone.<sup>9</sup> Their usefulness in the boat in fishing, and all kinds of hunting, is not to be compensated by any white man; and hence their position. At Hog Bay,<sup>10</sup> an old islander has four.<sup>11</sup> The oldest white resident on the island is "Governor Worley," [sic] who has been 50 years on it. By the end of our "yarn" the weather had become very hot. Most people ill at Brighton. Dined at the public-house, and finished the day by another stroll on the beach. At 10 p.m. some fishermen were hauling the seine, by which I obtained a fine specimen of a cephalopode.<sup>12</sup>

Monday.—An intensely hot day. Up at half-past 4, anxiously looking forward for a breeze. "Nat" still smoking on the sandhill; visited our forlorn boat, wandered about and did nothing; thought of giving up the expedition altogether. In the evening the wind came from the eastward, and at sundown finally started with an overloaded boat and nine souls, including two children. As we pushed off the sun sank behind a portentous bank of lurid glare, which gave an unearthly appearance to things on shore. Night drew on and the wind freshened; we kept coasting along within a furling [sic] of the "beetling crags," and some times considerably nearer. The object of keeping so near shore was, to avoid any chop of the sea, and the inconvenience of pulling in-shore in the event of a change of wind. About 1 a.m. the wind lulled, a strong puff of the S.W. wind came tearing down upon us, took timely notice, and put in at "Hanrok's" beach, about eight miles north of Yankalilla.<sup>13</sup> As it was very dark, the land very high, and the sea all in a

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<sup>9</sup> A reference to Nat Thomas's and Old Bet's daughter, Mary Seymour. She was born 13 September 1833, the birth recorded in a birthday book in the possession of Mrs M. Golder, a direct descendent. Alexander Tolmer met Mary, her brother and her sister in 1844, describing them as 'three very interesting little children, who combine the intelligence of the white with the activity of the native'. Mary Thomas married William Seymour, who had arrived in South Australia on the *Rapid* with Colonel William Light in 1836. William Seymour later became one of the lighthouse keepers at Cape Willoughby. See Ruediger 1980: 54, *Islander*, 6 June 1984 and Nunn 1989: 57.

<sup>10</sup> Now Penneshaw.

<sup>11</sup> Given Henry Wallen (here 'Governor Worley') is named in the next sentence, this reference must be either to George 'Fireball' Bates, William Walker or to William Wilkins, who all lived near Hog Bay in the 1850s. The name 'Worley' is further evidence that Cawthorne is the author of this piece, in that this version of Wallen's name is also used in the novel.

<sup>12</sup> Given likely net catches at that place, probably a squid (*Sepioteuthis australis*, Southern Calarmari). Good evidence that the writer is William Cawthorne. In December 1855, Cawthorne held an exhibition of 200 drawings and watercolours, 'all having a colonial interest attaching to them', together with collections of shells, fossils, minerals and precious stones at his Academy in Victoria Square.

<sup>13</sup> If Cawthorne's distances are more or less accurate, Nat Thomas must have beached his whaleboat at Myponga Beach, which is eleven kilometres (about 7 miles) as the seagull flies from the mouth of the River Bungala at Normanville. He describes a fine tidal estuary at Hanrok's, no doubt the mouth of the Myponga Creek, which these days hardly runs because of the Myponga Dam upstream. The named 'Hanrok' has not survived, possibly because it was used only by the Islanders in the days before colonisation. On the other hand, Haycock Point is the conical hill at Carrickalinga: a jetty called Haycock's Landing could be found

jumble, it was no small matter so to run the boat as to avoid the rocks on the one hand and getting swamped on the other. As soon as the boat touched, out we all jumped, at various depths, and, after a battle with the waves, got all the goods on shore, near about a ton; got the boat hauled up, and while the party went into the scrub I laid down by the boat on the sand; about an hour afterwards the tide surrounded me, the boat, and the goods; jumped up, called all hands, removed the goods and boat, which not long after we again had to remove, the tide being very high and the beach very low. Took a walk round, admired the country—splendid hills with a fine estuary filled with water at every tide, fringed with gum trees; was informed that the diggers had bought nearly all the land in the vicinity.<sup>14</sup> Took a couple of sketches,<sup>15</sup> watching the rising sun, and then had a pannican of tea; reloaded the boat with great trouble, and started again.

Tuesday.—Very calm, had to pull, which went sorely against the grain with “Nat.” At about midday “skillicked” [sic]<sup>16</sup> the boat at Yankalilla, went ashore for a “tot” of tea and a piece of bread and cheese. A little vessel was loading wheat, the produce of the district.<sup>17</sup> It is a fact strongly in support of the recent memorial of the settlers<sup>18</sup> that, though the harbour is an open roadstead, the swell that sets in is very small, and the water is generally very calm. It is the best landing-place south of Brighton. The spot where poor Meredith<sup>19</sup> was murdered by natives was pointed out by “Nat;” it was on a Sunday, and he was speared while reading the Bible. At 5 p.m. reached Rapid Bay, hauled up the boat; in passing the cliffs a very large niche is observable, about 400 or 500 feet high, and in it a huge white stalactite, and of such a form as to resemble a human skeleton: it is a most singular curiosity. Kangaroo Island abounds in caverns full of similar petrifications. The Rapid Bay cliffs are remarkable for their blackness and their cavernous nature, some of them of most appalling appearance, especially when associated with the roaring of subterraneous waves.<sup>20</sup> On landing, first thing we did was to

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there until it was blown away in a gale in the 1930s. Geoffrey Manning does not record either of these names.

<sup>14</sup> The Gold Rush to the Victorian diggings was still well under way in 1853. Cawthorne himself went to the diggings in 1851, but returned to Adelaide penniless and ill.

<sup>15</sup> Good evidence that the writer was Cawthorne, who is well known as a naïve colonial watercolourist. He contributed to the first art exhibition held in South Australia, and later set up an exhibition on his own at his Academy in Victoria Square, which was reviewed in the *Observer*, 29 December 1855, 3. Cawthorne is best remembered for his watercolours of Aboriginal subjects (see Dutton). It is curious that the Art Gallery of South Australia does not hold any examples.

<sup>16</sup> Misprint. To ‘killick’ or ‘kellick’ a small boat is to anchor with a stone attached to a rope.

<sup>17</sup> The Yankalilla district was famous Australia-wide for its wheat crops in first few decades of settlement.

<sup>18</sup> No doubt an application from the settlers for upgrading the estuary to take small trading vessels.

<sup>19</sup> Cawthorne’s novel ends with the murder of ‘poor Meredith’: the adjective suggests Cawthorne may have known W. H. Leigh’s *Reconnoitering voyages and travels with adventures in the new colonies of South Australia, during the years 1836, 1837, 1838* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839) in which he also uses the phrase: see page 155.

<sup>20</sup> These natural features seem to have been destroyed by BHP’s twentieth century mining activities at Rapid Bay.



kill a death-adder, just where we were preparing for our evening's repast. The reptile is of a tawny colour, and fatal in its bite or sting. The sting is at the end of the tail. Snakes abound in Rapid Bay and I saw several before we left.<sup>21</sup> Here we were most hospitably received by Mr. B., who has the charge of a cattle station. Milk is the order of the day, in all forms and compounds. Saw the whole process of cheese-making. It is the most admirable place for a dairy, there being, besides many other advantages, a perpetual running stream at the very door. Slept on the beach. After midnight, rain and thunder; got a good soaking, and having had the misfortune to come away without blankets, was all the worse for it.

Wednesday.—Pouring rain, strong winds; no starting for the day. Stopped all day at Mr. B.'s. An extensive fire had happened: 40 acres of wheat burnt. Visited the old mines;<sup>22</sup> took a sketch or two. Saw some snakes. Viewed the operation of milking 55 cows; had supper, and retired.

Thursday.—Wind still unfair. Towards 10 o'clock got more moderate; determined upon a start; and upon passing the N.W. Bluff<sup>23</sup> had to down sail and pull—wind dead ahead. Off Cape Jervis passed and spoke a whale-boat, which had just returned from the Lighthouse, containing a contractor, who had been engaged in putting up a gallery.<sup>24</sup> Exchanged news and condolences, and away he sped, before a beautiful breeze; while we poor weather-afflicted mortals toiled on at the rate of a mile and a half per hour. Rounded the reef off Cape Jervis, not without some peril, as the tide rip is so great and so strong that it swept us towards the rocks like a straw. Entered Boat Harbour—a mere rocky opening between furious reefs at the end of which is a small sandy beach. Boats can only enter at half and three-quarters tide. Anchored the boat for a few hours until the tide served. At sunset got the boat unloaded, and hauled up, wind blowing hard, and very cold; the whole Backstairs Passage before us, through which the tide runs like a mill race, and Kangaroo Island opposite. Boat Harbour contains neither wood nor water. Gathered a potfull of perriwinkles for supper, and eat my last saveloy, which species of meat had been a standing joke the whole passage down. Commenced making my bed, always an important matter when bushing. One lot of the party slept in a gully of seaweed; slept in No. 2 gully of the same; and the remainder in No. 3; but I certainly had the best accommodation. My bed consisted of a narrow rut, like a coffin, so that I exactly filled it, my face being a little below the surrounding surface; having first taken the spiders out (large brown ones), removed a most uncomfortable bedfellow in the

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<sup>21</sup> Cawthorne obviously had quite an obsession about snakes, as both these travel pieces demonstrate.

<sup>22</sup> Probably the Yattagolanga Mine, a copper/lead deposit owned by Mr. Phillips and mined in the 1840s, situated about a quarter of a mile from Rapid Bay 'on the top and side of a steep hill, with a plain at its foot leading to the sea' (Wilkinson 1848: 263). The notes to George French Angas's Plate XXXIX entitled 'Rapid Bay: Encampment of Yankallillah Blacks' in his *South Australia Illustrated* mention the mines on Phillips' station.

<sup>23</sup> A headland between Rapid Head and Cape Jervis, named by Flinders; now known as Rapid Head, named by Colonel William Light.

<sup>24</sup> See GRG 51/1, Trinity Board Minutes 1852–58, 16 April 1852, State Records of South Australia, which mentions this work done at the Sturt Light.

shape of a huge embedded stone, 300 lbs weight, containing on its surface all the angular fractures that crystallography comprises, and which, with all my ingenuity, I could not use, either as a pillow, bolster, warming-pan, blanket, or bed-post. I laid down a couple of sacks, in one of which I had put my lower extremities; I then pulled over me a borrowed blanket, a piece of old table covering, and then my coat for my shoulders; and to finish off profusely, to the depth of six inches strewed seaweed all over me, and thus literally buried myself. I then sank down on a couch that a king might envy, and fell asleep with the murmuring ocean, and the glimmering moon just faintly tinging the white crests of the surf. I am informed on the authority of "Nat," that wet seaweed is the warmest bed that can be slept in—at any rate damp seaweed is, for I experienced it.

Friday.—The last day of our tedious voyage, which under ordinary circumstances lasts only two days down and one day up. Rose a little after 4 a.m. Very little wind, and the passage rough. After a very scanty meal, mouldy bread and a pannican of tea, commenced loading the boat; I then took the steer-oar, and we stood over to Cuttle-fish Bay. About 11 o'clock reached Antechamber Bay. One singularity is observable on the coast of Kangaroo Island, viz., a giant letter M. A stratum of yellow rock has run through a mass of black rock, precisely and without any exaggeration of fancy, in the form of this letter; of this I took a sketch; it is near Cuttle-fish Bay, about 6 miles W. from Cape Snapper. On jumping ashore on the beach I thought all my troubles were at an end. I was mistaken: the boat had to be hauled over on skids into a salt creek, a distance of at least 300 yards, which was no joke on a hot day, and a boat about 30 feet long, besides unloading and reloading. This pleasure of travelling being duly accomplished, we pulled up rather a pretty looking creek for about a mile, and then for the thirteenth and last time, we unloaded the boat, having done more manual labour in six days than in the previous 12 months. Half-a-mile brought us to the first hut or huts, the house of "Nat's" son-in-law [William Seymour]; here we found about 20 dogs, wallabies, parrots, "Old Wab"<sup>25</sup> and "Long-un,"<sup>26</sup> both native

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<sup>25</sup> 'Old Wab' seems only to have been mentioned twice on the South Australian colonial record. This reference of Cawthorne's is the first published: he insists she was originally from Tasmania, but she is not named in G.A. Robinson's journals. James Kelly's 1815 diary mentions a 'Waub's Boat Harbour', which his editor has footnoted with the following: "This designation was apparently given to the locality in honour of Waubedebbar, an aboriginal woman who was probably of some importance in the district, as on her death she was buried there, and a stone erected to her memory. The inscription on the stone is as follows:—"Here lies Waubedebbar, a female aborigine of Van Diemens Land died June 1832, aged 40 years. This stone was erected by a few of her white friends"' (Kelly 1920: 180). Waub may be one of the women named by Robinson's informant Em.ma (Eme.me, or Emma) as living on Kangaroo Island in 1831, or possibly she was the 'Puss' named by Tindale in 1937. The second reference is Alexander Tolmer's in 1882, when she is named as the Aboriginal woman 'old Wauber' who in 1844 was living with the old sealer William Cooper. Tolmer names old Wauber' and 'old Bet' as trackers assisting the police contingent to hunt down George Gilkes and his gang on Kangaroo Island. She is not named in the 24 September 1844 article in *The Southern Australian*, 2c–e which is the contemporary version of Tolmer's exploits on Kangaroo Island in 1844. Tolmer records one telling anecdote about 'Old Wauber': when his party was heading towards Murrell's Lagoon (now Murray's Lagoon), 'old

Van Diemen's Land women,<sup>27</sup> with "Nat's" big daughter [Mary] and a baby.<sup>28</sup> We then started for the squire's place—"Nat's." Found a weather-boarded house, nice and clean; about sixty pigs,<sup>29</sup> chattering parrots, twenty or thirty dogs, a dozen mountain ducks, goats, geese, wallabies, &c., &c. Had a first-rate cup of tea, and took a turn round. A salt lagoon<sup>30</sup> is near the house, visited by hundreds of ducks, pelicans, geese, and swans, and surrounded by marsh and scrub, filled with snakes. In the meantime the coach was preparing, and after a ride of about three hours—through country very like that from Mount Jagged to Encounter Bay, but very much more sterile, the

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Waub suddenly halted, and holding her nose, and looking very comical, said, "Me smell—m smoke;" but although myself and the men sniffed the air vigorously, the perception failed us. ... I interrogated both women, who explained that the bushrangers were on the other side of the lagoon ... half a mile from where we stood. Whilst the colloquy was going on we were suddenly startled by hearing a furious barking of dogs, and thought of course they had been alarmed by our approach; but when I expressed my anxiety on the subject they both laughed heartily, making us understand that as the wind was south-west, and we were to windward, it was impossible for the dogs to have scented us. Hence their cunning device in approaching from that quarter, which enabled them to detect the smell of smoke a long distance off, and avoiding the risk of alarming the dogs' (Tolmer 1882, vol. 1: 321). A drystone wall stands on 'Freshfields' that still carries the name 'Old Wab's', now owned by the Gilfillan family at Antechamber Bay. See James 2001 and Taylor 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Plomley notes that Long'un or Wore.ter.lee.pood.yen.nin.ner was one of the Tasmanian women named by G.A. Robinson's informant Em.ma (Eme.me, or Emma) as living on Kangaroo Island in 1831, stopping with the sealer James Allen. She was also called Langern, and was originally from the Ringarooma people of Cape Portland, Tasmania. She is given as #267 in Plomley's List of Native Names and #141 in his List of English Names. Philip Clarke gives another of 'Long'un's' names as Lar.roon.er, who was the woman named by John Anderson to Robinson who was tied to a tree by Allen at American Wharf Lagoon [American River?], her buttocks deeply cut and part of one ear cut off as punishment for absconding after a quarrel with other women. Given that in 1852, as this article reveals, she was living with Mary Seymour, the daughter of Nat Thomas and Old Bet, her association with the Thomas family has further significance, demonstrating the close connections in the lives of all these people. See Plomley 1966: 335, 336, 987, 996, 1010, 1016; Clarke 1998: 33.

<sup>27</sup> Cawthorne here gestures towards the enduring fascination with the question of who was 'the last of the Tasmanians' that is reflected in many nineteenth century texts, from newspaper accounts to H.G. Wells' expressed motivation for writing his Darwinian fable *The War of the Worlds* in 1898, prompted by reading an account of the 'extinction' of the Tasmanian Aborigines, in which his narrator reminds us that: "The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by the European immigrants, in the space of fifty years." H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Afterword Isaac Asimov, (New York: Signet Classics, 1986) 5. Since 1836 there has been a great deal of interest in the 'survival' of Tasmanian women on Kangaroo Island. G.A. Robinson's informant Em.ma named thirteen Aboriginal women on Kangaroo Island in 1831. In 1844, when Tolmer visited, there were 'several' Van Diemen's Land natives out of an island population of twelve black women. Tindale records that the 'South Australian census returns for 1866 (5) ... record "4 natives of Van Diemen's Land"' while in 1894 it was noted that 'there were three (3) Tasmanian women, native blood, living in Kangaroo Island for many years, the last of these aborigines died about six years ago' (Tindale 1937: 30). It should be pointed out that there are many descendants of some of these women living today.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Thomas and William Seymour had three children: Emma, Joseph and Jane. There are many descendants today.

<sup>29</sup> Cawthorne's watercolour 'View on Kangaroo Island', PXD 42 f.48, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, represents some of this menagerie.

<sup>30</sup> Lashmar Lagoon.

verdure being chiefly broom, grass, stick, prickly-bush, heath and scrub—the bullock dray brought us to the residence of the head light-keeper<sup>31</sup> at Cape Willoughby, amidst solitude profound, and about half a mile or more from the Lighthouse, whose grim aspect added little to the scenery in the way of beauty. About midnight went to the Lighthouse to see the machinery wound-up, the lamps trimmed &c., and was much pleased with all I saw.

Saturday.—Strolled about, was duly cautioned about snakes—upwards of 120 were killed in the first year of the building of the Lighthouse;<sup>32</sup> they are everywhere; three dogs were killed by them just before I arrived. These with the hawks, guanans [*sic*], and blowflies, are the pests of the place. As to the latter, they exceed credibility. The guanans come boldly and seize a chicken, and even when caught will not release their bite.

Sunday.—Visited a bay on the S.E. coast. All around the Cape there are no sandy beaches, all round or oval granite boulders, from one pound weight to tons. They are most tiresome to walk upon. Found a great variety of sponges. The country around is a dense carpet of matted grass. Saw the gigantic rollers that set in, which, when they break, cause the very earth to vibrate. Perhaps some of those grand undulations had come from the South Pole, and, like the lives of many, finished their career upon a wild, barren and unknown spot.

Monday.—Inspected the Lighthouse from top to bottom. Everything very clean and orderly. It is a huge circular pillar, built of large blocks of granite, and the facings of the door and windows of a fine yellow sandstone. There are five flights of stairs containing 100 steps. The light-room is all iron and plate glass, in the centre of which stands a revolving iron stem containing 15 lamps, with parabolic reflectors. This stem is moved round at different rates, when required, by clockwork machinery. Five lamps form a group, and produce a concentrated flash of great brilliancy. Outside the light-room is an iron railing, and at the panes of glass, at night time, thousands of insects of

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<sup>31</sup> William Anderson Cawthorne's father, Captain William Cook Cawthorne, was, variously, a master mariner with the East India Company, involved in viticulture in the Cape Province in South Africa and in charge of lightships in the Hoogly River in India. He gained the position as head keeper at the Sturt Light in 1851 when the light first began operating, and remained at Cape Willoughby until 1862, when he was dismissed after he was accused of being drunk on duty and of molesting the teenage daughter of the second keeper. He died in 1875 and is buried at Brighton. Cawthorne painted at least one watercolour of the Sturt Light, still in the possession of the family. A copy is held in the Mitchell Library, PXB 213 f.4.

<sup>32</sup> Nat Thomas and his son-in-law William Seymour were among a number of locals who helped build the Lighthouse, using stone quarried from the crevasse to the south of the light. Both Thomas and Seymour worked as keepers at the Light: Thomas as second keeper, Seymour as third keeper between 1851 and 1858. Thomas may also have worked as a relief keeper when full-time keepers like Captain Cawthorne took annual or special leave, even after he had been dismissed. In 1857 Thomas certainly replaced the Captain during his summer leave. Thomas resigned as light keeper in 1857, citing ill health as the reason; by then he and Captain Cawthorne were feuding. Thomas and Black Bet also gave assistance to the survivors of the *Osmanli* which was wrecked on a reef off Cape Linois at D'Estree Bay on the evening of 23 November 1853. Captain Corbett subsequently claimed that the light was not operating that evening, prompting accusations that some of the Kangaroo Islanders were no better than wreckers. Nat Thomas was on duty that evening.

all kinds flutter and congregate together. There could not be a better place for an entomologist. The Lighthouse stands on the very pitch of the Cape, exposed to all the fury of the elements. Massive as it is, the rain has managed to penetrate on one side so as to cause the walls to drip with dampness.<sup>33</sup> This must be seen to before it becomes a serious matter. A coat of stucco, I believe, is the only remedy. The tanks also have given way, so that in the event of the drought of water, the nearest spot would be eight miles. The present distance is about a mile and a half, over a huge hill. Water is water at Kangaroo Island.

Tuesday.—Started on a trip to “Nat’s,” *via* Antechamber Bay; very squally and rain. Picked up two nautili,<sup>34</sup> and some fine specimens of radiatæ.<sup>35</sup> Tried to have a pop at some ducks.<sup>36</sup> Three were shot. Was nearly bit by an ugly black snake; 50 yards further brought us upon another, which we killed; it measured six feet. Took a few sketches;<sup>37</sup> returned in the evening, having walked about 20 miles.

Wednesday.—Dined off a Cape Barren goose. Two of these creatures actually alighted near the head lightkeeper’s house, and strove to get into the garden. He then went out, caught one by the leg, and shot the other. Very fine eating. Killed a snake at the hole where the water is obtained; he was eating small frogs. Saw several “emu wrens;” and tried to shoot some young hawks.

Thursday.—Shot a fine eagle that had done sundry damage amongst the poultry. One of the keepers<sup>38</sup> brought in a live guana and a wallaby which he had caught in his snares. Assisted in taking out some potatoes, which grow very fine on Kangaroo Island, as well as *all* vegetables.

Friday.—Went fishing off the rocks; caught a few “leather jackets,”<sup>39</sup> “rock fish,” and “sweeps,”<sup>40</sup> but no crawfish.<sup>41</sup> It is a rather dangerous

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<sup>33</sup> The Light was only four years old when this was written. Dampness and foul air in the sleeping quarters when the keepers were on duty are given as the reason for Nat Thomas’s resignation as Third Keeper at the Light.

<sup>34</sup> Cephalopod, a floating octopus, of the genus *Argonauta*. The beautiful paper-thin shell is from the female. Kangaroo Island is still well known as a place to find them, which come ashore after a gale. Although the locals will usually not divulge where to look for them, on Cawthorne’s evidence Antechamber Bay might be worth a look.

<sup>35</sup> The writer’s interest in shells and rocks again points to Cawthorne’s authorship. See *Observer*, 29 December 1855, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Again, good circumstantial evidence that the writer is William Cawthorne. He was a member of the No. 1 Company of the Adelaide Volunteers, the West Adelaide Rifles, where he held the rank of Captain. He won many prizes for his shooting over the years. See his Obituary, *Observer*, 2 October, 1897, 35d.

<sup>37</sup> No doubt ‘View on Kangaroo Island’, PXD 42 f.48, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, was one of these sketches.

<sup>38</sup> Nat Thomas seems not to have been working as third light keeper at this time: if he had held this position, surely Cawthorne would have identified him. Might this individual be Nat Thomas’s son-in-law William Seymour, whose wife Mary certainly possessed the skills necessary for snaring wallabies.

<sup>39</sup> Many varieties in South Australian waters, probably one of the *Meuschenia* species.

<sup>40</sup> *Scorpididae*, commonly caught near reefs.

<sup>41</sup> Another small detail which points to Cawthorne’s authorship of this piece. In his novel *The Kangaroo Islanders* he represents his Islanders not only setting off on a crayfishing

employment, as the seas run very high, and you rarely return without a good “ducking;” lost hooks and lead. As the poor keepers have no regular communication with town, they are frequently very hard up for the want of provision; salt meat of course is the staple article, varied with goat and pork when “Nat” can spare them. When I arrived, they were smoking hops for tobacco, and using roasted peas for coffee. Wallaby hunting and fishing require a great deal of time, more than they can spare, and, besides, very precarious; a bit of fresh mutton or beef would be a delicacy.

Saturday.—Christmas day—All hands in their best, in honour of the day. Fowls and green peas, and plum pudding—no despicable fare; the fatted calf that had been treasured up for many a day.<sup>42</sup> Long conversations upon Christmases past and Christmases future. Visited, in company of the head light-keeper, the light at midnight.

Sunday.—The dray from “Nat’s” came to take away our goods for the morrow, as we intended to start for Adelaide; our “watch” drawing nearly to a close.<sup>43</sup> Magnificent night; saw an eclipse of the moon.

Monday.—Rose a little after 4 p.m. Had breakfast, and started for the beach at Antechamber Bay, eight miles away. About 11, pushed off; fair wind until we reached the middle of the passage, when down came a roaring N.W. breeze, and we had to reef, and run back for our lives. Landed in the afternoon, greatly annoyed; had something to eat, and laid down on the beach with a skid for a pillow and tried to sleep.

Tuesday.—Wind dead against us, walked down to the beach; a <sup>r</sup>big standing in, and anchored. “Nat” went off and secured a passage; was soon bundled on board. It was the *Phantom*, from Melbourne, with about 90 diggers; weighed anchor and beat up, with a strong wind blowing, and rain. In the evening off Rapid Bay; the diggers very jolly; singing, recitations, and drinking, and a little fighting; vessel infested with rats; a female one with three little rats had her residence just under my ear, which rather prevented sleep.

Wednesday.—The Tug took us in tow early. A little after noon we bid adieu to the good brig *Phantom* and her kind captain.

The last infliction was an additional shilling as the fare up in the Port-cart, because it was races!

Through the want of space we have been necessarily brief. The botany, entomology, natural history, and geology of Kangaroo Island would be most interesting topics to the scientific, but a longer stay than a casual visit would be required to treat upon them.

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expedition to Cape Willoughby (‘on which the first lighthouse built by South Australia was erected’: 82) but also nearly being swamped by the waves in their whaleboat, losing their gear. The representation of the episode in the novel is obviously based on Cawthorne’s own experience fishing off the rocks to the north of the light, ‘just beneath the beetling crags ... of Cape Willoughby (p. 82).

<sup>42</sup> Surely a telling detail: only a son can make this remark!

<sup>43</sup> ‘Diary’ 1849–1859, B230, Mitchell Library, entry for 30 December 1852, reveals that the ‘we’ here refers to Cawthorne and his mother, who returned to Adelaide with him.

Through the kindness of the head light keeper I am enabled to subjoin the following. For his other meteorological observations there would be no space:—

The highest and lowest register of the Thermometer, taken in the shade.

1852	At 10 A.M.		At 3 P.M.	
	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest
May	66	56	65	54
June	72	51	72	52
July	57	43	61	47
August	60	49	61	47
September	68	52	69	57
October	68	52	74	54
November	82	52	87	60

Adelaide, 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1853.

## Appendix Two

### A Christmas Trip W[illiam].A[nderson].C[awthorne].

*Register*, 15 February 1859, 3b-c

#### TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER

SIR.—I belong to that class of animals that migrate annually; accordingly I flew southwards to that region that the “Ancient Mariner” that slew the bird of good omen visited.<sup>44</sup> Alack-a-day! My adventures were almost as unfortunate as his.

I went to Kangaroo Island. Now there is nothing like selecting that *terra incognita* for a visit, for this simple reason, that there is every probability of never getting there, and when there is every possibility of never returning. That is as it should be—real romance. A Christmas trip ought to be something out of the common; none of your railway ups and downs—your 50 miles a day certainty, but a good compound, like a Christmas pudding—a mixture of ease and care; of fear and security; of water and land; of clams and storms; of thunder and lightning, &c.

Determined to be on the right side, three of us took a passage six weeks beforehand for the enchanted island.<sup>45</sup> Behold us in a row, on the 20<sup>th</sup> December, with carpet-bag in hand, impatient to be off, when the dread news came—“can’t take you.” Directly the thermometer fell. One bird flew away to the north; the other wandered about, with an insane notion of getting to the island, by walking in circles, as poor lost wretches in the bush do; the other rushed to the Port to get a vessel, by hook or by crook, but all in vain. It was quite certain the quickest way to get there was by taking passage for Mauritius, and waiting for the mail steamer that calls at the island. However, one more try, and that’s the last. Addressing the master of a certain cutter that was advertised not to go to Kangaroo Island, I said in tones, as if they were the last effort of nature, “Will you give us a shove across to the island?” I thought I would ease the awful demand by speaking of the matter as if it were crossing a puddle of water—a sculling of a dingey from one side of a creek to the other—and not an affair that might involve a delay of several days, splitting your sails to pieces—snapping your bowsprit off in the jerking seas of the “Passage,”<sup>46</sup> and shipping your anchor on the coast. Like a true sailor, the man said “Yes;” and to sail in 2 1/2 hours—whew! Short time to hunt up my wandering friend. After rushing up and down to Adelaide, and playing hide-and-seek between the termini, my friend, at last, had the inexpressible pleasure of arriving just too late, and seeing the distant sail of the vessel that bore away the last remnant of a would-be Christmas party. In despair, he packed off with his baggage, drank a bottle of soda-water, and sang “Heigho!

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<sup>44</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798) begins with an ‘Argument’: ‘How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold country towards the South Pole’.

<sup>45</sup> Cawthorne uses this phrase in his novel, on p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> Backstairs Passage.



Says Roly.”<sup>47</sup> In the meanwhile we reached Snapper Point,<sup>48</sup> where, in a small fleet of windbound vessels, we dropped anchor; and taking my wallaby rug, I pricked for the softest plank and went to bed on deck, a gentle shower just imparting that necessary moisture that made the “rug” both supple and clammy. In the morning I had but one sensation, viz. that of being an inanimate plank—my legs seemed to be stringybark, my arms pitchpine, my head a piece of sheoak, and my body a gum log; when I walked it was as animated post and rail.

However, there are trifles to be smiled at. On looking round I found we were one of a regatta down the Gulf; the Orient ahead, dressed out in stunsails and skyscrapers, and making an admirable start. I watched her gradually disappear with mingled feelings. May she reach her destination in safety! The other craft were all scattered about, yet all bound one way. As luck would have it, we beat them all.

Dinner was announced by the steward, cook sailor—all in one man—in true coasting style, with a pipe in his mouth and preparing some “baccy” in his hands. We had chops à la caboose, soup flavoured with smoke-de-coal, salt cheval, and other delicacies. I partook very sparingly, for reasons private and confidential; for I felt certain qualms—not of conscience—that I need not further particularize, but somehow are invariably associated with the waves of the sea—a sentimental affection of the epigastrium.

Now it happened that my fellow-passenger was fresh from the Orient, and, contrasting the cuddy table of the one and the companion-hatch of the other, oh “what a falling off was there!” Nevertheless, as philosophers, we adapted ourselves to circumstances, and did justice to the viands before us.

Several attempts were made to ship me on board one or two of the craft which were more immediately bound to ports nearer the island than the one I was in. The master regretted having brought me, and would gladly have seen me at Jericho than on his decks. But it was no go; I stuck to him like another Jonah. At 9 p.m. we landed at Yankalilla, took a comfortable bed on a huge sail, which, as it was rolled away in the shape of a letter S, one had the peculiar delight of lying in the form of and on hills.

In the morning I took a walk on the beach down to the gorge,<sup>49</sup> which presented as aspect much the “worse for wear”<sup>50</sup> as regards the picturesque as it did 15 or 16 years ago. Now endless rows of bush fence, then beautiful glades of wattle and gum-trees; but this is rank heresy against “20 bushels per acre,”<sup>51</sup> I’d better keep my opinion to myself.

Took stroll into the country and observed that the crops looked very promising. It is remarkable that all the houses in this district are well-built of

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<sup>47</sup> From the traditional English Folk Song: ‘A Frog he would a wooing go,/Heigh-ho, says Roly,/A Frog he would a-wooing go,/Whether this mother would let him or no,/With a Roly, Poley, Gammon and Spinach,/Heigh-ho says Anthony Roly’.

<sup>48</sup> The southern end of Port Willunga, inside the Aldinga Reef.

<sup>49</sup> Cawthorne painted at least one watercolour of the gorge and had camped there previously: see Belcher DGA 58, #42, Mitchell Library.

<sup>50</sup> William Cowper (1731–1800) ‘History of John Gilpin’ (1782): ‘A hat not much the worse for wear’.

<sup>51</sup> The Yankalilla district was famous for its crop yields through the 1850s and 1860s, supplying grain for the Victorian goldfields.

either brick or stone, and present a favourable contrast to the villages of the north, which are generally built of wood.

Slept on board, the wind almost blowing a hurricane. The big ropes played bass viol; the lesser, tenor and second; the signal-halyards alto; it shrieked, and whistled, and roared all night. The vessel rolled in ecstasies, and the waves clapped their hands with delight.

The while away the time several yarns were spun, and apropos to the weather, shipwreck and loss of life were the themes. "Did you ever see a living man eat up by fishes?" asked the skipper. "No," I replied. "Well, I did. It was in one of the fiords of Norway that a drunken sailor, having determined to go ashore, stripped himself and jumped overboard. Directly several boats put off to catch him. I was in the bows of one, ready to grab him, but just as we were nearing him he held up one arm, and it was covered with herrings! Mad with pain he plunged about, rose and sank, and finally disappeared. During his struggles I could see that every part of his body was covered with herrings, devouring him alive. He looked like an old piece of plank, stick full of barnacles or spines. At the time there was a great shoal of fish in the bay. It was a sight I shall never forget." "Well," said the mate, "I saw a similar case off the coast of Scotland, where two dogfish attacked a fisherman and bit out his stomach. I was one of the party that brought the poor fellow to the shore. He lived a few hours after the brutes attacked him."

After thus pleasantly chatting for an hour or two I turned in, having the everlasting ripple under the counter of the vessel for a lullaby.

With permission I will give you a further account of my trip in a future letter.

I am, Sir, &c.

TRAVELLER

## A Christmas Trip

W[illiam].A[nderson].C[awthorne].

*Register*, 28 February 1859, 3b

### TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER

SIR—I beg to forward you a continuation of my Christmas trip.

In the morning I rose early, but the wind was still blowing with all its fury, that it became even a doubt whether we would visit the shore though the distance was extremely small.

There was an anger in the wind, a ferocity, a spitfireness, that indicated, like a terrible scold, no giving up of the point. We could see this in the blasts that came screaming and howling over the hills of Yankalilla, where the uplifted and gaunt arms of the gum-trees seemed striving in vain to stop its headlong impetuosity collecting whirlwinds of dust out of dusty Normanville, and then bouncing over the sandhills, leaping the sea with a bound, giving the *Kangaroo* a tussel in passing that almost shook her brains out; then gee-up for the wide, wide ocean, leveling little vessels to their beam ends, smashing sticks and rags of the big ships, and gamboling in mad pranks till sheer space exhausted its fury. I was out of all patience with the wind; it had already blown for 30 hours without ceasing, and there was every appearance of it blowing for weeks and months in the same direction, and if so, not the remotest hope of reaching my destination.

During the morning I got ashore; but the time it consumed was marvelous—the rate of progress was about one inch in ten minutes; and we were as often to leeward of the cutter as we pulled to windward. “Pull,” said the skipper, “pull, or we shall get blown to the devil.”

Reader, have you ever been blown off the land? Well, that was what the skipper meant. A whaleboat got blown away from its ship, and by a miracle it reached land eighteen hundred miles from its first position. Of the sufferings endured it need not be mentioned. Other instances are when the lost or blownaway reach islands and turn cannibals or Robinson Crusoes. “Blown away” is supposed to be the method by which the South Seas Islands became peopled; but the majority are food for sharks. These contingencies might happen again, for once blown away who was to fetch us? There was not a soul that could help us.

These pleasing reflections nerved the rowers, and at last we reached that splendid structure the Yankalilla Jetty! The accommodation for passengers consists of five blocks nailed on one of the piles. The first step is about three feet, the next nowhere, the next on the inside, the next brings you under the floor of the jetty, from whence you can communicate your whereabouts through the cracks. You finally ascend by being clutched by the hair of the head or anything else that might protrude.

There are steps, it must be acknowledged, but they are so situated that at low water they are dry, and at high water just in the break of the sea, so that no boat

dare approach. Either way they never can be used. Of course passengers are generally landed in the old style, viz., by beaching the boat.

To be cuddling a fat gum-tree, in the shape of a pile between heaven and the sea, is “such a getting up stairs”<sup>52</sup> that few like to venture on.

While on the Jetty, I might as well finish it. It is built on the wrong side of the creek that runs into the sea; it is in very shallow water. It is feared it is fast approaching that state that a table comes to when its legs get the *delirium tremens*. The tramway, owing to its narrow width, is dangerously near the edge. About 12 months ago a sailor, in pushing the trucks along, slipped, and over he went into the sea, and was much injured. When I was there, a bag of wheat slipped off the truck, and, of course, dashed into the sea. In fact, anything falling off the truck must go into the sea. It is built for that purpose, and it answers its end admirably.

As there was no prospect of getting away that day or night, I hunted up a nice bush in the sandhills that commanded the sea and sky—a very pleasant prospect under the circumstances—and made it my home. As for lodging in the village public-house, it was not to be thought of.

“Man wants but little here below;”<sup>53</sup> so a sandhill help all my hopes and fears. What a fuss some people make about a bed when out traveling. Little do these poor bedridden individuals know of the luxury of a sandy bed. It has mobility, flexibility, elasticity, and indurability. It is homogenous—granulous; in a word, like lying in vermicelli. It has all the elements of a good bed. I speak confidently, for I have slept on seaweed wet and dry—on stones—on the earth—on bushes—on boards—on a bag of coals—on horseback (very uncomfortable)—on cargo—on watercasks; but of all these I prefer—sand.

Towards midday there was evidently a change. The sky was ominous; and those who remember Christmas Eve will, no doubt, vividly recollect the rain, the wind, the lightning, and the thunder.

“Bear a hand,” said the skipper; “let’s on board. I don’t know what to make of the weather, but here I dare not stop; if the wind comes from the westward I am done for.” So down I hurried—down that delightful fat gum-post at the end of the jetty, and was soon on board; the fact was, we were going out to sea to meet it. “House the top-mast, set the storm-jib, double-reef the main-sail, and get the anchor up!” Such were the delightful preparations for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. There was a sudden lull; the sea assumed a leaden hue, and the sky got as black as ink, enlivened with some preliminary flashes behind the curtain of clouds that seemed to veil the worst.

Surely there is life in a ship! The cutter seemed to anticipate the storm. There was an uncertainty about her movements; she pointed her bowsprit to the N.W., then gently turned to the S.W., then S., then E.—in fact, all round the compass. Could ship speak plainer? Did she not say “the storm would be unsteady and fierce.” The safest place, therefore, as the skipper observed, was to be well off the

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<sup>52</sup> From a traditional hornpipe, a nineteenth century dance tune. Another source has a traditional dance from the village of Headdington in Oxfordshire. See <http://uk.geocities.com/mmorriso1uk/dance.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, “The Hermit”, Chap. viii. Stanza 8, ‘Man wants but little here below, /Nor wants that little long’.

land. Oh! How I pitied the poor wretches ashore. In Adelaide, for instance, with all the chances of verandahs blowing down on their heads, chimney-pots tumbling about, frightened horses bolting, the lightning striking their houses, streets flooded, children lost, fences smashed, and no sleep all night for the howling of the wind among alleys and yards and corners. Here, on the contrary, we had a snug craft, a mast that would bend to no storm, and rigging fit for a seventy four.<sup>54</sup> When the first gust hit us, the Kangaroo, in the most graceful form imaginable, made an obeisance so deep to the coming storm, as to be the very profundity of modesty and politeness; in fact, she would not rise until gently assisted by the captain letting go the peak halyards. She rose, she bowed, she dipped, and finally settled at an angle of 45°. The night had now closed in amidst all the sublimities of unparalleled lightning, thunder and wind. As our luck would have it, the anchor had got foul of the forefoot of the cutter, and the chain jammed somewhere. Nearly an hour was thus consumed in the most blinding light, and then in the intensest darkness conceivable; their work reminded one of looking for black pins in a coal-hole.

Midnight having arrived, and I had really no business to meddle with the domestic affairs of storm, rain, hail, and all that, I turned in for a few hours.

The morning disclosed the fag-ends of the great battle of elements of the overnight—a ragged sky, a disconsolate sea, a moaning wind. However, by 8 a.m. we were within a couple of miles of Cuttlefish Bay, Kangaroo Island, and landed about 10 miles from the point I had to be landed, which was again eight miles from the goal of my journey. Though so near, the wind fell, the tide set dead against us, we gradually drifted away, and once more I felt all the madness of impotence.

Between 11 and 12 o'clock on Christmas night I was silently landed in darkness and solemn stillness—something like the last act of a funeral procession—somewhere on the beach at Antechamber Bay. “Good night, good night;” and the men hurried off as from a cursed spot. I heard their voices afar—like weird spirits speaking in the air, but saw nought, as darkness covered all. I then scrambled about for a stick, slung my traps *à la Chinois*,<sup>55</sup> as there was no cab at hand, and slowly, and to some extent painfully, marched to the tune of “Mawpawk, Mawpawk” of the neighbouring thicket. Now, there are two very objectionable things in the island, especially the eastern end—wild pigs, as savage as the boars of the olden time, and deadly black snakes. Now these gentlemen are always about, and the route I had to take was decidedly too near their habitations to be pleasant—especially being totally unarmed.

A certain gentleman who has occasion to visit this part of the island from time to time generally has a sailor behind him with a lance or a harpoon, so if he is boarded by a couple of hogs he runs half a yard of cold steel through their hides; but as every man is not killed who goes to battle, so I, after a most wearisome and toilsome walk through scrub, sand, stones, and rock, besides half a hundred-weight on my shoulders, arrived safe and sound at the Sturt Lighthouse at about half past 2 on Monday morning, being the seventh day from Adelaide.

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<sup>54</sup> That is, a ship of the line, a third rate, with seventy four guns. See p. 92.

<sup>55</sup> To carry luggage on a yoke or shoulder piece, as Chinese coolies are supposed to.

TRAVELLER.  
*(To be continued.)*

*Register*,<sup>2</sup> 9 February 1859, 3b-c

TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER.

Sir.—A couple of hours' rest made me feel all the better after the previous toil of the night, for however pleasant a midnight trip may be on the main land, a midnight trip amidst the scrub of Kangaroo Island (where more than one poor soul has laid himself down and died)<sup>56</sup> is the very last place that I should recommend for a lover's stroll, or for peripatetics in general.<sup>57</sup>

Although it was not Christmas Day, I still fared off Christmas pudding—a pudding by the way—hear it ye cooks and Soyers, ye epicures of Europe—made with “wallaby fat” instead of bullocks' fat, *alias* suet, a substitute that beats the hitherto orthodox component “all to fits,” by which, as I am at a loss for cookery figures of speech, I wish to convey the superlative degree of excellence. Wallaby suet is richer, enters into the composition of the pudding thoroughly, and imparts a flavour difficult to define, but delicious and superior to the ordinary article. Amongst fatty ingredients wallaby suet holds the first rank, neither beef nor mutton, nor (as is very generally coming into use) horse suet, is to be compared to it.

Necessity is the mother of invention; and we all know, from the Latin proverb, that the stomach is an M.A. of cuisine. Strange are the dishes, therefore, to be found on the bushman's table—iguano<sup>58</sup> pie, iguano roast and boiled, flanked with a condiment of thistles, wakeries<sup>59</sup> in three states—live, roasted and fried—wallaby venison, salted wallaby tails, black swan eggs, and now and then a Cape Barren goose.<sup>60</sup> But the most unique and extraordinary of all dishes—which, had the Roman emperors known, they would have undoubtedly circumnavigated the globe to procure—is that wonder of wonders, the Australian anteater—half bird half animal—having the exterior organisation of the one and the interior organization of the other. It lays eggs; it beats its brother, the duck-billed platypus, or paradox, inside out. It is a curious freak of nature. To look at it, it is the most disgusting creature, if not absolutely loathsome. Imagine a long mole

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<sup>56</sup> Cawthorne refers here to two well-known incidents when people were lost in the Kangaroo Island scrub. See Note 200, p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> The Kangaroo Island scrub country obviously had a fearsome reputation in the days before widespread clearing. William Giles wrote the following letter to George Fife Angas from Kingscote, dated 6 March 1839: “[Kangaroo Island's] interior is a vast mass of wood, which costs at least £25 per acre to grub up and clear away, before the plough & spade can be used at all, from what I can see and hear, there are not five hundred acres in the whole Island, that are not more or less over-run with this deadly Foe to the Farmer & Grazier. I would not go a Mile into this dense mass of Underwood, on any account: the native women lead the Islanders through this bush more many Miles, but no one else would venture into the Interior. (PRG 174/1/1377)

<sup>58</sup> Goanna, which is a corruption of the Spanish *iguana*.

<sup>59</sup> Footnoted by Cawthorne, with the note ‘stupidly termed by the *mainlanders* “grubs”. He has in mind what are now known as witchetty grubs, the large wood-eating larva or pupa of several kinds of moths and beetles. In his novel *The Islanders* he makes much of the Islanders' eating wakeries. See Note 229, p. 90.

<sup>60</sup> Cawthorne's note: “The *Carsopsia*’. He means *Cereopsis novæhollandiæ*.

covered with spines, feet inverted—*i.e.*, the sole up and the back down—earthy in colour, and the movements of a huge worm. It burrows in the ground, and lives upon ants, grubs, &c.; but then, what is all this to its delicious flavour? In that it combines two creations, so it possesses the concentrated flavours of both; all the virtues of flesh and fowl; all the juices, gravies, shortness, softness, and lusciousness of both blended and united in this superexcellent titbit. When skinned and cooked, it presents a roll of *marrowfat*! Peacocks' brains, buffalo humps, *beche-le-mer* [*sic*], swallow nests, Hartebeast [*sic*] bilton<sup>61</sup>, [*sic*] &c., &c., are as dust in the balance when compared with this last dish of nature. Such, then, are some of the more prominent delicacies of the island.

I had determined to visit the Rabbit Point, or Cape St. Albans<sup>62</sup>—a point in a direct line from the Lighthouse above three miles, but by the way you are compelled to go at least six. To avoid this detour I struck away through the scrub—a procedure that involved the most laborious, and even hazardous, undertaking. The scrub varies in height from four feet to 20, and above. In some parts it is brown; in the valleys, a mass of bush overlaid with wild vine, interspersed with kangaroo furze, and forming an obstacle that frequently made me reascend a hill or traverse back a mile or more of ground. In other places it would be formed of a forest of “narrow leaf,”<sup>63</sup> so intricate as to be in many places quite impervious, the foliage as well being densely thick overhead. Under these circumstances how can one keep a straight course? And it is a very easy transition to understand how people get lost. Having been more than once temporarily bamboozled in dense scrub, on the River Murray, <sup>64</sup> in the hills, and on the island, I can well imagine the feelings of the doomed. In my own case, all notion of place and distance seemed first to mingle and then to vanish. The mind came possessed of one horrid idea—that all nature was leaves and branches. But as faint heart never won fair lady, so the best plan is to wipe the perspiration off your brow, buckle up your strength and push on, for it won't do to cry out, as a celebrated Hindley-street shopkeeper once did, all one summer's night, on the Mount Barker-road, “Host, host, host!”

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<sup>61</sup> Before emigrating to South Australia the Cawthorne family spent a decade or so in Cape Province, South Africa, where Captain William Cawthorne seems to have been involved in horticulture and viticulture. On 13 August 1840 he wrote to the Colonial Manager of the South Australian Company seeking employment as a ‘cultivator’. See BRG 42, Series 37. It is clear from Cawthorne's unpublished diaries (now in the Mitchell Library, Sydney) that he spoke Dutch and had been much affected by his time at the Cape.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey Manning has the following: ‘On Kangaroo Island, named by Captain Thomas Lipson in March 1850 after a town in Hertfordshire which was named for an eminent citizen who suffered martyrdom’. Geoffrey Manning, *Manning's Place Names of South Australia* (Adelaide: the Author, 1990) 273. Captain Lipson was Collector of Customs, Harbour Master at Port Adelaide, a member of Trinity House, later the Marine Board, and in the vicinity in 1850 overseeing the erection of the Sturt Light at Cape Willoughby. The town of Lipson and Lipson Cove (both to the north of Tumby Bay on Eyre Peninsula) are named after him.

<sup>63</sup> *Eucalyptus cneorifolia*, a variety of mallee-like eucalyptus very common on the island and forming characteristic road-side avenues, especially on the eastern end. The tree is the source of the eucalyptus oil still distilled for sale.

<sup>64</sup> Cawthorne published a fascinating account of at least one of these trips, on which he not only travelled to the Murray but to Burra, his description of which at its heyday is justly renowned. See the *Observer*, 29 March 1856, 3a–c.



Owing to the tiring nature of the ground, the walk turned out to be a severer one than anticipated. I noticed the beautiful grass-tree, which in the island grows to the largest size; one of the sticks measured over 12 feet, and undoubtedly there were many more of larger dimensions.<sup>65</sup> To this must be added a magnificent tuft of green leaves, on a stem from 10 to 12 feet high. The grass tree grows in patches of several acres, and forms a most striking feature of the Australian landscape.

On the very pitch of Cape St. Albans I found several "blowholes." Owing to the strata being nearly vertical, the waves have washed out large and very deep crevices and gullies, and into these, with the most incredible force, the huge billows sweep, and then far away from the actual entrance, up will jet a stream of water 30 or more feet high, to the astonishment of the spectator. Being unconsciously too near one of these "blowholes" as they are termed, I got such a ducking, and a fright at the same time, that I will not be in a hurry to forget one of Dame Nature's squirts. Although the orifice could not have been more than 18 inches by 3 or 4, the amount of water thrown up was immense.

After looking about for a gold field,<sup>66</sup> then not finding that for a coal-field, and unsuccessful in this for a copper mine, killing a couple of iguanos and one ugly black snake, I returned to head-quarters, which, under the circumstances, I thought the most comfortable place in the world. So much are all our notions of comfort and discomfort relative.

A fine day happening I went on a fishing excursion under the Rabbit Point;<sup>67</sup> as the course lies close along the perpendicular cliffs of that iron-bound coast, some caution is required in making your fishing-ground, this being rendered doubly necessary in the present case, as we had but two to pull and a very heavy boat.<sup>68</sup>

After catching nearly 50 blueheads<sup>69</sup> (a fish weighing from 2 to 4 lbs., beautifully coloured, and with yellow fins) and four sharks, which latter gentry cause us a good deal of trouble, as they would not die even after the most terrible stabs given with an old bayonet that we had in the boat, kept for that purpose. I laid down in the head-sheets, and watched the majestic rush of water as it madly dashed itself within a few yards of us against that terrible strong wall, sending its spray at least 60 feet in the air, and spouting through the various blowholes already alluded to.

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<sup>65</sup> *Xanthorrhoea tateana*, the grass tree, commonly called yakka or blackboy. For many decades KI yakka gum was harvested for export, where it was used for varnishes, munitions and explosives. Cawthorne completed a watercolour of the plant, a version of which can be found in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, although he is not acknowledged as the artist.

<sup>66</sup> Cawthorne is alluding here to a controversy in the newspapers in which he played a part: he wrote to the *Register* to mock the claim that Old Bet had found gold somewhere in the scrub country of the Dudley peninsula. See *Register* 15 September 1856, 3d.

<sup>67</sup> This name has disappeared from modern maps. Given the nature of the coastline, it is not likely that Cawthorne took a small boat south around Cape Willoughby. No doubt the name once marked a feature to the north of Cape Willoughby towards Cape St Albans.

<sup>68</sup> The keepers at the Sturt Light had available a whale boat which in summer was kept to the north of the lighthouse but in winter was taken to Creek or Antechamber Bay and moored in the Chapman River.

<sup>69</sup> Probably the Blue-throated parrot fish (*Pseudolabrus tetricus*), a very common rock fish which lives around reefy areas of the southern coastline.

It would be hardly credited that two sailors, being ignorant of the inland track to the Lighthouse, thought, as a matter of course, that the shortest cut to the Light would be by way of the coast, and accordingly went. It took them about eight or ten hours; and how they escaped with their lives is difficult to say, for they had to climb several hundreds of feet of rock, hauling each other up, then sliding down dreadful chasms, leaping ugly fissures, &c., &c. It ultimately became, not a journey to the Light, but a struggle of life and death.

The pull back to the Light was unpleasant, owing to a heavy swell that kept forcing us into the very verge of the surf's embrace.

The time having now expired that I should be called for, it became a matter of anxiety how I was to get off the island. Day after day passed and not a sail appeared. I had one alternative—to induce an old islander that lived in Antechamber Bay<sup>70</sup> to take me in his boat to Yankalilla, and then to walk overland to Willunga, and so to Adelaide by the mail.

For want of space I must necessarily omit many interesting incidents of my stay on the island. Amongst other matters, a cargo of lawyers came in windbound, and, after popping their guns, managed to leave a legacy in the shape of a bush fire.

By break of day on the 7<sup>th</sup> January I was on my way through scrub and sand to the place where the boat was beached, and at 8 a.m. I was launched on the uncertain waves of Backstairs Passage with a fair but strong S.E. wind.<sup>71</sup> When in the great tide “rips,” causing a fearful jumble of the sea<sup>72</sup>—not a regular roll, but huge broken hummocks—our little boat seemed absolutely no bigger than a walnut shell. With a skilful hand at the helm, and no increase of wind, there was not much to fear; still one could not forget that under that huge mass of clear, green, foaming sea, as it came toppling and tumbling on you several feet about your head, there were 30 fathoms of water. After rounding Cape Jervis, it blew half a gale, and right glad was I, when having weathered both seas and squalls, I jumped ashore on the beach, on the main land, at 2 p.m. Immediately I shouldered my small wallet, and commenced my long march to Adelaide, along the beach through Normanville, Yankalilla township, on to Myponga, at which place I arrived late in the afternoon very tired. However, there was no remedy. I started off again, determined to reach Willunga by the morning of the next day—so all through the hills over a road I had never seen before, down Sellick's<sup>73</sup> Gorge—a frightful ugly place at night—and then, mistaking my track in the dark, arrived almost done up at an Aldinga hotel a little before midnight, having walked over 30 miles, and sailed 30 miles, and had nothing to eat but a couple of hard boiled eggs and some water out of a creek. In four hours more I was on my way to Adelaide, where I duly arrived in the course of Saturday morning, safe and

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<sup>70</sup> Obviously Nat Thomas, who Cawthorne met and described at some length in his previous travel article to KI (*Observer*, 15 January 1853, 3d–e), immediately preceding this piece.

<sup>71</sup> That bloody wind blows all through January, as windblown KI campers and boaties will know.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Flinders was the first person to write about the confused seas of the Backstairs Passage, in his *A Voyage to Terra Australis*.

<sup>73</sup> ‘William Sellick (or Selleck) ... obtained the land grant of sections 425 and 430, Hundred of Willunga in 1847. A Post Office was opened there in 1851’ (Manning: 1990: 282).

well.<sup>74</sup> I since heard that the men who brought me across the Passage never got back for a whole week. I conclude with a piece of advice for future visitors, with the remark of the old islander when arranging about the boat—"What business have ye to come down here-away without your own craft?"

I am, Sir, &c.

W[illiam] .A[nderson]. C[awthorne].

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<sup>74</sup> 'Diary 1849–1859', B230, Mitchell Library. See the entry for 9 January 1859: 'Returned from Kangaroo Is<sup>d</sup>. after three weeks absence ... walked night and day—oh! Such a walk—to get home'.

### Appendix Three

**'Zyne' [William Anderson Cawthorne]  
'Port Gawler'  
*The South Australian* 1 January 1847 6a.**

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN.

SIR—At Christmas time, like many others, I always make a short tour. Taking up the map of the place, I at once pitched upon the Gulf—first, to visit Port Gawler, catch a few crabs and fish, shoot wild fowl, and very possibly run down an emu; then proceed up and explore the coast, shoot black swans, and so return, well laden and well satisfied with the expedition.

Christmas morning, at about ten, A.M., myself, two boys, and a friend, in a leaky patched up “dingey,” were beating up against a strong breeze towards the Light Ship. At eleven, however, I beached the boat on one of the dry sand flats, and it was not till half past six, P.M., that the tide rose sufficiently to allow us to start. Steering a N.N.W. course, with the wind on the quarter, through five inch water and one inch sand, for many miles, at nightfall I made the southern point of Port Gawler. As we were all very tired, our only thought was to get ashore and sleep; but the appearance of the place was very far from inviting. Instead of a nice creek, where small craft could sail, I saw nothing but one continuous sand flat, guarding the entrance. Instead of a deep water approach, I had already been ploughing up the sand for more than a mile, *and at high water too*. I giped the boat, and stood in. At eight or nine we were hard and fast, about three quarters of a mile from the nearest shore; having anchored the boat with stakes, as we had not anchor, we sat down to tea, dinner, and supper, all in one. Next morning we found our boat high and dry. about a mile or more from the nearest floating water; after trying in vain to move her, we were obliged to “smile at misfortune”. All that day we spent in the burning sun, which, with the reflection of the sand, was intolerable. Half a dozen pelicans were the only inhabitants of that dreary place, with a few hundred “sand pipers.” Night came, and of course the tide also; all prepared for a shove off—wind blowing a gale in the gulf, the roaring of which was rather unpleasant; but the treacherous sea was far better than being stuck in the mud.

At a quarter past eight, the water reached our boat, *one inch deep*; at ten, it was two inches; we wanted six or seven. All that time we had been sitting in the perishing cold, giving vent to forbidding thoughts; nevertheless, we shoved and tugged until quite exhausted, and moved the boat three inches. The tide, then, to our horror, retired, and in another hour we were dry. Gracious! How should we get back to Adelaide? One of the boys shed a tear, as he thought of his home, and expressed a fear of never seeing his mother again. I slept in the boat that night—the rest ashore, and a most miserable night I had of it.

Before sunrise, we were stirring, and, as things had come to a crisis, two alternatives only remained—either to abandon the boat and our goods and walk to Adelaide, or go into the country and get assistance. We tried first the latter,

and, immediately after sunrise, we were on the tramp through dense scrub to the nearest station. In going, we had the misfortune to lose one of the boys; although it was only for a short time, our mental anxiety was extreme.

At seven A.M., we found Mr. E. Having explained the occasion of our visit, a couple of hours afterwards we engaged a small party (six), who were going out emu hunting, to go with us and carry the boat to some likely point where the tide would be sure to rise. Having arrived at the boat, we pitched everything out; but but, alas! Two or three men took hold of the stern to slew her, and broke clear off the boat a part of the keel, and ripped up the gunwales. I could not help but groaning in spirit. After a long and tiresome haul, we got her to the appointed spot, paid the men, and were again left alone on the inhospitable shore. All that long day we had to sun ourselves; at night, we made a fire in the mangrove and prepared for staying, as there was but a *chance* of getting away. But at night the one inch tide flowed—then two inches, three, six, and we were off. How our hearts leaped as, at every quarter of a mile, we found deeper water. Standing on our larboard tack for some miles, we 'bout ship, and found we had only gained a few yards to windward of the point we had left. We now hauled in shore, and, in two feet of water, cast anchor (six bricks tied together; in the morning, we had brought them from Mr. E.'s). At midnight, we out oars and pulled, steering by a star. At half past three, P.M. of the next day, we were at the Port, and shortly afterwards at Adelaide.

In conclusion, I would beg to offer the following for the guidance of others inclined to wander:—Port Gawler is a bay, running inland from the line of coast good two miles, in breadth about four to six miles, and having sand flats all round it to the extent of one, two, and three miles. The bay itself is a mere sand flat—so level that an inch of water covers the whole, and at half tide it is perfectly dry. The beach has every indication of having been laved with waves in former years. Quantities of shells are there; but all blanched and old. No creek of any sort runs *in it* or *from it*. Three miles to the southward, on the Gulf coast, several large mangrove creeks penetrate deep into the land, with sufficient water to float small craft, when they are inside.

To visit Port Gawler, or any other part where sand flats abound, a boat ought to be anchored a long way off shore, with an individual in her to shove her in at high water, and to push her off at low; otherwise, it is impossible to know when to get off when once on. The tides being so uncertain, I think the Port will never be accessible to vessels drawing more than four inches water; in fact, it is fast verging into a vast sandy plain.

ZYNE

## Appendix Four

**Lines suggested on the Loss of the “Goulburn” off Kang. Is<sup>d</sup> when 3  
men & a youth were drown’d.  
July 1856.**

### **A558/A4 Mortlock Library of South Australiana**

Cawthorne’s note: “The Goulburn” was towed by the “Melbourne” when she broke adrift in Backstairs Passage—about Midnight. The “Melbourne” tried in vain to find her in the dark.

1.

Loud howl’d the storm, the lightning flash’d  
The pitiless rain beat, the black\* waves dash’d [\*wild]  
Heaven’s powers met in elemental strife  
Were launch’d forth with destruction rife.

2

Horrid night—fearful, black, death-veil’d night  
Clos’d o’er Kangaroo’s frowning heights  
Shrouding every point with awful gloom  
Shadowing forth portentous doom.

3

Battling along\* with the engulfing wave [\*strong]  
Oh! For help—to help those sailors brave  
Vain wish, for sea and squall on squall succeeds  
And mortal anguish reads the breeze.

4

Struggling with superhuman power  
Abandoned, helpless at midnight hour  
Oh! God, was there ‘ere such dire distress  
As all night on that doom’d ship did press.

5

See! How she rolls in the awful sea  
No mast, no sail—drifting helplessly.  
Aid’s near—but alas! No aid is given.  
She sinks, deserted by man, & heav’n.

6.

Through the long hours of that bitter night  
Show the fleeting beams of the “Sturt Light”.  
Speechless horror mark’d each livid face  
As they gazed on the intervening space.

7  
They launched the boat, but of no avail  
Dash'd to atoms, by the dreadful gale  
AS this last hope, is swept away  
To heav'n ascends their cry of agony.

8  
She fills—her stern to her grave declines  
Now glares the eye of Death—see them shine  
The helpless crew, in their wild despair  
Curse the hard lot that drove them there.

9  
The prow is all that now remains<sup>75</sup>  
And like [a] huge monster in dying pains  
She rolls, she reels, her very frame doth bend  
Her last throes on conflict—soon will end.

10  
Mark! For [?] the last—the farewell sight  
Brothers adieu, finish'd is your fight.  
They hold with con [?] [they] grasp the stern [?]  
Till her stern death at length releases them.

11  
Once more she rises in the air  
And dumbly speaks of untold despair  
Then plunges downwards beneath the wave  
And buries all in one common grave.

12  
Alas! Alas! For the dead—the grave  
For whose untimely end we mourn  
To friends their memory is doubly dear  
And claims\* the sympathetic tear.      \*[We yield]

Cawthorne's postscript: "The Goulburn" was on her first trip, intending to go up the Murray—she was built of iron—& divided into water tight compartments. The conduct of the Capt. of the "Melbourne" seems inexplicable he seems to have done nothing to rescue the crew. The night was very stormy.

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<sup>75</sup> Cawthorne's note: 'So described by an eyewitness—the bow remaining above water for some time & the men clinging to it.' He is obviously reporting his father's description of the sinking.

## Appendix Five

**‘The Curse of Ooroondool’  
William Anderson Cawthorne  
Manuscript poem<sup>76</sup>  
A558/A4 Mortlock Library of South Australiana**

When Ooroondool after creating all the country of the Lower Murray, departed to the Western Realms,—for the purpose of forming other lands, he having arrived as far as Kangaroo Island, looked back, & saw his two wives swimming after him, this being contrary to his expressed commands,—excited his wrath; he cursed them, & transformed into the stony islands [the Pages]; still to be seen at the entrance of Backstairs Passage.

### NATIVE LEGEND

#### I

Those little isles, those little isles  
For ever bath’d in [speamo?] smiles  
The Ocean’s unwearied song  
There re-echoes in thy caves along.

#### II

Far away, in a lonely sea  
Stern, sublime, & solitary  
Where storms howl, & Zyphers\* [sic] sigh,     \* Zephyrs  
Tis there the unknown islets lie.

#### III

The sun rose on Creation’s morn,  
And ne’er shone on so fair a form  
As then they loom’d from the rocky deep  
The Monarch of the Day to greet.

#### IV

Hark! The tide lapping on the shore  
Of those islets, with ages hoar [?]  
The rippling wave is heaving, swelling  
Up to the wild Sea Birds dwelling.

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<sup>76</sup> This fragment of a poem is in Cawthorne’s handwriting and is a first draft written in some haste. Various marginal corrections and alternatives by the poet are also given. This is obviously a version of the Ngurrunderi ‘Dreaming’, crucial to Ngarrindjeri people of the Lower Murray.



## V

Hark! The murmur of countless birds  
 Booming o'er the restless surge  
 Awakening in fancy's ear  
 The last wail of the doom'd ones' fear.

## VI

Oh! Ooroondool, thy potent spell  
 In dire transformation fell  
 As love pursued [?] thee to western realm  
 [unfinished stanza]

## VII

As the native from some headland scans  
 And thinks of the prophetic man &  
 Sees—Dancing on the island wave  
 The ghosts of the departed brave.

## VIII

Twirling aloft his magic spear  
 Invokes with superstitious fear  
 The spirits above,—of whose fell mien  
 The islets vanish to realms unseen.

## IX

When he hears the death omen cry  
 When the moon gleams in the eastern sky  
 Silv'ring o'er with tremulous say [?]  
 The wild surges ever varying\* spray      \*tossing

## X

When the Native from his Wurley fire  
 Listening to the aged sire  
 Sees gleaming in the moonlight sheen  
 Angry Ooroondool's shapeless fiends

## XI

The seals on slippery rocks recline  
 Add their fitful pathetic whine  
 And in a weird & wild refrain  
 Join the (hollow) whisperings of the main.

## XII

The sailor shudders with alarm  
 As he sights the islets in storm or calm  
 (For) the moon when darkening on the wane  
 Dim figures glide along the main.

XIIa

The glittering sands upon the beach  
Attest a thousand years in each  
The countless waves upon the sea  
The furrows of thy [their?] antiquity.

XIII

The emigrant from the lands\* afar      \*realms  
Sees the Islets—land! Hurrah!  
Safe from Ooroondool's dread curse  
She's gone, the winds her tale rehearse.

XIIIa

The mother sat upon the deck  
The father watches the glowing speck  
The children prattled of playing grounds  
The sailor windward looked and frowned.

XIIIa alt.

The family on that fatal night  
Retire to rest praying for the light  
The Captain with uncertain step  
Begins his dreary midnight watch on deck.

XVI

The rocks, the cliffs, the valleys deep  
Wet with the dew, scorch'd with the heat  
There on Natives self made trial  
To sum [?] the years of those twin isles.

XVII

See the tall shi, she strives in vain  
With sails all set, to reach the main  
Held by some secret influence  
She never more shall\* sail from thence.      \*can

XVIII

Hither, thither, nearer, farther  
The torrid [?] eddies toss and whirl her  
Thus the Gnomes, with magic powers  
Sport awhile, then shriek—"She is Ours."

XVIIIa

Hear the wailing and moaning\* seas   \*mourning  
Utter murmuring wrathfully & sadly  
A mysterious symphony  
To the woes of the unhappy.

XIX

Man trod but once, the cursed soil  
Where the (dire) fiend rose in turmoil  
He tries to leave the haunted shore  
But the spirits cry “never more”.

XX

Bay by day and night by night he waits  
And years\* the hour of his escape \*watches for  
But the sleepless fiend[s] as before  
Laugh and shriek “never, never more.”

XXI

Then to heav’n he breathes his last sigh  
And on the rocks lays down to die  
Fixing\* his gaze from the hated shore \*Turning  
He faintly whispers “never more”  
[alt. line: And sighs ah! never, never more]

XXII

Then with supernatural motion  
On heaves the mighty ocean  
The re-echoes from cliff to shore  
[alt. line: Reading along the rugged shore]  
The cruel words “never never more”.

XXIII

The “Porlee” playing\* in the foam   \*sporting  
Flies in terror to his “gunya” home  
And lispng\* tells the tale of fear   \*stamm’ring  
Of piteous moans that greet his ear.

XXIV

Hark! The low chant as it sweeps along  
Now loud now deep, now soft, now strong  
In\* the “murka” for the dead, the lost,   \*Tis  
The ghosts appeas’d, to rest are fac’d\*   \*forc’d

XXV

The green surf curls among the isles  
Whiten their beach in silvry\* smiles      \*sparkling  
Clasp them in their snowy arms  
The spirits mock in wild alarms

XXVI

Away, upon the breeze is borne  
From setting sun to rising morn  
[alt. line: From midnight until early morn]  
Bounding from crag to reedy pool  
The voices of great Ooroondool!

XXVII

From the lands of the setting\* sun      \*western  
When he arrives, who is to come  
Then Angry Ooroondool's dire curse  
Shall with blessings be reversed.

[not numbered, unfinished stanza]  
Scattered across the angry sky  
The flying scud  
The barred moon rose with ghostly light  
And lit the horrors of the night.

XXVIII

Then shall the Native learn to see  
In those twin islets of the sea  
A tale of their untutored fancy  
A legend of simplicity.

[not numbered]  
I go Great Ooroondool exclaims—  
O'er Marma's<sup>77</sup> boundless wat'ry realms  
My mystic nature lead me  
Beyond the bound'ries of the sea.

[not numbered]  
When I've other lands created  
And when then thy brothers initiated  
When thing dark [?] then they leave  
There a white spirit to receive.

---

<sup>77</sup> Appended to a manuscript copy of three poems by William Cawthorne held in the Mortlock Library (A558/A4) are several pages of definitions, including 'Marma', given as 'Gods of the Sea/Rising Sun'.

[not numbered]  
Disembodied spirits there  
Cloth'd in a white skin and fair  
Shall learn wonderful mystic arts  
Which to your children shall impart.

[not numbered]  
Then untold ages shall roll away  
When these rocks are hoar and grey  
When your fires at your camp are so bright  
Shall equal in number the stars of night.

[not numbered]  
Then like a sea gull capering\*   \*pelican appearing  
Then as a cloud upon the sea  
As the smoke of a great Palti

[not numbered]  
This is the sign which learn and know  
Shall reap [?] on the other life bestow  
Gindoo shall veil his face  
All the doom of his misled race.

[not numbered]  
Anon naught like thou has seen  
Neither in [?]       nor in dream  
          vision it shall be  
That monster of another sea.

[not numbered]  
Twill come filled with men pale white  
In all knowledge, pow'r and might  
To live upon their native soil  
And labour with patient [?] toil.

[not numbered]  
But I must go to the sunset sea  
My wives stay ye behind me  
Nor my wishes to disobey  
Then [?] will be thy penalty.

## Appendix Six

### 'A Midnight Reverie in the Bush'<sup>78</sup> by 'Australian' Adelaide, 1883

#### Extract

57  
With the 'Milmenrura' hiding<sup>79</sup>  
Skulking, —nowhere long residing,  
Long forgotten years transpiring [*sic*],  
But the white man's laws untiring  
And 'MULDIRA'<sup>80</sup> dies.

58  
Down the Murrumbidgee swarming,  
On the Rufus tribes are forming,  
Down the Murray slowly riding,  
At the junction some arriving,  
The Overlanders.

59  
All the night they hear resounding  
Native Paltee and his howling,  
Noiselessly obey the warning,  
For the conflict of the morning,  
With the Rufus Tribe.

60  
When the day is scarcely dawning,  
Every bush and brake is swarming,  
Not a single sound escaping,  
With their signs of ambush making,  
With native cunning.

---

<sup>78</sup> This is part of a manuscript poem to be found in the Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/11. It has all the appearance of a first or single draft, written in haste. Its interest lies in Cawthorne's listing of a number of the more notorious episodes in the history of contact in South Australia: only a brief extract is given here.

<sup>79</sup> The name of the Ngarrindjeri group responsible for the massacre of the survivors of the *Maria* wreck in 1840.

<sup>80</sup> The name of a Ngarrindjeri man hanged 29 March 1845 after being convicted for the murder of John McGrath. Cawthorne witnessed his execution, which he reports in his diary 30 March 1845 with considerable sympathy, noting that he should join the Society for the Total Abolition of Capital Punishment. See Foster 1991: 58.

61

Hear the stockman's merry whistling,  
When around him,—deadly bristling.  
Lo! A thousand spears are quiv'ring,  
Yelling forth—'there's no delivering  
From death, O white man!'

62

All in deadly strife are fighting,  
Purposely with shouts affrightning [*sic*],  
That the cattle by dividing  
May be captured by those hiding  
In the confusion.

63

With the jagged spear infixing [?]  
Ghastly ragged wound inflicting  
With barbarous tortures slaying  
From exhaustion only staying  
From their cruel work.

64

Soon a host of horsemen riding,  
Natives fearing—skulking, hiding,  
Then in fight again engaging,  
Until ten to one assuaging  
The white man's vengeance.

65

Grimly on crude [?] gibbets swinging,  
See their corpses, rearing—grinning,  
On the rocks their shadows flinging,  
While the locusts' [?] piercing singing  
Adds wilder horror.

66

On the Sabbath Day reclining,  
Neath the hot sun brightly shining  
On the sacred volume musing  
Of the life to come perusing  
At Yankalilla.

67

Murmured prayer to Him ascending  
With emotion strong contending  
Vague presentiment arising  
But a passing vain surmising  
Such his solemn thoughts.

68

Up the sandy ridges moving  
Silent gestures each step proving  
Subtle cunning never failing  
With their feet so deftly trailing  
Their deadly spears.

69

Slyly on their victim creeping  
Slyly sneaking while he's sleeping  
Through grass and bushes crawling  
Swift his death blow on him falling  
Ah! Poor Meredith.



## Appendix Seven

### An extract from Cawthorne's 'Literarium diarium'

**Wednesday, 12 July 1843** ... I recollect a little while ago seeing a native dress himself and, perhaps, it may be worth description and a place in my Diarium.

There was going to be a fight and a [...] dressed himself in his tuck and bitter [sic]—I mean his paint and oil. One I observed decorate himself in the following manner—he was sitting down amongst ever so many of them, at once he jumped up and threw off his blanket and stood in perfect nudity before unobserving friends. He began first by mixing some red ochre and fat and then making stripes like ribs all across his chest and belly, then he called his wife who made similar stripes across his back and legs. Then he made long perpendicular stripes on his thighs and rings on his arms. After this he oiled his back part and [he] [the] front [part well]. He commenced decorating his face by striping it with red and white, the first in oblique lines as well as the [second] varied white dots which made him look more like a ghost and a devil combined together than a human being. But this was not sufficient. The next act was to mix a quantity of ochre and grease and to put this with the help of his wife [in his] hair! After rubbing it in well and adding a little more fat and red ochre it seemed to be finished and presented a head of hair—Red!—as paint could make it. After this his lubra (wife) took a bunch of feathers and interwove them in his back hair so that it hung loose on the back part of his neck. Then a finer and smaller bunch of cockatoo feathers [Cawthorne's note: 'The crest of the cockatoo, yellow fringed with white.] bound on a neat little stick was stuck perpendicularly into his hair in the front part. After this the 'Woowoodteyadla' of which I have [presented] a rough sketch, to explain it better, was entwined with the front hair and [...] thus suspended on the forehead—then the 'Moodlata', a 'nosestick', was stuck through the cartilage of the nostrils—which is about two inches long and generally a fine kangaroo bone properly [rounded]. After all this was the 'yoodna' tied round his loins, this ornament is nothing else than a few slips of an opossum skin strung together—a bit of twine [or anything else]. Lastly the 'Taara' or [net] band [Cawthorne's note: This is sometimes made of human hair.] about 5 feet long was [carried round] the lower part of the belly and tightened. [While] all this was done a few white stripes of chalk were added here and there and the remainder of the ochre and chalk [daubed] over him.

[Cawthorne then includes a sketch, with the note: The natural size of the 'Woowoodteyadla' A and B are kangaroo teeth with hair, grease, the ochre, etc.]

His body was fully ornamented to his satisfaction and he gave a glance at the bystanders expressive of vanity. But now he was to accoutre himself. He soon picked up his Woculta (shield) which was also painted with circular lines of red on a white ground, then the 'Uwinda' (large spear) was also put into his left hand, besides a wirri or two, which is a stick of about 2 feet long, with a knob at the

end, to fight with in close combat. But now he took his 'Midlah' and 'Cootpee', the throwing spear of about 4 or 5 feet long, which is propelled by the Midlah, a handle, and placed then in his right hand. Lastly the '[Tento Yantanddanaloo]' was grasped exultingly—this is a stick of about 2 feet and more long, very hard and no knob, and used entirely in single combat by striking alternately on the shoulders and held till one of them is dead or stunned. Now 'Goorongnabeer' (the native's name) gave a glance at all present, same time rattling his shield and flourishing his spear, cutting a warlike caper or two, and uttering a yell to be heard ever so far off to the envy of all near. The young girls thought he looked exquisite as he strode with gigantic steps towards the field of battle. The young men envied him exceedingly, the old men turned their heads away at the thought of bygone days.

Would you not like a picture of 'Groongnabeer', a painted one to illustrate the above account—aye? Wish [you] get it. [Hooky walken?] first. Oh Mr Impudence you can't make one, that is the reason why you don't give us one. You can't paint one. Pshaw, I won't deign to answer you. Nincompoop.

## Appendix Eight

This Letter to the Editor by William Cawthorne was published in the *Register*, Wednesday, 24 April 1844 and reprinted in the *Observer* 27 April 1844. The letter records a remarkable protest from 'King John' about Kaurna commitment to country, about police behaviour. The letter also suggests Cawthorne's sense of his responsibility to his Indigenous friends and acquaintances.

NATIVE FIGHTS.—A correspondent, who signs himself "C" and lately gave us an account of the coroborees [sic] of the Adelaide natives, forwards the following, as he says "at the request of King John," and begs its insertion in our columns:—On Monday last, a fight was to have taken place between Moorundee, Encounter Bay, and Adelaide natives. Great preparations are accordingly made. The young men were all in high glee—tattooed, oiled, and all ready for the coming amusement, but unfortunately they were disappointed; for, as they were marching to meet each other on the old Bay road, three horse-police very unceremoniously stopped them, and had every spear and shield laid on the ground, and broken up. The astonishment that this act produced, was truly remarkable—some looked quite aghast, others were confounded, and many for the moment, I dare say, doubted their senses, whether such a collection of beautiful uwindas and shields, kylabs and midlahs, were absolutely to be destroyed. After this summary manner of settling old differences, whether right or wrong, the cry was "What for policemen do this? When white man fight in Adelaide, black fellow say nothing. When blackfellow fight, policeman come break spears, break shields, break all; no good. What for you no stop in England?" "But what for you fight," I asked. "What for? Me tell you," replied King John, "but no good tell you. You write in the paper and tell white man what for we fight. Before white man come, Murray black fellow never conic here. Now white man come, Murray black fellow come too. Encounter Bay and Adelaide black fellow no like him. Me want them to go away. Let him sit down at the Murray, not here. This is not his country. What he do here? You tell Captain Grey to make Murray black fellow go away, no more fight them. Adelaide and Encounter Bay black fellow no want to fight; but Murray black too much saucy. Let him stop in his own country." At the conclusion of his speech, all responded "very good." It seemed to be the sentiments of all, and it was the cause of their intended battle; and I think that either the Murray blacks ought to be sent away to their own country, or that a proper understanding be affected between the belligerent parties. Unless this is done, there will sure to be fights and affrays. Some such measure ought to be adopted for the general peace, for the manner in which their annual quarrels are quelled, is far from being satisfactory and permanent; they may destroy the spears and disperse the parties, and so effect a peace for a while, but this is not doing away with the evil. Spears can easily be made again, and their desire for revenge is but increased by disappointment. But independent of these considerations, I think it is but just that some attention should be paid to their grievances; for although trivial and unimportant as they appear to us, still in the eye of the natives they are of first importance, so much so, that force of arms can only settle the matter. And it would be more in

accordance with their notions of right and wrong, were such a measure adopted, than the off-handed manner in which the police decide their differences; galloping up—peremptorily demanding and breaking their “all in all”, and then threatening them into the bargain with the jail and manacles. This is not the way to raise our character in the estimation of the Aborigines—the reverse is the consequence—contempt and disgust. And, in conclusion, I would say, if we are desirous of establishing a right feeling between the natives themselves, let their complaints be listened to and redressed as far as possible; and let force alone be applied in cases of absolutely necessity.

## Appendix Nine

### The Pelican Island

James Montgomery

#### From Canto Fifth

Nature's prime favourites were the Pelicans;  
High-fed, long-lived, and sociable and free,  
They ranged in wedded pairs, or martial bands,  
For play or slaughter. Oft have I beheld  
A little army take the wat'ry field,  
With outstretch'd pinions form a spacious ring,  
Then pressing to the centre, through the waves,  
Enclose thick shoals within their narrowing toils,  
Till multitudes entangled fell a prey:  
Or, when the flying-fish in sudden clouds,  
Burst from the sea, and flutter'd through the air,  
These giant fowlers snapt them like musquitos  
By swallows hunted through the summer sky.

I turn'd again to look upon that isle,  
Whence from one pair those colonies had issued  
That through these Cyclades at freedom roved,  
Fish'd every stream, and fed on every shore;  
When, lo! a spectacle of strange extremes  
Awaken'd sweet and melancholy thoughts:  
All that is helpless, beautiful, endearing  
In infancy, in prime of youth, in love;  
All that is mournful in decay, old age,  
And dissolution; all that awes the eye,  
And chills the bosom, in the sad remains  
Of poor mortality, which last awhile,  
To show that life hath been, but is no longer;  
All these in blended images appear'd,  
Exulting, brooding, perishing before me.

It was a land of births. — Unnumber'd nests,  
Of reeds and rushes, studded all the ground.  
A few were desolate and fallen to ruin;  
Many were building from those waste materials;  
On some the dams were sitting, till the stroke  
Of their quick bills should break the prison-shells,  
And let the little captives forth to light,  
With their first breath demanding food and shelter.  
In others I beheld the brood new-fledged,  
Struggling to clamber out, take wing and fly  
Up to the heavens, or fathom the abyss.  
Meanwhile the parent from the sea supplied

A daily feast, and from the pure lagoon  
Brought living water in her sack, to cool  
The impatient fever of their clamorous throats.  
No need had she, as hieroglyphics feign,  
(A mystic lesson of maternal love),  
To pierce her breast, and with the vital stream,  
Warm from its fountain, slake their thirst in blood,  
—The blood which nourish'd them ere they were hatch'd  
While the crude egg within herself was forming.

It was a land of death. —Between those nests,  
The quiet earth was feather'd with the spoils  
Of aged Pelicans, that hither came,  
To die in peace, where they had spent in love  
The sweetest periods of their long existence.  
Where they were wont to build, and breed their young,  
There they lay down to rise no more for ever,  
And close their eyes upon the dearest sight  
On which their living eyes had loved to dwell,  
The nest where every joy to them was centred.  
There, rife corruption tainted them so lightly,  
The moisture seem'd to vanish from their relics,  
As dew from gossamer that leaves the net-work  
Spread on the ground, and glistening in the sun;  
Thus when a breeze the ruffled plumage stirr'd,  
That lay like drifted snow upon the soil,  
Their slender skeletons were seen beneath,  
So delicately framed, and half transparent,  
That I have marvell'd how a bird so noble,  
When in his full magnificent attire,  
With pinions wider than the king of vultures.  
And down elastic, thicker than the swan's,  
Should leave so small a cage of ribs to mark  
Where vigorous life had dwelt a hundred years.

Such was that scene; the dying and the dead,  
Next neighbours to the living and the unborn.  
O how much happiness was here enjoy'd!  
How little misery had been suffer'd here!  
Those humble Pelicans had each fulfill'd  
The utmost purpose of its span of being,  
And done its duty in its narrow circle,  
As surely as the sun, in his career  
Accomplishes the glorious end of his.

1828

## Appendix Ten

### Various sources relating to George Meredith

There follows below annotated selections from the historical record that represent 'poor' George Meredith. The man who emerges is a complex figure with a dark and violent past; Cawthorne's representation of an introverted and troubled gentleman has some basis.

H.P. Moore, in his 'Notes on the early settlers in South Australia prior to 1836', in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, Session 1923-4, Vol. XXV, 1925, quotes the following extract from the *Perth Gazette*, 3 October 1835 entitled 'Two English lads conducted to the settlement at King George's Sound by the Natives of the White Cockatoo, Murray and Will Tribes'. If this story has some basis in fact, then Cawthorne's representation of 'poor Meredith' as victim rather than participant must be questioned.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August last two English lads, named James Newell and James Manning, reached King George's Sound from the mainland opposite to Middle Island, after experiencing the most bitter privations for nearly seven weeks on the main, and about two years on the islands in Spencer's Gulph. The account given of their perilous adventures runs thus:

They sailed from Sydney in the month of August, 1833, in the *Defiance* schooner,<sup>81</sup> of about twenty-five tons burthen, laden with provisions for trading with the sealers on the islands on the southern coast of Australia, and bound to King George's Sound and Swan River, commanded by Mr. George Meredith. They were wrecked in September of the same year on Cape Howe Island. They went in a whaleboat with the commander, one man, and a native woman,<sup>82</sup> to Kangaroo Island; the remainder of the crew (six men) determined to make for Sydney, and accordingly started in another whaleboat; they never heard what became of them. They did not reach Kangaroo Island until February, 1834, being five months, during which time, they state, they were doing their utmost to make the passage. It is to be regretted that we have not here a more detailed statement of the manner in which these five months were occupied (it is idle to imagine that they were so

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<sup>81</sup> The *Defiance* was the vessel owned by George Meredith Sr. of Oyster Bay, Tasmania, stolen by his son George Jr. in 1832.

<sup>82</sup> This is probably Maggerlede, or 'Bumblefoot Sal'.

long a time “doing their utmost to make the passage”).<sup>83</sup> They established themselves on Kangaroo Island, built a house for the commander and his native wife, and made a garden. In September, 1834, a black man, named Anderson,<sup>84</sup> arrived at Kangaroo Island in a boat from Long Island,<sup>85</sup> with another black man, named John Bathurst. Manning and his companion took a passage with them to Long Island. They were obliged to continue working in the boat, sealing, to obtain their provisions. In November, 1834, George Meredith, their commander, whom they left on Kangaroo Island, came to a bird island,<sup>86</sup> where their boat happened to be, and accused Manning of having robbed him of £4 10s., and, with loaded pistols, and the assistance of Anderson, took from him the sum of £4 10s. There was another whaleboat on Long Island, with four men in her, named George Roberts, John Howlett, Harry and William Forbes. In November, on Boston Island,<sup>87</sup> the people in this latter boat caught five native women from the neighbourhood of Port Lincoln; they enticed two of their husbands into the boat, and carried them off to the island, where, in spite of all remonstrance on the part of Manning, they took the native men in Anderson’s boat round a point a short distance off, there they shot them and knocked their brains out with clubs. Manning believes they still have the women in their possession, with the exception of Forbes, whose woman ran away from him shortly after they were taken to the island. Two of the women had infants at their breasts at the time their husbands were murdered; an old woman was compelled to take them away, and carried them into the bush. Another native endeavoured to swim to the island to recover his wife, but was drowned in the attempt. In January, 1834, a small cutter called the *Mountaineer*, commanded by Evanson Janson, arrived at the island, in which vessel Manning paid £3 for his passage to King George’s Sound. Janson being always drunk, by some misunderstanding Manning lost his passage. Both Manning and his comrade frequently begged of Anderson to land them on the main, that they might walk to King George’s Sound, but he refused. When Manning landed on Middle Island from the *Mountaineer* he had £50 in his possession in Spanish dollars and English specie. This money Anderson stole; he was seen counting it with a man

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<sup>83</sup> In those missing five months, Meredith and his men raided the Port Phillip region of Victoria, abducting four women and two young men from the Point Nepean area. Meredith then sold the women to sealers on the Bass Strait islands. Newell and Manning were obviously not willing to tell the *Perth Gazette* everything about their exploits.

<sup>84</sup> John Anderson, or Abyssinia Jack.

<sup>85</sup> Long Island might be Thistle Island, near Port Lincoln, but there is also the island of the same name in the Recherche Archipelago, Western Australia. Perhaps Meredith and his party had been intending to go sealing as far west as Western Australia. Certainly by the mid-1830s seal numbers were vastly reduced on the eastern islands.

<sup>86</sup> Probably an off-shore island where mutton birds nest. If Long Island is Thistle Island, then this may refer to the Althorpe Islands, where the Kangaroo Islanders used to collect mutton birds. The Althorpes are described in Cawthorne’s novel.

<sup>87</sup> This seems good evidence that the ‘Long Island’ mentioned here is in fact Thistle Island. It is a long hard sail from Western Australia to Port Lincoln into the prevailing winds: did the whaleboat in question sail from Kangaroo Island to Western Australia and back in about three months?



named Isaac, who had also another lot of money rolled up in canvas.<sup>88</sup> Early in April, Janson, the master of the *Mountaineer*, arrived at the island in a boat with six men and two women, the vessel having been driven on shore in Thistle Cove. About the end of May five of these people left the island in the boat, without any provisions, intending to proceed to King George's Sound. On the 23rd June, Anderson, at the solicitation of Manning, and his fellow-traveller, James Newell, landed them on the mainland, but would not give them a charge of powder. They subsisted chiefly on limpets and on roots of grass, but were sometimes for several days with little or nothing to eat. They found at all times sufficient water, although they never left the neighbourhood of the coast. Arrived at Henty, Oyster Harbour, on the 9th August, reduced almost to skeletons, having almost lost all power of articulation.

It is interesting to know that these lads owed their safety entirely to the humane treatment they met with from the natives of the White Cockatoo, Murray, and Will-men tribes. From the moment they fell in with them, their exertions were unabated to restore them sufficiently to enable them to accomplish their journey; they fed, and almost carried them at times when, from weakness, they were sinking under their sufferings. This is a return which could scarcely have been expected from savages who no doubt been exposed to repeated atrocities, such as we have related in the previous narrative. Indeed, to the acts of these white barbarians we may now trace the loss of some valuable lives among the Europeans and more especially that of Captain Barker,<sup>89</sup> which took place within a short distance of the scene of the atrocities. We are happy to hear that Sir Richard Spencer, Government Resident at King George's Sound, as soon as he was satisfied of the services the natives had rendered these lads, issued a small portion of flour to each native, and gave presents to those who were most active and kind in the journey. The gentlemen in the settlement, to their credit, be it observed, were very liberal in their subscriptions to obtain for the lads blankets, clothing, and other necessaries. To the natives they gave a bag of rice and sugar.

The general vagueness of this report, more especially the five months' delay unaccounted for, had left an impression unfavourable to the lads' statement; but on reference to the *Sydney Herald* of the 24th October, 1833, two months subsequently to the departure of the *Defiance* from that port, we find the following paragraph:—"The schooner *Defiance*, Captain Meredith, which has left Sydney about a month" (the variation in the lads' statement of a month, after so long a lapse of time, may be reasonably accounted for), "on a sealing voyage, was unfortunate wrecked on the coast, about fifteen miles below Twofold Bay—all hands saved. The schooner *Blackbird* has gone in

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<sup>88</sup> Many of these details are confirmed in the Albany Court records, 13, 19 August, 7,8,9 December 1835, held in the Battye Library, Perth. See Cumpston 1986: 131–135. In September 1835 John Anderson and Issac Winterbourne were charged before three justices with having stolen certain goods from Manning, but both were acquitted.

<sup>89</sup> See Note 243, p. 94.

search of the wreck. The *Defiance* had about £400 worth of property in her when the accident occurred, and was not insured.”<sup>90</sup>

It is to be regretted that our informants were not more minute in their inquiries; a little acuteness in the inquiry would have opened to us the conduct and characters of those employed on the southern coast as sealers by our neighbours in Van Dieman’s [sic] Land. Passing, as they represent they did, along the coast in a whaleboat, with ample time for observation—five months—although we cannot doubt the fact, indeed, believe it to be fully confirmed, leaves an hiatus in the narrative which he gratifying to some of our romantic readers, but is annoying to us, searching as we do for facts. A further inspection of our files of the Sydney journals may throw more light upon this subject, which our leisure, in a future number, will enable us to disclose.

The habits of the men on the islands to the southward, by whaling or sealing vessels, have long borne the character given them by Manning and Newell; it appears, therefore, deserving of some consideration by what means their practices can be checked, as future settlers in the neighbourhood of Port Lincoln will be made to, expiate the crimes and outrages of these lawless assassins.<sup>91</sup>

The ‘five months delay’ that so bothered the author of this report in the *Perth Gazette*, a delay that ‘leaves an hiatus in the narrative which ... is annoying to us, searching as we do for facts’, can be explained by the next chapter in George Meredith’s life. The period in question is September 1833–February 1834.

During his time as Commandant of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement, George Robinson recorded several accounts of a sealers’ raid led by George Meredith in the Point Nepean district on the Victorian coast that resulted in the abduction of four (and possibly more) women and the deaths of at least two men, which probably happened some time in the second half of 1833.<sup>92</sup> Over several

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<sup>90</sup> In fact the *Defiance* was wrecked in Bass Strait in August 1833. See Ian Hawkins Nicholson, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures Sydney Vol, II 1826 to 1840 Parts I, II and III* (Canberra: Roebuck Books, 1963) 103.

<sup>91</sup> It is not surprising to discover that when settlers did move to the Port Lincoln district between 1839–1849 there was considerable conflict between the settlers and the Aborigines, necessitating the sending of a military contingent to Port Lincoln in 1839, led by Lieutenant Hugonin. Casualties were considerable.

<sup>92</sup> Diane Barwick notes that this date is ‘independently confirmed by the Bunurong man Yonki Yonka. On 6 June 1841 William Thomas noted in his journal that Yonki Yonka had rejoined the Bunurong after “eight” years as a captive of the sealers. Yonki Yonka was obviously the unnamed Bunurong youth described in the diary of Thomas’s colleague Dredge on 16 June 1841: he, another lad and “nine” women, one of whom afterwards escaped, had been seen near Arthur’s Seat (north of Point Nepean) about “five” years before when a sealing crew induced them into a boat, forced them aboard ship and put to sea. This lad was taken to Preservation Island but later boarded a ship at Launceston hoping to get home. Instead he was taken to Western Australia,

years Robinson not only heard and recorded a number of versions of this story but it seems he prepared a report for the Van Diemen's Land Governor Arthur about the events that (Robinson thought) led directly to Meredith's murder.<sup>93</sup> It is very clear from several of the entries that Robinson knew the Meredith family and was well aware of their social standing in Van Diemen's Land. His strongly-worded denunciation of Meredith's behaviour may have something to do with Robinson's own insecurities about his status: the Meredith family were patricians in the claustrophobic Van Diemen's Land.

Furthermore, Meredith's abduction of the Port Phillip women would have longer term repercussions. J.H. Wedge wrote on behalf of the Port Phillip Association to the Van Diemen's Land Colonial Secretary John Montagu requesting that George Robinson be instructed to find the four women abducted from Point Nepean on

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where he was hired as a stockkeeper; he purchased a fare to Adelaide with his savings and then worked his passage to Melbourne and then rejoined his relatives'. Diane Barwick, 'This most resolute lady': a Biographical Puzzle', *Metaphors of Interpretation: Essays in Honours of W.E.H. Stanner* (edited by Diane E. Barwick, Jeremy Beckett & Marie Reay, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1985) 212. Yonki Yonka may thus have been one of the young men accused of Meredith's murder.

<sup>93</sup> There are several official reports and correspondence about Meredith's abduction of the Port Phillip women from Point Nepean, suggesting the events were well known not only to the early settlers of the Melbourne district (or Bearpurt, as it was known) but also to the authorities in both Hobart and Sydney. John H. Wedge wrote to Van Diemen's Land Colonial Secretary John Montagu 15 March 1836 reporting a 'flagrant outrage' against the natives by a group of bark strippers. Wedge also reported that '[a]bout a year and a half ago a similar attack was made upon the Natives, and four of their women were taken from them, and it is to be lamented that the like outrages have been committed upon the Aborigines at Portland Bay and other whaling stations; and unless some measures be adopted to protect the Natives, a spirit of hostility will be created against the whites, which in all probability will lead to a state of warfare between them and the Aborigines, which will only terminate when the black man will cease to exist'. A couple of months later New South Wales Police Magistrate George Stewart wrote to John Montagu 10 June 1836 about the same 'outrage'. Meredith is not named, but the date is again given as 'upwards of 18 months ago ... The principal, accused of perpetrating ... commanded a sealing vessel and was killed by the natives in the neighbourhood of Spencer's Gulf. One of the females he carried from Westernport is reported to have been with him at the time he was killed'. *Historical Records of Victoria: Foundation Series. Volume One: Beginnings of Permanent Government*. Edited by Pauline Jones. Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981): 34–5, 39. Then on 2 June 1836 John H. Wedge responded to George Stewart's request for the 'Names of individuals who perpetrated the outrage upon the Natives at Western Port about eighteen months ago?' with '—', since killed by the Natives on the South Coast of New Holland, in the vicinity of Spencer's Gulf.' *Journals and Printed Papers of the Parliament of Tasmania 1895*. Vol. V, no. 44, 'Expedition from Van Diemen's land to Port Phillip in 1835': 15. George Meredith's name is again not given, no doubt in deference to the family: his brother Charles had died just five years before, a former distinguished member of Tasmania's Legislative Council. The family was obviously deeply ambivalent about his memory, as George Jr's shadowy representations in several of Lousia Anne Meredith's works reveal.

the Bass Strait islands and restore them to their families as an act of justice. Wedge obviously considered that relationships between the settlers and the Aborigines in the new settlements around Port Phillip would be improved if the women were to be returned.<sup>94</sup>

Robinson first recorded a reference to George Meredith Jr 10 January 1831, when he mentions visiting his farm which was next to his father's. The entry 11 January 1831 records 'Mr Meredith junior' visiting his camp and providing him with a week's supply of tea, sugar, flour and three days' supply of meat'.<sup>95</sup>

Five years later Robinson was in a position to determine what Meredith had been up to after the wreck of his ship *Defiance* in September 1833 and before his death at Yankalilla in early 1836.<sup>96</sup>

Robinson's record now follows:

9 May 1836 Monday

Saw the Colonial Secretary [in Hobart] ... said I was to have magisterial power over all the islands in the [Bass] straits, and another section would empower me to remove persons from the islands and on refusal they could be proceeded against in a summary manner by fine and imprisonment. ... Proctor informed me that the New Holland women was brought to the islands by George Meredith, that Munro has one, Baily has one and the other sealer the last. George Meredith was speared by the natives on the coast of New Holland, no doubt in retaliation for the injuries he has done to them. This was

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<sup>94</sup> CSO 5/19/384, cited Plomley: 1966: 938.

<sup>95</sup> Plomley 1966: 311-2.

<sup>96</sup> Meredith's murder was announced in the *Hobart Town Courier* 22 April 1836, 2d: 'We have the pain to announce the premature death of Mr. Meredith, junior, son of George Meredith esq. of Oyster bay who we learn was barbarously murdered by the savages on the north coast of New Holland while on a fishing expedition'. It sounds like the news had come from Kangaroo Island: Yankalilla is on the coast to the north. Vivienne Rae Ellis insists that the Meredith family did not discover what had happened to George Jr until 1844, when the murder was again reported in the Adelaide papers, but this seems unlikely, given this Hobart newspaper announcement. See also *Tasmanian*, 14 October 1836: 342b-c, Ellis 1979: 59. It is surely significant that there are very few references to the 'black sheep' in the Meredith family papers held in the Mortlock Library of South Australia, and as far as I can determine *none* responding to news of his murder at Yankalilla.

a just retribution. Many aggressions had been committed by the Merediths on the natives at Oyster Bay [in Tasmania].<sup>97</sup>

23 July 1836

Corporal Ramsey returned to the settlement from the Sisters Islands having removed the sealers, who offered no resistance. They had been on the islands about a fortnight and had collected about four hundred skins, i.e. wallaby kangaroo. They had two boats. Abyssinia Jack [John Anderson] had charge of one with some New Holland women and also some VDL women named [ ]. The New Holland women were the same that had been stolen from their country adjacent to Kangaroo Island<sup>98</sup> by George Meredith jnr of Oyster Bay and who was subsequently killed by those natives (here insert the interrogatory of New Maria whose name is now Matilda. She was present on the occasion [on Meredith's vessel]).<sup>99</sup>

[3? October Monday 1836]

Last week visited the *Duke of York* S.A. Company ship, and learnt particulars of the death of G. Meredith junior on the main opposite Kangaroo Island.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Plomley 1987: 353. Keith Windschuttle quotes a telling paragraph by George Meredith Senior proposing extreme measures during the Black Wars in Van Diemen's Land, in which he recommends 'the earliest possible importation of bloodhounds—dogs which I ever thought *ought* to have been sent at the first appearance of Bush Ranging—and in the meantime the training of colonial dogs—not to hunt and destroy the natives—but to be attached to every field party—to be *used in hand*—and thus to track unerringly and either insure their capture, or if indeed the alternative *must* be resorted to—their annihilation. Archives Office of Tasmania, CSO/1/323/7578 pp. 357–8, quoted Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002) 340.

<sup>98</sup> This is an intriguing detail. Rob Amery suggests that Robinson refers here to Emma or Emue, Kalloongoo's sister-in-law and on his own evidence a Kurna woman from the Yankalilla district. This does not seem likely, in that he knew her well, and surely would have named her if she were one of the women in question. Robinson records 12 January 1836 that 'Munroe gave £7 for the New Holland woman *he now has* named Emue or Emma. She was when I knew her the property of Abyssinnia Jack'. Plomley 1987: 336, my emphasis. Emue could not have been one of the 'New Holland' women described here as *with Anderson* and thus she cannot have been one of the women abducted during the November 1834 raid on Port Lincoln described below. Anderson's whaleboat was certainly involved in this raid, although whether Meredith was present is not clear. Rob Amery quotes Bill Mollison's view that this was the raid in which Emue was abducted, but Robinson records that in April 1831 she was already living with Anderson and 'had been married to a black man in New Holland, by whom she had several children' (Plomley 1966: 327, 335). Robinson later reported the news of her death 19 December 1837, noting that 'she had been living with Abyssinnia Jack for years on Gun Carriage Island and by whom she had had several children'—as many as ten, five of whom were alive in 1831 (Plomley 1987: 514). It is obvious that Emue was abducted (from the Yankalilla area?) much earlier, possibly in the early 1820s.

<sup>99</sup> Plomley 1987: 366. Maria's interrogatory is given below.

<sup>100</sup> Plomley 1987: 385. Plomley notes that the *Duke of York* had off-loaded settlers at Kangaroo Island 16 August 1836 before sailing for Hobart where she arrived 27 September, departing on a whaling voyage 11 October 1836. Captain Robert Clark Morgan may have been Robinson's informant, even though he did not record any meeting in his log. Both Robinson and Morgan were in Hobart 19 August to 11 October, when the *Duke of York* left on a whaling expedition: Robinson certainly visited the ship. They may also have met at one of the many prayer meetings Morgan records attending, possibly at the Wesleyan Chapel. Robert Clark Morgan, 'Journal of the *Duke of York*, 25 February 1836–10 February 1838', Mitchell Library A270. A sister ship of the

Said there was twelve men sealers, with a number of native women [on Kangaroo Island in 1836].

5 October 1836 Wednesday

The two Port Phillip natives with Mr Fawkner met me in Macquarie Street and informed me that the sealers had taken away their wives and that they were now with them the sealers in the straits.<sup>101</sup>

15 December 1836 Thursday

8 am Captain Hurburgh arrived per schooner *Eliza* relative to the New Holland women.<sup>102</sup>

16 December 1836 Friday

Anecdotes of the Port Phillip aborigines.

Captain Hurburgh said that he had heard that Munroe had bought one of the New Holland women of George Meredith; I must enquire into this matter.

Captain Hurburgh said he had heard that the aborigine shot at Port Phillip had been handcuffed to a tree by the white men and that a white ruffian then shot him in the back and afterwards through the head. This is murder of the worst description.<sup>103</sup>

26 December 1836 Monday

Point Nepean is on the eastern side of the entrance [to Port Phillip]. Matilda the VDL native woman pointed out the spot a few miles down the harbour at

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*Duke of York* was the *John Pirie*, the captain of whom, George Martin, found the murder tomahawk with Meredith's blood still attached.

<sup>101</sup> The women abducted by Meredith. Plomley footnotes this diary entry with the following: 'J.P. Fawkner brought three natives of Port Phillip to VDL in 1836, arriving at Circular Head in September. He went on from there to Launceston, from where one of the natives was sent back to Port Phillip; and arrived at Hobart Town at the beginning of October. The two natives whom Fawkner brought to Hobart Town were DERIMUT (DERRAHMERT), a chief, and BETBENJEE (BAITBAINGER). Benjamin Law took casts of their faces, and Benjamin Duterrau painted a portrait of one of them (both?). This portrait is in the Mitchell Library, and is inscribed — "DERAHMAT of Port Phillip October 5<sup>th</sup> 1836". Ref.: *Hobart Town Courier*, 16 September and 7 October 1836; James Backhouse, journal for 23 August 1837; Daniel Bunce *Australasiatic reminiscences of twenty-three years' wanderings in Tasmania and the Australias*. (Melbourne, 1857.); *Friendly Mission* pp. 929, and 938, note 11; J.P. Fawkner to Governor, 10 October 1836 (CSO 1/901/19140); J.H. Wedge to Colonial Secretary, 8 October 1836 (ML A7064: 201-3); J.P. Fawkner Papers, La Trobe Library, Box 67/3: 29-9. Barwick notes that Derrimut 'had gained fame as the 'saviour of Melbourne' [in 1835] ... by serving as a messenger for the Woiworung and Bunurong clan-heads, who, having authorised the visitors' presence in the June 1835 *tanderrum* ceremony which John Batman interpreted as a treaty of purchase, protected the colonists when distant clans threatened to attack' (Barwick 1985: 210).

<sup>102</sup> Plomley 1987: 402. Plomley's note to this entry explains that 'Captain Hurburgh had come with the *Eliza* to take GAR to Port Phillip to investigate the kidnapping of some Port Phillip women who had fallen into the hands of the sealers—these were the women removed by George Meredith. This matter had been brought to the attention of [Tasmanian] Governor Arthur by J.P. Fawkner when he was in Hobart Town in October (CSO 1/190/19140). It seems that GAR was instructed to try to obtain firm evidence of the kidnapping'. (670)

<sup>103</sup> Plomley 1987: 402.

Point Nepean where she said George Meredith and his crew of sealers stole the native women. The men's names were Brown, Mr West the master of the schooner, a man named Billy.<sup>104</sup> Said the schooner anchored off, the sealers went on shore. Said there was plenty of forest boomer kangaroo at the point. Said they deceived the people; gammoned them. Said the native men upset the boat and the men were all wet and fell into the water. Said there was plenty of black fellows, some on the Port Phillip side, some outside, sea coast. Said the sealers were afraid of the Port Phillip natives. Said they employed her to entice them. George Meredith stole the, I think she said, four women, took them in the schooner first to Kings Island and then to Hunter and Clarks and Gun Carriage Islands, and then sold them to the sealers there. I am informed that Munro bought one.<sup>105</sup>

30 December 1836.

Doog-by-er-um-bore-oke—the mother of the 2 girls stolen from P.P.

Nay-nar-gor-roke—one of the girl's names taken by the sealers

Bor-ro-dang-ger-gor-roke—another girl taken by the sealers

Nan-der-gor-roke—Derremart's wife who was taken by the sealers<sup>106</sup>

9 January 1837 Monday

Went on shore at Preservation Island with Captain Hurburgh. ... Found on shore James Munro who had a New Holland woman a native of Port Phillip.<sup>107</sup> She was ill in bed. Had an infant child by some of the sealers; had also a daughter about fourteen years of age that she had in her own country. This was an interesting girl and it grieved me to leave her in such hands for I felt persuaded she would be maltreated. Another daughter belonging to this woman was living with Strognal on Gun Carriage [Island] by whom she had had two children; she was about sixteen years of age. This is the same Strognal that was engaged in the murder at Macquarie Harbour where he was sentenced; his time of servitude had expired and he had resorted to the straits. There is positive proof that Munro bought the woman with whom he

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<sup>104</sup> Did these companions of Meredith's make it to Kangaroo Island? Given that other sources insist that Maggerlede or Bumblefoot Sal was with Meredith when they arrived at Middle River on the north shore in February 1834, it seems likely that after he had sold the abducted women to the various sealers named by Robinson, he disposed of or sold his schooner *Independent* and purchased the 'fine ten-oared sealing-boat' mentioned below and sailed for Kangaroo Island with Sal, Jacob Seaman and an American 'named Bathurst'. Ship's carpenter George Brown is named in some versions as not only accompanying them but also building the hut at Middle River: he was an African American. Plomley and Henley name James 'Little' West as the American master of George Meredith's schooner *Independent* and who later lived at Kangaroo Island with TIN.NER.MUCK, a VDL woman. Perhaps he also pulled on one of those ten oars. It is not known who the 'Billy' named by Matilda was. See Brian N.J. Plomley and Kristen Anne Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1990) 38, 39, 41, 54.

<sup>105</sup> Plomley 1987: 405.

<sup>106</sup> Barwick notes that 'entries dated 30 December 1836 in Robinson's private journals identify Derrimut as the one husband interviewed, mention that "Eurer nowel" had also lost a wife, and specifically names these four captives. Barwick 1985: 210.

<sup>107</sup> One of the women abducted by Meredith and his party.

was cohabiting and it is currently reported that he gave £7 for her. He denies having given a consideration for her and accounts for his having her by her being old or as he said he supposed she would not have fallen to his share; but this is only evasive, there is positive proof that not only was a consideration given for this woman but for every other woman brought from Port Phillip by George Meredith the original importer. The intention of visiting Preservation and the other islands was to endeavour to rescue the women native of Port Phillip from the sealers and restore them to their own country, but against this measure they the sealers had taken every precaution to frustrate. ... Acquainted Munro with the purport of my visit and that it was the intention of the government to have the Port Phillip native women removed to their own country. He said the woman was ill in mind and that he would bring her to the settlement so soon as she recovered if it met by approbation. He was very civil but this was all duplicity. Kelly a sealer whom I had employed when at the Hunter Islands was also living with Munro. He had living with him a girl about fourteen years of age, an halfcaste, daughter of Scott the sealer, with whom he cohabited. He is a bad character. Thomson's Sall, a native woman on VDL was concealed on Preservation Island; also Charlotte a native woman of Kangaroo Island<sup>108</sup> and who subsequently joined

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<sup>108</sup> Charlotte was one of Robinson's sources for information about the sealers on Kangaroo Island. Her real name was KAL.LOON.GOO, other names COW.WER.PITE.YER and WIN.DEER.RER. She was also known as Sarah. Robinson recorded the following her after she joined the Aboriginal Settlement 1 June 1837: 'Interrogated the woman who arrived last night from Woody Island; result as follows (1) KAL.LOON.GOO, (2) COW.WERTITE.YER, (3) WIN.DEER.RER alias Sarah an aboriginal female of New Holland, the point opposite to Kangaroo Island, the west point of Port Lincoln. Was forcibly taken from her country by a sealer named James Allan who in company with another sealer Bill Johnson (this man was drowned subsequent to my visit to Port Phillip) conveyed her across to Kangaroo Island and where she remained for a considerable time until she was seized upon by Johnson and forced on board the schooner *Henry J Griffith* owner and master and brought to the straits, when Johnson sold her to Bill Dutton, who has subsequently abandoned her. She had a child by Dutton a girl which he took away with him. The woman states that at the time she was seized and torn from her country, Allan the sealer was led or guided to her encampment and where her mother and sister then was by two blackfellows her countrymen but not her tribe and who had been living with the sealers on the island. Said the blackfellows came sneaking and laid hold of my hand; the other girl ran away. The white man put a rope round my neck like a dog, tie up my hands. We slept in the bush one night and they then tied my legs. In the morning we went to the boat. The other man Bill Johnson had been staying with the boat. They took me then to Kangaroo Island. She remained there a long time, until she was brought away in the schooner to the straits. She said there were several New Holland black men on Kangaroo Island. Said two of them died from eating seal; her brother died also from eating seal. Said the sealers beat the black women plenty; they cut a piece of flesh off a woman's buttock; cut off a boy's ear, Emue's boy. This woman is now on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. The boy died in consequence of his wounds. They cut them with broad sealer's knives. Said they tied them up and beat them and beat them with ropes. Bill Dutton beat her plenty. Said the sealers got drunk plenty and women get drunk too. Said the country where she came from was called BAT.BUN.GER.YANG.GAL.LALE.LAR. It is situate at the west point of St. Vincents Gulf. Said that Emue's brother was her husband. It is on the sea coast; there is a long sandy beach with three rivers. MAN.NUNE.GAR is the name of the country where she was born. Kangaroo Island is called DIRK.I.YER.TUN.GER.YER.TER; WAT.ER.KER.TER, an island. (YAR.PER, a hole; called the hole in the cartilage of her nose YAR.PER.) (1) WHIRLE (2) WHIR.LE, house [same in Kaurna]. Fire, KIR.LER. Wood, (1) NAR.RER (2) NAR.RAR. This aboriginal female of N[ew] H[olland] KAL.LOON.GOO has a hole through the cartilage of her nose. She relates the following



the establishment, and she was under the berth bed. I spoke to the woman who lived with Munro, but this wily person had tutored her and she was prepared to resist all and every overture made to her. She was evidently under fear. Before quitting Preservation Richard Maynard a sealer came to Preservation Island from Clarks Island. He had with him a New Holland native of Port Phillip. She was far advanced in pregnancy. She was a fine looking woman. She was completely under the influence of the sealer Maynard and when asked whether she would like to go to her own country she replied she would see me b ... first. Captain Hurburgh was with me at the time. Poor creature, he case and that of the others is truly pitiable. The man was impertinent and I warned him to quit the islands. To some remarks from Captain H he replied that he knew she was taken from her own country by G Meredith but with that he had nothing to do.<sup>109</sup>

George Robinson reported to the Colonial Secretary in Hobart 12 January 1837 with his discoveries about the abducting of the Port Phillip women by George Meredith. Plomley's summary of his report (CSO 5/19/384, pp. 171–96) stresses the depravity of the sealers (or 'islanders', as Robinson suggests they should be called), notes that once the Van Diemen's Land women had been removed, the Bass Strait islanders had sought out 'New Holland' women; that the women had been taught drunkenness; that many of them were mere children and were suffering from venereal diseases. Robinson also describes the grief of an 'aged woman who had two daughters forced from her' at Point Nepean by a vessel with two masts.<sup>110</sup>

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circumstances in reference to her removal from Kangaroo Island. She said one day the schooner *Henry* John Griffith master and owner came to Kangaroo Island. Allan was away at this time at another part of the island. Said that Johnson tied her hands and feet and put her on board of the schooner, when he and Harry Wally ['Governor' Henry Wallen] came away in the schooner to the islands in the straits. A sealer Harry Wally ['Governor' Henry Wallen] assisted in tying her. Subsequently Johnson sold her to Bill Dutton by whom she had had a female child a girl. She had had a male child by a Sydney black a sealer. This child is the one now with her and is about five years of age. Bill Dutton stopped on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. He has left about ten moons, has gone away and married a white woman. He took his child the girl with him. She has heard this. He has gone whaling. The boy was born at a rock near to the Julians. She had the girl first by Bill Dutton. Said she was a big girl when Allan took her away from her own country'. On 5 June 1836 Robinson wrote to the Colonial Secretary informing him that Kallongoo wished to return to her country in South Australia. (Plomley 1987: 445–6). Allen knew Nat Thomas: Thomas was named as maiming his son, the boy eventually dying of his wounds. Rob Amery clearly establishes that Robinson was mistaken: Kallongoo was a *Kaurna* woman from the BAT.BUN.GER (Rapid Bay) district. YANG.GAL.LALE.LAR is obviously present-day 'Yankalilla', while 'long sandy beach with three rivers' probably refers to the Normanville coastline. There are no rivers at Port Lincoln! See Amery 1998: 49–87.

<sup>109</sup> Plomley 1987: 414–5.

<sup>110</sup> Barwick 1985: 210.

Attached to his report is this statement by Maria (or Matilda):

She had been a long time living with the sealers; and was in Geo Meredith's schooner when he went to Port Phillip. The vessel anchored under Point Nepean, where there was a tribe of natives. She Maria was forced to entice some of the best looking women and girls to the sealers, who seized them and bound them, and took them on board the schooner. After a sealing voyage to King Island and the Hunter Islands, Meredith took the women to the Furneaux Islands and left them there.<sup>111</sup>

Meredith and his party then sailed for Kangaroo Island. The next published reference to the circumstances surrounding George Meredith's murder can be found in the *South Australian*, 24 September 1844, an article reprinted a day later 25 September 1844 in the *Register*, 3c and obviously written from the 'great deal of information' collected by 'Mr. Tolmer, Inspector of Police'. It is obvious from the details that appear in this and in two later versions of the story given below that Tolmer met and interviewed Nat Thomas at Creek [Antechamber] Bay, 'an old man named Jacobs' [Jacob Seaman?], 'Warland' ['Governor' Henry Wallen] and 'a man named Bates' [George 'Fireball' Bates]. It is not clear if he also interviewed William Walker,<sup>112</sup> but if Tolmer met and spoke to Wallen and Bates, both of whom lived at Hog Bay in 1844, then it is very likely that he also spoke to Walker, who with Wallen and Thomas went looking for Meredith after his murder and who also was living in Hog Bay in that year. Tolmer seems not to have met William Wilkins, another 'Islander' who lived at the eastern end of Hog Bay and who was a partner of Walker's. The *Register* 13 January 1844 p. 3b

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<sup>111</sup> Plomley 1987: 677.

<sup>112</sup> In 1834 it seems Walker lived at Nepean Bay. In 1833–1834 John Griffiths' whaler *Henry*, captained by John Jones, was again sailing the waters around Kangaroo Island. Jones was one of the first Europeans to see the Port River. His report was published in part in Charles J. Napier, *Colonization; particularly in South Australia, with some remarks on Small Farms and Over-Population* (London: C.B., 1835): 250–2. In this report Jones notes that 'there were seven Englishmen living on the island, and five native women. The women formed part of the crews of different sealers, who had been left behind on the island. No runaway convicts were among them. They reside on the eastern end of the island, opposite Cape Jervis; one, of the name of Whalley, has been fourteen years on the island; another, called Nathaniel Thomas, and James Allen, an Irishman, have been there seven years; William Day (who is a partner of Whalley's in sealing) lives at Nepean Bay, with a man named William Walker.' Jones's report is reprinted in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia South Australian Branch*, Session 19120–21, Vol. XXIV, 1923: 73–75. The *Henry* was the vessel on which the Port Lincoln woman Kallongoo had been taken after her abduction.

reported that a fine schooner called the *William* had been built by ‘Walker and Wilkins’ and launched on Kangaroo Island.

The article has this to say about the black women of the island:

There are twelve black women on the island [in 1844], several of them Van Diemen’s Land natives, and the rest from the mainland of Australia. They are generally between forty and fifty years of age, and have been upwards of seventeen years on the island. They are of the greatest use to the settlers, in catching wallaby, which is the principal employment of many of them. Ten of these blacks remain constantly in the service of the residents, but two of them have always deserted and joined runaways, and caught wallabies for them, without which, in fact, they could not subsist. These two, who are called “Sal”<sup>113</sup> and “Suke”, have been brought up by the police to Adelaide. (p. 3e)

The next published reference to Meredith’s murder is in the *Register* a day later, 25 September 1844, 3e, an article headlined ‘EXTRAORDINARY CASE’ and obviously based on Tolmer’s interviews with Jacobs, Bates and other Islanders.

From information which has been collected by the police, during their recent expedition, we are enabled to furnish our readers with the following particulars of a murder which took place at Yankalilla, about ten or twelve years ago.—It appears that a young man of the name of Meredith, son of a wealthy settler of Van Diemen’s Land, had deeply offended his father by his follies and extravagancies. In consequence of the quarrel, it is said that the young man seized and made off with a schooner belonging to his father. This vessel he sold at some port, where he had got the price in dollars. He then bought a fine ten-oared sealing-boat, and about seventeen years ago,<sup>114</sup> arrived at Kangaroo Island, accompanied by an old man-of-war’s man named Jacobs [the Dutchman Jacob Seaman]<sup>115</sup>, who is now on the island, and an American named Bathurst. The party settled at Western River, where they

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<sup>113</sup> Maggerlede or ‘Bumblefoot’ Sal was arrested for Meredith’s murder; Leigh describes meeting an Aboriginal woman ‘who had nearly lost her foot and hand’, but later, when he describes another young ‘black woman’ who watched him dissect a seal as ‘the murderer of poor Meredith’, he does not mention any deformity (Leigh 1839: 146, 155). Perhaps the second woman he describes, ‘her countenance ... as expressive and pleasing as any I had met with’, was Suke, Maggerlede’s companion in their old age.

<sup>114</sup> Tolmer is wrong. Meredith left Tasmania in 1832 after an argument with his father, and arrived on Kangaroo Island in February 1834. It seems he may have been murdered at Yankalilla just a few months before the first colonists arrived in 1836.

<sup>115</sup> While a letter to the editor of the *Register* describing Jacob Seaman’s death in 1846 insists that he arrived in Kangaroo Island in 1830, it does support the assertion that he was an old sailor, who had served eleven years in the British Navy. See *Register* 12 September 1846: 2d.

resided several years, and got a subsistence by cultivating and by sealing. In the course of their expedition to the neighbouring coasts, they had take [sic] a woman ("Sal")<sup>116</sup> from Port Lincoln, and two lads from Encounter Bay, who acted as their servants. Meredith, we should mention, had latterly become very religious, and was constantly reading his Bible. On one occasion he suddenly determined, very much against Jacob's advice, to visit the main land. He was accompanied by Sal and the two native lads. It appears one of the lads had fallen in love with Sal, and, as a means of getting her he determined to murder his master. The boat put in at Yankalilla Bay, and one day, when his master was sitting on deck, reading his Bible, the native got behind him, and killed him with a tomahawk.<sup>117</sup> This tomahawk was afterwards found by Captain Marten [sic], with parts of the hair and blood still upon it, but it is now lost. About three months afterwards,<sup>118</sup> Jacobs, who found means of communicating with the other islanders, came over with Warland (the Governor), Nat Thomas, and [William] Walker, to search for his master. They landed at Rapid Bay. In approaching, they saw a number of natives on the rocks, who ran off. They were then hailed by Sal, who was also on the rocks, and who immediately came on board. She informed them of the murder, and that she had refused the addresses of the young man; that she had been several times in danger of her life from the young man, and from the other natives who wished to kill her, to prevent her telling the white men of the murder. She also told that the Encounter Bay blacks had taken Meredith's boat; and that it was manned by them, and under the command of one of them (now called Encounter Bay Bob<sup>119</sup>); who intended to go over to the

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<sup>116</sup> This detail is intriguing, in that Tolmer insists that the 'Sal' implicated in Meredith's murder was from Port Lincoln. The women he arrested on suspicion of the crime in 1844 were, however, both from Tasmania—one of them Trukanini's sister!

<sup>117</sup> H.C. Barrett wrote to Norman Tindale, quoting J.P. Gell who knew 'Bumblefoot' or 'Old' Sal and from whom he had collected Sal's account of Meredith's murder. Meredith is given as 'Marion': 'She was very fond of Captain Marion, and said that the Captain was a good man, read his Bible every day and taught her to say "The Lord's Prayer", which she could repeat quite well. She told Mr. Bell of the murder of Captain Marion on the mainland near Second Valley by the blacks who crept on him as he was sitting on the beach reading the Bible. Old Sal was with him at the time and swam out to sea to escape meeting a similar fate. I understood she used to sail with Captain Marion frequently and used to weep whenever she told the tale of his murder' Norman Tindale, 'Kangaroo Island loose notes', AA/338/1/32, South Australian Museum.

<sup>118</sup> These dates are intriguing. John Woodforde's diary clearly records Captain George Martin of the *John Pirie* at Rapid Bay 8 September 1836, sailing in a whaleboat on a tour of Saint Vincent's Gulf. Sexton records him leaving Nepean Bay 7 September 1836 on William Walker's whaleboat. Walker undoubtedly showed Martin the site at Yankalilla (the nearest landing to the north of Rapid Bay) where Meredith was murdered: Walker was paid £2 for his services. See R.T. Sexton, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures South Australia 1627–1850* (Ridgehaven, SA, Canberra: Gould Books, Roebuck Books, 1990): 29.

<sup>119</sup> Tammuruwe Nankere was obviously well used to contact with Europeans, and became something of a celebrity in the early years of the colony. In 1839 he travelled with Charles Sturt as a guide to the North-West Bend of the Murray. See E. Davies, *The Story of an Earnest Life: A Woman's Adventures in Australia, and in Two Voyages Around the World* (Cincinnati: Central Book Concern): 121–168. In 1840 Tammuruwe Nankere was a member of the punitive expedition sent to the Coorong to apprehend and summarily execute those deemed guilty of the massacre of the survivors of the *Maria*. See for example *Register* 15 August 1840 and 24 April 1841: he is named in both accounts. He also made an application for what these days would be called native

island and murder all the whites. This intelligence terrified them much, and they state that for months afterwards they lay at night with their arms loaded, and imagined every noise to be the landing of the blacks. It should be observed that then, as now, they were settled at different points of the island. They were afterwards relieved from their fears by hearing that the boat had been wrecked at Encounter Bay. It is said that Meredith “planted” his dollars at Western River, and that the blacks got a few of them, which he [*sic*] took with him to the mainland. Those “planted” at Western River have never been found. Sal was one of the companions of the prisoners recently captured and is now in gaol. She says that she knows the spot where the skeleton of Meredith is.<sup>120</sup> The native who committed the murder is well known at Encounter Bay, and instructions for his apprehension were sent down a few days ago: he is probably by this time in custody. It is stated, with what truth we know not, that an estate worth £4,000, and £500 in money, are held by the Chancery Court of Van Diemen’s Land, until proof of Mr. Meredith’s death is given, and that the property then will belong to his sisters. It is remarkable that this story should not have been investigated. It may be that the parties who have now given the information, thought it would be of no use, as a native’s evidence will not be taken. We believe Sal speaks English uncommonly well, but are not aware whether she acknowledges the obligation of an oath. If she does not, this will probably be the first case in which the efficacy of the Act for allowing native testimony will be tried.<sup>121</sup> The old adage says that “murder will out,” and of its truth the present seems to be another and a most striking exemplification.

An article in the *Register* several days later, 28 September 1844 was obviously prompted by Alexander Tolmer’s article about Meredith’s background:

From a communication recently made by a gentleman intimately acquainted with the late Mr. Meredith, and with his family in Van Dieman’s [*sic*] Land, we are enabled to correct some particulars in the statement of our last number, which was a faithfully transcribed copy of the account current in Kangaroo Island. It seems Mr. Meredith was a perfectly well-conducted

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title to land at Encounter Bay, a proposal supported by Protector Matthew Moorhouse. Cawthorne knew Tammuruwe Nankere or Encounter Bay Bob well. In the 1840s Tammuruwe Nankere shared a house at the Native Location with Kudlitpinna, ‘Captain Jack’, the Kurna man who often visited the Cawthornes and who gave Cawthorne lessons in the Kurna language.

<sup>120</sup> Cawthorne was shown this site at Yankalilla by Nat Thomas.

<sup>121</sup> In 1844 ‘native testimony’ became partially admissible in the courts, when Governor George Grey was responsible for an ordinance allowing justices to hear such testimony after an affirmation that the truth would be given, with the proviso that no individual could be convicted upon such testimony alone. Before 1844 Aboriginal witnesses who could not take the Christian oath and thus could not testify. Grey commented in 1840 that the ‘fact of the natives being unable to give testimony in a court of justice is as great a hardship on them, and they consider it as such. The reason ... is at present quite beyond their comprehension, and it is impossible to explain it to them’. *Register*, 18 April 1840. See Ronald Gibbs, ‘Relations between the Aboriginal Inhabitants and the First South Australian Colonists,’ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch* 61 (1960): 68.

young man, though eccentric, and that the schooner was his own, and was lost in Bass Straits. He had left £500 in cash with Mr. Orr, of Hobarton, when he left in the schooner, saying that if he did not come back Mr. Orr might keep the money, but if he did come back he would claim the money. Mr. Orr would not keep the money, and put it into the Supreme Court of Van Dieman's Land. After the report of the death arrived in Van Dieman's Land,<sup>122</sup> Mr. Meredith sen., claimed the money, but the court would not give it up till proof of the death was given. Subsequently the affidavit of the late Captain Marten [*sic*]<sup>123</sup> was procured, and sent to Hobarton. Still the Court would not surrender the money. Probably if the evidence given in the forthcoming trial of the natives is satisfactory, the money will be paid.

Twenty years later, Tolmer published 'A Bundle of Stories. No. 3—The Old Settler's Story', obviously drawing on his memories of his 1844 visit to the island; here his literary ambitions can be seen transforming and enlarging his memories:

Our chief business at the place<sup>124</sup> was to enquire into the disappearance of a settler named Meredith—a man, who, as far as I can make out, has passed bitter years of remorse on this lonely island. God only knows why some minds are allowed to sleep on untormented by the past, and unvisited even in the most silent hours by remorse, whilst others suffer agonies of pain which increase of years only add to. This man Meredith had been on the island 15 years. He was the son of a wealthy settler in Van Diemen's Land, but had become an outcast through profligacy and crime.<sup>125</sup> In 1826 he fled from Hobart Town, taking with him a schooner belonging to his father. This vessel he sold at one of the Australian ports, and with part of the money he bought a fine ten-oared sealing-boat. In this boat he reached Kangaroo Island, accompanied by a man-of-war's man and an American negro. Here they settled, and a prettier place than the spot which they selected could not be well desired by any one tired of the world and anxious to lead a calm, peaceful life. It was a little nook on the western river—a fine stream of water which rose far away in the interior of the island, and which flowed throughout the year. The entrance to this river—which was navigable for boats—was most romantic. Immense piles of rocks towered up to a height of 250 feet, and inside these there was a little bay—and landlocked harbour in miniature. Further up a beautiful valley opened out, with excellent soil on both banks of the river. Gigantic gum-trees threw their shade upon the ground, and hundreds of aquatic birds covered the water. Surely, in such a happy valley as

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<sup>122</sup> In April 1836.

<sup>123</sup> Captain George Martin, of the *John Pirie*, found the blood-stained tomahawk that was allegedly used in Meredith's murder.

<sup>124</sup> Tolmer led a police party to the island in 1844 to arrest some runaways and smugglers.

<sup>125</sup> It is worth noting that by the mid-nineteenth century this is how Meredith seems to have been often remembered.

this the wanderer, after his misspent life, may have found rest!<sup>126</sup> Here was the little house which he had built, and here was the patch of garden which he had cultivated. But peace of mind would not come. The solitude of the valley, the deep murmuring of the sea, the very stillness of the summer air all aided to call up the past. Poor Meredith sunk into melancholy, and would sit for hours reading religious books—especially the Bible—

“For the peace of his soul he read that book  
In the golden eventide.”

But after some years an earnest desire came upon him to leave the island, and to visit the mainland; nobody knows for what reason. He, however, went, and never returned. He was murdered on board the boat by a native lad, who struck him with a tomahawk whilst he sat reading on the deck. Such was the account given by a black woman who was on board at the time of the murder, and a tomahawk was produced bearing evidence of some foul deed. Thus the unhappy man perished before he could make peace with the world he had fled from. The islanders—whose number, black and white, now amounted to 80—bestirred themselves a little when they heard of the murder, and the “Governor” even made a voyage to Yankalilla in search of Meredith’s boat; but they never found it, nor was anybody—if I recollect aright—ever punished for the crime. As to the motive for the murder, the story was that the victim had a bag of dollars on board—the price of the stolen schooner—and that he wanted to make a restitution of this money. The cupidity of the native was therefore supposed to have led to the crime. But on the other hand it was for a long while believed that the dollars were still hidden at Western River, and people talked of some day finding this ill-gotten treasure, as they might have talked of the buried wealth of Kidd, the pirate.<sup>127</sup>

Two decades later, Tolmer had more to say about the Meredith murder, in his *Reminiscences of an adventurous and chequered career at home and at the Antipodes*. He records the story in considerable detail, obviously drawing on the same notes that had resulted in the newspaper articles of 1844 and 1866 quoted above:

During the expedition I collected a great deal of information from old Jacobs, Bates and others on the island, and amongst it the particulars of a murder which took place at Yankalilla about ten or twelve years before,<sup>128</sup> in consequence of which the Advocate-General, (Mr. Smilie) deemed it expedient to charge the two native women (Sal and Suke) with complicity in the crime ... It appeared that a young man named Meredith, son of a wealthy

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<sup>126</sup> Tolmer visited Middle River during his 1844 visit to Kangaroo Island.

<sup>127</sup> *Register* 4 May 1866: 3a.

<sup>128</sup> Here Tolmer claims Meredith was killed between 1832 and 1834. The date is much more likely to be 1836.

settler of Van Diemen's Land, had deeply offended his father by his follies and extravagances.<sup>129</sup> In consequence of a quarrel, it was said, the young man seized and made off with a schooner belonging to his father. This vessel he sold at some port, where he got the price in dollars. He then bought a fine ten-oared sealing boat, and about the year 1827 arrived at Kangaroo Island, accompanied by the old man-of-war's man, Jacobs, and an American named Bathhurst. The party settled at Western River, where they resided many years, and got a subsistence by cultivating and by sealing. In the course of their expeditions to the neighbouring coasts they had taken a woman (Sal) from Port Lincoln<sup>130</sup> and two lads from Encounter Bay, who acted as their servants. Meredith at that time had latterly become very religious, and was constantly reading his Bible. On one occasion he suddenly determined, very much against Jacobs's advice, to visit the mainland. He was accompanied by Sal and the two native boys. It appears that one of the boys had fallen in love with Sal, and, as a means of getting her, he determined to murder his master. The boat put in at Yankalilla Bay, and one day, when his master was sitting on deck reading his Bible, the native got behind him and killed him with a tomahawk. This tomahawk was afterwards found by Captain Martin, with part of the hair and blood upon it, but was then lost.<sup>131</sup> About three months afterwards, Jacobs, having found means of communicating with the other islanders, who were settled at different points of the island, came over with Warland (the Governor [Wallen]), Nat Thomas, and [William] Walker to search for his master. They landed at Rapid Bay. On approaching they saw a number of natives on the rocks, who ran off. They were then hailed by Sal, who was also on the rocks, and who immediately came on board. She informed them of the murder, and that she had refused the addresses of the young man; that she was several times in danger of her life from him and from the other natives, who wished to kill her to prevent her telling the white men of the murder. She also told that the Encounter Bay blacks had taken Meredith's boat; that it was manned by them, and under the command of one of them called Encounter Bay Bob [Tammuruwe Nankere], who intended to go over to the island and murder all the whites. This intelligence terrified them much, and they stated that for months afterwards relieved from their fears by hearing that the boat had been wrecked at Encounter Bay.

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<sup>129</sup> This note helps explain why the Meredith family papers (and Lousia Anne Meredith's books) contain so few references to the son and heir of George Meredith. What little there is generally refers to George Jr as a child and adolescent. The family obviously decided to expunge memories of this black sheep who had murdered and engaged in slavery and—given nineteenth century sensibilities—'gone native', cohabiting with Aboriginal women.

<sup>130</sup> The confusion of the various Sals! Brown Sal was from Port Lincoln, but Big Sal, Meredith's companion, was originally from Bruny Island, Tasmania.

<sup>131</sup> After exploring St Vincent Gulf with the sealer William Walker—and finding the murder weapon at Yankalilla—Martin then sailed the *John Pirie* to Hobart Town, carrying not only Colonel William Light's report for the South Australian Company Commissioners about the proposed site for Adelaide but also the affidavit referred to in the *Register* piece 28 September 1844.



It was said that Meredith planted his dollars at Western River, and that the blacks got a few of them which he took with him to the mainland. Those planted at Western River have never been found. Sal said she knew the spot where the skeleton of Meredith was, but no steps were taken by the Government to confirm the truth of her statement. The native who committed the murder was well known at Encounter Bay, and instructions for his apprehension were forthwith sent down after the foregoing facts were made known to the Government. It was subsequently ascertained, however, that he had been dead about two or three years, and consequently the two black women were discharged.<sup>132</sup>

John Wrathal Bull's *Early experiences of life in South Australia and an extended colonial history* has a slightly different version of the story, but there are enough details in common to suggest that Meredith's story was known to a number of people in the early years of the South Australian colony. Bull claims his version was gathered 'from two of the original islanders, many years after he himself became a settler on the mainland, in addition to information he had previously gained':

One of the earliest islanders was a young man of the name of G. Meredith, whose father was an inhabitant of Tasmania, in a large way of business. He had been dispatched by his father in a small vessel amongst the islands to catch seals, and had the misfortune to wreck his vessel on Howe's Island, and escaped in a boat with a Dutchman who was known afterwards as Jacob Seaman.

They had with them on landing on the [Kangaroo] island a Tasmanian black woman, called Sal, who had lost one of her feet when young by sleeping with them too near the fire.<sup>133</sup> She was owned by Meredith. He took up his residence at Western River on the coast of the island opposite the Althorpes. He had also with him two native boys, whom he had procured from the mainland, and whom he was training to be of great use to him in his sealing trips. In one of his boat voyages with the black woman and the two boys he landed on the part of the coast now known as Yankalilla, and whilst there encamped Meredith was killed by his black boys, of which sad occurrence the black woman afterwards gave the following account to the islanders:—Whilst their unsuspecting master was sitting near the campfire partaking of

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<sup>132</sup> Alexander Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an adventurous and chequered career at home and at the Antipodes* vol 2 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882) 6–8.

<sup>133</sup> This 'Sal' is obviously 'Bumblefoot' or 'Big Sal, Trukanini's sister, who was abducted by 'Black' baker from Bruny Island, then lived with a number of sealers before settling on Kangaroo Island: one of George Robinson's informants named her as living with William Cooper there in 1831. Bull's insistence that she was one of Meredith's murderers is intriguing. See J.P. Gell's record of an interview with Bumblefoot Sal below.

porridge, the boys stole behind him. It was supposed that they had been instigated to commit this act of treachery by some blackfellows, who afterwards took possession of the black woman, the boat, and all its contents, with which they made their way to Encounter Bay. In the unsettled state of the country no steps were taken in the matter, as this occurred before the first colonist arrived from England.<sup>134</sup> The boat, it was reported by the islanders, was for some time used by the Encounter Bay natives in sealing and fishing, and was ultimately lost by getting adrift from their careless fastenings. Sal eventually managed to escape to the island and joined a settler (an American black) named George Brown. He had been engaged as headsman in one of the whaling companies. After the colonists arrived George Brown left the island, and was engaged at the first occupation of Holdfast Bay. He shortly afterwards married an immigrant girl. Sal, after parting from Brown, joined William Cooper, one of the sealers, who acted as interpreter to Colonel Light<sup>135</sup> in his intercourse with the aboriginals on the mainland.<sup>136</sup>

The *Perth Gazette* article of 3 October 1835 given above records a whaleboat with four associates of George Meredith in her (George Roberts, John Howlett, Harry and William Forbes) from Long [Thistle] Island raiding the mainland and abducting a number of women from the Port Lincoln area. Four decades later, when Nathaniel Hailes published his memoirs in the *Register*; the extract 29 May 1878 'Prehistoric Colonial Scenes' may refer to Nauo memories of this very raid.

Long before South Australia became the abode of a settled community its mainland and islands, in common with other portions of our island-continent, were occasionally visited and in some instances randomly settled on by human beings of a nomadic nature and a disposition or circumstance that longed for solitude. During the early part of the present century (1800s) many such men pursued a Robinson Crusoe sort of life on the islands with which Spencer's Gulf is studded.

These men were usually deserters from ships; convicts escaped from the penal settlements in New South Wales or Van Diemen's Land, which colonies were at that time still the receptacles of heavily sentenced criminals from Great Britain; or wayward, eccentric or unfortunate individuals who had

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<sup>134</sup> In fact it happened only months (perhaps even weeks) before the arrival of the first settlers.

<sup>135</sup> Biram Mildred, who arrived on the *Rapid* with Colonel William Light in September 1835, in a letter to the Editor of the *Advertiser* 27 December 1886 6a, recalled William Cooper, describing him as having two native women with him, 'Doughboy and Sall'. At the Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition in 1887, Mildred exhibited a stuffed kangaroo caught at Rapid Bay in 1836 by Cooper, Sal and Doughboy (Ruediger 1980: 74). Mildred does not mention any deformed foot of 'Sall's', but see Plomley 1966: 336, 981, 1018, where she is named as living with Cooper in 1831.

<sup>136</sup> John Wrathall Bull, *Early experiences of life in South Australia and an extended colonial history* (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg, 1884) 6–7.

voluntarily adopted that mode of life. The vagabond-like existence pursued by these men, however rugged it was, may readily be contemplated as free from privation and suffering, with a genial though occasionally over ardent climate, the seas, gulfs, and bays abounding with aquatic life of nutritive quality and excellent flavour. The mainland and islands bore edible roots and were inhabited by animals and birds, both large and small, possessing every quality necessary to sustain human life, hence starvation was not a contingency to be apprehended. Occasionally whaling vessels came into Boston Bay, not in search of whales, although within my recollection [no?] mountains of blubber have been captured there, but to take on water and to rest their crews. Of course these vessels carried with them such comforts as biscuit, tea, sugar, rice, tobacco, and spirits. These were made available via barter to the amphibious recluses about whom I am writing, for besides satisfying personal wants, they preserved the skins of seals and furry quadrupeds, collected shells of the nautilus and other inhabitants of the deep, branches of coral, sponges, &c., salted and smoked the bodies of wild geese and other waterfowl, and pursued a few other similar industries, so that when a whaler arrived at the anchorage they had the wherewithal to obtain comforts in exchange for their commodities. One of their most peculiar harvests was derived from the mutton-birds, whose scientific name I have for the moment forgotten. This extraordinary bird is about the size of a pigeon, and its egg rivals in size that of a goose. The latter, when boiled, I have eaten with a relish; but fried with bacon or absorbed into the composite of a batter pudding, it is exceptionable. The flesh of these birds, when properly prepared and cured, is delicious. Its flavour is a slight improvement on that of the genuine Yarmouth bloater [English herring]. A special characteristic of these strange birds is that on the same day of the same month, with a punctuality which would astonish and gladden a banker in commercially critical times, they habitually proceed to the islands in Spencer's Gulf in prodigious numbers, and there deposit their enormous eggs.

When I proceeded to Port Lincoln in March 1842, in the service of Government, many of these veteran haunters of solitude still existed. Of three chief varieties I sketched portraits with whatever photographic power I possessed; and although they are framed in verse—a form distasteful to the present practical and somewhat prosaic age—I present them as written, because they faithfully depict a phase of colonial life that has now become obsolete:

#### The Egg-gatherer

Along this shipless gulf, small rocky isles,  
Like rugged warts, grow out of ocean's breast,  
Where seals in sunshine climb and bask and rest  
And unmolested snakes need not their wiles;  
Myriads of sea-birds, in unending files,  
O'ercloud them; each, in season, one vast nest  
Egg-paven; then of brittle heaps in quest  
Comes one bred mid hoares London's stately piles—

A homeless, sun-brown'd, weather-hardened man,  
Plucking his meals from rocks and waves alone;  
The human visage he doth rarely scan,  
And save his boat, companion knoweth none;  
His own purveyor; his own artisan;  
One wayward will his law—even his own.

#### The Sealer

With thin-patched garb and shaggy visage sleeps  
The weary sealer on that mossy ledge;  
His drooping foot the wave's encroaching edge  
Laves idly; overhead, clasped foliage keeps  
Hot noon aloof—a mangrove screen, that weeps  
Heart-shapen tears upon the watery floor,  
Whence in arcades the trunks rise sheer and bare.  
Shuddering with sudden chill, the taint breeze creeps,  
And the sun-shunning fly twangs loud his horn  
Within this lonely palace of the sea,  
Part of the desert, though of woman born—  
A human crag—most soundly slumbers he,  
The sealer; one whose years have onward worn,  
Dimless as waves in their monotony.

#### The Escaped Convict

Men are there whom, it we should chance to meet,  
Guiding the team, or chasing through the deep  
The whale, or on the hillside tending sheep,  
Or moving with the throng in mart or street,  
In townsmen's garb, or seaman's fashion neat,  
Or bushman's wide-brim, woollen shirt, a belt—  
We know—their caste less seen perchance than felt.  
Hither comes one, whom lately fetter'd feet  
Slid from their bonds, the tact lours through his smile;  
A fix'd gaze on his heart wild tremors' rolls;  
Of capture, and of chains, he thinks the while!  
Crime ever holds whom he first cajoles;  
And though his serfs cast prison-garments vile,  
They cannot tear his livery from their souls.

What wonder if these men were as rugged as the scene around them! There can be no doubt that at the commencement of the present [nineteenth] century many a tragedy was enacted in the neighbourhood of which I am writing, unheard of and perhaps unwitnessed by man. What was there to prevent men, perhaps naturally vicious, guided by no principle, restrained by no law, from shedding the blood of weaker or unarmed comrades in anger, revenge, or to obtain a paltry booty? Their outrages on natives, when they could inflict them with impunity, were undoubtedly many. Often at Port

Lincoln, while sitting amid a tribe of aboriginals around their evening fire, have I heard from the elder members thrilling and repulsive narratives, the accuracy of which I had no reason to doubt. It is certain that island desperadoes occasionally visited the mainland, carried off native women by force, and murdered the children with whom their captives might unfortunately be encumbered.

About three-quarters of a mile from the dwelling which I occupied at Port Lincoln is, or was, a waterhole situated in the midst of a thin scrub, which deserved a far more gentle name, for it consisted of an immense variety of small flowering shrubs, whose blossoms, presenting every tinge of colour, were in many instances really beautiful. The narrow grassy avenues by which these natural shrubberies were intersected were thickly studded with the starry white and delicate blue flowers so prevalent in the uncultivated portions of the colony, as well as with the beautiful little fringe flower.

I am not certain that I was correct in using the term 'waterhole', which, I believe, usually designates a spring; for the small reservoir of which I speak was simply a deep round basin, sunk, I know not how, in a massive block of granite, and was so situated that every shower of rain assisted to replenish its store of water. I discovered it one day while waiting with my gun for an interview with a most interesting but shy family of wild turkeys who were accustomed on afternoons to wander in that direction. After having passed the spot scores of times without realising its existence, I suddenly stumbled upon it. Thereafter, I revisited the spot quite frequently. One fact however, struck me as being unusual. While bronze-wing pigeons, ground-parrots, parrots, and many other birds fluttered over its surface and took a passing sip, and the smaller indigenous quadrupeds, when it was full of water, drank at its brink, no human native approached it, although the tribes availed themselves of an inconvenient and far inferior waterhole some distance away. That they had formerly been accustomed to stake their thirst at the granite basin was evident, for the trace of a 'native path' was still unobliterated.

On making enquiry I ascertained that the tribes superstitiously avoided the spot in consequence of a tragedy which had been enacted there some twenty years before. One day at that remote period a large party, consisting chiefly of lubras and piccaninnies who had concluded the morning forage, were seated around the shrub-screened waterhole. Several varieties of roots were slowly cooking in hot ashes; a few girls with bark cradles were dexterously sifting pupae of the large ant, so as to eject the least savoury and nutritious portions; while on the glowing embers fish, birds, wallaby, snakes, and goannas were under-going various degrees of preparation for the anticipated meal.

In the meantime, unperceived by the dark skinned assembly, a small boat had rounded the southern extremity of Kirton Point, from which three white men landed, and, stealing under cover of the fragrant scrub, surprised the reclining party, shot some of the black men, and, before the scattered remainder had time to rally, bore off two women and conveyed them to an island a considerable distance away.

When I left the western portion of the colony, more than thirty years ago, the deep impression which had been made by this occurrence was beginning to subside, and the superstitious apprehension connected with the spot had been so overcome that some of the younger natives occasionally refreshed themselves at the scene of former violence and tragedy.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the later accounts of George Meredith's murder is that collected by J.P. Gell, who recorded 'Bumblefoot' Sal's account that she and Meredith had been 'crept up on' while he was reading the Bible, and that she had escaped by swimming out to sea:

She was very fond of Captain Marion, and said that the Captain was a good man, read his Bible every day and taught her to say "The Lord's Prayer", which she could repeat quite well. She told Mr. Bell of the murder of Captain Marion on the mainland near Second Valley by the blacks who crept on him as he was sitting on the beach reading the Bible. Old Sal was with him at the time and swam out to sea to escape meeting a similar fate. I understood she used to sail with Captain Marion frequently and used to weep whenever she told the tale of his murder.<sup>137</sup>

Cawthorne himself also represents Meredith's murder elsewhere: in 1883 he wrote a long poem called 'A Midnight Reverie in the Bush', in the style of Longfellow.<sup>138</sup> Several stanzas refer to Meredith:

66  
On a Sabbath Day reclining  
Neath the hot Sun brightly shining  
On the sacred volume musing  
Of the life to come perusing  
At Yankalilla.

67  
Murmured prayer to Him ascending  
With emotion strong contending  
Vague presentiment arising  
But a passing vain surmising  
Such his solemn thoughts.

68  
Up the sandy ridges moving

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<sup>137</sup> Norman Tindale, 'Kangaroo Island loose notes', AA/338/1/32, South Australian Museum.

<sup>138</sup> Cawthorne Papers, PRG 489/11, Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

Silent gestures each step proving  
Subtle cunning never failing  
With their feet so deftly trailing  
Their deadly spears.

69

Slyly on their victim creeping  
Slyly sneaking while he's sleeping  
Through the grass and bushes crawling  
Swift his death blow on him falling  
Ah! Poor Meredith

## Appendix Eleven

### Captain Cawthorne, Mary Manatto and 'the Aboriginal'

Captain Meredith wandered about enjoying the wild solitude of the place, and musing on the probable destiny of the great land, the present scene of the exploits of the wild desperadoes that he had lately been mingling with. As he gained the top of a ridge of sandhills, contiguous to the beach, he suddenly surprised some half-dozen naked and native children, in full play, dashing and darting in the surf as it broke and rolled upon the beach. They continued their gambols, laughing in their wild and unrestrained manner, when one of them perceived the stranger. A yell of fear and surprise pierced the air, and the troop dashed off and disappeared in the neighbouring scrub. The captain in vain tried to find the hut the children came from, so gave up the search and returned, finding the boat riding at her grapnel with a slack line, so imperturbably calm was the pond.

This paragraph can be found towards the end of *The Kangaroo Islanders* on page 117. It describes six children playing on the beach at Hog Bay, just below land that by the late 1860s was referred to as 'the Aboriginal', land (Section 100) that today is covered with housing.<sup>139</sup> The 'pond' referred to at the conclusion is Christmas Cove. Cawthorne travelled to the island on several occasions in the 1850s, his last trip in 1861, so it is very likely he might have noticed a number of mixed-race children. Who were they?

In 1859 the South Australian Government made it possible for non-Indigenous men to apply for a land grant if they had married South Australian Indigenous women. William Wilkins was a former sealer living at Penneshaw with his wife Mary 'Manatto' and their ten children. The land on which they had been living at Hog Bay had been 'taken' by a farmer called Lashmar, who had told Wilkins that he must not crop the land any more. Wilkins wrote to seek a land grant, arguing that the land was:

the only means I have of supporting my children and I have ten of them. I have been at great expence having built 2 good stones Houses and I have to work very hard for their support. The Mother of my children is Mary Manatto<sup>140</sup> who I have had for 16 years, one of the Aborigines. If I am obliged

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<sup>139</sup> I am very grateful to Keryn James for pointing out this detail to me.

<sup>140</sup> She is variously named Minarto, 'Minorla' and Manatto. The word is significant: Jane Simpson notes that 'Munato' or 'Monarto' means 'fourth-born woman' in Kurna. See Jane Simpson



to Leave; I have no other resource but, to bring my Children to the Destitute for it would be impossible for me to support such a Family any where else ... there is no place on the Island where I could move my Family too it having taken up with Cattle Runs.<sup>141</sup>

Dr Matthew Moorhouse, former Protector of Aborigines wrote in support of Wilkins' application, and 23 April 1860 Assistant Surveyor General Christie reported that the land had been surveyed 'and made an aboriginal reserve and that Wilkins will be left in possession', clear evidence that Mary Manatto was a South Australian Aboriginal woman, in that when Nat Thomas tried to apply for a similar land grant in the name of his wife Bet, the application was refused on the grounds that she was Tasmanian.

The Wilkins family were not to enjoy their new standing as land-owners for very long. Captain Cawthorne recorded the following in the Sturt Light log in September 1860:

Mr George Bristow & W<sup>m</sup> Adams arrived from Hog Bay [Penneshaw] bringing a Memorial sign<sup>d</sup> by four land holders farmers of that place. Asking the def. for Mrs Wilkins and family of Nine children the Mother a Native woman the family were represented as in the most distressing state from sickness and destitution having no provisions or Bedding and labouring under a severe attack of Influenza which disease hindered the Elder members of the family from providing for the wants of themselves and children. Supplied them with one sack of flour and two pairs of Blankets on Government account and sent them from our Private stocks Tea Sugar Rice and vegetables with small supply of Medecine consigned to Mistress Bristow to be distributed by her to the distressed family in such quantities as she thought beneficial and in accordance with their wants. I wrote at the same time to Memorialist Stating that as Wilkins had a Section of Land Granted him for his family's support, I could not think of Granting him any more assistance from the Government without an Order from the proper authoritys to that effect, As those stores were sent for the use of the Natives who were on the Island. I got a recipt for the flour and blankets vide Aborigines account. This Recpt. And Memorial will be forwarded to T.[rinity] B.[oard].<sup>142</sup>

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'Personal names' *History in Portraits: Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal people* (edited by Jane Simpson & Louise Hercus, Aboriginal History Monograph 6, Sydney: Aboriginal History, 1998) 224. See also John Philip Gell, 'The Vocabulary of the Adelaide Tribe', *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* 1 (1842): 124, which gives 'Munato' as fourth child.

<sup>141</sup> GRG 35/1/1860/374, State Records. Letter undated.

<sup>142</sup> 'Sturt Light Journal', Australian Archives, Adelaide, 1853–1860. D26/1 (1–2) 1853–1860, entry Monday 17 September 1860, signed W.C. Cawthorne.

A month later Captain Cawthorne again reported on the Wilkins family in the Sturt Light Log. The 'Mr Walker' named is another of the old Islanders, William Walker:

Mr Mr<sup>s</sup> Walker Resident of Hog Bay arrived at the Station and Reported the Death of William Wilkins and Son, likewise stating that the Native Woman Mary Minato and her eight children the oldest a girl 13 years Youngest Boy 10 months were in great distress by in want of Raiment and food Requesting that I would give him advice how to act as a Person named Martin had made a claim on the cattle of the deceased for an alleged debt of 35 £ but as no writing agreement or Bill could be found amongst the deceased papers referring to the Said Claim he had resisted the taking away of 7 head of cattle (the said Martin been in promise of 2 Working Bullocks) until he had seen me on the subject and taking my advice on how to act. He likewise stated that he had wrote to the Registrar of Deaths Births and Marriages informing that Officer of the time of decease of Wilkins and Son. Mr Walker stated that the Woman and Children had no food and the inhabitants of Hog Bay could not support the family any longer and they wished the Removal of the Woman and Children from that locality as the Residents were in danger of having their houses and property destroyed by fire as the children were constantly setting fire to dry grasses and Barkes and that as the previous day they had set fire to a tin of Camfor [?] which had completely destroyed the oven [?] and had the grass been dry the whole of the crops and probably the Township had been destroyed by fire.

Under those circumstances I have a writing document (acting on behalf of the government) that M<sup>essrs</sup> Walker, Thomas Johnston and Robert Bristow would take charge of the Cattle Crops and all property belonging to the Said Mr. Wilkins on behalf of the government and the proper authorities of Intestate Estates were made acquainted with the death of Wilkins and to allow no person to remove or claim Boats or Cattle belonging to the Estate.<sup>143</sup>

William Walker, Thomas Johnston and George Bristow then wrote to Matthew Moorhouse about 'the destitute condition of the Native woman (Mary Manarto) is left in, with eight young children, they have neither Food of Clothing the means of procuring any'.<sup>144</sup> The retired Protector of Aborigines recommended to the government that Mary and her children be sent to the Port Lincoln Farming Institution at Poonindie 'then will be food and raiment supplied and the poor creatures saved from starvation'.<sup>145</sup> However, the Bishop of Adelaide's office were quick to respond, noting not only that there

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<sup>143</sup> 'Sturt Light Journal' 1853–1860, Australian Archives, D26/1 (1–2) 1853–1860, entry Monday 14 October 1860, signed W.C. Cawthorne.

<sup>144</sup> GRG 35/1/1860/1342, State Records.

<sup>145</sup> GRG 35/1/1860/1342, State Records, note appended.

was no room at Poonindie, but that the 'other native married women [there were] hardly competent or willing to take charge and attend to the infant children of Strange natives, probably of hostile tribes' and furthermore, that the financial agreement between the government and Archdeacon Hale 'had been departed from'.<sup>146</sup>

Some of the locals gathered to prey on the few Wilkins' family possessions or take advantage of their situation. John Black, the master of the *Henry and Mary*, a small vessel trading between Adelaide and the island, wrote to the Protector of Aborigines offering to carry the destitute family to Port Adelaide for £5.<sup>147</sup> Thomas Johnston took it upon himself to reap, clean and bag the twelve acres of wheat that Wilkins had planted, a thirty-three bag crop, and he wrote requesting payment for his labours.<sup>148</sup> And a letter still survives from George 'Fireball' Bates to J.T. Bagot, the Commissioner of Crown Lands (at the time responsible for the welfare of Aborigines), noting that there were twenty cleared acres in question and if 'the section held by the late W. Wilkins in Hog Bay is to be let', might he be sent the forms?<sup>149</sup>

So Mary and her children were dispatched via Yankalilla to Adelaide, and from there to Point McLeay, to be held in George Taplin's care. It seems she was not only very anxious about her children but prepared to speak her mind, pressuring bureaucrats to defend her family's interests. The Secretary of the Aborigines Friends' Association wrote to the Commissioner of Crown Lands noting that she and some of her children were now at Point McLeay, while two remained in Adelaide 'for whom the mother manifests much anxiety'. Bagot was asked to inform the Association 'as to what amount of truth there is in the woman's statement that the Government was 'disposing of her late husband's property the proceeds of which will be remitted to her'. Another (elder?) daughter was living at Yankalilla: Mary had requested that she and her children might join her there. And in a wonderfully revealing detail: 'she says she has been used to live on better food than we give her ... it is possible that what is luxury to our Blacks in the way

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<sup>146</sup> 7 November 1860, GRG 35/1/1860/1383, State Records.

<sup>147</sup> 29 October 1860, GRG 35/1/1860/1325, State Records.

<sup>148</sup> 29 December 1860, GRG 35/1/1860/145, State Records.

<sup>149</sup> 12 January 1861, GRG 35/1/1861/165, State Records.

of eating may be poor living to her'.<sup>150</sup> Other surviving letters from Point McLeay reveal that £5.16.8 had been spent on establishing the family at Point McLeay and that the £3 allocated to build a hut for them was manifestly inadequate: George Taplin thought that £13 was more like the real cost.<sup>151</sup>

Mary obviously had her own views about the suitability and appropriateness of these actions taken on her and her family's behalf. On 14 March 1861 George Mason, Sub-Protector of Aborigines based at Wellington reported that 'the Native woman from Kangaroo Island' and her children had left Point McLeay for Yankalilla 'and she is not expected to return'.<sup>152</sup>

This is just one tiny human story, cruelly typical, of racism and dispossession, and bureaucratic wrangling between the government and the church about the responsibility for the care and welfare of Aboriginal families. Ruediger records a typical Kangaroo Island version of the story:

a sealer named Wilkinson [*sic*] ... lived with his native wife and half-caste son, in a small cottage, just above Frenchman's Rock. For this reason, the east end of Hog Bay was known as "The Aboriginal" for many years. On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1860 the barque "Fides", home port Christianstadt, Russian Finland, was wrecked in Snug Cove, with the loss of nine seamen and the captain (Frederich Robert Aspland). The chief mate, Andrea Henman Hjulman, and four seamen, survived, and managed to reach Cape Borda lighthouse with the news of the wreck. The cargo was washed ashore over a wide area, some even being found on Yorke Peninsula. Wilkinson and his son went by sea to investigate the wreck and both caught pneumonia, which caused their deaths. They were buried on the hillside above their home, and later the native wife was also buried there. All that now remains of the cottage is the chimney.<sup>153</sup>

That chimney, one of the most historic ruins in South Australia, was illegally destroyed by a shack owner in the 1980s who was never prosecuted under any heritage protection legislation.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> 7 January 1861, GRG 35/1/1861/80, State Records.

<sup>151</sup> 11 February 1861, GRG 35/1/1861/366, State Records.

<sup>152</sup> 14 March 1861, GRG 35/1/1861/538, State Records. There are many descendants of the family. Philip Clarke's biographical entry for 'Martha' draws on information collected by Norman Tindale between the 1930s and the 1970s, 'Journal of researches on Kangaroo Island, South Australia', held in the Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum. See Clarke 1998: 39.

<sup>153</sup> Ruediger 1980: 100.

<sup>154</sup> See diss. Honours, Department of Archaeology, Flinders University, 1999.

But what do we make of the local legend that the ‘native wife’ is buried on the site? Phillip Clarke calls Wilkins ‘John’, and describes him as a former Russian Finnish sealer, a relative of the Antarctic explorer Sir Herbert Wilkins, which seems to confuse some of the details of Ruediger’s version of the story. Clarke also notes that ‘In 1860 Nellie Raminyemmerin and the Wilkins children, Susan, Eliza, Lizzy, John and Harry, were sent by the Government from Kangaroo Island to the Point McLeay Mission’, citing the Taplin Journals, 22 December 1860, and gives details about what happened to the Wilkins children. Clarke states that Wilkins may have had *two* wives: ‘Martha’ and Nellie; which is interesting, as none of these island sources (in an extensive correspondence) mention any woman called Nellie as resident at ‘The Aboriginal’ in 1860. So were Nellie and Martha one and the same? Clarke cites Norman Tindale as his source for the information that ‘Martha’ had ten children born on Kangaroo Island, suggesting that Martha should also be remembered as Mary Manatto.<sup>155</sup>

Clarke has also raised the possibility that ‘Mary Manatto’ was the Kaurna woman mentioned by Bull, who lived for a while with Nat Thomas.<sup>156</sup> Was she Ivaritji’s sister? It is clear from Matthew Moorhouse’s letter of support for William Wilkins’ application that he knew her. It is unfortunate that his papers about her and her family have not survived.

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<sup>155</sup> See Norman Tindale, *Journal of anthropological researches on Kangaroo Island, South Australia* (Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum, ms) 43; Clarke 1998: 39, 46–7.

<sup>156</sup> Bull 1884: 32

## Appendix Twelve

### **‘Strange Tales from South Australia’s Past This week: The Abo Girl’s Revenge’**

**By ‘Trooper Dan’<sup>157</sup>**

***The Mail* 7 February 1931: 19d–e**

Dark and terrible is this story of the hate that surges in the human soul—as dark and terrible as the time in which it is laid. The early history of Kangaroo Island is notoriously gruesome, but surely no tale of those bad old days can equal in horror the story of Seaman Gill, his mate Robbins, and the black woman Kotura.

At an early date members of the crews of sealing and whaling vessels became attracted to the island. These men were in many instances joined by escaped convicts and runaway sailors, who stole native women from the mainland, and gradually these lawless communities grew up. There is definite evidence that as early as 1806, a party of sailors settled on Kangaroo Island for some years, and there carried on endless depredations. Being left by vessels for months at a time, they knew no law or order save that which they constituted among themselves.

It so happened that in the late part of the year 1827, there lived near the Bay of Shoals two renegade sailors, Seaman Gill<sup>158</sup> and a companion Edward Robbins. The early history of these two men is rather vague, but it may be presumed that they came to Australia by the same route as many others about that time—on a convict ship.

Gill was a huge, powerfully built man, stupid in intellect, but with the brute force and animal instinct of a primitive man. He was a rogue of rogues; among the drunken, he was the most settled, among brawlers the most unscrupulous, among killers the most cruel.

Robbins was the direct antithesis, and if ever opposites attracted it was so with these two men.

Robbins was a small, wiry, soft-spoken man, and it is said that never once did he permit coarse language to pass his lips. He was a former school teacher, and possessed a keen, active brain. What twisted fate sent this educated man out to this rough country is another unsolved mystery in Australian annals.

The two men made a bare living fishing and whaling round the coastline. They lived together fairly peaceably, except for occasional outbreaks of drinking on the part of Gill, when he would become violently abusive while the fit was on

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<sup>157</sup> The identity of this writer is not known.

<sup>158</sup> Might this name suggest a partial memory of Jacob Seaman, a Dutch sealer who was a member of George Meredith’s band who arrived on Kangaroo Island in February 1834, lived for some time at Western River and later settled at Point Morrison, at the mouth of American River where he lived until he died in 1846. Alexander Tolmer refers to him at some length in his account of his 1844 expedition to Kangaroo Island to arrest runaways. See *Register* 12 September 1846: 2d, a letter about his death, in which it is claimed he arrived on Kangaroo Island in 1830. Lydia Matthews, ‘The Cross-Cultural Hunter-Gatherers on Kangaroo Island,’ unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, Flinders University, 1999, 78–82.

him and sullen and morose for some days after. Robbins took little notice of these spasms, except to keep out of his companion's way as much as was possible.

ONE MORNING towards the end of December, Gill had one of his most violent drinking bouts. But instead of returning to their camp he took a boat and sailed off to the mainland. Robbins waited all night for his companion to return, but it was not until the next day that the boat hove in sight. Then Robbins saw that his companion was not alone but with him in the boat was a writhing black bundle that moaned and gave forth pitiful little whimpers. For a moment Robbins had the impression that it was some large animal that had been captured, but when the boat neared the land and the thing sprang up with a convulsive heave that almost upset the boat, he saw that it was human—and more than that, it was a woman.

When the boat was still some feet away from the beach Gill called upon Robbins to lend a hand. Springing out he lifted the wriggling figure in his great arms and bore her to the sand, while Robbins waded out after the boat. Dragging it safely to the beach, he turned to watch his companion, who had laid the struggling figure on the sand and was cutting the bonds.

The girl was a young aborigine, with slender, immature body and small hands and feet. She could not have been more than 14 years of age, and for a native was surprisingly good looking. She had a well-shaped nose, white, even teeth, and soft brown eyes, now dilated with fear and anger.

No sooner were her bonds released than she turned on her captor and buried her teeth in his hand. Gill uttered an oath and clapped his bleeding hand to his mouth, while the child, scrambling to her feet, raced across the beach with the speed of a hare. But she had counted without Gill's vile nature. He bent swiftly, and picking up a large stone threw it with all his strength at the flying creature. The stone caught the girl on the ankle, and with a cry of pain she stumbled and fell. The next moment Gill had imprisoned her again in his arms.

'Little devil!' he chuckled. 'You'd bite me, eh?'

Robbins stood watching, a frown on his face. 'You shouldn't have done that,' he said quietly, looking at the bleeding ankle. 'After all, she's a woman, you know, Gill.'

'Woman be blowed!' snarled Gill. 'She's a dirty nigger that's got to learn that I'm master here.'

But Robbins stood his ground. 'She's a woman,' he repeated stolidly. 'And no woman ever came into a man's camp without trouble following. Listen, Gill, take her back where she belongs.'

For answer, Gill released one hand and showed a jagged wound on his wrist. 'See that?' he asked. 'Well, I got that as I was getting her away. She's the youngest and the prettiest gin in the camp. Take her back—like hell I will.'

AND SO the black woman Kotura came to join the camp—and the red seeds of hate and murder were sown in her wake.

Nameless must remain the indignities heaped upon the unfortunate black child. It must be remembered that there was no law and order, and the camp was

a kingdom unto itself where all manner of atrocities might take place without interference from any outside person. Kotura spent her days waiting on Gill and her nights tied to a post outside the camp. She was tethered there with a rope round her wrists like some beast of the field.

Throughout this time Robbins tried to give Kotura all the help that lay in his power. But he could do little, since Gill, jealous of his woman, watched his partner day and night. Robbins managed to smuggle food and drink to Kotura occasionally, to be thanked with soft glances from her brown eyes. Then one night Gill caught him and knocked him down. Thereafter he tied Kotura hand and foot to the post so that she could barely move an inch. Early one morning, through this inhuman practice, a most revolting incident occurred that roused Robbins to a pitch of frenzy.

He was awakened by screams of agony. Gill, who had been drinking the night before, still slept on in a heavy stupor. Robbins rushed outside, to see Kotura writhing and screaming in her bonds. One glance was sufficient to see the poor girl's plight. That portion of the island was infested with large red bull ants, and on certain occasions great numbers of these creatures moved in masses across the island.

An army of these ants had passed close to the camp, and finding the bound figure of the girl swarmed over her body. Robbins rushed to her rescue, slashing at the bonds, and together the two raced for the water, where the girl dived to rid herself of the cruel pests.

Kotura was for making her escape at once, but Robbins pointed out to her the foolishness of attempting to swim the great distance to the mainland. She would probably be caught by Gill and ill-treated worse than before. Robbins then promised that if Kotura would wait until that night he would steal the boat and they would make their escape together. Kotura agreed to this, and the two laid their plans.

Later in the day Gill woke, and Robbins told him of the episode. Gill's only reply was to laugh uproariously and remark that he would never forgive himself for sleeping through such entertainment. He also quietly informed Robbins that if he ever so much as laid a finger on Kotura after this he would break every bone in his body.

From that moment the smouldering hatred that burned in Robbins' heart fanned suddenly into open flames, and he resolved that, come what may, he would somehow contrive the escape of Kotura, not only to relieve that unfortunate girl of her suffering but also to outwit this man for whom he had nothing but the keenest contempt.

Robbins seems to have gone about his plans with the cunning born of fear. The whalers, at that time, brewed among themselves a particularly potent wine, which they drank at their frequent carousals. Robbins obtained a large quantity of this wine, and on the pretext of it being his birthday invited Gill to partake freely of it. Gill needed no second invitation, and by nightfall had fallen into a drunken sleep—which was just as Robbins had planned.

But Gill was not lacking in cunning himself. For the place he chose to sleep off his drunken debauch was in the bottom of the sailboat in which Robbins and Kotura had planned to escape. Thus the pair were forced to wait until late at



night when Gill's slumber would be soundest. Then they planned to lift him from the boat and make their escape that way.

Whether it was that they misjudged their time and Gill had slept off the worst of his debauch, or whether he had been shamming from the outset will never be known. However, when Robbins cut Kotura from her post and the two moved quietly along toward the boat the sleeper remained without movement. But when Robbins attempted to lift him Gill twisted slyly in his grip, whipped a knife from his belt, and buried it to the hilt in Robbins' back. Without a word the man dropped to the sand.

Then Kotura acted. As Gill bent over his dead companion she picked up a huge stone, and with all her strength crashed it down on Gill's head. The force of the blow would have killed an ordinary man, but Gill's skull was unusually thick. The blow laid him unconscious on the sand beside his partner. Now comes the part of the story proving the terrible power of hatred.

Kotura was free! There was the boat. There was the open sea. She knew enough about the manipulation of the sails to send her safely back to her own people. But the dusky soul of Kotura wanted more than freedom. It craved revenge—payment for the daily humiliations and tortures she had undergone at Gill's hands. As she stood on the beach gazing out into the sea silver under the moon, there came to her mind the terrible experience with the ants—and something cruel and primitive stirred in her heart. Her dark eyes lighted up, and she moved quickly off in the direction of the shed. A few moments later she emerged, carrying a spade.

Swiftly she set about her terrible task. Directly at the foot of the post she began to dig. Slowly, as the night wore on, she lengthened and widened this hole that was to be a living grave. And as the first streaks of dawn crimsoned the sky she had finished a cavity in the earth some 5 feet deep and three feet wide. Even then, although the perspiration poured from her body and her hands were bleeding, she did not cease.

Just as dawn was breaking she threw down her spade and crossed to the unconscious figure of Gill. Taking the body by the shoulders, she dragged it slowly towards the hole and tipped it feet first into the cavity. The body stood limply against the earth walls, the unconscious head lolling grotesquely above the ground. The effect was horrible in the extreme, but Kotura had no time to admire her handiwork.

Swiftly she filled in the earth round Gill's unconscious body, treading it down round the neck. When she ceased the lined, evil face of Gill swayed just above the ground like some strange flower wavering on a scrawny stalk.

There remained but one thing for Kotura to complete her gruesome task. She sped to the hut, and returned with a kerosene tin filled with wild honey which Robbins had gathered a few days previously. Delving her hand into the sticky mess, she proceeded to plaster Gill's face with the sweet mixture. In his hair, in his ears, thick upon his cheeks and lips she spread it, then with a sudden burst of inspiration she tilted the tin, and walking back, laid a trail of honey from the unconscious man's head to a point some dozen yards away. Here she tipped the remainder of the contents and threw the tin aside.

She retraced her steps to where Gill's head protruded above the earth, and made horrible gestures at it.

'Today, tomorrow, big ants come,' she said softly. 'Ants eat honey—and eat flesh. Kotura know how they bite—now white man feel all same. White man beat Kotura—now white man beat ants too.'

With a laugh, she turned and ran swiftly for the beach. She paused for a moment over the body of Robbins then with a little shrug of her shoulders, she turned away and began pushing the heavy boat out into the sea. The waves floated it, Kotura leaped aboard and began to manipulate the sails. Smaller and smaller grew the boat until it was but a mere pseck [sic] on the water.

THREE months later a party of whalers put in at the Bay of Shoals. They were surprised to find on the beach the skeleton of a dead man, which they recognised as Robbins. Knowing Gill's reputation they made immediate search for him but he was nowhere to be found. Then one of the party, returning to the deserted camp, stumbled over the skull of a man. It had been absolutely denuded of all flesh, and judging by the signs, had been exposed to the weather for some time. Theories were advanced that it might have been the skull of Gill, but the whalers scoffed at the theory, pointing out that it would have been impossible for the skull to be in that condition in so short a time. And if it were Gill's skull, what happened to the remainder of the body?

Only Kotura, safe in the hands of her people, could have answered that question to the whalers' satisfaction.

## **‘a curious state of independence’: the Australian Sealing Industry**

After European settlement made its tenuous beginnings at Sydney Cove, it took close on a hundred years for frontiers to recede inland before the European advance. The continent’s littoral was one of the first frontiers to be defined: by 1803 the outline of the land mass had been drawn, the charting completed, the naming of features celebrating and codifying the European arrival. Matthew Flinders’ circumnavigation mapped ‘Australia’—the word was first used by Flinders—the land mass studied through telescopes and revealed as ‘girt by sea’. As Thomas Dunbabin observed as long ago as 1925, this mapping led to something not remembered much now in contemporary Australia: ‘When the whole interior of Australia was as little known as the other side of the moon, the remote sub Antarctic islands, set in one of the stormiest seas on the globe, were better known and far more frequented than they are today’.<sup>1</sup>

One reason why these stormy coastlines were sailed, often in the teeth of the gales carried by the Roaring Forties, was the discovery of vast numbers of seals of several varieties on the islands to the south of the mainland and in the Southern Ocean, the exploitation of which was to provide the staples for one of Australia’s first export industries, seal products. Five species of seals were present in Australasian waters. Four were killed for their skins: the Australian hair seal or sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*); the New Zealand sea lion (*Phocarctos leionina*); the Australian or brown fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus*); the New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*).<sup>2</sup> The enormous Southern Elephant Seals (*Mirounga leonina*) were also slaughtered, not for their skins but for their oil, which was in high demand,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Dunbabin, ‘Whalers, sealers, and Buccaneers,’ *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 11 (1925) 1.

<sup>2</sup> These days two pinnipeds or seals survive in several colonies along South Australian shores. On Kangaroo Island the New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) can be seen at Admirals Arch and the Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) can be seen at world-famous Seal Bay. See Parry Kostoglou, *Sealing in Tasmania: Historical Research Project a Report for the Parks and Wildlife Service* (Hobart: Department of Environment and Land Management, 1996) 5–6.

not only for lighting but also for many industrial uses in the decades before mineral oils became both relatively cheap and generally available. Elephant seals congregated each summer to breed on only a handful of islands in Bass Strait: Elephant Bay, the main rookery, was on the eastern side of King Island at the western end of the strait.

Although the convict origins of the colony at Sydney Cove provided some early impediments to the evolution of capitalist enterprises, and although the East India Company owned a supposed monopoly in the Australasian region which in theory excluded Sydney ship-owners from trading, a decade after first settlement the necessary conditions were in place for a sealing industry to flourish and money to be made. There are several reasons why sealing was profitable for two or three decades, allowing Jorgen Jorgensen to describe Hobart Town in 1834 as 'enriched with oleaginous spoils'.<sup>3</sup> With whale commodities included, seal products made up 40% of the value of the exports from New South Wales in 1830, a figure which by 1850 had fallen to just 1%, while equivalent figures for the exports of wool over a similar period show an increase from 25 to 67%.<sup>4</sup>

Seals were the source of valuable products in the early nineteenth century. In 1796 the London furrier Thomas Chapman perfected a technique for removing the coarse outer or guard hairs from a sealskin to leave the soft inner fur, a skill formerly known only in the Chinese fur trade based in Canton. The process is described by Sir Joseph Banks in an 1806 report that argues that the 'Sidney' colony might be productive rather than expensive if the sealing industry were to be developed even further:

A certain portion of the seals of the southern hemisphere, called fur seals, have under the shaggy hair with which they are cover'd a coat of wool almost as fine as that of the beaver, and much more valuable than that of the rabbit. This, by the invention of Mr. Chapman, can be separated from the hair that covers it and converted into a most valuable raw material for the hat manufactory, and possibly a more advantageous article to the

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<sup>3</sup> Dunbabin 1965: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Little, 'Sealing and Whaling in Australia before 1850,' *Australian Economic History Review* (:2 (1969): 125.

revenue when employ'd in that trade than any other of equal value. The fur of this seal will, by coating over the sheep's wool bodies of which hats are made, convert them into what the hatters call fine plates, each of which pays a duty of two shillings or three shillings to the Government. A seal, when worth ten shillings, will cover three or four of these bodies, and they clearly will produce the revenue as much as its sale price to the fishermen, which it is presumed no other article will do. More of this kind of wool would be us'd in the manufacture of hats if a greater supply of it could be obtain'd. At present the makers of shawls and other fancy draperies purchase a part of the stock at a high rate and covert it into various elegant and expensive articles—one of which is a cloth, not a little resembling the *drap de vigogne* [Swans-down], and sold almost as dear.<sup>5</sup>

Chapman's invention created a demand for sealskins in Britain: 'prices rose to from 13s to 14s for medium and up to 30s for large skins. A hat worth a couple of shillings [20c] could be sold for more than a pound [\$2] if covered in seal fur.'<sup>6</sup> By 1808 the market for sealskins was glutted and prices fell, effectively bring the in-shore sealing industry to an end, although sealing continued on the sub-Antarctic islands until well into the nineteenth century. Locally some skins were also made into shoes: in the 1840s there were shoemakers in both Sydney and in Adelaide working with Kangaroo Island seal and wallaby skins.<sup>7</sup>

While one or two of the first vessels to go sealing in the late 1790s were convict transports like the *Hillsboro'* returning to Europe after a detour to the sealing grounds to backload with seal-skins, the majority were small locally-built craft.<sup>8</sup> A third reason why sealing flourished in Sydney (and later on to a lesser extent in Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple) is because there

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<sup>5</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales* Vol. IV. Hunter and King (Sydney: Government Printer, 1896) 88.

<sup>6</sup> D.R. Hainsworth, *The Sydney Traders: Simeon Lord and His Contemporaries* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981) 68.

<sup>7</sup> Even after settlement Kangaroo Island wallaby skins seemed to have enjoyed quite a reputation as high-quality shoe leather. The Islanders made their own versions of colonial ugg boots, no doubt learning from their Indigenous women companions. The skin of a freshly-killed wallaby was tied around the foot—fur in—and left on until it dried, after which the moccasin kept the shape of the foot. Wallaby skins were also sewn together using sinews from the animal's tail to form rugs which were very popular among the colonists to sleep or sit on. A rug of 40 skins was worth 40 shillings (*Observer* 25 September 1844 6).

<sup>8</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales* Vol. IV. Hunter and King (Sydney: Government Printer, 1896) 717.

emerged a collection of entrepreneurial characters with an eye to the main chance, men who both financed and managed the nascent industry, negotiating the elaborate protocols and colonial regulations that supposedly prevented them from trading and coping with very high insurance costs that were a consequence not just of the longest sea voyage taken by Europeans but also of the taking of prizes during the Napoleonic Wars (1800–1815). Governors John Hunter and Phillip Gidley King gave increasingly overt support to those ‘enterprising people’ who had ideas about setting off sealing, especially during King’s tenure as governor (1800–1806). In 1802 he wrote to Lord Hobart:

The small vessels that catch seals about the islands of Basses Strait and Van Diemen’s Land belong to individuals of this place. A quantity of seal skins and oil has been brought ... I ... shall encourage that pursuit as much as possible to those who may be of industrious and enterprising dispositions.<sup>9</sup>

In what must have been one of the earliest Australian examples of economic rationalist thinking, King realised that the long-term independence of New South Wales depended on the development of a flourishing maritime industry in the hands of private entrepreneurs. Some of these ‘industrious and enterprising’ men were ex-convicts like James Underwood and Henry Kable, the former the first man to build ships in Sydney, the latter his business partner. Simeon Lord is another famous name; initially the ex-convict trader had little access to suitable shipping, so he made business agreements with others who did have access, sometimes even with visiting Americans. Underwood, Kable and Lord joined forces in 1805; Hainsworth provides a list of their flotilla of vessels which allowed them to dominate the industry until their partnership dissolved in a series of law suits. All three had given away sealing by 1816.

Other entrepreneurs were members of trading families, like the ‘country trader’ and gentleman merchant Robert Campbell from Calcutta in India

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<sup>9</sup> D.R. Hainsworth, *The Sydney Traders: Simeon Lord and His Contemporaries* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981) 130.

who was licensed to the East India Company. ‘Merchant’ Campbell’s firm sent the *Sydney Cove* from Calcutta on its ill-fated speculative trading voyage in 1797, and he traveled on a second ship to New South Wales a year later. He settled in Sydney in 1800, building up a successful importing, exporting and trading business. He was later to build Yarralumla, the present-day residence of Australian Governors-General in Canberra. He died in 1846, the ‘father of the mercantile community’.

Joseph Underwood was another well-known sealing master who entered the industry late: he sent teams to kill elephant seals on Macquarie Island in the 1820s when most of the seal rookeries on the more northern islands had been wiped out. There were also numbers of Tasmanians involved in the industry, though few as prominent as the Sydney traders. Most of the individuals who dominated the sealing industry were based in Sydney: until 1816 or thereabouts most ships visiting South Australian waters set out from Port Jackson. Based on the records of shipping movements in South Australian waters prepared by R.T. Sexton, after 1816 the South Australian rookeries were increasingly being visited by numbers of Tasmanian vessels, in the last decade before settlement in 1836 the majority out of Launceston.<sup>10</sup>

Another important factor that affected the rise of the sealing industry was the colonial administration in Sydney turning a blind eye to the establishment of a colonial shipbuilding industry that could provide vessels for coastal trading. Early penal administrations had not allowed the building of sea-going craft, fearing that convicts might seize them and escape—as a number did. Governor King, in contrast, discreetly assisted a number of New South Wales shipbuilders who began to construct small sea-worthy vessels of between twenty and ninety tonnes, mostly deep-draughted schooners and sloops, built on similar lines to the coastal craft of the English Channel and North Sea.<sup>11</sup> This was ‘in very direct breach of his Instructions, and [moreover] he allowed a consignment of skins and oil to be sent to England

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<sup>10</sup> R.T. Sexton, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures South Australia 1627–1850* (Ridgehaven, SA: Gould Books and Roebuck Books, 1990) 18–26.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Salter, *Bass Strait Ketches* (Hobart: St David’s Park Publishing, 1991) 14.

in breach of the East India Company's regulations'.<sup>12</sup> Shipbuilding also developed later in Tasmania, where the builders had access to the remarkable huon pine: some beautiful colonial vessels still survive. No doubt some of the impetus for developing the local ship-building industry came from the large numbers of ship-wrecks in the early decades of European settlement. Hainsworth records that *nearly half* of the Port Jackson sealing fleet owned by Lord, Kable and Underwood was lost between 1800 and 1813.<sup>13</sup>

The various ship-building yards in Port Jackson, on the Hawkesbury, the Derwent and the Tamar also produced fleets of indispensable whaleboats; the smaller craft carried on the decks of the coastal vessels and left with the sealing gangs. When the colonists arrived at Nepean Bay on Kangaroo Island in 1836 they found many of the Islanders had whaleboats in their possession. There are a number of records of monies paid to the likes of Nat Thomas and William Walker for ferrying passengers to and from the mainland, for exploring St Vincent's Gulf and for other in-shore work. Carroll describes 'Tasmanian whaleboats' as follows:

[they] followed the American pattern, double-ended and up to thirty-five feet long. Five or six feet at the stern was decked to provide storage and offer a firm support for the steersman. The boats had a graceful sheer—that is, their sides dipped smoothly from bow and stern towards the centre—with rowlocks for five or six pulling oars. At the stern, a housing was located for the long steering oar, and a little forward of the boat's centre was a socket for the mast to be stepped when required. ... Constructed of strong light wood often no more than half an inch in thickness, the boats could be carried by their own crews.<sup>14</sup>

Harry O'May adds that they 'were rigged with a spritsail and jib tanned red with wattle bark. The mainsail was like a tent at night, the sprit used as a pole ... they carried a fire-pot for cooking purposes'<sup>15</sup> and were often

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<sup>12</sup> Hainsworth 1981: 130.

<sup>13</sup> Hainsworth 1967a: 63.

<sup>14</sup> J.R. Carroll, Harpoons to Harvest: *The story of Charles and John Mills, Pioneers of Port Fairy* (Warrnambool: Warrnambool Institute Press, 1989) 53–4.

<sup>15</sup> Harry O'May, *Hobart River Craft* (Hobart: Government Printer, nd) 41.



ballasted with shingles. An 1849 description of a whaleboat owned by the Straitsman Jem Everard was recorded by Robert Elwes:

a fine whale boat, with a spritsail and jib on the foremast, and a spritsail on the mizzen, and would stand almost any sea, having slips of canvas along each gunwale, raised on pegs to keep the wash of the waves out.<sup>16</sup>

Small boats today are still set up with spray guards on the gunwales to keep the occupants dry, using this same technique.

Seals were relatively easy to harvest, at least in the early years when the rookeries were only three or four days' sail out from Sydney or Hobart. By the 1820s deep-sea whaling eventually displaced sealing, especially after the crippling duties levied on colonial whale products in Britain were removed as a result of the Bigge Report.<sup>17</sup> Unlike sealing, deep-sea whaling demanded large numbers of skilled and experienced men, high-quality chandlery and specialised equipment, not to mention very sturdy blue-water ships built with provision for carrying hundreds of tonnes of oil and whalebone and capable of venturing deep into the Southern Ocean, sometimes below 50° or 60° south.<sup>18</sup> Sealing, on the other hand, was (until the Bass Strait rookeries were gutted) a seasonal activity that needed only a small party of men, provisions, salt, a whaleboat, some clubs and knives and other basic equipment. Fur seals come ashore to breed and raise their young late each year, on reef and shore platforms, in caves and among boulder stacks, often in situations where the seas are active.<sup>19</sup> Because fur seals were taken in spring and summer when seas are calmer, the rookeries could be approached by smaller vessels: whaleboats were ideal. The much larger Elephant seals, on the other hand, came ashore on King Island in July, necessitating the creation of a rather more substantial camp and coping with the arduous mid-

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Elwes, *A Sketcher's Tour around the World* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1854) 256.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Pearson, 'Shore-based whaling at Twofold Bay: One Hundred Years of Enterprise,' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 71.1 (1985) 4.

<sup>18</sup> At least one of the Port Jackson craft ventured as far south as 70°.

<sup>19</sup> R.M. Warneke, 'The distribution and abundance of seals in the Australian region, with summaries of biology and current research,' *Mammals in the Seas Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations Fisheries Series*, 5.4 (1982) 440.

winter conditions, but because Elephant seals bred on sandy beaches, were cumbersome ashore and thus more easily killed, the difficulties of winter work on King Island did little to hinder the exploitation of the resource.

Among the first reports of large seal numbers along the southern coastline of Australia was that made by Captain George Vancouver, who in 1791 charted the coast from Cape Leeuwin to King George Sound in what is now Western Australia.<sup>20</sup> Sealing gangs were operating a year later, in 1792, when William Raven left men at Dusky Bay, South Island, New Zealand. He had a license from the East India Company that allowed him to seal in Australasian waters. He dropped off a gang of ten men at Dusky Bay with William Leith in charge: as well as taking 4 500 skins, they built a vessel with a forty foot keel, the first sea-going vessel built in Australasia from Australasian timbers.<sup>21</sup>

The first phase of the sealing industry was based around the rookeries of Bass Strait and began with the beaching of the *Sydney Cove* in 1797. Commanded by Captain G.A. Hamilton and owned by Campbell, Clark and Co. of Calcutta, she was headed for Sydney with a cargo of consumer goods, including 'India goods', chinaware, 7 000 gallons of Bengali rum, wine, spirits, general merchandise, foodstuffs and even some livestock. Hamilton's orders were to sell the cargo at Sydney and then take his crew sealing on their way back to Calcutta.<sup>22</sup> After sustaining storm damage south-west of Tasmania she began taking on water, and with all hands at the pumps the stricken *Sydney Cove* ran up the east coast of Tasmania, the labour at the pumps such that five of the 'lascars' (Indian seamen) died, while another British seaman was lost overboard. Then a second easterly gale drove the ship west into Bass Strait, and the order was given to jettison some of the

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<sup>20</sup> Anthony J. Brown, *Ill-starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000) 153, 345.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Dunbabin, *Sailing the World's Edge: Sea Stories from Old Sydney* (London: Newnes, [1937]) 46.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Steven, *Merchant Campbell 1769–1846. A Study in Colonial Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) 23.

cargo. On the advice of chief mate Hugh Thompson, Hamilton decided to run her aground as soon as a suitable place might be found: a sandy cove on the south shore of Preservation Island in the Furneaux Group is her final resting-place. She touched in six metres of water 8 February 1797.<sup>23</sup> After landing the crew without further losses, Hamilton took the precaution of off-loading the rum to what is known today as Rum Island. The survivors built a hut from the timbers from the wreck and settled in to await rescue, making short trips to some of the other islands in the Furneaux Group, on one of which Hamilton noticed that the strong tidal rips might indicate the presence of a strait between the mainland and Van Diemen's Land.

Hamilton then ordered the longboat to take the news of the wreck to Sydney—and a letter to Governor Hunter with his speculations about a strait. Seventeen set off, including Thompson and a company man, William Clark. After coasting north their boat was wrecked near Point Hicks on the main, and they were forced to attempt to walk to Port Jackson. The majority died along the way; some were killed by Aborigines, only three, Clark and two 'Lascars', reached their destination. Clark has left a memorable diary of their travails.<sup>24</sup>

When word reached Sydney, Governor Hunter sent the government schooner *Francis* and the privately-owned sloop *Eliza* south to look for survivors: the latter was lost with all hands, but the *Francis* returned to Sydney 6 July 1797 with some of the crew and cargo. The *Francis* made two more salvage trips to Preservation Island: Matthew Flinders was on board for the second of these trips, charged with further mapping of the islands. On returning to Sydney he reported to Hunter that two kinds of seals inhabited the islands: he described 'hair seals' (*Neophoca cinerea*) on Clarke's Island, and then after sailing east through Armstrong Channel to Cone Point on

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<sup>23</sup> Shirley Lester, 'The importance of a shipwreck: the *Sydney Cove* (1797),' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings* 31.3 (1984): 1. See also A. Charles Begg and Neil C. Begg, *The World of John Boulton: Including an Account of Sealing in Australia and New Zealand* (Christchurch, NZ: Whitcoulls Publishers, 1979) 54.

<sup>24</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales*, Vol. III (Sydney: 1893–1901) 757–768.

Cape Barren Island, he found colonies of the New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*):

The number of seals exceeded everything we had, any of us, before witnessed; and they were smaller, and of a different species from those which frequented Armstrong's Channel. Instead of the bull-dog nose, the thinly set, sandy hair [of the hair seal], these had sharp-pointed noses, and the general colour approached to black; but the tips were of silver grey, and underneath was a fine, whitish, thick fur. The commotion excited by our presence in this assemblage of several thousand timid animals, was very interesting to me, who knew little of their manners. The young cubs huddled together in the holes of the rocks, and moaned piteously; those more advanced scampered and rolled down to the water, with their mothers; whilst some of the old males stood up in defence of their families, until the terror of the sailors' bludgeons became too strong to be resisted.<sup>25</sup>

Governor Hunter sent Flinders and George Bass back to the Strait in the following year in the sloop *Norfolk* to chart the strait and in particular find safe passages through the dangerous waters, confirming the insularity of Van Diemen's Land. Flinders' descriptions of what would become known as the Bass Strait islands and rocks covered with seals led to something of a rush. Even while Bass and Flinders were undertaking their cartographic work, the Sydney merchants were equipping ships and sending gangs of men south to be left on the rookery islands to kill seals, dress the skins and (where elephant seals might be taken) render them down to oil.

The experienced sealer Charles Bishop in the 80-ton brig *Nautilus*, on his way back to the sealing grounds on the north-west coast of America, arrived in Sydney in May 1798 to make repairs to his vessel. There he heard about the fate of the *Sydney Cove* and the size of the seal rookeries. Bishop wrote to Sydenham Teast, the owner of the *Nautilus*, reporting the news in a letter that tells us much about the business of sealing:

From the Commander and sad remains of the Crew of the ship Sidney Cove of Bengal, who where obliged to run their ship on Shore after

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis* (2 vols. London: G. and W. Nichol, 1814) cxxvix.

doubling the South Cape of New Holland to save their lives, we learn that the Islands thereabouts abounds with Fur Seals, and it is our intentions to proceed from here about the 25<sup>th</sup> of this month for those parts with a Strong crew of 25 men and two whale boats to kill and dry skins for China, and boil out seal oil for this market, proposing first to secure the ship in a good Harbour and then divide the People in Seperate Parties, to the different Islands, under the command of myself and officers, keeping a few of the Crew boiling oil which we expect to procure to the quantity of 3 or 4000 Gallons and which will doubtless sell here well at least 5/- per Gallon perhaps more, and it is further proposed that when we have got about 2000 Gallons and 10,000 Skins to leave 2/3 of the Crew under the officers and proceed here [to Sydney] with both articles we have procured, sell the Oil, and lodge the skins as so much property secured, then take in a fresh stock of Provisions and return to the Seal Islands the distance not being more than 3 or 4 days sail, and then to Employ the time untill the end of February when we propose sailing direct to China from hence should we be so fortunate, which with ashurence we have every reason to expect, to procure a double Cargo of Seals Skins, as the *Nautilus* will not carry More than 25,000 to leave them in respectable hands here to send on to China by the first Ships for Teas—<sup>26</sup>

Bishop then sailed the *Nautilus* in company with Flinders and Bass as they headed south to circumnavigate Tasmania. They parted company at the Furneaux Goup, and Bishop landed the first sealing gangs at Kent Bay on Cape Barren Island. When they returned to Sydney in January 1799 they had not been as successful as he hoped; nevertheless his gangs managed to prepare 5 000 skins and 350 gallons of oil in eight weeks' labour. Bishop, however, had learned the hard lesson that there were not suitable all-weather harbours in the stormy Bass Strait islands where a vessel the size of the *Nautilus* lie at anchor safely for months, especially during the winter. Much smaller—and less expensive—vessels were needed, vessels that might be sent off trading while the sealing gangs laboured ashore at their bloody work. Almost as soon as the *Nautilus* returned to Sydney it was hired to take another gang back to Bass Strait. By the end of 1799 numbers of sealing gangs were at work on several islands in Bass Strait; William Reid returning

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Roe, ed. *The Journal and Letters of Captain Charles Bishop on the North-West Coast of America, in the Pacific and in New South Wales 1794–1799* (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1967) 290–1.

to Port Jackson with 1 300 skins and 30 tierces<sup>27</sup> of oil from King Island. In September 1801 the *Harrington* captained by William Campbell landed another sealing gang on King Island: within three months the ship had picked them up and returned to Port Jackson 'with 3000 hair and fur seal skins, which were purchased by Robert Campbell and Company at 3s 9d per skin and sent to China for sale, and 2 500 gallons of seal oil'.<sup>28</sup> In just two years most of the islands of the strait had been checked out for seals. By 1802 it has been estimated that there were two hundred sealers on the Bass Strait islands and tens of thousands of skins were being shipped out of Port Jackson bound for China.<sup>29</sup> Hainsworth's figures about the numbers of seas taken are revealing:

In August 1806 an official return showed that, since November 1800, 118,721 seal skins had been imported into Sydney by colonial sealers and 98,280 had been exported. (A further 14,750 skins had also come and gone in the holds of British whaling ships.) ... Lord had sent at least 52,000 skins direct to China and London from Antipodes Island, and 20,000 skins to London on the *Ceres* direct from the same island at about the same time (January 1804).<sup>30</sup>

Hainsworth also has some interesting figures about the numbers of men involved in the Australian sealing industry in the first decade of the nineteenth century:

In December 1804 [Governor] King reported that Campbell and Kable and Underwood had 180 men employed at the sealing islands. In October 1805 'two or three' ex-convicts (probably Lord, Kable and Underwood with Andrew Thompson) had 216 men sealing. Probably about ten to

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<sup>27</sup> A tierce was a barrel measure, a volume which varied according to the goods carried. Here the meaning is 30 barrels.

<sup>28</sup> John S. Cumpston, *First Visitors to Bass Strait* (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1973) 43.

<sup>29</sup> J.M. MacKenzie, *Sealing, Sailing and Settling in South-Western Victoria* (Kilmore: Lowden Publishing, 1976) 3. See also J.R. Carroll, *Harpoons to Harvest: The story of Charles and John Mills, Pioneers of Port Fairy* (Warrnambool: Warrnambool Institute Press, 1989) 43.

<sup>30</sup> Hainsworth 1981: 133.

fifteen per cent of the total male population 'off the Store' were sealers or mariners by 1805–6.<sup>31</sup>

These percentages obviously bothered the authorities; Philip Gidley King observing in 1806 that:

Another cause for the want of agricultural labourers [in the colony of NSW] is the number of free men who are employed by individuals in the seal and oil fisheries [King's marginal figure is 280], which, as a productive article for export, has received every encouragement that could be given; and as long as grain can be raised for the consumption of the colony, there cannot, perhaps, be a more advantageous employment for the benefit of the inhabitants in general.<sup>32</sup>

Governor King's concern for the effective management of the industry caused him some difficulties. It seems that sealing was (or at least became, by 1805) a single man's occupation. After one or two incidents in which starving and distressed sealers had approached government officers for assistance in Van Diemen's Land, King acted to ameliorate the working conditions in the industry, ordering that the sealing masters and owners should enter into bonds to provide their men with sufficient provisions. He also charged that the owners would be charged for any foodstuffs provided from government stores. King then added the following instruction to the Sydney merchants who controlled the sealing industry:

Free men having Wives and Families at this Settlement will not be allowed to engage in the Fishery because it is known that American Vessels have taken people of that description from the Islands and most certainly with the Consent of their Employers, by which means their Wives and families will become burthensome to the Public. But the Owners or Employers of all Colonial Vessels and Sealing gangs may enter into a separate Bond themselves in £200 and two sureties in £100 Sterling each, to maintain the Wives and Families of those permitted to engage, with a ration equal to that issued from the Public Store during the husband or parent's absence, unless satisfactory proof is adduced that the husband or parent so engaged is dead and not taken from the Colony or

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<sup>31</sup> D.R. Hainsworth, 'Iron men in wooden ships: the Sydney sealers 1800-1820,' *Labour History* 13 (1967) 19. Another record has 150 men engaged in 1804 (quoted Crowley 1980: 139).

<sup>32</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales* Vol. IV (Sydney: Government Printer, 1898) 40.

its limits; and to bring them back to this Settlement (if required) when the term of his engagement is completed.<sup>33</sup>

Another development that even further threatened the long-term viability of the industry was the arrival of foreign sealing vessels, many of them from the United States, some from Britain, a few from France or Mauritius, blue-water craft with much larger crews and often equipped for years at sea.

The first American ships were sealing in Australian waters as early as 1792. In February 1803 Captain Isaac Pendleton and the *Union* arrived at King George's Sound in Western Australia in response to George Vancouver's reports of rich seal rookeries to be found there. Instead Pendleton met Nicolas Baudin, who advised him that he had chosen the wrong time of year for sealing and to travel east to what Baudin called Bougainville Bay (the waters of Nepean Bay, American River and Pelican Lagoon) on the north coast of *Île Borda*, or Kangaroo Island.<sup>34</sup> Pendleton took Baudin's advice and spent four months of the 1803 winter on Kangaroo Island, at what he called Union Harbour (now American River), where they built a small thirty-five ton schooner, the *Independence*. The *Union* then left sealing gangs there for the following season and sailed to Sydney with a cargo of 5–6 000 skins which Pendleton sold through Simeon Lord. The *Union* subsequently won a charter to Norfolk Island to bring back a cargo of salt pork. After his Pacific venture, Pendleton returned to South Australian waters to pick up his sealing gangs and their skins. The *Union* and the *Independence* then sailed back to Port Jackson, the *Union* arriving 27 June 1804, the *Independence* three days later. While the latter was at anchor in Sydney Cove some casks of salt were stolen from her, suggesting that Pendleton's gang was the first to gather salt from the lake inland from the Bay of Shoals.<sup>35</sup> Baudin had named Kangaroo

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted Dunbabin 1937: 162.

<sup>34</sup> Brown 2000: 345.

<sup>35</sup> These details are drawn from Sexton 1990: 18 and Cumpston 1986. *The Independence*, the first ship built in South Australia, was later lost with all hands returning from a sealing trip to the Antipodes Islands off the south coast of New Zealand.



Island *Île Borda*, after the mathematician and astronomer Jean-Charles de Borda. Pendleton's preferred name was 'Baudin's Island', which was then transformed into 'Border's Island', used often by the sealing and whaling fraternity until 1836 when Flinders' original name was restored by the colonists.<sup>36</sup>

A famous American sealing master to visit Australian shores was Amaso Delano, relative of US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the author of a remarkable book about his sea-faring life. Delano established quite a presence in Bass Strait and won a spirited round of fisticuffs with a rival Australian sealing gang led by Joseph Murrell, <sup>who</sup> lived for a number of years on Kangaroo Island. The number of foreign vessels in Australian waters declined after 1804 when Governor King moved to refuse their clearances for the sealing grounds to protect the local industry, 'the first venture of an Australian government into foreign relations'.<sup>37</sup> Two years later his determination to maintain some slope on the playing field is evident in a report in which he argued that he acted to protect the sealing trade because it should be

confined to Englishmen and English vessels ... if the most decided checks were not given to the introduction of Americans and American vessels any benefit this colony may possess would become the property of Americans at the expence of England.<sup>38</sup>

Who were the sealers? What kinds of men were they? The first answer is that many were what these days would be called small businessmen or even sub-contractors. The sealing masters usually employed their labour on a profit-sharing system called lays that were negotiated and signed off before leaving port. The size of a man's lay depended upon his position, his rank and his

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<sup>36</sup> Anthony J. Brown, *Ill-starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000) 333.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Crowley, *A Documentary History of Australia Volume 1 Colonial Australia 1788–1840* (Sydney: Nelson, 1980) 130. See also *Historical Records of New South Wales* Vol. IV (Sydney: Government Printer, 1898) 40.

<sup>38</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales* Vol. IV (Sydney: Government Printer, 1898) 40.

experience. A captain might receive one-tenth, the mate one-twenty-fifth, an experienced man one-sixtieth and an inexperienced man one-seventy-fifth of the profits derived from skins and/or oil delivered in good condition to the master at the end of the sealing season. Often the men were paid in skins and oil, which they then had to exchange or sell to the master, in effect receiving the equivalent of three shillings [30c] for each skin.<sup>39</sup> Some masters paid their men in goods, slop clothing and alcohol. It seems that the traders, owners and sealing masters made good money: it is less clear that the industry was lucrative for all concerned.

The question of the ethnicity of the sealers has long been a matter of interest. While Plomley and Henley note that the 'largest group appears to have comprised seamen who had deserted their ships on arrival at Port Jackson or Hobart', not all those men were British.<sup>40</sup> Numbers of sealers and whalers came from other backgrounds. While most seem to have been of European descent, including numbers of French, New Zealanders and Americans, a surprising number seem to have come from what are described as 'coloured' or 'lascar' backgrounds, some African-Americans, some from Mauritius, numbers from the Pacific Islands including Hawaii and Fiji, and Maoris from New Zealand. Robinson's records are the most comprehensive; he mentions a number of individuals by name, including: John Baker ('a man of colour'); 'Bellarday' ('an American negro') George Brown ('an American black'); Jack Cammerlee ('man of colour'); Samuel Rodman Chase (American); John Myetye ('New Zealand'); John 'Black Jack' Williams (Barbados, West Indies); 'Yankee Bob'. Other sources refer to both named (and un-named) men from various parts of the world. A Portuguese named Thompson lived on Kangaroo Island for several years in the 1820s; it seems numbers of 'Portuguese' sealers actually came from either the Cape Verde islands or from the Azores, where there existed long traditions of blue-water sailing and deep-sea fisheries. Two of George Meredith's associates included

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<sup>39</sup> Hainsworth 1967: 71.

<sup>40</sup> Brian Plomley and Kristen Anne Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1990): 33.

an African-American called John Bathurst and Jacob Seaman, who was originally Dutch.<sup>41</sup> There were also a handful of Indigenous men and boys in some of the sealing gangs, as a number of shadowy references suggest.

What was it like to go sealing? There are only a handful of first-hand accounts. When an elephant seal rookery was discovered at what is still called Elephant Bay on King Island in 1802, a party of sealers settled in there to exploit the resource. There they were discovered by members of Baudin's French expedition sailing on *Le Naturaliste* and *La Géographe*, Péron providing one of our most vivid records of elephant sealing, describing a beach on the eastern side of King Island which the French called *B. des Eléphants*:

It is the fat alone that the English merchants seek from the sea elephant; it alone is the immediate object of their undertakings and of their distant expeditions: it well merits this from every point of view, from its abundance, from the ease of its preparation, or, finally, from the quality of oil that it yields. Indeed, equal in its dimensions to several of the large whales, the sea elephant yields nothing to them as to the thickness of the layer of fat that envelopes it. Anson did not exaggerate at all when he said that it was more than a foot. As for the quantity of oil that one of these animals alone can furnish, it is prodigious. For the largest individuals the sealers estimate 700 to 750 kilogrammes (14 to 1500 pounds). As soon as the animal is killed it is skinned; then, with large, well knives, the fat is peeled off in long strips, rather as is done in the stripping of whales: then this fat is cut into small cubes, and is melted over slow fires in huge cauldrons set up for this purpose on the shore: when it has had the degree of cooking considered necessary, it is poured into tuns.<sup>42</sup> The whole of this operation is so easy and so quick, that the ten men established on King Island could easily produce 3000 pounds of oil per day, including the time for hunting, skinning, stripping and carrying. Moreover all the casks that had been supplied to these men had filled long before we reached King Island, and the leader of this establishment was complaining that his owners had not provided him with the twentieth

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<sup>41</sup> Plomley & Henley 1990: 34–70. See also *Register*, 25 September 1844, 3e and 12 September 1846, 2d.

<sup>42</sup> Those engaged in the elephant fishery used a terminology drawn from whaling: the site for preparing the oil was called the 'try-works'; the process 'trying-out'; the fires that heated the try-pots were fed with scraps of seal blubber. It must have demanded a strong stomach to cope with not just the brutality but also the stench.

part of those he could have filled. The amount of oleaginous substance that can be obtained from each sea elephant is fairly constantly in proportion to the size of the animal whatever may be its sex and age; but it is infinitely smaller in all of them at this singular period of giving birth to pups and lactation, when the males and females remain for several weeks running without taking any nourishment. As for the quality, no very appreciable difference can be observed between the oil furnished by the young or the old, by the males or by the females: it is equally good in all of them. ... Prepared by the English sealers the sea elephant oil is clear, odourless, and does not take on that rancid taste that can never be removed from whale oil or fish oil. Used for foodstuffs of any kind it does not pass on to them any disagreeable flavour; it gives a lamp an extremely bright, clear flame, without making any smoke, and without giving off the foul smell of most of the animal oils; finally, it lasts longer than the other products of the same nature; for a sixth of a pint is enough to keep an ordinary wick alight for twelve hours. These details had been given to me by the English sealers, and we were able to satisfy ourselves as to their accuracy with the oil that their leader, the worthy Cowper, forced us to accept on our departure. All this oil is destined for England, where it is used for various industrial uses, but particularly in manufacturing cloth, to soften the fibres; it is sold there, so the sealers told us, for 6 shillings 6 pence ... the gallon.<sup>43</sup>

John Boulton's is the most graphic and detailed of the personal accounts. His description of sealers at work in 1824 communicates something of the brutal and bloody realities of the industry. While these days we may wonder how long it took for individuals to become habituated to life in the butchery, in the early nineteenth century men were made of sterner stuff. While Sir Joseph Banks may have considered that the sealers would have 'less trouble in killing ... [seals] as the servants in the victualling office have who kill hogs in a pen with mallets',<sup>44</sup> contemporary readers shudder at the details:

The seal are very dim sighted & it is of little consequence if they should only *once* see you, for they will not believe their own eyes at first, & will

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<sup>43</sup> Helen Mary Micco, *King Island and the Sealing Trade 1802: A Translation of Chapters XXII and XXIII of the narrative of Francois Péron in the official account of the Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands undertaken in the Corvettes Le Géographe, Le Naturaliste and the schooner Casuarina, during the years 1800 to 1804, under the command of Captain Nicolas Baudin*. (Roebuck Society Publications No 3. Canberra: Roebuck Society Publications. 1971) 33.

<sup>44</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales* Vol. IV. Hunter and King (Sydney: Government printer, 1896) 88.

look again & again towards you before they are sure of their sight. The usual way therefore, is to sneak round to leeward of them, so that they cannot smell you, and be very silent, for tho' their organs of perception are very indifferent, their scent & hearing are acute, & as soon as they find you are near them, they hasten down to the water, when you might as well chase the moon as to try to get at them. Generally one old seal sits apart as a sentry, & gives an alarm by a kind of grunting noise, followed by a sudden retreat in which the rest all join & it is singular to see them, their motion being so peculiar; they have a short of shuffling uneasy gait, their heads & necks being in continual motion from side to side. A man can easily overtake them, but when on very rough uneven ground covered with stones &c, they have the advantage; but in the water, they are quite in their element & are quite as active as porpoises. If you get close to them, just as you are ready to rush suddenly on them, it is commonly the custom to set up a yell to confuse them, for in the first panic, they do not know what to do, & are for a moment stationary; then begins the slaughter, the men hitting right & left as fast as they can with their clubs, until there is not a seal left; after which, they then commence skinning; the work being done, the skins are placed to dry, & are then salted, & are kept in salt until properly impregnated, when they are packed up—if there is no salt, the blubber is scraped off clean, & the skins are pegged out to dry in the sun till they are hard.

Sometimes sealing is a hazardous employment, & I was once myself near being pitched headlong over a precipice upwards of 60 feet; I was stationed with another at a narrow pass between two chains of rocks, at the end of which was a steep cliff, almost perpendicular down to the sea; the other person driving the seal towards this thoroughfare through which they usually passed, for the purpose of getting into their favourite element. The seal flocking in crowds, & almost leaping over one another, were so pressing that in order to save ourselves we had to clamber up & hold on to the rocks above them, after killing about 8 or 9 out of a couple of hundreds. Sometimes we had to shoot them, when we could not get near enough to club them.<sup>45</sup>

As Péron's account and Bishop's letter both indicate, it did not take long for certain methods, working practices and lifestyles to emerge. With several whaleboats on deck, a vessel would transport the gang of sealers and their provisions to a likely rookery site, usually an off-shore island, dropping off the men for the season. Leaving the gang to get on with their brutal and bloody business, the vessel might then depart to engage in the growing costal trade, carrying grain from the Hawkesbury, coal and timber (especially

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<sup>45</sup> Begg & Begg 1979: 101. See also J. Starke, ed. *Journal of a Rambler: the journal of John Boulton*. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1986).

cedar) from Newcastle and from the Hunter, spars from New Zealand, salt from Kangaroo Island, salt pork and sandalwood from the Pacific Islands or supplying the growing number of convict settlements along the eastern coast from Port Dalrymple to Norfolk Island. The vessel would then return to pick up the sealing gang(s) and their skins at the end of the season and return to her port of call: Port Jackson, Port Dalrymple or Hobart Town.

In one of the handful of first-hand accounts of sealing to have survived, the names given to seals of various ages have been recorded, a couple of which are still used. The mature males were called 'dogs', 'wigs' or 'bulls', the females 'clapmatches', the young 'pups', the pups' skin colours either grey, black or silver, depending on age, season and condition.<sup>46</sup>

Often the gangs would be marooned on short rations until a ship returned for them. Hainsworth notes that a sealing gang employed by Simeon Lord and sent to the Antipodes Islands south of New Zealand in 1804 signed up for the following ration:

seven pounds of meat, ten of flour or biscuit, one pound of sugar together with ten pounds of rice 'for the voyage' and 'tea or Grain for coffee'. ... The absence of green vegetables was unavoidable, but fruit juices could have been provided. The ration was minimal and an invitation to scurvy. ... In fact, sealing gangs were always exhausting their rations long before relief came, and existing for months on a diet of seal flesh and seal oil, seaweed, sea birds' eggs and fish. The Bass Strait sealers could sometimes supplement their diet with wallaby stew and mutton birds.<sup>47</sup>

In the first phase of sealing, most gangs spent only months in the rookeries which were four or five days' sail south of Sydney, even closer to Tasmania.<sup>48</sup> As early as 1800 it was obvious at least to some that seal numbers were declining in Bass Strait, by 1807 the industry was in crisis: the indiscriminate

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<sup>46</sup> Kostlogou 1996: 56, quoting Starke 1981: 27.

<sup>47</sup> Hainsworth 1967b: 22.

<sup>48</sup> After 1836 ships took just six days to sail from Launceston to Port Adelaide, and it was only twelve from Port Jackson (Theodore Scott, *Description of South Australia with sketches of New South Wales, Port Lincoln, Port Philip and New Zealand* (Glasgow: Duncan Campbell, 1839): 11.

slaughter of female and juvenile seals had led to the collapse of the in-shore industry. In 1807 Surgeon Luttrell wrote to Under-Secretary Sullivan:

Among the disadvantages that this country at present labours under is the want of an exportable article for shipping that touch here, either for the India, China or Home Market. A few of the ships that have arrived have had some Home freight of whale oil and seal skins; but the latter trade is greatly on the decline, as the seals are nearly all destroy'd on the southern islands of this coast, or from the constant molestation they have suffer'd, have abandoned the islands. To get a new cargo of skins, new and more distant islands must be discovered, and the consequent risk and expence must be so much increased that the amount of the cargoes will hardly pay the charges.<sup>49</sup>

Seven years or so after the sinking of the *Sydney Cove* the sealing industry moved into its second phase. The price of sealskins in China had fallen to about 4/- [40c] a skin.<sup>50</sup> Once the numbers of seals in the Bass Strait rookeries had fallen below numbers that justified the sealing masters leaving a team of men there to exploit them. Although experienced masters like James Kelly of Hobart might still take 7 090 skins in a five months' cruise of the Bass Strait islands in 1813,<sup>51</sup> most of his colleagues were looking further afield, first to the islands off the south of New Zealand (especially Antipodes Island), later foraging along the south coast to King George's Sound in Western Australia and then to the sub-antarctic islands of 50° south or even further. With rookeries with what must have been hundreds of thousands of seals, Macquarie Island was discovered in 1810, the numbers sufficient to divert interest from Australia's in-shore islands to a small island in the midst of the stormy waters of the Southern Ocean 1 400 kilometres south-east of Tasmania and halfway to the Antarctic. In 1815 a report in the *Sydney Gazette* 22 April 1815 noted that 100 000 seals had been killed at Macquarie Island in a single season. Then Campbell and Heard Islands were visited,

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<sup>49</sup> Little 1969: 14.

<sup>50</sup> Begg & Begg: 1979: 59.

<sup>51</sup> Cited Carroll 1989: 43.

ships sailing as far west as the French possessions Kerguelen and the Crozets, deep in the inhospitable southern Indian Ocean.

The best-known account of elephant sealing in the deep southern latitudes is that written by Thaddeus von Bellingshausen, a Russian<sup>52</sup> visitor who circumnavigated the world, meeting a gang from Port Jackson on Macquarie Island in November 1820:

We landed on the shore near the huts. The boats were perfectly safe, being protected from the breakers by the rocks. The foreman of the sealers invited us to his hut, which was 20 feet long by 10 feet broad. Inside it was lined with skins of seals, and the outside was covered with a kind of grass which grows on the island. At one end there was a small hearth, and a lamp was kept always alight. On the hearth, as wood and coal were unobtainable, there was burning a piece of sea-elephant blubber and melted fat was used for the lamp. Beside the hearth was a bedstead. Provisions were stored at the other end of the hut. Inside it was so black and dark from the smoke that the smouldering light from the lamp and from the holes in the wall over which bladders were stretched scarcely lit the interior of the hut, and until we got accustomed to the light the sealers had to lead us by the hand. The dwellings of the other sealers were better. The foreman informed us that on the previous evening they had felt two severe earthquake shocks. He had already been six years on Macquarie Island without leaving it and was employed in melting down the fat of sea elephants. There were no other sea animals on the island, which not long before had been a centre of exploitation by the Port Jackson guild of merchants. The abundance of fur seals had caused many vessels to come direct from New South Wales to trade in their skins, for which there was such a demand in Britain that the skin of a seal had risen to one guinea; but the unbounded greed of the sealers had soon exterminated the animals.

To-day [1820] the only industry in Macquarie Island is trading in sea-elephant blubber. Having killed the sleeping animals, the men cut off the blubber with a knife, and put it in a boiler, placed on stones and with room for a fire beneath it, which they kindle with lumps of the same fat. The oil from the boilers is then poured into barrels. Part of it is sent to New South Wales, and the remainder is shipped to Britain, where it commands a very remunerative price. At this time the sealers on the island were divided into two gangs, one of thirteen and the other of

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<sup>52</sup> Frank Debenham, ed. *The Voyage of Captain Bellingshausen to the Antarctic Seas 1819–1821* (Trans. from the Russian. Volume 1. London: Hakluyt Society, 1945). Debenham footnotes this passage with the following remark: 'It is curious that this account by a Russian of the methods and daily life of the workers in a British industry is more complete than any other known' (368).



twenty-seven people. The conditions of life here were in some ways more tolerable than that of the sealers we had seen in South Georgia. They live on the same sort of sea birds, the flippers of young sea-elephants and eggs of penguins and other birds, but the traders here enjoy, besides a better climate, the advantage of natural remedies to scurvy. The so-called "wild cabbage", undoubtedly an effective remedy, grows abundantly over the whole island. ...

One of the sealers accompanied us. He had with him in implement with which to kill sea elephants, which consisted of a club 4 1/2 feet long and 2 inches thick. The end was bell-shaped, 4 or 5 inches in diameter and bound with iron and studded with sharp nails. When we approached a sleeping sea elephant the trader hit him with this implement over the bridge of the nose; the sea elephant opened its mouth and gave a loud and pitiful roar. It had already lost all power of motion. The man took out his knife, saying, "It is a pity to see the poor animal suffer", and stuck it into its neck from four sides. The blood poured out in torrents forming a red circle. The animal then gave a few heavy breaths and died at once. Large sea elephants, after this blow which stuns them, are pierced through the heart with a lance, so as to kill them on the spot.

Old males which we saw were about 20 feet in length. They have a trunk about 8 inches long, with the nostrils at the end of the trunk. They crawl out of the water on to the grass and lie in hollows made by their own weight in the loose soil. The females and young males have snouts somewhat similar to those of pug dogs but have no trunks. On the flippers, which they use as forepaws, they have five webbed toes with claws. The sealers use these flippers for food, and they said that those of the young animals have a very good flavour. Sea elephants have no tails; their eyes are black; their hide is suitable for lining chests or trunks.<sup>53</sup>

When Thaddeus von Bellingshausen visited Macquarie Island in 1820, he met an Australian sealer who had lived there since 1814. In the early stages of sealing it was common for gangs to be marooned by unscrupulous (or incompetent) sealing masters on remote islands and forced to fend for themselves. Joseph Murrell and his gang were among the first to live for some time on Kangaroo Island from 1806–9. They were picked up by the *Eliza*:

from the South West coast of this Territory [that is, from New South Wales], with 500 seal and about 1000 kangaroo skins. At Kangaroo Island she fell in with a gang of sealers consisting of seven persons, who had been landed there three years since, under the direction of Mr. Joseph

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<sup>53</sup> Debenham 1945: 367–69.

Murrell. Their provisions were expended in three months after their landing, and having never received any supplies at all, they have for the long time of two years and nine months subsisted entirely on the flesh of wild animals. Mr. Murrell and two of the people came up in the *Eliza* from the Island, leaving four others behind.<sup>54</sup>

A corrupt version of Murrell's name is just remembered now in the place-name 'Murray Lagoon', while Harvey's Return on the north shore was known to the Islanders before 1836 as Murrell's Landing, which may have been where he and his gang camped for some of the time during their thirty-three month sojourn.<sup>55</sup> Cumpston speculates that Hungry Beach received its name to remember Joe Murrell and his party's stay.

A few years later another gang of sealers were rescued from Solander Island after an enforced stay of three years—one of the company an Indigenous man who had lived with his fellow-castaways on 'terms of perfect amity and understanding'. Although his name has not survived, the other 'solitaries' were Thomas Williams, Michael McDonald, Henry Shippey and Charles Freeman.<sup>56</sup> A report in the *Sydney Gazette* 24 July 1813 describes the men when they were found:

They were clothed in seal skins, of which their bedding also was composed, and their food had been entirely made up from the flesh of the seal, a few fish occasionally caught, and a few sea birds that now and again frequented the island. They birds they always salted for winter stock; the catching of fish was very precarious, and the flesh of seals they entirely lived on during the summer season. They attempted to raise cabbage and potatoes of which plants one of them happened to have some seed ... but their first and every subsequent experiment failed owing to the spray ... in gales washing over the whole island. ... They had long endured calamity but until the last few months of their relief, entertained some hope of succour which from a length of disappointment had gradually immersed into a state of utter hopelessness.<sup>57</sup>

This is an interesting report if only for the detail it provides that some Indigenous men did find work in sealing gangs.

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<sup>54</sup> *Sydney Gazette* 16 April 1809. Quoted Cumpston 1986: 31.

<sup>55</sup> Manning 1990: 143.

<sup>56</sup> Dunbadin 1937: 119.

<sup>57</sup> *Sydney Gazette* 24 July 1813. Quoted Hainsworth 1967b: 24.

Some Islanders moved from camp to camp, from island to island, no doubt forming seasonal working relationships with other sealers or with visiting sealing masters keen to employ local labour and benefit from increasingly detailed local knowledge. In his old age Captain William Pelham Dutton wrote to the *Hamilton Spectator*, his local newspaper, with details about his early years as a sealer in and around Portland, Victoria. He detailed his sealer's peripatetic life late in the history of the industry, sealing over the summer months, living in huts during the winter, establishing gardens:

I visited Portland bay in December, 1828, in the schooner "Madeira Packet" of Sydney with Captain McMullan. We were on a sealing expedition. We landed a boat's crew (myself among others) at Black Nose Point, a little south of the bay. We remained in the neighbourhood until the middle of January, 1829.

In July 1829, I returned in the schooner "Henry" with Captain McLean. We were sealing again. I was captain of a boat and we landed where the creek from the lagoon enters the sea and remained to seal. I built a house and lived in it. In January, 1830, I embarked again in the same schooner and went away sealing. I came again to Portland in March, 1831, in the same schooner under Captain Griffiths. We came to anchor off Black Nose Point and came around in boats. I landed at the same place and returned to my house and lived in it for 12 months.

The schooner "Elizabeth" under Captain Griffiths took me away and I returned in the same vessel in November, 1832, and lived again there until March, 1833. I then took a trip to Launceston and back, going in the "Henry" of which last vessel I had then command and established a whale fishery in Portland Bay. I erected buildings and grew vegetables for my own use.<sup>58</sup>

These details about William Dutton's career as a sealer and later bay whaler seem typical of a number of others: while he may have gone sealing in some seasons as far west as Kangaroo Island, in the 1820s and early 1830s he increasingly came to frequent one place, Portland Bay, where he built houses

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<sup>58</sup> Captain William Pelham Dutton, letter signed 11 February 1873, printed in the *Hamilton Spectator* 23 September 1874, quoted Vanda Savill, *'Tha' she blows': old ships, old salts and old days of sealing and whaling* (Hamilton, Vic.: The Author, 1980) 3. The several vessels named all visited Kangaroo Island, Griffiths' *Henry* certainly involved in at least one episode of abducting Kaloongoo, a Kaurna woman from Kangaroo Island. See Brian N.J. Plomley, ed. *Weep in silence: A history of the Flinders Island Aboriginal settlement* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987) 445-6.

and gardened, becoming well-known late in his life as the first non-Indigenous resident of Victoria.<sup>59</sup>

After 1805 the few remaining seals returning to the rookeries along the southern coastline constituted enough of an exploitable resource to encourage a few sealers to settle down to semi-permanent subsistence on the islands, even if the fishery was sporadic and small-scale. As Carroll puts it, the 'sealing era left behind it a human flotsam and a modicum of settlement', and quotes figures from a paper read to the Royal Society of Tasmania by J.W. Beattie in 1911: 'in 1830, the population of the whole of our Straits Group was 30 white males and 44 aboriginal women'.<sup>60</sup> On Kangaroo Island to the west numbers probably fluctuated between twenty and forty in the decade or two before the 'official' settlement, with only half a dozen or so living there for more than a decade.<sup>61</sup>

Stephen Murray-Smith notes a dramatic shift in lifestyle that attended this second phase of the sealing industry:

It was not ... at this time possible for white men to survive indefinitely in Bass Strait on their own resources, any more than it would have been possible for them to have survived in the Tasmanian bush. Until it became possible to kidnap the skilled labour of the Tasmanian women, or to persuade this labour to accompany them, the sealers were tied to an indentured existence. It was the Aboriginal women who, in giving up whatever freedom they possessed, made it possible for the sealers to find a form of freedom for themselves among the islands.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> J.G. Wiltshire, *William Dutton and the sealing and whaling industries* (Portland: Portland Council, 1973).

<sup>60</sup> Carroll 1989: 49.

<sup>61</sup> The figures included in the 1834 publication *Outline of a plan of a proposed colony to be founded on the south coast of Australia* make interesting reading. While Richard Wooton counted only 'three or four ... some more inland ... some black women with them' in 1823, Cunningham found forty living on Kangaroo Island in 1826. Hamborg, however, on a 1832 sealing trip, found that there had been 'some' on Kangaroo Island, but the Government 'sent a brig down about two years ago and took them away. There are none there now'.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Beyond the Pale: The Islanders Community of Bass Strait in the 19th Century,' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association* 20.4: 172.

The hunting, fishing, food preparation and Indigenous women made these lifestyles possible. Murray-Smith is right to stress that one of the intriguing characteristics of the Islanders' lifestyles that was noticed by many commentators was the achieving of levels of personal freedom that were remarkably dissimilar from the social and cultural restrictions that were considered essential for the maintenance of civilized living in the penal colonies, especially when dealing with restraining the egalitarian tendencies of the 'lower orders'. Furthermore, most of the Islanders seem to have been from working class backgrounds, only occasionally from the middle rank, which made the flaunting of their awareness of their independence even more exasperating to those middle-class commentators who recorded often disapproving impressions of their egalitarianism. These days we might recognize such larrikin enthusiasms and accommodating individualism as anticipating the anti-social behaviours that would later characterize what is now often seen as the stereotypical true-blue Australianism of the diggers on the goldfields, at Gallipoli and on the western front. But was that masculine Islander freedom won by removing from or denying other freedoms to their women?

The following remarkable description of two Islander men and their women is very revealing. It is from a journal kept by Captain Robert Morgan, master of the *Duke of York*, one of the South Australian Company vessels that brought the colonists to Kangaroo Island. Morgan recorded these impressions of meeting 'Governor' Henry Wallen and 'Billy' Day 2 August 1836:

Mr. Stevens, Cap<sup>n</sup> Ross and myself went to the [Cygnet or Three Wells] river in search of the boat and if possible to get some whild foul in walking along the side of the river on the oppersite side I saw a man [Governor Henry Wallen] some what like when a boy I have seen Robinson cruso with long hair and beard a stick in his hand and verry little apperil—I put to him a few questions which he answered said he had lived here since 1832 had a farm by the side of the river with another man and had come down in search of swans eggs ... we accompanied him to his farmwhich was closed in with piles drove in the ground covering about five acres of weat some turnips cabages onions and a few pertatoes they

have pigs and fowls a fine cat we where introduced to [William Day] the partner of our friend who appeared to be a rough sailor though left of sea and had bing on the island about—years and had become quite natified his voice appeared to have lost his mother tongue as regards voice they said they had two women lived with them which they called jins and they where gone to catch wallaby that is a small kind of kangaroo M<sup>r</sup>. Stephens invited them [Wallen and Day] to come with their wives to see him on Sunday and have a religious service but says the man to introduce our wives was to be like introducing a dog to your presence they lived in a small one story hut level with the ground howses had cut out for their stock I promised to give them some tracts with a Bible each in the morning.<sup>63</sup>

There are complex, ambivalent moments in this passage. ‘Billy’ Day may have ‘become quite natified’, which Morgan seems to mean he has lost some of his ability to speak English, good evidence that at least some of the men not only understood but practiced mutual exchange or reciprocity that they had learned from contact with Indigenous people. Here this Crusoe has learned Friday’s language, perhaps even learning more than just how to swear, as had William Buckley, another and rather more famous Crusoe figure who had ‘gone native’. Wallen’s and Day’s women are not with them at Three Wells; they are away in the scrub snaring wallabies, working independently of their lords and masters. They are hardly slaves; on the surface rather free spirits, individuals with an independent existence. But when Wallen is asked if he and day would bring their women to a religious service, he declines, describing their ‘wives’ as no better than dogs. Vernacular Australian English still deploys this and other even less salubrious terms for women: this is a tiny but enlightening insight into what might be read on the one hand as evidence of an unbridgeable cultural gulf between the Europeans and Indigenous Australians, but on the other of a profoundly gendered world, where European men and Aboriginal women came together to procreate, to eat and above all to work, but without much

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Journal of the Duke of York, 25 February 1836—10 February 1838’, Mitchell Library A270: 36, Morgan’s wonderful spelling. ‘Tiger’ Simpson, one of the grand-sons of Nat Thomas and Old Bet, owned an 1835 Bible inscribed ‘George Bates, from S. Stephens, Esq., Kingscote, October 2, 1836’ (Bates 1951: 36). The Bible is still in the possession of the Simpson family of Penneshaw (Wells 1978: 33).

friendship or companionship. Cawthorne's novel is valuable for making this very point, no doubt a consequence of his own contact with the households of one or two of the Islanders still living on Kangaroo Island when he visited in the 1850s, but even here an ambivalent note can be detected, in that Cawthorne also describes a relationship between his characters Old Sam and Black Bet that seems based on rather more affection and respect than that captured in Morgan's diary entry.

Morgan's diary raises other kinds of complicated questions about the status of the Indigenous women in the sealers' camps. Commentators such as Keryn James have been asking the question: *were such women wives or slaves?*<sup>64</sup> for two centuries now, reflecting the growing interest in the women which reflects not only a more widespread interest in Indigenous history and culture but also the shifts in emphasis brought about by subaltern studies and women's studies since the 1960s. Leaving aside the simple questions of just how many of the Indigenous women lived in legal marriages before 1840—answer, none—a more appropriate question to ask might be: how adequate is the binary *wife/slave* as <sup>a</sup>way of understanding the range of representations of Islander women from the first four or five decades of the nineteenth century? In other words, the binary does not take into account the complex and shifting roles played by the women over much of the nineteenth century, just as it fails to recognize the fact that while some women might have been abducted, bought and sold, the economy that fostered such practices was a covert one, operating at the margins of the mainstream and without any kind of official sanction.

It is certainly the case that the source of most of our information about the Islanders and their relationships with Indigenous women, 'the pacificator' George Robinson, who chose to represent the majority of the Islanders with the most negative of stereotypes, given he was charged with rounding up the women and their children and managing them on

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<sup>64</sup> Keryn James, 'Wife or Slave: The kidnapped Aboriginal women workers and Australian sealing slavery on Kangaroo Island and Bass Strait Islands' Diss. Department of Archaeology, Flinders University, 2001.

Preservation Island. The darker the evidence against the men, the more morally justified Robinson felt in taking the actions he did. Contemporary attitudes to Robinson are rather more negative today than even they were in the 1820s and 1830s, so the evidence from his journals must be considered in the light of such attitudes. In spite of these reservations, Robinson does record many telling and graphic descriptions of sealer brutality and violence towards the women, including some first-hand accounts of murder and hearsay evidence of the discovery of bodies, some on Kangaroo Island.

Hybrid communities developed on one or two of the Bass Strait islands—but not to the same extent on Kangaroo Island, where by 1836 the Islander community was small and widely dispersed. There were not enough households of the kind created by Nat Thomas at Freshfields at Antechamber Bay, and even though there were numbers of children from several relationships, the descendants seem to have assimilated rather more readily than their counterparts (and often relations) on other islands in Bass Strait. Boulton's diary makes it clear that at least by the 1820s some sealers were raising families, a handful even sending their children away for schooling, as 'Governor' Henry Wallen did with his son, who according to a number of sources was educated in Hobart. Boulton's telling remark about the women's affection for their hunting dogs—stronger than for their masters—suggests ambivalent (although still subservient) relationships that may even have allowed for expressions of affection and humour. While some of the individuals stayed in one place for months or even years on end, at places like Nathaniel Thomas's 'Greenfields' at Antechamber Bay on Kangaroo Island or James Munro's on Preservation Island.

It may be dangerous to generalize too far about both the Islanders as a group and their women. To begin with, what kinds of men were they? While a range of stereotypes still persist of the sealers on the one hand as freedom-loving Robinson Crusoes and on the other as a bunch of drink-sodden runaway convicts and depraved desperadoes, rapists and child-molesters, human flotsam and jetsam, *some* of the sealers were resourceful and



independent small businessmen, extraordinary seamen who quickly made themselves familiar with and at home on one of the wildest coastlines in the world. There were some remarkable sealers, like John Hart, who would go on to become a well-to-do flour-miller, businessman and three times Premier of the South Australian colony. James Kelly, who took a whaleboat around Tasmania and ended his days as the harbour-master at Hobart Town. Frederick Hasselberg, who sailed the *Perseverance* south to lat. 55° in 1810 looking for new sealing grounds, discovering both Macquarie and Campbell Islands, the latter named after his employer Robert Campbell, head of the firm Campbell and Co. William Stewart, who sailed through the Foveaux Strait at the southern tip of the South Island of New Zealand and circumnavigated the island that now bears his name. William Campbell, captain of the *Harrington*, who mixed sealing, smuggling and privateering and discovered a mysterious wreck on King Island—and a cat, the only survivor. William Dutton, of Portland Bay, mentioned above. Joseph Murrell, who made a number of trips to Kangaroo Island and who was eventually killed by Aborigines after coming ashore on the New South Wales coastline while returning from a sealing trip to Kangaroo Island. The remarkable ‘Jimmy’ Munro, the King of the Straitsmen, whom the government made a constable—no doubt on the grounds that to catch a thief you must set a thief—the cove who ran the rackets from his base on Preservation Island. Then there were the others, the rough-and-tumble mob who more closely match the stereotype quoted above. As Hainsworth’s figures suggest, at the height of the industry perhaps as many as 10–15% of the available manpower from Sydney was involved in sealing or in associated maritime industries, a sizeable cross-section of the free or emancipist population of the colony. No doubt all kinds went sealing, although it must have taken a strong stomach and a slaughterhouse temperament.

Here and there in the very few first-hand accounts of the sealing industry we are given revealing glimpses of the men who went sealing. John Boulton’s

wonderful journal offers one or two such vignettes. He joined the sealing ship *Sally* and left Hobart Town for Bass Strait 30 August 1824:

I had spent my money & had no great desire to settle in this country. I rather wished to go & see some of the islands in the South Sea, but could find no opportunity of getting to them, & at last desperately situated, no situation to be procured in any establishment, I went on board a miserable dirty Schooner of 45 tons burthen. She was going on a sealing excursion to Bass' Straits, & being persuaded to join her I accordingly agreed. I was more than once tempted to leave her before she left Hobart Town, from the disgusting & disagreeable manners of the crew, but strange to tell, variety had such charms that the love of it overcame every other feeling. The crew were in all about 10 men and how shall I describe them? They were the refuse of merchant ships & some were formerly convicts, thieves & scoundrels fit for no society, void of every good quality & only one man on board had the principles of a man. He was fortunately master of them all, or else perhaps I should have fared worse. Those evils that might otherwise have been done were happily prevented by the fear they were under, as this person was on my side whenever the rascally cabal tried to wrong me.

On board we had a small stock of provisions & firewood sufficient for a few days. The owner, a French adventurer, was so straitened in circumstances that he could not buy more & said we should reach the Straits in 2 or 3 days when we should be able to get a supply of fish & potatoes. When we got abreast of Bruné Island we hove-to & the Captain (a drunken little Tartar but a good sailor) seeing a smoke on shore sent his little boat, which returned with 2 common looking downcast fellows, who were convicts; they immediately skulked below where they continued till we cleared the Port.<sup>65</sup>

Boulton's shipmates are the sealers of the popular imagination: cut-throats, scoundrels, convicts, helpers of runaway convicts. A little later he describes meeting his first real sealers an encounter with '12 half-barbarous-looking fellows who seems to want no introduction but came on deck as if they were coming to take the vessel and all hands', members of a sealing gang who have come aboard to barter skins for booze:

Several of the worthies who come on board asked me if I was not a 'swell's son run out', meaning a gentleman's son has spent his fortune. But to

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<sup>65</sup> Begg & Begg 1979: 52.

their inquiries I answered with seeming indifference—some remarked I should cut a better figure amongst *swells* than amongst the ‘likes o’ them’, but they ‘reckoned as I had played at bowls, I must expect rubbers’. ‘What odds,’ said another, ‘I wish all *such* coves were made to run the same round as ourselves, if I had my way there should be no gentlemen.’ After they had sold their skins they left us to ourselves.<sup>66</sup>

Boulton represents these sealers as self-confident egalitarians, men who are intensely conscious of class differences, aware that they belong to an independent world of their own creation, defined by the ‘likes ’o them’. Their language suggests that once they were convicts, or at least that they affect ‘flash’, the convict style. Their manner is abrasive, larrikin, loud, they threaten violence, they function in a rum frenzy.

If the Bass Strait sealers of the kind met by Boulton were ‘the refuse of merchant ships & some were formerly convicts, thieves & scoundrels fit for no society, void of every good quality’, then their Kangaroo Island friends and associates were usually described as the worst of all. There are a number of contemporary accounts of the Kangaroo Islanders, the sealers who settled down on this ‘Ultima Thule’ of the British Empire. These famous and much-quoted descriptions of the men who had made their island homes have contributed to a shaping of our memories of their Islander lifestyles. Most (if not all) of these descriptions were written by sealing masters who travelled ‘beyond the pale’, had spent time at Kangaroo Island, had employed these men—and their women—and profited from their labours. While the sealing masters did their business with the Islanders they subjected them to scrutiny and recorded their ways of living in language often shaped by disapproval, even disavowal. Most the accounts we have of Islanders life are constructed from outsider accounts of transient visitors, from witnesses watching from the fringes.

One of the first descriptive accounts of the sealers can be found in a letter written by the sealing master Captain William Stewart to Governor Macquarie’s Colonial Secretary J.T. Campbell in Sydney, dated 28 September

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<sup>66</sup> Begg & Begg 1979: 61.

1815. Stewart presents 'the outlines of the tricks', delivering a stern warning about the consequences of over-exploiting the seal and elephant oil fisheries in a powerful and resonating account of sealing, significant in its detail and wording:

I feel it a duty incumbent on me to State for your information a practise that has some years past been carried on out of the Derwent and Port Dalrymple that is of a most dangerous tendency and ruin to the industrious and fair trader, as likewise a serious loss to the present and rising generation, and has totally annihilated the Seal and Elephant Oil fishery about Basses Straits and the adjacent Islands, that has been the Means of supporting and Employing Numbers of Individuals as well as Vessels in an industrious Manner; and, if some means are not taken to prevent or suppress it, any Vessell or peoples lives are not safe, that frequent these places or liable to touch there on their lawful occasions, that is not concerned with them, and there is two people dead or Missing, namely, Robt. Knight and James Curney, who's deaths no person has yet accounted for.

There is a Custom here of Whale Boats from 25 to 30 feet long, who clear out from the Derwent or Port Dalrymple, each with 2 or 3 people on board, and after there departure amount to 6 or 7 in No., then go equipped with arms and dogs to hunt for their living, and save the Kangaroo Skins as well as what Seal Skins they can; the Elephant they Kill and destroy for their tongues (root and Branch).

The people, who are not cleared out, are a Banditti of Bush Rangers and others who have carried from the above Settlements after committing robberies and depredations on the industrious Settlers and others and depriving them of their Arms, dogs, Boats, and other property.

Some time after their departure, Vessells are sent after them with diffit. Articles of Slops, Tobacco, Amunitions, etc., to purchase what they have procured. And, when at the Islands, they encourage Men belonging to Vessells to desert and leave them in distress as well as heavily in debt, and likewise to rob and plunder them; to augment their fund and make them more formidable they come frequently to the Heads at Port Dalrymple, where they obtain every information of the transactions or Steps that are taken.

I now Mention Men, who have been carried out of the above places in this Manner, and who were in His Excellency's proclamations, Namely, Morris Healy, Wm. Russell, Randal Ore, John Cresswell, John Whitehead, and also some others who's Names I cannot recollect; there is also now two boats about Kents Group and one at Kings Island, who have carried on this practise skulking and lurking about to evade Justice; they have also the custom of getting Native Women of Van Diemen's Land among them, who they mostly obtain by force and keep them as Slaves or Negroes, hunting and foraging for them, who they transfer and dispose of

from one to another as their own property; very few of whom ever see their Native Home, being away for numbers of years, and, if they do not comply with their desires or orders in hunting, etc., they by way of punishment half hang them, cut their heads with Clubs in a Shocking Manner, or flog them most unmercifully with Cats made of Kangaroo Sinews; several of them have from two to six women, who they claim as their own private property in this Manner.

These, Sir, are the outlines of the tricks, and I have candidly assigned my reason in Stating them for your information.<sup>67</sup>

A year or two later a 1817 report in the *Sydney Gazette* has thirteen Europeans living on Kangaroo Island in a 'curious state of independence' and living on 'wild birds'.<sup>68</sup>

In 1820 sealing master Captain James Kelly gave evidence before Commissioner John Thomas Bigge, who had arrived in the colonies in 1819 to undertake what these days would be called a Royal Commission into British interests in Australia, the question at issue being a conflict between running a penal settlement and entrepreneurial economic activity like sealing. Bigge questioned Kelly about the Bass Strait sealing industry: he was particularly interested in the men who had cleared out for the islands:

Q. Are these men permitted to clear out for these Islands and How do they subsist? A. They are permitted to clear out for the Islands sometimes in boats of their own and sometimes in boats that are called the property of individuals resident here. They Generally take convicts in as they go down the Harbour, and proceed to the Islands where they subsist on Kangaroo, Wombat and Emu. They also seduce the native women and have children by them, and instances have occurred of their Purchasing them of their husbands in exchange for the Carcases of the seals after they have taken the skins off. They likewise sometimes carry them off by Force and employ them in hunting kangaroos for their skins and also in killing seals, at which the woman are very expert.

Q. How do they sell their seal skins? A. Vessels passing to this Port and to Port Dalrymple, knowing that the men are there, take the sealskins of them as they pass, paying them in slop clothing and spirits. ...

Q. On which of the Islands in the Straits do these People chiefly reside? A. On Cape Barren Island and Furneaux's Islands. King's Island likewise on the Western Part of the Straits is a place of resort, but the Greatest

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<sup>67</sup> *Historical Records of Australia* Series III, Volume II, Tasmania: July 1812–December 1819: 575–6.

<sup>68</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 5 April 1817.

number of them is on Kangaroo Island. Some of the native women of New Holland are known to be there.

Q. How many do you think are now on Kangaroo Island? A. About eight or nine, some of them have families.<sup>69</sup>

In 1826 an extended account of Islander life was published in the *Hobart Town Gazette*. The author's name is not given, but there seems little doubt that he must have been a sealing master: the sea-going experience and local knowledge are obvious. The relevant sections about Kangaroo Island are quoted, including the well-known reference to the island as the '*Ultima Thule*' of the British Empire at the time:

It is, however, a curse entailed upon the wicked, to be contented in no situation; and these rovers having again set sail, usually follow the coast, which winds for 500 miles along a sandy beach, in a north westerly direction, skirting a fertile country, until they reach Kangaroo Island, in latitude 35 1/2. This island, nearly 300 miles in circumference, is the *Ultima Thule*. It lies opposite Spencer's and St. Vincent's Gulphs, and at one part is separated from the main by a narrow channel of only eight miles across. The hills, though numerous, are not lofty, and there is the appearance of much level good land, with a climate perhaps the most enviable in the world.

A bay called the Bay of Shoals, on the north coast next the main, is resorted to by the fishermen on account of a salt lagoon, or sea pool, which, when dried up after the rainy season, is filled with excellent salt to the depth of 5 or 6 inches. Near it is a lake of fresh water, both being situated about 2 miles from the beach, which distance the productions are carried on the back to the boats. This, as well as every other labour, is performed by the native women, whom these unprincipled men carry off from the main, and compel to hunt, work, and fish, and do every other menial service, while they themselves sit on the beach, and smoke, drink and sleep by turns, occasionally perhaps rousing to kill a young seal while basking on the sunny beach. This food, though far from palatable, is all that their indolence will in general allow them to procure, and they sometimes salt it down for future store. It is much to be lamented that so debased a specimen of the Christian race as these men, should be the first to give an impression to the natives, who are there very numerous, and of superior cast to those here and at Sydney. They live in regular villages, are all clothed with a cloak made of skins stitched together and ornamented, and though like all other savages addicted to stealing, are nevertheless, friendly and hospitable.

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<sup>69</sup> *Historical Records of Australia Series III Volume III: Tasmania January–December 1820: 462.*

The tide in this bay rises about 6 or 7 feet; it is not, however, safe for any large vessels, and about first quarter ebb, numerous shoals are visible. Ten miles to the east is a fine river called American River, with an excellent harbour. It is so named from an American who visited that neighbourhood about ten years ago, and built a very handsome schooner of the pine tree, peculiar to the island. The wood resembles red Swedish timber, and contains turpentine. Mr. Smith sailed 13 miles up this river, and by cutting one of these trees in halves, scooping it out with an adze, and afterward; uniting it with hoops, he constructed an admirable pump for his vessel. The trees common here [in Tasmania] also abound there, and the small species of kangaroo is very numerous. Among the animals which we have not seen here, is a kind of edible guana, a species of bear, about the size of a fox, and species of cockatoo, of a grey colour, with a red crest. The fish are very superior and well flavoured; among them a kind of whiting is described as being excellent eating.

When the fishing season for seals is over, these men, with the native women and their off-spring, amounting in all to about 40, retire into a valley in the interior of the island, where they have a garden and huts. One man called Abyssinia, has led this life for fourteen years. Are then these men, thus strangers to religion, strangers to principle, among whom rapine of every kind, and even murder is not unfrequent, are they to be suffered to debase human nature? They are at present supported and encouraged by the Colonial vessels that visit them for the purpose of bartering their skins for rum. Many of them are armed, and in a short time it will not be safe even for a large vessel to go among them.<sup>70</sup>

This is a fascinating account, obviously based on direct personal experience: the reference to whiting alone is sufficient to make us suspect that the writer took time off from bartering skins for rum and carting salt cross-country to the Bay of Shoals to drop a line and catch a couple of dozen. There is also a significant note of warning about how long these armed and ‘unprincipled men’ should remain free to make an impression on the Indigenous people of the mainland: it is clear the writer believes that colonization must proceed sooner rather than later, that the Islanders’ days are numbered.

This newspaper account contains a number of details that are also to be found in Peter Cunningham’s version of Islander life, published a year later in 1827 and which may draw on the *Hobart Town Gazette* piece:

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<sup>70</sup> ‘On Kangaroo Island, and the Runaways in the Straits,’ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 June 1826. The piece was reprinted in the *Sydney Gazette* 1 July 1826, and in Cumpston 1986: 84–5.

At Kangaroo Island, on our southern coast, about four hundred miles to the west of Bass's Straits, a settlement ... has long existed ... (by the latest accounts this settlement contains a population of forty individuals—men, women, and children) the men having reached that point by coasting along in boats and having seized and carried off native women. During the seal season they live upon the coast, feasting on the seal-flesh which their wives procure for them; and on the season being over, retire to their village, built in a valley in the interior, and subsist upon the produce of their gardens what game they can destroy. They lead a most slothful, idle life, obliging their women to perform all the drudgery and occasionally assisting vessels calling there to load with salt, which is found covering the bed of a lagoon six inches deep; and bartering their seal-skins for rum, tea, sugar and so forth, with the crews. The senior individual upon the settlement is named Abyssinia, and has lived there for fourteen years and upwards. Various islands in Bass Straits are also peopled in like manner; Flinders Island, according to the latest accounts, containing twenty, including women and children.<sup>71</sup>

The fourth of the representations of Islander life can be found in a written report presented to the Committee in London in 1831 that was involved in planning the new colony to be established in South Australia. The report was written by Captain Robert Sutherland, master of the brig *Governor Macquarie*, 142 tons, a sealing vessel that left Sydney 15 January 1819 and returned 10 May 1819 with forty tons of Bay of Shoals salt, 1 400 seal skins and 520 kangaroo skins. Sutherland reported as follows:

There are no harbours on the south side of the Island, but in fine weather a ship may anchor for a few hours in any place along the coast, but must always be ready to slip in case of the appearance of bad weather. It was the case with me at the south-west side of the Island. There are no natives on the Island; several Europeans assembled there; some who have run from ships that traded for salt; others from Sydney and Van Diemen's Land, who were prisoners of the Crown. These gangs joined after a lapse of time, and became the terror of ships going to the Island for salt, etc., being little better than pirates. They are complete savages, living in bark huts like the natives, not cultivating anything, but living entirely on kangaroos, emus, and small porcupines, and getting spirits and tobacco in

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Miller Cunningham, *Two years in New South Wales: a series of letters, comprising sketches of the actual state of society in that colony, of its peculiar advantages to emigrants: of its topography, natural history, etc.* (London: Henry Coburn, 1827) 206. Abyssinia was Abyssinia Jack, or John Anderson, one of Robinson's informants.



barter for the skins which they lay up during the sealing season. They dress in kangaroo skins without linen, and wear sandals made of sealskins. They smell like foxes. They have carried their daring acts to extreme, venturing on the mainland in their boats, and seizing on the natives, particularly the women, and keeping them in a state of slavery, cruelly beating them on every trifling occasion; and when at last some of the marauders were taken off the island by an expedition from New South Wales, these women were landed on the main with their children and dogs to procure a subsistence, not knowing how their own people might treat them after a long absence. There are a few even still on the island, whom it would be desirable to have removed, if a permanent settlement were established in the neighbourhood.

The period during which I stayed on and near the island was from the 8th January to the 12th August. I myself only landed once on the main, in the bight between Point Riley and Corny Point (Spencer's Gulf). The soil was thickly covered with timber and brushwood. Some of my men landed at several different places on the main, being sometimes absent three weeks at a time in search of seals. On these occasions they carried with them bread and some salt meat; but having a musket and a dog with them, they always obtained fresh meat (kangaroo) when on the main as well as on some of the islands. On these expeditions they never took fresh water with them. They often spoke of the places they had seen as being very pleasant.

I never saw or heard of any natives dogs on the Island of Kangaroo; and from the very great number of kangaroos, do not believe there are any. Some of the kangaroos I killed on the island weighed 120 lb. Our men used to go hunt them at sunrise, when they leave the woods to feed on the grassy plains. I have known as many as fifteen taken by my men in one morning. We never touched any part but the hindquarters.<sup>72</sup>

This relatively glowing report did much to encourage an interest back in Britain in establishing a colony either on Kangaroo Island or on the main. Sutherland found only twelve men living on the island: 'chiefly Englishmen, convicts and runaway sealers'. His descriptions of these men are rather less glowing than his comments about the country, but nevertheless they have been very influential in fixing on-going attitudes to the Islanders. Cawthorne certainly knew this description; he quotes from it three times in *The Kangaroo Islanders*.

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<sup>72</sup> South Australian Association. *South Australia. Outline of the plan of a proposed colony* (1834; Facs. ed. Adelaide: Austaprint, 1978) 45–9. Cumpston 1986 devotes a whole chapter to George Sutherland.

Captain Sutherland then gave further verbal evidence before the Committee. He said it took him fourteen days to sail from Sydney to Kangaroo Island. He had planted cabbages, but the kangaroos ate them. The seals were very abundant at Kangaroo Island and that there 'are great numbers killed annually', chiefly by the resident sealers. There was an abundance of salt, in a lagoon a short distance inland, although of late cheap imported salt had rendered salt scraping no longer worth while. There were about twelve sealers, 'chiefly Englishmen, convicts and runaway sealers'. The sealers lived at the head of the Salt Water Creek inlet (South West River) in bark huts and supported themselves by catching kangaroos with dogs and by bartering sealskins with vessels for provisions and rum. He and his men had killed 1 500 kangaroos. The seals on Kangaroo Island were mostly fur seals. They were the only seals worth catching, and the skin was 'the only valuable part about them'. They were killed with clubs. Captain Sutherland obtained 4 500 skins chiefly by bartering with the resident sealers. He bartered with them for rum. He afterwards sold the seal skins in Sydney for six shillings each, the kangaroo skins for three shillings. He had eaten porcupine, which was equally good as kangaroo. The sealers, who used sometimes to come on board the *Governor Macquarie*, never interfered with Captain Sutherland. Sutherland finished by declaring his intention to settle on Kangaroo Island himself when the colony was established.

Sutherland's report had several important effects. It was eagerly perused and often quoted by the intending colonists, many of them referring scornfully to it after arrival. His glowing account of conditions on Kangaroo Island served to create several misleading impressions in the minds of the future colonists eager to hear good reports about their destination. His references to soil fertility and the availability of water were both significant in influencing the taking of what would be a disastrous decision to base the operations of the South Australian Company on the island. Even some remarks about his 'ramblings' around Kangaroo Island led to several young men leaving the becalmed *Africaine* and attempting to walk cross-country

from Cape Borda to Kingscote, which resulted in their becoming bushed and the deaths of two of the party.

An interesting consequence of Sutherland's report was to help South Australian Company employees Robert Torrens and Samuel Stephens make a strong case for investors to take advantage of 'the spontaneous productions of its lands and waters', two of which, salt and seal products, are listed by the authors. Kangaroo Island salt, it was noted, sold in the colonies for £10 a ton, while salt imported all the way from Britain sold for £7 10/–, while seals were described as 'plentiful on all the adjacent islands, and on the coast. The seal-fishery will open two sources of wealth to the colonist; the first being a trade in skins, and the second in seal-oil'.<sup>73</sup>

Sutherland's reference to the Islanders as little better than pirates repeats a note heard in other accounts from the 1820s. When he suggests that the Islanders' presence poses a problem for the long-term maintenance of law and order, he would have found a sympathetic listener in Major E. Lockyer, commandant of the settlement at King George's Sound, who recorded these words in his journal:

From the lawless manner in which these sealers are ranging about requires some immediate measures to control them as, from what we know as also from what I have learnt from themselves, they are a complete set of Pirates going from Island to Island along the southern coast from Rottenest Island to Bass's Strait in open whale boats, having their chief resort or Den at Kangaroo Island, making occasional descents on the main land and carry off by force native women, and when resisted make use of the firearms with which they are provided; amongst themselves they rob each other the weak being obliged to give way to the stronger; at Kangaroo Island a great scene of villainy is going on, where to use their own words there are a great many graves, a number of desperate characters, runaway prisoners from Sydney and Van Diemen's Land.

A Government vessel or small man of war to be kept for the purpose of cruising on this would check a great deal of the lawless proceedings now going on, as also restrictions should be made respecting the seal fishery, which from their destroying the cubs as well as old ones will cause them

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Torrens and Samuel Stephens, 'New Colony of South Australia. To small farmers and others ...' in Brian Dickey and Peter Howell, eds., *South Australia's Foundation: Select Documents* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986) 63.

to become scarce. I should think it would prove both beneficial to Government and to the merchants and speculators if these islands were farmed out to those who offer a reasonable rent for them, for a certain extent of coast subject to such regulations as Government exact.<sup>74</sup>

The reputation of the Islanders as a desperate band of pirates and brigands ignores the miniscule numbers of men involved: Sutherland refers to a dozen, while Lockyer does not give a figure: it is likely that by 1820 in any given year only a dozen or two men were living on Kangaroo Island, hardly a threat to the might of the British Empire. Nevertheless, the threat posed by Islanders (whether real, imagined or symbolic) did shape at least part of the debate about the nature of the new colony in South Australia. When Secretary for War and the Colonies Viscount Goderich objected to the foundation of the Colony of South Australia on the grounds that ‘evil might arise from the resort to the new Colony of runaway convicts from the penal settlements’—fear of the ‘convict stain’—the South Australian Land Company responded:

Now, the fact is, that Kangaroo Island has been for many years, and is at this time, a place of refuge for runaway convicts; that in that island such persons have formed a society remarkable for existing without any social ties, and for the prevalence of the most horrid crimes; that convicts in the penal settlements are thus invited to escape, no power existing to prevent them from inhabiting the south coast of Australia; and that if a settlement were formed on that coast, instead of any evil so to be caused, an effectual stop would be put to the evil which already exists.<sup>75</sup>

Finnis notes that to demonstrate the nature of the Islanders on Kangaroo Island, the Committee then submitted the following statement on the authority of Dr. Barnes, ‘a gentleman of great respectability’, at that time resident in London:

Dr. Barnes, being in New Zealand, met with an Englishman, who some years before had, in a fit of madness, attempted to destroy himself. His lower jaw was shot away in the attempt. Recovering his senses, ashamed

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<sup>74</sup> *Historical Records of Australia*, Series III, No. VI: 471–2.

<sup>75</sup> The letter is dated June 18th, 1832. Quoted by H.J. Finnis, *Early Settlers in Bass Strait* (Adelaide: Pioneers Association of South Australia, 1950) 5.

of what he had done and of his frightful appearance, he sought to hide himself from the sight of civilised men and to pass the remainder of his life in a state of savage excitement. With this view he selected as a place of refuge Kangaroo Island, where he could obtain the society of men more degraded than himself. It should be further remarked that the savage settlers of Kangaroo Island seize native women from the mainland, whom they treat as slaves, and by whom they have children; so that there is every prospect, unless some counter measure be adopted, of the existence of a band of dangerous pirates in the spot it is now proposed to convert into a civilized colony.<sup>76</sup>

There is a curious logic in this response: a free-settler colony should be established in South Australia in order to ‘convert’ such savage settlers into the necessary civilized state where no individual will live ‘in a state of savage excitement’. I suspect that it is still this prospect that attracts many people to settle on Kangaroo Island, enjoying the free and easy life.

In 1854 Captain John Hart<sup>77</sup> recorded some of his experiences as a sealing master in a letter to the Victorian Governor Charles La Trobe, offering this influential representation of Islander life, which, although written in 1854, reflects Hart’s direct personal experience of contact with the Islanders in the 1820s. Hart had made a number of trips to Kangaroo Island to scrape salt and buy skins. He represented the Islanders’ lifestyle in this way:

These islanders were principally men who had left various sealing vessels when on their homeward voyage, the masters readily agreeing to an arrangement by which they secured for the next season all the skins obtained during their absence, This island-life had a peculiar charm for the sailors, being supplied from the ship with flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, and a few slops, and living generally in pairs on the shore of one of the little bays. They cultivated a small garden to supply them with potatoes, onions, and a small patch of barley for their poultry. They thus led an easy, independent life, as compared with that on board ship. They obtained wives from the mainland; these attended to the wallaby snares, caught fish, and made up the boat’s crew when on a sealing excursion to the neighbouring rocks. At Kangaroo Island, there were some sixteen or

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<sup>76</sup> Finnis: [1950]: 10.

<sup>77</sup> John Hart was a sea-captain and merchant, at twenty-two the commander of a Bass Strait sealing schooner. He overlanded cattle to the South Australian colony, became Harbour Master at Encounter Bay, later a flour miller in Adelaide. He went into politics in 1851 and between 1865 and 1871 was premier of South Australia three times.

eighteen of these men. On a certain day, once a year, they assembled from all parts of the island to meet the vessel in Nepean Bay, and dispose of their skins, getting a supply in return for the following year, the only money required being a sovereign or two for making earrings.<sup>78</sup>

Drawing on these several accounts, it is possible to make some observations about the lifestyles of the sealers. They usually began their stay on the island of their choice by erecting rudimentary houses, perhaps drawing on knowledge about building *wurlies* that had been gleaned from the Indigenous people of the colder southern coastline where substantial dwellings were common, sometimes built on whalebone frameworks and clad and thatched with bark or seaweed, sometimes roofed with soil.<sup>79</sup> To live in comfort and reasonable shelter on these offshore islands along the southern coast in mid-winter requires considerable planning and labour. The archaeological evidence that survives of a number of South Australian sealing camps detailed by Kostoglou and McCarthy includes a number of sites where not only were reasonably substantial stone dwellings erected, but on Flinders Island, bricks can still be seen where Bill Bryan[t] lived with Charlotte and Sally.<sup>80</sup> There are many bricks at the 1840s bay whale fishery sites at what was known as Trial Bay in the mid-nineteenth century but is now known as Yanerby, south of Streaky Bay. There are enough there for a couple of shackies to collect them up and build BBQs, no doubt completely ignorant of their Hobart Town, convict-made origins. Ships often carried bricks with them as ballast, jettisoning them to allow the loading of whale oil and bone

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<sup>78</sup> John Hart, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: being A Series of Papers on the Early Occupation of the Colony, the Aborigines, etc.* (Ed. Thomas Bride, Melbourne: Public Library, 1898. New edition ed. C.E., Sayers, Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1969). 52. Hart's letter is dated 1854.

<sup>79</sup> Cawthorne describes a 'wurley' which he may have seen near the fishery at Encounter Bay. Angas painted such a structure.

<sup>80</sup> Parry Kostoglou and Justin McCarthy, *Whaling and Sealing Sites in South Australia* (Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology Special Publication No. 6, Adelaide: State Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, 1991) 56. See also Cherrie De Leiuén, 'The Power of Gender,' A thesis submitted for the degree of BA (Hons) in Archaeology, Flinders University, 1998, which gives an account of archaeological work at the site.

for the return trip to Hobart, which may explain how they got to Flinders Island.

Perhaps the most intriguing description of a sealer's cottage is contained in a report about the 1838 discovery of a ruin on Thistle Island by T.H. Peet:

In the year 1838 I was an employee of the South Australian Company at their whale fishery, Thistle Island, Spencer's Gulf, and while I was there I discovered the walls of three stone buildings erected close together, of different sizes, and about 5 feet high, and built without mortar, each of them having an opening for a doorway. At the doorway of the largest building was a stone set into the ground and level with the floor of the building on which were the figures 178; there had been another figure close to the 8. I pointed them out to the master of the fishery and several of the employees, all of whom believed they had been erected by the sealers. My opinion was that they were erected by the crew of some ship-wrecked vessel, and I am of the same opinion still. One of the reasons that caused me to form this opinion was that if they had ever had roofs on, it must have been made of the spars and sails of a ship, for, if the roofs had been made of anything else and then burnt, the nails used in their erection would be found on the floors, on which I spent many hours looking for them, but did not find any. ... Anyone following the coast from the fishery towards the south end of the island must see them if he travels about three or four miles.<sup>81</sup>

Peet's speculations about huts with stone walls and roofs of canvas seem entirely reasonable: no doubt many such structures were erected on beaches for the sealing seasons and rebuilt on return visits.

Not all sealers lived in stone cottages. Here is 'Governor' Henry Wallen's establishment, several miles up the Cygnet River, Kangaroo Island, as seen by W.H. Leigh in 1836, who describes walking along the creek until they reached

the wigwam, called by the delightful name of Governor Wallen's farmhouse. Now let any one fancy a square about some ten feet long by five, the sides resembling the letter A, composed of the bark of a tree; a little

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<sup>81</sup> T.H. Peet, letter to the Governor of South Australia, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)* 4 (1901): 80-1. Peet mistakenly believed he had found La Perouse's camp, assuming he had been wrecked on Thistle Island. Did Peet find the ruins of the huts in which lived the sealer 'under suspicion of having murdered his original companions' who is mentioned by Hart?

fence in front of the same size as the interior, to “keep all vexatious intruders away,” and render it snug.<sup>82</sup>

The description is as rudimentary as the building itself, but it would appear that Wallen had built his hut from bark slabs, and the women who lived with him and his mate ‘Billy’ Day lived in a separate bark hut of their own.

The zoologist François Péron’s account of a stay on King Island in 1802 in company with a sealing gang is one of the very few extended descriptions we have of the way of life of the sealing gangs. Péron and his companions had been camped at Sea Elephant Bay: a sou’westerly gale reduced their tent to ribbons, so they withdrew to the sealer Daniel Cooper’s rather more substantial dwelling where they enjoyed his hospitality:

These sealers had set up their quarters at the top of a hill, on the north point of Elephant Bay, about six miles from our camp: it consisted of four huts or shanties, constructed with pieces of wood driven into the ground and meeting at an angle at the top; some rough pieces of bark filled the gaps between the pieces of wood. The leader of these sealers, the good Cowper, occupied one of these wretched hovels with a woman from the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, whom he had brought from Mowee, and who took the place of wife and chief housekeeper: in this same hut were kept the most precious of the community’s stores, particularly the strong liquor. In the other huts lived the remainder of the sealers. A great fireplace, fed day and night with big tree trunks, served both to warm the men and to cook their food. A big shelter nearby contained a huge quantity of barrels filled with oil, as well as several thousand seal skins dried and ready for shipment to China. On one side could be seen a kind of butcher’s hook, on which were hanging five or six cassowaries [emus], as many kangaroos, and two fat wombats. A big copper filled with meat of the same kind had just been taken off the fire, and spread forth a pleasant odour.

Scarcely had we appeared in the midst of the sealers, than these good people showered us with proofs of their interest and goodwill: their chief led us into his smoky house; and there, on a kind of trestle, he served a dinner that we considered excellent. The lumps of different kinds of meat, all delicate, well cooked in their juices, offered savoury nourishment, although it was necessary to eat them without bread, biscuit or any other similar substance. Such a way of life, however singular it appears at first, is doubtless not less healthy; for all the sealers enjoy the most vigorous despite the hardships that they were undergoing and despite the cold and

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<sup>82</sup> Leigh 1839: 123.



humid climate of the island on which they were living, and the foul atmosphere they were breathing in their huts.<sup>83</sup>

Péron describes a rudimentary hut with bark cladding and a decent fire, essential for a July sojourn on King Island. Some seventy years later hut designs were still much the same. This is Canon Brownrigg's description of mutton-birders' huts seventy years later on Chappell Island in Bass Strait, and although he is describing here the handiwork of the children and grandchildren of sealers, it seems more than likely that such seasonal dwellings reflect Indigenous building techniques learned from the Indigenous women:

These huts are odd looking structures; they seldom exceed four feet in height at the walls, and about six feet at the ridge. The sides and roof are made up of light sticks, and covered with long coarse grass. An opening at the side forms the door, and a few stones built up at one end serves for a fireplace. Grass is then strewed upon the earthen floor, and the habitation is considered to be complete. These huts are tenanted only during the "[mutton-bird] season," being manifestly unsuited for the colder portions of the year.<sup>84</sup>

In a letter to the *Hamilton Spectator*, 24 October 1874, Captain James Liddell records memories of the sealer William Dutton's huts at Portland:

a sort of hole scooped out of the earth and covered with boughs; one had almost to go on hands and knees to get into it ... Later, he erect a sort of shelter for his boat crews, or rough timber and bark, so rough and primitive that you could have gone out and in between any two pieces of the slabs.<sup>85</sup>

Other sealers had considerable building skills: George Meredith sailed with the ship's carpenter African-American George Brown who built their hut at Middle River when they settled there in 1835. After 1836 Brown moved to the

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<sup>83</sup> Micco 1971: 14.

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Murray-Smith, ed., *Mission to the Islands: The Missionary Voyages in Bass Strait of Canon Marcus Brownrigg, 1872–1885* (Hobart: Cat & Fiddle Press, 1979) 54.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted Carroll 1989: 47. Carroll notes that these huts of Dutton's are very similar to those drawn by de Sainson in his representation of Westernport sealers in 1826.

mainland and became a well-known tradesman in the newly-established South Australian colony.

Often the sealers' houses were improved and extended, with work done each season. The oldest house still standing in South Australia is 'Freshfields' at Antechamber Bay, Kangaroo Island, the original walls of the tiny stone cottage now completely surrounded by more modern construction, preserving the outline of the cottage first erected in the 1820s.

By 1810 sealing did not provide enough to sustain a lifestyle. As time passed and fewer and fewer seals returned to the rookeries, the Islanders had to diversify, to find other resources to exploit, to spend more time in their gardens and with their stock. By 1830 sealing was just about finished: George Robinson calculated that the Islanders of Bass Strait were averaging about 31 skins per man, providing them with an income of £15 [\$30] per annum, barely subsistence living.<sup>86</sup> The dwindling numbers of sealskins might be augmented with wallaby and kangaroo skins for sale or trade with passing vessels: many of the islands on which they lived contained several varieties of marsupial, some of them with valuable skins. In the 1820s Captain Hart did some business with a solitary sealer on Thistle Island:

one man who had been unvisited for three years when I saw him on this trip. This man lay under the suspicion of having murdered his original companions. He had two wives, whose woolly heads clearly showed their Van Diemen's Land origin. Although so long without supplies, he had every comfort about him. A convenient stone house, good garden, small wheat and barley paddocks, with pigs, goats and poultry, made him quite independent of the vessel except for tea and tobacco. He had collected 7,000 skins wallaby skins of a kind peculiar to this island—very small, fine-furred, and beautifully mottled in colour. I sold these in Sydney for the China market.<sup>87</sup>

Like this solitary figure on Thistle Island, just about all the Islanders established gardens, growing vegetables and a few small crops, even on

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<sup>86</sup> See Plomley 1966: 303–4.

<sup>87</sup> Hart 1854: 52–3.

remote places like Flinders Island off the west coast of South Australia. Some like Crusoe himself ran stock: goats, sheep, pigs and poultry. There is nothing on the record to suggest that King and Kangaroo Islands had early reputations for producing splendid cheeses, but no doubt some of the Islanders spent their time cheese-making. All the communities had hunting dogs, which were prized and valuable possessions. The very scanty evidence suggests such dogs were bred from greyhounds and staghounds: they were used to kill kangaroos and wallabies for their meat and in particular their skins, and other game like wombat, emu, geese and swans. These days they are still called kangaroo dogs. As Péron makes clear, such animals were very valuable and sorely missed when they were killed or went missing:

In order to obtain the great quantity of meat that they were eating the sealers employed a means as simple as it was inexpensive. On the deserted islands of which we are speaking the various animal species placed there by nature had been able to multiply and accumulate over the centuries without disturbance: thus each of these species there has numerous families. The most important are, at King Island, the kangaroos and the emus, equally swift, and the wombats, who know neither how to flee nor how to defend themselves. Any means of hunting is sufficient to procure these last: as for the emus and kangaroos the sealers, to catch them, have trained dogs to go alone hunting in the woods, and they rarely fail to strangle, each day, several of these animals: the hunt ended, the dogs leave their prey, running towards their masters and, by unmistakable signs, announce the success that they have obtained. Some of the men then go off, following these intelligent providers who, without faltering, guide them to the places where their victims lie. It is not only from having learnt them from the sealers that I report these details; we were able ourselves, to appreciate the truth of them during our stay on Decrès (Kangaroo) Island. With only one of these hunter dogs, we caught in a few days, such a large number of big kangaroos that it seemed probable to us that a few such dogs, abandoned on the island, would suffice to wipe out the race of these innocent animals.

The ease with which these English sealers procure their necessary provisions adds greatly to the importance of the trade in which they are occupied. With a few meager provisions of salted meat, of flour and of biscuit, to guard against unforeseen accidents, these men can subsist for whole years without costing their employers anything. Most of them do not spend very much either on clothing; for, after submitting the seal skins and kangaroo hides to a rough preparation, they are able to make

clothes out of them. All these details, however trivial, are an essential part of the history of the English fisheries in the Southern regions; such economics are part and parcel of the enormous profits that the British firms draw from their expeditions on these far-off shores.

Although the storm had blown itself out two days earlier *Le Géographe* had still not reappeared; and our anxiety as to the fate of this vessel was becoming greater as we understood better all the dangers of Bass Strait. Besides, the English, who, up to that time had so generously provided us with sustenance, had just lost one of their dogs that had gone astray in the forest and, as a few days before our arrival on Kin. Island, another dog of the same species had died in five minutes from the bite of the triangular snake of which I have previously spoken, there was only one left to supply the common provisions. Our good friend Cowper, in breaking this sad news to us, kindly promised to save for us all that he could spare from his own portion and that of his people; but he did not hide from us his fears as to our fate should our vessel not return.<sup>88</sup>

On Kangaroo Island the Islanders scraped and bagged salt, either from the salt lake at Bay of Shoals or from Salt Lake south of Pelican Lagoon, although by 1830 cheap imports had reduced the value of salt, as Sutherland's report quoted above indicates. 'Governor' Henry Wallen even owned the first horse in South Australia, a seventeen-hands animal which must have been transported to Kangaroo Island in a whaleboat, no doubt with the bright idea of ferrying bagged salt cross-country to the shore at Bay of Shoals.<sup>89</sup>

The Islanders had access to the southern coastline's bounty, to fish, abalone (often called mutton fish) and crayfish. The flippers of seals were a particular delicacy. There are numbers of references to the skill with which the Aboriginal women catch cray-fish, which is well represented in *The Kangaroo Islanders*.

The Islanders also went mutton-birding, a 'cottage industry' which became increasingly important as seal numbers declined after 1810 and which are still harvested by Bass Strait Islanders, many of them Palawa people. The mutton bird, (*Puffinus tenuirostris* or short-tailed shearwater) which still returns to Australian waters from the northern hemisphere to nest

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<sup>88</sup> Micco 1971: 14–15.

<sup>89</sup> Ruediger 1980: 41. The horse is mentioned in Jane Isabella Watts, *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-Three Years ago, Dating from October, 1837* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1890) 15.

on a number of Bass Strait islands and, in South Australian waters, on the Althorpes, is Australia's most abundant seabird. In 1798 Matthew Flinders recorded the following description of 'sooty petrels' on the wing one December morning:

There was a stream from 50 to 80 yards in depth, and of three hundred yards, or more, in breadth; the birds were not scattered but flying as compactly as free movement of their wings seemd to allow; and during a full hour and a half, this stream of petrels continued to pass without interruption, at a rate little inferior to the swiftness of a pigeon. On the lowest computation, I think the number could not have been less than a hundred millions.<sup>90</sup>

The mutton-bird migrates to southern Australia from the northern Pacific and nests on many islands in Bass Strait and along the coast of Tasmania. It arrives in September and lays one egg in nests in burrows lined with grass. It is protected in all states except Tasmania, where there a five-week season for commercial killing of mutton-bird chicks 27 March to 30 April, and a two week season for recreational killing supervised by the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service.<sup>91</sup> The oily stomach contents are used in the making of pharmaceutical products (including a sun-burn lotion), the down collected for sleeping bags, the body fat used as an additive for stock food and the carcasses are salted for eating. For two hundred years mutton birding on the Bass Strait islands has been associated with the Palawah people of Tasmania in particular, and traditional methods of catching, salting and drying the birds are still employed. In South Australia mutton birds nest on the Althorpes. W.H. Leigh observes in 1838 that 'it requires a desperate stomach to attack such an oily mess' (Leigh 1839: 109).

It was (and remains) a staple food item for the Islanders, taken in season, salted and preserved, the oil from their gullets stored in kegs, the down from

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<sup>90</sup> Tim Flannery, ed., *Terra Australia: Matthew Flinders' Great Adventures in the Circumnavigation of Australia* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2000) 23.

<sup>91</sup> D.L. Serventy, 'Mutton-birding', *Bass Strait: Australia's Last Frontier* (Revised Edition Sydney: ABC, 1987) 62–68.

their breasts pulled—there are a number of accounts of the reek of poorly-cleaned mutton-bird down pillows in Hobart's hotels and boarding houses.

Many of the Islanders' descendants survive, some of them living on the Bass Strait islands and still involved in such traditional practices as seasonal mutton-birding. No one kills seals any more, at least legally. These days we travel to Kangaroo Island to see seals close up, locals battling to find space to photograph seals on the Seal Bay beach with tourists from all over the world. When South Australians hear stories every year or two about crayfishermen killing seals (and dolphins) for craybait for their pots there is outrage in the local media. Times have changed. Few would have the stomach these days to cope with the appalling realities of the sealing industry. When the sealing season opens in the few places in the world where it still continues like Canada, first there is international consternation that the practice continues, followed by near-universal condemnation. The whaling industry, especially as the Japanese practice it, attracts similar odium.

Contemporary attitudes to conservation and to the fur trade in general mean that a knowledge of the history of the Australian sealing industry enables us to reflect upon a number of all-too-familiar scenarios. What was missing in the early colonial period in the minds of many was what these days would be called an environmental awareness: did any of the sealers reflect on the fact that their industry could not last forever? Hundreds of thousands of seals were slaughtered: as the rookeries were cleared out, some species like the elephant seal even changed their behaviour patterns (or the numbers in a given population fell below the point of recovery) and did not return again to King Island to breed. Apart from the odd visitor to the main, these days elephant seals do not venture north of Macquarie Island. It was Australia's first post-settlement experience—and not to be the last—of plundering a resource beyond the point of recovery. There are some sad ironies in this angry observation made in his diary by Donald Sinclair while elephant sealing at Macquarie Island: because of the sheer size of the beasts

they were slaughtering, the gang found it physically impossible to lug the blubber back to the try-works at their camp, so they were forced to leave the carcasses lying on the beach. On their return they found the birds had done their job for them:

Imagine our astonishment and anger at finding nothing ... the sea hens, scavengers and other sea birds having picked every bit of blubber off ... I cant explain how I felt when I witnessed all this destruction.<sup>92</sup>

What remains of Australia's first export industry? A few of the offshore islands reveal traces of Islander sojourns. Here and there is some tangible material heritage: a ruin or two, all that is left of stone walls and chimneys; some plant survivors; a plaque or two commemorating individuals whose names and histories have survived. There is an international tourism industry built in significant part on the remnants of the seal rookeries at places like Seal Bay on Kangaroo Island. In South Australia and on Kangaroo Island in particular there are a few surviving place names, many of suggestive of the sealing industry's colourful history: Lubra Creek; Bloody Jack's Gully; Wab's Gully; Creek Bay; Murray's Lagoon; Hungry Beach; Sall's Creek (near Stokes Bay); Murray Lagoon (a corruption of Murrell's); Stokes Bay; Smith Bay; Flour-cask Bay; Harvey's Return; Mount Thisby; Dog Creek; American River; American Beach. On Flinders Island a beach is still called Byant's Bay. There are even one or two place-names mainland like Yankalilla and Aldinga, which are Kaurna names learned by sealers and then passed on to the colonists in 1836. And there are, of course, large numbers of their descendants, some even still living on the island home where their forefathers and mothers had established their curious state of independence.

There remains an enduring interest in the Islanders, the Straits men and women and their children, the inhabitants of Kangaroo Island before the

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<sup>92</sup> F.I. Norman, "A horrible road to travel"—the diary of Captain Donald Sinclair at Macquarie Island, December 1877–January 1878,' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings* 36.1 (1989): 41.

establishment of the colony in 1836. Over the last two centuries there have been a number of versions of the South Australian colonial story which refer to this early Kangaroo Island drama, the *dramatis personae* containing one or two names that these days are on Kangaroo Island at least as well known as most of the colonial explorers, pioneers, politicians, administrators and businessmen whose names survive on street signs, and in suburb and country town names around South Australia. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century Kangaroo Island was the Ultima Thule of the British Empire, on the edge of the unknown, even beyond the known boundaries of the Australian penal colonies, at that time as remote from Europe as it was possible to be.<sup>93</sup> There the Islanders lived Antipodean versions of the wild man and Robinson Crusoe myths, their lifestyles challenging the paradigms of colonialism that underpin attempts by the South Australian colonists to reproduce the English class system in this Wakefield-inspired colony. In comparison, the Islanders lived in the ideological shadows of the French Revolution and American War of Independence; they were the hippies of their day, counter-culturalists practising self-sufficiency well before the phrase had any currency. And many of them had *gone native*, living with Indigenous women, some even speaking the languages of the main. When they made intermittent contact with their former countrymen, when Sydney or Hobart Port Dalrymple-based sealing masters sailed west to trade with them, or on the one or two occasions when colonial governors sent officials to muster them to check for convict runaways, they were usually described as beyond the pale, living outside the borders, beyond the influence of those strictly hierarchical societies the convict settlements. It is no small irony that the name the Islanders seem to have preferred for Kangaroo Island is 'Border's Land', not only preserving something of Baudin's 'Borda's Land', but also constructing a name for their island home that reflected its remote reality as the 'Ultima Thule', on the edge of the world.

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<sup>93</sup> The first reference to Kangaroo Island as 'Ultima Thule' is in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1826.



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