

'All I know is history'

Memory and land ownership in the Dudley District, Kangaroo Island.[\]

Rebe Taylor

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Three Moments of Discovery.

1.

One day in July 1954, Joan Maves^v was at home in Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, reading a copy of the popular magazine *Walkabout*.¹ There she found an article by Ernestine Hill titled 'Last of the Tasmanians'. Under the heading she saw a photograph of her Grandfather Joe and her Aunt Mary.

Joan was shocked. But she was also confused, for the caption claimed the photo was of Tom Simpson, the 'well known ... last Tasmanian half-caste of Kangaroo Island' and his daughter. Joan did not know that Tom Simpson was her late great-uncle, but she remembered Grandpa Joe and Auntie Mary well. She remembered going with her parents to visit Grandpa Joe in Penneshaw, on the western Dudley Peninsula. And Auntie Mary was still alive. It made no sense that their photograph had been used in the article; it must have been a mistake. But still the article scared Joan. She put it aside and did nothing about it.

2.

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^vAll the names of the people who have personally contributed to this article have been changed in accordance with their wishes.

Four years later Joan's ten-year-old son, James Maves, was reading the *Australian Junior Encyclopaedia* when he came across an entry titled 'The old Sealing Days'. It gave a brief history of the sealing industry in the Bass Strait and on Kangaroo Island. But what really interested James was this statement:

It has been claimed that the last full-blooded Tasmanian aborigine was not Trucanini, who died in Hobart in 1876, but Mrs. Seymour, who died at Hogg Bay, Kangaroo Island, at a great age in 1906.²

James was intrigued: not only was Kangaroo Island mentioned, but Seymour was his grandmother's maiden name. He asked his grandmother if they were descended from Mrs Seymour. She told him that they were, but she told him no more.

3.

Two years later, in 1960, Richard Tyler was at home in Adelaide reading the *Chronicle* newspaper when he came across a letter from an Edward Barnes [pseudonym] of Kangaroo Island.³ The letter caught Richard's eye because he lived there from the age of three until he was thirteen. Barnes was responding to an earlier article in the *Chronicle* claiming that Mary Seymour had been the 'last Tasmanian full-blood . . . to die'. Barnes wrote that Mrs Mary Seymour had in fact been a 'half-caste' Tasmanian Aborigine. He gave a brief history of Mary's family, beginning with her parents and concluding with a tribute to the youngest of her nephews, 'Tiger' Simpson, who had died in 1955. The name 'Tiger' brought an unexpected jolt of recognition for Richard. Tiger was his much-loved and well-remembered uncle; was he really of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent? Another connection was made.

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These three serendipitous moments of discovery launched journeys into a past lost and found, journeys of remapping a history over a land once known. This article reflects upon the experience of losing and finding, of journeying to discover what might, in a history with less prejudice, have been remembered.

It was not until the early 1980s that James Maves and David Tyler, acting independently, began to research their family histories in the archives and the libraries. There they found out that they were descended from Betty, a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman taken to Kangaroo Island by sealers in about 1819, and Nathaniel Walles (Nat) Thomas, an English sailor who jumped ship on the island in 1824.

Sealers had been visiting Kangaroo Island since Matthew Flinders officially discovered it in 1802. An estimated five hundred individuals visited there before the South Australian Company arrived in 1836. They mostly worked under Articles of Agreement for merchants in Hobart, Launceston and Sydney, and stayed on the island for a few months at a time.⁴

By about 1819, some of these men had begun to make Kangaroo Island their home. There was no indigenous population there, and the sealers took Aboriginal women, like Betty, from Tasmania and the adjacent mainland. The women helped the men and taught them to hunt and collect Aboriginal foods. With their assistance the men procured seal, kangaroo and wallaby skins and collected salt and whalebone. They traded these items with passing ships for basic provisions such as tobacco, alcohol, livestock and seeds. They grew gardens, stocked small farms and built huts from bark and logs. And some, like Nat and Betty, had children. By the mid-1820s it was estimated that there were about forty people living on Kangaroo Island. They were known collectively as the 'Islanders'.⁵

Then, in 1836, the South Australia Company landed on Kangaroo Island and established the first settlement of their new province. A rough census taken by a new settler estimated there was about sixteen Aboriginal women and eight European men living on Kangaroo Island.⁶ Some of these Islanders left: about four of the Aboriginal women and their children went back to their homelands and roughly eight men went back to Sydney and Van Diemen's Land. Three of the Islander men stayed as did most of the Aboriginal women. At least four of these women were Tasmanian. Perhaps they knew there was no home left to return to.⁷

Nat and Betty were among those who stayed. They had a son, Sam or Lorne,⁸ and two daughters, Mary and Hannah. Although their son went to sea as a boy, Mary and Hannah married official white settlers and had families. They were the only pre-settlement Islanders to do so. Today their descendants

are scattered across Australia. Most have only learnt of their Tasmanian Aboriginal ancestry quite recently, and many have no knowledge of it at all.

I came to learn about this history as a child. Shortly after my family arrived in Adelaide from London, my parents met a couple who invited us to stay on their sheep farm at the southern end of Antechamber Bay, in the District (or Hundred) of Dudley, Kangaroo Island.⁹ We found the place wonderful, and returned every summer holiday.

Their farm had been the home of Nat Thomas, indeed their house, the oldest occupied house in South Australia, had been built by him. The farming family had been there since the 1950s, but their neighbours had been there since the 1850s. So they could tell us stories about Nat, about the Aboriginal women and about Hannah and Mary. These stories were recalled by places on the farm with special names: places such as Old Joe's Grave, Wab's Gully and Lubra Creek. We would walk to these places and remember the stories as we went.

Old Joe's grave is under the Southern Cross windmill behind the dunes of Antechamber Bay. Old Joe, Nat Thomas' son-in-law, died crossing the dunes after landing his boat. Unable to shift him far, they rolled him down the dunes and buried him at the bottom.

Deep in the thick scrub of Wab's Gully is a low stone wall, said to be the remains of a house where an old Aboriginal woman 'lived out the last of her days'.

But the Lubra Creek crossing is my favourite place. It has a soft white sand floor that dips under a canopy of melaleucas. However blustery, it is always still and quiet. The light filtered by the trees' narrow leaves is soft but remarkably clear.

The farmer told us Lubra Creek had been a stone tool factory of the Aboriginal occupants of Kangaroo Island from thousands of years ago. We often found Aboriginal flint stones turned up by the sheep in the sand.

We were also told it had been the gathering place for the Aboriginal Tasmanian women of Dudley.

But an uglier story loomed at Lubra Creek: an Aboriginal woman had tried to swim from the creek's mouth across Backstairs Passage to escape home. On realising she couldn't make it, she turned back. There she was caught by Nat Thomas and beaten 'for her troubles'.¹⁰

These words have echoed through the generations of telling. Their shocking brutality could turn the serenity at Lubra Creek into an eerie silence.

With these stories in my mind and the sand still between my toes, I chose this history as the topic for my Masters thesis in 1993. In a local history of Kangaroo Island, I read that a descendant of Nat Thomas and Betty was living in Kingscote, the island's main township, about a hundred kilometres east of Dudley.¹¹ Her name was Joan Maves, and, the author of the local history told me, she could be contacted care of the Kingscote Post Office.

Joan Maves was happy to see me when I arrived a few months later at her home. With my dictaphone turned on, I began to ask Joan my questions. Did she know the same stories that I heard as a child? Did she know the farm at Antechamber Bay well? Had she inherited any Tasmanian Aboriginal language or traditional culture? I was insensitive with curiosity. Joan knew none of these. She told me of her discovery of her ancestry in 1954 and showed me the pile of books, and archival references that James had found for her. James told me his own story when we met in Adelaide a few days later. A year later, when I met Richard Tyler and his son David in Adelaide, I found a similar scenario: Richard's story of discovery and their wealth of researched information, mostly collected by David.

An obvious question arose from these encounters with the Maveses and Tylers: why had they known nothing of their ancestry? Joan and Richard shared similar responses: their parents had never told them, nor ever discussed their history, because (they supposed) of a sense of shame and fear. Joan and Richard had themselves, they told me, never experienced racism or exclusion first hand. They considered their parents' feelings as having been generic to the times in which they lived. Nonetheless, I wondered if there had been something more specific that had inspired the fear.

I also wondered how the Maveses and Tylers had been deprived of their history, while I had come to know about (some of) it as a child.

To answer these questions, I returned to Antechamber Bay, to find out how the stories there had remained in currency long after the descendants of the stories' protagonists had lost all knowledge of them. I needed to find out why the descendants of Nat Thomas and Betty were no longer there.

The Maveses, Tylers and I all knew from reading his will, that when Nat Thomas died in 1879 he left fifty-one acres of freehold land to his grandson, Nathaniel Simpson, the eldest of Hannah and Thomas Simpson's six sons

(they also had three daughters).¹² To find out what then happened to this holding, I sought out land records in Adelaide and on Kangaroo Island.

I learnt that two years after acquiring the Antechamber Bay block Nat Simpson bought an adjacent block of sixteen acres. This was shortly followed by another adjacent purchase of sixty-four acres. From this point the increase was sudden: by 1888 Nat Simpson, with three of his brothers and their father, were the owners of 10,354 acres of land near Antechamber Bay in mostly leasehold title.¹³ By 1904, a year after their father died, the Simpson brothers had increased their holdings to almost 12,300 acres. They were among the top three farming families in the Dudley district.¹⁴

In 1907 Nat Simpson was listed in the *Cyclopedia of South Australia* along side other successful South Australian gentlemen. His photograph shows him smartly attired in wing-collar and tie, with a handsomely curled moustache. His biography describes him as 'agriculturist and grazier' and a Justice of the Peace for the past six years who had served two terms for the Dudley District Council and who was interested in all matters political, sporting or social on the island.¹⁵ His brothers Thomas and William too had served as district councillors.¹⁶ A photograph in the local museum shows three of the Simpson brothers in suits and boaters as members of the local cricket team. The Simpsons, it seems, were an established, successful farming family.

But something happened to change all this. In the twenty years after 1910, the Simpsons lost almost all their land. They sold it to other farmers in Dudley. I could not work out why. There had not been a general slump in this period. Indeed, all the other substantial nineteenth-century landowning families in Dudley continue to own and farm land today.

The other substantial landowners in Dudley were, and still are, six large families who settled in the district between the 1850s and the 1890s. Between them, these six families have continually owned almost all the farming land in the Dudley district. When they showed me their genealogies, I also found these families were all intricately linked by marriage over five generations.

Of all the substantial farming families that had settled Kangaroo Island in the nineteenth century, only one was missing from all the genealogies and only one is no longer farming there today. That family was the Simpsons.

When I went to Dudley and asked members of these six colonial families why the Simpsons had lost their land, I was told, 'They were Aboriginal. They fell out of the social connection and didn't marry easily'.¹⁷ In everyday

interaction the Simpsons were accepted, but when it came to marriage the racial line was clearly drawn. 'No one would make a fuss', I was told, 'until you start to talk of marrying one'.¹⁸ That was the sticking point, and the source of several personal tragedies. When I spoke to these colonial descendants, the stories unfolded: the Marshal parents who forbade two of their daughters to marry Simpson boys¹⁹ and the Simpson girl who was jilted by her fiancé, the schoolteacher, after locals warned him off.²⁰ 'Stay white – keep away from any colour!', one informant warned me.²¹ Another colonial descendant explained that there had been a real fear of the 'throwback' in her parents' time. 'It was commonly believed in those days', she told me, 'that, even though the parents were perhaps only of quarter-caste, that any children could come back quite black. I know that's what my mother thought'.²²

In spite of all this, some of Nat and Betty's grandchildren married. Hannah's three daughters and one of her six sons married and had children on the island. One of Mary's two daughters and her only son married, and both had children. What is significant is that with the exception of one partnership, none of Nat and Betty's descendants married into the other large landowning families, but to people with small landholdings or no land at all.²³ Also significant is the timing; by the time the elder Simpson sons might have been able to recruit the support of nephews, they were in their late middle age, already hard pressed to keep their large properties viable. And they did not have the extended family support that the rest of the farming community enjoyed.

The Simpsons became swaggies depending on their former peers and neighbours to give them seasonal work. 'Old Nat', as an elderly colonial descendant remembered Nat Simpson, was a 'rather pathetic ... poor, haggard old man'. He and his brother William were, she told me, 'sort of bushmen', who occasionally came into town carrying swags. Another descendant described Nat Simpson as, 'a broken down old man', and said that his whole family, 'went to the dogs'.

Their admissions of marital exclusion did not prevent the colonial descendants from claiming that the Simpsons lost their land because of poor management and alcoholism. 'The Abo ... never gave much for land holding', a colonial descendant reflected. They were, according to another descendant, a 'de-tribalised people' for whom it was 'foreign ... alien ... to work on the land'. 'The Simpson family', one colonial descendant told me, 'wasted their inheritance through drinking'. Others agreed. 'They were drinkers', I was

told over again. 'That's where their money went', said one informant. 'I guess there was nothing much else for them to do on the weekend', another reflected.

Poverty, failure and finally absence have come to define the Thomas descendants' Aboriginality, and contradictorily, to justify their exclusion and land loss.

By the 1960s there were no Thomas descendants living in Dudley. Joan, her mother and her aunt remained on the island, in Kingscote, as did two of Richard's uncles. Most of the Thomas descendants had gone to Adelaide and some to other parts of Australia. When they moved out of the Dudley district, they took the opportunity not to tell their children about their Aboriginal ancestry and indeed very little, if anything, about their history on Kangaroo Island.

The history of the Thomas descendants is one of loss: of loss of land, of dislocation, and loss of history. And even when they began to regain their history from the early 1980s, they were unable to regain a historical *memory* comparable to that retained by the colonial descendants in Dudley.

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The six Dudley colonial families (pseudonyms):

Walker
Niven
Marshal
Cornelly
Barnes
Richards

I went to Dudley twice during my time as a Masters student to speak to members of the six colonial descendant families. The first time I went in 1993 they gave me my thesis: they told me that the marital exclusion of the Thomas descendants had led to their land loss and dislocation. The second time, a year later, I went not only to confirm this, but also to understand further how their sense of identity was linked to their history of land ownership and their knowledge, or memory, as a community, of that land.

I learnt that for a Dudley colonial descendant a name can ring up a five-generation genealogy as fast as a cash register. Their genealogies collectively encompass the history of the pioneering days and of land settlement, so that family history becomes community history. And in Dudley today those members of the six colonial families know the local history better than anyone else. Only they can claim a part in it, and only they (they believe) can call themselves 'Kangaroo Islanders'. When I went to visit Robin and Fiona Marshal they explained to me: 'To call yourself a Kangaroo Islander implies that you [are] . . . from a long-established family on the island'. Robin added, 'In my case I feel that way because maybe we are still working some of the land that was taken up before it was ever surveyed'.²⁴

The colonial families own almost all the farming land in Dudley, but they are numerically a minority within the present population. Margaret Southlyn, née Niven, explained to me that there are two groups within Dudley, the 'locals' and the 'local locals': those who live in Dudley and those who have '*always*' lived in Dudley. Margaret admitted that, for mere locals, the local locals are a difficult group to penetrate.²⁵ Without the history (or the land that contains the history) the locals do not have the language to be able to converse and celebrate the local locals' 'collective memory' in the sense that Maurice Halbwachs has defined it, where the act of remembering is a social phenomenon structured by group identities.²⁶

But while the locals are excluded because they have not '*always*' lived there, the Thomas descendants are excluded because they *have* '*always*' lived there but did not know it. Their exclusion is essential to the local locals' self-definition. If the Thomas descendants do not register in Margaret Southlyn's binary definition of the Dudley community, it is because their history has been absorbed, or more accurately, appropriated. Knowledge of 'the Aboriginal history', of the sealing days and of the descendants of Nat Thomas, is a fundamental part of the colonial descendants' exclusive memory, which is passed on by an oral tradition from generation to generation. Even knowledge of how to set a wallaby snare, a skill brought to the island by the Aboriginal women, is understood as part of colonial 'tradition' (Barnes, 1993). In the absence of a 'real' frontier, that essential ingredient of any pioneering narrative, the pre-settlement Islanders have become the Dudley colonial descendants' 'own' prehistory. Even the closeted story of the Simpsons' land loss plays an essential part in defining colonial legitimacy and success.

The ethnologist Roger Bastide argues that collective memory is not merely collective consciousness, analogous to Jung's collective subconscious, but is defined and structured by the group's power relations.²⁷ The colonial descendants can sustain an identity in part defined by the Thomas descendants' exclusion because their history is rooted in the land that they predominantly own. Even if the land is sold to another colonial descendant, the history remains within the group. The island's Aboriginal history has come into colonial ownership with the transfer of property. To those who know, the creeks, gullies and flats bespeak the people and events of the island's history. And, because those who know are colonial descendants, the places that bespeak *pre*-colonial history have become symbols appropriate to a narrative of colonial legitimacy and success.

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On a cold winter's day in 1993 I met Brian Barnes in the house his grandfather built on a steep hill overlooking Penneshaw. Brian told me a wealth of names, personalities and incidents that covered the Dudley district dating since his childhood. And, delving back further, he took out the exercise book in which he had recorded the stories his grandfather told him.

Pig's Head Flat

In the pre-1836 days, when Kangaroo Island was inhabited by all sorts of runaway sailors and escaped convicts with their Aboriginal wives, George Bates and Nat Thomas were living at Antechamber Bay. They had heard that a ship was anchored in Nepean Bay . . . so it was decided that George would walk to where Kingscote now stands and trade for . . . tobacco and nails. George had done his trading and was well on his way home . . . when he remembered he had not bought Nat's tobacco. He knew Nat, who could be a bit violent at times, would be very nasty if he didn't get his tobacco, so he decided to leave the nails under a tree on the flat which he marked with an old pig's skull which he found there. After walking all the way back for the tobacco, he searched . . . for the nails and was never able to find them, but the spot from that time on was always called Pig's Head Flat.

The Barnes family has owned the land near Pig's Head Flat for four generations. Brian's grandfather was the land's first owner, and, Brian told me, he had personally known Nat Thomas. The story is also well known by the other colonial descendants, and the council has put up a sign near the flat with the name 'Pig's Head Corner'. The story is part of the colonial descendants' collective memory. It offers them the opportunity to demonstrate their exclusive knowledge through story-telling.

As the land's owner, however, Brian is the story's primary curator, and he considers it particularly his own. Only he can give it validity. Not only has Brian written the story down, using as many of his grandfather's words as he can remember, but he has material evidence to prove the story's authenticity. After reading me the story, he took me to his shed where a couple of rusted hand-made nails were hanging on display. One of them had a paper tag attached stating that these were the nails of pre-colonial settler George Bates. Brian explained that he and his father had been digging a post-strainer hole on the flat when they found a 'mass of rusty iron', in which were preserved 'the remains of George's lost nails' (Barnes, 1993).

Literally earthed in the land, the buried nails of the Pig's Head Flat story ratify the notion that land secretes memory. Finding the nails brought the story back to life. On a broader level, working on land owned for four generations brings the history of the colonial descendants back to life; the reality of work meets the mythology of the past, the mundane blends with the memorial. Pierre Nora talks of history being the death of memory. Where history is critical and reconstructed, memory is spontaneous and unconscious.²⁸ Working their ancestors' land is for the colonial descendants predominantly an unconscious interaction with the past. In that context they are living, as Nora defines it, 'within memory'. If such an existence were total, then

Each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning. With the appearance of the trace . . . of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history.²⁹

For Brian Barnes, going into his shed is an act of 'true memory', but telling me about it is not. While Brian must go in there daily without thinking about his

ancestors, my presence as visiting student historian introduces a distancing 'trace'. Similarly, the colonial descendants must drive past Pig's Head Corner without considering its history, but at one stage they decided to memorialise its story by erecting a signpost. Could it be that, left totally 'alone', without visiting historians, tourists or even 'locals', the colonial descendants would be a 'people of memory', similar to Nora's example of the Jews?³⁰

The question is immaterial. For while Pig's Head Flat is contained within colonial descendants' land, it has a pre-colonial history. It is reminiscent of the same 'savage' as Lubra Creek – Nat Thomas. This process of appropriation distances the colonial descendants from their memory. They cannot live totally within memory because their history must not only remain in the past, memorialised by the signpost and by the nails with their paper tags, but must simultaneously reinforce their narrative of continual habitation. They strike a balance between the two by the semi-conscious/unconscious relationship that they sustain with their past through their land. Pig's Head Flat is both a historical site and farming land: it has a non-physical as well as a physical use. This means the colonial descendants are not totally 'within memory', nor are they totally 'within history'. They can consciously maintain the myth of pre-colonial history, but their unconscious maintenance of the land creates the honest belief that that history has become theirs to tell. It is, in essence, a Lockean appropriation of history: the colonial descendants invest the labour, and therefore claim the harvest of 'true memory', even if that memory is based on a history that is not their own.

So the colonial descendants must walk in both worlds: the world of constructed linear history, of signposts and museums, and the world of digging post-strainer holes on their ancestors' land. As long as they remain on the land, they can justify and sustain that contradiction. If the Barneses were to sell their land and leave the area, ultimately they would have only their history, which, as Nora points out 'belongs to everyone and no one'; a mere share in a public asset. Memory, on the other hand, Nora explains, 'is blind to all but the group it binds'.³¹

The colonial descendants are aware – consciously or not – of the role land plays in sustaining this balance between history and memory. This awareness is demonstrated in the history of the Barnes family produced by Brian Barnes' niece-in-law, Julie Barnes. Julie endeavoured to write 'not a history of the people', but a history of 'the land the family have farmed since first arriving at

Hog Bay'. The people only appear because their lives 'have been interwoven with the land'. Julie writes:

I hope to make the reader of these pages, particularly my children, appreciate the land. The value is not its financial worth, or the amount of production it is capable of, but the fact that five generations of the same family have survived because of it . . . It is the only enduring link we have with our forebears. It gives us a sense of belonging and continuity.³²

Thus the land provides history – the 'enduring link', the narrative of progress, of pioneering hardships and success – but it also provides memory, the 'sense of belonging and continuity'. It provides the pre-colonial myth that demonstrates the success of that 'enduring link'. Therefore, with land as the buffer, the polarities of history and memory can coexist. Memory can indeed 'crystallise', as Nora calls it, into history, but it can also exist in a fluid, dynamic form (7). The buried nails of Pig's Head Flat are a crystallised memory in so far as they are part of a myth, but their material presence brings the memory to life. As the land is living and growing, so too is the identity of the colonial descendants.

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Land, not blood, secretes memory. So little of the Thomas descendant history has entered museums, books and archives. So much has entered into the annals of colonial memory in Dudley. Theirs is a history of exclusion exclusively remembered.

But the Maveses and Tylers have visited Antechamber Bay. Their research has brought them to Nat Thomas' house, and they have seen the same view he enjoyed. They have learnt where Betty is buried and visited her grave. To these places they have fostered a sense of emotional attachment.

But these places and feelings were found, not given. Standing on their ancestors' land did not recall a grandparent's voice, but a reference in a book. And there are many more places the Maveses and Tylers did not see on their visits that are retained in colonial collective memory.

Further, their researched records did not contain a history of land loss or of marital exclusion. They related only to the places in the land where the earliest parts of their history lay. Indeed, Joan, Richard and David all spoke to me of their pride in being descended from what they claimed were the first people to settle on Kangaroo Island. It seemed to be their primary interest. How could they then engage with a narrative of exclusion?

This question became my focus. I found that rather than wanting to affirm or join in with the Thomas descendants' celebration of their historical primacy, I wanted to understand it. I wanted understand why this question had to be asked at all and if it was itself not a part of a narrative of exclusion.

Beginning dates belong to the realm of history, not memory. Historical priority is not a concern for Dudley colonial descendants, so they are not challenged by another's claim for it. As long as they continue to own and 'know' the land, then they remain (in their definition) the only 'true Kangaroo Islanders'. Claiming historical primacy is an act of those who have lost memory and have only history. It is an act of mere 'locals'. Excluded from colonial memory, the Thomas descendants are unable to see the division between local and local local. While they can't see their exclusion so it continues – a legacy of a history of Aboriginal marginalisation and dispossession. It is an Aboriginal experience of a particular kind.

Indeed, very need to research a history that has not been passed on through a fear and a stigma created by marital exclusion and by the loss of land is an Aboriginal experience of a particular kind. So too, in this context, is having to construct a narrative in order to understand the past a particular Aboriginal experience.

It is analogous to Sally Morgan's finding out about her Aboriginal ancestry in her adult life and then writing about her journey to understand it in her well-known book *My Place*. She too pieced together a narrative and then claimed to feel 'connected'. While her story has been widely celebrated, it has also been strongly criticised. Bain Attwood in his article 'Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality', finds Morgan's Aboriginality 'inherently problematic'.³³ This is not because she constructed it, for Attwood argues, 'Any identity is a cultural construction', it is because Morgan claims it is something more – essential and spiritual.³⁴ Attwood also criticises Morgan for trying to reconcile her past with her present and the experiences of her uncle, grandmother and mother with her own when there is 'no real dialectic' between them. While they, Attwood

states, have 'suffered a particular form of oppression ... this does not hold true for Morgan'.³⁵

But Attwood's criticism misses the point: it does not acknowledge the reason Sally Morgan did not know her history was that it was an Aboriginal history. If her family's testimonies represent, as Attwood claims, 'a foreign county which Morgan cannot readily understand', they do explain the historical silence she grew up with (313). Not knowing, and having to construct a narrative in order to understand, was part of her Aboriginal experience.

Like Morgan, the Maveses' and Tylers' historiographical constructions bespeak this Aboriginal experience, for they are made without the memory they might have inherited were it not for their history of exclusion.

These historiographies are not, however, static – I have noticed changes since our discussions began. This is partly due to my admittedly interventionist role. I could not, and ultimately found I did not want to, abstract my emotional attachment from my research and the places of my childhood memories. So I have allowed a strong sense of injustice to prevail in my writing. In this sense I am no less an informant myself. I have passed the stories of the colonial descendants to the Thomas descendants, told them of their history of exclusion and analysed of the ways they interpreted their history.

In an epilogue I reflect on my own role and argument within more recent discussions with Richard and David. Our discussions are ongoing. Sadly, Joan passed away before my thesis was finished and she has not read this work, but her sons, particularly James' two brothers, have read it and given me positive responses. Their words, however, along with those of several other Thomas descendants with different stories and experiences, have not yet found their way from tape to print. This story continues beyond this article. It has no certain conclusion, but perhaps there should never be one.

James Maves

When young James Maves found out that his great-great-grandmother was the same Mrs Seymour whom the *Australian Junior Encyclopaedia* described as the 'Last Tasmanian', he thought that she 'must have been a princess'.³⁶ But when he went to look for remnants of this fantastic past within his family and

home he was disappointed. He noticed that his great-aunt Mary Abell (née Seymour) had a 'darker complexion' and 'almost Aboriginal features'. And he remembers seeing some hand-woven baskets in his grandmother's house that looked vaguely Aboriginal, but he admitted to me, 'my grandmother might have bought them at the East End Market'. His discovery, James concluded, 'didn't change anything, because I couldn't find anything'.³⁷ Just as nothing material could give James a sense of having a 'real', or 'essential', Aboriginal history, the stories his grandmother told him had no sense of relevance in his home in Kingscote, nor later in Adelaide. And they have been mixed up and half-forgotten:

I still can't recall . . . if [my grandmother] was talking about her father or her grandfather; someone who went to the mainland in a boat . . . came back and was carrying a keg of nails and must of had a heart attack in the sand dunes . . . and they went looking for him and found him with a keg of nails lying alongside him.³⁸

We can immediately recognise the keg of nails from the Pig's Head Flat story, but it is mixed up here with the story of the death Nat Thomas' son-in-law William (Joe) Seymour in the sand dunes of Antechamber Bay which I had learnt as child. Fiona Marshal told me that when Mary Seymour heard William had died, all she said was, 'Trust the old bugger to die there!'³⁹ Fiona believed that this supported the popularly held opinion that William had been a useless sod. Mary, on the other hand, is remembered as a true battler who, after his death, continued to live and farm alone at Antechamber Bay with three small children.

So while James was imagining his great-great-grandmother as a princess of a lost Tasmanian tribe, the colonial descendants were remembering her as a hard-working woman with a sardonic sense of humour and a lazy husband. James does not know where Pig's Head Flat is, but through its story the colonial descendants remember his great-great-grandfather's violent temper. They know James' ancestors as they know their land. Beyond the details, however, the colonial descendants realise that knowing the intricate details of old Kangaroo Island history defines their identity. For James, however, the stories are merely something his grandmother once told him. His Aboriginal, pre-colonial Kangaroo Island ancestry is abstract, only tangentially relevant to his personal interest in history:

It's no different to finding out your great-great-great-grandmother was Welsh or Finnish or whatever else, except to the extent that it does make me feel a little closer to where I live. If I was to find out that she was a North American Indian, I would probably feel closer to Arizona than I do right now.

James is right; blood carries fewer memories than land. It makes him feel 'a little closer', only not to Antechamber Bay, to the land Nat Thomas once owned, but to Australia. He says he is no less interested in the history of his father's family, the descendants of a Tasmanian convict. Because James cannot find 'any *thing*', cannot feel or touch his Aboriginality, it is as if it were not there. But it is precisely that absence, the lack of signs and the lack of memory that constitutes James' experience of Aboriginality. Nevertheless, how does one identify with a numbness, with a lack of identity?

Joan Maves

Joan told me that when she read 'The Last Tasmanians' article in *Walkabout*, she 'was horrified that they had the names wrong'. She said she wasn't horrified about the Tasmanian Aboriginal reference because she 'didn't take it in'.⁴⁰ Joan said she did not 'take it in' until the early 1980s, when James came home from university with the results of his archival research into their genealogy. After seeing it, Joan said 'there was no way I wanted to push it under the carpet. I wanted more and more and more'.⁴¹ But Joan had 'pushed it under the carpet' for almost thirty years. She had not felt able to speak about it openly even with her family.

The early 1980s was a time when people generally had started to become more interested in heritage and public history, and a convict or (even) Aboriginal ancestry was no longer as shameful as it previously had been. With her new information in this more relaxed environment Joan began, tentatively at first, to tell people about her ancestry. Their interest and encouragement fuelled her to continue. When I spoke to her she was extremely proud of her ancestry. She regretted not having asked her mother and aunt while they were alive, and wished she had inherited her aunt's dark complexion.

But in 1993 James still described his mother as still being 'less secure' than he was about their ancestry. And it seemed to me that Joan only really felt secure relating to her history in a way that celebrated its antiquity on Kangaroo Island. She accepted her history as others had packaged it for her, in the way they had found acceptable and unchallenging. Being presented this 'packaged' version was a turning point for Joan, as she described it to me:

We was out on a picnic . . . and we met some new people . . . and they started to talk about it . . . and they said 'Oh, you're going to be famous, we're going to take your photo', and I said 'Whatever for?', and they said, 'Well, you've come down from the first child born on Kangaroo Island', and . . . I thought; 'Oh, gee, I am somebody', and from then on I went on talking about it, and I wasn't ashamed of it, or it didn't worry me.⁴²

Joan indeed became 'famous'. In 1984 she contacted the Kangaroo Island Pioneers Association (KIPA) and told them about her ancestry. The KIPA is an Adelaide-based organisation that has few connections with Dudley. It was established by descendants of the first official settlers who landed at Nepean Bay (Kingscote) in July 1836. Proud of their ancestors, KIPA members aim to challenge the popularly held belief that Glenelg beach in Adelaide was the site of first landing.

But they also thought Joan's history was very special, and they made her their first patron. The local paper, the *Islander*, reported this event with an article headed 'Family's Unique Link with Island History'.⁴³ And in 1988 *Australian Geographic* interviewed Joan as part of a feature on Kangaroo Island. 'I found out only a few years ago that I have Tasmanian Aborigine blood in me', she is quoted as saying, 'I think that makes me a bit special, don't you?'⁴⁴

Feeling special and accepted, Joan used her involvement in the KIPA to push for a more public representation of her history in Dudley. She asked the Dudley District Council that a street be named after Mary Seymour, to celebrate her being the first child born on Kangaroo Island. While the Council declined this request, they did name a street after Nat Thomas. And in 1991 Joan was involved when the KIPA organised two plaques to honour Nat

Thomas and Betty, one to be placed in Penneshaw at the end of 'his' street, and one at his farm at Antechamber Bay.

Joan assisted at the opening of these plaques, and on 28 July 1991 she and sixty members of the KIPA travelled by bus from Kingscote to Penneshaw and from there to Antechamber Bay. It was a big day for Joan; she was the centre of attention.

After the opening at Penneshaw a Dudley local, a retired farmer and colonial descendant, joined the Pioneers for their journey out to Antechamber Bay. On the way he began to talk about Joan's history. He told many funny and entertaining stories about one of Joan's uncles, Tiger Simpson, whom 'everyone' in Dudley remembered well. When the bus pulled up the steep hill out of Penneshaw the local pointed out the place where Tiger had lived, and mentioned that the hill was named after him.⁴⁵ Joan had not known this; she had only ever vaguely known Uncle Tiger.

Joan did not want to be outdone. Remembering a story James had told her, when the bus passed the turn-off to Chapman's River, at the eastern end of Antechamber Bay, she explained to everyone that her ancestor Betty was buried near by. She later told me that since then everyone in Dudley had talked about Betty's burial site as if they'd always known about it, though she was the one to tell them.⁴⁶ But they *had* always known about it. In Dudley Joan's history is not 'special'; it's just a part of the landscape.

'I suppose it never hit her'

'Didn't she know she had Aboriginal blood? Oh goodness me!', Mary Niven exclaimed when I told her Joan had discovered her Aboriginal ancestry only recently.⁴⁷ Perhaps for a moment Mary was shocked to realise that something so much a part of her environment and memory as Joan's history was known only within a very small, insular group. Perhaps she was shocked at the extent of the Thomas descendants' exclusion. After a pause, Mary finally reasoned, 'I suppose it never hit her'.

Other colonial descendants I interviewed were also surprised that Joan had not known about her ancestry. They too came to the same general conclusion, that Joan must have never bothered to ask.⁴⁸ But this assumes that, if Joan had experienced blatant exclusion, she would have known about her ancestry. It makes ignorance the measure of acceptance. As an example of such

acceptance Mary Niven told me about Mrs Richards, a French Mauritian who had married into one of the six Dudley families:

She wasn't Aboriginal, but she was very dark. Of course nobody here took any notice, she was just like everybody else, but . . . when she went to Adelaide . . . everybody used to turn around and look at her . . . because you never saw them in those days. You wouldn't associate with them.⁴⁹

This story was testimony enough for Mary that there was no racism in the community. Not being noticed was, in her reckoning, being accepted as equal. It is true that mundane interaction in Dudley was apparently not affected by racial difference. But there was exclusion underneath. According to Brian Barnes, the Richards' 'Negro background' did produce 'a certain stand-offishness' in the community. For fear of offending the Richards, Brian even declined to name them in this context.

And the idea that Joan's history was of so little consequence to her that she was not bothered to ask about it is transparently contradicted not only by the amount of attention she gave it after she found out, but also by the attention given to it by Dudley residents themselves. After Joan's history was publicised, the Penneshaw school started to teach pre-colonial island history and the Folk Museum curated displays on Nat Thomas, Betty and their daughters. But have their interpretations really altered the way history is presented and remembered in Dudley?

The Penneshaw Museum is under the direction of the colonial descendants. It is a monument to themselves. The whole east wall of one of the two display rooms is devoted to the histories of the six major colonial families. Each family has its own panel, with its own photographs of early homesteads and/or ancestors. Some early farming tools are scattered about.

There are displays of Nat Thomas, Betty and their daughters are prominent, but they are stuck on another wall, excluded from the continuing success story, and they stop after the first generation.

In 1996 I assisted the Museum to get funds to upgrade and complete some unfinished displays, and I suggested we also change the 'pre-colonial' section to include today's descendants. My suggestion brought a sharp response from the museum's curator, who was also a local teacher and the school librarian. I

was reminded that the term 'folk' meant a history of the people (the people, it seems, who established the museum). She also wrote that 'the non-white settlers (a very small minority compared to European settlers ...) are already well documented and relevant history displayed'.⁵⁰

Indeed, much public money has been spent on representing the island's Aboriginal history, but only in a way that locates progress and success on the side of colonial history.⁵¹ It is no coincidence that, just as Joan began to disclose her history and create the possibility of making what had been a narrative of failure into one of success, her history was historicised, abstracted and disconnected by the Dudley colonial descendants. Thus they did not challenge her push for plaques; on the contrary, they assisted it. Such public memorials celebrate a history past (indeed the passing of a history?) while still providing a formal structure for 'pride' and 'recognition'.

'The first white girl born on Kangaroo Island'

Not long after the *Islander* reported Joan's family history, a resident of Island Beach, east of Kingscote, went to see Joan and said he wanted to design a headstone for Mary Seymour's then unmarked grave. Fiona and Robin Marshal helped with the construction. A plaque mounted on two small granite boulders now bears the words:

Mary Seymour, nee Thomas, Born at Hog Bay River Sept 11, 1833, died Sept. 9, 1913, the first white girl born on K Is. Daughter of Nat Thomas and Betsy [sic], a Tasmanian full blood Aboriginal.

How is a white girl born of 'a Tasmanian full blood Aboriginal?' Possibly if the word 'white' does not refer to skin colour but is used to mean 'settler', 'one of us', 'part of our history'. The plaque concedes that Mary had Aboriginal 'blood', but does not allow for the suggestion that Mary may have *been* Aboriginal. If that were acknowledged, then the inspiration for the plaque, the word 'first', would no longer apply. For an Aboriginal cannot be the first in a white beginning. Aboriginals are not part of white history, of linear time. They belong on the other side of the frontier, the counterpoint to civilisation. Remembering Mary as the 'first white child born' seemed a positive attempt

to welcome Joan into the progressive, celebrated island history. The plaque did not attempt to question the borders of pre-colonial and colonial, of black and white. It merely accepted them and put Mary on the side of the orthodox.

But Joan felt comfortable with those divisions. She told me:

'My ancestor . . . Mary was the first child born on Kangaroo Island, well the first registered child . . . that's the start of everything, isn't it?'⁵²

While Joan's 'start of everything' appears to challenge colonial history by disregarding the year 1836 as the beginning, it is reliant on the chronological, linear, genealogical constructions produced by colonial interpretations of history. It is a formal point, made in order that Joan might find a safe and non-challenging perspective upon her history. It is prescribed to suppress the urge to excavate a history of exclusion and loss.

The Penneshaw storekeeper

Joan told me how her grandfather, mother and aunt had all been an integral part of Penneshaw community life; how her mother had been a champion tennis player, and her mother and aunt had also played for dances. 'They joined in with everything exactly the same as everybody else', Joan explained, 'there was nothing different about them'. Or was it that their treatment, on this mundane level, was the same *despite* their difference? Joan said:

Of course my mother was fair-skinned, but Auntie Mary . . . whose skin I noticed after I was told . . . was a little bit olive . . . was absolutely loved (Joan, 1993).

Yet when I asked Joan if she thought that she had been protected by not knowing her ancestry when she was young, she answered 'probably'. And later she admitted that her family *had* been disadvantaged in Dudley. 'I sort of had the feeling', she said, 'that they weren't given the opportunities of . . . perhaps if you was a [Niven] or a [Walker] . . . they'd get the pick of any land or anything' (Joan, 1994).

Joan referred to something James had uncovered from researching the Aboriginal Protection Board records. Because she was a 'half-caste', Mary Seymour had been forced to hand her house over to the Crown in return for basic rations when she was in need. For this Joan expressed anger towards the then Dudley community and the council, which had told the Destitute Board that Mary was a 'half-caste'. '[Mary] wasn't helped as much as she should have been', Joan insisted:

People didn't worry about whether she was the first or anything in those days . . . there was nothing done to help her, in fact I would go as far to say there was somebody in Penneshaw who got a bit of benefit out of that. (Joan, 1994)

'That' was Mary's dependence on the provision of rations. The 'somebody' was the Penneshaw storekeeper, who was an agent for the Protector of Aborigines and also a councillor. 'He was everything in Penneshaw', as Joan put it, 'a quite well-known figure' (Joan, 1994). The PRO material reminded Joan of her mother and aunt discussing how the storekeeper had ripped Mary off, but she would not tell me his name until I had turned off my dictaphone and promised not to repeat it. Two days later, a colonial descendant confirmed his identity to me and said that he was 'no good', but she also insisted his name not be exposed, explaining that his descendants still live in the district.⁵³

There seems to be a continuing sense of insecurity and sensitivity surrounding an issue that 'nobody noticed'.

'Nothing'

In 1991, some months after Joan had opened the KIPA plaques in Dudley, the *Adelaide Advertiser* contacted her and asked if they could photograph and interview her at the Antechamber Bay plaque. The plaque had been erected near the Hills hoist on the back lawn of the farmer's house, near the spot where Nat Thomas is apparently buried. The interviewer positioned Joan near the plaque and then asked her how she 'felt' to be standing so close to the

'burial site' of her ancestor. 'I felt nothing', Joan told me. 'Nothing'. (Joan, 1993)

Afterwards Joan went back to the Antechamber Bay property several times to revisit the sites she knew. She stood by the graves of Nat Thomas and William Seymour. She looked at the few stones that are the remains of Mary Seymour's cottage and thought of her life there with a farm, three children and no husband (Joan, 1993).⁵⁴ After this, Joan told me, she found she could not 'help but feel an affiliation with the land' (Joan, 1993).

But Joan's affiliation had to be learned. She did not inherit it along with generations of storytelling. Joan had only a simplified historical map as her guide.

Joan's map began with Nat Thomas, Betty and Mary, from whom a clear, constant line could be drawn to herself and her sons (Joan, 1993). She told me she was only 'sort of, a little bit, related' to the Simpsons (Joan, 1994). She seemed to show little interest when I told her that they were also direct descendants of Nat Thomas, or that they had farmed his land until 1926, when she was five years old.

Joan's historical tunnel vision was shaped by her insecurity. She knew that to assert an Aboriginality or to claim history of exclusion, to even mention that her great-great-grandmother was ripped off because she was a 'half-caste', would have pushed the limits of acceptance within the colonial-descendant community. One Dudley resident told me that 'anyone less than a half-caste' had 'no right to call themselves an Aborigine'.⁵⁵

Joan's sons have emphasised the importance that their mother's story be told, including her reticence to challenge the local community. For Joan may not have inherited mother's and auntie's stories, but she did inherit their silence.

Perhaps in this sense Joan lived within the 'true memory' of fear. Out of the same fear that her ancestors had known, Joan adopted an Aboriginality constructed for her out of the raw materials of the white colonial imagination, which had been used to replace her Aboriginality at the very site of its erasure.

Richard Tyler

Richard Tyler told me that when he read Barnes' letter in the *Chronicle* in 1960 it confirmed 'an inkling' he'd always had about his Aboriginal ancestry. He remembered, as a young boy, going to visit Aunt Annie Harry, Joan's mother, and seeing her sister, Mrs Mary Abell, née Seymour:

Now she, to my knowledge, is the only one who showed any colour, because I used to go around to Mrs Harry's and there used to be this dark lady there and I used to wonder who that dark lady was – I didn't know they were related.⁵⁶

After reading the *Chronicle*, Richard knew little more about his history until his son, David, compiled a genealogy in the early 1980s. This is one of several parallels between Richard and Joan Maves. Soon after David did the research, Richard too made contact with the KIPA. In 1986, two years after Joan had been made patron, Richard attended his first meeting and announced his ancestry. This was the first time Joan and Richard had properly met. They both realised that they were not the only Thomas descendants searching for their past.

Richard too became involved with the KIPA. He helped organise the two plaques honouring Nat Thomas and Betty, and he jointly opened them with Joan. Richard was also approached by the *Advertiser* to stand by Nat Thomas' 'burial site' and be interviewed, but this would have involved a helicopter ride to Antechamber Bay, so he declined.

Like Joan, Richard is emphatic about claiming historical primacy. He told me:

We go back to the very beginning. Nat Thomas was there in 1827 ... [and] ... Betty ... was there in about 1819 ... They were some of the earliest ... pioneers on the island.⁵⁷

Richard attends the KIPA's annual dinners, which are held on 27 July, the day the South Australia Company landed their first boat, the *Duke of York*, at Nepean Bay. But of his ancestors he claims, 'they were there to *meet* the *Duke of York*, so the South Australian Company were not the beginning by any means'.⁵⁸

While there are parallels to be drawn between Richard's and Joan's stories, there are also differences. Although Richard lived on Kangaroo Island as a child, he spent most of his life in Adelaide. He has not had same constraints that Joan had known; he did not know her fear. So he was far more relaxed and open to my interpretation of land loss and marital exclusion.

'Would you have married me if you'd known I was part Aboriginal?', he laughingly asked his wife after he read my thesis abstract. He wrote long and thoughtful letters in response to his interview transcripts and the drafts of my work. In one such letter in 1994 he made his opinion on the question of his ancestors' marital exclusion clear:

White women could pick and choose and therefore were not prepared to marry a half-caste or quarter-caste, consequently there were no children to hand property on to (Tyler, 1994).

Richard was also quick to agree that having an Aboriginal ancestry was the reason his family had not passed their history on to his generation. 'If you were a pure-blood' – meaning pure *white* – 'someone would be interested enough to make up a family tree' (Tyler, 1994). And, unlike Joan, Richard admits there are feelings of shame among other family members:

This cousin . . . when she was told, only a few years ago . . . she said 'I wouldn't shout that to the tree-tops', much to say, 'I don't feel I would like people to know I have black blood in me' (Tyler, 1994).

But if Joan's fear was a mark of her closeness to her ancestors, then Richard's relaxed and confidently analytical attitude is a mark of his distance. For Joan the KIPA, the memorials and the tunnel-vision view of her history were the only medium through which she could express a security with her family's past; for Richard, they are just about the only contact he has.

David Tyler

David Tyler is even more dedicated than Richard to the politics of public history on Kangaroo Island. He has a cottage in Kingscote, bequeathed to him by one of his great-uncles, where he often spends the weekends pottering around the garden overlooking Nepean Bay. Spending more time on the island means he can also spend more time with local affairs. He is the current President of the KIPA, a role that demands that he actively assist in conserving significant sites and establishing new memorials relating to all areas of Kangaroo Island history.

But David is particularly proud of his own history and has pushed persistently for its recognition as the island's real historical beginning. He admitted to me, 'I don't mind stirring up a bit of political trouble'.⁵⁹ As a result of his lobbying, there is now an informal but clear division in the KIPA between those who recognise a 'pre-colonial beginning' and those who do not. Among the latter group, who once defined the KIPA, are the descendants of the first official settler to step onto the sand of Nepean Bay Beach. David explained to me that they think 'the whole history goes back to 27th of July [1836] and that's it ... Nothing happened before then' (Tyler, 1994).

But both KIPA factions have little in common with how history is remembered in Dudley. David is not unaware of this. When I asked him if he thought an aristocracy of land-owning colonial families still exists in Dudley, he answered sardonically by listing the six families' names. David observed how these families have not only dominated land ownership and the District Council, but also how his own history is represented.

So in an effort to celebrate his history and also to challenge both the Dudley colonial elite and the '1836-as-the-beginning' KIPA faction, David approached the Division of State Aboriginal Affairs to fund a memorial to honour Betty near her unmarked grave at Antechamber Bay. The Dudley Council agreed to assist the project and in 1993, the International Year for the Indigenous Person, a plaque was erected on the side of the Cape Willoughby Road at the bottom of Antechamber Hill. The inscription reads in part:

Early settlers in this area included Nat Thomas [and] his Tasmanian Aboriginal wife Betty . . . [their] elder daughter 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.

Such a memorial is undoubtedly important. And having been erected using Aboriginal Affairs funding on a site almost exclusively known within colonial collective memory it also appears to be challenging white colonial structures of history. But here, at this seemingly most challenging point, the complexity and extent of the Thomas descendants' exclusion is still evident.

For its wording makes the plaque no more than a more sophisticated version of Mary Seymour's headstone. 'First born' has been replaced with 'first documented' and 'white girl' replaced with 'child of a European'. These plaques only reinforce the division between pre- and post-colonial, exiling the island's pre-colonial history safely into the remote past.

As if history were an esoteric, preordained structure, David, with his words 'first', 'settlers' and 'development', seemingly wants to squeeze into the right side of the beginning marker to qualify his history within linear progress. But it doesn't work that way: the point of one's *exclusion* can't become the point of one's *inclusion*. David, like Richard and Joan, wants what Jonathan Boyarin claims is the impossible: for the past to affect the present while reconstructed into a single arrow moving unidirectionally through a disconnected space.⁶⁰ This model of history does not, as Paul Carter describes it, offer the opportunity of 'going back';⁶¹ it treats space as dead. A space can be entered, can be recognised and memorialised for its significance within a detached linear model of history, but this does not bring it to life. To bring space to life is to recognise how it has been reconstructed into *place*.⁶² But the Thomas descendants cannot see how spaces become places within colonial memory; they have been excluded from such knowledge.

As a result their model of time and space is, to use Boyarin's terminology, 'politically ineffective'.⁶³ Their memorials offer no threat to the colonial descendants; they only reaffirm their own exclusion. The colonial descendants' continuing habitation within the sites of pre-colonial history allows them to move freely between the worlds of memory, history, place and space. So they can publicly welcome the Thomas descendants' history while privately continuing to deny its legitimacy in order to reaffirm their own. It is this private reaffirmation that further disconnects the Thomas descendants from the appropriated site of their history.

David's politics of historical primacy demonstrate and emphasise this disconnectedness. Words such as 'beginning', 'pioneer' and 'settlement' are attractive, but they are disparate to memory. They do not inspire colonial identity and thus do not challenge it. Not realising this is part of David's Aboriginal legacy. It demonstrates the extent of his exclusion.

Epilogue

But perhaps this is now changing. When I visited Kangaroo Island in April 1998, David invited me around to his cottage for lunch. He had read my manuscript and gave me his response. 'My initial reaction', he said, 'was "No, that's not right" ... I thought you'[d] missed the point about what I'm trying to do'. He explained: 'I see myself ... as a showman ... trying [as President] to keep the troops happy ... and I don't mind being a bit mischievous ... with the history. But', he continued, 'then I thought, you've probably made quite a valid interpretation in many ways'. I then asked if he still thought it was important to 'squeeze on the right side of the historical marker'. He answered that it 'doesn't matter who was here first'.⁶⁴ I laughed. Was this a change of attitude, or simply a demonstration of his mischievousness?

The next day we went together to Lubra Creek. He was awe-struck by the place, by the Aboriginal flint stones, the stories and most of all the sense of peace he felt there.⁶⁵

But his political mischievousness was still alive and well. A few days later, when he gave me a lift to Penneshaw, he asked me if I would address this year's KIPA annual dinner. 'Are you *sure?*', I asked. He was.

So on 27 July I presented the above story to the members of the KIPA. Several of the other Thomas descendants had also been invited. Many of them met each other for the first time. There were also several attendees with Dudley colonial family names on their cardboard name-tags. I don't think I have ever been so nervous. The mouths dropped open when I spoke about marital exclusion. I was quite choked up when I thanked the Thomas descendants for allowing me to be a part of their journeys. It was a very difficult performance.

I then welcomed questions. One of the Dudley colonial descendants stood up and in a forthright manner said:

I would like to say that [Joan Maves' Auntie Mary] ... and ... my mother corresponded ... for years ... And my grandmother used to walk up that hill to where [Joan's mother] used to live and play bridge with them. And they did that in the 1930s!⁶⁶

It was intended as a testimony to the lack of racism in Dudley. But then Richard stood up. He told everyone how, as a boy, he used to visit his Auntie Annie, Joan Maves' mother. There he often used to see 'this dark lady'. He had never known that she was Annie's sister, his Auntie Mary.⁶⁷

The colonial descendant had claimed that knowing Mary so well, *despite* her colour, had been a mark of her family's tolerance. But Richard told us he had not known her *because* she had been so dark. Because of the intolerance in Dudley, David never knew his Aunt Mary, let alone played cards with her.

Several months before the KIPA dinner I had sent a draft of this article to Richard. In response he wrote, 'You make a big thing of memory or the loss of memory, but to me it doesn't mean a thing. All I know is history'.⁶⁸

Richard's words inspired my title. But when we met again in April 1998 he said the notion of 'losing memory' was still not clear. So I asked him what he knew of the land at Antechamber Bay and when he said he knew little more than where the plaque was erected in front of Nat's house, I told him that this is what I meant by having lost memory. He said:

If they had been accepted, then ... it would have been like the colonial [descendants] ... they talk about their ancestors ... well, had they been accepted they may have talked about their ancestors too.⁶⁹

I redrafted this essay in September 1998 and emailed it to David Tyler. The next day he emailed me back. He told me that for a while now he and his father had thought about 'proclaim[ing]' their Aboriginal 'heritage'. But he said that in the current climate of 'overt racism' people might look at their 'apparent' whiteness and assume they were trying to claim benefits. He told me there were KIPA members disturbed by my talk and that he had tried to explain to them the differences between overt and covert racism, and that the latter had caused his family's exclusion. Finally he told me, 'you have to say

[this story] is important and [that] it must be told. The same story must exist across Australia ... but for those [who are] the subject of the story it can be difficult to do the telling. It must come from the outside'.⁷⁰

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'What is the unconscious (or conscious) problem that belief in her Aboriginality solves for Morgan', asks Attwood, 'or what wishes or desires does this belief satisfy?' (303). Assuming it is as simple as 'wishes and desires' Attwood thus discounts Sally Morgan's Aboriginality.

But when Sally Morgan and Richard and David Tyler discovered their Aboriginal ancestry it was not as simple as Attwood assumes. Not knowing their history was in fact their inheritance – the result of a history of Aboriginal exclusion. Their resulting 'constructions' cannot be abstracted from this legacy. David's words that, 'it has to come from the outside' is an acknowledgement of how much is lost, so much that its hard to begin how to tell the narrative of how it came to be that way.

But David, standing under the melaleucas at Lubra Creek crossing taught me that a sense of loss could not alone define his Aboriginality; it is not sustainable. David needed to find that same 'sense of belonging', that Julie Barnes, a white colonial descendant, claims she has. David's ancestors' land is also being used to form his identity, but unlike Julie, he had to learn where it was. Unlike Julie, David's sense of loss is incorporated into his sense of belonging.

¹ Ernestine Hill, 'Last of the Tasmanians', *Walkabout*, 1 July 1954, p.20.

² Thomas Dunabin, 'The Old Sealing Days' in *The Australian Junior Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Charles Barrett, 3 Vols, (Sydney: The Australian Educational Foundation, 1959),1, 304-306.

³ Letter from Edward Barnes [pseudonym], *Chronicle*, 22 September 1960.

⁴ J. S. Cumpston, *Kangaroo Island, 1800-1836* (Canberra: Roebuck Society Publication, 1970), p.v.

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- ⁵ Philip A. Clarke, 'Early European interaction with Aboriginal hunters and gatherers on Kangaroo Island, South Australia', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 20 (1996), 51-81.
- ⁶ Cumpston, p.127.
- ⁷ Clarke, p.75.
- ⁸ Philip A. Clarke, 'The Aboriginal Presence on Kangaroo Island, South Australia' in *History in Portraits – Biographies of nineteenth century South Australian Aboriginal People*, ed. by Jane Simpson and Luise Hercus, special edition of *Aboriginal History*, Monograph 6, (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1998), p.45.
- ⁹ The Dudley District, also the Hundred of Dudley, incorporates Antechamber Bay and Penneshaw within its boundaries. The Hundred of Dudley is a peninsula attached to the western end of Kangaroo Island by a narrow neck of land.
- ¹⁰ Clarke also lists several other stories of Aboriginal women escaping from Kangaroo Island by swimming in 'The Aboriginal Presence on Kangaroo Island', pp.24-28.
- ¹¹ Jean Nunn, *This Southern Land – A Social History of Kangaroo Island 1800-1890* (Adelaide: Investigator Press, 1989), p.57.
- ¹² Nathaniel Walles Thomas' Last Will and Testament, 29 July 1879, Penneshaw Folk Museum, Kangaroo Island.
- ¹³ Assessment Records of the District of Dudley, Dudley Council Chambers, Kangaroo Island, 1888-1889.
- ¹⁴ Assessment Records of the District of Dudley, 1904.
- ¹⁵ *The Cyclopedia of South Australia*, ed. by H.T. Burgess (Adelaide: Cyclopedia Company, 1907-9), 2 Vols, II, p.1021.
- ¹⁶ Minutes of the Dudley Council, Dudley Council Chambers, Kangaroo Island, 1889-1902.
- ¹⁷ Personal interview with Brian Barnes, Penneshaw, 28 June 1993.
- ¹⁸ Brian Barnes, 28 June 1993.
- ¹⁹ Personal interview with Agnes Marshal, Penneshaw, 27 August 1994.
- ²⁰ Personal interview with Agnes Walker, near Kingscote, 4 September 1994.
- ²¹ Personal interview with John Niven, Penneshaw, 26 August 1994.
- ²² Agnes Marshal, 27 August 1994.
- ²³ The one exception was a fourth-generation Thomas descendant who had become a deep-sea captain. His position was seen as an anomaly for his Aboriginal ancestry. But the fact he had 'worked himself up', as his position was described (and the fact he and his wife lived in Port Adelaide) made the marriage somehow more acceptable.
- ²⁴ Personal interview with Fiona and Robin Marshal, Antechamber Bay, 3 September 1994.
- ²⁵ Personal interview with Keith and Margaret Southlyn, Antechamber Bay, 2 September 1994.

²⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by F.J. Ditter and V.Y. Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980). In the introduction, Ditter and Ditter discuss the 'impassable barrier' between people who do not share enough of the same collective memories, pp.21-25. See also Paula Hamilton, 'The Knife Edge; Debates About History and Memory' in *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, ed. by Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.19.

²⁷Hamilton, pp.19-20.

²⁸Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, Vol. 26 (1989), 7-25. John Frow gives an excellent summary of Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire* in *Time and Commodity Culture, Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.218-223. Frow imagines postmodernity as a 'fall from memory into history, or from history into amnesia'. For Frow this is a 'state of loss', which, 'is repeatedly linked to . . . the world of commodity culture'. While Frow's work has parallels with mine, this article was inspired before I had the opportunity to read his most interesting interpretation of Nora.

²⁹ Nora, p.8.

³⁰ Nora, p.8. Further references to this article will be given after quotations in the text.

³¹ Here Nora is quoting Halbwachs' notion that there are as many memories as there are groups. Halbwachs, p. 22.

³² Julie Barnes [pseudonym], *History of the [Barnes] Family* (in the possession of Julie Barnes: unpublished, 199?), p.1.

³³ Bain Attwood, 'Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 99 (1992), 302-319, p.303. Jackie Huggins' response to Attwood is also directly relevant here: Jackie Huggins, 'Always Was Always Will Be', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 100, (1993), 458-469. Also appearing the same issue as Huggins' article are the following responses to Attwood: Tony Birch, 'Half Caste', 458, Tim Rowse, 'Sally Morgan's Kaftan', 465-468, Isabel Tarrago, 'Response to Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality', 469. See also Elizabeth Reed, 'Sally Morgan: A Black Tall Poppy?', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol.25, No. 101, (1993), 637-640.

³⁴ Attwood, p.303 and p.306.

³⁵ Attwood, pp.313-314. Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

³⁶ Personal interview with James Maves, Reynella, South Australia, 19 June 1993.

³⁷ James Maves, 19 June 1993.

³⁸ James Maves, 19 June 1993. Further references to this interview are given after quotations in the text.

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- ³⁹ Personal interview with Robin and Fiona Marshal, Antechamber Bay, 27 June 1993.
- ⁴⁰ Personal Interview with Joan Maves, Kingscote, 2 September 1994.
- ⁴¹ Joan Maves, 2 September 1994.
- ⁴² Personal interview with Joan Maves, Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, 26 June 1993.
- ⁴³ *Islander*, 6 June 1984.
- ⁴⁴ Paul Mann, 'Kangaroo Island – the pirate fortress that retains its free spirit', *Australian Geographic*, April/June, 1988, p.33.
- ⁴⁵ Personal interview with Richard Tyler, Adelaide, 14 April 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Joan Maves, 26 June 1993.
- ⁴⁷ Personal interview with Mary and John Niven, Penneshaw, 26 June 1993.
- ⁴⁸ John Cornelly claimed that being brought up in white community with no other Aborigines would have meant Joan 'could hardly have realised [she] was different from anyone else': Personal interview with John Cornelly, Penneshaw, 27 July 1994.
- ⁴⁹ John and Mary Niven, 26 June 1993.
- ⁵⁰ Letter from Penneshaw Folk Museum Curator, to remain unnamed, 6 November 1994.
- ⁵¹ Chilla Bulbeck discusses how the 1970s memorials also confined Aboriginality to a pre-history in 'Aborigines, Memorials and the History of the Frontier', in *Packaging the Past?: Public histories*, ed. by John Packard and Peter Spearritt, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.169.
- ⁵² Joan Maves, 2 September 1994. Further references to this interview will be given after quotations in the text.
- ⁵³ Personal interview with Agnes Walker, near Kingscote, 4 September 1994.
- ⁵⁴ Joan had been shown Mollison's reference to the *Civic Record of South Australia* of 1921 which states Mary Seymour attempted to farm on her own account; B. C. Mollison, *The Tasmanian Aborigines* (University of Tasmania: unpublished report, 1977), no page number.
- ⁵⁵ Personal conversation with the Penneshaw Folk Museum Curator.
- ⁵⁶ Personal interview with Richard and David Tyler, Adelaide, 15 August 1994.
- ⁵⁷ Richard and David Tyler, Adelaide, 15 August 1994.
- ⁵⁸ Richard and David Tyler, 15 August 1994. Further references to this interview will be given after quotations in the text.
- ⁵⁹ Personal interview with David Tyler, Adelaide, 21 June 1993.
- ⁶⁰ Jonathan Boyarin, 'Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory' in *Remapping Memory and the Politics of TimeSpace* ed. by Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994), p.2.
- ⁶¹ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p.294.

⁶²Paul Carter discusses how space becomes place through the process of naming; Carter, pp.xiii-xxv.

⁶³ Boyarin claims that when we talk of the 'politics of memory' that we are 'really referring to rhetoric about the past mobilized for political purposes'. It is from this premise that he argues if the past is *politically effective* in the present, than the model of timespace must be complicated to accommodate this assumption [my italics]; Boyarin, p.2.

⁶⁴ Personal interview with David Tyler, Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, 13 April 1998.

⁶⁵ Audio recording of the trip from Kingscote to Antechamber Bay with David Tyler and others, 14 April 1998.

⁶⁶ Audio and visual recordings of my address to the KIPA annual dinner, Adelaide, 17 July 1998.

⁶⁷ My address to the KIPA dinner, 1998.

⁶⁸ Letter from Richard Tyler of Hawthorn, Adelaide, 14 January 1998.

⁶⁹ Richard Tyler, 18 April 1998.

⁷⁰ Email from David Tyler, 29 September 1998.