Island Women: An oral history 1910 -1960

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School of History and Classics

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the personal experiences and memories of a group of Furneaux Island women during the period 1910 to 1960. The most important sources I access are the voices of the women who agreed to provide oral evidence. I use their voices to tell a story within a broader island story. Where possible and appropriate, I have supplemented their oral testimony with documentary evidence.

Part One provides an historical overview of the early arrival of women and the establishment of households in the islands as well as an analysis of the connections between family history and a sense of place. For many women island history is interwoven with family history. I argue that it is this fact, coupled with multiple island kinship ties, that has led to a powerful sense of identification with the islands - the site of the family narrative. In Part Two I use a chronological format to research the daily lives of island women at different life cycle stages. First, I explore the lives of daughters within the family home, and particularly their relationships with their mothers. This is followed by an examination of influences from outside the home upon girls, and I describe how young women move away from the family to set up their own households. In Part Three I change from a chronological approach to one that analyses, topically, the physical and emotional responsibilities of adult women within the home and the wider island community.

It is from this examination of women's lives at different stages and in different settings that the primary concerns of the thesis - feelings of isolation and a sense of place – emerge. It is in the remembering of everyday life that the effects of isolation and a sense of place become most apparent. On a broad level I argue that physical and emotional isolation have several results. These include, a close and mutual dependence among women within the family, the development of an extensive community social life and, ultimately, active efforts to overcome the potential for cultural isolation

List of Abbreviations

AOT	Archives Office of Tasmania
THRA	Tasmanian Historical Research Association
Furneaux Museum	Furneaux Historical Research Association Inc.
	Furneaux Museum

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Study Participants

Gwen Bailey

Lisa Bergamin

Hilda Blundstone

Joan Blundstone

Peter Blundstone

Stan Bowman

Joan Boyes

Nell Cook

Helen Cooper

Polly Coster

Lily Dargaville

Shirley Green

Jan Henning

Olga Henwood

Audrey Holloway

Shirley Holloway

Tiny Kismanis

Laraine Langdon

Judith Longhurst

Pat MacIntosh

Noreen McCarthy

Margaret Purdon

Gladys Robinson

Peter Robinson

Mary Walker

Leedham Walker

Joan and Eric Warren

Grace Wheatley

Margaret Wheatley

Heather Willis

Art and Una Withers

Acknowledgments

I wish first to acknowledge the contribution of the Flinders Island women who took part in this study. They gave generously of their time and of their memories. Their interest in the ongoing project sustained me through the difficult times and I thank them for this as well as for their friendship and care. I also interviewed six men for information about early days on Flinders Island and for a male viewpoint of island women's lives. Their input has enriched the thesis considerably.

Joy Robinson became an integral element in the ongoing development of the thesis. From the early days driving around the island together to visit our respective clients her interest and enthusiasm never wavered. Without Joy it is unlikely that I would have been able to access the number of people I did. I hope she is pleased with the end product of her efforts.

Colleagues at the Multi-Purpose Centre on Flinders Island did more than they perhaps realise. With humour and some good-natured teasing they kept me grounded. They also provided cheap accommodation and sometimes transport. Living within a small and relatively unknown community can be challenging; whenever loneliness threatened, morning tea at the Multi-Purpose Centre provided an instant remedy.

John Whinray kindly pointed me in the direction of sources I might not have located otherwise and for this I thank him. Doreen Lovegrove, President of the Furneaux Historical Research Association, Furneaux Museum, followed up references and other sources for me on several occasions, for which I'm very grateful. I met many other museum volunteers during the hours spent researching; all were interested and supportive and many provided me with leads to other sources.

There are many others on Flinders Island who supported this work in large and small ways. I cannot acknowledge them all but I have not forgotten the kind and encouraging words and acts I so often experienced.

Within the university environment I must acknowledge first the input of my two excellent supervisors, John Wilson and Tom Dunning. John retired in the early days of the thesis but his initial enthusiasm for the research and thoughtful comments on the written work were immensely encouraging. Tom Dunning has managed to be involved, enthusiastic and detached in exactly the right proportions, to ensure that I felt both guided and supported, yet still in control as the work progressed. It seems to me that this is the pre-eminent skill in supervision and I feel very fortunate to have experienced it.

The academic world is a busy and competitive world. Active support from colleagues is therefore very welcome and I am grateful for the encouragement I have received from those I work with. Two in particular, Philippa Martyr and Christina Bobrowski, made time in their very busy lives to each read several chapters and offer detailed, thoughtful and careful feedback. I am very grateful for their interest and friendship.

A work of this scope, based in a remote locality, is not just an intellectual endeavour; it also has considerable practical and financial implications and I have been fortunate in receiving assistance from various bodies. At the beginning of 2000 I was awarded the Myrtle Quicke Scholarship by the Royal College of Nursing, Australia. This helped me take one semester of unpaid leave to conduct the research. The Faculty of Health Sciences granted me a semester of study leave in 2000 and ten weeks' paid leave at the end of 2001 to write up the study. I am particularly grateful for the latter as it ensured I could meet my deadline. The Schools of Nursing, and History and Classics, each provided me with some financial support and this alleviated part of the costs involved in the constant travelling. I sincerely thank all these bodies.

Many others have contributed to this thesis. Billie Digney spent hours and hours carefully typing up the transcripts and working out the best ways of presenting them. Bob Lutszow drew some of the diagrams. Andrew Charman-Williams helped with programming the photographs. Julie Hawksley provided considerable help with presentation and formatting. Again there are many others, not all of whom I can thank individually, but to whom I feel a great debt.

This thesis is about families and, on a personal note, I would like to thank the members of my own family. Long ago my parents somehow imbued in me a need to complete what I commenced. A simple discipline and one that in adulthood often seemed irksome. Now I thank them. My children through the three years have maintained a healthy level of interest in the project and at times have offered insightful comments about the process. My brother Larry and his partner Tricia have not only been interested but, near the end, offered to do a preliminary edit of the study and therefore helped immensely. My husband, Michael, has supported me in everything I have ever wanted to do and maintained an interest in the project from the beginning, patiently reading the many drafts of every chapter. To him I owe a great debt.

Finally I would suggest that, just as I argue that the women on Flinders Island bring to their narratives the input of many others, I have brought with me to this task ideas and attitudes learned from many others—family, friends, colleagues and, above all, the study participants. I have gained so much and if it was sometimes a lonely journey, it was always an absorbing one.

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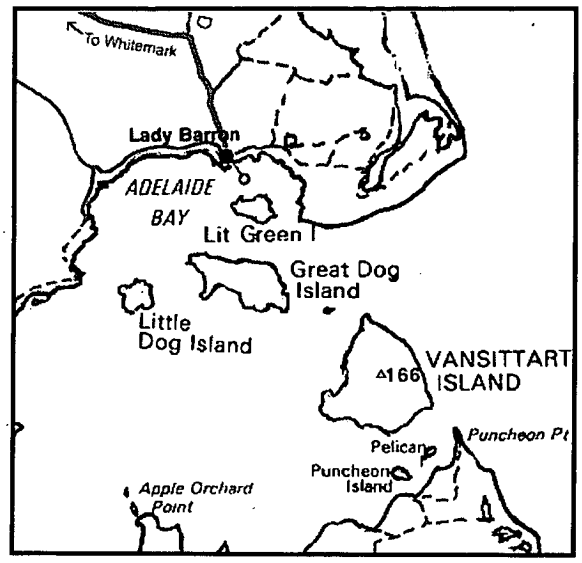
Introduction



Map 1: *Vansittart Island and Environs*

Alfred (Alfie) Cook was twelve years and seven months old when he died of snakebite on the 13 November 1927 on Flinders Island. He was catching mice in the hay when he was bitten on the right index finger by a tiger snake. He stayed to kill the snake and then had to run for about 15 minutes to get home. His sister Gladys, aged nine at the time, remembers clearly that it was getting dark, about 6pm, when he ran onto the verandah calling 'get the lance quick Mum, a snake's bitten me'.

The Cook family lived on Vansittart Island in the Franklin Sound between Cape Barren and Flinders Islands. The only other family on the Island was the Ross family, who lived about a mile and a half away. Mr Cook was ill, and had been staying with the doctor on Flinders Island for the past six weeks, waiting for a boat to arrive that could take him to Hobart for medical treatment. Consequently, the Cook family boat was in dry dock on Flinders Island. Mrs Cook had been caring for the seven children alone on Vansittart Island during this time.

The Ross's boat was moored up past high water mark and needed a high tide to free it. There was some debate between the two families about whether Alfie had really been bitten by a snake. Gladys remembers old Grandfather Ross saying he was too well to have been bitten, and then her mother wasn't sure.

They had their supper. Gladys recalls that all the children were frightened except Alfie. She asked him 'wasn't he scared he was going to die?'. He just laughed at them and said he wasn't going to die and they were all scared. Gladys can still remember the look on her mother's face as she watched Alfie. She was trying not to show how worried she was. She had done all the things women knew to do at the time, like cut above the bite and clean it with Condy's Crystals. The family went to bed and Mrs Cook put Alfie in her bed so she could watch him. At 11pm she woke the other children and said Alfie was paralysed. Gladys remembers he was conscious, but he couldn't speak or blink and just lay rigid, staring straight ahead. Gladys and her brothers made a stretcher out of chaff bags and poles and carried him across the island to the Ross's house. About ten the next morning the boat floated clear of the moorings and Mr Ross and the whole family accompanied Alfie across to Flinders Island.

They arrived at Lady Barron, a small settlement on Flinders Island, at about 11.30am and then had to wait for the model T Ford that was used for collecting cream from farms to return and transport them to Whitemark. When they reached the doctor's he saw Mrs Cook coming and asked her if she had come about her husband. 'No doctor, young Alf—he's been snake bitten'. He looked at him and replied 'yes a tiger snake too'.

By this time it was about two in the afternoon and the doctor commenced giving Alfie a series of injections. Later the paralysis wore off, except in his throat. He kept trying to tell his mother something, but she couldn't understand him and he would get angry and shake his head in frustration. At about a 5.45pm Mrs Cook was sitting by his bed with her niece Ettie waiting for the doctor to give him his last injection, when Ettie suddenly said 'Auntie look at Alf'. Mrs Cook sent her running for the doctor, who gave him the last injection, but he died, 24 hours after he had been bitten.

The other children had been sent up to the Whitemark Area School to the Schoolmaster and his wife, Mr and Mrs Dean, who were family friends. They had been bedded down in the schoolroom when Mr and Mrs Dean came in at

about seven and told them Alfie had died. Gladys remembers looking out the window and thinking 'which star's Alfie's?'. The children had always been told that a new star appeared when someone died. The following day she asked if she could see Alfie, and although her mother did not want her to, the doctor took her hand and led her into see him. She remembers that he was in a room in his coffin with his arms folded and he just looked beautiful.

Within ten days of the funeral a boat had arrived at Whitemark, and Mr Cook had to go to Hobart for treatment. He was unable to delay the trip any longer because of his health and uncertainty about when the next boat would arrive in the islands. Mrs Cook went with him, and for the next three weeks, the children were all left in the care of Mrs Holloway, an old lady they knew well and called 'Granny'. She was very kind, but Arthur, who was closest to Alfie, fretted and became ill.

Alfie was the second Cook child to die. Eleven years earlier their third child, Mary, had died on Vansittart Island when Mrs Cook was seven months pregnant with Alf. Mary was three years old when she died of gastro-enteritis in her mother's arms. She asked for a glass of water and Mrs Cook tried to give it to her, and then realised that she was dead. Her parents buried Mary the day after her death, above the shoreline on Vansittart Island.[1]. Gladys's mother, who was about 20 at the time of the death, told her that for years whenever there was a storm she could not sleep she would just walk the floor and think of Mary out in that awful weather.

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[1] These accounts of the deaths of Alfred and Mary Cook were given to me during four interviews and one telephone conversation with Gladys Robinson between 1998 and 2001.

Plate 1: Mary Cook's grave on Vansittart Island.

The thesis

Gladys Robinson—the child Gladys in the above account—first told this story to me in 1998. At the time I was working as a nurse academic and committing one day a fortnight to faculty practice on Flinders Island.[2] I was also considering whether or not to undertake a doctoral degree, and had decided only to do so if a subject or project arose that I could be sure would maintain my interest for the necessary number of years. Gladys Robinson was in hospital when I was introduced to her, and when she first told me this story it had a profound effect on me. I wanted to do something with it but was unsure exactly what. Inevitably, it seems now, the account of the deaths of these two children provided the catalyst that led me to commence my doctorate at the end of that year.

The story of Alfie's death encapsulates all the major elements of this work. While the central character is an engaging 12-year-old boy, the story is about women. At the time Mrs Cook is exceptionally isolated, living on an outer island with her husband absent. A nine-year-old girl who carefully watches and understands her mother's reactions closely observes the tragedy. She is aware, as are all the children, of the way the story might end. The pathos of Alfie's last attempts to communicate with his mother is not seen by Gladys, but is faithfully passed on and incorporated into the account. The unique confluence of events that contributed to Alfie's death all add to the tragedy—the father away, the boat in dry dock, the exceptionally low tide, the lorry not immediately available to take Alfie to Whitemark. This child's death is not viewed by Gladys's grand children simply as the death of a great uncle long ago in the 1920s. Rather it is viewed as an important part of the history of the family, because it represents so many elements of life in the islands in the early twentieth century.

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[2] Faculty practice is the term given to the arrangement between the Tasmanian Department of Health and the University of Tasmania that encourages academics in the health professions to spend time maintaining their clinical knowledge and skills in practice settings.

The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to offer a partial re-creation of the lives of a group of European Australian women living in an isolated island environment between 1910 and 1960. These dates signal times of new settlement on Flinders Island. Between 1910 and 1912 new land was opened for settlement and later between the late 1940s and the 1960s more land was made available for settlement by returned soldiers. The time in between—the period of this thesis—was stable in terms of population growth. The central concerns of the thesis are the connections between feelings of isolation and the emergence of a strong sense of place. I argue that physical isolation led to efforts on the part of island families to form a strong and generally supportive community. The strong kinship networks that gradually developed enhanced these efforts. The remoteness of the setting forced families to travel off the islands and this factor, combined with strong family and community ties, reduced the possibility of physical isolation being compounded by emotional and cultural isolation. Women were central to the development of kinship and community networks and were also keepers of the family story within the islands. They were therefore, integral to the development of a sense of identification and belonging to the islands.

The islands are more than just a useful geographical setting for undertaking an historical analysis of the effects of isolation on women's lives. They are in themselves central to the thesis. Living on an island affected almost every aspect of the participants' everyday lives. For some their imaginary life was coloured, perhaps occasionally transformed, by the physical beauty of the islands. The majority of the participants were born and brought up on the islands, as were their parents and sometimes their grandparents. The question of the importance of place and past family history in the development of identity, became a subsidiary interest of the thesis.

While this thesis is a history of women in the Furneaux Group of Islands, it is not an inclusive history of all women in the islands. It does not incorporate the experience of Aboriginal women, although Chapter One, which provides an historical framework for the thesis, includes material dealing with the early

settlement by Aboriginal women and white sealers in the islands. Initially, I had intended to include Aboriginal women in the study. However, Aboriginal women voiced several concerns to me about this. They were concerned that retelling the old stories of injustices would contribute to racial tensions within the island community that they felt were beginning to settle down. One Aboriginal elder, while wishing me well, said simply that she was tired of telling the same old stories over and over again and wished to move on. Although it was not stated, I was also uncomfortably aware of how often white researchers had used Aboriginal material for their own research ends. On the other hand, the experience of European women in the Furneaux Group had not been historically explored. So with some initial regret I decided to concentrate exclusively on the experience of that cohort of women. However, sometime after collecting a number of interviews I did discover that two of the women I had interviewed had a female Aboriginal forbear. This fact had not been referred to in the interviews, and did not appear to have altered the participants' perception of their experience.

Researchers are required to behave ethically. Without prompting, all the women interviewed spoke, at some time or the other, about the bi-cultural situation within the islands. They were adamant, however, that I was not to use the material—that it had been given to me only to improve my 'inside' knowledge of the community. It needs to be remembered that within such a small community extensive intermarriage between the two groups has occurred, and that there exists considerable friendship and employment links. The potential to cause community tension from thoughtless delving into the past is very real. For this reason, I have not focused upon the bi-cultural experience of island women in this thesis.

The thesis also does not include information from women who have left the islands. Early in the planning stage of the research I considered including a cohort of women who lived elsewhere, and who could reflect on their island experience from a position of distance in terms of time and geography. I felt this might have uncovered different views about island life and the difficulties of

living within a very small and isolated community. I knew from my professional experience with younger women that a variety of problems often did exist. I fairly quickly came to see that this would not fit, at least not easily, within the framework I was establishing for the thesis - it was outside the areas I wished to explore. What I was interested in was the experience of women who had lived in the islands all or most of their lives, in particular, how long-term residence affected their emotional attachment to the islands and how much—if at all—the women's geographical isolation removed them from mainstream Australian women's culture. At the beginning of the research I had no reason to believe, based upon my experience with younger women, that the study participants would be positive about all aspects of their lives in the islands. I found, however, that while hardship is often tellingly described in the thesis, most of the women are, in fact, positive about island life. I now believe that it is probable that the memories and attitudes of those women who have lived the greater part of their lives on the islands, either by conscious decision or because of an inability to escape, have been favourably coloured by their experience.

Finally, if the thesis is not inclusive it is also not a complete account of women's lives in the Furneaux Islands. Relationships between men and women, for example, are not explored in depth. Oral history depends upon the readiness of people to share their experiences. Willingness to do so is commonly circumscribed by social conventions particularly when the resulting work will be available within the public domain. For this reason it was not to be expected that participants would disclose material of an intensely personal nature. So the participants did not often volunteer details of close relationships between men and women, or indeed of religious belief.

Furthermore, in the first round of interviewing where the focus was on childhood and domestic life the women in the study articulated clearly the importance of other women in their lives. But, not surprisingly perhaps, men did not figure prominently in this sphere of child care and household work. Therefore, while there are frequent references in this thesis to the men in participants' lives and passing references to relationships between husbands and

wives, these are used only to provide a framework for the major focus, the effect of isolation on women and their relationship with the islands.[3]

The study participants

Twenty-seven women and six men participated in this study. Some of the women were interviewed several times over a three-year period. In all, sixty-one interviews were conducted, of which thirty-nine were recorded and transcribed. A few women did not wish to be tape-recorded and occasionally the setting was inappropriate, for example, at a hospital bedside. Sometimes I have used information given to me in informal, face-to-face, or telephone, conversations. As there is no record for this information I have distinguished between these conversations and the formal, either taped or written, recorded interviews by calling them personal communications.

Of the two dates, 1910 and 1960, 1910 is the least satisfactory. The arbitrary nature of dates—essential to put some boundaries around the work—interfered with many of the accounts given me by the participants. In describing their childhood, the women gave rich and powerful descriptions of their mother's life as seen through a child's eyes. This led to them giving more factual details about their mothers, for example, dates of birth, schooling information, marriage and childbirth details, as well as accounts of events which had taken place before their birth and which had been told to them by their mothers.

This group of women, long dead, who could only be known through the memories of their daughters, caught my interest. In my mind I called them 'the mothers' and I found that any attempt to keep them in the period after 1910 was impossible. If I did so, lack of knowledge about their lives negated attempts at understanding their relationship with their child and later adult daughters. To

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[3] Chapter Five provides material about how young men and women interacted socially and how some of the participants met their future husbands. Chapter Six provides information about the adjustments made between couples in relation to domestic and farm work. In Chapter Eight the complexity of the relationship between women and men is briefly examined in relation to the chapter's central discussion on the level of support women gave each other.

understand, I had to slip back over the 1910 line into the nineteenth century—into a hazy world which could only be perceived 'third hand' from stories told by 'the mothers' to their daughters and then repeated to me, with editing and selecting of material taking part at each stage of the process.

The narrative thrust of the thesis, therefore, moves between three generations of women. Chronologically, the first group was born towards the end of the nineteenth century, and gave birth to the group I regard as the 'core' group of women in the study, those born between 1912 and the late 1920s. In turn, five of the core group's daughters and a few other younger women born after the 1940s have also taken part in the study. The core group provides the majority of the oral evidence for this work, and their stories also encapsulate those of their mothers, and so the first generation, 'the mothers', continually filter through into the narrative. The information about these women is so partial—in both senses, so fragmentary yet so evocative of another past time—that I have incorporated their story into that of their daughters.[4]

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[4] See diagram of study cohort on following page.

Diagram 1: *Study Participants*

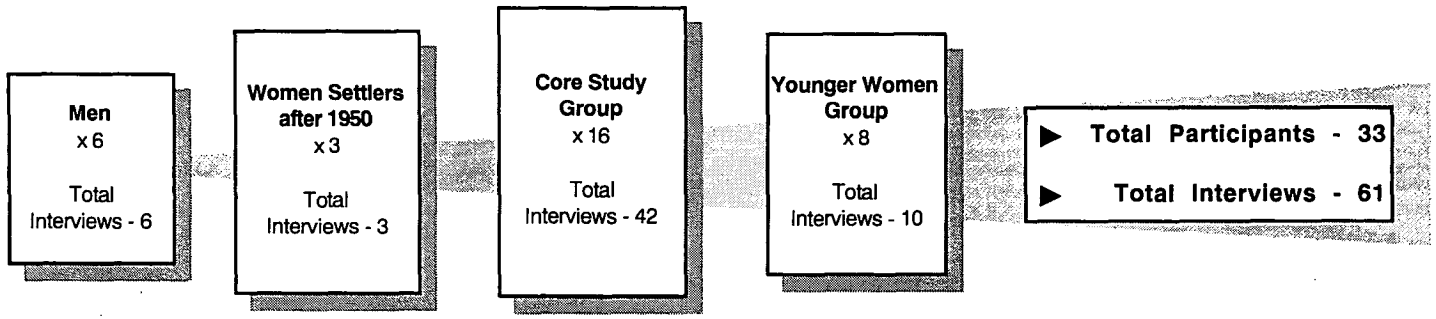
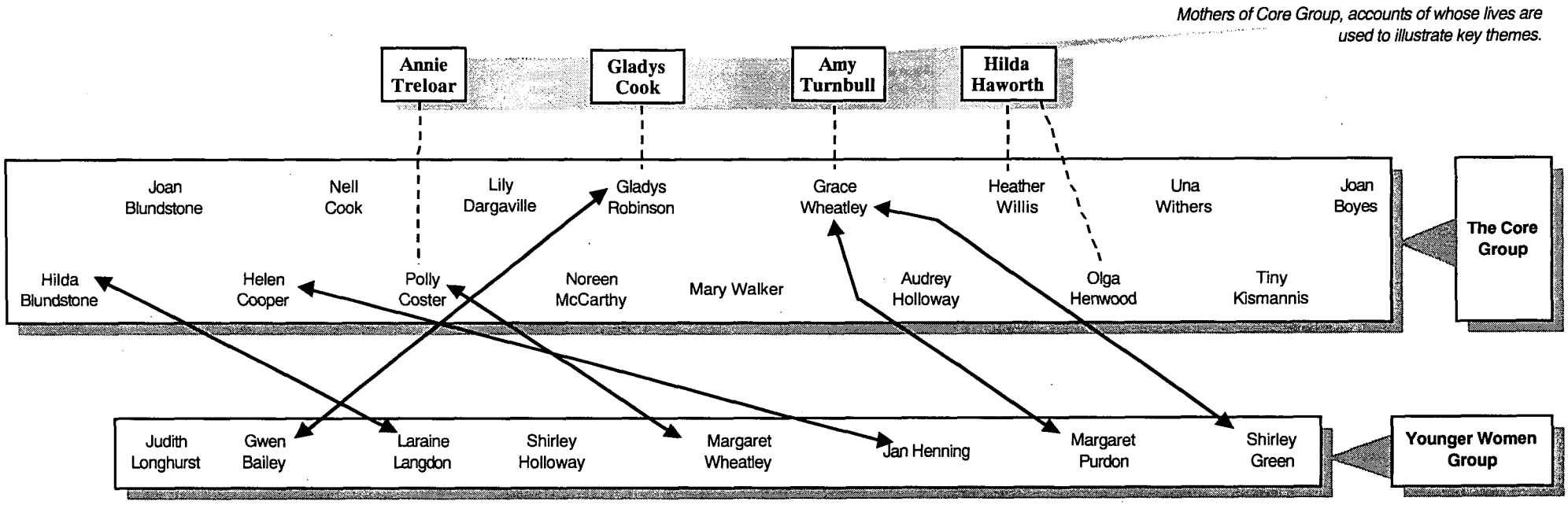


Diagram 2: *Study Cohort and Grandmothers and Daughters*



- Arrows denote mothers and daughters
- Other relationships of interest:
  - Margaret Wheatley is Grace Wheatley's daughter-in-law as well as Polly Coster's daughter.
  - Hilda and Joan Blundstone are sister-in-laws.
  - Olga Henwood and Heather Willis are sisters.
  - Gladys Robinson and Nell Cook are sisters-in-law
  - Judith Longhurst is Mary Walker's and Helen Cooper's Niece
  - Mary Walker and Helen Cooper are sister-in-laws (In this instance a brother and sister married a brother and sister).
  - There are several cousins within the two groups.

The world revealed by the participants is a past world, another time – a fact they are well aware of and which underpins their willingness to attempt to record it. It is close enough, however, for its 'pastness' not to seem foreign; rather it seems familiar, just out of reach as though it sits at the very edge of our memory. It is, after all, the world of the stories of our mothers and grandmothers.

The participants were accessed with the help of the local community nurse. It is unlikely that I would have been able to locate so many women prepared to speak to me had I not had the help of a person they knew well, socially, professionally, and in a couple of instances, as a member of their extended family. Once the interviews had started, women recommended other women they knew and often spoke to these women to reassure them. While not all the women are related, a number of extensive kinship networks do exist among them. However, the discrete kinship groups do vary, to some extent, in social and economic terms. Despite this, similarities in viewpoint and outlook existed between a large number of the participants.

When gaining informed consent from women to interview, I suggested that they consider the use of pseudonyms in the written work. The possible value of this was clear to me, in that I thought the women might speak more freely under the cover of anonymity. Without exception the women rejected the use of pseudonyms. They were proud of their story and wanted it told and recognised. As well, they could see no sense in using pseudonyms, as they claimed everyone within the island community would be easily able to identify the speaker. In such a small community the concerns and history of individual families are well known. Whether or not the use of their own names inhibited women during interviews was difficult to discern. It appears that in all the interviews a certain amount of selection and editing of material took place. On a few occasions I have been assured that I could have been told more but that the person involved thought the information unsuitable or inappropriate. I now believe that in such a small and closely-knit community the use of pseudonyms would not have made any difference to the quantity and quality of the information I received.

The literature

Local History

The early history of the Furneaux Group is romantic, colourful and tragic, so it is not surprising that it has fascinated scholars. Extensive material exists about early sealing activities in the Group, the mutton bird industry, the Aboriginal companions of the early sealers, and the struggles and hardships of the mixed race community within the islands during the nineteenth century. I accessed a considerable amount of this material in order to develop an understanding of the historical background to the time I was researching. This enabled me to place the family stories I was told within the context of ongoing island history. I found that the oral information given to me by the participants was almost always based in fact. They were, in fact, always careful to be as accurate as possible. Differences did occur, as expected, between mainstream historical interpretations of events and those of individuals.

R.W. Fowler's comprehensive coverage of the discovery and early settlement of the Furneaux Group, I found invaluable.[5] This work covers the period between 1773 and 1848. It provides an extensive review of the primary sources associated with the discovery of the islands. The wrecking of the *Sydney Cove* is described, as well as the establishment of a sealing industry, the arrival of white sealers with Aboriginal women, and the commencement and failure of the Aboriginal settlement at Wybalenna.

Equally useful was Stephen Murray-Smith's editing of Canon Brownrigg's diaries.[6] Brownrigg was an Anglican evangelical cleric who conducted a series of missionary voyages to the Furneaux Group between 1872–1885. He travelled in small boats, usually in February, without aid of wireless, sophisticated navigational aids or safety devices, and deliberately took his boats into the shoals and lee shores of many small islands in order to reach families. His focus was the mixed race community located on Cape Barren Island and some of the

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[5] R. M. Fowler, *The Furneaux Group Bass Strait,* vol. 1, Roebuck Books, Hobart, 1980.
[6] Stephen Murray-Smith (ed.), *Mission to the Islands: The Missionary Voyages in Bass Strait of Canon Marcus Brownrigg 1872–1885,* Foot & Playsted, Launceston, 1987.

smaller islands in the Franklin Sound and to the west, south-west of Flinders Island. While he was a man of his time and class, he reveals considerable understanding of the difficulties faced by the fledgling Aboriginal community in the Group. Brownrigg was a scrupulous churchman and was, therefore, prepared to face considerable personal danger in attempting to baptise, marry, bury and provide pastoral care to all the inhabitants—European and Aboriginal—of the islands. His diaries contain some fascinating detail of the families he dealt with, including many of the forbears of the participants in this study.

Primary source material accessed for background information included diaries, surveyors' reports, parliamentary reports, valuation and electoral rolls, letters and written accounts of the islands by visitors in the nineteenth century located in newspaper articles, books and archival correspondence files. I found a particularly rich source of material to be the family folders held in the Furneaux Museum on Flinders Island which provide extensive detail of early families, and often contain letters, wills, certificates, maps, memoirs and photographs. This documentary evidence has been used throughout the thesis to support the oral accounts.

Other secondary sources consulted included the work of Lyndall Ryan,[7] and N.T.B. Plomely's editing of George Augustus Robinson's papers.[8] As well, I found the papers of various scholars published in the *Tasmanian Historical Research Association's* Papers and Proceedings valuable in offering a range of interpretations of Furneaux Island history. This body of work has been drawn upon and appropriately acknowledged throughout the thesis. A book edited by Stephen-Murray Smith and containing the work of specialists from a range of disciplines proved exceptionally useful in explaining aspects of the Furneaux

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[7] Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Australians,* 2nd ed., Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1996.
[8] N.T.B. Plomely (ed.), *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement with the Flinders Island Journal of George Augustus Robinson 1835-1839,* Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1987.

Group outside the area of history.[9] Thus issues pertaining to geography and climate, the mutton-bird industry, and island wildlife were all made clearer. In a similar vein the archaeological survey of the outer Furneaux Islands conducted by Robert Sim and Iain Stuart helped provide answers for many tangential questions that arose throughout my reading.[10]

There was limited material available about women in the Furneaux Group. That which existed was mainly concerned with the abduction and exploitation of Aboriginal women by white sealers. The activities and experiences of white women settlers in the Furneaux Group appear to have been of little interest to historians, the one notable exception being the life of Mrs Elisabeth Robinson, whose story was remarkable and far removed from the more prosaic experience of the average female settler.[11]

Women's history

The women, whose oral testimony forms the basis of this thesis, appear to be ordinary Australian rural women, typical of their generation. Yet their lives, and those of the earlier generations of women in their families who settled in the Furneaux Group, were remarkable. Despite their extreme isolation, they succeeded in establishing homes and rearing their families in similar ways to women in closely settled areas of Australia. Although this thesis is about women, it is not a feminist history. However, I believe it makes a contribution to that body of literature in that it may change some views about the essentially hidden agency of rural women during this period.

The thesis does not overtly explore issues of patriarchy or oppression. Most of the evidence comes from oral interviews, and as the research progressed it

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[9] Stephen Murray-Smith, (ed.), *Bass Strait: Australia's Last Frontier,* ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1987.

[10] Robin Sim & Iain Stuart, *Outer Furneaux Islands Archaeological Survey: A Prehistoric and Historic Archaeological Site Recording Project in the Furneaux Group, Bass Strait Australia,* A Tasmanian Centre Report for the National Estates Grants Programme, Commonwealth of Australia, 1991.

[11] Mrs Robinson's life is covered in some detail in Chapter One of this thesis.

became obvious that while there were few opportunities available to the women, they made sense of this in terms of their isolation and in some cases, their poverty. They rarely viewed their opportunities as more limited than those available to island men or saw themselves as oppressed by the men in their lives. If life was hard and raw, the study participants saw this as primarily the outcome of the time and place in which they lived their young and middle adult lives. The gendered division of labour, which they experienced, not only made sense to them at the time, but also was easily surmountable when required.

Female historians have set out to address the obvious lack of information about 'ordinary' women in the past. The range of literature now available is voluminous and increasing. However, I have chosen to engage only with those parts of this body of work that I could see illuminated in some way the experience of women on Flinders Island between 1910 and 1960.

Joanna L. Stratton's work on nineteenth century women in Kansas was enlightening in terms of increasing my understanding of how women lived their lives on what was seen as the margins of western civilisation.[12] In particular, the accounts of childhood contained in her book reveal similarities to the childhoods described by women on Flinders Island, although Stratton's work was set a lot earlier. Children in Kansas and on Flinders Island, and presumably in other rural areas around the world, worked hard at daily chores divided along gender lines. Some degree of flexibility existed, however, in that, as in the Furneaux Islands, women and girls in Kansas helped with the heavy farm work when required. Men in both places found that if they needed the help of women on the farm this was easier to obtain if they helped with some of the inside work. Furthermore, Stratton makes the point that the pioneering family existed as a self-sufficient unit that 'took pride in its ability to provide for itself and persevere in the face of hardship'.[13] She claims that men and women combined their strengths to work as partners, and as a result pioneering wives found themselves on a more equal

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[12] Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1981.
[13] ibid., p. 57.

footing with their spouses than was common in the nineteenth century. In addition, I found it reassuring that my experience of interviewing women for this study replicated Stratton's, who claims that her informants used euphemisms to speak of intimate topics such as pregnancy, childbirth and death, and avoided speaking of love and sex altogether. Stratton also states unequivocally that her study is necessarily confined to topics that the women in it considered suitable for publication.

Julie Roy Jeffrey's *Frontier Women* was also valuable.[14] This work explores the experience of women pioneers migrating to the American West. Jeffrey is interested in exploring what opportunities became available for women in the new and unconventional setting in which they found themselves. A secondary focus is what part women played in mediating between culture and environment. The ideology of domesticity gave women a role at the time—a civilising function which was to some extent threatened by the migration west. Jeffrey writes of her 'journey in understanding'. While her original perspective was feminist and she had hoped to find that, in helping open up a new frontier, women grasped opportunities to move outside stereotypical behaviours, she discovered that largely they did not. While her own ideological commitment remained unchanged, her research increased her understanding and sympathy for the largely domestically-orientated choices made by women in the mid-nineteenth century westward migration.

Read together, Jeffrey's and Stratton's books suggest that pioneering women moved by necessity outside the narrow socially acceptable roles available to women in the nineteenth century. They differ in that Stratton's work maintains that many women took considerable pride in their increased skills and knowledge as a result of the pioneering enterprise. Jeffrey, on the other hand, suggests that while women accepted the necessity of moving beyond traditional women's areas, they did not allow this to distract them from what they saw as their primary function—the civilising of the wilderness.

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[14] Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880,* Hill & Wang, New York, 1979.

Another book, which examines the North American female pioneering experience, is Carol Fairbanks' work on prairie women.[15] Fairbanks analysed 120 fictional and autobiographical texts for representations of prairie women. She found that, from about the last quarter of the nineteenth century, female authors challenged the persistence of the stereotypical view that women pioneers were often unwilling and unhappy partners in their husbands' pioneering adventures. Fairbanks found that most writers, whose work she examined, attempted to present a more positive, competent and active image of prairie women than had been previously presented by male authors. Fairbanks suggests, following Clifford Geetz, that the small facts of women's everyday existence, when analysed from a different perspective, have the capability to lead to a different version of women's contribution to prairie settlement.[16] Of direct relevance to my study is the depiction, by the writers examined, of an intense attachment to the prairie landscape. Fairbanks claims that this reveals women often 'responded to the land emotionally and spiritually in positive ways' and that such responses helped women adjust to the difficulties of settlement life on the prairies.[17] The writers also recognise that their identity was shaped by their prairie childhood. As young adults many had felt alienated from, and consequently left, the prairies, but in maturity, either physically or in memory they frequently returned, and felt a sense of belonging to the prairies.

The domestic experience of women is central to this study. Inevitably, therefore, most of the secondary sources I read were concerned with women in relation to their families. There is an enormous body of literature—historical, sociological and anthropological—available about the Australian family.[18] Much of the literature concerned with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focuses on the development of separate spheres of work within late nineteenth century colonial families. Grimshaw and Willett maintain that the strength of this

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[15] Carol Fairbanks, *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1986.
[16] ibid., p. 32.
[17] ibid., p. 252.
[18] Patricia Grimshaw & Graham Willett 'Women's history and family history' in *Australian Women Feminist Perspectives*, eds N. Grieve & P. Grimshaw, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1981, p.149.

ideology within Australia did much to inhibit women's entry into the formal economy. In this study I recognise the change in spheres of responsibility between the study participants and that of their mothers. It is recognised that these responsibilities are never rigid in either generation. The situation pioneering families found themselves in during the early part of the twentieth century did not allow non-surmountable divisions between men's and women's work. As well, there were considerable variations between families as regards 'men's work' and 'women's work'.

Grimshaw and Willett also examine chain migration and the development of extensive kin networks among the second and third generations of migrants, and the reciprocal assistance given between kin.[19] I found this helpful in terms of underpinning my developing understanding of how kin relationships in the Furneaux Islands worked. It also led me on to explore some anthropological literature in the area of kinship. Martine Segalen's work, which combines sociological, historical and anthropological approaches to the family, provided useful insights into the pre-industrial family as well as the contemporary family.[20] I have drawn upon this work in Chapters Two and Three that explore mother-daughter relationships and other kinship ties among Island women.

Elizabeth Roberts' two books I found especially helpful in understanding the position and culture of women at the time of this study.[21] The first book set between 1890-1940 helped me understand a period before my birth. The second covering the period 1940-1970 was also useful, if to a lesser degree. The stories of the participants in Roberts' work were often uncannily similar to those I was hearing as I interviewed women. Yet Roberts' participants were women from industrial centres in the north of England. Their crowded world of factories, pawnshops, and close neighbours—both supportive and intrusive—seemed at

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[19] ibid., pp. 145 & 154.
[20] Martine Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.
[21] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-class Women 1890-1940*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984; *Women & Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

first glance vastly different from that of the women on Flinders Island. A closer reading explained why the stories resonated so strongly. Both groups of women ran their homes in similar ways. They often had extended family close by —distance being relative—around the corner in Preston or two or three kilometres away on Flinders Island could mean the same thing. In addition they were a generation of churchgoers, maintainers of standards, and they enjoyed some similar leisure activities —for instance dancing was extremely popular in both regions. More than anything else they both subscribed to the notion that a woman's primary allegiance was to her family and her home regardless of whether she worked for money or not.

In a similar vein, Ellen Ross's study of women's survival networks, set in London before World War One, makes the point that mothers were the creators and transmitters of a rich cultural tradition, but that when working-class culture is subjected to historical analysis women disappear totally from sight.[22] Ross stresses the importance of women in structuring domestic and local culture and notes that in London, husbands and wives lived in quite separate worlds, organised around their responsibilities in a fairly rigid sexual division of labour. These findings regarding men's and women's work are similar to Elizabeth Roberts' conclusions for Lancashire. As already stated, on Flinders Island and perhaps in other rural settings at the time, the gendered division of labour appears to have been more flexible.

In a later work, Ross explores the experiences and motherhood practices of two generations of English women in the period up to and including the World War One.[23] Of interest is Ross's claim that the physical work of mothering, what she calls the 'service aspect', became considerably lighter during the twentieth century, with the advent of antibiotics, smaller families, and easier to manage homes. On the other hand, as the century progressed the social and emotional

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[22] Ellen Ross, 'Survival networks: Women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War One', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 15, no. 4, Spring, 1983, pp. 4-28.
[23] Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870–1918*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993.

work of mothering became greatly expanded.[24] In London at the turn of the twentieth century, the survival of families often depended on the ability of the mother. Ross claims as a result of this awesome responsibility, childhood recollections of this period are imbued with the notion of the central importance of the mother to the family.[25]

I found two Australian collections of oral histories informative in that they explored the values and attitude of the Great Depression generation, the generation I focus on, and another that looked at the generation immediately preceding them. In the 1980s Rhonda Wilson collected oral testimonies from elderly women living in the South Melbourne–Port Melbourne area.[26] Within the collection of stories are accounts of extreme poverty, hardship and struggle. Yet all the women, whom Wilson regards as survivors, see themselves as having led full and interesting lives. This book reinforced a perception I was developing of a generation with profoundly different values and attitudes to those that followed and perhaps to those that preceded it. Jan Carter's collection of oral histories of Western Australian women born between 1890–1918 focused more on the generation prior to the Depression generation.[27] As in Wilson's work, many of the women had led lives of great hardship, although the collection was drawn from a wider class sample than Wilson's, and included recollections from middle and upper-middle class women. Carter claims that this collection of histories makes the point implicitly and explicitly that early opportunities for young women were shaped by their fathers' occupations. This group did not have the benefits of prosperity and the government support in their middle age, a point which may partially explain the difference in tone of the two collections.

Glen McLaren argues that the generation of the Great Depression, whatever the hardships of poverty and war they endured, had happier long-term outcomes

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[24] ibid., p. 5.
[25] ibid., p. 23.
[26] Rhonda Wilson (ed.), *Good Talk: The Extraordinary Lives of Ten Ordinary Australian Women*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, Vic., 1985.
[27] Jan Carter *Nothing to Spare: Recollections of Australian Pioneering Women*, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic., 1981.

than their parents' generation.[28] Although his work does not fit into the genre of women's history, many of his informants gave powerful descriptions of women's lives, and therefore it was helpful from that point of view, as well as the insights it gave into the generation born between the wars. He points out that while fathers particularly were often hard on their children, there were frequently good reasons. They had often experienced the 1890s Depression and the World War One. Both parents endured lives of unremitting toil with no hope of things improving. Their children also experienced a Depression and a world war, but their later lives were made easier than that of their parents by rapidly improving economic conditions in Australia following World War Two.[29] Most of those he interviewed rounded out accounts of their lives with positive comments. 'I've had a pretty good life to date...,' 'everything's more or less worked out well', 'I wouldn't change my life in anyway', 'I consider I've been happy', 'its certainly been interesting and I don't have any regrets'. Yet this generation still often experienced poverty in childhood, casual and sometimes enforced separation from their parents, hard work and limited life opportunities.

Another work offering insights into the generation of Australian women born in the first half of the twentieth century is Jane Bradhurt's, study of 40 women born in the late 1920s and early 1930s—the group she calls 'the pre-pill generation'.[30] While holding a variety of opinions on men, marriage and motherhood, the great majority of these women clearly accepted the ideological view that women were primarily responsible for home and children. Within that framework the study highlights considerable differences between women in their level of commitment to the home and, interestingly, between men. Most of the husbands of the women in the study did help with children, getting up at night to them and playing, bathing and feeding them. As well, some—although fewer—husbands helped in the house. Many women in this study threw themselves into voluntary work with tremendous enthusiasm despite its lack of recognition, gaining

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[28] Glenn McLaren, *Life's Been Good: The Children of the Great Depression,* Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, 1996.
[29] ibid.,
[30] Jane Bradhurt, *Document of our Day: The Opinions of Women of the Pre-pill Generation on Men, Marriage and Motherhood,* Australia Free Press, Australia, 1986.

feelings of achievement and companionship from a shared enterprise with other women.

Most oral testimony given by women born in the first half of the twentieth century highlights the centrality of home and family to women's lives. The women whose recollections are used for this thesis were the first Australian generation to feel the full weight of the domestic science and infant welfare movements. These movements promoted higher levels of cleanliness and hygiene in the home, order and efficiency in household routines and management, and effective, consistent, routine-based parenting. The goal was to improve the health and productiveness of future citizens. Such high standards meant that household management and motherhood became full-time occupations for women. This situation was promoted by the dominant ideologies concerning women and families at the time.

Philippa Mein Smith has explored the methods used in Australia to change maternal behaviour between 1880-1950.[31] Her major focus is the work of Dr Frederic Truby King, a psychiatrist, who developed a systematic approach to baby rearing and encapsulated it within 12 easily understood rules. Truby King, like most of his class and profession, placed the ignorance of women ahead of poverty as the primary cause of infant mortality and morbidity. Mein Smith claims that Australia became a battlefield over infant feeding in the 1920s. How this affected ordinary women is difficult to discern. Mein Smith suggests that mothers continued to listen to their own mothers as well as the new baby care professionals, and in the end often used their own discretion. As well, she suggests that changes in behaviour are not always due to interventions, but often depend upon altered attitudes and practices. It is clear, however, that interventions supported by widespread and easily accessed propaganda,[32] promoting a strong and consistent message that suggested adherents were responsible and probably respectable citizens, was likely to be at least reasonably

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[31] Philippa Mein Smith, *Mothers and King Baby Infant Survival and Welfare in an Imperial World, Australia 1880-1950*, MacMillan Press, Basingstoke, 1997.
[32] The term propaganda had no pejorative connotations at the time and was commonly used by infant welfare supporters to explain their activities.

successful in altering attitudes and practices. That the domestic science and infant welfare movements were successful in Tasmania is beyond doubt in quantitative terms.[33] What is less easily ascertained is at what level women internalised their message.

Two writers I found valuable in developing my understanding of my own interest in women's domestic lives, were Leonore Davidoff and Sally Alexander. Davidoff particularly immerses herself in domestic preoccupations and the intricacies of housekeeping.[34] She presents a strong argument that aligns the symbolic and material aspects of dirt and disorder with nature and, therefore, women—a traditional feminist position that she argues very clearly. She is also attracted to areas that she sees as peripheral or marginal to mainstream historical and sociological interests, in this instance domesticity. Alexander points out that the lived experience of the generation born in the first half of the twentieth century informed mid-twentieth century life and that in her view, importantly, the young girls of the 1920s and 1930s remember themselves as 'obedient' above all else.[35]

Also working in this area is Ruth E. Ray, whose approach stems from feminist literary criticism.[36] Ray examines how writing or discourse mediates the relationship between self and lived experience. Ray is most concerned with the issues of autobiography and some of her concerns are also pertinent to oral narratives. For Ray, autobiography represents a 'complex interplay of language, memory, culture and the conventions of story telling'.[37] Ray examines 'the filters' through which women write their life story and claims that western, white, middle-class women demonstrate 'the cult of true womanhood' in their accounts. As well, she states that women's autobiography is characterised by

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[33] Sheryl Brennan, Nurses and Constructions of Motherhood, Masters thesis, University of Tasmania, Launceston, 1995.
[34] Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives in Gender and Class,* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995.
[35] Sally Alexander, *Becoming a* Woman *and Other Essays in nineteenth and 20th Century Feminist History,* New York University Press, New York, 1995.
[36] Ruth E. Ray 'Feminist readings of older women's life stories', *Journal of Aging Studies,* vol. 12, no. 2, Summer, 1998, p.1.
[37] ibid.,

self-effacement, responsiveness, identity established in relationship to others and a 'culturally conditioned timidity about self dramatisation'.[38] The men and women in Ray's study were aged between 65 and 80 and therefore similar in age to the core group of women I interviewed on Flinders Island. Ray found that the men in the group set themselves apart by telling stories of achievement and agency; while the women attempted to connect themselves to others by telling stories of thoughts, feelings and relationship. In interviewing the older women in my study I found that they almost always played down their experience and often referred me to men who they felt would give more factual accounts. They were hesitant to say anything that might cast anyone else in a less than positive light and were usually discreet and often reticent. Their interests were, for the most part, firmly centred on their homes, families and community. They did, however, as an extension of their community interests, have firm political opinions in relation to issues that affected the islands. These they shared freely, while invariably requesting that I not use them. In view of this experience, I found Ray's analysis of women's discourse through autobiography, particularly useful.

Place

There is a large and growing body of literature concerned with the relationship between people and the places they inhabit. Concepts of space and place are clearly central to the concerns of geographers. They are also of importance to others interested in questions of identity, personal as well as social and political. In addition, several writers have pointed out the link between memory and place, how our memories of people and objects are always place bound.[39] While space and place are viewed as related concepts, I have not engaged with the extensive literature concerned with space, particularly concepts of spatiality. My interests centre on the meaning particular places can have, whether they are homes, farms, workplaces or landscapes; whether or not they exist in a material sense or only in the memory or imagination.

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[38] ibid., p. 117.
[39] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* Beacon Press, Boston, 1969; see also E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness,* Pion, London, 1976 and J.E. Malpas, *Place and Experience; A Philosophical Topography,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.180.

What the Furneaux Islands meant to the participants is central to this thesis. In this sense the study is interested in questions of identity in relation to locality —did the participants identify primarily as Furneaux Island women and, if so, did they view their experience of being isolated, small island dwellers, as significantly different to that of other Tasmanians? The evidence suggests that they did. Nevertheless, despite their remoteness, the women's lives were ordered in ways that reflected dominant cultural views of the role and place of women within Australian society at the time.

Therefore, the concept of place and its importance for the women in the study is taken beyond the geographical setting and used also to explore the homes and other settings in which they lived their private lives. A sense of place can be on several levels. Being island women did not mean, for the participants, that their identification with Australia and Australian concerns and culture was less than that of other Australian women. In global terms, Australia was their place (although a few of their parents may well have regarded the United Kingdom as their place). On a regional and local level they were island women. On a day-to-day experiential level, they were homemakers—wives and mothers—and their place was the home and its immediate environs.

Much of the literature concerned with place, stems from a psychoanalytical perspective that stresses the importance of a sense of place to the development of identity. I have drawn upon the work of several writers approaching the concept of place from this perspective to support my developing conviction that, for many people—and for many of the women in this study—a sense of emotional attachment to particular places is important to wellbeing. While this study primarily concentrates on the meaning of physical places, attachment to communities and groups can obviously occur—for example, the artist might find his or her home within a global community of like-minded people.

Michael Godkin's in depth study of the life experiences of three alcoholics, demonstrates how, for the people in his study, psychological wellbeing or psychological stress could be subsumed under two key notions: rootedness and

uprootedness. Godkin's subjects had few places to which they felt positive feelings of attachment, but those that they did have, were viewed as safe places or as refuges, and, therefore, associated with feelings of happiness or at least contentment.[40]

Taking a similar perspective, Deborah Tall associates commitment to place with a personal sense of history, maintaining that 'a weak sense of the past encourages a weak sense of place'.[41] Tall suggests that for humans who have been transplanted to many different places in their lives, a sense of place may require a continual act of imagination. In other words, members of highly mobile societies may need to creatively compensate for their lack of a strong sense of both past and place. Tall continues to link place and identity by claiming that frequent moves or the destruction of a known environment can be 'fundamentally deranging—it means the loss of personal landmarks which embody the past—and the disintegration of a communal pattern of identity'.[42]

Anne Buttimer also regards a 'sense of place' as being bound up with personal and cultural identity.[43] Buttimer has developed the notion of 'home and horizons of reach' to explain the continual movement of people in towards the home and out toward the wider world. She claims that 'like breathing in and out', most species have both a home and an extended horizon that legitimately belongs within their social, political, imaginative and practical reach. Shayne Breen, following Buttimer, suggests that for human wellbeing there needs to be a proper balance between home and reach. 'For any one person, the home and reach of one's thought and imagination can be distinct from the home and reach of one's social affiliations, and distinct again from the home and reach of

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[40] Michael E. Godkin, 'Identity and place: Clinical applications based on notions of rootedness and uprootedness', in *The Human Experience of Space and Place,* eds A. Buttimer & D. Seamon, Croom Helm, London, 1980, pp. 73–85.
[41] Deborah Tall, 'Dwelling: Making peace with space and place', in *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place,* eds W. Vitek & W. Jackson, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996, p.112.
[42] ibid., p. 104.
[43] Anne Buttimer, 'Home, reach and sense of place', in *The Human Experience of Space and Place,* eds A. Buttimer & D. Seamon, Croom Helm, London, 1980, pp. 184–86.

physical location'.[44] For Breen, it is when all three senses of home and reach are integrated that a person can be said to be centred—embedded in a place that fulfils their needs and interests.

Gaston Bachelard goes further, claiming that the relationship between place and personality development is so intimate that to understand oneself the use of topoanalysis—the exploration of self through place—might be more meaningful than psychoanalysis.[45] For Bachelard, places that are important in our memories have often been the sites of our most powerful day dreaming. Equally, we maybe attached to places that exist only in our imagination—dream places which we develop from floating, fragmentary images of past places we have known and associate with security, freedom and happiness.

All these writers regard a sense of place as vitally important to psychic wellbeing. Not all women in this study articulated a strong sense of attachment to the Furneaux Group as a geographical location. While for some the physical beauty of the islands or their island family history formed the basis of strong feelings of emotional attachment, others were more likely to speak with great affection of smaller particular places within the islands—the sites of memories of home and community. The feelings and emotions associated with a sense of place can be difficult to express. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that' if an experience resists ready communication, a common response among activists ('doers') is to deem it private—even idiosyncratic—and hence unimportant'.[46] Women's lives in the period of this study were lived mainly in intimate places: home is an intimate place, a place whose nooks and crannies the participants knew well as they went about their daily business of cleaning and home-making. Home is also the site of intimate family relationships, and of emotional and imaginative investment, all of which makes it a place both important and difficult to speak about. The

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[44] Shayne Breen, *Contested Places: Tasmania's Northern Districts from Ancient Times to 1900*, Centre for Historical Studies, Hobart, 2001, pp. 5–6.
[45] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 43–73; p. 167.
[46] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1977, p. 6.

hesitations and silences in the women's narratives about place—home, community and islands—reveal rather than obscure its importance.

In *Invention, Memory, and Place,* Edward W. Said explores how memories of places can be used selectively in the interests of political agendas. Said argues that memory is not neutral and can be used to support the invention of tradition, which, in turn, can be used for political and social purposes. He maintains that memories of geographic locations can stimulate a range of emotional responses that can then be used in similar ways to those evoked by other memories.[47] In other words, for Said, the notion of a sense of place evolving from feelings of belonging, and linked strongly to a sense of personal identity, is exploitable. In the first instance, all memories including those of particular places, are reconstructed in line with developing personal narratives of self. Secondly, emotional identification with places can be used in the development of historical, racial and national myths. A local example of Said's second point is the expropriation, by an entire nation, of Australian war veterans' memories of Gallipoli Cove.

Oral history

The paucity of written historical sources about the experience of women in the Furneaux Islands meant that I was dependent on oral testimony to obtain any real understanding. The participants provided me with factual information and explained and fleshed out information obtained from written sources. Their voices come through strongly in the choice of word, turn of phrase, articulateness or hesitancy. They enhance the narrative and provide an immediate connection for the reader.

Oral testimony deals in memories and this factor is central to many of the debates about the veracity and legitimacy of oral history. Written sources can, of course, also be the product of memories. The difference between oral and written

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[47] Edward W. Said, 'Invention, memory and place', *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 26, no. 12, Winter, 2000, p. 175.

sources in this regard, lies in the fact that people providing oral testimony actively re-construct their memories over time, and yet again, in the presence of the interviewer. Yet is this essentially different to the diary or letter written years before with an awareness of possible future readers? Critical analysis is essential in both cases, but, it must be said, is often more difficult with oral testimony because researchers know that informants will want to read what has been made of their personal life histories.

The method I used in this work incorporated serial interviewing. Not all the study participants were interviewed more than once, but a small number were interviewed on several occasions over the three years of the research. I found that returning to participants at a later date allowed them time to reflect on their life experiences between interviews. Each time I returned the relationship altered, becoming closer and more comfortable. Returning to the island regularly also meant that the project and my commitment to it were clearly evident. This meant that the participants knew there would be a tangible outcome from their efforts; one they could see and, if they wished, read.

Much has been written about oral history methodology. I have not attempted to cover all the material. Rather, I have concentrated on areas that deal with the reliability of memory, the issue of quality in oral evidence, and the concerns about the nature of the oral interview.

I found Elizabeth Tonkin's work especially informative. Tonkin examines 'the interconnections between memory, cognition and history, and shows how they help to shape our individual selves.[48] Tonkin is an anthropologist and uses an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the construction and interpretation of oral testimony. Central to her book is the question of memory and the notion that humans construct themselves and their world over time, from their memories. Memories that in turn, they have actively constructed. Tonkin seems

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[48] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 1.

versions of events. An example is that many of the women expressed genuine sadness at the current level of alienation between white and Aboriginal members of the community. These women, without exception, looked back to another happier time when, they maintain, the community was cohesive, no difference was made between people, and there were few racial problems. As I have made clear, the historical racial and cultural situation within the Furneaux Group is not part of this study, but this is a useful example of a commonly-held interpretation of the past. Perhaps on one level it is not surprising to find high levels of agreement about the past, given the small population of the islands and its remarkable stability, however, I was curious to understand the mechanism that enabled such widely-held views to develop. Fentress and Wickham suggest that it occurs because people share relevant memories in the context of a social group, and this allows the group to construct an agreed image of the past. This occurs over time within continual and ongoing communication. Did this explain why the factual information of the women's lives often seemed at odds with the interpretation they gave of the past in the islands? Factual details of great hardship and endurance were frequently married with often almost joyous descriptions of the quality and simplicity of their past lives.

Peter Burke is another historian concerned with what he calls 'the social history of remembering'.[52] Burke is also interested in the mechanism of transmission of social memory and recognises that one way is through the work of historians. The political use of social memory and of social amnesia is a particular concern of Burke. In an earlier work he has explored the development of social movements and the way ideologies and hegemonic views are imposed and accepted or rejected over time.[53]

Oral historians have noted the way both parties to an oral history interview influence each other. In turn, this has led to concerns regarding the validity of

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[52] Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1997, p. 46.
[53] Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 84-96.

repetitive and does not produce new insights about the past.[59] As well, the sheer volume of taped and transcribed material stored in libraries and museums can cause problems of accessibility. Perhaps a more telling critique has been established around the largely subjective nature of oral testimony. In response, Alessandro Portelli maintains that if the historical research is broadly enough based, a composite picture of the event in question will emerge from the subjective recall of those interviewed.[60] I found that even a relatively small number of interviews provided a useful cross-section of experiences, although it must be acknowledged that this may have been considerably greater in a less cohesive group of participants.

The thesis structure

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part One, Keepers of the Story, includes Chapters One and Two and provides an historical overview of the arrival of women and the establishment of households in the islands. This is followed by an analysis of the meaning of family history to the study participants and its connection with a sense of place. The role of women in recording and re-presenting the family narrative to succeeding generations is also explored.

Part Two, Entering the Story, uses a chronological approach to explore the daily lives of women at different life cycle stages. Chapter Three focuses on daughters within the home and particularly their relationships with their mothers. It also explores the participant's memories of long ago bush childhoods. Chapter Four explores the range of outside influences on girls—school, seasonal work and travel. Chapter Five examines the experiences of adolescent girls and young women as they leave school, look for employment and ultimately seek a partner.

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[59] Ronald Grele, 'Can Anyone Over Thirty be Trusted? A Friendly Critique of Oral History', in *Envelopes of Sound: the Art of Oral History*, Precedent Publishing, Chicago, 1985, p. 199.
[60] Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different?' in *The Oral History Reader*, eds Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 69.

Part Three, Continuing the Story, moves away from the chronological format to examine the lives of adult women topically. In particular, it approaches from different directions the concept of isolation and examines this in relation to contact or lack of contact with other women. The focus of Chapter Six is women's work inside and outside the home. Their relationship with their husbands as working partners and the status accorded them as farming partners, is also given some attention. Chapter Seven explores the, often undervalued, nurturing work of women. Central to this chapter is a section that addresses women's nursing skills and their responsibility in times of crisis. Chapter Eight examines the ways in which women cared for and supported each other. As part of this chapter the community work of women is given attention—work which, while inherently useful, also provided a legitimate venue for women to meet and socialise.

In 1960, the participants in this study were either mature women entering early middle age or young girls. While I use the women's lives as a vehicle to explore the major concerns of the thesis within a specific period of time, finishing in 1960 does appear to truncate the story. To address this, I have provided a postscript that briefly examines the later years of some of the principal study informants.

PART ONE

KEEPERS OF THE STORY

CHAPTER ONE
The Arrival of Women in the Islands

CHAPTER TWO
Family History and Sense of Place

CHAPTER ONE

The Arrival of Women in the Islands

The place

The Furneaux Group lie in Bass Strait below the south-east tip of mainland Australia and above the north-east tip of the island of Tasmania. They form part of a series of island groups stretching across Bass Strait, the highlands of a mountainous land bridge that joined the Australian continent and Tasmania approximately 10–15 thousand years ago.[1] More than 50 islands make up the group.[2] The three largest are Flinders Island, followed by Cape Barren Island and then Clarke Island. Flinders Island is 75 kilometres long by 40 kilometres wide—a total of 10 333 square kilometres in area. Both Flinders and Cape Barren Islands have large mountainous areas. The mountains, formed of granite and devoid of vegetation on the upper reaches, contribute to the rugged appeal of the two larger islands. The large granite peaks of Flinders Island and Cape Barren Island, when not shrouded in sea mist, are an impressive sight and one that potential settlers in the nineteenth century would have had hours to study as they slowly approached the islands under sail in small boats.

The first European women who settled in the Furneaux Group of islands were isolated from colonial civilisation, not only by distance, but also by hazardous and difficult-to-navigate seas. During the nineteenth century a large number of

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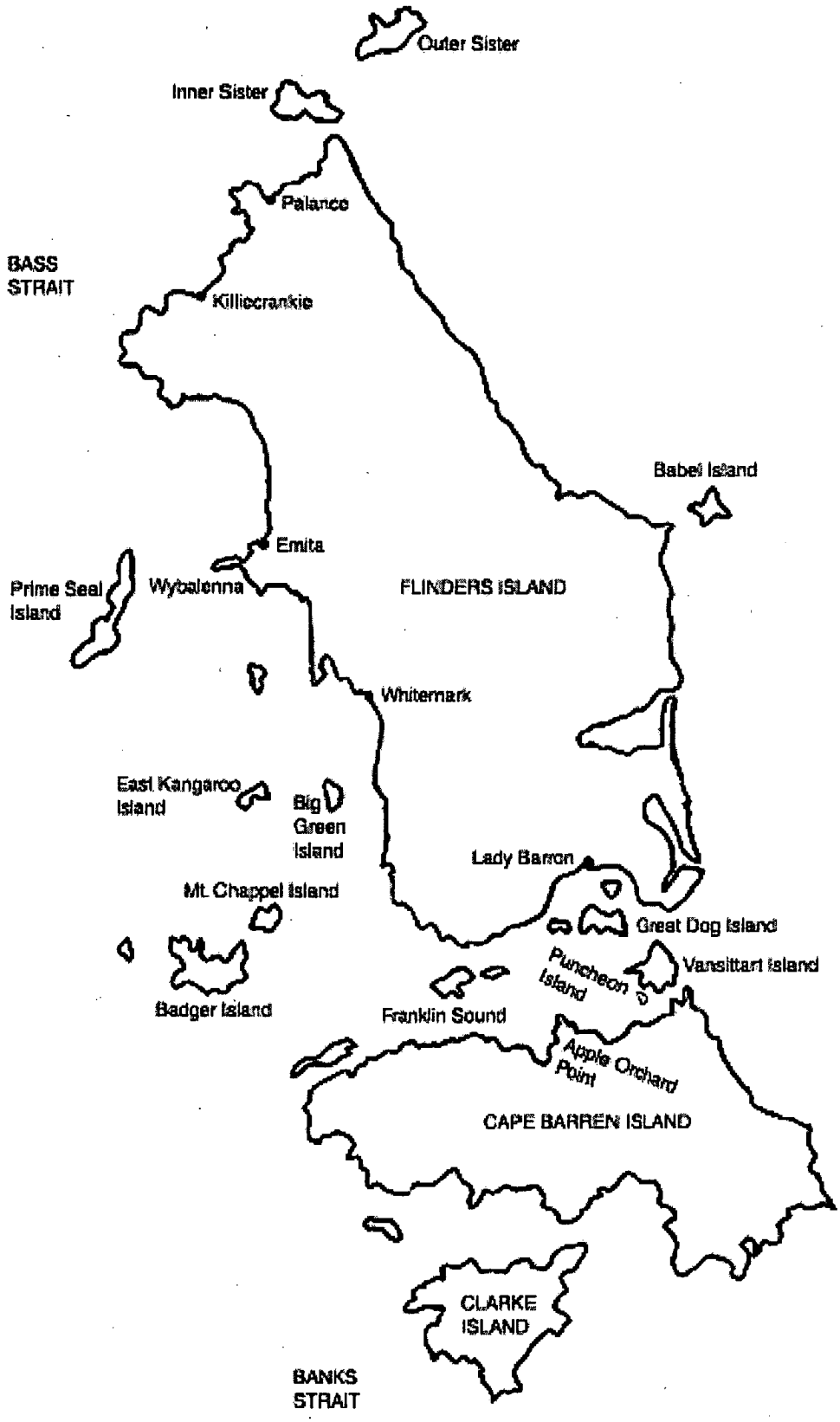
[1] J.N. Jennings, 'Geological history of Bass Strait', in *Bass Strait: Australia's Last Frontier*, ed. Stephen Murray-Smith, ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1987, p. 24.

[2] The exact number of islands is difficult to determine and depends on what is classified as an island, rock or reef. Figures given range from about 28 to 50. The Flinders Island Municipal Council estimate was 'more than 50', pers. comm., May 2000. *The Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no. 5, 1912, p. 78, lists 40 islands. Jean Edgecombe states there are 40 islands in the Furneaux Group and 80 in the Municipality of Flinders in *Flinders Island and Eastern Bass Strait*, J.M. Edgecombe, Sydney, 1986, introduction p. ix. Leedham Walker claims there are 42 islands in the Group in *Sail on the Tide–The Story of Flinders Island Shipping*, ed. Leone Scrivener, MBA Publishing, Hobart, 1994, p.7.

Map 2: *The Furneaux Group of Islands*



ships were wrecked in the waters off the Furneaux Group, ensuring that early settlers were well aware of the potential danger of the seas surrounding them.[3] The islands are situated in the path of the 'Roaring Forties'—winds that blow from the west and which are frequently of gale force. These strong winds add to the difficulty of navigating in waters containing numerous hidden rocks and sandbars, as well as complex tides and currents. A local historian, R.M. Fowler, has gone so far as to characterise the waters of the Furneaux Group as 'the graveyard of ships'. He claims that seas rolling halfway around the world meet the currents swirling down the eastern coast of Australia, making them possibly the most treacherous and dangerous waters in the world.[4]

Throughout the nineteenth century, new settlers trickled into the islands but this did not appreciably reduce the isolation experienced by women. The pattern of early settlement in the Furneaux Group was unusual. Flinders Island, the largest island, was not available for long-term leasehold until the passage of the *Waste Lands Amendment Act* of 1861. At that time, Robert Gardner of Launceston successfully applied for all available land on Flinders Island.[5] Later applicants were granted leasehold of the smaller outlying islands, often dispossessing the evolving mixed race Aboriginal-European community who had held many of the smaller islands under annual tickets of occupancy.[6] Consequently, newly

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[3] Jack Loney, *Wrecks in the Furneaux Group (Flinders Island)*, Marine History Publications, Geelong, n.d. Last wreck listed is in 1968. Loney lists 54 ships wrecked in the Group between 1797 and 1910.

[4] R. M. Fowler, *The Furneaux Group: Bass Strait*, vol. 1, Roebuck Books, Canberra, 1980, p. 272. Also Leedham Walker, co-founder of an island shipping service, details some of the difficulties facing ships working the islands including tides, uncertain weather and water depth, in *Sail on the Tide*, pp. 44 & 47.

[5] Furneaux Historical Research Association Inc., Furneaux Museum (hereafter Furneaux Museum.), Album 51, Robert Gardner: Leasee of Flinders Island, 1862–1886: Allen Warden, 'History of Robert Gardner' n.d. Furneaux Museum material is currently being archived and allocated accession numbers. This process commenced after the research phase of this thesis.

[6] Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Beyond the pale: The islander community of Bass Strait in the nineteenth century', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, (hereafter *THRA P&P*), vol. 20, no. 4, December, 1973. Murray-Smith refers to settlement on many different islands throughout this paper. As well, many study participants have discussed the settlement of the outer islands of the Furneaux Group by their forbears during interviews.

arrived European women found themselves living in a little known group of small islands separated from possible friends and neighbours by unpredictable seas.

While a few stories about early women appear to have been passed down to their descendants, the sparseness and lack of detail in these do not illuminate their experience. By the time European women arrived in the islands, white sealers had been living there with their Aboriginal female companions for at least two decades. Consequently, the earliest white women settlers encountered a developing community comprised of white men, Aboriginal women and their children.

The central concern of this thesis is the experience of European women. However, it is impossible to glean an understanding of that experience without referring to the earlier arrival of Aboriginal women in the Furneaux Group. Although marginal to this thesis, the story of the Aboriginal women casts a long historical shadow and is central to any understanding of the early settlement history of the islands. To overlook it would be to deny that experience and its place in island and Tasmanian history. It would also present a misleading picture of the social environment of early European island women.

The first women in the islands

It appears that humans inhabited the Furneaux Group for some time after the separation of Tasmania from the continent of Australia due to rising seas 10-15 thousand years ago. Rhys Jones has postulated that sandbars may have existed that linked land masses at least at low tide, and that, therefore, it was some time after the flooding of Bass Strait that the islands were finally deserted.[7] There is evidence that suggests that people survived on Flinders Island up until about

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[7] Rhys Jones, 'Bass Strait in prehistory', in *Bass Strait: Australia's Last Frontier*, ed. Stephen Murray-Smith, ABC enterprises, Sydney, 1987, p. 39.

4000 years ago, but nothing to indicate what happened to these early island inhabitants.[8] After they disappeared, the islands remained untouched by human contact for thousands of years. Jeanette Hope suggests this makes them unique in Australia as, prior to the arrival of Europeans in 1797, they were the only area of reasonable size that had been unaffected by human occupation for such a long period of time.[9] As a result, the islands teemed with exploitable wild life—seals, fish, seabirds, wallabies and geese. Lack of exposure to humans meant that initially animals were so tame they did not perceive people as a threat. Early visitors to the Strait's islands recorded that hunting was almost effortless as men could walk freely among the curious wildlife, but this acceptance of humans effectively meant that the wildlife succumbed easily to the depredation of hunters.[10]

The beaching of the *Sydney Cove* on Preservation Island, off Cape Barren Island, in 1797, meant that numbers of people, including Mathew Flinders, had seen at first hand how plentiful seals were in Bass Strait.[11] Inevitably competition to exploit this resource was intense among local and foreign entrepreneurs. By October 1798 Captain Charles Bishop was in the Furneaux Group sealing.[12] The first cropping of the seal harvest produced 5200 sealskins and 350 gallons of oil.[13] Between 1798 and 1839 sealing was the major activity in the Furneaux Group. Enormous numbers of seals were killed and so many skins flooded the lucrative

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[8] Robin Sim & Iain Stuart, *Outer Furneaux Islands Archaeological Survey: A Prehistoric and Historic Archaeological Site Recording Project in the Furneaux Group, Bass Strait, Australia,* A Tasmanian Centre Report for the National Estates Grants Programme, Commonwealth of Australia, 1991.
[9] Jeanette Hope, 'Wildlife of Bass Strait', in *Bass Strait Australia's Last Frontier.*
[10] ibid. p. 90.
[11] Scholars have extensively researched the running aground of the *Sydney Cove* and the subsequent exploration of the Furneaux Group. Detailed coverage of these happenings, as well as the discovery of the islands by Tobias Furneaux, is given in Fowler, *The Furneaux Group: Bass Strait* and in Michael Nash, *Cargo for the Colony: The Wreck of the Merchant Ship Sydney Cove,* Bexus Press, Sydney, 1996.
[12] Brian Plomely & Kristen Anne Henley, 'The sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island community' *THRA P&P,* vol.37, no. 1, 1990, p. 39.
[13] ibid.,

Chinese market that their value fell dramatically.[14] It was this industry, with its supposedly quick profits, that attracted sealing gangs to the area and led to some sealers recognising that they could improve their harvest of seals if they used the labour of Aboriginal women.

While initially the Strait's islands were viewed only as an exploitable resource, within two decades, signs of permanent settlement were occurring as white sealers opted to stay in the islands and persuaded or forced their Aboriginal women to remain with them. The abduction of Aboriginal girls and women from Tasmania and the south coast of mainland Australia, was already commonplace and probably increased at this time. Munro, an early sealer who has generally been treated kindly by historians, stated that at first sealers kidnapped, purchased or persuaded women to accompany them for sexual purposes, but their ability as hunters and gatherers was also valued.[15] Stephen Murray-Smith claims that the skills of Aboriginal women were essential to the sealers if they wished to survive in the long term in the islands.[16] As time passed the status of Aboriginal women rose with the sealers, as their obvious contribution to the fledgling community economy became apparent.[17]

Nevertheless, some sealers perpetrated terrible atrocities on their women, a reflection perhaps of the brutality of the age, the racism of British society at the time, or the type of person who sometimes chose to live beyond the reach of law and order. Aboriginal women were frequently whipped, occasionally maimed or killed, bought, sold and passed around between the men.[18] Not all sealers

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[14] Tim Jetson, 'An Island of Contentment? A History of Preservation Island', *THRA P&P*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1996 p. 31.
[15] ibid., p. 39
[16] Murray-Smith, *THRA P&P*, p.172.
[17] Lyndall Ryan, 'The struggle for recognition: Part Aborigines in Bass Strait in the nineteenth century', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1977, p. 32.
[18] There are contemporary reports of the brutality of some sealers. Many women were abducted at gun-point and sometimes as children. On one occasion a woman was killed for not working satisfactorily. Accounts exist of infants being killed by sealers and of some women practising infanticide. It is unknown whether this was of their own volition. For further information see: Plomely & Henley, *THRA P&P*, pp. 37-124; N.T.B.

treated their women brutally. James Munro is said not to have physically maltreated any of the many women who lived with him.[19] Also, some of the women removed by George Augustus Robinson to the Aboriginal Establishment at Settlement Point on Flinders Island later chose to return to their white partners.[20] On the other hand, other women told tales of prolonged abuse at the hands of the sealers. It seems probable, however, that some couples grew to care for and rely upon each other in a situation, that in any case, offered few viable alternatives.

From the 1820s onwards visitors to the islands observed and recorded changes in the lifestyle of the sealing families who had begun planting gardens and raising livestock.[21] The increasing number of children being born gave the impression to observers that the community was in transition from the early sealing stage to something more permanent. By 1820 there were 20 children in the community and, unlike earlier times, they were now welcome.[22] This was the community that Bridget Lee, reputed to be the first white woman settler in the islands, and wife of John Lee, an ex-sealer, entered when she arrived in the Furneaux Group.

Plomely (ed.), *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement with the Flinders Island Journal of George Augustus Robinson 1835-39,* Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1987; also, Anne McMahon, 'Tasmanian women as slaves', *THRA P&P,* vol. 23 no. 1, 1976, pp. 44-49.

[19] Jetson, *THRA P&P,* p.37.

[20] Plomely & Henley, *THRA P&P,* p. 56.

[21], Furneaux Museum, Album 85, Historical Documents, vol. 1: Thomas Scott, *Furneaux's Isles (A Short Geographical Memoir Thereof), taken from information of James Campbell (boatman) Hobart Town 1828,* Printed J. Fawkner, 1830/31. Thomas Scott, in 1828, recorded that on Gun Carriage Island (Vansittart) 'the sealers have gardens where they grow excellent potatoes and vegetables.' James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies,* Hamilton, Adams & Co., London, 1832, similarly commented that James Munro on Preservation Island was raising wheat, potatoes and other vegetables as well as grazing stock.. Furneaux Museum, Album 85, Historical Documents, vol 1: *Launceston Examiner* 29 Jan 1845, James Munro's obituary states that he possessed large herds of goats and pigs and cultivated vegetables for his own use and to supply visiting vessels.

[22] Murray-Smith, *THRA P&P,* p. 177.

European women settlers before 1861

Prior to the passage of the *Waste Lands Amendment Act* of 1861, which permitted the leasing of any island or part of any island, very few European families moved into the islands.[23] Those who did settle before 1861, tended to have prior links with the area, either through sealing or through contact with the Aboriginal establishment at Wybalenna on Flinders Island.[24]

In 1849, Major Robert Power, Surveyor General of Tasmania, made a tour of the Bass Strait islands and issued tickets of occupancy at a peppercorn rental to many of the inhabitants.[25] These tickets of occupancy were valid for one year from the date of issue and were the only means of acquiring some right of occupancy for most inhabitants prior to 1861. Dr James Allen and Captain Laing Smith did acquire yearly leasehold of Clarke and Flinders Islands respectively prior to 1861, but long-term leasehold was still more than a decade away.

A few contemporary visitors to the Strait's islands mentioned the Lee family who were possibly the first white family in the Furneaux Group. They tell us little, other than that the family was evidently considered respectable and possessed the ability to adapt to life in the islands. Most visitors who left records were middle-class men—clergymen, government officials and curious travellers. From the tone of their comments it is easy to see the Lees were regarded as members of the respectable working-class.

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[23] Furneaux Museum, Album 51, Robert Gardner, Leasee of Flinders Island 1862-1886: Letter from Ian Pearce, Senior Archivist, Archives Office of Tasmania, 15 Aug 1977 to Miss Jean Gardner. Pearce mentions that Smith had been granted a lease for Flinders Island from February 1859 renewed annually for 10 years.

[24] The remnants of the Aboriginal tribes were rounded up and taken to Flinders Island for their own protection in 1833. At Wybalenna on Flinders Island their numbers were decimated due to illness and probably depression, and the few survivors were transported back to mainland Tasmania in 1847. See Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2nd edn., Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1996 and Plomely, *Weep in Silence*, for accounts of this period of Tasmanian history.

[25] Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart, (hereafter AOT) CSO 24/93/3033, 'Report of the Surveyor-General', Colonial Secretary. to Denison, 7 Jan 1850.

Power was certainly impressed by the Lees. He mentioned that a John Ley, almost certainly John Lee, had settled on Cape Barren Island and that his wife appears 'a respectable active woman' and that the couple had an infant child.[26] The couple ultimately had several children and eventually interests in several islands in the Group, although they were most often associated with the Apple Orchard area of Cape Barren.

In August 1860 Malcolm Laing Smith visited John Lee on Big Dog Island in the Franklin Sound, and expressed surprise at being welcomed very civilly for he had heard that Lee was 'a very intemperate and reckless man'.[27] This is the only reference among the very limited material available concerning the Lees that hints at them being anything other than hardworking and respectable. Smith comments in his journal that the appearance of John Lee's large family is a credit to him, as is 'their decent respectable looking mother'. An interesting insight into the status of women at the time.

Archdeacon Reibey, in a letter to a fellow clergyman, following a visit to the Furneaux islands in 1863, also comments on the Lee family and indirectly on Bridget Lee's efforts at home-making. 'Their humble little cottage gave us the impression of real comfort, everything was thoroughly clean and in order'.[28]

Another frequent clerical visitor, Canon Brownrigg, also mentioned the Lee family from time to time in his accounts of his voyages to the Furneaux Group. On one occasion Bridget Lee summoned him in to Apple Orchard by means of a smoke signal as he was sailing past bound for Vansittart Island. She explained apologetically that she was anxious for news of her son who had been absent for 13 days when he had only planned to be away for two days. Brownrigg, was

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[26] ibid.,
[27] Furneaux Museum, Album 44, Private Journal of Malcolm Smith 1850-61, p. 9.
[28] Thomas Reibey, 'Letter from Archdeacon Reibey to Archdeacon Davies', *Church News for the Diocese of Tasmania,* 9 August, 1863, pp. 208-209.

able to put her mind at rest regarding her son—he does not explain how.[29] On a later visit to the islands, Brownrigg refers to Bridget Lee as 'the good old lady Mrs. Lee' and comments somewhat patronisingly on the strength of her simple Christian faith.[30] At other times in his writings, he refers to the comfortable nature of the Lee's cottage and their pretty and productive garden.[31] In 1873 Brownrigg called in on the Lees in the evening. After family prayer, the three Lee daughters offered to guide Brownrigg back through the bush to his boat. He hesitated 'as it really seemed to be such an inversion of the natural order of things', but accepted the offer when he was reassured that they were quite used to walking around in the bush.[32] Murray-Smith states Bridget Lee died in 1903 at the age of 85 and is buried at Apple Orchard on Cape Barren.[33] This casts some doubt on information recorded by surveyor John Thomas to the effect that they settled in Bass Strait in 1826. [34] It would mean Bridget Lee had arrived at the age of eight years with her husband.

Maria Allen, daughter of George Augustus Robinson—sometimes known as the Protector of Tasmanian Aborigines—was another early settler in the Furneaux Group. She lived with her husband and large family, and later as a widow, for years on Clarke Island. Maria had been educated at Ellingthorpe Hall in the Tasmanian midland town of Ross. In 1842 she married James Allen who had been the surgeon for the Aboriginal establishment on Flinders Island. After 1842 she went with her husband to the Goulburn River Aboriginal Settlement in Victoria. Her early married life does not appear to have been happy. The couple left the Goulburn River Settlement some time in 1844 after an inquiry into an

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[29] Stephen Murray-Smith, (ed.), 'Seventh voyage 1878' in *Mission to the Islands: The Missionary Voyages in Bass Strait of Canon Brownrigg, 1872–1885,* Foot & Playsted, Launceston, 1987, p. 147.
[30] Stephen Murray-Smith, (ed.), 'Ninth voyage 1881', in *Mission to the Islands,* p. 167.
[31] Stephen Murray-Smith (ed.), 'Second voyage' 1873, in *Mission to the Islands, p.67.*
[32] ibid., p. 83.
[33] Murray-Smith, *Mission to the Islands,* Principal Personalities, p. xxx.
[34] Murray-Smith, *THRA P&P,* provides information in article references from Lands Department (Hobart) Survey diagram Dorset vol.4, fol.4/49, remarks by surveyor John Thomas.

alleged attempt by Allen to cut his wife's throat.[35] Their departure must have been late in 1844 for they were still there in October 1844 when Maria wrote to her mother mentioning her daughter 'a fine girl' and her new-born son and her hope that 'there be no more for three or more years'. Her hopes were not be realised; a third child, Alfred, was born in 1845.[36]

The couple settled on Clarke Island in September 1846. Power, during his 1849 survey of the islands, noted that Allen resided on Clarke Island with the permission of Mr. Latrobe.[37] According to Bishop Nixon's rather jaundiced view, Maria appeared to be totally under her husband's control. Nixon, it must be said, did not like Allen who offended him with his views on baptism. The Bishop felt that had he been able to see Mrs Allen on her own he might have been able to persuade her to consider having her children baptised.[38] Allen appears to have suffered a crisis of faith. Early extracts from his journal reveal an intensely religious man capable of having, on occasion, visions filled with religious meaning. In later years his journal is far more prosaic, containing mainly details of farm work, and lacking any mention of religion. The tone is radically different to the early years.[39] Nixon's opinions of the couple's relationship may be tinged by this dislike of Allen's later views on religion. However, it does appear that Maria Allen led a hard and difficult life. On one occasion she mentioned to visiting Victorian merchants that she had left Clarke Island only once in the 16 years she had lived there.[40]

Dr Allen drowned in 1856 between Clarke and Preservation Islands. At the time of his death his wife was five months pregnant with their tenth child. In May

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[35] AOT, Hobart, George Augustus Robinson Correspondence Folder.
[36] AOT, Hobart, See notes in George Augustus Robinson Correspondence Folder, Letter from Maria Allen to her mother 27 Oct 1844.
[37] AOT, Hobart, CSO 24/93/3033, 'Report of Surveyor - General'.
[38] Francis R. Nixon, *The Cruise of the Beacon,* Bell & Daldy, London, 1857.
[39] Furneaux Museum, Album 64, The Diaries and Papers of James Allen.
[39] Mark Howard, 'Archdeacon Thomas Reibey's 1862 Missionary Voyage to the Islands of Bass Strait' *THRA, P&P,* vol. 38, no. 1, 1991, p. 85.
[40] ibid.,

1857 Maria Allen wrote to her sister, Eliza, in Melbourne to inform her of her husband's death and the safe arrival of her baby daughter. In her letter she stressed her enormous financial difficulties and at the conclusion signs herself 'your unhappy sister'. This led Eliza, in turn, to write to their father, George Augustus Robinson, living comfortably in England. Eliza pointed out her sister's position and suggested that her father 'send her a few hundred pounds to enable her to live and prevent people saying that you are living in affluence while your daughter and grandchildren are living as beggars'.[41] It appears that George Augustus Robinson did send some money, but Maria's life appears to have been difficult. Twenty years later her son James Allen drowned in almost the same place as his father. At the time of her son's death Maria Allen was still living in the islands.[42]

Catherine Barry was born in 1828 and transported to Tasmania for seven years for highway robbery in 1849. On arrival she was assigned to R.G. Watt of Flinders Island.[43] She married Charles Harley on 4 August 1851 in the Anglican Church in Georgetown. Her religion is given as Catholic in her conviction details. Charles Harley is described as a sealer and Catherine as a spinster and pass holder on their marriage certificate.[44] According to Murray-Smith, Charles Harley arrived in the islands at least as early as 1851 and was said to be a Colour Sergeant in the Sappers and Miners.[45] In 1854 Bishop Nixon noted that Harley was resident at Settlement Point with his wife and two children and described him as a servant.[46] Catherine and Charles settled at Puncheon Head on Cape Barren Island where they built a comfortable homestead and eventually had five children—three sons and two daughters. Charles Harley purchased the 50 acres the home stood on and leased another 500 acres. The family also leased a

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[41] Furneaux Museum, Album 64, The Diaries and Papers of James Allen: Letter from Eliza Reed to George Augustus Robinson, 4 May 1857.
[42] Stephen Murray-smith (ed.),'Seventh voyage 1878', in *Mission to the Islands,* p. 142.
[43] Furneaux Museum, Album 49, The Harley Family.
[44] ibid., Marriage certificate.
[45] Murray-Smith, *Mission to the Islands,* Principal Personalities p. xxix
[46] Nixon, *The Cruise of the Beacon,* pp. 368–438.

substantial holding on Kangaroo Island.[47] In 1879 Catherine Harley was bitten on the finger by a snake and died ten days later, sadly, not from the snake bite but from tetanus which followed from her husband cutting the finger off to prevent the spread of venom.[48] A friendly glimpse of Catherine is given in the following verse penned by Hamilton Allen, which also reveals that mutton birding was a serious enterprise for the Harleys.

> There is the catching, the killing, The plucking, the scalding,
> The opening, the salting, The packing for sale,
> In casks they are salted And sent to the market,
> The profits of which Are the poor salter's gain,
> There is the egging, the oiling, The mutton bird boiling,
> There is likewise Kate Harley, That came from Colrain,
> In her boat called the Shamrock, Daily is sailing,
> With cargo of mutton-birds, Off to the Main.[49]

The Harley family played an important part in the early history of the Furneaux Islands, and one of the islands major tragedies occurred when the three sons of Charles and Catherine—Charles, David and Thomas—were drowned in April 1885. The brothers had left Kangaroo Island for Chappell Island in the cutter *Gem* in squally weather with a strong westerly wind. As Charles Harley's wife, Jane, watched she saw the vessel suddenly disappear halfway across the passage. No trace of the brothers or their boat was found. Charles Harley left one son and four daughters and David Harley's wife was pregnant with their first child.[50] Many of the women interviewed in this study are direct descendants of Charles and David Harley's children and the history of the Harleys is well known. Charles Harley Senior died five years after his son's deaths in 1890 at the age of 72.[51]

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[47] Furneaux Museum, Album 49, The Harley Family.
[48] Murray-Smith, *Mission to the Islands* Principal Personalities p. xxix.
[49] Furneaux Museum, Album 49, The Harley Family. Punctuation and capitalisation as in the original. 'The Main' is the nineteenth century island term for Tasmania. Hamilton Allen was Dr James Allen's brother. AOT, Hobart, see notes George Augustus Robinson Correspondence Folder.
[50] Furneaux Museum, Album 49, The Harley Family: 'Supposed Loss of Life', *Launceston Examiner,* 11 May 1883, p. 2, and 'The Loss of the Harley Bros.', *Launceston Examiner,* 16 May 1883, p. 3.
[51] Murray-Smith, *Mission to the Islands,* Principal Personalities, p. xxix.

Bridget Lee, Maria Allen and Catherine Harley are the first European women permanently living in the Furneaux Group. While Maria Allen had had contact with the islands prior to settling, it seems Catherine Harley stayed where she had been sent as a young convict, and Bridget Lee first saw the islands as a bride. Like pioneers all over Australia, their lives passed by unnoticed outside of their community. They arrived, helped establish farms and homes, brought their children up in the islands, observed the later expansion of settlement and, in the case of Bridget Lee and Catherine Harley, died in the islands they had come to as young women.

Later nineteenth century settlement

After the passage of the *Waste Lands Amendment Act* of 1861, settlement in the islands rapidly increased, with profound effects on the Bass Strait Aboriginal population. Many lost their original island family home, moved to Cape Barren Island, and became embroiled in a decades-long dispute with the Tasmanian government over protection of mutton bird rookeries and security of tenure. Quickly outnumbered by European settlers, their seasonal way of life, based on both Aboriginal traditions and a European sealing lifestyle, came under threat.

Among the first Europeans to take up land after 1861 were the Holt brothers, Thomas Barrett, Henry Robinson, Elizabeth Davis (Robinson), Jules Virieux, Alexander Ross and the Davey and Maclaine families.[52] Early settlers tended to try to spread their holdings over several islands. For example, in 1883, Henry Robinson - brother to Maria Allen, had leasehold land on Tin Kettle, Woody, Chappell and Flinders Islands. The Barrett family, by the same time, had part leased and part purchased Little Green Island, leased Long Island, part of Babel and 50 acres of Chappell Island. A decade later they also had freehold land on Flinders Island.[53]

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[52] Murray-Smith, *THRA P&P*, p. 184.
[53] H.S, 'Visit to the Islands in Bass Straits, With an Account of What I Saw and Heard There', *Launceston Examiner*, Monday 28 May, 1883. 'H.S.' (a pseudonym) visited the

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Smallfields settled on tiny Puncheon Head Island in the Franklin Sound close by Cape Barren Island. As a young girl,. Gladys Robinson visited and stayed with Mr and Mrs Smallfield who had no children of their own and were the only people on the island. Gladys's family, who lived on nearby Vansittart Island, were neighbours:

> They both came from England—they dressed for dinner every night. We feel that Mr. Smallfield—he did something wrong and was sent to Australia by his family. They were better off than most people were. They had a nice little English cottage with gravel paths that had to be swept everyday. They served artichokes in white sauce and had serviettes in rings—a nicely set up table. Mrs. Smallfield did tapestry and I used to fiddle around with her. She used to talk about her life in England and where she came from. I'm sure she was very lonely. They partly reared Joan Blundstone's father and also Joan's sister Lily. They moved to Lady Barron eventually and when Mr. Smallfield died, Billy Mills [Lily's brother] lived with her and cared for her till she died.[54]

Why the Smallfields, without children or other family, were living as the only residents of a tiny island in the Franklin Sound no-one now knows. Mr Smallfield was not from a farming or fishing background and did not work. It was presumed the couple lived on a private income.[55] Gladys Robinson's family knew the couple well but did not know why they were in the islands although they clearly indulged in speculation. Mrs Smallfield never returned to England and is remembered by Gladys as often seeming lonely. She is recalled with great affection by many elderly islanders, mostly for her great kindness to several island children.

Generally nineteenth and early twentieth century settlers were of English/Scots descent with a few of Irish origin. They came via Tasmania or mainland Australia or directly from England, Scotland or Ireland. The population was,

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Furneaux Islands in 1883 and stayed for several months. His observations were published in a weekly column in the *Launceston Examiner*, between April and June of 1883. See also Valuation Roll for District of Ringarooma, *Hobart Gazette*, 18 October. 1892

[54] Gladys Robinson, interview, December, 2000.

[55] Joan Blundstone, pers. comm., December 2001.

therefore, made up either of people of Anglo-Celtic or mixed Anglo-Celtic/Aboriginal descent. One notable exception was the Virieux family who came from Mauritius.

While there is generally little detailed information about European woman living in Bass Strait in the nineteenth century, the one notable exception is Mrs Elisabeth Virieux, three times married and ancestor to many present day island residents. Her extraordinary life made her a Bass Strait legend. A brief examination of Elisabeth Virieux's life in the Furneaux Islands reveals that women could and did settle islands by themselves. To avoid confusion, her third husband's name—Robinson—the name she is most commonly remembered by, will be used throughout the following account.

Mrs Robinson was born Elisabeth Matilda Perrin in Mauritius in 1824. She had a son, Jules Virieux, in Mauritius around 1840. Mrs Robinson was said to be the wife of a Captain Virieux but, according to Guiler and Guiler, no record has been located of the marriage or of a Captain Virieux in Lloyd's Registers for the period.[56] She met Captain James Davis in the 1840s and for some time travelled with him on his ship trading in Africa and Australia. In 1854 Captain Davis was appointed lighthouse keeper of the Goose Island lighthouse and so the couple arrived in the islands. Mrs Robinson's two children, Jules and her adopted daughter Marie Antoinette (always known as Jane), came with them. Jane's origin is uncertain. The most widely accepted story is that Mrs Robinson adopted her during her travels as the wife of Captain Davis. It is also commonly thought that she may have been the child of Mrs Robinson's sister. As well, the suggestion that she might have been Mrs Robinson's natural daughter has been made and, while less readily accepted by her descendants, it has not been refuted.[57]

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[56] Eric Guiler & Lalage Guiler, , *THRA P&P*, vol. 39, no. 3, September, 1992, p. 127.
[57] ibid., p. 128.

Captain Davis died in 1864, which meant that Elisabeth and her children had to leave Goose Island. In 1865 she bought land on Green Island and moved there with her daughter Jane. The two women built a house for themselves, erected fences and stockyards, and planted gardens. As a young woman, Helen Cooper, Jane's granddaughter, was told that initially when the two women moved to Green Island they squatted in a roofed rock shelter.[58] Jane and Elisabeth did a lot of the heavy work on the island. They had a liking for building stone walls, erecting several over the island. This may have also been a way of ridding the fields of stones. In 1879 Elisabeth married Henry Robinson, son of George Augustus Robinson and brother to Maria Allen.[59]

Prior to her marriage to Henry Robinson, Elisabeth, with the help of Jane, had established a productive farm on Green Island. The two women purchased two boats that Jane could handle and that traded with Launceston. After her marriage to Henry Robinson, Mrs Robinson became known by people in the islands as 'Granny Robinson' and was famous for her hospitality. A superb cook, she was known to send out her two boats collecting all the young people from the surrounding islands for parties that lasted two to three days. Throughout her life she fostered a large number of children.[60]

In 1875 Jane married Charles Harley and went to live at Puncheon Head on Cape Barren, where she gave birth to five children before, as has already been described, witnessing her husband's death with his brothers by drowning in 1885. After the death of her father-in law in 1890, Jane moved to Kangaroo Island with her children.[61] Her four daughters all married and remained in the islands and through them, and the children of her stepbrother Jules Virieux, numerous island families are descended from Mrs Robinson.

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[58] Helen Cooper, interview, August 1998. A woman who had been a governess in Jane Harley's household on Kangaroo Island repeated this story to Helen Cooper.
[59] Guiler & Guiler, *THRA P&P*, p. 132.
[60] Murray-Smith, *Mission to the Islands*, Principal Personalities, p. xxviii.
[61] Guiler & Guiler, *THRA P&P*, p. 132.

Henry Robinson died in 1884. Mrs Robinson lived for another 30 years on Green Island and managed the farm with the help of friends and relatives. She died in 1909 while alone on Green Island, and left a considerable amount of property throughout the islands. Green Island was left jointly to Jane's four daughters, Jane having already died in 1905.[62]

In 1883 'H. S.' stayed at Green Island for several weeks and has left some insights into Mrs Robinson household. On the day of his arrival he found all the household in the middle of shearing and related activities. Henry Robinson was shearing, while Mrs Robinson and Mrs Lloyd, helped by a number of excited 'half-caste' children were rounding up the sheep. He was soon pressed into helping.

'H.S.' also recounts the story of how Mrs Robinson and Jane eliminated rabbits and snakes from Green Island in the days before the widow's marriage to Henry Robinson. The two women apparently killed 800 snakes and 8000 rabbits in five years. Since then Green Island has had neither snakes nor rabbits. Canon Brownrigg also recounted this story in his written accounts of his missionary trips to the island.[63] 'H. S.' was also impressed by the tameness of the cattle and sheep, almost all of who had a name and came when called. Another visitor also stated that when he visited Green Island all 400 sheep on the island at the time had French names and came when called.[64] The animals were domesticated to such an extent that it was often difficult for Mrs Robinson to move around the island as she was usually followed by a large number of animals.[65]

Of interest, as an example of cross-cultural pursuits in the islands, is that the writer became involved in searching for suitable shells for the ladies to use for

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[62] ibid., p. 135.
[63] Stephen Murray-Smith, (ed.), 'Second voyage 1873', in *Mission to the Islands,* p. 85.
[64] Account given by Captain H.C Axcup, of the steamer *Linda* and reproduced in the *Examiner,* 19 October. 1988.
[65] H. S., 'Visit to the islands in Bass Straits,' 26 May, 1883 & 4 June, 1883.

'stringing'. The making of highly intricate, delicate shell necklaces, which is part of the traditional pursuits of Aboriginal women was a common activity in the Furneaux Islands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It seems that some European women adopted this traditional practice.[66]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a change in settlement patterns began to occur. At the end of Robert Gardner's 14-year leasehold of Flinders Island, the island became available for large-scale settlement. In April 1878 the island was advertised for rent in 68 lots on 14-year leases. Yearly rental was fixed at five pounds for 500 acres and ten pounds for 1000 acres respectively.[67] At that time, eight of the 68 lots were leased, Robert Gardner took four lots and the remaining four were taken up by three individuals. Subsequently, Gardner's lease was reportedly terminated for non-payment of rent in 1886.[68] It appears that none of the remaining lots were leased. However, by 1887, 47 lots of land were leased on Flinders Island ranging in size from 15 to 320 acres.[69]

In 1886, John Brown had been requested by the Tasmanian government to visit Flinders Island and inspect the island in terms of its appropriateness for future settlement. While he reported to the government that most of the land was of good quality, he stressed that allowances had to be made for the distance—one hundred miles from Low Head, the first port on the way to Launceston in northern Tasmania—and the difficulties of communication. Nevertheless, he felt that if the right class of person could be encouraged to settle on Flinders Island, they would very likely be successful. The type of person Brown saw as being the 'right' type were 'the sturdy dwellers of the coast of the United Kingdom,

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[66] ibid.,
[67] *Hobart Town Gazette,* 2 April, 1878.
[68] *Hobart Town Gazette,* 11 May, 1886.
[69] Furneaux Museum, Album 85, Historical Documents vol. I: E.W.N. Butcher, 'Chart of Flinders Island' 1887.

accustomed to boating and fishing and having the pluck and energy essential to succeed in settling down in a new country'.[70]

In the last years of the century, settlement sped up on the island and some settlers began to build substantial homes. In 1891 the *Launceston Examiner* described some of the houses being built on Flinders Island. The Ferguson family had just finished building a six-room weather-board home complete with stables, outhouses and blacksmith's shop. Others were in the process of completing or had just completed building four-room cottages, including Jane Harley who had moved with her children that year to Kangaroo Island, and who was one of the few remaining residents on the outer islands. [71]

In 1906 the electoral roll for Whitemark showed 56 men resident on Flinders Island. Fifty-three men gave their occupations variously as farmer, hunter and miner; the remaining three were listed as store-keeper, teacher, and 'of no occupation'. Thirty-five women were listed, 34 of whom gave their occupation as domestic duties, the one exception being Mrs Robinson on Green Island who listed her occupation as pastoral pursuits.[72]

Flinders Island was clearly opening up for apart from Mrs Robinson on Green Island, the Harley family on Kangaroo Island and the Blyth family on the Inner Sister's Island, and the lighthouse families, everyone else on the roll was resident on Flinders Island. The Cape Barren electoral roll for the same year had 90 voters registered, of whom all but sixteen were resident on the island.[73] The pattern of settlement was becoming clear; families were moving from the smaller islands to

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[70] *Report on Flinders Island,* (Mr John Brown surveyor), Parl. Paper no. 62, Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1886, p.5.
[71] Furneaux Museum, Album 85, Historical Documents, vol. I: 'Flinders Island', *Launceston Examiner* 19 September, 1891.
[72] Furneaux Museum, Album 85, Historical Documents vol. I: Copy of Electoral Roll for White Mark (Flinders Island) for the Division of Bass, State of Tasmania, 1906.
[73] Furneaux Museum, Album 85, Historical Documents vol. 1: Copy of Electoral Roll for Cape Barren Island for the Division of Bass, State of Tasmania, 1906.

the two larger ones, while continuing to lease the smaller islands for grazing and mutton-birding purposes. The Aboriginal community settled mainly on the reserve on Cape Barren Island, although three or four Aboriginal families settled on Flinders Island. European settlers mainly moved onto Flinders Island.

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Women living in the Furneaux Islands in the nineteenth century were living in one of the most isolated parts of Australia at the time. The sea separated them not only from the wider Australian society but also, at times dramatically, from their neighbours who, while possibly only a few miles away, were totally beyond reach in times of rough or unpredictable weather. Women helped settle the land and established comfortable homes on a par with those in more established areas, but they must have done so with a heightened awareness of their physical surroundings. Farming, trading, hunting, mutton-birding, social interaction and family safety—the emotional and economic planks of their lives—could all, at any moment, be affected by the surrounding seas. Yet, from the little we know, it does not seem that they were all passive victims of their husbands' pioneering ambitions. While it appears that Maria Allen may have led a difficult and perhaps tragic life, others were not so unfortunate. Mrs Robinson as an elderly woman was clearly able to order her business and social life effectively in a very remote locality without male kin. Her daughter, Jane Harley, managed as a widow and mother of five very capably on Kangaroo Island. Bridget Lee is a more elusive figure, but she outlived her husband by many years, respected and liked by all that met her. It seems reasonable to assume that some of these early women settlers were motivated by a desire to establish their families' economic future and by a spirit of adventure similar to that of their men.

By 1910, however, the mothers of the core group of study participants were born and many were approaching adulthood. They knew, or had known as children, some of the women identified in this chapter. A few passed on to their daughters, stories and recollections about these women. Their daughters see little difference between the lives of their mothers and their grandmothers in

terms of isolation. Their mothers may have been living on Flinders Island rather than the outlying islands, but Flinders Island in 1910 was two years away from having a government school and there was no hospital or reliable medical care. Roads were few and primitive, with the one to the north of the island being nothing more than a rough bush track. Consequently, boats were still the preferred mode of travel, even around Flinders Island. Shipping services to and from the islands were erratic and it was not until after the World War One that a fortnightly service was established.[74] Therefore, it was not always possible to get off the islands quickly in times of emergency. In bad weather the trading vessel might not appear for weeks.

However, in the 50 years between 1910 and 1960 island living changed irrevocably. The women whose oral evidence is used in this work regard their own lives as having been considerably easier than those of their mothers and grandmothers and clearly, in many physical respects, they have been. Nevertheless, they still had to contend with running their homes with only intermittent, petrol-generated electricity.[75] As well, for decades, secondary education for children remained a major issue for families. Even today children must leave the islands for the last two years of secondary schooling. Prior to the advent of air travel in 1932, medical evacuations remained difficult to arrange and were often delayed. The lives of the study participants may have changed dramatically from those of their mothers and grandmothers, but the fact remains that few other Australian women lived such isolated lives during the first half of the twentieth century.

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[74] Jim Davie, *Latitude Forty: Reminiscences of Flinders Island,* The National Press, Melbourne, 1980, p. 13.

[75] Hydro-electric power finally came to Flinders Island in 1984—the community celebrated with a series of 'power parties'. Prior to this generators were used to provide power for domestic and farm use.

CHAPTER TWO

Family History and Sense of Place

Many women who participated in this study did so because of their general interest in the history of the Furneaux Islands and their involvement in their own family history. Often the two are inextricably linked. The history of the islands has intrigued outsiders for generations, and while it may not have seemed of great importance to early inhabitants as they struggled to establish themselves, it is now of very real interest to their descendants. It is history that affirms the different experience of island settlers and in turn is linked to questions of personal and cultural identity.

All the women with long family histories in the islands also had extensive and complex island kinship ties. This means that many community members share parts of the same family history. On the island many residents live within a short car trip of dozens of close and distant kin. Living in an isolated environment and yet close to many extended family members is an unusual situation for white Australians.

This chapter primarily explores the importance placed on family history by the study participants, and the connection between history and a sense of attachment and belonging to the islands. It provides insights, not only from women with long family histories in the islands, but also from three women who came to live in the area in the 1950s. They viewed the islands differently and compared, sometimes unfavourably, their new existence with the one they had left behind. Their 'outsider' view provides some revealing insights into women's lives and the island community in the 1950s, as it sought to make the newcomers welcome.

I describe many of the women as belonging to 'old' families, a term used in the islands to identify early settler families. For the purposes of this thesis, old families are defined as those who were present in the Furneaux Islands before World War One. This group includes settlers who arrived in the nineteenth century as well as those who took advantage of the land boom of 1910–12 that followed the Tasmanian government's release of new land for settlement.[1] Between 1912 and the late 1940s the population remained relatively stable. New settlers did arrive during this period, often through marriage into island families, but no large-scale new settlement took place. After World War One the Tasmanian government had opened up some land for settlement by returned ex-servicemen. In the Furneaux Group, land was usually allocated to people who were resident or familiar with the islands, therefore, there was little alteration in the population as the result of this round of soldier settlement. The scheme was not a success. Ten years after the end of the war only 800 of the 2000 servicemen allocated land were still on their properties.[2] Following the end of World War Two, in the late 1940s, the population rapidly increased with the arrival of Agricultural Bank employees and soldier settlers following the release of further land by the Tasmanian Government as part of the War Service Entitlement Scheme. These new soldier settlers often came from other parts of Australia, with a strong contingent from New South Wales.[3]

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[1] *Report for Department of Lands,* (E.A. Counsel, Surveyor-General) Parl. Paper 22, Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart,1910, p. 5, Hobart. *Statistics of the State of Tasmania: Population,* Tasmanian, Parliament, Hobart, 1921-22, p. 9. Figures from the 1921 census show an increase in population due to migration between 1911 and 1921 of 152 people and a total population of 905 for Flinders Island.

[2] Lloyd Robson, *A Short History of Tasmania,* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 118 & 120.

[3] AOT, Hobart, AD610/69 - 14B8/52 'Proposal for War Service Land Settlement Scheme, 1948', n.d., n.a. See also *'Conditions in Flinders Island Municipality', Report to Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament,* Parl. Paper 22, Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1948, describes plans for soldier settlement'. Also, 'A look at Flinders Island', *The Express,* 2 November 1963, p.9 gives the population as 1407. By 1996 Census figures reveal a drop in the total population to 924, almost back to pre-soldier settlement times. 1996 Census, *Statistics of Tasmania,* Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Women as keepers of the family story

Descent from an early settler family can add to the sense of being an 'islander', a term until recently applied to Aboriginal island inhabitants and now often used to describe anyone living permanently in and identifying with the islands. While the islands are politically part of the State of Tasmania, long-term residents when interviewed, did not articulate an emotional identification with Tasmania. Each new generation loses many members to mainland Tasmania or other Australian States for personal or work-related reasons. Some will not return permanently but, nevertheless, these expatriates often travel back and forwards regularly between the islands and their new homes. A few of each generation remain, and while they sometimes marry other island residents, they more often introduce newcomers into the island community through marriage.

Descendants of early settler families understand—even if they sometimes have difficulty explaining—the extensive island kinship networks. All the older women interviewed possessed detailed knowledge of their own family and other families connected through marriage to their own. Women frequently appear to be the keepers and re-presenters of the family history, even though they often draw on the memories and knowledge of men to provide the physical and economic context. A common present day lament is that 'the old timers haven't documented anything'.[4] The grandparents of the women involved in this study were closer to the origins of their family's island history and may have seen little point in documenting their own parents' and grandparents' settlement experiences, or had little time to do so. While little may have been recorded, a number of people are remembered as excellent raconteurs and many stories of early settlers and establishment struggles were passed down to children by word of mouth. The study participants are convinced that these oral traditions are now dying out.

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[4] Laraine Langdon, interview, October 1999.

Interest in family and island history appears to be growing. Nell Cook, one study participant, is currently gathering together photographs and other information of her husband's family's early years in the Furneaux Group.[5] Nell's husband has been dead for many years and her intention is to leave as complete a history of the family as she can for her daughters, knowing, that in turn, they will probably add to it. One of her major informants is her sister-in-law, Gladys Robinson (also a major informant for this thesis). Gladys has been able to give Nell considerable information regarding the Cook family years on Vansittart Island at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gladys is also on the same journey, compiling stories so that knowledge of the family's early island history will not be lost. Jan Henning clearly recognises the increasing level of interest in family history and the efforts expended on attempts to preserve the past:

> People ask a lot 'where do you come from?' and I have said in my older years 'I'm a fifth generation islander on my mother's side'. Once upon a time you tossed out the old, you didn't keep it, now you hold onto things that show ways of life that are now obsolete and the ways things were done in older times.[6]

The developing interest in island and family history appears to be in line with the upsurge in interest in this area throughout Australia. There is though, another consideration. The islands, small both in population and size, have nevertheless attracted the interest of historians since the first days of settlement. Outside observers have always watched and analysed island events and then written about them. It would seem difficult not to have a heightened sense of historical awareness in such a situation.

Many of the women who took part in this study did so because they saw it as an opportunity to record details of a now past island way of life. They accepted as important the need to record the experience of women and recognised how easily it

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[5] Nell Cook, unrecorded interview, August 2000.
[6] Jan Henning, interview, April 1999.

could be lost. Other women generously agreed to be interviewed, but stated that they did not think they could offer much which would be of value. However, taking part in the interview did lead some to re-evaluate the importance of their memories and develop a greater interest in their family's and the island's history.

Family history and kinship ties

Frequently it has been elderly women who have retold the stories of the past. Chatting with their children and grandchildren—but particularly their daughters —they pass on and help preserve the family narrative. Their stories inevitably reach out to include significant others and in this way knowledge of the intricate kinship network is reinforced and a general understanding of the islands' history transmitted to the next generation. Kinship ties give many members of the island population, including those arriving since 1950, a sense of incorporation, as individuals, into the islands' ongoing history. If one marries into an 'old' family one's children become a sixth or perhaps seventh generation islanders.

Of the 27 women interviewed for this study, only four came to Flinders Island after 1940. One arrived as a single woman in the 1940s and married an island man. Two came as soldier settler wives, and the last as the wife of a migrant Agricultural Bank employee who later became a soldier settler. The remainder came from families who had settled in the islands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The kinship relationships between the women were complex and puzzling. All the women, except for the four women who arrived in the islands after 1940, were related to other study informants, some individuals were related to several other women. These relationships had important repercussions for this thesis as women frequently recommended other women, many of who were related to them, and often reassured them about the nature of the research. Increasingly, however, I became aware that on Flinders Island, multiple kinship ties played an important role in preserving the community's history.

A table is provided on the following page to give an example of the complicated kinship relationships between the women in the study. Of the 32 people interviewed, 11 women and one man are directly descended from, or related by marriage to, the descendants of Mrs Robinson's two children—Jules Virieux and Jane Harley.[7] The table is simplified in two ways. First it leaves out all siblings in each generation not directly related to women in the study. Secondly, it does not include relatives of the participants who are not part of this study. As well, many of the women in this table are also related to other women in the study who are not part of this particular descent group.

The table does not show unusually complex relationships in island terms. Noreen McCarthy (not in this table) is a direct descendant of Jack Riddle, one of the earliest sealers in Bass Strait. As a child she can remember her father adding up every permanent resident on the sland and not being able to find one person he was not connected to in some way or another.[8] It is difficult to assess the value of such extensive kinship networks among island women. On the one hand, distant relationships are recognised and acknowledged. On the other, it seems that unless some special affinity exists between distant kin, they are treated no differently than other unrelated islanders. This is supported by Gladys Robinson who maintains that with so many other residents related by blood or marriage, it is not possible to treat distant relatives differently from other unrelated people.[9] Close relationships, not surprisingly, are mainly with the immediate extended family of parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts.

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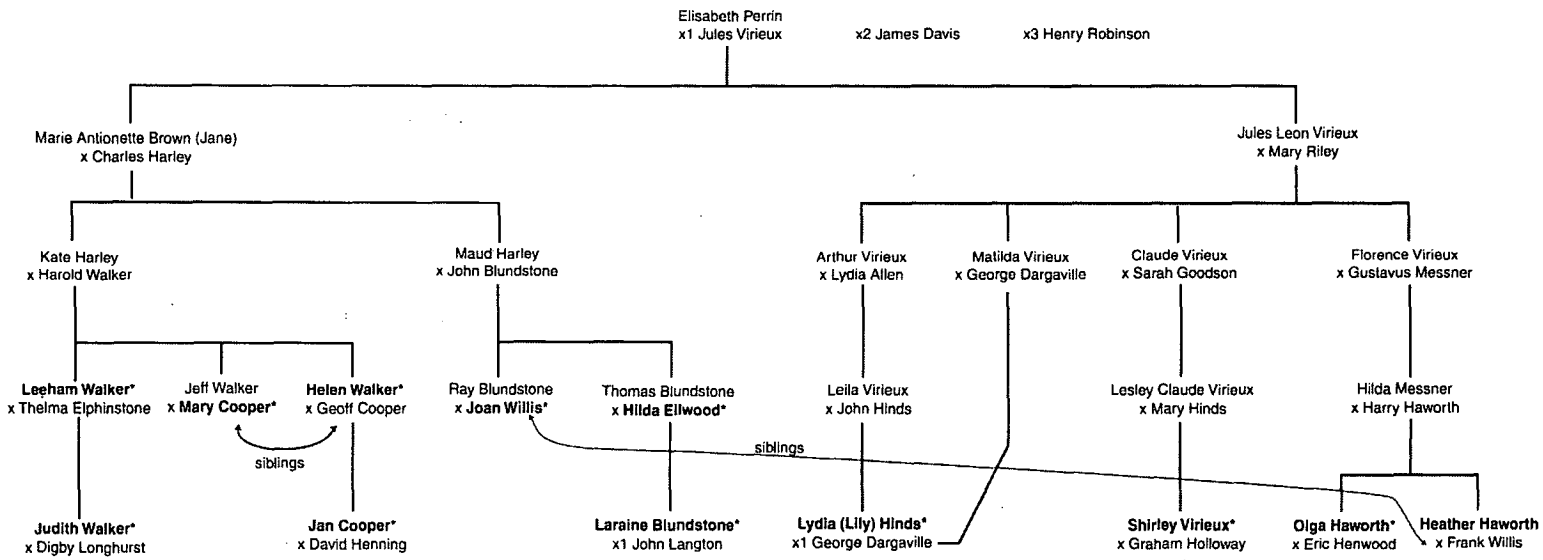
[7] See references to Mrs Robinson's remarkable life in the Furneaux Group in Chapter One.
[8] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.
[9] Gladys Robinson, interview, October 2001.

Diagram 3: *Relationships of study participants descended or connected by marriage to Elisabeth Perrin.*



*The names of study participants are in bold.

While interesting, the intricate web of island relationships is primarily of value for this study in so far as it reinforces the importance of family and island history for islanders. Many distantly related women share a common ancestor, for example Mrs Robinson. Within any one large descent group there are usually many people who remain in the islands and who, therefore, share part of the same family history. This is invaluable in raising a general awareness of family and, more indirectly, island history. It can also be of specific value for interested individuals. For example, if knowledge of a grandmother's early days is lost within the immediate family, there are many other more distant relatives within easy reach who may be able to fill in important details. Women frequently contact kin both off and on the islands in search of family information. Family history is intricately connected with island history as stories told of earlier family members are told within the context of earlier island life.

Belonging

A central interest of this thesis is what part a sense of historical identification with a particular place plays in establishing feelings of belonging. Rarely did the study informants in their oral accounts directly touch on this issue, nor did I expect them to. The majority of the informants belonged to the generation of women born before, during or in the decade following the World War One. This generation of women is reserved in speaking about emotional issues. Brought up in a time when children were expected to be seen and not heard, they were in general, not encouraged to ask questions let alone express abstract ideas during their formative years.[10] A long life of hard work and often slow but steady material advancement did not usually allow time for dwelling upon abstract concepts and ideas, which might often be regarded as fanciful or romantic. As Joy Damousi has pointed out they belong to a generation

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[10] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998; Tiny Kismannis, interview, June 2000.
There were some notable exceptions to this generalisation among families interviewed, but it was, nevertheless, a common experience of children of this generation.

in which stoicism and reticence are valued.[11] However, the study participants' interest in their family history, their strong sense of identification with the local community, and the pleasure with which they recall long past island events, reveals their sense of the islands being home.

Identification with a place or places can be on several levels. The women in this thesis identified with the Furneaux Islands as a whole, though only those who had family histories linking them with particular outer islands seemed very interested in islands other than Flinders. While a few overtly stated that Flinders Island was their place, within the island a deeper attachment was often exhibited for particular areas. The Robinson and Cook families, for example, have mainly lived in the southern part of the island. On the other hand, the Wheatley family has mainly settled in the northern sections of the island.

The participants' experience of the island was often confined by the availability of transport. In their childhood they commonly only knew the areas within walking and riding distance. Shirley Holloway, living on the southern outskirts of Whitemark in the 1940s and 1950s, went to Lady Barron about once a year.[12] The distance from Whitemark to Lady Barron is 20 kilometres—too great a distance for the family when they travelled by horse and jinker. While Shirley as a child might know of families living in the south-east and northern parts of the island, she rarely met them in person except through school.[13] While a general identification with Flinders Island might exist and a remoter one with the Furneaux Islands, the known world within physical reach not surprisingly became the children's place—the place they belonged in.

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[11] Joy Damousi *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-war Australia* Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Vic., 2001, p. 185.
[12] Shirley Holloway, interview, August 2000.
[13] ibid.,

As adults the world expanded to incorporate other parts of Flinders Island, the Furneaux Islands as a whole, Tasmania and mainland Australia and, sometimes other countries. However, for those who remained permanently resident in the islands the part played by their family in island history could often contribute powerfully to a personal sense of identification with the Furneaux Group. Apart from family ties, other factors could also be important. Direct experience of the wild beauty of the country and tempestuous weather could lead to a sense of pride in belonging to a place perceived as both beautiful and different. Living contentedly in a place which presents the individual with many economic and lifestyle difficulties could also lead to a sense of pride and identification.

Noreen McCarthy is descended from one of the oldest island families, and while her paintings and her poetry show an awareness of the islands' past, it is her physical sense of the islands which appears to be her major inspiration.

> My island of bush and crystal air
> And sea lashed coastlines beyond compare
> Born of bloodshed and torn by strife
> When the blood of death was the blood of life
> Haunted by souls of the lost and the brave
> Whose bones lie buried in some secret grave
> Days when wild winds tear and shriek
> And wear themselves out on tall granite peaks
> Days of warm sun and calm blue and gold
> When it's hard to believe the stories of old
> Nights of black velvet and pearly shine
> When the smell of warm earth is as heady as wine
> My land around me warmed by the sun
> The earth comes to meet me our hearts beat as one.[14]

Nevertheless, family history is important in creating a special sense of belonging as Shirley Holloway reveals.

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[14] Noreen McCarthy, poems offered to me at interview, March 1999.

> I think it belongs to all of us born here. I'm a fifth generation of actually living here, four generations of my family have been born here and I think we have the same feeling. I mean we were all brought up struggling to survive off the land. I have been to lots of places, I've travelled and it's so lovely to come back here—you just feel as though it's home and it's part of you—I couldn't even think of living anywhere else or being anywhere else. [15]

This is a present day description of 'belonging'. To ascertain if earlier generations felt such a strong sense of identification, one has to go beyond oral evidence. One indicator that some may have done so is the number of people who felt moved to write about their island experiences, particularly in the early twentieth century, and lodge their memoirs and papers with the Flinders Island Historical Association at the Furneaux Museum.[16]

The community living within the Furneaux Group during the first half of the twentieth century contained both Aboriginal and European inhabitants who, for the most part, followed similar occupations to earlier generations. It was a small, closely knit, stable community containing many families who had first come to the Islands in the nineteenth century and others who arrived just prior to Word War One. Not until the 1950s did another large group of settlers arrive. The experience of these settlers is important because it reveals something of how outsiders saw island life. That they often viewed islanders favourably does not detract from the difficulties many experienced as soldier settlers. That settlement was difficult is supported by the fact that few of the original soldier settler families remain in the islands.

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[15] Shirley Holloway, August 2000.

[16] There are a number of books, memoirs and articles written by local and ex-local inhabitants lodged with the Furneaux Museum. There are also some in the local library and others held in private collections. For a feel for island life during the first half of the twentieth century I found the memoirs of Iola Fowler, in Album 38, Iola Fowler's Stories, and Marion Colgrave's in Album 85 vol. II, Historical Documents, both held at the Furneaux Museum, particularly valuable.

Newcomers—the outside view

After the World War Two, the Tasmanian government, along with the governments of other States, decided to open up previously unused land for soldier settlement by war veterans. The east coast of Flinders Island was selected as a suitable site. The Tasmanian Agricultural Bank used workers from interstate and overseas, including post-war refugees, to drain and clear the land, put through roads, erect houses and fences. Unlike some other States, the Tasmanian scheme established settlers on already cleared and fenced land in return for which they worked for the Agricultural Bank for a variable period of time preparing further land for settlement.

Therefore, towards the end of the 1940s, hundreds of male workers descended upon Flinders Island to prepare the east coast for settlement. Their impact on the tiny island community was profound as Judith Longhurst remembers:

> The other huge decision was to do with the War Service Land Settlement Scheme to open up the east coast of the island. This brought to Flinders an influx of people not only from other parts of Australia but from other parts of the world. Often these were stateless refugees as a result of World War Two, so we had Austrians, Germans, Hungarians, and a whole mix of Europeans. As a ten-year-old I can remember the impact of these people arriving. The men used to travel out [to work on the scheme] just standing on the back of the truck and I used to swing on the front gate listening for them. Because, particularly the Italians, they would sing, and they would sing, of course, in Italian. In the late afternoon I would hear these voices before I would hear the truck and I would wait for them to come past singing this incredible language.[17]

For young girls the advent of so many young, and at least temporarily, single men meant a dramatic improvement in their social life:

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[17] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.

> As a teenager coming home on school holidays and going to the local dance you never lacked partners. There were times when you might have three or four partners in the one dance, so everyone had a turn. It was just fabulous for a girl's ego and some of them were fabulous dancers...I always remember one man, he was from Finland, and he was a superb dancer and I was always thrilled if he ever came and asked me to dance.[18]

Noreen McCarthy also remembers the number of young single Agricultural Bank employees who seemed to suddenly descend on the island.

> Over three years there were over three hundred single men sent out by the bank. Dances were marvellous.
> *How did you meet your husband?*
> Oh, he just came over here working - half the girls on the Island married men off the Agricultural Bank.[19]

The Flinders Island community seemed to absorb the influx of migrant workers with little difficulty. The fact that eventually workers lived and worked on the east coast away from centres of population, and the money they spent boosted the island economy, probably aided their acceptance. They were also temporary residents who would move onto the next job once the properties were ready for occupation. While there were hard-headed practical reasons for welcoming them, the islanders seemed to have also enjoyed them for the excitement they brought and the window they opened into other, far away, worlds. The only time Judith Longhurst can recall any ill feeling being openly expressed was when a group of Italian workers were brought to the island on Anzac Day.[20]

Soldier settlers and their families followed the migrant workers to the island. What the soldier settler families thought of Flinders Island is of interest, because most of them were rank outsiders. The majority of the settlers who came to Flinders Island were from New South Wales. Many of them had lived in inland New South Wales,

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[18] ibid.,
[19] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.
[20] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.

miles from the sea, yet often reasonably close to small provincial towns and cities which provided a reasonable range of services. Despite this, moving into a small, tightly knit, isolated community, which had seen few new arrivals since 1910–1912 does not appear to have presented them with many difficulties. The pressure to make a success of their settlement venture was initially too great to allow much time for pondering the idiosyncrasies of the island community.

Joan and Eric Warren were typical of new settlers. Like many of the other settlers they came from New South Wales, they had a young family of five children and they were committed to making a success of their settlement venture. Eric was employed, working 8–10 hours a day, for the Agricultural Bank for the first three years of their time on Flinders Island. The couple laboured incessantly to become established. About two years after their arrival Joan's cousin, a keen photographer, and his family came from Sydney to visit them. Joan showed them around the island and it was when her cousin commented that the island was the most photogenic place he had ever been that she began to see it in a different way.[21]

The Warrens had come from near Parkes in New South Wales to take up land on Flinders Island. While Eric had seen both King and Flinders Island, Joan had only seen photographs of her potential new home. [22] Uncertain that the island even had a church, she had the baby, Phillip, baptised on the last Sunday they were in Parkes.

Moving a family from New South Wales to Flinders Island in 1956 was an organisational feat. The Warrens travelled from Parkes to Melbourne by car—they remember as they were leaving Parkes that their oldest daughter's boyfriend cycled furiously alongside the departing car waving goodbye. A friend of Eric's brought

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[21] Joan and Eric Warren, interview, August 2000.
[22] King Island, in western Bass Strait, was also taking soldier settlers at the same time as Flinders Island.

the family's furniture to Melbourne in a van. Once in Melbourne, car and furniture were loaded onto a Bristol Air Freighter and flown to Flinders. The family flew from Melbourne to Launceston and then onto Flinders Island. They were the fifth in the first lot of 14 soldier settlers. They arrived on Flinders Island in January 1956. That year was the wettest year for decades on Flinders Island with a rainfall of 49 inches being recorded for the year, of which nine hundred points fell in January—the middle of summer—and the month the family moved. Joan's recurring memory of that first year is the difficulty in getting the washing dry:

> It was so wet and Phillip being a baby [it was very difficult]. It used to be fine one day a week and you would wash of course, and of course it would rain. I used to dry Phillip's nappies in the oven. burned a few and scorched them.
> *Did you ever have regrets in that first year?*
> Oh yes, I'd think, where have I come to?[23]

While the men worked together for the Agricultural Bank, their wives were far more isolated. Like many other wives Joan did not drive. The family farm was a considerable distance from Whitemark, but groceries could be ordered from Whitemark and delivered once a week on the Agricultural Bank bus. Not surprisingly, Joan missed the convenience of electricity and telephone, both of which she had had in New South Wales.

The positive outlook of the Warrens probably contributed to their eventual integration into the island community. They recall that on one occasion, after living on the island for 14 years, giving another island resident a lift in their car and having him call them 'new arrivals'. However, they maintain that there 'is no difference between old and new residents, really it depends entirely on how much you want to involve yourself'.[24]

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[23] Joan and Eric Warren, interview, August 2000.
[24] ibid.,

Other soldier settler families saw the whole move to Flinders Island as a chance to improve the family prospects as well as something of an adventure. Pat Macintosh moved to Flinders Island from New South Wales with her family at the age of 20. Her parents were still in their 40s and the family virtually sold all their furniture and belongings before moving, bringing with them only personal and treasured objects. They sailed from Melbourne to Devonport on the *Taroona* and then flew to Flinders Island. There were not enough plane tickets for their father to accompany them on the trip and because of the wet weather (1956), it was a week before he could join them. This did not daunt the family's enthusiasm for the new venture:

> Well it was just a big adventure. Because no one had any great expectations of anything - even when you were first married you had a bare little house and just a few pieces of furniture and you worked towards getting something better and better all the time.[25]

Pat recalls that her mother just seemed to be happy to go along with anything her father wanted to do. For Pat the move meant an improved social life and she remembers both the weekly dances on Friday night and the pictures on Saturday night as highlights. The films were shown in a local hall and the audience sat on hard wooden benches enduring, with good-humoured patience, the frequent breaks in the reels.[26]

Migrant workers and soldier settlers meant a sharp increase in the population of the island and were welcomed for these reasons. In retrospect the 1950s are seen as boom times on Flinders Island. The increased population led to better airline and shipping services and improvements for the local school. 'This was something that everyone thought would put the island on the map, . . . we would have the extra political clout to have the things we needed and deserved to have'. [27]

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[25] Pat McIntosh, interview, August 2000.
[26] ibid.,
[27] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.

Just occasionally there are hints that there was a degree of ambivalence felt by some members of the Flinders Island community in relation to the new settlers. The community overtly welcomed the settlers and the long-term benefits it was perceived they would bring to the island. However, there was occasional resentment expressed at the government assistance they received:

> Well there was one woman there—she was really having a bitch one day—there was some piece of machinery which had broken down and they hadn't been able to get it fixed, . . . and I said 'look at you, you start where we can't even hope to finish, you've got nothing to bitch about'. And she said 'oh I suppose you're right'. You see they came onto farms that were already established, they were fenced and stocked. Their houses were built for them and they had stoves and everything like that already in them. However, I think that it was really good to have them and they really boosted the island'.[28]

Judith Longhurst also remembers some mild resentment at the level of support the soldier settlers received. However, she stressed that it was very mild:

> So there was a little bit of 'them' and 'us' particularly if there was lobbying for improved services. There was a feeling among island farmers that these newcomers, what did they really know about island life?'[29]

Flinders Islanders still often express irritation when people perceived to be 'outsiders' and lacking any real depth of knowledge about the island attempt to influence the political life of the islands. The island has a long history of people coming from 'outside' developing a superficial understanding of the social, economic or political life of the community and then attempting to introduce change. As a result, resentment is usually felt by at least some sections of the community.

> But it's the fact that we have had so many 'come lately' people. I'm not trying to put down the 'come lately' people who've seen it from a different angle, but they're the ones who give interviews

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[28] Nell Cook, interview, October 1998.
[29] Judith Longhurst, interview, November, 1999.

> when the press come in. People who have only been here—say 15 or 20 years—have no idea what it was like before and [therefore] they rely on misinformation or badly remembered information, however you like to put it.[30]

It would be surprising if a sudden increase of workers and settlers into a stable and close-knit isolated community did not cause some problems. However, after 40 years there are few people who remember any great ill feeling. Perhaps this could be put down to a retrospective nostalgia for happier times, except that the soldier settlers remember specific examples of being shown a great deal of kindness and warmth by islanders. This point is reinforced by Lisa Bergamin in one of the more poignant settlement stories. Lisa travelled to Australia from Verona in northern Italy with her husband Primo and four-year-old daughter Maria in 1958, on the Lloyd Tristana vessel *Toscana*. Lisa was a very shy 22-year-old, who spoke no English, when she immigrated:

> I cried all the way. I left ten brothers and sisters, my grandparents, Mum and Dad. The morning we left the priest brought about 300 people to the house to say goodbye. Everyone was crying, we were all crying. The taxi driver said we had to leave—so we left. Mum said 'you're going to the end of the world—there's no place after it', . . . I was sick [on the ship] all the time, so I lost lots of weight, I felt awful and I thought 'better die now and finish with this life'.[31]

On the ship there were 1000 immigrants and 400 crew. Conditions were barely satisfactory. Families were separated, with the women and children being allocated three or four large rooms and the men accommodated separately. They met up with each other during the day and at meals.

Primo began working for the Agricultural Bank, draining and clearing the land when the family arrived on Flinders Island. They lived in the camps set up for the Agricultural Bank workers for 11 years before saving enough for a deposit on their

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[30] Laraine Langdon, interview, October 1999.
[31] Lisa Bergamin, interview, September 2000.

own property. The camps had people of all nationalities living in them and few of the women had any English. Lisa, homesick and very alone, made a slow and painful adjustment to life on Flinders Island. The landscape horrified her; 'there was nothing around, no people—no nothing. It was so isolated; all the bush was a nightmare to me'.[32] In retrospect, Lisa believes she cried every day for the first three years she lived on Flinders Island.

In time Lisa adjusted to island life and is today a well-liked and respected inhabitant. When she looks back on the early years, one of her strongest memories now is of the kindness of the local community. Everyone from the man who delivered bread, to the shopkeepers and the local women, tried to help as much as possible.

> The people on Flinders Island were very good to the workers. Bowmans [the local storekeepers] were wonderful, everyone was good, they were very very good to us. Flinders Island people were wonderful; we've never had an enemy since we've been here.[33]

Stan Bowman, the storekeeper mentioned above, remembers the influx of migrant workers and soldier settlers 'made all the difference to the island, we built a new shop, the roads were sealed then—there was money to be spent'.[34] He remembers that his wife, a very kind person, was prepared to listen and help anyone, and that at the time, he recognised that with new people coming into the island 'it was necessary to give a bit more lee-way'. The soldier settlement that occurred after World War Two brought considerable benefits to Flinders Island, with the enlarged population making possible previously unhoped for services and aiding the island economy.

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[32] ibid.,
[33] ibid.,
[34] Stan Bowman, interview, December 2000.

Nevertheless, adjustments had to be made by both the Flinders Island community and the newcomers. The settlers had to learn to live on an island where shipping and air services, however improved, were still affected by the notorious winds and tides of Bass Strait. This often meant considerable delays in obtaining necessary equipment and commodities previously seen as basic. Most of the settlers had been used to electricity. Diesel driven generators, used throughout the island until 1984, meant that power use could only be intermittent, a factor which affected the work of both men and women. As well, there were adjustments to be made in coming to terms with living in such a small and remote community.

For women the life was hard. They had left family and friends, most of them did not drive and they were isolated on the east coast away from the more settled areas of the island. As well, they often worked on the farm in addition to running their homes. While invited to join organisations like the Country Women's Association, lack of transport made any socialising difficult for them. Many settler families moved on, several returned to New South Wales.

Those that stayed are adamant that the island community was generally helpful and welcoming. They appeared to come to terms with their new home through their labour and their desire to be successful. This, in turn, brought them acceptance within the community. But there were minor problems. The small island community was deeply conscious of its heritage and knowledgeable about what had been done before. With the arrival of the soldier settlers, the islanders had to be prepared to let new voices express new opinions. The newcomers were greeted with genuine good will and kindness, but there remain indications that, from time to time, mild resentment developed, both at the level of assistance the settlers received and at their readiness to express opinions about what was of benefit for the island as a whole.

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For some people who had lived in the Furneaux Group for generations, the right to express opinions about the island was earned through intimate knowledge of the land, of the surrounding seas, of the family and kinship networks spread throughout the islands, and of the past. Old families possessed status, not earned through wealth or culture, although a few old families possessed both, but through endurance. Islanders came from families that stayed generation after generation within the islands.

As Shirley Holloway made clear in her earlier statement, 'you just feel as though it is home and part of you', long term residence in the islands can lead to strong feelings of attachment to place. The study participants, by actively seeking to preserve past stories, are also fostering feelings of identification with the islands. In this way a sense of history and a sense of place are intertwined.

PART TWO

ENTERING THE STORY

CHAPTER THREE
Daughters Within the Home

CHAPTER FOUR
Girls Beyond the Home

CHAPTER FIVE
Young Women Moving Away

CHAPTER THREE

Daughters Within the Home

The young child does not dwell on the passing of time for he/she is not conscious of it in the same way as adolescents and adults.[1] The remembered world of childhood can feel as though it is suspended in time – almost bracketed from the ongoing temporal world. The extraordinary vividness of some childhood memories may be due to this quality of being outside of time. Another quality of childhood memories is their immutability. Yet children often construct memories from a pastiche that might, for example, include direct experience, later only partly understood explanations and their own imaginative embellishment.[2] The resulting memory can be extremely meaningful and full of explanatory power for the reminiscing adult and therefore, difficult to question. Ruth Ray claims that autobiography represents 'a complex interplay of language, memory, culture and the conventions of story telling'.[3] Life history interviews are subject to all the same influences as autobiography, and I would suggest as well, complex issues of identity, particularly when recalling childhood experiences.

Consequently, it is important for the oral historian to recognise that memories of childhood, whether accurate in all particulars or not, are often cherished possessions and an important part of a person's emotional life. The focus then shifts from questions of veracity to interest in why certain events and feelings are recalled and interpreted subjectively in particular ways. Such a focus allows for exploration of the multiple influences that work upon the selection of content for retelling. For example, some research suggests that gender is a powerful influence and that childhood accounts incorporating extensive relationship

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[1] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1977, p. 186.
[2] J.E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999 p. 76.

detail are far more prominent in the life story scripts of women than in those of men.[4]

However, it should be said that the vividness of some childhood memories can also be due to the power of the event or experience and the young child's total absorption in the smell, taste, sight, sound and/or drama of the important happening. What is obvious in listening to people speak about their childhood is the frequency of extrapolation. If several long happy days were spent at the beach one year, then that summer is remembered draped in the intensity of the colours of sun, sand and sea and with a sense of always being at the beach. When attempting to describe the essence of their childhood experience many women in this study used the following or similar phrases: 'it was wonderful—long sunny days at the beach', 'we would go to the beach - there was never any hurry'. In this type of overview, recollection descriptions of long days at the beach were common. In more detailed conversations, it was apparent that, even in summer, children and their parents worked long hard hours and days at the beach, while common in some families, were still special outings. So often in childhood memories the vividness of the overview memory leads to the in-between ordinary, mundane events and times being overlooked.

The descriptions the study participants give of their childhood reveal the existence of a child's world that is long gone—a world that exists only now in the recollections of the elderly. The simple, powerful and occasionally poetic recollections of long ago bush childhoods inevitably lead to a number of questions: Are they at least partially, justifications for a life experience constructed as very special? How much does the Australian cultural myth of the bush help define stories of childhoods lived in remote locations? Could it be that the stories actually do represent another time- a simpler, more limited yet strangely freer period in the history of childhood?

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[3] Ruth E. Ray, 'Feminist readings of older women's life stories', in *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer, 1998, p. 117.
[4] ibid., p. 118.

It must be said that all the women told very similar stories of wandering and playing in the bush. Moreover, in the act of recounting their stories of childhood their faces lit up, they laughed more often, leaned forward, engaged in eye contact, and told more funny stories. As well, they often had considerably less difficulty remembering detail from this time than from other later periods of their life. For them their childhoods were special and they want their experience as children recorded, for they are well aware that childhood is now significantly different. This chapter endeavours to capture the essence of the study participant's childhood in the early part of the twentieth century.

The physical home

The study participants revealed an intense attachment to the memory of their childhood home. Two women still lived in the home of their childhood and could describe its physical evolution over a period of 70 or 80 years. Another lived in her husband's childhood home, the family home of her sister-in-law, another study participant. Others live within walking distance of where they had lived and played as children.

Relph claims that 'home is the foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a community, the dwelling-place of being'.[5] Home means more than the house we live in, it is a place invested with great emotional significance and while we may have many homes, the memory of the home of our childhood and the place of its location provides an important reference point for many people.[6] The childhood home is important because it evokes memories of the place where many people first experience love and affection. Memories of being small, vulnerable, carefree and loved appear to invest the remembered home of childhood with, in Tuan's words, 'enchanted images of the past'.[7] For most of the women in this study the home of their childhood appeared to be surrounded with emotionally significant memories.

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[5] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, Pion Ltd., London, 1976, p. 39.
[6] ibid., p. 37.
[7] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 144.

The earliest settlers in the Furneaux Islands built rough shelters of split palings, thatched roofs and earthen floors. After they had partially cleared and fenced the land, they built stock buildings and put a garden in place. Then they often both extended and renovated the huts or built new homes nearby and used the old huts for storage or extra accommodation.[8] Anecdotal evidence suggests that later in the first decades of the twentieth century, settlers were more likely to construct small two and three-room dwellings, with wooden rather than earthen floors, and with roofs of shingles or iron rather than thatch. Gladys Robinson recalls her grandparents' first house on Flinders Island as being made of split palings and lined with hessian. Her grandparents had followed one of their daughters to Flinders Island from mainland Tasmania in the late nineteenth century and, having built their house on their daughter's land, they lived for some years on the proceeds of mutton-birding and kangaroo hunting.[9]

When the parents of Lily Dargaville married in 1910, they originally built a two-room dwelling. Later as their family grew, eventually to five children, they added another two rooms.[10] Lily Dargaville was still living in this house, built by her parents, when I interviewed her in 1999. The house originally had outside walls of split palings and inside walls lined with hessian over which wallpaper was applied. Two rooms were still lined in this way, making the walls very soft to the touch. As with other old settler cottages, there was no hall or central passageway.

Many of the memories of childhood homes are happy. Gladys Robinson can see Vansittart Island, where she grew up, from the living room window of her present home in Lady Barron. Her father built her childhood home for her

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[8] Pamela Gait and Robin Sim, *The Southern Furneaux Islands Archaeological Survey: Stage 2 of the Prehistoric and Historic Archaeological Site Recording Project in the Furneaux Group.* A Tasmanian Environment Centre Report for the National Estate Grants Program, Commonwealth of Australia, 1992. The authors give a reasonably detailed description of the first type of houses built in the nineteenth century. See also Eric Guiler and Lalage Guiler, 'The settlement of Big Green Island', *THRA P&P,* vol. 39, no. 3, September, 1992. This paper gives a detailed description of the development of Mrs Robinson's home on Big Green Island from the 1865 till 1910.

[9] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April 1998.

[10] Lily Dargaville, interview, April 1999.

mother when they married in 1910 and photographs show a substantial weatherboard cottage with a large verandah. Gladys gave the following description of the living room:

> Well, just imagine a big room with a board floor; wallpaper on the top of the walls and lined on the bottom. Under the window was a big wooden sofa, that mother had made a mattress of mutton-bird feathers for, so that it would be more comfortable to sit on. In the centre of the room was a big wide pine table, which we had to scrub with sand-soap and a brush to keep white. Under a window to the west was a rocking chair that mother always sat in. On the other side of the stove was an armchair that Dad sat in and then there were numerous small wooden chairs. We only had a kerosene lamp.[11]

While Gladys has many pleasant memories of her childhood home, there is little doubt that like most family homes of the time it was very crowded. Seven children and two parents in a three bedroom home meant that family members lived in very close proximity to each other. In winter, when the weather was bad, the family were cooped up together from dusk till dawn, possibly 14 hours. Nor were visitors common; the only regular visitors the children saw were their uncle and aunt and cousins, who were the only other family living on the island. Perhaps not surprisingly, this family found many ways of spending the evenings harmoniously together. For Gladys's family, inside activities included reading aloud and being read to in turn, playing board games, family singing to the piano accordion, listening to the wireless and dancing.

In relation to overcrowding within the home, many of the study participants showed a degree of ambivalence. In retrospect some women wondered how they had all managed to fit in, but no-one mentioned feeling irritated or annoyed at being constantly surrounded by other people. Rather, many of the women suggested directly or indirectly that there were advantages in families living so closely together. According to this view, physical closeness helps the development of close and enduring family ties. Often the women also stated simply that, 'it was different then'. Things that are considered important now, like personal space, were not always important when they were young. They

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[11] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April 1998

were happy because they knew nothing else and because most people they knew lived in a similar way.

Tasmanian housing figures for the year 1911 show that the majority of the population lived in houses with four to six rooms.[12] Few people would have been living in such comparatively large houses in the Furneaux Islands at that time. Even much later than that date, families were still building two to four-room cottages and enlarging them later on if they could. This reflects the fact that the Furneaux Islands were still essentially in a pioneering phase of development.

During the land boom of 1909–12, settlers and speculators from Victoria, King Island and mainland Tasmania, took up land on Flinders Island. That there was a small, but significant in island terms, land rush is clear from the annual report of the Surveyor-General. In the period 1909–10 there were 139 applications for land and 21 708 acres were surveyed in 87 lots. In 1909, Flinders Island had by far the largest number of applications for land of any area in Tasmania.[13] At the same time, old Furneaux Group families were also moving—from Cape Barren Island, the small islands of the Franklin Sound and the islands west of Flinders Island—to take up land on Flinders Island. In the following decades, as the new settlers struggled to establish themselves, they generally focused their energies on the land or business rather than the house. It is not surprising then that for many people on the island, large families crowded together in small cottages appeared quite normal. It was, after all, how nearly everyone lived. Margaret Wheatley, Polly Coster's daughter and Grace Wheatley's daughter-in-law, grew up in a small house with her parents, five brothers and sisters, her grandmother and two uncles:

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[12] *Statistics for the State of Tasmania: Population, for the year 1912–1913, Housing the People, Census, 3 April 1911.* Parl. Paper, no.54, Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1921, p. 67.
[13] *Report for the Department of Lands and Surveys for 1909–10,* (E.A. Counsel, Surveyor-General) Parl. Paper no. 22, Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1910.

Plate 2: *The Ross family home on Vansittart Island – late nineteenth century*

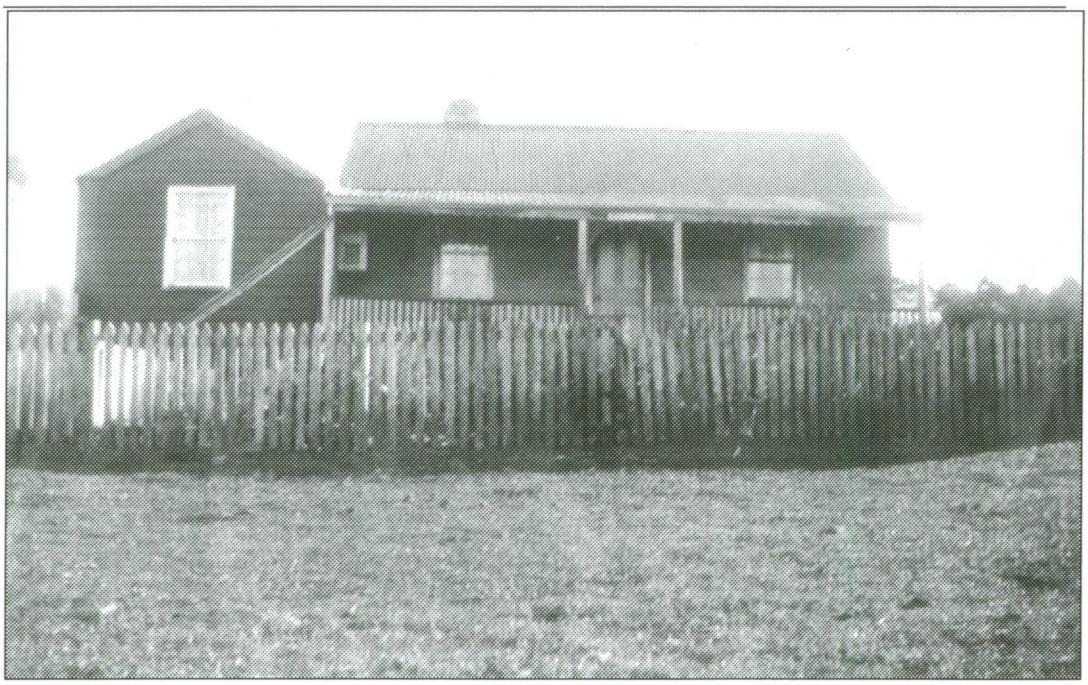

Plate 3: *The Cook family home on Vansittart Island 1920s*

> It was a three bedroom house, but they were all small bedrooms and I said to Mum 'where did we all fit?' She said 'well your grandmother had the little bedroom—which was little more than a broom cupboard—Uncle Jim and Uncle Fred had the middle bedroom. The main bedroom, about 12 foot by 12 foot had a double bed in the corner, four cots and a bassinette'. And I said 'where did you keep the clothes?' 'Oh' she said 'we did have a wardrobe in the lounge-room, but nobody had many clothes and because the children were so close in age, we could just put them on whoever they fitted at the time'.[14]

Janet McCalman has detailed similar instances of crowding in homes in Richmond between the wars. While lack of privacy did not cause serious problems for some of her interviewees, McCalman claims that others remained afflicted with 'pathological sexual modesty for the rest of their lives'.[15] It is difficult to know exactly what the effect was on the women in the Furneaux Islands, but they appear to have taken crowded housing quite casually, both as children and adults, while at the same time feeling some pride in their ability to manage. An obvious difference between rural and metropolitan crowded living quarters is the space and privacy available in country areas once outside of the house. Also, with only distant neighbours, limited entertainment and no electricity, people in the Furneaux Islands were almost totally dependent upon family members for company. This need for social interaction may have ameliorated some of the more irritating consequences of cramped living conditions in the home.

Mother's apprentice

Children in the Furneaux Islands began to work as soon as they were able. Few of the participants' can remember at what age they began do household and farm chores, but most can recall performing simple tasks like collecting sticks for the fires in their pre-school years. By six or seven years of age they usually had a range of responsibilities. In general, there is a difference between the two generations in the study in terms of the amount of work they did. The older

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[14] Margaret Wheatley, interview, May 1999.

[15] Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-class Community 1900–1965*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1984, p. 44.

group born around the World War One and in the 1920s seem to have done more house and farm work than their daughters' generation born in the 1940s and 1950s. However, variations in the amount and type of work done in both generations exist, and the amount of assistance required from children often depended upon how hard pressed the adults within the family were.

There was no mystery about parents' work. Its relevance was clearly understood and the skills required easily demonstrated and quickly learned with regular practice. Parents and children worked side by side, and as their skills increased, children imperceptibly took over more complex tasks from their parents. In general, children seemed to have accepted their role within the working family without question, and felt pride when they took over jobs that had been formerly performed by their parents.

> Learning daily chores came naturally to us. Parents were at the dairy twice a day so it was natural to sweep floors, wash up dishes, set the table for meals etc. The same applied for my children. They had set jobs as we had had. Getting the sticks to start the fires, feeding and watering the chooks.[16]

Adults and children spent long hours working together and could become very close, particularly as the isolation of many families meant that there was little in the way of a children's culture. The closeness of some family members is captured by Gladys Robinson when talking about the family morning routine.

> Dad always got up very early. He took every child up a cup of tea and he would have the fire going and then Mother would have a cup of tea and get up and we'd all have a big bowl of porridge. That was our breakfast with toast if we wanted extra. Then we would all have our jobs to do. The boys would go out with Dad, they'd milk the cow and help in the vegie garden and go and get the wood. It was my job when I was old enough to scrub the floor. My sisters used to make a lot of our clothes. Mother did the washing and we did the ironing. I used to make a lot of bread when I was about ten or eleven, Mother taught me. We used to make our own yeast.[17] We made our own

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[16] Olga Henwood, letter to author, September 1998. 'Chooks': Australian colloquial expression for domestic fowls.

[17] The recipe for this was: boil up hops with salt, vinegar and potatoes and strain, when cool thicken with flour, bottle, adding one sultana to each bottle. After a few days it starts fermenting and can be used.

> butter. Mum would milk the cow, scald the milk, boil it on top of the stove and then put it in big white dishes and the next morning she would skim the cream off. [18]

Gladys Robinson's daughter, Gwen Bailey, described the after school routine of her childhood. Although there are more than 30 years between the two accounts, they are similar in several respects, revealing that styles of integrating child rearing and work may be passed down through generations in families. As a child Gladys had worked closely beside her mother. In turn, her children stayed close by her, sharing tasks and watching her work. The busy, active, kindly parents in both accounts are central to these recollections from childhood.

> First thing when we got home we would go straight to our bedrooms, take off our school clothes and put on our house clothes—old work clothes. And we'd be allowed to grab a drink. Mum always cooked so there'd be something sitting on a plate, and then we'd go and do our jobs. I would get the sticks for the stove or the lounge room fire for the next day, Brian might help Mum with the cow and Pearl would start preparing the vegies or whatever she'd been told to do in the morning for tea. Mum would come in and start organising us or telling us what, you know, if we had homework or she needed a hand to get the tea on the table. Once we had tea there was always a bit of ironing to do with the flat iron. I started on hankies and tea towels. I knitted when I was five or six. If you were knitting you'd be sitting on the couch in the kitchen so wherever Mum was we'd be. So if she was in the kitchen baking, I might be sitting there doing some knitting or Pearl might be crocheting, or we might be drawing or doing homework.[19]

Gwen regards her experience as a child as being substantially different to the childhood of her daughters in the 1960s and 1970s. Even though Gladys was always busy there was no television, and Gwen and her mother worked and talked together. On the other hand, when Gwen and her husband had their children, they were running a business and she remembers that as the business grew life seemed to become busier and busier.[20]

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[18] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April 1998.
[19] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 1998.
[20] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.

Children learned by copying adults, often with little overt instruction. They also learned to master skills as a necessity. Mothers did not set aside times for their children to play at cooking, but rather from the beginning showed them how to perform a basic task and then expected them to do it. As well, homes were smaller without separate adult and children's areas, and mothers performed their work in full view of the whole family who often spent their days and evenings in the kitchen. Perhaps the simplest example of how children absorbed knowledge is the following:

> I think we used to clean up for Mum. I think she was really busy and I think she'd bake the bread and she'd say 'can you clean the table down ready for the next thing?' Or something like that and you'd just automatically do it.[21]

Only one interviewee expressed any resentment in relation to the amount of housework she had to do, possibly because the work she performed related to maintaining the appearance of the home rather than carrying out what she regarded as essential tasks.

The work of children seems to have been largely determined along gender lines. Girls worked alongside their mothers learning housekeeping and the outside work normally expected of women. At times the work of boys and girls overlapped and girls would take on aspects of farm-work usually performed by men or boys. Boys generally had greater freedom to roam, hunt and fish, but they were also more likely to be expected to perform physically hard and unpleasant tasks. Leedham Walker, born in 1905, remembers collecting cow manure to burn in drums in front of open windows to keep flies and mosquitoes away; carting and spreading manure; digging the vegetable garden; keeping the wood box full; milking before and after school; driving the cows to paddocks on the way to school and collecting them on the way home. The last task required time management skills, for if he was late to school he got the cane. If in trouble at school, he might be kept late to write lines and then the cows would be late home for milking and he would be in trouble at home.[22] While girls were

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[21] ibid.,
[22] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999.

usually expected to do more inside work, they often still milked, split kindling and cared for animals.

The volume of work which had to be done on a farm without electricity and modern machinery meant that everyone was involved, children as well as parents. And while the children had to go to school, they almost all helped before and after school and on the weekends. Among the study participants, there seemed little if any resentment regarding the level of work they had to do as children. Their families regarded their contribution as necessary and valuable and they also had before them the example of their parents' unceasing physical labour.

Where families were struggling to become established children seemed to have understood clearly how and what they could contribute. Some boys would regularly provide food by setting snares before school and then bringing the catch home after school. Grace Wheatley's sons fished for the family from a very young age. They each also had a dog and a rifle with which they hunted kangaroos and wallabies. Occasionally they would 'wag school' to go around their snares, and then bring the catch home for tea.[23]

Both girls and boys were given—or in some cases forced to assume—responsibility early. While Olga Henwood was still at primary school one of her sisters failed to make a quick recovery from whooping cough and the doctor advised a seaside holiday. The family arranged to rent a cottage at Lady Barron, a distance of 16 kilometres away for her mother and the three girls. They travelled by horse and dray to the cottage, and having checked out what provisions were required, Olga returned home alone with the horse and dray to collect them. Olga thought 'nothing of it' and regards this as the normal level of responsibility given a seven-year-old in the early 1930s.[24]

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[23] Grace Wheatley, interview, February 1999.
[24] Olga Henwood, interview, August 1998.

Perhaps less acceptable, even in the early 1940s, was Polly Coster's experience of being left to care for her bed-ridden mother, Mrs Treloar, after she had a stroke. Polly was 11 and in her second year at school. From then on Polly only went to school two or three days a week and left at 14, after three and a half years of schooling. The family were poor—Mrs Treloar was a widow with eight children. Once she became ill the older boys needed to work to support the family. Polly, as the only girl, took over nursing her mother and running the household. The family's problems were compounded by Mrs Treloar's German nationality, and as World War Two progressed, the whole family experienced ethnic discrimination from sections of the local community—this was the second time Mrs Treloar had endured a war in Australia. In 1913 she came to Sheffield in Tasmania to visit her uncle, a baker, and then when hostilities broke out between Australia and Germany she was trapped in Tasmania. The following year she married William Treloar. As a German, she experienced active hostility during her early years in Australia. A neighbour had to deliver her first three children, born in Sheffield, as neither a doctor nor midwife would attend her, due to her nationality.

The question arises as to whether, during World War Two, Polly was left to care for her paralysed mother with the help of her brothers because of her mother's nationality, the family's poverty, the stress of the war, or the lack of available social services. Or in fact, a combination of the above. It is an experience that is at odds with the commonly reiterated claim of other interviewees that the island community members cared for each other.

The family moved so the boys could work on a large property where they acquired a house rent-free. The house was pre-fabricated and had been lying on the ground, and when assembled the walls were covered in cow manure. Polly and her brothers scrubbed it off and eventually painted the lounge room when they saved up enough money for paint. Most of the boys were working on the farm, and Polly's day went like this:

> They used to get up at half past three in the morning, get the stove going and one would get the cows in and they would come back and have a cup of tea and probably a bit of toast before they left for the dairy. When I got up I'd cook a lot of porridge, feed Mum, wash her down a bit and one would come back from the dairy and help put her on the bedpan, because she wasn't tall but she was fat, and I used to roll her off the bedpan, and if you missed the bedpan, you had to change the bed. I mean my younger brother and I had to leave for school by 8 am [to ride to Blue rocks to catch the school bus][25]

This seems an unusual level of responsibility to be given a child even in the 1940s. The family's social and physical isolation may have contributed to the situation. It may also have been the case that there were community members concerned about the situation but unable or unwilling to take meaningful steps to help. What is interesting is Polly's knowledge and understanding of what was required of her in nursing her mother and caring for the household. It must also be recognised that while her mother was bed-ridden and paralysed, she was nevertheless mentally alert and able to speak, and presumably would have been able to advise and support her daughter.

Play and entertainment

Most families worked hard and expected their children to work as well. Nevertheless the majority of families seem to have set aside time for fun and relaxation. Many people had a range of activities they took part in for pleasure and companionship. The limitations of daily life made it easy to develop a variety of home-based entertainment with little outside competition. Few people had very close neighbours and even when they did, there was no certainty that they would be socially compatible. During the long winter nights, families congregated in one room for warmth, company and light. After the advent of wireless sets they would often spend evenings listening to music and serials, with the adults determining what programmes were suitable for children. In most families, wireless listening was controlled so as not to interfere with 'family time', in much the same way as later generations of parents have tried to control their children's television viewing.

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[25] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.

Children took advantage of any opportunity to create unusual and imaginative playing spaces. Sisters Olga Henwood and Heather Willis swam and made bridges and boats in the large pools made by the removal of huge tree stumps on their parents' property. While some individual girls roamed as freely as boys did, generally girls appear to have played closer to home. Margaret Purdon, one of Grace Wheatley's 11 living children, remembers her brothers as being far more active and adventurous in their play:

> ....we entertained ourselves. The boys used to go setting roo snares for the kangaroos and they'd be gone all day.
> *What did the girls do?*
> We just helped around the house, we had one bike between the lot of us and we used to play around I suppose.
> *Did you learn how to set snares and things too?*
> Yes, we knew how to do it, but we just weren't as interested. No I didn't like being around the kangaroo much.[26]

While examining different play patterns of boys and girls and their use of play materials, Birkeland-Corro also found that girls were generally less likely to roam far from home than boys.[27] Whether girls were kept or chose to stay closer to home for safety reasons, or because they might be required to help their mothers, is difficult to determine. Nell Cook, whose mother died when she was three, was one young girl who led an exciting outdoor life:

> Basically I spent most of my time outside. . . As I grew older I'd walk miles in the bird nesting season to see how many sparrow or starling eggs or whatever I could accumulate for the season and I would end up with hundreds . . . You know, there must be something that looks after kids because the brushes I've had with snakes. See the tea-trees over there, they've only got a comparatively small trunk and no leaves if they're growing in with other trees. And there was a sparrow nest up in the top of it and I was nearly at the top and there was about six inches of snake hanging out of it. So you can imagine I went down the trunk of that tree a lot faster than I went up...There was a post at one of the gateways and there was always a starling nest in that, and you know, you sort of had to get your head right over the opening to see what was down there, and I got my nose stuck right down it and here's this snake right down in the bottom, so I left that one too.[28]

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[26] Margaret Purdon, interview, February 1999.
[27] Janice Birkeland-Corro, *Child's Play: History of Playground Design*,. St Mary's, http://www.australiat.uts.edu.au/ARCHIVE/SSTMO2.shtml
[28] Nell Cook, interview, October 1998.

Plate 4: *Picnic to Palana, Flinders Island, 1920s. Nell Cook second from right of picture.*

Plate 5: *Olga Henwood and Heather Willis (nee Haworth) at Ranga 1920s*

In the Furneaux Islands snakes are a constant fact of life.[29] All the interviewees had had several brushes with snakes, both in their childhood and their adult lives. Snake stories abound—particularly relished are those concerning snakes in the house. There are also numerous tales of close brushes with snakes, accounts of surviving bites without medical aid, stories of surviving several bites with medical aid, and sometimes tragic stories of deaths. Polly Coster, sister to seven brothers, also spent a considerable time playing in the bush, leading to brushes with snakes whilst collecting eggs from bird's nests:

> We used to climb trees and take bird eggs, sparrow eggs and this was great - shin up a tree, grab the eggs, pop them in your mouth, if you had a pocket you'd pop them in your pocket and hope they didn't break . . . We used to carry a nail with us, break the end of the egg so we could suck them . . . another time I pulled out a snake, only a little snake, well that put me off taking sparrow eggs for a long time, but it was good doing it.[30]

Stories about snakes, along with stories of the sea, early struggles to survive, and colourful personalities, contribute to a sense of a special island cultural identity. However, past snake stories have a particular immediacy and seem timeless as they differ little from present-day accounts of brushes with snakes. They are stories that can be enjoyed by all generations and with which everyone can identify.

It is hardly surprising that island children would spend a lot of time at the beach and sometimes appear to have, as in Noreen McCarthy's case, an affinity with water. Each year the McCarthy family, as with other island families, moved across to the outer islands for the mutton bird season. They birded on Big Dog Island.

> We used to go across in a 17-foot dinghy most of the time. Sometimes we got towed over with the Robinson's boat . . . but

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[29] Snakes are far more common in the islands than on the Tasmanian mainland. Three snakes exist in the Furneaux Islands, tiger snakes, copperheads and white-lipped snakes. The tiger snake is particularly common and preys on mutton bird chicks in season. In summer sightings are common and a reasonable level of care is required. However, all are generally timid and bites are relatively rare—about one a year. Information re number of bites obtained from Flinders Island Multi-Purpose Centre.

[30] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.

> we used to row a lot. Dad used to row with two oars in the middle and Mum and I had one each. It was easy, about a mile and a half to where we went. We went to the bottom of the island.
> *And did you have everything with you?*
> Chooks piled right on top of everything, squawking as the spray went over them...We were never scared, nothing scared you. I mean the boat would be rolling over and dipping the sides, but we were never scared as kids... the little boats, the closer you are to the water, the less afraid you are. Big boats you're more afraid in. But you seem to be part of the elements when you're in a little dinghy...There is nowhere to fall—you're just part of the sea.
> *Could you swim?*
> Oh yes, we lived in the water. We were good swimmers. Float too, Dad used to float rocks on me to see how many I could carry. [1]

Plate 6: *Jan Henning and father at Greenglades 1940s*

Lily Dargaville played all the usual childhood games of the time with other children—knucklebones, hopscotch, collecting birds eggs, tree climbing. She also liked to play on her own a lot, leading her mother to tell her she was unsociable.

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[1] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.

Sometimes she would wander down to the beach and sleep on the sand at the edge of the water for hours.[32]

Many, although by no means all, of the interviewees were taught to sail. Gladys Robinson grew up on Vansittart Island and her father taught all his children to sail from an early age:

> Oh yes, we were all made to sail, Dad made us all learn to sail a boat . . . we all swam and when I see them around now in their smart little speedboats and things, I think—well I think, that's alright but you're not sailors. [33]

Noreen McCarthy also learnt to sail young:

> We used to go sailing too—old boats. When I was a real little kid little boats never used to have engines, all sails . . . [we learnt] how to keep clear of the boom and not get the gaff caught up and all that and keep hands free, not get your ropes tangled. No we could sail an ordinary little boat. I wouldn't say we could sail a yacht, although when we were kids a friend of ours built a yacht at Badger Corner and we used to go out in that sometimes but I never sailed that. We used to row everywhere. We used to go out in dinghies, no life jackets, nothing. No one ever was afraid of the water, and we knew how to row and we knew how to scull if we lost a paddle. [34]

However, once the children went inside at night and jobs and school homework were done, recreation became family centred rather than child centred. Because of the family's isolation on Vansittart Island, Gladys Robinson had only 18 months of schooling and her parents taught her to read and write. Once a month the *Examiner*[35] arrived by boat from Launceston and for a time her task was to start at the beginning and read each day's newspaper aloud to the family at night. When she finished them, the next month's supply was usually due to arrive. Her parents also read aloud to the family and she remembers that they gradually worked their way through the complete set of Dickens' novels. There was little money to buy books, so they were obtained by barter. Her father

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[32] Lily Dargaville, interview, April 1999.
[33] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April 1998.
[34] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.
[35] The Launceston daily newspaper.

would send a barrel of mutton-birds to a friend in Launceston and he would send the barrel back full of books. [36]

Most of the interviewee's families also played board games and cards, often including bridge, and some families regularly sang around the piano or to the piano accordion.[37] All members of the family listened to sport on the radio, particularly cricket, with children enjoying it as much as parents. In 1932 Olga Henwood's parents bought a Marconi phone radio with headphones and then split the headphones so that Olga and her sister Heather could have one each and listen to the cricket. Later they had an Argosy Radio that stood on the floor in a wooden case. Penfriends were also popular among children: Olga had 30 to 40 pen friends from all around the world and collected and sent stamps, shells and Killiecrankie diamonds.[38]

Gwen Bailey, Gladys Robinson's daughter, grew up just out of Lady Barron in the 1940s and 1950s, and remembers life as being more cohesive without the separate child, youth and adult cultures she sees now:

> There was no TV and people would come from houses around. One fellow played the guitar and we'd sing. It was a different lifestyle, I mean take music, for instance, we didn't have our own music, we learnt what our parents learnt. We sang songs that Dad played. Today we've got our own music, our kids have got theirs and our grandchildren have got theirs. [39]

While families in the Furneaux Islands often struggled to succeed in a difficult environment, this fact does not seem to have reduced their enjoyment or participation in whatever entertainment and pleasure was available. The isolation of families from each other meant that much of this was of a simple and home-based nature. However, at times there were larger community gatherings, when almost all the inhabitants of the islands would come together. The high

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[36] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April 1998.
[37] Interviews with Olga Henwood, Gladys Robinson, Mary Walker & Nell Cook specifically detail these family activities.
[38] Olga Henwood, letter to author, September 1998. Killiecrankie Diamonds are a local form of topaz found on Flinders Island.
[39] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 1998.

point of community life occurred over the Christmas—New Year holiday when three separate sporting clubs held their annual sports meetings. The Whitemark Club's meeting was held on Boxing Day, the Emita Club's on New Year's Day and the Lady Barron Club's on a suitable day between the other two, usually a Saturday.[40] The Emita and Whitemark meetings were largely horse events with some athletics, while the Lady Barron meeting consisted mainly of aquatic events, sailing, swimming, diving and one event which interviewees remember well—'walking the greasy pole'. The poles in question were positioned out over the sea from the pier and covered in grease. Entrants in the event had to walk to the end, turn and walk back without slipping off into the sea.[41] It seems most participants landed in the sea fairly quickly, amid much laughter from onlookers. The three days of meetings over the Christmas holidays were greatly enjoyed by islanders, with many families attending all three days. Children particularly enjoyed them and Mary Walker described them as among the 'happiest days of your life.[42]

The culture of separate entertainment for children and adults does not seem to have existed in the Furneaux Islands during the time of this study. Children accompanied their parents to all entertainments and other outings. They went to dances, where they often slept under the forms down the side of the hall; to evenings spent with friends and neighbours; to the cricket; to funerals and to church. While they could participate, they were expected to do so in ways, which did not disturb the adults present. Usually benign parents could be very strict about certain infringements of what was seen as desirable child behaviour. Swearing was especially frowned upon. Nell Cook's father only ever hit her once when he overheard her swear at her brother while playing table tennis.[43] Olga Henwood and Heather Willis's parents were also very strict about swearing and

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[40] Jim Davie, *Latitude Forty: Reminiscences of Flinders Island,* The National Press, Melbourne, 1980.
[41] Mary Walker, interview, August 1998. Nell Cook, interview, October 1998.
[42] ibid.,
[43] Nell Cook, interview, October 1998
[43] Olga Henwood, letter to author, September 1998. Heather Willis, interview, December 1998.

the girls were taught to 'speak properly to each other and to our parents and this was policed by our parents'.[44]

Children were disciplined in a variety of ways. Physical punishment was widely accepted and practised, although parents differed markedly in their willingness to use it. Some parents never hit their children or did so on one occasion as with Nell Cook's father. Gladys Robinson was never hit by either of her parents; nor was Noreen McCarthy. In some families, one parent only would smack and quite often it was the mother. Other forms of punishment were common, for example, being made to sit still on a chair or write out lines.[45] Many of the women remember their parents as being very strict, particularly about doing jobs properly, speaking correctly and not being cheeky, but in general they do not seem to have been a group of children who caused their parents much angst. However, retribution when they did step out of line, could be swift:

> I remember another incident when my brother, two years older than me was teaching me my lessons. You see he asked me to spell 'dog', of course I knew how to spell it, but just because he was teaching me I wasn't going to. He knew what I was like and Dad came across when this tussle was going on and picked me up took me out and gave me a good spanking with his hand. I could spell 'dog' after that I can tell you.[46]

Telling lies was a serious misdemeanour:

> My eldest, my own eldest child, didn't matter what trouble he was in, he was so truthful. If he said he didn't do a thing, I could depend on that. He'd get into trouble, he knew he'd get into trouble, but it would be less, of course, than if you told a lie. But I used to tell lies when I was a little thing. When we lived on the island there was very little fruit and Dad and Mum would get a case of apples down, or something, and that was a marvellous thing to happen, These beautiful eating apples, you imagine—you could smell them all through the house, they were so lovely. Well I collected some of these apples and put them under my pillow, and my father used to pop me into bed and this night he said 'have you got apples in here?' 'No Dad'. But they smelt lovely. I was going to eat all these apples when I

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[44] Olga Henwood, letter to author, September 1998. Heather Willis, interview, December 1998.
[45] ibid.,
[46] Mary Walker, interview, August 1998.

> got into bed . . . Well that ended up in me having no apples and a really good hiding. [47]

The parents of the study participants seem to have taken seriously their responsibilities in relation to their children's moral development. On the one hand the children experienced a great deal of freedom. This freedom allowed them to mix and mingle with adults in a wide variety of settings, and yet maintain a distinct world of child play largely free from the supervision of adults. On the other hand, parents dealt firmly with their children's transgressions. The child-rearing literature at the time places responsibility for the moral development of children firmly on the shoulders of their parents. In general, it is quite prescriptive regarding the methods parents should choose to discipline their children and train them into socially acceptable ways of behaviour.[48]

However, it is difficult to determine from the oral accounts whether the parents of the study participants read any of the child-rearing literature directed towards them at the time. None of their children remember them doing so, but then it is unlikely they would have known. The impact of 'professional experts' upon child-rearing practices is more obvious in the 1940s and 1950s when the children in this chapter themselves became parents and occasionally disagreed with their mothers over child-rearing methods.

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During the period of this thesis young girls usually grew up within large families which were struggling to become established in the islands. Contact with other children outside of the family was not easily maintained and children were dependent upon siblings and other family members for company. They also

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[47] ibid.,

[48] There is a considerable amount of literature directed towards parents at this time. Some examples are: Mrs. J. Langton Hewer, *Our Baby,* John Wright and Sons, Bristol, 1932; Helen Deem & Nora P. Fitzgibbon, *Modern Mothercraft,* Royal New Zealand Society for Women and Children, Dunedin, 1945; Mrs. Sydney Frankenburg, *Common Sense in the Nursery,* Penguin, U.K. 1922;

engaged in solitary play and creatively used their surroundings to extend their range of play. At the same time both girls and boys appear to have absorbed skills and knowledge deemed to be useful for them in their future adult roles. Discipline was strict and children were expected to both, know their place and to willingly help in the family work. However, once these expectations of suitable child behaviour were met, children were allowed considerable freedom to roam at will. It is the freedom and carefree nature of their childhood that the study participants particularly remember. Although some participants experienced poverty, hardship and sometimes grief, these women regard their childhood as belonging to another world—a simpler, more relaxed and less restricted world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Girls Beyond the Home

While the island family modelled, and sometimes enforced, appropriate expectations and conduct for children, in the early twentieth century girls and boys were, nevertheless, exposed to a wide range of experiences and influences from outside of the home. Unlike their city counterparts, they could not run messages for their mothers or take part in the children's street culture that was common in urban areas of the time.[1] On Flinders Island, distance between families meant that it was difficult for a distinct child culture to exist. However, children could and did accompany adults as they went about their everyday business and they also went with their parents to all adult venues of entertainment. From babyhood, children went to dances, parties, sporting events, church, fishing and mutton-birding. As well, living on a small island with few facilities meant that children were exposed to travel early in their lives. Poor families moved around between Tasmania, Victoria and the islands with their children, in search of seasonal work. Other island residents had to leave at regular intervals and their children often went with them. Older children travelled alone back and forwards to Melbourne, Launceston and Hobart by boat, and with the advent of air travel, very small children regularly travelled unaccompanied. [2]

In attempting to address the influences that affected children outside of the home, I examine several different areas. After providing an overview of the development of public schooling, I move on to first explore the different expectations held by parents and teachers with regard to schooling. Conflict

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[1] See for example McCalman's depiction of street culture in Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-class Community 1900–1965*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1984, p. 65.

[2] Nell Cook, interview, October 1988. At the age of three Nell Cook accompanied her mother, who needed medical treatment, to Launceston. When her mother unexpectedly died Nell was placed in the care of 14-year-old Mary Walker, who was returning to the islands from school, for the boat trip home.

between the role of the growing girl within the house, on the farm, on the mutton-bird islands, and in the school did occur. Not surprisingly, there was often a clash between the time frames of parents, accustomed to flexible and seasonal work, and teachers, trained to inculcate punctuality and regular routines in their pupils. The type of education parents could expect their children to receive from the private tutors commonly employed before the arrival of public schools is also described, using the experience of one child living on Vansittart Island. The difference in style between the older system of private tutors and the new state or public schools is clear.

Secondly, I reflect on what the experiences of being sent away to school and of sending one's children away meant to the women interviewed. Some women recall feeling both homesickness and a sense of dislocation, as children. As mothers, some felt a chronic long-term sense of loss while their children were away. The emotions involved could lead to complete reappraisal of island living.

Thirdly, for many of the women, one of the most significant events of their childhood was the annual mutton-bird harvest. Therefore, I present a brief overview of the historical, economic and cultural importance of mutton-birding to island life, before considering the impact of this event on those who took part. In the 1920s, 30s and 40s, mutton-birding was the high point of community life. It is, therefore, a central component of the life histories of many of the study participants.

Finally, some provision was made for the interests of school-age girls through the establishment of various clubs and organisations. Inevitably, distance placed these possibilities beyond the range of many of the participants. I use the example of the Girls Art Club to provide a sense of these organisations, before moving on to explore the effect of regular travel on the women as young girls.

The background to public schooling in the Furneaux Group

Ideas about the value of education and appropriate styles of delivery have never been static, and the accounts of schooling given by women born about 1920 reveal differences from those given by women born a decade later. Their daughters, born in the 1940s and early 1950, provide yet again, a significantly different picture of schooling. While schooling changed in line with social mores, some issues, like the question of whether or not to send children away for secondary schooling, continued to trouble both parents and students throughout the period 1910 to 1960.

Exploring the background to schooling in the islands reveals the impact of the 1930s Depression and World War Two on the education of children. The poverty and disadvantage of some island families at these times is captured in the school record books. It emerges more clearly from these documents than it does from the oral testimonies. To some extent this may be a question of perception. Teachers might consider bare feet, probably correctly, a sign of poverty. Children could perceive them as the norm and wearing shoes as something saved for exceptional occasions. Also as Joy Damousi points out, memories are constantly revised and a life history is a continual work in progress. Constructing one, therefore, involves not only remembering but forgetting—deletion of aspects of the story that, at a later date, are unwanted.[3] There is no denial of poverty by the participants, in fact many women stressed that their families were poor, rather there is, in the oral testimonies, no sense of poverty affecting their wellbeing as children.

The women born at the end of the 1930s and during the 1940s and starting school therefore, towards the end or after World War Two, were the most likely among the participants to consider education in relation to their future careers. They benefited from the post-war improvement in the Australian economy, and changing views about education for women. At the same time, State concerns

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[3] Joy Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-war Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Vic., 2001, p. 3.

about further education for children living in rural and remote areas, combined with raised parental expectations, led to the establishment of the Whitemark Area School in 1948. But it was not until 1972 that the school was upgraded to a district high school. Until that date parents still had to decide whether or not to send their 14 or 15 year-old child away for further schooling.[4]

The first school established in the Furneaux Group was in 1871 on Cape Barren Island. This school had been requested by the Aboriginal community who sought the help of the Anglican Church in pushing their claims for a school for their children. The church became a powerful advocate on behalf of the Aboriginal community with the Tasmanian government, and lobbied for the establishment of the school. The Tasmanian Anglican Church saw the existence of a mixed-race community in the Bass Strait Islands as an opportunity to expand its missionary endeavours. Anne Morgan states that in their eagerness to stress the urgent needs of the community, clergymen misrepresented its members as 'illiterate heathens'.[5] The majority had at least basic literacy skills and practiced a simple form of Christianity. While the Tasmanian government was committed to a state system of non-sectarian, non-discriminatory education, in this instance they entered into an agreement with the church, that later led to teachers being appointed as missionary teachers. At no time was it envisaged that European children would attend this school.

As land became available for lease and freehold, Europeans began to outnumber the Aboriginal inhabitants, but they were still too dispersed to make the establishment of a government school possible. Therefore, parents put in place a range of alternative strategies to provide their children with basic education. Malcolm Vick suggests that this was quite common during the nineteenth

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[4] Furneaux Museum, Album 63, Schools and Education: 'Flinders Island District High School', compiled by Anna Stewart, Acting Principal, 1995.
[5] Anne Morgan, Aboriginal Education in the Furneaux Islands 1798-1986, Masters thesis, University of Tasmania, November 1986, p. 52.

century and that generally parents tried to provide their children with at least basic literacy skills and often much more.[1]

How they received their education before schools existed in the islands has a bearing on their later expectations of schooling for their children. Table 4 shows how the parents of 11 of the participants were educated. It reveals that as long as public education was inaccessible, parents were prepared to try a range of options to ensure that their children received some education.

Plate 7: *Cape Barren School late nineteenth century.*

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[1] Malcolm Vick, 'Their paramount duty: Parents and schooling in the mid-nineteenth century', in *Family, School and State in Australian History,* eds M.R. Theobold & R.J.W. Selleck, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, p.178.

Table 1. *Education of Study Participants and their Parents.**

	Participant	Mother	Father
1.	Attended school on Flinders Island from 10–13 years	German, no details, literate	Primary schooling in Tasmania
2.	Correspondence lessons, then 3 years of school till Grade 6	Unknown, literate	Schooling in Melbourne, level uncertain
3.	Grade 7 Whitemark Primary School	Private tutors on outer island	Grammar school in England
4.	Whitemark Primary School from 9–15 years of age	Taught by parents on Flinders Island	Taught by parents in islands, possibly also school in Northern Tasmania
5 & 6.	Primary schools on Flinders Island. Secondary schooling in Launceston.	Private tutors then Whitemark Primary School	Grammar school. England till 16
7.	Primary school till age 14	Some schooling in Hobart then tutors on outer island	Some schooling in Tasmania before arriving in islands.
8.	Correspondence lessons from Hobart to Grade 7	Lived and attended school in Launceston	Taught at home by mother on Flinders Island
9.	Private tutor for 18 months on outer island, also taught by parents	Some primary schooling before moving to Flinders Island	Attended school Hobart till age 10, then tutored on outer island.
10.	Taught at home then 2 years primary schooling. Secondary schooling in Launceston till age 15.	Primary education, North-West coast of Tasmania	English, schooling unknown, educated
11.	Attended primary school Flinders Island till Grade 7	Private tutors on outer island	Attended school in Launceston, level unknown

*Table compiled from the oral testimonies of 11 women (two are sisters) in the study who grew up in the islands. Data from women who moved to the islands after completing their schooling, and that of daughters of participants have not been included.

The push for a public school came from parents, but also from government officials. In 1908 the Tasmanian government sent J. E. C. Lord, Commissioner of Police, to report on the state of the islands. Lord's report was well researched and considered and had a wide brief. He reported extensively on the Cape Barren School, noting disapprovingly that one white child was attending the school. On enquiry he had found that three white children had been 'adopted'

by Aboriginal families.[7] Although he recorded that the children were 'well treated and in good health', Lord was a man of his time and found the practice 'objectionable'. He pointed out that there were 52 European children living in the islands who lacked access to government schooling. Lord believed the major difficulty in providing a school was that the children were spread all over the island, with no more than a handful at any one place, other than Whitemark where 29 children were living. He suggested two half-time schools in different localities be established with perhaps an itinerant teacher travelling by boat to reach the isolated children at either end of the island.[8]

While they waited for the Tasmanian Education Department to make a decision on a school, families continued to put in place intermediary measures. Those families who remained on the outer islands could not envisage their children attending a school within the islands, even if one became established, and therefore tended to hire tutors. But on Flinders Island the situation was different and where a few children were grouped together, families tended to hire a teacher and start small private schools.

The men who became private teachers were generally well educated but lacked any teaching qualifications. The Furneaux Group had always offered refuge for people with undesirable histories or personal problems. Others found within the islands a chance to 'drop out' of the confines of urban late Victorian society.[9] The outstanding characteristic of people who taught children in the islands privately was their level of education. Whatever their teaching prowess, they were generally far better educated than the teachers working in the state primary system at the time, who had mainly completed six years of primary schooling

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[7] The term 'adopted' was loosely used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact no 'adoptions' constituted legal and binding contracts until the *Adoption of Children Act* of 1920 was passed.

[8] *Report upon the State of the Islands, the Condition and Mode of Living of Half-Castes, the Existing Methods of Regulating the Reserve and Suggesting Lines for Future Administration'*, (J.E.C. Lord), Parl. Paper no. 57, p. 6, Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1908.

[9] Eric Guiler & Lalage Guilder, 'The settlement of Big Green Island', *THRA P&P*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1992, p. 133. This paper mentions a nephew of Mrs Robinson of Green Island who gave up a Hobart law practice to spend most of the rest of his life in the islands during which time he tutored many island children.

before entering the pupil teacher system.[10] While there were many people who tutored children on a casual basis, sometimes for fairly short periods of time, Hugo Gottlieb and Walter Bing Lyall both taught island children for many years and are well remembered.

Gladys Robinson grew up on Vansittart Island, the sixth child in a family of eight children. Both Gladys's parents read extensively and they taught all their children to read and write. Before bed the family would read collectively for about an hour. Each night two or three children would read a chapter each of the current book aloud and in three to four nights the book would be finished. The reading was always followed by a family discussion about the story-line and the characters. In 1929, at the age of 11, Gladys was able to attend a small private school on Vansittart Island, run for the children of the two resident families by Hugo Gottlieb. Originally from Denmark, Gottlieb had a drinking problem and his family suggested he spend some time travelling. From England he travelled to Australia and finally arrived in the Furneaux Group. The schoolroom built for Gottlieb was also his living quarters. In winter the children would walk across the island in bare feet to keep their boots from getting wet. When they got to school they were allowed to warm their feet by a little wood stove before putting on their socks and boots. At lunch time Hugo Gottlieb accompanied them home for a hot lunch which was part of his employment contract. Gladys's tuition consisted of mental arithmetic—they had little equipment—history and geography, as well as a considerable amount of reading and composition writing, usually on island or historical subjects. Her education was cut short when she was admitted to Launceston General Hospital with acute appendicitis. The children imitated Gottlieb's accent behind his back but they liked and respected him.[11]

Mary Walker had lessons at home with her mother before beginning lessons with Walter Bing Lyall at the age of nine. There were only two children being taught by Lyall, and she remembers that after lunch he would tell them that if

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[10] Derek Phillips, *Making More Adequate Provision: State Education in Tasmania, 1839–1985*, Education Department of Tasmania, Hobart, 1985, p.47.

they finished off their work quickly he would read to them. He was apparently a wonderful reader and the children would sit mesmerised for up to an hour while he read aloud.[12]

Walter Bing Lyall was English from an upper middle class background. He held an Arts and a Law degree from Cambridge. An alcoholic, he was sent to Tasmania and ended up in the islands. He is remembered with great affection as a 'real' gentleman. After his death, his sister wrote to Iola Fowler about his 'wasted life'. Iola Fowler did not share the sentiment; for her, his valuable contribution to the education of many island children meant his life had been anything but wasted.[13]

The opening of the first non-segregated school in the islands at Whitemark, did not mean that the era of private tutoring and small private schools automatically came to an end. Children were still scattered all over the islands, roads were almost non-existent and cars still in the future, making several small schools necessary and so it was not until the 1920s that small private schools finally disappeared.

The Whitemark School was officially opened on Thursday July 5th 1911. The first teacher was Miss J.B. Adams. Unlike later teachers, Miss Adams did not record daily events within the school. However, special events were recorded and it appears activities associated with the school provided some excitement for Flinders Island inhabitants in the first few months of the school's operation. Early in December 1911 a school concert was held in the school to raise money. Children sang and performed drill exercises and various adults performed vocal and instrumental items. Later in the same month, there was a combined prize giving, school feast, Christmas tree and gifts. Although the school enrolment was small, Miss Adams noted that 'Quite a hundred (men, women and children)

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[11] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[12] Mary Walker, interview, August 1998.
[13] Furneaux Museum, Lyall Folder no. 23: Stan Blyth, 'Memories of Walter Lyall'; Iola Fowler, 'The Walter Lyall Scrapbook'.

were present and all thoroughly enjoyed the Christmas tree. Mr. William Holt Senior acted as Father Christmas'.[14] The Whitemark School had commenced not only as a centre for learning, but also as a centre for community family activities.

An excitement of a different nature was provided inadvertently by Miss Adams a few weeks later, when she became lost in the bush for three and a half days. The school was closed from Monday 15 January to Thursday 18 January. It appears probable from the school closure dates that she was lost over the weekend, Monday and part of Tuesday, in which case she took only one or two days to recover.[15] George Smith recalls Julia Adams; she boarded with his parents and asked him to make the opening speech at a school concert at the age of four. She coached him for the occasion and he remembers her as very kind and understanding. He does not hold such positive memories of the next teacher who he maintains was cruel to children who had difficulty learning. One small child who had to walk five kilometres to school had chillblains on his hand and would get the cane for any mistakes he made.[16] Appropriate school discipline was one area that parents and teachers often held different views about, as was to become clear in later interactions between them.

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[14] Whitemark School Record Book, 1911-1930, held at Whitemark District High School.
[15] ibid.,
[16] George Smith, *By Jingo!! By George,* monograph published by author, December 1998, copy in the possession of Olga Henwood.

Plate 8: *Miss Adams (n.d) sent to Olga Henwood sometime after Miss Adams left Flinders Island. Miss Adams is believed to have become a missionary.*

Parent and teacher expectations regarding education

The succeeding years, until 1960, were to bring considerable change in the expectations of individual parents, and the community as a whole, in relation to education for children. In general, the community supported the school and the other small primary schools, which opened later on Flinders Island. This should not disguise the fact that there were often very real differences between the views held by some parents and teachers on the place of education in rural life. Many parents now able to send their children to school had never attended school themselves. As we have seen, they usually had some education but this had often been received from their parents and acquired in time, which could be spared from farming work.[17] The time and effort given to learning was,

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[17] Phillips, *Making More Adequate Provision,* p. 143. Phillips states that in 1901, 74% of rural Tasmanians were literate. While this was a lower figure than for other Australian States

therefore, unavoidably haphazard. These parents could find the school system rigid and inflexible. They were also likely to find the actual amount of time the children had to spend in school surprisingly long, compared to their own experience.

Teachers also had to come up against parents who were also often unused to the type of institutional discipline common at the time. However parents disciplined their children at home, some resisted the right of strangers to punish their children. Generally this resistance took a passive form, and a pressing domestic or farming reason would be presented to the teacher for removing the pupil from school following the administration of corporal punishment. Both the Whitemark and Lady Barron school record books document instances of parents, living beyond the distance of compulsory attendance, removing their children temporarily from school following the child being disciplined by the teacher. Occasionally resistance was less passive and irate parents, often mothers, would confront teachers over the issue of discipline. This resistance to the authority of teachers may have been partly the result of parents being unused to formal schooling. There are no recorded instances, for example, of private tutors using corporal punishment. But the waiving of compulsory attendance for children living more than two miles from the school handed parents a useful tool with which to express their displeasure.[18]

The *Education Act* of 1885 had increased the difficulty for those minority of parents who sought to avoid sending their children to school. After 1885 children were expected to attend school between the ages of seven and 13 years, and in 1912 the leaving age was raised to 14 years.[19] Children who lived more than two miles from a school were exempted from compulsory attendance, but in most instances families living further than two miles still sent their children to

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Phillip's quotes Johnstone, the government statistician, who pointed out in 1891 Tasmania had the greatest proportion of people aged over 65 years and this affected literacy rates.

[18] Whitemark School Record Book, 1911-1930; Lady Barron School Record Book 1941-1948, held at Whitemark District High School..

[19] Clifford Reeves, *A History of Tasmanian Education*, vol. 1, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1935, p. 94.

school.[20] However, this provision meant that compulsory attendance was probably not a great issue for farming and itinerant labouring families who often lived more than two miles from the school. It enabled them, if necessary, to keep their children at home to help with farm and domestic work. While families living more than two miles from the school may have used the exemption clause for their own ends in times of family crisis or heavy seasonal farming work, they still appear to have mostly tried to send their children to school. But distance was inevitably a factor in school attendance. A six-hour school day, in addition to perhaps two to three hours spent walking to and from school along bush tracks, presented a difficult, and in times of bad weather, insurmountable problem.

Teachers sent by the Education Department to staff the government schools on Flinders Island usually stayed two or three years, although a few stayed much longer. Almost always they opened their initial report in the record book with the date the school opened that year, the number of students present, the number enrolled, a list of their requirements, and occasionally a comment on the children.

A few new teachers expressed something of what they thought of their new surroundings. B. Cook, Headmaster of the Lady Barron School during 1945 and 1946, began his first entry in the School Record Book with, 'the environment is altogether strange to me—some children are extremely backward...the locality is very windy and the school is built in an ideal spot to get the full force of the wind'.[21] Others started off more positively. A. F. Carrington-Leach commented after his first day, 'I feel sure I am going to enjoy being at Whitemark, and I like the class of scholar attending this school. Each child was given a cup of tea at dinner hour'.[22]

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[20] ibid., p. 78.
[21] Lady Barron School Record Book, 1941-1948.
[22] Whitemark School Record Book, 1911-1930.

Whatever their private thoughts on their surroundings, the entries of teachers in the school record books were checked and signed regularly by School Inspectors and, therefore, it is hardly surprising that they reveal a high level of interest in and commitment to their pupils. However, teachers did use the record books for other purposes, for example, to bring grievances to the attention of the Inspector. One teacher in 1917 pointedly commented that because there would not be a boat for three weeks, 'holidays were of little use in a place like Flinders Island'.[23] Individual teachers could also be surprisingly candid and disclose a certain amount of personal detail. Carrington-Leach recorded in some detail his varied experiences. He is the only teacher who mentions how often he was late for school and why, including, on one occasion, sleeping in and, on another, fainting. He seems to have been innovative, initiating film nights in the Whitemark Hall to raise money for the Parents Association. During the early 1930s films were regularly screened and raised a considerable amount of money. Titles included, *The Volga Boatman, The Term of his Natural Life, Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and *The Foreign Legion.*

Carrington-Leach also commenced a competitive system of flags in an attempt to improve his pupils' work. Each class was given a flag, and the one that topped the weekly tests flew their flag for the following week. At the end of his first six months, he commented on what a happy time he had spent at the school. Two months later he was disturbed by an incident of petty theft:

> May 15. On Tuesday I lost three pounds. I had it in the pocket of my overcoat which I hung in the porch as the coat was wet. I put the money in that pocket in a hurry intending to take it out when I arrived at school but it slipped my memory until about 4.45pm. when I went to get it and found it gone. I have searched everywhere at the boarding house and also at school in the hope that I may have taken it out of my pocket and mislaid it, but it is nowhere to be found. It is rather disconcerting as one does not like to think of dishonesty amongst the children.
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> May 19. The money I lost last week I found in the table draw (sic) this morning. It had been put in there by whoever took it

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[23] ibid.,

> as I had thoroughly searched the draw (sic) when I discovered my loss.[24]

However, school life went on and he continued to record the progress of pupils, cricket matches, accidents in the school yard, maintenance of buildings and the planting of trees. Several hundred trees were planted between 1912 and 1950 in an effort to form wind-breaks around the school but few survived. [25] Unlike all the other teachers, Carrington-Leach rarely mentions the attendance rates of the school children. Perhaps he was not concerned about attendance, or he may have recorded such information elsewhere.

The rate of attendance was one of two items which consistently concerned most teachers throughout the period under examination. The other was the standard of pupils' work. New teachers constantly note in the record books that the children were behind the required standard and occasionally criticise how they have been previously taught. Most, thereafter, rarely mention the level or rate of progress, and the issue usually only arises again when another new teacher arrives.

The primary school curriculum for Tasmanian schools had been developed in 1910–1911 and implemented in 1912. It was slightly modified in 1921 and updated in 1929. In 1934 a new curriculum was developed based on the old one, but with more emphasis on the developmental stages of children. In 1948 the curriculum was more extensively altered.[26] The original curriculum of 1912 was therefore the basis of what children between 1912 and 1950 were taught. Subjects laid down to be studied were, English, Mathematics, Moral Instruction and Civics, Geography, History, Nature Study, Drawing, Music, Health, Sewing for girls, in country schools Gardening, and non-sectarian Sacred History.[27] Despite their likely future as farm wives, girls were not taught gardening. Occasionally

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[24] ibid.,
[25] ibid.,
[26] Phillips, *Making More Adequate Provision,* pp. 174 & 180.
[27] A. W. Garrett, *History of the Development of the Curriculum of State Primary Schools in Tasmania,* prepared at the request of the Advisory Committee of the Imperial Education Conference, Monograph no. 1, 1912.

teachers make comments like 'girls have taken over the flower gardens from the boys and improved them', but this was their choice and carried out in their spare time and not part of formal instruction. At the Whitemark school only boys appear to have worked in the vegetable gardens.[28] Similarly, although many of the children frequently travelled to the outer island in small boats, only boys in the 1930s, at least, appear to have received swimming instruction. The centralised curriculum that came out of Hobart clearly had a non-rural view of women's lives.

While teachers taught all the subjects listed, their students often had difficulty in realising satisfactory standards. Two teachers in the 1920s kept a record of students whose progress was 'retarded'. They also listed reasons why, in their view, these students were behind in their studies, and strategies they had implemented to deal with the problem.

In 1924 the average monthly enrolment at the Whitemark School was 29 pupils, 17 of whom the teacher regarded as being behind in their school-work. The following year, out of an average monthly enrolment of 26, 18 pupils were described as being behind. Many reasons were listed in the record book for pupils being below the expected level for their age. These included late age of commencement—only one child had started school at six years. The commonest age for children on the list to start school was between seven and nine years. Another reason was living too far from the school, one child is described as 'having a very weak constitution and the walk of four miles each way to school exhausts her'. Another child is noted as having four miles to walk as well as having to work very hard at home. Illness-related reasons caused problems with attendance, as did having undergone operations or suffering from nervousness. Parental sickness also meant that children could be kept at home to do the work of the sick parent. Finally, the seasonal and mobile lifestyle of many parents affected their children's attendance.[29]

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[28] Whitemark School Record Book, 1911—1930.
[29] ibid.,

Plate 9: *1950s Flinders Island school children, left to right, Judith Longhurst (nee Walker), Jan Henning (nee Cooper), Kenneth Walker and Leedham Walker*

Plate 10: *School bus driver, Joan Boyes seated, with school bus 1940s*

The teachers often commented that the children who were behind in their school-work were 'bright', 'industrious' or 'enthusiastic'. They gave some children extra work to do at home to help them catch up with their peers, and spoke to parents, encouraging home reading. They described some individual parents as 'interested' in their suggestions. Remarkably some children were recorded as catching up quickly and were promoted rapidly through the classes.[30]

Transport to school remained a problem until the roads on Flinders Island were improved. Then bicycles became common and a school bus service was finally established on the 1940s. Few children rode horses to school, perhaps a hint as to why is obtained from an entry in the Whitemark School Record Book, which states that a particular child was often absent because the horse was needed for farm work. On the other hand, from the age of nine, Nell Cook rode her horse each day from Lughrata to school at Blue Rocks, a return journey of eighteen miles.[31]

While teachers could expect to encounter problems with distance from school, illness, and having to help at home, within any rural school in Tasmania during the 1920s, an added dimension to teaching in the Furneaux Islands was the itinerant nature of a large section of the workforce. Many families followed employment possibilities around Flinders Island and the outer islands as they arose. During the 1920s when the long annual vacation over the mutton-bird season was changed to be in line with other Tasmanian schools, 'birding' families seriously upset school attendance records.

Each year in the islands the harvesting of mutton-birds took place over a six-week season during March and April. The money earned from the season set many families up for the rest of the year, and the labour of children in the processing sheds was essential for many families. Families moved with all their

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[30] ibid.,
[31] Nell Cook, interview, October, 1998.

requirements for the length of the season to the outer islands, where most of the substantial rookeries were located.

The Education Department had dealt with this by ensuring, between 1912 and 1920, that the long annual holiday for schools on Flinders Island occurred during the 'birding' season. In the 1930s holidays were changed to be the same as the rest of Tasmania, with the long annual break occurring over the Christmas period. Every Autumn teachers watched their class numbers decline as pupils left temporarily to go 'birding' with their families. For example, in 1921 the average attendance for April was 12 out of 33 children registered. In 1926, the figures were 14 of 26 registered. [32]

In 1930 the Education Department re-introduced the annual long school holiday in the Furneaux Islands over the mutton-bird season, and yearly attendance rates improved. It was finally changed back to be in line with the rest of Tasmania when the mutton-bird industry began to decline in the 1950s.

Most teachers seemed to have been prepared to accept the annual mutton-birding activity. What they found more difficult, was the frequent moving of families on and off the outer islands and the constant travelling of labouring families to and from the Tasmanian mainland and around the islands, seeking seasonal employment. Winshurst suggests that regarding childhood as 'a period of complete dependence and close supervision is a characteristic assumption of the twentieth century'.[33] It is presumably this belief which underpinned attitudes teachers held in relation to the seasonal employment of children. Some parents, however, still held onto earlier beliefs; this was after all a period of educational transition. In the late nineteenth century schooling was often seen as a part-time activity which could be fitted in around pressing farm commitments.

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[32] Whitemark School Record Book 1911-1930.

[33] K. Winshurst, 'Child Labour and School Attendance in South Australia 1890-1915', *Historical Studies*, vol. 19, no.76, 1981, p. 388. See also Mitchell & Sherington for a discussion on nineteenth century attitudes to compulsory education. Winifred Mitchell & Geoffrey Sherington, 'Families and children in Illawarra', in *Families in Colonial Australia*, eds P. Grimshaw, C. McConville, & E. McEwen, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p.110.

While useful, it was not often seen to provide a basis for employment in the rural economy.[34]

The school record books reveal that some children were taken off school rolls and then re-enrolled several times each year. For these children attendance was clearly sporadic and, while illness and living a long way from the school are seen as acceptable reasons for irregular attendance, the constant movement of seasonal workers is seen as an irritant and a disruption by teachers. One teacher at the Lady Barron School noted in October 1945, 'enrolment falling rapidly—four went on Wednesday—three more leave today—ten altogether in the last few weeks. Leaves twenty-six "nomadic fits nicely" '.[35]

In 1938 the Tasmanian Education Department again tried to bring school holidays on Flinders Island in line with the rest of the State and that year the annual 'birding' holiday was not granted. Yet again, school attendance dropped over the month of April. Clearly families had been asked if they would be going mutton-birding before the decision was made, as the teacher at the time makes clear:

> March 7th After attending school for nine days the [name withheld] children have left to go 'birding'. I have not taken their names off the roll. [Name withheld] who is sick at present, also intends to go 'birding'. Last year the three children mentioned said they had no intention of going 'birding'. They are more a nuisance than a help to the school. With having been absent from school more often than present, they are already behind in their work.[36]

At the end of 1938, it appears from the date school finished that the decision had been taken to re-instate the annual mutton-birding vacation for 1939. Unfortunately the record books for subsequent years at the Whitemark School are missing.

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[34] Winshurst, ibid.,
[35] Lady Barron School Record Book, 1941-1948.
[36] Whitemark School Record Book, 1931-1938.

The nature of the Furneaux Group contributed to the 'nomadic' lifestyle of many of the inhabitants. They consist of dozens of small islands, and farming families with holdings on the outer islands were forced to travel back and forwards between them to transport and care for stock. The assistance of women and children during these times was essential for families who could not afford casual labour. During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, a significant proportion of the workforce of the Furneaux Group was dependent upon casual seasonal work. Farm labouring, particularly at harvesting and shearing times as well as mutton-birding and hunting, were common occupations. Sometimes these families travelled to Launceston where they had relatives and might get temporary work to tide them over the 'off' times of seasonal work on the islands. Poverty was simply a fact of life for many families. Gladys Robinson recalls, 'we were all poor then, there were a few better off white people but all the Aboriginal and most of the white families were really poor'.[37]

Poverty affected school attendance and probably school performance. In 1944 the school teacher at the Lady Barron School reported that during that year there were 16 cases of scabies, usually complicated with impetigo, commenting that the condition was difficult to cure because of 'the conditions under which people live and an inadequate water supply in most homes'.[38] In 1947 the government Medical Officer examined six students at the head teacher's request and reported that five of the six were 'small and thin' for their age. He was concerned that three of the children were bare footed even though the day was cold and damp and concluded that 'these children, either through neglect or poverty, were not as well clothed (and probably fed) as they should be'.[39]

After receiving this report the head teacher wrote somewhat dourly:

> From this report taken in connection with the report of Dr. Brothers and the remarks in the cards of these and other children at this school, I conclude that a number of children at this school are undernourished, badly clothed and suffering

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[37] Gladys Robinson, pers.comm., June 2000.
[38] Lady Barron School Record Book, 1941-1948.
[39] S. Rumbold, Medical Report, 11 July 1947, in Lady Barron School Record Book, 1941-1948.

> from ailments due probably to emotional and constitutional causes. In other words, I have a number of neglected children at my school.[40]

It is apparent from the record books that many poor families found it difficult to keep their children in school and, while there, performing adequately. The problems they faced were more complex than cyclical movement around seasonal employment. Poorly clad, hungry children were not likely to value prolonged schooling. For them, a job of any type was the way to help their situation and that of their families. Like other working-class children around Australia, earning money was of primary importance.[41]

On the other hand, some parents came increasingly to consider the notion of sending their daughters away for secondary education from the mid 1920s onwards. These families had to have the necessary financial resources to be able to consider such an option. Sometimes they only achieved their aim by practicing great financial stringency.

Sending them away

Before 1972, if parents wished their children to have a secondary education beyond Grade 8, they had to send them away. Usually the children went to Launceston, Hobart or Melbourne to school. Although high schools had been established in 1913 in both Hobart and Launceston, they lacked subsidised boarding hostels until after the period of this study and, therefore, presented problems for rural parents.[42] Some parents did send their daughters to high schools, particularly if they had relatives living near the school with whom their children could stay. But few parents, particularly in the early years, considered the advantages of education outweighed the problems of boarding their 12 or 13 year old daughter with

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[40] Lady Barron School Record Book.

[41] See Allyson Holbrook's thoughtful discussion about the differing expectations of parents, students and teachers in relation to employment choice in the 1930s in Victoria. Allyson Hollbrook, 'Apathetic parents and wilful children: vocational guidance in the 1930s', in *Family, School and State in Australian History*, eds, M.R. Theobold & R.J.W. Selleck, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, pp.134-156.

strangers. Boarding school, for those parents who wanted a secondary education for their daughters, often seemed the best option if they could afford it. Later, as other choices arose, parents did not automatically choose private boarding schools, but rather looked at the best option for each child from a still very limited range.

Whether or not parents chose boarding school, government high schools or technical schools, or placed their children directly into vocational training, for example, business college, the expense of boarding them was an enormous financial drain. Olga Henwood and Heather Willis's parents paid 300 pounds a year to board their three daughters in Launceston, fortunately not all at the same time.[43] Nor were financial considerations the only factor influencing the choices parents and children made. The journey to and from school up until 1932 and during World War Two had to be made by boat. It usually took between 12 and 24 hours, but sometimes much longer. Heather Willis on one occasion spent five days at sea on her way home due to rough weather, and the boat ran out of drinking water.[44] An additional problem was the difficulty of keeping in touch. Most island families did not have telephones and contact was, therefore, by mail or, in an emergency, by telegram. As well, the length of time the children spent travelling meant that coming home during intra-term breaks and boarders' weekends was simply not possible. Parents had to be committed to the value of secondary education, confident that their daughter could cope away from home, and they needed to have sufficient emotional and financial resources to take up the option of 'sending them away'.

Most parents did not consider doing so. Some did, however, and from the experience of being sent away or sending away children, a powerful motif has emerged to express the emotions of loss, pain and loneliness. Many women did not want their children to go away and missed them painfully. On the other hand, it needs to be noted that not all children were terribly homesick and some

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[42] Basil W. Rait, *Advance In Education 1886-1946; Sixty Years of progress in Tasmania,* Education Department of Tasmania, n.d., possibly 1947, n.p.
[43] Heather Willis, interview, December 1998.
[44] Olga Henwood, interview, September 1998. In this extract Olga is recalling an event that happened to her sister Heather Willis.

parents saw the benefits of the extended educational experience as outweighing other considerations, particularly if they knew their children were well cared for.[45] One woman commented, somewhat wryly, that having children away during term time meant that parents had far more freedom. Viewing the issue from the parents' perspective, she thought it 'was a very different way of living to people in a suburban situation where your children were coming home everyday and you were involved in all those school things.'[46]

While a few women remember schooling away from home as being relatively trouble free, most are more ambivalent about both going away to school themselves and sending their children away. Some, like Olga Henwood feel that the biggest hardship women faced living in the islands before the establishment of the District High School in 1972 was 'losing their children at such an early age for further education'. [47]

As well as missing their children and worrying about homesickness, women feared for their safety. They regarded island children as less worldly and, therefore, more vulnerable than children brought up in towns and cities. In part this is merely a reflection of the often reiterated fear some island people feel regarding the level of violence in urban areas. While certainly isolated in a day-to-day sense, most island children between 1910 and 1960 travelled more often, and on longer trips, than many town children during the same time. They were also more likely to have done some of their travelling alone. Nevertheless, for many families, 12 and 13 was very young to be so far away from home, particularly with limited forms of communication.

Mary Walker, born in 1913, was the first of the older women in the study to go away to school. Her time at boarding school was not very happy and has left her with strong and enduring memories of being humiliated and treated unjustly. In the beginning she was very homesick but gradually settled down - although she

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[45] Audrey Holloway, interview, October 1999.
[46] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.
[47] Olga Henwood, interview, September 1998.

remembers always counting the days to going home. Her initial homesickness had been compounded by difficulties she experienced settling in, catching up on school work, learning to live surrounded by girls—her siblings were all boys—and becoming accustomed to rules and regulations, many of which she regarded as 'very unreasonable.' As well as being behind with her school-work she grew 'into a big girl which seemed to make it worse'. On one occasion, having only skimmed through her homework, she was stood up in front of the class while the teacher told Mary and the class that she had thought Mary was backward because she hadn't had the opportunity but now she knew it was because Mary was lazy. Over 70 years later Mary remembers the words that the teacher said clearly, and the laughter of some of the class.[48]

Mary experienced a defining event during her first year at boarding school. Her mother had sent her a delicately knitted beautiful white pullover with pearl buttons, and she opened the package in her room in front of the three girls she shared the room with. One of the girls grabbed the jumper and said she was going to wear it to supper that night. The headmaster complimented the girl on her lovely new pullover while Mary watched and listened. At the end of the term the jumper was thrown across the room to Mary with the comment that it wasn't wanted any more. Mary remembers that by this time the pullover was dirty and the threads all pulled. This simple event has stayed with Mary all her life. She felt ashamed that she did not have the courage to confront the girl and demand the pullover back or to tell the headmaster. The fact that the pullover was ruined she interpreted as punishment for her weakness and lack of courage.

There were other difficult times at school, but this one remains most vividly in her mind. Her humiliation and sense of shame at not being able to deal with the bully remains with her to this day. At times she resented, and viewed as petty, many school rules and regulations.

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[48] Mary Walker, interview, August 1998.

Island children, at this time, were often unaccustomed to regular schooling. Mary had been educated at home and then spent a couple of years at Mr Lyall's small school at Emita before going to boarding school. They also often carried considerable decision-making responsibility in terms of farm work. Did this make accepting life in tightly-controlled situations more difficult for them? Noreen McCarthy has described the resistance she felt to the petty and often pointless rules she came against in her nurse training. Noreen had completed her whole education, including a commercial art diploma, by correspondence prior to commencing nursing. Despite doing very well in her examinations she failed, to her later great regret, to complete the four-year training period.[49]

Whatever the difficulties of school life, the long journey by sea allowed young people time to put painful partings from family behind them and to look forward. On the way home the excitement and anticipation was greater for the delay. And of course the journey was in itself intrinsically interesting:

> Mum told me she was lonely after we went, see you had to go when you were 12 to make it worthwhile—to get that first year at high school. In our case the war was on and there was no plane service. Travelling by boat cost 25 shillings and took around 12 hours or longer if the weather was rough. I loved the boat and I was never sick. For those who were bad sailors it was not so good. But I loved the boat, you had time to study everything going up the Tamar.[50]

During World War Two students were not allowed to travel by air and the boats they went on crossed Bass Strait in all weathers—and without any lighting at night. This seemed to add to the excitement of the trip for the student travellers who would regularly hear planes overhead also without lights. Air travel to and from school also brings back powerful memories for those who regularly made the trip. The students, even when attending different schools, still often all left on the same day and flight. Judith Longhurst remembers the flights at the beginning and end of holidays as traumatic:

> Everyone would be crying, I had my mother there but I'd be bawling my eyes out because I was leaving the rest of the

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[49] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.
[50] Olga Henwood, interview, September 1998.

> family, but on the way home you'd watch the plane being loaded and think 'can't you go a bit faster?' because every minute counted.'[51]

Judith Longhurst's family had solved the needs of their adolescent children's education in an unconventional way for the time. The children and their mother moved to Devonport in mainland Tasmania for the period of secondary schooling. During the holidays they would all return to the Flinders Island and during term time their father commuted regularly between Flinders Island, Devonport and, later on, Hobart. The issue of secondary schooling led the parents to critically reconsider island living. Because of the isolation, Judith and her siblings were actively encouraged to see their future as not being on Flinders Island. Although she never returned to live permanently on the island, like every other island child, she longed for the school holidays and the return to Flinders Island. Eventually, two of her brothers did return to take over the family farm and business.[52]

In time many small schools opened on Flinders Island but, wherever schools were situated, there were always some families living beyond an accessible distance. All these schools closed prior to 1950 after the establishment of a school bus service. With the conversion of Whitemark Primary School to an Area School that provided eight years of schooling, in 1942, the issue of secondary education was solved for some parents. But for others the problem of sending children away for further education remained until the opening of the District High School in 1972.[53]

Isolation continued to be the key factor affecting the education of children in the time of this study. Distances did not have to be great for them to be insurmountable. Gladys Robinson, living on Vansittart Island, was only a few miles from Flinders Island and could see it clearly, but the sea made an effective

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[51] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.
[52] ibid.,
[53] The District High School provided schooling until Year 10. For Years 11 and 12 children must still, today, travel off the island.

barrier. Ultimately, whether children lived six miles along a bush track, or a couple of miles across the sea, or were facing leaving home to go to Launceston, the common factor affecting educational and therefore later lifetime opportunity, was isolation from services within reach of most other Australians at the time.

Going to the mutton-bird islands

To young people growing up in the Furneaux Group, mutton-birding was a part of their cultural heritage. From the early nineteenth century until the second half of the twentieth century, mutton-birding was a vital seasonal industry for the population of the Furneaux Group. The mutton bird or short-tailed shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*, also often called the sooty petrel, spends June to August in the coastal region of north-east Siberia before flying south in September and October to the southern coastline of Australia. Over 80% of the world's population of 23 million birds breed in Tasmania, with the largest colonies in Bass Strait, particularly in the islands of the Furneaux Group.[54] It is estimated that the bird population in the nineteenth century may have reached several hundred million.[55]

Watching flocks come in during the early evening is an impressive sight today, but the same sight in the nineteenth century must have been awe-inspiring. In 1799 Mathew Flinders made the following observation.

> ...they were followed by such a number of sooty petrels as we have never seen equalled. There was a stream of from 50 to 80 yards in depth, and of 300 yards or more in breadth; the birds were not scattered but flying as compactly as free movement of their wings seemed to allow; and during a full hour and a half this stream of petrels continued to pass at a rate little inferior to the swiftness of the pigeon. On the lowest computation I think the number could not have been less than a hundred million...[56]

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[54] Irynes Skira, 'C.H. Smith and Co., of Launceston, a muttonbird buyer', *THRA P&P*, vol. 41, no. 3, September 1994, p.163; Lyndall Ryan, The Aboriginal Tasmanians, 2nd edn, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1996, p. 70.
[55] D.L. Serventy, 'Mutton-birding', in *Bass Strait: Australia's Last Frontier*, 2nd edn, ed. Stephen Murray-Smith, ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1987, pp. 53-60.
[56] R.M Fowler, *The Furneaux Group*, vol. 1, Roebuck Books, Canberra, 1980, p. 13.

This abundant, and easily caught, food supply was part of the traditional diet of Tasmania's indigenous people. Egging and mutton-birding—the collecting of eggs in November and the catching of fledglings in April—were important seasonal activities.[57] With the decline in the Bass Strait sealing industry, sealers were introduced to mutton-birding by Aboriginal women. During the nineteenth century the existence of the mixed race Aboriginal-European community was dependent upon a subsistence economy based upon mutton-birding as the core industry. Mutton bird by-products were also exploited by the Strait's population and, for a time, oil and feathers were exported to Launceston along with salted birds. The Tasmanian Railways and fossil fuel companies purchased mutton-bird oil in the early years of the twentieth century.[58]

White settlers coming into the Furneaux Islands from the middle years of the nineteenth century were quick to realise the benefits of mutton-birding as a seasonal cash crop. As a result, the Cape Barren Island Aboriginal population lobbied the Tasmanian government continually to have either the mutton bird industry preserved for their exclusive use, or certain island rookeries set aside for the Aboriginal community. With little substantial support from the government at the time, many Aboriginals became employed as workers in European run sheds.

By the beginning of the twentieth century many people of both groups were employed in the 'birding' industry. Skira claims that at this time 'up to 400 people participated in the annual harvest', with approximately one million birds being caught in the 1920s.[59] Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people looked to the mutton-bird harvest to sustain them through hard times.

Joan Blundstone, born in 1918, recalls that while her parents grew vegetables, kept hens, had a milking cow, fished and hunted, their cash income for the year

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[57] Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, pp. 228–229.
[58] Skira, *THRA P&P*, p. 164.
[59] ibid. p. 163.

came from the mutton-bird harvest.[60] Gladys Robinson's family also used the mutton-bird season to enable them to buy necessities. At the end of the season both parents travelled to Launceston and bought new boots, tools, some clothing or linen, as well as food.[61]

For children, the annual five to six week season meant a change from ordinary everyday routine. Normal rules and regulations were relaxed and children were both allowed more freedom and given temporary entry into the adult world of the process worker. The women in the study, who went mutton-birding as children, were also often involved as adults, in turn taking their own children. Gladys Robinson went 'birding' for a total of 42 years. She first went at the age of six months and spent 20 seasons with her parents and 22 with her husband mutton-birding.[62] For women who have spent many years involved in the annual harvest of mutton birds, the current decline in the industry is a cause of some sadness. Two women in the study, both in their eighties, still go each year, but more as a recreational interest which also allows them to gather a few birds for personal consumption.[63]

Up until the late 1940s, the mutton-bird season was seen as a high point of island community life. The local schools had only a short holiday at Christmas, and then closed during the mutton-bird season—the end of February into April—to allow children to accompany their parents. During the week the 'birders' worked long exhausting hours, but work stopped at midday on Saturday. Sunday was especially a time for socialising.

> On Big Dog [Island] particularly, that was a fun time. . . there were 12 other sheds working and there was, in that time, lots of young people. See the Daveys had five youngsters, the Willis family eight, and there were eight Cooks [the speaker's family] and the three Robinson boys who worked next to us and the

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[60] Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000.
[61] Gladys Robinson, interview, 30 April 1998.
[62] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[63] Ricky Eaves, 'The followers of the moonbirds: The end of ancient traditions?,' *40 Degrees South Tasmania and Beyond,* no. 14, Spring, 1999. Sisters-in-law Heather Willis and Joan Blundstone appear in this article which describes how they still go to Big Dog Island each year to the hut that Heather and Frank Willis have leased for 51 years on the island.

> Riddles. There were lots of people and so it was a social time. You know every weekend the kids would meet. We had a little place we used to call Bald Hill, and that was our meeting ground and we would all meet there on a Sunday and decide where we would go. And of course you had your romances you know.[64]

Sometimes dances were held, generally to the music of a fiddle, although Heather and Frank Willis recall these had stopped by 1948.[65] On Sunday people from Flinders Island would bring their own lunch and visit family and friends on the birding Islands.[66] As Joan Blundstone remembers, this was often helpful because the birders could send requests back to Flinders Island with the visitors for anything they needed. The following Sunday it would be delivered by Tuck Robinson, who regularly transported goods and people between the islands.

Getting across to the mutton-birding islands was a major event for all families and a time of great excitement for the children. While some families had their own boat and sailed across to the birding islands, many did not and had to pay someone to take them across. Noreen McCarthy's family used to row themselves across in their 17-foot dinghy unless they were offered a tow. Noreen's father rowed with two oars and Noreen and her mother with one each. The distance the family rowed from their home on Flinders Island to Big Dog Island was approximately a mile and a half.[67] This was no mean feat though, especially when two trips had to be made, one with the necessary supply of wood and the other with the family, their animals and belongings.[68]

That the mutton-bird season was the highpoint of the year for the families who took part is clear from the delight the study informants took in recalling their childhood experiences on the birding islands:

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[64] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998; Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000.
[65] Heather and Frank Willis, interview with I. Skira, 17 December 1987. Transcript held by interviewees and lent to me.
[66] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998; Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000.
[67] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.
[68] The outer islands in the Furneaux Group were rapidly denuded of timber in the 19th century and processing mutton-birds, as well as cooking, and washing, required a large

> Before we went to Big Dog we ordered all our stores for the time from C.H. Smith & Co., in Launceston—flour, milk and sugar. One favourite was a tin of cream biscuits, these were a real luxury because we usually only had home made biscuits. We took the chooks, cats and dogs. The night before we left we would wait until the chooks had roosted and then go out and grab them and put them in specially prepared boxes. Everyone helped catch them. All our provisions would be taken to Lady Barron by Gunter's lorry and Tuck Robinson took us over in his boat. When we got to Big Dog everything would be taken out of the boat and loaded on the beach and we would carry it up. We'd also have to take a load of wood over.[69]

Preparations went on all year directed towards the next mutton-bird season. Each family had a big trunk or box in which they saved those clothes that were beyond repair to wear while mutton-birding. The work was extremely dirty so the clothes worn while birding were then thrown away.[70] While on the islands this practice saved both precious water and women's energy.

Families usually went over to the birding islands a week to ten days before the official opening of the mutton-birding season. This time was spent in preparing for the season. For women, this meant clearing out the hut, wallpapering the walls with new cut-outs from magazines and newspapers, sweeping through, spreading new floor grass, helping erect temporary accommodation for fowls and other domestic animals, and white-washing the processing shed. They would also try to cook as far ahead as possible, for women not only worked all day in the processing shed but they also continued their usual domestic work in relation to caring for their families.

Once the mutton-bird season commenced, the daily routine varied only slightly from family to family and over generations.

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amount of wood. This meant families usually had to transport over to the islands the wood they would need for the 6-8 weeks spent on the island.

[69] Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000.

[70] Jim Davie, *Latitude Forty: Reminiscences of Flinders Island,* The National Press, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 43-48. The process described by Davie supports the participants' claims of mutton-birding being extremely dirty work. It includes: pulling birds from burrows, squeezing—removing the stomach contents, plucking, scalding, opening, salting and packing . The 'birding' islands also had to depend on caught rainwater.

> Men got up first, they'd have a cup of tea and then go out to the rookery. Mum would get up then and get breakfast, usually porridge. We kids would all get up early because it was all so exciting. The men came back from the rookery about 8am had their breakfast and then everyone went to the shed. Mum would sit all day by the scalding pot, dropping birds in and out one bird at a time for about 5 seconds. Then they were rubbed down, to get the down off, quick and firm but not hard enough to break the skin. We'd stop for morning tea, Mum would prepare lunch then and we'd all go back. When we finished for the day we would clean up the shed, usually it would be after dark. The workers needed baths then; we kids would swim to get clean, then tea and bed. Saturday work finished at 12 midday. Mum spent time cleaning and baking for next week. We would help clean up. We'd often take the bags the birds were cleaned on, down to the sea and trample them into the water to get the blood out.[71]

Gladys Robinson's description of work on the birding islands is very similar. One important difference is that as a child Gladys also actually caught birds. In most accounts of birding, men catch the birds and then bring them back to the shed, where the whole family works as a team to process them. It was, therefore, unusual for Gladys to be catching birds as a very young child.[72] She did so until her family employed casual workers to help with the catching.

> You'd get up about 5am have a cup of tea and a thin Capstan biscuit and just as you could see you'd go out into the rookery to catch the load. My sister and I used to go too. The first load had to be in the shed by half past six or twenty to seven. There was a technique to it—but now I'd rather starve than put my hand down a burrow. But when you're out in the tussock grass there's all these burrows, and you can tell by looking at them whether there's a mutton bird in them or not. So you lay down among all the grass and you put your arm down the burrow, and if you have a short arm you have what they call a tick or a little bit of wood and you prod the bird and it jumps up and you grab it by the neck, pull it out and kill it. Then you thread it through the bottom bill on what we call a spit. You get them out of the bush here; a thin bit of stick and you put a sharp point on one end of it. You stick it in the ground and thread your birds on it. Now the average ordinary mutton birder carries about 50 birds. Maybe a few more, everyone carries an odd number because in your load there might be a bird that

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[71] Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000.

[72] When Gladys Robinson worked with her parents on Big Dog Island as a girl, the family often processed between 1000-1100 birds daily.

> isn't fit for use, so to get your tally right at the end of the day, everybody tried to carry 50 odd. Then the dicey part was to get them on your shoulders. They halved the birds really and carried them across the back of their neck half each side.
> *How long would it take to get 50 birds?*
> About half an hour in the days when we worked.[73]

Heather Willis remembers her mother telling her that on Chappell Island around the turn of the twentieth century, girls and women regularly worked as catchers along with the men. On one occasion her mother had been catching mutton birds, as a child, 'and she fell over with the whole load of mutton birds and a snake crawled right beside her.'[74] By the 1920s female catchers were almost unknown.

The birds were then taken to the processing shed, where all members of the family worked on the production line. In the shed run by Gladys's parents the men plucked the birds, threw them through a trap door to be cleaned, after which they were thrown through another door to be brushed up and then put on racks to cool. Later, after opening and salting, they were packed in barrels of brine. The brine had to be strong enough to float a potato or an egg.[75] In 1872, 50 years earlier than Gladys's childhood mutton-birding experience, Canon Brownrigg observed, and left a detailed description of, the birding technique of the Bass Strait Aboriginals. In all-important points it closely resembles the description given by Gladys, including a description of brine 'that is sufficiently strong to float an egg'.[76]

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[73] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[74] Heather Willis, interview, December 1998. Tiger snakes have always been plentiful on Chappell Island. One reason given for commercial mutton-birding not continuing on Chappell Island in recent decades is that snakes have just become too numerous. At present the Aboriginal owners of Chappell Island are attempting to reduce the snakes by environmental means and therefore increase the population of mutton birds, (Stateline 7 December 2001, ABC Television, Tasmania).
[75] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[76] Stephen Murray-Smith (ed.) 'First voyage 1872' in *Mission to the Islands: The Missonary Voyages in Bass Strait of Canon Marcus Brownrigg, 1872-1885,* Foot & Playsted, Launceston, 1987. p. 61.

Young children from five or six years started with the job of cutting the birds' legs off with a sharp knife. As they grew older they progressed to other tasks - brushing the birds down, placing them on the racks to cool and finally to helping with the opening of the birds and the cleaning.[77]

The importance of children's labour in the mutton-bird harvest should not be underestimated. While children seemed to have been given easier and more enjoyable tasks, like catching a fish for tea, they were kept busy from a very young age. That they enjoyed it is beyond doubt. Some informants expressed some ambivalence about the work involved for adult women, but they all remember having a wonderful time as children during the birding season. Living on the birding islands also gave the children opportunities to socialise more easily and in a freer way with their peers than when they were at home. Gladys remembers the difficulties caused for her when the mutton-bird school holiday ceased and her children could no longer accompany the family to the birding islands:

> When the Area School came in 1948 the mutton-bird holidays were soon stopped. So I started taking the kids out of school and the teachers would give them some work but I found I didn't haven't the time to supervise it . . . then we found the children were getting behind in their school work so we had to get someone to take our children for the six weeks and we lost our helpers. The children used to get so upset because they loved it on the islands. George used to get them every weekend and bring them over to the island and take them back on Sunday, they used to get terribly upset . . . it was hard, yes it was hard. And we had to work longer hours to compensate for the loss of the children and it was difficult. Mutton-birding is a family affair. Parents have to keep their children all year, so it didn't cost any more to keep them during birding. Where if you were employing labour you had to feed and pay the labour so it was not so productive as a family working. The children had their jobs, they'd get a few pennies, little surprises and things. They used to work really well during the week.[78]

Children knew that their work was valuable and that their parents relied on them. It is hardly surprising that they enjoyed the six to eight week break from

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[77] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[78] ibid.,

schooling and the opportunity to join in working with adults. Having specific responsibilities, which became more complex as they became more competent, must have also added to their sense of personal achievement. However, if work seemed of more relevance to children than schooling, clearly some parents, as in the case of Gladys and her husband, were not prepared to compromise their children's schooling for economic benefit.

The time spent on the mutton-bird islands was undoubtedly for many young people the highlight of the island year, but it encapsulated only a few weeks of the Autumn. On the mutton-bird islands, all the families came together, just as they did for whatever social events occurred during the weekend, although Gladys Robinson remembers the young people wandering around by themselves on Sundays which points to the possibility of some social interaction occurring beyond that organised by families. On Flinders Island during the remainder of the year a few organisations existed specifically for young girls. Olga Henwood and Heather Willis were enthusiastic Brownies and Girl Guides.

The Girls' Art Club

One club for young girls established on the island in the 1930s was the Girls' Art Club. It met a presumed need of somewhere for young girls to meet and learn skills both artistic and useful. Two single women friends, who had come to the islands as adults, ran it. Its primary aim, beyond the development of art and craft skills, was to raise money, two thirds of which was to be used to provide a suitable multi-purpose hall in Whitemark, which could be used as a rest room, music and art room, and gymnasium for women.[79] The remaining one third of the club's income was to be given to charity. This ambitious project for the benefit of island women would indicate that there was concern about the lack of facilities for women at the time. Just who actually initiated the project is now lost. It may have been the two women who ran the club and perhaps saw with outsiders' eyes what was necessary. Or perhaps they tapped into a need that was being expressed in other quarters. The Art club did build a hall in Whitemark,

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[79] Furneaux Museum, Album 2, vol. 11, People and Places: The Girls' Art Club.

one large enough in which to play badminton—a very popular sport for decades with both men and women. The hall was used for decades and is still occasionally used today.

Membership of the club was restricted to girls and young women between the ages of 12 and 25. [80] Meetings were held monthly and the standard of art and craft work very high. Helen Cooper was a member of the Girls' Art Club in her youth and remembers well the women who ran it and the type of skills they attempted to inculcate in young women:

> We had fairs and one year every stall was compelled to decorate their stall with hand-made flowers. We all had to have a different sort of flower. Ours was the afternoon tea and cake stall, I think, and together we decorated ours with laurel leaves and bunches of hand-made wisteria hanging down.
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> Miss Browning died and the other lady, I forget her name, carried on. She was very unpopular with my mother who had three sons, because when it was suggested that we needed some men to erect the framework of the stalls she said 'we don't need men, we can live without men'. Mother wiped her at that stage.[81]

The Girls' Art Club was established as a result of the lack of services for women and girls in the islands being recognised. Just who was responsible for its establishment, whether it was island women or the two women who ran it, is now uncertain. In any case, to be acceptable in the 1930s it had to offer girls skills in a socially approved area for young women. This it demonstrably did, but at the same time there is just a hint of something stronger—a tinge of what we might now regard as feminism—both in the aims of the club and in its reliance on women's efforts. However, this does not appear to have been recognised or to have particularly influenced its members as they struggled to master intricate and difficult traditional female crafts.

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[80] ibid.,
[81] Helen Cooper, interview, August 2000.

Beyond the beach

Beyond the Furneaux Islands lay another world, a world that island parents, in the first half of the twentieth century, identified with and wanted their children to know. From the beginning of settlement, islanders and others travelled constantly to and from the islands, and everything needed above subsistence level living came from elsewhere.

> We had an awareness of a bigger world beyond the Furneaux Islands—we had planes that would bring people in, take us out and bring us back home again...so much of what made up our lives, be it in mode of transport—the school bus, the new tractor for the farm, whatever it was—came from elsewhere. So you always just knew you were very dependant on things which came from elsewhere...everything you didn't do yourself you had to get from elsewhere.[82]

This extract reveals how island children recognised the inherently separate quality of island life. While most urban Australian homes would have contained at least a few objects that came from other regions or countries, for example books, a piano, or some furniture, generally most household items were manufactured in their local city. The difference between these homes and island homes was that, in the latter, every single thing that could not be homemade or grown came by boat or plane to the islands.

Most freight came by sea, and sea transport can never be as reliable as road, rail or even air transport. Sometimes, because of storms and wild seas, groceries and other necessities would be in short supply in the islands, but this was not perceived as a major problem by residents who were used to waiting and to improvising.[83] However, ships at island wharves loading and unloading animals, cars, people, large machinery, furniture, food and other goods were part of the visual landscape that surrounded island children and probably helped heighten their awareness of the marginality of the Furneaux Islands in terms of the wider world.

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[82] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.

The experience of living on a small landmass bounded by sea is what distinguishes the day-to-day life experience of island inhabitants from that of others. The interior reality of island living is the experience of otherness and apartness. Greg Dening claims that:

> Beaches are beginnings and endings. They are the frontiers and boundaries of islands...[for human beings beaches divide the world between here and there, us and them, good and bad, familiar and strange...Crossing beaches is always dramatic. From land to sea and from sea to land is a long journey and either way the voyager is left a foreigner and an outsider.[84]

Dening portrays here the different quality of island life. An island community is distinct, there can be no merging at the edges with the adjoining community, and community membership is made up of those who live within a clearly bounded area. There is no possibility of getting into a car and driving into the next region for an outing. One cannot visit somewhere else casually, some planning is always required, at the very least tickets need to be booked. While most residents travel blithely in very small planes, a few in every generation are severely constrained by fear of air travel, particularly as only small planes fly on island routes.

To overcome the disadvantages of isolation, island residents actively sought experiences in other places. For those families able to do so, holidays were one way of exposing their children to the outside world. Judith Longhurst's parents took their children travelling around Tasmania and her mother moved with the children to Devonport so the children could attend school in mainland Tasmania.[85] The large numbers of people who moved off the islands to make their life elsewhere, meant that islanders had many relatives and friends in other places whom they could visit and stay with, and to whom, if necessary, they could send their children.

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[83] Bad weather still holds up shipping and from time to time supermarket shelves can run very low on Flinders Island

[84] Greg Dening *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land Marquesas 1774–1880*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1980, p. 32.

[85] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.

Noreen McCarthy's father had sisters living in Sydney and for a time each year he would travel to New South Wales (NSW) to go shearing, leaving his wife and Noreen with his sisters in Sydney while he was working. After Noreen's brother was born, her father stopped his annual NSW shearing and the family only went to Sydney for holidays. In the early days, they would travel by boat from Flinders Island to Tasmania, then board the *Taroona* to travel to Melbourne, and finally go by trading boat from Melbourne to Sydney. In later years, they flew part of the way. In Sydney the family stayed at Bankstown, then a comparatively rural area. They would shop and go to the cinema and visit Bondi. The almost annual visits to Sydney ceased when Noreen was a teenager, after a poliomyelitis epidemic broke out in Sydney. Her father bundled his family on the next boat sailing south and although the epidemic eventually reached Flinders Island, the family never visited Sydney again.[86] They did, however, continue to travel to Launceston at least twice a year to visit relatives.

Heather Willis remembers that her family would go to Launceston for a holiday once a year. Her mother would rent a bed-sitting room for a fortnight for herself and her three daughters. However, because the family operated a dairy farm, her father could never join them, and the three girls, therefore, preferred the annual fortnight holiday they spent at Lady Barron, nine miles from home and where their father could visit them.[87]

Even very poor families could manage to get to Launceston from time to time. The exigencies of life meant that in many cases women had to travel to Launceston fairly frequently. Some women had relatives in mainland Tasmania who might require their assistance; others had to visit medical or other specialists; a few would follow their husbands looking for seasonal work in northern Tasmania. However difficult the trip, women travelled on and off the islands and that often meant taking their children with them.

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[86] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.
[87] Heather Willis, interview, December 1998.

Island life inculcated in children a sense of difference—of being apart. At the same time, island living, by its very nature, exposed children to a far wider range of travel experiences than was typical for other Tasmanian children at the time. Judith Longhurst remembers vividly how surprised she was, when she commenced school in Devonport, at the lack of interest in other places shown by her new classmates compared with island children.[88]

The unique features of an island childhood contributed powerfully to the sense of an island identity felt by adult islanders. But knowledge and familiarity with the wider world beyond the boundary imposed by the sea tempered any strong sense of cultural difference.

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Island living meant that all age groups mingled and shared both work and entertainment. Until after the time of this thesis, there was little in the way of a separate youth or children's culture. Outside of school, children were expected to socialise with all age groups, for example, young children dancing with middle-aged adults was a common feature at dances and balls, and children were not sent away when adults settled down for good long session of reminiscing, but rather expected to listen and learn. Many children went mutton-birding every year and a number travelled with their parents regularly to other places. These were valuable experiences and the clarity with which they are now recalled, point to them being childhood highlights. But they were still experiences which took place within the ambit of the family. Only school offered children an ongoing and long-term experience beyond the family. The establishment of State schools imposed upon children and to a lesser extent their families, a discipline—one that was often at odds with the seasonal flux of rural work and life. Whether parents desired or resisted schooling for their children, they were powerless in the face of the modernist imperative to expose children to an egalitarian, centralised and rational school system.

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[88] Judith Longhurst, interview, November 1999.

CHAPTER FIVE

Young Women Moving Away

As they became older, daughters outgrew the apprentice stage and often acted as junior partners to their mother; leading to a shared concern for household work and the outside work they perceived to be their responsibility. This meant that they could not easily leave their mother at key busy times in the year. Ellen Ross, in a London-based study set between 1870 and 1918, reveals the dependence of women on the help of their adolescent and young adult daughters.[1] In London, part of that dependence included the need to get children out into the workforce as early as possible in order to increase the money coming into the household. Janet McCalman has highlighted the same pattern at work in Richmond, an inner Melbourne suburb, between 1900 and 1965.[2] Women needed the help of their daughters in the home, particularly to help care for younger siblings, but they also needed their wages. Therefore, the priority was to get them into the workforce.

However, in rural areas daughters were more likely to be required to help on the farm and to be paid 'in kind' rather than in wages. Given the discrepancy between male and female wages at the time, the income they could earn beyond the farm would not have paid the wages of labourers employed to replace them. This meant that daughters sometimes found the needs of the farm and the farm household could over ride any wish on their part for a job or their own income. In addition, mothers possibly gained their first respite in years as their daughters grew to adulthood and could take over some of the household work. Therefore, their daughters' opportunity to travel or take paid employment frequently depended upon how many sisters they had. The more daughters in the family, the more the responsibility for helping their mother could be shared.

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[1] Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870–1918*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 158–165.

[2] Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-class Community 1900–1965*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1984, pp. 120–148.

Helen Cooper's two oldest sisters went to Hobart to train as nurses. This was also Helen's ambition. She put her name down with the Royal Hobart Hospital to commence nurse training but deferred commencing twice because neither of her sisters were available to take her place helping her mother with the housework and milking. Later she travelled to Melbourne to study music but only after one of her sisters had returned to Flinders Island to be with her mother.[3]

Her sister-in-law, Mary Walker,. stayed home after leaving school and helped on the farm. Often her parents would be away clearing land elsewhere and they would leave the farm in the hands of Mary and her brother Geoff. Mary remembers that she often ran the dairy alone and sometimes would bake half a dozen loaves of bread and take them to her parents with enough other supplies to last for a week. Her brother was provided with a car for the work he did on the farm. Mary was mainly paid in the form of holidays.[4] On one occasion her parents sent her away on holiday to Sydney as they did not approve of her boyfriend, who later became her husband. Mary stayed in Sydney with two of her brothers, who were in the navy, for several months, but eventually she began to feel guilty and decided to go home and help her mother:

> Mum was having quite a busy time, she had a house full of men, you know, and all the washing and ironing. She was very particular about housework.[5]

Soon after arriving home, Mary became engaged although her parents were still uncertain about her choice of future husband.

Lily Dargaville remained close to her mother all her life and the two women always lived together even after Lily's marriage. After leaving school at 15 Lily stayed at home and helped her mother. Later she worked at the local airport doing clerical and cleaning work. The airport was within easy walking distance

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[3] Helen Cooper, interview, August 1998.
[4] Mary Walker, interview, October 2001.
[5] Mary Walker, interview, September 1998.

from her home and she could still help her mother when needed. She was offered a job in Melbourne managing the tearooms at Essendon Airport, but she refused it as her mother was a widow by this time and Lily could not face leaving her. She married at 42 and her husband moved into the family home. Lily was one of three girls. One sister was blind from infancy and died in a Hobart institution, the other left the islands as a teenager and although she came back to visit, she did not live again in the islands.[6]

In most of the participants' recollections of childhood, there is a strong sense of their mothers. Many of these women were close to their fathers and several came from large families with numerous siblings. Yet it is their mothers who often take central stage in their narratives. Their mothers' knowledge and skills were essential to the physical, emotional and economic functioning of the family unit, and the importance of acquiring similar skills for their own later lives was recognised. After World War One many Australian women remained unmarried, but none of these young girls considered that they might not marry. Noreen McCarthy claims it simply never crossed her mind, she just knew she would grow up and marry.[7]

Growing up

Few of the older women in this study were prepared for puberty. Usually their mothers waited until after they had reached the menarche before telling them about menstruation. In most cases, even after this event, they were given no information about sexuality, although those who attended secondary school did receive some biologically based sex-education. Suellen Murray suggests that it was not reticence or prudery alone that restricted the ability of women to inform their daughters about sex.[8] Often they had only a flimsy understanding of the male and female reproductive systems themselves and lacked an appropriate language to explain what they did know. Murray claims that the silence

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[6] Lily Dargaville, interviews, August 1998 and April 1999.
[7] Noreen McCarthy, interview, November 2001.
[8] Suellen Murray, A History of Menstruation in Australia; 1900–1960, PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 1997, pp. 53-61.

surrounding menstruation and sexuality was extreme in the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, this silence made it difficult for girls to approach their mothers and ask questions. The experience of the women in this study would seem to support that of the Western Australian women in Murray's study.

Sisters Olga Henwood and Heather Willis seem to have been two young girls whose mother did attempt to prepare them for puberty, although there are discrepancies in their memories around this issue. Olga was the older of the two and she remembers her mother having a talk to her and then trying to talk to Heather, who told her that she did not need to bother for 'she knew all about it'.[9] Heather, on the other hand, recalls that her menstrual periods 'came out of the blue, I didn't know anything about it—they started one night when we were camping in a tent in the backyard. I didn't know what had happened'.[10]

More commonly, however, girls were supplied with some, usually barely adequate, information after rather than before the event. Noreen McCarthy remembers that she thought she was dying and when she approached her mother she was given a book to read. Mothers adopted a variety of approaches to providing their daughters with information. Gladys Robinson's mother told her that her body was being prepared for womanhood. Polly Coster's mother said that she would menstruate every month and explained how to manage it. Helen Cooper's mother also told her she would have a period every month and that she could stay home from school this time for a few days.[11] Such an unexpected event could lead young girls to feel that they must have done something wrong, as Mary Walker explains:

> I don't think my mother did the right thing she was a very retiring sort of person. When my periods started I thought I was bleeding to death. I walked around and didn't know how to tell Mother. I thought I must have done something awful but I knew I hadn't. I wrote notes to Mother and tore them up,

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[9] Olga Henwood, interview, October 2001.
[10] Heather Willis, interview, October 2001.
[11] Gladys Robinson, Polly Coster, Helen Cooper, Noreen McCarthy, interviews, October/November 2001

> eventually I gave her one. She sat me down while she was cutting up the salad for a cold meat lunch and told me all about it. When I was at school I was also told about babies.[12]

Nell Cook's mother died when she was three years old and, although she had older sisters, she was also unprepared for menstruation. Her reaction was very similar to Mary's:

> I wondered what had happened to me, really I did, and I thought I had done something wrong and I tried to hide it and I managed for a couple of days and then probably when she was washing my older sister found out. She explained it and set me right on that score.[13]

Beyond the initial necessary practical information, there seems to have been very little discussion between these mothers and daughters about menstruation. Murray points out that in Australia, although disposable sanitary products were available from the early decades of the twentieth century, very few women could afford them before the 1950s.[14] In the Furneaux Islands, sanitary pads were often made out of old nappies and neatly hand stitched. The sight of rows of small squares of cloth hanging on the line at monthly intervals seems not to have raised the curiosity of most children. Helen Cooper must have asked what they were for; she remembers being told they were the window cleaning cloths.[15]

Any form of sex education seems to have been totally overlooked by mothers. Women found out about sex from friends at school, in sex education classes in secondary school, or from observation. As Polly Coster said: 'Living on a farm you got ideas of your own'.[16]

While the silence around sexuality could lead to anxiety—Helen Cooper remembers being worried about getting pregnant from a kiss—generally the

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[12] Mary Walker, interview, October 2001.
[13] Nell Cook, interview, October 1998.
[14] Murray, A History of Menstruation, p. 254.
[15] Helen Cooper, interview, October 2001.
[16] Polly Coster, interview, November, 2001

women seemed to have actively and successfully sought the information they needed.[17] By the 1940s and 1950s when they had daughters of their own, the idea that ignorance was a protection against sexual experimentation had been effectively debunked, and they were careful with their daughters to ensure that they were at least prepared for the onset of menstruation.

Going to work

Most of the women in the study entered paid employment at some time in their life. They may have worked before they were married and then again later in life, or have found themselves working for the first time in middle age. Others worked in outside paid employment briefly before marriage but not afterwards. Almost all the women regard themselves as working wives in that they were partners in the family farming and business enterprises, and their work directly or indirectly earned income. Frequently, as young women, their labour was essential to the smooth running of the farm business. In this situation outside paid employment, if taken on at all, appears to have been regarded, in some instances, almost as an interesting diversion from the norm. For Polly Coster, the second youngest of eight children and the only daughter of a widow, there was so much work to be done at home that she never considered paid employment. Other women appear to have taken on outside work provided it fitted with their filial responsibilities.

Reference to Mary Walker's and Helen Cooper's feelings of responsibility to their mother has been made at the beginning of this chapter. Both young women did, however, spend some time studying and working before marriage. Mary Walker worked for 18 months as an unqualified teacher at the Lughrata subsidised school. This position allowed her to still live at home with her parents and help on the farm. The Lughrata School had been closed because there was no qualified teacher. The parents then approached Mary's father and asked him if Mary would teach the pupils. Because she was not qualified Mary refused to

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[17] Helen Cooper, interview, October 2001.

take any payment from the parents of the students.[18] Basically Mary thought back to her own days at primary school and used the same style to teach the same content. Unfortunately, one parent became upset because his daughter's handwriting deteriorated and removed his child from the school. This meant the pupil numbers dropped to eight, below the level capable of attracting a subsidy, and the school closed. Mary then stayed home and helped her mother and ran the dairy, except for the period of time she spent in Sydney referred to at the beginning of the chapter. At the age of 24 she married Helen Cooper's brother and settled down to become a farming wife.

Helen Cooper had always wanted to become either a nurse or study music. Her family was aware that she was a gifted singer, but it was only after the local doctor talked to her mother and brothers about her studying music and singing in Melbourne that voice training and piano lessons became possible. Dr Ick was from Victoria, and through his contacts Helen began studying at the St Kilda Music Conservatorium at the age of 21. Helen hired a piano from Maples Stores and usually put in a nine-hour day alternating between piano, voice production, theory and counter-point classes. The boat trip each way to Melbourne was lengthy, usually around 28 hours, and Helen boarded with a woman who had once worked as a governess in the islands for her grandmother.[19] She was engaged to Mary Walker's brother, and in Launceston, waiting for Helen to catch the boat to Melbourne they tossed a coin and decided to get married then and there on the result. The decision caused consternation in both families. In this instance a brother and a sister married a brother and a sister. Geoff Cooper married Helen Walker and Jeff Walker married Mary Cooper. Helen and Geoff's wedding took place one day before Mary and Jeff's.

Helen settled down to become farming wife and mother with no regrets. But as she says, music remained her 'great passion'. Helen worked equally with her

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[18] Subsidised schools attracted a small government subsidy and parents paid some fees. They existed in situations where there were only very small groups of children who were too far from the local school. A school had to have nine pupils to attract a subsidy. Mary's school had just nine when she began teaching.
[19] Helen Cooper, interviews, August 1998 and October 1998 and pers. comm. June 2000.

husband carrying out all aspects of farming work. Her children regarded her very much as a 'working wife'.[20]

At the age of 12, Gladys Robinson became friendly with a girl from Hagley in Northern Tasmania, while in hospital in Launceston after having her appendix out. After discharge, the two corresponded regularly. When Gladys was 16 the Hagley family invited her to stay with them and then asked her to remain on and help in the house and farm for her board. This was the first time Gladys had lived away from home apart from short visits within the islands. After ten months away she returned to Vansittart Island and told her father that she could not spend the rest of her life there. He agreed and the family began to make arrangements to move to Flinders Island and buy a farm. Gladys had a couple more jobs, living with island families and caring for their children, before she married and helped her husband run their farm and school bus business. After her husband's death when she was 52 she worked at the local fish factory until she was 68, to acquire the necessary money to finish off the house she had been building with her husband before his death.[21]

For women looking for qualifications after school, teaching and nursing offered traditionally acceptable occupations. Heather Willis became a teacher and later so did Shirley Holloway. After her marriage, Heather considered returning to teaching. This plan came to a sudden end when her sister-in-law worked out that she only had to milk two more cows a day to earn the same money as she would teaching.[22] Noreen McCarthy went nursing in Launceston, but found the demand for unquestioning obedience coupled with the imposition of a rigid system of discipline, difficult to tolerate. Despite doing very well in her examinations, and having the matron take a personal interest in her, she left after being reprimanded for passing a senior staff member in the corridor rather than standing back to allow them to go first.[23]

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[20] Jan Henning, interview, March 1999.
[21] Gladys Robinson, interviews, April 1998 and May 1998, pers. comm. June 2000.
[22] Heather Willis, interview October 2001
[23] Noreen McCarthy, interview, November 2001.

Olga Henwood always enjoyed work. After completing year eight at Whitemark Primary School she went to Launceston where she obtained a diploma from a Zerco's Business College. She then had two or three jobs in Launceston before returning home at the beginning of the war. Although only in middle age, both her parents were in failing health and her mother died in 1948 followed by her father in 1952. During these years at home she met and married Eric Henwood and together they took over Olga's parents farm. Eric also died comparatively early at the age of 52, he had never fully recovered his health from World War Two. At about the age of 36, Olga went back to work and took on the position of Deputy Council Clerk. She gave up work as Eric's health deteriorated, but then stood for the local Council and was elected.[24] On Eric's death she retired from Council. Later, however, she took on a clerical position with the Agricultural Bank and stayed there until the bank closed in 1978. She was immediately offered a job doing the books for the Aboriginal Fish factory and she stayed there for almost a year before moving on to work at Webster's as an office worker, as well as 'doing real estate, bit of everything, it was the best job I ever had'.[25] Olga retired at 65 but was immediately offered the job of doing the books for the local hotel which she continued to do until she was 69 at which time she suffered a stroke.

These working histories show that young island women did move into employment when the opportunity was available. A few took on nursing and teaching as careers; most, however, worked wherever they could. But there were two powerful constraints on outside employment. Young women who had been brought up on farms and/or came from large families found their responsibility to their mothers and the family farm circumscribed their ability to take outside employment. Their financial contribution to the farm, in the form of labour, was greater than the money they could hope to earn elsewhere. They were also well aware of the difficulties of their mothers' lives and how necessary their

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[24] Letter from John L. Madden, MHA, to Olga Henwood, congratulating her on becoming the first woman elected to the Flinders Island Council, 17 April 1969. Olga had already in 1967 become a Justice of the Peace for Flinders Island. Letter from J.D. Dwyer, Attorney-General's Department, offering the appointment, 16 May 1967. Both letters in Olga Henwood's possession.

[25] Olga Henwood, interview, December 2000,

contribution was if their mother was to get any respite. Secondly, they married and became mothers in the 1940s and 1950s, a time that promoted the ideology of full-time mothering which made returning to work difficult. Olga Henwood did return to work, but only after her children were of a suitable age. Married women with children who wished to work at this time could find only one socially acceptable avenue - work on the family farm or in the family business – an avenue that Chapter Eight shows could also mean their children being unsupervised .

Social life

Young women led a full and active social life in the islands, and this enabled them to mingle with all community groups as well as temporary residents and visitors. Ultimately, however, to fit the role for which they had been prepared, they had to marry, and to marry they had to meet a suitable young man. Community social events were the means that made this possible for many women. Problems could occur sometimes when parents did not regard their daughter's choice of partner as 'suitable' and consequently needed to be won over. But before the stage of commitment and 'settling down' was reached, there was another delicious stage that all the women remember with considerable delight. For a few brief years, as they danced and partied their way into their early 20s, life was just marvellous fun.

Dancing had been a particularly popular form of entertainment since early settlement times in the Furneaux Islands. All the women were experienced dancers, they had been attending dances since early childhood. Helen Cooper recalls her father-in-law telling her that:

> ...people would come from far and near in their carts and buggies and all the children would be put to sleep in the dressing room which was at the side of the stage...he said to me 'all the children would sleep there, except you, you were always on the floor'. That was when I was about five I always loved dancing.[26]

There does not appear to have been any disapproval of dancing within the Furneaux Islands. This is probably because the Anglican and Catholic churches were the two major Christian denominations and the only two with churches and church halls. Neither of these churches were concerned about the morality of dancing in the way some Protestant churches were. Elizabeth Roberts has shown that in northern England, Methodism, for example, disapproved of dancing.[27] However, Roberts suggests that despite this concern by some churches, in general, dances were viewed as suitable places for young men and women to meet. This was a commonly held view in the Furneaux Islands, where everyone from babies to grandparents might meet at a local dance or ball. Therefore, dances played an important role in providing a regulated venue for young people to meet and spend time with each other under the watchful eyes of the whole community.

Many of the women in the study recalled the dances and balls of their youth with considerable pleasure. Dances were markedly more informal than balls for which everyone dressed up.

> Men didn't wear dinner jackets but always suits and ties. It was very formal in those days; we always had long frocks and evening bags. The MC kept everything under control and if there was a visiting person who could play for a dance it would be announced. Then the MC would escort the visiting artist or participant to the stage and then escort them back to their seats.

> Balls could go all night. The New Year's Ball was always the ball after the Emita Sports and it was common for the men to go home and get changed and go straight out to the harvesting. Oh yes I've danced all night.[28]

Clothes played an important part in making social events seem very special. Dressing up for any outing was normal and competition between women regarding outfits was common. Shopping for best clothes was done by catalogue,

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[26] Helen Cooper, interview, August 2000.
[27] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-class women 1890–1940*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 70–71.
[28] Helen Cooper, interview, August 2000. MC — Master of Ceremonies.

often from David Jones or Myers, and women kept their special outfits highly secret. But as Helen Cooper recalls, 'you could get there only to find that someone else had chosen the same outfit'.[29] People travelled to dances and balls, often in groups, perhaps in the back of an open truck together or by horse and cart. The weather was not a serious consideration, as Mary Walker makes clear in describing transport to dances in the early 1930s:

> Dad had an old T model ford...it was an open one—no hood on it and you could put a tray on it, you could put an extra seat on the back. When we were teenagers there were dances on in Whitemark every week and we used to come down in it. It was pretty cold coming down in this old open car, but we used to dress up in our pretty dresses. We had long dresses in those days and our hair would be all titivated up, then we'd wrap up everything but our nose and ride down to the dance [in the car]. You'd be freezing cold on the ride home. No hot water bottle or anything like that. The bed would be freezing cold but we'd go to bed and sleep.[30]

Helen Cooper was born in 1914 and in the days of her youth, original square dances like quadrilles and the lancers, as well as waltzes, were common at dances and balls. In the 1920s the blues came in and then the charleston. Helen's mother did not regard the charleston as a very graceful dance and Helen was not supposed to do it 'but Merle and I learned and did plenty of it'. She remembers also at this time the little printed programmes with all the dances listed which enabled young women to book their partners ahead for all the different dances.[31]

Behaviour at dances was well regulated. Alcohol was not allowed and people who had been obviously drinking were not admitted. Nevertheless, some young men would wait until the hotel closed before going on to the dance. In Noreen McCarthy's opinion they often required a few drinks to have the courage to approach a girl at the dance.[32] Several interviewees described the inside of the hall, where the girls and women sat around the sides of the room on forms and

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[29] Helen Cooper, interview, October 1998.
[30] Mary Walker, interview, August 1998.
[31] Helen Cooper, interview, August 2000.
[32] Noreen McCarthy, interview, March 1999.

the younger men stood around the door, but none as vividly as Noreen McCarthy:

> The men would all stand, leaning back watching all the girls, picking one out and talking about them. It was funny the dance would finish and all the men would go whoosh out the door, and it would be completely bare—just the girls sitting along the wall, and immediately it would start again [the music] in they'd come like a herd of elephants.[33]

The young and unattached were not the only ones to enjoy dancing. Other age groups also attended dances, despite their exclusion from the picture drawn above. Regular dances and balls continued into the 1960s on Flinders Island and mostly they were places of family entertainment. All age groups went to dances and children were never excluded. If they slept during the early part of the evening, they usually woke up during supper to play at slipping and sliding around the hall and between the adults as they stood eating and drinking.[34]

Helen Cooper recalls that in the 1920s and 1930s strict controls about behaviour could be enforced:

> ...and you know that you were put on your honour that you would never go out of the hall. Girls who went out of the hall during the dance were marked down socially.[35]

At most venues of entertainment young people met each other under the public gaze of the whole community. It is easy to imagine how reputations could have been damaged by behaviour deemed to be inappropriate. How much this actually mattered to young girls at the time is open to dispute. Both Nell Cook and Heather Willis recall being watched by older women in the community, but they did not take them particularly seriously or allow the constant observation to impinge upon their behaviour. Heather certainly remembers leaving the hall

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[33] ibid.,
[34] ibid.,
[35] Helen Cooper, interview, August 2000.

with friends, including her future husband, and sometimes having small parties up the road from the dance before going back in.[36]

Apart from dance and balls there were many other venues where young people could meet. Both men and women played a considerable amount of sport and matches would draw large numbers of supporters. House parties were common, as were beach parties. Individual clubs and churches regularly staged drama and choral performances. Any form of public entertainment appears to have been well supported. Films were first introduced to Flinders Island by an enterprising schoolteacher looking for ways to raise money for the local school.[37] The first commercial picture shows were introduced by local businessman, Leedham Walker, who also ran a bus to pick people up for the shows. Olga Henwood remembers that the first film shown was 'Mickey Mouse and as it was shown upside down, in error, all the audience ended up with sore necks'.[38] During the 1950s, dances were usually held on Friday night and films on Saturday night in Whitemark.[39]

Most of those interviewed remember the opportunities for leisure and entertainment in their youth and young adulthood as being excellent, and regard them as being far more extensive and inclusive than what is available for young people today on Flinders Island. They seem to have had, in general, a full and enjoyable social life at this stage of their life. Lack of confidence did not inhibit young people, for it was easy to find someone to talk to or stand with when you knew many of the people present at any event well and the remainder at least by sight.

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[36] Nell Cook, interview, August 2000; Heather Willis, interview, August 2000.
[37] Whitemark School Record Book, 1911-1930.
[38] Olga Henwood, letter to author, September 1998.
[39] Pat McIntosh, letter to author, October 2000.

Finding a partner

Dances seem to have played an important part in bringing young people together. Mary Walker had known Helen Cooper's brother, Jeff, most of her life but she did not start going out with him till she was 21:

> I met him at dances he was a wonderful dancer, he'd been away to Western Australia for a few years and while he was there he really learned to dance properly. He was good to look at and wonderful to dance with—very graceful.
>
> He asked me to marry him, nothing romantic—just will you marry me? I didn't know if I was doing the right thing. My parents didn't want me to marry him. He was harum scarum—a scallywag. He changed when he grew up. He was a lovely husband, very considerate. If I had my time over again, I'd marry him again.[40]

Heather Willis began to go out with her future husband after a dance. When Heather was dropped off at the farm gate by the Willis's truck, Frank got out and walked her up the long drive. Polly Coster also began courting after a dance.[41] Young girls did not meet their future husbands for the first time at dances, but often it was at dances that they were first noticed as potential romantic possibilities. Dances also provided the opportunity to continue and deepen the relationship. Heather Willis had known Frank all her life although he had been away in New South Wales when she was a teenager. Like Mary Walker she had to contend with her mother's opposition to the marriage—she never knew why her mother objected. After her parents' initial refusal to allow her to marry they waited three months and then Heather wore her engagement ring anyway.

Noreen McCarthy also faced opposition from her family in her choice of husband. While her mother quite liked her future husband, her father and brother disliked him intensely. He was not a local man but had come initially to Flinders Island to work for the Agricultural Bank. Noreen met him while riding

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[40] Mary Walker, interview, October 2001.
[41] Heather Willis and Polly Coster interviews, October and November 2001.

her bicycle along the coast road from Lady Barron. His motor bike had broken down and as Noreen came along he was kicking it in frustration. She pulled over to see if she could help. At the time he was employed driving the school bus and from then on, after he had dropped the children off, he would pull over on the side of the road and talk to Noreen. However, she did not marry quickly, but instead went to Launceston to commence nursing. Eighteen months later after leaving nursing she decided to return home and get married.[42] Whether or not parents opposed their daughters' choice of husband, these young women still married who they wished. In none of the families did this cause even a mild rift between daughters and parents. With whatever misgivings, parents accepted their daughters choice and husbands were absorbed into the family. Mary Walker's parents had not wanted her to marry Jeff Walker but he turned out to be a caring and loyal son-in-law who looked after Mary's parents until their deaths.[43]

Eric Henwood was serving in New Guinea during World War Two when he read, in the *New Guinea Gold*, that Olga Henwood had been crowned the Queen of Queens at the conclusion of a fund raising competition on Flinders Island.[44] Olga had raised nearly 780 pounds, as the paper pointed out this was more than one pound per head of population, for patriotic funds.

Eric wrote to Olga congratulating her. Olga didn't actually know Eric although she knew his family. She replied, and a few months later when he came home Eric visited her. At that stage it was just a friendship, but later when Eric was invalided out of the army they started going out together. They went around for a couple of years till Eric said, 'I'll have you if you'll have me?'. Like most of the other women they were engaged about 12 months before getting married. Everything was rationed at the time and Olga did not bother about putting together the traditional glory box. Heather, who married a little later also did not

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[42] Noreen McCarthy, interview, November 2001.
[43] Mary Walker, interview, October 2001.
[44] The *New Guinea Gold*, 1942. The *New Guinea Gold* was a newspaper that put together items of news from all over Australia for the troops serving in New Guinea. Copy in Olga Henwood's possession, complete date indecipherable.

bother. They claim that during the war and in the immediate post-war years there were so few material objects available that it was impossible to put anything aside for after marriage.[45]

Olga and Eric married in 1945 and for the first six months of the marriage lived at Lady Barron. During this time Eric was fishing with his father's boat and could be away for up to a week at a time. Olga had always hated the idea of living alone, so when Eric was away she would go home and live with her parents. At this time, Olga's parents began to find the farm too much so they moved to Lady Barron and took over the Lady Barron Guest House and Eric and Olga took over the farm, thus solving the problem of Olga being alone when Eric was fishing.[46]

Housing could cause another problem for young married couples. Heather Willis initially lived with her parents-in-law.[47] Gladys Robinson moved in with hers and then stayed all her married life.[48] Lily Dargaville and her husband moved in and lived with her mother for the length of their marriage.[49] Polly Coster was 20 when she started going out with George Coster who was 40. Like other couples they had met at local dances. They were married in 1951. 'I suppose I was getting the best of two worlds, a father and a husband in one. He was very caring, very placid—easy to get along with'. Polly's father had died when she was seven. Nevertheless, the couple started out like many other couples. They commenced married life living in a little cottage across the

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[45] Olga Henwood, interview, October 2001.
[46] ibid.
[47] Heather Willis, interview, October, 2001.
[48] Gladys Robinson, interview, September 1998.
[49] Lily Dargaville, interview, August 1998.

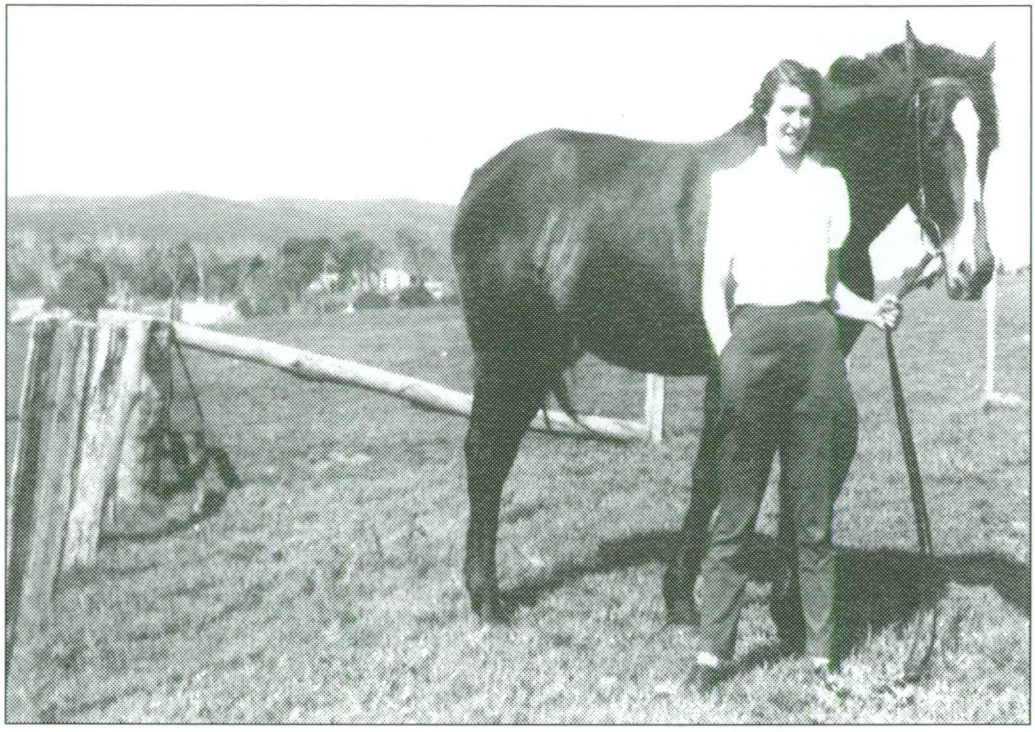

Plate 11: *Polly Coster (nee Treloar) in 1946 before her marriage.*

paddocks from Polly's mother's house and which belonged to Polly's brothers. They then moved in and lived with Polly's mother and two of her brothers until her mother died several years later. They were a very close family. Perhaps because Polly's father had died when the children were so young, Polly's mother had tried to keep the family very close. None of Polly's brothers married until late in life.[1]

* * * * * * * *

For young women who hoped to have jobs or even careers before marriage there were several intrinsic difficulties. The most obvious were the limited employment opportunities available in the islands. This meant that young women had to leave home and travel off the island to gain qualifications and often work. For families who wanted their daughters at home and who needed their help, this could seem a needlessly expensive and unnecessary exercise. But

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[1] Polly Coster, interview, November 2001.

it does not seem that families forced their daughters to stay at home and work, but rather that those daughters often saw this as their duty. The women in this study worried about their mothers and the amount of work they had to do, but perhaps more importantly they identified with their mother's lives and viewed their role within the family and on the farm as important and, therefore, deserving of support.

As young women moved through their adolescent and young adult years, they took part in the wide range of community entertainments and this seems to have been supported and encouraged by their families. However, all forms of entertainment attracted the whole community, from infancy to old age, and behaviour was subjected to considerable public scrutiny. Most young women seem to have adhered to community norms. Outbreaks of rebelliousness appear to have been mild and regarded indulgently by families and the wider community. Social activities were essential if young men and women were to meet and marry. Even when daughters married men their parents thought unsuitable, the family accepted their husbands, although this is not to say that parental disapproval did not cause some pain to daughters. Mary Walker and Heather Willis have both had very happy marriages and both, decades later, still seem at a loss to explain why their parents disapproved of their choice.

When they did marry, a number of women lived with parents and in-laws. Some moved into their own homes after a time but others remained living within an extended family situation until the older generation died. Living with parents once married seems to have been the deliberate choice of a few women—the preferred option, not a situation of having no other alternative. This may have been because in each instance the daughter's mother was a widow.

Setting up a home, either on her own or within an extended situation, was part of becoming a wife and moving towards maturity and probably eventually motherhood. Young women expected to work hard as their mothers had done, but they also knew that with better transport and facilities life was likely to be easier for them than women of their mother's generation.

PART THREE

CONTINUING THE STORY

CHAPTER SIX
Working women

CHAPTER FOUR
In Times of Need

CHAPTER FIVE
Women Supporting Each Other

CHAPTER SIX

Working Women

Before marriage young women worked as their mothers helpers and supporters. After marriage they took on the full management of their own homes. It does not seem that this increased responsibility posed any particular problems to the study participants. They were generally well prepared for home management. Nevertheless, moving from the childhood to the marital home did mean assuming a greater work load. Young wives worked alongside their husbands to establish themselves in the early years of the marriage, often at the same time as bearing their children.

Household work

The lack of electricity caused each generation of housewives problems, although towards the end of the period under study kerosene and gas refrigerators and gas stoves were becoming more common and diesel generated electricity was used throughout the island, albeit intermittently. Up until the 1920s most families cooked over an open fire and many families did so for considerably longer. Grace Wheatley married in 1940 and had 11 living children and cooked on an open fire for years before getting a wood and gas stove. Many writers have argued that the increasing use of domestic appliances in the early decades of the twentieth century increased rather than decreased the amount of housework women did, as standards of household cleanliness rose as task became easier to perform.[1] I argue that women in the Furneaux Islands were susceptible to pressure to raise standards of hygiene and cleanliness in the home, but lacked the tools common to many other Australian women, particularly urban women, to easily do so, leading to an increased level of manual labour.

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[1] See for example, Steven Mintz & Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life,* The Free Press, New York, 1988, p. 125; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave,* Basic Books, New York, 1983, Ch. 6; Michael Gilding, *The Making and Breaking of the Australian Family,* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1991, Ch. 4.

Water for household purposes was heated on top of the open or wood fire.[2] Few families had inside tap water before the 1940s and this meant that water had to be brought from an outside tap or hauled from an underground well, carried into the house in buckets, heated and used, and then carried outside again. With hindsight Leedham Walker wondered why efforts were not made to reduce the hardships of women's work, because as he points out, it would not have been very difficult at the time:

> The women's life was hard and tough and in many cases, when I look back on it, could have been made easier. But they didn't complain, for instance the water that ran off the roof ran down into an underground tank because there was no galvanised iron in those days to make a tank [above ground tank]. There was a home made pump with a lever that you could pump the water into a bucket and then it had to be carried in and covered with muslin on a big work bench. Everything had to be carried out also, but when they washed up, which was a big wash-up, they could have had some sort of get away for it but there wasn't.[3]

Later Leedham's father built a stone and mortar drain outside the back door into which water could be poured and allowed to drain down to water the vegetable garden. But this drain could have easily, as he points out, been attached to an inside outlet. He mentions also, as have many of the women, the wooden floors common to the time which entailed almost daily scrubbing. The first linoleum floors the Walkers had drastically reduced his mother's workload as they could be mopped.[4]

The effort involved in doing the weekly family wash was enormous. By the time the study informants were married many had inside wood burning coppers and although washing was still a difficult and exhausting task, they regard it as nothing compared with the efforts their mothers' expended doing the family laundry during their childhood. Some families did have combined bathrooms and wash-houses separate from the house; others did not, in which case washing

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[2] Grace Wheatley, interview, February 1999.
[3] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999.
[4] ibid.,

was done outside over a wood fire place. Gladys Robinson's mother was fortunate in having a wash-house.

> Out from the house we had this fairly big room, maybe 20feet by ten feet or something. It had a bath in it and it had a wood copper. It had wooden wash troughs and the washing board and she had a hand wringer because there was washing every day. She would wring the sheets out, you know with her hand, around her arm; I can still see her.[5]

Sometimes the physical effort of doing the washing made it difficult for women to continue with their other work, in which case other family members might step in and help:

> Mum wasn't a strong person physically and her shoulders used to ache from wringing the clothes, so Dad used to wring the clothes, because it was necessary for Mum to milk, but her arms would ache from wringing the clothes so Dad would do it.[6]

When there were no others available to help, women struggled on alone, carrying water to fill coppers, scrubbing, rinsing, blueing, starching and endlessly wringing mostly by hand, between each washing stage. The difficulties were greater when the water supply was limited or when they had to wash outside. Polly Coster's mother, a widow by her 40s, had eight children and only one small house water tank. Extra water was often carried from an underground roadside culvert tank.

> There was a recreation paddock reserved for stock (waiting to be shipped). . . . Well I suppose it would be about a quarter of a mile from where we lived, and there was a boarded up well there and by throwing a kerosene tin or bucket in you could bucket the water out. My Mum used to bag up the clothes in old chaff bags and go there. She used to have two kerosene tins set up boiling up all the clothes like the sheets, towels, pillowcases and shirts and things and she had an iron tub. There was a fence along this reserve and she used to hang the clothes over it or on the scrub, and when they got dry she would go down and pick them up.[7]

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[5] Gladys Robinson, interview, 30 April 1999.
[6] Jan Henning, Helen Cooper's daughter, interview, April 1999.
[7] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.

Grace Wheatley washed for her family in a similar fashion in the 1940s. She carried her washing to a nearby creek where she had kerosene tins set up over open fireplaces. The clothes were scrubbed sometimes in the creek, sometimes in a tub, then boiled up with water bucketed from the creek in tins. The washing was wrung out by being twisted around one arm. It was left to at least part dry on a single line or on gorse bushes before being taken home.[8]

Farm clothes became particularly dirty and required extra effort to get them clean. Mary Walker described how she used to get the men's mud and sometimes manure-encrusted trousers clean:

> You'd start early about eight in the morning with all the farm pants. We had a cement floor in the laundry, still have . . . We'd soak these dirty trousers, poor men only used to have one or two pairs of filthy trousers a week and then we'd put them on the floor and get to work with a bass broom. I think it was a bit hard on the pants, but you were careful and you'd brush the worst off . . . and then you'd put them in the copper and give them a little boil. They used to be beautifully clean.[9]

Washing and scrubbing were two household tasks that directly reflected the ideals of the sanitation and hygiene movements of the late nineteenth century. These movements aimed to educate the public regarding the connection between dirt and disease. All the women and their mothers took pride in clean and tidy homes and snowy white laundry. In doing so they were reflecting the norms of a generation powerfully affected by domestic reform movements.[10] While poverty might induce sympathy it was not regarded as an excuse for a dirty home which was viewed as a serious reflection on a housewife. As family health was the province of women and cleanliness and health were aligned in the thinking of the day, a musty, grubby house revealed a woman who did not care for her family's health. But the work of attempting to maintain a clean and healthy

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[8] Grace Wheatley, interview, February 1999.
[9] Mary Walker, interview, September 1998.
[10] See Kereen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernising the Australian Family 1880–1940,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1985, for a full coverage of the activities of the Australian Health Society's and the domestic science movement in promoting the professionalisation of housekeeping and mothering.

house with little money and few facilities could damage a woman's health. Polly Coster's mother, whose hardships doing the family wash have already been recounted, regularly ruptured the varicose veins in her legs:

> Mum had terrible varicose veins, they were all down her legs and some as big as my arm . . . There were lots of prickly boxes and prickly box punctured one of the veins. I was with her, and she put her hand down and said 'go and get a penny and a piece of rag out of the bag'. Well I rushed in and got the penny and I raced back and she's holding it you see, but the moment she took her fingers off it was like a tap. She put the piece of rag first and then the penny and she pushed it real hard and wound this bandage thing around it and held it in place like that, and somehow or the other they must have arranged for her to go to the doctor. They would put a support bandage on to support the vein and that would stay on for months. She was supposed to rest as much as possible but when you've got a lot of family you can't do that so these veins periodically burst and her feet and legs were all scarred.[11]

Late every night Polly's mother would get down on her hands and knees and scrub the kitchen floorboards as this was the only time she could be assured that no-one would need to walk over it. Mrs Treloar had a stroke in her middle 40s when Polly was ten, and remained bedridden for the next six years, nursed by Polly and her brothers. Her frustration must have been immense as she watched Polly's attempts to do the family wash; attempts which included boiling all the clothes together and reducing Mrs Treloar's snowy white sheets to a dull gray. Eventually a neighbour, Mrs Armstrong, was asked to help Polly with the weekly wash.[12]

Cooking for the family was the other major inside task faced by women. Women baked their own bread, churned their own butter, often by hand, made all their jams and pickles and grew and preserved vegetables and fruit. They also milked the household cow and cared for the fowl yard. Game, fish and meat were usually hunted, caught or killed by the men of the family. Most island families ate considerable amounts of fish, mutton bird and wallaby. Without refrigeration

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[11] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.
[12] ibid.,

Plate 12: *Polly Coster's mother, Mrs Treloar, with her grandchildren, 1950s.*

meat was often salted and stored in barrels for later use. Mutton birds would be caught throughout the season and salted and eaten for the remainder of the year. Cows and sheep were slaughtered and hung from trees or gallows. Leedham Walker's mother would use old sheets turned side to middle and sewn together to make a large pillowcase which would be put over the carcass to protect it from the flies. Other women used old muslin. Meat hung this way would develop a protective coating from the wind and last several days.[1]

The family diets described in the interviews changed very little in basic foodstuffs over the 50-year period of the study. However, by 1960 most women did not bake their own bread or make butter and a wider range of foods was being eaten, particularly more pork, beef, fruit and canned goods.

In general, island farming families did not go short of food in depressions and wars and the food they ate was usually fresh and always homemade. On the other hand, it seems clear that a few very poor families may have struggled at

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[1] This paragraph is compiled from the following interviews: Gladys Robinson, 30 April 1999; Leedham Walker, October, 1999; Olga Henwood, letter to author, September 1998.

times to feed their children.[14] In 1936 the Technical Commission of the Health Organisation of the League of Nations recommended a list of foods which should be eaten daily to gain a sufficient intake of vitamins and minerals.[15] The list included milk, butter, eggs, fruit and vegetables. Most of the study participants recall the dairy products eaten in their youth with relish, particularly home-made butter and cream. What was at hand, fresh and easy to procure on the islands fitted well with the dietary recommendations of the time, although from a present-day perspective, it appears to be a diet heavy in saturated fats and salt. During the Great Depression and World War Two island families were more fortunate than most Australians in being able to eat a varied, fresh and generally plentiful diet. Women contributed substantially to maintaining the health of their families by producing, preparing, cooking and preserving seasonal foods and local produce, but they did so at enormous costs in energy and time.

Grace Wheatley, after her marriage in 1940, cooked several loaves of bread a day for years for her large family in an outside bread oven built for her in the back yard.[16] This situation may have been preferable to cooking in small overcrowded houses in summer over wood fires, a task made more difficult by the flies and hoards of mosquitoes around in the evening. Efforts to defeat insects before the advent of fly-wire screens were inventive:

> We used to start a fire in an oil drum with sticks and leaves and then you would put cow pads in and the smoke would dispel mosquitoes. Of course you had to have a number of fires because you had millions of mosquitoes and as soon as it got all nice and hot you would put in green gum leaves and the eucalyptus smell would repel them. And you would probably have half a dozen of these burning around outside the open windows of the house at night.[17]

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[14] See Chapter Four, p. 126.
[15] Frederick W. Clements, *A History of Human Nutrition in Australia,* Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1986, p. 95.
[16] Grace Wheatley, interview, February, 1999.
[17] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999.

Some foodstuffs, particularly flour, sugar, salt, tea, spices and flavourings, could not be produced in the islands and had to be freighted to the islands by sea and later by air. Housewives had to be careful in their ordering and allow for possible delays in the arrival of produce due to bad weather.

Without electricity, clothes were sewn first by hand and then later by treadle sewing machine. Women worked into the night by kerosene and gas lamps to keep their families adequately clothed. Gladys Robinson remembers that as a young girl she used to help her father make the boat sails by hand and that in turn, he would sew up the seams of the clothes her mother was making for the children on the treadle sewing machine. 'He wouldn't set the sleeves in, Mum had to do that, he said his hands were too big'. One of her brothers became a skilled darner and mender and was relieved of many of his outside duties so he could darn the family socks.[18] In some families men and women worked together both within and outside of the house. More often men would help women inside when and if they needed their help outside.

Neither Gladys Robinson nor her daughter, Gwen, remembers either of their husbands getting up at night to attend to children. George Robinson never helped inside the house, although he cut the household wood and did outside maintenance work. Nor was he overtly affectionate:

> I went through my whole life with George and he said to me when he was in hospital at the last, when we were talking about different things and things he wished he had done like spend more time with the children, when he said to me 'you know perhaps I was a funny bloke but I never needed to be like the other men running around the place, boozing and that. I liked being at home with you by the fire'. But he didn't tell me that at the time.[19]

However Gladys's marriage changed substantially after the death of her father-in-law and her youngest child leaving home.

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[18] Gladys Robinson, interview 30 April 1998.

> George and I had eight years of our 34 years alone. After Pop died and Brian got married and there was just George and I, then he would wipe up for me, and if we were going for a walk down the beach take me by the hand. Now this is something that came at the end. So that gave me a bit more confidence and thinking back now I should have stood up to him, roused him or something to get the satisfaction whether his Dad was there or not...but then, a wife in those times, you didn't do it. And I think now how weak I was.[20]

In retrospect Gladys believes her behaviour was inhibited by the constant presence of her father-in-law within the home. Gwen remembers her mother as very quiet and that her father was definitely the head of the household, while in her view her marriage is that of a more equal partnership.[21] It is possible that had Gladys been able to establish her own household she may have been able to establish different norms within the relationship. Those women who lived permanently within an extended family situation have stressed the benefits, but it is also likely that such living arrangements could have a constraining and conservative effect on relationships.

Work on the mutton-bird islands

While memories of spending time on the mutton-bird islands as a child are mainly very happy, the recollections of adult women are more ambivalent. The annual trek to the islands and the long hours spent in the processing sheds, as well as trying to continue their domestic work, was exhausting for women. They obviously enjoyed the opportunities for a little weekend socialising and the extra income the harvest generated, but they, nevertheless, remember how hard their mothers worked and feel birding for women was only slightly improved in their time.

The driving force behind participating in the bird harvest, for many families, was the possibility of earning a reasonable amount of money that could help

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[19] Gladys Robinson, interview, September 1998.
[20] ibid.,
[21] Gwen Bailey, interview, September 1998.

carry them through the rest of the year. In the late 1940s when Frank and Heather Willis ran their own birding shed, they could make 1000 pounds in the season and put the badly needed money back into their farm.[22] Families often relied on the birding season to pay off debts to the local stores that they incurred through the year.

> I think we were pretty resilient, but if it hadn't been for Bowman's [the local storekeepers] we wouldn't have survived because we didn't get enough off the farm to keep us going the whole 12 months so Bowman's used to carry us until the bird season which started in April.[23]

The birding islands presented women with greater difficulties in terms of house keeping and cooking than their homes. And although the season only lasted five to six weeks it was an exhausting time for adult women. As on Flinders Island they were dependent on tanks and wells for water, but on the birding islands water was a scarce resource and in any case was needed for the processing shed. Water had to be hauled in kerosene tins from wells and tanks and heated up over a fire, that was almost always an open fire or a camp oven, for every purpose. Bread still had to be baked and butter was transported over to the island in huge crocks. Root vegetables were frequently buried in the ground to keep them fresh. Three large if plain meals had to be prepared and served to children and workers every day. Many women would cook for ten or more people at every meal. Domestic work, performed under far more difficult situations than at home, continued on top of the eight or more hours a day women spent in the processing sheds.

> When I was working on Big Dog [Island] with George, we did 22 seasons there; I used to get so tired. It was awful really. I remember the first house we had on the island . . . it was a house that the people we bought the lease off used to live in. George went over one year to burn the rookery, they did that every year to make it easier to work the next year, and somehow he burned the house down. I was so pleased—no more scrubbing board floors. The next one he built was a lovely little compact house . . . we had a porch, it went into the living room with a stove. There was a girl's bedroom, our bedroom

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[22] Heather Willis, interview, August 2000.
[23] Nell Cook, interview, October 1998.

> and Brian's bedroom. We had a dirt floor, and you cut green tussock grass to cover it. It was lovely. No more floors to sweep. All you had to do was run out and get a bit of green grass and shake it around.[24]

Tussock grass spread over earth floors was the traditional floor covering of mutton-birding huts. This account reveals that from the perspective of a busy woman, it was also more time saving than later more modern styles of flooring. Birding was exhausting work for all island women. When Joan Blundstone was about 12 her mother had a 'nervous breakdown'. All eight children were left with their uncle and Joan's father took his wife to Melbourne for a three-week holiday staying with relatives. Joan cannot remember her mother behaving strangely or being in anyway different, and at the time the children were not told about their mother's condition. Only years later were they told she had had a 'breakdown'. Joan believes it is hardly surprising, as she 'never had a holiday and all those children, very little money and for years she did a mutton-bird season every year'.[25]

Providing food while on the mutton-bird islands was a major logistical exercise for women. In the 1940s, at midday every Saturday, Gladys Robinson would leave her husband to clean the shed and go back to the family hut, where she would rake out all the old grass and spread new grass on the floors. Then she would do the weekly washing, have a bath and begin cooking. This consisted of baking bread and trying to prepare as many meals ahead for the next week as possible. Every Saturday night the family would have mutton bird curry and rice because it was a meal that was easy to prepare while she did the other cooking. After the evening meal she would make tarts and pies and other easily stored food which could be used for lunches during the next week.[26]

This account differs very little from Gladys's childhood memories of her mother's work on the mutton-bird islands. Gladys helped her mother cook the

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[24] Gladys Robinson, interview, April 1998
[25] Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000.
[26] Gladys Robinson, interview, 30 April 1998

evening meal as soon as they were finished in the shed, and on Saturdays she would get the clean grass for the floor and help her mother with the washing. Her mother baked bread every day and the family lived on fish and cold mutton birds.[27] Over a generation, women's work on the birding islands changed hardly at all. Most women followed the same routine of leaving the shed at midday on Saturday and spending the rest of the day cleaning and cooking for the next week.

Despite the difficulties food preparation caused women, the sort of food eaten by the family while mutton-birding is remembered with pleasure. Joan Blundstone recalls continually eating mutton birds and fish for the six weeks and never being tired of them. They also took with them potatoes, rice, other fresh vegetables, and tinned fruit and vegetables.

Most families took powdered milk, although some remember their families taking a milking cow with them to the birding islands. Children expanded their diets by fishing and foraging.

> We used to get a bucket and cook limpets and periwinkles on the fire. We often used tinned fruit cans to cook them in. We'd boil them up and when they opened hook them out with a hair pin. We also ate pig-face and native cranberries.[28]

Not all the women in the study belonged to families that went mutton-birding, but all had some first-hand knowledge of the mutton-birding experience, even if it was only through visiting friends on the birding islands on Sunday. Recipes for cooking mutton birds are numerous and often complex, and women took pride in knowing both traditional and innovative ways of cooking them.

The family mutton-birding season could not be managed without both men and women and each was equally necessary to the success of the enterprise. From the

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[27] ibid.,
[28] Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000

Aboriginal women who first showed the sealers how to catch the birds, women have been an integral part of the process. Yet their involvement has never been easy for they carried the double burden of full-time cook and housekeeper as well as processing shed worker.

Mutton-birding offered women opportunities for informal socialising, particularly on Sundays, the one day the sheds did not work. The income for poor families was vital and therefore must have relieved a great deal of mental stress. On the other hand, it was hard, dirty back-breaking work compounded by primitive housekeeping and cooking facilities.

Working on the farm

Throughout her married life Olga Henwood worked beside her husband, carrying out the full range of tasks performed on the farm at the time. In her view, sharing the workload made all the difference to their relationship.[29] Her sister, Heather, now in her late 70s still worked alongside her husband on their farm until last year. Similarly, Helen Cooper also worked with her husband carrying out a full range of farming tasks. Her daughter, Jan Henning, describes her as a 'working wife', neatly distinguishing between the value placed upon women's inside work and outside farm work.[30] Both Helen and Jan stressed the closeness of Helen's relationship with her husband.

But this prescription for marital harmony is not quite as simple as it seems for, as Olga says, 'you had to have someone to mind the children'.[31] Working within the home allowed women to also supervise their pre-school children. Working in paddocks situated a considerable distance from the house could cause problems for women with young children. While such work was more likely to be socially acceptable than employment in the paid workforce, it presented women with many of the same dilemmas.

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[29] Olga Henwood, interview, September 1998.
[30] Jan Henning, interview, March 1999
[31] Olga Henwood, interview, September 1998.

Household management was primarily viewed as women's work, but it was work that some men might help with to enable their wives to work beside them on the farm. Working together in the family farming enterprise could lead to an especial closeness between couples, with men appreciating their wives' input, skills and knowledge. Childcare, on the other hand, was women's work and, increasingly during the first half of the twentieth century, regarded as work requiring large amounts of time and attention from women in order to develop satisfactory mothering skills and happy healthy children.[32] At a time when motherhood was being promoted as a skilled profession, being a 'good' mother contributed to women's feelings of self worth. Reflecting on this, Olga states 'women in the past often worked with their husbands but they had to leave the children with their mother or mother-in-law or leave them [alone]. If they left them alone they were always worried'.[33] In Olga's case her mother-in-law helped look after Olga's pre-school children. Helen Cooper, on the other hand, with no close female relatives, took her children with her around the farm. Her daughter, Jan, recalls the family routine:

> Mum went everywhere with Dad...when we were children, after milking on Monday morning, Dad helped Mum with the washing and then we all went up the paddock or wherever again. On Saturdays Mum stayed home and cleaned the house....When we were young I can remember sleeping up under the trees, having an afternoon sleep in the paddock. Dad would dig a hole put a bag in it and we would have our sleep under the trees. I remember doing that, I thought it was wonderful.[34]

Olga Henwood's statement that 'they had to leave children with mothers and mothers-in-law' reinforces both the dual responsibilities of farming women and their dependence upon other women within the family when they were available. A couple fully sharing the farming workload, the frustration and the future planning of the family business, might save money on hired help as well as become close partners. However, this could only occur where women had the

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[32] Helen Cooper regarded her childcare book written by Truby King as her bible. Truby King was a leading proponent of the view that motherhood was a woman's most important role.
[33] ibid.,
[34] Jan Henning, interview, March 1999.

health and interest to undertake large amounts of farming work and, perhaps even more importantly, had female kin living close by prepared to care for their young children. That many women did juggle childcare and farming and enjoyed doing so reveals, at best, a flimsy adherence to the dominant middle-class ideology of the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, that good mothers devoted themselves fully to their children. Women in the Furneaux Islands continued an older tradition of juggling their childcare responsibilities with their household and farming work.

How far the doctrine of 'separate spheres' for men's and women's activities actually infiltrated rural life during the late 19th and early 20th century is debatable.[35] While lip service may have been paid to it in that women continued to accept the responsibility of caring for home and family, the reality was that some women and most men valued more the farm work women performed outside of the home. Therefore, any belief that a woman's role should properly be confined only to the home was overlooked, if she managed to care competently for home and children as well as help on the farm. Women accepted, it seems mostly willingly, the double burden of homemaker and farmer. Lake has explored rural women's role in farming 'in the light of two contradictory ideological constructs: they were helpmates or slaves. The work enhanced their status or degraded them'.[36] The women interviewed on Flinders Island have indicated that those women who actively undertook farm work, and not all of them did, felt that their status was raised because of their increased knowledge and skills and the fact that they had more in common with their husbands. It is interesting (though not surprising) that men usually only entered and assisted their wife in the sphere of 'women's work' when they needed her help on the farm.

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[35] The ideology of 'separate spheres' associated women with the private world of home and family and men with the public world of paid employment. Coltrane states the doctrine first developed in the United Kingdom but spread rapidly to the United States. Scott Coltrane, *Gender and Families,* Pine Forge Press, California, 1998, p. 60.

[36] Marilyn Lake, 'Helpmate, slave, housewife: women in rural families 1870-1930' in P. Grimshaw, C. McConville, E. McEwen in *Families in Colonial Australia,* George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 182.

The oral testimony suggests that young and strong women managed their dual responsibilities competently and with varying amounts of interest and pleasure. However, in certain situations farm work could affect the health of women. This is most obvious when farms were being cleared and established. Sisters Olga Henwood and Heather Willis enjoyed working long hours on their farms with their husbands. In doing so they were repeating a pattern they had observed as children in their parents' marriage. Their father, a veteran of World War One had heart problems, but took up the offer of land, available to returned soldiers, from the Closer Settlement Board. The land selected was a forest, all of which had to be cleared by hand. The Closer Settlement Board gave little help to soldier settlers and many walked off the land.[37] Harry Haworth stayed on the land and made a success of the farm under enormous difficulty. His daughters believe that the farm work their parents did contributed to their deaths in middle age.

Olga's and Heather's mother, Hilda Messner, was born in 1900 on Chappell Island during the mutton-bird season. Thirteen years later her mother, died, while again on Chappell Island, along with three of her adult siblings of a virulent influenza. Hilda at 13 was the oldest daughter and left with a grieving father, the household management and the care of the younger children. Hilda found herself in the unusual situation for the time, given her large number of female kin, of lacking female support. Her daughters feel this was due to the fact that many of her relatives lived too far away and others were also bereaved by the epidemic.

Added to Hilda's problems at this stage was her recognition of her father's difficulties. Gustavus Messner did not remarry and had a drinking problem. Women admit that in the past men frequently caused disruption within families due to excessive drinking, but rarely did they speak about it in relation to their own families. To Hilda, through her daughter Olga, we therefore owe thanks for one colourful description of the drinking behaviours of men 80 and 90 years ago.

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[37] Olga Henwood, interview, September 1998; Lloyd Robson, *A Short History of Tasmania*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 118-120.

> Mum was very happy when the hotel came to the island in 1911 because she said that before that the men used to get kegs of wine and take them to one another's place and stay there like pigs at a trough until they had used it all up. Well I suppose her father didn't have much of a life with no wife and a handful of children.[1]

Plate 13: *From left to right, Heather, Elaine, Hilda and Olga Haworth, 1930s.*

Hilda worked very hard after her marriage to Harry Haworth and both her daughters believe that her death at 48 from a stroke was partly due to hard work. The couple cleared the land by chopping huge trees by hand and then using bullocks and horses to drag them down. The stumps were burnt out. As her husband's heart complaint precluded him from putting his hands above his head, Hilda chopped all the family wood. The couple milked large herds of cows by hand and Hilda began smoking during the early morning milking to stave off

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[1] ibid. , There are obvious date discrepancies in this account. The hotel on Flinders Island did open in 1911 but Hilda's mother did not die until 1913. It seems that Hilda in talking to her daughter may have been drawing on earlier memories and that her fathers drinking was not entirely due to his wife's death. The account of male drinking behaviours is confirmed by Leedham Walker who witnessed several drinking parties and remembers men rinsing empty wooden kegs out with water to draw out wine from the wood. Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999.

hunger pangs. This presumably contributed to her later high blood pressure and eventual stroke. Hilda's life is similar to accounts of other pioneering women all over Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But in 1948 when Hilda died, most rural areas in Australia had electricity and dairying was usually mechanised. At the time women on Flinders were working under greater difficulties than many other rural women.

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Women on Flinders Island during the first half of the twentieth century rarely found their role confined purely to housekeeping following marriage. Most women ran their homes and cared for their children with few of the modern conveniences available at the time. As well, they frequently took part in the seasonal mutton-birding industry and worked alongside their husbands on the farm.

The work involved in housekeeping required skills and expertise that appear to belong more properly in the nineteenth century. Women up to and after 1960 put into everyday use knowledge of ways to store food without the benefit electricity or the availability of ice, and how to prepare and cook indigenous food. Without corner shops and dependant on sea freight to stock the grocer's shelves, ingenuity as well as knowledge, energy and strength was also required. The volume of housework to be performed, along with working on the farm, meant that only a few women occasionally took on outside paid employment. Most women did, however, work for community and/or church organisations.

While the amount of work performed by women appears prodigious, there is considerable evidence that women often enjoyed housekeeping and farming, and that the skills and knowledge they developed led to increased self-esteem. More ambivalent are the women's adult memories of working on the mutton-bird islands. Yet generally there is widespread sadness at the demise of the industry. The value of the contribution women made to supporting the family home and income appears to have been rarely recognised by others, and the

women interviewed did not overtly draw attention to it. While the day-to-day routine work women performed may have been taken for granted, the skills they required in times of special need were not.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In Times of Need

The 50 years between 1910 and 1960 brought many health services to the Furneaux Islands. The arrival of these services in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s coincided with a marked change in societal views in relation to the responsibility of women for family health and emotional wellbeing. On one hand, the establishment of health services meant that responsibility for certain areas like childbirth was removed from women to health professionals. On the other hand, more pressure was being placed on women by health and education reformers to achieve harmonious, happy and healthy homes. This paradox—more people involved in the care of the family, yet more responsibility placed upon women, as social expectations rose—was apparent across Australia.

In 1910 island families were considerably more isolated from each other and from medical help than they were in 1960. This isolation had a number of ramifications for women. In 1910 a family with small children who lost their mother, and had no other close female kin, was unlikely to continue in the islands. In many different ways women were essential to the survival of families. Their ability to produce goods for family consumption from materials close at hand, meant that they were central to the family's economic survival. Sometimes the same goods could be used for barter or sale to others, thus either saving money or earning a small income. Their work on the farm delayed or reduced the need to employ workers, and they provided a range of caring services vital to the wellbeing of a developing and isolated community that also had an economic benefit. They cared for children and the aged, they helped neighbours in times of ill health and distress, and they looked after the sick and injured as best they could. The services they provided then are (sometimes) now provided by the state at considerable cost. This hidden and often overlooked caring work of women contributed substantially to the success of their families' settling endeavour.

As well, women appear to have accepted the notion, widespread at the time, that it was their responsibility to bring some level of refinement and civilisation to the settling experience. They developed gardens around their cottages and, as time went by, planted more and more flowers among, and around prolific vegetable gardens. Most photographs of early island cottages reveal some attempt at growing flowers. Women took pride in their homes and worked hard to keep them clean and comfortable. Some women played the piano, and if they did not, they often tried to make sure their daughters learned to play. With the arrival of more and more families in the islands, entertainment in the form of dances and parties became relatively common, and the presence of women helped ensure that social gatherings conformed to the requirements of respectable rural society at the time.

By 1960 the islands were benefiting from the general boom in the post-war Australian economy. More directly, the arrival of many new settlers during the 1950s and early 1960s under the War Service Land Settlement Scheme, which set aside 82 890 acres for settlement in the islands by ex-servicemen, enabled island residents to lobby for many services taken for granted in less remote parts of Australia.[1] By 1960 the increase in population and its concentration on the two largest islands made service provision easier than at any time in the past. Flinders Island had an Area School, a hospital, a subsidised resident medical officer, and was soon to have access to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Cape Barren Island had a school and hospital, resident nurse, and regular medical visits. Air services were excellent and island residents remember nostalgically the days when air services were subsidised and Ansett Airlines able to provide planes capable of transporting 35 passengers and carrying flight attendants.[2]

With improved health and communication services women no longer had to carry the responsibility for family health alone. Consequently the core group in

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[1] AOT, Hobart,. AD610/69-14B8/52, Proposal for War Service Land Settlement n.d. n.a.
[2] Since air travel has ceased to be subsidised airline services have had difficulty maintaining services. There is a recent history of small airline companies lasting only one or two years on the Flinders Island route. Planes usually now hold nine passengers.

this study—born just before and during the 1920s and beginning to establish their own families in the 1940s—see their lives as considerably easier than those of their mothers. Yet despite better transport and communications, the lives of the women in this study were still powerfully affected by their geographical isolation. Distance, in times of crisis, became their enemy as sea and air travel could be suspended at any time in bad weather. This was as true in the 1940s and the 1960s as it is today and was in the nineteenth century.

War times

World War Two brought island families problems that were both similar and different to problems being faced by other Australians at the time. Sons and daughters went off to war and families worried and fretted as they waited for news along with the rest of the nation. On the other hand, some young people had to put up with the frustration of being defined as essential producers and denied entry to the defence forces. Islanders, like other Australians, experienced food rationing but were affected less as they were used to providing much of their own food by living off the land. Petrol was rationed; cars and school buses could not use it but farms were allowed petrol to run their farm machinery. Many island people returned to using horses and jinkers for the duration of the war.[3]

In the more sparsely populated middle and northern sections of the island petrol rationing added to fears of not being able to escape in the event of a submarine landing by the Japanese. Stan Bowman, a member of the Voluntary Defence Force during the war, states this was a definitely considered a possible scenario and was one that was often put forward by the military.[4] In discussions about the Second World War it is clear that geographical isolation did not bring any extra feeling of safety. Instead after the submarine attack on Sydney, island residents appear to have felt particularly vulnerable. Many people thought the

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[3] Jinker is an Australian term for a two-wheeled vehicle similar to an American sulky.
[4] Stan Bowman, interview, December 2000.

islands, sparsely populated and isolated, offered the Japanese a potential base for launching an attack on southern Australia.

Stan Bowman mentioned that Asians, presumed to be Japanese, were sighted several times on the rocks around the island in the late 1930s. Helen Cooper similarly told her daughter about a picnic at the beach at that time during which an Asian man appeared around the rocky headland.[5] Under Australia's immigration policies at the time Asians were not common in remote areas during the 1930s and 1940s. It is impossible now to know what to make of these stories. But the marginal nature of the islands to Australian interests appears to have significantly increased the sense of foreboding experienced by residents.

Heather Willis and Nell Cook do not remember the war causing great problems for island residents but they were teenagers at the time.[6] Slightly older women remember it as a time of considerable strain. Both Gladys Robinson and Helen Cooper were young married women in the early war years. Gladys remembers the plans the community faced for evacuation and how residents never knew when they might have to go. Part of the fear according to Gladys was that 'there would be no where to go' if the Japanese did land.[7] There was an airstrip but logically it would be occupied. The Flinders Island Municipal Council provided very detailed information about what evacuees could take with them but did not explain how island residents might actually be evacuated. However, Gladys remembers that the common belief, which may have been grounded more in hope than anything else, was that the navy would remove them from the south-east coast of the island.[8]

> I guess that was the first time I felt very isolated. The one time in particular that stays in mind was when I had Gwen in the Whitemark Hospital and it was 1944 and you know, I used to hear these planes overhead at night and you used to think 'I hope its one of ours'. It was a bit scary and then for the first

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[5] Jan Henning, interview, April 1999.
[6] Heather Willis, interview, October 2001; Nell Cook, interview, October 1998.
[7] Gladys Robinson, interview, October 2001.
[8] 'Flinders Municipality: 'Proposed evacuation of women and children and aged males', 15 July, 1942. Held by Gladys Robinson.

> time I felt how isolated, how very much alone we were. Actually nothing happened. We were ordered one time to be ready for evacuation or what ever. There were ships just out here. Our own ships, you know patrolling, and we were told all we could take was a tin box with our personal identification papers...and particularly, you know, you used to worry about the kiddies, what if you had to be evacuated at night, what would happen, and it was really scary, very scary.[9]

Whether or not the Japanese were interested in the Furneaux Islands, the fear that they might have been does not seem unreasonable given the size of the islands, their sparse population, and their isolated location south-east of mainland Australia.

Helen Cooper, as a young wife living at Emita and fairly isolated, certainly found the early war years difficult. Her husband was in the Voluntary Defence Force and away at Whitemark for several nights a week. Her father-in-law would come over to help her finish the milking each night and then leave. One of Jan Henning's first memories is of her parents discussing where they might meet in the event of an attack. They arranged to meet at a position on the farm to the west of the house. Jan can remember thinking this was definitely the wrong decision. To her everything seemed to come from the west—the weather, visitors, equipment—and therefore, so would these people called the Japanese.[10] The war could have a profound effect on even very small bush children. The Australian Airforce used the Furneaux Group for night flying missions for their trainee pilots and Jan can remember planes combing Flinders Island looking for one that had crashed and her mother's distress:

> I remember her telling me 'that's the mummy planes looking for the baby planes'. But you could tell she was really upset about it, I used to like watching the planes but I had heard Mum and Dad saying 'oh they must have lost another plane'.[11]

The isolation of the Furneaux Islands protected islanders from many of the social and cultural tensions and anxieties that beset urban Australians during World

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[9] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[10] Jan Henning, interview, April 1999.

War Two. But it encouraged particular fears of being trapped and unable to escape if the Japanese did invade. Nevertheless, even with the pressure to produce more food as their contribution to the war effort, the women interviewed are convinced that their war experience was easier than that of women living in urban areas.

Needy children

During the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century a number of children found their way to the Furneaux Islands without their families. The experience of those children who stayed and who are related to the women in the study is outlined here, to give an indication of how children found new homes, and how common, particularly within the family, the practice of sharing children was less than a century ago.

Mrs Robinson of Green Island was famous for taking children in. Not only did she apparently adopt her daughter Jane, but she also cared for her two nephews from Mauritius, later sending them to boarding school in Hobart and one to university to study law. As well she cared for many other children, often for a considerable time, and assisted them later in life.[12] Caring for as many children as Mrs Robinson did was unusual. Other women were more likely to seek a child as companion for their own child, or simply add an extra child to the household when they appeared, in return for some assistance in the house or on the farm.

When unattached children came to the islands someone had to take them into their home and feed and clothe them. Sometimes the outcome for the child was not happy. There is little evidence of families exploiting children for their labour, although it is probable that the children expected, as part of the bargain of being cared for, to work for their 'foster' family and did not consider it worth

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[11] ibid.,

mentioning. However, caring for a child is one thing, loving him or her is another. Some children were given great affection by island women; others lived more emotionally austere lives.

The early life of Gladys Robinson's father, Alfred Cook, is an example of how casually children could be boarded out to families by Benevolent Societies in the late nineteenth century. Alfred went to live with the Ross family just prior to his tenth birthday in 1891. Before this he had been living with his four brothers, in the care of Mrs Ada Simpson in Hobart. His mother was still alive and three of his brothers were returned to her care at the same time as Alfred was sent to the Ross family on Vansittart Island. The fourth brother is not mentioned as moving from Mrs. Simpson's care – perhaps he stayed there.[13] Mr Alex Ross of Vansittart Island informally adopted Alfred on 30 June 1891.[14] His mother did not know where he had been sent.

In later years when Alfred Cook spoke about his childhood with the Ross family he claimed that he was sent to live with them because they wanted a companion for their son Alec Ross. For the ten-year-old boy moving to the Islands was traumatic. He did not understand geographically where he was or where his mother and brothers were. He had believed that along with his brothers he would go back to their mother when she could support them. He believed that, as the oldest child, he was being punished by the Benevolent Society for a fire that the children had accidentally started from an overturned candle at Mrs Simpson's house. When he first arrived on Vansittart Island he often cried himself to sleep and on two or three occasions he tried to row to Tasmania in a dinghy. Fortunately each time he was found and brought back by Mr Ross. He was physically well cared for by the Ross family and a private tutor educated

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[12] Eric Guiler & Lalage Guiler, 'The settlement of Big Green Island', *THRA P&P*, vol. 39, no.3, September, 1992, pp. 131 & 133. Mrs Robinson's life and Jane's origins are discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

[13] AOT, Hobart, SWD 57/B0/4496, 'More References to Tasmanian Children in Care 1826 -1899'.

[14] Prior to the 1920 *Adoption of Children Act* 'adoptions', although presumably entered into in good faith, were not legal and binding. They were probably more like long-term foster care placements.

both Alec Ross and Alfred.[15] However, he viewed his childhood as loveless. In retrospect he saw both his 'adoptive' parents as severe and dour personalities, but it was Mrs Ross whose harshness he most resented. Nevertheless, he stayed in close contact with the Ross family and lived on Vansittart Island well into middle age and his children were brought up to regard them as grandparents.

Alfred Cook did not see his biological mother again until he was 27. For years she had no idea where he was. Finally after learning he was in the Bass Strait Islands she travelled to northern Tasmania. At Exeter on the Tamar River she asked the crew of a boat calling in from the islands whether they knew of an Alfred Cook, and was told that he was following them up the river on a boat called the *Vansittart* and to wave to attract the boat's attention. When the *Vansittart* came into view, family legend says, she ran along the river bank waving a handkerchief to try and bring them in. Alfred saw her first and suggested to his step-father that they pull in to investigate. Consequently seventeen years after he had been placed in the islands, Alfred and his mother were reunited. The relationship continued and they stayed in contact for the rest of her life.[16]

Despite his difficult, and in his view, loveless childhood Alfred Cook was a particularly devoted husband and father. His daughter Gladys Robinson remembers both her parents with enormous affection and states that the couple were particularly close. 'He never left the house unless he gave Mum a kiss and, you know, you'd see them walking around holding hands'.[17]

Olive Mills, the mother of Frank Willis, Heather Willis's husband, and his sister, Joan Blundstone, came to the islands at the age of 12 in 1907 to act as companion to the daughter of the Mills family (no relation) on Big Dog Island. She came from a large family in Tasmania dependant on seasonal work and it

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[15] Gladys Robinson, pers. comm., May 2000.
[16] ibid.,
[17] Gladys Robinson, pers.comm., May 1998.

was important for the family to get their children into work or supported in some way as soon as possible. Three years later she left the Mills family and went to work for Mrs Iles on Flinders Island. At the age of 20 she married Valentine Willis who had come to the islands alone as a youth. Valentine Willis was born in Sheffield in 1894 but little is known about his early history. His descendants believe he was an orphan who was 'adopted' by the Morid family who lived in Launceston. He arrived in the islands before World War One and went straight to Puncheon Head Island to live with the Smallfields.[18] The Smallfields were very caring and he remained attached to the couple until their death. Olive's mother and brother, Bill, later also came and lived in the islands. Bill lived with the Smallfields for a time and after the death of Mr Smallfield he lived with and looked after Mrs Smallfield..[19]

Joan Boyes' father-in-law, Toby Boyes, came to the islands in search of work as a young boy with another youth, Edwin Brown. The boys were possibly orphans and were apparently stowaways on a boat coming to the islands.[20] They were both absorbed into the island community and remained for the rest of their lives.[21] Many other children came to the islands who were not forbears of the women in the study. It appears from the few instances outlined that they were likely to be provided with food and shelter by families and that, in many cases they became attached to the families who cared for them. All the children described here remained in the islands and contributed to their settlement.

Within the oral testimonies there is also some evidence of children being moved around the extended family to relieve pressure on parents. These were not short visits but could last years. Grace Wheatley gave birth to 11 living children after her marriage in 1940. The pressure of feeding and housing so many children was considerable, and within the family there was a tradition of grandmothers

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[18] See Chapter One for a brief account of Mr and Mrs Smallfield.
[19] Joan Blundstone, interview, September 2000, and pers. comm., December 2001.
[20] AOT, Hobart, CSD 1/51/1071, 'Boarded Out (Fostered) Children 1865-1897'. The boys' status is uncertain; no record exists of Toby Boyes or Edwin Brown being boarded out from the Queen's Orphanage or other charitable agency.
[21] Joan Boyes, interview, May 2000.

helping with the care of their grandchildren. Grace's mother, Amy Turnbull, had left her own children in the care of her mother for weeks, and sometimes months at a time, to fish around Tasmanian and Victorian waters with Cliff Wheatley. Therefore, in later life when she took on the long-term care of two of Grace's children, she was simply repeating what her mother had done for her. Nor was Amy the only person to help Grace. Another daughter lived with neighbours for a few years while at primary school to reduce the load on Grace.[22]

Gladys Robinson's mother raised her six surviving children and then travelled to Tasmania, when her daughter died in childbirth, to collect her infant grand-son, whom she then raised to adulthood.[23] Children appear to have fitted into the families they lived with, whether they were kin, neighbours or strangers, while maintaining close ties, where possible, with their families of origin. Nor did parents appear to worry unduly about the psychological trauma their children might experience from being placed in such situations. Their primary concern seems to have been that their children be with kindly people who would ensure they were physically well cared for and, where possible, provide them with some education. By the 1930s views on the responsibilities of parents had changed and the psychological wellbeing of children and parents' duties in relation to this were being increasingly stressed by childcare experts.[24] It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees who were parents after the 1930s mention leaving their children in the long-term care of others, with the exception of Grace Wheatley, whose large number of children and exceptionally high level of family support make her a special case. They did, however, continue to make use of the willingness of other family women to provide short-term care when required.

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[22] Margaret Purdon, interview, February 1999.
[23] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[24] Scott Coltrane, *Gender and Families,* Pine Forge Press, California, 1998, p. 85.

Mother's remedies

Island women had to deal with illnesses, both minor and major, as well as accidents. With the help of doctors' books and nursing manuals they developed a repertoire of remedies in time of illness.[25] All the older women in the study remember different types of skin infections being common problems in their childhood. Boils and carbuncles as well as infected feet, legs and fingers were common, the latter particularly common during the annual mutton-bird season and probably exacerbated by children not wearing shoes:

> Well I never wore shoes till I went to school...you'd get thorns in your feet. Talk about boxthorn—they do hurt because they've got a barb in them. You know they're not a straight thorn like a thistle that you can pull out. I remember I got one through my toe and they made a poultice...Mum made bread and bran with disinfectant poultices...But if the thorn went through the bottom of the foot, old Mrs Pyke said it was no good putting the poultice underneath, it had to go on top, and the thorn would eventually come up through the top of the foot because it's got a barb in it...and it would take days, and you've got this great big red foot. Every time the poultice started to go cool you'd get another one put on. It's a wonder it didn't cook the feet. But eventually the thorn would come out with the pus around it and your foot would heal up and you had no more problems.[26]

Boils and carbuncles were treated mainly with poultices. Mary Walker remembers that her brothers frequently had boils, but that on the other hand her children never had them. She believes that this was probably due to the difficulty and expense of obtaining sufficient fresh fruit in her childhood compared with later, and that consequently her own children had better access to fresh fruit and vegetables, and she was more knowledgable about their importance in diet.[27] Ingredients in poultices varied, depending on what was at

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[25] Through the early and middle decades of the twentieth century a number of books were written for housewives by doctors. These large, hard-bound manuals covered all aspects of home nursing and diet, first aid, child and adult illnesses, common and medications. They were common in Australian households and known as 'Doctor's books'.

[26] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.

[27] Mary Walker, interview, October 2001.

hand and individual preference. Potato, bran, bread, soap and sugar, honey and flour poultices were all popular, but Polly Coster's mother also used cupping very effectively.[28] Bates Salve was also commonly used as a drawing agent for skin infections. As well, every home used honey and lemon for sore throats, and bad chests were treated with mustard plasters. Children with colds were often fed a teaspoon of sugar with two drops of eucalyptus on it, a remedy children were at least likely to find palatable.[29] A little more unusual is Leedham Walker's recollection of wounds being packed with cobwebs to stop bleeding.[30]

Some of the study participants were exposed to valuable nursing experience as young girls:

> On one occasion the bush nurse we had here was very sick and the doctor came up and asked Mother would I go down and look after her for him. He was sure I could do it. Mother wouldn't let me go but she said 'if you would like to bring the patient up here, Helen could look after her'. So of course, she taught me how to sponge patients in bed and I just loved doing all that...[31]

Practical experience of this nature could prove very valuable in later life. In Helen Cooper's case, years later in the 1950s stranded with her husband and sick 17-year-old son on Clarke Island by bad weather, she drew on all her medical and nursing knowledge:

> Geoff was teaching him to do the crutching and he got a thistle or something off the sheep in his knee...It was very painful, he had lumps up in here [groin]...Well I fomented it, hot foments as often as I could through the day and then at night I made very large grated potato poultices with heaps of salt in them

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[28] Edwin Lankester, *Haydn's Dictionary of Popular Medicine and Hygiene,* Ward, Lock & Co., London, n.d. (probably late 19th century) gives the following definition of cupping. 'Cupping is a method of local blood letting, practised for the relief of inflammation and congestion in internal organs...As the rarefied air within the cupping glass cools and becomes condensed, the skin rises up as a dome-shaped swelling'. The Coster family used a similar method to bring about the discharge of carbuncles.

[29] Ruth Walsh, pers.comm,, October 2001.

[30] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999. A similar incident where cobwebs are used successfully, in the mid-nineteenth century, to stem bleeding is described in Alison Alexander, *A Wealth of Women: Australian Women's Lives from 1788 to the Present,* Duffy & Snellgrove, Potts Point, NSW, 2001, p. 33.

[31] Helen Cooper, interview, October 1998.

> and I think a bit of sugar too and put that on the leg, on the most likely part, but most around the knee, and there was one part which looked like it might come to a head and this went on for days. And although we had a two way radio no boat or plane could get in...The weather was terrible and I think that lasted about two days. Well he'd been a bit sick before then but by that stage I was very worried about him and just as the weather started to ease off, it broke and all this terrible stuff poured out of it, but of course he felt better, the pain was better. And then we got off on a fishing boat and came up to Trousers Point . . . went straight to the doctor, who just looked at the knee and looked at Dennis and said 'you're a very very lucky young man, that has been very serious'.[32]

The above account set in the 1950s has many aspects in common with the problems faced by the previous generation of women. Families may not have lived on the outer islands in the way of earlier generations, but they were still often working them. Once on the smaller islands, they were isolated from the services on Flinders Island and dependant upon the weather and the seas, both of which were beyond their control. While it was less common than in their mothers' generation, island women in the 1950s could still find themselves caring for family members in times of acute illness without medical support.

Even after the arrival of the first state-subsidised medical officer in 1920, problems still existed. The size of Flinders Island, the poor state of its roads, the pattern of settlement, as well as the practice of families regularly travelling to the outer islands, meant that people could be days away from medical help or evacuation. Everyone needed some idea of what to do in an emergency. As well as coping with emergencies, many women became skilled nurses, caring for their families in times of sickness without medical care, antibiotics or analgesics. A few became trusted and skilled lay midwives.

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[32] ibid.,

Facing childbirth

Probably nothing illustrates so graphically the isolation of women in the Furneaux Islands as childbirth. By the first decades of the twentieth century in most of Australia childbirth had come under medical control. Whether this historical fact is viewed as always beneficial for Australian women is open to debate. Nevertheless, at the time, the move to institutional and medically-controlled childbirth was viewed as modern and safer than past practices. Some Australian women still gave birth at home but they were in a minority and, increasingly, registered midwives or doctors attended them. Most women gave birth in maternity homes or hospitals. Women in rural areas continued to be often confined in their own homes but lay midwives were a disappearing breed of carers.[33] In Tasmania, the *Midwives Act* of 1911 introduced a penalty of five pounds for any unregistered person assuming the title of midwife and a penalty of ten pounds for anyone practising without a certificate. The Act allowed unregistered women to assist at births in remote areas providing it was not for gain and a medical practitioner was in attendance.[34] In Tasmania the number of registered midwives in June 1922 was 319 and these were distributed throughout the State; for example, Ringarooma had six and Queenstown two, yet none was present on either Flinders or King Island.[35] In the Furneaux Islands at least two Aboriginal women acted as highly respected midwives and a number of European women also became skilled in assisting with childbirth.

While the *Midwifery Nurses Act* of 1901 had allowed for women who had practised as lay midwives prior to that date to register as midwives, and this was

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[33] The increasing interest in, and desire for control of, midwifery by the medical profession in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is well documented. In part, this was due to a desire to reduce maternal mortality by ensuring women were attended by people with the requisite knowledge and skills. The horrors associated with untrained attendants were, however, exaggerated in the interests of ensuring that independent midwifery practice became tightly controlled by medicine. See Hilary Marland and Anne Marie Rafferty (eds), *Midwives, Society and Childbirth: Debates and Controversies in the Modern Period*, Routledge, London, 1997, for an in-depth and thoughtful analysis of the issues involved.

[34] *Public Health Department Annual Report 1911–12*, (J.S. Purdy), Parl. Paper no. 47, p. 22. Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1912.

[35] *Tasmanian Department of Health Annual Report 1921*, (E.S. Morris), Parl. Paper no. 46, p. 22. Tasmanian Parliament, Hobart, 1922.

continued in the *Midwives Act* of 1911, no midwives were registered on Flinders Island in 1922. It would appear that none of the lay midwives practising in the Furneaux Islands became registered. The isolation of the Furneaux Islands and the need to constantly sail between small islands to reach the scattered population, meant that even had the doctors in private practice prior to 1920 been interested in midwifery the likelihood of them being present at a birth was remote. There is no indication that they were particularly interested. So it is possible that they, and the State Health Department, turned a blind eye to a practice for which they had no reasonable alternative. Prior to 1920 and the arrival of the first government doctor, Furneaux Island women had no alternative but to rely on the services of skilled lay midwives.

> Mother was very young, 16, when she married father and he was thirteen years older than her. When she was 17 she had her first child, a year and five days after that she had her second child. It was 15 months after that that she had her third child, and so it went on—each couple of years she had another baby...by the time she was 29 she had eight babies and she never had a visit from a doctor or sister because there was no medical help in these islands at all. They were completely on their own. They got pregnant, they went through the pregnancy without medical help and when they were due, there was an old lady called Mrs Julia Burgess, who everyone called 'Granny' Burgess, she would come and stay with mother until whatever child was born, and then stay for a week . . . In these islands she confined 305 women and she never lost a mother or a child. [36]

Two lay midwives, Mrs Julia Burgess and Mrs Lagger Maynard, are remembered by a few of the oldest inhabitants. These two women were Bass Strait Aboriginals and greatly respected for their midwifery skills. Julia Burgess is mentioned as delivering family babies by three of the women in the study. Born on 18 December 1859 she was already in late middle age at the time the participants recall her.[37] She seems to have restricted her maternity practice to the southern end of Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island, and the islands in the

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[36] Gladys Robinson, interview April, 1998

[37] B.C. Mollison, *The Tasmanian Aboriginal Genealogies with an Appendix for Kangaroo Island*, III, Part 1, University of Tasmania, October 1976, in Marita Bardenhagen, Professional Independence and Isolation of Bush Nurses in Rural and Remote Tasmania 1910-1957, PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, Launceston, work in progress.

Franklin Sound. She probably lived on Cape Barren Island in which case this would be an area reasonably accessible to her. A note book exists belonging to Julia Burgess detailing the procedures to be followed in childbirth.[38] The statement that she confined 305 babies without loss of life is interesting. When questioned further Mrs Robinson was unsure where she had first heard that figure, but stated she had always known it. The figure is interesting because it is not rounded off; it gives the impression that, at one time, someone had counted exactly how many babies Julia Burgess had delivered. Without proof, the precise number must remain uncertain, but it would be reasonable to expect that Mrs Burgess was a very experienced midwife who had delivered a large number of babies. Her career as a highly respected Aboriginal midwife, who often sailed from island to island in potentially dangerous waters to deliver both Aboriginal and white babies, is the material of which legend is made. Unfortunately she remains a shadowy figure, remembered, within the white community at least, by only a few elderly people.

Gladys Robinson states that as children she and her siblings all loved Granny Burgess, and described her as wearing a spotlessly clean long white apron, a pleated white bonnet, and occasionally going, unobtrusively, out onto the verandah to smoke a small clay pipe. Audrey Holloway recalled that her mother was born on Long Island because when her grandmother was due to be confined, 'Mrs Burgess said she couldn't look after her because she was due to go to Long Island and deliver Mrs Barrett's baby'.[39] Audrey's grandfather arranged for his wife to go and stay with Mrs Barrett at Long Island so that Mrs Burgess could deliver them both.

Leedham Walker remembered Mrs Lagger Maynard, another Aboriginal midwife:

> The one I do remember used to come by boat to Whitemark and stay with us, [Walkers operated a boarding house for

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[38] Bardenhagen, Professional Independence. and Isolation of Bush Nurses in Rural and Remote Tasmania 1910–1957.
[39] Audrey Holloway, interview, October 1999.

> people in transit to other parts of the island]...Because she would have to get to people at the mines, have to get up north—there were very few roads and the only means of getting there was by horse or go in a dray...when they knew, they would come and get her, so she would be there for days. I'm talking about Mrs Lagger Maynard...and she used to come from Cape Barren Island on a boat up there, come through Walkers, stay there until she was transited out to the ladies in the hinterland as it were...she wore a big white hood, pleated with a long string and she smoked a clay pipe. I think she was beyond mid life when she used to come there. But I can see her sitting there in her chair now, and she would go on, and I don't know I suppose she returned through the system back to Cape Barren.[40]

It is reasonable to suppose that other Aboriginal women also acted as midwives, however, no documentation exists of this and these two women are the only ones whom the study participants recall acting as midwives. European women did on occasion also assist at childbirth, some becoming very experienced. Helen Cooper was seven or eight when her mother was called out one night:

> ...there was a knock on the door in the middle of the night and Mother went, and I heard a man say his wife was in labour. So Mother put on clothes, he had a hurricane lamp, and they walked and they had to cross the river [Pat's River] on a log...but anyway Mother delivered the baby.[41]

Other European women who assisted at childbirth were Mrs Hammond and Mrs Sarah Viriuex. Helen Cooper recalls that on one occasion Sarah Virieux helped a woman in childbirth who eventually gave birth to a little boy. After the birth things began to go wrong:

> 'I think not everything came away and Dr Ingram was there and he prescribed some medicine, but she refused to take it. Mrs Virieux kept trying to persuade her to take it but she wouldn't and she eventually died. Poor Mrs Virieux took the baby and reared it and she already had a big family'.[42]

In the Furneaux Islands medical control of child birth had to wait until the arrival of a subsidised doctor and the establishment of a bush nursing service

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[40] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999.
[41] Helen Cooper , interview, August 1998.
[42] Helen Cooper, interview, October 2001.

and hospital, in which women could be confined under the supervision of medical and midwifery staff.[43] In the meantime island women were fortunate in having skilled and caring lay midwives available to help with childbirth within their own homes. The women in this study may have known these midwives personally as children and been in the house when they assisted their mothers during childbirth, but their own experience was different. Without exception they all gave birth to their babies in the local hospital in Whitemark, or if complications were suspected, in Launceston.

By the 1930s and 1940s when Polly Coster was having her babies, medical and nursing help, and a small bush nursing hospital, existed in Whitemark. Yet while women may have felt more confident, the problem of isolation still remained.

> [I had] seven children—the first five born at Whitemark—always had difficulties. The fifth birth was very difficult, so the nurse at Whitemark said, 'no way are you going to die on me...someone else can deal with you', and so I had to go to Launceston for the last two.[44]

This caused a considerable amount of difficulty, because not only were there five young children left at home, but Polly also cared for her mother, who lived with them. With the first baby born away, her husband took some time off work to care for her mother but he had 'to farm some of the kids out' to other island families.[45] When the couple's seventh child had also to be born in Launceston he tried to manage without taking time off work.

Conflicts also occurred between mothers and nursing staff from time to time at the local hospital. The following extract is interesting because it highlights the fact that women were hardly passive recipients of medical and nursing care. It is

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[43] Nurse Higgison was the first nurse appointed by the Bush Nursing Association in 1914. Although an earlier nurse, Nurse Adams, may possibly have been a Bush Nursing Association appointee. Flinders Island Bush Nursing Hospital was opened in 1941. In Bardenhagen, Professional Independence and Isolation of Bush Nurses in Rural and Remote Tasmania 1910-1957.

[44] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.

[45] ibid.,

also illustrative of the relative helplessness or unwillingness of some doctors to intervene in nursing care, at a time when medical authority was considered to be unquestioned. Helen Cooper was a strong supporter of the new scientific approach to infant feeding and care promulgated by Dr Frederick Truby King. In hospital in Whitemark she had to battle older and more *laissez faire* nursing practices:

> Well he was perfect when he was born, . . . I had agreed with the doctor that I would stay on the island and have the baby on condition that my baby would be only fed every four hours right from the start. I said 'I believe Sister Green is anti- clinic'? I knew my sister-in-law and another woman who had had a baby in the hospital had been given bottles by Sister Green at night and told to give them to their babies. They used to drink it themselves rather than give it to their babies. Well he said that he had talked to her and she had agreed that my baby would only have breast milk and if all was normal only be fed every four hours...I didn't have a long labour but he was nine pound and I was very badly torn. Mind you, she [Sister Green] did a wonderful job with me, the cracked nipples and everything she had the answers you know, it was a big cotton wool pad with sterile vaseline on it...however, that's beside the point, she decided to give him other things because he cried...It was the middle of summer...and she was giving him unscalded milk. I found out afterwards, it absolutely ruined his digestion and doctor even told me that he knew she had given him brandy or whisky. Well he couldn't keep food down and if my sister hadn't got a month off and come over here we would never have saved him. By the time I got him out of hospital after a fortnight he had hardened breasts, he had lumps in the groin, the skin was off under here, and his buttocks were raw...I just cried because I could barely bath him—I was so worried and upset. [During the fortnight in hospital] I got out of bed and went out to the kitchen and she [Sister Green] was giving him raw sugar out of this basin that wasn't covered, and she shook it down into the bottle with a teaspoon and said 'There you are , give him that'. I didn't.
> *Was there much diarrhoea among babies at the time?*
> I don't know we were too far out, I didn't really have much to do with anybody else, no telephone and without any conveniences...boiling the nappies on the stove in a kerosene tin, we had a bath but we had to heat the water for it on the stove. I didn't have a tap over the sink...I wasn't well, I had dreadful haemorrhoids and I had never had them before or since...just when I had the babies and they were so painful, and I felt terribly miserable.[46]

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[46] Helen Cooper, interview, October 1998.

In retrospect Helen Cooper feels sure that the numerous obstetric difficulties she endured arose, in part, from medical mismanagement at the time of birth, and contributed to later gynaecological problems she developed in her seventies. The above extract reveals that women resisted nursing care and advice that was not in line with fashions of the time or that did not fit with the type of care typical in their family. Helen Cooper's sister was an infant welfare nurse working at Tweddle Baby Hospital in Melbourne and a supporter of the Truby King philosophy of baby care. Sister Green seems to have had little time for this philosophy, and Helen Cooper's doctor either felt ambivalent about or lacked the will to enforce it.[47]

Other women dealt with professional advice they perceived to be inappropriate in other ways. Gladys Robinson who was close to her parents, recounted the following story:

> I breastfed Pearl, I breastfed Gwen until I got a bad kidney infection and then I had to put her on the bottle, so she was fed Lactogen...and then when Brian came I was breastfeeding him but he wasn't doing any good. He just wasn't growing and progressing and my Dad said 'if you don't feed that kid you're going to lose him'. So I went to the bush nurse and she said to me, 'oh try and hang on, try and feed him, I'm sure he'll be alright you know, drink lots of water' and this sort of thing. So I went out of there and I went and bought a tin of Lactogen and fed him and took him back next week and she said 'there I told you dear'. I said 'yeah you're right'. And I never took him back.[48]

While women did ignore medical and nursing advice they regarded as inappropriate, they rarely did so openly. Opposition was also easier after discharge than when they were still in hospital. In hospital they were likely to resist covertly rather than openly challenge the authority of health workers.

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[47] F. Truby King was a leading proponent of the concept of training infants according to scientific principles. Following a fall in the infant mortality rate in New Zealand, which was attributed to his methods, Truby King became a very influential figure, widely respected in Britain, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. The Tasmanian government invited him to Tasmania to speak several times in the 1920s and his speeches were widely reported in the press. His influence on methods of baby care gradually began to wane during the 1940s.

[48] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.

Helen Cooper's testimony of her hospital experiences gives a clear example, in that her sister-in-law and a friend were prepared to drink bottles of milk themselves than challenge the dictates of the nurse in charge. The Whitemark Hospital was a small, and apparently friendly, cottage hospital, but the authority of nurses and the power of the hospital setting was still capable of reducing even assertive women to helplessness. Polly Coster was the only midwifery patient in the hospital when the following event occurred:

> When I heard the baby crying at 10pm I said 'what's wrong with the baby?' the nurse went to look and then went running for the doctor. I saw the doctor come rushing into the hospital and I didn't know what had happened and nobody told me. I kept waiting to be told and at 5am I heard the baby crying again so I asked again and they said 'that's not your baby'. Another lady had given birth through the night. Then they told me that the night before my baby had had a small haemorrhage from his circumcision and no-one had remembered to tell me.[49]

Although some of the anxieties and potential dangers of childbirth had been removed with the establishment of a bush nursing hospital, and the arrival of medical and trained nursing care, women obviously made a trade-off in independence for that greater safety. It is likely that some women continued to use their own skills and favoured remedies for some time, but with the safety net of medical care being available should they need it. The significant difference between the experience of the women in this study and that of their mothers was that, with the arrival of medical care and faster transport to Launceston in the event of an emergency, women and their families were safer. At the same time they still did not receive the care that was available to urban women or other rural women in Tasmania. In relation to childbirth there was little provision of prenatal care for pregnant women, yet in other parts of Tasmania this was a new initiative in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and was seen as an essential part of preventative health.[50]

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[49] Polly Coster, interview, November 2001.
[50] *Happy Motherhood,* A Department of Public Health publication, Tasmania, 1950.

In Tasmania from the 1920s onwards, increasing emphasis was placed on prenatal care, with clinics available from hospitals and baby welfare centres. By 1950, 53 baby health centres around the state, in urban and rural areas, conducted regular prenatal clinics, but not in the Furneaux Islands. [51] The figures for the prenatal clinic at Launceston's Queen Victoria Hospital show a steady increase in attendance between 1930 and 1942, and by the later date over three quarters of women in the hospital's catchment area had visited a prenatal clinic at least once during their pregnancy.[52]

On Flinders Island, however, regular prenatal care was less common. Olga Henwood had three children born between 1946 and 1950, and visited a doctor only twice over the whole time of her three pregnancies. She did not realise she was pregnant with her second child until her sister commented that she'd 'got a bit broad in the behind'. Olga was fortunate in having few obstetric problems, given the level of prenatal care she received. Life as a farm wife virtually went on unchanged until she went into labour:

> And I went in about 11 o'clock. I was milking a cow and the water broke and I had the baby about 7 o'clock and the second one the same. I had the same kind of labour with her, it wasn't very hard. I was so active that you wouldn't expect a hard labour...and with the third one, we'd been to the boat, and got a pig off it, and when I went home I said I was cold, it had been a beautiful moonlit night, I said to my sister 'I'm cold I've got the shivers'. 'Oh' she said ' I think it's time for the baby,' and she said 'I'll ring the doctor'...he said 'bring her in' and the baby was born in half an hour.[53]

Olga's easy labours might have been partially due to her level of fitness, but other women working just as hard had long and difficult labours, including her mother. Olga's mother was in labour for two days with Olga and told her daughters that the delay in the doctor turning up was because he was drunk. When he came he had to use forceps to deliver Olga. With the arrival of Olga, her mother's obstetric problems were not finished; while she had an easier time with

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[51] Queen Victoria Hospital Archives, Launceston. Baby Health Clinic Reports in the Queen Victoria Hospital Annual Reports, Launceston for years 1930, 1931 and 1942.
[52] ibid.,
[53] Olga Henwood, interview, August 1998

her second baby, she haemorrhaged so badly after the third birth that she almost died.[54] These children were all born in the 1920s before the advent of air travel to the islands, and obstetric emergencies could easily mean death for island women.

Planning the family

Gladys Robinson's mother had eight children before she turned 29. After the last child's birth Dr Ingram advised her not to have any more children and provided her with information on an appropriate method of birth control. The arrival of a doctor in the islands who was prepared to disseminate information on contraception was, therefore, a great help for Gladys's mother and when Gladys was preparing to get married her mother passed onto her information regarding contraception. Gladys had three children – all planned.[55]

The majority of the core group in the study had significantly fewer children than their mothers had had. This is in line with birth rate trends throughout Australia for the time.[56]

In general island women got their contraceptive information from a range of sources that included mothers, sisters, friends, magazines, husbands, and sometimes nurses and doctors. Sometimes this information was unsolicited but, nevertheless, gratefully received, as when Sister Kolosky, a local bush nurse, approached Helen Cooper when she was getting married and asked her if she wanted to know how to prevent having children.[57] It is difficult to be sure about such an intimate subject but it seems that in most marriages contraception was the woman's responsibility. Polly Coster, a practising Catholic, gained her information about natural family planning from a magazine and used it with great success to plan the conceptions of her seven children at regularly-spaced

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[54] ibid.,
[55] Gladys Robinson, interview, October 2001.
[56] Stefania Siedlecky & Diana Wyndham, *Populate and Perish: Australian Women's Fight for Birth Control*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, pp. 21-31.
[57] Helen Cooper, interview, October 2001.

intervals.[58] In the 1960s, after the time of this thesis, some of the women began using the contraceptive pill and found it liberating.

That older and more dangerous methods of controlling family size were known and practised is probable. When Heather Willis was pregnant with her first child, a local woman of some social standing asked her if she was 'going to get rid of it'. Heather also remembers one woman pregnant with an unwanted child going to the beach and jumping from rock to rock in a desperate and ineffective effort to induce a miscarriage.[59]

A number of issues come together to make the generation the women in the study belonged to generally keener to have smaller families than their mothers. Contraceptive knowledge existed within Australian society from the late nineteenth century onwards.[60] It may not have always been easy to access, particularly for women in remote locations, or always reliable, but increasingly these two problems began to be overcome. Therefore, women giving birth in the 1930s and 1940s were highly likely to try and limit their family size. Smaller families meant there was less possibility of losing children at birth or in the first year of life. As well, the health of women was less likely to be affected from repeated child-bearing. Smaller families also meant that more could be done for each individual child and as the 1940s moved into the 1950s, the importance of parents to the emotional as well as the physical health of their children became increasingly emphasised. Parents in Flinders Island were as likely as parents elsewhere to see advantages in husbanding their resources to, therefore, provide more for fewer children.

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[58] Polly Coster, interview, November 2001.
[59] Heather Willis, interview, December 1998.
[60] Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, pp. 83-85; Siedlecky & Wyndham, *Populate and Perish*, p. 14.

In times of emergency

One senses in the oral accounts the almost palpable sense of relief the community felt with the arrival of the first permanent government-subsidised doctor. Dr Ingram frequently visited patients at home and his movements around Flinders Island and the outer islands by car and boat probably meant that he could not be reached quickly every time he was needed, but at least the probability of help being at hand within hours existed. Gladys Robinson, growing up on Vansittart Island in the Franklin Sound, remembers Dr Ingram with great affection:

> Well he made everything so absolutely different for everyone. Because he went everywhere. He had a sailing boat and he would sail out to Vansittart to see us. Dr Ingram said if my mother had any more children she would probably lose her life. You know she'd had all those babies very close together, and then he helped her with contraception and it was wonderful for her.[61]

In the meantime, when doctors were not available or could not be reached, women were forced to call on the knowledge learned from their mothers and other women, and on their own native common sense.

> Because there are circumstances in which you are placed, you have to use your initiative—and guidance from somewhere, no doubt—in times of stress. But I think we just had to be practical ...I mean I haven't got a scientific thought in my head, but I'm pretty logical. You know practicalities have to rule your thought. But I had learned from my mother home nursing things of course.[62]

However, women were often lonely for other women, for even when extended family lived in the islands, they could still be a considerable distance away from each other and dependant on favourable travelling circumstances before they could meet. Some women faced the difficulties of settlement with little other female companionship. Gladys Robinson remembers her mother's account of the loneliness as young married woman:

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[61] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[62] Helen Cooper, interview, October 1998

> She spoke about missing her mother, how her mother had gone to Victoria to live and how devastated Mum was that she didn't have her own Mum close to talk to or the companionship of other women to compare stories with when she was having babies. [63]

The problem most consistently faced by island women in relation to health was always their isolation. Few roads existed on Flinders Island in the 1920s and those there were, were very rough.[64] Furthermore, families working on the smaller islands were totally dependent on small boats, tides and winds to reach other people. Prior to 1912 a small internal telephone service existed within Flinders Island, but there was no telephone contact with the outside world. In 1912 a wireless mast was established at Emita, allowing telegrams to be transmitted by Morse code from Tasmania and then phoned to the small exchanges. This system stayed in operation until 1942 when a radio telephone link was established between Whitemark and a counterpart on the Sideling outside of Scottsdale in northern Tasmania.[65] From then on Flinders Island had telephone contact with the outside world. Useful as this service undoubtedly was for the community, few women in this study had private telephones during their childhood or young married lives. For those living on the outer islands, like Gladys Robinson's family, contact with the outside world continued in the same way as it had done in the nineteenth century. In the 1920s, as a form of mutual support, Gladys's family communicated with friends on Cape Barren Island each evening in the following way:

> Each night at 5 o'clock we would light a fire and we would answer each other. Everything was alright [when one fire was lit]. But if they needed help, or were in trouble there would be two fires and then if there was a case of death they would light three fires. And you'd answer by your fire. If you saw two fires the men got in a boat and went to investigate—that is how we communicated.[66]

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[63] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998
[64] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999
[65] Jim Davie, *Latitude Forty: Reminiscences of Flinders Island,* The National Press, Melbourne, 1980, p. 13.
[66] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April, 1998.

The system of fires or smokes had been developed during the nineteenth century when most of the population of the Furneaux Islands lived on Cape Barren Island and the small islands surrounding Flinders Island, with no easy way of communicating between families. Two fires signalled an emergency and three a death. In the oral accounts a picture is painted of people around the islands, descending to the beach at dusk to look for each other's fires and reassurance that no trouble had occurred.

Prior to World War One, the ability to travel to and from the islands was dependent upon the irregular visits of small sailing ships and occasionally steamers. After the war, a state-supported service was established. The steamer *Colliboi* sailed from Launceston, making regular fortnightly calls to Lady Barron, Whitemark and Emita, and therefore, providing a regular service not only for travellers but for the moving of livestock and produce.[67] In time, privately owned vessels operated on the Launceston–Flinders Island route and some of them are etched in the island's history and well remembered by the study participants, particularly the *Locatta*, the *Lady Jean*, the *Lady Flinders*, the *Colliboi* and the *Shearwater*.[68]

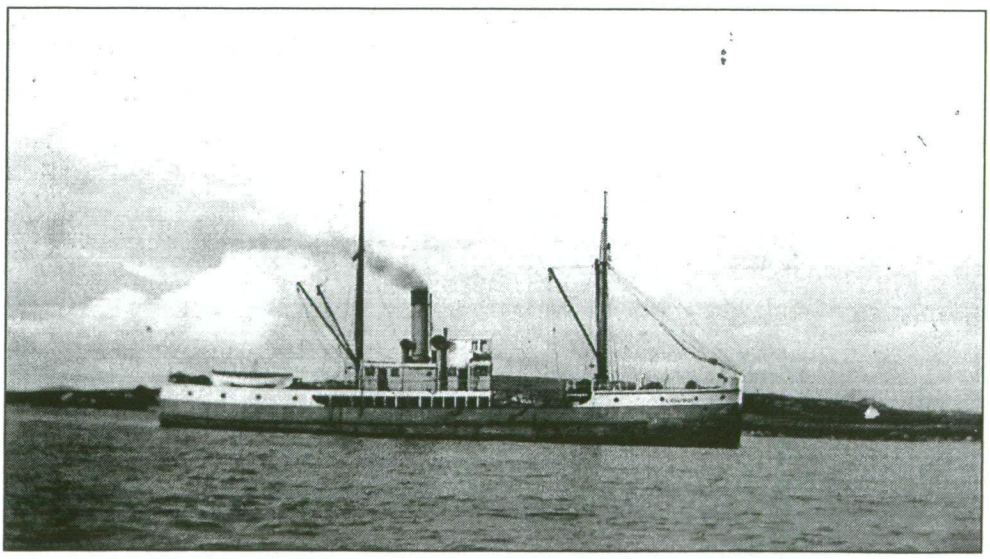

Plate 14: *The SS Colliboi May 1922*

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[67] Davie, *Latitude Forty*, p.12.
[68] Mary Walker, interview, September 1998; Helen Cooper , interview, October 1998

The arrival of an air service to Flinders Island in 1932 made a vast difference to the island life; for the first time patients could be in a large regional hospital within a few hours. Gladys Robinson's father, Alf Cook, was the first patient evacuated by air to Launceston. A radio message that there was a patient in need of an emergency operation was transmitted to Launceston on Saturday 19 March 1932. Bad weather held the pilot up, but he was able to leave Launceston on Sunday morning and four and a half hours later Mr Cook was in the Launceston General Hospital. This was in spite of the fact that the return trip was flown through heavy rain squalls, with poor visibility and no radio contact.[69]

Before the establishment of an air service, people waited for a boat to be evacuated to Launceston in a medical emergency, and sometimes the wait could be a long one. On one occasion a local man had an accident with a gun and shot most of his hand off. Dr McSweeney, who was the doctor in the islands between 1913 and 1920 amputated his hand at the wrist, dressed the wound and put him on a fishing boat for Melbourne. He needed little treatment in Melbourne and soon returned to Flinders Island.[70] Islanders remember McSweeney, a relatively young man, as highly capable and holding qualifications in both medicine and surgery.[71] Unfortunately he had a serious drinking problem which seems to have progressively interfered with his ability to carry out his work, sometimes increasing the delay patients experienced between injury and specialist treatment. One day, as a young boy, Leedham Walker took a mare into the bush to collect firewood, leaving her foal at home. Usually quiet, the mare kicked him in the knee when he attempted to milk her to relieve her discomfort. In terrible pain and unable to stand, he was returned home by cart. A two-day delay ensured before Dr McSweeney was sober enough to examine his leg. He suggested Leedham be transferred to Launceston. Another two day delay occurred before a trading ketch arrived at the island. Then, as there was no wind, the ketch took two and half days to cross to Georgetown, where he was

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[69] *Mercury*, 21 March 1932.
[70] Helen Cooper, interview, October, 2001
[71] Furneaux Museum, Album 36, The Doctors of the Furneaux Group

transported to another boat and taken up the Tamar to Launceston and admitted to hospital.[72]

Depending upon wind and tides, what was usually a reasonably short crossing to mainland Tasmania might take days and be a difficult and arduous voyage for the sick and injured.

> I remember one time my mother was brushing down a table and a needle went into the palm of her hand. And she called to Father to pull it out, the muscles were drawing it in. And he said 'yes' but he wasn't hurrying too much. 'Well hurry up' she said, 'this is serious'. And the whole needle went down into her hand. She had to get a fishing boat and sail to Launceston and it took some days...they operated on it there.[73]

The combination of the arrival of a state-subsidised medical officer in 1920, a bush nursing hospital and trained nursing staff, and improved forms of communication with the outside world, meant that many of the difficulties women faced in relation to health care were progressively reduced in the decades between 1920 and 1960. The likelihood of having to travel to Launceston was also reduced, but when necessary the trip, after 1932, became a comparatively comfortable, far shorter, air journey.

Up until 1960 the Tasmanian Aero Club carried out all medical emergency flights.[74] There were problems with this arrangement for transporting seriously ill people, which became particularly apparent during the 1950s. The planes had no emergency medical equipment installed, there was no way of liaising with ambulances on the ground, and no nursing or medical personnel available to travel with the patient. The introduction of the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1960 meant that those problems were resolved. The Aero Club, who received

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[72] Leedham Walker, interview, October 1999.
[73] Mary Walker, interview, October 1998
[74] One pilot, Reg Munro is mentioned repeatedly in conversation with locals and in written memoirs of the time. Apparently he flew in all weathers and landed in potentially risky places to get to patients.

payment for work undertaken and therefore a guaranteed income, ran the new service.[75]

That the Aero Club service, despite its limitations, was constantly in use is clear from reading the fortnightly local newspaper *Island News*. Throughout 1954, when the newspaper recommenced, 1955 and 1956 the newspaper notes constant air trips to Launceston for medical reasons. Almost every edition records the evacuation of someone from the islands to mainland Tasmania. Women were flown out for possible childbirth complications and the remainder of the population for a range of medical reasons, including babies and children with whooping cough and acute appendicitis. Accidents appear to have been common and included broken bones from falls off bikes, shooting mishaps, accidental poisoning and serious burns.[76]

When children were flown out for possibly lengthy periods of hospital care, family life was seriously disrupted. Mothers usually followed their children over to Launceston, leaving the remainder of the family in the care of fathers who normally had to continue working. The Flinders Island community usually supported people in that situation in a variety of ways, depending on their needs. But the strain on parents of long separations of their children and each other, as well as their dependence on extended family or the wider community, could be severe.

Dealing with death

In the early part of this study there was no undertaker available on the Flinders Island and, in any case some families still resided on some of the

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[75] Furneaux Museum, Album 54, Museum Scrapbook: Letters, notes and other documents compiled by Iola Fowler: Letter from Honorary Secretary of the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia (Tasmanian Branch), name indecipherable, to R. M. Fowler, October 1963.
[76] *Island News* 1954, 1955, 1956.

outer islands. In such a situation children could become drawn into the funeral preparations:

> Well my Dad seemed to be chosen to make most of the coffins, Old Grandfather Ross used to keep the pine and everything in what they called the boatshed . . . and they had these big bolts of calico. Dad used to make and varnish them [the coffins] and we used to make mattresses and pillows and line them with calico and then around the top we would put a piece each side to make flaps to cover the corpse. I can remember making them with a little hand machine, making these pieces, sometimes we would put a piece of lace around the top of them. You went to everyone's funeral you could get to and the funerals were very solemn occasions, you nearly always dressed in black or wore black armbands and there was a cup of tea after the funeral.
> *And often there would'nt be a priest or minister?*
> No, one of the men would do it. My dad buried my sister, did the funeral, made the coffin and did the burial service.[77]

At times the level of responsibility placed on family at the time of death seems incomprehensible in today's terms:

> When Grandpa was away one time Mum's brother fell on a rock and was killed. Grandma had to lay him out herself [she was alone with only her children at the time] and wait for Grandpa to come home in two days to bury him.[78]

This child's grave can still be seen at Badger Corner on Flinders Island.

For women in the Furneaux Islands, at least till the end of the 1920s, caring for the family in sickness and health extended to caring for them at the time of death and prior to burial. Children were not excluded from this, although the level of involvement expected from them may have varied from family to family. Gladys Robinson's mother had not wanted her nine-year-old daughter to view her dead brother.[79] Polly Coster's mother apparently had similar feelings, but her extended family felt differently. Polly was seven years old when her father died:

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[77] Gladys Robinson, interview, 30 April 1998
[78] Audrey Holloway, interview, October 1999.
[79] See Introduction to this thesis, p. 2

> Well Mum said we weren't to go into that room where Dad was, but you'd go in when she was busy, and she's got that sheet over him you see, so you'd fold the sheet back and sit by the bed and wait for him to wake up. It's true, he just looked like he was asleep, he didn't look any different, the only reason was that for some reason they had this cotton wool plugged up his nose and in his mouth and ears, which a kid of seven doesn't understand. Even a kid of 12 doesn't really understand unless it's explained to them, because I was about 12 and Mum had a stroke and she was in hospital in Launceston and I was sent over to stay with my Auntie in Sheffield and while I was there my grandmother died of pneumonia...When my Auntie got the message that Granny had died we walked to Paradise,[80] not that far I don't suppose, and I went and looked at Granny with the rest of the family and she just looked like she was asleep, but it always had me puzzled why she had the wool, it must have been awfully uncomfortable I thought to myself...I mean no-one ever explained.
> *No one ever told you anything about it?*
> No, kids in those days were supposed to be seen and not heard. Kids never asked any questions and it was a long time before I found out why the cotton wool was there.[81]

Elizabeth Roberts in her oral history of women in Lancashire during the same period, states that while sex was hidden, death was not, '...and children learned early from their parents and neighbours about its inevitability, frequency and indeed naturalness'.[82] Many of women in Roberts study experienced death within their families as children. They routinely viewed dead bodies and would go to neighbours and ask to see the corpses of their friends. Roberts states that the custom in viewing and touching the body gradually became less common in Lancashire, although it continued in some instances as late as 1940.

Marion Aveling suggests that 'the particular contribution of the nineteenth century was to make heaven more concrete, to place children and families at centre stage, and to cast God less as a harsh judge and more as a merciful

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[80] Paradise is a geographical location in north-west Tasmania.
[81] Polly Coster, interview, November 1998.
[82] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890 -1940*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, p. 19.

father'.[83] This view of heaven and the after life remained till well into the twentieth century and would have been consoling to grief-stricken relatives. Many of the women interviewed in the study came from families who were practising Christians.

While familiarity with death from an early age, and the consolation of religious belief, may have led to a greater acceptance of death than is common today, it should not suggest that grief for the loss was any less. Janet McCalman asserts that in working-class urban Melbourne, in the early decades of the twentieth century, parents went in considerable fear of their children becoming ill or being injured.[84] Furthermore, this fear was worsened by the difficulties of obtaining medical help, when only two slot telephones operated in the area and these were closed after 8pm. Understandably anxiety and fear were heightened in this situation, and this gives us an insight into the trepidation and distress which could be experienced by families living in remote areas far from any help.

The literature of the time promoted the view that women, under the direction of health professionals, could actively improve the health of their families, and women appeared to have accepted this view. Family health had always been the province of women, and as knowledge was generated and made available it was integrated into the body of knowledge required to care capably for a family at the time. However, it would be a mistake to assume that women were passive victims of a new redefinition of their role. For women living in remote areas, knowledge and skills in health care were necessary and therefore actively sought.

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[83] Marion Aveling, 'Death and the family in nineteenth-century Western Australia', in *Families in Colonial Australia*, eds P. Grimshaw, C. McConville & E. McEwen, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 38.
[84] Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-class Community 1900-1965*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1984, p.61.

Nevertheless, as medical care became available and hospitalisation possible on the island, some of the strain on women should have been reduced. Instead, one type of responsibility was replaced by another. Once survival of children had been the paramount concern of parents, followed by the production of useful, hard-working and moral citizens. But as the middle decades of the twentieth century approached, more and more attention was given to the emotional wellbeing of children. In the early 1950s, John Bowlby's theories on maternal deprivation powerfully influenced health and education workers who passed on to women the main principles of his theories.[85] Perhaps even more influential were the writings of Dr Spock, who stressed the need for children to feel loved and secure. Women's responsibility for the family changed in response to improvements in child health, but on Flinders Island as elsewhere, it did not lessen.

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Between 1910 and 1960 the situation in the Furneaux Group changed dramatically for women. The system of fires still used in 1910 for emergencies was replaced by the telephone. Cars became relatively common and roads improved to cater for them. Regular shipping services replaced an irregular one and air travel became common—though often still hampered by the weather. Improved medical and education services made life safer and probably more stimulating for children. Outside of the Whitemark area electricity was still decades away, but women knew that compared with their mother's child-rearing times they were advantaged—and their mothers were often still alive to tell them.

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[85] John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1953, p. 185–187.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Women Supporting Each Other

There was an inherent contradiction in the situation of some women on Flinders Island between 1910 and 1960. Most women in this study, except the soldier settler wives, had numerous female kin on the island and regarded their lives as being generally easier than their mothers had been, yet they could still feel lonely and isolated. These feelings in most instances came from geographical isolation. Although the island is not large, it was and is sparsely settled, and at the time of this study had few passable roads.

Davie states that prior to 1912 a small local island telephone service was in operation and after this date a wireless mast was built at Emita and connection to the Tasmanian mainland was possible.[1] Women from their homes operated several small exchanges at this time. However, many people could not afford the expense of a telephone and, in any case, they could only be used at certain times. To make a telephone call outside of the exchange's operating times meant incurring an extra charge.[2] Few women in the study had phones until towards the end of the period under review.

Some women were fortunate in having ready access to other women in their family and to friends. Others, like Helen Cooper, were very isolated as young wives—perhaps only seeing other women every two or three weeks. This chapter first explores relationships between women inside the family and then between personal friends. The focus then broadens to take in other places where women met, particularly women's organisations. Charitable work gave women

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[1] Jim Davie, *Latitude Forty: Reminiscences of Flinders Island,* The National Press, Melbourne, 1980, p. 15.

[2] Early island phones operated on a system of party lines. Each subscriber on the line had a different ring. Phones operated between 8am and 8pm during the week, Saturday morning between 8am and 12 noon and Sunday morning between 9am and 10am. Peter Robinson, interview, November 2001.

places to meet legitimately and enjoy each other's company while pursuing a worthwhile purpose. They did not allow enjoyment to distract them from the primary purpose of the group, and many of the women's organisations were ferociously successful fund-raisers for the time and place.

Family friends

Most island households between 1910 and 1960 consisted of parents and their dependant children. However, there were a few women interviewed who had lived in households in which three generations of family resided, if not permanently, at least for long periods of time. A striking example of three generations of family sharing the same home is the account of the Robinson/Bailey families provided later in this chapter. Even though the majority of households consisted of nuclear families, frequently these families had a number of kin living by. Within the island community the extended family played an important role for men, women and children, not only in providing material and emotional support, but also in spreading information and news. Where women did not have easy access to other women within the family they were likely to feel particularly cut of from the wider community.

Some historians have argued that the nuclear family has been the norm in Australia from the early days of settlement, basing their argument on evidence that, in Australia, most family households have consisted of parents and their dependant children.[3] As well, there has been recognition of the value of looking at family interaction beyond the immediate household.[4] In Australia, during the twentieth century, the extended family was strong and viable despite rarely inhabiting the same house and the pressures placed upon it by increasing family mobility. Individuals within the extended family have traditionally had responsibilities to others within the kin group. Martine Segalen who has

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[3] See Peter McDonald, 'The family beyond the household', *Family Matters,* Australian Institute of Family Studies, no. 32, August, 1992, for a useful discussion on this area.
[4] Ellen McEwen, 'Family history in Australia: Some observations from the field', in *Families in Colonial Australia,* eds P. Grimshaw, C. McConville, E. McEwen, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp. 186-197.

examined kinship from an historical anthropological perspective describes the kindred group—the large extended family—as 'that flexible cluster of relatives with whom one can decide to have or not to have relationships'.[5] She goes on to state that the various domestic groups making up the kindred group can be 'seen as channels along which news, mutual help and goods and services travel'. On Flinders Island the degree to which each individual family member belonged within the network of mutual obligation depended upon factors, which changed over time in response to circumstances. In times of real need distance, however, does not seem to have been a deterrent, as daughters might come from interstate to help their mothers at shearing time, or if they perceived their mothers to be lonely or in need of other assistance.[6] On a day-to-day basis, however, female kin, living for example, 20 kilometres apart and lacking phones, could not readily assist each other

The level of help and support women received from female kin often depended upon the closeness of the relationship. Mothers and daughters were most likely to give each other considerable help and support. Nor did this help flow in one direction. While older women often gave considerable help to daughters and grandchildren, daughters understood they had reciprocal duties and obligations. Behind each woman stood a family of women, past and present; a history of knowledge, attitudes, values and ways of behaving that made clear what could and could not be expected from close family and more distant kin within that particular family group.

Women in the family were important to each other in terms of emotional support and practical help, however, they did not live within a purely feminine world. Male members of the family always influenced their lives. The oral evidence for this chapter, therefore, incorporates material regarding relationships between men and women within families

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[5] Martine Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 69.
[6] See Chapter Five for description of Helen Cooper's and Mary Walker's sense of obligation to their mothers.

Two families within this study reveal particularly strong patterns of mutual help and obligation between women within the family over three generations. Many other families described in the study appear to have operated in similar ways. However, these two families illustrate very clearly the pattern and style of helping that could occur between women. The first is the Turnbull/Wheatley family and the second the Cook/Robinson family.

When and how Amy Turnbull first met Cliff Wheatley is unknown. According to family accounts the first member of the Wheatley family to live in Tasmania was a young English sailor, John Fry Wheatley, from Somerset. He arrived on the *Henry Porcher* in 1836 and settled in Cygnet in southern Tasmania. He married Ann Thomas, in 1824, and the couple had 15 children. William Wheatley, their second last son, founded the family fishing business that was eventually passed on, in turn, to his son Cliff[7]. William and Cliff fished the coast of southern and eastern Tasmania and as far north as Port Welshpool in Victoria. Wheatley family legend claims that on one occasion the pair were caught in Bass Strait in bad weather and they sheltered in Killacrankie Bay on the northern coast of Flinders Island and later decided to settle there.[8]

Amy Turnbull also came from the Cygnet area of southern Tasmania. Her maternal grandmother was Mary Ann Cowan, a Tasmanian Aboriginal born in 1834 and known as 'Black Ann'. Her descendants are uncertain as to whether she was of mixed race or not. Mary Ann had twelve children by James Bones, an Englishman. One daughter Eliza married Thomas William Turnbull in 1894 and subsequently had ten children. Amy was their fifth child.

As a young woman Amy had two daughters: Grace, born in 1921, and Kathleen, in 1925. Nothing is known of their father. Amy met Cliff Wheatley some time after her second daughter's birth and soon after began working with him on his

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[7] Margaret Wheatley, pers.comm., December 2000.
[8] ibid.,

fishing boats, and caring for his two-year-old son Terry who went to sea with them. Cliff Wheatley also had an older family of four children by a woman living in Victoria. Terry was the child of a second finished relationship. While Amy was away on the boats with Cliff she left her two daughters, Grace and Kathleen, in the care of her mother. In 1939 she moved to Flinders Island to live with Cliff Wheatley, taking Grace, who was by then 18, with her, but leaving her younger daughter, Kathleen, who was still at school, with her mother.[9]

Grace had already met Terry Wheatley, Cliff's son, during one of her mother's visits home to Cygnet. When Amy and Grace moved to Flinders Island to live with Cliff and Terry Wheatley, romance quickly blossomed between the two young people, presumably with the help of proximity, and they were married within a year.

Amy continued working with Cliff and Terry after moving to Flinders Island, and when Cliff's father died she took over the financial management of the family fishing business. However, not long after she moved to the island Cliff began to go blind. He had cataracts on both eyes and two operations did not improve his sight. It is possible Amy knew of his failing sight before she moved to Flinders Island and the knowledge precipitated the move. Soon, however, she began a second round of mothering as Grace gave birth to a baby every year.

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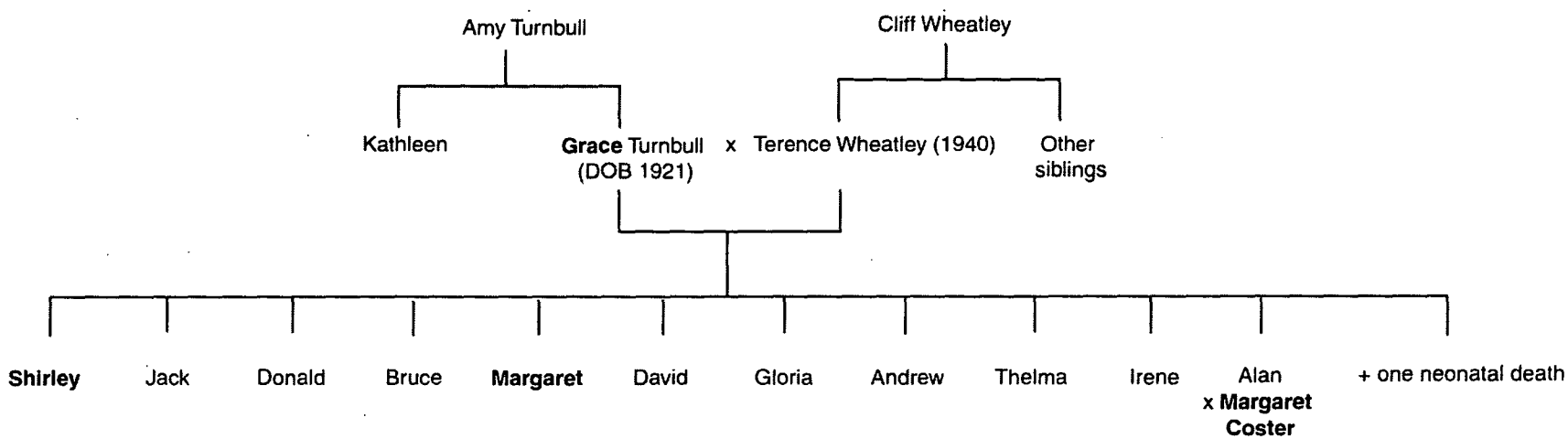
[9] ibid.,

Diagram 4: *The Turnbull/Wheatley Family Tree*



Study participants are in bold.

Shirley, born in 1940, was Grace and Terry's first child. The following year when Jack came along and was sickly, Shirley was sent to stay with Amy, who lived close by, so that Grace could give all her attention to her sick infant. When Jack recovered Shirley was returned to her parents, but by this time she had grown fond of her grandmother and continually wandered back to be with her. When this continued happening and Grace became pregnant for a third time, Amy said, 'Oh well I'll keep her here for a while'.[10] Shirley then lived with her grandparents until she left school. For the first ten years of her life the two families lived very near to each other and Shirley saw her parents and siblings every day and wandered comfortably between the two houses. With the steadily increasing number of children being born to Grace and Terry her parents' house became very crowded, and this led Shirley to feel very privileged as the only child in her grandmother's house.

When Shirley was ten years old, Cliff Wheatley sold the business to his son Terry because of his increasing blindness, and Amy and Cliff moved back to mainland Tasmania, taking Shirley with them. They went first to Cygnet where, presumably, Amy was reunited with her other daughter, Kathleen. After several months away they returned to Flinders Island for six months, before finally leaving the island again to settle in northern Tasmania where Shirley was enrolled at the Lilydale Area School.

In the ten years between Shirley's birth and Amy and Cliff leaving Flinders island, Amy had continually assisted Grace with the management of her large family. For years Amy grew all the vegetables required by both families and baked most of Grace's bread. Amy came to own a large amount of land around Killacrankie and she ran sufficient dairy cows to provide both families with milk and butter. As well, every day Amy transported her grandchildren to Emita to catch the school bus to Whitemark. Getting children down to Emita each day to connect with the school bus was a constant problem.[11] Amy took other children

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[10] Shirley Green, interview, August 2000. Most of the following account of Shirley's life with her grandmother Amy is taken from information given at this interview.
[11]. Shirley Green, interview, August, 2000.

as well as Grace's children in the back of her old truck, which she had furnished with old car seats for her young passengers to sit on.

After Amy, Cliff and Shirley moved to northern Tasmania another of Grace' s children, Gloria, came to live with them. Gloria had been born prematurely and required a lot of attention as well as special food as an infant; at some point when she was failing to gain weight satisfactorily her grandmother took over her care. Gloria also lived with her grandparents into adulthood.

Shirley returned to Flinders Island to live with her parents when she was 17. Although she was particularly close to her grandmother, her grandfather was very strict with her and she missed her parents and siblings. Returning home allowed her to view Grace's life as a young adult, and as she worked alongside her mother in the house, she observed just how hard it was to care for a large family with few amenities.[12] Also of course, life was harder for Grace with Amy living away in northern Tasmania.

Amy's commitment to her daughter and granddaughter was not finished, however. Years later, in the 1960s, Shirley separated from her husband while pregnant with their seventh child and returned to mainland Tasmania to live near her grandparents and sister. Her grandparents found her a house to rent cheaply very close to them and she lived there with her children for the next five to six years.

> My grandmother was wonderful, she did a lot, she even baby sat for me over there when I went into town to do my shopping. She would have been 70 or in her late 60s then. She was a hard worker...she even came up when I broke my wrist. She used to come up and peg the washing on the line for me, that sort of thing.[13]

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[12]. ibid.,
[13] ibid.,

This is, of course, only a very partial picture of Amy's life as seen through the eyes of her female descendants. It describes a life that even into old age was involved in the care of the family and particularly the care of children. There is little knowledge of her early life. Who the father of her two daughters was and how she met Cliff Wheatley is lost. There is simply no indication of how she may have felt leaving her two children in the care of her mother while she worked with Cliff Wheatley and brought up his son. Grace remembers the grandmother who brought her up as a child, with affection. In the Turnbull family it may have been customary for childcare to be shared among the women of the family, and Amy's later actions in caring for Grace's children may have simply been a continuation of that tradition.

That she was unconventional for her times is obvious. As a young woman she was very attractive. For an idea of her character and personality we are dependent on the picture drawn by her granddaughter:

> Nan was very hard working, very small, a tiny woman...a very happy-go-lucky person, a very straight outspoken person. If she was upset with anyone she would tell them, very open, not particularly strict.[14]

In later life when Amy took over the care of two of Grace's children she was also taking on the type of grandmotherly role already established by her own mother. Grandmothers in the Turnbull family, and perhaps in many working-class families of the time, did not necessarily stop permanently caring for children when their youngest child reached adulthood. For the women in the Turnbull and Wheatley families their closest friends and supports were found among other women in their family. Today, Shirley Green, while having many friendly acquaintances throughout the islands, distinguishes between these and women in the family. Her closest and most important friends are family members.

This thesis opened with the story of the death of Alfie Cook as recorded by his sister Gladys. At the time of his death his mother was in her early 30s with seven

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[14] ibid.,

living children. Gladys Cook was born in Tasmania in 1894 and she moved to Flinders Island with her family when she was eight years old. She first met Alfred Cook, 13 years her senior, as a young girl. The couple married when Gladys was 17 and went to live on Vansittart Island where Alfred worked for the Ross family who had 'adopted' him as a ten year old.

A year after her marriage, at the age of 18, Gladys Cook gave birth to her first child. During the first 11 years of her marriage she gave birth to a further seven children on Vansittart Island, without medical or trained midwifery assistance. Their sixth child, another Gladys, later married George Robinson. In later life Gladys Cook recalled for her daughter—the young Gladys—how much, as a young woman living on Vansittart Island, she had longed for her own mother who had moved to Melbourne. She is one woman who lived her life largely apart from other women and keenly felt her lack of female companionship:

> Mum got terribly lonely for the company of other women. I mean she did have her sister Ella on Vansittart, but Auntie Ella died when I was eight, and then her husband married her niece [Gladys's and Ella's niece]. Mum must have been very lonely at times but maybe that's why we had such a close relationship.[15]

Of the eight children born to Gladys Cook, three died in childhood or young adulthood. Ivy, the oldest, died in Westbury, Tasmania giving birth to her first children, twins, of whom one survived. Ivy haemorrhaged to death and her family have always believed that had she been in Launceston and closer to medical help, she would not have died. Mary, the second child died of gastro-enteritis at the age of three on Vansittart Island. She died and was buried without ever having been seen by a doctor and Alfie, the fourth child, as has been described, died of snake bite at the age of 12.

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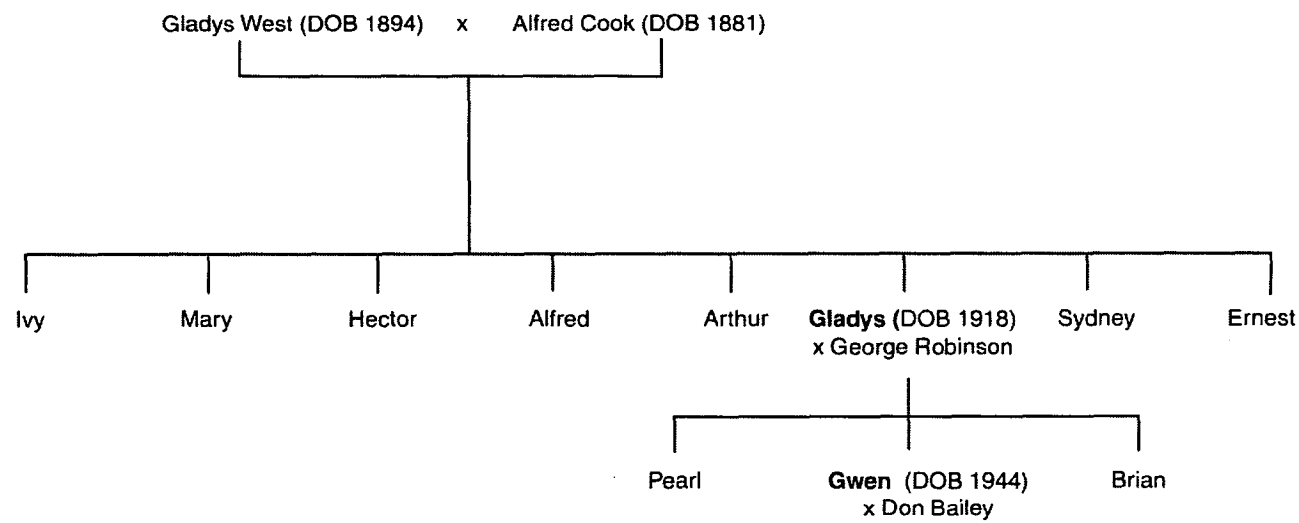
[15] Gladys Robinson, interview, 16 April 1998.

Diagram 5: *The Cook/Robinson Family Tree*



Study participants are in bold.

Plate15: *Gladys West age 16, on Vansittart island, before her marriage to Alfred Cook*

Plate 16: *From left to right: Gladys, Sydney, Mrs Cook and baby Ernie*

Gladys Cook's daughter and grand-daughter believe that she survived the tragedy of losing three chidlren with her spirit intact:

> I remember my grandmother, she was a wonderful lady. She was really caring, her faith meant a lot to her...she gave a lot of herself. When I was first married, she was in her early 70s and she used to love to come and stay for a weekend. Quite often she would come, perhaps once a month, to be in the house with us and her great grandchildren. You could ask her anything and she would give you her best advice, whether you took it or not.[16]

Like Amy Turnbull, Gladys Cook did not cease child rearing when her children were grown up. When her daughter Ivy died in childbirth, she travelled to northern Tasmania to collect the surviving twin and bring him back to islands. He grew up in the care of his grandmother and remains very close to his mother's family.[17]

Gladys Robinson recalls catching whooping cough on Vansittart Island along with all her brothers and sisters. The isolation of the island does not appear to have protected the family from the usual childhood infectious diseases. The children went down with the infection one by one, with the baby Ernie, becoming seriously ill, and Gladys remembers her mother apparently coping calmly alone through the long weeks of illness and nursing. In retrospect Gladys believes that her mother's generation had 'an inner strength that today we don't have. They seemed to accept everyday happenings as part of everyday life'.[18] Perhaps the certainty of their religion gave them strength, this is what both Gladys and Gwen believe of their mother and grandmother. Or perhaps the knowledge they possessed of women's traditional skills and crafts gave them confidence. Or perhaps there was simply no alternative to coping in a society where illness and death were common and there were few supports for physical and emotional distress.

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[16] Gwen Bailey, pers.comm., August 2000.
[17] Gladys Robinson, interview, May 1998.
[18] ibid.,

Nevertheless, in reading the accounts of island women's lives in the early years of the twentieth century one senses a profound psychic difference to women of later generations. This difference is obvious even to their daughters. Threaded through the participants' accounts are similar beliefs and understandings about the past which they then use to explain the difference between themselves and their mothers. They claim life was simpler then—with the long hours of backbreaking toil compensated at least in part by sometimes spontaneous but always robust times of fun and conviviality. What you had was, largely, what you could grow or make. Time was not important. Accidents, disease and death were part of everyday life. Religious belief compensated, in part, for loss, and led to a level of acceptance. People rarely discussed emotional problems, and while grief was respected there was no need, or desire, to dwell on tragedies. Woven together these interpretations of the way of life of their mother's generation seem to depict a quiet group of women who approached and experienced their lives with stoicism and endurance. While they told their daughters the events of their lives, few described their related thoughts and feelings. Sentimentality in literature, music and religion was widespread in Victorian and Edwardian times, but with a couple of notable exceptions, this does not seem to have provided these women with the license or language to attempt to describe their interior lives in any but the sparsest of terms.

Their daughters reveal something of the same reticence in the role of religion in women's lives. It seems, however, that if one takes into account their actual practices then religious belief may have been central to the world view of many women. Several women in this study have attended church regularly at different times in their lives, as did their mothers. They remember that when they were children their mothers frequently prayed or read the bible at bed time and encouraged them to do carry out the same religious observances.

Helen Cooper considers that religion was an important element in the lives of past women:

> ... but one of the things I've always thought about, my mother's mother and her mother who was the old Grandma Robinson, you know they came to these isolated windswept

> places in 1854 and through it all the isolation and everything, their Christianity lived through. ... these people were of French origin from Mauritius and they were all Catholics so Roman Catholicism came in a simple but strong form.[19]

In Helen's family dogmatism had little place. Her father a Methodist and when her parents married, Catholic priests were not regularly visiting the islands. So the couple were married, and their children later baptised, in the Church of England. Helen's father died when she was four and afterwards Helen slept with her mother and she remembers 'that there was always a little bit of prayer at night and a closeness.'[20]

In general, women demonstrated their commitment to religion by kindness, community involvement and hard work—work that frequently benefited their Church.[21] Their spiritual lives, as with other intensely personal and emotional aspects of their lives, remain, not surprisingly, largely hidden.

The women of the Cook/Robinson families, however, were generally very open and ready to discuss personal issues. Gladys Cook passed on to her family a willingness to share thoughts, feelings and emotions. In later life she was a great talker. Her daughter-in-law, Nell Cook, remembers how she would come into her kitchen and sit and chat for hours. Now she wishes she had had both time and inclination to listen more closely.[22] Her daughter Gladys Robinson, and granddaughter Gwen Bailey, share a warmth of manner and willingness to question and explore beyond the factual details of the family story. Gladys Robinson has, elsewhere in this work, evocatively described her mother's style of parenting and home-making. It is apparent that many of her mother's attitudes and ways were passed on to subsequent generations.

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[19] Helen Cooper, interview, August 1998.
[20] ibid.,
[21] See page 245 for a description of the work performed by the women of St Barnabus Women's Guild.
[22] Nell Cook, interview, May 2000.

Gladys Robinson married her husband George when she was 21 and he was 22. They had known each other all their lives as the two families were close friends. As a young married woman Gladys relied on her mother and other female family members for her companionship and advice. She particularly remembers one of her aunts as being very helpful when the children were small. 'She was a sweetheart, she would help with the children's sewing, she'd come down and help me with the washing. She was older but she was very "with it", she wasn't a prude'.[23] For Gladys Robinson her mother was her major mainstay during most of her life. And the importance of Gladys Cook to her female descendants flowed into the third generation with Gwen Bailey remembering her with a mixture of affection and awe.

When Gladys and George Robinson married in 1940 they moved into George's family home just outside of Lady Barron to live with his parents. Gladys lived in this home with her husband and his parents. After the death of his wife her father-in law remained on with Gladys and George until his death. Eight years later George died. Throughout all her young and middle-aged married life Gladys lived with her husband's parents. There is no doubt that she was very fond of her father-in-law and that his presence added an extra and valuable dimension to family life. But there is also no doubt that the young family lacked privacy. From an adult perspective, Gwen Bailey recognises some of the difficulties her mother faced:

> My Dad's father lived with us all his life. I married and he was still living at home with Mum and Dad, he was a wonderful person, but I guess it must have been hard on Mum because she and Dad didn't really have a life of their own. When they married they moved in with Grandma and Grandpa, and when Grandma died, Grandpa Tuck still lived there, and I often think—well really they didn't have any privacy.

Yet from the perspective of childhood Gwen remembers only the benefits of living within an extended family household:

> But it was happy, it was warm, we had a radio, but Dad was very musical, he played a little piano accordion and Grandad

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[23] Gladys Robinson, pers. comm., August 2000.

> played the mouth organ, that was our entertainment. People would come from houses around—one fellow played the guitar and we'd sing.[24]

When Gwen married she found herself in the same position as her mother. As in her mother's case, the young couple moved in to live with the husband's parents.

> When we had our first baby we lived with Don's Mum and Dad and I wouldn't advise anyone to ever do that. They were wonderful—but! And I couldn't drive then but my Grandfather, the one I spoke earlier about who lived with Mum and Dad, he could. So I used to ring home and say to Grandpa 'can you come and pick me up and take me home for the day?' And yeah Mum was wonderful, she talked me through all that. She helped me, I lived with them for 18 months. Mum and Dad used to pop in and take me to clinic and things like that. Mum was wonderful and then as each one came she knitted.[25]

The difference in the experience of the two generations of women is that Gwen and her husband moved into a home of their own after 18 months, an option apparently not available to Gladys and her husband. For both Gladys and Gwen the problems of living within an extended family situation were mainly centred around different methods of child rearing. These may have been less obvious had they lived with their own mother rather than their mother-in-law. However, in a time when family and domestic responsibilities were seen as a woman's paramount role, it seems likely that each generation of young wives would have wanted a separate space from other women to both showcase their individual domestic talents and styles and highlight their adult married status.

Gladys Robinson has described her parents' marriage as very happy, yet she also believes that women in the generation before her were very subservient '...they would only talk about what their husbands approved, the men made all the decisions.'[26] It is difficult to discover what exactly were the power relationships between women and men in the early decades of the twentieth century from individual oral accounts. While the women interviewed openly discussed their

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[24] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.
[25] ibid.,
[26] Gladys Robinson, interview, September 1998.

relationships with other women in their family they became, understandably, more reticent regarding their relationship with their husbands. Nevertheless, there is sufficient material available to show that whatever the position of women in the wider Australian society at the time, the position of individual women within island families varied enormously.

In retrospect, Gladys believes that her behaviour was inhibited by the constant presence of her father-in-law within the home. Gwen remembers her mother as being very quiet and that her father was definitely head of the household, while her view of her own marriage is that of a more equal partnership.[27] One problem Gladys had to overcome after the death of her husband was her inability to drive. George had never allowed her to learn to drive. Gladys had spent two and a half months with George in Launceston during his last illness. When he died she returned to Flinders Island alone.

> First thing I said when she came back was 'now Mum there's something you have to do'. And she said 'I know my girl I have to learn to drive'. She was that keen. She was 55 then. I'd pick her up and we'd go into big paddocks on the farm and practice, we used to laugh that much.[28]

Gwen had been helped by her mother all her life, but in this instance it is Gwen who helped her mother begin to pick up her life and gradually move on. Learning to drive was important if Gladys was going to have any independence, but equally important were the hours Gwen gave her as she acquired the necessary driving skills.

These two partial accounts of the lives of Amy Turnbull, Gladys Cook and their daughters and grand-daughters illustrate the way women, within the extended family, assisted each other both practically and emotionally during the period of this study. Nor are these insights applicable only to women living in isolated islands. Janet McCalman has shown that, in the 1920s, in Richmond, a working-

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[27] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.
[28] ibid.,

class, inner urban area of Melbourne, mothers, daughters and other female kin, where possible, also supported and helped each other.[29] What two seemingly disparate areas like Flinders Island and Richmond appear to have had in common, at the time, are relatively stable populations over generations. Consequently many women in both areas had a number of female kin living nearby.

Threaded through these histories are several themes. First, women depended on other women within the family for more than just practical help. Secondly, the balance of power between women and men within relationships was complex and is difficult to discern today. As well, women would often care for children throughout their whole lives, thus giving credence to the belief that childcare was a lifelong vocation rather than a life stage for women. Related to the issue of childcare is the apparent casualness with which children could be passed around between extended family members, and sometimes, as in the preceding chapter, by charitable agencies.

Central to the accounts of the lives of Amy Turnbull and Gladys Cook and their daughters and granddaughters are specific examples of the dependence of women, within their families, upon each other for help and support. They reveal the central importance of mothers and grandmothers to younger women within the family. Amy Turnbull and Gladys Cook were born towards the end of the nineteenth century and are now dead, yet they are viewed as pivotal members of their families by the two generations of women who have followed them.

Beyond the immediate family was the possibility of other supportive relationships. While women possessed and valued their extensive family and kinship networks, many women lacked the opportunity rather than the desire to form friendships with women other than family members. Some women were so physically isolated that not only did they rarely get to meet women friends, but

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[29] Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-class Community 1900–1965*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1984.

even seeing other extended family members could be difficult.[30] They particularly missed the companionship of other women during stressful life events, like childbirth, the early mothering days, and times of sickness and loss.

Friendship beyond the family

None of the women interviewed was friendless. As has been made clear, to some extent they all lived within a rich network of family and community relationships. For many it would be easy to say that they had friends throughout the whole community. All the women had been well known on Flinders Island all their lives. At the present time when they go shopping every passing local person greets them. Yet curiously during the interviews, even in response to direct questioning, there was little overt acknowledgement of the importance of friendship.

A few women described close and special friendships they had had in the past. However, many struggled to recall any particularly intimate unrelated friends. Repeatedly they described the hardships their mothers endured and how these were often relieved if other women were close at hand. They did not deny the importance of women to each other, but the type of help that they, and their mothers, had often needed was seen to be more the responsibility of family than friends. This view of friendship supports Pat O'Connor's thesis that the help friends give each other is more within the affective than the functional areas of the relationship.[31]

Friendships have been defined as relationships of equality that contain elements of reciprocity.[32] O'Connor states that friendships are usually formed with others who are similar in some important aspects, for example, gender, class, age, life stage, marital status, race, religious attitudes, interests, personality traits and

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[30] Helen Cooper, interview, October 1998.
[31] Pat O'Connor, *Friendships Between Women: A Critical Review*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, UK, 1992.
[32] ibid.,

intelligence.[33] Furthermore, she claims that where friendships are embedded within dense and stable networks they are more likely to endure. In these settings people are more likely to meet their friends in a wide variety of different situations. O'Connor argues that where most people are known to each other and meet frequently, help and assistance is more likely to be given without the recipient having to ask for it. Asking for help can upset the equality of the friendship, and except in exceptional circumstances, help should be of a type which can be easily reciprocated, therefore maintaining the equal balance of the relationship.

On Flinders Island, many of O'Connor's prerequisites for the formation of enduring friendships between women existed. Women lived within a setting where almost everyone was known to them. The smallness of the community meant that the same people were likely to meet in a range of different venues. It seems, however, that hard-working farm women without transport still found it difficult to make and maintain friendships outside of their immediate family. The role of close kin in supporting each other in practical day-to-day activities meant that family members were more likely than others to informally visit and expect to be visited in return.

When friendships did occur between island women, the initial reason for their development strikingly supports O'Connor's claim that people become friendly with others with whom they have something in common. Jan Henning remembers:

> I had one girlfriend who had been young and single with us, we'd see them occasionally, but sort of didn't go out very much. When we had children we used to get together with three or four families about once a month and have a day which we really looked forward to.
>
> ...I didn't have girlfriends as such when I was a child. Judith left [the island]. I went to school here for three and a half years, didn't have any girlfriends here. Pearl Robinson was a friend.

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[33] ibid.,

> She was a very quiet person. We used to walk around at lunch and recess time.[34]

Close and intimate friends could add an emotional dimension to women's lives and be unhappily missed both in childhood and adulthood, when they were no longer accessible:

> I had a friend, Vida Ferguson, I used to stay with her and she used to stay with me. Once she finished Grade 7 her parents sent her away to St Thomas More. I saw her in the holidays. When she finished at St. Thomas More she moved to Hobart. She came back a couple of years ago and it was just like all the years fell away. I really don't know why we were friends, she was always top [of the class], I was about third. Sometimes we might be put together to work on a project. We were both good kids, she had grown up very protected and she was very good. We clicked. We rubbed off on each other.
>
> As I grew up in life I made another and we were so close. She was a hairdresser, married in the same month as me, children about the same age. She got Hogkinson's Disease. Louise, her daughter, was a baby when they told her and Louise was 14 when she died. She was so close and I haven't made another close friend.[35]

Both Gwen Bailey and Jan Henning were born at the beginning of the 1940s and have a long history of active involvement in the local Anglican Church. Neither, however, formed their closest friendships within the church[36]. In an earlier time, when most people went to church, friends would meet at church as well as other places.

> Back then Mum's family were great friends with the Willis's. Mum's from Vansittart and the Willis's from Cape Barren and when they moved to Flinders they lived close. They all went to church. Today the people I go to church with I might only see on Sundays and they are not necessarily your friends...not close friends you visit.[37]

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[34] Jan Henning, interview, August 2000.
[35] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.
[36] Jan Henning, interview, August 2000.
[37] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.

Steve Duck argues that isolation, which he defines as physical separation from others, can lead to feelings of loneliness. Whether it does, or not, in Duck's view largely depends on how prepared people are for their isolated situation.[38] Most of the women interviewed had been born and brought up in the Furneaux Group. Many of these women did not see themselves as living isolated lives, though they recognised they lived within an isolated setting. They were, after all, living in much the same way as women had always lived in the Islands. Not surprisingly, women who had had friends and family close by and regular access to Whitemark or Lady Barron, mentioned loneliness and isolation considerably less than those who had fewer opportunities to meet others.

Among the interviewees there were, however, some who had felt particularly lonely and isolated at several points in their life. Many women recalled the worries of isolated mothering and how they wished there was some other woman they could talk to. Helen Cooper, bringing up her young children on a farm at Emita during World War Two, felt very anxious and vulnerable when her second child had a number of infant health problems. Her sense of isolation was compounded by petrol rationing, which meant that the farm vehicle could rarely be used for socialising. Helen's mother and mother-in-law were on the island, but the fuel restrictions meant that visiting became more curtailed.[39] Helen's isolation was compounded by the fact that the family had no telephone until the early 1940s.

Most of the women interviewed spent considerably more time with female family members than other women. Not surprisingly, therefore, they were closest to other women within their extended family. In general, beyond the family, relationships with other women could be placed on a continuum, which ranged from friendship to distant acquaintanceship, with only a few women identifying very close and intimate friendships. This does not mean close friendships were not common, but rather, perhaps, not always identified.

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[38] Steve Duck, *Friends for Life: The Psychology of Close Relationships*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, UK, 1983, p.15.
[39] Helen Cooper, interview, August 2000.

O'Connor cites several writers who suggest that the concept and style of present day friendship did not begin to emerge until the early twentieth century. In remote areas it may have developed even later. While many middle-class nineteenth century women formed close attachments to other unrelated women, this type of relationship was not widespread throughout society, and many other women interwove their friendship and kinship relationships.[40]

That women on Flinders Island often formed their closest friendships within the family was probably due to geographical restrictions as much as anything else;. although the primacy and privacy accorded the family in the early and middle decades of the 20th century, may have also made the maintenance of close friendships outside of the family difficult for some women.

O'Connor states that 'a concrete, but important inhibitor of women's friendships within a patriarchal society arises from the scarcity of public places where women can meet and mingle and form and maintain friendships'. Flinders Island appears to have lacked venues where women could easily meet and which were separate from those they attended or visited as part of the family. Men met easily and naturally at work, at the local hotel, at stock sales and similar venues. Women spent most of their time at home and were restricted due to lack of transport. Therefore, it was difficult to meet other women in settings which were not family centred. Even the normal sociability of island shopping was difficult to achieve where women did not drive or could not gain access to the farm vehicle.

Women's organisations

It is not surprising, therefore, that the establishment of a branch of the Country Women's Association (CWA) on Flinders Island was an immediate success. The CWA was affiliated with the Associated Country Women of the World, 'a world

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[40] O'Connor, *Friendship Between Women*, pp. 9-16.

wide organisation of country women and home-makers'.[41] The organisation was formed in 1927 in Geneva with the aim of representing the interests of country women around the world. Within Australia, it has at times been an influential lobby group. At a global level it lobbies the United Nations and individual national governments on such matters as adequate food for women and children world wide, nutrition, education for women and girls, childcare, and economic and social problems affecting the family.

The CWA was seen as an eminently respectable organisation, and one, which has traditionally provided an opportunity for rural women to develop managerial and leadership skills. Following a visit to Whitemark by Mrs. Gilbert, the State President of the Tasmanian CWA at the end of 1945, a Whitemark branch of the organisation was formed in January 1946. Mrs Nield and Mrs Bowman were elected President and Treasurer respectively. In a letter she wrote in 1973, Mrs Estelle Barry recalled Mrs Nield's reaction to being elected President:

> I remember so clearly the late Mrs. Nield was speechless when asked to become President. She declined at first, saying she couldn't take such a responsible undertaking and felt she never had the confidence to carry out her duties, but what a great President and active member of the CWA she became.42

At the second meeting of the Whitemark CWA held on 6 March 1946, the branch was obviously becoming very active. Plans for the purchase or building of a meeting place of their own, known as a rest room, were commenced; stalls and a fair were planned. In April, following a visit by Mrs Burcher of the New South Wales CWA, who outlined the activities of her branch, a Publicity Officer and a Hospital Visitor were elected from the membership.[43]

The Whitemark CWA grew rapidly, leading to the establishment of other branches. Emita was commenced in 1948, with Altmoor and Memana starting up

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[41] Whitemark CWA Minute Books, 1946-1950, in the Flinders Island Country Women's Association Archives held by Judy Walker, Whitemark.
[42] CWA Archives, Whitemark; Letter from Estelle Barry to the CWA Secretary 27 November, 1973.
[43] Whitemark CWA Minute Book 1946.

in 1949 and 1956 respectively. In 1948 there were 69 members of the CWA on Flinders Island.[44] CWA activities expanded in line with the rapidly burgeoning membership. Between 1946 and the early 1950s the Whitemark CWA sent monthly food parcels to Britain as part of the Food for Britain Appeal.[45] As well, it regularly sent money and goods to Lachlan Park Children's Home in Hobart. It also responded to international emergencies, sending three tea chests of clothing to China for the Clothing for China Appeal, and money to Britain for a Flood Relief Appeal. At home it contributed money to the Furneaux Island Scholarship Fund which provided financial support for secondary students to pursue their studies off the island. Finally, it steadily raised funds to provide a CWA building for Flinders Island members. By August 1949 the island branches had raised 511 pounds 19 shillings and sixpence for this purpose, and the rest rooms were finally opened in Whitemark in 1954.[46]

The Country Women's Association offered the women of Flinders Island more than just the opportunity to support charitable causes. There were two other important ways in which it proved a real benefit to the women who joined. Part of the mission of the CWA was to educate not just the world's women and children, but also its own members. Outside speakers regularly came to Flinders Island to speak to branch members about health, welfare and education issues, which were, at the time, deemed to be important and appropriate concerns for educated and progressive rural women. As well, it offered some members the opportunity to attend conferences and sit on committees. Quite soon after the establishment of the Whitemark Branch in 1946, two CWA members sat on a combined committee set up to examine the possibility of soldier settlement on Flinders island. Like country women in other parts of Australia, the CWA offered women the opportunity for an acceptable public role within their communities.

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[44] Whitemark CWA Minute Book 1947-48.
[45] Whitemark CWA Minute Books 1946-1950.
[46] ibid.,

However, its most important contribution was probably that it offered women a monthly opportunity to meet and enjoy each other's company, and provided an opportunity for personal growth. Built into every meeting were some activities designed to be both entertaining and instructive. Impromptu speeches were a regular feature. During one year play readings were held at every meeting. Debates were regularly organised, as were informative talks and group singing. Many of these activities gave women the opportunity to speak publicly in a safe and protected setting.[47] That they were also introduced to educated and articulate women holding positions of power within the CWA must also have increased the women's self-esteem.

Joan Boyes moved to Flinders Island after World War Two, to work as a school bus driver and bookkeeper for Leedham Walker. Part of her job was also to drive tourists and the local cricket team around the island. She also scored for the cricket team. In 1948 she joined the Emita Branch of the CWA and then took on the duty of collecting people for meetings. At that time members included women of all age groups, from the very elderly to the very young. She remembers that meetings usually followed a standard format. First the formal meeting was held and then some form of entertainment would follow. Craft activities were usually confined to knitting and crocheting and were not as extensive as in later times. The meetings were always enjoyable and 'a lot of fun'. Approximately 15 women were members of the Emita CWA in the late 1940s.[48]

The CWA provided a constructive outlet for the talents of many Flinders Island women, as well as the opportunity to socialise. Nevertheless, it was not an opportunity all women could take up. Shirley Green, raising nine children on her own, was invited several times to join, but always refused, as she could not see how she could spare the time with so many children.[49] Joan Warren came to Flinders Island in 1956 as the wife of a soldier settler. She was also asked to join the Memana Branch of the CWA, but equally could not see how it was possible

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[47] ibid.,
[48] Joan Boyes, pers.comm., August 2000.
[49] Shirley Green, interview, August 2000.

given her domestic responsibilities and lack of transport.[50] It is possible that these refusals to join may have also been partly grounded in personal disinclination. While the CWA was successful in attracting many Flinders Island women to the organisation, it was not the only group that had been established for the benefit of island girls and women.

Many women belonged to more than one organisation. The Hospital Auxiliary, founded in 1941, commenced with a stall and afternoon tea and, with donations, managed to raise 15 pounds 12 shilling and fourpence for its first fundraising exercise. The major aims of the Auxiliary related to raising money and lobbying for more equipment for the hospital.[51] The local Catholic Church and the Anglican Churches at Whitemark and Lady Barron also relied heavily on the fundraising efforts of local women. Of these, only the Anglican Church of St Barnabas at Lady Barron has any surviving records of the Women's Guild.

St Barnabas Church had originally been built at Badger Corner, on the southern coast of Flinders Island, by James Robinson for his family's use and that of any other denominations who wished to use it. Later, after their children had grown up, the Robinson's donated the building to the Anglican Church and it was subsequently moved to Lady Barron in 1925. The chancel was built and the church lined in 1938 with money donated by Mrs Ada Smallfied in memory of her husband. In the mid 1940s a gradual programme of restoration was commenced with the aim of ensuring the church would stand as part of the island's heritage.[52]

The St Barnabas Women's Guild was formed in 1951. Its primary aim was 'to unite all women who want to follow the Christian way of life in Worship, Prayer,

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[50] Joan & Eric Warren, interview, August 2000.
[51] Copy of Hospital Auxiliary 50th Anniversary Address given by Una Withers, 22 February 1991, held at Flinders Island Multi-Purpose Centre.
[52] Brief history of St Barnabas Church n.d, n.a, found in back of the of St Barnabas Women's Guild Minute Book 1951-1964, held by Mrs Gladys Robinson. Discussion with various members of the Robinson family confirms the details.

Fellowship and Service. Gladys Cook and her daughter, Gladys Robinson, as well as three other Robinson women and Noreen McCarthy were among the nine women present at the first meeting. Between 1951 and 1964 the Minute Book records many of the discussions and debates that concerned the Guild. Their initial primary focus was restoring and improving the fabric and grounds of their church. They made and rolled bandages, sewed aprons and kettle holders, knitted coat hangers and baby clothes and cooked cakes and sweets to raise money. As well they made and raised money for clothes for Children's Homes in mainland Tasmania. They ran social evenings, dances, debutante balls, and organised street stalls. At every monthly meeting the next fundraising event was discussed. The money they made significantly helped to improve the church and the rectory, they bought carpets, furnishings, a kitchen and had cement paths laid. As well, they supported the Australian Mission Board, babies and children's Homes in mainland Tasmania, and a leper hospital. Many of the women were also members of the Lady Barron Branch of the CWA.

Despite their evident hard work and busy lives they could still slip up in the eyes of church representatives. As when Gladys Cook received a letter from the local rector stating how 'shocked and sad' he was to arrive at the church the week before and find 'all the flowers dead, the church undusted and the kneelers all over the place'. Unfortunately this had occurred during the Bishop's visit and, while hurried attempts were made to cover up the dishevelled state of the church, the writer points out that 'it should not have happened at any time particularly at the visit of a Bishop'.[53] The letter was addressed to Mrs Gladys Cook and there is no evidence of her reply.

Women's organisations, along with sporting venues, provided places for women to meet around a task or an objective. There does not appear to have been an informal place where women could meet other women in the way that men met at the local hotel. Essentially casual meetings took place within the home, a reflection of the predominant view of the time that women's lives should be

lived primarily within the home. It may also reflect the point made by Janet Finch that, although many women either managed the family finances or contributed to family financial decision making, they rarely had spending money of their own in the way that men had beer and cigarette money.[54]

Part of the importance of meeting with others is the opportunity it gives for keeping up with what is happening within the community. Being physically separated from others can lead to feelings of being 'out of touch'; it also makes difficult one of the prime functions of close interpersonal contact, comparing one's own efforts with that of one's peers. Feelings of uncertainty can develop without the chance to compare and contrast actions and situations. In the past, the small community on Flinders Island frequently relied on what they often called 'gossip' to transmit news and information.

Women's talk

Traditionally women have been viewed as more likely than men to indulge in gossip. It could be said that women gossip, while men discussing the same topic share information. Talking about others is a normal part of human activity and one that performs important integrative and socialising functions.[55] On Flinders

Island gossiping or sharing information has been and remains commonplace behaviour indulged in by both sexes. Paine defines gossip as 'talk of personalities and their involvement in events in the community' and 'talk that draws out other persons to talk this way'.[56] The isolation of married women meant that frequently news about island events was brought home at night by their men-folk for dissemination.[57]

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[53] St. Barnabas Women's Guild Minute Book 1951-1964: letter from N.H. Watt to Mrs Gladys Cook.
[54] Janet Finch, *Family Obligations and Social Change,* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 15.
[55] Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk A Social History of 'Gossip' in Working-class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960,* Scolar Press, UK, 1995, p. 173.
[56] Robert Paine 'What is gossip about? An alternative hypothesis', *Man,* New Series, vol. 2, no. 2, June, 1967, pp. 278-285.

Through all of their known history, the Furneaux Islands have had a small and very stable population, most of which, since the early twentieth century, has been congregated on Flinders Island. Not surprisingly in such a small isolated community, interest in the actions of others is high. Not to show interest and concern regarding the activities of others within the community would place individuals outside of the community norms. As Gwen Bailey says, 'it's human nature to wonder and think...in the country people do like to know what is going on, but they're concerned—country life is different'.[58] Not all gossip stems from friendly concern, and although scandal spreading does occur, in general, the intent is not consciously destructive or derogatory in tone. In part, the interest in gossip may be a continuance of an historically firmly entrenched oral tradition within the islands, which in turn is a reflection of the early meagre news resources. On Flinders Island past stories are relished and repeated. So, logically the kernel of future stories lies in present-day happenings.

The repeated use of the word 'community' is not meant to imply that there was one cohesive island community whose values and norms everyone accepted. The islands consisted, in fact, of a mosaic of different communities, based on class, race and family, as well as personal interests and loyalties. Within each group, talk or gossip would have a slightly different dynamic and purpose. Thus when men gossiped about local women at the hotel, such talk was likely to be different in form, approach and attitudes displayed, while possibly similar in content, to a group of women discussing the same people.[59]

The impact on people of living their life under the interested gaze of the wider community should not be under-estimated. Among the permanent residents of Flinders Island, anything approaching the level of anonymity available in an urban setting is impossible to achieve. That this has a regulatory aspect and can inhibit some behaviours and encourage others in line with community norms is

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[57] Pat McIntosh, interview, August 2000.
[58] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.
[59] Shirley Green, interview, August 2000. Shirley Green has worked as a bar-maid at the local hotel, and gave a specific example of men talking about women.

fact. While the level of interest in other members of the community may require major adjustments for new residents, it appears to have been rarely a problem among long-term residents. Interest in the doings of others is usually accepted as a normal and indeed useful part of life, albeit sometimes with a degree of rueful amusement.

This is not to say that people have not suffered from the malicious spreading of scandal, or been intensely irritated by more benign forms of gossip about their concerns. However, gossip can only occur about matters that are allowed to become public. One interviewee stated that people always think they know more about the business of others than they actually do. In her view, mostly they are guessing and have no idea of the truly private concerns of other people; in which case it does not matter.[60] It may be that people become intensely private and very selective about who they share personal information with within such a small community.

How did women find out what was happening to other families on the island during the time of this study, when they were frequently housebound and lacked telephones? Largely it seems they were dependent upon their men to bring home news. As well, outings to church and occasionally to Whitemark to shop may have kept them up-to-date. According to Gwen Bailey, before telephones news could only be transmitted by actually meeting someone.[61] The world of island women was largely restricted to the family and farm well into the twentieth century, in ways which town women at the same time did not experience. However, after telephones became common in the 1940s and 1950s, news would spread rapidly though not always legitimately. Almost every interviewee mentioned that it was well known that people listened in on party lines. Stan Blyth, in his memoirs, tells the story of two women who always

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[60] Jan Henning, interview, April 1999.
[61] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000.

conversed in French to outwit the listeners. The tone of his memoir suggests that he did not regard this as a fair practice.[62]

Other useful people were telephonists. John Chapman recalled that in the 1950s if you wanted to find someone, often the easiest way to do so was to phone the local telephone exchange and ask the telephonist where they were.[63] In a similar vein, when Peter and Joy Robinson were courting, rather than phone Joy from home, Peter would walk down to the local telephone exchange at Lady Barron to call from the telephone box there. This allowed him to watch the telephonists through the window and see if they were listening in on his phone call. [64] Even in later times crossed lines meant that conversations were frequently overheard. Nell Cook was talking to her sister-in-law one evening and mentioned some information about the next door neighbour. When the call was finished her irate neighbour, who had overheard the conversation, phoned her.[65] Finally, what frequently astounds and amuses island residents is how stories can change as they travel from one end of the island to the other.[66] This awareness causes some internal island amusement and presumably reduces the power of gossip within the community.

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Women living in isolation and lacking ready access to others outside of the family could feel out of touch and remote from the events of their community. Their men-folk, on the other hand, heard news and gossip as they moved around the island. The traditional separation of male and female spheres may well have meant that valuable though the information they brought home was, it reflected their own concerns and interests rather than that of their wives.

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[62] Stan Blyth, *These days are Gone Forever: A Narrative of the EarlyDdays of the Furneaux Islands as I knew them,* published by author, 1986.
[63] John Chapman, pers.comm., August 2000.
[64] Joy Robinson,, pers.comm., August 2000.
[65] Nell Cook, interview, August 2000.
[66] Gwen Bailey, interview, August 2000; Joy Robinson, pers.comm., May 2000.

Girls on Flinders Island grew up aware of the privations adult women often endured in terms of female company. That they observed their mothers' lives carefully and generally consider themselves to have been fortunate in comparison, is clear from the interviews. During their childhood, social events of any type were eagerly looked forward to and long remembered. As adults they often physically distant from friends and family, and in this situation, mutual family obligations meant that contact with family was favoured over that with friends. One of the reasons women appear to have enjoyed the mutton-birding season, despite their heavy workload, was the easy accessibility of other families on the birding islands.

When women's organisations and groups commenced they helped reduce the isolation of women, providing women had the available time and transport to attend them. Group meetings structured around the requirements of an organisation provided women with an acceptable opportunity to meet outside the home. Informal meetings with family and friends could only occur within the home. But it was important to remain informed about the activities of others, some of whom had been known since childhood. This was an essential part of remaining in touch with the wider community. The interviewees have lived through a time of great change in communications, particularly with the arrival of the telephone. They have little sense of having been isolated, although some would have appreciated greater contact with other women at certain periods of their lives. However, in making a comparison with the lives of their mothers, they see themselves as having been advantaged in terms of accessibility to the wider community.

Conclusion

The primary concern of this thesis is the connection between feelings of isolation and a sense of identification with, and attachment to, the islands. The relationship is complex and difficult to unravel. What is apparent is that understandings of isolation are subjective and often contradictory. Not only does the term mean different things to different people, but it has a range of meanings and levels of intensity for individuals, depending on their changing circumstances.

Islands are by definition isolated—cut-off, detached. The Furneaux Islands are additionally situated within often hazardous seas and subject to difficult weather conditions. Yet the women in this study accepted geographic separation from other parts of Australia with little difficulty—in their eyes it was logically to be expected. Consequently, for many women at this time, the issue of the island's geographic isolation only became a problem at particular points in time, as when they had to face sending their children away to school or in medical emergencies. Other aspects or types of isolation were more problematic for them and I argue that, in response these island women developed a range of strategies to deal very effectively with the issue of isolation.

These strategies distinguished between the different causes of feeling isolated. Most of the women interviewed felt particularly isolated when they were cut-off from the company of other women. In response they actively sought regular contact with other women, particularly women from within their family. This was facilitated by the stability of the island population between 1910 and 1960 and by the consequent large female kinship networks. Where possible, however, they also formed friendships with women within the wider island community. One important way of doing this was through the process of forming women's groups and organisations. As a result, during the middle decades of the twentieth century, the closely-knit, small island community provided a cohesive and supportive framework for the women's lives.

The security achieved through membership of strong, overlapping family and community networks allowed women the freedom to reflect on their lives and perceive advantages in their situation. These women did not view life in cities and towns as offering much, other than a few enjoyable holiday diversions. In addition, the length of their families' residence in the islands and knowledge of the difficulties they had surmounted to settle in the islands, has led to the development of a sense of pride; pride both in family history and in the islands, which they also recognise are marginal to mainstream Australian consciousness.

Recognising the marginal nature of the islands reinforces, however, notions of isolation. In the Furneaux Islands, I suggest, this led to concerted efforts on the part of the inhabitants to remain in touch with dominant Australian culture(s). These women lived in an unusual setting but they were not unique; there are other small offshore island communities scattered around Australia. It is, however, uncommon among Australians of European descent for families to live for generations within small island communities. A central finding of the thesis is that the women did not allow geographic isolation and pride in an island heritage to alter their primary cultural identification as rural Australian women.

European island women joined the same organisations as other Australian women and worked for the same causes. They ran their homes in similar ways, with the possible exception of incorporating into their diet a different variety of indigenous fauna. They bought their clothes by catalogue from the same large city stores as other women and expressed themselves—and reflected the values of Australian culture at the time—through music, art, craft, sport and writing, in the same way as women did in other places.

The small population and rural nature of the islands meant that some families had to travel off the islands intermittently in search of employment. Many families travelled for social reasons and almost all would leave when necessary to reach services only available off the island. Apart from the basic necessities of life everything had to be obtained, to use an island expression, 'from away'. Many families seem to have taken the requirement to travel as an opportunity to

introduce their children to the wider Australian community. Families were most likely to have to conduct business in cities and so many island children were exposed to city life in Launceston, Hobart and Melbourne. Eventually if their children were to have an education beyond the basic level, they had to move to regional towns or cities. All these factors meant that island women were not likely to be any more culturally isolated than women in rural mainland Tasmania.

As has been pointed out, the study participants identified separation from other women as one of the most difficult problems they faced, and frequently used the terms 'isolated' and 'isolation' in the oral interviews to describe situations where they had reduced contact with other women. A few women were never in the situation of being cut off from the company of other women, and only used the term 'isolated' when speaking about the physical remoteness of the islands. For the others, the level of isolation they experienced changed at different stages of their lives. Gladys Robinson regards her mother's life, while she lived on Vansittart Island, as extremely isolated, because the sea separated her from most of the female members of her family. On the other hand, Gladys views her mother's later life on Flinders Island surrounded by female kin as quite acceptable.[1]

Helen Cooper remembers the time following the birth of her second child as very difficult. Unwell, she struggled with the care of a fractious infant and the work of a busy farming household. In this situation she regards herself as having been isolated because she was too far away from other female members of her family for them to be able to meaningfully assist her.[2] Polly Coster was devastated after the death of her mother. She had always lived with or near her. Unable to get to Whitemark more than a couple of times a year and with only

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[1] See Introduction to this thesis, Chapter Two and Chapter Eight for details of Gladys Cook's life on Vansittart Island.
[2] Helen Cooper, interview, October 1998.

one child at home, she remembers this period in her life as 'a sad and lonely time'.[3]

In these examples the study participants specifically relate the feeling of being isolated to separation from other women—particularly women within their family. Gladys Robinson's mother was very happily married and spent most of her time surrounded by her many children, and yet she still felt lonely because her own mother was so far away in Melbourne. The emotional connectedness of female kin is particularly highlighted in this work. Relationships with other women could not often be maintained in the same way as they could with family members. Apart from the small numbers of families resident in Whitemark and Lady Barron, distance and lack of transport effectively hampered the development of close friendships with women from outside the family.

While many island women may have experienced loneliness and missed the company of other women at certain times in their lives, few appear to have felt personally isolated for long periods of time. On the other hand, the wives of soldier settlers in the 1950s, stranded on the eastern side of the island without cars and community supports, could feel very isolated. Lisa Bergamin and Joan Warren have provided powerful recollections of feeling lonely. Lisa, young and unable to speak English, was overwhelmed by the strangeness of her surroundings and sank into a depression that lasted for almost three years.[4] Perhaps it is fortunate that for many women in their situation, the struggle to succeed at settling left them little time or inclination to reflect on their situation.

This thesis concentrates on the relationships between women—grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters and sisters-in-law, child and adult friends. It does so because from the first round of interviewing, designed to explore the private and domestic world of the home, the impact of other women, particularly mothers, was powerfully articulated. It is because of this primary focus that the study is

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[3] Polly Coster. interview, November 2001.
[4] See Chapter Two for details of soldier settler settlement.

only a partial re-creation of women's lives during the period. Other important parts of their lives, the parts which involve the men in their lives and male concerns, are not seen as other than tangential to the world of childcare, home-making and physical and emotional care and support. For the women in this thesis these are areas of 'women's business'.

Following Elizabeth Tonkin's claim that 'all our consciousness and action includes the experience of others living and long dead', I suggest that not only did the women interviewed for this thesis reflect in their daily lives, attitudes, values, and the contribution of others to their sense of self, but that they brought cumulative and reworked understandings of their life story to the interview.[5] They brought with them, as well, other women from the past, incorporating their stories almost seamlessly into their own. Often these other women came powerfully to life in the accounts of their younger relatives.

In exploring the everyday lives of a group of island women between 1910 and 1960 I have tried to convey something of the texture of daily life in another time and a little known place. A central problem is that no two people have the same imaginative vision. The picture in the mind of the speaker is different from the picture that develops in the mind of the listener and possible recorder of the happening. The reader's picture will be different again. The struggle to capture the meaning and interpretation that the source material has for the speaker, and to keep this separated from one's own analysis, is part of the historian's task. It becomes particularly compelling when people have trusted the researcher with parts of their life story and hope to see the essence of their material faithfully captured.

The study participants demonstrated a high level of interest in their family history. This is an absorption they have developed late in life. The women claim that much of the social history of the islands has been lost and see this as directly

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[5] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 118.

attributable to the fact that the 'old-timers' did not record anything.[6] The women also recognise that if their grandchildren are to understand their families' past, the stories will have to be presented differently as increasingly information is accessed from written sources. For ease of access and for retention of material, family narratives, it seems, must be recorded in written form.

Within the islands there is a long tradition of oral story telling. The oldest women in the group remember hearing stories set in the second half of the nineteenth century, as children. Despite the mass of written historical material, Tonkin asserts that 'the business of relating past and present for social ends has for most been done orally; it still is so.'[7] In telling their story in order to have it recorded in print, the women in this study are continuing an oral tradition, while at the same time attempting to preserve something of their past.

The women I interviewed were predominantly widows. But even among those with husbands still living, responsibility for developing and passing on the family narrative appeared to rest mainly with women. Their interest in their family history, particularly those parts that are connected with island history and events, reflect their identification with the islands as their place.

While it is probable that the study participants caught glimpses into the lives of their grandmothers as they listened to their mothers and aunts talking as children, there seems little to pass on. Half-heard fragments of stories from long ago do not constitute a record from which a picture of the past can be drawn. That there is no surviving record left by or of a nineteenth century woman settler in the Furneaux Group, documenting her experience, is unfortunate. We, therefore, have no way of knowing how these women felt about the extremely isolated environment in which they found themselves. It seems reasonable to assume that some women may have felt apprehensive and even resentful about moving to settle in the islands. Yet those nineteenth century women who came

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[6] See Chapter Two, p. 62.
[7] Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts*, p. 3

and settled in the islands rarely left, even after their husbands' deaths. It is tempting to attribute their life-long residence to a sense of emotional attachment and identification with the Furneaux Group. The fact remains that we know so little about them that we cannot tell if they had any choice other than to stay.

Through the use of oral history the identification of their daughters and granddaughters with the islands has been able to be explored, to some extent. There are obvious limitations about what can be obtained from oral interviews, even from serial interviewing over months and years as has been attempted in this study. The proponents of oral history recognise and extol its considerable strengths, particularly the access it gives to the experience of 'ordinary' people. In personal story-telling, the intimate dimensions of a life can sometimes come alive with a colour and an immediacy that capture the attention and can thrill a researcher, in the same way as coming across a long-sought piece of documentary evidence. Yet oral testimony only ever allows a partial re-creation of a personal history because it is always presented through a social relationship. The problems inherent in this situation have been outlined in the introduction. While many difficulties stemming from the interaction of the two parties to the interview remain, serial interviewing does, however, change the nature of the relationship and has some advantages. The relationship becomes closer as the long-term interest of the interviewer—who keeps returning—is recognised. Serial interviewing also leads participants to reflect more intensely on their past lives and, sometimes, to check their memories with others. This can result in more detail being revealed. Serial interviews also allow the interviewer to check specific details or follow up on areas only touched on in the previous interview, but which, with the benefit of hindsight, appear to offer possible further areas of research. This, in turn, can lead to the uncovering of layers upon layers of further information. Inevitably it seems the more a person is interviewed the richer and more complex their life history becomes.

Elizabeth Tonkin asserts that memory makes us and we in turn make memory.[8] My experience of conducting serial interviews that focus on life experience in a particular time and place is that they lead to improved recall of detail and shifting interpretations of events. Sometimes new and more reflective understandings develop, and, inevitably, the narrative is reconstructed under the influence of the interests and concerns of the interviewer.

The complexity of the process has made it difficult to locate feelings of identification with place in the oral narratives. I have, therefore, concluded that it is the willingness of the study participants to share their knowledge of the islands and of island history, as well as their family history, rather than what is actually articulated in the interviews, that reveals the strength of their attachment to the islands.

This study is a woman's history, and the importance of women to each other within the islands is demonstrated. It remains a partial history, leaving many possible areas for future research. A study that focussed on the comparative difference between the ability of men and women in the middle decades of the last century to meet and mingle with their peers would be interesting. Outside of the home, why did women appear to meet more easily with other women in settings with a charitable or otherwise worthwhile purpose? Were gender roles so circumscribed that married women could not comfortably meet outside of the home with other women simply for company and amusement when men were not present? Another research possibility is an oral history that examines the relationships between rural men and women within the home and on the farm. While undoubtedly difficult to carry out it would, nevertheless, make a valuable contribution to present-day Australian cultural understandings. This study has also revealed the possibility of an oral history project designed to uncover how parenting styles and methods are passed down through generations of women within families. All of these projects would make a valuable contribution to understanding relationships in remote and rural parts of Australia.

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[8] ibid., p. 117.

I have focused upon how women in an isolated setting drew upon kinship ties and developed community networks, which in turn, engendered a sense of identification with the islands and pride in the settling role of their forbears. The convoluted relationship between isolation and identification with place described in the work has, I believe, the potential to help explain the connections between people and the places they love across rural and remote Australia.

Postscript

In 1960 the youngest woman contributing to this thesis was still a child and the oldest was in her early 40s. Most of the women's mothers, who are mentioned extensively throughout the thesis, were still alive. Many of the women were in the busiest and most productive period of their lives. The purpose of this postscript is to tell some of what happened afterwards and to reintroduce a few of the participants in middle and old age. The majority of the women are now widows and some have been so for a long time. Only the younger women and three of the older women still have their husbands with them. Since 1960 many women have had to learn to live alone, often for the first time in their lives.

The community has changed around them. The population has declined since the boom times of the 1950s and 1960s and now appears relatively stable at around 800 to 900 permanent residents. Throughout Australia the rural sector is in decline, and increasingly the women's children and grandchildren leave the islands in search of work and wider opportunities. However, though their children and grandchildren may live away they seem to come back frequently, and small grandchildren, who will probably never live in the islands, fly back and forwards regularly to visit their grandparents and experience something of the Flinders Island lifestyle.

Now many farms and residences belong to people from interstate who visit intermittently. The islands are beautiful and isolated and it is inevitable, given the Australian cultural dream of owning a place by the sea a long way from anywhere, that people from elsewhere with time and money would take up land and properties as they become vacant. Some of these people spend large amounts of time in the islands and contribute to the community in various ways. Others fly in their food and other necessities and have little contact with local people. The islands offer opportunities for solitude as well as social interaction.

At this late stage of their lives these European women have had to try to come to terms with Aboriginal activism. The past has come back to haunt them, but it is a past that they claim to be unable to recognise. Every historical interpretation is open to reinterpretation and we are all influenced by dominant ideological views. We might claim to bracket our biases and prejudices, to sometimes think outside the frame of our historical situation, but we are still human with views and emotional responses at least partially created by our experience. And so the study participants have had to face radically different interpretations and understandings of the twentieth century island past— and of their memories.

What are these women like now? Sadly, during the research stage of this thesis, one women, Lily Dargaville, died at the age of 88. During the writing stage, Leedham Walker, who at the age of 95 shared with me his incisive and yet reflective thoughts on the islands' history, also died. The thesis benefited from both these people. During the three years they were involved in the research some of the older participants have become frailer—others seem to have taken on a new lease of life. Mostly they live alone and sometimes in comparatively isolated settings.

Gladys Robinson, at the age of 84, lives in the small home on the waterfront she created for herself after the death of her husband. She has neighbours whom she has known all her life, and from her back windows she looks directly out across the Franklin Sound to Vansittart Island, the home of her childhood. Her daughter, Gwen, lives within a few kilometres, her son is close by, and some of her grandchildren are on the island. She has invariably found time to fit me into her busy life, and to answer what must have seemed, at times, an endless series of questions. Fastidious about accuracy, she is, nonetheless, a natural story teller who can, by a turn of phrase, a hand movement or an inflection of voice, bring an image or a memory to vivid life.

Helen Cooper, now aged 87, lives alone at *Greenglades* the property she owned with her husband at Emita. While she uses a walking frame inside the house and two sticks outside, these do not greatly inconvenience her. She manages her

immaculate and large house alone with only two hours of domestic help a fortnight. Her son runs the property but Helen still takes a keen interest in all aspects of farming. Helen's situation is very isolated and two years ago she fell and fractured her pelvis while shutting the gate. She dragged herself back down the drive, into and through the house to phone for help. Now she wears a medical emergency alarm that she can activate should she fall or get into other difficulties. The alarm rings in the local multi-purpose centre and identifies the person needing assistance. She drives herself about the island and remains very much the family matriarch.

Shearing had ended at *Greenglades* just before my arrival in October 2001, and Helen cooked every day for the ten days of shearing. Cooking for shearers entails morning and afternoon teas—or smokos—and a two-course cooked midday meal. Helen's morning smokos consist of hot savoury toast, sandwiches and two types of cakes and buns. Afternoon smoko is much the same without the savoury toast and usually with moister cakes, like fruit cake. The midday meal might be roast meat with vegetables, milk pudding and fruit, and jugs of water and cordial. The shearing gang only consisted of three workers this time so with Helen and her daughter Jan, who arrived in the middle of each morning to help, there was usually five to six for each meal. Jan says that her role was mainly to act as her mother's legs and that Helen was in control of the whole operation.

Music has been the great love of Helen's life. With no regrets she chose marriage over a possible classical singing career, but within the privacy of her home and family music has remained her great passion. Each year she holds two or three musical evenings for about 40 people. Every Easter Sunday night the evening consists of community singing, soloists and finishes with a group rendition of the *Holy City* for which everyone stands.

A second night is always held in October or November to raise money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. For this evening a violinist always comes across from Melbourne.

Noreen McCarthy retired four years ago from working as a Hospital Aide at the multi-purpose centre. All her life Noreen has painted and written poetry. Fiercely independent, she found fitting into nurse training in the early 1950s difficult and left before completion. Now she is in ill health and for a time she gave up her art work. This month she has started painting again. She lives in her own home overlooking the Franklin Sound and not far from where she grew up at Badger Corner, the focus of much of her poetry. Her son and grandson live with her.

Mary Walker, Helen Cooper's sister-in-law, is now 89 and has severe osteoporosis. She lives in the house that Helen grew up in and which her husband brought her to as a young bride. Each morning her son comes in to make her breakfast and later the community nurse to help her shower. She has help with the housework and receives meals on wheels. With this help she can stay on in her home. As well, a wide range of friends and family transport her to any outings she wishes to attend. She listens to the radio through the night, reads the paper, watches television, sits in her garden feeding the birds and watching their antics with great pleasure. Her beloved husband, two sons and a grandson have predeceased her, but if she is ever sad she refuses to show it.

Two sisters, Olga Henwood and Heather Willis, contributed much to this thesis. During the three years ill health forced Olga to move out of her farm home and into the multi-purpose centre. Always an active member of the community, she has in the past been a Councillor, and now writes a column for the fortnightly local newspaper entitled *From the Bed*. In the current edition, 26 October 2001, her column includes information about the first load of heavy machinery which arrived in the island 50 years ago. She reminds her readers to fill out their Needs Assessment Form for Tracks Access, and explains why it is important to do so. She tells a funny story at her own expense about a day at work in 1959, as well as a series of other anecdotes. Not surprisingly her column is popular with local readers. Olga always liked working with men and being part of the world of planning and policy that was often, in the past, the domain of men. From her bedside she remains completely involved in island life.

Her sister Heather has also experienced some serious health problems in the past three years. She is now out of hospital and home with her husband on the farm and gradually recovering. Up until last year she was still working the farm together with her husband. Frank and funny, she has shared many stories with me, many of which she specified I could not use. Heather was a school teacher as a young women and loved teaching. She was, in a sense, a victim of the discrimination which existed against women into the 1960s in terms of salary and employment and, consequently, did not return to teaching after the birth of her first child. In need of money, she realised she could earn a lot more milking than teaching. Until about two years ago, with her husband and sister-in-law Joan Blundstone, she was still mutton-birding on Big Dog Island for part of each season, taking a few birds for personal consumption.

Polly Coster had her last baby in 1969 at the age of 39 and after an almost eight year gap in child bearing. She recalls having to convince the doctor that she was pregnant and not beginning, as he insisted, the menopause. She called Allen, this last baby, her saviour, for he was born when she was going through a difficult time. All her other children were at school and her mother had recently died, as well as her oldest brother to whom she was very close. Her husband worked away all day and did the shopping and collected the mail on his way home from work. Polly only went to Whitemark, 16 kilometres away, about twice a year when a priest came over from Launceston to say Mass. She remembers this stage of her life as a lonely, sad time. Alone all day she would take the baby up to her elderly neighbour, Mrs Fowler and help her in her garden. Last year George, who was 20 years older than Polly, died. Now she lives alone in the rambling old house overlooking Marshall Bay that they shared. She lives still without electricity, managing capably with lamps and a wood stove. Around the house are acres of garden, once a productive market garden; it was the money from the market garden that she saved in order to send her children away to school. She still has 'her girls', a hundred or so hens that help keep the island in free-range eggs. Polly has children and grandchildren on the island and seems in remarkably good health. She is always either busy in her garden or visiting others, often helping in their gardens.

I have described here the present-day lives of the women whose oral accounts I most often drew upon. But other women of the same age on the islands and in this study live similar lives. Hugh Mackay has called this generation of Australians the lucky generation, and despite the tragedies and problems that have beset individuals, it seems a fair, if surprising, description.[1] Mackay claims that this is how they view themselves. They believe that the hardships they endured in their youth, during depression and war years, gave them the necessary skills to deal with, and the appreciation to enjoy, the modest prosperity of their middle and later years.

How do these women feel about the very different lives of their daughters and granddaughters? Olga Henwood feels that there is less difference between her life and that of her daughters and granddaughters than there might have been had they lived in another place. She points out that her daughters and granddaughters do what she did; work on the farm, prepare food in similar ways—they still bake, pickle, and preserve home produce—and that, in many ways, there is little difference.

But Olga and all the women note one major difference in today's families, and that is the willingness of men to be involved in childcare and sometimes housework. Very few of their own husbands got up to children in the middle of the night or changed nappies, and they are very impressed with today's young husband and father. However, they do not imagine that men have taken on this role willingly—they believe it comes from the instigation of young women who are assertive in ways they never dreamed of being—and without exception, they view this assertiveness as a change for the better.

During the ongoing interview process women were rarely prepared to speak about unhappy or violent families and, in such a small community, there was good reason for their discretion. But when, at the end, I asked them what they

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[1] Hugh Mackay, *Generations: Baby Boomers, their Parents and Their Children,* Macmillan, Sydney, 1997.

thought of young women today, one powerful and common thread came through all their reflections. They know that women today are better educated and, in their view, this enables them to leave unhappy or violent situations and make another life for themselves and for their children. Important also in their view is the acceptance of the community of this right, and the support society offers in providing financial assistance. They contrasted this with the situation when they were young women—a time when abuse was not talked about —although most people knew or suspected where it was occurring. They expressed themselves so forcibly on this issue that it was clear they could remember particular instances of abused women and children who had no choice but to stay where they were.

Gladys Robinson believes that 'women have come into their own and they are respected by their male peers'. Heather Willis is convinced that women are much happier and this is because they are more equal. But they also note the considerable responsibilities their daughters and granddaughters assume, a level of responsibility they would not usually have been expected to deal with. Nowadays farming is big business and farmers' wives help on the farm and in the running of the business. When wool and cattle prices drop farmers are forced to diversify and try new ways of making a farm living, all of which requires research and careful economic planning—areas that usually closely involve wives. As well, in the islands, generally one partner is in some form of outside work to help with the cash flow. On top of this are the responsibilities to children; parents want every opportunity for their children, and rural parents want these as much as urban parents. As with women everywhere, women on Flinders Island find that transporting the family around eats into their precious time. So while the study participants admire women today and express considerable pride in the achievements of their daughters and granddaughters they do not necessarily believe that life is easier even if it is, as Gladys Robinson says, far freer.

Some Study Participants

Plate 17: *From left to right Gwen Bailey with her mother Gladys Robinson 2000.*

Plate 18: *Mary Walker at home 2000.*

Plate 19: *Joan Boyes 2000.*

Plate 20: *From left to right, Helen Cooper with daughter Jan Henning.*

Plate 21: *From left to right, Margaret Wheatley with her mother, Polly Coster 2000.*

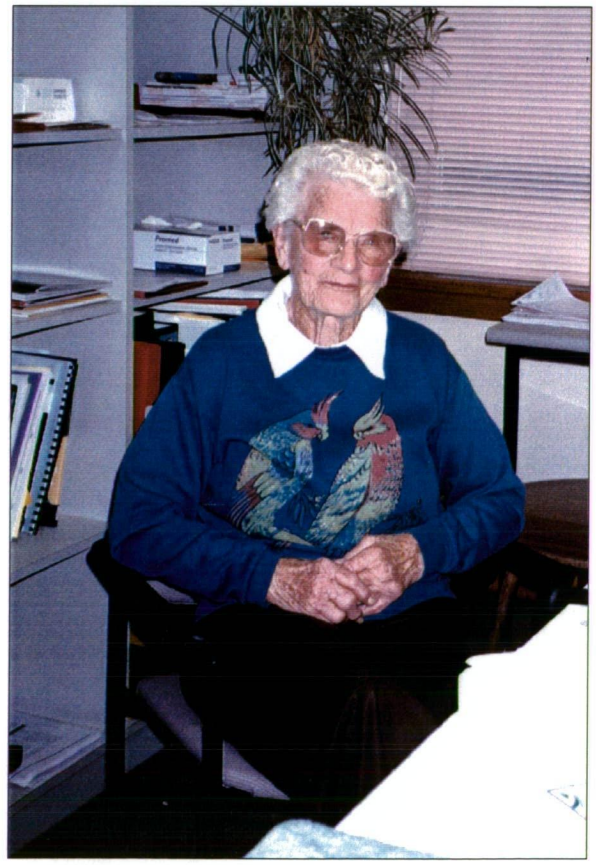

Plate 22: *Nell Cook 2000.*

Appendix 1

Informant Profile

Informant Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Place of Birth Home or Hospital _____

Locality _____

Place of Schooling _____

Educational Level _____

Occupation before Marriage _____

Occupation after Marriage _____

Date of Wedding _____

Husband s Name _____

Children s Names	Date of Birth	Home/Hospital Location of Birth	Locality
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			

Informant Profile: PARENTS

Mother Name _____

Place of Birth _____

Age at Marriage _____

Schooling Details _____

Occupation _____

Father s Name _____

Place of Birth _____

Age at Marriage _____

Schooling Details _____

Occupation _____

Children s Names	Date of Birth	Home/Hospital Location of Birth	Locality
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			

Appendix 2

Consent Form

Statement by Participant

1. I have read and understood the information sheet for this project.
2. The nature and outcome of the project has been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves discussing my past experience of mothering on the Furneaux Islands and that this may involve discussing issues of a personal nature.
4. I understand that I have the option to have a pseudonym used in place of my family and given name. It has been explained to me that I have the right to withhold the use of any material from the transcripts and tape.
5. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
6. I agree to participate in this project and understand that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that information gathered may be used by the interviewer in reports and articles subject to the conditions contained within point 4 above.

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Statement by Researcher

I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this person and I believe that the consent is informed and that she understands the implications of participation.

Name of Researcher _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date_____

Appendix 3

Release and Deposit Agreement

The purpose of this release and deposit agreement is to ensure that the tapes and transcripts of your interview/s are dealt with in the way you wish. Please tick one of the options below.

(a) Returned to me. Yes No

or

(b) Another place of my choosing. Yes No

Please specify _____

or

(c) Queen Victoria Museum
Oral History Archives Yes No

All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures and broadcasting.

If you wish to limit public access to your tapes and transcripts for a period of years, please state length of time. _____

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Statement by Researcher

I have explained details of release and deposit to this person and I believe that the agreement for placement of tapes and transcripts is informed.

Name of Researcher _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date_____

Appendix 4

Biographical details of women in study

Gwen Bailey

Gwen was born in 1944, one of the three children of Gladys (née Cook) and George Robinson. In 1963 she married Don Bailey and the couple subsequently had four children. Gwen's mother Gladys Robinson and her aunt, Nell Cook, also participated in the study.

Lisa Bergamin

Lisa was born in northern Italy in 1936. She married Primo Bergamin in 1956 and emigrated to Australia in 1958. The couple, with their small daughter Maria, settled on Flinders Island. They subsequently had two more children.

Hilda Blundstone

Hilda was born in northern Tasmania in 1914. She came to Flinders Island as a young school teacher. She taught many of the women in this study over many years and her contribution to education on the island is well recognised. In 1943 she married Thomas Blundstone and subsequently gave birth to two children. She is the sister-in-law of Joan Blundstone and mother of Laraine Langdon, both of whom also participated in this study.

Joan Blundstone

Joan was born in 1918 in Hobart. Until the age of five she lived with her parents on Cape Barren Island. The family then moved to Flinders Island. Her parents, Olive (née Mills) and Valentine Willis had both come to the islands as children to live with island families. Joan is the second oldest of the nine children born to the couple. In 1941 Joan married Ray Blundstone and subsequently gave birth to two sons. She is related to many other women in the study (see page 66).

Joan Boyes

Joan was born in 1921. In 1946 she came to Flinders Island to work for Leedham Walker Senior (also interviewed for this study) as a book keeper and bus driver. In 1958 Joan married Herbert Boyes whose father, Toby Boyes, came to Flinders Island as a child looking for work around the turn of the twentieth century. In 1952 Herbert Boyes was granted land as a soldier settler by the Tasmanian government. Joan still lives in the house that was built for the couple at that time. Herbert and Joan had six children.

Nell Cook

Nell was born at home on Flinders Island in 1923. Her mother died when she was three years old and her father, who did not remarry, brought her up with the help of her older sisters. In 1945 Nell married Ernest Cook brother of Gladys Robinson, who also participated in the study. The couple have four living children.

Helen Cooper

Helen was born in Launceston in 1914, the daughter of Kate (née Harley) and Harold Walker. In 1937 she married Geoff Cooper. She is a direct descendant of Jane Harley, the adopted daughter of Mrs Robinson of Green Island, and is related to many other women in the study (see page 66). Her daughter, Jan Henning, and sister-in-law, Mary Walker, also participated in this study.

Polly Coster

Mary Coster, always known as Polly, was born in 1930 in north-west Tasmania. Polly is the second youngest of eight children, and the only daughter, born to Annie (née Schmitt) and William Treloar. Her parents moved to Flinders Island while she was still an infant. Polly's father died when she was seven. In 1951 Polly married George Coster. They settled at Emita and subsequently had seven children.

Lily Dargaville

Lily was born in 1912 and died in 1999. She was the daughter of Leila (née Virieux) and John Hinds Lily and was, therefore, a direct descendant of Jules Virieux son of Mrs Robinson of Green island. Her mother was born on Flinders Island and her father on Little Green Island in the Franklin Sound. Lily was related to many women in the study (see page 66). In 1954 Lily married George Dargaville, also a direct descendant of Jules Virieux, and subsequently gave birth to one son, James.

Shirley Green

Shirley was born in 1941, the first of twelve children born to Grace (née Turnbull) and Terry Wheatley. She was mainly brought up by her grandmother, Amy Turnbull, and spent a considerable amount of her childhood in northern Tasmania. Following her return to Flinders Island she married Cyril Green in 1960. She has nine children. Her mother Grace Wheatley, sister Margaret Purdon, and sister-in-law Margaret Wheatley, also participated in this study.

Jan Hennning

Jan was born in 1940 at the Queen Victoria Hospital in Launceston. She is the daughter of Helen (née Walker) and Geoff Cooper and through her mother is a direct descendant of Jane Harley the adopted daughter of Mrs Robinson of Green Island. In 1960 she married David Henning and subsequently had three children. Jan is related to many other women in the study (see page 66). Her mother, Helen Cooper, and her aunt, Mary Walker, also participated in this study.

Olga Henwood

Olga was born at home on Flinders Island in 1924, the oldest of three daughters born to Hilda (née Messner) and Harold Haworth. She is a direct descendant of Jules Virieux, the son of Mrs Robinson of Green Island, and is

related to many other women in the study (see page 66). In 1945 Olga married Eric Henwood and subsequently gave birth to three daughters.

Audrey Holloway

Audrey was born in 1935 at a Launceston Hospital to Clara (née Robinson) and Thomas Diprose. Her mother had grown up on Long Island between Flinders and Cape Barren Islands. Audrey was privately tutored at home until the age of 12, after which she attended school on Flinders Island for two years. In 1953 she married Lance Holloway and subsequently gave birth to two sons.

Shirley Holloway

Shirley was born in 1939. She attended school in Whitemark and later as a primary school teacher taught on Flinders Island. In 1959 she married Greame Holloway the couple subsequently had two children. Shirley is a direct descendant of Jules Virieux, son of Mrs Robinson of Green Island, and is related to many women in the study (see page 66).

Tiny Kismannis

Theodocia Kismannis, always known as Tiny, was born in 1918 in the house she still lives in at Blue Rocks on Flinders Island. She was the third youngest of the eight children born to her parents Thomasina (née Harley) and Geoff Hammond. She is a direct descendant of Charles and Catherine Harley, reported to have been living in the islands in the 1850s. In 1952 Tiny married Albert Kismannis and subsequently gave birth to four children.

Laraine Langdon

Laraine was born in Hospital at Launceston in 1945. Her mother, Hilda Blundstone, also participated in the study. She attended boarding school in Melbourne for her secondary education. She is a direct descendant through

her father of Jane Harley, the adopted daughter of Mrs Robinson of Green Island, and is related to many other women in the study (see page 66).

Judith Longhurst

Judith was born at the Whitemark Hospital in 1942. Her parents were Thelma (née Elphinstone) and Leedham Walker. Her father has also been interviewed for this study. Judith's secondary schooling was acquired in Devonport and she is the niece of Helen Cooper and Mary Walker and cousin to Jan Henning, also participants in this study. She is a direct descendant of Jane Harley, the adopted daughter of Mrs Robinson of Green Island, and is related to many women in the study (see page 66).

Pat McIntosh

Pat was born in 1936. In 1956 her parents came to Flinders Island as soldier settlers and Pat accompanied them. In 1957 she married Don McIntosh and subsequently had two children. Pat has lived on Flinders Island since 1956.

Noreen McCarthy

Noreen McCarthy was born in hospital in Launceston in 1934. Her parents were Rosa (née Hall) and William Riddle. Her father's family had been resident in the Islands since the mid 19th century. Noreen's schooling was undertaken by correspondence. In 1954 she married John McCarthy and subsequently gave birth to two sons.

Margaret Purdon

Margaret Purdon was born in 1945 and is the fifth child of Grace (née Turnbull) and Terry Wheatley. She was interviewed jointly with her mother in 1999. She married in 1965 and has three children. She is now living with her husband at Bicheno on the east coast of Tasmania.

Gladys Robinson

Gladys was born in 1918 at home on Vansittart Island. Her parents were Gladys (née West) and Alfred Cook. Gladys was the sixth of eight children born to the couple. Her childhood years were spent on Vansittart Island. In 1940 she married George Robinson and subsequently gave birth to three children. Her daughter, Gwen Bailey, and sister-in-law, Nell Cook also participated in this study.

Mary Walker

Mary was born in her grandmother's home in Penguin, on the north-west coast of Tasmania, in 1913. Her parents Lily (née Anthon) and Arthur Cooper had lived on King Island. They were en route to Flinders Island to settle when Mary was born. Mary attended boarding school in Launceston for her secondary schooling. In 1937 she married Jeff Walker, Helen Cooper's brother. The day before Helen had married Geoff Cooper, Mary's brother. Mary is, therefore the sister-in law of Helen Cooper and aunt of Jan Henning, both of whom also participated in this study.

Joan Warren

Joan was born in 1921. In 1943 she married Eric Warren and the couple farmed in NSW. In 1956 they moved to Flinders Island with their children to take up land under the Closer Settlement Scheme for returned servicemen. They have five children and have remained on Flinders Island.

Grace Wheatley

Grace was born in Hobart in 1921, the daughter of Amy Turnbull. In 1939 she moved with her mother to Flinders Island and in 1940 married Terence Wheatley. She subsequently gave birth to 12 children of whom 11 survived infancy. Her daughters, Shirley Green and Margaret Purdon also paticipated in this study, as has her daughter-in-law, Margaret Wheatley.

Margaret Wheatley

Margaret, the daughter of Polly (née Treloar) and George Coster, was born in Hospital at Whitemark in 1954. She attended boarding school in Launceston for her secondary education and married Alan Wheatley in 1973. Her mother, Polly Coster, her mother-in-law, Grace Wheatley, and sisters-in-law, Shirley Green and Margaret Purdon, also participated in this study.

Heather Willis

Heather was born at home on Flinders Island in 1925. She is the second of three daughters born to Hilda (née Messner) and Harold Haworth. Her older sister, Olga Henwood, also participated in this study. Heather became a primary school teacher after leaving school. In 1947 she married Frank Willis and subsequently had three children. She is a direct descendant of Jules Virieux, son of Mrs Robinson of Green Island and is related to many women in this study (see page 66).

Appendix 5

Interview format

The interview process used in this study employed serial interviewing, the merits of which are discussed on pages 31 and 260–61. As well, it was considerably influenced by grounded theory methodology as outlined by Glaser and Strauss[1], which I had used in an earlier study with a colleague.[2] Therefore, first round interviews invariably began with an open-ended question about the participant's childhood, for example, 'tell me about your childhood?' or 'how do you mainly remember your childhood?'

From this point the remainder of the interview was only very loosely structured. However, in the first round of interviews all participants were asked questions about the following areas: their childhood; memories of schooldays; memories of their mother with particular emphasis on the sort of domestic tasks she performed; remoter ancestors, grandmothers and great grandmothers; mutton birding and travelling around and off the islands.

Most interviews were analysed as soon as the transcript became available and the information from transcribed interviews was used to add depth and direction to later interviews. After eight to ten interviews had been performed a tentative analysis of the material was carried out and the themes that emerged were then incorporated into subsequent interview questions. All participants were questioned in later interviews with regard to feelings of physical and emotional isolation and the importance of the islands to their sense of individual and family identity. Where appropriate they were also asked for more detailed information about their mothers' lives and their

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[1] B Glaser& A Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research,* Aldine Publishing Company, US, 1967.

[2] Judy-Joy Sankey & Sheryl Brennan, 'Living with Difference: Caring for a premature baby at home', *Collegian,* vol. 8, no.2, April 2001.

island family history. The obvious importance of women to each other led to another series of questions relating to friendships and female family relationships as well as women's organisations.

The conversational nature of the interviews enabled participants to volunteer a considerable amount of material that might at first glance have seemed irrelevant. Wherever possible I followed the interviewees' lead and in doing so was often introduced to valuable material I might otherwise have missed. When an area, for example mutton-birding, had been discussed with several women on multiple occasions and no new material was emerging I regarded that area of the research to have, in Glaser and Strauss's terminology, reached 'saturation point'[3] and did not pursue it any further.

Other than ensuring that the same broad areas were brought into each interview no attempt was made to ensure that participants were asked the same questions. I felt such a structured format would not have assisted the collection of the largely subjective material in which I was interested.

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[3] Glaser & Strauss, 1967.

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