

NATURALLY DISTURBED
6 APRIL - 7 MAY 2010



SASA
GALLERY



NATURALLY DISTURBED

Artist

Sue Kneebone

Curators

Sue Kneebone & Dr Philip Jones

External Scholar

Dr Philip Jones, Senior Curator
Anthropology Department, South Australian Museum

Editor

Mary Knights, Director,
SASA Gallery

Catalogue design

Keith Giles

Front image: Sue Kneebone, *For better or for worse*, 2009, giclée print

Inside cover: Sue Kneebone, *Hearing Loss* (detail), 2009, native pine telegraph pole, sound, furniture

Back cover: Sue Kneebone, *A delicate menace*, 2008, giclée print



Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA : C949 (detail) *Part of South Australia Shewing the Recent Discoveries*, Surveyor-General's Office, 1859

Contents

- 5 **Introduction**
 Mary Knights
- 7 **A Yardea frontier**
 Philip Jones
- 14 **Inland Memories**
 Sue Kneebone
- 21 **Acknowledgements**



Sue Kneebone, Yardea Station, photograph, 2008

Introduction

Naturally Disturbed is the result of an interdisciplinary collaboration between Sue Kneebone and Philip Jones. The exhibition engages with the complex history, intersecting narratives and unexplained absences that relate to Yardea, a pastoral property in the Gawler Ranges in South Australia, once managed by Sue Kneebone's great grandfather. The exhibition is underpinned by research into family, history and place, and considers the roles that environmental philosophy and fieldwork play in contextualising histories.

Naturally Disturbed is one of a series of research based exhibitions that engage external scholars to participate in the SASA Gallery's exhibition and publication programs. Dr Philip Jones, the external scholar, is a senior curator in the Anthropology Department of the South Australian Museum. Philip has curated exhibitions exploring aspects of Aboriginal art, history and material culture, anthropological and expeditionary history, and the ethnography and history of the Australia's 'Afghan' cameleers. Philip's research into the provenance of artefacts and the history and the context of their collection informs much of his work. In 2008 Philip won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Non-Fiction for *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* (Wakefield Press).

The SASA Gallery and curators have received immense support and assistance from many people in the development of this exhibition including Tara Dodd, David Kerr, Maya Penck, David Stemmer and Keryn Welsh at the South Australian Museum; Mike Turner and the South Australian Museum Aboriginal Advisory Group; Andrew Starkey and members from the Kokotha Mula Nations Land Council; Barry Patton; and Sandy Morris of Yardea Station.

The SASA Gallery supports a program of exhibitions focusing on innovation, experimentation and performance. With the support of the Division of Education, Art and Social Sciences and the Division Research Performance Fund, the SASA Gallery is being developed as a leading contemporary art space publishing and exhibiting high-quality research based work, and as an active site of teaching and learning. The SASA Gallery showcases South Australian artists, designers, writers and curators associated with the South Australian School of Art, Architecture & Design, UniSA in a national and international context.

Mary Knights
Director, SASA Gallery



Artefacts of the Gawler Ranges region, dating from the 1880s – 1920s. Left to right: spearthrower, Eyre Peninsula, A61398; kookra playstick, Yardea, A2951; digging stick, Eyre Peninsula, A6378; sword club, Yardea, A31899; bulbous-headed club, Gawler Ranges, A5852; double-pointed throwing club, Koonibba, A14551; spearthrower, Yardea, A4024; boomerang, Gawler Ranges, A5320; wombat fur-string belt (top), Koonibba, A14331; human hair-string belt, Gawler Ranges, A3200. South Australian Museum Collection.

Photograph: Michal Klivanek

A Yardea frontier

Philip Jones

Focusing on the Yardea region of the Gawler Ranges, Sue Kneebone's artwork offers a series of vignettes turning on particular ironies and juxtapositions. These amount to a sharp, often wry critique of frontier pastoralism from a post-colonial perspective. It is more acute for the reason that her own paternal ancestor, Arthur Bailey, managed Yardea station during a period in which significant damage was done to its cultural traditions and natural heritage. What follows is a brief exploration of the subject of cultural collision and the frontier of contact in the Gawler Ranges, as a means of understanding something of the context behind these Yardea artworks.

More than a generation has passed since equal wages legislation obliged pastoralists across Australia to lay off their Aboriginal workers, critically weakening their links to their traditional country. Since the beginnings of Gawler Ranges pastoralism during the late 1850s, Aboriginal people had worked on, and travelled between, the sheep stations scattered among their tribal lands through the low granitic hills. The principal stations had supplied rations, clothing and a small wage to station-hands and domestics, supporting a network of extended family groups. It was a frail, but viable simulacrum of the traditional web of Aboriginal relationships stretching across and beyond the Ranges. As it happened, Aboriginal people had little more than a century to blend their ancient knowledge of this landscape with the new codes of the pastoralists, whose homesteads were built next to the limited number of permanent waters. Today the names of those stations provide almost the only visible reminder of the Ranges' Aboriginal past – Thurlga, Uno, Hiltaba, Paney, Kodondo, Nonning and Yardea, where Sue Kneebone's ancestor Arthur Bailey lived and worked during the early 20th century. The Aboriginal link remains though, and the past

associations are still remembered. Those are the basis for the series of native title claims brought by descendants of the Kokatha, Wirangu and Parnkarla peoples whose territories intersected in the Ranges.

Travellers in the Ranges can be forgiven for overlooking the area's Aboriginal associations. Even within the National Park, encompassing land from Paney and Yardea stations, the signs and brochures focus either on the natural landscape or the built heritage of the settlers. I spent a day driving and walking in the park during early January (fortunately between heatwaves), without meeting another soul, and was struck by this combination of the sublime and the prosaic. I found myself considering an isolated and abandoned four-roomed stone house, as solid and straight as an Adelaide bluestone villa, and a stone-walled dam built across a rocky creek, still watertight after a century. Without an Aboriginal presence, I could weigh these pioneer achievements only against the enfolding landscape, poised as always on the edge of drought. The point was brought home to me as I arrived at a picturesque stony gully near old Paney station, where a sign offered no more than the enigmatic name, 'Policeman's Point'. Later I learnt that this remote site, now undistinguished by any trace of human occupation, had been one of the first police camps in the Ranges, placed there to protect the first Paney flocks from Aboriginal depredations.

It was not until the following day that I made the chance discovery of a carefully-worked adze implement, fashioned from the base of an 1880s glass bottle to create two working edges. It lay in the dirt a few metres from the old Yardea police and telegraph station. It is unlikely that during the past century anyone had given this nondescript artefact a second look, but its recognition brought a sudden flash of insight. Each chip and bevel in the glass tool confirms the particular confluence of ancient tested skills and new materials that so often marked these Australian frontiers. And in that confluence, a kind of levelling, so that the act of conjuring such efficient tools from cast-off

bottles, made in the image of ancient lithics, suggests that the European presence could momentarily enhance Aboriginal worlds as well as demolish them.

The site of the old Yardea police station and telegraph station is a few hundred metres to the east of the homestead, itself a complex of buildings dating back to the 1860s. All these stone buildings stand against the looming range to the north and overlook a broad plain, towards more granite hills. Between the homestead buildings and the telegraph station is Yardea water itself, an Aboriginal spring until the 1860s, now the main source of station water. Somewhere nearby must have lain the Aboriginal camp, once consisting of low domes of bent whipstick mallee boughs, echoing the profile of the hills around, supplanted no doubt by iron and hessian, and now scattered to four corners of the landscape.

In the steep range behind the buildings, nestled exquisitely into a high stony gully like an Andy Goldsworthy sculpture, is another dam wall. It was built by craftsmen; stone fits to stone so neatly that every irregular crevice is perfectly matched. Grafted to the rocks around it and bowing outwards like a rampart to trap the maximum volume of water, it evokes an ancient European stone age, displacing Aboriginal history once again. As I clambered towards it a wallaby bounded upwards through the gully, steadily and without panic towards the summit. On those granite hilltops, the station manager had told me, were rock-holes used by Aboriginal people throughout the Ranges as small reservoirs, capped with stone lids to minimise evaporation and prevent contamination. The most lasting elements of Aboriginal and European occupation seem to be those constructed to conserve that most fleeting element.

And water has been a preoccupation for the inhabitants and visitors to the Ranges for longer than anyone can imagine. These Ranges do not contain permanent pools deep and dark enough to hold mythological creatures, as in

the Flinders Ranges or MacDonnell Ranges. Instead there are the surface rockholes and a series of soaks or wells which include Yardea. These always required maintenance of some kind and were probably unreliable, even in pre-European times. The Yardea lease-holder James Grey Moseley 'put in some long, hard years sinking for water, and ... knew what it was to beat a drill for long hours in that red granite country'. He recalled an Aboriginal party arriving at Wilcherry out-station, probably during the 1860s, close to perishing through thirst, 'their tongues sticking to the roofs of their mouths'. Setting out from Streaky Bay they had found all the rockholes dry along their route and had survived only by cutting out the transverse water-storing roots of mallee trees, gathering the precious drips in wooden bowls. During his journeys north of Fowlers Bay during the 1900s, accompanied by Wirangu and Kokatha guides, the explorer R.T. Maurice collected several bottles of mallee root water, donating these to the South Australian Museum. In 1928 Norman Tindale obtained samples of the roots from a Kokatha man at Penalumba near Fowlers Bay and recorded a song verse about a person's great niece digging up the roots: *Wan'bu nare wanji wanji wan'bu nare* ('digging stick look, roots of water mallee, sister's daughter's daughter, look').² Such fragments become precious relics of a culture.

Moseley's reminiscences were those of a hard man who had confronted the reality of Aboriginal occupation and ownership of the Ranges in a matter-of-fact manner. As he put it, he 'had a shot or two at them', but also 'helped them in times when hunger and thirst attacked them'. It is difficult to know exactly what 'a shot or two' might mean, but we can assume that Moseley was instrumental in establishing an unambiguous *pax Europaea* in the region, centred on Yardea itself. He considered the Aborigines of the region at that time to be Parnkala, and 'in dealing with the blacks acquaintance with that language was a great help'. Moseley's neighbour to the east, A.D. Sawers of Uno station, contributed a vocabulary of mainly Parnkala words to the Australia-wide linguistic survey published in 1886 by E.M. Curr.³



Images clockwise:

Roots, leaves and flowers of the red mallee, cut by Wirangu people near Penong, 1928, to demonstrate the method of extracting drinking water. A14173, South Australian Museum; Two double-pointed throwing clubs, made by Wirangu and Kokatha people at Koonibba Mission, 1928, collected by Pastor C. Hoff. A14551 (larger club), A77222, South Australian Museum; Water dish or scoop, Eyre Peninsula, dating to the early 20th century. A32414, South Australian Museum; Softwood shield of beantree wood, originally collected at Yardea, ca. 1900. Faint incised decorations can be discerned on the shield's surface. A2229, South Australian Museum.

Photograph: Michal Klivanek

It is clear enough though, that the Gawler Ranges was not a hermetically sealed area, in cultural terms. The low hills, open corridors of grassland, and the intermittent nature of the main waters suggest a more fluid, permeable pattern of occupation than the steeper, less penetrable Flinders or MacDonnell Ranges. The parched group arriving at Wilcherry from Streaky Bay during the 1860s, for example, was probably Wirangu. In 1928 an elderly Wirangu man, Yaldildi, told Norman Tindale that his country extended east past Yardea, as far as Nonning station. According to him, the Kokatha's southern boundary was also close to Yardea.⁴ By 1928 a mixed group of Wirangu and Kokatha people were living at Yardea. It included an elderly Wirangu woman, Lucy Gibera, from whom Tindale and the ethno-musicologist Harold Davies recorded a short song-chant on wax cylinder, describing a large white bird tied to the sea-shore near Fowlers Bay. According to Tindale, this suggested a long-held memory of the Dutch ship *Gulden Zeepaerd*, which had reached present-day Ceduna under the command of Francois Thijssen during 1627. If so, Yardea holds a place in Australian history as the locality of this unique record of Aboriginal-European contact.⁵

The European discovery of Yardea itself came during Stephen Hack's 1857 expedition. Hack was offered reimbursement of his expenses and a further reward if he discovered useful pastoral land.⁶ It had been his intent to simply pass through the Ranges to reach country to the north, imagined to be richer. The Ranges had been known to Europeans since September 1839, when Edward Eyre had crossed their south-western corner, naming them after the South Australian governor. In a dry year, unaccompanied by local guides, Eyre judged the Ranges harshly: 'travelling for a great part of the distance under very high rocky ranges, we never found a drop of permanent fresh water nor a single spring near them ... all is barren, rocky and naked in the extreme'.⁷ This assessment, followed by the spearing of explorer John Charles Darke in the southern Ranges five years later, was

enough to deter interest for a further decade.

By the mid-1850s, explorations suggested that the best route for crossing the continent lay west and north of Lake Torrens. MacDouall Stuart himself was initially proposed as Stephen Hack's draughtsman, but was unable to join the party. By June 1857 the season was perfect and Hack was well equipped. More importantly, he adhered to the instructions received from Charles Bonney, Commissioner of Crown Lands, stressing the importance of good relations with the Aboriginal people. 'Every endeavour', Bonney wrote, 'is to be made to conciliate and win the good-will of such natives as may be encountered during the journey; and you are to urge upon each individual the great desirability of impressing the aborigines favourably towards Europeans, by keeping good faith with them, and by not offending against their natural habits and prejudices'.⁸ Extraordinarily enough, Hack and his two European companions had set out from Streaky Bay with an Aboriginal guide from the Sydney region, named 'Billy Grant'. Sadly, but fortuitously perhaps, this man's sudden illness and death caused Hack to rely on local Aboriginal guides. Unusually for the times, these guides were named in Hack's journal and he stressed that the success of his expedition depended almost entirely on their cooperation. During the first part of his expedition Hack reported:

... during my trip to the range, I succeeded in getting two natives, Membulta and Yandulta, after several unsuccessful attempts to get within speaking distance; we saw many smokes, but the blacks were all as wild as kangaroos, and it was with some difficulty I got them; they have been with me since as guides to water; and as I have got another who knows more of the country north, I have paid these two, and sent them with this [letter] to the depot.⁹

Membulta and Yandulta, together with the third man, variously named as Toogulta or Wolgulta, and a fourth, named Pinegulta, led Hack to more than 40 springs, soakages, creeks and other features. Hack retained the

Aboriginal names for most of them, largely resisting the temptation to apply names of politicians and patricians. Here, in the interests of supplying a form of mnemonic to a dissociated landscape, are those Aboriginal names: *Kahrachildy, Yarna, Warrea, Moonaree, Mendea, Murnea, Cowierrida, Yarinda, Kundery, Koleymirrika, Yardea* ('a good creek' wrote Hack, 'full of springs ... first rate country in every direction around this water'), *Pondanna, Kodendo, Puttamaring, Yandinga, Polturkana, Paney, Narrenie, Muddera, Winnabinnie, Kolay, Tarkumbleboo, Nukay, Echanulbo, Pondamunda, Pindarriby, Ponculto, Tandale, Pareulboo.*

Of the four Aboriginal guides, at least Membulta and Yandulta were younger men, whose lives straddled the frontier period. They probably lived long enough to regret their generosity in piloting Hack to their choicest waters. Hack's report on the Ranges, detailing the discovery of 4,500 square miles of available country, ensured that these waters were soon alienated from their ancient possession. Hiltaba, Yardea and Paney were among the first stations to be taken up. Whipstick Billy, one of 'the last Gawler Ranges natives' still alive in about 1910, whose tribal land was apparently centred on Hiltaba, recalled his people's first encounter with a wire fence, probably during the mid-1870s. Yardea was one of the first Australian properties to be enclosed with sheep-proof fencing: 'they touched it with their yam sticks and the twang of the wire made them all jump back. They then got back a few feet and dug a hole under the fence'.¹⁰ These were the days when Europeans and their commodities seemed exotic, even magical, attributed with peculiar power and strange effects. And what might the local Aboriginal people have thought of the discovery of the Yardea meteorite in 1875, which had apparently fallen to the earth just three years earlier? A newspaper article of 1872 described the 'comet's' fall, as witnessed by a Paney shepherd:

It looked as large as a full moon, and of a pale colour with a long tail like a comet. It traversed the heavens from a S.E. to a N.W. direction, and just as it reached the

mallee burst into a thousand fragments. The tail then ascended, and was visible for nearly half an hour. The time of its appearance was about noon.¹¹

Lying on one of the main east-west corridors through the Ranges, Yardea became the main postal depot during the late 1860s. A stone police station was erected in 1873, staffed by two police troopers who had been placed there a year earlier to keep order and to distribute rations to Aboriginal people who were increasingly attracted to Yardea. Erected a year earlier, the stone cells still stand. They probably held a succession of Aboriginal sheep-spearers and those charged with stealing provisions and clothing from Yardea shepherds. In 1876 the cells held Chelengie, charged with murdering another Aboriginal man named Hanchie in a quarrel over a woman, 'beloved of both'. Chelengie could not speak English. His acquittal on the grounds of self defence can be attributed largely to the efforts of the court interpreter, James Locke Higgins, a local pastoralist – a telling indication that a modicum of equal justice was possible on this tilted frontier.¹² After the Yardea police were withdrawn in 1885 the building served as a post-office and telegraph station, and then as a repeater station when a direct telegraph link to Western Australia was established in 1903.

During the 1890s, when the most of Gawler Ranges station leases (including Yardea) were abandoned due to a combination of high government charges, drought, and uncontrolled dingo numbers, the building was still staffed by three telegraph station employees. No longer a ration depot, the small outpost was unlikely to have been a major destination for those surviving Aboriginal groups still moving through the region, although rare surviving photographs of ceremonial performers were probably taken at Yardea during this period. Unfortunately, neither Yardea nor any of the other Gawler Ranges stations were home to a Francis Gillen or George Aiston, pioneer anthropologists who gained the trust of the Arrernte and Wangkangurru peoples, respectively. Instead, we must

rely on traces in the official record, or reminiscences of men such as Moseley, whose attitude towards the Gawler Ranges people was ambivalent at best. The scant record is perhaps illustrated best in the surviving ethnographic heritage. The fullest record of the spears, clubs, boomerangs, shields, wooden containers, play-sticks, articles of dress and decoration, and ceremonial objects once used by the Wirangu, Kokatha and Parnkala of the Gawler Ranges is probably contained in the collections made Pastor Hoff at Koonibba Lutheran Mission during the late 1920s, and by Norman Tindale during the 1928 expedition. Aside from those collections, which relate only incidentally and historically to the Gawler Ranges, artefacts obtained by passing travellers such as S.G. Hübbe, Inspector of Vermin, who gathered a collection of clubs, spears, shields and boomerangs during his 1898 forays against dingos, or the Government Geologist, H.Y.L. Brown.

By 1912, when ornithologist S.A. White and his wife Ethel journeyed through Yardea as guests of Arthur Bailey, Gawler Ranges Aboriginal men were hunting kangaroos with repeating rifles. Observing their skill through his fieldglasses, White confirmed that the days of boomerangs and spears were over. He watched the three men hide their game under a bush, then don clothes to approach his camp. One of the three, 'who sat apart with with pink crests of cockatoos in his headdress was a "myall"', perhaps one of the last Aboriginal people in this part of South Australia to encounter Europeans. White showed him his fieldglasses, directing him to look out on the plain where they had been hunting. A 'blank look of astonishment' came over the sportsman's face, as he 'repeated the word "spyglass" over three times'.¹³ Through the white man's lens, for that brief and extraordinary moment, the frontier was inverted.

1. 'Tales of the Natives ... Chat with Mr Moseley, M.P.' *The Advertiser* 13 September 1913, p.6.
2. Tindale, N.B. 'Field notes and journal on the anthropological expedition to Koonibba on the west coast of South Australia by Norman B. Tindale, August 1928', p.43. AA338/1/5, South Australian Museum Archives.
3. Sawers, A.D., 'No.63 – Gawler Range'. Pp.130-32 in E.M. Curr (ed.) *The Australian Race*. (4 vols), vol.2. John Ferres, Melbourne, 1886.
4. Tindale 1928, p.39.
5. Wax cylinders preserved as AA70 in the Harold Davies collection, South Australian Museum Archives. See Tindale 1928, p.43.
6. See 'Explorations by Mr S. Hack' Parliamentary Paper 156 of 1857, House of Assembly, Adelaide, pp.1-11.
7. Eyre, E.J. *Journals of Expeditions into Central Australia*. (2 vols), T. & W. Boone, London, vol. 1, p.205.
8. 'Explorations by Mr S. Hack', p.2.
9. 'Explorations by Mr S. Hack', p.5.
10. 'Fitzgerald memoirs' (n.d.) Kimba Historical Society (per S. Kneebone).
11. 'Gawler Ranges, August 18', *The Chronicle*, 31 August 1872, p.7.
12. *The Advertiser*, 24 March 1876, p.3.
13. White, S.A. *The Gawler Ranges. An Ornithological Expedition*. W.K. Thomas, Adelaide, 1913, pp.22-23.

Inland Memories

Sue Kneebone

Naturally Disturbed explores the pastoral frontier, a place from which distant memories and tensions hover in the present. Parlour room photos, furniture, guns, telegrams, bones, skulls, and animal pelts evoke the dreams of past colonial enterprise of opening up the land for stock and white settlement. Rather than idyllic scenes of picturesque landscapes, the sense of interiority in these works calls into question the ramifications of the colonial settler mind-set and the continuing desire to push the limits of nature towards an unknown future. The art works are provocative expressions recast from the material traces of the past to create an uncertain dialogue between memory and history.

This exhibition began with a small collection of family photos from Yardea Station, a pastoral property once managed by my great-grandfather Arthur Bailey in the early 1900s. Yardea Station lies in the north-western part of the Gawler Ranges, a semi-arid zone between the temperate coastal area of Eyre Peninsula and the arid regions of northern South Australia. The people depicted in these family photos are now deceased and none have recorded their personal stories. What little history has been written of the region emphasises the admiral deeds of white male pioneers who 'reigned' over and 'improved' the lands.¹ Left with only a vague sketch of Yardea's history, my research has taken on a speculative kind of journey where, by attending to the past through the combined engagement of archival material and field trips, I have searched for ways to reach a more nuanced understanding of the cultural mirage that lies behind the history of colonial settler culture and its relationship to the land.

With a long Aboriginal history and only one hundred and fifty years of pastoralism, the Gawler Ranges provides a stirring location for examining the far-reaching effects of land use since white settlement. Yardea is believed to be

an Aboriginal word for 'place of rushes' and its location was most likely an important source of water for several Aboriginal groups that moved through this country. From the 1860s introduced stock and changed land use practices had a severe impact on Aboriginal people's lives. The Gawler Ranges' scarce surface water could easily be depleted by stock and the intensification of stock-carrying in the 1870s and 1880s would have left little water for use by Aboriginal people or the native fauna on which they had traditionally relied for food. The renowned Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner pointed to pastoralism as having a devastating effect in terms of usurping Aboriginal people's environment:

The great wrecker had been the pastoral industry ... pastoralism easily wins and must wear the laurels both for the number of tribes dispossessed and dispersed and the expanse of territory over which this happened. The industry was still expanding into the 1890s and was carrying the chain of like causes and like effects out into the dry zones of the west and centre and into the Northern Territory and the Kimberleys.²

This exhibition includes Aboriginal cultural artefacts dating back to the period of early contact in the Gawler Ranges thanks to a collaboration with the South Australian Museum and the Kokotha-Mula Nations Land Council. It is hoped that the juxtaposition of Aboriginal material culture alongside my own visual art works will allow for white-settler and Aboriginal peoples' histories to circulate around each other provoking critical engagement about the human and environmental impact of pastoralism.



Top Row: Mrs & Mr Bailey holding Win (baby), Mrs Stuart holding Edna Bailey, Mr Stuart, Pram Singh. Middle Row: Miss Cole, Miss Bailey, Miss Stuart and Miss Cole. Front Row: Bert Bailey & Keith Stuart.³

This photograph of my great-grandparents' family and friends from around 1908 first drew me into this investigation. My felt response was one of incongruity – women in white attire with long sleeves and skirts sitting on the dirt in the Australian bush with tennis racquets seems to exaggerate their cultural dislocation from the environment within which they pose. Standing slightly adrift from the group is an unidentified Indian man. Through archival work I have been able to identify this man as Pram Singh or Phram Singhreckie who became a friend of the Bailey family.⁴



Image of 'Travelling Hawker' visiting Yardea, early 1900s.⁵

At the Kimba Museum I came across another photograph of Pram Singh which helped me to contextualise his place on the land. Singh is seen with a wooden cart laden with haberdashery that he is showing the women at Yardea and is identified as a 'Travelling Hawker', again anonymous but now the centre of narrative attention allowing for a more accommodating reading of his role in this photograph. Small findings such as these helped to develop and expand the significance of these images beyond the constrained narratives of male-oriented pioneering progress and achievement.



Shearers at Yardea Station, early 1900s. Whipstick Billy standing at back.⁶

In another family photograph, an unidentified Aboriginal man stands behind a group of shearers at Yardea. He is believed to be Whipstick Billy, reputedly an outcast from his Wiragnu people who spent lengths of time working at Yardea and other stations in the region until he died in his wurlie near Yardea around 1920. As with Pram Singh, we never hear Billy's own version of events; he is represented anecdotally through stories of the local settlers whose accounts render him as a friendly character who drifts between properties with his dogs. The way he is mythologised through written accounts symbolises his movement from bush to a marginal state in which he co-existed with white settlers. He was seen as someone with an innate understanding of nature, incorporating his knowledge of country that involved such skills as listening

to the ground and attracting the curiosity of animals. 'He was always a splendid man at tracking, but once he got near the dingo he always took the pants off and hung them in a tree as the swish of the pants would frighten the dingo out of his lair.'⁷ The archival stories give a sense of freedom and independence and respect for Whipstick Billy's mobility and wanderings. He still occupied the natural world in white settlers' eyes, but demonstrated his own agency to co-adapt and survive while becoming pre-ordained in white society as 'the last of the Gawler Ranges Natives'.⁸ These nebulous narratives of Whipstick Billy portray him as leading a hybrid life, a visitor in his own country as he enters and leaves demarcated pastoral territories, and in the settlers' eyes coexisting somewhere between nature and culture.

As the photographs and archives disclosed their contents, Yardea became a more complex place than that presented in the straight white lessons of pioneering achievements. In Foucault's terms it could be comprehended as a *heterotopic* place – a contradictory location where the pastoral landscape is a place of superimposed meaning and where cultural transformations occur as one enters its boundaries.⁹ A shifting network of pastoralists, Aboriginal people, white settler families, teachers, police, telegraph and postal workers, field naturalists, hawkers, cameleers, dam sinkers, stockmen, hunters, shearers, cooks, swagmen and other itinerant workers have entered and left these marginal lands over time. More recently tourists, anthropologists, historians, feral control officers, ecologists, geologists, mining companies and native title claimants have all left traces on the Gawler Ranges landscape to differing degrees. It is a place where the anxieties and tensions of white settlement struggles with its pioneer foundations and unhomey dissonance. *Naturally Disturbed* evokes the anterior world of Yardea as a place where white settlers wandered in 'out of place'.

Australian anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose maintains that we 'can only inhabit what is for us "wounded space" ...

much of the past can be known in the present as absence.'¹⁰ This notion corresponds with memory theorist Susannah Radstone's idea that rather than the past being a subject for us to recapture, the past instead malignantly captures us in uncanny and unsuspecting ways.

While the links to a familiar past had become irretrievable, memory arose unbidden and in uncanny forms – forms that demanded new modes of interpretation. Yet at the same time ... in the nineteenth century, the belief (or lack of belief) in a liveable, if not utopian future became tied to a struggle with the ambivalences sited within memory.¹¹

By working with memory and history one can probe white settler consciousness to expose and unsettle its ambivalent relationship with nature and the rigid divide between self and other. In making white settler culture strange, the interpolative processes of photomontage and bricolage have allowed me to explore the fluid zones between memory, myth, history and landscape. These art works evoke a place where white settlers appear out of place. Australian cultural theorist Lisa Slater's notion of reimagining the self underpins the sentiment behind my creative practice.

By letting in some of the elements which are strange and unhomey, one might begin to build connections which aid the reimagining of the self and the social, which in turn enables one to not only live in postcolonial Australia but participate in creating it. A strange place: unsettled by other desires, histories, knowledge and memories...¹²

In 1912 an ornithological expedition led by Captain S.A. White wandered across the Gawler Ranges and stayed with my great-grandparents at Yardea Station. Despite procuring 300 specimens from this expedition, there was 'evidently no contradiction in White's eyes between his conservationist stance and his collecting.'¹³ This is reflected in his journal notes in which he describes how he goes out to shoot a rare species of bird:

After forming camp we strolled out with the gun, and I was fortunate enough to secure the thick-billed grass



Sue Kneebone, *A cautionary tale of overconfidence*, 2008, giclée print

wren (*Amytornis modestus*). This is an extremely shy and rare bird; it is seldom if ever flushed, but passes from one saltbush to another like a mouse.¹⁴

In Captain White's and Arthur Bailey's time, the notions of ecology and environment were rudimentary and did not become popular scientific thinking for another century. The 'duty' of preservation was expressed in the following sentiment by the South Australian Museum's Institute Board in 1859:

It is highly desirable, and, indeed, almost a national duty, to preserve for posterity the forms and semblances of the various singular and beautiful animals and birds, reptiles and insects now inhabiting Australia, ere they shall have finally disappeared before the footsteps of the white man.¹⁵

The photomontage *For better or for worse* (2009) is a wedding portrait of my great-grandparents from the late 1890s transmogrified into a foreboding tale of ecological misadventure. Before them lies the Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*), a vulnerable ground dweller now believed to be extinct as a result of habitat destruction brought about through feral animals such as cats and foxes. This particular night parrot, now in the South Australian Museum, was shot and procured from the Gawler Ranges in 1871 by the ornithologist F. W. Andrews.¹⁶

Saintly Sinners is a series of photomontages based on images of pioneers who were part of the early endeavour to open up the Gawler Ranges for pastoral runs. These venerable men are now seen through the lenses of environmental and cultural history as protagonists who brought with them a legacy of vermin, weeds and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. *Saintly Sinners* seeks to reveal how masculine endeavours behind the pioneer myth serve to cover up a deeper sense of fragility and impotence. By giving them a mythical aura of animistic parity with the non-human world, these pioneers of the north-west have been transformed into 'ecoprophets' who are also victims of their own actions and belief systems. Kate Rigby explains that 'the prophet is both implicated in and wounded by the

wrongdoing that is shown to be driving his or her world headlong into catastrophe.'¹⁷

There is in the prophetic voice ... an 'ethical self-exposure' in which subjectivity lays bare its vulnerability, and opens itself consciously to others.¹⁸

The installation *Unnatural causes* refers to stories from the frontier past, including accounts given as evidence at court trials and personal reminiscences that over time became well-known local myths and legends. In particular, it draws on a story common in the Eyre Peninsula in which the head of murdered settler is discovered in a camp oven pot. This story dates back to an incident in 1848 in the west coast area and is part of a cluster of local legends that have been told in regard to the putative Waterloo Bay massacre of Aboriginal people near Elliston. In *Unnatural Causes* the hovering figure with emu feathers, horse tail, dinner shirt, coat tails, clay pipe and shearing blades inhabits a gothic world emerging from the shadowy stories and myths passed down in various incarnations and now part of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous legend and lore.

In 1896 when the east-west telegraph line was re-routed through the Gawler Ranges, the abandoned Yardea police station was put to use as the only post and telegraph office in the district. Australian historian Ingereth McFarlane notes the telegraph line allowed instantaneous connection to the rest of the world, however it also had unintended outcomes by creating another form of 'contact zone' as it cut through the country and lives of local Indigenous people.¹⁹ In 1898 a telegram was sent along the east-west line from Fowlers Bay to the Protector of Aborigines via Yardea telegraph station pleading: 'For God's sake send rations. Natives starving. Their case urgent.'²⁰ In the installation *Hearing Loss*, an 1870s native pine telegraph pole from Yardea telegraph station revives this message in the arcane language of Morse code. This work also draws on the story of Mrs Cole, who passed away at Yardea, too sick to travel the distance to Port Augusta for medical help. Her husband, a telegraph operator at Yardea, was left to bury his wife at Yardea and reportedly made a makeshift coffin out of office furniture.²¹

Naturally Disturbed is an ontological interrogation of a place with which I have become unsettlingly implicated, ambivalent, discordant, confused and confronted. Through this exhibition project I have sought to bring to the surface unsettling aspects of colonial settler culture. It is hoped that by expressing the poetical and ethical, an imagination desirous of social change may be stirred, an imagination more holistic and ecocentric as the need increases to shift from hegemonic nationalisms to understanding the local struggles in an adversely affected environment. New ways of imagining ourselves may not only help to avoid the mistakes of the past, but also bring attention to the forgotten or silenced 'other' – 'to bring down the walls of human-self enclosure that render us insouciant towards other-than-human suffering.'²²



Night Parrots (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*) collected from the Gawler Ranges, 1871 by F.W. Andrews. Photo: Sue Kneebone courtesy South Australian Museum

1. Norman Richardson, *Pioneers of the North West* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas & Co. 1925: facsimile edition. Adelaide Libraries Board of South Australia, 1969).
2. W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009), p. 197.
3. Kneebone family collection.
4. Clem Fitzgerald, 'Clem Fitzgerald Memoirs,' (unpublished) courtesy of John Starkey, September 2007.
5. Photo courtesy of Kimba and Gawler Ranges Historical Society
6. Kneebone family collection.
7. Clem Fitzgerald memoirs, recorded by Molly Eatts, Kimba Historical Society, 1975. In collection of Kimba Museum.
8. Images relating to Whipstick Billy. Series AA 26, Robert Arthur Bedford, South Australian Museum, www.samuseum.australia.sa.com/aa26/AA26-02.htm, viewed 12/06/08.
9. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986), pp. 25-26.
10. Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2004), p. 36.
11. Susannah Radstone, ed. *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p.5.
12. Lisa Slater, 'No Place Like Home: Staying Well in a Too Sovereign Country,' *Media-Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2007), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/13-slater.php>, viewed 10/7/2009.
13. Rob Linn, *Nature's Pilgrim* (Adelaide: South Australian Government Printer, 1989), p. 49.
14. S.A. White, 'The Gawler Ranges: An Ornithological Expedition. Part IV,' *The Register*, Adelaide, 3 June 1913, p. 14.
15. 'Adelaide's Early Specimens,' *Origins and Early Years*, South Australian Museum, <http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/page/default.asp?site=1&id=1198&fragPage=1>, viewed 12/12/09.
16. J. Burton Cleland, 'The History of Ornithology in South Australia,' *The Emu* 36 (1937), p. 298.
17. Kate Rigby, 'Writing in the Anthropocene: Idle Chatter or Ecoprophetic Witness,' *Humanities Review*, no. 47 (2009), p. 178
18. Ibid, p.175.
19. Cited in Rodney Harrison, 'Historical Archaeology in the Land of the Black Stump,' in *Beyond the Black Stump*, ed. Alan Mayne (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2008), p. 95.
20. J.B. Rickaby to Protector of Aborigines, 1 February 1898, State Records of South Australia GRG52/1/1898/42. Reproduced with permission from Department of Aboriginal Affairs.
21. Herb Kirk, 'Herb Kirk's Outback Adventures,' *The Australian Postal Clerk*, 1940.
22. Rigby, 'Writing in the Anthropocene', p. 184.



Sue Kneebone, *Angelfire*, 2008, bones, ceramics & cloth

Acknowledgements

The SASA Gallery supports a program of exhibitions focusing on innovation, experimentation and performance. With the support of the Division of Education, Art and Social Sciences and the Division Research Performance Fund, the SASA Gallery is being developed as a leading contemporary art space and as an active site of teaching and learning. The SASA Gallery showcases South Australian artists, designers, architects, writers and curators associated with the School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia in a national and international context.

The Director, SASA Gallery, would like to acknowledge the contribution to the development of the 2010 exhibition program by the SASA Gallery Programming Committee and AAD Events and Exhibition Committee; Professor John Barbour, Associate Head, AAD; Professor Mads Gaardboe, Head, AAD; and Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Pro-Vice Chancellor, DivEASS, UniSA. Thanks to Tony and Connie Perrini for the generous and on-going support of the SASA Gallery program by Perrini Estate.

Special thanks to Dr Philip Jones and Sue Kneebone for their generous participation in this exhibition, catalogue and associated events.

The Director, SASA Gallery, and curators warmly thank Mike Turner and members of the South Australian Museum Aboriginal Advisory Group, Andrew Starkey and members from the Kokotha Mula Nations Land Council and Sandy Morris of Yardea Station for their interest, consent and advice with respect to the display of Aboriginal material culture from the Gawler Ranges. We also appreciate and thank the contribution and assistance from staff at the South Australian Museum, Tara Dodd, David Kerr, Maya Penck, David Stemmer, Keryn Welsh, and Sandy Morris of Yardea Station.

Published by the SASA Gallery
University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471, Adelaide SA 5001
March 2010

Printed by Finsbury Green
© artists, curators & SASA Gallery

Artist: Sue Kneebone & artefacts from the South Australian Museum
Curators: Sue Kneebone & Philip Jones
Editor: Mary Knights
Catalogue design: Keith Giles
Catalogue project management: Mary Knights & Keith Giles

SASA Gallery staff:
Mary Knights, Director, SASA Gallery
Keith Giles, Gallery Administrator
Chris Boha, Sue Kneebone, Brigid Noone, Gallery Assistants (Research/Education)
Julian Tremayne, Installation Consultant
Peter Harris, Technical Officer

SASA Gallery
Kaurna Building, City West Campus, UniSA
Cnr Fenn Place & Hindley Street
Adelaide SA 5000

ISBN 978-0-9807261-4-5



Perrini
ESTATE



Government
of South Australia



Art, Architecture
and Design



