

Mountain Beings
Relationships with land in the Oberon district,
1800-1900

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Technology, Sydney

April 2018

Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of ideas I have turned over for many years and it is impossible to acknowledge here all the people who have contributed to it. Many disparate learnings are woven through it - I am grateful to all my teachers.

In particular I thank my supervisor Robert Crawford, now Professor of Advertising at RMIT, for accompanying me on this five year journey. His diligence and professionalism have been a constant support, and his insistence that I write an argument not a story has impelled me to develop as a scholar beyond my expectations.

My dear friend Georgia Allen generously seared the thesis with her fierce intelligence and poetic sensibility, boosting my flagging energy in the critical final weeks.

My children Alexander, Georgia and Susannah Payne, and partners of two, Antoinette Clements and Rob Wilkinson, encouraged and supported this thesis in so many ways, especially technologically.

Colleen and Graham Maranda graciously shared the branch of their family history which traces to Murrundah, "Chief of the Burra Burra".

Numerous librarians – at UTS, the Mitchell Library, NSW State Archives and Eilagh at Oberon Library – helped make the research process fruitful and enjoyable.

My old friend Mary Adams encouraged me to read Jean Gebser's *The Ever-Present Origin*.

Many friends balanced the isolation of this process with conversation and laughter via phone calls or over shared meals – in Sydney, Sylvia Emmett and Jane Wynter, also Belinda Allen, Vanessa Berry, Roe Howard and Liz Loxton, Bruce Gardiner, who made constructive suggestions in the early stages; from France Lisa Giddy; from Queensland Dinie Ferrier and my cousin Sabina O'Callaghan; in and around Oberon, Wayne Kelly with talks about religion in the pub; Sarah McCormick and Mathias Regali-Koczorowski, Virginia Kurtz, Deborah and Anthony

Hoolihan, Jennifer Balaam and Ed Power, Jenny Johnston and Greg Dargan, Lyn D'Arcy-Evans, Bev O'Brien, Ed Barnes, Matthew McManus, and Alison Allen; and scattered across NSW, my brother Nick and Amanda and their family, Geoffrey and Josh Payne and Ginny Handmer. Kiara Hopwood cared for my animals when I went to Sydney.

Tilly Hinton, whose thesis is in some ways the twin of this, made transformative suggestions when we connected in the last few months of our gestations.

In Oberon Peter Stiff shared with me the suppression of his grandmother's Aboriginal identity. Lynn Agland answered genealogical questions, Brett and Karen Bailey gave me access to the Gingkin papers, and my neighbours Brian and Marilyn Nunan patiently answered questions. The thesis also has the benefit of the published and unpublished work of many family historians, and of the research of the late Alans, Brown and Hoolihan. I was fortunate to have started my Oberon historical research nearly twenty years ago, as many of wonderful keepers of Oberon's history have since died.

I pay my respects to the elders of the Traditional Owners of the land of the Oberon district, past and present. The story of Gurangatch and Mirragan, referred to in this thesis, is on the public record, and I acknowledge their simultaneous ownership of it. Lastly my thanks to my predecessors on the land where I have lived for the past 26 years, both black and white. They and the land itself have inspired this thesis.

In memory of my parents
Margot née McKenzie 1921-2013
and
Gavin (Snape) Gemmell-Smith 1916-1979

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Abstract

Oberon is a local government area and small town on a plateau running west of the Great Dividing Range, in New South Wales. As it was on the first road to Bathurst, the north of the district was one of the earliest areas of inland New South Wales to be invaded/settled, from at least 1820. Despite this its early colonial history is obscure for reasons explored in this thesis, which traces the course of Aboriginal and European relationships with land throughout the nineteenth century. It suggests that these relationships reflect the manifold nature of land.

The thesis employs the post-colonial genre of a conversation of consciousnesses, understanding *conversation* in the wider sense as *interactions*. The central tenet of the thesis challenges the contemporary academic understanding of land as culturally constructed. It argues that many Aboriginal relationships recognise the inherently spiritual nature of the land, rather than imposing meaning onto it. As some compensation for the fact that Aborigines rarely represent themselves in the sources of this period, it reads 'against the grain' accounts of conversations between Aborigines and colonists, particularly explorer journals.

Since the rejection of social progressionism, no effective alternative approach to cross-cultural studies has emerged. Rather than understanding consciousness in the post-colonial model of the colonised and the coloniser, the thesis adopts the paradigm of structures of consciousness of phenomenologist Jean Gebser. This schema understands that the ways people experience phenomena are multiple, and universal. It recognises the losses as well as the gains in shifts of consciousness, enabling an approach that is wholistic and inclusive, uniting subject and object. Well-known material is thus re-read in the thesis, and complex interpretations of new and old material are made in its exploration of experiences of land. An insight into the nature of the land of the broader Oberon district across the nineteenth century accumulates over the course of the work.