In Loving Memory

Inscriptions, Images and Imagination at the North Head Quarantine Station, Sydney, Australia

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Abstract One hundred and fifty years ago, on a sandstone cliff high above Sydney Harbour, Australia, a number of individuals began carving the rocks and making their mark upon the land. The people who made these inscriptions were amongst Australia's first migrants and free settlers who were put in quarantine. The Quarantine Station was established in 1828 to manage and control the spread of infectious diseases in the nascent colony of New South Wales. Who were these people and why were they compelled to mark their presence in stone here? In this paper we explore the words and images inscribed at the North Head Quarantine Station. They are, we suggest, an historical archive of passengers, ship's names, and ports of origin as well as markers of passage and acts of memorialisation. An evocative testimony to lives held in suspension, we discuss also the profound effect of seeing these inscriptions and realising that for some of their makers the journey remained unfulfilled.

Introduction

A slowly fading inscription scored into a sandstone boulder at the North Head Quarantine Station, Sydney, records the names of three, or possibly four, people – John, Alice Oliver and George (Fig. 1). Dated to July 1893 the inscription prompts immediate questions: who were John, Alice Oliver and George? Were they a family? Under what circumstances did they find themselves in quarantine? Where did they come from and how did they get here? What prompted someone to inscribe their names amongst all the others on the edge of this cliff? Did they survive their time in quarantine, or is this a memorial to loved ones taken? Just one of over a thousand inscriptions, some singular, some collective, some formal, some informal, some visible, others tucked away from common sight, this example nonetheless illustrates the affective pull and power that a simple list of names and an associated date can exert, drawing the viewer into a visual and haptic interaction between this particular moment

and the present of the past. In this paper we consider how the images created by the texts, motifs and design structures of the historical inscriptions at the Quarantine Station effect a process of communication between past and present, creator and observer, landscape and location.

Would the inscription described above and all the others that surround it spark our imaginations and engage our senses if it was located inside a church or some other public building where commemoration and memorialisation is anticipated and expected? Are we moved instead by finding something unfamiliar in the dramatic and abrupt physicality of the North Head cliffs and in and around the dark and multi-layered fabrics of the historic Quarantine Station infrastructure? In short, to what extent does the landscape and the spatial conditions of place play a role in our affective encounter with the traces the past has made? These associations; the interplay between the singular instances of inscription, the clustered groups of inscriptions, the physical and cultural landscapes of quarantine, filtered through our own responses to these contexts of mark-making, form the focus of this exploration of an assemblage of images located within a highly specific historical context.

Fig. 1. Inscription at Old Man's Hat, North Head Quarantine Station, Sydney, Australia. Photograph: Ursula Frederick.

Maritime connections

Like many nations in the southern hemisphere, Australia was founded in an age of European expansion propelled by maritime technologies. Beginning in 1606 the continent called *Terra Australis* was discovered, mapped, and settled in a piecemeal

fashion by the Dutch, the French and the English. Prior to European colonization, another maritime culture – the Macassan fishermen of Indonesia – undertook regular voyages to northern Australia for the purposes of trade with Indigenous peoples (Macknight 1976). This maritime history is reflected in the country's settlement patterns, archaeology, built environment and the genealogical heritage of its population. Even today major political, environmental and economic issues are framed by the vast stretches of ocean that surround the country.

Early settlement of the British colony centred on the anchorage of Port Jackson, a natural harbour which is now part of the greater city of Sydney. The colonial town of Sydney was deeply reliant on shipping for penal transportation, supplies and communications from Europe (Karskens 2009). Unsurprisingly then, life in this early colony and the landscape within which it flourished, was consequently shaped by the people, news and goods that arrived from overseas. Through their actions, the early colonists wrote this history of sea transportation into the fabric of their fledgling settlement. In addition to the wharves, roads and buildings springing up to service the growing colony, a complex of fortifications was constructed on the perimeters of Sydney Harbour (Boyce 2008). Arguably, one of the earliest defensive measures was the development of a Quarantine Station on North Head at the entrance to the fledgling settlement (Foley 1995).

During the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thousands of ships passed through the Heads and entered Sydney Harbour. Approximately 580 such ships were quarantined at North Head during the 156 years (1828-1984) of the Station's operation (Foley 1995:11). More than 13,000 people passed through the quarantine system staying for periods that varied from short stays to several months. The location and geography of the area made it difficult for people to abscond. A stone wall was built along the eastern boundary of the Station, while the surroundings of bush land, steep cliffs and the choppy waters of the Harbour provided an even greater disincentive to escape. Needless to say, many people never did leave. Some 572 individuals were buried in one of the Quarantine Station's three burial grounds (Foley 1995:11).

Today there is a wealth of material, in the form of historical records, architectural infrastructure and material culture, which offers insight into the formal procedures and institutional activities undertaken during the service history of the Quarantine Station (Freeman et al. 2000). In addition to the activities normally associated with quarantine, archaeological evidence demonstrates that a well-established practice of mark-making was also in place (Fig. 2). The traces of these actions remain with us today in the form of inscriptions engraved and painted onto and into the natural Sydney sandstone. These inscriptions might be considered simultaneously as images and as historical texts as the great majority of them incorporate some form of writing such as initials, personal names and titles, place and ship names and company names.

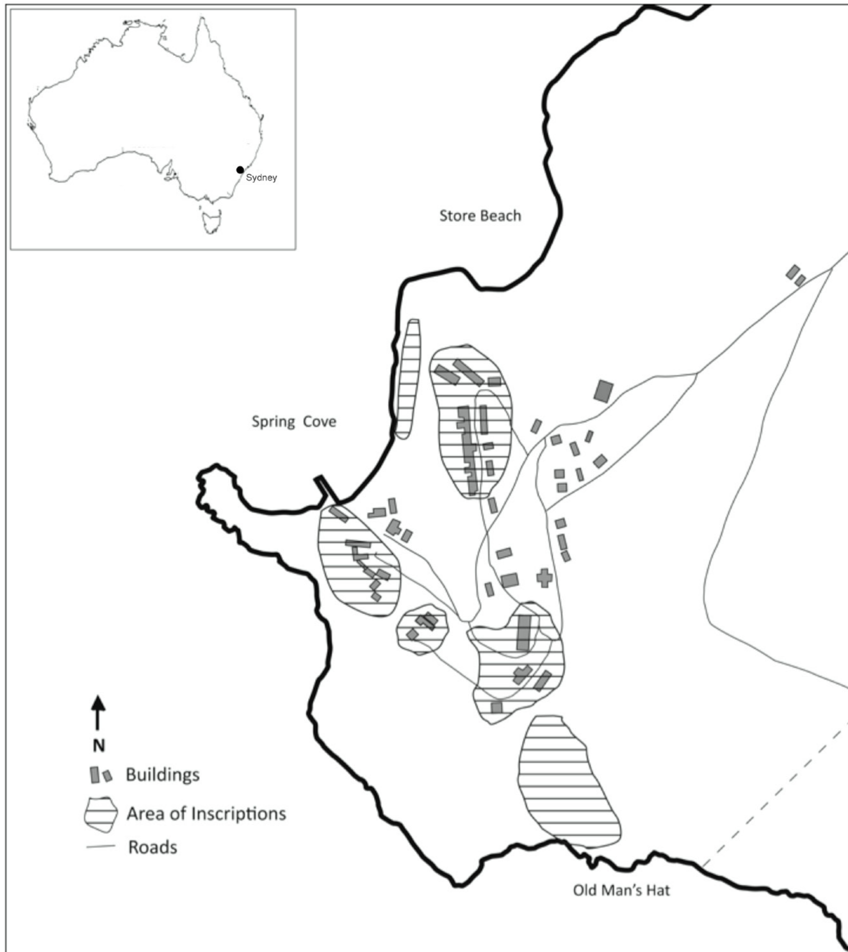

Fig. 2. Map of the Quarantine Station and its location in Australia.
Map constructed by the authors.

Encountering inscriptions

Standing at the very edge of the Quarantine Station today the first thing that strikes you is the beauty. The city skyline of Sydney dazzles in the distance and the harbour waters change colour under the passing cover of clouds, going from a deep, glistening azure to a dull grey topped with the choppy white foam of breakers pushed along by inshore winds (Fig. 3). The horizon is wide open and in a slight turn of the head from east to west, you can take in a sweeping 180 degree vision from the open Pacific Ocean, past the craggy coves and cliffs of the Heads, past the intricate bends and indentations

of Middle Harbour and all the way into the haze rising above the modern suburb of Mosman. Within this expansive vista you cannot help but feel both privileged and small. Perhaps it is then, after you have had a moment to take in the breathtaking splendour of the scene, that your eye will catch a glimpse of something else. There, in the rock at your feet, mingled in with the sand and small, wiry *Banksia* bushes, whose delicate scent is carried on the breeze, a name appears etched in the surface. You soon become aware that just a little to your left, a great sprawl of words and maritime motifs stretches across the rocky platform and towards the edge of the cliff (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. View to Sydney city across the Harbour. Inscriptions at Old Man's Hat in the foreground. Photograph: Ursula Frederick.

Under the warmth of such pleasant circumstance it is difficult to comprehend the harsh realities of life in quarantine and the state of suspension between sickness and health, life and death, arriving and departing experienced by the various identities inscribed here. We cannot quite imagine the conditions under which these souls shared this very same outlook but it is their presence, nevertheless, that press upon us a poignancy and sense of longing (Stewart 1993; Clarke et al. 2010) that is difficult to divorce from the view ahead.

Although we may not immediately recognize this feeling as such, at the heart of such affective encounters lies the hermeneutic impulse. This "archaeological imagination" as it is sometimes called (Thomas 1996:55), reflects an urge to understand the past in our present state of being. While this process may include 'the art of understanding something that appears alien and unintelligible to us' (Gadamer 1986:141) it also

offers an opportunity to 'catch sight of ourselves' (Gadamer 1986:130) and 'become conscious of something shared' (Gadamer 1985:151).

Our first engagement with the inscribed cliffs overlooking Sydney Harbour may be likened to Tilley's (2008:16) account of Simrishamn carvings where 'there was a dialectic at work between the rock itself, and its landscape location, and the positioning of the images carved on it'. Tilley (2008:17) goes on to point out that 'the images had a direct influence, agency and power in themselves: they set people in choreographed motion around them. And this force of the image was quite independent of verbal exegesis- of talking about meaning....'.

Just as Tilley talks of the carvings having agency today, we suggest here that the sandstone rocks into which the Quarantine Station inscriptions were engraved, also carried an agency in the past, by directing where people might begin to carve as well as constraining and encouraging the specific characteristics of the inscriptions such as their orientation, depth, shape and size. We may find in this approach a correspondence with Gell's idea that an art object's source of power relates to how it is 'construed as having come into the world... [that is] their becoming rather than their being.' (Gell 1992:46). One might take this to mean the technology and tools, the way an artwork is made (Tilley 2008:28). In the case of the Quarantine Station this might entail how the inscriptions were carved, whether people employed specialist masonry tools and what formal techniques of production were used. But to our minds, an emphasis on becoming also exerts an inquiry into why these inscriptions were made in the first place and further, in the context of this volume, what is the work they perform today in guiding our attention not only to the happenstance of history but also to the current political reality of people smuggling and the arrival of asylum seekers in small wooden boats from across the seas between Indonesia and Australia?

In tackling the coming into being of the inscriptions we find that we cannot separate the affective dimension of what is the becoming of the archaeological record. Like Barthes' (1981:27) concept of punctum, those intimate, uncoded details found in photographs that prick the viewer into a private response to something recognized, remembered or experienced, the visual and textual elements contained within the inscriptions also elucidate an emotive reaction from the observer. Russell (2007:71) describes this interpretive process as 'the externalization of individual and social expectations of past and meaning onto the archaeological record' as a form of representation. Thus, through our hermeneutic endeavors we are creating images of the past. It is this image – one of the archaeological imagination – that is also the subject of this paper. Moreover, our encounter with the Quarantine Station inscriptions may be seen to operate at different scales and the sensations and insights that inform our understanding have a multiplicity of origins. As Williams noted (2007:280), in his phenomenological account of how an archaeological and anthropological research team engaged with place at Leskernick on Bodmin Moor in the United Kingdom,

working in a particular landscape engenders a feeling of intense familiarity, even identification with a setting replete with names, memories and historical associations. He goes on to state:

> By attempting to understand the nature of the encounter and experience that contemporary practitioners enjoy with the physical remains of the past, we begin to reveal the background noise that instructs much of what they do (Williams 2007:281).

At the Quarantine Station the interplay and recursive movement between our archaeological imaginations, the form and content of the inscriptions, the intense physicality of the Quarantine Station setting with its dramatic viewscapes, and the historical contexts of production all contribute to the image of the past that we experience. Acknowledging this congruence, what follows is a discussion of the image as individual inscriptions, inscription assemblages, and the landscapes of quarantine.

The historical context of quarantine in New South Wales, Australia

In the early days of the NSW colony passengers and crew entering Sydney Harbour were quarantined on their ships (Foley 1995:10). A land-based quarantine encampment was initiated in 1814, under the authority of the governor, in response to a 'contagious and malignant disease' that broke out on the convict ship *Surry* (Sydney Gazette, 1814). It was not until several years later, however, that a quarantine facility was established on the North Head, some distance from the emerging city. The first ship to be quarantined here was a convict boat called the *Bussorah Merchant* in July 1828 (Foley 1995:18). Along with many cases of fever and other respiratory illnesses an outbreak of smallpox had occurred during the long voyage from England (Dunn 1828).

On arrival the convicts and their guards were housed in tents on the shore of the cove for several weeks. However, it was not until the late 1830s that a more permanent establishment was developed following the allocation of Government funds (Foley 1995:25). Although first set up in the early days of the Australian colony the Quarantine Station remained in service until 1984, a period which encompassed such events as the Federation of Australia, two world wars, a local outbreak of the plague in 1902, the introduction of air flights to Australia (a period reflected in the built fabric and current heritage interpretation of the site), the Vietnam War with the use of the site for "Operation Babylift", the White Australia policy and as a reception centre in the 1970s for refugees and illegal immigrants from the Pacific (Freeman et al. 2000:87-88, 95).

The bare statistics of quarantine history at North Head provide some sense of the scale of migration to Australia and of the importance of disease control and management in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A period when global

mass migrations were just beginning, it was also a time when medical science was still developing and disease treatments such as antibiotics had yet to be discovered. Quarantine was a major tool of governments around the world as ships and their passengers became vectors for the spread of contagious diseases (Bashford 2004, Markel 1994, 2007). The fabric of the site, the buildings, grounds, medical facilities, shower and luggage handling areas, and class-based accommodations (consisting of first class, second class and Asiatic quarters) remain as a material testimony to the changing histories of national identity, shipping and transport technologies, medical practice and global networks of migration, quarantine and disease control.

The inscriptions

The presence of 1000 or so inscriptions created from 1835 to the 1980s can be placed in relation to this background. The inscriptions provide an archive of ship's names, ports of origin, dates of arrival, names of crew and passengers and give some indication of the diverse ethnicity of migrants with inscriptions in Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Dutch, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, in addition to those in English. The presence of inscriptions in languages other than English from the late nineteenth century onwards gives historical depth to the multicultural nature of Australian society, often perceived as a mid to late twentieth century phenomenon.

The repeated use of maritime symbols and motifs such as life buoys, anchors, ropes, steering wheels and shipping company insignia all speak to the central role of the sea and maritime voyages in the experience of those migrating or returning to Australia. A hint of the passing of time and the impact of changing technologies is indicated by one small barely noticeable inscription placed amongst late nineteenth and early twentieth century ship names and ports of origin. It depicts an arrow-like speedbird logo and the letters BOAC, denoting the British Overseas Air Corporation which operated from 1939 to 1974.

Borders, framing devices and the use of regular-sized fonts are used to create a sense of formality and structure, echoing the commemorative and memorial plaques found on official monuments and gravestones. Others, inscribed in a flowing cursive script seem to mimic handwriting and a more spontaneous process of commemoration and marking of presence. Love hearts speak to romance and love, whether lost at sea, left behind or newly discovered and Masonic symbols and Stars of David are indicative of belief systems and social alliances practiced beyond the temporary confines of quarantine.

Although Sydney Hawkesbury sandstone is not a hard rock, the scale and intricacy of such inscriptions demonstrates both a degree of skill and an investment of time and labour. Some inscriptions are likely to have been formally commissioned by the ship's crews or their companies (Clarke et al. 2010:81, Fig. 4). The names of stone

masons or sculptors are included in a number of the more formal inscriptions, for example W. COH-HLAN, SCULPTOR (Fig. 4, C). The friable surface of the sandstone also created a medium for bas-relief sculpture. Two sculpted heads, one of a sailor and one eroded and indistinguishable are set in round frames scooped out of the sandstone to resemble a pair of commemorative medallions or coins. The time spent to create inscriptions coupled with a degree of playfulness and humour, as a very personal response to the circumstances of quarantine, are evident in an inscription which reads, RMS (Oct) (1895) Cuzco, In Loving Memory of Irish Stew (Fig. 5).

Fig. 4. Inscriptions from the Wharf precinct, North Head Quarantine Station, Sydney. Photographs: Ursula Frederick.

The Quarantine Station inscriptions as assemblage and landscape

Today the grounds that were once the Quarantine Station reveal two distinct areas of mark-making activity. One is situated in the immediate vicinity of the Wharf buildings which we might call the hub of the Station itself. The other is in an area of bush land called Old Man's Hat, located 500m south east of the Station infrastructure and delimited by sea cliffs (Fig. 2). At the main Quarantine Station site 854 inscriptions have been recorded in eleven distinct locations or precincts (Thorp 1983a, 1983b;

NPWS 2000). The location and content of inscriptions were documented during an inventory project carried out in 1983 when the Quarantine Station ceased operations. The Old Man's Hat (hereafter OMH) assemblage is located a short walk from the managed grounds of the old Quarantine Station facilities. A fieldwork project commenced (by the authors) in 2010 has so far recorded 207 inscriptions. Another 30 or so inscriptions are estimated to occur along the cliff edges. As yet, these have not been recorded as they require safety harnessing equipment to be accessed.

Fig. 5. RMS (Oct) (1895) Cuzco, In Loving Memory of Irish Stew.
Inscription at Old Man's Hat. Photograph: Ursula Frederick.

Many of the inscriptions incorporate a date and Fig. 6 shows the numbers of inscriptions produced in 10 year increments from 1835-1983. In the Quarantine Station assemblage 22% of the engravings have an identifiable date associated with them and a further 2% have an ambiguous date such as Jul. 14 or 28.8.41 (Thorp 1983a:14-15). At OMH the figures are similar with 20% of inscriptions having a clear date and a slightly higher percentage (8%) with an ambiguous date. Fig. 6 compares the two assemblages and shows that the OMH assemblage is much more temporally restricted with 48% of the dated inscriptions occurring between 1910 and 1919. This period encompasses outbreaks of Spanish influenza from 1918-19, smallpox from 1913-1917 (Wotherspoon 2008) and tuberculosis associated with soldiers returning from Europe during the First World War (Freeman et al. 2000:65-66). At the Quarantine Station proper, the inscriptions are more temporally

spread with dates ranging from 1835-1983 (Fig. 6). There are two peaks in the dated inscriptions here, the first occurs from 1910-1929 when 26% of the dated assemblage was created and then much later from 1960-1979 when 23% of the dated assemblage occurs. The later period of dated inscriptions is interesting because it post-dates the main period of maritime quarantine from 1828-1920 and coincides with the period of decline in use of the Station facilities (Foley 1995:127). For example, only three ships were quarantined between 1950 and 1975 (Freeman et al. 2000:65). 1960-1979 encompasses the later period of air quarantine when people arriving without appropriate vaccination certificates were quarantined (Freeman et al. 2000:68) and when evacuees from Cyclone Tracy and refugees escaping from the war in Vietnam were also housed at the Quarantine Station (Freeman et al. 2000:68). Further research will enable the temporal variation in inscription production to be examined in association with the peaks and troughs in migration patterns, changes in health policy, and major and minor disease outbreaks. This data shows that the OMH and Quarantine Station assemblages are not temporally separated, suggesting instead a continuous landscape of mark-making production, rather than two isolated precincts created at different times.

Fig. 6. Inscriptions emerging from beneath encroaching vegetation at Old Man's Hat. Photograph: Ursula Frederick.

Today however, the separation of the two areas of inscriptions is emphasized by the amount of vegetation re-growth on edges of the managed grounds and gardens. Access to the OMH inscriptions requires a degree of bush bashing and rock scrambling, firstly through a tangled thicket of dense tree re-growth and then across

a zone of lower vegetation where sandstone heath plants have re-grown obscuring the sandstone surface together with many of the inscriptions. The ways in which the landscape of the Quarantine Station has been managed since it was transferred to a land management authority in 1984 (the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) has a direct impact on our engagements with and experience of the inscriptions. As noted in the 2006 Heritage Landscape Management Plan (Thompson Berrill Landscape Design 2006:14-20) the priority has been the conservation of natural plant and animal communities in an environment on the fringes of the city where development impacts have reduced the integrity and prevalence of those communities. The Plan notes that since 1984 vegetation re-growth has been encouraged within the previously managed and cleared grounds of the Station itself. Aerial photographs from the 1940s provide further evidence that the landscape of Old Man's Hat previously had more rock surface exposed. Furthermore, these photographs show definite paths between the Quarantine Station and the cliffs, where the inscriptions cluster, which are no longer discernible today.

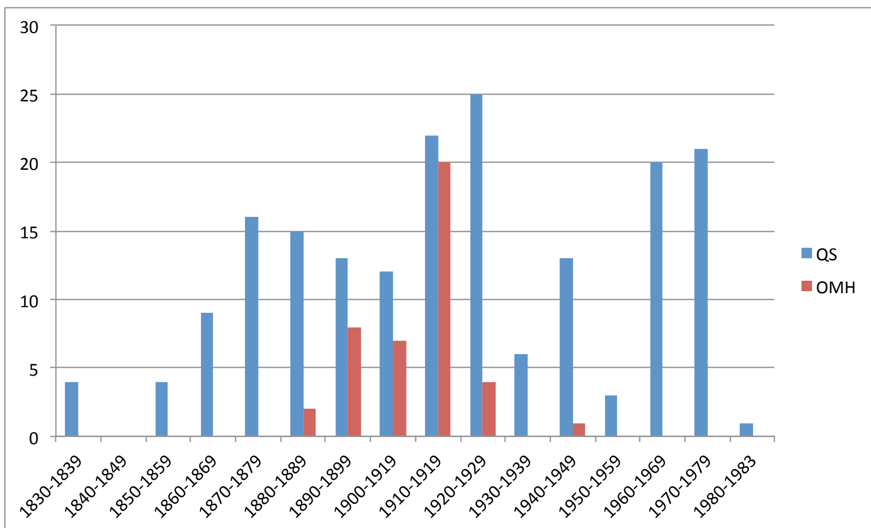

Fig. 7. Graph showing frequency of inscriptions by date (where listed).

So to a certain extent some of our sensory engagements with the landscape of OMH arise out of contemporary rather than historical practices and policies of land management. The sense of separation and isolation from the Quarantine Station facilities, of being in a wilder, more natural setting hidden out of sight from official surveillance, have been amplified by changes in the re-growth of vegetation

since 1984. This impression of remoteness and natural context makes the special discovery of inscriptions as they emerge from a thicket of bush (Fig. 7) seem all the more extraordinary. This, we would suggest, presents an example of the dialectic engagement Tilley (2008) refers to, where our encounters with the past emerge out of an entangled and multi-layered relationship with the present.

The largest assemblage of inscriptions at the Quarantine Station is located in what is referred to as the Wharf area (Freeman et al. 2000:110). The Wharf is situated in a small sheltered cove on the western flank of the North Head peninsula. It is here, in the relatively protected waters of Spring Cove that ships would disembark their passengers. Hence, the Wharf was the first landing and primary access point for those entering into quarantine. It is here, along the low sandstone cliff face running from the waters edge up an incline to the accommodation quarters, that Thorp (1983a:13) identified and recorded 451 inscriptions. A section of this cliff was quarried and cut in the early 1900s during building development for the jetty and rail shed (Thorp 1983a:33; Freeman et al. 2000:113, Fig. 20) and as a result a large proportion of the inscriptions are vertically oriented towards the viewer at a 60-90 degree angle from the ground. A lesser number of inscriptions lie on isolated sandstone boulders and platforms outcropping with a horizontal aspect. There are at least 180 initials and names inscribed along this cliff face. There are also a large number (73) of highly formalized inscriptions such as those depicted in Fig. 4. These inscriptions are contained within a structured framing device which acts to separate the inscription from those surrounding it. The framing device is not a visually uniform feature but was instead fashioned to different sculptural effect and shape. It might comprise a line channeled into the rock to create a rectilinear shape or it may be a circular form rising from the parent rock as a bas relief. There are also more decorative framings that resemble plaques and shields. In this way the content of the inscription – names of crew, passengers, shipping companies, dates of arrival, ports of departure and other maritime motifs – becomes both enclosed within itself and demarcated from other markings.

Many of these inscriptions were originally decorated with coloured paints (Thorp 1983a:14). A conservation project in 2006 and 2007 by the current managers of the site the Mawland Group[1] restored a sample of the inscriptions to show their polychromatic design. This act of restoration draws the viewer's attention to the formal inscriptions, most of which sit within the height of an adult's eye line. This, together with a low metal barrier along the base of the cliff, now creates the effect of being in a gallery where the viewer is set apart from the artworks on display. It seems here that the formality evident in the Wharf inscriptions is in a direct dialogue with the way that the built landscape was used to formally structure the initial human experience of arrival under conditions of quarantine. After leaving their ships at the wharf, people were put through a structured sequence of events. They moved from

the disembarkation building where they were inspected by medical staff, their luggage was removed and sent to the autoclaves for steam cleaning and then each person was sent to the shower block to shower and be disinfected.

At Old Man's Hat the configuration of the landscape offers a very different atmosphere. It provided an open area for people to explore and a different kind of canvas on which to place one's moniker. Stepped rock platforms and irregularly scattered sandstone boulders provided relatively flat surfaces on which to sit and engrave. Vertical cliff faces accessed via narrow ledges, formed another venue for place-marking for those brave enough to stand literally on the edge of the continent, one step away from a 100m plunge into the sea below. Inscriptions here are less densely clustered than those at the Wharf and the sheer expanse of the area has enabled many carvers to create inscriptions covering large rock platforms. Nevertheless, superpositioning occurs to a greater degree here than along the sandstone cut at the Wharf and many of the inscriptions are localised on the large sandstone platforms that run to the cliff edge. One large inscription 250cm long and 120cm wide has been engraved in a flowing font reminiscent of handwriting. The depth of the line alone (10mm at its deepest) indicates the carver's commitment (Fig. 8A). It reads:

> S.S. Gunga,
> W.R. Fleetwood
> Aug 1885

Although, the assemblage at OMH also contains formally structured inscriptions set within framing devices similar to those found along the Wharf, there is a greater sense of freedom and informality created by the interplay between the inscriptions and the physicality of the location. The high visibility of less formal inscriptions, the superimpositioning of inscriptions and their density along the cliff edges are all suggestive of a change in tempo for people taking time out away from the confinement of the Quarantine Station. Old Man's Hat sits within an expanse of rocky bush land, physically separated from the ordered, controlled landscape of the Quarantine Station proper. To the east, there is a never-ending view across the Pacific Ocean, and to the south the city of Sydney offers the promise and potency of a new and different life. The broad canvasses and expansive possibilities for life beyond the boundaries of confinement seem to have created a greater freedom of expression in the form of the inscriptions. Moreover they both invite and suggest a different physical relationship with the landscape. You can walk on and around them, sit next to them or even lie against them basking in the sunlight.[2] In short, the inscriptions at OMH invite a different kind of bodily engagement than those at the Wharf. This closeness to the materiality extends to a haptic desire to trace the grooves of the lines engraved into the sandstone with one's fingers. Indeed, this is one technique we used during our fieldwork to record highly eroded and barely visible letters and numbers. We found

that our ability to identify these fading marks of presence was sometimes enhanced by the simple act of closing our eyes and allowing other senses to engage with, and identify the shape of the inscription. This is not say that we literally imagined the data we were recording but more that the mind's eye allowed us to form a cognitive connection between the feel of the shape being traced and the identity of the letters or numbers. People doing the field recording would say "this feels like a 'T'" or "that feels like 1895". This is perhaps not a technique found in the textbooks of conventional archaeological methodologies but nonetheless demonstrates the communicative potential of non-visual sensory engagements.

Inscriptions at the artefact level

As archaeologists used to thinking about human action at the levels of society, state, and culture it is a unique experience to encounter material evidence that is directly identifiable to a single person. By comparison with material traces that are forged anonymously, the inscribed name is an indexical link to another individual which lends the inscription a rare communicative efficacy. It is almost as if the humanity of the past is confronting us directly. Faced with these names we cannot help but be curious about who these identities once were.

If we return to the inscription of the SS *Gunga* noted earlier (Fig. 8A), we naturally read the three lines of the inscription as associated information. Presumably W.R. Fleetwood was a voyager on the steam ship *Gunga*. We might also assume either that the mark is some record of his life and/or death. Either he arrived safely in Sydney in August 1885 or he died at sea or in quarantine around the same time. The placement of the inscription, at the very edge of the sea cliff might lend support to the latter. Or perhaps Fleetwood, like many a landlocked sailor desiring a return to the sea, spent hours carving his name as he sat gazing wistfully to the southern oceans beyond the Heads. There are, of course, many possible answers to how this inscription came into being and it is the role of the archaeological imagination to consider the most probable. In this instance, the historical archives provide information that assist us in this process.

The SS *Gunga* featured regularly in the shipping news of Australia's capital cities. From its first launch on September 11, 1878 at Glasgow the *Gunga* regularly travelled between Europe and the southern oceans and along the coastal waters of Australia. During 1885 it sailed in and out of Sydney four times before being placed in quarantine. On its return from Fiji and Noumea on August 17th five cases of dengue fever were reported as being discovered on the *Gunga* (Cleland 1918). According to shipping records of the time, the master of the ship was a W.R. Fleetwood (State Records Authority of New South Wales, 1885:468). Such information brings a new perspective to the aforementioned inscription. We now know that Fleetwood was in

command of the *Gunga* even though his position is not denoted in the inscription. Perhaps Fleetwood's stature accounts for the scale of the inscription.

Although apparently the signature of a single individual the polysemic character of the inscription is revealed when Fleetwood's role is understood. It is possible that the inscription refers not only to Fleetwood the man but to the entire ship, as a collective body under his charge. In this sense Fleetwood's name functions like the name of the shipping company, a date or other details commonly ascribed to denote the particularities of a voyage. Subsequent shipping news suggests that this was likely the last time that Fleetwood captained the *Gunga*. Although not a memorial to his death - by October of that same year he was captain of the *Wentworth* (State Records Authority of New South Wales: 1885:469) – the inscription may well have been made to mark his last voyage on the *Gunga*.

Figs. 8A and 8B. Two inscriptions relating to SS *Gunga*, on different rock platforms at Old Man's Hat. Photographs: Ursula Frederick.

As we have signaled previously the size and depth of the inscription, its position and its neat cursive script means that the inscription is (and was) highly visible to those venturing to OMH. Because these features are not especially common in the Quarantine Station assemblage it is intriguing to note that a similar inscription occurs in the OMH vicinity, about 100 metres away down the rugged escarpment on a lower rock platform overlooking the headwaters. Given the content of this inscription, we would suggest that the *Gunga* Fleetwood Aug 1885 inscription invited mimicry. This second inscription (Fig. 8B) uses a similar triple line arrangement, ornate, cursive script and grand scale. It reads:

> SS Gunga
> J E Meaburn Com
> Sept 1885

The historical record reveals that Meaburn became the captain of the *Gunga* immediately following Fleetwood. He had been in command less than a month when on September 26, 1885 the *Gunga* was once again placed in quarantine (*The Argus*, 1885:6). On this occasion smallpox was feared after a crewman became ill. Meaburn was later charged with committing a breach of the Quarantine Act for progressing well into the Harbour without notifying the health authorities of the threat onboard his ship (*South Australian Register*, 1885). What may we elaborate from knowing this history and knowing that Fleetwood's inscription was already in place? Did Meaburn feel the need to state his newly acquired authority over the *Gunga* by adding his name along with Com (short hand for Commander) to the OMH gallery of inscriptions? Was his inscription, obviously visually derivative of the other, an act of respect or one of rivalry? The presence of two spatially separated inscriptions, similar in style and referring to the same ship only one month apart, prompts us to query the relationship between the two inscriptions and the interplay between the material and historical records.

If we turn our attention to a specific inscription at the Wharf precinct in the main Quarantine Station we find a more formal treatment of commemorative mark-making. These inscriptions share a distinctive unity in terms of their compositional structure, form, decorative embellishments, placement, and the nature of their content. In keeping with these features, one particular inscription heralds the arrival of the *Samuel Plimsoll*. This inscription (Fig. 4D) is located on a rock face approximately three metres above the ground. The rock has been hewn away to produce a rectangular plaque with a curvilinear top in bas-relief. The shape of the inscription resembles a headstone and its vertical position resembles a wall plaque. A star motif and the word SHIP has been engraved at the top. Below it there are a series of names framed within an ornate triangular pattern. The name of the ship "SAMUEL PLIMSOLL" appears at the very top and in a descending hierarchical order appears the name of

the captain, the first and second officers, the purser, and the matron. The remaining people on board are recorded as "EMIGRANTS" and number "462" and below this their date of "ARRIVAL JUNE 11TH 1879" is noted. The words have been evenly spaced and centred and the letters themselves are of a consistent size, case and font. At the bottom of the list, and unusually aligned to the right there appears the name "JOHN HOWIE".

The inscription reveals a professional craftsmanship and the mark of the chisel is evident in the rock that surrounds the bas-relief. Aside from the information it reveals about people associated with the ship, it shows different conventions of naming and ordering which may tell us something about the social conventions of the day. For example, both the captain and the matron are accorded formal address (CAPT. R. BOADEN, MISS JONES), whereas the crewmembers are listed with initials and surname but without a title. John Howie is the only name that appears in full, and just as it is set a part from the other names compositionally, no title or position is assigned to it.

The historical archives both supplement and complicate our reading of this inscription. The *Samuel Plimsoll* '... sailed from Plymouth for Sydney on March 21 with 465 emigrants' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1879:4). Although twelve of those travelling died on the journey another three were born at sea. One of those who did not survive the journey was William Howie, the infant son of Agnes and John Howie, a stonemason from Scotland. The archives note that in total 456 emigrants landed while the Quarantine Station inscription lists 462. These numbers confer if we conclude that the named individuals in the stone inscription count themselves amongst the total. This would suggest a desire to communicate the sense of community amongst those who made safe passage.

What is most remarkable, if we read the inscription and the historical text alongside each other is the extent to which absence plays a part in the inscription's materiality. In the first instance we may surmise that John Howie was the mason who was either commissioned or took it upon himself to undertake the engraving. It is hard to know how difficult his task may have been but we might imagine. Howie may well have exerted himself physically because the rock in which the inscription is located is at an awkward angle and at a height that would have required some climbing. But how difficult must it have been to work on an inscription in which he could not include his own son. This particular inscription is, afterall, a commemoration of those who survived the journey. In carving those three numbers 4 6 2 Howie must have felt acutely aware of their significance. In knowing a little more of the inscriptions understory we too become aware of the loss that this act of remembrance enfolds within it. And as such the very lines in the rock that make up these simple characters take on a greater poignancy.

There is another striking absence within the carving, which occurs in the list of the noted individuals. The name of the ships surgeon – Pringle Hughes – is a glaring omission. As the surgeon-superintendent Hughes had the important role of supervising and maintaining the health of the ship's passengers. We might well ponder the circumstances for his exception when we consider that the ship's matron – Mary Jones – does appear.

A final loss that is made evident is the time that the passengers of the *Samuel Plimsoll* spent waiting to reach their final destination. Their liminal state is encoded in the interstices between the 11th of June recorded in the inscription and the 30th of June listed as their arrival in the official Sydney records (State Records Authority of New South Wales*,* 1879).

These examples demonstrate how, when we come closer to individual inscriptions, the realities of life in quarantine and the human condition come into focus. When we see, for example, the names W.R. Fleetwood, J.E. Meaburn and Miss Jones the inscriptions come to embody a real person with a real history. Similarly, a single inscription may take on the presence of a collective body, as in the case of the passengers and crew that sailed into Sydney on the RMS *Cuzco* in October 1895 (Fig. 5) or the emigrants of the *Samuel Plimsoll* (Fig. 4D). Invariably, some inscriptions are more ambiguous in who they represent. An inscription detailing the arrival of the RMS *Himalaya* into quarantine on April 24th 1897 lists only 17 individuals despite having 62 passengers and 268 crew (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1897, see Fig. 4C). This is an example of an inscription, which although noting certain persons, is less about the individual than about the social order and status of a select group. While those that travelled with these 17 individuals no doubt shared their voyage, they are left out of the group which effectively symbolises the journey and quarantine of *Himalaya*. Thus many of the inscriptions simultaneously unify and ally individuals at the same time as they divide. This example may reflect a difference in the social classes of those on board the ship, because 'the voices of the state and higher-status individuals are often louder than those of common sailors' (Stewart 2006:6). Even though the inscription may privilege the presence of some names over others, in doing so it casts light on the fact that some names are missing.

Inscribing presence and absence under conditions of quarantine

We have drawn attention to the role of absence in some of the inscriptions of the Quarantine Station. This is due in part to a sense of loss that penetrates this landscape, as we understand it, both as a place of quarantine and an extension of the maritime cultural sphere. Absence and separation are exemplified in the dislocation of the sick from the healthy and in the bodies that never arrived but instead were buried at sea.

Functioning variously as poems, warnings, commemorative gestures, playful light-hearted acts, declarations of existence, deeds of remembrance or simply a way to while away the time, the inscriptions were clearly made to different purpose. Nevertheless they remain as materializations of presence, absence and memory. With the passage of time and the hindsight of historical knowledge, for those of us who view them today, each and every inscription inevitably becomes a memorial. Like wandering through a graveyard, there is a pathos that comes naturally in knowing that the names that once stood for the living must now stand for the dead.

Yet even in the present of the past the Quarantine Station was a landscape redolent with death and sickness. We find some evidence of this spectre of death pervading the inscription activities of the living. The formalised technologies of inscription, the conventions of names and dates and the framing structures all contribute to a stylistic transformation of rocks hewn into metaphoric cenotaphs. The presence of mass inscriptions in two discrete locations contributes to this sensibility. Like cemeteries they lie on the perimeters of the site, pushing at the boundaries of existence in the Quarantine Station landscape.

The memorializing elements of the Quarantine Station inscriptions are evident not just in the self-conscious form of the images but also in the role that they played in the past and continue to play today. In writing about the contemporary practices of creating private memorials in public spaces, Gibson (2011:150) notes that eventually the people commemorating the dead or the event die themselves and the role of the memorials transforms: 'Memorials serve an important remembering function not because they restore living memory, but because they symbolically articulate and engage with the fragility and temporality of living memory's mortality.'

Memorials serve an important remembering function not because they restore living memory, but because they symbolically articulate and engage with the fragility and temporality of living memory's mortality. Buchli and Lucas (2001:80) see memorials as active agents in the processes of remembering and forgetting, in their view memorials do not merely recall memories but they actively create and produce them. Gibson further suggests (2011:151) that memorials in places other than the immediate sites of death can act as biographical spaces for remembering. The Quarantine Station inscriptions seem to contain these configurations of space, biography and memory production. That is, our understanding of this place is shaped by what we know to have happened here.

What we find from looking at the inscriptions is that there are discernible patterns in the content and form they adopt. But in considering these inscriptions either as individual or collective expressions we must be conscious not only of the trace itself but of the actions that lead to its formation. Gadamer's work on the hermeneutical experience of art is instructive to this line of thinking. He emphasizes first that art is not only an object but an event that occurs. As Bruns (2002:61) clarifies 'this is not an event that merely reproduces an original production; it is the emergence of the

original itself.' Taking this as our cue, we view each assemblage of inscriptions as a suite of performative gestures that collectively accrue. Each and every individual act of inscription is an occurrence of the once and future inscription and where 'every repetition is as original as the work itself' (Gadamer 1989:122). In short we are proposing that over the course of the Quarantine Station's history its inhabitants were experiencing their own hermeneutic engagement with the past(s) that came before them. Thus what we encounter at the level of assemblage is a 'reshaping produced by its actualization' (Risser 1991:105) an active involvement of the makers/viewers in the inscriptions they made/saw. By its very nature those hermeneutic encounters were obviously different to ours today. Because of their confinement and liminal status, as well as the difficult quarantine circumstances, no doubt they were far more aware of the frailties of existence. In such situations, what might otherwise seem like an incidental signature becomes a profound declaration of human identity and presence. Consequently, the performative nature of the inscription process, and what we might call its reiterative character attest to the continual re-use of the site as the stage for acts of remembrance and for the continuation of life itself.

What is essential to gain from the level of assemblage, is that the repeated act of inscription is an accepted and established practice. It is possible that these mark-making practices alleviated personal insecurities and served to build a sense of community. Discernible patterns in the content and form of the inscriptions lend this conclusion some weight. Moreover the virtual encouragement of this practice at the Spring Cove Wharf, and under the immediate watch of the Station authorities, leads us to believe that the inscriptions were perceived as serving some kind of institutional purpose. It is possible that this mass of inscriptions was presented as a sort of welcome wall or honour roll. Considered at a communal level such simple measures might have helped to promote social cohesion and maintain a sense of control at a time when life itself seemed uncertain. Although in many respects they utilize an iconography associated with remembrance, we imagine that the inscriptions were a strategy for coping and commemorating life in a landscape ripe with uncertainty.

By imprinting place-names such as Liverpool, Southhampton and Batavia into the ground in which they arrived, the landscape of the life left behind came to coexist in the landscape of their present. In this way also the naming of ships brings the maritime passage and the sea itself into material substance. With the destination not entirely fulfilled the journey itself is made to *matter*. Furthermore, because some people survived and others did not, the commemoration of the living began to coexist with the commemoration of the dead (Petts 2003:202). Consequently, the communities of the past, present, dead and living all came to be incorporated into a wider discourse that is the Quarantine Station landscape. Furthermore, these linkages underscore the liminal quality of the quarantine experience as a state of being which is echoed in the environment itself: a site comprising bush and settlement, land and water, survival and death.

Conclusion

We have proposed that the mark-making that constituted the Quarantine Station inscriptions are a form of writing and image creation. It is possible that they functioned as some kind of material marker of passage in a spatially, temporally and culturally liminal environment. Most likely they represent both declarations of existence and 'technologies of remembrance' (Jones 2003:68). To paraphrase Ricoeur (2002) they all at once give a place to the dead and make a place for the living. And because, in Heidegger's terms (cited in Ricoeur 2002:250) such repetitions are not static reconstructions of the past 'but an actualization over again', these inscriptions and the landscape in which they operate remain as memorials of becoming.

We also sought to explore how the power of past imagery is enhanced and amplified by the specificities of place. Although it is difficult to imagine the emotional and physical hardship many of those quarantined will have suffered there is no doubt that the atmosphere of the Quarantine Station today is a little heavier because of its history. What makes this place particularly evocative are the hundreds of inscriptions, made by people kept in quarantine, that remain visible today. The names, most clearly, are metonyms for the bodies that passed through here. The Quarantine Station landscape is, in a manner of speaking, one large memorial to the people who lived and died here.

In keeping with the notion of becoming that Gadamer's hermeneutics and Gell's notion of agency outlines it is important to note the pasts future, that is, that 'the past context has *become* the present context', Thomas (1996:61). In other words the inscriptions tell us something more than the names of people and ships that passed through the Heads into Sydney harbour. They tell us of the human motivation to record their very existence. They also remind us that 'even though what has happened cannot be made not to have happened, the import of what has happened is not determined once and for all' (Ricoeur 2002:252). Perhaps it is *this,* our own desires to communicate with and through the past, to understand and make of it our own stories that makes our archaeological engagement with the image such an affective experience afterall.

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Notes

1. The main Quarantine Station site was leased to the Mawland Group in 2006 and was subsequently restored and renovated for contemporary use. Currently the Mawland Group operate the site as the Q Station a tourism venture incorporating luxury accommodation, restaurants, a visitor's centre and conference venue facilities.
2. In light of their historical significance and their vulnerability we do not mean to suggest that the inscriptions should be treated this way today. Historical photographs suggest that these inscriptions were treated more casually in the past and such activities were likely.

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