The Mysteries of Karta (Alias Kangaroo Island): Creation, Colonisers and Crusoes

GORDON COPLAND
Department of Archaeology

Abstract
This paper compiles and examines the early settlement of Kangaroo Island with some reference to adventure writers of the 18th Century.¹

Introduction
The lack of information and research in a particular area is perhaps what creates a mystery, or at least requires academic questions to be asked. While currently completing a thesis on Settlement Theories, in particular European colonisation of South Australia, it has become apparent that Kangaroo Island (KI), from its very creation to the peoples who have inhabited KI, is such a mystery. Available information is meagre, contentious, or simply fanciful romance and although this paper will provide little that is new, but rather compiles, or orders, much of what has already been written it does perhaps presents this information in a different format and current light. From the beginning, KI’s remoteness and isolation has added to the air of mystery surrounding it but with the advent of modern technology the air is clearing. The whole State of South Australia is part of a larger land mass which has existed for millions of years, however, it is relatively recent geological and climatic factors which created KI as it is today. The first factor was a period of tectonic activity, known as the ‘Kosciusko epoch’, which occurred about 1,000,000 years ago at the beginning of the Pleistocene. It is now believed that it was during this mountain building period that KI was formed as a structural part of the Mount Lofty Ranges.² The second period, beginning at approximately 12,000 years ago, was heralded by the end of the last glaciation and resulted in massive increases in sea levels. At sometime in the Holocene, about 10,000 years ago, KI was severed from the mainland of Australia and subsequently the environment on the island “became increasingly arid between about 5000 and 2000 years ago.”³

The first factor would have created a landscape of mountains and valleys with plains extending in excess of 100 kilometres (kms) south of KI’s current southern shoreline. Therefore, when one considers that recent deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) tests have shown that people existed 60,000 years ago at Lake Mungo,⁴ about 160 kms north east of Mildura, then questions are raised regarding early colonisation of the plains and valleys which are now the Southern Ocean, Gulf St. Vincent and Spencer Gulf. The obvious problem for any archaeological investigations to establish habitation is that any possible sites are underwater and most probably damaged through the action of the sea. However, what we do have is the island itself which is the remnants of the earlier landscape. At present work is currently in progress by Dr Keryn Walshe, of the Department of Archaeology at

¹ The full version of this paper includes a comprehensive chronology. It is available at the Counterpoints Website: [http://ehlt-online.flinders.edu.au/counterpoints/].
⁴ The Australian, “DNA clue to man’s origin”, Tuesday, 9 January 2001, no. 11,288, pp. 1, 8-9 & 16.
Flinders University, to establish what has been examined in the island to date. One example of earlier investigations is the ‘Seton’ site which is a limestone cave on the southern coast of KI and was inhabited 16,000 years ago with a “period of intensive occupation” about 11,000 years ago.5

Clearly, the area was inhabited before the second event of rising sea levels and the signs of ‘intensive occupation’ probably represents consequential pressures to utilise higher ground in a constricting environment. Much of the debate is still relatively hypothetical but we do know from various sites that humans continued to live on, or visit, KI up until 2500 years ago.6 It has been suggested that the sea crossing would have been prohibitive as there is no evidence of the mainland Indigenous population having watercraft to undertake distance sea travel. There is also the suggestion that disappearance of a relict population occurred due to the deterioration of the environment. However, it could be argued that dreaming stories, such as the Dreaming Story of ‘Ngurunderi’ which names KI ‘Nar-oong-owie’/‘Narungawi’,7 that mention creators travelling over to the Island actually represent past memories of a seafaring past. Raging seas combined with perhaps diminishing needs may well add weight to an argument of a loss, over a few thousand years, of skills and knowledge of the required watercraft. Such a loss is easily supported as most people today have lost many of the skills, and much of the knowledge, that their grandparents had barely a hundred years ago. On the other hand, the mainland Ramindjeri, Ngarrindjeri, and Tangane word ‘Karta’8, the name for KI meaning the ‘island of the dead’,9 may well be representative of the lost contact with people who remained on the Island. It is interesting to note that the Tiwi, of Bathurst and Melville Island north of Darwin, have a similar belief of the ‘land of the dead’ but for them it is the distant mainland of Australia. This Dreaming may also correlate with the lost contact with those that remained on the mainland during the period of rising sea levels but in a situation where the a relict population on the islands survived. Until further research is undertaken, many of these arguments are open to conjecture. The knowledge of the KI people, their activities of that time, and their relationship to the South Australian, Tasmanian, indeed Australian Indigenous populations is yet to be dealt with adequately. Also it should be noted that the word extinct has not been used here for the simple reason that this may not be the case as the descendants of these people may well still exist in the Indigenous populations of Australia. There has been an increased interest in whaling/sealing activities, which of course privileges European contact, however, this new interest may lead to facts being revealed which relate to the earlier local population. In recent years, at Flinders University alone, there has been several honours theses written relating to both maritime activities and the Indigenous people in the Southern Hemisphere. Authors like, Cherrie De Leuwen, Lydia Matthews, Keryn James, Pauline O’Malley, currently Kylili Firth, and many more, have added a wealth of knowledge to this area of growing interest. Even this author has been involved having compiled and co-written a report on the Fishery Bay Whaling Site, and made it available to the Maritime Division of Heritage Branch.

---

5 Flood, p. 141.
6 pp. 140-144.
8 The much debated ‘Kartan’, a large stool tool industry found on Kangaroo Island, takes its name from the Indigenous word ‘Karta’.
Although there is a growing body of information linking legend to past reality, the mystery of a distant land, even one that can be seen across the large expanse of Backstairs Passage, tends to fire the imagination and may be the simple answer to the various Indigenous legends regarding KI. Europeans were no less susceptible to the possibilities of the unknown or remote as can be seen in 1726 when Swift “wrote of Gulliver being driven by a violent storm to the north-west of Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania 1642), and finding the islands of the Lilliputians at latitude 30° 2” south”.\textsuperscript{10} Fenner suggests that Swift is referring to Nuys’s map which places the South Australian islands of St Peter and St Francis at this latitude,\textsuperscript{11} but these Islands are actually at approximately latitude 32° 10” south and there are a number of islands in this area, including KI at latitude 35° 30” south. It would appear Nuys was a couple of degrees out which is only about two hundred kilometres on a journey of thousands. Therefore it would not be surprising that Swift’s map, Fig 1, is dramatically incorrect yet loosely based on knowledge of the day, particularly as many early maps tended to display more artistic licence than was perhaps safe for sailors. One ‘Gulliver expert’, Asimov, would probably take issue with Fenner’s suggestion, as he points out that at the latitude of 30° 2” Gulliver would be on the mainland of Australia.\textsuperscript{12} This is quite true, however, it could be said Asimov misses Fenner’s point which appears to be about the intrigue of remoteness, and general lack of knowledge of the area, being the rationale for the setting. If we were to be pedantic then one could take issue with Asimov’s statement that the southern Australian coast had not been discovered in Gulliver’s time,\textsuperscript{13} since he deduces Gulliver was born in 1661\textsuperscript{14} and Nuys explored the southern coast prior to this in 1627. Asimov, who appears to take the whole story a little too seriously, estimates the size of the Islands of Lilliput and Blefuscu by measuring distances and the size of Sumatra on the map and suggests they are to large. He also complains that Gulliver tried to sail to islands north-east of Van Diemen’s Land which, although the Furneaux Islands were discovered later, were not known at the time. With these errors in mind he, perhaps wisely, decides that “the simplest way out of the dilemma is to suppose that the map is not to be trusted”.\textsuperscript{15} Many exploration expeditions developed from the belief in a ‘Great South Land’ and, while not mentioned, the search for Lilliput perhaps was in the mind of the explorers of the 1700s and the separation between fact and fiction may well have been as difficult for these early explorers as it seems to be for Asimov. Certainly looking for Lilliput with its little people would have been a more pleasant vision than expecting to find the giants Fenner mentions stating, “It is curious to note that in 1717 a Frenchman, Jean Purry, had written of this same remote area, expressing fears that the land might be peopled by mighty giants”.\textsuperscript{16} A translation of the title of Purry’s writing is, \textit{Proposal to Colonise Parts of the Southern Hemisphere especially Nuys Land [New Holland]}, and it is presumed Fenner suggests this is ‘curious’ because of the mention of ‘giants’ rather than the idea of colonising area. What would seem to be curious is the fact that many of the first Europeans to inhabit the Kangaroo Island area were sealers and whalers who, as will be seen later, visited St. Peter and St. Francis Islands (Lilliput?) and

\textsuperscript{11} Fenner, p. 7. In 1627, having sailed from the west, Francois Thijssen and Pieter Nuys, on the \textit{Gulden Zeepard}, turned back at these islands.
\textsuperscript{12} Asimov, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{13} p. 7.
\textsuperscript{14} p. 5.
\textsuperscript{15} p. 9.
\textsuperscript{16} Fenner, pp. 7-8.
are often referred to, using a term coined from another work of fiction, as ‘Robinson Crusoe’ or living a ‘Robinson Crusoe lifestyle’. There has even been a theory of settlement per se developed from Wyss’ book, *The Swiss Family Robinson* and modelled on the actions of the castaway family.

While *Gulliver’s Travels* may well be grounded in certain geographical facts, and offer political and social comment of the day, to date it would seem the Lilliputians are pure fantasy. Yet, it is interesting to find this other literary connection to exploration, discovery and settlement, in particular, in the common reference to the book *Robinson Crusoe*. The characters in this book are less fanciful and the setting is more realistic but the lifestyle of the central character has been the basis for many romanticised yearnings to escape political, social, and economic restraints and responsibilities. Recently, during the outpouring of Matthew Flinders bicentennial verve, even a young Flinders is shown to have been one of those affected in this way. In one article he is depicted as a boy dreaming of the future “while reading of exotic locations in Robinson Crusoe”. The book was published in 1717, at a similar time to Purry’s work mentioned above, and written by author Daniel Defoe at a time of expansion in sea travel and exploration. One wonders if, in the later work by Swift, whether Swift actually casts the Whigish Defoe in the role of Gulliver since Defoe was born in 1661 the year Asimov determines Gulliver was born. Perhaps an Asimov type stretch but the romanticising of the lives and actions of the first non-Indigenous people of KI, which is shown later in the characterisation of them as Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, is not the only connection Defoe has with the South Australian region. Defoe, like the architect of the British colonisation of South Australia, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, had spent time in Newgate prison. However, unlike Wakefield, who was gaoled for kidnapping and marrying an heiress who had just turned 14 years old, Defoe’s crimes appear to have been of a political nature. In this area he has also something in common with another founder of South Australia, Robert Gouger, who, prior to assisting Wakefield, had been released from the Kings Bench having been imprisoned for pamphleteering. The actions of Wakefield and Gouger have also been romanticised in historical works yet perhaps, similarly to the Robinson Crusoe’s of KI who are otherwise often referred to as; whalers, sealers, runaway convicts, pirates, or simply criminals, there are two sides to this judgement. On one side, such treatment covertly obfuscates the stratagem of: colonial idealism, empire building, propaganda, and nationalism, neglecting those colonised or trespassed against and giving succour to like behaviour. While alternatively, perhaps such portrayal accepts the limits of retribution recognising, if society requires more than prison sentences, fines, etc for transgressions against it then surely this should be reflected in legislation. The obvious inequities of legislation of this nature renders it prohibitive, so perhaps the best one can hope for is that future authors will critically analyse their work whereby the gravity of past events, and their repercussions, are not disregarded or diminished through the engravissement of individuals.

The passage of time and lack of reliable data leaves us unsure if the early Islanders had committed crimes in the past, perpetuated criminal behaviour on the Island and if so whether they paid for these deeds. The consensus appears to be that many had been convicted of crimes and there are many references to atrocities committed against others in the area, particularly the Indigenous population.

during the early 1800s. The men in and around this island area have been given the relatively prosaic generic name of ‘Straitsmen’22 while KI itself is often romantically referred to as ‘Ultima Thule’.23 Typically, the Hobart Town Gazette and Sydney Gazette report, in 1826, that it has “the hint of lawlessness and something of the unique” and as late as 1991 it is mentioned by another that it was inhabited by a few “Robinson Crusoes” between 1802 and 1836.24 As will be seen these attitudes infiltrate throughout the available information and hence it is difficult to determine reality from urban myth or erroneous and regurgitated stories from fact.

The general details of whaling/sealing aside, we can not even be sure of the date of the first arrival of a non-Indigenous person on KI but it is suggested by W. H. Leigh that it was as early as 1800. In April 1837, he wrote that he located a carving on a tree on KI stating: ‘This is the place for fat meat 1800’ which he suggests proves arrivals prior to Flinders visit.25 While chronologically this would be correct, earlier he oddly writes that Flinders arrived in 1800.26 In recent discussions with Anthony Brown, author of Ill-Starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin,27 he suggested that this date may have been affected by the elements as it was on wood and therefore could appear by anything by 1839, perhaps having originally, for instance, been 1809.

Whether taken from this report or from other unknown sources, Captain J Lort Stokes stated, in 1840, that the Island was frequented by sealing vessels between 1800 and 1805.28 Some note that 1800 seems too early, particularly as Flinders only met Baudin in the area, but Lieutenant Grant sighted and noted Mount Gambier on the South Australian coast as early as 3 December 180029 and Baudin met the Union, an American sealer, in May 1803 which went on to KI and actually built a boat while staying there.30 Price simply states, without any citation, that there were whalers and sealers before Flinders and Baudin visited in 180231 and Howell take a more general approach and suggests there had been up to two hundred sealers and some whalers on the Island between 1800-1836.32 Therefore the best one can say is that so far there is no earlier date of non-Indigenous arrivals than possibly 1800.

There is always the question of what constitutes settlement. One can presume it begins with an intention to remain relatively permanently in a place, a dwelling, or entertain a particular way of life but this is unsatisfactory. It could be argued that some intentional acts of settlements fail in a very short space of time, those who are called settlers actually intend to return to whence they came within

---

22 Wells, p. 10.
23 Thule being a name given to islands north of Great Britain by Pytheas of Massilia which is often used to represent any faraway or unknown region.
26 Leigh, p. 81.
a specified period of time, and a particular way of life might mean visiting a place once every so often for a defined purpose. As Wakefield points out, "the word colony is used to express very different ideas ... Mere stations, also, for military or trading purposes, such as Malta or Heligoland, go by the name of colonies" and Mills reiterates this view citing Ceylon and Jamaica as examples. This author’s PhD thesis, currently near completion, entitled “Settlement Theory and a House for the Governor”, focuses on European ‘Systematic Colonisation’ of South Australia and defines settlement from the position of intentional settlement, rather than random ingress or opportunistic arrivals and departures, as the criteria for the settlement discussion. For the purposes of this paper it would seem appropriate to further clarify this definition. Firstly, simply discovering a place is clearly not considered to be settlement. Likewise, going to a place once, sporadically, or even repetitively, where the expressed intention is of departing, then this too is not considered to be settlement. However, extended stays may well be accepted as embryonic settlement even though in the case of KI that settlement was superseded, or rather integrated, with ‘Systematic Colonisation’. Therefore, it would seem most visits to KI can be considered transient in nature, and not settlement, at least until 1806 when a gang of sealers took up residence and some remained for three years and some for longer. Perhaps this argument is supported by the fact that the Government Storekeeper, who took part in the experiment of settling South Australia in 1836, attributes the name ‘settler’ to one of the resident sealers he met on arrival.

The European discovery of KI in 1802 is accredited to Flinders and the charting of the coast to both Flinders and Baudin. The name use today was given by Flinders in gratitude for the supply of kangaroo meat and though the French name, Decrés, has been disregarded many of the southern coastal parts of the Island retain their French nomenclature. Baudin originally named the Island ‘Île Bordua’, after the mathematician and astronomer Jean-Charles de Borda, though Pendleton, of the American whaling vessel the Union, preferred the name ‘Baudin’s Island’ which was transformed into ‘Border’s Island’ until 1836 when Flinders’ original name was restored by the colonists. The discovery, while possibly a future opportunity to colonise, was not an act of settlement. At the time Flinders stated the Island was uninhabited and suggested this view was supported by the fact that the Island.

36 Moore, pp. 87–88.
37 Capper, H., (comp.), 1837, South Australia; Extracts from Official Despatches of Colonel Light, Surveyor General of the Province of South Australia, and Letters of Settlers who have Reached Nepean Bay..., South Australian Facsimile Editions, no 16, Public Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 1962,’ p. 11.
39 Brown, pp. 333 & 345.
wildlife was not wary of people.\textsuperscript{41} Peron, travelling with Baudin, appears to concur as he states he did not see any traces of dwellings.\textsuperscript{42} Hence, from the information available, it would seem Indigenous settlement no longer existed on the Island and non-Indigenous settlement did not occur until after Flinders and Baudin visited.

Almost two hundred years later, Flood suggests, without citation, that European settlement with abducted Indigenous women, began late in 1802.\textsuperscript{43} Like many similar all encompassing statements, regarding the settlement of KI, the origin of the information is nebulous and may be a combination of several pieces of unsubstantiated evidence. Most other references to the earliest habitation of KI relate to the four month visit by the \textit{Union} in 1803. During this time the crew built a 30 to 35 ton schooner \textit{Independence}\textsuperscript{44} and there is an associated anecdote that the schooner was built from local wood and parts of the wreck of the \textit{Sydney Cove} from Preservation Island near Tasmania.\textsuperscript{45} Other than this, there is little information noted between 1803 and 1806. The \textit{Charles of Boston} was also in Bass Straight in 1803 but there is no mention of a visit to KI and one author suggests that with the arrival of these whalers/sealers in the area then “… from then on the arcadia became a charmel -house”.\textsuperscript{46} It is not clear whether the author is referring to the whales and seals or the human carnage that appears to have taken place over the ensuing years. Perhaps for these reasons, or probably more likely for economic and nationalistic reasons, Governor King tried to restrict American access to the area as shown in a letter to Lord Hobart, dated 20 December 1804, refusing permission for an application for sealing by an American, Mr. Smith.\textsuperscript{47} King also commissioned a report on the Island and this 1803/4 report, by Grimes\textsuperscript{48} of the Van Diemen’s Land Survey, may well have hindered any thoughts of settlement as he “condemned Kangaroo Island as fervently as Captain Sutherland [later] overpraised it in 1819”.\textsuperscript{49} In the recent discussions with Anthony Brown, mentioned earlier, it appears that this report mentions King Island in Bass Strait, possibly why many have assumed a different KI, and that so far it seems Grimes did not even visit Kangaroo Island.

King’s attempt to restrict activity in the area seems to have failed since Joseph Murrell, skipper of the sloop \textit{Surprise} wrote that on the 17\textsuperscript{th} October 1804 he was seized on an island, probably in Bass Strait, by the crew of the notorious Captain Amos Delano, master of the American ship \textit{Perseverance}.\textsuperscript{50} Delano’s account of the Morrill/Murrell incident is quite different than Murrell’s but basically the whole affair seems to have been about attempting to gain supremacy in the region. Murrell is recorded as having been transported for life and had reached Sydney in the Second Fleet on 9 September 1789.\textsuperscript{51} The incident with Delano appears to be the next mention of him and then the \textit{Sydney Gazette}, on 9 April 1809, reports that the \textit{Eliza} had brought Joseph Murrell and two companions from KI where

\textsuperscript{41} South Australian Association, 1834, \textit{South Australia; Outline of the Plan of a Proposed Colony to be Founded on the South Coast of Australia, London, 1834}, South Australian Facsimile Editions, Public Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 1962, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{42} p. 41.
\textsuperscript{43} Flood, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{44} Price 1927, p. vi; Price 1936a, p. 33; Price, Grenfel A., 1936b, “Pioneering Difficulties”, in Charles Fenner and et al, (eds), \textit{The Centenary History of South Australia}, Royal Geographic Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch, Adelaide, p. 57; Moore, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{45} Ayliffe, M. (comp.), 1952, \textit{Flinders Land of the South}, Margaret Ayliffe, Penneshaw, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{47} Moore, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{48} Heritage Investigations
\textsuperscript{49} Price 1936b, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{50} Ruediger, W. J., 1980, \textit{Borer’s Land; Kangaroo Island 1802-1836}, Wynnis Ruediger, Morgan, South Australia, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{51} Nunn, Jean M., 1989, \textit{This Southern Land}, Investigator Press, Hawthorndene, p. 21.
he, and six others, had been stranded for three years.\textsuperscript{52} It is perhaps this group that Price is referring to when he states, “There is definite evidence that as early as 1806 a party of seven sealers settled on Kangaroo Island for a period of three years”.\textsuperscript{53} Some say Murrell and six others were ‘left’ on the Island\textsuperscript{54}, others that they were “landed at the Head of Pelican Lagoon, from the vessel ‘Marcia’ sometime in 1806…”\textsuperscript{55}, and it is also possible that he was on a whaling/ sealing expedition of his own. Whether this constitutes settlement or not is debatable based on the doubt regarding the intention or lack of intention to actually set up a settlement. For the purposes of this paper it has been decided to accept this as the point at which the first non-Indigenous settlement took place for two reasons. Firstly, whether intentional or not they were there for an extended period of time and it is quite possible that many such settlements over time and all over the world were the unintended consequences of such beginnings. Secondly, the fact that others remained when Murrell returned to Sydney tends to suggest ongoing settlement, no matter whatever had caused them to be there in the first place. Murrell, who died c1815\textsuperscript{56}, went on to figure in many sailing trips but these seem to be without direct reference to KI, however, it is onwards from his contact in c1806 that the frequency of reports of people in the area increases, though it is not clear if they are references to; his sealing gang that was left behind, casual visits over long periods, people living only on KI or other islands, or a combination of all of these. The suspicion is that it is the latter.

Contacts increased after 1806 and therefore to facilitate access to the compiled information a chronology has been included at the end of this work. The data presented shows some of the inconsistencies in the information and highlights the lack of definitive credible facts. In the names alone problems arise through a variety of different spellings, to vague references, and the use of pseudonyms or characterisations as mentioned above. For example, “Robert Wallen the Island’s ‘Robinson Crusoe’...known as Governor Whalley. His name has been variously spelt as Wallen, Warland, Wallin and Waland...”.\textsuperscript{57} Leigh applies the name Robinson Crusoe more than once during his travels and when on KI he mentions, “One such ‘Robinson Crusoe’ personage who deserted a ship “with another person”. \textsuperscript{58} In this instance, Leigh is presumably talking about Robert Wallen as the former and probably Billy Day as the latter of whom the Observer notes was induced by Wallen to “…join him in his Robinson Crusoe life”.\textsuperscript{59} Leigh’s use of these pseudonyms may be because he did not know the name at the time, wanted to add his romantic spin on the telling of the story, or for privacy reasons. The other issue which shows up is that many of the names of those involved are very similar. This could be because people related to each other, or simply with similar names, were travelling at the same time and in the same region, or that they are actually one and the same person.

The non-Indigenous inhabitants tend to be named, although there are also generic terms used instead, such as; sealer, whaler, or runaway, particularly in the early reports. There is also the occasional euphemism used like Harry ‘Big Mouth’ Smith,\textsuperscript{60} George ‘Fireball’ Bates,\textsuperscript{61} John ‘Abyssinia Jack’ Anderson,\textsuperscript{62} and ‘Abyssinia Bob’.\textsuperscript{63} The latter appear to be Afro-Americans and the term ‘Abyssinia’

\textsuperscript{52} Moore, pp. 87–88.
\textsuperscript{53} Price 1927, p. viii; Price 1936b, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{54} Wells, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{55} Ruediger, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{56} p. 25.
\textsuperscript{57} Wells, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{58} Leigh, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{59} The Adelaide Observer, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{60} Ruediger, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{61} Prest, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{62} Wells, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{63} Gill, p. 115.
may be a euphemistic term used in a similar way to the use of Robinson Crusoe for the white non-Indigenous population, or it could be simply that they came from a place called ‘Abyssinia’ near Hobart in Tasmania.\textsuperscript{64} Generally these, supposedly Americans, are generically referred to as; a man of colour,\textsuperscript{65} an American black,\textsuperscript{66} or a mulatto.\textsuperscript{67} In one case, it would appear there was obviously a distinction drawn between Afro-Americans and the Indigenous population of Australia as Major Lockyer reported in 1826 that in John Randall’s boat crew there was a “black boy” Harry and a “native woman” Mooney.\textsuperscript{68} The Indigenous people on the Island, all Tasmanian and mainland women and their children, were generally referred to in generic terms or distinctly similar and repeated first names. Commonly known as; ‘housekeepers’, ‘wives’, or sealer’s women, while ‘Sal’, ‘Sally’, or ‘Sophie’ seems to have been applied to a number of the women. Again, this may represent the same person or several people but either way it highlights the lack of value placed on these women by both the male inhabitants and probably also those that visited and reported the activities on the Island over the years. It is doubtful that the mention of ‘wives’ and in other instances ‘being married’ actually refers to any kind of ceremony but rather what would probably be described in Britain at the time as a common law wife. The children of the sealers and Indigenous women are generally unnamed and referred to as ‘half-castes’ and appear to have had even less value than their Indigenous mothers.

The children, perhaps even to a degree greater than their mothers, have been lost in the record, particularly as very few reached maturity.\textsuperscript{69} The usual hazards of being a child would have been increased through living on isolated islands and the mortality rate has been attributed also to the brutality of the sealers and possible infanticide by the children’s mothers. From his trip in 1819, George Sutherland attests to the seizure, slavery, and cruelty towards the women and also provided the often quoted statement about the sealers that “They smell like foxes”.\textsuperscript{70} The sealer’s atrocities are mentioned many times, as is the seizing of Tasmanian and Mainland women, and Price suggests that deaths of Europeans, caused by the Indigenous population, were probably as a reciprocation of the cruel actions of the sealers.\textsuperscript{71} There is one reference among hundreds that suggests that “The Aborigines offered women in exchange for goods and for hunting dogs”.\textsuperscript{72} This is arguable but it is known that there were some cases of better treatment and these are mentioned here, without wishing to detract from the majority view of barbarous conduct, and remembering there are only a few such cases documented. Firstly, whether married officially or not, Nat Thomas declared Sophia to be his wife in his will and their family and their children are well documented in the record and secondly, while the information may be part of Leigh’s romantic style, he does state that Robert Wallen gave “… his son [Henry Wallen] a good education and trade at Hobart town”.\textsuperscript{73} Lastly, William Dutton who may have started whaling at KI in 1832,\textsuperscript{74} supposedly had married a Tasmania woman called Sarah and although he left Sarah in Tasmania, he apparently took their child Charlotte with him. There does not appear to any information as to Charlotte’s destiny but William married a Mary Sagger in 1841.\textsuperscript{75} One wonders what became of all the children especially considering John Anderson and Emma had ten, five of

\textsuperscript{65} Nunn, pp. 39-40.
\textsuperscript{66} Moore, pp. 110–111.
\textsuperscript{67} pp. 101–103.
\textsuperscript{68} pp. 126-127.
\textsuperscript{69} Ruediger, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{70} South Australian Land Company 1832, pp. 32, 34 & 36.
\textsuperscript{71} Price 1927, p. viii.
\textsuperscript{72} Nunn, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{73} Leigh, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{74} Ruediger, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{75} Nunn, p. 45.
It seems likely that the first European woman to visit the Island was Mary Beckwith who was with Nicolas Baudin, as his companion, when he arrived there in 1803. The first European women to perhaps settle on the Island were Mrs. O’Brien who travelled on the *Elizabeth* in 1832 and Mrs. Taylor, in 1833, travelling on the *Henry*. There is no mention, found to date by this author, of European children on the Island but as this paper was compiled after an extremely limited time researching the material there may well be references available somewhere in the records which would make for an interesting line of research. It would appear that the first non-Indigenous child on the Island, apart from those Indigenous children brought from other parts of Australia and those born to whalers/sealers and Indigenous women, may well have been the daughter of second in command of the South Australian Company, William Hudson Beare. The child along with family and other settlers had arrived at KI in the *Duke of York* on 27 July 1836 and she was carried ashore, and put on the sand, to settle the argument of who was to be the first of the first authorised British settlement to set foot in the new colony. In Sierp there is a photograph of Robert Frazer Russell, the crew member who carried her ashore, which was taken in 1871, in Adelaide, and beside it is the caption, “The Pioneers – 1835–1836”. Russell went on to survive the wreck of the *Duke of York* in 1887 but sadly the child, Beare, died in 1842.

Total numbers of inhabitants on the Island between 1800 and 1836 seem to oscillate from none to forty, and up to as high as two hundred. Perhaps we will never know the full facts as many inhabitants probably did not want to be recorded and the information to date is sketchy and erroneous. An example of the problems of establishing facts can be seen in the Cawthorne book, first written in 1854, which uses real names, such as; Yankalilla and Rapid Bay, Sal and Suky who are mentioned by Inspector Tolmer, and Meredith, and then includes what appears to be a number of fictitious names. Unfortunately, this book, like several others, is simply “several chapters of romance” where “the tale does not discriminate between facts and fiction...” In other works, the repetition of certain stories, like the building of a schooner or barge on the Island, provide some credibility to events having taken place but precise detail of who was involved, or even the dates events occurred, are sadly lacking. The consensus appears to be that there were no Indigenous inhabitants of KI in 1802 but between 1803 and 1836 there were; whalers, sealers; runaway convicts, seized women from Tasmania or mainland Australia, and children, all in varying numbers and duration of residence. There is also at least one instance of the removal of an Indigenous South Australian women to Flinders Island near Tasmania.

---

76. Wells, p. 39.
78. Nunn, p. 45.
79. Reschke, W., nd, “Kangaroo Island’s Wild Colonial Days”, *Flinders Collection ERH9519*, Special Collections Finders University Library, South Australia.
83. Moore, p. 105; South Australian Land Company 1832, p. 40.
84. Nunn, p. 37.
86. Moore, p. 98.
87. South Australian Land Company 1831, p. 28; South Australian Association, pp. 29 & 41.
88. South Australian Association, p. 51.
89. Ruediger, pp. 33-34.
While islands in the Southern Ocean area were fictitiously discovered by Gulliver they actually do exist and St. Peter and St. Francis Islands, the land of Lilliput, was eventually inhabited by Bryant, Charlotte, Sally and four children, but there the fantasy ended.

With the close of this southern frontier, through habitation, exploration and economic contact, came the shattering of isolation and to some degree the mystery of the region. The new Robinson Crusoes from 1836 had to face the harsh realities of a difficult environment and as word began to seep back to the dream-weavers in Europe then the fantasy was over. On the Island, some still clung to these aberrations. In the midst of wholesale appropriation of land, Leigh indignant rails at the injustices of the 1836 settlement which paid Wallen so little for his land and stock which was “his own by every law of possession”.

For others, reality came quickly. T Horton James, mentions the death on KI of two of his fellow passengers who had tried to walk to Nepean bay from their very first landfall. Whether this incident affected his view of the landscape, or not, is hard to tell but from his perspective, in October/November 1836, the Island was “utterly worthless for any purpose of general cultivation, that [he] should consider it dear as a purchase at a penny per acre”, it was “worthless and inhospitable”, and while Nepean Bay was a good bay “the entire island is good for nothing”. Perhaps he too had been caught up in the romantic notions of distance and new worlds and reality shattered these allusions which may have been exacerbated by the less than accurate information provided, in Britain, to prospective settlers. By this time even the name had become a misnomer as there appears to have been almost no Kangaroos to be found. Why the earlier reports had been glowing may be due to; better environmental conditions twenty to thirty years before, exaggeration in the belief that distance would keep few from ever ratifying the facts, or the distance of time from visits to relating the story may have embellished the memories.

Either way, the situation had changed and Colonel Light moved the settlement to Holdfast Bay and so began the trial of ‘Systematic Colonisation’ in earnest. This latter event is another story and one that is being told by the thesis-in-progress, mentioned earlier, however, the story of the end of the earlier era is probably best told by Leigh who on leaving KI states:

I embarked on my way to Sydney, having, by this time become most heartily tired of my residence; and I can safely say I left not one soul behind me who would not have joyfully returned with me.

After only six months, the fantasy seems to be clearly over for Leigh and perhaps it was for many others in even a shorter space of time. However, it is worth quoting his words on actual departure to gain some insight into how prevailing some attitudes and beliefs are, how insidious inspiration can be, or simply as an example of the irrepressible human spirit.

“Long looked for come at last!”- the gallant vessel that is to bear me from the shores of a wilderness, in which I have now nearly completed a six months’ sojourn. Those who have read the Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, and there are few who have not, will recollect the description of his delight on quitting a spot where he has passed so many dreary days; and yet there was a charm in the solitary wilderness, to which he clung; and the regret which he

---

90 Moore, pp. 101–103.
91 Leigh, p. 124.
92 James, Horton, T., 1838, Six Months in South Australia, London, 1838, South Australian Facsimile Editions no. 18, Public Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 1962, p. 9. It is interesting to note that Horton James does not mention the name of the ship or Captain, probably for liable reasons, but the same story about the Emma is mentioned by Mrs Thomas in her diary, parts of which were published in The Adelaide Observer, p. 33.
94 p. 100.
95 Leigh, p. 134.
felt at parting from the familiar objects, mitigated the delight inspired by the occasion. Thus it was with me W. H. Leigh, 1839.96

Perhaps, overall, one should be less critical of the inspiration and more critical of its uses and the repercussions. Without Gulliver and Crusoe some may not have ventured into the mysterious South which lead to the discovery of KI and without this discovery political economists and settlement theorists, like Colonel Torrens and E G Wakefield, may not have been inspired to create a new society through a new kind of settlement system. The ability to dream, or theorise, was perhaps enhanced by these earlier fantasies, and particular genre of literature, which to an extent may have replaced still earlier heroic tales. One interesting repercussion from Torrens’ and Wakefield’s musings on ‘capital’ and ‘surplus-labour-absorbing capital’, respectively, is that they may well have inspired Karl Marx who cites both of them in Capital.97 As more research is undertaken then presumably more interconnected and interrelated facts will emerge to strengthen this embryonic argument of associated cause and result. In the process, the simple chronology created may assist in providing a base from which to pursue archaeological and other enquiries by checking; shipping records, crew lists, documents and diaries, thus providing other connections and data which may assist in solving some of the mysteries of Karta (Kangaroo Island) and the people who inhabited these places.

References


Capper, H., (comp.), 1837, South Australia; Extracts from Official Despatches of Colonel Light, Surveyor General of the Province of South Australia, and Letters of Settlers who have Reached Nepean Bay…., South Australian Facsimile Editions, no 16, Public Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 1962.

Cawthorne, W., 1927, The Kangaroo Islanders; A Story of South Australia Before Colonization 1823, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide.


Fenner, C., 1931, South Australia a Geographical Study, Whitcombe & Tombs Limited.

96 p. 179.
Countercultural References

Melbourne.


Gordon, D. J. and Ryan, V. H., (eds), 1914, Handbook of South Australia, Government Printer, Adelaide.


Price, Grenfell A., 1936a, “Explorers by Sea and Land”, in Charles Fenner and et al, (eds), The...
Centenary History of South Australia, Royal Geographic Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch, Adelaide, pp. 30-43.


Reschke, W., nd, “Kangaroo Island’s Wild Colonial Days”, Flinders Collection, Special Collections Finders University Library, no. ERH9519, South Australia.


Ruediger, W. J., 1980, Borer’s Land; Kangaroo Island 1802-1836, Wynnis Ruediger, Morgan, South Australia.


South Australian Association, 1834, South Australia; Outline of the Plan of a Proposed Colony to be Founded on the South Coast of Australia, London, 1834, South Australian Facsimile Editions, no. 9, Public Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 1962.


The Australian, “DNA clue to man’s origin”, Tuesday, 9 January 2001, no. 11,288, pp. 1, 8-9 & 16.

