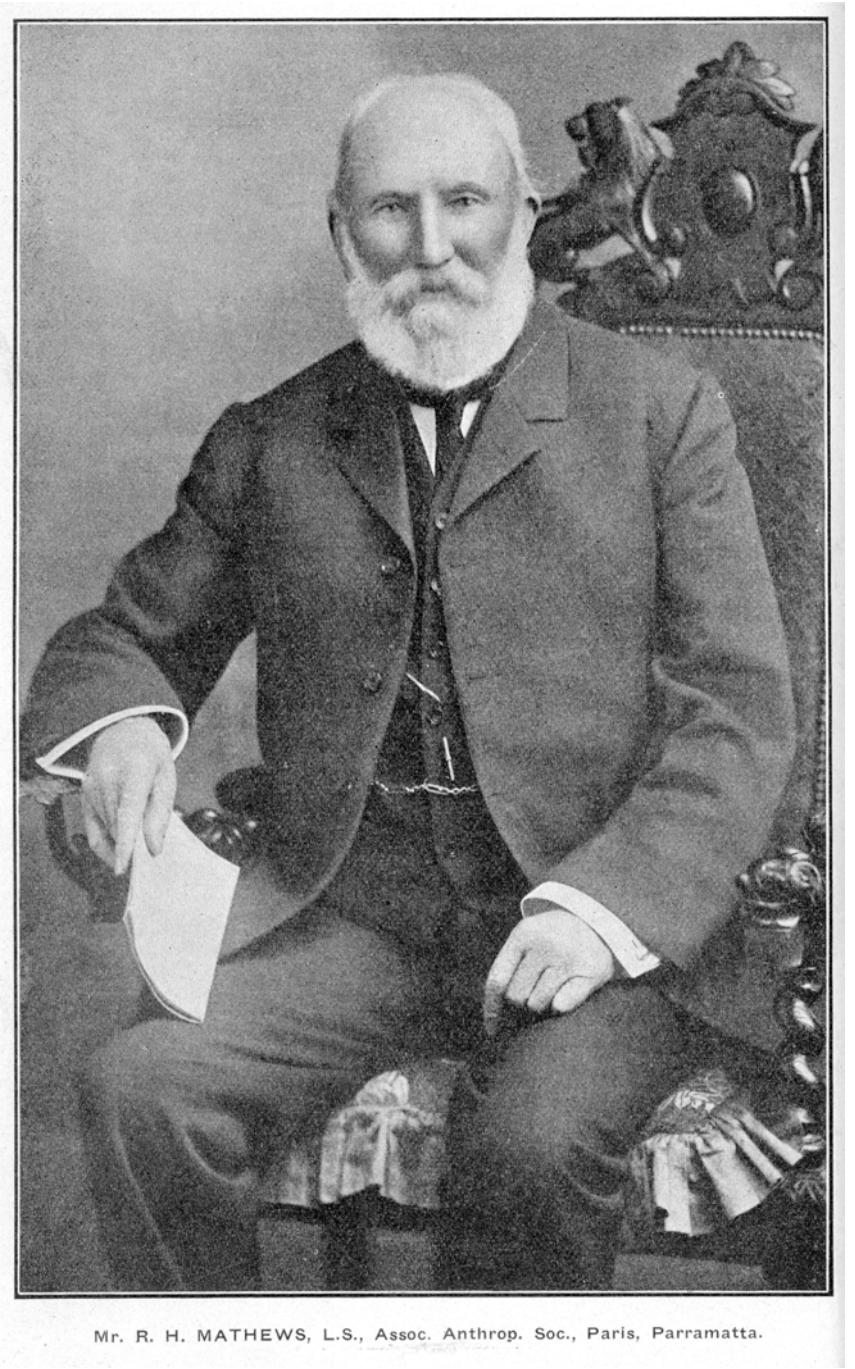

R. H. Mathews had himself photographed in this throne-like chair for a portrait published in his booklet *Some Peculiar Burial Customs of the Australian Aborigines* (1909). By permission of the National Library of Australia.

Introducing R. H. Mathews

‘Birrarak is the name given to me by the natives’

Ethnological Notes on R. H. Mathews

Martin Thomas

In 1872, while surveying at Narran Lakes in New South Wales, R. H. Mathews wrote a letter to Mary Bartlett, who would soon become his wife. ‘I was talking to a blackfellow,’ he wrote, ‘who can speak English, and he told me a lot of their words and expressions which I made a note of in my book’.[1] He then complained: ‘I can’t find letters in our language to express the proper sounds.’ From the outset, Mathews was involved in a labour of translation.

While evident in all his writings, the limits of translatability are most conspicuous in his descriptions of Aboriginal language where, beneath the subheading ‘Orthography’, you always find a stream of directives on how to sound the words transcribed.

> *G* is always hard. *R* has a rough trilled sound, as in the English word *hurrah! W* always commences a word or syllable. *Y* at the beginning of a word or syllable has its ordinary consonant value. The sound of the Spanish *ñ* often occurs.[2]

When Mathews tried to re-create the Aboriginal words, his English notation showed signs of stress. Diacritic symbols caution us against habitual pronunciation; analogies are drawn from other European languages, perhaps recalling the eight months of his life spent outside Australia. It was unusual then (as now) for someone of British background to be interested in the non-English aspect of Australia’s linguistic heritage. Whether he attained fluency in an Aboriginal tongue is doubtful, but even the smattering of words and phrases that he documented, and must at times have used, would have won him favour in the communities where he worked.

Always secretive, Mathews recorded little about these interactions with his Aboriginal teachers. But a few memories became part of the family lore. William Mathews, second-youngest son of R. H., recalled his father’s sessions with Emma Timbery, a senior Dharawal woman of Botany Bay. Her name appears often in his notebooks, so presumably she was one of the people with whom Mathews discussed the three large rock engravings, described in his paper ‘Rock Carvings and Paintings by the Australian Aborigines’ (1898) (this volume). William and his father took the suburban tram to La Perouse. The boy played with the local children while his father worked. He remembered peering into Mrs Timbery’s

humpy where she and Mathews smoked pipes as they sat on boxes. Mathews with his small notebook and pencil was 'writing very hard' and young William was waved away.[3] We can think of them there, working within and across their respective languages, engaged in a process of translation that will never entirely stop so long as there are readers of Mathews' work.

He studied with people such as Mrs Timbery and returned to his home in the western suburbs of Sydney. He wrote up articles which he posted to journals. Months or even years later when the journal article was published, he received a package of 25 or 50 offprints—the 'pamphlets' or 'separates' as he called them. They were the only payment he received for his labour, and he liked them to circulate. He posted them to colleagues and to settlers out bush in the often forlorn hope that they might gather information from the Aboriginal people they knew, following his example. The process was circulatory and hopefully generative. Sometimes, as happened with much of the work in this collection, the information gathered by Mathews was marked by a further transformation. Journals in France and Austria commissioned French and German translations from his English manuscripts. The haphazardness of this process was brought home to me, comically at times, when, in the preparation of this book, I regularly conferred with Mathilde de Hautecloque and Christine Winter who translated the French and German texts back into English. The curious process of *retranslation* rekindled some of the bewilderment that Mathews' European translators might have felt when they came across his references to stringybark and grey box trees, or tried to follow his detailed description of making a stone axe. Their errors are sometimes deliciously preposterous. For the French reader a human torso becomes a tree trunk (*tronc d'abour*) in a description of a ritual, and the sandstone of the Sydney basin is mysteriously metamorphosed from sandstone to limestone (*calcaire*). Needless to say, we eliminated these errors from the retranslations. But in their quirky way they were instructive. If such discrepancies are possible in the shuffle between European languages, how much more was lost or transformed when Mathews used the language of anthropology (still an inchoate discipline) to describe ceremony, art, kinship and other aspects of Aboriginal life? Here we are reminded of both the necessity and the impossibility of translation. When putting a concept into another language we inevitably transform it. That is a danger. But if we refuse to take this risk, we pursue the even more dangerous course of barricading our world against outside influence. In so doing we refuse the possibility of hearing ourselves through the ears of an other.

In excavating and interpreting Mathews' legacy, I frequently wonder whether I am narrating or translating. Perhaps it is a combination of the two. Working from fragments of evidence (and Mathews left little more concerning his own life story), I will try to chart the context for his remarkable and too often neglected work. There is an occupational tendency among historians to try to

render the past as a seamless narrative. Yet to do so belies the randomness of working with evidence; the chaos of flashes and fragments that occurs daily. Take for example the experience of searching a microfilmed newspaper. Reports of the Great War, now in its final catastrophic year, are whizzing past—a typographic blur—as I look for, and eventually find, an obituary, telling how Mathews died aged 77 at his home in Sydney. The funeral occurred at the Presbyterian cemetery, Parramatta, and was reportedly well-attended. The newspaper noted that he had been engaged in 'many years of survey work in the northern and north-western districts of New South Wales'. He was survived by his wife, four sons and a daughter; his anthropological work gained him honours, including the Prix Godard from the Anthropological Society of Paris. 'His investigations,' we are told, 'were, with very few exceptions, carried out by personal interviews with the natives themselves, and he spared no labour to make his information absolutely reliable before embodying it in his writings.'[4]

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Little more was said publicly about Mathews' legacy. None of the journals to which he contributed published an obituary or even a notice of his passing. Perhaps the oversight is understandable in a world ravaged by war. Or perhaps his international mode of publishing, which straddled both sides of the Rhine, smacked of the old order. Then, three years after his death, Mathews' old foe, W. Baldwin Spencer, made a brief and unfavourable mention of his work in an Australian journal.

Born in Manchester, Spencer arrived in Australia in 1887 to take up the first Chair of Biology at the University of Melbourne. He was 26 years old. Spencer's impact on his adopted city was profound. He made a major contribution to Australian zoology, collected the work of the Heidelberg school artists, served as museum and gallery director, and was for a time president of the Victorian Football League. He was also a magnificent photographer. As a student at Oxford he was introduced to anthropology by E. B. Tylor, a founding father of the discipline, whose lectures he attended. He satisfied both his photographic and ethnographic curiosity during a series of missions to Central Australia, beginning with the Horn Expedition in 1894. There he met the Alice Springs postmaster F. J. Gillen with whom he wrote *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899) and other weighty tomes. From that date Spencer became internationally recognised as one the brightest stars in the anthropological firmament.

Anthropologists F. J. Gillen (front left) and W. Baldwin Spencer (front right) at Alice Springs, Northern Territory, in 1901. The men in the back row are (left to right) Erlikiliakira, Mounted Trooper Chance and Purula. Spencer's opinion of R. H. Mathews is expressed in his remark: 'I only wish I dare say in print what years ago I said to him in private but it was just a bit too libellous.' By permission of Museum Victoria.

When Spencer attacked the late R. H. Mathews in 1921, he expressed particular objection to study he had done with Ngemba people who resided near the Barwon River at Brewarrina in northwest New South Wales. Spencer never worked in this part of the country, nor even visited it so far as I am aware. Mathews had first seen the waters of the Barwon at the age of 19 while working for a drover. Then, after qualifying as a surveyor, he worked there on occasions in the 1870s. After he began to publish in anthropology in 1893, he went to Brewarrina for the express purpose of meeting with Ngemba people. He published articles about their burial customs[5] and the ancient maze of drystone walls, built into the bed of the Barwon—the fish traps of Brewarrina.[6] He spoke to them about material culture and trade, as seen in 'Contributions to the Ethnography of the Australians' (1907) (this volume). He also explored marriage and kinship rules, a subject that interested him greatly. As Mathews described

Ngemba kinship, the community was bilaterally divided into moieties (which he usually referred to by the Greek term *phratry*). Each moiety was itself divided into another two groups (which Mathews referred to as *sections*). In addition to the moieties and sections, the community was also grouped according to totem.

This in itself was not news to any student of Australian kinship. Comparable forms of social organisation had already been documented across much of the continent. Some communities had the two moieties only. Others divided each moiety into two or four groups. Designated groups (sections or sub-sections) of opposite moieties were expected to marry each other. (The principle of marrying outside one's classificatory group made it an *exogamous* system, a key term in the anthropological argot.) But according to Mathews—and it was this that Spencer found problematic—the kinship system of the Ngemba had further attributes.

> Beside the phratries, sections and totemic groups … the whole community is further divided into what may, for convenience of reference, be called 'castes'. These castes regulate the camping or resting places of the people under the shades of large trees in the vicinity of water or elsewhere. The shadow thrown by the butt and lower portion of a tree is called 'nhurrai'; that cast by the middle portion of the tree is 'wau-guē'; whilst the shade of the top of the tree, or outer margin of the shadow is 'winggu'.[7]

Mathews later reported the Kurnu people to the west, the Kamilaroi to the east and other neighbours of the Ngemba also had bloods and shades.[8]

Mathews claimed that these 'castes', like the moieties, sections and totems, were taken into consideration when marriages were being arranged. But that was not the extent of their influence. The very basics of social responsibility and interpersonal association were affected by the bloods and shades.

> Again, the men, women and children, whose prescribed sitting places are in the butt and the middle shades of the trees are called 'guai'mundhan', or sluggish blood, while those who sit in the top or outside shade are designated 'gai'gulir', or active blood. This further bisection of the community into Guaimundhu and Guaigulir, which may be referred to as 'blood' divisions, has happened so long ago that the natives have no explanation regarding it. The Guaingulir people—those who occupy the 'winggu' or outer margin of the shade—are supposed to keep a strict watch for any game which may appear in sight, the approach of friends or enemies, or anything which may require vigilance in a native camp.[9]

In describing these beliefs, Mathews was steering kinship study away from the laboured taxonomy of marriage rules which had preoccupied so many anthropologists of the Victorian era (including himself). He later declared that

his approach would 'revolutionise all the old-school notions respecting the organisation of Australian tribes'—a view that proved overly optimistic.[10] Mathews' legacy was already fading by the time Spencer took the trouble to criticise his findings on the blood and shade 'castes', disparaging them as 'very vague, and somewhat difficult to understand'. He also argued that Mathews 'was dealing with very decadent tribes, who had, for nearly half a century, been in contact with white men, and whose numbers also were so depleted that, of necessity, old marriage customs had become profoundly modified, whilst more important still the beliefs of their forefathers were to them, for the most part, only a matter of past history in which they took practically no interest'.[11] In this way, Spencer stigmatised the long-settled communities of eastern Australia—the areas where Mathews worked in person—as anthropologically clapped out. In the years following Mathews' death, when anthropology became more professional and academic, this odour of redundancy began to hang not only around Mathews' informants, but around the anthropology of his generation. The First World War marked the terminus of so many things raised in the hothouse of the nineteenth century, including the ethos of 'enlightened amateurism' that had permitted Mathews, a country surveyor who never went to university, to make a voluminous contribution to the scientific culture.

To me there is nothing vague or confusing about Mathews' description of Ngemba kinship. And while Spencer's assertion that European occupation brought cultural transformation is necessarily correct, it by no means confirms his view that Mathews' Aboriginal informants were indifferent to their cultural heritage. If that is the case why, over a period of more than 20 years, did they take such trouble in explaining it to him? From a contemporary vantage point, Mathews' comments about spatial organisation in the Ngemba community are not so much strange as tantalising. If there is a problem with them it is that don't go far enough. Even in truncated form, however, these observations provide a welcome antidote to the preoccupation with marriage rules which is in part a polite way of talking about the regulation of sexual intercourse—an anthropological fixation that probably says as much about Victorian and Edwardian mores than it does about the people being studied. This was a time when Aboriginal kinship was typically presented as an almost endless series of tables, accompanied by algebraic formulations showing who can marry whom. It now seems terribly restricted. After decades of tuition from Aboriginal teachers, westerners have come to understand that the moiety, sectional and totemic groupings influence far more than one's choice of spouse. Mathews himself hinted at this. 'The human subject, animals, plants, inanimate objects, the elements, the heavenly bodies—everything on the earth or above it,' he wrote, belong to a moiety and a section.[12] This means that the affiliations and responsibilities of every person—to the land and to each other—are shaped by relations of kinship.

*

Although preoccupied with kinship, the anthropologists of Mathews' day were inexpert in displaying it amongst themselves. One gets the impression that Spencer might have intended his dismissal of Mathews' work on bloods and shades as a final nail in his coffin, for in making it he was breaking a 17-year silence during which time he had never acknowledged his rival's existence—in public at least.[13] The rift between them was no secret in Australia or even in Britain. Spencer dispatched numerous epistles damning Mathews; the latter sent pleas for recognition, often to the same people. We see this in a letter from the Scottish man of letters Andrew Lang to the English folklorist E. S. Hartland, the recipient of several letters from Mathews (reproduced in this volume). Lang wrote:

> If Mr Mathews has written to you in the same way he did to me, you will understand why I tried to prove to him that there was no conspiracy against him. His letters did not increase my opinion of his evidence, while Spencer's about *him*![14]

I have not been able to locate the correspondence mentioned between Lang and Spencer. But an impressive example of the latter's vitriol is revealed in a letter to his great friend A. W. Howitt, also an anthropologist from Victoria, and the other key participant in the feud with Mathews. Spencer wrote to him in 1907:

> As to that miscreant Mathew [sic] … I don't know whether to admire most his impudence his boldness or his mendacity—they are all of a very high order and seldom combined to so high a degree in one mortal man.[15]

As the Lang letter indicates, Mathews was well aware that Spencer was working against him. This was in contrast to the early days of their acquaintance when the relationship was at least civil.[16] In 1896 Spencer had viewed Mathews with sufficient favour to present two of his papers at meetings of the Royal Society of Victoria.[17] This was also a time when Mathews could describe Howitt as a 'friend and co-worker'.[18] For reasons that were never fully articulated by any party, the relationship between Mathews and the Victorians had completely fallen apart two years later. A letter to Hartland conveys Mathews' perspective. 'Ever since 1898 the fact has been thrust upon me that Spencer and Howitt looked upon me as "the opposition candidate" and never lost a chance of doing me an injury.'[19] The problem, Mathews said, was his research on the Northern Territory (carried out not from personal interview, but with the assistance of outback correspondents). This part of Australia, Mathews believed, had been singled out by Spencer for Gillen and himself.[20] In addition to Spencer's territorialism towards the Territory, which also put Carl Strehlow and others on the outer, kinship study played a part in aggravating the differences between Mathews and the Victorians. Both evolutionists, Spencer and particularly Howitt

were influenced by the American scholar Lewis Henry Morgan who believed that power and property in the most primitive societies were vested with women. The transition to patriarchal power marked a 'higher' level of development.[21] This theoretical model influenced the questions that were asked of a moiety-based social system (the likes of which existed in Australia and elsewhere). Since a spouse must come from the opposite moiety, does a child belong to the moiety of the maternal or the paternal line? Exhibiting an understanding of gender that was itself fairly primitive, the evolutionists regarded the answer to this question as a key indicator of whether a society was patriarchal or matriarchal.

Being more an on-the-ground reporter than a theorist, Mathews did not subscribe to evolutionism or any other 'ism'. So possibly he did not realise the theoretical import of his intervention when, in 1898, he politely argued against Howitt's report that the kinship system of the people living around Maryborough in Queensland descended through the father.

> There is, however, no question that he is in error … and has evidently been misinformed. I have drawn attention to the matter now, because on a former occasion I was misled by Mr. Howitt's conclusions respecting the line of descent of the Kaiabara tribe. I have since, however, from personal inquiry, reported that descent is through the mother.[22]

One might have thought that such dialogue would be permissible—even desirable—in a community of scholars. But these findings were highly inconvenient to Howitt, who was developing the theory, fully elaborated in his major book of 1904, that various phases of social evolution were represented in Australia. Unlike Mathews, Howitt categorised the marriage rules of different tribes as a hierarchical order, with the most 'primitive' inhabiting the centre of the continent.

> I shall give instances, commencing with the Dieri, which is one of the socially backward standing tribes; going through the tribes in a socially progressive series, until the end is reached, with tribes of which the Kurnai are an example. In this way I hope to be able to show the actual advances made in the local and social organisations, but also the character of these important changes.[23]

Since Mathews' claims about the Kaiabara challenged this lofty (if specious) paradigm, Howitt pretended they had never been made. (Interestingly, on the point in question, Mathews was almost certainly correct. His view was endorsed by John Mathew, the Melbourne clergyman and anthropologist, who had lived in that part of Queensland for five years, during which time he had constant dealings with Aboriginal people and learnt Kabi Kabi, the local language.[24] Mathew shared Mathews' view that Howitt was 'altogether wrong' in discerning patrilineal descent.)[25]

It is also likely that Howitt was annoyed or embarrassed that Mathews had directly approached Harry Aldridge who was the source of his information. Aldridge, who came from a family of Queensland pioneers, had married into the Aboriginal community where he is still fondly remembered.[26] This won him a certain notoriety, and he was approached by a number of researchers. He admitted in a letter to Mathews that to some of these investigators he had told 'tall tales' on occasions.[27] Such were the hazards of working with correspondents, but all the anthropologists of the period relied on them to varying degrees.[28] Settlers prepared to forgo what leisure time they had to do unpaid research for anthropologists were always in short supply. Mathews' correspondence files contain many letters expressing incredulity at his pleas for assistance. As a consequence, the anthropologists were possessive towards their correspondents, and often implored them not to assist their rivals.

There was no department of anthropology at an Australian university until 1925 when A. R. Radcliffe-Brown was appointed to the first professorship at Sydney. Until that time, the highly competitive research environment was largely unregulated by academic protocols. This helps explain the rift between Mathews and the Victorians which assumed grotesque proportions after that first polite criticism of Howitt in 1898. So passionately did Spencer dislike Mathews, according to the psychologist E. Morris Miller, that when he saw the article 'Social Organisation of some Australian Tribes' (1906) (reproduced this volume), Spencer 'convulsed at Mr Mathews' audacity'.[29] There was at least one occasion when Mathews and Spencer met in person, perhaps in an effort to settle their differences. The extent of their failure is revealed in Spencer's remark to Howitt: 'I only wish I dare say in print what years ago I said to him in private but it was just a little bit too libellous.'[30]

As the policy of ignoring him persisted, as months became years, Mathews became increasingly strident. He hurled insults, declaring on one occasion that if Howitt and his collaborator Lorimer Fison 'had never been born, it could not have made an atom of difference to my work'.[31] Perhaps he resorted to these measures in the hope of provoking a response. If so, he finally enjoyed some success. In 1907 he took Spencer and Howitt to task in the letters page of *Nature*.[32] He pointedly complained about the extent to which Howitt had ignored his work, and the latter judged it too prominent a forum to ignore. Howitt's response is highly revealing. He claimed to have

> learnt from Mr. Mathews's letter that he has sent 'more than one hundred contributions to various scientific societies'. I have only met with two of them, neither of which recommended itself to me by its accuracy. It is therefore difficult to understand how I can have 'ignored' statements of which I am ignorant.[33]

As Mathews pointed out in a forceful rejoinder, this was a bare-faced lie. Howitt had been receiving the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* and the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* through all the years of Mathews' anthropological research. In these journals alone he had published 16 articles. After the contretemps in *Nature*, Mathews and Howitt finally did what years earlier they could have done productively: debated each other. The forum was the journal *American Antiquarian*, and in this exchange the differences between them are most clearly articulated.[34] The debate centred on whether the Aboriginal traditions of southeast Australia were more or less dead, as Howitt claimed, or whether, as Mathews believed, they had survived into the twentieth century. So intense was the hostility that even on his deathbed, Howitt (who died in 1908), was busily fulminating against Mathews. He condemned him in a text titled 'A Message to Anthropologists' which was posted to a who's who list of anthropological luminaries and published in the Parisian journal *Revue des Études Ethnographiques et Sociologiques*.[35]

Mathews acquitted himself well in *American Antiquarian*, but it was arguably too late for his reputation. Howitt's magnum opus, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, had been published in London in 1904 and it contained what can only be described as a travesty of omission. Mathews had received not so much as a footnote in the 819 pages of Howitt's book.

The personal effect of this treatment is best measured in the 'Correspondence' section of this volume. Squirming at the way they silenced him, Mathews took pot-shots at his opponents, and sometimes it was he, not they, who looked absurd. Howitt and Spencer's achievements were considerable, but this he refused to acknowledge. It is significant to an understanding of Mathews' character that he rarely expressed his feelings about this or other matters of a personal nature. A substantial collection of his notebooks, correspondence and other manuscripts survives in the National Library of Australia. But even so dramatic an event as the meeting with Spencer could slip by without so much as a note in his diary. Getting a sense of Mathews the person is made more difficult by his failure to keep copies of the thousands of letters he wrote. Communications from his correspondents were carefully filed, but his own voice is missing from the dialogue. Fortuitously, there is one major exception to this rule. From 1905 to 1907 Mathews corresponded with Daisy Bates, and since they both kept each other's letters, an exchange could, in this one case, be reconstructed. However, this is not to understate the extraordinary value of the Mathews manuscripts. His notebooks, drafts and annotated offprints of articles reveal much data that he never published, including the particulars of communities visited and the names of many informants. Mathews' personal papers are an outstanding record of intercultural history in the turn-of-the-century period. But so little do they illuminate his inner life that to

the biographer they seem a carapace. They evoke not Mathews, but a space where Mathews has been.[36]

The image of a private and isolated individual is confirmed in a short memoir, apparently written by his son William Mathews.

> Owing doubtless to the fact that he was what usually is known as a self-contained man, RHM felt little or no desire to seek the society of his fellows, but rather was disposed to avoid them as much as he reasonably could … For, to be quite candid, RHM was inclined—frequently, it must be admitted with good reason—to look upon the majority of people with considerable disdain, if not with something very akin to contempt.[37]

R. H. was not so misanthropic in the recollection of Frank Mathews, his grandson. Perhaps, as often happens, he was less remote as a grandfather than a father. Frank Mathews noted his shyness, although he said that this trait lessened in old age. He remembered his 'Irish sense of humour' and that he had 'an amusing way of quizzing people and drawing them out'.[38] Mathews' tendency to shield himself was probably accentuated by a lifetime of exerting authority over others. Or else his innate sense of isolation drew him towards such roles. A copy of a letter to his wife Mary, written from the field, reveals that he was routinely addressed as 'sir' by members of his survey team. When, from the age of 40, he wound back his surveying practice and regularly served on the bench as a magistrate and coroner in local courts, he was required to sit in judgement of his fellow citizens—a role that required aloofness from those around him. That Mathews had difficulty in dropping the mask of authority is suggested in letters he wrote to Carl Strehlow. The latter was a man of the cloth, a fellow professional, and also a scholar of anthropology. Yet at times Mathews seemed to treat him as more of a subordinate than a colleague, as when he asked him to do research on the pronouns of the area.

> You will be able to get all the information about these 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' forms in a few hours from any native.
>
> Please also enquire how far north the language extends. For example, would your blacks understand a blackfellow from Barrow's Creek Telegraph Station? I presume your blacks speak substantially the same language as at Charlotte Waters …
>
> Please answer this letter by the return mail.[39]

Mathews' diary lists many overseas luminaries to whom he wrote.[40] In that class-ridden age, a degree of humility would have been expected from a colonial surveyor writing uninvited. Yet seldom was it forthcoming. The mighty J. G. Frazer of Trinity College, Cambridge, author of *The Golden Bough*, had been forewarned by Spencer that Mathews was of nuisance value, so his prospects

in that quarter were never promising.[41] Even so, it is interesting that Frazer complained that Mathews wrote 'in a tone which showed the character of the man. I did not answer his letters and shall hold no communication with him'.[42] Andrew Lang was no friend of Frazer's, but he too was uncomfortable with Mathews' tone, even though he had a high opinion of his work, having praised him as the most lucid and 'well informed writer on the various divisions which regulate the marriages of the Australian tribes'.[43] In a letter to Hartland he expressed reservation about Mathews' manners and his failure to reciprocate in the exchange of publications.[44]

There were other irritations for contemporaries, not all of Mathews' doing. But their frequency suggests, at best, a tendency to mismanage his interactions. The Queensland anthropologist, W. E. Roth, claimed (incorrectly) that Mathews had published 'as his own' the grammatical findings of Mary Everitt, a Sydney researcher linked with the Gundungurra community of the Blue Mountains.[45] This misunderstanding led Roth to denounce Mathews as a 'common or garden blackguard' and 'a *true* parasite—no "mutualism" or "commensalism" about him'.[46] Early in his anthropological career Mathews had lost favour with learned societies in Melbourne, Sydney and London by publishing the same or similar findings in multiple journals.[47] He also had a habit of imposing his grievances with Howitt and Spencer upon uninterested parties. He once offered a paper to the Anthropological Institute, London, on condition 'that it should not be referred to any Australian Ethnologist'. This did not endear him to the executive of the Institute, and the paper went unread until he withdrew the condition.[48]

Lest this sound like a life of unmitigated faux pas, I should emphasise that Mathews *did* have friends and confidants. He once declared that he practised anthropology 'in the fervent hope of exciting the interest and encouraging the investigation of younger students'.[49] That he enjoyed some success in this regard is shown in his mentorship of W. J. Enright, a Hunter Valley solicitor, whose memories of Mathews were recorded by A. P. Elkin in his important trilogy of articles, 'R. H. Mathews: His Contribution to Aboriginal Studies'.[50] Another, younger man whom Mathews inspired was J. A. (later Sir John) Ferguson, who wrote to Mathews in 1918 seeking 'a complete set of your many monographs'.[51] After Mathews died later that year, Ferguson wrote a highly complimentary obituary of him.[52] An eventual supreme court judge and a noted bibliophile, Ferguson's Australiana collection, containing many offprints of Mathews articles, is now a cornerstone of the National Library of Australia.

Mathews also enjoyed friendship with some of the more prominent anthropological figures of the period. In addition to the correspondence with Hartland (this volume), with whom he found a rapport, he became allied with a number of his Australian contemporaries. 'Your letter is like a good cup of tea to me,' wrote Daisy Bates, 'which is my most stimulating beverage, & I cannot

give it higher praise.'[53] For a period Bates and Mathews entertained the idea of working collaboratively in Western Australia where Mathews had never been, but he was only prepared to do so if the government met his expenses.[54] Such largesse was not forthcoming, and Bates herself struggled to get reimbursement of modest expenditure from the Western Australian Registrar General, for whom she worked. Mathews' correspondence with John Mathew was extensive and mostly warm, lasting from 1895 until 1909.[55] To some extent, Mathews, Mathew and Bates, who all wrote to each other, were thrown into alliance by the exclusionary behaviour of Spencer. He cared little for Bates[56] and is alleged to have staged a coup de grâce against John Mathew by orchestrating the rejection of his doctoral thesis by the University of Melbourne.[57] So Mathews was by no means a lone soldier in these 'anthropology wars'. Aboriginal studies in this formative period is a tale of attack and subterfuge. The pool of researchers was small but fractious, with the central players competing on an array of fronts: for correspondents, for international patronage, and for access to Aboriginal people themselves. The urgency with which Mathews and his coevals went about their work is evident in their prolific output. They assumed, like most white Australians at the time, that the Aboriginal race was hovering at the edge of extinction. Rhetoric to this effect helped justify the value of their work to editors, publishers and perhaps even to themselves. Among the many effects of the dying race fallacy was its exclusion of any possibility that a future generation might regard the knowledge they were studying as *their* cultural property. In this regard, early anthropology can be regarded as a shadow of the imperial expansion that made it possible. Knowledge and tradition, like the land itself, became territory that could be claimed and divided.

*

This is the competitive terrain that Mathews entered when he became interested in anthropology in the 1890s. In trying to get a sense of him, we depend—too heavily perhaps—on the letters he wrote and the way people perceived him, frequently from their reading of these very letters. That is to say, we know Mathews from the persona he presented as a correspondent or as an author of learned papers. Perhaps it was his manner as a correspondent, more than anything he did, that put him on the wrong side of Howitt and Spencer. In thinking about this persona, we must acknowledge how it affected others, influencing the terms in which they wrote to him and about him. We must also recognise that this persona might have borne only a slight relation to the man himself. Perhaps he was accomplished at some transactions and poor at others. Claude Lévi-Strauss once observed that a calling to anthropology allows an individual in 'an initial state of detachment' to find advantage when approaching different societies 'since he is already halfway towards them'.[58] In his own society Mathews was long inured to personal and intellectual isolation. But as he sometimes

communicated in his published writings, his affinity with Aboriginal people allowed a form of kinship to develop between him and them—a kinship that grew from his interest in their kinship structures and other aspects of cultural life. This affection is sometimes revealed in his writings. We see it, for example, in a paper dated 1896 when he described his reunion with a group of Kamilaroi people whom he knew from his surveying years:

> I entered into conversation with the head men … I had been kind to them in those days, while listening to their legends and their songs, and studying their wonderful class [i.e. kinship] system; and when I met them now I found their friendship of the greatest value to me.[59]

Illuminations such as this are fairly rare in Mathews' opus, but his familiarity with the social fabric of Aboriginal communities is nonetheless evident. His remarkable 1907 paper 'Contributions to the Ethnography of the Australians' (this volume) is his most detailed evocation of everyday camp life. The narrative is notable for the comfort, indeed the fondness, he feels for Aboriginal communities. He describes ball games, wrestling, story-telling, spear practice, technology, trade. He tried, not always successfully, to write in a dispassionate and scientific manner. Sometimes this makes him seem remote from his subjects, but it also brings a remarkable lack of judgement. While Mathews shared the prevailing view of his epoch that Aboriginal culture was less developed than his own, he seldom complained about its simplicity. Assumptions to this effect were difficult to sustain when dealing with the complexity of grammatical construction or piecing together the puzzle of kinship. Even in Europe the vanguard anthropologists were beginning to acknowledge this, as is evident in criticism of Durkheim by Arnold van Gennep, a supporter of Mathews. As van Gennep's biographer paraphrases his argument: 'so-called primitive societies are not simple societies; they are just as complex as "civilized" societies from the point of view of their internal mechanism and the interweaving of their functions; they are never uniform nor homogenous.'[60] In Mathews' writings, we can often sense his admiration for practices or traditions, sometimes because they *are* simple, though beautifully efficacious. When Mathews describes a bird or small animal baked in clay, he evokes the very texture of the food. 'When they were taken out, the skin or feathers stuck to the hard clay crust while the animal remained clean and juicy.'[61]

This photograph of an Aboriginal camp at Tabulam, northern New South Wales, was taken by commercial photographer Charles Kerry, circa 1895. It is a part of a set of Aboriginal portraits and scenes commissioned by the NSW government. R. H. Mathews visited many such camps from the 1890s. By permission of the National Library of Australia. [NLA.pic-an3298931].

Mathews was attentive to protocol even before he entered a camp where he might have partaken of such a meal. As his friend Enright explained to Elkin, Mathews 'observed Aboriginal courtesies of approach and the patterns of behaviour that he had learnt from childhood onwards'. The two men visited a number of communities in northern New South Wales in the 1890s, and 'when RHM got near a camp, he usually lit a small fire and sat at it until invited to join the group'.[62] The etiquette of approaching strangers was apparently so habitual for Mathews that he never thought to mention it in his diaries or letters. Hence the value of Enright's recollection which explains a great deal about his success as a fieldworker. Although he never wrote directly about how his Aboriginal collaborators were affected by the invasion of their country, a sense of devastation must have been commonplace. There are hints of this in a letter to Daisy Bates where Mathews responded to her failure to find totems in the area where she was working.

> I feel *certain* that there are totems. The blacks of now-a-days don't like to admit that they are rats, chicks, grubs &c for fear of the white larrikin's derision, and need to be approached cautiously and kindly on the subject.[63]

Here he reveals a compassionate awareness of the loss of self-esteem, the often daily sense of humiliation, that so many people endured. If we are to explain the troubling issue of why the old languages and kinship affiliations of eastern Australia did not survive the twentieth century, much of it is to do with the sense of shame that Aboriginal people were made to feel about themselves and their traditional way of life. This lack of self-worth was instrumental in discouraging parents from teaching languages and traditions to their children. Loss of language can be partially attributed to feelings of shame.[64] In many cases, including the descriptions of the Wailwan and Kurnu dialects in this volume, Mathews' work is among the few surviving fragments of these now unspoken tongues.

I get a sense of him as a cabalistic person. His extensive documentation of ceremonial life is an indication of how he was drawn towards matters of secrecy. A cryptic reference in his diary, 'Went to Lodge' at an address in Sydney, suggests he may have been involved in a Masonic order.[65] Although I can find no further evidence concerning this, it is worth mentioning that Mathews' eldest son Hamilton attained seniority as a freemason and that Masonic connections frequently pass from father to son.[66] That Aboriginal people were aware of—and interested in—the secret societies of whitefellows is occasionally revealed in anthropological records. Evidence can be found in the work of Janet Mathews, the wife of R. H.'s grandson Frank, who extended the family tradition of cross-cultural research when she became a sound recordist for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in the 1960s.[67] Janet was told by Howard Timbery, a descendant of Emma Timbery who tutored Mathews in Dharawal, that the anthropologist had been initiated.[68] Herbert Chapman, a Dharawal man, confirmed this story. He explicitly compared the initiatory Bunan ceremony of his culture with the Masonic rituals of white men.[69] The perceived correlation between Masonic and Aboriginal secrecy is seldom acknowledged, but it is interesting to note that as early as 1936 Elkin received a letter from a Melbourne freemason inquiring about the advisability of admitting 'a full-blooded aboriginal' who had applied to join the organisation.[70] Interestingly, Elkin recommended his acceptance: 'let us remember that no one can keep a secret or guard his membership of a secret society better than an Aborigine.'[71]

Mathews was certainly treated as an initiate. Enright once accompanied him on a visit to an Aboriginal camp near Port Stephens, north of Sydney. Whereas Mathews was 'at once received by them as one of the initiated,' Enright 'remained in the camp "with the women and children," as they jocularly expressed it '.[72] Mathews possessed his own bullroarers, perhaps the most secret and sacred ceremonial objects in eastern Australia.[73] He took one with him when documenting ceremonies, secretly showing it to the senior men, who 'treated me as one who had been initiated, and gave me all the further information I

wished to obtain'.[74] The wording of this statement, dated 1896, implies that he had not at that time been initiated himself. Perhaps it happened at a later date, or maybe he was given the status of an initiated man because he was recognised as a lawman and a figure of authority in his own society. The fact that he never wrote about his own initiation—if it occurred—could reflect his willingness to keep the secrets that were confided.

One of the most interesting hints of how he was regarded by Aboriginal people can be found in Mathews' own copy of A. W. Howitt's *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, the book that snubbed him so comprehensively. Hamilton Mathews lent this and other items from his father's library to Elkin who never returned them. They can now be found in the Elkin Collection of rare books at the University of Sydney's Fisher Library. In the margins of Howitt's book Mathews made pencilled comments: 'No, no!', 'Bunkum', 'Rot', 'Nonsense', 'Bosh', 'Not so!' and, *very* occasionally, 'Correct'.[75] As a point of principle, it seems, Mathews' spelling of Aboriginal words differed from Howitt's. But he could have only been referring to the same thing when he annotated a page on which Howitt described those persons who were known by the Kurnai of Gippsland as the *Birraark*. A pencilled note states: 'Birrarak is the name given to me by the natives.'[76]

The lack of self-reflection in Mathews' records is such that I am reliant on his arch-enemy's description to convey an understanding of what this name might have meant to the people who bestowed it. Howitt claimed that the Birraark

> combined the functions of the seer, the spirit-medium, and the bard, for he foretold future events, he brought the ghosts to the camp of his people at night, and he composed the songs and dances which enlivened their social meetings. He was a harmless being, who devoted himself to performances which very strikingly resembled those of the civilised 'mediums.' A man was supposed to become a *Birraark* by being initiated by *Mrarts* or ghosts, when they met him hunting in the bush; but, that they might have power over him, he must at the time be wearing a *Gumbart*, that is, one of those bone pegs which the Australian aborigine wears thrust through the septum of his nose. By this they held him and conveyed him through the clouds.[77]

From Howitt's description it is clear that Birraarks were highly esteemed and widely known. He names eight who were living in Gippsland when whites arrived in 1842, although none had survived by the time he started his ethnographic research in the 1870s. Several individual Birraarks were remembered by Howitt's informants who related numerous observations, all of which enliven an understanding of how Mathews' documentary project might have been construed in eastern Victoria and the culturally connected communities of southern New South Wales. As a medium between the living and the dead,

a Birraark could travel from one realm to the other at will. He conveyed messages and information about the movements of friends or enemies who had died and he could also bring material benefits, the makings of a feast, as happened, for example, when 'the *Mrarts* informed them of a whale stranded on the shore'. Not only was the Birraark a leader of ceremonial activities during large inter-communal gatherings, but through his mediation with ghosts he brought songs and dances into the world of the living.[78] Here is rare and compelling evidence of how Mathews was regarded in an Aboriginal community. As a person who *moved between worlds* he could facilitate the transmission of understandings. In that intermediary capacity he evidently encouraged a two-way traffic in ways of speaking, singing and moving.

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So how did a Parramatta-based surveyor come to acquire the sobriquet Birrarak in Aboriginal communities? Here we must consider the subject that Mathews was least prolific in documenting: himself. In trying to get a sense of him, I have drawn from his own writings and papers, and also from the biographical manuscript, already cited. This invaluable document is in the handwriting of R. H.'s son William Mathews (1883-1967), a keen genealogist and to some extent the keeper of the family lore. Frequent references to 'we' and 'our father' suggest that some of his siblings could also have contributed to this account which was based on discussions with R. H. in his later years. The National Library of Australia acquired this document from Mathews' descendants in 2003.[79]

Robert Hamilton Mathews was born in 1841 at Narellan, now a south-western suburb of Sydney. The previous year his protestant parents had arrived from Ulster. Most of his childhood was spent on a pastoral property at Breadalbane near the town of Goulburn in New South Wales. Mathews had no formal schooling; his education, and that of his siblings, was entrusted to a private tutor, a so-called 'remittance man' and an alcoholic, who regularly absconded when payments arrived from England. As William Mathews' memoir quaintly puts it, the children's father 'came to the conclusion that the harm likely to be done by the tutor's unworthy example outweighed the value of his teaching, and so he reluctantly felt obliged to dispense with his services'. From that time Mathews senior (also a William), oversaw their education.[80] He had attended Foyle College, a well known school in Derry, and was 'a sound classical scholar'.[81] Signs of classical learning are evident in Mathews' manuscripts and publications. He knew the basics of Latin, as would be expected at the time, and seems to have modelled his descriptions of Aboriginal grammar on the primers used by him or his children.[82] For most of his life Mathews was a regular churchgoer, attending Presbyterian and sometimes other services. He knew his Bible, regarding it, in the words of his son, as 'a collection of the folk tales of an eastern

people'. He saw clear analogies between this folklore and the Aboriginal mythology he later documented.[83]

That he was Australian-born is fundamental to understanding Mathews. In this respect he differed from Spencer, Howitt, Fison, Mathew, Bates and Roth—in fact all his anthropological contemporaries. Aboriginal people were not exotic to Mathews in the way they were to more recent immigrants. He once stated that 'black children were among my earliest playmates,' revealing that Aboriginal people lived near, or were employed on, the property at Breadalbane.[84] According to his own documentation of tribal boundaries, this would make them Gundungurra or perhaps Ngunawal people, unless (as sometimes happened) they had shifted from more distant territory. In 1854, then 13 years old, Mathews was greatly intrigued by the activities of John F. Mann, a surveyor then working on the Great Southern Road which passed near the family homestead. Mathews spent time in the surveyor's camp, and Mann explained his work in detail. Captivated, the boy made his own mock instruments and with a surveyor's chain made of bark he played at measuring the country with an Aboriginal friend.[85]

As a young man R. H. Mathews was involved in various pastoral activities. In 1860 he joined a droving party taking sheep from New England to the Moonie River in Queensland where he remained until 1862. The Moonie is an upper branch of the Barwon River, a locale often mentioned in the later anthropological writings. On returning, he worked on his father's property and selected land nearby. But his childhood interest in surveying never diminished. He eventually received on-the-job training with a railway surveyor named Kennedy, passing his final exams in 1870. Then followed ten hard years doing government and private surveys. He married Mary Bartlett of Wallah in 1872. He had met her while surveying in the Maitland district. Of their seven children, the ornithologist Gregory M. Mathews (1876-1949) is the best known. An autodidact like his father, he wrote and published the 7,000-page *Birds of Australia* (1910-27), a work intended to outdo Gould. Hamilton B. Mathews (1873-1959) (the freemason) was also distinguished. He joined his father's profession and attained high office, serving as surveyor-general of New South Wales.

The experience of working on the land and dealing with the everyday detail of topography was clearly fundamental to Mathews becoming an anthropologist. He and his team travelled with bullocks and wagons, living out bush for weeks at a time. Inevitably, they encountered signs of Aboriginal occupation, sometimes occupying the ancient camping grounds. Meetings with Aboriginal people would have been unavoidable and he once stated that some found employment in his surveying business.[86] Although, by this time, the Aboriginal people of southeast Australia were dispossessed of their territory, many maintained connections with country by working for settlers or living as 'fringe dwellers' on tribal grounds.

The great bulk of Mathews' survey work occurred in central and northern New South Wales. He was first stationed at Deepwater in New England from 1872. Two years later he moved to Goondiwindi on the Queensland border. Then in 1876 he moved to Biamble near the small town of Merrygoen on the upper Castlereagh River where he bought land. A notebook in Mathews' hand, recently found among family papers, gives a job-by-job inventory of his work for the decade from 1874. It shows that during the Merrygoen period he worked extensively on the Moree Plains in areas around Warrumbungle and Wellington, ancestral territory of the Kamilaroi people, who are discussed extensively in his anthropological writings. The notebook indicates that many leading pastoralists were among Mathews' clients, including the Rouse, White and Cox families.[87] In 1880 the Mathews family moved again, this time to the town of Singleton in the Hunter Valley, 190 km north of Sydney. Gregory Mathews remembered the move.

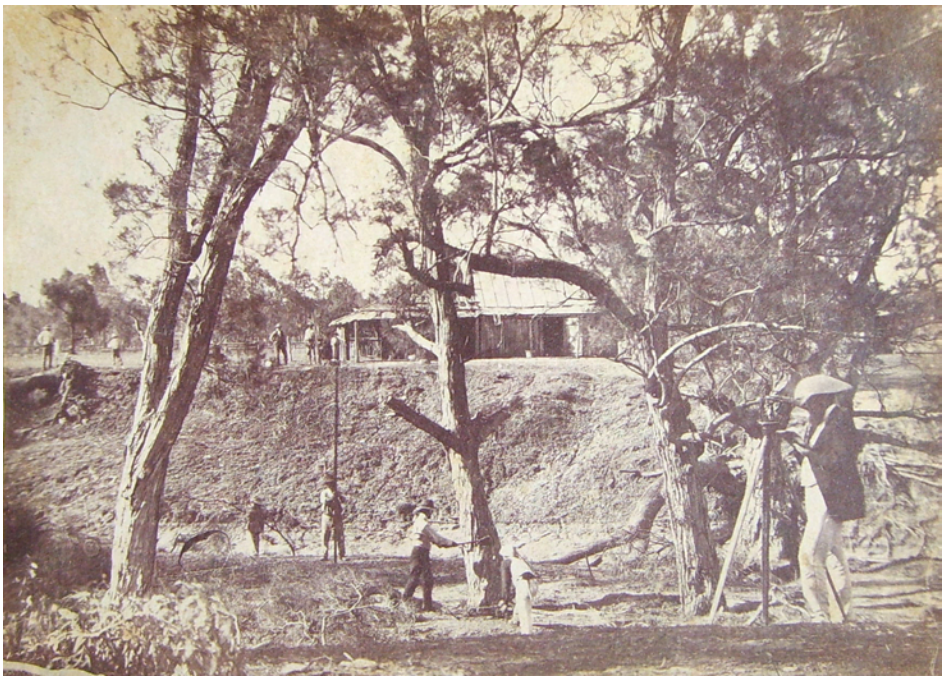
> It was a long overland journey and, young as I was, I can remember the gaping crowds that stared at our cavalcade as we passed through the various settlements along the road—my father driving the big buggy with four horses, and all the other vehicles following. Except for an occasional bush inn, we camped out in the open at night …[88]

His experience as a surveyor familiarised Mathews with the land and its inhabitants—and made him wealthy. Both were integral to his anthropological labour. As Gregory described it, his father had, by the age of 40, amassed 'a competence and could call himself an independent gentleman'.[89] How he achieved this within the period of just ten years was explained by William Mathews:

> Perceiving that a considerable income could be earned by an energetic man who arranged his work in such a way as to avoid any serious loss of time while moving from place to place, Robert decided to apply for a district where he would not only be given all the Government work but would have the right to engage in private practice.[90]

In his business activities, Mathews displayed the same industriousness that he later applied to anthropology. In one month in 1873 he submitted to the surveyor-general plans for 591 portions of land, a departmental record.[91] The notebook held by the family indicates the vast range of work performed: selecting properties; laying out schoolyards, churches and cemeteries; preparing sites for building. He laid out the township of Mungindi in northern New South Wales. Speculation occurred constantly during Mathews' surveying years; land was bought and sold according fluctuations of the market and the season. There was constant demand for his services. His daily routine was well adapted for his later ethnographic fieldwork. He led his team by day, attended to calculations and

other paperwork by night. The rewards were substantial. Government work alone provided him with average returns of more than £2,000 a year in the period 1873-79.[92] To set that in context, a professor at the University of Sydney was paid handsomely at £900. Little wonder that Mathews was in a position to invest substantial sums. He lent £2,000 in cash to a building society in 1880;[93] acquired an interest in a property called Goorangula, 24 miles north of Singleton; he owned another farm closer to the town called Springwood.[94] Diarised complaints about recalcitrant tenants reveal other investments in property.[95] As he became wealthier, however, his interest in surveying lessened. In February 1882 he resigned as district surveyor for Singleton and sold his horses and equipment. The time had come to reap the rewards of success, and in May that year he and Mary set sail for San Francisco on the *City of New York*. By this time they had three girls and two boys, all of whom were left in the care of a nanny and a governess. A budget of £1,500 was allocated for the trip.[96] This was £300 more than Mathews later paid in cash for the family's house in Parramatta.[97]



A day in the life of a colonial surveyor—R. H. Mathews and theodolite, together with members of his team. This unique photograph from the family album was probably taken in the 1870s or early 1880s when his surveying business was at its peak. By permission of Jane Mathews.

Robert and Mary's round-the-world trip, which lasted from May 1882 until March 1883, is a matter of particular interest in thinking about his overseas publishing and correspondence. His diary for the period indicates that he kept a separate journal during the period abroad, but it has not survived.[98] William Mathews provides detail of the early part of their travels. They stopped in New

Zealand and Honolulu en route to California where they visited Yosemite Valley and other attractions, before heading for Salt Lake City, where Mary 'derived a good deal of entertainment watching Robert and others—particularly a very fat man—bathing in the dense water of the Lake … and next day they attended service in the Mormon Tabernacle'.[99] Sadly, the greater part of William's account of the tour is also missing. He takes us as far as Chicago. From there the records are fragmentary. A letter of credit reveals that they drew funds in New York from where, presumably, they sailed for England. The next withdrawal was dated 12 October 1882 from the Midland Grand Hotel, London. Later that month they drew £119, a substantial sum, which probably funded a tour of the Continent. (Mathews' obituary claims that he travelled in America, Europe and Africa.)[100] The financial records show that they visited Edinburgh and Inverness in the early days of 1883. On return to London they booked their passage back to Australia via the Suez Canal.[101] Records of the trip are slight, but it must have been formative in many ways. Mathews' profession had demanded extended absence from his family. This was the longest period that he and his wife had spent together. Even less is known of Mary than Robert. How did she cope with a husband always fixated, by his profession and then his scholarship? Gregory writes of her briefly but romantically. She was a 'very beautiful woman,' he says, 'the belle of the district' as a girl. He considered his parents 'a splendidly matched couple,' but beyond that he says almost nothing about his mother. The voyage home from Europe could not have been easy for Mary. Just a few weeks after they returned in March 1883, she gave birth to William Mathews. Their youngest child, Robert, followed in 1886.

There is nothing to suggest that Mathews visited the anthropological societies of Vienna, Paris, Washington or London—all future publishers of his work—during the period abroad. His anthropological interests remained inchoate. Presumably he and Mary visited the attractions favoured by prosperous Victorians. They visited galleries, saw the sights. A later article mentions a boomerang exhibited in the British Museum.[102] Although he was not active in anthropology during this period, it is significant that he had firsthand, if only brief, acquaintance with Britain, Europe and the United States, the destinations for his anthropological writings and correspondence. His transmission of data from the Australian backblocks to the great international centres—places he had read about and briefly encountered—expresses his position on the edge of the empire. As someone personally known in Aboriginal communities, he picked his way around the insights, assumptions and prejudices of 'armchair anthropologists' in Europe. His attitude to these theorists is sometimes expressed in the agitated marginalia that crowd his copies of Lang and the British kinship scholar, N. W. Thomas. Yet Mathews also craved validation from such authorities, as can be seen in his letters to Hartland.

> I am very anxious to know whether my views have any points of value in them, or whether I am thought by ethnologists to be altogether wrong. If I am entirely in error I do not wish to publish any further particulars until I see the views of my critics and gain enlightenment from them. On the other hand, if my views are upheld by competent authority, it will give me courage to go on in the work I am engaged in.[103]

The time in Europe raises the question of Mathews' multilingual ability. The project of retranslation establishes conclusively that Mathews did not write in French or German. With the French publications this is immediately apparent. A Germanically-named Oscar Schmidt is credited with translating six of the nine French articles. No German translators are acknowledged, but they certainly existed as we know from footnotes added by and attributed to these anonymous scholars. Mathews certainly knew some German and by his own account more French. A letter to Mary dated 1872 states: 'I know a little of French and German myself, but have not had sufficient practice to engage in much conversation, although I can read French books pretty well.'[104] Instruction in these languages might have come from his father or the wayward tutor. He could have had private lessons, studied at a school of arts, or taught himself with dictionaries and primers. That his French was not strong is revealed in his surviving correspondence with Oscar Schmidt and another more celebrated Parisian, the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep. Both wrote to him in English and van Gennep suggested that his article 'Does Exogamy Exist in Australian Tribes?' be published in that language, four tongues being admissible in his journal *Revue d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie*.[105] Mathews' competence in German is indicated by the correspondence with the Frankfurt-based Baron Moritz von Leonhardi, editor and supporter of Carl Strehlow (see 'Correspondence', this volume). Each wrote to the other in his own language.

Apart from his time in Europe, Mathews had limited opportunities for practising French and German. But this did not lessen his interest in the multilingual dimension. While it was certainly a compliment that Europeans regarded his work as worthy of translation, it opens important issues, exemplified by his correspondence with the remarkable van Gennep who drew upon the initiation rituals described by Mathews and other Australian anthropologists in his seminal book, *Les rites de passage* (*The Rites of Passage*) (1908). Van Gennep was born in Germany to a Dutch father and a French mother. He lived most of his life in France, spoke the major European languages, studied Egyptian culture and was fluent in Arabic.[106] It is revealing that Mathews, who was so heavily spurned by British anthropologists, should find a sympathetic ear in the person of van Gennep and, more generally, a readership in Europe. In charting the histories of empire, it is convenient—and indeed sometimes appropriate—to lump Britons and Continentals together under the descriptor 'Europeans'.

However the linguistic dexterity of a scholar such as van Gennep is a reminder of differences *within* Europe and *between* Great Britain and its neighbours across the Channel. Europe, as a linguistically crowded place, suggests certain parallels with the Aboriginal world in which Mathews worked. Recall him as a young surveyor struggling with the limits of his English notation. His interest in recording the sound of Aboriginal tongues epitomises the difference between him and most of his contemporaries in colonial Australia. In a settler society, dominated by British values, it was normal to be monolingual. To be interested in Aboriginal language was doubly aberrant, as can be seen in a letter from an irate farmer whom Mathews petitioned for assistance in grammatical inquiry.

> I certainly have not time to spare to sit in office with a blackfellow or gin to talk patiently with him or her … If you can send a few inches of rain I might then have time to go into the question of niggers' grammar but under present conditions am not interested.[107]

Non-Aboriginal Australians now have some idea of the linguistic diversity that once prevailed. Prior to colonisation there were some 250 languages. This diversity was not recognised in colonial times, and since then more than two-thirds of the languages have become extinct or have only a few elderly speakers. The very fact that I can cite such a statistic is due to the foundational work of Mathews and others like him.[108] For decades, white people derided Aboriginal speech as 'black mumbo jumbo'. Managers of Aboriginal institutions discouraged the use of Indigenous language, partly because it threatened their own authority. Frequently the word *dialect* was improperly applied to discrete languages, a practice so widespread that many Aboriginal people themselves adopted the term. In Aboriginal circles, loss of language is often mentioned in the same breath as loss of land—a logical connection. Languages are associated with particular territories; land and language are integral to one's sense of being. When traditional languages are lost, the colonised must express themselves in the words of their colonisers and for the most part, their world becomes monolingual.[109]

One of the great revelations of Mathews' work is the degree of differentiation within Aboriginal Australia. He was interested in the languages of various regions, and other distinguishing cultural traits. Mathews came to realise that Aboriginal people were often proficient in negotiating these differences. Many lived outside their traditional territory—by choice or necessity. In Mathews' descriptions of ceremonial life and in his more limited discussion of trade, he showed how diverse communities congregated for ritual and celebration. This can be seen, for example, in 'The Mŭltyerra Initiation Ceremony' (this volume), described by Kurnu people on the Darling River in the vicinity of Bourke. The organisers of the ceremony dispatched messengers to summon the surrounding tribes.

> The bearers of the message on approaching the boundaries of the camp of the foreign tribe sat down in view of the dwellings of the single men and made friendly signs. Some of the old men then walked over to them and led them to the special meeting place of the initiated men where they were brought before all the chiefs and warriors.[110]

Similar deputations are described scores of times in the Mathews opus. Frequently, as occurred with the Bunan ceremony of the Shoalhaven district, the messengers followed a particular route, advising each tribe along the way of the impending ceremony. The most distant tribe would join the messengers immediately, and then the next tribe, and the next, so the mass of people grew continually throughout the homeward journey.[111] The gatherings were celebratory occasions. Much partying and revelry occurred as the mobs assembled. The hosts occupied the centre of the campground, while each group of visitors was 'situated in the direction of the region from where it has come', as the anthropologist-surveyor never failed to point out.[112] It is not always clear what Mathews meant when referring to a 'tribe'. Sometimes, as suggested here, it refers to localised groups that might comprise several families. At other times 'tribe' referred to an entire language group, a large mass of people. While the ceremonies described by Mathews were usually associated with particular language groups (Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri, Muruwari, etc), there are strong indications that the presence of 'foreigners' was a feature of these gatherings. In a description of the initiation ceremony of the Darkinung people (a relatively small language group north of Sydney), Mathews was at pains to point out that the ritual was influenced by their more populous Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri neighbours.[113] Given that the rituals were secret-sacred, 'influence' would only be possible if visitors were admitted. The ceremonies as Mathews described them showed remarkable consistency across much of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. This in itself is evidence of their inter-communal quality. Mathews' fastidiousness in documenting the social and co-operative aspects of Aboriginal life forms a marked contrast to the emphasis on tribal enmity that saturates so many observations of the colonial period.

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A decade passed from Mathews' return from Europe in 1883 until the issue of his first publication in anthropology. In many ways it was an unsettled period, a time of restlessness and searching. He did some part-time surveying and explored other interests, intellectual and religious. While he usually attended a Presbyterian service each Sunday morning, he now strayed in his evening worship, sometimes to the Wesleyans and even the Catholics. Often he took the train to Newcastle and then a steamer to Sydney, where he saw to business and attended meetings of the Royal Society of New South Wales. Since 1875 he had been a member of this small but influential scientific body, modelled on (though

independent of) its London namesake. But until the 1880s he had been a fairly passive member. Now that he had the opportunity to attend meetings, he could hear presentations by members and participate directly in the scientific culture of the colony. The society encouraged research into all branches of science including archaeology and ethnology (as anthropology was often known). While inquiry into matters Aboriginal was hardly a major concern, it did appear in the occasional paper, as Mathews noted in 1885 when he heard a presentation 'by Rev. McPherson on Implements of the Australian Aborigines'.[114] After he emerged as an anthropologist, the Royal Society of New South Wales became enormously important to him. This was the chief forum for presenting and publishing his research. It also provided members with access to its library containing periodicals from around the world. There Mathews discovered the major journals for which he wrote.[115]

Ness House, Singleton, NSW. The Mathews family lived in the Hunter Valley township from 1880 until 1888, when they moved to Parramatta. The girl in the foreground is Mary 'May' Mathews, the fifth of Robert and Mary's children. Standing is the family nurse, Tilly, and their 'lady help', Miss Agnes Beck. By permission of Jane Mathews.

During this period Mathews often served on the magistrate's bench. Salaried or 'stipendiary' magistrates were uncommon throughout the colonial period. Untrained Justices of the Peace presided over local courts, and this gave the office 'JP' considerable cachet. It is a mark of Mathews' wealth and gentlemanly standing. He was first made a Justice of the Peace by the Queensland government in 1875; and by New South Wales after he returned from Europe in 1883. In his frequent travels during this 1880s, he often served at local or police courts in the towns he visited. It brought some income, for he received a sitting fee for his service. As a magistrate he was also entitled to preside over coronial inquiries, and in 1886 he was appointed District Coroner of Singleton. The court experience

also played a role in his anthropological career, for his status as JP made him known among policemen, some of whom assisted him greatly as correspondents. It also marked his debut as an author. He became sufficiently versed in legal practice to publish *Handbook to Magisterial Inquiries in New South Wales* (1888), a how-to manual for gentlemen new to the bench.

Mathews' court work occurred alongside various business dealings, one of which had unfortunate repercussions. In June 1884 his diary mentions that while in Sydney 'in search of employment' he formed an arrangement with a man named McCulloch to go to Silverton for £150 'to look at land for mining purposes'.[116] Silverton, near Broken Hill in southwest New South Wales, had been founded as a silver town just five years earlier. To get there required a lengthy journey. He travelled by train to Melbourne, steamer to Adelaide and then took the train to the railhead at Terowie, some 200 km north of the South Australian capital. The final leg he did by coach. While in Silverton he pegged out claims for McCulloch and officiated at various court proceedings. Then, on 8 August,

> Got telegram from Dr Read telling me my dear little daughter Australie was dead, – died on 3rd instant and was to be buried on the 5th. She died from inflammation of the brain brought on by knocking her head accidentally against a door on the 15th July.[117]

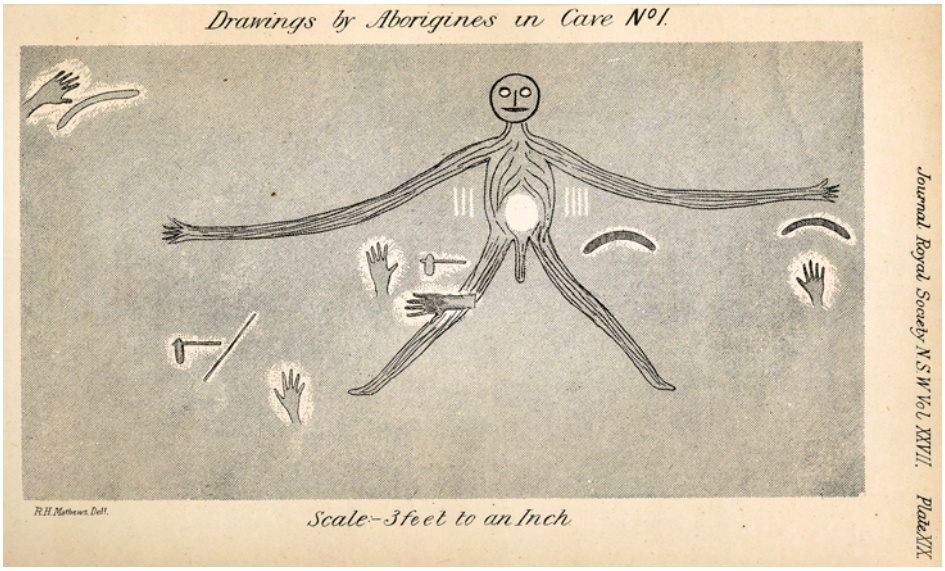
In the emotionally sparse terrain of Mathews' diary this entry stabs deeply. They are perhaps the most expressive words he recorded. Despite being so affected by the news, he could not return to Mary and the children. He had come down with measles a few weeks earlier, and for obvious reasons he was not prepared to take the risk of infecting the rest of the family.[118] Instead, he remained in Silverton for a further three months. In that time he surveyed a small township and continued to officiate at the police court where a large and thirsty population of miners was creating a steady stream of business. Not until late November did Mathews begin the return trip. He stopped at Kingston in South Australia where he was sworn in as a magistrate for that colony. He stopped again, with cousins in Ballarat. When reunited with the family at Singleton, his diary records various activities with the children—days in Sydney; a cruise up the Hawkesbury. The death of five-year-old Australie must have been bitter blow to them all.

Robert and Mary's fourth child, Australie Matilda, was five years old when she died from a head injury. This is how she was memorialised in the family album. By permission of Jane Mathews.

Great difficulties resulted from his business dealings with Andrew Hardie McCulloch, who became an ogre in the family history. He was a solicitor, property developer, pastoralist and, for 11 years from 1878, a member of parliament. He was at the centre of many public controversies, including that surrounding the development of the Blackfriars Estate in the Sydney suburb of Chippendale, a sub-division that flaunted the town-planning laws of the day.[119] McCulloch was also the reluctant father-in-law of Dowell O'Reilly, the poet, fiction writer, and left-leaning MP—and thus the grandfather of the novelist Eleanor Dark.[120] His business dealings with Mathews involved a mining syndicate and a speculative land company which Mathews managed. He also advanced McCulloch considerable sums of money. These ventures crashed in the late 1880s and McCulloch was declared bankrupt. According to William Mathews, R. H.'s losses amounted to approximately £30,000.[121]

It is an indicator of Mathews' wealth that he was not ruined by this experience. He could still afford to send his children to elite schools. Indeed they moved from Singleton to Parramatta in 1888 so the boys could attend The King's School, the elite military-style academy frequented by many scions of the pastoral dynasties. Mathews avoided future investments to do with mining and as a consequence he declined an invitation to acquire for £105 a one-fourteenth share in the mine that became Broken Hill Propriety Company (BHP). Had he done so, he would soon have been numbered among the wealthiest men in the country.[122] Instead, he returned to his former occupation, fleshing out his surviving investments with survey work. His monetary losses proved to be anthropology's gain.

It was a routine survey, commissioned by a farmer named Benjamin Richards, that took Mathews and his son Hamilton to their old stamping ground in the Hunter Valley in 1892. Richards owned land at the hamlet of Milbrodale, about 20 kilometres south of Singleton. They were going about their business when someone on the farm told them 'of the existence of a rather striking aboriginal painting of a human figure in a cave in the vicinity'.[123] In this way Mathews' attention was drawn to one of the great Aboriginal art sites of eastern Australia, a representation of the creation hero or 'great spirit' known as Baiame. It is not altogether surprising that Mathews, on seeing this huge, painted image, was inspired 'to make an accurate copy of it '.[124] Few observers would be unaffected by the painting in that sandstone shelter. Baiame is stunningly depicted in red and white ochre. His eyes are large and almost luminous, and his arms are extraordinary. They are greatly exaggerated in proportion to the rest of him, extending laterally from the torso, reaching across the wall of the cave, so as to measure five metres from fingertip to fingertip.



A cave painting of a giant figure, identified by R. H. Mathews as the creation hero, Baiame, prompted his first anthropological publication in 1893. Mathews and his son Hamilton visited the site at Milbrodale in the Hunter Valley, NSW, during a routine surveying job. Reproduced from 'Rock Paintings by the Aborigines in Caves on Bulgar Creek, near Singleton' (1893). By permission of the National Library of Australia.

Mathews' observations of the Baiame painting and some other less dramatic art sites in the area became the basis for a short presentation, delivered to the Royal Society of New South Wales in 1893. It was his first paper in 17 years of membership. While revealing some residual knowledge of Aboriginal customs, this first ethnological publication is quite prosaic. Mathews states unashamedly that he has confined himself 'as much as possible to descriptions only of these drawings, and have not attempted to connect them with the myths and superstitions of the Australian aborigines'. With the benefit of hindsight there is a certain humour in his remark that he will leave these more detailed questions 'for those better qualified to follow them than I am, or have more time at their disposal'.[125] Soon he was feverishly visiting rock art sites within and beyond Sydney, gathering information for the Royal Society's essay prize, which had as its topic for 1894 the rock art of the Australian Aborigines. He won the prize, a bronze medal and a cheque for £25—perhaps the one time he made money from anthropology. With the essay prize in the bag, the man with little time at his disposal soon discovered how little time he had for anything else.[126] He turned 52 the year that first article went to press. By the time of his death 25 years later he had clocked up 2,200 pages of published work. Starting with rock art, he turned his attention to ceremonies, kinship, mythology, material culture, and more. He came to realise that his entire former life had prepared him for this particular vocation. The rush was on.

*

Interpreting the produce of that 25-year period is no simple matter. While we turn to Mathews for his portrayals of Aboriginal life, we must read them with caution. Like any documentary project his writings are only a partial representation. The problem they pose is reflected in the scenario with which I started: Mathews as a young surveyor recording language at Narran Lakes, unable to 'find letters in our language to express the proper sounds'. Such perplexity is more than a hindrance to ethnographic documentation; *it is integral to its meaning*, as Franz Boas, the German-American anthropologist, argued in a seminal essay titled 'On Alternating Sounds', published in 1889. Analysing the very problem Mathews experienced, Boas quoted from his own notebook to show how he had failed to differentiate between phonetic variants that were recognised as discrete sounds in the ears of his Eskimo instructors. He recommended study of the philologist's notebook as a key to the linguistic and cultural background of its author who 'apperceives the unknown sounds by the means of the sounds of his own language'.[127] This nascent awareness of cultural relativity had profound ramifications. As the historian of anthropology George Stocking glosses its eventual impact, Boas began to question 'whether the cultural practices of savages were to be treated as imperfect approximations of those of European civilization, or rather as quite differently constituted cultural categorizations that were at best problematically commensurable to a Eurocentric evolutionary standard'.[128]

This is to say that Mathews' writings can feed into different forms of cultural and historical inquiry. They inform localised Aboriginal histories; they open up debates about anthropology as a discipline; and they colour understandings of colonisation and the spread of modernity. It is the first of these that gives Mathews the bulk of his current readership. He provides information on languages and traditions that have been modified, and in some cases lost, in the period since he recorded them. As suggested above, we must always read him cautiously. Often it is beneficial to consult his correspondence or notebooks in order to identify the locations where he worked or the individuals with whom he spoke. Where possible, his work should be evaluated in the light of other evidence. To say this is not to downplay his integrity as an ethnographer, as has often happened. Mud flung by Spencer and others stuck and hardened, and it lasted for generations. Unfortunately for his reputation, many of the anthropologists who admired Mathews did not say so publicly, perhaps in an effort to differentiate their newly professionalised discipline from the world of their amateur forebears. Elkin claimed that Radcliffe-Brown's use of Mathews bordered on plagiarism, and it is likely that others have been similarly grudging in their attribution.[129] Elkin's own writings on Mathews are the most sustained homage from within the profession. Many others expressed their admiration privately. Norman Tindale, who often cited Mathews when mapping Australia's

tribal boundaries, came to think of him as 'our greatest recorder of primary anthropological data'.[130] W. E. H. Stanner expressed delight at Elkin's work on Mathews. 'It is something I had always hoped to do myself'.[131] These comments by leading authorities might temper the arguments of critics such as Diane Barwick who claimed (without substantiation) that Mathews was a plagiarist and a fraud.[132] Although he could exaggerate the extent of his personal inquiries, and sometimes suppressed the names of correspondents, I can find nothing to suggest that he invented or pirated data. As he said to Hartland in 1907, 'I have a large mass of information regarding all the states which has not yet been published anywhere'.[133] He suggested publishing a book on mythology and another on languages. He could have proposed a substantial tome on ceremonial life. As we now know from his unpublished papers, Mathews had no need to pillage from other writers, and given the loathing between him and Howitt it is hard to believe that either could have plagiarised from the other.

While Mathews has, for some time now, been cited as a standard reference in community histories, native title claims, cultural heritage projects and attempts to revitalise Indigenous language, there are strong arguments why the cross-cultural project of his formative period should be read more broadly, rooted as it is in the history of modernity and empire. The historian Patrick Wolfe presents a more extreme version of this argument, proposing that anthropological theory of this period should be read *solely* for its insights into the colonial imaginary. Anthropology, he says, 'begins to emerge as a kind of soliloquy—as Western discourse talking to itself'.[134] To me this argument is not ultimately sustainable, principally because it replicates the colonial paradigm that it criticises. Anthropology can only be regarded as a soliloquy if it ignores the input, actions and agendas of colonised people, many of whom find the work of Mathews and other researchers sufficiently accessible and convincing to make use of it in their own political and cultural projects. Still, Wolfe's position is instructive in that it points to the value of intercultural investigation in elucidating narratives of nation and empire. As Barry Hill points out in his study of T. G. H. Strehlow, the few histories of anthropology we have in Australia 'have not fully attempted to put the individual lives of anthropologists into the field of cultural history'.[135] Reading Mathews has convinced me that all its layers of significance must be recognised and interpreted with reference to one another. As much as they evoke the Aboriginal world that so intrigued him, they are expressions of his own culture and, more obliquely, expressions of himself. Like the moraine that marks the passage of a long-thawed glacier, these writings chart a personal quest, an intellectual journey, as much as they evoke the wider milieu. Mathews has left us a swarthy monument, as difficult to come to grips with—and almost as intriguing—as the land he measured for a living.

ENDNOTES

[1] Mathews to Bartlett, 17 March 1872, R. H. Mathews Papers, National Library of Australia (henceforth NLA) MS 8006/7/8.

[2] RHM 1903, 'Das Kumbainggeri, eine Eingeborenensprache von Neu-Süd-Wales', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 33, p. 321. Trans. Christine Winter.

[3] This experience was related in an interview with Frank Mathews, 1971, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (henceforth AIATSIS) Audio Archive, A1954.

[4] 'Late Mr. R. H. Mathews', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1918, p. 8.

[5] RHM 1910, 'Some Articles used in Burial and other Rites by the Australian Aborigines', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 24.

[6] Ibid, and RHM 1903, 'The Aboriginal Fisheries at Brewarrina', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 37.

[7] RHM 1904, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 38, p. 209.

[8] RHM 1906, 'Bemerkungen über die Eingebornen Australiens', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 36. Reproduced this volume.

[9] RHM 1904, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria', p. 209.

[10] RHM 1904-5, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Queensland', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 20, p. 74.

[11] Spencer, Baldwin 1921, 'Blood and Shade Divisions of Australian Tribes', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, vol. 34, no. 1, p. 2.

[12] RHM 1906, 'Notes on Some Native Tribes of Australia', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 40, p. 99.

[13] Spencer, Baldwin 1904, 'Totemism in Australia', *Report of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*, vol. 10, p. 380 (note).

[14] Lang to Hartland, 19 October [year not stated], Letters to E. S. Hartland, National Library of Wales (henceforth NLW) MS 16889C.

[15] Spencer to Howitt, 15 August 1907, A. W. Howitt Papers, State Library of Victoria (henceforth SLV) MS 9356/Box 1049/7(b). The content of the letter clearly indicates that Spencer was referring to RHM and not Rev John Mathew, another anthropological contemporary.

[16] One letter from their correspondence survives: Mathews to Spencer, 24 September 1896, Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer Papers, Mitchell Library (henceforth ML) MSS 29/9.

[17] RHM 1896, 'The Burbung of the New England Tribes, New South Wales', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, vol. 9 (new series), 1896 and RHM 1896, 'The Bora of the Kamilaroi Tribes', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, vol. 9 (new series).

[18] RHM 1896, 'The Būrbŭng of the Wiradthuri Tribes', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 25, p. 313.

[19] Mathews to Hartland, 10 August 1907, Letters to E. S. Hartland, NLW MS 16889C. Reproduced this volume.

[20] Mathews to Hartland, 9 April 1907, Letters to E. S. Hartland, NLW MS 16889C. Reproduced this volume.

[21] Howitt and his collaborator Lorimer Fison were encouraged and supported by Morgan. See Stern, Bernard J. (ed.) 1930, 'Selections from the Letters of Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt to Lewis Henry Morgan', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 32 (new series).

[22] RHM 1898, 'Divisions of Queensland Aborigines', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 37, p. 330.

[23] Howitt, A. W. 1996, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra [1st pub. 1904], pp. 43-4.

[24] Mathew to Mathews, 11 December 1907, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/2/11.

[25] Mathew to Mathews, 11 February 1909, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/2/11.

[26] See Jones, John, 'Federation and the Dalungbara', viewed 30 March 2007. <http://brumbywatchaustralia.com/WelcomeFraser06.htm>

[27] Aldridge to Mathews, 10 September 1898, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/2/6.

[28] The extent of this reliance is becoming more apparent with the publication of several volumes of anthropological correspondence. See, for example, Mulvaney, John, Morphy, Howard, and Petch, Alison (eds) 2001, *My Dear Spencer: The Letters of F. J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer*, Hyland House, Melbourne [1st pub. 1997] and Mulvaney, John, Morphy, Howard, and Petch, Alison (eds) 2000, *From the Frontier: Outback Letters to Baldwin Spencer*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

[29] Miller to Howitt, 13 August 1907, A. W. Howitt Papers, SLV MSS 9356/Box 1049/7(a).

[30] Spencer to Howitt, 15 August 1907.

[31] RHM 1904-5, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Queensland', p. 74.

[32] RHM 1907, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria [Letter to the Editor]', *Nature*, vol. 76, no. 1958.

[33] Howitt, A. W. 1907 'Literature relating to Australian Aborigines [Letter to the editor]', *Nature*, vol. 77, no. 1987, p. 81.

[34] Howitt, A. W. 1908, 'The Native Tribes of Southeast Australia', *American Antiquarian*, vol. 30, and RHM 1909, 'Sociology of some Australian Tribes', *American Antiquarian*, vol. 31.

[35] Howitt, A. W. 1908, 'A Message to Anthropologists', *Revue des Études Ethnographiques et Sociologiques*, vol. 1.

[36] See Thomas, Martin 2005, 'Looking for Mr Mathews: Uncovering the traces of an early Australian anthropologist', *Meanjin*, vol. 64, no. 3.

[37] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/7/8.

[38] Interview with Frank Mathews, 1971.

[39] Mathews to Strehlow, 14 November 1905, Strehlow Research Centre Manuscripts, Alice Springs.

[40] Diary 1893-1907, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/1/2.

[41] Spencer to Frazer, 13 June 1903, Sir Baldwin Spencer Manuscripts, Pitt Rivers Museum (henceforth PRM) MSS Box 5/Frazer 51.

[42] Frazer to Spencer, 19 April 1908, Sir Baldwin Spencer Manuscripts, PRM MS Box 5/Frazer 70.

[43] Lang, Andrew 1903, *Social Origins*, Longmans, Green, and Co, London, p. 38.

[44] Lang to Hartland, 19 October [year not stated].

[45] The paper referred to by Roth is in fact co-authored. See RHM and Everitt, M. M. 1900, 'The Organisation, Language and Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of the South-East Coast of N. S. Wales', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 34. Records of the Royal Society of New South Wales indicate that the two were still friendly in April 1901 when Mathews presented two papers on Everitt's behalf. This was necessary because women were not admitted as members. See Records of Council Meetings, Royal Society of New South Wales Minutes 1894-1903, 13 March and 24 April 1901.

[46] Roth to Spencer, 8 February 1903, Sir Baldwin Spencer Manuscripts, PRM MSS Box 1A/Roth 14.

[47] See Thomas, Martin 2004, 'R. H. Mathews and anthropological warfare: On writing the biography of a "self-contained man"', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 28.

[48] Executive Committee Minutes, 9 February 1904 and 20 October 1903, Records of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, F 80 and F 90-1.

[49] RHM 1904, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria', p. 204.

[50] Elkin, A. P. 1975, 'R. H. Mathews: His Contribution to Aboriginal Studies: Part II', *Oceania*, vol. 46, no. 2.

[51] Ferguson to Mathews, 19 March 1918, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/8/544.

[52] 'A Noted Ethnologist: Robert Hamilton Mathews', R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/7/8.

[53] Bates to Mathews, 13 June 1905, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/2/10.

[54] Mathews to Bates, 13 April 1905, Daisy Bates Papers, NLA MSS 365/970/250-381.

[55] R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MSS 8006/2/11.

[56] Mulvaney, D. J. and Calaby, J. H. 1985 *'So Much That is New': Baldwin Spencer, 1860-1929: A Biography*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, p. 370.

[57] Prentis, Malcolm 1998, *Science, Race and Faith: A Life of John Mathew*, Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, Sydney, p. 136. Lang expressed disbelief at the rejection, declaring that 'very few *theses* are so well deserving of a degree'.

[58] Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1992, *Tristes Tropiques*, Penguin, Harmondsworth [1st pub. 1955], p. 383.

[59] RHM 1896, 'The Bora of the Kamilaroi Tribes', p. 137.

[60] Belmont, Nicole 1979, *Arnold Van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago [1st pub. 1974], p. 27.

[61] RHM 1907, 'Beiträge zur Ethnographie der Australier', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 27, p. 34. Reproduced this volume.

[62] Elkin 1976, 'R. H. Mathews: Part II', p. 132.

[63] Mathews to Bates, 29 August 1905, Daisy Bates Papers, NLA MSS 365/970/250-381.

[64] See Donaldson, Tamsin 1985, 'Hearing the First Australians' in Donaldson, Ian and Donaldson, Tamsin (eds), *Seeing the First Australians*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 85.

[65] Diary 1879-90, entry for 22 April 1884, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/1/1.

[66] Atchison, John, 'Hamilton Bartlett Mathews', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, viewed 28 June 2006. <www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100431b.htm>

[67] See Thomas, Martin 2003, '"To You Mrs Mathews": The Cross-Cultural Recording of Janet Mathews 1914-1992', *The Australasian Sound Archive*, vol. 29, Winter.

[68] Mathews, Janet 1994, *The Opal that Turned into Fire*, Magabala Books, Broome, WA, pp. 161-2.

[69] Interview with Herbert Chapman, AIATSIS Audio Archive, J11 - 01019B.

[70] F. A. Ray to Elkin, 26 August 1936, Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives (henceforth USyd Archives), P130/41/53.

[71] Elkin to F. A. Ray, 10 September 1936, Elkin Papers, USyd Archives, P130/41/53.

[72] Enright, W. J. 1899, 'The Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of Port Stephens, N. S. Wales', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 33, pp. 115-16.

[73] RHM 1897, 'Bullroarers used by the Australian Aborigines', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 27, p. 58.

[74] RHM 1896, 'The Bora, or Initiation Ceremonies of the Kamilaroi Tribe (Part II)', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 25, p. 319.

[75] Mathews' copy of *Native Tribes* is Item 262, Elkin Collection, Fisher Library Rare Books, University of Sydney.

[76] Ibid, p. 391.

[77] Ibid, p. 389.

[78] Ibid, pp. 390-93.

[79] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Interview with Frank Mathews, 1971.

[82] Koch, Harold 2007, 'R. H. Mathews' schema for the description of Australian languages' in McGregor, William (ed.), *Excavating Australia's linguistic past: Studies in the history of Aboriginal linguistics*, Pacific Linguistics, Canberra.

[83] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family.

[84] RHM 1904, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria', p. 203.

[85] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family.

[86] RHM 1910, 'Does Exogamy Exist in Australian Tribes?' *Revue d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie*, vol. 5, p. 1.

[87] RHM, Survey Book. Collection of Susan Upton.

[88] Mathews, Gregory M. 1942, *Birds and Books: The Story of the Mathews Ornithological Library*, Verity Hewett Bookshop, Canberra, p. 12

[89] Ibid, p. 12.

[90] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family.

[91] Amount earned by Licensed Surveyor Mathews from the Government in Six Years, from Official Records, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/7/2.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Diary 1879-90, entry for 11 November 1880.

[94] Mathews, G. M. 1942, *Birds and Books*, p. 15.

[95] Diary 1879-90, entries for 28 July 1895 and 23 November 1888.

[96] Letter of Credit, 9 May 1882, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/7/4.

[97] Diary 1879-90, entry for 28 August 1889.

[98] Ibid, entry for 15 May 1882.

[99] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family.

[100] 'Late Mr. R. H. Mathews', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1918, p. 8.

[101] Letter of Credit, 9 May 1882.

[102] RHM 1907, 'Beiträge zur Ethnographie', p. 30 (note). Reproduced this volume.

[103] Mathews to Hartland, 27 September 1908, Letters to E. S. Hartland, NLW MS 16889 (see 'Correspondence', this volume).

[104] Mathews to Bartlett, 18 February 1872, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/7/8. This early correspondence between Robert and Mary is evidentially problematic in that we do not have originals but only copies in William Mathews' hand. Still, I see no reason to doubt their veracity. In documenting his father, William copied many pages from his publications and other documents, always with fidelity to the original.

[105] Van Gennep to Mathews, 28 October 1907, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/2/13.

[106] Belmont, *Arnold Van Gennep*, and Zumwalt, Rosemary 1982, 'Arnold van Gennep: The Hermit of the Bourg-la-Reine', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 84 (new series), no. 2.

[107] McLean to Mathews, 8 December 1905, R. H. Mathews Papers, NLA MS 8006/2/7.

[108] Schmidt, Annette 1993, *The Loss of Australia's Aboriginal Language Heritage*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, p. 1.

[109] I acknowledge that in northern and central parts of Australia, a tongue is sometimes replaced by pidgin or a more dominant Aboriginal language. These remarks apply principally to the areas where Mathews worked in southeast Australia.

[110] RHM 1904, 'Die Mŭltyerra-Initiationszeremonie', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 34, p. 77. Reproduced this volume.

[111] RHM 1896, 'The Būnăn Ceremony of New South Wales', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 9.

[112] RHM 1904, 'Die Mŭltyerra-Initiationszeremonie', p. 78. Reproduced this volume.

[113] RHM 1897, 'The Burbung of the Darkinung Tribes', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, vol. 10 (new series), p. 12.

[114] Diary 1879-90, entry for 4 November 1885.

[115] See Thomas, Martin 2007, 'The Ethnomania of R. H. Mathews: Anthropology and the rage for collecting' in Poiner, Gretchen and Jack, Sybil (eds), *Limits of Location: Creating a Colony*, Sydney University Press, Sydney.

[116] Diary 1879-90, entry for 6-14 June 1884.

[117] Ibid, entry for 8 August 1884.

[118] Ibid, entry for 11 July 1884.

[119] Fitzgerald, Shirley 1990, *Chippendale: Beneath the Factory Wall*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, pp. 54-64.

[120] Brooks, Barbara and Clark, Judith 1998, *Eleanor Dark: A Writer's Life*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, p. 14

[121] Biographical and Historical Notes of the Mathews Family.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] RHM 1893, 'Rock Paintings by the Aborigines in Caves on Bulgar Creek, near Singleton', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 27, p. 358.

[126] Mathews to Bates, 14 November 1905, Daisy Bates Papers, NLA MSS 365/970/250-381.

[127] Boas, Franz 1974, 'On Alternating Sounds' in Stocking, George Jr (ed.), *The Shaping of American Anthropology 1883-1911: A Franz Boas Reader*, Basic Books, New York, p. 76.

[128] Stocking, George 1995, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, p. 12.

[129] Elkin, A. P. 1956, 'A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1880-1955', *Oceania*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 249-50.

[130] Tindale to McCarthy, 12 February 1958, Papers of Frederick D. McCarthy, ML MS 3188/1350, Box H 2313. I am indebted to Val Attenbrow for bringing this reference to my attention.

[131] Stanner to Elkin, 4 June 1975, Elkin Papers, USyd Archives, MS P.130/9/131.

[132] Barwick, Diane E. 1984, 'Mapping the Past: An Atlas of Victoria Clans 1835-1904 Part 1', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 8, no. 1-2, p. 102.

[133] Mathews to Hartland, 9 April 1907.

[134] Wolfe, Patrick 1999, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, Cassell, London, p. 126.

[135] Hill, Barry 2002, *Broken Song: T. G. H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession*, Knopf, Milsons Point, NSW, p. 225 (note).