

Necklace making and placedness in Tasmania¹

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Abstract: This paper has been written against the backdrop of John B. Hawkins' paper, *A Suggested History of Tasmanian Aboriginal Kangaroo Skin or Sinew, Human Bone, Shell, Feather, Apple Seed & Wombat Necklaces*, published in *Australiana*, November 2008, and the research it sparked. Hawkins proffered some contentious propositions concerning unlikely and speculative connections between Tasmanian Aboriginal shell necklace making and the making of so-called "Tasmanian Appleseed necklaces". Within the acknowledgements section of his paper Hawkins said that he "[looked] forward to a response to [his] article by the museum authorities, for it is only by the cut and thrust of debate that knowledge can be further enhanced". This paper takes up that challenge albeit from outside the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and totally independent of any institutional sponsorship.



Introduction

Cultural production is at the nexus of different understandings of place and the cultural realities that belong there. It turns out that necklace making in Tasmania has a resonance of a kind that might not be easily found elsewhere because of the complex relationships it exemplifies between settler, and Indigenous trajectories. Like a thread these necklaces join both sides of the colonial equation in revealing, ambivalent and contested stories that resonate with the new globalism that is shaping the 21st Century

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and in which questions to do with place, ownership and memory have taken on a heightened urgency. These cultural landscapes come with an array of cultural and social subtexts that have their origins in the particular colonial history of the place.

Tasmania was separated from ‘mainland Australia’ 10,000 years ago and it has been populated for at least 35,000 years. This makes Indigenous Tasmanians the descendants of the oldest and southernmost human population on the planet. Its long isolation was broken when Abel Tasman² sighted the island’s western coastline on November 24 1642, though from the Indigenous perspective this isolation only ended from the 1770s when European explorers began regularly visiting the island.³ Tasmania’s colonial history began in 1803 when a British penal colony was established on the island at the far edge of the European world. A cultural collision was almost inevitable. Except for a few observers⁴, the colonial settlers did not draw a much more detailed picture of Aboriginal cultural life than the explorers who preceded them. By-and-large Tasmania’s Aboriginal people were regarded as ‘primitive’, inconsequential and a part of the island’s fauna.

In Tasmania's non-Aboriginal history, apple growing had an inter-colonial, colonial and international context. It has figured in cultural imaginings to do with Tasmania since early colonial settlement until the present day.

For the most part, the island’s colonisers/settlers/invaders were far too busy ‘cleansing’ the landscape of Aboriginal people and clearing woodlands – and of course eradicating vermin like the thylacine because it attacked livestock.⁵ There was almost no ambition, nor any imperative, to understand these people or their cultural production. Clearly Tasmania’s Aboriginal people were envisaged as being less deserving of the land than the colonisers. They were ‘in the way’ and the colonials simply wanted the land. After all, the colonisers had convinced themselves that they had a more useful or a superior purpose for the landscape and all it contained.

In just over 40 years of colonisation, it is thought that there were less than 50 Indigenous people who had survived colonial dispossession. In 1859 it was estimated that their numbers had dwindled to around a dozen. With the death of Truganini in 1876 it was claimed that with her “the last true Tasmanian”⁶ had died. Within a generation this was openly ‘celebrated’ in Tasmania. All of this ignored the many women and their children living on Tasmania’s offshore islands and elsewhere and, no doubt, others not caught up in the great ‘cleansing’.

For much of the 20th century European commentators assumed that these Indigenous survivors had been absorbed into the colonial project that dispossessed them. Yet they had retained, and continued to identify with and celebrate, their Indigenous cultural life, of which shell necklaces were an important signifier. To the colonisers they were, along

² Able Tasman celebrated for his ‘discovery’ of Tasmania – [REFERENCE LINK](#)

³ Fresne (1772), Cook, Furneaux (1773), Cook (1777), Bligh (1788 & 1792), Bass & Flinders (1798-99), Bruny D’Entrecasteaux (1793) and Baudin (1802).

⁴ Most notably George Augustus Robinson – the conciliator – who in the 1830s did document some important firsthand observations of Aboriginal life.

⁵ Thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) Reference #1 • #2 Dec 09

⁶ Truganini died in 1876 and was described as being the “last full blood Tasmanian Aboriginal”. This is a proposition fiercely challenged by Tasmanian contemporary Aboriginal community – [REFERENCE LINK](#) Dec 09

with the skeleton and the name Truganini, about the only signifier. Given this and the particularly violent colonial history, it ought not be seen as remarkable that necklace making in Tasmania should turn out to be loaded with histories and cultural cargo.

In two centuries much has changed in Tasmania. Yet a great deal in regard to understanding the placedness of Tasmania's cultural production is shaped by very early perceptions – Aboriginal and settler. One way or another necklace making is firmly rooted in Tasmanian placedness and Tasmania's colonial histories. It occupies a significant if not the most significant place in politics and the aesthetic of nostalgia for both contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous Tasmanians.

Collecting Tasmanianness

In Tasmania there are a number of collectors who have put together substantial collections of 'Tasmanian necklaces.' Prominent among them is the collector and dealer, J.B. Hawkins. He has published a paper in the Australian collectors magazine, 'Australiana'⁷ in which he introduces a number of propositions to do with necklace making in Tasmania – shell and apple seed necklaces in particular. Paraphrased, Hawkins speculates that with these necklaces there are Aboriginal and colonial cultural crossovers to be found. He also suggests that this can be traced back to Aboriginal people's earliest contacts with European explorers – and in particular James Cook.

That this might be fiercely contested from within the Aboriginal community is unsurprising given Tasmania's colonial history. In the 21st Century, Aboriginal people are not predisposed to letting speculative ponderings about their cultural production go unchallenged.

When a collector takes an interest in cultural production that has stories deeply enmeshed in it, and a contested colonial history to do with place, sometimes it is difficult to make out whether it is the object or it's cultural cargo that is being collected. Much more is at stake than the provenance of some necklaces. In Tasmania any object that has Tasmanian Aboriginality linked to it routinely comes with a contentious cargo on board that will almost automatically have links to Australia's 'History Wars'⁸.

In Australia/Tasmania there is an ongoing public debate to do with how British colonisation has, and arguably continues to, impact upon the development of a multidimensional contemporary Australian society that is inclusive of its Indigenous people.

Boiled down, the debate is largely about the extent to which British colonisation – post-1788 – can be understood as being:

- Humane, by-and-large peaceful and benign with occurrences of violent conflict between '*settlers*' and Aboriginal peoples being merely aberrations; or

⁷ Paper published in *Australiana* November 2008 Vol. 30 No. 4: [REFERENCE LINK](#) – *Australiana Link* Dec 09

⁸ The 'History Wars' is a shorthand term for the debate between various prominent historians, (such as Clark, Blainey Reynolds, Whinshuttle et al.) politicians (such as Paul Keating and John Howard) and social commentators [REFERENCE LINK](#)

- Stained by imperialism, exploitation, cruelty, neglect, dispossession, sanctioned violence and cultural genocide; or
- Resulting in a social cum political condition somewhere in between.

Bound up in all this are ideas to do with identity – national and personal – and the reliability of official and unofficial written histories alongside the oral traditions of Indigenous Australians plus the ideological biases of those who interpret these histories.

Therefore, when something's Tasmanianness is spotlighted, immediately there is a confluence of ideas to do with 'place', identity, history and heritage that come into play. In recent times two kinds of necklaces seemed to be quintessentially Tasmanian – one linked to Aboriginal culture and the other attributed to apple growing in Tasmania 'spiced up' by presumed Aboriginal connections. Interestingly, Tasmanian Aboriginal shell necklaces are arguably 'the place's' most powerful cultural emblems and identifiers of a kind of Tasmanianness.

It was not for nothing that in the 20th Century Tasmania came to be known as the "The Apple Isle". However, the shells are Indigenous and apples are quintessentially European – British even. Ironically, in 1788, over a decade before the island's colonisation, William Bligh⁹, of Bounty fame, planted Australia's first apple trees at Adventure Bay on Bruny Island off Tasmania's southeast coastline and within 'cooee' of Truganini's birthplace.

If shell and apple seed necklaces might carry cultural cargo to do with the island's distinct colonial histories this is unsurprising. Hawkins and others have collected both kinds and for their Tasmanianness – and in the case of appleseed necklaces, contentious Tasmanianness.

Collecting is a contentious business if for no other reason than it involves shifts in ownerships – real, emotional and cultural. Collecting also transforms the ways things are understood and imagined or re-imagined. Anecdotally, within anthropology's mythology it is sometimes said that "museums are full of lies, and there are lies about the lies and what's more, lies about the lying". Delving into the stories that underpin cultural production and collecting quickly leads to the social histories and cultural circumstances that lend meaning to an object or artefact. Invariably there is something to be contested, not to mention room for constructed memories and self-serving histories.

Given Tasmania's colonial histories, it is almost inevitable that any investigation of shell and apple seed necklace making will turn up stories with contestable interpretations that echo, or even go the heart of, the colonial question, and related questions of identity and ownership. Collectors like J.B. Hawkins seem to find all this, for whatever reason, all too enticing not to speculate upon assumed hidden histories.

The closer a cultural product is scrutinised the nearer it seems to be like unscrambling an omelette. Perhaps the ingredients might be guessed at, but a more sensible approach is to appreciate the omelette for what it is now – not what it was once.

⁹ William Bligh, prominent British explorer and Australian Colonial administrator – [REFERENCE LINK](#)

First, the notion that a necklace is just a necklace can be put to one side. Second, the stories and cultural connotations associated with it need to be put into play, even if the result looks like an omelette and the initial ingredients lost sight of. This may well be difficult, but in the end it is compelling storytelling.

Australian jeweller, Barbara Heath¹⁰, says “a jewel without a story is no jewel at all”¹¹. Unavoidably, necklace making in Tasmania is story laden.

Necklace Makers Absent and Present

The story of Tasmanian Aboriginal shell necklaces made a sharp turn following the craft movement’s emergence from post war internationalism. Designers and craftspeople received more personal acknowledgement than they had ever enjoyed. Little by little, they achieved equal billing alongside their fellow cultural producers – artmakers.

There have been named makers and designers of high profile objects for centuries but generally it was uncommon. Contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal shell necklaces also became part of this story. For two decades now it has been very important to name the makers. Since about 1990, when the Tasmanian Aboriginal community began to focus on the revitalisation of their necklace making, named makers emerged from their anonymity and questioned authenticity. They are now acclaimed. As cultural heroes of a kind, they have a newfound status outside their communities. In 2009 Tasmania’s National Trust awarded Aboriginal shell necklaces’ ‘Cultural Heritage Icon’ status¹² albeit somewhat late and Tasmanian Aboriginal Elder, Lola Greeno, being identified as a ‘Living Cultural Treasure’¹³.

If these Indigenous shell necklaces thus became contemporary craft, their ‘contemporary status’ is like no other. While very little of Tasmanian Indigenous cultural life was documented or studied in any depth in pre and early colonial times, it is clear that contemporary Aboriginal shell necklace making in Tasmania is part of a cultural continuum that reaches back millennia. Thus the shell necklace is a potent signifier of Indigenous culture and identity as well as Tasmanianness. The two are not the same. Indeed, Tasmanian Aboriginal necklace makers occupy a curious space in Australia’s cultural imagination evidenced by the high prices their necklaces fetch due to their ‘Aboriginality’, and their contemporaneousness in concert.¹⁴ This is further evidence by one maker, and community Elder, Lola Greeno being awarded the somewhat coveted ‘Living Cultural Treasure’ status within the Australian contemporary arts community.

Since the 19th century shell necklaces have also been emblems of another side of Tasmanianness – its place in the British Empire. Older Tasmanian shell necklaces are

¹⁰ Barbara Heath, ‘Jeweller To The Lost’ Brisbane Aust. REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

¹¹ Pers. com. Barbara Heath Dec 09

¹² 2009 Tasmanian Heritage Icons announced REFERENCE LINK: Nov. 09

¹³ Object Magazine 62, May 2012 REFERENCE LINK Jan 2013

¹⁴ Hobart’s Dick Bett Gallery Listings

<http://www.bettgallery.com.au/aboriginal/tasshells/index.htm?> Jan 2013

typically attributed to nameless ‘unknown’ Aboriginal makers. However, to Europeans in the 19th century and much of the 20th, their ‘value’ lay largely in the context of being exotic, other, a curiosity and ‘trophies of empire’. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that not all the ‘postcolonial’ necklaces were made by Aboriginal makers. Yet all have currency in the ‘Tasmanian Story’ and are exemplars of ‘Tasmaniana’. Without doubt, shell necklaces – original Aboriginal necklaces and their commercialised colonial mimics – have been significant souvenirs carrying Tasmaniana narratives since early colonial times. However, as Tasmania’s colonial history is re-examined, as stories and objects are recontextualised, and as cultural memories steadily reveal themselves, new tensions to do with authenticity and reliability arise. The stories linked to Tasmanian shell necklace making carry these tensions in abundance albeit sometimes in unexpected ways.

In terms of what we know, the story begins at least one thousand years ago. Interestingly, J.B. Hawkins contests this in his paper.¹⁵

In spite of some claims to the contrary, there is archaeology done in the 1970s by Rhys Jones¹⁶ where a burial pit was studied and found to contain a significant number of “pierced shells.” The site has been dated at least 1,000 years pre-contact and the shells are now a part of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery’s collection in Hobart. This seems to provide enough evidence that shells were strung pre-European contact.

It may not be possible to say whether or not these shells formed a necklace or were related to some other body site. Nonetheless, there are strong indications that they were strung together for some purpose. Indeed, there is very strong circumstantial evidence for the proposition that it was for a ‘necklace’. Since it was found in a burial pit, it probably also had an important ritual purpose. This is supported in George Augustus Robinson’s journal. Robinson, who had the most extensive first contact experiences with Indigenous Tasmanians, described an Aboriginal mourning ritual where the mourners “broke their spears and necklaces, throw away kangaroo skins, cut their baskets, don’t red ochre themselves”¹⁷.

The oldest intact necklaces are from colonial times and have Indigenous provenance. Generally the Aboriginal makers of 19th century shell necklaces are unknown, but two iconic makers, Truganini¹⁸ and Fanny Cochrane Smith¹⁹, stand out as exceptions. Then, sometime in the 19th century, the shell necklace became an artefact of Tasmanianness and Empire. By the end of the century non-Indigenous entrepreneurs were

¹⁵ ‘A Suggested History of Tasmanian Aboriginal Kangaroo Skin or Sinew, Human Bone, Shell, Feather, Apple Seed & Wombat Necklaces’

¹⁶ Rhys Maengwyn Jones (1941–2001) Described as ‘The Australian archaeologist’
REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

¹⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. 1966, *The Friendly Mission; The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson*, Sydney, p. 892.

¹⁸ Truganini (Trugemannner, Trukanini, Trucanini) (1812?–76), Aboriginal woman, was the daughter of Mangana, leader of a band of the south-east tribe. In her youth she took part in her people’s traditional culture, but Aboriginal life was disrupted by European invasion. When Truganini met G.A. Robinson in 1829, her mother had been killed by sailors, her uncle shot by a soldier, her sister abducted by sealers, and her fiancé murdered by timber-getters:
REFERENCE LINK Dec 09

¹⁹ SMITH, FANNY COCHRANE (1834-1905), Tasmanian Aboriginal, was born in early December 1834 at the Wybalenna Aboriginal establishment, Flinders Island, Tasmania, daughter of Tanganuturra (Sarah), father unknown. REFERENCE LINK

manufacturing them on an industrial scale. Just what form this ‘industry’ took is unclear but the evidence seems to point to it being something more than a ‘cottage industry’ albeit that there must have been an element of this.

In the early 20th Century Mrs M.M. Martin regularly advertised her shell necklaces in The Hobart Mercury. She advertised the foundation date for her “factory” on the then outskirts of Hobart as 1975. She also advertised that there was a “branch factory” in Honolulu. The establishment date of the Honolulu operation is uncertain but it is perhaps unlikely to have been before the turn of the century. The Martin family business clearly survived until the late 1930s.²⁰

The extent of this manufacture is evident in a court case. In Hobart on May 20 1908 John Ward, a Hobart wharf labourer, was found guilty for having:

“stolen, or otherwise [receiving], a large quantity of shell necklaces [100 dozen], consigned to a wholesale firm in Sydney by Mr. Paget, fur dealer, Elizabeth Street. At [his] previous trial the prisoner pleaded not guilty, and the jury failed to agree as to a verdict, whereupon the accused was remanded on bail, to be retried. On this occasion John [Ward] again pleaded not guilty, and was defended by Mr. Harold Crisp, the Solicitor General (Mr. E.D. Dobbie) prosecuting for the Crown²¹. – Hobart Mercury, 20.05.1908.

In 1908 Tasmania's population was less than 200,000 and Hobart's was less than 40,000. Given that small communities thrive on gossip mongering, this ‘robbery’ has all the makings of being “the talk of the town” – it’s a story with so many threads to unpick.

At his first trial in February 1908, Ward failed to offer a plausible defence, in particular a witness who could testify that the necklaces were not in fact Paget’s²² as Paget claimed. Neither did Paget offer any evidence to prove that the necklaces were indeed his. The jury could not agree on Ward’s guilt but at the second trial in May, the prosecution presented three ‘reputable’ witnesses, variously Hobart shell dealers, furriers and taxidermists, – Martin, Barker and Owens²³ – who identified the necklaces as Paget’s. The four dealers – curio merchants – involved here give us insights into the size and nature of Tasmania’s shell necklace trade at the time. Interestingly, there would have been more than a few Hobartians at that time who would have had living memories of Truganini out and about – and her wearing necklaces.

However, Indigenous Tasmanians had not forsaken the shell necklace. Research undertaken in the early to mid 1990s revealed that within Aboriginal culture on the Bass Strait Islands shell necklaces were common gifts given to celebrate rites of passage such as the birth of a child, the coming of age, betrothal and marriage. They also seem to retain a place in the rituals of welcome and farewell, as well as the bestowal of honour

²⁰ Pers. com. with a Martin family member and descendant August 2008

²¹ Hobart Mercury, Wednesday 20 May 1908 – full transcript – Dec 09

²² Paget’s enterprise, established in 1860, was “Under Royal Patronage” – See sample advertisement Hobart Mercury February 2, 1903 transcribed

²³ Pers. com. with Marin family member who understood/speculated that this “Martin” was quite possibly M.M. Martin’s son, August 2008

and respect. There is contemporary anecdotal and circumstantial evidence to support this, as the necklaces are common gifts to important visitors to the Aboriginal community.²⁴ The Tasmanian Indigenous community frequently presents various visiting public figures and first nation elders from elsewhere have been presented with shell necklaces. For example, the Dali Lama received a *maireener*²⁵ shell necklace as a welcoming gift in 1992, and two senior Tiwi²⁶ artists from Melville Island received a *maireener* shell necklace as a farewell gift after an Artist-in-Residency in Launceston also in 1992. More recently, a member of the Aboriginal community presented a shell necklace to the Tasmanian born Princess Mary of Denmark on a visit 'home' to Hobart. These are but three examples of a frequent occurrence²⁷.

Rituals reinforce social cohesion across cultural divides. It follows that shell necklaces, or strung shells, may well have had a role in pre-colonial Aboriginal culture as visual expressions of met obligations or the reinforcement of these relationships. As is the case in other cultures, they may have served as a kind of 'wealth object' and secondarily, as adornment of a kind. The shell necklaces' reported use as 'rites of passage,' plus welcoming and farewell gifts in contemporary Aboriginal culture, seems to be strong evidence for the necklaces' ongoing and evolving cultural purpose.

Given this history, no reading of the history related to shell necklaces, and the cultural associations related to necklace making, could realistically dismiss the thread of continuity that links contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal necklace making with the cultural expression of the people's ancestors. However, the rich cultural cargo of the shell necklaces combined with their ambivalent history, is ripe for speculation. The most interesting speculation has been by the collector, J.B. Hawkins. Firstly, he has offered an interesting variation on the known if sketchy history of the Tasmanian shell necklace that has enormous consequences for the signifying symbolism of the necklaces. Secondly, for whatever reason, Hawkins' speculation seems to be driven by something other than postcolonial research.

Notwithstanding its contentiousness, arguably Hawkins' paper is important in Tasmania in two ways. Firstly it reflects, and has crystallised to some extent, two centuries of settlers' accumulated subliminal perceptions of, and understandings of, Tasmanianness and Indigenousness. Secondly, it seems to have opened up a new critical discourse with opportunities to include Tasmania's Aboriginal community more actively in discussions concerning their cultural realities, and their histories, in a contemporary context – and a contemporaneous critical discourse.

Paraphrased, in respect to shell necklaces, Hawkins says that James Cook presented the people he encountered at Adventure Bay with glass bead necklaces and circumstantially these gifts introduced the idea of shell necklace wearing to them²⁸.

Not surprisingly, the 'speculation' that Cook introduced necklace wearing to Aboriginal

²⁴ Patsy Cameron Tasmanian Aboriginal Elder REFERENCE LINK: Dec.09

²⁵ "maireener" the Tasmanian Aboriginal word for shells (rainbow kelp shells et al.) prized for necklace making and sometimes used for the necklace as well REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

²⁶ Tiwi Islands – Melville and Bathurst Island – the home of the Tiwi people and a vibrant Aboriginal art community REFERENCE LINK Dec 09

²⁷ Pers. com. Cameron, Patsy November 1992, Lehman, Greg October 1993 and Greeno, Lola January 2009

²⁸ J.B. Hawkins – Australiana magazine, November 2008 Vol. 30 No. 4

people is regarded as audacious, and impertinent. Given the cultural dispossession the Tasmanian Aboriginal people have experienced, such speculations are ever likely to bring on emotionally charged responses – and especially so if Aboriginal people are not part of the conversation.

Hawkins' suggestion is pure speculation. What we don't know and can never know is how these Cook glass bead necklaces were received. What we do know, however, is that glass beads do not seem to have won much favour as 'gems' or as barter currency in the Pacific region, even though they were highly regarded in Africa and North America.²⁹

For example, glass beads are almost ubiquitous in North American postcolonial cultural production. Likewise and by way of example, in Africa, glass beads enjoyed a 'currency value' that had its foundation in slave trading prior to European colonisation. Nonetheless, European colonisers exploited glass beads' various currency values as can be evidenced in African material culture in its various contexts – southern Africa, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Province of South Africa, being a good case in point.³⁰

Bead historians have charted the ways beads reflect the progress of civilization³¹. Oceania is virtually absent from this history but Lois Sherr Dubin says:

[Beads] made from shell, teeth and fibre ... [were] worn during feasts, weddings and other special events to display wealth and social position. Glass beads introduced through that late eighteenth century explorers were never as coveted as those of locally made shell.

The reason may have been that Pacific cultures had access to some of the most aesthetically attractive shells on the planet and so did Tasmania's Aboriginal people. Therefore, the glass beads of the time may well have been seen as poor counterparts and thus relatively valueless. Aside from that, glass beads may not have carried any 'totemic' significance either.

Hawkins has also speculated that Tasmanian 'apple seed necklaces'³² found in Tasmania in estate sales, clearance auctions and antiques shops represented a kind of crossover cultural product. Speculatively, this is designed to add weight to his first speculation that the shell necklaces are a postcolonial artefact, as it links both types of necklaces to the same postcolonial source. He suggests that they are the outcome of some kind of cultural crossover involving Tasmania's colonists and the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. It turns out that Hawkins' speculation lacks the evidence to support its veracity.

²⁹ Prior to European contact Native American peoples did not possess glass technologies but had beads made of antler, bone, shell, stone and wood. Spanish Explorers, Jesuit Priests and 'traders' used glass beads for trade with the American First Nation people. 'Bead prices' varied according to location and the desirability of the beads by colour translucency etc. – e.g. the Hudson's Bay Company used a standard value for a beaver pelt: six Hudson's Bay beads; three light blue Padre beads; two larger transparent blue beads. [REFERENCE LINK](#)

³⁰ The Zulu are best known for their intricate and often spectacular beadwork that dates from ancient times [REFERENCE LINK](#)

³¹ Timeline Chart for The History of Beads Page 328 – 343, The History of Beads– Louse Sherr Dubin, Thames & Hudson Ltd. London 1987

³² J.B. Hawkins – *Australiana* magazine, November 2008 Vol. 30 No. 4

According to Hawkins two things come together to provide the circumstance for apple seed necklace making in Tasmania. First with the industrialisation of apple drying in Tasmania in 1908, large quantities of seeds were made available. The Huon Valley is Tasmania's southern apple growing district. It's also is the home of Tasmania's southern Aboriginal community, many of whom are the descents Fanny Cochrane Smith – now known to be an Aboriginal Tasmanian who outlived Truganini. Then he speculated that there was a coinciding lack of access to the shells required for necklace making in the Huon region.³³ This last point is easily dismissed – there is now clear evidence that the kind of shells needed for shell necklaces were anything but scarce in the early 1900s in the region³⁴.

While Hawkins' apple seed speculation can be categorically dismissed, without doubt the 'apple seed' necklace has entered the Tasmanian imagination as a kind of classic Tasmanian souvenir. J.B. Hawkins has amassed a significant collection of over 200 necklaces that he acquired exclusively in Tasmania. It is very important that Hawkins collected in this disciplined way. Nonetheless Hawkins could equally have purchased a great many of his necklaces on eBAY.³⁵

All the apple seed necklaces Hawkins collected were described to him, and were understood by him, as exemplars of "apple seed craft" and by implication here, with a speculative Aboriginal connection. There are also mats, belts and purses in his collection. More than interesting, is the fact that Hawkins is not Tasmania's sole "apple seed collector" – there are several. It seems that not only tourists from elsewhere but Tasmanians also – auctioneers, antique dealers, collectors, et al – seem very ready to adopt these souvenirs as Tasmania's 'very own' cultural production. These necklaces have been promoted as Tasmaniana too, and in good faith, without looking too hard for the social and oral histories to support it. On eBAY.com – the ubiquitous global market place for disparate cultural production – these necklaces turn up and are described almost exclusively as apple seed necklaces. A few Tasmanian antique dealers seem happy enough to embrace Hawkins' speculative latent Aboriginal 'cultural cargo' and find the contrary evidence something of a bitter pill to swallow.

Anecdotally, there are references suggesting that these apple seed necklaces were being made "in the Huon Valley sometime in the 1970s". There is also credible 'Huon folklore'³⁶ of feeding substandard apples to a tethered cow and recovering the seeds from the manure. This is the traditional way of collecting large quantities of apple seeds for propagation – though it discounts the need for the industrialisation of apple processing to create a bountiful seed source. All of this suggests that there must be firsthand observers around if one looked hard enough.

³³ The Huon River, in the southeast of Tasmania, Australia. It lies 38 km south of Hobart on the Huon Highway. REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

³⁴ There is a report of 100 doz shell necklaces being stolen from the Hobart wharf in 1907, which in turn suggests that many more such necklaces were produced in Hobart at that time REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

³⁵ Personal note: As a part of the research for this paper I have indeed done so in 2008 and they are regularly listed on eBAY to the present; see:

<http://www.tasmanianappleseedresearch.blogspot.com/> Jan 2013

³⁶ Pers. com. Bob Magnus, Houn District fruit orchardist and nurseryman – April 09

In order to locate them, in 2009, I established the Tasmanian Apple Seed Research Network³⁷. The research was premised on the idea that it was unlikely that the stories about “apple seed makers” were indeed lost. If the people were there, so too would be their family histories or other stories in a relatively small community like Tasmania.

However, eBay proved to be the most valuable information source. eBay is a very useful research tool as it is a kind of ‘digital museum’ for the ‘exotic and other’ plus the mundane and mis-described – though there is a need to take account of the global cultural homogenisation made possible by Internet sites in general.

Tasmania is a small enough community for such stories to be kept alive. Typically, in small communities, once the questions are asked, it is possible to find out something about the people about whom the stories are told. In places like Tasmania the speculated “six degrees of separation” turns out to be more likely two degrees. Here the search was for necklace makers who were making these ‘Tasmanian folk craft’ objects between WW1 and the 1970s – during the Great Depression in particular. However, firsthand or even secondhand, witnesses have proven impossible to find.

Nonetheless, one first-hand observer of another kind was located. She reported selling ‘apple seed’ necklaces in her souvenir shop which she operated during the 1970s. She discovered back then that these necklaces were not in fact “apple seed necklaces” made in Tasmania but “ipil seed necklaces”³⁸ – *Leucaena leucocephala* seeds – most likely made in The Philippines.³⁹ They were imported into, not made in, Tasmania.⁴⁰ The ‘apple-ipil’ phonic slip is somewhat understandable. Given that ‘ipil seeds’ so easily pass for ‘apple seeds’, in Tasmania, ‘The Apple Isle’, souvenir sellers might have found the confusion convenient. Tasmania is not alone in this misreading, as the seeds have been described as apple seeds elsewhere in the world – the USA in particular.

Somewhat curiously, Hawkins in here, and apparently egged on by fellow ‘dealers’, readily accepted the myth promulgated by Tasmania’s trinketeers of the 1970s.

“Scientific testing” quickly verified the botanical origin of the seeds. It was established that all the necklaces to hand were not in fact made using “apple seeds.” In fact they were a kind of tropical acacia seed,⁴¹ the seeds of:

... the plant *Leucaena leucocephala* (Lam.) De Wit of which the names *Mimosa glauca* L., *Acacia glauca* Willd. and *Leucaena glauca* L. are all synonymous, all of course belonging to the family Fabaceae and therefore nothing to do with

³⁷ <http://www.tasmanianappleseedresearch.blogspot.com/>

³⁸ Pers. com. Ruth Clarke, a Launceston antique collector reported this story plus the fact that her “Gran, Lotti Woollard who died in 1969 had a purse made of these seeds that Clarke saw in the 1950s and played with. She understood that her Gran had this purse since before WW2, probably 1930s” Dec 09

³⁹ *Leucaena leucocephala* (Lam.) de Wit (*leucaena*) a member of the acacia family and endemic to Central America. It has naturalised widely throughout the Pacific in tropical regions
REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09.

⁴⁰ Pers. com. Peter Sandor of Sim Crawcour Pty Ltd Launceston - Souvenir Suppliers & Manufacturer’s Agents, March 09

⁴¹ Pers. com. Alan Gray Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery Herbarium - March 09
REFERENCE LINKS – #1 , #2

"apple" – Alan M. Gray Tasmanian Herbarium, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, March 3 2009.

Not only can Tasmanian folklore be discounted in regard to apple seed necklace making, but Tasmanian Aboriginal community involvement in the practice can be discounted as well.

Curiously, the necklaces adopted as “apple seed necklaces” in Tasmania are indeed an Indigenous cultural product. It is just the case that they were most probably made by the Tagbanua who live in The Philippines – other Filipino indigenous groups made such ‘seed craft’ also. The necklaces are a part of a rich cultural tradition that has been ‘blanded out’ in the globalised lowest common denominator nick-knack market. They provide yet another exemplar of the place specific cultural wealth that is transformed through globalisation.⁴²

Tasmanian Necklace Making: Plunder, Appropriation and Theft

Tasmania’s two major museums, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, are custodians of ‘the official view’ of Tasmania’s heritage. In these ‘Antipodean Wunderkammers’ the Tasmanian Aboriginal people’s shell necklaces figure large. Deep in the museum memory banks, and in their exhibition spaces, the museums have catalogued the shifting paradigms within which these ‘loaded artifacts’ are, and have been, imagined. It is important to note here that until the present day Launceston’s Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery has no dedicated Aboriginal gallery to tell Tasmania’s Aboriginal story.

Somehow these Tasmanian Aboriginal necklaces seem omnipresent in Tasmania along with the Truganini story,⁴³ the Thylacine⁴⁴ extinction story, apple anecdotes, convict tales, Huon Piners’ legends and much more. Any ‘New Tasmanian’ would need to have these things explained in order to begin to make sense of their new home. Inevitably these iconic shell necklaces will be quietly explained in the induction process. These are stories that one needs to know about on an island with histories and their subtexts under almost every rock. The iconic status of these ‘placemaking stories’ comes with the implication that Tasmanian stories generally come in a form that is beyond critique – even if there is more than a touch of ‘The Gothic’ about them. It is as true of necklace making as it is of other stories like Reynolds and Windschuttle History Wars debacle⁴⁵.

Equally well known at the time, the late 19th Century, would have been the Royal Society’s implication in the robbery of Truganini’s grave. In fact, four years before the

⁴² There is a certain irony to the fact that these “apple/ipil seed necklaces” served a purpose as ‘love beads’ in the Western world’s hippy subcultures during the 1960s and 1970s.

⁴³ Cite Truganin’s Necklaces: Paper, Oceanic Passages Conference, Ray Norman, Hobart, June 2010, Organisation: CAIA – University of Tasmania

⁴⁴ The Thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*: dog-headed pouched-dog) is a large carnivorous marsupial now believed to be extinct. It was the only member of the family Thylacinidae to survive into modern times. It is also known as the Tasmanian Tiger or Tasmanian Wolf.

REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

⁴⁵ Reference: Henry Reynolds vs. Keith Windschuttle on Aboriginal history debate at Gould’s Book Arcade, Newtown, Sydney 12 November 2000 ... [http://www.sydneyline.com/Gould’s Book Arcade debate.htm](http://www.sydneyline.com/Gould's%20Book%20Arcade%20debate.htm) Jan 2013

Ward trials, just a generation after Truganini's death the Tasmanian Museum put on exhibition a perplexing and somewhat macabre tableau that included Truganini's⁴⁶ skeleton, her death mask, various photographs of her, shell necklaces and ironically one of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur's famous 'proclamation boards'⁴⁷ plus other Aboriginal artefacts.

In retrospect, if not at the time, the potency of these shell necklaces famously worn by Truganini⁴⁸ is palpable. For the colonials cum settlers cum 'invaders' there is almost no escaping these necklaces' 'trophy of empire' cultural cargo. For Tasmania's Aboriginal community, clearly the necklaces are cultural property and treasures invested with the continuum of their being; charged with connections to place; and endowed with linkages to elders and ancestors. In Tasmania there is nothing ordinary about shell necklaces – they are evidence of Aboriginal Tasmanians' continuing presence and identity.

Unraveling the narratives that attach themselves to necklace making in Tasmania is an exercise full of irony and there is no comfort whatsoever to be found in the postmodern proposition that truth is myth, and myth, truth.

Mixed up within the Social Darwinian idea of "survival of the fittest" is the need to identify and to be identifiable. Body 'adornment' can be a sophisticated identity tool and a 'necklace' can be many things – souvenir, token or simple adornment. But 'necklaces' often wait to be given meaning, a social function or perhaps some personal significance. As 'jewels', necklaces are something precious – a gem, a treasure – that carries cultural values and stories. In the end, it is the ideas – identities – invested in jewels that are the most precious. But identity is not an idea that is readily transferable. For instance, a crown of ephemeral flowers, or precious gems and gold, without a monarch, and realm over which to reign, is no crown at all. Likewise, wedding rings without two people 'to be wed' are empty of meaning.

Essentially, "necklace" is a generic European cum globalised idea. It's not an idea that fits at all well within local or Indigenous peoples' naming and belief systems. 'Necklace' is a kind of generic term that best fits the circumstances of the industrial era. It's a catchall term, a lowest common denominator, something that comes to a wearer via 'commercial' production ready for it to be invested with meaning. In a postcolonial cum 'global' paradigm, various kinds of 'necklaces' – rosaries, chains of office etc. – carry subtexts that typically emerge from the ether to haunt us in various ways. Interestingly, they are rarely referred to as "necklaces."

Hawaii's Queen Liliuokalani, the last of the Hawaiian monarchs, owned a number of Tasmanian kelp – *maireener* – shell necklaces that seem to have come to her via a retail sale in Honolulu – and possibly understood by her as lei⁴⁹. They are now in the collection of the Bishops Museum in Honolulu.

⁴⁶ Pers, com. David Hansen, Southebys Melb. [IMAGE LINK](#)

⁴⁷ Image of the 'proclamation boards' and context information online

⁴⁸ Truganini was typically depicted wearing shell necklaces – [IMAGE LINK](#)

⁴⁹ Lei – a customary Polynesian gift [REFERENCE LINK](#)

Queen Liliuokalani lived until 1917, and thus it's most likely that she would have either bought them at a store, or perhaps someone might have given them to her, but probably (again) just by having purchased them commercially. By the time she was an adult, Hawaii had a completely westernized economy, particularly in Honolulu.⁵⁰

Clearly, these 'shell necklaces/lei' originated in Tasmania. Most likely they found their way to Honolulu via the M.M. Martin⁵¹ enterprise of Hobart and Honolulu to be recontextualised as, and marketed as, lei – and ultimately accepted by a Polynesian monarch as such. In a postcolonial context this is no small thing.

There is also a kind of shell necklace production that is coming to light via oral histories in Tasmania. Albeit a somewhat romantic aberration, 'native settler' Tasmanians talk about making shell necklace along the lines of those made by Indigenous Tasmanians and the colonial commercial necklaces that mimicked them. By-and-large they were made by this relatively small group of Tasmanians from childhood, and aided by various family members, while "holidaying at the beach"⁵². Seemingly this activity was prevalent post WW2 when beachside holidaying and recreational day tripping became more possible due to greater access to motor transport and more workers in Australia having statutory holidays. Nonetheless these oral histories go back much further to the early 20th Century, and earlier, for one location in northern Tasmania where some families that were able to travel with relative ease to a remote beach location by boat⁵³. By necessity these holidays were somewhat rustic affairs that involved, necessitated even, a certain amount of 'hunting and gathering' given the relative remoteness. Apparently this seemed to evoke an atmosphere of 'going native'. If the shell necklace making mimicked Indigenous necklace making and at the same time provided a diversion on "wet and windy days", this is not particularly surprising.

In its romanticism, this activity is relatively innocent and benign. These necklaces were never 'up for sale' but interestingly it seems making them is indeed tied up with the idea of connection to place – Tasmania and Tasmanian beaches in a European cum settler context. Yet, these necklaces still seem to carry colonial subtexts to do with Aboriginal dispossession while reflecting settlers' yearnings to be connected to place. It's a very local story with a colonial flipside of a kind. In the cut and thrust of the antique trade in Tasmania all this is grist for the mill.

Attempts have been made to homogenise language and use more general, more inclusive and global terms, such as "neckpiece" and "body adornment", but they all fail in their hollowness. In the end these words fail because they lack cultural value; they simulate authenticity but ultimately lack meaning. When Tasmanian Aboriginal shell necklaces – *maireeners* – are claimed as "necklaces," or 'lei' even, it says nothing at all about their 'original' cultural context. It is an act of cultural homogenisation. Moreover, it is more

⁵⁰ Pers. com. DeSoto Brown, Curator Bishops Museum Honolulu, REFERENCE LINK Oct 09

⁵¹ M.M. Martin shell necklace manufacturers REFERENCE LINK:

⁵² Pers. com. Artists Lindsay Broughton report making such necklaces with his mother on beach holidays in southern Tasmania, and Tim Smith similar reports of northern Tasmania, of the 1950s. Nov 09

⁵³ Pers. com. Jean Cooke, born 1910 and now living at the holiday location of her youth reports on the collection of shells from the beach in WW1 era, their 'cleaning' and their stringing. Feb 2010

to do with "blanding" than it might have anything to do with blending." – Dr. Rod Ewins paraphrased.⁵⁴ What is missing is the accommodation of differing cultural sensibilities in a global context. Ultimately, all this is to do with colonising 'identity'.

On eBay at least, it seems that the Tasmanian Aboriginal language word '*maireener*' has been added to the lexicon when it is necessary to distinguish one shell necklace from another. 'The word' has currency when it comes to asserting a 'necklace's' Tasmanian Aboriginal bona fides. Indeed, '*maireener*' has come to carry layers of meaning to do with identifying a class of personal adornment cum cultural identifier. In the Aboriginal community, it is also the word used to describe the kinds of shells⁵⁵ used to make necklaces. In its Aboriginal context, it seems that a *maireener* is not by necessity a necklace any more than a lei is a necklace. A lei is a lei. A *maireener* is a *maireener*. Like a lei, a *maireener* has cultural functions and cultural significance.

Firstly it seems, it is itself, a *maireener*, and almost coincidentally a necklace. But a *maireener* is something more than a necklace – at the very least quite different. They seem to embody a bond with place and carry the imprimatur of cultural continuum. Possibly, a *maireener* might be a necklace of a kind sometimes. In a way a *maireener* cum necklace may be significant as a kind of cultural crossover when it is used as a memento of 'place' – a souvenir. Arguably the '*maireener* idea' is somewhat 'liquid'.

In the end, however, the *maireener* continues to be what it has probably always been: a 'connector'; a bonding agent; a 'gift' that connects people. The making of one clearly seems to connect people to place. Likewise, the receiving of one seems to connect people to a set of beliefs and imaginings to do with a place and its stories. In so many ways a *maireener* seems to be something like a symbolic umbilical cord that connects people to both place and culture – ways of believing and being.

As for appleseed necklaces, rather ipil seed necklaces from the Philippines, their tenuousness, and contentiousness, as 1970s Tasmanian 'tourism currency' offer a poignant exemplar evidencing the cultural branding that goes on under international cultural imperialism and globalisation. That too was going on in Tasmania with shell necklaces since the late 19th Century at the very least and there are place specific resonances to tune into if we look and listen as closely as we might.

There is something primordial about a Tasmanian Aboriginal *maireener*. There's something there that refuses to be diluted by colonialism, globalism or cultural imperialism. Is the colonial appropriation of, the sanctioned plunder of, and the global commodification of these so-called 'necklaces', and by the thousands it now seems⁵⁶, tantamount to the theft of identity and innocence? On the one hand, appropriated Tasmanian shell necklaces are exactly what they are, mere shadows of the *maireeners* they mimic. They are simply a 'commodity' analogous to grain before it becomes bread – cake even. You cannot steal, subsume or overtake history – written or oral. Then

⁵⁴ Dr. Rod Ewins, artist and anthropologist, paper "Fijian Art" presented to the Oceanic Art Society, Sydney, March 17, 1999 REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

⁵⁵ King Maireener, Phasianotrochus eximius, Maireener (Pink-tipped Kelp shell) Phasianotrochus apicinus, Maireener (Rainbow Kelp shell) .Phasianotrochus irisodontes REFERENCE LINK: Dec 09

⁵⁶ Ward Trial Hobart 1908, 100 doz necklaces stolen from a dealer Hobart Mercury, Wednesday 20 May 1908 – full transcript – Dec 2009 ... S. Jacobs Advertisement Hobart Mercury January 1882 "18 Gross" of necklaces advertised as being in stock REFERENCE LINK Jan 2010

again, when a shell necklace is understood as “a flapper’s Art Deco necklace” on eBAY, somehow in that naivety there may be a glimmer of innocence. Yet, despite this destiny as cliché, the presence of the *maireener* remains. Certainly, its present Indigenous makers aim to take back this presence from its colonial commodification as a necklace and an artefact of Tasmania.

Reference research websites

Appleseed research

<http://tasmanianappleseedresearch.blogspot.com.au/>

Tasmanian shell necklace research

<http://tasmanianshellnecklaceresearch.blogspot.com/>

<http://shellnecklacefile.blogspot.com>

<http://qvmagstrunghistories.blogspot.com/>

<http://truganininecklaces.blogspot.com/>

<http://themawlereport.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.shellnecklacerobbery.blogspot.com/>

COOLABAH*placedness* BLOG

<http://coolabahplacedness.blogspot.com.au/>

The research web sites contain an archive of images and document links that support this paper, including images, recovered from eBAY sites, of necklaces offered for sale.

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