

## MY APPRENTICESHIP AND BEYOND

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One cold wintry afternoon in June 1983 I was sitting at my desk at Port Arthur. Tucked away in Tasmania's southeast corner, Port Arthur is about as different from the Pacific islands as anywhere that I know in Australia. I was then working as Project Historian at the site of the former penal settlement. The phone rang and my thesis supervisor, Stewart Firth of Macquarie University, asked me to return his call, giving no reason for this unusual request. I had no idea what he was playing at. A moment later we were back in contact and he removed any cause for speculation. All three examiners had given my thesis, on the history of Tuvalu, the nod. After all these years I was going to be doctored.<sup>1</sup>

As I write these lines (on 23 June 1996) I realise that I have never asked other people how they felt at that moment of truth. As I now recall it, I was fairly excited but not delirious. A far stronger sensation was the overwhelming relief. Only then did I realise how stressful the months of waiting had been, despite the conscious effort on my part to adopt a nonchalant approach to life (which probably fooled no one). It wasn't a fear of failure that kept me on edge, because neither Stewart nor I seriously thought the thesis merited a dumping; but I was worried about the possibility of a partial rewrite because there were too many typos and the last chapter was somewhat breathless. But now, fears proven grossundless, I straight away blurted the news to the person with whom I shared the office. I should have known better, for he had frequently made known his poor opinion of the 'over-rated' PhD degree. With ill grace he replied: 'You've still got to do your job properly'. Whatever I thought might have been his response, it wasn't that.

Savouring as best I could the bad taste in my mouth, I suddenly realised that my formal apprenticeship was over.

But why did I choose to become a historian and not something else, and why a Pacific Historian? Nothing in my background or upbringing suggested that I would take this direction. I am not a *giritiya*'s grandson who seeks understanding by writing about Indian emigration to Fiji; or a cane cutter's son who researches the Queensland labour trade; much less a bishop's begotten son who authors books about missionaries. My New Zealand father and Scottish mother were musicians, who met at the Royal College of Music in London. Born in that city, a product of the post-War baby-boom, I came to New Zealand as a young child in the early 1950s.<sup>2</sup> In fact, my initial experience of the Pacific was on that voyage out from Britain. There was a shipboard epidemic and my brother and I contracted measles one day past Pitcairn Island.

Nor did my primary schooling provide the slightest inkling that my future vocation would be academic life. Quite the opposite. I thoroughly disliked school, schoolwork and most of my schoolteachers, who were unanimous that I was a dull and uncomprehending little boy. I undertook eight years of primary schooling without ever giving rise to the suspicion that one day I would go to university, much less become an academic. My father had other ideas and made it clear that 'the boys' would receive the tertiary education that he lacked. No son of his was allowed to read comics at home, so I read them at friends' places and at the barber's whenever I went for the obligatory short-back-and-sides. I also read lots of books, so long as they weren't school textbooks. My despairing parents encouraged this line of activity, and I happily went to the local library on a fortnightly basis. Among the usual quota of Biggles and Enid Blyton titles that I wouldn't care to see my own children reading, I borrowed—and re-borrowed—a stout volume on British history called *Kings and Things*.<sup>3</sup> I'm sure after all these years that this was where I first learned about Alfred burning the cakes, about Canute's encounter with the oncoming tide, and about Robert the Bruce learning a lesson in resolve from the efforts of a persistent spider. That was where my interest in history started, and my father still recalls how I would get emotionally involved in such sagas as the little princes in the Tower. He said—much later I might add—that he knew from that moment that one day I would be a history teacher, and he was

immensely proud that I could recite the chronology of British monarchs from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth II.

It is just as well that I had this interest because my school work was a comprehensive disaster on other fronts, not least French. I just wasn't interested, although it did dawn on me at secondary school that I had more ability than others gave me credit for, and I started to lift my game. Maths and Science remained a wipe out: I simply have no aptitude for this line of country. That left the usual trio of English, History and Geography, supplemented by Bookkeeping, and I did win a class prize for English and Social Studies in Form Four. My English master that year, Pat Day, who went on to become the Director of the National Gallery of New Zealand, was my outstanding secondary school teacher. He harboured the notion that an education should challenge, not limit, the mind: he would use English newspapers to give dictation tests, he had the good sense to drill us in grammar, and he introduced me to Somerset Maugham. His considerable talents were absolutely wasted as an English teacher to low stream 14-year-olds. But he was just what I needed as I tried to salvage the ruins of my schoolwork and it was he more than anyone else who gave me an idea of the possibilities of the English language as a medium for expression. However, it was History that really interested me and in my last year at secondary school—or so the 'Prefects' Notes' of the school magazine record—I wrote 47 pages of notes on Sir Robert Walpole.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, I failed to carry off the History prize in my final year of high school, if only because no such award was made that year.

Then came what was to prove a decisive event of my life. Like being born, it had nothing to do with me. In 1966, during my last year at high school, my father was offered an appointment at the University of Adelaide's Elder Conservatorium of Music. Early the following year the family moved to South Australia and I washed up at the new Flinders University where I majored, predictably enough, in History and Politics; and in my final undergraduate year started up the *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, still going. It is evident, at least in retrospect, that I was not only channelling myself into History (not least because I disliked the systems approach to Politics then in vogue at Flinders), but that I had more affinity with certain varieties of history than others. I did not particularly care for European history—and we got a lot of it at Flinders. I enjoyed and did well in British history. But I far preferred Australian history,<sup>4</sup> to my mind

so much more manageable and compelling, and closer to the environment in which I was raised than the one from which I hailed. In my second undergraduate year I could actually get enthused over such delights as parliamentary factions in colonial New South Wales (Loveday and Martin 1966). I clearly had more interest in the periphery than the metropolis.

So when I saw on a noticeboard that a Pacific history course to be taught by fellow New Zealander David Hilliard would be offered as a 3rd year option, I immediately knew that this was for me. What could be more peripheral than Pacific history? But there were other reasons. Although I revelled in the intellectual atmosphere of Flinders, despite an up-and-down undergraduate career, I was ill at ease in my new surroundings.<sup>5</sup> Of all the family I coped least well in adjusting to Adelaide, which was a stifflingly puritanical place in the pre-Dunstan decade (see Blewett and Jaensch 1971). I missed the windy hills of Wellington and the friends, and the girlfriend, I had left behind. It was perhaps not surprising that this rather lonely New Zealander would go for a course that catered more to elements in his personal background: New Zealand's links with the Pacific, the Maori population, and the Polynesian immigrants.

The other point to make is that I was much less interested in the history of the rulers than of the ruled, Sir Robert Walpole notwithstanding. In part, no doubt, this would have stemmed from the political climate engendered by the Vietnam War. Like so many other somewhat conservative undergraduates of the mid- and late-1960s, I was—in relative terms anyway—radicalised (see Hilliard 1991:51–56), to the consternation of my father, who may have had second thoughts about the wisdom of sending ‘the boys’ to university. Then there was the presence, in my final year at Flinders, of George Rudé as Professor of History. His irresistible charm and his books on what he politely termed ‘popular protest’ rubbed off too.<sup>6</sup> When I took the course I found that the theoretical thrust of Pacific History, with its emphasis on empowering the Islander in the face of Western intrusion, made it doubly appealing.

The influences started to converge. It is no accident that my interest in Pacific history initially focused on traders, who seemed to intrude themselves on my consciousness. Not only were they as isolated as I sometimes felt in Adelaide, but Dorothy Shineberg (1967) and Harry Maude (1968a) wrote about them with style, panache, and a loving care to detail that I much admired. They set a superb standard of close documentary research, so

necessary for the difficult retrieval exercises involved in the study of trade and traders; and I retain an admiration that I do not intend to outgrow for the well-researched, well-written and well-crafted case study (e.g. Winks 1985:112–46). Jim Davidson, the Professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University, whom I met at the 1969 ANZAAS Conference in Adelaide, encouraged this interest, and Jim, as we know, had an unrivalled knack of matching individuals to a topic. He also had the good sense to let people follow their interests, knowing that really creative work always springs from the heart.

In the early 1970s I was back in Wellington, eventually working as a garbo. Jim was there on study leave in 1971 and, one afternoon in a Thorndon pub, he suggested that I start work in the Alexander Turnbull Library on the papers of George Westbrook, an island trader who ended his days as a small-time merchant and political agitator in Samoa. Thus did I stumble on the subject of my first journal article (Munro 1972). Returning to Australia in 1972, I enrolled in the Master's Qualifying course at the ANU and was fortunate enough to get an insider's view of the Department of Pacific History—described by one grateful visitor as 'the unique creation of the late Professor J.W. Davidson . . . a privileged world in which, when you wished, you could count on being alone, and when you sought help, it overflowed' (Owens 1974:7–8).<sup>7</sup> Harry Maude was by then in retirement but I visited him and Honor frequently enough and my interest in trade and traders was reinforced. He and Jim, so different in temperament yet with a sometimes exasperated understanding of each other, were a remarkable complement. Together they built up a quondam great Department.

I did my Master's Qualifying thesis on sandalwood and *bêche-de-mer* trading in Fiji<sup>8</sup> and then went to Macquarie University to write an MA (Hons) thesis on traders in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, as they were then called. After a desultory year's research I lost confidence in my ability to handle a topic that involved working up the separate histories of 26 different islands, and settled for a general history of Tuvalu. In 1977–78 and again in 1979, I undertook that further rite of passage known as fieldwork. Just beforehand—and not without a big fight—I transferred my candidature at Macquarie to a PhD. Stewart Firth took over as supervisor and stuck with me through thick and thin—mostly the latter—as I graunched my way at snail's pace to eventual submission. (I felt, in truth, that the thesis had beaten me into submission.) My ordeal by thesis took ages longer than it

should have, to my embarrassment and the sneers of ill-wishers. Even well-wishers showed signs of impatience, one of them referring to me as 'our brilliant young star now rising like Newton's apple'. The hard part was not the research (far from it) or even the writing-up (tough going though that was), or even being hard up all the time (ditto), but rather the loneliness of the long distance thesis writer. I found the isolating tendencies of the exercise hard to endure, although I have since developed decidedly reclusive tendencies and just want to be left to myself much of the time.

I have sometimes been asked if Stewart influenced my thinking. He sees events in the Islands as being part of a world-wide phenomenon (Firth 1979: 127), and I was at pains in my thesis to point out that Tuvalu history was the product of the constant interplay between outside forces and local events—going beyond the insular, island-oriented view of the Canberra school. Actually, I arrived at this view when writing the first draft of a chapter on trade, well before Stewart took over as supervisor. In contrast to his predecessor, Stewart never tried to impose his views but left me to work out my own. What he did was to provide the sort of supervision and support that made possible the completion of the thesis. Like Jim Davidson before him, he saved my academic life.

My ordeal by thesis was, in the words of the cliché, a great learning experience. I have never regretted working on the history of an island group: the multi-thematic nature of such a topic obliged me to branch out into the explorers, whalers, missionaries, naval supervision and colonial administration, labour migration, and demographic history, as well as trade and traders. Familiarising myself with such variety of themes and their sources was a broadening experience that has stood me in good stead. All this in addition to learning about another culture. There were so many new byways to traverse. I had never before involved myself in missionary history, probably as a response to one aspect of my upbringing. Some of my primary schooling had been undertaken in Lanarkshire on the two occasions when my mother returned 'home' to see her parents, and there I received a thorough grounding in the sectarian intolerance that passed for a Scottish education.<sup>9</sup> This turned me off religion and initially stifled any interest in missionary history. But such a posture could not be maintained because to attempt to understand the Pacific islands without an appreciation of missionary activity and the indigenous response is as futile as writing about medieval Europe 'as though the church did not exist' (Grosart

1969:296). Significantly, my first piece of writing on Tuvalu (before I actually went there) concerned the Samoan pastors (Munro 1978:75–93)—and I might add that the sheer bastardry of some of them impelled a sneaking admiration, at least from a position of detachment. Even so, it is no coincidence that trade rather than missionary activity was the more important organising theme of my thesis. It could hardly have been otherwise, given my background and leanings. Another historian with different interests and outlook—and one of my thesis examiners comes to mind—could equally validly have reversed the priorities. I simply chose to write where my strengths (and sympathies) lay.

My thesis was a broadening experience in another way. Far from being a parochial study of a tiny island world, it took lateral perspectives to take into account that Tuvalu was an archipelago on the edges of everyone else's history. That is to say, Tuvalu formed part of the On-the-Line whaling ground; mission activity emanated from Samoa; the trading companies saw Tuvalu as an insignificant segment of their wider commercial networks; and to add to the confusion, during the colonial era the group was, for practical purposes, an adjunct of the Gilbert Islands Protectorate. What happened in Tuvalu was often the result of decisions made elsewhere, so to understand Tuvalu a good deal had to be known about the history of Samoa and Kiribati, not to mention British and German colonial policy and also of trading companies in Auckland and Hamburg. It made no sense to study Tuvalu as an isolate because Tuvalu was no longer isolated, at least in ways that it had been before.

At the same time, I quickly realised that each Tuvalu island had its own individual history. To ignore this fundamental point was to miss the point entirely. Yet, for the purposes of organisation and in the interest of significant generalisation, the archipelago had to be treated as a unity. Barrie Macdonald, who published his general history of Kiribati and Tuvalu only months before I submitted my thesis, noted that: 'The exercise demands a concentration upon major themes . . . and general trends—a concentration that is sometimes difficult to reconcile with the particular concerns of so many small and relatively isolated communities' (1982:ix). Macdonald put it only too well. It was not easy to adopt a conceptual framework that was 'Insular' in its focus yet 'Oceanic' in its range. Whatever else my thesis failed to do, I hope that I cannot be accused of missing 'the Ocean for the Islands [and being] content to be marooned in the tight but so safe confines

of [my] little atoll of knowledge, regardless of the sweep of the currents which bring life to the isles' (Spate 1978:34). I am under no illusions, however, that I succeeded in integrating the two strands of inquiry any more than the proponents of 'total history' have avoided compartmentalising their work, despite the intention to integrate their themes into a seamless whole.

As formal training in the discipline of History—winning my spurs, if you like—my thesis work was an invaluable part of my apprenticeship. When I proposed writing a thesis on Tuvalu, Harry Maude advised that it was possible but that the sources would be hard to track down. He too was right. By and large the documentation was dispersed, fragmented and difficult to locate; and my abiding memory is of wading through miles of microfilm for snippets of information, much like looking for a needle in a haystack.<sup>10</sup> No one *ever* showed me how to do this; I taught myself and gained no mean reputation as an archives-grubber and for my ability to find things;<sup>11</sup> and I remain a firm believer in the notion that archival research skills are largely self-taught—just as I remain convinced that interpretation should be embedded in, not detached from, one's narrative, and that clarity of expression is the only way to go. I cannot abide sloppy and obtuse writing, which explains just one of my gripes with postmodernism. But I grudgingly concede that pointers can be helpful, such as Harry Maude's suggestive passage:

I have never ceased to experience a feeling of astonishment at the way in which one piece of information, often seemingly irrelevant at the time, leads on to the discovery of another—and once one is fairly started to an infinity of others until, like some fascinating jig-saw puzzle, the pieces begin to fall into a coherent and credible picture: and at the end something new has been added to our knowledge of the island world (Maude 1968b:221–22).

Systematically follow the trail of the sources and, with persistence, you'll probably find what you're looking for. This seems so obviously true, yet I have never convinced my students on the matter.

But don't think that I am prepared to defend every conclusion of substance in my thesis. I never believed that I adequately explained the conversion to Christianity, and suspect that it lies in the realm of the unfathomable. Be that as it may, Michael Goldsmith did so much better (Goldsmith 1989). At another level I too readily accepted that the difficulties



and upheavals often associated with European activity elsewhere in the Pacific were either absent or muted in Tuvalu, largely because the group contained too few resources to be attractive to the outside world. I would now argue that I under-rated the disruptive impact of the West. We all try to be open minded, to scrutinise our sources, to be aware of our presuppositions, and generally to follow the tenets of the critical method of inquiry. But there is a danger that once an idea has become fixed, it so remains, come what may. On the basis of the very same evidence, I would now argue that foreign impact was more damaging and disruptive than readers of my thesis would gather (e.g. Lal 1994:440)—at least with respect to certain atolls (see Besnier 1995:44). Historians do change their minds, probably more commonly than is generally appreciated—not necessarily because new sources impel a contrary interpretation but because individual historians come see the world in a different way. Despite trying to go beyond the tradition in which I was reared—namely the Canberra-school notion that Islanders were active agents in their encounters with the West—I was in some respects wedded to it more firmly than I realised. Or as David Chappell points out, Islander agency has its appeals ‘but like any chosen emphasis it can screen out subversive data’ (1995: 304). I am also more aware than I was when a thesis writer that the past is indeed by no means independent of the historians that interpret it.

The submission of my thesis in December 1982 brought to a close, in a formal sense, my apprenticeship. I had just turned 35—exactly mid-point through my allotted three score years and ten. Within a few years I would be seen as a historian of different ilk and colleagues occasionally express curiosity as to why I put Tuvalu on the back burner and assumed the mantle of a labour trade historian. After all, very few Tuvaluans enlisted for indentured servitude in the nineteenth century.

The move to an apparently unconnected interest did in fact grow out of my Tuvaluan preoccupations. Present day Tuvalu is caught in a web of return labour migration with a good 20 per cent of the population offshore at any one time. I was aware of this before my fieldwork in 1977–78 (Brady 1975:135; Chambers 1975:99–103). However, the magnitude of the implications only impressed itself on me once in the field, because the evidence was all around me. When I staggered ashore at Nukulaelae atoll in October 1977—in a memorably seasick condition—to do my first stint of

fieldwork, I arrived with a shipload of returnees from the phosphate extraction industry at Nauru. A month later, an officer from the maritime training school in Tarawa (Kiribati) arrived on a recruiting drive. I also witnessed from time to time the arrival of Tuvaluan seamen on leave from their jobs in various overseas merchant marine. My second stint of fieldwork, in 1979, coincided with the arrival home of the last contingents from Ocean Island, whose commercial phosphate potential was exhausted. Throughout my fieldwork, the question of return labour migration was never far beneath the surface, and often to the fore, in day-to-day existence, not least as residents anxiously awaited the next remittance from a relative working abroad. Labour migration is integral to contemporary Tuvaluan life on a broad front.<sup>12</sup>

This was emphatically not the case last century. Nevertheless, it was my archival research into nineteenth century Tuvalu that led to a long-term commitment to the Pacific Islands labour trade. The point of entry was the question of nineteenth century i-Kiribati labour migration, which directly resulted in the British declaration of a protectorate over the then Ellice Islands. I already had a passing interest in the labour trade, so when repeatedly confronted with documents on i-Kiribati labour migration (to Samoa, Queensland and Central America) among the relevant official British archives for the 1890s, I made a mental note that I would pursue these questions at some future date, and I did. Thus my current research stems from my thesis work—a lateral extension, if you like, into a seemingly unrelated field.

But there is more to it than that. Stewart Firth's thesis was on the German labour trade and included a section on i-Kiribati labourers in Samoa. I suggested to him in 1981, even before I went to Port Arthur, that we should collaborate on this; I would work-up the British documentation. Predictably, he told me that he would think about it only after I had submitted my thesis. So when I made good my escape from Port Arthur, I reminded Stewart about the possibility of a joint paper on the i-Kiribati in Samoa. We ended up writing six papers in as many years in what must be the most productive supervisor/ex-student partnership in Pacific historiography.

That is how it began. My labour interests emerged unexpectedly from a larger and not obviously related project. One realises during the course of archival- or field-work that a topic is there for the taking, keeps a weather

eye cocked, and follows it through. This question of knowing the possibilities of a situation, or its serendipity, was explained when I was still in the field:

Producing is a consequence of having done a lot of archival research. Once you are 'into' it, the topics suggest themselves. The first pre-condition, however, is total immersion in the documents. The best example I know is Paul Kennedy [now famous for *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*]. He simply leaves us all for dead in this. Unfortunately it all takes time to accumulate the material & immerse oneself in it. (John Moses, personal communication, 5 July 1978)

My interest in Tuvalu was only gradually displaced by a growing fascination with labour trade studies. Sooner or later I would have to move on to something else, not least because I had little interest or opportunity to conduct more fieldwork, which I would not care to repeat, least of all on atolls. When I wrote about the miserable lives of traders in Tuvalu the autobiographical element loomed large, as I realised at the time (Munro 1986:90–94).

My interest in labour migration is also related, I am sure, to being a wandering scholar. As summed up in the *Pacific History Association Newsletter's* announcement of my impending return to Suva:

Since his first appearance in the firmament of Pacific history 20-odd years ago, Doug Munro . . . seems to have tried hard not to let the grass grow under his feet. In one capacity or another, he's spent periods at the ANU, Port Arthur (Tasmania), Macquarie, USP, [in] Suva, the College of Advanced Education, [in] Toowoomba, Bond University and probably other places that we have forgotten—not to mention Tuvalu for fieldwork for his PhD thesis and the taking unto himself of a wife. Now he's heading back to USP to assume the headship of the USP's history department (no. 26, Sept 1991:2).

But to return to the mid-1980s, it is also the case that I was being tugged in different directions. A combination of heavy teaching loads at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (DDIAE), teaching all manner of unfamiliar material,<sup>13</sup> and having a young family all contributed to my not getting around to revising my thesis for publication, and I regret that I was

not more single-minded in sacrificing articles for *The Book*. I might also have avoided getting involved in co-authoring booklets in the Tuvaluan language for a Tuvaluan readership (see *Chronicle* [Toowoomba], 25 Nov 1987:23). The idea was to return history to the people, to make it available to a wider audience, little realising that a potential Tuvaluan readership was about the same, or less than, that for a typical academic monograph (see Munro 1995). Other distractions were also too tempting to resist. My work with Stewart Firth had the effect of gradually whittling down my interest in Tuvalu as well as taking me away from *The Book*. This tendency was strengthened during six months' study leave in 1988, at Flinders University, and although I intended to polish off *The Book*, my energies focused even more strongly on the labour trade. For that I can thank Ralph Shlomowitz, an economic historian of different persuasion from mine, whose infectious enthusiasm, energy, and love for scholarship have never been doubted.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to vigorous prompting from Shlomowitz, I applied for and was awarded a handsome grant from the Australian Research Council to continue my labour trade studies, which DDIAE, incredibly, attempted to block. Ironically, I keep being pressed back into Tuvaluan studies, most recently by Michael Goldsmith to co-author a paper on the pacification of Tuvalu.

At Flinders I received an offer of a lifetime, or so it seemed, to join the staff of Bond University, in the process of being created. It provided an escape route from the appalling College of Advanced Education environment in Toowoomba, for which I shall be eternally grateful. I would certainly be financially better off had I remained, but the emotional and academic costs would have been heavy. I had to get out to participate in any meaningful world of scholarship. At DDIAE I could only expect my teaching load to intensify and to have every impediment thrown in my path by a hostile administration.<sup>15</sup>

Bond was Australia's first attempt at a private university and for a short while it was an incredible place to work. The buoyant sense of confidence that characterised the first few months took me back to those glorious days of the late sixties. For a few sweet months we were on a perpetual high. But when projected student numbers were not achieved, reality hit home and it was downhill thereafter.<sup>16</sup> At least, with few students and plenty of research time, my interest in the field flourished. I continued to explore largely

untapped areas, such as the colonial partition of labour supplies (following the lead of Colin Newbury 1980), the phosphate extraction industries at Ocean Island and Nauru, the German labour trade, and questions of resistance and accommodation. I wanted to get away from the better known facets of the labour trade so I focused on the recruitment and employment of i-Kiribati, on which little work had been done (see Macdonald 1982:55–65). The significance and relative scale of this stream of labour migration was insufficiently appreciated by other Pacific historians, whose knowledge of the labour trade was drawn from recruiting in Melanesia and employment in Queensland. The contrast between i-Kiribati and Melanesian labour migration called for corrective comment that I was only too happy to provide.

It did not end there. I was invited to co-edit books on the labour trade. Quite out of the blue, Clive Moore asked me to help with the editing of *Labour in the South Pacific*. Initially I was reluctant until confirmation of the move to Bond University which meant that I would be in a position to pull my weight (although secretly I was enormously gratified at the implied compliment). A year later Brij Lal asked me to help out with *Plantation Workers*, which focused on questions of resistance and accommodation. I am now becoming typecast as a historian of labour in the same way I was a decade earlier with respect to Tuvalu;<sup>17</sup> and it genuinely puzzles me when colleagues form the impression that I know nothing else and publish nothing other than labour trade studies, especially in view of my work with Michael Goldsmith and Andrew Thornley on missionary history.<sup>18</sup> One's scholarship is not so much a matter of self-definition but more the collective definition that colleagues apply.

Now I am back at USP. The research momentum has slowed as the administrative duties, which I had always managed to avoid, continue to mount; the eternal arithmetic of student numbers takes on a ghastly life of its own; and I get into hot water by embroiling myself in those silly squabbles over the 'ownership' of Pacific history (Munro 1994). Being an expatriate in a country where race is a defining feature creates ambiguities at a profoundly personal level, and there are some things I guess that I'll never get used to. Life has become too much of a juggling act and the future assumes an uncertainty that was not evident when I was younger. Having moved around so much, I can no longer call any place my 'home', and my

children to some extent share this feeling. There are times when I feel more than a touch of affinity with Thorstein Veblen's 'intellectually gifted Jew':

He becomes a disturber of the intellectual peace, but only at the cost of becoming an intellectual wayfaring man, a wanderer in the intellectual no-man's-land, seeking another place to rest, further along the road, somewhere over the horizon. They are neither a complaisant nor a contented lot these aliens of the uneasy feet; but that is, after all, not the point in question (Veblen 1976:475).

Looking back, I am reminded of Stephen Jay Gould's remarks about the role of contingency:

[There are] a million scenarios, each perfectly sensible. Little quirks at the onset, occurring for no particular reasons, unleash a cascade of consequences that make a particular future seem inevitable in retrospect. But the slightest nudge contacts a different groove, and history veers into another plausible channel, diverging continually from the original pathway. The end results are so different, the initial perturbation so trivial (Gould 1989:320–21).

That seems to sum up the volatile recipe of life, in which the ingredients are so strangely mixed. Critical decisions are made, or made for you by others, along the way (such as going to live in South Australia). Opportunities are seized or lost, or simply not recognised. (Had I played my cards right and gone to Oxford there would have been quite different outcomes.) The fall of the dice can go six-ways. (Had I remained in Tasmania I would have probably pulled out of Pacific history and written the history of the Port Arthur Penal Settlement.) At any point there can be subtle and not so subtle changes whose import is realised long-afterwards, if at all. I have had brushes with death on three occasions, most recently this year when I trod on a fallen power line that was very much alive. With more than a touch of prescience, a friend once inscribed my copy of one of his books (Lewis 1961): To Doug. Where do we both travel indeed?

Perhaps life is a continuing apprenticeship.

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## Notes

1. Or as the *Pacific History Association Newsletter*, no. 8, April 1983:7, reported: 'Doug Munro, whose wanderings in recent years between Sydney, Tuvalu, Adelaide and Suva have almost rivalled the migrations of the ancient Polynesians, is now holed up in Port Arthur, Tasmania, scene of some of the most lurid incidents in the Apple Isle's convict past. And what has brought him to Port Arthur? A job as historian of the Port Arthur Conservation Project, this being a project sponsored by Tasmania's National Parks and Wildlife Service. Doug polished off the last of his PhD thesis on Tuvaluan history and got copies away to his examiners. The main title has a Louis Becke-like air about it. It is simply "The Lagoon Islands".'
2. Shortly after our arrival, my father started up an opera company, which is described in *Bravo!: a tribute to the New Zealand Opera Company, 1954-1971*, produced by Maxine Rose and presented by Adrienne Simpson, a 'Concert FM' production first broadcast by Radio New Zealand in November 1994, and available on three tapes marketed by Replay Radio, Wellington.
3. Or so my recollection goes, but I couldn't locate this title on an ABN search.
4. *Te Rama o Rongotai*, 1966:6. Rongotai College was not thought of as one of Wellington's 'better' secondary schools when I started there in 1961, but it certainly was by the time I came out in 1966. I was fortunate to have passed through at the same time as many talented students. At least in the circles in which I moved in my final years, there was an overriding tolerance that others should be left to get on with 'their own thing' rather than being hounded for 'being different'.
5. But make no mistake. It was my very good fortune to be an undergraduate in Australia during the late 1960s when universities were the beneficiaries of what Hugh Stretton called a 'noble revolution' (quoted in Foster and Varghese 1996:173) and funded as never before (which does wonders for morale and performance); and I retain great affection for most of my undergraduate lecturers. Being a brand new university, Flinders had the added advantage of being staffed by academics who were typically young and committed, many in their first job and only just in possession (or nearly so) of their doctorates. We can hardly expect to return to 'those glorious days' (see Munro 1987-88) in the foreseeable future, and I feel badly that today's undergraduates, not least at USP, suffer the consequences of insufficient funding, overcrowding, inadequate library resources and other threadbare conditions. Teaching under these circumstances often isn't much fun either. (For a commentary, see Graham G. Mills's note at the end of this article.)
6. Rudé's personal and professional qualities are beautifully captured by Stretton (1985). To have a professor of Rudé's eminence and affability was such a privilege. His work is summed up by the phrase *sans érudition, pas d'histoire*.

7. It is different today. Such is the proliferation of committee work and other distractions that academics at ANU's Coombs Building are more likely to work at home when writing deadlines get uncomfortably close (Denoon 1996:211).

8. People are invariably impressed that my Qualifying thesis was supervised by Peter Corris. This reaction arises not from the fact that he happened to be a good historian, but rather because he has since become the successful writer of detective novels (see Cotton 1991).

9. My grandparents in Scotland were considerably better off than my struggling parents in New Zealand. Living with my grandparents in 1955–56 and again in 1959 provided insights—which served me well during the mid-1980s when I taught British social history—into British middle class attitudes towards self-improvement, respectability and other 'Victorian values'.

10. This also meant a preponderance of unique sources. Events and occurrences in nineteenth century Tuvalu were typically described in a single document and nowhere else, so corroborative evidence was often not available. The scarcity of evidence, in turn, created an anxiety that missing just one source might also mean losing a vital piece of the figurative jigsaw puzzle.

11. I was later to discover that my cussed resolve in locating sources resembled the approach of the American inventor Thomas Edison, who said: 'When you are experimenting and you come across anything you don't thoroughly understand, don't rest until you run it down; it may be the very thing you are looking for or it may be something far more important' (quoted in Gelatt 1977:18). The difference is that Edison was financially independent by the age of 30.

12. The remittances came in the form of 'Telmos' (or *telegraphic money orders*).

13. This is how my appointment was reported in the *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, 39 (1984):29: 'Dr. Munro has taught at the University of the South Pacific and joined us from his position as Historian with the Port Arthur Restoration Project [in Tasmania]. Although his field is Pacific history, Dr. Munro will teach units in Revolutions, Victorian Society and Culture, Australian Government and Political Communication as well as taking part in the Special Study in History'. I was finally able to mount a Pacific history course in my third year of teaching at DDIAE.

14. A gratuitous speculation has been offered by Tom Brass (1996:222–23), who supposes that Shlomowitz is my 'mentor' (in fact I was 40 years old when I met him, on 5 Jan 1988 to be precise). Brass dares me to 'prove' my intellectual independence by critiquing Shlomowitz's work, little knowing that I did just that in 1990 in an unpublished paper referred to by one of my postgraduate students (Halapua 1993:26, 164). Shlomowitz took this in his stride but made it clear that I hadn't convinced him.



15. See *Chronicle* (Toowoomba), 16 Aug 1988: 5, 29 Nov 1988 (letter to editor), 2 Dec 1988: 4; *Honk* (DDIAE Student Union newspaper), Oct 1983:3.
16. See *Achievement* (Bond University), no. 14 (Sept 1991):5; *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, 58 (1989):15–16, and 69–70 (1991–92):30–34; *Bulletin* (Sydney), 26 Nov 1991:54–56; *Campus Review* (Sydney), 21–27 Nov 1991:15; Sharkey 1991.
17. It should not be thought that I was the first to conduct serious historical research on Tuvalu. Derek Freeman was working in the Public Records Office and Livingstone House in 1946 (1978:163n). Harry Maude, although he published little specifically about the group, extensively researched the documentary records relating to Tuvalu, as did Barrie Macdonald for his general history of Kiribati and Tuvalu (1982).
18. Munro and Thornley 1996. Goldsmith and I are writing a biography of Elekana (see Goldsmith 1995:5–14).

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