Mad Aunts, Illegitimate Children and Royal Bloodlines! Family, Women and History in 2008

By

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In an opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald in March this year Zoe Pollock wrote how the discipline of history is sidelined in the tertiary sector. She cites her alma mater, the University of New South Wales, where recently the School of History amalgamated with the School of Philosophy. I too have great memories of that same School of History and the work of Patrick O'Farrell in community history and his unwavering support for those of us working in the field. Zoe Pollock argued that history is pushed aside because it does not appear to fit with the vocational push so dominant now in the tertiary sector. But, as she argues, it should. She notes that the skills of research and analysis history teaches are fundamental to our understanding of the society we have created. I agree with Pollock about the disappearance of history from our universities...we've been talking about it in the history of education for a long time.

The quote 'mad aunts, illegitimate children and royal bloodline' Pollock made at the beginning of her article in the context of family history, or as it was once called, genealogy. She commented that family historians discover the family's darkest secrets - a mad aunt, the scandal of illegitimate children or royal bloodlines - and her comment encapsulates some of what I have to say later in this paper about a woman who worked in the professions, the public service and whose life, education, emigration to Australia and specific life circumstances - and the way they are portrayed - tell me something about the continuity of past mythology and stereotyping of women in history and how it has both changed and not changed in 2008.

Before I do look at the life I am writing I want to talk about changes more broadly in the history of women, in biographical writing and memoir, and in family history a field that I currently teach and write about in the community. I am no longer an academic. I am an honorary professor in the Nursing History Research Unit (NHRU) at the University of Sydney but I see myself now as a writer and a professional historian. I am a freelancer. I don't go to academic conferences. I do go to writing festivals. Last year I participated in both the Sydney Writers Festival and the Brisbane Writers Festival having published my latest book with Allen & Unwin on Writing Family Made Very Easy, (2007). That book draws on my expertise as a professional historian and also on the many, many interactions, questions, ideas, and discussions I have had with family historians over the decades...it is a book that tries to make history method and the writing of professional history more accessible to the community and to local and family historians who are splendid researchers but often very new to and inexperienced as writers. It is impossible for them to access the history that is written by and for academics and professional historians as I wrote in 1994 and that access has not improved or changed in the fifteen years since.
It was at Wollongong University in the 1980s that I began to research the lives of women teachers and educators. I was interested, as others were, in how differently women experienced childhood and growing up. I had encountered many of these women first in my doctoral work and my book on the history of women's education in New South Wales. I now wanted to find out how women teachers encountered leadership, and about their experience of being policy makers - how they made contributions to society, to education and to world affairs. I was interested to explore how this was different to that of men. And how one could write about this, how it was different to writing about men in educational history.

I wrote about several women including Caroline David, Agnes King, Annie Fawcett Story, Fanny Fawcett Story, Sarah Hynes, Annie Golding, Eliza Darling, Euphemia Bowes, Charlotte Brennan, Mary Gilmore, Catherine Fraser, and Mary Ann Flower. None of these women are immediately recognisable. If I had used Mary Gilmore's previous name of Mary Jane Cameron few would know it. These women were teachers, educators or social reformers of one kind or another. None of the women left records of significance, no diaries or writings except for Mary Gilmore and Caroline David. Agnes King was the Matron-Superintendent of the Reformatory School for Girls from 1869 to the 1890s. I found her story when writing my honours thesis on the Industrial and Reformatory Schools. Most girls then were placed in the Industrial School, (on the dubious charge of being in 'moral danger'). Very few of them were actually placed in the Reformatory school designed to take girls who were convicted of crime. There were a number of public inquires/select committees during Agnes King's administration (not specifically aimed at her but at the large Industrial School and its iniquitous and incompetent administration) and her story emerged allowing me to begin an examination of the role of female administrators and their experiences in the late nineteenth century.

Mary Jane Cameron, (later Dame Mary Gilmore), aged in her early 20s. Source: W. H. Wilde, Courage a Grace, p.49.
Charlotte Brenning, Catherine Fraser and Sarah Hynes took the Department of Public Instructions to task through select committees. I found their stories interesting because they were challenging the promotional system in a department which, in the eyes of the authorities at the time, quite rightly favoured men. Sarah Hynes story, with hindsight and from this distance, was one of the strangest that I encountered in terms of a woman fighting battles with the bureaucracy in New South Wales. She was one of five women and seventeen men listed in a set of complaint files in the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction and found in the New South Wales State Records (NSWSR). Sarah Hynes was a teacher of botany but was employed at the Sydney Botanic Gardens when these complaints were aired. There were three public service board enquiries attached to Sarah Hynes, all of which take on an air of comic melodrama as her aggrieved male superiors and colleagues are described as desperately scurrying around the flower boxes and herbariums defending their special domains.

The following quote is from her immediate superior, a Mr Betche, who believed she had a bad temper and that:

*She is such an aggressive women. She cannot take anything quietly. She must have her say, and I will not listen. This is a constant source of trouble. If I say I will not listen to her disturbances and complaints, she forces me to listen. I told Mr Maiden, and she was forbidden to enter my room, so that I could have quiet. I say I will not dispute with her, and she comes knocking at the door. I do not want her in my room, because if she comes in at any time with any of her complaints I cannot get rid of her. I told her to leave me alone, to leave my room, and she would not. I have said if she would not go away I would call the Director.*

Portrait of Eliza Darling and her two children, John Linnell (1792-1882) oil painting.
One of the problems in this case, at least for her male work colleagues, was that Sarah Hynes was better educated. She already had a science degree when she arrived in Australia and she had a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Sydney as well.

Of course Sarah Hynes did not have a hope of winning her case. She had thirty-nine charges detailed against her which included: insulting conduct toward her superiors, disobedience, 'laying a trap to catch an officer by wilfully misplacing a box of the Anacardiaceae in the herbarium', eavesdropping at the Directors room, prying in the directors room, loudly abusing poor Mr Betche, untruthfulness, frittering time, unreliability, prevarication, distorting conversations, inventing situations, habitually wasting time over herbarium specimens, neglect of duties, accumulation of rubbish, incompetence in her knowledge of botany, and habitually raising the question that she is independent of Mr Betche and the list goes on and on. At the end of the inquiries she was found to be insubordinate, fined two weeks salary and transferred to the Department of Public Instruction as a teacher of botany. As a matter of interest Sarah Hynes became a well loved and well respected teacher and she ended her days at St Georges Girls School in Sydney south where became the first woman to drive a Citroen car.

I was influenced by the writing of Leydesdorff and other feminist writers in the 1980s who observed how feminism chose its subjects (at first) in an effort to provide feisty predecessors to identify with: the Amazons because they were large and formidable, witches who were marginalised and persecuted, victims of male violence and repression and women who resisted. And we chose women teachers and educators who challenged, resisted or who were different. They were interesting and they stood out in the records. But they were not typical. And, we eventually began to see there were limits to such a view. Women are not homogeneous, most did not resist, most stayed home to do the washing. Most belonged to that 'passive majority' that we couldn't dismiss easily. In other words women constitute a whole range of characters, identities, attitudes, interests, ideas, hopes, dreams and histories. Leydesdorff suggested we chose that ideal because we wanted to identify with atypical, interesting, rebellious characters in history. We know now this is impossible.

Marjorie Theobald wrote much the same thing at the conclusion of her study of women teachers in Australia Knowing Women published by Cambridge University Press in 1996. She wrote, 'I make no spurious claims of sisterhood between the women whose lives I have appropriated, nor do I assume that they would wish to know themselves as I have depicted them. The knowing woman is truculent, enigmatic and elusive.' Theobald was right, there is no way we can know these women exactly from long ago. But, it is possible to interrogate a life closely and make a considered judgement about her, and it is biography, the story of a life from birth through to death, that provides that sharper window into a woman's life. Kathryn Hughes wrote recently in the Guardian - spend enough time with your subject, do the time-consuming research and you will, as far as is possible, really know what you are talking about.

Biographical studies of women in education
After researching and writing short biographies about these interesting women in education I moved towards a more in-depth biographical study of one woman. My subject was Caroline Edgeworth David, nee Mallet. Caroline Mallet was an Englishwoman recruited by Henry Parkes to become the first Principal at Hurlstone Training College for Women in Sydney. She left to marry Tannant Edgeworth David after two years. But this was not the end of her educational career or her contribution to the profession. Caroline David became a noted public speaker, she wrote on girls and their schooling and about women's role in society. She was a founding member of the Women's Club, the Feminist Club and was a member of the National Council of Women. When Caroline Mallet arrived in New South Wales in 1882 she brought with her a full set of Pestalozzies' Kindergarten Gifts and Occupations. She was familiar with Froebel's ideas and had already a long career behind her as a lecturer at a teacher's college (Whitelands) in London. Caroline Mallet was a woman of ideas and was especially skilled in what was then called kindergarten and infant education.

After Mallet left Hurlstone Training College and married, she remained happily married until the death of her husband in 1934 some seventeen years before her own. What was striking about her story for me, however, was despite her marriage and her commitment to a conservative middle class life, she continued to be an educational leader and social reformer and one of some significance. The key means by which women like Caroline David wielded influence was through their membership and involvement in unions, in women's organisations, in women's professions (nursing, health, social/child welfare, kindergarten work,) in girls sports (e.g. girl guides, YWCA, Christian fellowships) in the teaching profession and in middle class philanthropy. Caroline David, for example, was active in all aspects, except for union activity.

These women also used traditional lobbying techniques such as writing letters and appearing as witnesses to Select
Committees on education. Annie Fawcett Story appeared as witness to the Fink Commission and pressured the Director of Education in Victoria Frank Tate, for a College of Domestic Economy. Agnes King and Sarah Cunyhihame wrote to Henry Parkes about industrial schooling for girls and Mary Gilmore worked and wrote for the Tribune for all of her long, active life supporting a range of social and educational reform for women and working class people. How, when and in what context women would experience a professional career in education would always be very different and thus the way we might research and write about it would also differ. Caroline Edgeworth David's life, especially after she married, was an interesting template of how women could be overlooked as educators if we do not ask different questions or if we do not recognise that her diverse range of activities (mostly unpaid) did constitute an extension of her professional career and a contribution to educational, social and political affairs. One example is her substantive work as an examiner at Sydney Technical College and in the early years of the Diploma in Education at the University of Sydney.

In 2005 I gave a talk to the Society of Genealogists in London on female emigrants to Australia. English researchers apparently have difficulty finding the records on convict and emigrant women once they leave the ship and begin their new life in Australia. This led me to look at new research published on convict women by Deirdre Beddoe, Joy Damousi, Deborah Oxley and others and work published on female emigrants by Jan Gothard, Emma Curtin, Hammerton, Elizabeth Rushden and Kay Daniels. Women's history is being written, doctoral work is being done. I was impressed.

That talk and my research for it led me to reflect on the changes to women's history over the last decade. I was interested to find the recent surge in publication of memoir and biography and of course the debates surrounding fiction, history and that strange beast called creative non-fiction.

The Changing Face of Biography

Kathryn Hughes is a biographer, a literary critic, she teaches life writing...her most recent biographies are on Mrs Beeton and George Elliott....Hughes makes the point that there are now endless lives written of saucy 18th century society ladies, plenty of royal mistresses and about people who ran little kingdoms in clammy parts of the globe and or were worshipped as gods by confused locals. The careful, considered and well-researched biography is on the downslide, indeed she argues it is in crisis. What is on the rise however is the celebrity memoir. Quality is down, quantity is up. And, authors keep going back to the 'big lives' and writing them again as publishers press for a bestseller based on a known life rewritten perhaps with a tiny twist in the tale. We know this is not good news for women's history. Their lives are rarely considered on the same scale as men unless it is in those atypical, unusual and sensational roles cited above.

Once upon a time, biography was lively and experimental, think of Lytton Strachey's Eminent Victorians, or our own Dick Selleck's and Martin Sullivan's Not so eminent Victorians. Inga Clendinnen, biographer and public commentator, asks the question: why write biographies, because you won't be able to find out what matters, except by chance, and then you won't know why it matters. And also, as she further
argues, when we do move from the personal to the social, the dangers are even more evident because there is ‘the rage, the tears, the lawsuits a biography can unloose.’ Her example here is the writing of biographies of famous writers who, if not still alive, have living relatives, partners and friends who quite rightly, demand a reckoning from the unwary author.

Clendinnen cites the example of Janet Malcolm who wrote *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*. She goes on to say that we do not invent our stories freely. And we have constantly to juggle them within the context of perhaps a ‘hostile sibling’ or other family members, our own changing perceptions, our aging perhaps, and so on...Of course Inga Clendinnen does not say we should not write biography or memoir. Her point is essentially the same as Marjorie Theobald, *how difficult it is to know and understand the past*. And that writing about characters takes more than just a cursory, one-dimensional race through it.

Women, of course, have suffered much more in a portrayal that is stereotypical in published biography, hence the popularity of the royal mistresses, the saucy out there character, or the bawdy female convict. Anne Summers said this very succinctly in the title of her book *Damned Whores and God's Police*. Current biographers are not undertaking time consuming research. The biography and the memoir is now short, sharp and repetitive. Or we do what Amanda Foreman did when she published her biography of the Duchess of Devonshire, on the front cover of the book is a photograph of her nude behind a pile of books...so that her life, the author’s life becomes as important as the person she was writing about. There is a distinct reluctance to consult primary archives and to do scholarly research. Publishers do not want to wait six, seven or eight years for a biography and the reading public are perhaps unaware or do not care. They want a rollicking yarn.

At the time of this paper we are waiting breathlessly for our latest Australian memoir - Peter Costello, whose publisher, and it seems the Liberal Party, are beefing up the tension - will he or won't he say he will lead the party in opposition, when of course he has already said that he won't but that doesn't seem to matter in this media-saturated and seemingly celebrity-driven culture. I expect that any minute now that Stephanie Rice will produce her memoir: she has the attributes, she is young, pretty, successful and the media, and indeed the public, are hungry already for more.

Not all of women’s’ history is narrow, stereotypical or sensationalised. There are many good books like Sylvia Martin's study of Ida Leeson the first female librarian at the Mitchell Library in Sydney, and Alice Pung’s *Growing up Asian in Australia*, Roberta Sykes' *Snake Cradle*, Inga Clendinnen’s *Tiger’s Eye*, and the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* which continues to add women to its lists. But there remains a tendency for biographies of women to go with the stereotypes, at least those that are published today.

I want to turn now to my latest biography... and if this sounds grand, well it is, because I have not had a full scale biography published by a commercial publisher to date. I did try to find a publisher with my work on Caroline David but despite her name and her family connections these were not enough to persuade them. There is the thought too, that perhaps my approach was too serious and ponderous at the time. There is no doubt we can get a bit carried away with the importance of our writing.
sometimes! Authors are terrible judges of both the quality and the originality of their topics. On the other hand, I was not young, not edgy and nor was I prepared to write creative non-fiction, historical fiction or indeed a fictionalised version of a life and sell it as 'based' on history, or indeed as historical version of a life. The latest best sellers are often in this genre including recent work by Kate Grenville (*The Secret River*, *The Lieutenant*), Colleen McCullough (*The Independence of Miss Mary Bennet*) and Carol Baxter (*An Irresistible Temptation*). There are too, the well-known 'hoax' books published as 'true stories' so as to enhance sales but since found to be largely untrue and fictional. These latter texts include James Frey *A Million Little Pieces*, Norma Khouri *Forbidden Love*, and Helen Dimedenko, *The Hand that signed the Paper*. Truth is not necessarily a prerequisite for sales however. James Frey, for example, continues to write and has sold millions of copies of his original book and his latest publication. I am not sure what else one should say about these trends except to note that there is a set of events in the past, a past that is not fictional, and as historians we are obliged to continue to document it in as historically accurate, interesting and readable way as is possible.

We have long known that there are close links between women’s lives, child welfare, education and social history. All of these fields of study background my work on women teachers and educators and they continue in this latest biography of Constance Emílie Kent. If time spent in research is any measure of quality this biography has it all! I have been researching (mostly part time since my retirement) for the last six years on this life and have had several attempts at the story. It has only been the last twelve months however that the story of her life, drawn from my research, has taken on a distinctive shape of its own. I wanted to write about her life in Australia, the long almost sixty years of life after prison, and what her aging, her growing maturity might tell me about her, about the past and about the murder.

Constance Kent was educated in various ladies schools in Victorian England, trained as a nurse in Australia, worked in one hospital briefly, but her major career and contributions was as a public servant. She worked as a supervisor, mentor and teacher to adolescent girls at the Parramatta Industrial School for Girls for a significant period and then was Matron of a Nurses’ Home at Maitland. And, as well, she was a murderess. There are many, many publications in the ‘true crime’ genre about this woman. When I first started to look at publishing this biography I was asked by one publisher to gothic it up...it was a murder in 1860, it was in huge mansion in the countryside of Wiltshire and they wanted dark, forbidding scenery, scary creaking floors and strange, chilling people in it. There have been several doco-dramas produced by the BBC on this topic, the story always framed within a bleak, very windy, dark context where creepy, dark hunched figures are scurrying about with their coat tails flying and, of course, with the obligatory jarring music blaring in the background. The truth? It was July, it was summer in the south of England, it was a balmy quiet night and the family and the neighbours and the community had no idea of what was about to happen.

**Constance Emílie Kent and the Road Murder - A biography**

It is in this story of Constance Emílie Kent that I find my mad aunt. There is madness at least in the minds of the officials at the time and the ‘true crime’ writers who find this murder so compelling. Constance Emílie Kent is portrayed as a mad aunt, this very typical of how middle class women who commit murder are presented in the
Constance Emílie Kent, in her guise as Ruth Emilie Kaye, was working quietly in Parramatta as Matron and second in charge at the Parramatta Industrial School for Girls when I first found her in 1979. I wrote about her then as a senior public servant along with other women who had achieved highly paid and relatively significant government positions and some status, at a time when promotion and recognition for women in top public roles was almost non-existent.

What set Constance Kent apart from other women however was the fact that prior to her emigration to Australia she was incarcerated for twenty years in English prisons for the murder of her three-year-old half brother. This was a dreadful crime even for those times. I seem to talk about it now with very little emotion although when I first read the detail I was horrified by it. I did not write then about the murder. I knew about it. I found Bernard Taylor's Cruelly Murdered at Mitchell Library and read the story of the murder, the police investigation and the court appearances, and marvelled at the horror of it. But, I did not pursue it. Bernard Taylor's book, published in 1979, the same year as my honours thesis, was the first publication to reveal that Constance Kent, under her alias Ruth Emilie Kaye, had emigrated to Australia. No writer since has elaborated further on her Australian life, career and family events. My book takes up that story to argue that the more than twenty years this woman was in prison (these years too are not researched or written about fully) and the nearly sixty years she lived in Australia need closer examination.

The events of the night of the murder are so well known so as to need little reiteration but in summary are thus: Francis Savill Kent, aged three years and ten months, was found dead in an outside privy, his throat cut on the morning of 30th June, 1860. The crime became a front-page story throughout England. The public were transfixed, enthralled, shocked; they could not get enough of it. The local police conducted an inept investigation and the Scotland Yard detectives brought in to help were unable to gain a conviction. The father of the child, Samuel Savill Kent, was a Factory commissioner employed in several southern counties of England to inspect factories that employed women and children. Thus, he was not well liked in the local community but he did have important social and political contacts within the coterie.
of local magistrates and public officials including those who would sit in judgement of this case. As a result he was able to intimidate local (and inept) police and partially subvert the various investigations. As the head of a family with substantial means he was also able to use legal counsel to good effect.

There was no successful prosecution in the case. The Kent family moved to Wales. Constance was sent to France. The story of these years are well covered in Bernard Taylor's *Cruelly Murdered*, Yseult Bridges *Saint with red hands*, John Rhode's *The Case of Constance Kent* and if you care to Google her name or the 'Road Murder' you will find thousands of websites, ranging from the weird and the strange to the obsessive, about this case. The case continues to fascinate people around the Western world. More recently Kate Summerscale has written *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*. Jonathon Whicher was the detective from Scotland Yard sent to oversee the case. His failure to gain a conviction earned him ridicule in the press and some difficulties in his career.

In 1865 Constance Kent, now twenty-one, confessed and went to prison for twenty years. Debate has ensued since on whether she was guilty. Some believe she took on the mantle of guilt to 'save' the family further harassment. Other writers point to the father or the nurse as possible suspects. Also her brother William was a possible suspect. In the end few can say what really happened. But the events of that night changed forever the lives of all within Road Hill House, guilty or not. When news of the crime broke on the day after the murder the press, the public, neighbours and nearby villagers converged like vultures toward the house, they poured into the grounds, they peered into windows, they had to be held back by long suffering local police. No wonder the Kent family withdrew, that they closed ranks, began their secretive journey to keep out not just these prying, intrusive eyes but also to hide what actually happened on that previous night. Not that one of them was not guilty. One or two of them certainly was - everyone knew that. But proving it was another matter.

Madness was always going to prove a factor in the investigation and mythology of this crime once the sixteen-year-old Constance Kent came under suspicion. Stories of madwomen, murder and the family dominate the cases of middle class women charged with murder. Ann Jones writes of how the middle class Lizzie Borden has had her life, crime and later events written about and reinterpreted many times since
the night she allegedly murdered her parents in 1892. Lizzie Borden is now considered to have been guilty but that has not stopped playwrights, ballet, opera and television from portraying her in all kinds of ways and as Ann Jones writes: 'She dies hard, and she sprouts theories like dandelions.' She writes:

Most of the latter-day versions of the Borden story, like the trial itself, try to get society (that is, men) off the hook. Many contend that the killer was someone else; a farm laborer, a mutinous seaman, Bridget Sullivan, Emma Borden, or (in a most peculiar version) Andrew Borden himself in the grip of 'male menopause.' Other versions that ascribe the murder to Lizzie find a credible motive in 'true love': either Lizzie wants a man but can't get him, or has a man but (thanks to Andrew) can't keep him, or - in suggestive Freudian scripts - has a taboo yen for Andrew himself.

This was a particularly brutal murder. Lizzie Borden's father Andrew and stepmother were found battered to death in the family home. At the time the court, the judges, the lawyers and public commentators were convinced that 'ladies' would not, indeed could not, kill. Ann Jones writes how women who kill are viewed differently simply because they are women. For the infamous Lizzie Borden this skewed perception worked in her favour, it saved her from the gallows because stuffy conservative male judges were unable to believe that a lady of breeding and class, a woman with impeccable good manners could kill her own parents. The male jurors who acquitted her were shunned by local townspeople who believed Lizzie Borden had “got away with murder.” In other cases, where women from the lower classes and impoverished backgrounds were charged with murder this theory worked negatively many of them ending up in prison or in the hangman’s noose despite their innocence or doubts about their guilt.

In the first months following the Road Murder, and after his first wife Mary Ann had been dead for seven years and not able to speak for herself, Samuel Kent reported that the years following the death of four babies and just prior to the birth of Constance, was the beginning of his first wife's unstable mental state. He cites these years as being particularly damaging for the family and he is supported by Joseph Stapleton who began the 'unstable' portrayal of Mary Ann Kent with his book in 1861 and following writers repeat. Joseph Stapleton was a local surgeon and good friend to Samuel Savill Kent. And so the mother, the first wife, dead for seven years before the murder was then and is now somehow seen as the precipitator of it. Madness, for the mother and then the daughter, was an explanation, a reason also for this dreadful crime. It did not have to be true. And so the themes of madness and women and murder have became synonymous with the case thereafter.
After prison Constance travelled to Australia, trained first as a nurse, worked for four years at the Coast Hospital at Little bay in Sydney, and then was appointed as the matron and second in charge at the Parramatta Industrial School for girls in 1898. She remained at the industrial school for eleven years. She ended her professional career as the matron in charge of a Nurses' Home in Maitland and she died aged 100 at Strathfield in 1944. These are the bare facts of her life as they have been outlined to date for the Australian decades of her life. Previous writers dismiss these years in a paragraph or two. True crime writers stop writing as the prison gate swings shut as though this is the end of the story. For Constance Emiflie Kent as she walked into Millbank Penitentiary in July 1866 it was in fact the beginning of the next part of her long, eventful and revealing life. My book will take the reader past the crime, into the prison and into the living spaces of her Australian life, her relationship/s with her siblings and half-siblings (all of whom also emigrated) and open a window into the whole life. It is a story of this woman as she matured and as she aged, of her working experiences, her social and political concerns, her responses to family, work, community and her own aging, - and how this can tell us about the woman, about the murder and about the complex and revealing journeys of every member of the Kent family after this terrible event.
Do I come away from this study knowing more about Constance Emílie Kent, yes I do. As Kathryn Hughes notes, you cannot spend long years of research and reckoning with a subject without knowing them very, very well. Do I think she was guilty. You will have to read the book to know what conclusions I come to about this woman, this family and that awful crime in 1860. My book is about a family, a dysfunctional, broken, disturbed family and how they dealt with one of the worst, most horrific events any family can be faced with. It is about a murder within and by a family member, and worse, of a child, a young defenceless, three-year-old child. It is about family secrets and about how individuals and families survive and change and live afterwards. It is about the family today as I am the first to have traced all of the living descendants of Samuel Savill Kent, his two wives and sixteen children. It is also about resilience and damage control. This is not a CSI or a Law & Order version of a life, of murder, of crime. And, why would we think that such a family would stop living, stop thinking, stop being and stop knowing about that past as Constance walked into prison and they, all of the Kent family, faced a future so much changed it might hardly have been able to have been borne? This story is about a family in despair, in disarray. It is also about how women lived out their childhoods, grew up, were educated or not in Regency and Victorian England. It is also about how in 19th century and 20th Century Australia women like Constance Kent, Caroline David, Mary Gilmore and Sarah Hynes and others, worked within and outside the political and educational and other bureaucracy to make a difference in their own unique and sometimes damaged way.

1 Zoe Pollock is the executive officer of the History Council of NSW.
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3 I am grateful for the support of the NHRU and its director, Emeritus Professor Lynette R. Russell in developing this paper and in the final research and writing of my latest biographical study.
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23 The Borden’s maidservant.

24 Ann Jones, op cit, pp.234-35.

25 ibid.


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