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On Finding Oneself in a Library,
Greg Dening Lecture, 24 November 2011

Do you want to know how I knew I was right? One day I was reading in the glow of a lamp in the gloom of the Great Reading Room of the State Library of Victoria, on a green leather desk carved with the message 'Foo was here', with a bucket behind me into which rainwater dripped from a vast height, with a smelly sleeping drunk beside me—I used to wear a clerical collar in those days, half the homeless men in Melbourne used to sit beside me in the library because they thought that they would not be thrown out if they did—in this act of historical research which I re-enact for you right now in a sentence that is clearly never going to end, I read Harold Gatty’s survival pamphlet for crashed airmen during World War II. 2

And here the sentence ends. The act, which took place in 1958, was re-enacted by Greg Dening in his essay ‘Endeavour and Hokule’a’, published in a collection called Readings/Writings in 1998. It was a profound moment of discovery, one that played a part in overturning an erroneous orthodoxy, and one that set Greg on a journey of self-discovery and historical exploration that had personal consequences for Greg and for every student he taught and many readers of his books. And it happened here—well very close to here, in the domed reading room.

The discovery was Gatty’s account of the lore and knowledge of Polynesian navigators, given as advice to airmen downed in the vast

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1 I would like to thank Dr Donna Merwick for her gift to the State Library of Victoria of the Library of Professor Greg Dening. I would like to thank Professor Joy Damousi for inviting me to give the 2011 Greg Dening Lecture. I would like to thank all those who attended, especially Russell Walsh for his generous response to my reference to his thesis and my daughter Alexa who sent this text message afterwards: ‘Good talk tonight Dad. I love you and I didn’t realise all the shit you have had to go through. I love you and I am proud of you. Also I now understand why you have lost a lot of hair and its gone silver’.

stretches of the Pacific, knowledge that had survived the impact of conquest and disease and had continued to be used by the Polynesian sailors that traversed the ocean using currents, changes in sea temperature, cloud formation, stars, birds and the merest drift of debris as their guide. Gatty’s practical guide provided a translation of evidence to challenge the latest expression of the academic orthodoxy that the Pacific was settled by random acts of nature, with canoes blown off course setting people on islands like the fluff of dandelion seeds. Greg seized his moment and precociously, as a mere student in John Mulvaney’s Pacific Pre-history class, he submitted his review essay for publication in *Historical Studies*. It won him a stinging rebuke in an aerogramme from the great historian, which Greg kept as a ‘sort of scouts badge of adversarial academia’. Of course in a parade of new scholarship Greg’s challenge to the orthodoxy eventually saw the whole Eurocentric colonial façade tumble and the triumph of the Polynesians fully acknowledged.

Greg revisited the moment in a longer reflection in the book *Beach Crossings* which has the provocative sub-title of *Voyaging across times, cultures and self*, published in 2004. In a longer description of his experience of the Dome he had this to say:

> It was a magical place for me. I loved the heavy silence of its great space. It was a silence you could feel on your shoulders, something like standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon or in the Australian bush. The few sounds there have a distant feel, like children’s voices in a schoolyard far away.

> The hours I spent reading in this library rolled into days, into weeks, into months, maybe even into years. You could squirrel away stacks of books on your table, against the time it took to search for some volumes, against the volumes lost forever somewhere in the stacks.³

Now I don’t think I am being disrespectful to say that I hear in this passage the beguiling siren song of nostalgia, and in my current role I have quite often contended with protests that the Dome is not silent enough and the sound of children’s voices are all too close, but nostalgia has its place in personal recollection and it is the insertion of the personal into the historical narrative to which I now turn.

Along with perhaps fewer than 200 students across Greg’s teaching career at the University of Melbourne, I took part in an honours seminar called ‘Social and Reflective History’. The seminar was Greg’s way of creating a meeting place for the cognate disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and history, mixed with theatre and theology. His manifesto (although he would hate the word) was an essay published in *Historical Studies* in 1973 and soon after his appointment as Max Crawford Professor in History. Called ‘History as a Social System’ it declared an intention to break down the barriers cemented by departmental structures between systems of thought, to socialise students (hence the word ‘social’) in a wider imagination and to do so through personal consciousness in the act of narrative (hence the word ‘reflective’).

The immediate effect was to cause confusion. Greg was not a lecturer and his preferred way to teach was to tell a story, load us with seemingly irrelevant reading, and wait for a reaction. I well remember one fellow student, a sheep farmer from Ballarat in his forties, and gifted with an enviable Australian drawl, challenging Greg one day by saying ‘Listen Professor, sometimes a goalpost is just a goalpost, it isn’t always a phallic symbol’. Greg waited patiently until we realised it probably was. His means to this end was to have us not write about the past, but to observe the present, and he set us to write an Ethnography by describing as closely and as imaginatively as possible a ritual in modern day life. A favourite was the Dawn Service at the Shrine, another (and for some) the baffling ritual of the Catholic mass, but I chose another, the calling to the Bar of new Barristers. Armed with nothing more than the idea I approached the tipstaff of the then Chief Justice, who listened bemusedly to my request to observe and take notes in the proceedings and then gave me the title for my piece by saying ‘well I suppose it is a bit of a tribal custom’. Greg set exacting restrictions. The ethnography could be no longer than 1500 words, so the task of writing was as important as the story told. I no longer have the piece although a version was published in a journal called *Shades*, which lived for but one issue and is preserved in this Library! I do remember Greg’s comments. I had quoted from Robert Bolt’s play *A Man for All Seasons* and Greg flattered me by saying my writing owed more to Erasmus than to More, while urging me to read and read widely.
All these years later I hear in the memory of his counsel the core of his purpose. Greg was a humanist, and one who drew on a rich strand of that optimistic and sadly neglected way of thinking. For he had been schooled by the Jesuits and then for the first part of his adult life was a member of the Jesuits and ordained as a priest.

Underpinning the Jesuits is a tension that can be traced to their foundation. Their spirituality is rooted in *The Spiritual Exercises*, a kind of handbook to mysticism reflecting the journey of its author and founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola. At the core of the exercises, usually taken as a thirty-day silent retreat, is decision on a purpose, and once made it is intended to liberate. At the time of its creation *The Spiritual Exercises* and indeed the Jesuits were suspect as too liberal and free, and potentially reflecting the revolution of the protestant reformation that placed the individual conscience ahead of the teaching of the Church. As a balance to this the other side of the tension was written, *The Constitutions*. This was not meant to be a ‘rule’ as in the rules governing more ancient monastic traditions like the Benedictines, Franciscans and Dominicans, but served in that purpose and was designed to set boundaries around the life in common that the Jesuits shared in their houses. The core of the tension was the contemplative and the active life, and a Jesuit was meant to be active in the world while constantly reflective as if he were a hermit, leading to the description *contemplativus simul in actione* or contemplative in action, a perfect formation for an Anthropologist given the practice in that discipline of participant-observer. A second key influence was the form of contemplation described by Ignatius in *The Spiritual Exercises*. Key to this was the use of the imagination, as Ignatius proposes that in reflecting on a story in Scripture the full senses to be engaged in what he calls a composition of place. In meditating we are to imagine the scene as if we were there and have it speak its message to us.

If we take the essence of Jesuit spirituality and apply it in a secular understanding of History then we start to see how Greg revolutionised thinking for so many. Historians manufacturing facts from scraps of evidence and placing them in chronological order to tell a story suddenly become participant observers in a memory told as much from the silences in the past as from the records that we can
read. Indeed Greg in concluding his account of his moment of discovery in the Domed Reading Room said as much. Gatty’s matter of fact account of how to navigate the Pacific without modern instruments or maps in Greg’s imagination opened his eyes:

It was a moment of solidarity with experiences I had never had, a moment of trust and imagination if you want. Anyone engaged in cross-cultural research will know that it is not the mountains of texts of the encounter between the indigenous peoples and the intruding strangers that are the problem. It is the depth of the silences. Translating silences is the hardest thing in cross-cultural research. Anyone in cross-cultural research will have to have trust and imagination to hear what is said in that silence.4

Greg wore his clerical collar at that time to mark himself from the ‘world’ as much as to be a refuge for the homeless in one of the few free spaces available to them, and it also marked a different way of thinking and of reading in the depths of the dripping silence of the Dome.

At this point I think you may need some entertainment. I may be taking you too far, and too fast into the mysticism of history. So I propose to tell a joke that perhaps illustrates the dangers of ‘composition of place’. It is an old joke, and one that follows a traditional form, the clerical equivalent of ‘the Englishman, the Irishman and the Scotsman’ joke namely the ‘Jesuit, Dominican and Franciscan’. In this joke they are not in a bar, but kneeling on Christmas Eve in a vigil of prayer before a representation of the nativity scene. Suddenly they are granted a miracle and the scene comes to life. The Dominican steeped in the theology of Thomas Aquinas marvels at the moment, the very incarnation, God become man. The Franciscan is entranced by the poverty of the scene, a birth in the muck and simplicity of a stable. After a while the Jesuit stands up and walks over to St Joseph to ask ‘And where are you sending your son to school?’

My own practice as a historian is really quite recent. I had dabbled in history during a disconnected career as a public servant in areas of trade and industry policy, and I owe my release from that sterile domain to a great warrior in history, John Winston Howard. I

4 Dening, Readings/Writings, 111.
remember watching the election count on the evening of the 2 March 1996. I was doing the ironing in the living room of the house that Ann and I had bought, and that I was about to vacate after its sale following our divorce. I had five shirts to iron, optimistically expecting to wear each of them in sequence in the week to come, a week that already held two major events. One was an appointment at the Family Court to dissolve the marriage, and the other was moving out of the house to a rented unit. The third event was happening before my eyes, as Howard won his victory I knew I had now lost my job, because first on the list of government agencies to be abolished was the Australian Manufacturing Council where I worked. Years later a psychologist struck by the enormous impact of three events of that magnitude in one week asked if I had ever painted that event. I am no artist, but I have now told the story to you.

The AMC as it was known was abolished and along with my colleagues I was faced with taking a package or continuing on the government payroll for seven months during which I could find another job. My tenure in the public service meant that the package was worth less than the seven months retention, and seeing the huge wave of redundancies across the public service I resolved to use the retention salary as a way to gain experience in the private sector and make a transition. I made my way in the orderly queue of so many refugees to the inelegantly named Australian Public Service Labour Market Adjustment Program, which consisted of one overworked woman in a small office trying to make a difference for so many. I gave her my CV and asked her to make arrangements for my retention salary to be paid while I worked in the private sector. She looked at my CV and remarked that it demonstrated a high level of administrative and management skills and asked if I would consider a job in the public service. I said yes, never expecting to hear from her again. The next day I received a call from her to say that the Australian Archives needed a new director for the Melbourne office and would I apply? Clearly she had read to the very bottom of my CV where I had buried my degrees in History. I said yes without great optimism and duly called the Human Resources manager in Canberra. I had two questions for him. I remembered from research visits the dreadful recycled factory that the Archives had as a repository in Brighton, was I expected to work there? He told me that that building had been sold and a new purpose built repository
constructed at East Burwood. My second question was whether there were any internal candidates? I had been successful in three public service job applications only to be turned away in favour of an internal candidate that was also facing redundancy. His answer was a relief but perhaps should have been a warning: ‘We offered it as a management challenge to colleagues but none would take it’. George Nicholls, the Director General, then interviewed me and later phoned to offer me the job with the comment ‘we are taking a risk appointing you’. Concerned as to what he may have found out about me I asked what he thought was the risk and he replied ‘well putting an historian in charge of an archive might mean you disappear into the repository never to be seen again, but I think you will be too busy for that.’ He was right, and my five year appointment stretched into a sixth, the Archives tolerant of my need to find a job in Melbourne given the fact that I was still caring for my children. They readily agreed to me participating in a transition program where I polished my CV, practiced my interview skills, learned that 99 per cent of jobs come through networking and not advertisements in the paper, and I performed one truly revelatory task.

We were asked to chart our careers in a graph, marking each turning point and noting for whom it was made. This simple piece of mapping revealed to me that at every point I had made a change for someone else, and for good reason. It was for Ann to help her career, or for the children to ensure an income. This change, I resolved, would be for me. Soon after the 1 per cent actually happened. In the Saturday Age an advertisement appeared for the position of Director Collections and Services at the State Library of Victoria.

And so I found myself in this Library
I arrived at a moment of great transition. The huge redevelopment project was about to deliver new public spaces, the then CEO and State Librarian, Fran Awcock had announced her intention to retire, and the tensions and conflicts of many years making were boiling over in industrial disputes. Chris Loreto, who had been working on secondment from the Library at the Archives, had warned me to expect a challenging environment, and her counsel was to take refuge in Rare Books when the going got tough. I spent a lot of time in Rare Books that first year, and my interest in the collection started to win me friends amongst my colleagues. In my second week Professor
John Barnes, then editor of the La Trobe Journal appeared in my office to invite me to join the editorial committee. Soon after I was at a meeting of this august group, and when invited to speak I thanked them for their work in preserving the scholarly tradition of the Library in difficult times. Professor Wal Kirsop interrupted me to ask me to repeat what I had said and then said that the word ‘scholarly’ had almost been banned—not any more I remarked. John Barnes seized his moment, and invited me to co-edit a planned edition to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Library in 2004 focusing on Redmond Barry.

Now Greg Dening used to warn us about ‘metric moments’, anniversaries considered important because they end in a zero. Personally I find them quite useful as they sometimes trigger government largesse in the form of grants so they have their purposes. I accepted John’s invitation, having never edited before, and set about inviting people to write on aspects of the great man. In a moment of weakness I offered to write about Ned Kelly and Redmond Barry. I had a certain guilt I needed to expiate and I felt this might be the way to do it. On 11 November 1980, another metric moment, being the centenary of the execution of Ned Kelly, I stole on to the forecourt of the Library with a co-conspirator Ciaron Crehan and together we decorated the huge sculpture of Redmond Barry to look like Ned Kelly. The sheets of art board resembling the armour bore a declaration of independence as a Republic drawing the links between the execution of Kelly, the declaration or Armistice in 1918 and the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975. A few years later I found myself as a research assistant for Professor Ann Galbally for her biography of Redmond Barry, and in the days of reading through files at the Public Record Office I formed a broader view of this extraordinary individual. On the day I arrived at the Library I found stuck to my door a photograph of the article published in the Herald on 11 November 1980 reporting on our exploits; I felt the Journal article would somehow help me right a wrong by writing about it.

But how to do this? Rivers of ink have been given to Kelly, less to Barry, and my initial idea of exploring the Irish context for the story seemed to have been thrashed to death albeit in different ways by Ian Jones and Ann Galbally. After an inspirational conversation with the
late John Ireland I found a way. I would explore the Irishness by proxy through the lives and writings of others. One from an establishment perspective, the radical and reforming politician Charles Gavan Duffy, the other from a simpler place, the policeman and sole survivor of Stringy Bark Creek, Thomas McIntyre. Duffy, windbag that he was, left thousands of words in pamphlets, parliamentary speeches and a tedious two-volume autobiography. McIntyre left a typescript memoir called *A True Narrative of the Kelly Gang by T. N. McIntyre Sole Survivor of the Police Party Murderously Attacked by those Bushrangers in the Wombat Forest on the 26th of October 1878* all but forgotten in the archives of the Police Historical Unit.

McIntyre is Greg Dening’s kind of witness. His account had been derided by several Kelly historians as the work of an unreliable witness, and it is true that he was prevailed upon to change his testimony to ensure a conviction, but the humanity in his memoir spoke to me. Here was a protestant Irishman caught up in a moment in history which over time and in mythology has grown out of all proportion. He has been treated as a bit player in a drama that has assumed defining nationalist dimensions, and is thus precisely the kind of liminal figure that can help fill the silences. Remarkably McIntyre recorded a conversation with Kelly while he sat next to the corpse of Trooper Lonigan in the camp at Stringybark Creek, bait in a trap waiting for the return of Sergeant Kennedy and Trooper Scanlon. He made a ‘strong appeal’ on behalf of Kennedy and Scanlon:

> I told him that they were both countrymen and co-religionists of his own. That one of them was the father of a large family, and that the other was a good-natured inoffensive man liked by everybody. This statement that they were countrymen of Kelly's was not strictly true, for Kelly was Australian born, but his father came from Tipperary and his mother from Armagh, and I thought he might be possessed of some of that patriotic-religious feeling which is such a bond of sympathy amongst the Irish people. My opinion is that he possessed none of this feeling. On the question of religion I believe he was apathetic, and like a great many young bushmen he prided himself more on his Australian birth than he did upon his extraction from any particular race. A favourite expression of his was: “I will let them see what one native can do”.5

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5 Thomas McIntyre, *A True Narrative of the Kelly Gang by T. N McIntyre Sole Survivor of the Police Party Murderously Attacked by those Bushrangers in the Wombat*
I concluded my article by decrying an Irish interpretation of Australian history as a way of disguising constitutional reform (Duffy’s preoccupation) in the bright clothes of Irish radicalism, and criminality as Irish rebellion. John Barnes took my manuscript and with some deft suggestions on structure improved it and sent it out for review. The report was positive and it was published. I had found my voice.

Greg saw part of his purpose to give voice to his students. In the ‘Crossing’ called ‘Remember me?’ in *Beach Crossings* he has this to say:

… students can learn all they need to learn in their reading. I always felt what they really needed from me was inspiration, a sense of passion for scholarship and an understanding of the need to gamble a little. The first thing I can inspire them to is to use their freedoms. And the first of these is to discover their own voice and style. Style—the imprinting of one’s personal signature on whatever it is that one is doing—is not easily won. There is much pain in finding one’s style.6

I was soon to find out the pain of perfecting a style.

John Barnes continued to encourage me to write. I resolved in a vague way to offer something for every second issue of the Journal as a contribution to the scholarship I had so precociously promised Wal Kirsop, and as part of a leadership to encourage others to write as well. My next effort was small piece in an issue celebrating the opening of the Cowen Gallery, but what followed was the product of all those hours in Rare Books. Des Cowley, our Rare Printed Manager, had tolerated my frequent visits and soon found the best form of distraction was to give me a book to read. On one occasion he gave me the copy of *Mirrour of the World* printed by William Caxton in 1490 and the only complete Caxton in Australia. I was instantly intrigued and especially by the fact that it had pasted into the cover a bookplate proclaiming it to be a gift from the Felton Bequest. In a serendipitous moment I discovered whilst working on the huge project to move half the collection to our new store in

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6 Dening, *Beach Crossings*, 263.
Ballarat a cache of administrative records from the Library from the 1920s onward. Amongst these were files telling the story of the Felton Bequest and its impact on the Library. A rich seam had opened in front of me. There followed over the next two years four interlocking articles telling the story of the Library and its collections from the beginning of the twentieth century to just after the Second World War. The first told the story of the Caxton volume, the second the story of a key Librarian, Albert Foxcroft, the third the relationship between the Library and its key London bookseller, William H. Robinson, and each of these were published in the *La Trobe Journal*. The fourth began as a paper delivered to a conference at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, telling the story of the impact of Sir Sydney Cockerell on the collections in Melbourne it was later published in the wonderfully named *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* as part of Volume XIII, Part 4 (2007) but from a conference that happened in November 2008 and in a book printed in 2010, such are the chronologies of academic publishing.

In the midst of all of this John Barnes faced another metric moment. Issue 80 of the *La Trobe Journal* loomed, and it was to mark the end of his time as editor. He approached me with a request to write a special piece telling the history of collecting Australiana in the Library. I protested that this was the history of the Library itself and he responded with his wry smile and encouragement to give it a go. The timing was terrible. I was in the midst of the preparatory work for the exhibition *The Medieval Imagination* which was swallowing time, Margaret Manion had me writing the introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition, we were also fully occupied with complex projects as part of the initiative known as slv21, and I was on four steering committees, for the digital object management system, the new search facility, the service redesign and a digital copy service. But how could I say no? My digging in the archives had uncovered many hidden gems, and as ever my colleagues were willing to help suggesting other pockets of material perhaps unknown to the catalogue.

I threw myself in to the project. And after snatched moments between steering committees spent in the reading rooms, and weekends spent with books and online resources, I began to write to a
very tight deadline. As the deadline loomed I nearly admitted defeat. John had wanted an article of around four to five thousand words; I had easily reached fourteen thousand words without getting to a conclusion. I sent the pile to John with a forlorn note ‘somewhere in here is an article, I just can’t find it’. He read it all and came back with two suggestions: I could tell the story of the La Trobe Library, in his view a worthy but possibly dull task; or, I could tell the story of the Library’s collecting of John Batman.

The second of these suggestions terrified me. Even more than Ned Kelly, John Batman is a divisive figure. Was he or was he not a founder of Melbourne? What are we to make of the treaties and what does this now say in a time of painful awareness of the very different indigenous history? Besides this I knew that Professor Bain Atwood, a scholar for whom I have enormous respect, was about to publish his major work on Batman and the treaties, the product of years of research and appearances at conferences. It was a minefield, but John is a hard man to refuse, he had done so much for me as my editor, I took the plunge. I was helped by clues and assistance, Alex McDermott in a conversation near the lockers in Palmer Hall directed me to correspondence from Redmond Barry on the purchase of the treaties, Gerard Hayes in our Pictures Collection told me of a box of brochures and catalogues that detailed the history of exhibitions in the Library dating back to 1896, and Shona Dewar in Manuscripts patiently helped me as I navigated the collection.

Finally I had a draft and John sent it out for review. The results were terrible. As I had feared I had trodden into territory that demanded exactitude I could hardly begin to understand. One review was vituperative, John suspecting I knew the author quietly filed that away. The other was merely devastatingly critical, but at least offered hope of reform. With patience learned from years of teaching and guiding theses to conclusion John helped me get the manuscript to a point where it could be published. The final hurdle was to give it a title. John had never liked my titles and I had always deferred to his judgment, but this time I held my ground and ‘John Batman’s Place in the Village’ was duly published in Issue 80 of the La Trobe Journal.

At its core it tells the story of the self-conscious collecting of the history of Victoria by this Library. I used the term ‘canon of Victorian
history’ which brought a sharp rebuke until I changed it to make it clear that it was Redmond Barry’s canon. Items were collected as relics rather than archives but the accumulation soon led to a creation of a narrative and a separate historical museum. Through display myth was made, and Batman had a rise to fame through the reifying collecting by the authoritative institution with its classical portico proclaiming its status. The fall from grace can be traced through the changing ways that art and monuments around the city have altered. Plaques removed or replaced with ever increasing confusion about what public statements are meant to say. Our history is so young we cannot tell the story. Still to this day we cannot be sure that Batman ever set foot on the banks of the Yarra where a plaque once proclaimed he did (the council had it removed some years ago) and the entry in his journal ‘This will be the place for a Village—the natives on the shore’ continues to haunt our memory. Rather than see him as a hero or a villain I proposed that he occupied an ambiguous place as a liminal figure caught between the certainty of his boat and the native shore.

In this he was like James Cook, the great figure that sails in and out of Greg Dening’s narratives. Cook, as Greg observed, was the first to propose the Polynesian problem. How was it that in this vast ocean of so many islands that people separated by such distances spoke similar languages and had similar customs? Cook actually had the answer with him on the Endeavour. Joseph Banks ‘collected’ Tupaia, a priest of the god ‘Oro from the sacred island of Ra’iatea of the Tahitian islands. Tupaia had known the English before Cook and had acted as a go-between. Banks thought he would be good as a trophy, and in the rest of that voyage as far as Batavia he acted as an interpreter, and showed Cook that he and many like him knew the ocean and its islands. He died in the fevers that struck the ship in Batavia so his personal knowledge went with him although his record remains in the log of Cook and the journal of Banks, trophy treasures of the National Library of Australia and the Mitchell Library in Sydney. We have a lesser and not unique reminder. In 2004 the State Library Foundation purchased Peter Brown’s *New Illustrations of Zoology*, published in 1776. In this book is the first illustration of an Australian bird, a Rainbow Lorikeet, captured for Tupaia to have as a pet and unlike its owner long lived enough to make it to England.
Cook made three voyages to the Pacific, and in his last he was driven as much by the need to match fortune to his fame as the desire for the Admiralty to have this great navigator prove definitively the existence of a North West passage. Cook wanted to secure advancement, places for his sons and social standing. Years of privation and malnutrition aboard ship had affected his mental state, he was driven to the point of madness. John Batman afflicted by syphilis had a similar driving ambition. James Boyce in his recent book *1835 The founding of Melbourne and the conquest of Australia* shows how in this state great bursts of energy emerge, and Batman wanted to secure his fortune by expanding his pastoral holdings into the lands of Port Phillip securing the future for his children. Both failed. Cook killed on the beach in Hawaiï, Batman dying a pauper his disease-ridden body thrown hurriedly into an unmarked grave. In *Sharks that Walk on the Land*, Greg Dening tells the story of Cook’s death and the strange co-incidences that surround it giving layers of meaning to the Hawaiians and to the English. He points to the parallel of Cook's body being dismembered by the priests and shared, while his officers conduct an auction of his no unwanted personal belongings on board the ship. But it continued beyond that. Cook’s widow made a practice of giving items that belonged to him to those who shared her veneration of her husband, and in a strange twist of fate this part of the story combines with that of Batman and in this Library.

Redmond Barry had tried to acquire Batman’s journal for the Library. It belonged to William Weire husband to one of Batman’s daughters and Town Clerk of Geelong. He failed in his efforts, but two years after Barry’s death in 1880 the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Alderman C. J. Ham presented the journal to the Library. He had paid £60 for this treasure and at the same time he presented a remarkable collection of Cook memorabilia for which he had paid £20.

The Cook items came from a Mrs Ann Elizabeth Smith of 1 Balmoral Terrace, Albert Park, and were authenticated by an affidavit attesting to their authenticity:

I am the widow of the late James Smith, commonly called James Cook Smith, who was born in London in 1813. That James Cook Smith was the son of the late Captain John Smith RN whose services are detailed in volume 12 page 407 of Marshall’s Naval Biography. That Captain Smith was first cousin to Mrs James Cook, the widow
of the circumnavigator. That Mrs Cook bequeathed to Captain Smith aforesaid certain pictures, prints, charts and instruments which belonged to the Circumnavigator. That this fact is noted on page 419 of the aforementioned volume of Marshall's Biography. That on the death of Captain Smith, his relict, Mrs Annie Smith kept them in her possession till her death when by will dated 12th July 1859 she bequeathed these relics to her son James Smith, the husband of the declarant. That Mr James Smith received these relics at the time he was resident in Launceston Tasmania, about June 1865. That they have remained ever since in his possession until his death on the 19th of September 1881, and since that date in the possession of his widow the declarant, from whom they are now purchased for the purpose of being presented to the Public Library and Museum of the Colony of Victoria by C. J. Ham Esquire, the Right Worshipful the Mayor of Melbourne. The above named relics of Captain Cook consist of the following items viz:

(1) Large engraving of the Death of Captain Cook;
(2) Water colour drawing by Webber, artist of the Expedition showing view in Dusky Bay New Zealand;
(3) Water colour drawing of New Zealand War Canoe;
(4) Red chalk drawing of a native of Otaheite;
(5) Red chalk drawing of a native of Malicolo (both by Webber)
(6) A small celestial globe;
(7) The celestial atlas of John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal;
(8) A sketch chart of Captain Furneaux's exploration of the South and East coasts of Tasmania (Van Dieman's Land) on board HMS Adventure when he was with Cook on the Second Voyage.7

Subsequent research by Rudiger Joppien has shown that the water-colours are by William Hodges from the second Voyage, and comparisons with charts in the hand of James Burney who was on the Adventure show that the chart is in his hand.

Cook and Batman combine once more in the celebrations for the centenary of European settlement in Victoria. Batman is now the hero, immortalised in a famous poster designed by Percy Trompf showing him as a ghostly figure towering above modern Melbourne with the caption This will be the place for a village (all references to the natives on the shore being removed). Cook appears in the form of stones and slates, the pieces of a cottage once inhabited by his parents and brought to Melbourne by the philanthropist and trustee of the Public Library Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, Russell

7 The Age, 25 October 1882.
Grimwade. Stored in a great pile on the vacant Little Lonsdale and Russell Street corner, the Trustees pondered reconstructing the cottage on one side of the forecourt with La Trobe’s cottage on the other until a happier solution was found in the Fitzroy gardens.

Such memorialising reflects a kind of fetishising of history, a kind of domesticising of the great men of the past to match current beliefs. Perhaps we are wiser now or perhaps as Greg Dening observed in the essay where we began ‘Endeavour and Hokule’a’:

> Social memory... is as much about the present as the past. Social memory enlarges the continuities between past and present. Social memory is in that word of Aristotle’s of the theatre ‘catharsis’, getting the plot, seeing the meaning of things.

A little later in the same essay Greg expands this idea to show how understanding meaning requires humility:

> All history is in that sense cross-cultural. But difference is the hardest thing to see. Difference is the hardest thing to accept. To see difference we have to give a little of ourselves: old to young, young to old, male to female, female to male, black to white, white to black. That is the first thing to be said about cross-cultural research I think. It always begins with a little giving, whatever way one crosses.

Towards the end of his life (although he didn’t know this of course) Greg was challenged to give in a way he hadn’t before. He was asked to examine a doctoral thesis by Russell Walsh entitled *Obscenities Offstage: Melbourne’s Gay Saunas and the Limits of Representation*. The content was graphic and challenged Greg, he confessed to Donna that he almost couldn’t read it, until one morning he resolved to do so by keeping a log. Like Cook he explored the unchartered, marking his soundings as the new and strange world unfolded. His report or log was seven pages long, entitled *An obscene performance by an examiner (Wait there’ll be more)* and the doctorate was awarded.

I have four books inscribed by Greg, given as gifts or bought at launches. *Beach Crossings: Voyaging across times, cultures and self* is inscribed ‘to Shane who has crossed many beaches too—some of them mine’. One of our common beaches is the Jesuits. I spent six

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8 Dening, *Readings/Writings*, 100.
9 Ibid., 101.
years in the order, enough to understand Greg’s reflections on that time, and just as he took refuge in the Mitchell Library in the terrible year of his persecution before leaving the priesthood, I took refuge here, in Queens Hall, reading deeply about Rembrandt, drawn to the pathos and empathy of his work in the year I struggled with my vocation. There was another beach I had actually crossed, which Greg understood through his log. At about the time I started work at the Library I was able to declare my sexuality as a gay man. It is an accident of timing really, my children were old enough to understand and to accept and beyond them few others mattered. I truly found my ‘self’ in this Library.

Every day people come to read in the Library. Even as information is available instantly in the computers we carry in our pocket and call ‘phones’ a public space is still used for reading. The affirmation of the public act of reading is as relevant as an expression of democracy now as it ever was, and while technology changes, a public library and a public reading room remains as a place to assert the civic purpose of learning.

I learned of Greg’s stroke from Margaret Manion. We were both in the frantic final days before opening the exhibition *The Medieval Imagination*. After he died I visited Donna. She welcomed me into her house and we sat and talked. I had a copy of the exhibition catalogue for her as a gift and she told me clearly and honestly the story of his death. As we talked I remembered that in my research on those early exhibitions I had come upon a catalogue of early bibles and books of religious significance prepared by the great Jesuit trustee of the Library Father William Hackett. He listed a first edition of the Spiritual Exercises, a great rarity, and excited I made my way to Rare Books to find it. There on the shelf it stood, and in the magic of the Dewey Decimal System, its companion cover to cover was a Catechism written by Martin Luther: Reformation and Counter-Reformation. I offered to bring the copy of the Spiritual Exercises to Greg’s funeral and place it on his coffin. Donna accepted. It seemed the right thing to do.

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