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‘CHEQUE SHIRTS AND PLAID TROUSERS’: PHOTOGRAPHING POONINDIE MISSION, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

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Poonindie mission, the Anglican church’s ‘Christian village’ established in 1850 on the Spencer Gulf in South Australia, represented an idealistic experiment. Its first few years were seemingly crowned with success when eleven young Indigenous residents were baptised by Bishop Short and Archdeacon Hale in February 1853. For their supporters, the gentlemanly demeanour of the converts revealed their essential humanity and capacity, demonstrated by several series of photographic portraits commissioned during this period – newly rediscovered in Australian and British collections in recent years. This relatively large and early archive of related, contemporary, material held in the Hale Papers in the Library of the University of Bristol, the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford, at Mill Cottage in Port Lincoln, at Ayers House (National Trust of South Australia) and in South Australian cultural institutions, re-writes the history of photographing Indigenous Australians. These photographs reveal that the Anglican church actively commissioned photographic portraits of its Indigenous congregation as part of a program of documenting its work. At Poonindie ‘the nucleus of the native Church’ was defined in distinctively classed terms, and a narrative of redemption was expressed through an exceptionally high quality series of images. During the late 19th century Poonindie’s increasingly disputed existence was defended by missionaries who continued to assert its worth through visual evidence. These remarkable photographic portraits remain a testament to a generation of Indigenous people struggling to survive the first decades of colonisation and dispossession.
Introduction

...the like feelings [of]...Etonians and Harrovians at the cricket matches at Lord's proving incontestably that the Anglican aristocracy of England and the “noble savage” who ran wild in the Australian woods are linked together in one brotherhood of blood. (Augustus Short 1872)

The privileged social background of the Anglican Bishop of Adelaide, Augustus Short, strongly shaped his view of his South Australian experiences. His biographer tells us that “when one or other of his clergy complained of the rough and often menial work which falls to the lot of the colonial missionary”, Short would reply, “You ought to have been a fag at Westminster”! (Whittington 1888:7). Similarly, Short’s assumption that external appearance – and especially clothing and demeanour – expressed inner capacity, governed his evaluation of the first Australian Aboriginal converts to Christianity at Poonindie Mission in 1853. During this initial, hopeful phase, visual ‘proof’ of the church’s achievements was commissioned by Anglican clergymen in the form of photographic portraits of its Indigenous converts – complementing J.M. Crossland’s much more well-known paintings of Conwillan and Nannulterra (Tregenza 1984). In the Australian context, these images, ranging from daguerreotypes and ambrotypes to cartes de visite, are unique in their quality and in the social status they assert. Exceptionally, the Poonindie subjects are shown as equals and gentlemen, contrasting with the second-class role for Aboriginal people explicitly envisaged by most Australian evangelicals.

Missionary Visions: ‘Cheque Shirts and Plaid Trousers’

The colony of South Australia was established in 1836, after the British Parliament passed the South Australia Act 1834. South Australia was the only Australian state to be settled entirely by free settlers under the Wakefield scheme. The Letters of Patent attached to the Act acknowledged Aboriginal ownership and guaranteed land rights under force of law for the Indigenous

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1 Fagging was a system developed in Britain’s public school system where junior boys would perform a range of simple tasks for senior boys, who were in turn responsible for their welfare.
inhabitants, however these provisions were generally ignored by the Colonisation Commissioners in London and white settlers, who followed the usual pattern of relations with the Indigenous inhabitants ranging from violence to accommodation. Various attempts were made to protect and ‘civilise’ Aboriginal people (e.g., Berg 2010). In 1838 William Wyatt established the Native Location on the north side of the Torrens River, intended to comprise a school and ten huts. In 1844 Murray River children were schooled at Walkerville under a government teacher. In 1845 the schools were combined as the Native School Establishment, off North Terrace (Patton 2008).

In 1848 the new Anglican Bishop of Adelaide, Augustus Short (1802-1883), arrived in the colony with his Arch-Deacon Matthew Hale (1811-1895). With Protector Moorhouse’s support, Short and Hale proposed the establishment of a ‘training institution’ at Poonindie on southern Eyre Peninsula, where children and young adults could be further educated and Christianised, away from the ‘corrupting’ influence of their parents (Brock 1993:24; Brock and Kartinyeri 1989:3-4). In 1850 Hale applied for land north of Port Lincoln, the traditional country of the Barngalla-Nauo [Barngarla] people and the site of numerous violent clashes throughout the 1840s (Horton 1994:1016). Since the 15,000 or so acres, which were farmed by Poonindie, were subdivided in 1896, the land has been controlled by a number of different owners. Today the area on which the main settlement site is situated is owned by three different landowners: the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council (PLACC), the Anglican Church, Diocese of Willochra and a private landowner.

Short proposed that the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel buy a portion of it; he later bought an adjoining run himself to ensure its isolation (Moorhouse 1850:3-4). Where attempts to convert Aboriginal people to Christianity had all previously ended in failure, such a venture was considered an ‘experiment’, and when eleven Indigenous residents of Poonindie were baptised in February 1853, it was acclaimed as a success.

The story of Poonindie must also be understood in the broader context of British missions and colonisation. As many have argued, at the heart of the modern evangelical mission lay a conception of otherness that was incorporative, as missionaries...
argued for the malleability and transformative potential of Indigenous people – often against those who argued for their essential difference on racial grounds (e.g., Lydon 2005). The intensely politicised context of Victorian science gave great weight to such debates about human history and difference. In particular the mid-19th century battle between polygenists (who argued for multiple origins) and monogenists (a shared origin) had significant implications for hotly contested public debates about slavery, for example, and the American Civil War. These views were to an extent reconciled by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), which provided both for a common origin for different human groups, as well as accounting for their contemporary divergences. As evolutionism became scientific orthodoxy from the 1870s onwards, ideas of biological difference spread and hardened into popular belief. In attempting to counter such ideas, the ‘conversion narrative’, contrasting a former state of savagery with a subsequent elevated Christian state, was widely deployed and took many forms (e.g., Mitchell 2011; Thomas 1994).

The vision shared by Short and Hale for their venture was strongly materialist, shaped by a belief in the importance of environment in moulding character, and, conversely, the expression of one’s inner state through outward appearance and behaviour. Such views had a long lineage within Western thought, but were strengthened in the context of social changes occurring across Britain over the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as an emerging, and avidly consumerist middle class came to perceive material prosperity as a sign of godly favour and spiritual progress. As Max Weber (2002 [1904-05]) first noted, at this period forms of Protestantism that justified worldly success in moral terms created a new association between sacred and secular that set the scene for the development of capitalism (and see Lydon 2009:6-15). Poonindie was founded on the principles of isolation and practical skills, which were intended as an improvement upon the Adelaide school. As Short explained (1853:10):
It had also been the defect of the school-system in Adelaide, that industrial education was not sufficiently employed. The natives were taught to read, write, and cypher. They were put in possession of the signs of ideas, without having acquired the ideas themselves. They could do a sum in addition, but knew not practically the value or proper use of money. They were not educated to be labourers or mechanics.

Here, in emphasising the industrial work the Indigenous residents were to perform, Short betrays the disjunction between missionaries’ claims of equality and inclusion and the practical, embodied everyday hierarchies enacted through the mission regime. The biblical catchcry declared (Acts 17:26): “and hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the places of their habitation.” Yet the clergy’s idealising representations of transformation were undermined by material differences in occupation, training, and the conditions experienced by Indigenous people. Under Hale’s direction, the Aboriginal residents helped to construct buildings at the new site, to clear and fence the paddocks, and to plough the land and sow crops (Mattingley and Hampton 1988:179; Short 1853). Darren Griffin’s (2010) spatial analysis of Poonindie identifies the layout of the mission as designed by Hale at its inception to recreate an English village centred upon the Church. The missionary’s house, however, was located far distant from the Indigenous dwellings, embodying a hierarchy within the village (Griffin 2010:156-169; Hale 1889:1). Once a school building had been constructed, eighteen children from the school in Adelaide were transferred to Poonindie to begin their studies there. From an original group of 19 (four couples, two single men, and two boys) the community grew so that by January 1852 there were 46 Aboriginal people at Poonindie, including the school children (Hale 1889:22; Raynes et al. 2002:16). By early 1853 the clergymen were delighted with their small flock: At that time there were 54 residents, including eleven married couples, the rest children (including 13 from the Port Lincoln district).
But the most momentous event took place in early 1853, during a visit by Bishop Short to Poonindie. Short (1853; see also South Australian Register 1853:3; Wollaston 1852) later described how:

After hearing them, and asking them questions, I agreed with the Archdeacon that there was good ground for admitting them by baptism into the ark of Christ's Church, believing them to be subjects of God's grace and favour. We held regular evening service at sundown; and after the second lesson, I baptized Thomas Nytchie, James Narrung, Samuel Conwillan, Joseph Mudlong, David Tobbonko, John Wangaru, Daniel Toodko, Matthew Kewrie, Timothy Tartan, Isaac Pitpowie, and Martha Tanda, wife of Conwillan.

Visible evidence for Poonindie’s achievements took on particular significance. Short’s and Hale’s vision was also distinctive in defining the Indigenous subjects, who were termed the ‘nucleus of a native church’, as gentlemen. Given its founders’ desire for segregation, visual representations of Poonindie in the press were uncommon, contrasting with the later publicity given to Victorian ‘successes’ which began to be widely promoted from the 1860s (Kenny 2008; Lydon 2009). However, Short and Hale were diligent in reporting progress to their financial supporters, in the form of popular accounts written for a wide audience – especially for the senior missionary societies of the Church of England, The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) which had sponsored Poonindie. These accounts included visual evidence. In 1847, for example, at the time that the wealthy philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts had personally endowed the bishopric of Adelaide, Short sent her an engraved portrait inscribed “To Miss Burdett Coutts, through whose munificence the See of Adelaide was founded…” (Figure 1). This personalised ‘thank you’ was intended to remain a memento of his distant labours.
Many years later, after his retirement to England in 1885, Short again used visual evidence to prove to Burdett-Coutts the material colonial progress her generosity had made possible. As his biographer recounts:

Twice the bishop found himself in the society of the lady to whose liberality the original endowment of the see of Adelaide is due – the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. On one occasion he accepted her hospitality at luncheon, and on the other he met her at a garden party at Fulham Palace. The baroness must have felt a deep satisfaction in hearing his own graphic account of the prosperity which had attended the see of which, under God, she had been the foundress. She looked with great interest at the photos the bishop showed her of the various edifices reared by the Church in Adelaide, remarking, ‘I had no idea how forward everything is.’
(Whitington 1888:263)

Figure 1 James Thomson, [Portrait of Augustus Short, first bishop of Adelaide], 1849. Engraving. Facsimile signature l.r.: Augustus Adelaide. ‘To Miss Burdett Coutts, through whose munificence the See of Adelaide was founded...’ . Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1947, National Library of Australia.
For Short (1853:16), Poonindie’s gratifying results were demonstrated “under the heads of Civilization, Moral Training, and Christian Attainment.” Civilisation was evidenced by the converts’ marriages and farming accomplishments, including skills such as shearing and brick-making (particularly at a time when most labourers in the colony were going to the Victorian diggings!). Proof of their ‘moral’ worth was their ability to earn wages and shop for themselves at Port Lincoln. Finally, in a highly revealing passage that conflates the converts’ appearance, measured in terms of their clothing and personal grooming, with their spiritual transformation, Short (1853:17-18) wrote:

3dly. With respect to Conversion. When the Archdeacon came in from Poomindie [sic] to meet me, he was followed by ten of the elder boys and young men, who asked leave to go and meet the Bishop. Some I had known in the Sunday School at Adelaide. I was agreeably surprised to see them nicely dressed in the usual clothing worn by settlers; cheque shirts, light summer coats, plaid trowsers, with shoes and felt hats—articles mostly purchased with their own earnings. They were better dressed than the labouring class in general at home. They had brought their blankets, blacking, brushes, &c, making the broad verandah of a wool shed their sleeping-place, and cooking their meals at a fire in the yard. Not far off was a small native camp, and the contrast between these two groups would have convinced any candid observer of the truth for which the Archdeacon has always steadily contended, viz. that the Aborigines are not only entitled to our Christian regard, but are capable, under God’s blessing, of being brought out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

The “cheque shirts” and “plaid trowsers, with shoes and felt hats” revealed progress made on the road to civilisation. Short (1853:18 and see Hale 1889) concluded that: “There is now a small body of trained Christian natives, the nucleus of the native Church.”

This first group of converts was frequently compared with the flower of English aristocracy – especially on the sporting field. In February 1854, Sam (Conwillan), ‘Sam junior’, and Charlie were in Adelaide, and were invited to play cricket with the pupils of St Peters College, also founded by Short. This boarding-school for colonial youth – named after Short’s own former school, The Royal College of St Peter in Westminster –
was not dissimilar from the mission in its aims and approach, which Short described in 1853 as: “...educating their minds, shaping their characters, and making their souls Christian” (Thornton 2010). The Adelaide Register (1854; see also Daly 1994) reported that:

The Port Lincoln natives from Archdeacon Hale’s establishment are very fine fellows. They speak pure English, without the slightest dash of vulgarism and are in truth far more gentlemanly than many.

In 1873 English travellers Florence and Rosamond Hill (1875: 181) visited Poonindie and commented that: “Cricket seems for many years to have occupied as important a position [here] as at Harrow and Eton and the Poonindie Eleven have been almost invariably victorious over their white antagonists of Port Lincoln.” Short (1853:19-20) lauded the gentlemanly behaviour and principles of Christian fellowship expressed through the noble game of cricket, writing:

I was pleased at watching, with the Archdeacon, two Australian native ‘elevens’ thus enjoying themselves; and remarked, not only their neatness in ‘fielding and batting,’ but what was far more worthy of note, the perfect good-humour which prevailed throughout the games; no ill-temper shown, or angry appeals to the umpire, as is generally the case in a match of Whites.

Six months after this glowing accolade was published, Hale sent two star pupils, Samuel Conwillan (also Kandwillan) and Nannultera to have their portraits painted in Adelaide by a well-known painter, John Crossland (Tregenza 1984). Crossland, who had arrived in the colony in 1851 (d. 1858) has been deemed South Australia’s ‘finest colonial painter’, whose portraits of notable settlers were prominently displayed in public spaces (Radford 1987). These graceful, well-groomed figures submit to British rules of conduct, their poise and elegance transcending popular expectations (Figures 2 and 3).
Figure 2 J.M. Crossland, [Native of South Australia, pupil of the Missionary Institution of Poonindie], 1854, Rex Nan Kivell Collection: National Library of Australia and National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Accession No: NGA TEMP.318.

Figure 3 J.M. Crossland, [Portrait of Samuel Kandwillan, a pupil of the natives' training institution, Poonindie], 1854, Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6294, National Library of Australia, an2242495.
Photographs of Poonindie People: The Hale Papers, Bristol

In recent years, the exciting re-discovery of several series of photographs linked to Poonindie’s early history has revealed that in addition to the Crossland portraits the Anglican church actively commissioned photographs of its Indigenous congregation as part of a sustained program of documenting its work. These assemblages have until recently been overlooked within institutional collections in Australia and the United Kingdom: here we focus on the series held in the Hale Papers in the Library of the University Bristol, UK. Together with related, contemporary, material held in the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford, at Mill Cottage at Port Lincoln, at Ayers House (National Trust of South Australia) and in the South Australian Museum this relatively large and early archive changes the history of photographing Indigenous Australians (and see Lydon [in press] for further discussion). Despite variations in their historical purpose and reception, what unites these widely separated collections is their production by prominent figures within the Anglican church in South Australia during the mid-late 19th century, and their circulation in the context of documenting missionary success. The exceptions to this pattern are the daguerreotype portraits made around 1860, of Jackey and Jemima Gunlarnmen, Tatiara people in the employment of settler William Mortlock. These are the only other portraits showing clothed Aboriginal people from this period but by contrast with the missionary images emphasise the subjects’ status as servants within a colonial hierarchy (Lydon in press).

The Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale, at the Library of the University of Bristol, contain eleven Poonindie portraits (DM130) including four duplicates. Hale retired in March 1885 and returned to England where he continued to promote the Church’s mission to the Australian Aboriginals through writing and lecturing until his death at Bristol in 1895 (Robin 2013). This collection appears to represent souvenirs of his life in Australia, including letters from Aboriginal people at Poonindie.

The identity of the photographic subjects is not certain, but may be narrowed down to a group of the more well-known residents, most likely those whom Hale knew personally during his time at Poonindie between 1850 and 1856. The exceptionally
well-dressed and dignified portraits reflect the sitters’ status and the respect in which they were held at this time. Two are ambrotypes, likely to be among the earliest portraits and to represent residents of the mission prominent during the 1850s (Figures 4 and 5). This pair clearly belongs to the same series, as their subjects are identically dressed, and pose in the same studio setting, seated at a table covered with a distinctive paisley-patterned cloth.

Figure 4 Ambrotype, Aboriginal man of Poonindie. With the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/239.
What is striking is that the dress and face of the man portrayed in DM130-239 are very close to Crossland’s 1854 portrait of Conwillan, allowing for the artist’s adjustment to his usual formula for depicting colonial figures – such as the explorer Charles Sturt, whose portrait by Crossland in the National Portrait Gallery in London shows him wearing an identical, if more carefully finished, outfit. In a similar way, the painting smooths out and idealises the photographic subject’s more idiosyncratic features.

**Figure 5** Ambrotype, Aboriginal man of Poonindie. With the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/238.
In February 1854 Matthew Moorhouse, Protector of Aborigines, wrote to Hale at Poonindie that Conwillan had been so keen to return to Poonindie that he had left hurriedly after only one sitting (Tregenza 1984:23). Is it possible that a photo assisted the artist to complete his portrait? (Crossland’s portraits were also later photographed by Townsend Duryea and offered for sale in the form of cartes de visite – for example, in 1863 after Crossland’s death [South Australian Register, 15 December, 1863:2]). This would date it to 1854, making it very early indeed.

Any portrait series made before 1860, when Samuel Conwillan (also Kandwillan, d. May 1860) died, is likely to have
included him, as he was one of the most highly regarded Aborigines at Poonindie in the early years. Both he and his first wife Martha Tanda (also Tandatko) had been at the Adelaide school a considerable time and could read and write; Tanda was a good needlewoman and washerwoman (Hale 1851). Conwillan was often mentioned as a committed Christian and leader of his community, and Short (1872:8) was not the only one to tell the story of how:

The natives were moral in their conduct, and able to resist temptation when sent with drayloads into Port Lincoln. It is remembered how ‘Conwillan’ on one occasion having loaded his own dray with goods from a coasting vessel according to orders, was found by the Archdeacon rendering the like service to a settler, whose teamster was lying intoxicated on the beach.

In early 1853 the celebrated group of converts comprised Thomas Nytchie, James Narrung, Samuel Conwillan, Joseph Mudlong, David Tolbonko, John Wangaru, Daniel Toodko, Matthew Kewrie, Timothy Tartan, Isaac Pitpowie, and Martha Tanda, wife of Conwillan. However, several of these had died within a few years, including Narrung and Tartan in 1853 and ‘Neechie’ (Nytchie) and Mudlong in 1855 (Hale 1889:71-83 passim). Hale (1889:57) noted that Narrung was the “leader in the movement” with his younger brother Toodko. Short (1872:7 – see also Brock 1987) later noted that:

Some of the Aborigines became devout Christians, while others were nominal Christians. Narrung, Toodbrook, and, later, James Wanganeen became evangelists. Kandwillan took services at Poonindie in Hale’s absence and Wirrup and Wanganeen often assisted with services and prayers.

Three further Bristol portraits are seemingly copies of daguerreotypes or ambrotypes, and were taken during the same studio session, as indicated by their identical setting, pose and clothing (Figures 7-9). The originals for these three copies may have been earlier than the surviving ambrotypes (DM130/238-239). One (DM130/241) shows a man holding a flute (Figure 7). This suggests that it portrays either Conwillan or Tolbonko (also Tolbonko), of whom in 1858 one of the mission trustees, Rev Hawkes (1858:3), noted that:
My old friends Konwillan and Tolbonco (of St. John's Sunday school) knew me at once, and appeared glad to see me. They always lead the hymns with their flutes: both of these young men read and conduct the services of our church by turns on Sunday morning, when Mr. Hammond is absent celebrating divine service at St Thomas's, Port Lincoln.

**Figure 7** Copy of ?daguerreotype, Aboriginal man of Poonindie holding a flute. With the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/241.
Figure 8 Copy of ?daguerreotype, Aboriginal man of Poonindie. With the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/240.

Figure 9 Copy of ?daguerreotype, Aboriginal man of Poonindie. With the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/244.
As a group, these five early portraits seem likely to have been made after 1853 when the first group baptism took place, and perhaps around the mid-1850s for the following reasons: first, the subjects’ demeanour – including their clothes and manner of doing their hair – is very similar to Crossland’s 1854 portrait of Conwillan. In addition, the flute was a sign of refinement of particular import during these years. Finally, not only does their appearance closely mimic Crossland’s portrait in formal terms, but they similarly express the significance assigned to this group during the mid-late 1850s by the Anglican leaders Short and Hale as evidence for the mission’s success and a more generalised capacity for Indigenous civilisation and Christianisation. Their shocking mortality rate somewhat undermined this achievement over subsequent years, requiring extensive explanation and accounts of their ‘happy deaths’ in Hale’s (1889) and Short’s (1872) memoirs.

If we accept that these five early images date to before 1860, then another question arises: who might have made them? One possibility is the American Townsend Duryea, who opened his own photographic studio in Adelaide in 1855, and during 1856 visited other South Australian towns, including Auburn, Clare, Kapunda, Goolwa, Milang and Port Elliot, advertising that country people might ‘enshrine themselves in the immortality of his art’. This tour appears to have prompted the formation of the Duryea Brothers firm, incorporating his brother Sanford (South Australian Register, 31 December, 1855). In 1857 the South Australian Register (26 November, 1857:2) noted that Duryea had arrived back in Adelaide aboard the Marion, from Port Lincoln: had he produced some early portraits of the Poonindie residents then?

**Mill Cottage, Port Lincoln and James Wanganeen**

The Bristol photos appear to share some characteristics with a series of six daguerreotypes and ambrotypes that were rediscovered in November 2011 by Community History Officer with History SA, Pauline Cockrill, at Mill Cottage, a house museum at Port Lincoln. Mill Cottage was built for storekeeper Joseph Kemp Bishop, son of John Bishop, one of the district’s first settlers and a trustee of Poonindie. Joseph married Elizabeth
Hammond, the daughter of Rev. Octavius Hammond, the Superintendent of the nearby Poonindie Mission (between 1856-68) in 1868, but died in 1877, leaving Joseph with four small children. Joseph married his wife’s sister Ethelah in 1887 and they had two more children. Hammond remained associated with Poonindie until his death in 1878 (Bott 2009). Mill Cottage was originally managed by the Port Lincoln branch of the National Trust but is now the headquarters of the Southern Eyre Peninsula Family & Local History Group (Mill Cottage Museum 2013).

Close inspection of the Mill Cottage portraits reveals some similarities with the Bristol series: all are well-dressed, carefully posed images emphasising their subjects’ dignity and successful adoption of European civilisation. Octavius Hammond must have known almost all the residents of Poonindie throughout the mission’s life. Like Hale’s collection, they suggest a personal relationship with the subjects, kept in a personal, domestic context as mementoes of known individuals rather than circulated among a public audience.

Only one sitter in the Mill Cottage series has so far been identified – James Wanganeen. Interestingly, this daguerreotype is a brother of the only other previously known portrait of Wanganeen, held in the Pitt Rivers Museum, which is likely to have been made during the same session (see Braithwaite et al. 2011). The Oxford print is a copy – presumably of an original daguerreotype that was a close relative of the Mill Cottage portrait. It forms part of a larger South Australian assemblage comprising eleven portraits of South Australian men and women that was a donation from the estate of Henry Wentworth Dyke Acland (1815-1900), a prominent Oxford man of science (Atlay 1903). Short had been Acland’s first college tutor and it is likely that Short originally assembled the Pitt Rivers’ series (Braithwaite et al. 2011).

The Bristol collection also includes a portrait of Wanganeen (Figure 10) (DM130/231) – with his third wife, Mary Jane – but this is a later photograph, belonging to a series of six cartes de visite in the collection (the others being DM130/232, DM130/233, DM130/234, DM130/235 and DM130/236). The reverse bears the studio mark “T. Duryea, Photographer to His Excellency, 56 King William Street, Adelaide”, which dates it to after 9 November 1867, when the
Duke of Edinburgh visited Duryea’s studio to have his portrait made. Wanganeen died in 1871, dating the carte de visite to between 1867 and 1871.

Figure 10 Townsend Duryea, c. 1867-1870/1, James and Mary Jane Wanganeen. Carte de visite, with the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/231.

James Wanganeen was a Maraura man from the Upper Murray who had attended the Native School in Adelaide in the late 1840s and was then transferred to Poonindie in 1850. He was baptised in 1861, after Hale’s departure, and during the 1860s rose to prominence as an evangelist among his own people (Brock and Kartinyeri 1989). It is unlikely that the daguerreotypes were made prior to his baptism in 1861. In 1869 Short wrote to Hale to describe the labour James Wanganeen had accomplished in the field, and noted that “Wanganeen and Mary Jane have a boy and girl, and seem very happy together” (The Inquirer & Commercial News, 11 August. 1869:3). Rev. F. Slaney Poole arrived at Poonindie in 1867, and later recalled that “One of the members of the choir, named Wanganeen, was a handsome and intelligent aborigine, and he used to read the service on
occasions when the superintendent or myself was not present” (Howell 2013). These three portraits, collected by Hale, Short and Hammond, express his status within the community.

**Promoting the Anglican Church: Poonindie and Mt Gambier**

Such evidence reminds us of the portraits’ value within the well-known genre of missionary propaganda, incorporated into longer textual narratives for distant, British audiences (e.g., Edwards 2004; Greenwell 2002; Gullestad 2007; Jenkins 1994; Long 2003; Murray 2008; Webb 1997). Another of the Bristol cartes de visite is of interest because its female subject (Figure 11) appears as an engraved bust in the frontispiece of Hale’s 1889 book, *The Aborigines of Australia*, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, captioned (alongside an engraving of Crossland’s portrait of Conwillan) as ‘natives educated at Poonindie, 1858’ (Figure 12). As discussed above, this account provides a detailed record of the mission’s objectives and struggles throughout its life. It does not, however, identify this woman by name.

![Figure 11](image_url) With the permission of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, Papers of Mathew Blagden Hale. DM130/233.
It is notable that only three women are represented in these collections. To an extent this might reflect the shortage of women at Poonindie, in part because the missionaries had trouble convincing women to go to Poonindie, where they did not know what tribe the men were from. However, women were often overlooked in extolling missionary success, despite their important role. One direction for future research might be to determine who the women are: for example Figure 12 could show Annette, from Swan River, who was too young to be baptised in 1853, but had “long formed part of the Archdeacon’s family” (South Australian Register, 14 March, 1853:3).

Despite the idealising vision of the community the missionaries wished to create, and the ‘attachment’ between the couples whose marriages they had arranged, it is also important to note the historical evidence for dissent among the Aboriginal individuals involved, such as James’ third wife Mary Jane. In March 1865, Taplin described Mary Jane as:

Figure 12 Frontispiece, ‘Natives educated at Poonindie, 1858’, in M. Hale 1889 The Aborigines of Australia, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
...a bad girl. She refuses to do any work and acts in a very immodest and imprudent manner. She will persist in going to the wurleys in the absence of her husband...

He eventually sent her away to Adelaide under James’ supervision (Brock and Kartinyeri 1989; Taplin 1865).

As many have argued, photographs were a tool that served in shaping understandings of the people the missions aimed to reform, as well as documenting everyday life and achievements in the mission field (e.g., Greenwell 2002). Many missionary photograph collections are centred upon a visual conversion narrative, generated by juxtaposing images of Indigenous people leading a traditional way of life with those who have successfully adopted a Western lifestyle (Lydon 2005). However, it must be noted that Hale’s Bristol series seems to express his genuine affection for the people whose lives he shared between 1850-1856, and this is perhaps evident in the emphasis on the accomplishment and dignity of the sitters. Hale’s collection lacks the ‘before’ images so integral to this formulation, instead comprising portraits of people shown without exception as respectable, well-dressed and sophisticated.

By contrast, the series of eleven South Australian photographs held by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, while having some elements in common with Hale’s Bristol collection, as an entity constitutes a classic visual conversion narrative. Seven images show Indigenous people seemingly leading a traditional way of life, wearing kangaroo skins and bearing elaborate cicatrises. They form a powerful contrast with four studio portraits, including Wanganeen’s portrait, noted above, and three that were commissioned to demonstrate the work of lay missionary Mrs James [Christina] Smith, who established an Aborigines’ Home and school at Mt Gambier between 1865 and 1867, under Short’s sponsorship.

Smith’s book The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of their Habits, Customs, Legends and Language (1880) centred upon ‘a few short memoirs’ and belongs to the genre of conversion narratives popularised by the published diaries of evangelists such as John Wesley. These accounts portrayed conversion as a difficult journey of spiritual progress culminating in a deeply felt and transformative
revelation. Smith’s aim was to create an Indigenous missionary to his own people, and each of these fourteen accounts ended with the death of the converted Aboriginal man, woman or child (Nettelbeck 2001; Smith 1865; Smith 2001). Like Hale’s and Short’s discussion of the ‘happy deaths’ at Poonindie, Smith’s encounters with the Booandik (now known as Bunganditj) were structured by this narrative of redemption. Seemingly commissioned by Short, these three studio portraits of Smith’s protégés – “Caroline, a half-caste. MT GAMBIER, S.AUSTRALIA 1867” and two girls in their teens (Pitt Rivers Museum 1998.249.33.10-12) – were taken by professional photographer William Walter Thwaites, son of Walter Thwaites, who opened a studio in Mount Gambier in November 1865 (Dictionary of Australian Artists Online 2013). In the same month, the Border Watch reported that his:

...capitally executed photographs of the aborigines of Mount Gambier, embracing more particularly Mrs Smith's little tribe, Annie Coutts and Johnny Short make capital pictures. The photographs would form excellent souvenirs to send home to friends, and we have no doubt Mr Thwaites will have a large demand for them.

One month later, it suggested that this series would make “suitable Christmas presents”, and listed, along with views of the town’s principal public buildings, and a “Carte of the Lord Bishop of Adelaide”, photos of a “Group of Aborigines, with Prototoress [sic]” as well as individual “Large Cartes of Misses Anne Burdett Coutts, Helen Bishop, Old Sally, and Master John Short”, all clearly Aboriginal people, and some named after Short and his benefactor the Baroness Burdett-Coutts (Border Watch, 25 November, 1865; Advertising, Border Watch, 23 December, 1865:3). Thwaites’ series did meet with some popular interest, as indicated by its representation in Australian institutions.2

2 Other photographs from this series include Thwaites’ studio group portrait of Mrs Smith and five other “Boandik” (Bunganditj) friends in about 1866, State Library of South Australia (B16564); also South Australian Museum Archives, Fauclus Collection (AA1111). Comparison also reveals that W.W. Thwaites was the photographer of a carte de visite held in the University of Adelaide’s Archives, Series 1151, University Photographs and Glass Slides, “Rght Rev A Short Lord Bishop of Adelaide Original pres. by Mrs H.L. Aldersey”; On back of photograph – “H. Davis, Manager 1867-78”, and in the South Australian Archives (B 458).
Despite the broad divergence between the narrative structure of Short’s and Hale’s Poonindie portrait collections, they share an interest in showing their subjects’ successful transformation and redemption. Short’s wide-ranging responsibilities took him across the colony of South Australia, and he is less likely than Hale to have formed close relationships with the people of Poonindie. His use of photographic evidence to demonstrate the achievements of the church attempted to measure the distance travelled along the road to progress, as when he displayed views of the material landmarks Baroness Burdett-Coutts’ beneficence had funded. His Oxford series similarly sought to create a visual narrative that contrasted the accomplishments of Poonindie with the Indigenous people’s former state. Nonetheless his interest in their welfare is clear from his sustained support for Poonindie and for the welfare of the colony’s Indigenous people, notable at a time of increasing settler criticism. There are stories of his personal interest and intervention, such as when he invited five native children to stay at his home, Bishop’s Court, where they slept in the loft of the Coach House. We are told that “He held prayers for them each evening” and [his daughter] Isabella felt:

...he would grow as fond of them as the Bishop of Perth. Mama I am afraid, does not agree with him in his love for them...
(Brown 1974:160)

When he visited Poonindie in 1872, after sixteen years of absence, he re-affirmed his belief that “the like feelings [of]...Etonians and Harrovians at the cricket matches at Lord’s proving incontestably that the Anglican aristocracy of England and the “noble savage” who ran wild in the Australian woods are linked together in one brotherhood of blood” (Short 1872).

Ultimately, however, the Indigenous people of Poonindie experienced the disjunction between the idealising missionary rhetoric of inclusion and autonomy and actual colonial practice. By the late 1860s Poonindie was no longer isolated but was becoming surrounded by other farms and settlements. By then it was no longer a training institution, but a self-supporting farm essentially run by the Aboriginal residents but supervised by white authorities. During the 1880s a more authoritarian regime led to increasing disputes between the residents and mission staff, and some long-standing residents were expelled from the...
mission as a result (Brock 1993:50-51). By that time too there was increasing pressure from nearby white settlers who coveted the large area of fertile land leased by the Poonindie trustees, the Anglican Church. Following protracted negotiations with the Government, the Anglicans surrendered their leases in 1894 and the area was opened up for subdivision (Raftery 2006:108-9; Raynes 2002:28). Only one Poonindie man, Emanuel Solomon, was successful in gaining one of the blocks (Brock 1993:55-6). Most of the other residents, some of them who had been at Poonindie for more than 40 years, were transferred to Point McLeay or Point Pearce Missions. A few others remained on Eyre Peninsula, some working for white farmers, while others, particularly local Barngala and Nauo people, drifted into fringe camps at Port Lincoln, Franklin Harbor or other nearby settlements.

Conclusions

Art historian Jeanette Hoorn has argued that Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s scheme for South Australia, providing for a program of small to medium landholdings devoted primarily to agriculture, prompted a peculiarly georgic colonial iconography expressing the values of hard work and its rewards (Hoorn 2007). This aesthetic emphasised the moral value of settler productivity, justifying dispossession of the Indigenous owners of the soil. Yet perhaps another distinctive aspect of the colony’s visual culture was owed to the early influence of its religious leaders, and their conception of the essential unity of humankind. In commemorating the achievements of newly Christianised Indigenous farmers, these re-discovered portraits from Poonindie mark a radical departure from contemporary photographs of Indigenous Australian people focusing on traditional culture and visible difference. More typical was William Westgarth’s (1864) popular guide for prospective settlers, one of the first to include photographs of Indigenous Australians in the form of engravings based on Douglas Kilburn’s remarkable 1847 daguerreotypes of Koories (Indigenous people from the colony of Victoria) in traditional dress. Like other Australian emigrants’ guides produced during these decades, Westgarth emphasised the colony’s potential for settlers, but by contrast characterised Aboriginal people as lazy, savage and
doomed to extinction (Mitchell 2009). One reviewer noted of Westgarth’s account that it was “a disagreeable subject, because so soon as our curiosity is gratified, every philanthropic hope is destroyed by the conviction, forced upon us by the failure of repeated attempts, that the race is incapable of elevation” (The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 June, 1848:2.) By contrast, these private mementoes of Poonindie expressed respect for the achievements of known individuals: Hale’s personal collection of portraits of the people of Poonindie reflects his life-long commitment to their welfare; Hammond remained at the mission regardless of his gradual disenfranchisement by authorities until his death; Short was driven by a conception of Indigenous Australians that was grounded in the essential unity of humankind. Despite the long-term failure of the mission to provide a secure and respected place for its Indigenous residents within settler society, these remarkable photographic portraits acquired by Anglican clergymen at Poonindie remain a testament to a generation of Indigenous people struggling to survive the first decades of colonisation and dispossession.

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