

Wet their bones with sweat and blood, knit their bones with me: Reflections on arts-based research into colonial Western Australian child murder (1829-1901)

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This article outlines the arts-based research practices used in my doctoral thesis to explore the lived experience of Mary Summerland, a 20-year-old, unmarried woman, who, in 1832, was accused of murdering her newborn baby boy at the port town of Fremantle, Western Australia.

In my thesis, Mary's story, entitled *Unearthing Mary Summerland*, is told in three interwoven voices that blend to form an interpretation of her lived experience.

The first voice is historical, a comprehensive non-fiction narration of Mary Summerland's story that analyses the scant surviving historical documentation; the second is musing, a reflexive examination of the politics of my own knowledge-making practices; and the third voice recounts my informed imagination, a fictionalized imagining, informed by detailed historical research, of what might have happened to Mary Summerland, her son and the other inhabitants of colonial Fremantle in 1832 when Mary's murder investigation was taking place.

This article reflects on the development and use of these arts-based research practices as a deliberate feminist methodological strategy to enliven stories suppressed by colonial record-keeping. It describes how the three voices of *Unearthing Mary Summerland* bubble up between what remains in the archives to create a suggestion of what can never really be known: how did Mary's baby die? In so doing it demonstrates how arts-based research practices can provide a reading of the social and political forces at play in erasing the lived experiences of women who killed their babies in colonial WA.

When I first began to unearth the extent of infanticide, neonaticide and concealment of birth in colonial Western Australia, I did not know what to do with all the pain I found.

Infanticide is the killing of a baby younger than one year of age by her/his genetic mother. Crucially, infanticide can only be committed by a child's mother. If a father kills his baby it is called murder (Alder & Polk, pp. 4-9; Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2007, p. 104; Motz, 2001, pp. 113, 141; Wilczynski, 1997, p. 8). *Neonaticide* is a subcategory of filicide that refers to the murder of a baby by her/his genetic mother or father within twenty-four hours of their birth (Alder & Polk, 2001, p. 31; Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2007, p. 111; Motz, 2001, p. 141; Resnick, 1970, p. 1414; Scher, 2005, pp. 14-15; Wilczynski, 1997, p. 8). *Concealment of birth* refers to the crime of hiding the dead body of a child after her/his birth, in order to conceal the fact that they were born (Legal Online, 2010, p. TLA [10.11.182]).

In the course of my doctoral research I uncovered 55 cases of infanticide, neonaticide and/or concealment of birth that had occurred between the years of non-Indigenous settlement of Western Australia in 1829, and federation in 1901. The number overwhelmed me. As a feminist researcher interested in the embodied experience of colonial women, I found the similarities between these women's stories - some over 60 years apart - to be striking. I found the desperation inherent in their actions deeply distressing. The hypocrisy implicit in the treatment meted out to them left me angry (Gardiner, 2014).

The stories I uncovered were similar to those found by researchers in other Australian states (Allen, 1990, Swain & Howe 1995): pregnancies and labour were storied as cancer, abscess or vomited up tumour; headache, stomach ache, tooth ache or eye ache; sore throat, bad dreams or heavy menstruation. Dead infants were discovered in sacks, parcels, candle boxes or tea boxes, kerosene tins, packages and water closets. They were wrapped in the intimate domesticity of feminine garments – flannel, chemise, skirt, jacket and petticoat – or bound by the harshness of cord, rope, string, brown paper or newspaper. Tiny bodies were discovered/dug up/eaten by dogs or pigs; were drowned, strangled, smothered, cut and stabbed. Babies bled to death because their umbilical cord was not tied (or if it was, it was tied only on the side of the placenta). Some babies remained anonymous because their gestations were so successfully hidden that when they were born, murdered and disposed of, their parents were never found.

Pulsating through every story were themes of silencing, abandonment, concealment and collusion, aching loneliness and fear, isolation and punishment. There persisted a strangely resolute denial by both society at large and the mother herself regarding the corporeality of her pregnancy and the birth, death and disposal of her child. With an unrelenting repetitiveness, the lived experience of the women concerned seemed to have been ignored or suppressed until a baby was dead, a mother was traumatised, and a corpse was waiting to be found.

The suffering of these women, their blood, their shame, their pain, the palpable distress implicit within their actions and behaviour and the societal response to the death of their babies seemed clearly linked to the roles and positions available to unmarried women in colonial Western Australia. Their fragmented stories raised questions about the power that single women held (or did not hold), and the opportunities and rights that were available to them and their children. Crucially, these crimes – the clues that can be gleaned from them and the punishments meted out in response to their occurrence – spoke to the *value* that colonial society placed on both these children and their mothers.

There seemed to be no place in Western Australian history for these women: their actions, their bodies and those of their babies had been suppressed, and I came to see that the silenced narrative of colonial Western Australian child murder was a symptom: the link between the dead babies appeared to be “illegitimacy”. These children were *unlicensed*.

The unlicensed child is a term coined by Swain and Howe to more accurately define the social matrix enveloping single women and their children in Australia. The term seeks to emphasise the repressive and controlling religious, legal and social pressures that acted on Australian women who had children outside marriage until the mid-1970s (Swain & Howe, 1995, pp 1, 2, 92).

The women whose crimes I uncovered gave birth within a society that did not allocate them “permission” to be mothers, something that the corporeality of pregnancy made it impossible for them not to be. Their bodies – and the bodies of the babies growing inside them – betrayed them. Their children were considered sinful and inferior to children who had married parents simply because they had been born (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. xxi). As it appeared that the babies killed through infanticide or

neonaticide were almost exclusively the result of sex outside marriage, I began to contemplate who (or what) within nineteenth-century Western Australia these complex levels of erasure were protecting. I began to wonder how unlicensed mothers knew that their silence would help them to survive (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. xxi).

Seduction by Archive

My research methodology unfolded slowly. I had searched the archives and dug up every available piece of material I could find about women who had committed child murder, yet the extant information was not enough. The more I unearthed of the lived experience of these women, the less I felt I knew. I wanted to explore the gaps in the archives, the things that I could never know - the tastes, smells and sensuality of colonial Western Australian life and the ways it was experienced by the women who lived there. My research process itself became embodied. I grieved for these women. I felt their shame and distress. I lived their desperation, but I did not know how, methodologically, to best enliven and explore the stories I was glimpsing. Two years into my research process, after a day spent hunting women through the State Records Office of Western Australia, I had a dream I was holding a set of archival documents in my hands:

Dream, 29th April, 2011

I am not supposed to touch them like this.

The set of bones is not complete, but I know they belong to one of my women. They face me, a severed pelvis stripped of anything that could bleed now. Two deceptively delicate hipbones encircling three lumbar vertebrae, the sacrum and the little pointed tail of the coccyx, they emerge dry from the age-altered paper of the court case document that lies, cracked open and supported by my hands. I cannot see my hands, (the document hides them), but I feel them. Held out palms up, touching mirrored at the heart line, they meet at the document's bent spine to serve up the writing?/words?/document?/bones? like an offering to myself.

The bones have nothing fleshy to hold them together yet they are suspended in perfect harmony. Each piece as it should be, but without any connective tissue or the rest of a body that is supposed to hug them tight. If these bones were clothed in the woman's skin and

muscle, all I would see would be the swell of her belly and the dip of her groin, cut off at the crease. There are no femurs here. No ribs. (Where is the rest of her? Who is she?) When I tilt the paper from side to side, looking at the pelvis from every angle, the bones keep their formation. They do not crumble. They do not fall apart and rattle together.

The paper is densely packed with writing, much more so than they would be on a normal case file. In the way of dreams, the bones of the pelvis rise up out of the words, yet they are also made up of the words. A hologram the grayish silver of things that have been old for a long time. I don't reach to touch them, (my hands can't abandon their document), but I know/feel the miniscule pits and grooves of aged calcium, formed by and made up of the tightly linked scrawl of the hand inked writing lifting from/embedded in the paper.

I hold, simultaneously balanced in my hands, the words, the ink, the pages, the bones. Yet all of these substances have combined with one another to make up a single entity: something new. There is no baby skeleton.

I felt like an archaeologist. Through the gift of this dream, I began to understand that in the process of my research, I was digging down through the layers of discourses in which the stories of my women were immersed. I was clearing away previous representations and understandings and lifting their stories into the fresh air. Through the dream, I knew that I now held the skeletons of these women and their stories in my hands: but how to take their bones and breathe them into life?

Six months after this dream, I unearthed court documentation relating to the trial of a 20 year-old woman named Mary Summerland, who, in 1832, had been accused of drowning her newborn baby at the port settlement of Fremantle. For me, the non-descript pieces of paper recording the details of her crime positively reverberated with latent possibility.

Archival documents hum with a resonance that rewards close attention. If you listen to them properly you understand. *They*, the ghostly people of the past, handled these papers; *they* licked a finger and rifled through them, breathed over them, scratched their pens across the pages, when the parchment was creamy-crisp, not yellowed-brittle and doomed forever to be handled carefully with cotton gloves. The documents resonate with

all the sensuality of the past, because they were there. When stories are this old, and this dark, documents are the only tangible connection left.

This means, for a researcher, archival documents are not simply the bare bones of history. Melded together with their ink and parchment is the latent potential of the stories they carry: the tantalising opportunity to reach out towards the living, breathing bodies of the past.

I am not alone in my seduction by archive. My investigation has been carried out within the wider context of my community of feminist academics whose interests swing towards arts-based inquiry and embodied engagement with the research process, and my fascination for the materiality and sensuality of the archives is something that has enticed scholars throughout history. In the spirit of Jacques Derrida's "archive fever" (1996) I place the research that culminated within my doctoral thesis as *Unearthing Mary Summerland* firmly within an existing field of historical, creative non-fiction and feminist historiography, and a body of considerable feminist literature about the nature of the archive. Influenced by works such as Anna Haebich's *Murdering Stepmothers* (2011), an investigation into Martha Rendell, the last woman to be hanged in Western Australia, Antoinette Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003), Carolyn Steedman's *Dust: the archive and cultural history* (2002) and Brian Matthews' biography of Louisa Lawson, *Louisa* (1987), my methods have emerged from my immersion in the archival material and through my desire to en flesh the bare bones of these women's narratives. The inquiry has been driven by my desire to understand why, when there were so many narratives of child murder in colonial Western Australia, none of the stories was known to me. Why, when the stories of the women I unearthed spanned over sixty years, did they remain so similar? I was also particularly driven to understand why these women and their children often seemed so alone. My explorations have been driven by an empathic, life-long familiarity with the language of secrecy and shame (Gardiner, 2007), and by a need to understand the political, sociological and cultural backdrop to the everyday lives of women who were investigated for murdering their children in colonial Western Australia.

Perhaps, when it all filters through, I was seeking a methodology for how to research the significance of the small lives of women who were not important enough for the history books. Women it was possible to silence.

Three Voices

There is little extant documentation regarding Mary Summerland. All that exists are the court documents that describe her crime (*Rex V Mary Summerland*, 1832), the listing of her name in the Western Australian census of 1832, and three brief newspaper articles (Berryman, 1979, p. 56; "Classified advertising," 1834, p. 353; "Classified advertising: About to leave the colony," 1834, p. 378; "Ship news," 1834, p. 4). Yet the few details of her life captivated me.

From this meagre information, I knew that she was twenty years old and that she was employed as a live-in domestic servant in the house of a prominent Fremantle family. I knew she had travelled to Australia with her father, stepmother and her step brothers and sisters only a few years prior. I also knew that when the body of a baby was found washed up on the beach at Fremantle in September 1832, two witnesses named Jane Draper and Olive Clulow implied that Mary was the mother of the dead child and as a result she was subsequently investigated over the baby's suspicious death. I also knew that the inquest had led to a trial but that the case had been dismissed for a reason unknown in October of that same year. Most interestingly, the court documentation suggested that Mary had strongly denied that she had ever been pregnant at all.

As I became more immersed in her story, my absorption combined with my detailed understandings of the world in which she lived and I began moving inwards, to see my information gathering processes as a platform that allowed me to explore more fully the silenced stories of women like Mary and their children. In an attempt to make sense of the politics of silencing that was clearly occurring in colonial WA, I decided to focus a large part of my research project on uncovering the detail, real and imagined, of Mary's story. The research methods I came to adopt are reflected in the structure of *Unearthing Mary Summerland*. As I shall now describe, the resultant creative component of my doctoral thesis is written in three voices: the *historical voice*, the *musings voice* and the *voice of informed imagination*.

The voices represent my ways of making sense of history. In feeling my way into Mary Summerland's story I used colonial artworks, images, imagination, self-reflection and self-reflexivity. I was transparent about my compulsive interrogation of extant historical material and presented a clearly positioned challenge to existing "gentrified" colonial narratives (Stannage, 1985).

I swam so deeply in Mary's story and in the stories of the other women accused of infanticide that I began "to live inside the work that I do" (Nielsen, 1998, p. 8). Now, through sharing my process, I want to impart my somatic empathy, *my living inside it*. I want to infuse it, sensually, into the bodies of others (Trinh, 1989, p. 1). But how do I take your hand or scoop you up? The first step is to take you digging.

Paying Attention: The Historical Voice

Finding The Documents: The First Step On A Dig

The court documentation recording the details of Mary Summerland's case is archived at the State Records Office of Western Australia under the title *CONS 3472, Item 10: Rex V Mary Summerland*. When I try to describe methodologically how these pieces of paper – these bare bones – could turn into *Unearthing Mary Summerland* it is difficult to single out a starting point. The processes of looking for, researching, imagining and writing these narratives, of thinking ethically about my place within them, of my somatic empathy and my responsibilities as researcher, occur almost exclusively in concurrence. However, I also acknowledge that *Unearthing Mary Summerland* also emerged, in part, as the result of my attempts to puzzle out why the case file *CONS 3472, Item 10* felt so strange.

The files felt strange because as I read *CONS 3472, Item 10*, I could *feel* that these pieces of paper were hiding something. I also knew that whatever they had kept so safely, darkly silent for all these years, I wanted to hunt down, open up and move around inside of in any possible manner I could, until I could find out what it was.

I love unearthing archival documents. It is one of my favourite moments in the research process – because, when I find one of these women I always think: *I found you*. I always think: *I knew you were there, I have got you*. I could feel the potential of Mary Summerland waiting inside those words (that paper and ink) – just out of reach. *I knew I was going to find out what happened to both Mary and her son*.

Even though I know it isn't true, when I open up an archival document, I like to imagine that I am the only person who has looked at it or cared about it, for over a hundred years. These documents hunch around their stories. They are so old there is often a deep crease down their back, a spine the symptom of a century or more of being folded in the dark. I hold

them open with the fleshy pad-tips of my fingers or the skinny beanbags shaped like sausages provided till their secrets tumble out. They are always age-tinted. I am very careful. I do not want to damage the paper. I turn pages that were once rustled roughly and scrawled on without a thought, carefully, carefully. I feel guilty when little sepia crumbs fleck off at my touch, but I still do it: cruising pages, deciphering handwriting, getting momentarily distracted by snippets of juicy gossip, I turn, turn, turn until I find them. And then what?

Do I want the narratives of these women because the distance keeps me safe? Do I gather up their stories because the distance makes me powerful? Am I a hunter? In whose name do I expose their bare bones to fresh air?

Perhaps this ruthless vulnerability is why I found such initial difficulty in articulating the separate strands of my methodological approach. The documents, the conversations, the differing registers of my historical, musing and imaginatively informed voices seem to me to be of the same liquidity - maybe fresh or salty, warmer or cooler, viscous or runny as tears, but all of these mingled in the merging current of my writing.

Approaching The Documents: The Second Step On A Dig

Methodologically, my version of feminist archaeology begins with my approach to the documents themselves. I engage with the archives in a series of steps or conversations. These conversations are not mutually exclusive. It is in the reverberation of these conversations, undergirded by my simultaneous immersion in feminist thought and research practices that my imagination becomes informed and nourished.

It was only by chance that I came to know about Mary Summerland. Late in 2011 I was searching *An Index to Violent Indictable Crime in Western Australia* (2002) when I came across the following:

1 October 1832 Mary SUMMERLAND was indicted for the murder of a male bastard child. No true bill filed. Discharged. (Purdue, p. 11)

These three little sentences piqued immediate interest. I had not found any reference to this woman before and I was curious about a case that had

occurred so early in the Swan River Colony's history. I visited the State Records Office of Western Australia to find her.

In the microfilm viewing room, I located the reel of film that records some of the first criminal trials in the colony, claimed a machine, and, surrounded by my papers, notes and possessions, began following the scent. I slid through these documents for a long time, experiencing an immersion similar to scouring paper documentation. Intent on my path and scanning for Mary Summerland's name, I moved through numbered cases to the *nolle prosequi* batch and suddenly, there she was.

This moment of discovery is wonderful; hunting and detection coalesce and unfurl in an instantaneous flower of possibility. I can sit in the viewing room surrounded by the bustle of the real world yet be transported to another realm by that gift, but I am not fond of microfilm. Somehow the procedure sucks away a bit of the life when it fades the document to black and white. I can't touch the actual paper and see the personality of the handwriting. I also always wonder if any pages or information have been missed.

This was what happened with Mary Summerland's case file. As I have mentioned, when I sat with her documents, I knew they were hiding something but I could not work out what it was. Words jumped out at me with tantalising suggestiveness, but I could not absorb the totality of their narrative. Like the majority of case files I have unearthed (microfilm or original) they had to be transcribed. I made digital copies, took them home, printed them out (I have found this is the closest I can get to the real thing) and got to work.

Transcription

Beginning in that delicious first meeting, transcription is a conversation that may go on for days. Handwriting – nib and ink DNA – is as unique as a fingerprint and more lasting. Some hands produce exquisite calligraphy, elegantly flowing across the page in a perfect formation that invites immediate intimacy; others purposefully scratch across a document in scrawl that refuses to let me in. In these types of exchanges I have to steal my moments of imagination from flashes of comprehension. Certain words with solid meaning float above a sea of foreign, random letters, and I catch them up, crush them, sift for bone. I listen for breath in the dust, suss out suspects, wallow in words, guess at terminology that people of my time are no longer familiar with. Try to force some sense. It doesn't work. We

negotiate. I pay with time and patience. The narrative permits me to coax it out.

Sometimes the task seems impossible. I fuss and reorganise, the writing so impenetrable I wonder if the words I have chosen are the right fit. But then I walk away, come back and import flows right into me. Sometimes I can't cajole or charm enough: the meaning remains hidden. Sometimes, because the documents are so old, the words simply end. It is only paper.

Mary Summerland's case file sits somewhere between comprehension and obfuscation. The court indictments are written in a lovely hand: a clean, clear penmanship the natural choice for a court scribe. His hand is so identifiable I can follow him (whoever he is – he gives no clue to his name) to another child murder trial involving a 16 year old girl named Jane Green eight years later (*Regina V Jane Green*, 1840).

The rest of the documents, written almost exclusively by a man named George Leake, are more reclusive. Leake wrote in not quite a scrawl, but his writing is hunched, difficult and took a long time to let me in.

I worked on the transcription over a number of days and when it was complete I felt so certain something was missing I asked for permission from the State Records Office to review the case file in the original. This visit was arranged and I sat down with the original documentation with an air of anticipation. But when I read *CONS 3472, Item 10* through from front to back, it was clear nothing had been missed. I already had all of Mary Summerland that there was left to find.

This was disappointing yet my understanding of the limits of the documentation was tempered by my pleasure in the paper: seeing the original documents was like that first moment of discovery on microfilm – wonderful. All the subtleties of the parchment gave themselves up to me. In the flesh, the documents were different colours and textures. George Leake's writing was confident no-nonsense in dark chocolate ink. Could I detect furtiveness? Anger? Dismissal? I could feel the bustle of the witness named Jane Draper, and a deep suggestive space around another called Olive Clulow. Words I had not been able to decipher emerged. I could feel the hesitations, the movement, the life in them, the people who had surrounded them and caused their making. It was in this feeling that my impression of the document's strangeness intensified.

Working outwards: The third step on a dig

When I state that Mary Summerland's case file felt "strange", I knew the documents were hiding something because there is knowledge in what an archival document says – its words and the narrative it wants you to know – but there is also knowledge in *what it is* – its paper and its ink, the way its words were written down; its age, the order that the information was recorded, its secrecy.

When I read case file *CONS 3472, Item 10*, I can sense the corporeality of Mary Summerland, just as I sense all the people in her case file – and colonial Fremantle itself – saturating the document. Annotations, date changes, words or sentences that are crossed out then adjusted with more palatable sentences. The paper that was used. Enigmatic tense or context changes. *All* the long dead people who have left their trace in the paper, they form a space in the shape of Mary Summerland that is a type of knowing.

When I engage in conversation with an archival document's "(textual) corporeality" (Grosz, 1995, p. 37) it is with an awareness that resonates across the historical, the questioning and the informed imagination voices simultaneously. It becomes a way to read unintended hints buried within/written upon the paper as potentialities of the *what is not said*. When seeking to uncover the story of a woman buried under a century of other people's narratives, these hints become a jumping off point to finding her. They give me a place to start. This is how, methodologically, my feminist archaeology begins to read the bones.

Reading the Bones: Cleromancy and The Musing Voice

Entwined with the historical voice of the archaeological dig I have described above, the second voice wending its way through *Unearthing Mary Summerland* is my musing voice. This is the voice of reflection and questioning.

As the manifestation of my curiosity, *Unearthing Mary Summerland* is infused with questions. Intentional or intuitive, explicitly posed through my musing voice or humming implicitly through the informed imagination, they are always methodologically strategic.

The choice to formulate a clear space for questions within the writing spurs an interconnected web of possibilities that already begin to coat the bare bone of the archive. It allows the dominant narrative represented by the document itself to be considered as part of a rich array of alternative possible contexts (Rich, 1972, p.23).

Integral to this interrogation – indeed, a key objective of my research – was the explicit feminist intention of placing the women I unearthed at the centre of the inquiry. Through this feminist centering, the archive becomes a springboard for my practice of informed imagination. Rather than being a dead or passive material, the paper of the documents becomes a potential site for acts of historical witnessing, leading to new understandings of marginalised women’s lives. The tactility of the paper engages more than my sense of sight. I imagine how these documents have been written upon, creased, stored, opened or buried for decades. I consider the implications of my handling of them now. Their musty scents evoke the past. Most importantly the archival documents are keys to unearthing the embodied realities – the forgotten lived experiences – of the women they represent in the cold matter-of-fact language of legal, social and gendered discourses.

The process of clearing space for these women’s stories raises some questions that may be answered and others that cannot. If, as Adrienne Rich argues, writing is re-naming, when dealing with the long dead, writing also becomes a form of cleromancy (the casting of bones, lots or stones). I read the bones of the archive for clues to what might have been. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) suggests, “every discourse that breeds fault and guilt is a discourse of authority and arrogance” (p. 11). Shame and guilt permeated the actions of Mary Summerland and those around her. I needed to understand the authority and arrogance that had shaped these emotions. Questions insist on fresh perspectives. Research and interrogation move together, slip around and underneath dominant narratives, troubling the ossification of their place within the archive, emerging as a discovering/uncovering that builds up as it reveals, forming a narrative of Mary Summerland and the world in which she lived.

Interrogating the Documents

In an attempt to flush out more of the clues that may be hiding in an archive, I interrogate four areas of each document I uncover: its *production*, its *physicality* and *what it does and does not say*.

1. *The Case File's Production*

When I interrogate a document's production, I think about how and when the document was produced, what purpose was it created to serve and who wrote it within the context of their gender, class, ethnicity and occupation.

I contemplate how the document can affect the corporeality of its subject: how these pieces of paper could lead to someone being institutionalised or imprisoned; how these pieces of paper could set them free.

I consider how it represents the discourses it serves: the legal, medical, religious, social and political contexts within which it was produced. I consider the people who were, or were not, allowed to participate in its creation; the people who had permission to speak within the narrative it presents.

I envision where has it been kept and who was allowed to read it or use it – both in the past and in the present.

2. *The Case File's Physicality Or What It Is – "(textual) corporeality" (Grosz, 1995, p. 37)*

When I investigate a document's textual corporeality, I also spend time with the paper, not just what is written upon it but how and in what ways the writing was put down on the page: I explore its body.

I think about what it is made of, what can be revealed by the actual ink and paper. I imagine how those pen marks got there: what the ink blotches, the annotated information, the crossing out and adding in, the different types of handwriting and where they are placed on the document say about the moment when the information was recorded.

3. *What the Case File Says*

In thinking about the contents of the documentation, I try to understand the "accused" – their gender, ethnicity, class and occupation. I try to find out if they were permitted to contribute to the narrative of the document.

I investigate the witnesses and *their* gender, ethnicity and class. Who *they* worked for and lived with, who worked for them and what their position was in their community.

I also investigate the wider context of the crime itself. For example, what does committing child murder entail? How was child murder law formed? What were the discourses of power that were in existence that allowed child murder law to travel from Great Britain and emerge as a legal practice in the new colony of Western Australia?

4. What the Case File Does Not Say

The questions I ask about what the case file does not say are about the places in the narrative that appear to be hiding something. They are about reading implicit gaps, held silent between the explicit, dominating narrative written down on the paper. They are about obsessively hunting down information that may have been obscured or excluded. These questions dabble in the unknown, and they are where the juice is.

A repetitive theme throughout the narrative of Western Australian colonial child murder is the suite of individuals who are not interviewed or discussed in the document: mistresses and masters, potential fathers of the dead baby, the unlicensed mother's family, fellow servants and the other members of a household, friends, visitors, neighbours and even women sleeping in a bed next to a woman as she labours alone. The dearth of people who come forward to assist a mother about to give birth to her unlicensed child does not ever fail to dismay me.

Silence can protect and silence can harm. When I consider who is prevented or protected from speaking I consider who is protected by the silence. I critically engage with who is interviewed by police, or who voluntarily supplies information in comparison to those who move underneath or run alongside the legal gaze. Silence is important in considering the power relations that are active within a community. Silence can maintain the status quo.

Methodologically, questions refuse the option of silence.

The Voice of Informed Imagination

In the "The Intimate Archive" (2011), Dever, Newman and Vickery observe that "[h]owever disturbing, exciting or, indeed, 'possessed' our archival exploits have been, as researchers we are almost inevitably trained to suppress these elements in the published accounts of our findings" (p. 115). Yet, for them, the reading practices of the researcher are "never

innocent". Rather than viewing the meaning of an archive "as singular, fixed and fully present within the documents we peruse" (p. 115), (as if "history" were waiting fully formed to be merely uncovered by the researcher), considerations of the role of the scholar in shaping and interpreting archival material "inevitably arise when considering the fragmentary or incomplete evidence of women's intimate lives" (p. 97). For Dever et al., "readers will construct their own 'archive' from the documents they variously choose to highlight, ignore or pass over, and, in this way, we are all implicated in the infinite unfolding quality" (p.116) of what is uncovered.

Yet, extending Dever *et al's* observations, what is a researcher to do when there is no archive? If there is no archive should there be no "history"? What about the intimacy a researcher can feel towards stories that have been suppressed? Or the responsibility the researcher can feel toward stories that no longer exist at all?

Mary Summerland was a young, unmarried woman employed as a live-in domestic servant. There is barely a scrap of extant documentation regarding her life. Much of what I do know is what she was not. Mary Summerland was not a "gentlewoman" (Church, 2011). She was not wealthy and she was not married. She was, like so many others, "the servant": a young, single, white, working class woman, who most probably cooked, cleaned and emptied the slops. Does allowing "we do not know what happened to Mary Summerland" to draw a secure framework around my research share one molecule of the desperation she must have felt on finding herself pregnant with an unlicensed child in a town where everyone knew her? Does "we do not know" help us towards a deeper understanding of the subtle complexities of interpersonal relationships in the little town of Fremantle circa 1832, or in any way embody the discourses of power inherent within the colonial Western Australian world?

Clearly, many of my research methods are fuelled by my need to uncover what the documents *do not* say. Much of my writing emerges in response to these omissions. As many of the answers to these questions are not available within the case file itself, the next step in feminist archaeology is to take the shards of bone that do emerge and work my way out from them. This is another, seductive, form of immersion: in seeking answers I learn who (or what) to go hunting after next. In addressing Dever *et al's* concerns I leave myself, my process and my practice explicitly present in the narrative of my research. In the case of Mary Summerland, for example, when I had gleaned all I could of Mary from the scraps, I hunted down the

people around her: her family, her employers, the people who made witness statements about her. In learning about them I then pursued *these* people's families, the people who knew *them*, worked with *them*. On reflection, I became swept up in concurrent narratives that in moving me further away from Mary Summerland, finally brought an understanding of her within my reach.

I dug and dug, till all the contexts surrounding the treatment of Mary Summerland had been simultaneously revealed and brushed away. I dug until all I had left was paper and bones, the ghosts of long dead people and places, and me.

And when I finally finished digging, I found that I had created the space that I needed. I began to understand that my somatic, emotional, intellectual and sensual response, my visceral need, was to allow my imagination to bubble up in between the skeletal remnants of Mary's story, and seek understanding through narrative. I began to realise that I was so immersed in the world of all these women and what had happened to them, that my imagination had been steeped for so long in the minutia of their lives, that when I wrote about Mary Summerland it was as if I could write a type of answer to my own questions. I discovered that my knowledge making had gained a suppleness, a fluidity. It had been nourished and informed in such a way that left me comfortable with the understanding that I would never know what happened to Mary, yet through the knowledge I had gathered about her world, I had created a way to feel myself into (the gaps of) her story.

And so it was through bones and gaps and spaces, through the enfleshment of my informed imagination, that I finally felt the whisper of her presence.

Despite the cold, the smell is very strong. It unfurls from the remains on the table to push rotten meat into Susannah Summerland's face. Susannah begins to take thin breaths through her mouth, sealing off the end of each inhalation with the press of tongue to palate before exhaling through her nose. The other people in the room, the three men and Mary, do not speak, and Susannah continues breathing in this way, listening to the ocean moving back and forth across the rocks at the cliff-base of Bather's Bay, until the Rev. looks up from his chair and asks again,

"Do you recognise the child?"

Susannah is standing. Rev. Wittenoom and Mary's master Mr. Leake are seated across from her, on the other side of the table. To her left the doctor Harrison guards the inner doorway. To her right her daughter sits waiting on a low stool. The dead baby lies in the centre of all of them.

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In 2008, two 9,000-year old skeletons were found with their bones infected by an all too familiar bacterium. The ancient Greeks knew its effects as phthisis; the Incans called it chaky oncay; and today we call it tuberculosis, or TB. TB is still one of the world's most infectious killers, causing more deaths than malaria or even HIV. How has it persisted for so long? Melvin Sanicas investigates. [Directed by Augenblick Studios, narrated by Addison Anderson, music by GDM Production Music].