

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

‘Looking through time itself’: Henry Handel Richardson and the Haunting of Lake View

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Abstract:

Located in the Victorian goldfields town of Chiltern, Lake View was the childhood home of well-known expatriate Australian novelist Henry Handel Richardson (Ethel Florence Richardson). Lake View was the site of great personal trauma for Richardson, which she explored in her novel *Ultima Thule*, the third volume of the acclaimed *Fortunes of Richard Mabony* trilogy. In 1912, revisiting Lake View to undertake research for this trilogy, Richardson encountered her ‘phantom self’ and communed with the spectre of her late father, enabling her to textually re-animate him. As a preserved literary site, Lake View today is dense with spectral phenomena, providing opportunities for haunting and encounter through engagement with various texts, objects and practices. The first part of this article offers a reading of fictional and autobiographical texts related to Lake View. The second part investigates authorial relics residing at Lake View which function as talismans for those seeking connection with the departed author. The third part compares Lake View tourism with the better known and more popular form of themed local tourism, goldmining tourism. This article argues that Lake View, with its layers of psychic resonance, offers a uniquely palimpsestic experience — mediated by its curation and narration by guides and visitors — enabling further exploration of the interconnections between spectral geography and cultural tourism in an Australian context.

Key words: literary tourism, spectro geography, Australian literature

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Introduction

The haunted house is a standard trope of ghost stories. As Jacques Derrida observes, 'haunting implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house.' (Derrida 1995: 86) Haunting frequently takes place in the home, disrupting the comfort of the familiar, transforming the homely into the 'unhomely'. Lake View, novelist Henry Handel Richardson's home from the age of six to seven and a half, was the site of her father's descent into madness, semi-fictionalised in her novel *Ultima Thule*. Through the act of bringing her father's ghost back in the form of protagonist Richard Mahony, HHR created a haunted text in which a lost past is recovered and reconstituted in writing. *Ultima Thule* is a temporally disjunctive text which in turn produces narratives of haunting that continue to inflect Lake View as a tourist attraction. In this article I wish to discuss the complex spectral geography of Lake View through an examination of texts, objects and practices that enable visitors to engage in imaginative time travel. I argue that Lake View's spectral geography confounds temporal liminality, disrupting the neat ordering of past and present (Lee 179).

Spectral geography involves the mapping of immaterial traces in a variety of spaces, including but not limited to the home. It is concerned with apprehending the liminal presences which are absent, neither alive nor dead. These might be described as ghosts, spectres or apparitions. Michael Bell argues that ghosts – that is, the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there – are a ubiquitous aspect of the phenomenology of place.

Although the cultural language of modernity usually prevents us from speaking about their presence, we constitute a place in large measure by the ghosts we sense inhabit and possess it. The meaning of a place, its *genius loci*, depends upon the geniuses we locate there (Bell 1997: 813)

Bell figures the ghost as a felt presence—an anima, geist, or genius—that possesses and gives 'a sense of social aliveness to a place' (Bell 1997: 815).

In the case of literary houses, which are almost always established as such after the author's death, visitors may sense the presence of the 'genius' formerly in residence. Indeed, the promotional materials for many literary houses actively encourage the idea that the writer's home is haunted by their spirit. Ghosts, as readily imagined embodiments of the past, can help visitors to connect with the layers of history existing in a particular heritage site.

Literary houses like Lake View provide fertile territory for spectral phenomena, which can form an important aspect of a literary tourist's itinerary. Literary tourism involves apprehending the 'absent presence' of the vanished author, or imagining the author inhabiting the same space in which the tourist temporarily stands. Literary tourists may even imagine themselves *as* the author, or they might mentally conjure up the characters and

scenes that the author has created. In this way, the author's 'real life' and the world he or she has produced may co-exist in the mind of the literary tourist.

Located in Chiltern in the state of Victoria, Lake View was built between 1872-1874, at the height of the goldrush. Chiltern forms part of a constellation of regional goldfields towns that actively memorialise Victorian goldrush heritage. In the Australian context, goldfields tourism eclipses literary tourism in terms of popularity, but the town of Chiltern encourages both forms of cultural tourism without privileging one over the other.

Textual Hauntings

After it was bequeathed to the National Trust by its former owner Lily Salmon, Lake View deteriorated to such an extent that it only barely escaped demolition. In the absence of its original inhabitants, the restoration of Lake View has been shaped to a large degree by the interpretation of texts such as Walter and Mary Richardson's correspondence and HHR's *FRM* trilogy and *Myself When Young*.

However, one text almost prevented its preservation. In *Henry Handel Richardson: A Study* (1950), literary critic Nettie Palmer states that the house had already been demolished. Palmer wrongly asserts that HHR looked at another house instead of Lake View on her return to Australia in 1912:

...she visited Chiltern to examine the house in which her father had spent some of his most painful months. It had been pulled down, but she carefully took measurements of the rooms in another house of the same kind and pattern, so that she might more easily visualise Mahony in his little box of a surgery, or the living-room where the round rosewood table devoured the floor-space and the Collard took up nearly the whole of one wall. (Palmer 1950: 159)

Whatever the reasons for this error of fact, it had a detrimental effect on the efforts to turn Lake View into a museum, since many people thought it had already been destroyed. This near-disaster neatly demonstrates the power of texts to shape heritage practices.

While the first move to preserve the building was made in 1961, approval was not granted for its restoration until 1965. Following a successful struggle by locals to preserve it, the house was officially opened on the 3rd of January 1970, Lake View still stands in front of Lake Anderson (or the 'lagoon' or 'swamp' as it is called in *Ultima Thule*) which was created by the subsidence of the Alliance gold mine. There is a small island covered in trees in the middle of the lake which was originally an old mullock heap, reminding the visitor of its goldrush origins.

HHR spent precisely eleven months of her life from the age of 6 in Chiltern, in two periods, the first from 26 July 1876 to 26 Jan 1877, after which she spent the next 3 months spent in the seaside town of Queenscliff, and the second after her return to Chiltern until her departure in the last week of September 1877. Chiltern was a booming gold town in the 1870s with a population of approximately 22,000 and 45 hotels to accommodate them.

Walter Richardson had moved to Chiltern seeking work as a doctor after his practice in Hawthorn, Melbourne failed and he had suffered a decline in his fortunes due to the embezzlement of his once lucrative mining shares. This involved significant downsizing for the family, which had previously inhabited a mansion, yet the children immediately appreciated the pleasures of cottage life.

In her unfinished memoir *Myself When Young* HHR draws on childhood memories of the Chiltern house:

Of the place itself I remember chiefly its heat...the small red-brick one-storeyed house...is clear in every detail I liked it because all its windows were French windows and usually stood wide open, which gave one a sense of freedom, and because it had a verandah running round three sides of it (Richardson 1948: 17).

Cuffy Mahony in *Ultima Thule*, who is partly based on HHR herself, initially has a delighted response to the house on the first morning after the family's arrival in Barambogie.

For oh! what a lovely house this was! — long before anyone else was astir, Cuffy had pattered out barefoot to explore; and all his life after, he loved an empty house for its sake. It had nothing but doors; which spelt freedom: even the windows were doors. There were no stairs. A passage went right down the middle, with a door at each end, which always stood open, and three room-doors on each side. You could run out of any of the windows and tear round the verandah, to play Hide-and-Seek or Hi-spy-hi (Richardson 1929: 66).

In this passage the reader can detect connections between HHR's memories of Lake View and its depiction in *Ultima Thule*, through the eyes of Cuffy. His mother Mary's attitude towards the house is less positive, particularly on the morning she is first introduced to it by her husband:

[W]hen he led her round house an garden: he skimmed airily over the drawbacks—the distance of the kitchen from the house; the poor water-supply; the wretched little box of a surgery; the great heat of even this late autumn day—to belaud the house's privacy, separated as it was from the rest of the township by the width of the Lagoon; the thickness of the brick walls; the shade and coolness ensured by an all-round verandah. (Richardson 1929: 65)

Cuffy's mother Mary is dubious about the house but she takes pains not to 'damp' her husband by saying what she really thinks. Nonetheless, Cuffy and his twin sisters enjoy the unsupervised freedoms the house offers since the maid was busy in the kitchen behind the house for most of the day, leaving them to their own devices.

Despite the pleasures afforded by the house, HHR noted in *Myself When Young* that the mood in the house was tense when she lived at Lake View: '...the walls were thin, the

doors mostly ajar; and nerves frayed by heat and anxiety often escaped control' (Richardson 1948: 20). Worries about her father's ill health, dwindling medical practice and the future of the children led to marital disharmony. The money concerns had a real basis since people were leaving Chiltern because the mine had been delayed by at least six months by the striking of water. This meant that workers were laid off and the town was suddenly depleted, affecting Walter's business. When Mary was away with the children, Walter wrote that: 'The practice is gone, & is now a farce [-] there is *no money & no sickness!*' (Richardson cited in Steele 2013: 119). As Michael Ackland observes, Chiltern 'marked the end of the family's hopes' (Ackland 2004: 38).

In *Ultima Thule* Mahony suffers mood swings, headaches, nightmares, giddiness and difficulties with speech and writing. The whistle from the nearby flour mill added to the under-employed doctor's torment. The sound is described as 'a shrill and piercing scream—a kind of prolonged shriek, that rent and tore at the air.' (Richardson 1929: 65) HHR explores the mental anguish of Mahony in considerable detail, based on her experience of her father's illness; however, she adds another tragic event to increase the drama. One of Cuffy's twin sisters, Lallie, dies from fever during their time at Lake View. This increases Mahony's sense of impotence and contributes further to the family's instability.

As Mahony's condition worsens, he feels the need to escape the claustrophobia of the house and to run into the trees for solace.

Arrived there, he flung himself at full length on the wet and slimy ground...And for a time he did no more than lie and exult in the relief this knowledge brought him—this sense of freedom from all things human...[Mahony] became suddenly aware of the breaking over him of a great light: he was lying, he found, in a pool of light; a radiance thick as milk, unearthly as moonlight. And this suffused him, penetrated him, lapped him round. He breathed it in, drew deep breaths of it; and, as he did so, the last vestiges of his old self seemed to fall away. (Richardson 1929: 214-218)

Mahony experiences a 'white ecstasy' that 'left mere knowledge far behind'. He believed, as he lay face down in the mud, that he now had access to the 'Ultimate Plan'. The suddenly the light was gone and 'the hideous spectre of his blackest nights took visible form, and persisted, till, for the first time, he dared to look it in the face.—And death seemed a trifle in comparison' (Richardson 1929: 218-219).

Mahony's disordered mind sees his madness outwardly manifested as a 'black spectre' that is worse than death. Seen as a failed suicide attempt by the Chiltern community, this incident marks the end of Mahony's credibility as a doctor and necessitates the family's immediate departure from the town. Mahony's long-suffering wife Mary is resigned to the fact that they must leave Chiltern but her greatest regret is that she will be deserting the spirit of her dead daughter Lallie:

her heart was heavy: no matter how unhappy you had been in it, the dismantling of a home was sorry business, and one to which she never grew accustomed. Besides, this time, one of them had to stay behind. As long as they lived there, her child had not seemed wholly gone; so full was the house of memories of her. To the next, to any other house they occupied, little Lallie would be a stranger. (Richardson 1929: 221)

The idea of Lallie inhabiting the house after their departure is deeply distressing to Mary who wishes to protect her even in death. Furthermore, even though Lallie is a fictional character, her ghost coexists with those of 'real' former inhabitants for literary tourists to Lake View.

HHR assumed the role of tourist in 1912, at the age of 42, when she returned to Australia from her home in England on a research trip for her projected trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1917-1929; hereafter *FRM*). She had already published two semi-autobiographical novels *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910) and *Maurice Guest* (1908). HHR spent five full weeks in Victoria. After Melbourne and the Dandenongs, she visited Queenscliff, Koroit and Chiltern in quick succession, 'completing the stations of her father's ordeal in less than a week' (Ackland 2004: 200).

During her tour around Victoria, accompanied by her husband and nephew, HHR wrote detailed notes on her travels, recording views, smells, sounds and sensations. The 1912 notes, which are kept in the National Library of Australia, are the earliest outline of the trilogy. They also give the reader some idea of the people and places she encountered on this trip and the ways in which she recorded them for her fiction. As HHR observed, she used the 'scaffolding' of her father's life in her depiction of Richard Mahony. In his reading of the 1912 notes, Clive Probyn observes that 'she is both re-enacting the journey of her parents, and at the same time telling herself about the future novel' (Probyn 2012: 5). Indeed, the notes show that HHR's research trip encouraged her to imaginatively inhabit her father's psyche in preparation for her fictionalisation of his life. In her 1912 notes, we see a foreshadowing of the bleak depiction of Chiltern as 'Barambogie' in *Ultima Thule*. This name may have been taken from Lake Barambogie, named after the Barambogie mining company, during the course of her research trip.

Although it is not mentioned in her notes, HHR actually walked around Lake View taking photos of the house and its surroundings, conducting a thorough inspection to fill out her already vivid mental images of the place. Her notes give no indication of her personal feelings about re-visiting the house with its freight of memories. Yet there is evidence of strong affect transmuted into her fiction.

HHR's mode of travel differed considerably from that of her parents, since she saw the country from a railway carriage and stayed at good hotels, whereas her parents had travelled by horse and cart or on foot, living under canvas on the way. Despite the difference in their modes of travel, HHR faithfully re-constructed her parents' journey and its travails down to the minutest details.

After making very detailed notes on the natural environment, particularly the flora, HHR writes:

Narrow streets of the township; the crude red of the brick. The great bare green-bordered roads. All the horrid sticky little-ness of the place. To think of it going on day after day with no hope of escape.
 Banksias everywhere
 (He could not always find his words)
 The lagoon almost dried up
 The right-of-way beside the house.
 Flies, blowflies, dust, heat.
 Blaze of light and sun (October); bare roads.
 Lilac full out. Figs quite large. Shops shut up.
 Journey back.
 The gums grey in the heat; they droop, look withered.
 Sky grey with heat; trunks grey. Hills full of bare grey trunks.
 (Richardson 1912: 20).

Clive Probyn notes that when reading the 1912 notes ‘we are in a creative area where the real and imagined are utterly inseparable’ (Probyn 2012: 4). The notes reveal HHR’s imaginative reconstruction of her father’s mental state during the eleven months in Chiltern. It was here that he succumbed to a devastating illness, which may have been the result of syphilis or arteriosclerosis, that led to mental deterioration and collapse. When HHR writes: ‘To think of it going on day after day with no hope of escape’, she is empathising with his pronounced sense of entrapment and desolation. The repeated references to grey-ness — ‘the gums grey in the heat’ ‘Sky grey with heat; trunks grey. Hills full of bare grey trunks’ indicate the depressive mood that the landscape conjures up in the Barambogic scenes of *Ultima Thule*. To some degree, the oppressive landscape is both the backdrop and the trigger for the doctor’s mental disintegration.

Through a close examination of HHR’s notes, the reader may discern that she was focusing her energies on connecting with her father’s ‘spirit’ in order to re-animate him textually. Although he had a huge impact on her life, she claimed that she had few memories of her father: ‘Of the many dim shades of the past, his is one of the dimmest. I cannot remember what he looked like, or how he spoke or moved, or, in fact, anything at all about his outward appearance.’ (HHR in Steele 2013: xiii) She only had a few fragments of memory and sources such as letters and newspapers from which to resurrect her father in the form of Richard Mahony.

While Richard Mahony is *not* Walter Richardson, HHR gave Mahony her father’s interest in Spiritualism, a movement originating in the mid-nineteenth century spiritualism that encouraged communication with spirits of the dead through séances. One line in her 1912 notes confirms this: ‘It would be in Chiltern with nothing to do that he would abandon

him [self] to Spiritualism' (Richardson 1912: 20). In this cryptic sentence, HHR enters imaginatively into her father's attraction to communing with entities from 'the other side'. In Chiltern, Walter Richardson joined a Spiritualist circle that held regular séances. In fact, he had been first drawn to the post in Chiltern because the former physician Dr Rohner was well known in Spiritualist circles, contributing to the Spiritualist publication *The Harbinger of Light* to which Richardson also contributed. In July 1877 *The Harbinger of Light* published Richardson's report on a meeting of the Chiltern Spiritualist circle:

I have had the pleasure lately of being present at the above circle by invitation of the spirits themselves; and as I was long convinced by personal investigation of the phenomena, and the causes of the same, I hardly expected to receive such fresh evidence, or to witness anything new. I was, however, agreeably disappointed...I held conversation with the invisibles. They wished me to come oftener, they said. They were so happy (Richardson quoted in Steele 2013: 124)

Richardson had long been interested in the intellectual side of Spiritualism but his time in Chiltern saw an increasing preoccupation with séances and supernatural practices. HHR, like her father before her, was a fervent believer in Spiritualism, subscribing to the existence of human entities beyond death. (Ackland 2004: 240). As she wrote to her friend Mary Kernot in October 1931:

I do wonder if, like me, you [Kernot] have come to look on death as a simple passing from one room to the next?— a mere matter of a different rate of vibration. For me, the dead go on existing just as they were, though invisible to us, & only gradually reaching heights from which they are inaccessible. To know this, has certainly made my own life much easier. (HHR to Kernot quoted in Ackland 2004: 239)

HHR uses the image of the house to explain her Spiritualist belief that loved ones continue to exist 'invisibly' in the next room. For HHR it is a comfort that the dead continue to surround the living, existing invisibly at a 'different rate of vibration'. At Lake View, the site of Walter Richardson's mental collapse, spectral phenomena co-habit with one another, only perceptible to those with sufficient familiarity or sensitivity to its psychic resonances.

Writerly Artefacts

As Wenche Ommundsen argues, 'the adoration of famous writers, living or dead, is in the practices of tourism dependent on physical proximity: the body, or bodily remains, of the writer become the repository for literary genius, and paying homage becomes synonymous with experiencing, through one's own body, a sense of continuity and contact' (Ommundsen 2005). HHR's remains are absent from Lake View but the literary tourist's own body can come into contact with spaces and objects that she has touched.

Just as spaces may be inhabited by ghosts, objects may also be invested with a ‘geist’ or spirit. Through the course of an object’s lifespan, it may become a repository for social sentiment due to the personal associations it has accrued. People have a certain intimacy with their domestic objects, especially items which are handled daily. In *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (2015) Deborah Lutz argues that ordinary objects can carry us to other times and places. Lutz observes: ‘I feel the deep mystery of the lives of others in this palpable emissary of past moments, now impossible to recover. The texture of those lost days settles into possessions that outlive their owners. . . .’ (Lutz 2015: xxi)

Due to HHR’s literary fame, objects that once belonged to the author are now considered culturally valuable. Since Lake View houses very few original items, there are a number of pieces that have been approximated or substituted by the National Trust and dedicated volunteers. A piano in the drawing room reminds the visitor of the major role played by music in HHR’s life, who had a musical career in Leipzig before she became a novelist. The house also contains medical equipment, including a birthing chair, which references the house’s former function as a medical practice. Memorabilia such as copies of articles, letters, photos and portraits are also displayed — including a striking portrait of HHR by Rupert Bunny — once again reminding the visitor of HHR’s successful life beyond Chiltern.

Objects that were actually owned by HHR – momentos, heirlooms, gifts – have a certain ‘aura’ due to their proximity to the author; they were regularly touched by HHR and are now displayed in her childhood home. The author’s body no longer exists – her mortal remains having been scattered in the sea near Hastings, England – yet these relics are tangible reminders that she existed in physical form.

HHR’s first writing desk is located at Lake View, even though she was too young to have written there during her childhood habitation. However, her memoir suggests that she was already composing stories in her head at this time. In *Myself When Young* HHR reflects on her juvenile storytelling which arose in response to the lack of reading matter; a symptom of the family’s reduced means: ‘It was here that, no new books coming in, I took to making up stories for myself. To the accompaniment of a ball bounced against a wall. (Richardson 1929: 18) The desk now displayed at Lake View accompanied HHR on moves between Europe and England, enabling the writing of *Maurice Guest* and *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910). The presence of this desk, which belongs to HHR’s middle age, dramatises the writer’s labour but also represents a departure from strict historical accuracy, indicating that there is no way of going back to the precise time that HHR lived in the house.

Nicola Watson argues that relics assembled in a writer’s house ‘make up a shadowy outline of the author’s domestic and physical life’ (Watson 2006: 105). Two other ‘authentic’ objects that were owned by HHR on display at Lake View provide insight into the domestic side of her life; a delicate Queen Anne silver cream jug (1795) and a twenty-sided glass prism paperweight which had purportedly been used daily by HHR. These two items have a complicated history, having been returned to Lake View by Dame Pattie Menzies — the widow of Sir Robert Menzies — a former Australian Prime Minister in 1990. The artefacts

had been in the possession of the Menzies family since they were first presented to Sir Robert by the Mayor of Hastings in 1966, as a gesture of goodwill. In the absence of any lasting memorial to in Hastings, these objects housed at Lake View provide a tangible link to HHR's years of residence in the United Kingdom. The display of HHR's desk, milk jug and paperweight, with their complex material histories, bring together multiple times and places into the present of the house.

Curation, storytelling and ritual

The practices enacted in and around a literary site play an important role in shaping the tourism experience. In this section I will consider the contribution of curation, storytelling and ritual to the memorialisation of Lake View. As mentioned earlier the National Trust played a major part in the restoration of Lake View. HHR's descriptions of the Mahony residence in *Ultima Thule* were used as the basis for the reconstruction of Lake View as a museum. National Trust conservators took pains to replicate the layout of the house, sourcing period furnishings and suitable domestic objects that aligned closely with those described in *Ultima Thule*.

The volunteer guides at Lake View also reinforce the connections between the house and its fictional representation in *Ultima Thule*, contributing to a slippage between the 'real' narrative of the Richardsons and the partially invented story of the Mahonys. The guide's standard narrative emphasises Richardson/Mahony's madness, claiming that the cause was syphilis contracted at the Ballarat goldfields, when this has not been definitively proven. As Dorothy Green noted, 'no proof of the cause of dementia was possible in 1879' and indeed none is possible now, with a handful of bones over a hundred years old (Steele 2013: xi). Although the diagnosis of syphilis is not verifiable at this distance in time, this information conveyed by the guide shapes the visitor's response to the house. The experience of *Lake View* then becomes overlaid by a narrative of trauma and disgrace, of which some visitors would have been previously unaware. This is by no means unusual, since guides tend to embellish the facts and add their own interpretations for greater entertainment value, often dwelling on the tragic dimension of a literary site, in this case, Walter Richardson's madness and subsequent death.

In Henry James's short story *The Birthplace* (1903) set at a literary shrine modeled on Shakespeare's house at Stratford Upon Avon, a guide is threatened with dismissal when he is honest about the lack of real information available about the writer's life. This approach was unpopular with literary tourists visiting the house who desired to feel a closer engagement with the great man's life. The guide is rewarded with a pay rise when he embellishes and fabricates once again, using his imagination to fill the gaps in Shakespeare's biography.

Across that threshold He habitually passed; through those low windows, in childhood, He peered out into the world that He was to make so much happier by the gift of His genius; over the boards of this floor - that is over some of them, for we mustn't be

carried away! - His little feet so often pattered; and the beams of this ceiling (we must really in some places take care of our heads!) he endeavoured, in boyish strife, to jump up and touch. It's not often that in the early home of genius and renown the whole tenor of existence is laid so bare, not often that we are able to retrace, from point to point and from step to step, its connection with objects, with influences - to build it round again with the little solid facts out of which it sprang (James 1964: 450)

One of the aims of the literary museum guide is to populate the house with past inhabitants, explain the significance of objects and events, and weave a narrative that engages, however 'truthful' it may be. The guides at Lake View display a familiarity and fondness for the young HHR and her troubled father, referring to them with the familiarity of old friends.

Hilary Iris Lowe in her discussion of Mark Twain's former residence Quarry Farm, observes that research fellows who stay there frequently say that the place is 'haunted' by the 'spirit' of Twain but they hardly ever mean that it is 'actually haunted'. Instead, they are referring to the mingling of presences at Quarry Farm both past and present, real and imaginary (Lowe 2012: 153). Similarly, Lake View exhibits a layering of psychic presences, both metaphorical and perceptible.

At sites such as Lake View, there is an intimate quality of the communion (albeit one-way) between living tourist and the dead writer, enabling a temporal shift. Polly Atkin describes this function as a 'co-presencing' which does not describe a journey into the past so much as it indicates that the past continues to exist in the present (Atkin 2009: 87-88). Visitors to Lake View, while still inhabiting the present, can perceive the layers of history at the site, including HHR's childhood habitation, her 1912 return, the period of residence by others, followed by the near dereliction and subsequent refurbishment of the house.

The annual celebrations for HHR's birthday held by the Henry Handel Richardson Society on the 3rd of January at Lake View implicitly recognise the importance of acknowledging the past in the present. At this event, HHR members sit in the garden of Lake View, speeches are made, creative writing inspired by HHR is read aloud, a cake is cut and Happy Birthday is sung to HHR despite the fact that she has been dead since 1946. Through these rituals at the site of her childhood residence, the spirit of HHR is summoned to engage with the living.

Visitors have produced their own stories about uncanny experiences at Lake View, indicating that it can have a powerful effect on the imagination. At a birthday celebration in 1977, Joan Palmer sat on the lawn at Lake View listening to HHR's work being read aloud when she apprehended a presence: 'It was then I heard the sound of running feet and a childish voice talking to herself as she bounced a ball regularly against the old brick walls.' (Palmer 1977: 49) For Palmer, the atmosphere of Lake View was vivid enough to bring the young HHR back to life. The visitor who has read *Ultima Thule* or *Myself When Young*, which offer insights into HHR's childhood, has a greater chance of imaginatively entering the author's psychic space.

Travel journalist Kerrin O’Sullivan reported that the house gave her the opportunity to ‘see’ through time: ‘It feels a little eerie, as if I’m looking through the great author’s eyes, indeed through time itself’ (O’Sullivan 2012). O’Sullivan engaged in imaginative time-travel in order to inhabit HHR’s subjectivity, seeing Lake View from the author’s perspective, if fleetingly.

In their discussion of the use of ghosts in Scottish heritage tourism, David Inglis and Mary Holmes recognise the value of spectres for attracting and entertaining tourists. (Inglis & Holmes 2003: 56) They argue that ‘the places where ghosts are held to live out their spectral non-lives are constructed as being authentic through the very presence of the ghost, which operates as a hallmark of the archaic nature of the locale in question.’ (Inglis & Holmes 2003: 56) Since ghosts rarely appear on cue, some tourism operators use actors dressed up as ghosts to frighten tourists as they tour various Scottish houses and castles. Actors masquerading as ghosts may assist in the mental construction of the apparitions purported to reside in a particular place; alternatively they may render the communion with other presences impossible. Although Lake View does not feature actors masquerading as ghosts, there are myriad possibilities for engagement with the departed presences of the young HHR, her troubled father, and assorted others.

Beryl Pickering, a guide who has been associated with Lake View for twenty years, claims that the ghosts inhabiting the house are not all connected with HHR but that the preservation of the house has allowed them all to be perceived by a wider audience. As Steve Pile argues, ‘To be alert to the ghost – and the presence of ghosts – requires a particular kind of seeing’ (Pile 2005: 139). Not all visitors to Lake View can perceive ghosts but some haunting ‘experts’ have identified their characteristics. Beryl observes that four mediums have come through Lake View at different times and have felt the presence of ghosts in the house, most notably a ‘distressed’ man pacing up and down the hallway and a little old lady sitting on a bed in the children’s nursery. Beryl herself has not seen ghosts but she says that she has had a number of strange experiences, including the unexplained movement of items in the house (Pickering 2015). In June 2015, the security company rang Beryl to tell her that they had spotted a figure in the hallway of *Lake View* on their CCTV footage. Beryl replied: ‘That’s Mr. Richardson. Leave him alone!’ (Pickering 2015). This incident involved a clash between the systems of surveillance protecting the house and the ghostly presences that are known and accepted by the guides. As Julian Holloway and James Kneale argue, ‘[g]hosts and spectres appear and disappear, are both absent and present. They are incarnations which hover between secure accounting mechanisms’ (Holloway and Kneale 2008: 308). Spectres are liminal figures hovering in an indeterminate space between spirit and flesh. It is precisely the indeterminate quality of ghostly phenomena which give them such appeal to those who seek to perceive them. Through a range of practices enacted by curators, guides and visitors to Lake View, resident spirits are summoned up, apprehended and transmuted into storytelling.

Ghostly gold trails

So far, this article has discussed spectral presences in the context of Lake View as a literary heritage site. As mentioned earlier, Chiltern is part of a network of goldmining trails that commemorate the Victorian goldrushes of the mid-late nineteenth century. Literary and goldmining tourism — which exist side by side in Chiltern — are complementary, with their shared emphasis on the preservation of sites, buildings and objects that speak of the distant past. Both practices involve conjuring up the absent-presence of former inhabitants who are no longer physically there. The places where they once existed can appear highly charged with psychic phenomena to those who are sensitive to them.

Without goldmining, the town of Chiltern simply would not exist. In 1858, John Conness, a veteran of the Ballarat, Bendigo and Beechworth rushes, registered a prospecting claim on the Indigo Lead approximately 3.4 km from the current site of Chiltern. Within months 20,000 miners of all nationalities including 2000 Chinese came to the area, creating the town of Indigo virtually overnight, complete with stores, hotels, shops, shanties and dance halls. In 1859 Conness' Nil Desperandum Company discovered gold on the Chiltern Lead near the present day football ground. Within 12 months the old Indigo township was deserted as miners and businesses moved to the new town of Chiltern.

The Indigo cemetery houses the graves of 58 people who died during this shanty town's brief existence. The first death of the Indigo Goldfield, on 4 November 1858, was newborn Francis Nicholls, whose grave testifies to the perils of goldmining life, especially for children. Indigo is Chiltern's shadow ghost town, reminding the visitor of the transience of the gold rush.

Having spent part of her childhood in the goldfields region, HHR was attuned to the human toll taken by the goldrushes. Indeed, the opening sentence of *Australia Felix*, the first volume of the FRM trilogy, concerns the horrific death of a gold miner: 'In a shaft on the Gravel Pits, a man had been buried alive...The digger fell forward on his face, his ribs jammed across the pick, his arms pinned to his sides, nose and mouth pressed into the sticky mud as into a mask; and over his defenceless body, with a roar that burst his ear-drums, broke stupendous masses of earth' (Richardson 1962: 3)

With this striking image, HHR draws attention to the victims of the hunt for gold. In fact, Richard Mahony's fluctuating fortunes are inextricably linked with gold mining throughout the FRM trilogy. Mahony leaves England to seek gold on the Ballarat goldfields but later decides to start a store which is an abject failure due to his lack of business acumen. His purchase of mining shares leads to a great fortune which is later embezzled by a dishonest clerk which then leads him back to practicing medicine in Barambogie, yet another a goldfield town.

As discussed previously, the town of Barambogie that features in *Ultima Thule* is modeled closely on Chiltern. The name of the novel may have been taken from 'Ultima Thule Creek' at Alexandra, Victoria, where gold was also discovered. The boom and bust nature of mining meant that many Australian towns — like Indigo, Chiltern's precursor— were developed and died within a short space of time in the late nineteenth century. Since at least the 1930s, hundreds of Australian pioneer settlements across the country, in various

states of abandonment and decay, have been called 'ghost towns' (Ballantyne 2001: 33). In the state of Victoria, there are at least a dozen ghost towns which remain, in skeletal form, as monuments to the era. These shadow places are commodified as part of Victoria's official goldfields tourism strategy. The goldfields region is extensively promoted using slogans such as 'The Goldfields: leave a little richer' and 'The Goldfields track is a journey through time'. (Goldfields Track Victoria) Chiltern is part of the Indigo gold trail which is advertised as a reminder of the goldmining legacy:

Today, in and around Beechworth, Chiltern, Rutherglen and Yackandandah, and the villages and countryside in between, the legacy of the rush for gold remains - from the perfectly preserved streetscapes of the towns to the countless mine shafts and mullock heaps to astonishing water races sluiced through solid granite; from Chinese Burning Towers and pioneer graves to historic government buildings, schools and museums all dating from those early, heady days of the gold rush (Indigo Gold trail website).

Anja Nelle argues that in a heritage town the historic image or 'journey into the past' are the products that are marketed for consumption. The historic image has an 'old-age value' (Nelle cited in Atkin 2009: 86). In order to escape the fate of many ghost towns, Chiltern has emphasised both its connection with the goldfields and its artistic figures such as novelist and travel writer Mary Gaunt and goldrush gum leaf painter and poet Alfred Eustace. The Athenaeum Museum in Chiltern brings the artistic and industrial heritage of the town together, with a large library of works by local authors, another desk formerly owned by HHR and mining paraphernalia such as goldmining scales and old equipment from the goldfields.

Chiltern's perfectly preserved 'Gold Era' streetscape, with twenty two of its properties listed by the National Trust, has enabled its use as a backdrop for a number of feature films, needing very few props to recreate the required atmosphere. Films shot in Chiltern include *Ride a Wild Pony* (1974) *My Brother Tom* (1986) and *The True Story of Spit McPhee* (1987). Lantern Ghost Tours regularly use Chiltern as a location for walking tours by lantern light, accompanied by ghost stories illuminating the town's 'dark and bizarre' history (Lantern Ghost Tours).

The experiences of the mining heritage tourist are undoubtedly affected by the nature of the physical heritage that is on display. This may range from ghost towns managed under policies of 'arrested decay' to artificial reconstructions such as the Sovereign Hill Museum in Ballarat, Victoria. In many cases Warwick Frost observes, all that remains may be a pile of rocks and a hole in the ground, 'providing little for the imagination of the visitor' (Frost 100). The hundreds, if not thousands, of mines around Chiltern are of the unreconstructed variety, allowing for the interpretation of the visitor. Tourists may embark on the 'Take a Walk Track' and see about 20 mine shafts within 200 metres. The bigger mines include the Magenta Gold mine, Gold Bar mine, Alliance Gold mine, Chiltern Valley Number One Gold mine and the Chiltern Valley Number Two Gold mine. These mines

around Chiltern, both large and small, are of interest to the industrial enthusiast, or 'geotourist,' as well as the purposeful cultural tourist. Heritage mines such as these can function multiply as a source of industrial interest for mining buffs, as a trigger for imaginative reconstruction of the goldrush era and as a geological spectacle.

Preservation of heritage succeeds and reaps economic returns because it suits certain cultural needs, in this case, the need for connection with our colonial past (Squire 1994: 116). Literary places tend to attract both general heritage visitors like those visiting the goldfields sites, as well as a niche segment of 'genuine' literary pilgrims (Smith 2003: 86-87). Evidence suggests that goldfields tourism is currently a more sizable industry than literary tourism in Australia, yet this may change in future, if overseas trends are followed. Despite the fact that literary tourism is considered to be a niche practice, Anne Hoppen, Lorraine Brown and Alan Fyall observe that it is of growing relevance within the field of cultural and heritage tourism (Hoppen, Brown and Fyall 2014: 38-39). The demand for cultural holidays increased by 17% between 1997 and 2007 while the OECD and UNWTO registered that cultural tourism accounted for 40% of all international tourism in 2007, according to the first ever report on literary tourism by market research group Mintel (Mintel 2010). According to Mintel's 2011 report, the only literary figure associated with tourism in Australasia is Katherine Mansfield whose birthplace has become a popular attraction in Wellington, New Zealand (Mintel 2011). Unfortunately, there remains no comprehensive statistical data available on the scale or market size of literary tourism in Australia.

As Mary Beth Gouthro and Catherine Palmer argue, heritage mining sites can become as important to their visitors and have as much meaning for them as shrines do for their visitor/pilgrims. Literary tourists visiting sites associated with authors often display a similar passion, akin to the devotion motivating religious pilgrims. Acts of mining pilgrimage and literary tourism are often exercised in similar contexts, in that they are practiced with others: family, friends and/or members of the same community of interest. These experiences are made meaningful through storytelling, by the narration of guides, the reading of associated materials and through the production of their own stories after the visit. (Gouthro and Palmer 2010: 41)

Literary tourists are especially fascinated by the traumatic aspects of author's lives — like mental breakdowns and suicides — just as mining tourists are inevitably drawn to the tragic dimensions of the goldrush era; the violence, hardship and untimely death experienced by miners and their families. In this way, the decaying ruins of mining settlements can be more emotionally resonant than reconstructed, theme-park versions of mining heritage but they may require more mental effort on the part of the visitor.

Paul Westover observes that pilgrims often describe their experience at literary sites in terms of time travel, 'as if a ruin or artifact were a portal to a vanished past' (Westover 2012: 6). This can equally apply to mining heritage sites in which ruins may be perceived as haunted spaces, dense with spectral absences that cannot be filled, or interpreted rationally (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012: 473). With its careful attention to preservation of its heritage,

as seen in its period streetscape and its seemingly untouched goldfields terrain, the town of Chiltern offers rich experiences for the cultural tourist.

Conclusion

Mike Crang has observed that tourism is an important vector in the functioning of late modernity, operating as ‘an interplay of movement and fixity, absence and presence.’ Crang argues that the tourist ‘seeks to travel to be present at a place, but that as we examine those places we find they are shot through by absences where distant others, removed in space and time, haunt the sites.’ (Crang 2006: 49) Despite the growth of virtual tourism, the act of physically visiting a place, and the opportunity to commune with apparitions, is an essential component of the cultural tourist’s experience. As this article has shown, the hauntedness of Lake View and its surroundings is a drawcard for visitors to Chiltern. The space of the house is palimpsestic, with layers of ‘real’ history, fictional representation, the narratives of guides and projections of literary tourists existing simultaneously. Lake View, with its complex spectral geography, functions as a portal to other moments in time, ‘tangling the string of temporal linearity’ (Maddern and Adey 2009: 292). Ghosts are woven into the very fabric of the house, drawing attention to HHR’s traumatic family history and encouraging curiosity about the past lives of Chiltern itself.

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