

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to all who illuminated portions of the dark path I have travelled over the past seven years as I followed Aesi deeper into the underworld.

I am deeply indebted to the hard work of Jill Poulton who produced *Adelaide Ironside: The Pilgrim of Art*, the first biography of Adelaide Ironside in 1987. This thoroughly researched study has been a constant companion over the last seven years and demonstrates admirable detail regarding many elements of Adelaide's life which were then scattered across public and private holdings and even harder to access in the non-internet age. Likewise, Ros Pesman's careful academic papers which situated Adelaide in her cultural milieu. I greatly appreciate the expertise of many generous individuals who provided practical assistance at the various art galleries and archival institutions I visited across Australia as well as Italy, England, Scotland and Wales, which are all listed in the bibliography. Among these, Rosemary Sempell from the Parliamentary Library of New South Wales deserves special mention as she helped me unearth the petition which was signed by over 9000 Sydney female inhabitants in 1850 which is now probably the first documentary evidence of collective female political activity in Australia.

I am also appreciative of the collegial environment I enjoyed during my visiting fellowship at the American Academy in Rome in 2019. During that time, I was fortunate to meet the wonderful American sculptor, Patricia Cronin, who produced a splendid biography on Harriet Hosmer. During this time, Professor Frank Snowden entrusted me with chapters from the unpublished manuscript of his 2019 book, *Epidemics & Society*, which proved crucial to the research I was conducting about Aesi's tuberculosis. The archivists at the American Academy also provided me with access to their nineteenth-century photographic collection which became crucial to evoking the Ironsides' life in Rome. My research in Italy was also assisted by Dr Kees Windland, who taught an Oxford summer school class on Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, which I attended. Kees also translated the Italian letters in the Ironsides Papers and accompanied me on my research adventure throughout Italy, which was often slow going as I was then recovering from a knee-operation. Kees usefully challenged many of my early speculations in ways that allowed them to become better grounded in 'the discipline of historical context'. Other incisive English interlocutors include Dr Jane Wildgoose from Kings College London, then working on a special issue of 'death writing' for the *European Journal of Life Writing*. Her thoughtful insights deepened my thoughts about Aesi's final days. While I was visiting the Ruskin Centre at Lancaster University, I met Professor Rachel Dickenson, whose excellent work on the nonsense letters between John Ruskin and Joan Agnew deepened my understanding the Ironsides relations with this family. While these English scholars helped to refine my research in key areas of Victorian culture, a group of 'creative historians' at Bristol University did much to stimulate my methodological reflections about the role of speculation and imagination within biographical practice.

I have Anna Clark and Margaret Harris to thank for their support as I prepared my application for an Australian Research Council Discovery Award for Early Career Researchers (DECRA) on 'Historical craft, speculative biography and the case of Adelaide Ironside'. I also thank the ARC Academy of Experts for this award which provided me with over \$300K of federal funding and thus transformed the book project by enabling me to dedicate more than three years to researching the book and reflecting upon the ethical implications of my speculative methods. I did so between 2018 and 2020 at the Australian Centre for Public History at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), where I also benefited from creative conversations with clever colleagues such as Craig Batty, Alecia Simmonds, Delia Falconer, Sue Joseph, Deborah Adelaide and Paula Hamilton. Paul Ashton was a wonderful friend and mentor during this time and shared many useful and amusing insights regarding the distinctive worlds of academia and public history. During this period, I worked closely with literary scholar, Professor Donna Lee Brien, with whom I co-convened a symposium on Speculative Biography in 2018 which eventually led to the Routledge collection we co-edited on that topic in 2021. I thank her and the generous contributors to that Routledge book for the opportunity to work on a fascinating project which did much to distract from the discombobulating context of COVID.

In 2018 I received an email from a stranger named Chris Slade who explained that he had heard me talking about Adelaide Ironside on Radio National and thought I might be interested in his family memorabilia as he was a descendant of the Redman family. What followed was joy upon joy as I was welcomed into the world of the kind and entertaining Chris and his perfect partner-in-crime, also named Chris, as well as Chris's two superb sisters, Mary and Phil. Since then, this beautiful family has provided me with access to the art, archives and objects which returned to Sydney in the Ironsides' trunk in 1870. Over long lunches they regaled me with oral memories and intrigues about their ancestors. They often recounted the work of their excellent mother Enid who took up the torch of family history with such gusto that she devoted decades of research to detailing the rise and fall of the Redman clan and convincingly established that Aesi's grandfather, John Redman, the gaoler, is more likely to have been a first fleet marine, rather than an Irish convict, as some previously assumed. The Slades' generosity allowed me to piece together an abundant miscellany of oral history and objects, archives and art associated with the Ironsides and encounter more intimate insights into both women than is available via the Ironsides' various public holdings. Although my speculative imagining involve considerable creative license, the Slades always insisted that their mum, Aesi and Martha would have been delighted to know the family's story was being shared. The Slades friendship remains one of the enduring joys of this project.

Researching this book has taken me down many garden paths, including those at Sydney's Botanic Gardens where I met with two botanic illustrators who shared details about their work and insights into how Aesi would have produced her watercolour wildflowers. At Mt Annan Botanic Gardens, John Siemons, Director of Horticulture & Living Collections gave me access to the Australian PlantBank and members of his outstanding team. He also introduced me to the fabulous D'harwal elder, Aunty Fran Bodkin, with whom I was so fortunate to spend time walking Country as she shared her precious cultural and ethnobotanical expertise. When the time came to travel off the garden path and into the bushlands of the North Shore, I found perfect companionship in the polymath Mark Schuster, Bushfire Technical Officer at Ku-ring-gai Council, who innately understood my passionate pursuit of Aesi and her wildflowers.

I feel compelled to apologise to those who were kind enough to read drafts of the manuscript as I wrestled to make sense of what I wanted to say and how. This was no easy process as I wrote a lot and most of it was awful. Indeed, as my first manuscript was returned from Allen & Unwin with the feedback that it 'was not working' and I needed to start again, it became common for me to grimly mutter that writing this book was an agonising exercise in failure, very like a rocket ship constantly course correcting its path towards the moon. Nonetheless, Emma Balazs was good enough to given me honest feedback early in that process. Likewise, Jude King, who reminded me the book should be about Aesi, not my research. My dear Aunty Fiona gave me hope when I was at my wits end. I shall remain grateful for that moment when she read aloud a few paragraphs from a draft, and I suddenly heard Aesi and Martha's voices outside of my own head and knew they could and would exist on their own terms one day.

Dr Shane Greentree has been my Research Assistant on the project he dubbed 'the Aesi-ad' since 2020. Throughout that time he has persistently provided me with prompt, good humoured and thorough assistance as I persisted with my seemingly endless quest for obscure nineteenth-century characters and clues about everything from art materials and opiates while also curating my commas and designing my website. I must also thank Professor Susan Forde from Griffith University for believing in me. Her support ensured I was able to continue with my ARC in 2020 when the COVID context threatened to derail not only my international research and collaborations but also my ability to honour my publishing commitments and funding obligations. Susan and members of her team, confirm that integrity and authenticity still flourish within the academy.

For all the deep pleasures associated with researching and writing this book, the last seven years have been some of the most gruelling in my life as they included two major knee operations, two interstate relocations, five house moves and a significant reorientation of my career which eventually led to an exciting opportunity for public service via my new role as the inaugural History Advocate of South Australia. I am indebted to the love of friends Karen Soo, Emily Harms, Renata Denes, Naomi Wynn, Diana Newport Peace, George Richter, Rosie Roberts, Lisa Jones and Penny Edmonds who made me laugh in the midst of all my moaning and groaning. I also thank my exceptional family for their good humour and patience during what still feels a little like the great disappearance act of the last decade.

I was still working on *Wild Love* in 2022 when Greg Mackie, OAM, CEO of the History Trust of South Australia appointed me the inaugural History Advocate for South Australia, a refocused incarnation of the role of State Historian. Greg has shown exceptional understanding in supporting me as I relocated, settled into my exciting new job and continued wrestling with the demanding commitments of editing and proofing the book, then preparing extensive online sources and website. Greg, your sincere support has made a huge difference to what has been an epic and physically demanding process.

I also thank those who were prepared to endorse *Wild Love*: Melanie Nolan, Kate Darian-Smith, Donna Brien, Kevin Morrison, Will Pooley and Sue Williams. Your generous words gave me confidence when I could no longer see the project clearly. The team at Allen & Unwin played a crucial role in this process too, for although *Wild Love* has been a big book to publish, Production Manager Greer Gamble remained dedicated to this 'epic adventure' of it throughout, while the clever copy editor, Emma Driver & publicist, Rosie Scanlan warmed the cockles of my heart with their enthusiastic responses and excellent work. For the last seven years Allen & Unwin's Commissioning Editor, Elizabeth Weiss, has remained a constant presence, helping to refine my methods often via tough but necessary feedback, which she always delivered with good humour. Above all she has championed Aesi and Martha's story.

Through all of this, there have been my two companions in the underworld. Like Martha or Demeter, my mum has often fretted about my disappearance into the dark but she never lost faith that I could and would find the passage back into the light. My husband, Brye, has also taken this journey with me. As well as holding my hand when I was terrified and occasionally carrying me when I insisted I could go no further, he has also stepped back to prove that I was strong enough on my own. During such travails I would often quote Winston Churchill's famous phrase, 'If you are going through hell, just keep going'. To which, Brye would reply that once my eyes had adjusted to the dark I would probably see that there was also gold glittering in the underworld.