THE VICTORIANS IN ‘PARADISE’

GENTILITY AS SOCIAL STRATEGY IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF COLONIAL AUSTRALIA

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Queensland
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In memory of my father,

Edward Quirk
1934—2006
Statement of Originality

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Signature of Candidate  Date

Signature of Principal Advisor  Date

Statement of Contributions by Others

The case study presented in Chapters 5 and 6 builds on the Paradise Archaeological Project, a consultancy undertaken by The University of Queensland Archaeological Services Unit (UQASU). The preliminary historical survey undertaken by UQASU garnered primary source documents which have been consulted here, while the salvage excavations at Paradise generated the assemblages upon which the artefactual analysis is based. The extent of these contributions are acknowledged in Chapters 1 and 4.

Signature of Candidate  Date

Signature of Principal Advisor  Date
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First among these is my supervisor Dr Jon Prangnell, who encouraged me to become involved with the Paradise Archaeological Project in the first place, and in doing so, invited me into a miniature Victorian world more complex and wonderful than any I could have imagined. Thanks also to Jon (and UQASU) for allowing me to be involved in the excavation of Paradise, and for the financial and practical support provided during the artefact analysis. The Paradise Archaeological Project as a whole was funded by Burnett Water, while my doctoral research was funded by the School of Social Science and the APA scholarship scheme. I also received financial support from the UQ Graduate School, for which special thanks must be extended to Professor Alan Lawson.

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Publications and Presentations

Presentations and publications relevant to, but not forming part of, this thesis:

Prangnell, Jonathan M., Lynda Cheshire and Kate Quirk

Prangnell, Jonathan M. and Kate Quirk

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Quirk, Kate

Quirk, Kate and Prangnell, Jonathan M.
Abstract

The last two decades have seen increasing archaeological interest in the ideology of gentility, that complex set of social rules, rights and expectations which is virtually synonymous with the Victorian period around the world. In this ideology’s conventions of ‘correct taste’ and ‘correct behaviour’ archaeologists have seen a template for how the Victorians were to behave and, even more importantly, how they were to express themselves through material culture. Gentility provides an explicit link between the intangible world of the Victorian mind and the tangible world of Victorian goods and, because of this, has been a popular model for archaeologists of the nineteenth century.

In recent years, however, historical archaeologists have become disillusioned with the Gentility Model. Critics have argued that the model homogenises the past, obscuring the diversity of the Victorian period, and it is these criticisms which provide the impetus for this work. In this thesis I examine the Gentility Model in detail, reviewing its strengths and weaknesses, and considering in particular the way that this model applies to the Victorian period in Australia. It is clear that the Gentility Model as it currently exists does have serious flaws but, I would argue, these are not intrinsic to the model itself. Rather, these flaws reflect the influence of the dominant ideology thesis, a theoretical approach which casts gentility as an oppressive force in the nineteenth century, and in doing so, artificially constrains our understanding of Victorian life.

I argue that to overcome these limitations, notions of gentility as a dominant ideology must be abandoned in favour of those which recognise the primacy of human agency, and I suggest a new model based on the idea of gentility-as-strategy. This new model builds on the work of Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001), and integrates both the dramaturgical theory of Goffman (1969) and Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic capital (1977; 1984; 1990), to reconceptualise gentility as a social strategy. In this new model, gentility is not an oppressive force, but rather a means to an end, a symbolic language which the Victorians employed to negotiate matters of gender, class, and social power.
I examine the applicability of this new form of the Gentility Model through a case study of Paradise, a late-nineteenth-century goldmining town in central Queensland. Paradise was home to a diverse group of men, women and children, and provides an excellent setting in which to explore the functioning of gentility in colonial Australia, and to assess the explanatory power of the revised Gentility Model. From this case study emerges a highly detailed picture of daily life in the nineteenth century, and of the role gentility played in the negotiation of status and identity.

It is clear from the Paradise case study that the Gentility Model still has much to offer archaeologists of the Victorian period. Reconceptualised as it has been here, the Gentility Model provides a means through which human choice and agency can be explored and the subtleties of nineteenth-century history appreciated. In this history, the Victorians are not the victims of an oppressive ideology, but rather social actors with the power to control their own destinies.
# Table of Contents

Statement of Originality ........................................................................................................ v
Statement of Contributions by Others................................................................................ v
Publications and Presentations ........................................................................................... ix
Abstract ................................................................................................................................... xi
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................. xiii
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... xv
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... xvii
List of Abbreviations .......................................................................................................... xix

1 **Introduction** .................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 A Genteel World ........................................................................................................... 2
   1.2 An Archaeology of Gentility ...................................................................................... 4
   1.3 The Research Problem ................................................................................................. 6
   1.4 Thesis Outline ............................................................................................................. 17

PART I **THE VICTORIAN WORLD** .................................................................................... 19

2 **A History of Gentility** .................................................................................................... 21
   2.1 Origins ......................................................................................................................... 22
   2.2 Correct Taste and Behaviour ........................................................................................ 26
   2.3 Public and Private Spheres .......................................................................................... 28
   2.4 Religion ........................................................................................................................ 30
   2.5 Childhood ................................................................................................................... 32
   2.6 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 34

3 **The Model of Gentility** .................................................................................................. 37
   3.1 Current Approaches to Gentility Research ............................................................... 38
   3.2 Critiques of the Gentility Model .................................................................................. 55
   3.3 Gentility as Strategy ................................................................................................... 62
   3.4 Gentility and the Working Classes ............................................................................. 69
   3.5 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 74

PART II **CASE STUDY** ........................................................................................................ 77

4 **Methods and Methodology** .......................................................................................... 79
   4.1 Recognising Gentility ................................................................................................. 80
   4.2 The Community Study ............................................................................................... 86
   4.3 Historical Research .................................................................................................... 92
   4.4 Archaeological Analysis ............................................................................................ 103
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 A History of Paradise</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Beginnings and Endings</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Town Layout</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Demography</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Economy</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Civic Development</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Social Life</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Childhood</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Religion</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 An Archaeology of Paradise</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Household 1 – McGhie Machine Area</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Household 2 – The Shuttleworth House</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Household 3 – The Kirke Parsonage</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Household 4 – The Turk House</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Household 5 – The Bartlett House</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Household 6 – The McGonnell House</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Household 7 – The Buzza House</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Household 8 – The Plastow Cobbler</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART III DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Discussion and Conclusions</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Gentility in Paradise</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Gentility-as-Strategy</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Reconsidering Gentility and the Victorians</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 The Methodology of Gentility-as-Strategy</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Gentility and the Archaeology of Mining</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References Cited</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

**Figure 1** – Map showing the location of Paradise................................................................. 7

**Figure 2** – Plan of Paradise showing the major town blocks............................................. 8

**Figure 3** – Table setting from *Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt-Book*................................. 25

**Figure 4** – Plan of a genteel home......................................................................................... 29

**Figure 5** – Illustration promoting ‘maternal vigilance’.......................................................... 34

**Figure 6** – Screenshot of database showing entry for blue floral transfer-print plate........ 105

**Figure 7** – Map showing location of Paradise and surrounding towns......................... 124

**Figure 8** – Photograph of Paradise on the bank of the Burnett River c. 1891..................... 128

**Figure 9** – Original 1891 plan of Paradise............................................................................ 129

**Figure 10** – Map of Paradise Township and surrounding mines c. 1890............................ 130

**Figure 11** – Photograph of Allen Street c. 1891................................................................. 131

**Figure 12** – Photograph of Paradise Police Station c. 1891............................................... 136

**Figure 13** – Mine workings showing shaft head, windlass and mullock heaps............... 138

**Figure 14** – Photograph showing Paradise Courthouse c. 1891.......................................... 147

**Figure 15** – The Paradise Black and White Minstrel Troupe c. 1891................................. 150

**Figure 16** – Photograph of Mt Shamrock School c. 1890.................................................. 153

**Figure 17** – Photograph of Paradise children c. 1891....................................................... 156

**Figure 18** – Plan of Paradise showing locations of sites included in the case study......... 165

**Figure 19** – Detail of McGhie Machine Area....................................................................... 167

**Figure 20** – Plan of the McGhie Machine Area showing detail of excavation area........ 168

**Figure 21** – Remnant Crepe Myrtle avenue at the McGhie Machine Area..................... 169

**Figure 22** – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic ceramics assemblage from the McGhie Machine Area............................................ 175

**Figure 23** – Illustration of ‘reclining nude’ pipe................................................................. 180

**Figure 24** – Bisque ‘Frozen Charlotte’ doll from the McGhie Machine Area.................... 181

**Figure 25** – Plan of Shuttleworth allotment........................................................................ 190

**Figure 26** – Collapsed fireplace at the Shuttleworth house.............................................. 191

**Figure 27** – Remnant aloe plants at the Shuttleworth house............................................ 192

**Figure 28** – Photograph of Clara Shuttleworth c. 1910..................................................... 193

**Figure 29** – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic ceramics assemblage from the Shuttleworth house................................................. 196

**Figure 30** – Fragments of a blue floral transfer-print dinner service.................................. 198

**Figure 31** – Decorative, clamshell-shaped glass bowl from the Shuttleworth house...... 199

**Figure 32** – Illustration of a cast iron lamp base from the Shuttleworth house............... 200
Figure 33 – Collection of black glass beads recovered from the Shuttleworth house. .... 202
Figure 34 – Detail of female dress. ........................................................................... 202
Figure 35 – Photograph of the Methodist Mission Hall and Parsonage. ................. 208
Figure 36 – Plan of the Methodist Mission. ............................................................... 209
Figure 37 – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic 
ceramics assemblage from the Kirke parsonage. ................................................. 216
Figure 38 – Fragments of a Tennyson pattern whiteware saucer ......................... 217
Figure 39 – Dyed-body ware from the Kirke parsonage. ....................................... 218
Figure 40 – Possible ‘motto’ mug from the Kirke parsonage. ............................... 218
Figure 41 – Doll’s leg from the Kirke parsonage. ....................................................... 221
Figure 42 – Doll’s limbs recovered from Paradise. ................................................... 221
Figure 43 – Photograph of Turk hearth, facing north. ......................................... 226
Figure 44 – Plan of the hearth at the Turk house. ..................................................... 227
Figure 45 – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic 
ceramics assemblage from the Turk house. ......................................................... 230
Figure 46 – Women’s decorative dress buttons and hat pin from the Turk house ...... 233
Figure 47 – ‘Low brow’ doll’s head from the Turk house. ...................................... 234
Figure 48 – Toy plate from the Turk house. ............................................................. 234
Figure 49 – Plan of the Bartlett allotment, showing detail of hearth area. .............. 239
Figure 50 – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic 
ceramics assemblage from the Bartlett house. .................................................... 242
Figure 51 – Plan of the McGonnell allotment, showing detail of hearth area. ........ 250
Figure 52 – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic 
ceramics assemblage from the McGonnell house. .............................................. 253
Figure 53 – Catfish spines and otolith from the McGonnell house. ....................... 257
Figure 54 – Pipe with beaded decoration from the McGonnell house. .................... 257
Figure 55 – Thorn pipe from the McGonnell house. ................................................. 258
Figure 56 – ‘Basket weave’ pipe from the McGonnell house. ................................. 258
Figure 57 – Bakelite and silver pipe mouthpiece from the McGonnell house. ......... 258
Figure 58 – Plan of the Buzza allotment. ................................................................. 265
Figure 59 – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic 
ceramics assemblage from the Buzza house. .................................................... 269
Figure 60 – Plan of Plastow allotment. ................................................................. 277
Figure 61 – Proportions of tea, table and other vessels of each ware in the domestic 
ceramics assemblage from the Plastow cobbler. ................................................. 279
Figure 62 – One of the many advertisements for Wolfe’s Schnapps. ................. 281
List of Tables

Table 1 – Quality ranking for transfer-print vessels ............................................................. 109
Table 2 – Primary functional categories used in artefact analysis ........................................ 115
Table 3 – Secondary functional categories used in artefact analysis .................................... 116
Table 4 – Table of Paradise population 1891-1900 .............................................................. 134
Table 5 – Paradise Businesses .............................................................................................. 142
Table 6 – Sites included in the case study. ............................................................................ 164
Table 7 – Indicators of gentility ............................................................................................ 166
Table 8 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the McGhie Machine Area .................................. 184
Table 9 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Shuttleworth house ..................................... 204
Table 10 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Kirke parsonage ......................................... 222
Table 11 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Turk house ............................................... 235
Table 12 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Bartlett house .......................................... 246
Table 13 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Bartlett house .......................................... 261
Table 14 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Buzza house ............................................ 273
Table 15 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at the Plastow cobbler ......................................... 282
Table 16 – Indicators of gentility fulfilled at each Paradise site ........................................... 290
List of Abbreviations

EIS – Environmental Impact Statement
GRO – General Register Office (United Kingdom)
IOGT – The International Order of Good Templars
IOOF – Independent Order of Odd Fellows
MC – The Maryborough Chronicle
QCW&MJ – The Queensland Christian Witness and Methodist Journal
QEO – Queensland Electoral Roll
Qld – The Queenslander
QGG – Queensland Government Gazette
UQASU – The University of Queensland Archaeological Services Unit
XU – Excavation Unit