



Dedication Plaque. Christina Stead. Woollahra Council Plaque Scheme
 The Plaque installed at 14 Pacific St, Watsons Bay, where Stead lived from 1917-1928
 Photograph by author, 2021

Dedication plaque. Christina Stead. Sydney Writers' Walk. Est. 13 February, 1991
 Circular Quay pathway. Sydney, NSW.
 Photograph by Janette Pelosi, 2021

Inscription: *This land was last discovered: why? A ghost land, a continent of mystery ... Its heart is made of salt; it suddenly comes from its burning pores, gold, which will destroy men in greed, but water to give them drink. (Seven Poor Men of Sydney, 1934)*

“The Pollits are my family,”
 Christina Ellen Stead (1902-1983)

Between the Lines. Behind the Doors

Christina Stead’s ‘formation’ years in Lydham Hill, Bexley, NSW

Olga Sedneva, 2023

ISBN 978-0-6487449-7-9

Acknowledgements

The Author appreciated encouragement from friends and is particularly happy about locating correspondence from Peter Orlovich. He said over the phone: “I was hoping somebody will find and use them.”

Your hope has been realised, Peter.

Olga Sedneva, 2022-2023

Foreword

Enduring interest in the works of Christina Stead is very special to those living in the St George area of NSW. Lydham Hall in Bexley is the only place open to the public where the Steads, Christina, an Australian Novelist, and the second family of her father, David George (1877–1957),¹ lived.

The curious mind of this study's author propelled her on a journey of sourcing and exploration of original material, learning Christina Stead's biography, and cross-referencing a number of historical documents. Only then did the author 'dive' into the writer's "peculiar childhood,"² as reflected in the novel *The Man Who Loved Children*.

This time consuming process, sometimes tedious, but also unpredictably enlightening and endlessly enjoyable, was filled with discoveries and unexpected connections. The author of this paper is looking beyond the short statement "the Steads resided in Lydham Hill." The author explores Stead's original letters dated 1939, 1942, 1954, 1964 and 1966; selected interviews, chapters 1-7 of *The Man Who Loved Children*, and her short stories.

The author seeks answers to the following questions:

What can we learn from Stead's own words about the house now called Lydham Hall within the period 1907-1917 from her correspondence, interviews and publications? To what extent is Stead's novel *The Man Who Loved Children* is fictional? How do original recollections of Stead change the story of Lydham?

The author has chosen to use an extensive number of citations to document Stead's emotional and factual connection with Lydham Hill.

Author

Disclaimer

All images, documents, personal correspondence, and other materials are reproduced with the verbal or written permission of their authors or owners.

All Christina Stead citations preserve original wording, grammar and syntax.

¹ Walsh, G. P., *Stead, David George (1877–1957)*, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* via: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stead-david-george-8634>. Family Notices (1907, February 2). The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), p. 12, via <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article14869826>

² Lidoff, Joan, *Interview with Christina Stead*, 1973, in Lidoff, Joan, *Christina Stead*, Literature and Life Series, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, New York, USA, page 184

The Novel

Commonly considered as fiction, this possibly the most successful of Stead's twelve novels, TMWLC³ is claimed to have been 'largely based on her own family.' By the writer's own admission, the work is autobiographical, the same as all her other works: "My biography is written in all my novels." Even though the author stated on multiple occasions "I have written my biography in all my books,"⁴ the general audience and critics accepted this particular novel as a product of the author's imagination and the story as her complete invention. One will find it in the libraries across the World catalogued under the 'Fiction' section. Stead's biographical content is reflected in her other works such as *For Love Alone* telling the story of a young woman leaving Australia for England, as Christina Stead did herself in 1928;⁵ *The Seven Men from Sydney* is based on the author's real acquaintances, and so on.

The life of the Steads in Lydham Hill became a plot for Christina Stead's novel *The Man Who Loved Children*, and follows everyday life of the Pollits, an ordinary family. It was written in the USA for the American audience and published there in 1940. Cross-reference of the events and characters described in the novel with a number of original sources, proved a very strong connection between reality and the book, albeit with some details reinterpreted or even omitted. Always claiming that her characters were created from real people, their stories and circumstances, Stead masterly maintained that fine line between fact and fiction in TMWLC by simply changing the scenery: "I am writing it in an American setting for America (Washington and Baltimore) which will conceal its origin for the USA."⁶

Over ten years of the Stead's residence in Lydham Hill were described in the novel as having taken place within a year or so, which also could be claimed as a way to 'conceal' the truth. Stead's own recollections of her life in Lydham Hill and in Watsons Bay were used to create the plot, where everything happening in the book

³ From here onwards TMWLC, the abbreviation most likely invented by Stead herself in her private correspondence and later used by reporters, critics and journalists

⁴ *Christina Stead (1902-1983), A collection of reviews and reminiscences reflecting the life and work of the famous Australian novelist*, compiled by Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, United Kingdom, 1984

⁵ <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stead-christina-ellen-15545>

⁶ Letter to Thistle Harris, 1939. Stead, Christina, *Letters to Thistle Harris (Stead)* MS 8317, NLA

took place more or less in the same order and under similar or even the exact circumstances as in real life. Not long before finishing the novel, in 1939, Stead shared in her letter to Thistle Harris:⁷

*The book I am writing now, "The Man Who Loved Children" has a plot derived from, although not exactly mirroring, our home in the early days, not the proves-verbal, but the dramatic truth. It won't interest you so very much, because it is more of a child's book of hours than an adult tragedy.*⁸

It is only after reading the novel, we understand that Stead struggled to begin writing it:

*I have left it all these years, not able to touch such an autobiographical subject, but last winter I decided to get it off my chest once and for all. There was no trouble in the subject, but the arrangement was an immense difficulty, the surplus material and surplus drama getting in the way.*⁹

As an expat writer, Stead was planning "to rewrite it considerably for Australia, with real Australian settings, although not the real settings. This is what is taking me so long with such a comparatively single subject. It has been a grand thing for me to get this plucked out of the back of my mind."¹⁰ When leaving Australia, Stead was "... a girl, a worker, a poor..." She was leaving "deep-bitten ... that home ... so atrociously wretched," and "... so ill at ease as a result..." She did not want to see Australia, Sydney, family, "...nor anyone connected with the old days."¹¹ Thus it is understandable why sadness is present in every line and every word of TMWLC.

Disregarding the bitterness of her departure from the country, Stead preserved her love for the country, and was always hoping to come back to Australia. She was very excited about her ideas for the future:

⁷ Stead, Thistle Yolette (nee Harris, 1902–1990) <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stead-thistle-yolette-15520>

⁸ Letter to Thistle Harris, 7th July, 1939. Stead, Christina, *Letters to Thistle Harris (Stead)* MS 8317, NLA

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

*I have had a tremendous idea - to write a novel about the Pacific and Pacific shores, that glittering continent of water which is bigger than all the land-mass: that is a transfiguration of my local patriotism.*¹²

With time, Stead was able to re-establish good connections with her half brothers and sisters, and even with those from the Gibbins' family line. She came to Australia on a visiting Fellowship to the Australian National University in 1969. She returned to her so much loved Australia in August 1974 to receive the Patrick White Prize, which was an important recognition of her talent in her homeland. She stayed with her half-brother Gilbert Jordan (born in 1917) at 10 Donald Street, Hurstville,¹³ where his garage was adapted as a comfortable place for Christina to stay between her university residences, visits to friends and leisure trips.

We know that later on, she was able to speak "extensively" with her half brother Gilbert of "what could not be written," though we cannot conclude whether Stead's pain eased, but the plans to rewrite TMWLC for the motherland audience were never realised.

A Word on Lydham Hill in 1907-1917¹⁴

In 1890, the property known as Lydham Hill in Bexley, NSW, was purchased by a Sydney Oyster Merchant, Frederick Gibbins (Frederick John, 1841-1917),¹⁵ the owner of *Dappeto*, a grand property nearby. It was leased out up until 1907, when Gibbins' daughter Ada (1878-1951) married the naturalist David Stead (David George, 1877-1957).¹⁶ Christina, David's daughter from his previous marriage then aged five, and his unmarried sister with child,¹⁷ moved into Lydham along with the

¹² Letter to Thistle Harris, 7th July, 1939. Stead, Christina, *Letters to Thistle Harris (Stead)* MS 8317, NLA

¹³ Stead, Christina, "The Man Who Loved Children," Melbourne Univ. Publishing, 1st July, 2013. Accessed via https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=SFNAQ5AA5ksC&pg=GBS.PA54.w.1.2.37_262&hl=en, page ...

¹⁴ The original name given to the property by Joseph Davis, was Lidham Hill, after his grandfather's farm in England, where Joseph spent a substantial time as a child. Later, the property was known as Lydham Hill, and in 1917, thanks to accidental typographical errors, became Lydham Hall, as we know it now. [Pelosi]

¹⁵ Bell, Leonie, *Dappeto*, 2022. https://www.bayside.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/Dappeto_Leonie_Bell.pdf

¹⁶ Stead, David George (1877-1957) by G. P. Walsh in: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stead-david-george-8634>

¹⁷ <https://www.geni.com/people/Christina-Stead/6000000080096166036>

newlyweds.¹⁸ The family grew fast having six children during almost eleven years of their residence there. This is how Stead begins this story:

My father and mother (stepmother) moved in to Lydham Hill house a little after New Year's Day, 1907, I believe. I was a little more than four years and a half. (My mother had died a few years before). It belonged to my stepmother's father, Fred Gibbins, who owned some property around there and I think some round his own house, an Edwardian or late Victorian villa called Dappeto and I believe taken over by the Salvation Army as a hostel about the same time as we moved (1916-1917). It was on Wollongong Road, about a mile down towards Arncliffe Stn, a fairly big house with outbuildings, paddocks, an orchard, etc; two storey with attic, gardens, a bowling green, hothouse. Etc... My father and stepmother were married there in the house I mean, then spent their honeymoon up at Lydham Hill while I stayed at Dappeto for a few weeks.¹⁹

All above mentioned accounts were recorded from Christina Stead's original papers held in State institutions.²⁰ It was only from her own recollections we learn that her mother was pregnant when her appendix burst, then a fatal incident. A traumatised widower, David Stead preserved his mistrust of doctors for life.²¹

Needless to say that thanks to the writer's recollections, we can only now verify a few more details to be true or false. One particular example of such is the long existent claim that Frederick Gibbins had extensive debts at the time of his death. According to his Probate, Gibbins' wealth was much greater than his ongoing expenses nor was an insolvency claim recorded. Therefore, Lydham Hill was not sold to cover his debt. Christina Stead had no chance of knowing that, but recalled in her novel that against everyone's expectations, there was nothing left to any particular member of Gibbins' family, "it was nothing left to anybody," - she wrote in the novel. The fact of the piano being left to Ada by her father as detailed in Gibbins' Will on the very first page, matches the novel's version.²²

¹⁸ Stead, Christina Ellen (1902–1983) by Margaret Harris in: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stead-christina-ellen-15545>

¹⁹ Letter Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, 19th December, 1965. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca.1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW

²⁰ Stead, Christina Ellen, Certificates, MLMSS 9364 1(1), State Library of NSW

²¹ Letter Christina Stead to Thistle Harris, 7th July, 1939. Stead, Christina, *Letters to Thistle Harris (Stead)* MS 8317, NLA

²² MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13660-7-417-Series 4_78844. Frederick John Gibbins - Date of Death 16/02/1917

Also, according to Christina, the Steads did not reside in Lydham Hill for free although the rent was unsubstantial and was to be paid monthly. There are no known documents supporting or opposing this fact, but the words of the novel's characters and thus of Stead: "We occupied Lydham Hill for a very small rent and I was dimly aware of some restrictions - i.e. not too much digging, alterations."²³ There is no reason to doubt this eye witness statement.

Other Letters

Initial interest in Christina Stead's life in Lydham Hill in general appeared well before the property was purchased by the Rockdale Municipal Council in 1970. Her books were first published in America where the place called Rockdale, NSW, meant nothing. Growing interest in the successful expat writer in the USA, triggered numerous reviews wherein Stead's Australian origin was lost behind the words *socialist, feminist, marxist, liberalist, atheist, etc* - all used with singular regularity. However, when asked, she spoke warmly of "that wonderful house in Bexley."

In 1954-1966, well before a number of her interviews flooded the Australian press, then High School leaver Peter Orlovich,²⁴ initiated a conversation at the suggestion of his English teacher. Stead welcomed Peter's enquiry and an update on the area "she knew so well."²⁵ In return, she shared some of her personal recollections of the house, location of support buildings, the area and her own childhood.

Peter produced a sketch of the house and confirmed a number of details related to the location and use of different parts of the building.

Stead returned it with her own sketch and comments. She highlighted how some parts of the property were used. Her comments provides more detailed description of the area at the back of the house:

²³ Letter Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, 19th December, 1965. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca. 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW

²⁴ Dr Peter Orlovich is a noted Australian Archivist and academic in the field, former librarian in the State Library of NSW and Archivist Kogarah Council, Chief Archivist at Seaborn Broughton & Walford Foundation, Academic and Lecturer of the UNSW, and Founding Member of the Australian Society of Archivists NSW

²⁵ Letter Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, October 28th, 1954. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca. 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW



Lydham Hall, Lydham Avenue, Rockdale, 1850 Sandstone with slate roof. In good repair and being sympathetically restored.

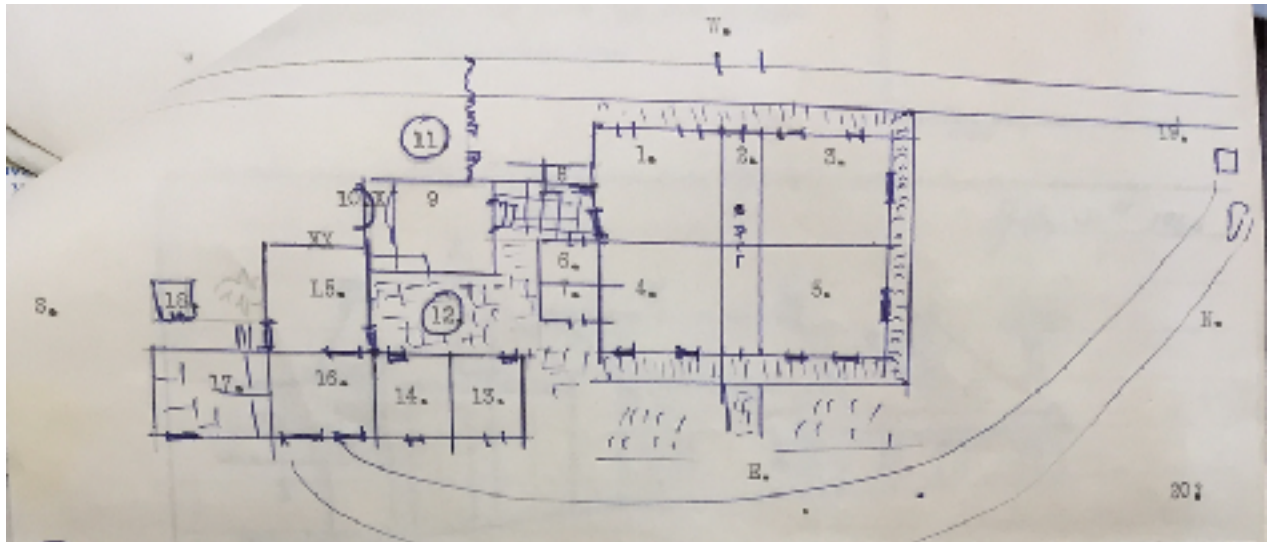
Photo taken April 1962

Mr & Mrs G. Long
18 Lydham Ave.
Rockdale
1850

Photograph and a note with information on Lydham Hall. Handwritten notes on the back of the photograph. Handwriting is attributed to Mrs Long SGHS Inc entry to the SMH Historic Homes Contest, 1962. State Library of NSW, Jules Gincwick papers, c 1951-1999 Snapshot by the author, 2016



Snapshot from the Peter Orlovich file Letter Orlovich to Stead, July 1965 State Library of NSW Author, June 2023



Christina Stead Sketch with comments listed below
 Peter Orlovich, Papers, ca 1954-ca 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2) State Library of NSW collection

| The key to the top sketch as identified by Mrs Long | The key to sketch above as identified by Christina Stead | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 Stables | 1 Dining Room | 11 Low well with cover |
| 2 Coach house | 2 Hall | 12 High well with dome on the paving area |
| 3 Coachmen room | 3 Children Bedroom | 13 Servants room |
| 4 Maid's room | 4 Chief Bedroom | 14 Maid's room |
| 5 Chimney of laundry | 5 Small larder | 15 Laundry |
| 6 The rear of Lydham Hall | 6 Bathroom | 16 Coach house |
| | 7 Bathroom reached from outside | 17 Stables with two mangers |
| | 8 Pantry | 18 Outside toilet, the only one in the house |
| | 9 Kitchen with old stoves | 19 Stone pillars for iron gate |
| | 10 Underneath Kitchen large seller | 20 Tall gallows swing |

19. Stone pillars for iron entrance gate. Beside these small picket gate. In front of hall door a picket gate facing west. The orchard ran downhill. The paddock larked was fenced with a white fence, one or two wires. Kangaroo grass grew in it and we kept pets there (Emus). A gate in the corrugated iron fence at the bottom. A large grazing paddock surrounded by corrugated iron and wooden fences. 20. Corrugated iron fence run around, accept part of S. [outh] paddock, and the front fencing picket which run from the swing area round the front to the "low well" areas.²⁶

²⁶ Letter Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, 19th December, 1965. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca. 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW. Original spelling preserved



Peter Orlovich Sketch,
Peter Orlovich, Papers, ca 1954-ca 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2) State Library of NSW collection

Stead also mentioned that the “water wells were filled as her father was very much concerned with his little children’s safety.”

She wrote to Peter extensively about walks with her father “from Arncliffe area (really Bexley) via Tom Ugly’s to Cronulla... and the beaches to Kurnell,” “from Kogarah and from St George High School ... to the baths at Brighton-le-Sands,” family holidays in Cronulla, and “seafishing” at Cape Banks and Cape Sola[nder].²⁷ Then she recollected further on the house:

I used to live on the top of the highest climb from Arncliffe a mile or so away, in Bexley in a stone house called “Lydham” which may be still there, although I am sure it is now surrounded by brick villas, if it exists at all, for the last of the estate, a few acres on the top of the hill was sold in subdivision when I was about fourteen, that is about 1916. This old house of big sandstone blocks, quarried from the bottom of the hill, was surrounded by old pines, of good growth, which went downhill with the paddocks (there were three that were sold in subdivision) and from our verandas, windows and attics, of course, we could see straight through the Heads of Botany Bay, as well as clear away West to the Blue Mountains. It was a lovely situation ...

Stead also included a snapshot of Dappeto in her letter:

Relatives of ours lived a mile or so away, down Wollongong Road in a big house called then and even perhaps Dappeto. It was sold (as it was part of the same estate) to the Salvation Army about 1916 for a

²⁷ Letter Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, October 28th, 1954. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca. 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW

children's home, I think, but I never saw that district after; as we moved to Watson's Bay and we became familiar with that area and the Harbour area. The way from Lydham, (the stone house on the hill) to Dappeto (the Edwardian house down Wollongong Road) I traipsed many many times, as in the beginning they had their own cows, out with the milk and I used to get fresh milk and unsalted butter for our little ones from our grand-parents. I was very little then, it was a long walk and I used to get very tired, with the milk can. There was a dairy then at the very junction of Wollongong Road and Forest Road, which ran right down into Stoney Creek; the dairy gradually declined I don't know why. The people and cows lived in a few ramshackle sheds with faded whitewashing and were very poor. There were quite a number of people living about the district (which was very scattered) in very very, you might say, upcountry, conditions, then ... Well, I did not set to write you all this about an area that is, in this sense, vanished, I suppose ...²⁸

The following passage was later used for the story *The Milk Run*, first published in the *New Yorker* on 9th December, 1972,²⁹ the same writing as her recollections of her school years, which were later used in the short story ***The Old School***, first published in *Southerly* in 1984:³⁰

As a child I went to Bexley Public School which was at first a little old place of the real old penitentiary style of school-building - though they changed it while I was there. We went on nature-study expeditions down Stoney Creek Gully: and for the rest, the family went often and often down Stoney Creek Gully and the Gully beyond, I forget the name, which was then of course quite bare of dwellings, for nature specimens and walks. Stoney Creek was quite fresh and lovely at times then.³¹

Peter Orlovich revived his correspondence with Stead after about ten years following enquiries from the then Lydham Hall owner, Mrs Valmai Long,³² who was informed by the neighbours of a famous writer spending her childhood in the house.

²⁸ Letter Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, October 28th, 1954. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca. 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW, page 1

²⁹ Stead, Christina, *The Milk Run*, in *Ocean of Story, The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, Penguin Books, 1986, pp 27-28, ISBN 0 14 010021 0

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Certificate of Title Vol 7492 Fol 109, 9th May 1958. Viewed via <https://hmv.nswlrs.com.au>

Then, in 1966, Stead readily divulged her knowledge, and even clarified to the current property name, which triggered long-standing confusion, changed once for good:

*Well, about LYDHAM HILL - that is the right name. ... PS My father once when repainting the name on the drive gates, painted in Lydham Hall instead of the original Lydham Hill. My mother objected, rightly, it seems to me, saying "It is NOT a hall!"*³³

Orlovich and Stead exchanged details letters and very warm and friendly cards for Christmas. Peter visited Lydham Hall and posted to England slides showing the property. Stead replied providing her recollections on the house and comments. She was very much concerned that the house would be demolished, but since the enquiry was current, Stead was pleased to know that it still stood.

It seems photographs printed from Peter's slides were later used to enter the building into the *Sydney Morning Herald* Historic Homes Contest. The competition aimed "to encourage in Australia a proper pride in and appreciation of the fine buildings erected by our pioneers." It was held to mark the 175th anniversary of the founding of Australia.²⁸ Lydham Hall was entered by the St George Historical Society Inc, and its owners Mr and Mrs Long who were Society members, into Class 2 "The best preserved or restored town or country house."³⁴ According to a family member, the Longs purchased Lydham house to spare it from succumbing to the developers, and were very proud of their hard work. To the Society members and the owners' disappointment, no homes from the St George area won the competition that year. All the photographs were deposited in the State Library of NSW in 1965, and are held according to the classification of the Competition.³⁵ A few photographs are now available on the Bayside Council Library online catalogue.

Mrs Long published citations from both letters addressed to Orlovich, but never disclosed her original sources. Peter, being a true and professional archivist, deposited his correspondence in the State Library of NSW. He mentioned over the

³³ Letter Ch. Stead to Peter Orlovich, October 28th, 1954. In: Peter Orlovich papers, ca.1954-ca. 1968, ML MSS 1926 2(2), State Library of NSW, page 1

³⁴ Photograph and a note with information on Lydham Hall. Handwritten notes on the back of the photograph. SGHS Inc entry to the SMH Historic Homes Contest, 1962. State Library of NSW, Jules Gincwick papers, c 1951-1999. Photo Olga Sedneva, 2016

³⁵ <https://archival-test.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110036901>

telephone, that it is unfortunate that some of her [Stead-OS] letters were lost due to an incident at the Library's conservation department, when a newly hired staff member placed them into water.³⁶

One of the Heritage Reports provided another citation which was claimed to be from Stead's Diary, describing the property's grounds housing her father's menagerie containing "one hundred guinea pigs, four snakes, two owls, one kingfisher, two possums, one rabbit, two seagulls, lizards, small birds, white mice, newts, two emus and other unspecified animals"³⁷ apart from the Diamond and venomous Black snakes transferred from his family home in Rockdale.³⁸

The author of this study inspected Stead's papers in the National Library of Australia. They consist of handwritten notes, manuscripts and correspondence. There were no diaries to be located, therefore the original source for this citation could not be identified. Generally, Stead's papers are scattered between the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre of the University of Texas, Austin, in the Berg Collection at New York Public Library and at Yale University, New Haven.

Pads of lined paper, single sheets all filled by Stead's hand, are a curious case. Formally trained as a secretary, she alternated paragraphs in shorthand and lines in her challenging handwriting, neither easy to read. She preferred a typewriter for her correspondence though, which was common for that time, and afterwards, she was correcting typographical errors and only then posted the letters. Most letters to Orlovich were typed, an exception being her comments on the hand drawn sketch.

³⁶ Telephone conversation with Peter Orlovitch, July 2023, author

³⁷ *Major Assignment. Lydham Hall.* Lecturer Ian Olsen. Prepared by Samantha Trotter and Brendon Fairleigh

³⁸ Webb, Joan, *Thistle Y. Harris*, Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, NSW, November 1998, page 21

Between the Lines. Behind the Doors

From the novel's first pages we see the resemblance with Christina Stead's own life circumstances. Jonathan Franzen sums it all up in his introduction: "Basically, Sam Pollit is her father, David Stead. Sam's ideas and voice and domestic arrangements are all David's, transposed from Australia to America. And where Sam is infatuated with an innocent girl-woman, Gillian, the daughter of a colleague, the real-life David fell for a pretty girl the same age as Christina, Thistle Harris,³⁹ with whom he briefly had an affair, later lived and eventually, after many years, married." Even though "the novel feels finally like a daughter's offering of love and solidarity to her father..."⁴⁰

We meet the girl of 11 and half named Louisa, or Louie as her father calls her, who lost her mum early, as did Stead herself. Ellen Stead (nee Butters of Rockdale), died from a burst appendix followed by septic absorption and heart failure in Prince Alfred Hospital on December 9th, 1904.⁴¹

We meet Sam, Louie's eccentric father, his bitter and depressed wife Henny, their children, relatives and neighbours. We see their births and deaths, scandals and cozy chats, loud gatherings and whisperings behind each others' backs, and everything else that is part of human life and of most families.

David Stead is easily recognised in Sam Pollit: both were left "to mother Christina [or Louie in the novel-OS] along with his sister and her fatherless child."⁴² David's sister Maud is also present in the story in the same role. The original occupation of David Stead was preserved by the TMWLC author, as Sam Pollit is working as a biologist and his position after his father-in-law's passing, is the same as it was in David Stead's real life. Henrietta, Henny Pollit, Samuel's wife and Louie's step-mother is Ada Gibbins, the second wife of David Stead.

³⁹ Thistle Yolette Stead (nee Harris, 1902-1990) was 12 days older than Christina Stead. Webb, Joan, *Thistle Y. Harris*, Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, NSW, November 1998

⁴⁰ Webb, Joan, *Thistle Y. Harris*, Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, NSW, November 1998

⁴¹ BDM Certificate, BDM online 14133/1904; letter Christina Stead to Thistle Harris, 7th July, 1939, MS 8317, Christina Stead, NLA

⁴² Stead, Christina, TMWLC, Introduction by Jonathan Franzen

In real life, Ada, Henny Pollit, was the daughter of Frederick Gibbins, “Collyer clam-and-oyster magnate” in the novel,⁴³ the same as the real Old Man in *TMWLC*. It is claimed that after their marriage in January 1907, Old Man offered Lydham Hill to the newly weds to live in for free. In the novel, Stead insists on breaking that long standing narrative: “Henny, why can’t you make a go of it on eight thousand a year? You pay fifty dollars a month rent to your old man, that’s all.”⁴⁴

Even though Sam and Henny’s marriage produced six children, all present in the novel, their union was presumed as a marriage “of convenience.”⁴⁵ The same was claimed for years about David Stead and Ada Gibbins, daughter of a Sydney oyster tycoon at the time, who owned a large house called Dappeto, “an old mansion on a hill, surrounded by noble trees.”^{46,47} We read in the novel: “Old David Collyer, self-made man who loved struggling talent [meant Frederick Gibbins], picked out Archie Lessinum [Henny’s brother-in-law] who apparently married Eleanor, [Henny’s sister instead of Henny], and made him his clerk, then lawyer, then son-in-law, just as he had picked out Samuel Pollit and made him son-in-law and advanced him.”⁴⁸

After reading *TMWLC*, the author of this paper has reasonable grounds to presume that David Stead was begging Ada to marry him having in mind his own employment prospects. Henny explains it all in the novel: “I never wanted to marry him: he went down on his knees!”⁴⁹ She continues the blame: “You took me and maltreated me and starved me half to death because you couldn’t make a living and sponged off my father and used his influence, hoisting yourself up on all my aches and miseries.”⁵⁰ As another example of true events, after Frederick Gibbins’ death, David Stead’s department was shut. There was no alternative income for the family.

⁴³ Stead, Christina, *TMWLC*, page 102

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, page 107

⁴⁵ Webb, Joan, *Thistle Y. Harris (a biography of Thistle Yolette Stead)*, Surrely Beatty & Sons, 1998

⁴⁶ Christina Stead, *TMWLC*, Page 102

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Page 173

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, Page 196

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Page 49

⁵⁰ *Ibid* Page 155

The character of Henny in TMWLC is delivered as a hysterical or constantly depressed woman. Decades later, Christina Stead stated her own explanation of such behaviour:

*“Henny is a heroine in a narrow sense. She married the wrong man, that’s all. I wouldn’t say that she takes it out on children. In no way would I attack Henny, who in a sense won their [children’s-OS] sympathy by her quite obvious situation. Henny was trained to be the daughter of a rich man. Her father was a rich man, and she was trained in a not very common Australian way, to go to a young ladies school away from home, and she was intended to be what I said, but she didn’t. That was all.”*⁵¹

The Pollits of TMWLC were married in the nearby mansion belonging to Henny’s father. In fact, David Stead married Ada (1878-1951) in Dappeto, the bride’s father’s house, on New Year’s Day 1907.⁵² The Pollits in the novel have six children, as many as David and Ada Stead. All born in Lydham Hill, they were named after scientists: David Darwin (born 1907), Catherine Ada (Kate or Kit, born 1908), Frederick Huxley (born 1910), Doris Weeta (born 1912), Samuel Kelvin (born 1915) and Gilbert Jordan (born 1917). All six of Pollit’s children were born in Tohoga House, a large estate in Washington that they rent from Henny’s father.

As the eldest in the family, Louie is mothering her half siblings every hour of the day: she plays with them, feeds them, dresses them, tells a night story and tucks them into their beds. She comforts them with stories she invents and takes children away from their mother at the latter’s request. This mirrored Christina Stead’s living experience. According to Gilbert Stead, for the children it was a totally different experience:

Being the oldest, taken for granted, always busy in the home with her own and household chores. Chris loved the other children and would do all sorts of things to interest and amuse them. One favourite, well remembered by me, was the exercise of her “powers” as a magician. In the breakfast room at Boongarre,... a large silver tea-pot from Dappeto full of trinkets. Abracadabra ...

⁵¹ Christina Stead talks to Rodney Wetherell, ABC, Radio Drama & Features, transcript, Recorded in September 1979, first broadcast in Sunday Night Radio Two on 24th February, 1980, and repeated Radio Helicon on 2nd May, 1983. In: *Christina Stead (1902-1983)*, Ian D. Gibbins, 1984, Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, UK Page 11

⁵² Family Notices (1907, February 2). The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), p. 12. Retrieved May 1st, 2019, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article14869826>

In the novel, Louie, is the subject of humiliation from the household, she was called an 'orphan' to her face by the servant, yelled at and blamed for everything that goes out of Henny's control. Later in life, "that girl" Stead claimed herself to be, then turned into the "cradle rocker and message runner and the one who sang the children to sleep and told tales."

Stead reflected on her relationship with Ada later in life bringing out something from 'behind these doors': "My stepmother did not like me, very natural, as I was the kind of child only a mother could love and then probably with doubts: her treatment of me was dubious." When speaking about her TMWLC, Stead concluded "that no child "should be put into an orphan asylum and beaten and that's good for them."⁵³

Just a few examples given here convince the author that *The Man Who Loved Children* is a very true and emotionally complicated story of one person. Almost all of Stead's creations are written in the third person omniscient narrative style, a story telling way used by Christina Stead in almost all of her works. By doing so, the author allowed the reader to see a thorough picture: to make the thoughts and feelings of every character transparent. TMWLC is not an exemption, wherein the Pollit's life was masterly delivered in a story telling style, the novel became universal.

The novelist never mentioned her childhood experiences on any other occasions, not even when she visited Lydham Hall. She divulged it all via her novel. The pain, sorrow, sadness, loneliness - all which she had carried for decades. Upon return to Sydney, she spoke extensively on "what could not be written" with her brother Gilbert.⁵⁴ Thus so much more lays between the novel's lines and remains forever hidden, as a never fully revealed burden.

On a personal note, the author of this paper is convinced that by writing this novel, Stead definitely tried to let go (sought catharsis) from her longstanding pain, struggle and suffering which were rarely broken by brief encounters of happiness. She infuses the complexity of her feelings between the lines and never obtains

⁵³ Christina Stead talks to Rodney Wetherell, ABC, Radio Drama & Features, transcript, Recorded in September 1979, first broadcast in Sunday Night Radio Two on 24th February, 1980, and repeated Radio Helicon on 2nd May, 1983. In: *Christina Stead (1902-1983)*, Ian D. Gibbins, 1984, Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, UK

⁵⁴ Preface, Gilbert Stead. In: Gibbins, Ian D., *Christina Stead (1902-1983)*, 1984, Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, United Kingdom

closure. It is preserved behind Lydham's doors, in the recess of her mind, and still present even though unseen.

Return to Lydham

Probably the most famous of all *Lydham Hill's*⁵⁵ residents, Christina Stead visited her childhood home once, in 1980,⁵⁶ and commented on her impression of the house in the interview transcribed below:

They filled it with ... they made a museum⁵⁷ of it, and it's nothing like it was when we lived there of course. People have made donations of China and old beds, fancy beds and all kinds of things. Rockdale Town Council owns it, I believe, and it's being used for a museum. They show people through. It's nothing like it was, 'cause the whole half ... It was built after the model of a European, of an English stone farm. It's built entirely of sandstone, slightly chipped sandstone, and this looks very nice, so it can't decay; and then there was an entire house holding system - a flagged walk leading to a large kitchen built of the same sandstone, and a cellar underneath which was never used, at least in our time. There was a brick yard, there was a large wash-house, a very large wash-house built of the same sand stone. There was a groom's room and a maid's room, which of course we used for other things, and a coach house and a stables, and down some stone steps a stone W.C. [water closet-OS] all in the same stone. Now everything was cut off from the house, and all that stone was sold. So now you don't know what it was like. And it had three and a half acres with paddocks and things.⁵⁸

RW: which are now built on, I suppose.

CS: *Oh yes, indeed, but it still has the marvellous view. You could see between the heads of Botany Bay - Cape Banks, Cape Solander - and most days which were clear you could see straight through to the Blue Mountains, because the owner - that was the grandfather - had kept the place opposite the front gate open, so you could see straight through,*

⁵⁵ The original name *Lydham Hill* was given to the property by Joseph Davis

⁵⁶ The Lydham Hall Committee Report, SGHS Inc Bulletin, February 1980

⁵⁷ Stead mentioned here the museum which was established within Lydham Hall after its purchase by the Rockdale Council in 1970. The Museum has been operated by the St George Historical Society Inc since its establishment.

⁵⁸ Christina Stead talks to Rodney Wetherell, ABC, Radio Drama & Features, transcript, Recorded in September 1979, first broadcast in Sunday Night Radio Two on 24th February, 1980, and repeated Radio Helicon on 2nd May, 1983. In: *Christina Stead (1902-1983)*, Ian D. Gibbins, 1984, Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, UK

*over the valleys, the gullies and things, straight through to the Blue Mountains. And that view still exists, of course from the attic.*⁵⁹

Ronald George Geering, Stead's editor, cited the writer's description of the house as she recalled it:

*"I used to live on the top of the highest climb from Arncliffe a mile or so away in Bexley, in a stone house called "Lydham" which may be still there although I am sure it is now surrounded by brick villas, if it exists at all, for the last of the Estate, a few acres on top of the hill, was sold in sub-division when I was about 14, this was 1916. This old house of big sandstone blocks, quarried from the bottom of the hill, was surrounded by old pines of good growth, which went downhill with the paddocks, (there were three, they were what was sold in subdivision)⁶⁰ and from our windows, verandas and attics of course, we could see straight through the heads of Botany Bay, as well as clear away west to the blue mountains. It was a lovely situation.*⁶¹

*There was a Marine museum of rare specimens; reptiles coiled sleepily in the snake house; guinea pigs cropped the lawns under a moveable frame; there were lizards, an opossum and a tame Kookaburra. A rambling old place on the hill at Bexley, Lydham Hall was an ideal home for an imaginative child. Extensive grounds were surrounded by a belt of ancient pine trees, and there was an orchard and paddocks, where tall grasses grew undisturbed.*⁶²

An outdoor bench on the *Lydham Hall* back verandah has a commemorative plaque dedicated to Christina Stead visiting her childhood home. Jack Stead, the writer's half-brother, was the President of the SGHS Inc in 1971-1972.⁶³

⁵⁹ Christina Stead talks to Rodney Wetherell, ABC, Radio Drama & Features, transcript, Recorded in September 1979, first broadcast in Sunday Night Radio Two on 24th February, 1980, and repeated Radio Helicon on 2nd May, 1983. In: *Christina Stead (1902-1983)*, Ian D. Gibbins, 1984, Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, UK

⁶⁰ Probably 1917 subdivision after F. J. Gibbins died

⁶¹ Geering, R. G., Christina Stead, Angus & Robertson, 1979, page 20

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ SGHS Inc Bulletin, November 1977, the issue dedicated to Christina Stead with the articles including *The Australian Women's Weekly* dated November 17th, 1976, and by Jill Stokes from *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17th June, 1976, and Mrs V. Long reprint from the SGHS Inc, November 1966

Short Stories

According to an article in *The Good Weekend*,⁶⁴ Stead trusted her half-brother, Gilbert to distribute her extensive library amongst worthy organisations. Several books located in the Rockdale Library Local Studies collection were obtained from Gilbert and have a label stating “Presented to Rockdale Municipal Library from the library of Christina Stead by D. & G. Stead & R. Geering.” Ronald George Geering, being the writer’s Literary Trustee, has bequeathed Stead’s papers and manuscripts to public libraries. ***Ocean of Story. The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*** published in 1985 was based on this material⁶⁵ as a curated collection of biographical stories by Stead set in a chronological order.

Brilliantly written, the stories offer lively pictures of *Lydham*, its surroundings, a brief overview of Stead's family, biography of David Stead, Bexley at the beginning of the 20th Century and the author’s life experiences.

Lydham Hill was the name of the knoll and of the cottage, too; it was painted on the stone pillars where the iron carriage gates closed the now unused drive. The cottage stood on the crest of a high ridge overlooking Botany Bay, some eight miles distant and was built four square, east-west, so that they could look from the verandah straight between the headlands, Cape Banks and Cape Solander, to the Pacific. They could see from the attic windows the obelisk standing where Captain Cook first landed with his botanists, Banks and Solander, and they could see on stormy days the little launch they called The Peanut tossing between the heads as it went towards Kurnell. The cottage was built of rough-hewn sandstone blocks cut in the quarry down the hill and hauled up in the old days. The trees round the house, Norfolk Island and other pines, pittosporum, camphor laurel, were seventy and more years old and pines had seeded in the old neglected orchard where the seedlings grew higher every year, faster than the children. The knoll itself was ironstone capped and penetrated by heavy, thick and almost pure clay, gamboge yellow, stained red where the ironstone stuck out its nodules.

It was almost country still; a few houses, large gutters. The short street Lydham Avenue, which went over the hump before the house,

⁶⁴ Wyndham, Susan, *With Love, From Christina Stead and help from her brother, Gilbert*, in *Good Weekend*, 2/2/1985, p 22-23

⁶⁵ *Ocean of Story. The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, compiled and edited by Geering, R. G., 1985, Ringwood, Vic.: Viking, ISBN 0670809969

westward, was a hazard, almost impassable in wet weather. Cartwheels, horseshoes, boots, umbrella ferrules were sucked in the clay. In the hot sun the clay soon turned to dough and then to pottery. A messenger boy, the young postman, the women and children of Lydham Hill, had to cross the clay to get to the tram or the shops and might lose a handkerchief, a parasol, a shoe, a parcel; and after poking at it gingerly, afraid to fall in the muck, would abandon it and struggle to the clay bank and look back just as if the thing had been carried out to sea. The postman's prints, first of a sand shoe which he lost as he crossed to Lydham and then of his naked foot, and a copy of the *St George Call*,⁶⁶ which he had dropped while trying to get his shoe back, remained week after week. The footprints and tracks remained and even at the next big rain they did not disappear, but formed little foot-shaped puddles and long canals.

The Council occasionally sent men with a cart and shovels to scrape off the surface; and with it, they gleaned the lost articles and went away with the cart, leaving behind an identical clay surface, but with the banks higher now, until the people in Lydham Hill had to cut steps in the bank, yellow clay steps.⁶⁷

Stead's short story ***The Old School*** opens the book with a story from Stead's years at Bexley Public School:

*The brick school in its yellow playground lay south west from and below Lydham Hill. One morning the wind-break on the knoll half sank to the horizon like a constellation wheeling; the house lay close to the breast of clay, shawled in pines. It turned out that there were trees in the school ground too - a Moreton Bay fig, a pepper tree with outstretched arms and in the lower part, near the headmaster's house, some flower beds for the infants.*⁶⁸

Then Stead gives us a glimpse of *Dappeto*, home of the Gibbins, the family of David Stead's second wife Ada. This grand mansion still stands on Wollongong Road:

...Dappeto. Inside the fence grew all kind of trees, camphor laurel, pittosporum, swamp box, eucalyptus, wattles. ... big gate for the buggy down the lane. Asphalt softened by day's sun. Camphor laurel with the

⁶⁶ A local newspaper of the time published and printed in Kogarah, NSW, in 1904-1979. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/title/854>

⁶⁷ Stead, Christina, *The Milk Run*, in :*Ocean of Story, The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, Penguin Books, 1986, pp 27-28

⁶⁸ Ibid

*broad arms good for climbing and hiding, there the giant Araucaria bidwilli, with shining dark green stabbing leaves.*⁶⁹

A short story ***A Waker and Dreamer***, uncovered the details of the Stead family history from before arrival in Australia and the life of Christina's father, David Stead. The story also reveals some further details of her father's second family and then Lydham Hill as follows:

They had six children and lived at Lydham Hill (the original name of the place, not Lydham Hall) in a cottage built of large sandstone blocks cut in the quarry at the foot of the hill, by convicts in the old days. The house stood on top of the rise, facing the Pacific Ocean directly through the headlands of Botany Bay; Cape Banks and Cape Solander. The monument to Captain Cook at his landing place at Kurnell was visible from the attic windows. David was very pleased with this; he never failed [viewing] a Kurnell anniversary.

The house was surrounded by two paddocks, an old orchard, grassy places and a belt of trees, pines, camphor laurels and others, some seventy years old. It was occupied by two emus, which came to us as striped chicks (about the size of fowls). There was a paved courtyard surrounded by the stone built kitchen, washhouse and servants' rooms; in the middle, an old well. David and his boys filled it in and made a tall aviary there, with many birds, budgerigars, a cockatiel, finches. In the other old well outside the kitchen were two large turtles. One of the servants' rooms was used by David for his Museum, to which the children had access every Saturday; a miscellany, Aboriginal weapons, a humming bird, crabs, a crocodile, a whale's tooth, a painted dried head ... Sometimes in the other room we had a servant; not often.

*Round the courtyard stood the cages containing snakes, a boobook owl, a kookaburra, two kinds of possum, black and honey coloured, and in various corners of the house were aquaria and various small beings, such as fire-bellied newts and pygmy opossums. It was a colourful house. A good life for children.*⁷⁰

It would be delightful to have a bunch of local school children at the back veranda to sit and read aloud Stead's short stories. Especially on her birthday, every year on 17th July.

⁶⁹ Stead, Christina, *The Milk Run*, in :*Ocean of Story, The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, Penguin Books, 1986, pp 27-28

⁷⁰ Stead, Christina, *A Walker and Dreamer*, in *Ocean of Story*. First published in *Overland* in 1972. *The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, 1986, Penguin Books, edited with an afterword by R.G. Geering, pp 489-490

Conclusion

A large number of facts described by Christina Stead in her letters, interviews and particularly in the novel match her and other's real life encounters. Therefore, the fictional novel becomes not just a true story of a true family, but a line up of candid recollections of the author. By the use of a third person style, the novel becomes recognisable to many families.

Every time when asked about *The Man Who Loved Children*, Stead had to remind the audience that she wrote another twelve novels.⁷¹ Still, this book was claimed to be "*Little Women* rewritten by a demon" by one of the critics. Stead herself claimed it to be the best and the most successful of all her work.⁷² Other critics placed Stead's novel in line with Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*: "...as few books ever known - [author-OS] knows specifically, profoundly, exhaustively - what a family is..."⁷³ We must agree here with Stead claiming that the novel is not "a child's book" but "an adult tragedy:"⁷⁴ **who wants to read the book promoting resolving a family 'corroboree' by parents retiring to the bedroom and having a new baby nine months later?**

Whether David Stead ever read TMWLC remains unknown.⁷⁵ Christina did not send a copy of her novel to her father, rather it was addressed to Thistle Harris. The inscription read: "*To dear Thistle. A Strindberg Family Robinson. New York, August, 1941.*" Harris, who became the third and last wife of David Stead, replied that the *Man Who Loved Children* was 'substantially true' and at the same time 'tremendously cruel.'⁷⁶ It may now be presumed much unspoken content was left behind Lydham doors, or concealed from the reader between the lines.

⁷¹ Lidoff, Joan, *Interview with Christina Stead*, 1973, in Lidoff, Joan, *Christina Stead*, Literature and Life Series, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, New York, USA, page 15

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Jarrell, Randall, *An Unread Book*, in: Christina Stead, *The Man Who Loved Children*, The Miegunyah Press, and imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Limited, 187, Grattan Street, Carlton, Victoria, 3053, Australia. July 2013. ISBN: 9780522864809

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Introduction by Jonathan Frazen, *The Man Who Loved Children*, Stead, Christina, The Miegunyah Press, c 1980s, pages vii-xvi. At this time Thistle resided with David Stead at *Boongarre* at 14 Pacific Street, Watson Bay, NSW, a two-storey weatherboard cottage built during the early 1890s [https://www.woollahra.nsw.gov.au/library/local_history/women_in_woollahra/thistle_harris_stead].

⁷⁶ Webb, Joan, *Thistle Y. Harris*, Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, NSW, November 1998, page 22

One aspect of the book was the author's own relationship with her father David Stead. Christina in deed had her own views on his "philosophy" which ... *is part of the Huxley-Darwin resealable-retinol nature-agnostic mother-of-all-thing-fresh-air-panacea eclectic-socialist universal-peace-manhood-suffrage-and-vegetarianism of the English breed, inheriting from the eighteen century age of light and Jean-Jacque...*⁷⁷ That daughter-father conflict seems to stay unresolved and is better left for biographers, critics and readers' individual interpretations. Davis Stead was left to mother Christina becoming a dominating figure in her early years and heavily influencing her character. Stead herself, portrayed as Louie in the novel as being complex mix of a loving and angry, tolerant yet passionate teenager, was able to preserve her interest to everything that alive and natural. This intensely biographical novel has author's own interpretation of events and characters with no judgement.

With or without agreement, childhood recollections occupied the writer's mind for some time. Stead analysed everything she remembered and concluded that her father undeniably had a very strong influence on her own personality, interests and views in life, and on her growing into the intellectual she was to become. She reflected on her formation as a writer:

*... my father, for his part, told us all stories. He'd come up at night and talk to us about folk-lore, or tell us details about animals and the natural world. I think that was the start of my fondness for stories. I used to make them up for my brothers and sisters. Four or five of those ones later got into The Salzburg Tales.*⁷⁸

It seems that the ten years Christina Stead spent in Lydham Hall, whether happy or not so, were always in the back of her mind. She lived keeping her memories of that old house she "could go around blindfolded." She admired that house and her motherland:

That was the house of my childhood, the scene that took place there - all quiet scenes, visual, natural, the scenes that always pass over the screen at the fringe of thought. I am thinking of something quite different, listening to someone, agreeing, disagreeing; and all the time views of Lydham are passing over the screen; as it happens with some place you knew for a long time and that impressed you.

⁷⁷ Letter. Christina Stead to Thistle Harris, 7th July, 1939, MS 8317, Christina Stead, NLA

⁷⁸ Smith, Graeme Kinross, *Australia's Writers. An illustrated guide to their lives and their work*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1980, pp 210

According to the article in *The Good Weekend*,²²² Stead trusted her half-brother, Gilbert to distribute her extensive library amongst worthy organisations. Several books located in the Rockdale Library Local Studies collection were obtained from Gilbert and have a label stating “Presented to Rockdale Municipal Library from the library of Christina Stead by D. & G. Stead & R. Geering.” Ronald George Geering, being the writer’s literary trustee, has bequeathed Stead’s papers and manuscripts. *Ocean of Story. The uncollected stories of Christina Stead* published in 1985 was based on these materials²²³ as a curated collection of biographical stories by Stead set in a timely order. Brilliantly written in a fictional style, the stories offer lively pictures of *Lydham*, its surroundings, a brief overview of Steads family, biography of David Stead and the author’s life experiences.

On that final note, in the novel Henny was poisoned by Louie, but Christina Stead never poisoned her step mother. In real life, David and Ada Stead separated soon after moving to Watson Bay. They never got a divorce. David Stead married his lover Thistle Harris the same year as his wife Ada died.***

Illustration 28
Commemoration book sticker from the Library of
Christina Stead located in the Bayside Library Local
Studies Collection
Rockdale, NSW
Photograph by the author, 2021



PS. It is the wish of the author that local children and adults will hide from the sun on the Lydham back veranda to read Christina Stead’s short stories aloud. It is also a dream of the author the let local children recreate David Stead’s home zoo using found and recycled materials.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- *Christina Stead (1902-1983), A collection of reviews and reminiscences reflecting the life and work of the famous Australian novelist*, compiled by Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, United Kingdom, 1984
- *Christina Stead. Selected Fiction and Nonfiction*, Edited by R. G. Geering and A. Segerberg, University of Queensland Press, 1994, ISBN 0 7022 2520 7
- Gibbins, Frederick John, NRS-13660-7-417-Series 4_78844. Frederick John Gibbins – Date of Death 16/02/1917, Granted on 17/04/1917; NSW State Archives and Records Collection
- Gibbins, Ian D., *Christina Stead (1902-1983)*, 1984, Ian Gibbins & Co, Clifton, Bristol, United Kingdom
- Orlovich, Peter, *Papers, Correspondence with Christina Stead, c. 1954 - ca. 1968*, call number ML MSS 1926 2(2), ca. 1954 - ca. 1968, State Library of NSW
- Register of Land Grants and Leases, Cumberland, 1835-41, NRS-13836_7stroke450ColSecLandGrantRegisterReel2846, reproduction. Museums of History, NSW State Archives
- Smith, Graeme Kinross, *Australia's Writers. An illustrated guide to their lives and their work*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1980, ISBN 0 17 005321 0, pp 209-216
- Stead, Christina Ellen, *Certificates*, MLMSS 9364 1(1), State Library of NSW
- Stead, Christina, *Papers*, MS 8317, NLA
- Stead, Christina Ellen, *Letters to Thistle Harris*, Ms 8318, NLA
- Stead, Christina Ellen, *Papers*, Ms Acc 22.022, NLA
- Stead, Christina, *Selected Fiction and Nonfiction*, Edited by R.G.Geering and A. Segerberg, University of Queensland Press, 1994, ISBN 0 7022 2520 7
- Stead, Christina, *The Man Who Loved Children*, Miegunyah Modern Library, 9780522855548 (pbk) First published in the United States by Simon and Schuster in 1940. Foreword by Jonathan Franzen, 2010. Afterword by Randall Jarrell, 1965. Google Play: <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=SFNAQ5AA5ksC&hl=en>
- Stead, David George and Harris, Thistle Yolette, *Papers*, ML MSS 5715 11(25), NLA

Secondary Sources

- Long, Valmai, *Lydham Hall*, illustration by Gifford Eardley, SGHS Inc Bulletin, September 1970
- *Bexley As I knew It from 1895-1917*, Grace (Middenway) Nicholls, recorded by Philip Geeves, 1963, initially published in SGHS Inc Bulletin, February 1964, reprinted in the SGHS Inc Bulletins, January 1971 and in September-October 1991 issues
- *Lydham Hall. Bricks and Mortar*, The Golden Jubilee Edition, 2021 Compiled by Olga Sedneva, Edited by Wesley Fairhall, Consultant Anne Field. ISBN 978-0-909878-12-2
- *Lydham Hall, Beyond Bricks and Mortar. From Colonial Times to 2000*. Ms Olga Sedneva, Editor Mr Wesley Fairhall. Submission to 2021 Ron Rathbone Local History Prize. ISBN 978-0-6487449-6-2

- Pelosi, Janette, 2023 Ron Rathbone Local History Competition Open Category entry: <https://www.bayside.nsw.gov.au/area/libraries-and-museum/local-history/ron-rathbone-local-history-competition>
- Sedneva, Olga, *The Lydham Hill Tale*, 2023 Ron Rathbone Local History Competition Open Category entry: <https://www.bayside.nsw.gov.au/area/libraries-and-museum/local-history/ron-rathbone-local-history-competition>
- Stead, Christina, *Ocean of Story*. The uncollected stories of Christina Stead, Penguin Book, ISBN 0-14-010021-0
- Stead, Christina, *The Man Who Loved Children*. Foreword by Jonathan Frazen. Afterword by Jerald Darrell. The Miegunyah Press, and imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Limited, 187, Grattan Street, Carlton, Victoria, 3053, Australia. July 2013. ISBN: 9780522864809, 0522864805. Accessed via <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=SFNAQ5AA5ksC&pg=GBS.PR1&hl=en>
- Stead, Christina, *The Man Who Loved Children*. Foreword by Jonathan Frazen. Afterword by Jerald Darrell. The Miegunyah Press, and imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Limited, 187, Grattan Street, Carlton, Victoria, 3053, Australia. July 2013. ISBN 9780522855548 (pbk)
- Webb, Joan B., *Thistle Y. Harris. A biography of Thistle Yolette Stead*. Surrey Beatty & Sons, November 1998, ISBN 0 949324 85 X

Collections

Bayside Council NSW Library, Local History Collection

Bexley Public School Archives Collection

Georges River Council NSW Library, Local History Collection

Heritage NSW database: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/heritage>

Museums of History NSW: <https://mhnsw.au>

NLA: <https://trove.nla.gov.au>

State Library of NSW: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au>

St George Historical Society Inc Bulletins, private collection