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Tea Plantation Families of Northeast India

For many Kalimpong families in New Zealand, the ‘tea’ heritage was the most visible and least sensitive aspect of their otherwise mysterious Indian origins. Objects from plantation life and photographs of tea planters have been proudly displayed and treasured. Yet descendant imaginings of plantation life have deferred largely to imperial nostalgia and assumptions about exploitative capitalism, detached planters and family wealth. We have expected that the ‘Indian’ women that the planters cohabited with held little sway in the decision to send their children away to Kalimpong; and it has been very difficult to even imagine what the children’s lives might have been like before that separation occurred. In this chapter I interrogate these origin assumptions, and use a variety of sources to begin to bring colour and noise and movement to families that have been hushed from history.

These assumptions have of course been unsettled by descendants themselves when they have visited Kalimpong. Travelling around the Darjeeling region and sometimes venturing into Assam, they have received a very direct education in the specific geographies, diverse peoples and political climate of the eastern Himalayan region. Through travel and research descendants have found many records of the planters’ lives. The Homes files at Kalimpong have provided information about the children, although these too were filtered through the planters’ perspectives and carried by their words. When conducting research about their maternal forebears, however, descendants have felt a frustration akin to – albeit substantially different from – that of historians who have confronted the frequent exclusion of South Asian women from British colonial archives.¹ These structural inequalities are vitally important, but what I am interested in here is the familial structure that together they formed. The fragmented archival record makes it difficult to imagine the families in their original settings on a day-to-day basis – three-dimensional human beings, vocal, brushing by each other, sharing food and so on.

Previously, sources about these interracial tea families have been almost non-existent. The planters did not marry the women, nor did they write home about them, and thus no record was created. There were no birth certificates for the children, and they too have left very few memoirs. Some have spoken about their experiences. The novel *The Secret Children* was based on the recollections of a tea planter's daughter; it is a thoughtful and likely story woven from details she revealed late in life.² Michael Palin, while travelling through the upper tea districts of Assam for his *Himalaya* series, met the daughter of an 'illicit relationship' between a planter and a tea picker.³ Because such liaisons were 'strictly forbidden', Anne grew up not knowing anything of her father, but in an extraordinary set of events – related by Palin in the book that accompanied the television series – was reconnected with her British family almost fifty years after her father's death. I want to counter this narrative of isolated, exceptional cases, and argue that planters in northeast India routinely cohabited with South Asian women and produced mixed-race children that must number in the thousands. Those individuals' dispersal along various lifeways has incurred an absence of opportunities or forums for telling the larger story.

Hence the value of the Kalimpong case is that it presents the opportunity to build a collective story for a subset of plantation children, because it did involve a systematic and documented intervention. The Homes' administrative procedures created an archive that at least affords a glimpse into the various circumstances that the children were sent away from. I begin the chapter by foregrounding the distinct geographical and political setting of northeast India, both today and in the colonial past. I then use sources generated by Assam planters in tandem with recent interviews to unsettle the terms 'planter' and 'coolie' and to enhance our understanding of the ways in which planters' relationships with South Asian women were enacted and lived. From there I delve into the Homes files for the 'six families' that will be followed throughout this book, where planters were required to commit details of their familial circumstance to paper.

Tea districts of northeast India

Descendants in New Zealand trying to weave narratives from the scarce, often confusing information left by their Kalimpong forebears have been influenced by representations of India which ascribe a certain collectivity to

its people, underplaying the linguistic diversity, complex cultural texture and localized social formations that this nation contains. The association of the terms 'India' and 'Indian' with a particular set of images and circumstances has shaped our thoughts about the 'Indian mothers' of the Kalimpong children, and affected the likelihood of descendants travelling to India to research their family history.⁴

The experience of visiting Kalimpong is often described relative to the travel in other parts of India that precedes heading into the hills. Ron Gammie travelled with a small group from New Zealand to attend the Homes centenary celebrations in 2000. Like most visitors to northeast India, his trip began with a short stay in Calcutta. Although he expected this to be a challenging journey, he found the experience of Calcutta 'overwhelming'. But once in Kalimpong 'away from that, and you could just talk to people ... things were fine'.⁵ He enjoyed idyllic accommodation at 'Orchid Retreat' and wandered at leisure around the township of Kalimpong. He described the contrast of expectations and experience in these distinct settings:

When you go back there ... the concept of India was nothing like what it's like up there, in Kalimpong, it's totally different. If you were going to put a blanket over what you think Indians are like, it's nothing like what it's like up there.⁶

While this group travelled without issue, others, particularly those who tried to visit Kalimpong in the 1980s, have had their travel disrupted by local agitation against the Bengali government. Indeed on my visit in 2007 I was confined to my hotel in Darjeeling for a day due to the calling of a *bandh* (strike) which saw a complete shutdown of services.

At the time I did not understand the motivations of this action, but I might well have made some strong connections between this political unrest and my ancestral ties there. As historians have recently claimed, the marginality of Kalimpong and Darjeeling today is in sharp contrast to their significance in the colonial era, and is only countered now by the occasional travel writer 'gushing' over their 'quaint charms' and media attention to natural disasters or political agitation.⁷ These characterizations are all directly related to the colonial period. The British were interested in the region first for its strategic proximity to Tibet, second for its healthy climate as a place of respite for British officials in Bengal and third, among other commercial ventures, for its crucial contribution to imperial markets through establishment of the tea industry.⁸ Had the region not been brought into British India for these reasons, it would not have been part of the territories handed 'back' to India in 1947. The agitation since the

1980s has been motivated by the claims of the majority Nepali population in the Darjeeling district for greater autonomy under, or independence from, the Bengal government.

Media portrayals of a 'culture of violence' and social unrest in Assam, along with governments warnings, have meant that descendants have been less likely to go there.⁹ Richard Hawkins's children, Gilbert and Pam, have visited Kalimpong twice, the second time travelling onward to Assam and to the tea plantation their grandfather had managed. While they did so unimpeded, their movements were sometimes constrained. Aside from the value of experiencing those local conditions, the Hawkinses' visit is notable for two reasons. First, although Gilbert and Pam were keen to see their father's place of birth, they were primarily motivated by a desire to know more about their grandmother in response to the lack of detail about the women in the Homes records (I will return to this later). The damage incurred by the maternal separations in the previous generation is palpable in the action descendants like Pam and Gilbert have taken in order to correct it. There was no information about their grandmother at the plantation, and this relates to my second point: the Hawkinses were surprised to find that they knew more about the history of the plantation than the current management. There were no records there. Historians face the same challenge and attribute the marginalization of the region's history to archival dispersal and scarcity in the postcolonial period.¹⁰

So, as a primary intervention into the origin narratives developed by Kalimpong descendants, we first need to understand the distinctions between the region as a whole in the face of the national narratives and imaginaries of India. From there, some knowledge of the differences between the Darjeeling district (which includes Kalimpong) and Assam will bring a more nuanced understanding to the dynamics of plantation life. In the first instance, rather than representing the northeast as existing on the outskirts of India, it is usefully placed at the centre of the eastern Himalayas – the 'Indo-Tibetan frontier' – and portrayed at the centre of a cultural zone where national borders have been drawn across the intersection of many peoples (see Figure 2.1).¹¹ As Egerton Peters wrote in a letter to his Aunt Caroline in 1926:

Geographically we are not India at all, climatically we are not India. We belong to the large hilly and dense jungle tracts between Bengal to the West, Bhutan to the North and naturally connect up with the China hills and Burma. We're foreigners to Bengal and treated as such. ... Cachar district of Assam Province is my country and I never think of it as India at all.¹²

Figure 2.1 Historic tea districts in Assam. Map created by Harley McCabe.

Although Darjeeling and Assam were administered separately by the British government and have distinct geographies, climates and populations, they were united in their categorization in the colonial era as ‘Tea Districts’.¹³ This shared commercial interest to the British had consequences for the management of land and, importantly, inward labour migrations. In both regions, British men were brought in to manage the plantations. In Darjeeling, labourers were mostly drawn from Nepali populations, a large number of whom migrated towards these employment opportunities.¹⁴ This accounts for today’s Nepali majority in Darjeeling. The British tendency to fix ethnicities to occupations saw many Nepali women employed as housekeepers in planters’ bungalows and subsequently drawn into relationships with British men. While Nepali people also laboured in Assam, the situation there was more complex. The coerced movement of large numbers of indentured labourers, known as ‘coolies’, from marginalized groups in other parts of India was to have a divisive legacy.¹⁵ Much of today’s violence is a response to historic and recent migrations of ‘outsiders’.¹⁶

These distinct labour histories are an important precursor to reading my descriptions of plantation life further on. So too is the relative isolation of Assam, and proximity of Darjeeling to the Homes in Kalimpong. This 'isolation' is also important for understanding both the motivations for and the possibility of establishing interracial families on the Assam plantations. Further, the romanticized 'hill stations' of Darjeeling and Kalimpong came to occupy a very different place to the 'jungles' of Assam in the British colonial imagination.¹⁷ Assam was understood chiefly as a frontier where civilization could tame the wild through the establishment of 'tea garden'.¹⁸ The cultural and ethnic diversity the British encountered in Assam saw them struggle to bring the area under control, establishing an 'inner line' in 1872 within which it would govern to ensure the stable development of the tea industry.¹⁹ But this rhetoric of building protected and predictable spaces within a frontier territory masks the reality of what the British did, which was to draw circles within circles around contested spaces to keep some locals out and coerce labour from regions disconnected to Assam in. In doing so they made an already dynamic cultural region more complex, more fractured, and less at ease with what it was.²⁰ These are the origin places of the Kalimpong narrative.

'Planters' and 'coolies'

I turn now to the peopling of the origin narratives. In the face of forbidding silences, descendants have often framed their life stories against two powerful and almost archetypal colonial figures: on the one hand, an imagined female ancestor, the powerless and unknown Indian woman, and on the other, the tea planter, forthright in his archival presence and the cause of 'great romantic visions' about familial wealth and social status.²¹ The terms of the relationships between tea planters and Indian women, some of whom were recorded as 'coolies' in the Homes files, were expected to have been dictated by an enormous power differential. Planters are assumed to have lorded over their estates, living detached and privileged existences made possible by the exploitation of local labour. Like any stereotype, there are elements of truth to these characterizations; yet it is important to unpack both terms in order to construct a more meaningful picture of what the relationships between these two extremes on the spectrum of colonial entitlement might have looked like.²²

For the planters, there are numerous records of their experiences in Assam in the form of diaries, travel guides or memoirs.²³ All followed a predictable

narrative, conforming to a colonial ideology that painted the planters as adventurers in, and tamers of, a hostile environment. They described hunting, social activities such as polo and picnics with other planters, tea production, labour management and the many threats to life in the 'jungle' – disease, famine, flooding and worker revolt. Unsurprisingly, none wrote of their own or others' interracial relationships, nor the families that sprung from them.

While these memoirs do more to reinforce than to unsettle romantic notions of planters, they do provide useful insights into how and why the men went to Assam. A family background in India was a strong impetus for working on tea plantations. P. R. H. Longley, who published a memoir of life in Assam (and later settled in New Zealand), wrote that he grew up in Darjeeling and 'had always longed to be a tea planter'.²⁴ Likewise A. R. Ramsden, born in Assam in 1898 and educated in England from the age of six, returned to the region to work on a plantation in 1925. The Kalimpong emigrants' fathers often followed a family tradition of working in India too. Egerton Peters's grandfather was an East India Company agent and his father served with the Royal Engineers in India, Burma and Afghanistan.²⁵ The father of the Gammie children, John Perrell Gammie, worked on a tea plantation in Darjeeling and in the forest service.²⁶ His father had been a government scientist in the region.²⁷ It seems reasonable then to suggest that many tea planters were ensconced in 'empire family' structures, where generation after generation of men shaped their careers to fit British Indian requirements, and where a particular mode of family life emerged to cope with the attendant separations.²⁸

Frank Nicholls, the father of five children sent to the Homes in Kalimpong and from there to New Zealand, was working in the London office of a tea agency when he was offered a transfer to Calcutta. Nicholls hesitated, after which 'the big man then asked me if I would prefer to go out to a tea estate in Assam, as an assistant manager. There was no hesitation in my reply this time and I was elated at the idea and by the offer.'²⁹ His preference for a position that promised elevated status and a lifestyle that differed fundamentally to office work in a city – be it Calcutta or London – is revealing of those two key motivations for careering on tea plantations: status and adventure.

Photographs of bungalows (Figure 2.2) and colonial objects such as polo trophies passed on to Kalimpong descendants have reinforced imaginings of this planter lifestyle and fuelled speculation about 'what happened to all the money'.³⁰ Yet Nicholls's recruitment by a tea agency helps us begin to untangle notion of planters as wealthy entrepreneurs. Very few *owned* plantations. British men who wished to work on tea plantations applied to tea agencies, were interviewed,

assigned positions and transferred as the agencies required. Generic use of the title 'planter' disguised their progression through a labour hierarchy that began with the role of assistant manager and was followed by promotion to a manager, usually after ten years of service. Then there was the possibility of promotion to the highest role of superintendent, overseeing multiple plantations.³¹ Men in all three roles were described as 'planters' in official documentation such as shipping records, marriage and death certificates, obituaries and the application forms to the Homes. Consequently the title and its various meanings were flattened and concretized in the kinds of documents that researchers routinely consult and weave into their family or academic histories.

In addition to not owning the plantations, these assistants and managers were not particularly well paid, as Peter Webster explained when I interviewed him in Wellington in 2011. Webster's pathway to working on tea plantations in Darjeeling and Assam in the 1950s echoed those of previous generations. Webster was born in Bombay in 1926 to British parents, sent 'home' to be educated in England at the age of six and after spending more time in India in his teens, found himself working as a teacher in Kent. His career prospects were 'pretty dim' and he was eager to further his interest in mountaineering in the Himalayas. 'The obvious place was the Darjeeling district,' Webster recalled in his memoirs, 'and the only jobs there still open to Europeans were in the tea industry.'³² He applied to various tea agencies and was offered a place as an assistant with the Dima Tea Company in the Duars, near Darjeeling. Webster

Figure 2.2 Planter's bungalow, Assam. Courtesy Hawkins private collection.

became aware of the status that accompanied his new job as a 'tea planter' as soon as the SS *Strathmore* departed Tilbury for Bombay:

I travelled first class and quite suddenly, my life and social status were quite changed. From being an unqualified Prep school teacher with little chance of advancement, I had been elevated to the status of an assistant manager of a tea plantation in India with every chance of advancement, even possibly to be the superintendent of a number of plantations.³³

Yet Webster was careful to make the distinction between social status and financial reward. While the lifestyle provided by the tea agencies was very comfortable, there was less money in tea than he had anticipated. 'Planters had an exceptional standard of living,' Webster explained, 'but actually you didn't get that well paid. You did compared to the workers, but you weren't affluent ... but you were well off, I mean you travelled first class and you had a big bungalow, and servants.'³⁴ Webster's assessment of the limited financial opportunities for tea planters is supported by other accounts, and by the application forms in the Homes personal files.³⁵ Many planters who sent their children to Kalimpong claimed that they were unable to pay 'full fees', as we will see further on.

Planters, as managers rather than capitalists, might therefore be reimagined as being caught up – albeit willingly – in the imperial drive to direct labour into 'frontiers' to facilitate the development of so-called empty lands. Like the coolies whose lives they presided over, and the women they entered into sexual relationships with, they spent most of their adult lives far from home. While some fathers of the Kalimpong emigrants did invest in tea, they were a very small minority, and they did so from a position of existing family wealth. Egerton Peters frequently lamented the precariousness of the tea industry in letters to his Aunt Caroline. In 1919 he complained that for the third year in a row they received no commission, remarking that it was 'alright provided one does not hope to retire and is not married'.³⁶ The Cachar district of Assam had endured six months of drought, 'while a few weeks hence we may be a flooded swamp'. 'India is famine stricken,' Peters continued, 'and our coolies have suffered dreadfully from influenza.' Peters's concern for the welfare of his workers was offset by his casual description of the expediency of plantation labour. Having 'lost' two hundred workers in the previous six months, he planned to 'replace them' with 'coolies from the famine districts'.³⁷

The planters' daily routines bring further nuance to our understanding of their interactions with workers. Plantations were essentially small townships – self-contained spaces comprising an extensive infrastructure of roads, factory

buildings, workers huts (known as 'coolie lines'), markets, schools, hospitals and the planters' bungalows. They were populated by thousands of workers from various ethnicities and castes, with one European manager and perhaps an assistant. Although planters in Assam have been regarded by historians as particularly flagrant in their mistreatment of workers, they were also acknowledged to have occupied a risky and isolating position.³⁸ They had to be fluent in the multiple languages and dialects of the plantation to resolve employment issues and disputes among various groups.³⁹ High worker mortality rates necessitated repeated migrations of new workers from different regions, comprising various configurations of single workers and family groups, all of which added to the complexity of plantation life.⁴⁰

Hence the term 'coolie' disguises gendered, ethnic and generational variation within the working population on tea plantations. And although there was an enormous power differential between planters and labourers, the workers did have the ability to disrupt the smooth operation of the estates. Women on plantations were regarded as posing a particular challenge to management. Longley recorded that 'more understanding and experience being necessary in dealing with the women, the senior assistant controlled the plucking and all works done by the weaker sex'.⁴¹ An incident which he described as the closest he came to being physically attacked was sparked by an altercation with a group of women whose work he rejected.⁴² According to Peter Webster, stories were rife of the dangers of being 'set up' by locals, who would accuse a planter of sexual impropriety and arrive at his bungalow en masse to exact retribution.⁴³ Whether or not this ever actually happened, it surely affected the mindset of new assistant managers. They arrived, often as teenagers, into complex social settings of which they had little or no knowledge. It was in the midst of this immersive experience – acquiring languages, learning tea production, adjusting to the environment, managing labour and resolving disputes – that British men became involved in sexual relationships with women workers.

These women, the mothers of the Kalimpong children, have been silent shadows in their family stories. Descendants are immensely frustrated by the solid brick walls that their archival silences have become. This is the one aspect of the Kalimpong scheme that has prompted unambiguously negative sentiment towards the planters and Graham, since it has deprived families of the opportunity to ever reconnect to their Indian heritage. Decisions made a hundred years ago to omit non-European women from the documentary record solidified into a permanent absence after the women – and anyone who might have remembered them – passed away. This erasure of their existence, in the Western bureaucratic

sense, has left an impression that the women were powerless, perhaps as silent in life as they were in the archives. One way of addressing this absence is to bring together the evidence we do have of the way their relationships with the planters were enacted and lived.

The high incidence of planters cohabiting with women workers is usually attributed to the tea agencies' policy of not allowing a British wife to be brought to the plantation until the men were managers, which as noted required an apprenticeship of ten years. This, along with the isolation of the plantations, is understood to have made interracial relationships inevitable.⁴⁴ The marriage policy was still enforced when Peter Webster was in the region in the 1950s, and he made the same link between the policy and high incidence of these cohabitations.⁴⁵ Webster first encountered his manager's 'mistress' on the evening of his arrival at the Duars plantation. The manager had become 'aggressively drunk' at a social club, and when Webster escorted him home he saw 'a sariied Indian woman run out from the bungalow to help him'.⁴⁶ He subsequently learnt that the woman, from the Chota Nagpur tribe, had been 'installed' as his mistress some years prior. The manager had 'a number of children by her and they all lived in a special house at the back'. Webster made particular note in his memoirs and in our interview that while the existence of the family was common knowledge, in three years of working at the plantation he never actually met the woman or the children and his manager never referred to them.⁴⁷ It was an open secret.

Given this explanation of the inevitability of the relationships, I wanted to know how it was that the relationships were enacted. Webster found the question difficult to answer. While he was aware that both of his managers 'kept mistresses', he was not privy to the details of the arrangements other than the visible evidence afforded by their presence in the planters' bungalows. Webster could only speculate as to how the relationships were initiated, suggesting that women of low caste were more likely to be taken as mistresses in order to minimize the potential social fallout. In some situations the woman lived with the planter; in others a separate bungalow was built for the woman and her extended family. According to Webster, tea companies 'frowned upon' cases where 'the mistress took over the bungalow and brought all her relatives in'.⁴⁸ Here, then, is evidence of the women's ability to make the arrangement work for them; and the presence of extended family challenges the belief that the women were always outcaste as a result of their relationships with British men. It also points to the economic advantages that might have been negotiated for the women and their families.

In order to understand the motivation of women to enter such arrangements, we can only surmise as to the negotiations that may have taken place. It is easy

to imagine the planters, who managed their workers with absolute power, selecting a woman who was unable or unlikely to refuse. But as we have seen, the complexity of social relations surely precluded such ease in many situations. Given the impoverished circumstances of migrant workers on plantations, these domestic arrangements may equally have resulted from negotiations with the women's families. During fieldwork for her beautifully nuanced ethnography of a tea estate in Assam, Piya Chatterjee listened for 'narrative traces' of these historical arrangements. She heard uncorroborated stories of both the 'offering' of women by their communities and the power of a planter to 'summon' a woman.⁴⁹ Gaiutra Bahadur's exploration of the life of her great-grandmother, an indentured labourer on a Guiana sugar plantation, also ventured into the territory of taboo relationships between planters and coolie women. Like Chatterjee, Bahadur found it difficult to find any 'truth' about the space the women occupied, describing it as a 'zone where coercion and incentive intermingled'.⁵⁰

Life in the bungalow

These hushed relationships potentially took on a different character when offspring were produced. A rumoured affair could become a quiet family; an opportunity for the planters, and for the women, to experience a kind of domesticity on the plantations that they might not otherwise have known. The addition of children also brings their testimony and memories to our efforts to reconstruct an image of life in the bungalow for an interracial tea family. In my interviews with Kalimpong descendants, several recalled plantation stories and memories passed on by their parents.⁵¹ More immediate recollections were gleaned from my interview with Ruth Nicholls, the daughter of Frank Nicholls whose memoir of Assam was cited earlier.⁵² Although Ruth was not one of the 130 emigrants sent to New Zealand under the scheme, she did attend the Homes in Kalimpong and her older sister, Sheila, was in the final group sent in 1938. Frank then took matters into his own hands and took Ruth and her three siblings to New Zealand, one by one, in the 1940s.

Ruth had no difficulty remembering plantation life. Although she was sent to the Homes at the age of four, she went home to the plantation every holidays and spent time there before leaving for New Zealand. She and her siblings enjoyed a 'comfortable' existence in the bungalow with their father.⁵³ They had day servants for all domestic and outdoor tasks, and *ayahs* (native nursemaids)

who arrived in the evening along with a night watchman. Ruth remembered close relationships with these household workers, and recalled life outside the bungalow with equal fondness (Figure 2.3). There was a large garden and tennis courts, and the children would often venture further into the ‘jungle’, free to wander while their father was working. Ruth understood the workers’ villages to be divided according to caste, religion and ‘sub-tribes’, and she and her siblings were not restricted in their interactions with these workers, who would ‘salaam us, because they knew who we were’. Ruth spoke a combination of Assamese and Bengali, as well as Hindi, which enabled her to communicate with everyone on the estate. She remembered this as an idyllic childhood in terms of both the freedom of life outdoors and their privileged existence in the bungalow:

We lacked for nothing. But that’s just something we accepted as given. And we used to play princesses ... I was Princess Margaret, June was Princess Alexandra, and Nora was Princess Elizabeth. We used to dress up in drapes and curtains [laughs]. And the servants used to laugh. They used to come and peekaboo.⁵⁴

Ruth described a close relationship with her father. He and the children conversed in English; however, Ruth emphasized his fluency in many dialects and his understanding of the local ‘rules’, which enabled him to resolve disputes between the different groups on the plantation. Occasionally her father would use local languages to speak to the children, especially to emphasize particular

Figure 2.3 The Nicholls children on the plantation in Assam. From left: June (with neighbour's child on lap), Sydney, Nora and Ruth. Courtesy Nicholls private collection.

things, 'like, *jaldi jaldi*, hurry up. He wouldn't say hurry up, he'd say *jaldi jaldi*!' Ruth remembered her father as a 'bit of a loner'. There was no town nearby to visit. Her father's only social contact with other Europeans was with the neighbouring planter, who also 'had an Indian wife' and two children; and other planters occasionally called at the bungalow. Ruth's recollection of visiting Calcutta with her father to get a passport for New Zealand attests to this isolated existence. They only stayed one night but the whole family were 'agog' at the 'beggars' and crowds of the city. 'On the tea gardens everybody had a job', Ruth explained, 'there were some poor people yes but *nothing* like what we saw – oh!'

Ruth's description of her father's work routine was typical of the planters' duties, and she remembered it in some detail:

The daily thing was that he would be out and about to do his *kamjari* [work], which was [to] go and inspect the tea gardens. And he'd go along to the tea factory to see how the situation was in there, that everything was done correctly ... and then he'd come home at about 2 in the afternoon, and have a – because it was so hot you see – he'd go and either have a rest at the front of the house on a chair with his feet up, or go to his bedroom for about an hour. And then he'd have a cup of tea and off he'd go back [to work] until about five or six and then he'd come back and listen to the BBC news. And if we were in the lounge, shhhhh, not a word, this is the BBC news, read by such and such. So we had to listen to all that.⁵⁵

In contrast, Ruth had only scarce recollections of her mother, who had suffered a nervous breakdown and returned to live in her village when Ruth was three years old. She was Tanti caste, a Hindu group that originated in Bihar and were traditionally weavers; she died when Ruth was seven. Ruth knew that her mother's family lived on the plantation because she remembered being visited by them: 'Her brother was there, I know that, and his wife and children. I remember people coming in a group to see us, and they sat around, you see the bungalow has got this big entrance area, and they would sit in that entrance area, there were chairs all around, and some of them chose to sit on the floor, Indian style.' Even when her maternal family ventured into the bungalow, Ruth's status was clearly delineated from theirs.

Tales of plantation life have also filtered through to descendants of the emigrants. Ian Spalding's father, Tom, often told stories about plantation life – exotic tales of snakes and tigers – and passed on some recollections of life in the bungalow. While Tom's stories did not refer to his mother's place in the

home, he did speak of her role as a healer who administered to people on the plantation and in the surrounding districts. Likewise most of the stories Kate Pattison, a 1915 emigrant, told to her daughter Mary were about the jungle; 'charging elephants, [and] she used to talk about leopards a lot'⁵⁶ (Figure 2.4). As for memories of Kate's mother, Mary heard only one, of an incident that occurred when the tea planter was on leave and one of his daughters fell ill. He was angry to discover upon his return that the 'witch doctors' had been called in and the girls passed around in a circle on people's shoulders above a bonfire. Notably, Mary believes that Kate and her sister lived in the village with their extended family, rather than in their father's bungalow.

The Pattison family story raises the possibility of mixed-race children being absorbed into their mothers' families, and thus an important question regarding the children's future lives: what would have become of them had they not been sent to the Homes? Many descendants understand the Homes to have intervened in families that would have eventually been separated when the father returned to Britain. But did the planters' departure necessarily mean that the women and children would be stranded and destitute, outcaste from their families? John Graham, founder of the Homes in Kalimpong, described the 'local policy', where planters paid the women a sum of money upon leaving India, which he disapproved of as an inadequate solution to a dire circumstance.⁵⁷ But evidence of children being absorbed into their mother's extended family presents a different scenario. It was in this situation that Graham, and the tea-planting fathers, could

Figure 2.4 The other side of plantation life: the Nicholls children riding elephants. Courtesy Nicholls private collection.

be said to have created Anglo-Indians out of children who could otherwise have been integrated back into their maternal family.

The acceptance of mixed-race children into their maternal families highlights the need to understand ethnic diversity in Assam in order to accurately reframe the Kalimpong narrative. The idea that women lost caste by being in a relationship with a planter rests on a generalized understanding of social structure in India. One community in Assam known to have absorbed mixed-race children in the colonial period were the Khasi people in Shillong. In her field research undertaken in 1990, Anne Selkirk Lobo described the Khasi community as 'located on the margins of Indian society, outside the Hindu caste system' with no established hierarchy.⁵⁸ In this matrilineal society, land is inherited by the youngest daughter. This and other sociological factors meant that there was scope for productive encounters between Khasi women and British men. According to Selkirk Lobo, non-heiress women took the opportunity to convert to Christianity for 'vast tactical advantage':

They crashed through the taboos surrounding their society and changed their lives. Christian schools, hospitals and churches would fit in quite well with their plan. They could send their children to learn English in the missionary schools and find gainful employment with the British. The terrors of sickness could be cured in the hospitals, and if they now had to congregate in a church instead of worshipping on their own in a field, they set out to do so. ... Conversion to Christianity, followed by marriage to a British man, altered their status of marginalised 'losers' to inclusive 'winners'.⁵⁹

Selkirk Lobo drew clear distinctions between Anglo-Indian communities in greater India and that in Shillong. The latter were not dependent on jobs in the railways, police and telegraph departments, nor were they segregated into the living quarters associated with those occupations. There was also consistency in Khasi interracial families that distinguished it from the diffuse lineage characterizing the wider Anglo-Indian community; the mothers were all Khasi, and their British husbands were brought into Khasi social structure. Hence, the Anglo-Khasi community 'did not suffer a crisis of identity when the British left' and there was no exodus following Independence in 1947.⁶⁰ Selkirk Lobo's study points to the unexpected ways in which the diverse peoples of Assam might have regarded and acted upon the addition of interracial children to their families and communities. But of course segregation was only part of the 'problem' that Graham and the tea planters sought to remedy. The economic prospects on offer in the settler colonies were no doubt perceived as far brighter than local communities in Assam could offer.

Six families: Separations

According to the recollections of Ruth Nicholls and the memories passed down to the children of Tony Spalding and Kate Pattison, the tea planters' children wandered freely around the estate, including the workers' villages and the 'jungly surrounds'. It was precisely these kinds of wanderings that prompted most British families in India to send their children 'home' to be immersed in British social and educational norms, at a safe distance from interactions with Indian workers.⁶¹ For the tea planters brought up in 'empire families', it was at this juncture that the difference between their lives and that of their children became undeniable. They simply could not manage their interracial families using the model of their own childhoods. While planters could have sent their children to local mission schools, this would equate to a public admission of their indiscretion and exposure of the families that they worked hard to conceal from British society. Sending their children to the Homes signalled the planters' acceptance that the domestic arrangements that had enabled them to enjoy a familial existence on the plantation were limited to the early years of their offspring's childhood.

The process by which these separations were decided upon, enacted and formalized was documented in the Homes family files. The files were all collated in an identical manner: a cover sheet listed the names of the children included in the file and their admission numbers, and beneath the cover sheet were the application forms, despite being predated by the initial enquiries about admission. This re-ordering of documents attests to the bureaucratic control exerted by these 'official' forms, and the priority afforded to the paperwork that declared the terms upon which the children were admitted to the Homes and the circumstances from which they were sent. These documents were proof that guardianship had essentially been handed to Graham, not just for the term of the children's residence at Kalimpong, but for their futures as well. The form recorded information about the children's upbringing and education, the parents' statuses, the remuneration offered by the applicant and whether the children were to be trained for India or 'the colonies'. The rest of the file comprised all of the correspondence that was ever received about, or from, the children of that particular family.

Five of the six families introduced in Chapter 1 had retrieved copies of their family files from Kalimpong prior to meeting me; I obtained copies for the Mortimores on their behalf when I visited the Homes in 2012. Similarities in familial circumstances were immediately apparent upon comparing the

application forms and correspondence in the six files: all of the fathers of the children were tea planters; all were located in either the Assam or Darjeeling tea-planting districts; the majority of the siblings in each family were sent to New Zealand; and all of the children were first-generation Anglo-Indians – that is, their fathers were European and their mothers were non-European (and not Anglo-Indian). This accords with information I gathered over several years from many families in New Zealand; something like 90 per cent had their origins in tea plantations. Table 2.1 details the parents' nationalities and ethnicities, and location of their tea estates.

While there was some information about the mothers on the application forms, in the early years the Homes adhered to the colonial practice of excluding South Asian women from official records. For descendants, this erasure has brought great disappointment. Although not completely surprised, there has been hope, given the other sensitive information included in the Homes records, that the mothers' names might have been written down somewhere. Many descendants have travelled to Kalimpong or gone to considerable effort to obtain copies of their files chiefly for this purpose – to learn something, anything, about their female ancestor. After 1912, there was at least a space for the mother's name on the form. Despite this, Paul Moller wrote 'Nepali' for the mother's name and then under 'nationality' put a dot; he was not expecting, it would seem, to be asked for information other than her ethnicity. The other post-1912 applications did include the women's names, and some had additional information about

Table 2.1 Parents' details on application forms

Father's name	Nationality	Mother's name	Ethnicity	District	Tea estate
Egerton Peters	English	Not recorded*	Nepali	Cachar (Assam)	Backola
Francis Hawkins	British	Not recorded*	Bengali	Margherita (Assam)	Makum
Paul Moller	Danish	Not recorded	Nepali	Darjeeling	Gamong
R. M. Mortimore	Scottish	Ka Ngelibou Marlangiang	Khasi	Sylhet (Assam)	Charkula
John Gammie	Scottish	Bisumia	Nepali	Tindharia (Darjeeling)	Nurbong
W. C. Spalding	Scottish	Prosoni	Tanti	Sylhet (Assam)	Adampur

Source: Dr Graham's Homes, personal files.

*These earlier (pre-1912) forms only required the parents' nationality and whether they were alive at the time of admission. The fathers' names were recorded under the 'Applicant' section.

their caste and occupation. The problem then becomes one of finding a way to follow up on an individual who is unlikely to have ever been recorded anywhere else, and who was possibly at a distance from her own community. It is an enduring loss.

As to their own circumstances, the planters had to state the financial terms they offered and provide further information if they claimed to be unable to make full fee payment. There was a suggested fee structure, comprising an initial lump sum payment and monthly instalments, but allowances were made for those who could not meet these terms. The form required two referees. Supporting my argument that the families existed as an 'open secret' among the planters, most listed fellow planters as referees. Others who perhaps desired greater discretion listed churchmen. The final question on the application form asked whether the children were to be 'trained for work in the Colonies, or for India'. All applicants, with the exception of the mother of the Mortimore children, answered 'the colonies'.

The application form also requested details of the children's age, religion, health and education, adding to the picture we are beginning to build of their lives on the plantations before being admitted to the Homes. As shown in Table 2.2, their age upon admission varied greatly. Of the twenty children in these six families, eleven were over the age of five years and eight were ten years or older. This has consequence for later narrative building by their descendants, as the children sent to Kalimpong at a later age were more likely to remember plantation life. Despite their relatively advanced ages, only four children had attended school and none had received a British education. The Spalding boys had attained 'elementary Bengali' and the Mortimore children had attended a Khasi Mission School.⁶² Only the Mortimore children had been baptized. Overall, the forms attest to the children's lack of exposure to European norms and thus to the role of the Homes in moulding them into substantively different social beings; they also indicate the diverse languages, customs and experiences that the plantation children brought to the cottages at Kalimpong, from which point onwards they would be treated simply as 'Anglo-Indians'.

For descendants perusing their family file for the first time, any disappointment about details missing from the application forms is often quelled by the unexpected quantity of correspondence they contain and the tantalizing stories that might lay within the crumbling pages covered in inky scribbles that will take time to decipher. Having viewed the files of many families, with their permission and encouragement, I can assuredly say that each contains the makings of a

Table 2.2 Children's circumstances upon admission

Surname	Applicant	Date of admission	Children	Sex	Age	Father alive?	Mother alive?
Peters	Father	1906	Lorna	F	4	Yes	Yes
		1906	George	M	2	Yes	Yes
		1915	Alice	F	4	Yes	No
Hawkins	Father	1911	Richard	M	2	Yes	Yes
Moller	Father	1912	Charles	M	14	Yes	Yes
		1912	Dora	F	13	Yes	Yes
		1912	Peter	M	4	Yes	Yes
			Elizabeth*	F			
			Dennis*	M			
Mortimore	Mother	1917	Jane	F	10	Yes	Yes
		1917	Rend	M	7	Yes	Yes
Gammie	Father	1919	Betty	F	15	Yes	No
		1919	Fergus	M	12	Yes	No
		1919	Moir	F	10	Yes	No
		1919	Alison	F	8	Yes	No
		1919	Sheila	F	6	Yes	No
		1919	Gavin	M	4	Yes	No
		1919	Alexa	F	1	Yes	No
Spalding	Associate	1921	Charles	M	12	No	Yes
		1921	Thomas	M	10	No	Yes

Source: Dr Graham's Homes, personal files.

*The application forms for Elizabeth and Dennis were not in the Moller file.

magnificent transnational novel. Many span decades and include letters from various branches of the family around the globe. They are emotive and poignant from start to finish, narrating everything from traumatic separations and questions about one's identity to mundane yet intimate renderings of everyday life written somewhere and sometime when a graduate's thoughts turned to Kalimpong. Most pertinent here is the initial correspondence from the tea planters to Graham, in which they were compelled to admit – and to create possibly the only written record of – the circumstances that prompted them to enquire about sending their children to the Homes. The planters' early letters also describe the process of deciding to admit their children, and the terms negotiated for fee payment. Here I look closely at this phase of correspondence in each family file in chronological order, beginning with the Peters family.

Egerton Peters first wrote to John Graham in 1905; a brief letter marked 'private and confidential' from Cachar, Assam. He stated that he had two children, 'a little girl of three and a half and a boy of 1½ years of age', asked if they were too young to be sent to Kalimpong and, if not, queried the conditions of admission. Peters noted that if a lump sum payment was required he would be unable to send the children.⁶³ In the following months a number of letters were exchanged between Peters and Graham negotiating financial terms. Peters was explicit in his desire that the children should stay 'permanently' at the Homes until being resettled in the colonies. His only mention of the children's mother was several lines of frustratingly illegible writing in his first letter. On the application forms she was listed as Nepali, and alive at that time. Peters reached an agreement with Graham to transfer an insurance policy in lieu of an initial lump sum, to be followed by regular fee payments. He arranged for the children to journey to Kalimpong accompanied by a 'reliable man' arranged by the Welsh mission.⁶⁴ In his final letter upon the children's departure, Peters asked that his children be treated with kindness and consideration, given that they had been raised 'mostly in the hands of natives, do not know a word of English, and will I'm afraid be difficult charges'.⁶⁵

In 1909 Francis Hawkins, a planter in Margherita in the far northeast of Assam, wrote a similar enquiry to Graham about his fifteen-month-old son, whom he wished to send to the Homes when he reached two years of age. Unusually, the Hawkins file included a copy of Graham's reply, in which he instructed that Richard 'would be with us for at least 15 years before he could be emigrated'.⁶⁶ Regarding fees, Graham stated that 'of course we do not put the question of money in the first place', but added that 'as trustees for the money given by the public we have to be assured that the sum paid by guardians represent the amount which they can reasonably afford'.⁶⁷ Hawkins replied that he could not afford the lump sum but would pay the regular fees and arrange for payments to continue should he leave India or die 'before the boy is emigrated'.⁶⁸ Like Peters, Hawkins made repeated references to the colonial future. The letters of both men attest to the planters' limited financial means, but also to their willingness to make regular contributions. Graham's concern to extract the maximum amount possible from planters while still maintaining the charitable function of the Homes highlights the complex task of funding a private institution that attracted significant state support and public donations.

Hawkins contacted Graham again the following year and arrangements were made for Richard to be met at Dhubri – a town some four hundred miles

from the plantation along the Brahmaputra river – by a representative of the Homes. In an urgent letter on the scheduled date of meeting, Hawkins wrote that the ‘bearer’ was waiting with Richard but no one had arrived to meet them. The child, Hawkins suggested, could wait at Dhubri for a few days but would otherwise have to return to the plantation. He was ‘distressed at this unfortunate affair’, mainly because ‘if [Richard] comes back now I shall never be able to get him away again.’⁶⁹ As it turned out, the situation was resolved and to Hawkins’s ‘great relief’ his son travelled to Kalimpong as planned.⁷⁰ Hawkins’s concern that he might miss the opportunity to get Richard away from the plantation is highly suggestive of the power and the desire of Richard’s mother and perhaps her extended family to prevent him from leaving. The only record of this woman was on the application form. She was listed as Bengali.

Paul Moller, a Danish tea planter in Darjeeling, wrote to Graham in 1912 from ‘The Club’ requesting that his three children be admitted as soon as possible. ‘Their mother has been fighting hard against this,’ he wrote, ‘but it must be done.’⁷¹ According to Moller, after learning of his impending transfer to a different plantation he had ‘persuaded her to send them up.’⁷² Egerton Peters also sent his children to the Homes just prior to a transfer. Theirs was a mobile existence and these shifts clearly disrupted domestic arrangements specific to the plantations in which they were established. A Dr Seal met the family in Darjeeling and recommended to Graham that the youngest boy, four years old, be admitted. ‘About the two elder,’ he wrote, ‘we should think a bit.’⁷³ He was in favour of admitting the girl (Dora, aged thirteen) who he thought was ‘decently brought up’, but felt it was ‘a different thing to a boy of 14’, referring to the eldest boy, Charles.⁷⁴ On this advice Graham advised Moller that only the youngest boy would be taken. Apparently Graham was willing to refuse two fee-paying students rather than risk bringing the negative influence of adolescents who had grown up on the plantation into the Homes. However, Moller repeatedly appealed to Graham and Seal to reconsider, and all three children were soon admitted.

For the Mortimore and Spalding families, the applicant was someone other than the father. Consequently, the descriptions of their circumstances were more candid than those contained in the other family files. W. Mortimore, a Scottish tea planter, had followed what Graham described as ‘local policy’ by paying the mother of his two children a sum of money and refusing to accept further responsibility for them. The first letter to Graham on their behalf was written in 1916 by Annie Jones, the wife of a Welsh missionary in the Cherrapunjee Mission, near Shillong in the Khasi Hills. Jones opened the letter by referring

to other children that the mission had sent to the Homes, apologizing for her impending offer of 'more children in this time of uncertainty'. She pled the mother's situation as desperate:

There are two children here, the mother a Khasi, the father a Planter in the South Sylhet District, a W. Mortimore. The mother came up to her home not far from here when the father went on furlough about five years ago, and came under Christian influence, renounced her bad life and joined the church. She belongs to a proud family and in order to keep up the family prestige the money given by Mortimore did not last very long ...

Her people are anti-Christian, very much so, so that she is handicapped now in every way. She can't go out to earn money [as she would] have nobody with whom to leave her children.⁷⁵

Jones went on to explain that she had 'tried to persuade her to send the children to Kalimpong when there was money, but she would not part with them as they were "so young"'. Having only enough money left to care for the children for 'a few months', their mother, listed on the application form as Ka Ngelibou Marlangiang, 'came of her own accord to beg of me to write to you today'. Known as Nelly, the children's mother wanted both of them to be admitted to the Homes, but was particularly concerned for her son to have a place. She offered to make small payments ('2/- or 3/- a month'), which Jones doubted her ability to pay, 'especially if she will be supporting the girl at home, but she may be able to [send] it – perhaps 4/- or 5/- sometimes if the two children are admitted and she could go to work'. Jones added that she had corresponded with Mortimore through a Reverend J. White, and learnt that he 'washes his hand[s] of the whole concern now and that the mother has signed not to trouble him after he paid the last 500/- in 1915'. Jones made a final plea on behalf of the children, stating that although Nelly was 'nominally a Christian', she was 'not one likely to devote herself to much self-improvement or to improve her children.'⁷⁶

Jones's pleas apparently fell on sympathetic ears, and early in 1917 she wrote to notify Graham of the children's impending arrival, accompanied by Nelly. Such an arrival – children with their *mother* – would have been highly unusual for the Homes. Jones was apparently aware of this, asking Graham to arrange lodgings for Nelly for several nights, and penning the only written record I have seen acknowledging the mother's pain at this traumatic separation:

It will be a good deal of a strain for her for she is a very devoted mother and I often wonder that she has been brave enough to give them up. She is of a very respectable family in spite of her own wanderings in the past, she is not a

common class coolie woman at all. I just mention this that you may judge how [to] arrange things.

She *hopes* to be able to earn enough money to come and fetch her children sometimes for the holidays if she talks about this to you which she may or may not do. You need have no worries about consenting to this. They keep a clean respectable house.⁷⁷

There was an undeniable boldness in Nelly's life choices. Her navigation of the separate but entangled worlds of a planter's bungalow, her 'proud' family home and the Cherrapunjee Mission brings to mind Selkirk Lobo's image of Khasi women 'crashing through taboos', and Bahadur's finding that coolie women used the opportunities colonialism presented to escape difficult social circumstances.⁷⁸ Returning home for the support of her family after her relationship with Mortimore ended, she then defied them (presumably for a second time) by converting to Christianity. By accompanying the children to the Homes at Kalimpong herself, she risked another negative reception. I have heard numerous anecdotes of women being turned away at the gate, no matter how many days they had walked to get there.

Although they were the children of a tea planter, the Mortimore family circumstance was exceptional in that their mother was the applicant. Because of this, we have a unique opportunity to consider the lifeway of one of the mothers, rather than only encountering her story at the point of intersection with the planter. The circumstance that preceded the children's admission was also notable for the evidence in the correspondence that Jones was not able to simply take the children from their mother and send them to Homes. Even in a situation where the children were separated from their British father, Graham did not have the power to 'remove' children to Kalimpong. But as the next chapter will show, he did have the power to ignore Nelly's choice of 'India' rather than 'the colonies' for the children's future placement. Nelly's dismayed reaction to this second separation supports my contention that the departure from India needs to be understood as a distinct moment in the Kalimpong story, rather than a smooth continuation of the journey from tea plantation to settler colony.

A second case in which the applicant was not the father, and hence greater detail was provided about the family circumstances, was the Spalding family. W. C. Spalding, a Scottish tea planter in Sylhet in the south of Assam, died while visiting Calcutta in 1920. A year after his death the executor of his estate, James Dewar, wrote to Graham about Spalding's two sons. Dewar's first letter included completed application forms and a lump sum of 4,000 rupees. 'The boys are bright and well-behaved', he wrote, 'and, under the circumstances, well

brought up.⁷⁹ Although the boys were ten and twelve years old, there was no recorded concern about their age. On their application forms they were listed as Presbyterian, and both had attained 'elementary Bengali' in schooling in Assam.⁸⁰ Their mother's name was recorded as 'Prosoni (Tanti Caste)', a 'garden coolie' who was alive at the time of admission. Dewar continued to correspond with Graham about the boys during their residence at the Homes. Himself a tea planter, Dewar hinted at his own familial problems, admitting in one letter that he had 'been unable to make headway with the mother of my own little girl as far as allowing the latter to go to school is concerned and I am disappointed'.⁸¹ This again speaks to the agency of the women in negotiating with the planters over the fate of their children, and to the commonplace existence of interracial families among tea planters in this region.

For the Gammie family it was the death of the children's mother that prompted their admission to the Homes. Gavin Gammie, interviewed by his daughter in 2000, understood the shift to Kalimpong in simple terms. 'I'd be about four years when Mum died. So, our father couldn't look after us and he sent us up to Kalimpong'.⁸² The first communication with the Homes on behalf of the Gammie children was penned by U. C. Duncan, of the Church of Scotland Mission in Darjeeling, who informed Graham that

Gammie of Nurbong has seven children. The mother I am told is dead and the children are living in a [*word illegible*] with some Lepcha woman to whom Gammie pays Rs 20/a month for their support – this is what I am told and I have no reason to suppose that the facts are otherwise. I was also told that Gammie has thought of sending the children to Kalimpong but that he had found it would cost too much.⁸³

Duncan wanted to ascertain if Graham was aware of the family before proceeding further. He wrote again in June, exclaiming that 'there are seven children!'⁸⁴ The eldest was fourteen and the youngest was a year old. Gammie himself wrote to Graham several months later, asking that the children be admitted and trained for the colonies.⁸⁵ Describing his financial difficulties, Gammie offered a small monthly sum for each child and to make the Homes executor of his will. His estate contained shares in tea that he hoped 'if anything should happen to me it might be enough for their education'.⁸⁶ Like other planters, Gammie gave enough detail of his circumstance to elicit Graham's assistance and no more. This was in contrast to the way that his familial situation was described initially by Duncan, which communicated the scandal and intrigue that these interracial families prompted among the European community in the towns around the plantations.

Although outsiders like Duncan played a key role in promoting and facilitating admission to the Homes, the decision to send the children to Kalimpong in each of these families was ultimately taken by the children's guardian. When both parents were alive, it was the father's wishes that dominated.

Utilizing the correspondence contained in the Homes personal files that negotiated the children's admission, this chapter has significantly increased what we know of interracial tea plantation families in northeast India. The files disrupt any notion that these families can be generalized as social units organized solely around the unequal terms of colonial encounter. The workings of diverse ethnic groups, in communities often established away from home, affected the way that these hidden branches of 'empire families' functioned. It was the mobilization of labour around the British Empire that created the scenario from which they emerged, by directing 'planters' and 'coolies' into an isolated social setting. Imperial labouring was also to be the solution for their children, who were admitted to the Homes on the condition that they would be trained for work in the settler colonies and emigrated upon reaching 'working age'.

Hence, in this primary setting of the Kalimpong narrative, the first connection between New Zealand and India was made. The tea planters had already begun to imagine their children's future lives in settler colonies, far removed from the social worlds and geographic locations of tea plantations in Assam and Darjeeling. Graham's imperial network had a role to play too; as we have seen, missionaries and planters who had prior knowledge of the Homes facilitated the children's relocation away from the plantations. While the women held some sway in the decision to send their children to the Homes, they were very unlikely to have understood that a second shift would occur some ten to fifteen years later. This chapter has addressed the archival silences that have muted the volume of life in the bungalow, of the drama of sending the children away, and of the consequences for those left behind.

It is worth reflecting momentarily on those journeys away from home. Letters from Peters and Hawkins state that the children were taken to Kalimpong by associates, and neither man ever visited the Homes. It is heart-wrenching for descendants of both families to contemplate these little children undertaking lengthy and risky journeys in the company of a stranger. My grandmother was four years old, the age when children lay down their first memories, and think they know everything, and she no doubt felt responsible for her little brother. After travelling for several days on swollen rivers and then by rail

over completely unfamiliar territory Lorna and George were delivered into the arms of more strangers, the likes of which they may never have seen – white women – and whose language they did not understand. Perhaps they thought they would see their mother the next day, or the next. They never saw her again. From their father's perspective they were safely delivered from one British space into another, self-governing entities meant to protect them; yet for Lorna and George the 'wilderness' outside would have felt safer. What was this world they had arrived into?