

## *Otim Singh in White Australia*

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By the sea-front at Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, the Indian, Otim Singh, ran a store and was a valued member of the local community during the first three decades of the twentieth century. During his life, Otim Singh made a number of journeys and crossed a number of seas and many shores. His migration from India to Australia in 1890 bought about a number of sea changes. He prospered in Australia, crossing many boundaries and barriers. Coming to Australia before the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, he was able to remain a resident, after which date his fellow country-men were classified as 'prohibited immigrants'. Living in this white community, he prospered with his successful business in Kingscote and married a woman from a prosperous white family. However, there were some boundaries which he did not breach and his final journey across the sea marked a return to his religious and cultural roots.

It has been estimated that there were up to 7,637 Indians in Australia during the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> This number dwindled as Indians were excluded from entering Australia after 1901 and as those who had been resident for some years and went back to visit India were then unable to reenter. Just as these men were excluded from Australia, they have also been marginalised in written Australian history.<sup>2</sup>

The Indian diaspora to Australia, which developed strongly from c1880, saw some thousands of men coming to Australia to work as cameleers, hawkers, shop-keepers, cameleers, farmers and agricultural labourers. Some stayed only a few years, while others spent many years in Australia, often interrupted by long periods back in India, before returning to Australia to carry on their work.<sup>3</sup> If they could establish that they were resident in Australia, they could return.<sup>3</sup> While some men had wives and children in India, others married in Australia and established families here; a number lived out their lives alone, and by the 1920s were a dwindling number of elderly men, living out their days without the support of family.

There are relatively few historical sources on these men. Certainly for those seeking to leave Australia temporarily after 1901 for a trip back to India, a Domicile Certificate or Certificate Exempting the Dictation Test (CEDT) was produced by the Commonwealth Government Customs and Excise Service,

which was charged to administer elements of the Immigration Restriction Act.<sup>4</sup> Such a certificate made it possible for that person to re-enter Australia without having to take the dictation test that was administered to exclude Indians and other prohibited immigrants. These certificates typically included brief personal descriptions of the applicant, together with two photographs and hand or thumb-prints. Surviving applications include further details of the applicant's activities in Australia along with references attesting to good character. Such documents provide some basic information about a number of British Indians who lived in Australia in the period in question.

In the case of Otim Singh, sufficient resources make it possible to explore his biography in a more extensive manner and to gain some understanding of his life. Some of these documents were created by him and provide richer information than the brief remarks on an official form, and give us a greater insight into the ways in which he negotiated living as the representative of what was seen as an inferior race in a determinedly white Australian community.

He was born a Sikh in the Punjab in 1862. According to a personal entry which he prepared for the *Cyclopedia of South Australia* in c. 1909, he left home at the age of nineteen before going to Sumatra, where he worked as a 'supervisor in a large tobacco-plantation on behalf of an English firm for about five years' and where he had '200 coolies under his control ... whilst in Sumatra [he] served four years in the British Mounted Police.'<sup>5</sup> In other versions of his story, it is claimed that 'crossing to Java, [he] took service for several years under the Dutch, in the police force'.<sup>6</sup> He was able to benefit from the opportunities that the British Empire offered. As Tony Ballantyne has noted, the Sikhs were seen as 'reliable, "fairly incorruptible", [and] hard-working', and believed to be suited to police work and supervisory roles.<sup>7</sup>

The migratory worker often set out on his travels to recoup the family honour, its *izzat* and its fortunes at home. When such a worker had amassed sufficient funds, he might return to India to purchase land. Thus Otim Singh returned home and purchased some land, but only stayed for nine months.<sup>8</sup> It seems that the family farm was still not large enough 'to provide for all members of the family at an adequate standard of living'<sup>9</sup> and he left home again, to visit his brother who was working in Java. His brother may well have been one of the Sikhs brought over by the British firms Ocean Liner or General Motors to act as watch-men at Tanjung Priok, the port near Batavia.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that he heard from other Sikhs in the Punjab or in South East Asia, that Australia or "'Telia" was open'.<sup>11</sup> After a couple of months Otim Singh went on to Australia, arriving in Melbourne in 1890. W.H. McLeod has noted that the Punjabi Sikhs often left India for the first time when posted as soldiers or police to Hong Kong

or Malaya, then later moved into civilian employment there and subsequently ventured further in the 1880s when they heard, via their Sikh information networks, of opportunities in 'Telia' (Australia) and 'Miktan' (America).<sup>12</sup> Otim Singh's experience was slightly different; he worked either for an English firm in Sumatra from c. 1882 or in the Dutch police force in the Netherlands East Indies, before finally moving on to Australia.

Otim Singh records receiving his English education in Melbourne; he must have been quite familiar with English, for in three months he had 'a sufficient mastery of the language ... to enable him to continue his travels inland'.<sup>13</sup> He went to Ballarat and Colac and learned from one of his compatriots how to be a hawker. He pursued this occupation in southern centres, both in Western Victoria and into South Australia, for the township of Wolseley in South Australia became his headquarters. Presumably he ordered goods from Melbourne and Adelaide, collected them from the railway station at Wolseley and then distributed them to customers across the South-East of South Australia and the Western Districts. Perhaps the hostility to what was termed the 'Indian hawker nuisance' in Victoria, or perhaps the opportunity to find greener pastures, led to his proceeding to Adelaide in 1897 and shortly thereafter going to Kangaroo Island. He later recalled that, 'in those days no commercial travellers visited the island', so he had a 'free field before him'.<sup>14</sup> He did well and set up a store in Kingscote in c. 1902 that he ran until his death in 1927. He made only one return trip to India, in 1927, just before his death.

Otim Singh made numerous sea voyages during his life-time. On his first trip to Sumatra, he was probably going to a job for which he had been contracted in Delhi. Nevertheless it appears that he was among the earliest wave of Sikhs to venture outside of India in pursuit of work.<sup>15</sup> As he crossed the seas from India to Sumatra, to Java and then on to Melbourne he probably travelled on the deck or in third class. Such Indians usually travelled cheaply, usually in third class.<sup>16</sup> As he became more prosperous on his regular short business trips between Kingscote and Adelaide and on his final return trip to India, presumably he would have moved to travelling in better style.

As he made these voyages he was helped by others, chiefly by a network of Sikhs who shared their knowledge about potential greener pastures. Information from other Sikhs probably led to his going to Sumatra, and when he visited his brother at Batavia in Java he would have found information about Australia. In Victoria, one of his countrymen instructed him 'in the trade of a hawker'. In Adelaide, a friend advised him to 'settle on Kangaroo Island, where it was averred he would find excellent scope for his business'.<sup>17</sup> This network helped him to launch himself across the unknown.

While in his earlier voyages Otim Singh was relatively free from surveillance from governmental authorities, to make his trip back to India in 1927, he had to apply to the Australian Customs service for a CEDT. Given that he was a respected businessman by that time, possibly he was spared the indignity of having to give his hand-prints.<sup>18</sup> CEDT holders had their presence on a ship noted by the customs boarding officer, as it reached and departed from each Australian port, as if the officer were recording the passage of dangerous cargo. Indeed, in June 1927 the Collector of Customs in Western Australia advised his counterpart in Adelaide that Otim Singh, the holder of SA CEDT 325/57, had been on the *Moldavia* when it left Fremantle for Colombo.<sup>19</sup>

During the years he spent working in Australia, Otim Singh moved up the hierarchy of hawkers, from one who carried his goods on his back to having a horse and a cart to travel between farms, stations and townships in the bush. Later, on Kangaroo Island, he crossed over from the marginal position of itinerant hawker, one largely occupied by Indians and Syrians, to become a business owner with a house, an individual with real property, and with a real stake in the community.

The lowest level of hawker went around on foot with his pack on his back, and presumably Otim Singh began hawking on foot. Certainly when he first travelled around Kangaroo Island he went by foot; he later records that 'he trudged along with his bundles on his back'.<sup>20</sup> Here he would have had to 'study the needs and wishes of the little farmers ... and visit the little farming hamlets in the countryside, with the things they would need, things like pins and needles and buttons and sewing cotton'.<sup>21</sup> Presumably he graduated to a horse and cart, but like their colleagues the pedestrian hawkers, those who went about in their carts in itinerant fashion were also positioned outside of the norm of Australian society. Jewan Singh, another South Australian hawker, on one occasion gave his address as c/- Post Office, at Tanunda. But the local police reported: 'Jewan Singh is not a resident of Tanunda, but occasionally camps on the reserve and collects his mail at the local PO'.<sup>22</sup> When he was in Adelaide he camped where he stabled his horse and cart. The proprietors of the Central Horse and Carriage Bazaar in Bentham Street Adelaide noted, 'Jewan Singh for several years stabled his Hawker Van turnout in our stable and latterly camped here when he came to town to buy new stock'. They attested to his good character: 'we always found him strictly honest in all his dealings and a very decent steady man on whose word you could place every reliance'.<sup>23</sup> But his manner of life and his 'race' put him outside mainstream society.

During the 1890s there was a certain amount of concern in both Victoria and South Australia about itinerant hawkers.<sup>24</sup> Racial prejudice was crucial to

this social anxiety. Indian hawkers, although they were British subjects, were marginal in emerging white Australia, because of their 'race'. While the controversy in Victoria seemed to focus upon Indians, in 1893 in South Australia the authorities refused to renew hawking licences of Afghans, Assyrians and Chinese.<sup>25</sup> Popular understandings tended to include all those seen as not-white into an inferior category. As a *Register* columnist candidly admitted:

With true British arrogance we virtually regard all such, whether Chinese, Afghans, Syrians, Hindus, or Persians, as the scum and offscouring of the earth. They have committed the unpardonable sin of being coloured, and although they were not consulted in the choice of their complexion they must perforce be Ishmaelites.<sup>26</sup>

Concerns about Indian hawkers surfaced from time to time, and there seemed to be an on-going discussion of their worth. In 1905 a 'Country Schoolmistress' wrote to the *Register*, in defence of Indian hawkers, suggesting there should be some reciprocity within the British Empire:

I ... have always found them civil, honest, and obliging. I for one would be genuinely sorry if their licences were stopped ... [Considering many of our countrymen have made their fortunes in India, and that Calcutta owes its name, 'City of Palaces,' to the splendour of the British merchants' residences, is it fair to deny our Indian subjects the right to earn a decent living in our colonies?]<sup>27</sup>

Individuals became known and liked in the white community. A Punjabi Muslim who worked as a hawker in Victoria from c. 1899, commented that he got to know the farmers he served 'very intimately'. He reported having friendly relations with his customers would 'ask [him] to put up [his] horses in the stable and come and have tea with them'.<sup>28</sup> However, another hawker noted the dominance of white people: 'We are nobody, we are of no consideration in this country: the white man is everything'.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Indians in Adelaide reported in 1922 'that there was a general attitude of contempt on the part of people, as though it were shameful and humiliating to be an Indian ... the ordinary people have a very poor conception of Indians'.<sup>30</sup>

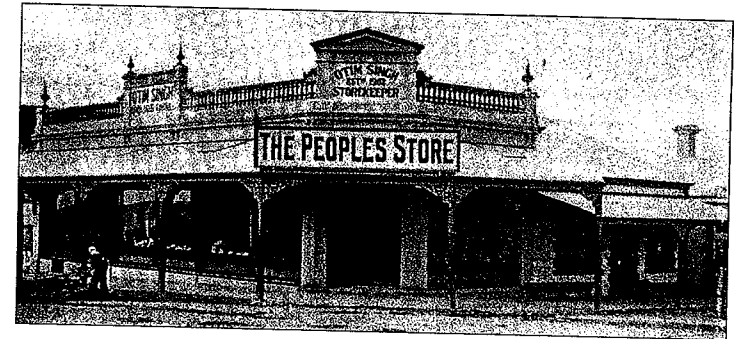
Otim Singh moved beyond being a hawker to establishing a store and buying a house. While the histories of Indians living in Australia have scarcely been researched, it seems that some at least were able to establish successful businesses. The transnational Sindhi company, Wassiamull Assomull and Company, had offices and representatives in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and briefly in Adelaide, while Marm Deen was in partnership with the Syrian man Jaboor in Melbourne for a number of years until c 1913.<sup>31</sup> In Adelaide in 1930, 'Professor' Ali Haider, Qualified Optician and Herbalist, had an office in Union Chambers



Mr Otim Singh

in Wakefield Street. He owned real estate in Queenstown valued at £1,000.<sup>32</sup> The self-made man who rose in the ranks of society, securing for himself and his family a good living, was a key element of the narrative of settler society. In the second volume of H.T. Burgess, *Cyclopedia of South Australia* published in 1909, there are scores of such accounts: of men and families who made good in the colony, each penned by the subjects of a short biographical statement and then converted to the third person by the editors. Many included photographs not only of the men but also of their farmhouses and business premises. Otim Singh's entry appears to be the only one about a non-white subject. It includes a photograph of him as well as one of his shop in Kingscote. This entry is highly anomalous in a collection of white settler men. No Indigenous people are similarly represented as individuals making their way in the society.

In the *Cyclopedia* we read the story of Otim Singh's business life framed within a narrative of success. We discover that while trudging about with his pack on his back, he liked the island and decided



Mr O. Singh's premises, Kingscote

to give the place a fair trial with the ultimate result that success so crowned his efforts that he was able to establish himself in a store. His first premises, which were built of tin, were in time replaced by a stone building 20 feet long, which afterwards was enlarged, and finally, in 1907, the present fine premises were erected. The People's Stores, which has a frontage of 60 by 48 feet, is one of the best shops in Kingscote, and Mr Singh's connection extends throughout the length and breadth of the island.<sup>33</sup>

Otim Singh's pride in his achievement is almost palpable. The photograph of the substantial corner shop with attached residence, with his name and the store's name in large letters, underlines this.

He seems to have been a very enterprising business man catering to the Kangaroo Island community of farmers, fishermen and townspeople. The relatively isolated nature of the island, with small communities scattered across it, meant that the residents could be quite dependent upon local stores for a wide variety of goods. Many of the people would not have been able to afford to go to Adelaide by boat to buy clothing and many other requisites. In addition, Kingscote was a very popular holiday destination for many from Adelaide, on the mainland, who would come and stay in the local hotels and boarding houses for a week or two in the spring and summer.

From 1908 Otim Singh ran a large advertisement for his store on the front page of the *Kangaroo Island Courier*, noting that he sold a wide range of groceries, goods and gifts such as watches and clocks. He also sold drapery items, footwear, clothing and offered tailoring services, and for the tourist trade he offered post cards with a 'Fine Assortment of KI views' and 'Best Quality Chinaware with views of Kingscote'.<sup>34</sup> He was agent for a number of companies and seemed to have always been open to new business opportunities. In 1907 he was 'Agent

for Aachen and Munich Fire Insurance Company' and in 1908 for 'Edison Phonographs and Records' and 'Universal Cycle and Motorworks'. In 1909 he had opened a branch store at the small community of MacGillivray at the farm of Reed and Coy, although it is not clear how long this lasted. In 1917 he could advertise that he had a 'Six Cylinder Buick Motor Car On Hire' and would arrange trips to suit visitors.<sup>35</sup> In 1924 he was an agent for Harrington's Photographic Supplies and in the following year he became an agent for Buick and Chevrolet Cars and Trucks. In that year he owned two Buicks, a four cylinder and a larger six cylinder one, 'with all the latest improvements' advertising 'trips arranged to any part of KI'.<sup>36</sup> By 1926 he was also the sole agent for Golden Fleece Benzine'.<sup>37</sup>

He was now a prosperous man. In 1927 he was described as owning freehold property at Kingscote, consisting of a large shop and dwelling valued at £4000, and also two houses valued at £800. He carries stock in his General Store valued at about £1800. His turnover averages between £5000 and £6000 per annum and he estimates his income as varying between £200 and £500 per annum.<sup>38</sup>

At his death, his estate was valued at £10,240.<sup>39</sup> Otim Singh was very much the self-made prosperous man. Such material success on the part of an Indian could well have aroused resentment and jealousy among some in the white community, but there is no evidence of that occurring.

As he made this transition from itinerant hawker to becoming a man of substance within the community his appearance changed. In a photograph taken in Mount Gambier in 1895 he is shown as Otter Singh.<sup>40</sup> Photographed with two other Indian hawkers, Gunga Singh and another un-named man, he wears a turban and sports facial hair, a full beard and moustache. He wears a suit with a watch chain across his mid-riff. He and the other hawkers wear white dust-coats over their suits, which may have been a sign of their occupation.

By the time he is photographed for the *Cyclopedia of South Australia* in 1909 he has cut his hair short and discarded his turban; now he is clean-shaven apart from a moustache, and wears a three-piece suit with a watch chain on his vest. He had modified his appearance to leave behind the features which marked him as a Sikh man. There is a suggestion in the Burgess entry that he had cut his connections to other Indians in South Australia: 'Since coming to this state he has no dealings with his countrymen, preferring to make his purchases direct from the business houses in Adelaide.'<sup>41</sup> While it is said that he separated himself from business dealings with other Indian hawkers, it is possible to read this to mean that he cut himself off more generally. Certainly he maintained contact with his family



Indian hawkers at Mount Gambier 1895: (left to right) Gunga Singh; Otter Singh; unidentified. Credit State Library of South Australia

in the Punjab. He would have done this by post and most probably was sending them money via money orders or by other means.

A number of the Indian men living in Australia at the time married white women; others married Indigenous women, while some remained single. Yet others had wives and children in India, whom they visited from time to time. When he visited Australia in 1922, V.S. Sastri, the Indian envoy, was somewhat surprised to find that '[a] good many Indians have married Australian wives from whom they have children and live in harmony and friendship with their neighbours.'<sup>42</sup> Australia never had generic laws about miscegenation such as those introduced in the United States.

In 1906 Otim Singh married Susannah Buick, a white woman, the daughter of David Buick, a long-established farmer of Hog Bay, Kangaroo Island. She was aged thirty-four, although she gave her age as twenty-nine years on the marriage certificate. Otim was forty-four, although his age was recorded as thirty. Otim married into a prosperous and significant family on the island. By 1909, Susanna's brother, Alexander, had added 2,000 acres to his late father's holding. However, we cannot assume that such a marriage was totally un-problematic.

Rebe Taylor has recently explored the fate of the descendants of the Indigenous Tasmanian women who lived in the Dudley area of Kangaroo Island. She

notes that marriage patterns among the larger landowners excluded marriages with Indigenous-descended families, even though these families also had significant land-holdings in the district. When interviewing people on the island in the 1990s she met comments such as 'I would always say, stay white, keep away from the colour' and 'no white person, parents wouldn't have wanted their daughters to marry them'.<sup>43</sup> Taylor notes that the racial prejudice was greatest against those with Aboriginal forebears, but she also quotes a woman descended from 'a French national from Mauritius' that '[t]here was a very strong racist attitude' and '[h]aving black grandchildren ... that's at the back of the minds of these Kangaroos Islanders'.<sup>44</sup>

It seems likely that the marriage between Otim Singh and Susanna Buick was seen as controversial. Susannah was thirty-four when she married and the marriage may have been seen as more acceptable to some as she might have been seen as being past the first flush of youth and perhaps her child-bearing years. It is not clear how long Otim and Susannah knew each other, but it is possible that they could have met when he first went to the island in 1897, when she was only twenty-five years old. One can speculate that their marriage was delayed for a number of years, due to her family's opposition. For a woman to marry at such an age was certainly well above the average age of marriage at the time, but, in fact, it was not beyond the age of child-bearing. It is significant that Otim and Susannah did not have any children. Taylor notes that at least one couple, Mary Seymour, of Indigenous descent, and her husband, Frank Abell, decided not to have children as '[s]he didn't want to have children who had stigma attached to them'.<sup>45</sup> The Kangaroo Island community was a small one and as Taylor notes: 'Almost everyone knew everyone on Kangaroo Island'.<sup>46</sup> Thus it is also equally possible that Otim and Susannah made a similar decision. Perhaps being childless was the cost they had to pay for their marriage.

Certainly after 1901 Indians were not thought of as possible settlers; that is, as people who had a future in this land for their children and grandchildren. Rather, they were anomalies, relics left over from an earlier era, from before the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act. Under later changes introduced in 1919, Indians resident in Australia were able to bring in their wives and minor children to live in Australia if they could show that they could support and house them properly. However only a few people availed themselves of this opportunity, which allowed some communities, such as Woolgoolga, New South Wales, to have a significant number of Sikh families.<sup>47</sup> But, generally, Indians were not seen as settlers and when they did settle in Australia, they were often viewed with suspicion. In 1911, the NSW Minister of Lands, Niel Nielsen noted the following about Indians gaining land in northern New South Wales:

The Hindoo applicants are undesirable settlers in many ways and in any community of white settlers are regarded with much disfavour amounting almost to complete aversion. The majority of the Hindoos in this state have started as small hawkers or peddlars and saved a fair amount of money; they are naturally acquisitive.<sup>48</sup>

Nielsen alleged that these Indian men posed a sexual threat to white women and their children:

On the northern rivers, where many of these undesirables have obtained farms the white settlers cannot leave their wives and families on the adjacent properties without protection, nor will the women-folk stay on the farms if their men folk are away.<sup>49</sup>

In the white society, there could be a certain level of anxiety about the sexual propensities of these 'coloured' men. Otim Singh would have had to work against such prejudices. Perhaps his marriage into a respected and white land-owning family would have shored up his position.

Otim Singh's manliness could always be suspect. This becomes evident in the correspondence relating to a request he made to the customs officials in 1926. He applied for permission for his nephew Sunda Singh to come to Australia to work in his business while he had a trip back to India. Otim Singh already employed an assistant but was concerned that an employee might leave his position during his absence and thus cause difficulties for his wife. A family member would be more reliable. In all he asked that his nephew be able to stay for three years.

As was normal with regard to such applications, the Investigation Branch was asked to assess Otim Singh's worth and his standing in the community and also whether 'his white wife would be able to manage the business during her husband's absence.' The officers were required to make inquiries 'of principal business houses in Adelaide and at Kingscote'.<sup>50</sup> The local police at Kingscote made inquiries and the report reads: 'Otim Singh had an old established business as a General Storekeeper at Kingscote, Kangaroo Island and is well spoken of by residents of good standing there.' Further, they questioned Otim Singh and their report reads:

Mrs Otim Singh who is a white woman will he states hold his power of attorney during the time he intends to be away, and although she is capable of looking after the business, doing the necessary buying etc Mr Otim Singh desires that his nephew Sunda Singh should be permitted to enter Australia.<sup>51</sup>

They also checked whether Susannah Singh would be supported in Otim's absence. The implication here was that an Indian man might just leave and

abandon his wife, that he may not know how to behave in an appropriately masculine manner. When Indians applied to bring their wives and minor children in, as allowed under the 1919 regulations, inquiries were made about their incomes and their residences. Some were refused permission to admit their family as their residence was not seen as suitable. The suggestion was that an Indian man might not know how to look after his wife and family in a manner appropriate to a 'civilised' community. Something of Susannah Singh's feelings about such inquiries can be heard in the officers' report of her reply: 'Mrs Singh intimated that if her husband left Australia he would do so with her full knowledge and consent and that she had no reason to doubt that she would be fully provided for.'<sup>52</sup>

It is not clear whether Sunda Singh came to Australia, but within six months of this request, Otim Singh went to India in May 1927. He travelled on the *Moldavia* and he may have arranged to travel with some other Punjabis for Gainda Ram, Mahdo Ram and Keshan Singh were also on the same ship.<sup>53</sup>

It seems that Otim Singh, now aged sixty-five, was not well and he made the trip to India in the hope of recovering his health. Presumably he also wanted to visit his family and his homeland. However, his illness recurred and he returned to Adelaide where he was for 'several weeks' in a private hospital under the care of Dr De Crespigny and Dr Pülleine.<sup>54</sup> In December 1927, he returned to his home in Kingscote, where despite his doctors' efforts, he died shortly afterwards.

The day after his death, a long obituary appeared in a prominent position in the local newspaper, which began: 'The residents of Kangaroo Island will hear with regret the death of Mr. Otim Singh'.<sup>55</sup> He had been in an unusual position, an individual and prosperous Indian man in a white community. While it cannot be claimed that every white Australian absolutely and energetically supported the 'White Australia policy' without allowing for any individual exceptions, he clearly occupied a liminal position. Some strategies that he employed to strengthen his position can be discerned in this obituary. His public-spiritedness was emphasised, and we read that he 'interested himself in local affairs, always being willing to assist in any movement for the good of the town and district'.<sup>56</sup> The *Kangaroo Island Courier* for 1916-17 reveals that he was often a generous donor to fund-raising activities. Late in 1915 he contributed prizes to the Kingscote school prize-giving. During the years 1915-17 he made contributions for the Wounded Soldiers Club and the South Australian Soldiers Fund. On New Year's Day 1916, he presented an 'ambulance car', presumably a toy for an Art Union raffle which raised £1.16.0. When some South African Soldiers had a rifle shooting match against the Kingscote Club, Otim Singh presented £1.1.0 to the

highest scorer in the match.<sup>57</sup> At the Australia Day celebrations at Kingscote in August 1917, he was one of the 'staid and dignified townsmen' who dressed up in the Ugly Man Competition to raise money for soldiers.<sup>58</sup> A member of the local Vigilance Committee, which seems to have been a group of businessmen seeking to advance the interests of Kingscote, he spoke at valedictory dinners for departing bank managers and other prominent citizens.<sup>59</sup>

Otim Singh's fine store, which was enlarged once more in 1916, was seen as a community asset. A report of some festivities held there, quoted here at length, gives some idea of this as well as the local regard for Otim and Susannah:

#### A Pleasant Evening

A very enjoyable evening was spent by a number of the townspeople on Thursday evening at the 'warming' of the additions to the People Stores. The ample floor space of the new room made it ideal for dancing and the large numbers of young folk of Kingscote, who are always so ready to 'step the light fantastic', spent a merry time until the 'wee sma' hours' of Friday, to music supplied by Mr. L. Wright on the good old accordeon. At a suitable hour a dainty supper supplied by Mrs Otim was served and was done justice to by all present. The additions are a great improvement to Kingscote and reflect credit both on Otim Singh and the contractors.<sup>60</sup>

In all the accounts of Otim Singh, there is a continual emphasis upon his family's loyalty to Britain and Empire. In his entry to the *Cyclopedia of South Australia* we read: 'In earlier life he had a great ambition to join the British Army in India, and whilst in Sumatra [he] served four years in the British Mounted Police'. His obituary reads: 'His father and uncles were soldiers and fought with the British forces during the Indian Mutiny of 1857/8'.<sup>61</sup> From the late nineteenth century, Sikhs had been constructed as particularly martial and also very loyal, and it seems that he was able to present himself in this light for his obituarist noted, he 'belonged to that fine type of Hindoo known as Sikhs'.<sup>62</sup>

Some weeks after his death, his widow published an extensive and effusive return thanks, which can be read as a statement of his worth. With her detailing of others' care and kind wishes, she seems to be reminding the readers that he was a loved man of some standing:

Mrs Otim, widow of Otim Singh, wishes sincerely to thank all relatives and friends for all telegrams, letters and personal expressions of sympathy extended to her during her recent sad bereavement. Thanks is extended to the officers and members of the Kingscote Lodge of the RAOB, to Mrs Lermite and all friends who rendered personal help during her husband's last illness. Especially desiring to thank Drs Des

[sic] Crespigny and Pulleine and nurses for their care and attention to her husband during his illness in Adelaide, and also to Dr Lermite for his unceasing attention and medical skill during her husband's last illness.<sup>63</sup>

Otim Singh had crossed many boundaries and many shores in his life-time. He had travelled far from his birth-place and had lived in Australia for almost forty years. But in death, there were further crossings which linked him back to his home. There was no funeral at Kingscote, rather his body was shipped back to Adelaide for cremation. In a codicil to his will added in 1923, he specified that he wanted his ashes delivered to the Secretary of the Import-Export business, G. and R. Wills, Adelaide, presumably for their ultimate return to India.<sup>64</sup> He left his widow all of his estate, for her use during her life time. However, upon her death it was to revert to his three nephews, Sundar, Eishar and Kham Singh, of Bhgalawalla Village, Ferospur District, P.O. Druli, in the Punjab. Mrs Otim ran the business for some years after his death. It seems that finally his estate was returned to his family in the Punjab, where they could contribute to one of the quests which sent Otim on his many journeys, namely, the strengthening of the family's *izzat*.

## Notes

- 1 A. Palfreeman, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy* Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1967, p.146.
- 2 But see Marie de Lepervanche, *Indians in White Australia* Sydney (Allen and Unwin, 1984), Rashnere Bhatti and Verne A. Dusenbery (eds), *A Punjabi Sikh Community in Australia: from Indian sojourners to Australian citizens* (Woolgoolga N.S.W.: Woolgoolga Neighbourhood Centre Inc, 2001); Margaret Allen, "Innocents Abroad" and "Prohibited Immigrants": Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910' in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (eds) *Connected Worlds* (Canberra, ANU E-Press, 2005) 111-24.
- 3 For a brief discussion of this see Margaret Allen, 'Innocents Abroad' 120-2.
- 4 The State Collectors of Customs reported to the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs and after 1916 to the Department of Home and Territories.
- 5 H.T. Burgess, *Cyclopedia of South Australia* (Adelaide: Cyclopedia Company, 1909 volume 2) 1019-1020.
- 6 See his obituary in *Kangaroo Island Courier* 10 December 1927: 2. Also see *Register* 18 May 1927: 10 and *Register* 14 December 1927: 13.
- 7 Tony Ballantyne, 'Entangled pasts: colonialism, mobility and the systematisation of Sikhism' un-published conference paper presented at CISH, University of NSW July 2005, 7.
- 8 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1019.
- 9 Tom. G. Kessinger, *Vilyatpur 1848-1968 Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974). p. 138.
- 10 A. Mani, 'Indians in Jakarta' in K. S. Sandhu and A. Mani (eds), *Indian Communities in South East Asia* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1993) 103.
- 11 Quoted in Ballantyne, 'Entangled pasts' 8.
- 12 W.H. McLeod, 'The First Forty Years of Sikh Migration', in W.H. McLeod, *Exploring Sikhism Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture and Thought* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000) 250.
- 13 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1019.
- 14 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1019.
- 15 W.H. McLeod, 'The First Forty Years of Sikh Migration', in W.H. McLeod, *Exploring Sikhism Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture and Thought* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000) passim.
- 16 In the files of the National Archives there are a number of such third class tickets sent from India by Indians seeking to show that they had been in Australia.
- 17 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1019.
- 18 In 1912, Rochimull Pamamull, a Melbourne businessman was thus excused from having to give his handprints. National Archives of Australia (NAA) Collector of Customs, Melbourne, General Correspondence B13 1912/5677 Roehumull Pamamull Certificate of exemption from Dictation Test.
- 19 NAA Australian Customs Service, South Australia Correspondence Files SB D1976 Immigration Act Gainda Ram application for CEDT and passport. Otim Singh's CEDT has not currently been located.
- 20 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1020.
- 21 Quoted in S K. Datta, 'India and Racial relationships', *Young Men of India* v. 35 (8) August 1924, 500.
- 22 NAA Australian Customs Service, South Australia Correspondence Files D596 1921/3865.
- 23 NAA D596 1921/3865.
- 24 See Athol Brewster, 'The Indian Hawker Nuisance in the Colony of Victoria 1890-1900', Honours history thesis, University of Melbourne 1978. My thanks to Dr Andrew Brown-May, University of Melbourne and Athol Brewster for access to this thesis.
- 25 See reports in *Register* 22 April, 1 May, 5 July and 7 July 1893.
- 26 *Register* 5 July 1893, 4.
- 27 Letter to *Register* 1 Dec 1905. See another supportive letter from Dumosa in *Register* 7 December 1905. Brackets in original.
- 28 Quoted in S.K. Datta, 'India and Racial relationships' 500.
- 29 Quoted in S.K. Datta, 'India and Racial relationships' 500.
- 30 *Argus* 12 June 1922.
- 31 See Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000) Passim; NAA B13 1909/9567 Fatah Singh.
- 32 NAA Investigation Branch, Investigation Case Files S. A. D1915/2634 Admission of Hadi Haissan.



- 33 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1020.  
 34 See advertisements in *Kangaroo Island Courier* on 2 November 1907, 13 January 1926 and also on 6 June 1925.  
 35 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 22 December 1917: 5.  
 36 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 28 February 1925.  
 37 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 13 January 1926.  
 38 NAA D191/1589 Singh Otim  
 39 Last will of Otim Singh Probate Registry Office, Supreme Court Adelaide Number 48675/1927.  
 40 Indian hawkers at Mt Gambier Photograph B16740 State Library of South Australia.  
 41 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1020.  
 42 *Report by the Honourable V.S. Srinvasa Sastri P.C. Regarding his Deputation to the Dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Canada* (Simla: Government Central Press, 1923) 3.  
 43 Rebe Taylor, *Unearthed: The Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* (Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 2002) 225.  
 44 Taylor, *Unearthed* 226.  
 45 Taylor, *Unearthed* 236.  
 46 Taylor, *Unearthed* 233.  
 47 See Bhatti and Dusenbery (eds), *A Punjabi Sikh Community*  
 48 Public Record Office (London) Colonial Office (CO) 886/4/21 Further correspondence relating to treatment of Asiatics in the Dominions. Enclosure in no 37 NSW Minister of Lands, Niel Nielsen wrote this minute in 1911.  
 49 Public Record Office (London) CO 886/4/21 Enclosure in no 37.  
 50 NAA D1915/1589. Singh Otim.  
 51 NAA D1915/1589. Singh Otim.  
 52 NAA D1915/1589 Singh Otim.  
 53 See NAA D1976 Immigration Act Gaiinda Ram application. See also *Register* 18 May 1927, 10.  
 54 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 10 December 1927.  
 55 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 10 December 1927.  
 56 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 10 December 1927.  
 57 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 29 April 1916, 5.  
 58 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 1 September 1917, 3.  
 59 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 9 May 1916, 4 and also see *Kangaroo Island Courier* 13 June 1908, 7.  
 60 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 4 October 1916, 2.  
 61 Burgess, *Cyclopedia* 1020 and *Kangaroo Island Courier* 10 December 1927.  
 62 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).  
 63 *Kangaroo Island Courier* 17 January 1928.  
 64 Last will of Otim Singh

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