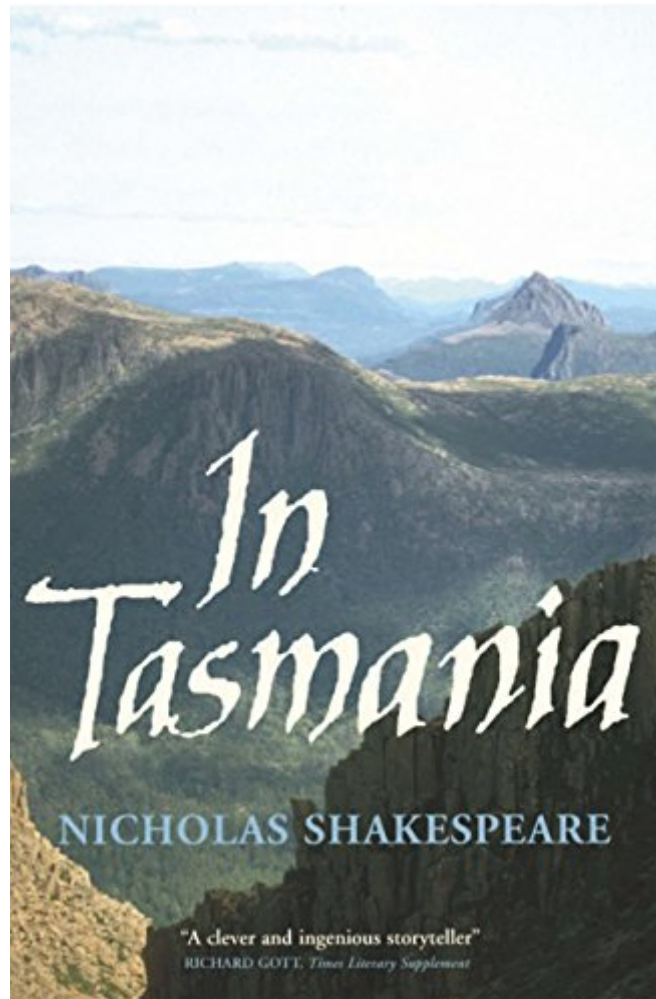




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In Tasmania



Synopsis

An insightful and exquisitely observant work exploring one of the world's most distant, mythic and misunderstood lands. The settlement of Tasmania by Europeans began two hundred years ago. Nicholas Shakespeare first went there, having heard of the island's exceptional beauty, because it was famously remote. He soon decided that this was where he wanted to live. Only later did he discover a cache of letters written by an ancestor as corrupt as he was colorful: Anthony Fenn Kemp, the so-called Father of Tasmania. On his mother's side, too, Shakespeare found he had unknown Tasmanian relations; a pair of spinsters who had never left their farm except once, in 1947, to buy shoes. Their journal recounted a saga beginning in Northern England in the 1890s with a dashing but profligate ancestor who, having played tennis with the Kaiser, ended his life in disgrace in the Tasmanian bush. In this fascinating history of two turbulent centuries in an apparently idyllic place, Shakespeare effortlessly weaves the history of the island with his multiple stories, a cast of unlikely characters from Errol Flynn to the King of Iceland, a village full of Chatwins, and, inevitably, a family of Shakespeares.

Book Information

File Size: 3390 KB

Print Length: 366 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 1585677205

Publisher: The Overlook Press; 1 edition (June 22, 2005)

Publication Date: June 22, 2005

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B013JQMGSA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #448,436 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #126

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Travel > Australia & South Pacific #258 in Books > History > Australia & Oceania > Australia & New Zealand #305 in Books > Travel > Australia &

Customer Reviews

The book is off beat and beguiling. It begins with a rather fun visit by one member of the Shakespeare family to another and leads on to all sorts of observations of what this English writer encountered by going to live in Tasmania. I read it while I was travelling around Tasmania and its aptness to what I was seeing fascinated me. Nicholas Shakespeare lives on the Freycinet Peninsula. I looked out across it one morning and agreed with what his English father said when he visited: This. is. the. most. beautiful. place. in. the. world. "I loved Tasmania. The book gives an unfolding look at one person's growing awareness and knowledge of this lovely place. I was pleased by what I read.

Tasmania is an island that is rich in physical beauty- and Nicholas Shakespeare's *In Tasmania* has uncovered many diverse people and stories throughout Tasmania's history. Each page is full of enjoyable and illuminating surprises.

This book is primarily historically oriented on the development of Tasmania. It does provide valuable insight on many different aspects of the land.

"*In Tasmania*" by Nicholas Shakespeare is an enjoyable blend of remembrances, anecdotes, and history. The stories are split into four sections, each one tackling a different aspect of the history of Tasmania, and each with wonderful supporting personal stories which take us along on the journey of Nicholas Shakespeare discovering the history of his family as well as the history of Tasmania and the significant overlap between the two. The book could easily fit into the category of History or Memoir, and the writing in places is almost like that of a novel. The first section is titled "Father of Tasmania" and focuses largely on Anthony Fenn Kemp, an unusual character who travelled to France during the revolution and then went to South Carolina and met George Washington before making his way to New South Wales. There he got involved in most everything, and not in a good way. Shakespeare alternates between detailing the colorful adventures of Anthony Kemp and his own discovery that he was related to this important, but not particularly well-remembered or well-liked figure. It would be impossible to cover Kemp's life in a review, and not surprisingly this is the largest section of the book. The second section is called "Black Lines", and it deals with the aboriginal population and the interactions between the Europeans and the natives. This is a very

poignant section, detailing the history right down to the death of the last full-blooded male (William Lanne) and female (Lalla Rookh, a.k.a. Truganina) Tasmanian aboriginals. Shakespeare discusses the scenes of both of their passings so well, that it cannot fail to touch the reader's heart. The horrors of the fight over Lanne's body, and the sorry of Truganini's last years after Lanne had passed leave an impact that one will remember long after completing the book. The third section is called "Elysium", and in this section the author looks at how Tasmania went from being perceived as "hell on Earth" to a much more positive reputation. There is no single thread in this section, but his family history focuses on a favorite uncle of his father's whom Nicholas Shakespeare learns came to Tasmania and the relatives that he meets while learning about him. This is a more personal section than the previous ones, and more general in its approach to covering the history of Tasmania. Though called "Elysium", there is still a bit of "hell" included, especially in the detailed section on an 80-year old murder which took place near where his relatives lived. The last section is titled "Oyster Bay", and this section itself is divided into four short chapters, each detailing one particular aspect of Tasmania. The first is "Daughter of Tasmania" and is about the actress Merle Oberon who claimed to be from Tasmania, but her history is not quite so clear. The second chapter is titled "Tigers and Devils" and discusses the history of the unique animals of Tasmania, and in particular the mysterious Tasmanian Tiger who some say still survives. The third chapter discusses Oyster Bay and the unusual events which have occurred at that location. The last chapter which closes the section and the book is titled "Doubles" in which Shakespeare discovers that the subject of his previous book also has numerous relatives in Tasmania. He goes on to bring together the two sets of relatives that he has there as well. Those who have been there know that Tasmania is an unusual place, with its own feel and pace. "In Tasmania" does a beautiful job of capturing the feel of the place, from the scary and horrible past, to the beautiful natural environment, to the quaint English country town feel in some areas. For those who have been there, you will enjoy your own remembrances as you read this book, and for those who haven't, this book is the next best thing to visiting.

Shakespeare lives the genealogist's dream. Weary of the excitements of city life, he relocates his family from London to Tasmania and idly asks himself if there are any other Shakespeares on this remote isle a long, long way from Warwickshire. He checks the phone book and Lo! a hitherto unknown distant cousin beckons and Behold! a book is born. The more Shakespeare digs into his ancestry the more publishable his book becomes. Turns out he is related to one of the most notorious characters in Tasmanian history and he happens to have in his possession a treasure

trove of family letters and business accounts that shed a colorful array of lights on the pre-Tasmanian life of this character. Other family connections lead him to discover distant Aboriginal relatives. Now he is able to craft a narrative in which social and political history entwines with family biography. And which also happens to be a pleasure to read.

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