

**Media Release**  
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### **Can you help to find Australia's missing governesses?**

Governesses were not always the prim and proper figures that literature would have us believe. The larger than life Daisy Bates was a governess in Queensland before her first very brief marriage to a possibly under-age Harry Murant (later Breaker Morant). She had a subsequently exciting but often scandalous life.

In the nineteenth century governesses held an ambiguous position in society. They were teacher, companion, servant, lady; and yet not quite any or all of these. Governesses were to be useful without being obtrusive; often relegated to the corner of the parlour when not in the schoolroom, far from the illuminating glow of candlelight and the warmth of the hearth. Other famous Australians have governesses in their families. Both Henry Handel Richardson's mother Mary and Aunt Lucinda were governesses.

Kate Matthew wants to bring these governesses out of the shadows and into the light of historical research. And she is asking for help to locate other governesses who worked in the Australian colonies.

"Governesses are fascinating on so many levels", Kate said.

"Their uncertain status, combined with the hardships of governessing in colonial Australia and the difficulties of gaining ongoing employment make them an interesting group to study. And occasionally you find a celebrity with a particularly juicy story."

It is difficult to know how many women worked as governesses in colonial Australia. Kate estimates that there were probably no more than a few hundred, and hopes to eventually find all of them. To date, Kate has been able to identify over 120 by name. Many of these were emigrants from Britain, and Kate is now researching the detail of their lives. Of the Australian born governesses there is at least one celebrity. Mary MacKillop worked as a governess in South Australia before establishing the Josephite community in Australia.

"Family historians are among the most accomplished and dedicated researchers in the world. If they have a governess in their family tree, chances are they already know quite a lot about her," Kate said.

Through studying and publishing these stories, Kate intends to position the governesses and their lives firmly within the threads of Australian history.

To find out more, or to share your information, please go to [www.electichistory.net](http://www.electichistory.net).

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*Biographical information*

Kate Matthew is a Masters candidate at the University of New England in Armidale, and this research forms part of the requirements for that course. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (History) in 2007, and has a variety of research interests, specializing in colonial Australia.

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