“Dab-toe”, supposedly a reference to an old Aborigine with a permanently disabled foot. Thanks to the forebears of Christina Stead’s step-mother we can now be slightly more confident that the Aboriginal word for Dapto probably originally had three syllables and that the middle syllable is likely to have contained the labio-dental ‘b’ or ‘p’.

CHRISTINA STEAD AND 1980S WOLLONGONG

Using my exquisite filing system, I recently decided to seek out the original article which sparked my interest in Christina Stead’s Wollongong Connections. I felt sure I would have saved it.

Of course I couldn’t find it anywhere, but after whinging to my wife that I was certain she’d lost it on me, the wayward article miraculously did turn up in one of her files. It turned out to be by a writer for whom I now have some admiration, Barry Hill (whose spirited defence of the ABC’s radio programme ‘The Listening Room’ has long impressed me). The article was entitled “Christina Stead at 80 says love is her religion”, (SMH, Saturday, July 17, 1982, p. 33; coincidentally July 17 is Stead’s birthday; she was born in 1902) was not quite as savage as I’d remembered but it did labour the suburban angle a bit much for my taste:

“I met her at her sister’s place near Wollongong where she has been staying for the past two months: a suburban house in a most suburban street, one of those brick cottages on the ledge between the high, dark escarpment that surmounts the coal, and the pounding light of the Pacific.”

Unfortunately, Hill does not give the address of this residence. It should, however, be possible to find out.

WHERE DID ‘WEETA’ LIVE?

Hazel Rowley states in her biography that:

“After Stead’s departure from Canberra, her life darkened. Back with her family, she was ‘shovelled about’, as she put it, form one relative to another [Stead was notoriously irascible]. She felt she was a burden on them all. First she stayed with David and Doris, then
she was passed for two months to her sister Weeta, recently widowed, who lived in a small brick house in Wollongong, an hour from Sydney. Though Weeta was kind and her grown-up children called in often, Stead felt 'all but a prisoner. She missed friends with whom she could have a little booze and a chat.'

'Weeta' is such an unusual name (it's supposedly an aboriginal word for the spotted bowerbird) that there must be someone in Wollongong who can remember a neighbour or acquaintance who went by this unusual monicker. Her two Christian names were Doris Weeta (nee Stead) and she was born in October 1913. I would be delighted if someone could tell me either whereabouts in Wollongong Weeta lived or even simply her married name so I can use an old phone book to track down her address.

The person responsible for inflicting the name 'Weeta' on this hapless individual was of, of course, Christina's father - David Stead. He was a truly fascinating man and a noted naturalist. A member of the Linnean Society at an incredibly young age and an authority on fish in Australian waters he'd had very little education but was a man of considerable intellect. The one thing about which Rowley's biography convinces me is that David Stead is at least as worthy of a biography as his more famous daughter Christina.

And if you haven't read either Christina Stead's *For Love Alone* or *The Man Who Loved Children* then I suggest you do (and while you're at it give *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* a go) and you'll find you might gain at least an inkling (fictional though much of that inkling may be) of precisely how interesting it can be to have put up with an 'interesting' man.

Joseph Davis

**LINDSAY WATERCOLOUR ACQUIRED BY CITY GALLERY**

After being pressured by myself and Michael Organ, The Wollongong City Gallery has purchased a watercolour depicting Bass & Flinders and some aboriginal figures.

It's basically good plain old 'Bad Art - not only banal, but probably racist as well. Nevertheless, the Gallery's unlikely to get another opportunity to purchase an early twentieth century work depicting Bass and Flinders.

See it and weep!