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Aboriginal History is a refereed journal that presents articles and information in Australian ethnohistory and contact and post-contact history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Historical studies based on anthropological, archaeological, linguistic and sociological research, including comparative studies of other ethnic groups such as Pacific Islanders in Australia, are welcomed. Subjects include recorded oral traditions and biographies, narratives in local languages with translations, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, archival and bibliographic articles, and book reviews.

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Contacting *Aboriginal History*

All correspondence should be addressed to *Aboriginal History*, Box 2837 GPO Canberra, 2601, Australia. Sales and orders for journals and monographs, and journal subscriptions: Thelma Sims, email: Thelma.Sims@anu.edu.au, tel or fax: +61 2 62125 3269, www.aboriginalhistory.org

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Contributors

The polemics of making fire in Tasmania: the historical evidence revisited¹

Rebe Taylor

When Jones asserted in 1971 that the Tasmanian Aborigines had dropped scale fish from their diet, he did so with corroborated archaeological evidence: he found a non-presence of scale-fish refuse in middens past 4000 BP.² When, in 1977, he asserted that they had also lost the ability to make fire, he did so without any such evidence. Apart from the possible traces of fire left on stones that may have been used as striking flints, as suggested by Gisela Völger, there is no archaeological evidence that could reasonably exist to determine the notion positively or negatively.³ The evidence concerning whether the Tasmanian Aborigines could make fire is drawn entirely from a small number of historical sources, all of which are ambiguous. If this is the case, how did the idea gain wide acceptance and why has it survived for so long? The short answer lies in the persuasiveness and popularity of Jones' work. In his widely-read 1977 paper he controversially concluded that the Aboriginal people had chosen, imprudently, to drop scale fish from their diet.⁴ Jones went on to propose that the Tasmanians had also lost a range of arts and tools such as hafted axes and boomerangs because, being a small population isolated for millennia, they had eventually degenerated to a culture so simple that Jones wondered if they had been 'doomed to a slow strangulation of the mind'.⁵ These words became famous with repeated reference, but it was their resonance with the hugely successful film *The Last Tasmanian*, in which Jones appeared as narrator, that made them (and him) so well-known and so controversial.

Perhaps the most provocative aspect of Jones' degeneration thesis was the idea that the Tasmanian Aborigines had lost the ability to make fire. 'Fire was carried ... in

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1. This article is the second of a two-part examination of the historiography of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The first article, 'The polemics of eating fish', published in volume 31 (2008) of this journal, questioned the certainty archaeologists have held for the proposition, first suggested by Rhys Jones in 1971, that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people stopped eating fish with scales about 3000 to 4000 years ago. This article re-examines another of Jones' widely accepted assertions: that Indigenous Tasmanians were unable to make fire.
 2. In light of the adage 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence', the term 'non-presence' is considered by archaeologists to be more meaningful and accurate in a context such as this.
 3. Völger 1973: 61.
 4. Jones 1978: 44–46; Jones 1987a: 38; Jones 1977a: 196; Jones 1977b: 343.
 5. Jones 1977a: 196–197, 202–203.

smouldering slow burning fire-sticks', Jones wrote, 'but the Tasmanians did not know how to make it': if their sticks went out, they had 'to go to their neighbours for a re-light'.⁶ In making this statement, Jones relied on a note by NJB Plomley in the edited journals of GA Robinson: 'the Tasmanians seem to have had no artificial means of producing fire. They had to keep a fire constantly alight and, if it was extinguished, had to obtain fire from other natives.'⁷ Plomley in turn was relying on the one entry in Robinson's diary from which such an interpretation could be made. It is from 28 December 1831, written as Robinson was making one of his five epic treks across Tasmania with 'his mission' Aborigines:

As the chief always carries a lighted torch I asked them what they did when their fire went out. They said if their fire went out by reason of rain they [were] compelled to eat the kangaroo raw and to walk about and look for another mob and get fire of them. They must give fire and sometimes they would fight afterwards. MANNALARGENNA said that the two men in the sky first gave the natives fire, that they stood all round. WOORADY said PARPEDER gave fire to the Brune natives.⁸

In the years since Jones' pronouncements on fire, the claim has been widely repeated:⁹ by Lyndall Ryan in *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*; by Vivienne Rae-Ellis in *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*¹⁰ Tim Flannery's 1994 book, *The Future Eaters*, restated the claim, citing Rae-Ellis;¹¹ and Jared Diamond's 1993 article 'Ten thousand years in isolation' stated that 'most archaeologists suspect that [the Tasmanians] had no means of kindling [fire]'.¹² Most recently, Keith Windschuttle, in *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, writes that the 'colonists were astonished to observe [the Aborigines] could not make fire, a skill that even Neanderthal man had mastered'.¹³ The idea has broad appeal even beyond books: while holidaying in the Bass Strait in 1996, another tourist told me that the Tasmanian Aborigines were 'so backward' that 'they couldn't even make fire'.

6. Jones 1977a: 196.

7. Plomley 1966: 225.

8. Plomley 1966: 567.

9. There may have been some wider currency for the idea the Tasmanians may not have known how to make fire before Plomley published *Friendly Mission*: a pamphlet published in 1960 for visitors to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery stated that the Aborigines 'usually carried fire with them, but there is no direct evidence to show how they produced fire'. Plomley appears to have taken this lack of evidence a step further when he asserted that they had no means to make fire at all (Bryden 1960: 3). Interestingly, Jones did not repeat the idea the Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire in his 1978 chapter, 'Why did the Tasmanians stop eating fish?', despite recapitulating all the other aspects of his regression theory, though in 1987 he stated 'they could not make fire' (Jones 1987b: 30).

10. Lyndall Ryan no longer considers it reasonable that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people could not make fire (Ryan, personal communication with the author, 4 November 2008; Ryan 1996 [1981]: 11; Rae-Ellis 1981: 8). Neither Ryan nor Rae-Ellis reference Jones; Ryan has no reference and Rae-Ellis references Plomley 1966: 567. However, considering their books were published shortly after Jones' work became public, it was arguably Jones who influenced both scholars to make their statements on fire making.

11. Flannery 1994: 264–270. Flannery contextualises the claim that the Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire within a detailed description of Jones's thesis of regression in detail from the dropping of fish, bone awls and other wooden implements, but with no reference to Jones. Instead Flannery references Diamond 1993.

While the idea that the Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire became most widely repeated from the late 1970s, there were writers in the 19th century who also considered it true. James Backhouse, following his journey to Tasmania from 1832 to 1838, wrote that the Aborigines 'had no artificial method of obtaining fire',¹⁴ and Thomas Dove, after talking to Aborigines at the Flinders Island settlement, concluded in 1842 that:

their memory supplies them with no instances of a period in which they were obliged to draw on their inventive powers for the means of resuscitating an element so essential to their health and comfort as flame.¹⁵

James Calder (quoted by Roth) claimed in 1874 that the Aborigines of Tasmania 'were ignorant of any method of procuring fire'.¹⁶ In his 1878 edition of *Researches into the History of Mankind*, Tylor reported that Joseph Milligan, who compiled a significant vocabulary of Tasmanian Aboriginal words in 1859, thought, in Tylor's words, 'the Tasmanians never produced fire by artificial means at all'.¹⁷ Even though Roth and Tylor quote such opinions from early writers, they did not agree with them. In the preface to the second edition of Roth's *The Aborigines of Tasmania* Tylor defined the 'rude savages' of Tasmania as 'representatives of the immensely ancient Palæolithic period', but he thought any of the 'accounts of finding fireless tribes are of a highly doubtful character'.¹⁸ Roth thought the idea just as fantastic; he introduced his quotations of Calder, Backhouse and Dove with the exclamation 'at one time, the natives were said not to have known the art of making fire!'¹⁹ Tylor and Roth were unconvinced by these writers because they were aware of a plethora of available evidence that suggested Tasmanian Aborigines could make fire.

Early evidence of fire making

The various accounts of fire making in Tasmania describe two main methods: a flint stone that struck a spark and the friction of two pieces of wood. Most of the earliest references to Tasmanian fire making describe the 'percussion method'.

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12. Diamond 1993: 50. Diamond, like Flannery, details the dropping of fish, bone awls and other tools but only quotes Jones on his theory of isolation-induced cultural loss so as to criticise him as 'degenerationist' (1993: 55). Diamond reiterates Jones' thesis of cultural regression but creates the impression that the thesis of Tasmanian isolation is his own. Further, the editor of *Discover*, Paul Hoffman, included, on p. 4 of the same edition of the magazine, a preface to Diamond's article headed, 'The Tasmanian paradox', without any reference to Jones' 1977 chapter of the same title.
 13. Windschuttle 2002: 377–378. Windschuttle references Robinson's diary entry of 28 December 1831 and also summarises Jones's thesis on the cessation of fish eating, loss of tools and the theory of cultural regression, footnoting his PhD thesis and his 1977 and 1978 chapters.
 14. Roth 1899: 83; Backhouse 1843: 99.
 15. Roth 1899: 83; Dove 1842: 250.
 16. Roth 1899: 83.
 17. Tylor 1964: 249–250.
 18. Roth 1899: vii; Tylor 1964: 249–250. While 'Fire, cooking and vessels' was originally published as chapter 9 in *Researches in the History of Mankind*, in the 1964 edition it is presented as an appendix. Editor Paul Bohannon writes that that this chapter is 'still one of the best general summaries on its subject' (Tylor 1964: v).
 19. Roth 1899: 83.

In 1773, during the du Fresne expedition, Tobias Furneaux reported finding a stone kept in a basket 'to strike fire with and tinder made of bark' at Adventure Bay, Bruny Island.²⁰ Lieutenant George Mortimer – on Cox's exploration of Maria Island (north of Bruny Island) in 1789 – wrote of finding 'a few flints and stones and a little dried grass; from which circumstance I conclude they produce fire by collision'.²¹ Similarly, JJH La Billardière in 1792, on the second French expedition led by Bruny D'Entrecasteaux, found baskets in an abandoned campsite at Recherche Bay 'filled with various pieces of silex, wrapped up in the bark of a tree, as soft as good tinder', from which he concluded, 'the method which these savages employ to procure fire is, to strike two pieces of silex one against the other'.²² On the same expedition, Louis Ventenat described small baskets containing tinder and flints and a 'silex' with which the Aborigines ignited a 'very dry bark', and further identified two soft barks used as tinder. Joseph Raoul also found 'baskets full of stones for striking fire', while La Motte du Portail described a 'leather bag' that contained 'pebbles, by the striking of which they procure fire, using a moss instead of tinder'.²³

In 1792 George Tobin, an officer on Captain William Bligh's *Providence*, found in an empty hut at Adventure Bay 'two small pieces of white stone, very different from any about Adventure Bay, and soft bark wrapped up carefully in grass'. Tobin concluded that 'with this stone and bark natives probably strike their fire',²⁴ while Bligh remarked that he could not find a tinder that would ignite, when he tried this method. Considering his lack of experience with these materials, this is perhaps not surprising.²⁵

Some 40 years after the first explorers came to Tasmania, GA Robinson wrote in his journal on Bruny Island, that he had 'obtained a stone' used by the 'Brune natives with which they sharpen their waddies and by means of which they strike fire. They call it My.rer'.²⁶ Völger observes that this word may correspond to the words Milligan records in his 1859 vocabulary for 'flint' – *Mungara* or *Mora Trona* from Bruny Island, Recherche Bay, Mount Royal and south of Tasmania and *Trowutta* from the Aboriginal people from Oyster Bay to Pittwater.²⁷

Roth was unconvinced by the early explorers' conclusions: he was 'very certain' that these observers 'mistook the so called "flint" implements or stone hatchet for real flint for striking fire' and concluded that the percussion method of fire making was 'unknown to them'.²⁸ Plomley, in 1983, too remained unconvinced by the early explorers' conclusions, pointing out that they were 'no doubt influenced by their own

20. Plomley 1983: 201.

21. Roth 1899: 83; Plomley 1983: 75, 188, 201. Note that while Plomley attributes this quote to Cox, Roth attributes it to Mortimer.

22. Silex is a kind of quartz or gunflint (La Billardière 1800: 127; Plomley 1983: 201).

23. Plomley 1993: 272.

24. Giblin, 1928: 98; Völger 1973: 60–61.

25. Plomley 1993: 271.

26. Plomley, 1966: 113.

27. Völger, 1973: 60–61; Plomley, 1976: 413. Having studied these words for 'flint', John A Taylor concludes that 'the linguistic evidence quite independently of the ethnographic records establishes that the percussion was used' by the Tasmanian Aborigines. Taylor sees parallels between Tasmanian words and Victorian Aboriginal words, his thesis being that ancient migration patterns linguistically link the two communities (Taylor 2003).

28. Roth 1899: 83, lxxxviii.

flintlock arms'.²⁹ Plomley further disputed Robinson's find of the 'my.rer' stone, writing in a footnote in *Friendly Mission* that it was 'an error' made 'due to Robinson's inexperience' or 'due to misunderstanding what he was told'.³⁰ In 1993, however, Plomley revised his earlier conclusions about the percussion method and could now say that the early explorers' references made 'an impressive record' and that the stones were clearly regarded by the Aboriginal people as precious, being wrapped in bark and stored in specially-made baskets.³¹ Even Fritz Noetling, who considered the Tasmanians to be at the 'Archaeolithic' [pre-Palaeolithic] stage of evolutionary development, had concluded they were able to make fire 'by striking the piece of iron pyrites against a siliceous stone'.³²

Völger points to some of the stone artefacts in the Westlake Collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum for which 'neither the material nor the form has been defined', but which 'sometimes show traces of use and fire'. Considering both the linguistic evidence and the fact the writers all drew the same conclusion independently, Völger concludes it is 'very likely that the percussion technique was the Tasmanian method of lighting fire'. She further notes that Aboriginal use of the percussion method in other parts of Australia. Philip Jones identifies detailed evidence for the method in South Australia, New South Wales and Central Australia and notes that Völger's linguistic findings 'suggest that the percussion technique was known in Tasmanian'.³³ Along with anthropologists Berndt, Calley and Mountford, Jones further considers it likely that the percussion method preceded the friction methods, especially since it appears in Dreaming stories throughout southern Australia.³⁴

It may be, however, that the percussion method was not used across all of Tasmania since all observations, including the linguistic evidence, about this method come from the island's south-eastern corner, particularly the D'Entrecasteaux Channel.³⁵

The friction method

The earliest reference to the friction method was noted in 1793 by Louis Ventenat on the D'Entrecasteaux expedition, who wrote that the Aborigines 'make fire by rubbing together two pieces of wood one against the other'.³⁶ Gott considers that Ventenat's description might be an eye-witness account, since it was preceded with a detailed description of meeting with a group of Aborigines.³⁷ Indeed, unless they had somehow

29. Plomley, 1983: 201. Plomley had previously noted that while there were reports that the Tasmanians used both the percussion and friction methods that 'none of these methods of making fire can be proven for the Tasmanians, and it is nearly certain that in fact they could not produce fire' (Plomley 1977: 25).

30. Plomley, 1966: 225.

31. Plomley 1993: 272.

32. Noetling 1907: 2, 5; Gott 2000: 10.

33. Jones 2008: 10–16; Völger 1973: 6.

34. Jones 2008: 10–11.

35. Gott 2002: 653. Philip Jones suggests that the percussion method may possibly have preceded the friction methods. He notes that the percussion method was used 'in Northern New South Wales, Flinders Ranges, Lower Murray regions of South Australia, isolated localities in Victoria and possibly in Tasmania' (Jones 2008: 10, 13–14).

36. Plomley and Piard-Bernier 1993: 365.

37. Gott 2002: 652–653.

shown him, how else would Ventenat know this was the way they made fire? Thus, it is possible that Tasmanian Aborigines in the south – where the D'Entrecasteaux expedition was confined – may have used both the percussion and friction methods to make fire. Ventenat in fact noted both.

Subsequent friction method references date from the 1840s. RH Davies, in 1846 stated: 'I have been informed that they obtained [fire] by rubbing around rapidly in their hands a piece of hard pointed stick ... inserted into a notch in another piece of dry wood'. Henry Melville, in 1851, wrote that the Tasmanian Aborigines made fire 'from the friction of a stick, rapidly moved between the palms of their hands, with the point embedded in a piece of soft bark'. James Bonwick, in his 1870 book *Daily Life and the Origins of the Tasmanians*, asserted 'we have abundant evidence that they did know how to produce artificial flame'. Bonwick presents a description, told to him by a bushranger that 'the Natives' made fire from creating 'friction' between 'two pieces of grass-tree stem'. One stick was twirled in the groove of the other, into which was also placed 'some soft down of the inner bark of trees, called balls-wool' and some 'powdered charcoal'.³⁸ In a letter written to the Royal Society of Tasmania in 1873, James Scott stated that his brother Thomas, a former assistant Surveyor-General and resident in Tasmania from 1820, told him the Aborigines knew how to light fire 'by friction of two pieces of wood'.³⁹

These references are all cited by Roth, who ultimately doubted their reliability, as, subsequently, did Jones and Plomley. This may explain why Windschuttle wrote in a footnote in his *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* that 'the inability to make fire has long worried many observers', before adding 'for several implausible rationalisations, see Roth'.⁴⁰ Roth had not questioned these sources in his first edition (1890) of *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* where he considered the Aborigines had been able to make fire 'by means of two quite distinct methods': the percussion and friction methods (p 96). In his second (1899) edition, however, Roth reassessed most of his findings on fire making.

Roth had featured illustrations of two wooden fire drills in his first edition. These he presumed had been collected by GA Robinson in Tasmania. One had featured in John Lubbock's 1863 *Pre-historic Times*, prompting Tylor to conclude that the Tasmanian Aborigines made fire by this method.⁴¹ The 'hearth' of this drill (the piece of wood into which a straight stick was turned) is now housed in the Fuller Collection in Chicago. The second drill – the only complete fire drill provenanced as Tasmanian in existence – is housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum. When Roth carried out his research for his second edition, he became aware that, like several other artefacts collected by Robinson, these fire drills may have in fact been collected by him in Victoria.⁴² Gaye Sculthorpe and Plomley share these doubts, both noting that when Robinson was in Victoria, he wrote in his journal on 13 May 1840: 'I observed for the first time how

38. Roth 1899: 83; Bonwick 1870: 20.

39. Roth 1899: 83; Scott 1873: 24–25.

40. Windschuttle 2002: 377.

41. Tylor 1964: 253. Lubbock 1878: 439–440. Since much of Lubbock's brief section on the Tasmanian Aborigines is devoted to quoting Dove's assertion that they were unable to make fire the illustration of the drill is left quite unexplained. Plomley observed that Lubbock failed to respond to Robinson's letter warning him not to trust Dove's observations (Plomley 1962: 12).

natives in their original state get fire by friction from two pieces of wood', suggesting he had never seen this in Tasmania.⁴³ While Robinson may not have seen fire being made in Tasmania, he did record, from the Port Sorell and Ben Lomond people of northern Tasmania, the phrases meaning 'to light (make) a fire': mo.yer.way.ne' and 'per.le.we.pe.nup.ple'. Further, Plomley notes that in 1865–1866 Robinson had written to a Dr John Davy explaining 'the manner employed by the Tasmanians to produce fire', but from these descriptions Davy 'could only *infer* that the method was 'by friction'.⁴⁴ Sculthorpe also explains that a very similar fire drill collected by Robinson, and now in the Museum of Victoria, was tested in 1956 and it was found that the hearth of the drill 'agree[d] well' with a species of bush that did not occur in Tasmania.⁴⁵

In 1899 Roth wrote to James Backhouse Walker, a Hobart solicitor and grandson of George Backhouse, about the fire drill in the Pitt Rivers Museum. Walker, a respected and published expert in Tasmanian Aboriginal history, had, since 1891, been Roth's primary informant and guide for the changes to the new edition of his book. Walker agreed that there was indeed 'a grave doubt' the drill was Tasmanian, but warned 'there is surely sufficient evidence that the Blacks were acquainted with some method of producing fire, though the exact apparatus used appears to be now beyond discovery'.⁴⁶ Indeed, there are relatively few original wooden Tasmanian Aboriginal artefacts in museum collections; the absence from any such collection of a definitively-Tasmanian fire drill does not signify such an artefact was never used or that the Tasmanians could not make fire.

Unlike his grandfather, Walker considered the idea the Tasmanian Aborigines had been unable to make fire absurd. In 1899 he wrote to Roth about a recent article in the *Spectator* that 'ventured the astounding statement that there were races of mankind, "like the Tasmanians", who ... were ignorant of the use of fire!' But he added that the *Spectator* occasionally went 'wildly astray, and sometimes falls an easy victim to a hoax'.⁴⁷ Further to this, Walker sent two descriptions he had gathered on Aboriginal fire making. The first was from Edward Cotton of Kelvedon (whom Westlake later met)

42. In his Appendix H, 'Tasmanian Fire Sticks', added after *The Aborigines of Tasmania* went to press, Roth (1899: lxxxix) claims this drill was given to Barnard Davis by Dr Joseph Milligan who had had charge of the mission at Oyster Cove, Tasmania. Roth considered that Milligan 'knew nothing of the Aborigines until 1847' and therefore 'his presentation of the fire drill to Barnard Davis as a Tasmanian implement does not prove the drill to have been Tasmanian'. However, Plomley considers it unlikely that Milligan presented the drill to Davis, but that it came directly from Robinson (Plomley 1962: 11–12). Roth (1899: lxxxix) illustrates Robinson's unreliability in discerning Victorian from Tasmanian Aboriginal artefacts with the example of a ground stone tool presented to Barnard Davis by Robinson as Tasmanian, but later concluded by EB Tylor as Victorian.

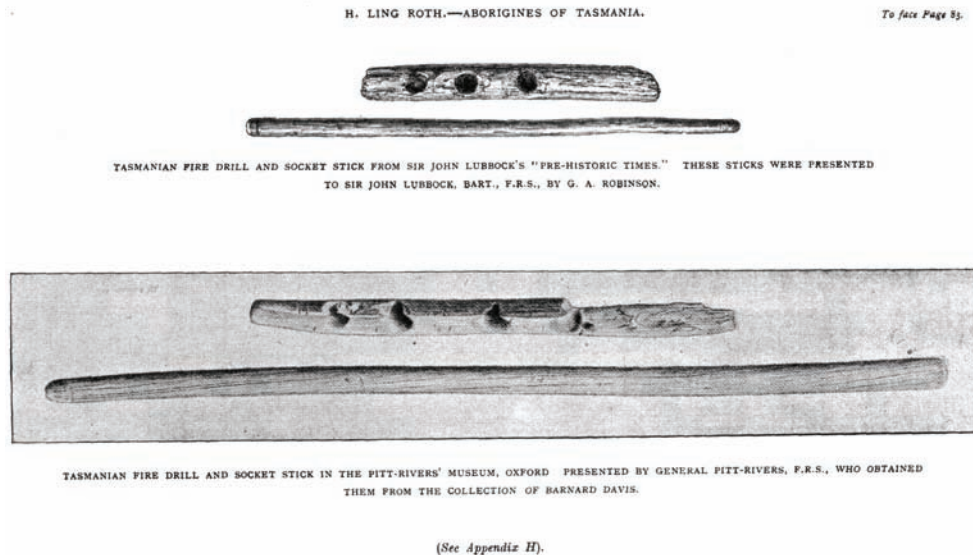
43. Sculthorpe 1990: 35–36; Plomley 1962: 11–12. Gott agrees that the drill sets 'cannot be unequivocally attributed to Tasmania' (Gott 2002: 654).

44. Plomley 1976: 225; Plomley 1962: 11–12.

45. Sculthorpe 1990: 34–36. Sculthorpe notes that Westlake's reports of fire drills being used in Tasmania 'suggest caution in attributing a southeastern Australian provenance for all these specimens' but considers that the form of the fire drill 'no doubt' originated on the mainland and was possibly introduced to Tasmania by Port Phillip or Sydney Aborigines.

46. Walker, letter to Roth, 16 May 1899. Walker reiterated the plausibility of the stick-and-groove method and refers to Roth's Appendix H (Walker 1900: 5).

47. Walker, letter to Roth, 16 May 1899.



Tasmanian fire drills as featured in Ling Roth 1899, facing page 83. The lower drill featured is still housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum.

recorded in about 1896. Walker explained that 'it may be relied on' since Cotton had lived 'from childhood among the old settlers' and was a man of 'keen observation, retentive memory, vigorous intellect, and is thoroughly trustworthy'.⁴⁸ Cotton told Walker how his elder brother had witnessed an Aboriginal man making fire:

He first found a dry log or dead trunk ... next he collected ... a quantity of dry wood dust ... [with which] he filled the crack in the log. He then chose a dry stick, and shaped it a little at one end until it roughly fitted the crack ... he then rubbed it vigorously and firmly up and down [until] ... the dust began to smoke and eventually took fire.⁴⁹

Walker later sent Roth a second description from Mr Rayner, a similarly-aged settler, from the Derwent Valley whose account, Walker noted, 'agrees with that of ... Cotton':⁵⁰

A piece of flat wood was obtained, and a groove was made the full length in the centre. Another piece of wood about a foot in length with a point like a blunt chisel was worked with nearly lightning rapidity up and down the groove till it caught in a flame. As soon as the stick caught in a blaze, a piece of burnt fungus, or *punk* ... was applied ... My father has seen them light it. The piece in the groove, he said, was hard, the other soft.⁵¹

48. Walker, letter to Roth, 10 June 1896.

49. Roth 1899: 83–84.

50. Walker, letter to Roth, 20 May 1998. A copy made by Walker of Rayner's letter to him, including this quote, is in 'Various Manuscripts XXVV' of Ling Roth, Henry 1919: 'The Aborigines of Tasmania: Papers ...'.

51. Roth 1899: lxxxxviii.

While Roth noted that these accounts appeared to be more detailed variations of the descriptions from Melville, Davies and Bonwick, he considered that only these first-hand memories of older settlers had the capacity to 'carry us back to the early part of the century when the natives were still roaming about the country'.⁵² Roth summarised from the available evidence that the Tasmanian Aborigines appeared to have had three methods by which to light fire: stone and flint, a fire drill and the 'stick-and-groove' method (as suggested by Cotton and Rayner). But, considering it was 'incredible that a race so low in culture could have known and used three methods', and since Roth deemed most the sources unreliable, he concluded that the Tasmanians knew only of the friction 'stick-and-groove' technique. While Roth doubted most of the evidence, he never doubted that the Tasmanian Aborigines could make fire.⁵³

The Westlake evidence for fire making

The greatest body of evidence for Tasmanian fire making is contained in the Ernest Westlake papers.⁵⁴ Of the 95 people Westlake noted conversations with in Tasmania, 27 recounted, in varying detail, methods by which the Aborigines made fire. They often echo earlier historical accounts of both the percussion and friction methods. The evidence for the percussion method is sparse and contrary relative to the friction method, but, it is significant that sources for the former come from southern Tasmania – where that method was first recorded by French and English explorers.

In 1910, Mrs Imms, of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, told Westlake that she thought the Aborigines got fire 'from two flints [that is flint and steel] and 'used a piece of punk one side of which was burnt and the spark would ignite that'.⁵⁵ Is it possible that after settlement Aborigines began to use steel in what was already an established method with stone?⁵⁶ Mrs Hughes, also of the Channel, told Westlake she thought that the Aborigines had used two pieces of wood to start fire, but that this was 'before [they] used steel', suggesting that the friction method had come first. Reverend Atkinson, who had spent much time with the Aborigines at the nearby Oyster Cove Mission, told Westlake that fire was 'certainly *not* made with flint and steel. I *expect* would be rubbing', but he admitted, 'I *don't* know'.⁵⁷

The confusion over the methods may be due to several factors. The percussion and friction methods may both have been used in southern Tasmania. Aborigines from different parts of Tasmania arriving at the mission at Oyster Cove after 1847 may have brought together varying regional fire-making methods, which by then may also have

52. Roth 1899: lxxxix.

53. Roth 1899: lxxxix.

54. For details of the Westlake Papers, see Part 1 of this paper (Taylor 2007: 1–3).

55. Westlake 'Notebook 6': 36. The reference to 'punk' being used as tinder is common in Westlake's interviews and other sources. It is either rotten wood, or a fungus growing on dead wood. Mrs Sarah Miller told Westlake that 'punk' was used along with flint and stone to make fire and explained: 'punk is a white fungus in sheets' (Westlake 'Notebook 6': 114–115). Also, Mr Rayner informed James Backhouse Walker that 'burnt fungus, or *punk*, as it is generally termed ... would keep alight' (Roth 1899: lxxxviii). Sylvia Hallam notes how Aboriginal women in Western Australia carried small Banksia cones or a 'dry white species of fungus' with them in bags in order to kindle fire (Hallam 1975: 44).

56. Gott 2002: 653.

57. Westlake 'Notebook 2': 21 (emphasis in original).

been adapted to different living conditions and contact with different cultures. Plomley, however, considered the D'Entrecasteaux testimonies to be significant because they witnessed Aboriginal people living at Oyster Cove after the mission was moved there and because it was a region 'where there was less aggression between settler and Aboriginal' early in the colonial period.⁵⁸

Many of Westlake's interviewees described the friction method in ways similar to Cotton and Rayner, in particular the Aboriginal Islanders. At Killikrankie Bay, Flinders Island, Harry Armstrong told Ernest Westlake that the Aboriginal Tasmanians made fire by a stick worked in the groove of another piece of wood. He 'has tried it', wrote Westlake. The more senior Philip Thomas told Westlake that 'I have seen them making fires by rubbing pieces of wood together. I used to watch them doing it'. Thomas could also explain the process in detail: the stick was held at about an angle of 45 degrees, and also trimmed to that angle 'so as to fit in the groove'. 'Very fine powder like the ashes from a pipe' is placed into the groove, and 'turn black and catch fire very quickly'. The 'best wood' for this was 'the top of the old man grass tree, with a piece growing out of the top like a kangaroo's tail', which can 'serve [as] both sticks'.⁵⁹ This description has echoes with Cotton and Rayner's 'stick-and-groove' method and also with Bonwick's reference to the use of grass tree and charcoal to make fire. The fire drills collected by Robinson appear to be made from grass tree, the drill being a harder wood and the hearth a softer, pithy, wood.⁶⁰ According to Philip Jones, grass-tree stems were also used by Aborigines in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and Victoria. Jones further notes that 'the grass-tree generated its own tinder as it worked deeper, bringing the powdered or triturated wood to the surface'.⁶¹

Philip Thomas indicated to Westlake that both the fire-drill and the stick-and-groove methods were used by his traditional ancestors, explaining that fire could be made not only by rubbing, but also 'produced by twirling the stick between the palms of the hands like lightning'. Thomas added that 'one person will do this', suggesting that the other method required at least two people. But both techniques were practised, he said, 'using the same wood'. Thomas then said to Westlake, 'I saw them making fire from rubbing wood together before they were on Flinders'.⁶²

On Cape Barren Island, Henry Beeton told Westlake he had 'seen some of the old sealers twirling sticks to show us youngsters how the natives used to get the fire in Tasmania'. Here it seems that the white sealers had passed on traditional knowledge from their Aboriginal partners, a possible indication of their cultural integration. Like Thomas, Beeton explained that fire was made with the 'old man grass tree' - the 'piece of wood ... like kangaroos tail growing out of the top'. This was a 'sort of pithy wood', he described, 'with a hardish shell on the outside'. A 'hard stick' was placed into the 'spongy stuff' and 'worked till pith kindled' by 'twirling' the stick with the palms of the

58. Plomley and Piard-Bernier 1993: 270.

59. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 87.

60. The method of fire making Robinson noted in Victoria in 1840 corresponds very closely with the descriptions by Cotton and Rayner, including the type of wood, the addition of 'charred' powder and the action used (see Sculthorpe 1990: 35).

61. Jones 2008: 17.

62. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 87-88.

hand'. Notably Beeton did not refer to the stick-and-groove method, as Thomas had. While Thomas described using 'ashes from a pipe', Beeton said that a 'dried sap' from a 'particular kind of tree' was also used to help 'starting fires' and that punk was used to take the fire out of the worked hole. Beeton also said that 'tringinabiddy' was the 'small brush wood' used for kindling, and 'parteroly' was 'any sort' of fire, 'as long as it blazes'.⁶³ Notably, variations of this word appear in other vocabularies: GA Robinson recorded 'par.tro.ler' and 'Par.trow.ler' and Rev James Norman, who lived in Tasmania from 1827 to 1868, included the word 'partroller' for fire. Norman also added in brackets after this word: 'the natives in the interior obtain a fire by rubbing together two pieces of wood - one green and one dry - till the wood ignites by friction'.⁶⁴

There were many non-Aboriginal Tasmanians who could tell Westlake something of how they thought the Aborigines had made fire using the friction method, and Westlake recorded descriptions all over the state. Henry Gardam told him that the Aborigines 'used to make fire with the grass tree'. He said that while he had not seen the 'Blacks', make fire, he had seen the half-castes 'split tail of the grass tree and holding one piece in each hand rub the two together'.⁶⁵ JW Graves, a Hobart solicitor, said he thought the Aborigines had got a 'piece of dried grass tree' and 'a stick or spindle' of the same wood and would 'twirl it'. While he said he had seen Aborigines do this in South Australia in 1847, he claimed that 'halfcastes have told me that the same was used in Tasmania'.⁶⁶ GW Knight, the Cape Barren Island school master, told Westlake he knew a man named Pinnington who had told him that 'somewhere around Ross', he had seen the Aborigines 'make a hole in a piece of wood' and with sticks 'sharpened ... almost to fit it ... twirl it with their palms'.⁶⁷

While Knight referred to Aborigines twirling a fire-drill, others referred to the stick-and-groove technique. In the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, Mr Benbow told Westlake, 'I have seen the natives at [Oyster Cove] get fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together'. He said they got a 'plane surface with a little groove in it' and then, with a 'pointed stick ... rub it to and fro'. It was a method he and a mate had tried themselves when 50 miles 'up the Gordon' on the West Coast when their matches had got wet.⁶⁸ Fysh, of Plenty, told Westlake his father had seen the Aborigines make fire using '2 pieces of wood and a groove [sic] working backwards and forwards like lightning'.⁶⁹ Fred Collis, a Flinders Island farmer from 1871, also told Westlake that he thought the Aborigines had made fire with a 'soft piece of wood and another piece to push forward and pull back'.⁷⁰ In Launceston, Mrs Charles Smith told Westlake the Aborigines made fire working one piece of wood in the groove of another.⁷¹

⁶³. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 76, 82-84; Westlake 'Notebook 4': 22 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁴. Norman 1910: 333-342. Plomley lists further variations for the word *par.tro.ler* from a range of sources (Plomley 1976: 225).

⁶⁵. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 90.

⁶⁶. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 67.

⁶⁷. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 89-90.

⁶⁸. Westlake 'Notebook 2': 36.

⁶⁹. Westlake 'Notebook 2': 25.

⁷⁰. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 92.

⁷¹. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 101.

Thomas Riley, formerly of Carlton, where his grandfather had settled, said he remembered Charley and Shinall, two Aboriginal men who 'told me and showed me how their people got fires'. They would 'rub the stick (pointed stick) backwards and forwards ... while the other pounds charcoal and puts it in the groove'.⁷² Mr Blyth in the Channel recalled, in 1847 – when the Aborigines were brought to Oyster Cove and he was nine or ten years old – being told how the Aborigines were seen making fire by placing a spear in hard wood and 'two or three would twirl it in their hand', which he called the 'old way of getting fire'. The other way was to simply work a pointed stick in a groove.⁷³ Riley also said Charley and Shinall's method took two men. Is it possible that this 'old way' had been recently adapted into a one-person variation?

Both Beeton and Rayner (the latter in Roth) thought that 'punk' was used to catch the fire made in the groove. Fanny Cochrane Smith's son, Frederick, told Westlake that the 'inner part of stringy bark was used to ignite fires and was called "bulls" wool'.⁷⁴ This corresponds with Bonwick's description of fire being captured in 'some soft down of the inner bark of trees, called balls-wool'. Also in Launceston, William Twelvetrees, the government geologist, informed Westlake that Edward Cotton – the same man quoted by Roth – had told him that the 'Aborigines produced fire by rubbing a pointed stick in cleft [of?] honeysuckle wood'. He said they 'proby [sic] make a groove in it', into which they put in a 'powder taken from below the bark' – or 'inner bark' – of the 'white gum tree'.⁷⁵ Mrs Holmes in Devonport told Westlake that her 'Father has often seen them rub two sticks' to get fire, and that they used 'a bit of fluffy stuff to ignite' it.⁷⁶ Thomas Dunabin of Bream Creek said that the Aborigines 'made fire with two sticks, rubbing a hard stick on a soft piece till it made a groove and the fluff caught fire'.⁷⁷

There are also several descriptions given to Westlake of the friction method that have less detail. Mrs Elmer, who claimed to have personally known the Aborigines of Oyster Cove, told Westlake, 'they told us they used in their native state to make fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together'.⁷⁸ Mrs Hughes and Mrs Smith of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, and the former Premier Thomas Reibey, also agreed that the Aborigines made fire 'rubbing two sticks together'.⁷⁹ In Launceston, Henry Button said the Aborigines made '[f]ire by rapidly rubbing stick', while Drake, on whose south coast farm

72. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 107, 112.

73. Westlake 'Notebook 2': 49.

74. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 82. Riley described using charcoal (Westlake 'Notebook 4': 82). This is similar to Philip Thomas' powder-like 'ashes from a pipe' and Bonwick's 'powdered charcoal' that was also added to the worked groove (Westlake 'Notebook 3': 87–88; Bonwick 1870: 20). Philip Jones notes that Arnhem Land fire-makers used a speck of charcoal in their fire-drills; in Bunbury, in south-western Australia, they added dried flowers from the grass tree, while in southern Victoria frayed bark fibre was 'blown into a flame' (Jones 2008: 19, 26, 30).

75. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 32. Beeton had said a 'dried sap' from a 'particular kind of tree' was added to the groove, while GW Knight explained that the Aborigines twirled the fire-drill, and 'at the same time' they 'blow'd with their mouth' and also used 'a dry wood dust (such as might be got from old wattle trees)' to catch the spark (Westlake 'Notebook 3': 89–90).

76. Westlake 'Notebook 5': 30.

77. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 109.

78. Westlake 'Notebook 6': 43.

79. Westlake 'Notebook 2': 31; 'Notebook 3': 58–59; 'Notebook 3': 68, 71.

Westlake stayed, thought the Aborigines 'used to make a fire with two pieces of wood (not more)'.⁸⁰

There are, however, several descriptions in Westlake's interviews for making fire by rubbing sticks across each other rather than in a groove. Fanny Cochrane Smith's son, Tasman, described by Westlake as a 'very good witness', explained that one 'got two really dried sticks and rubbed them together till got a light. Really dry wood. Think peppermint not certain. Seen mother when a baby ... do it. Just done by rubbing it across. Not in a groove according to mother'. Westlake then noted: 'Mrs Robt Polly at [Oyster Cove] said the same'.⁸¹ Tasman's brother, Frederick Smith agreed, telling Westlake, 'I think they could get fire by rubbing two sticks. Two dry sticks and rub them across one another - never heard of groove'.⁸² George Davis of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel told Westlake that the Aborigines made fire by getting 'two pieces of Dry Tea-tree' and 'rub two sticks together on their sides'.⁸³ Henry Denne also thought that fire was made 'by rubbing two sticks together' - to which Westlake added a picture of two sticks across each other forming an X.⁸⁴

There are differences in opinion and detail in Westlake's interviews regarding the friction method of fire making - the several kinds of wood and additives to help ignite a flame - charcoal, 'fluff', wood dust and sap - and whether the woods were rubbed forward and backward, twirled or across each other. But one consistency runs throughout the answers Westlake gathered: all the informants concur that the Aborigines could make fire, and most agree it was by a friction method.

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence

Westlake's papers come relatively late in the historical record. Indeed, with the notable exception of Ventenat's description, all references to the friction method date from the 1840s, although many informants' memories claim to be from earlier in the colonial period. By the 1840s, almost all the Tasmanian Aborigines - either the partners or children of the sealers, or those confined to the Flinders Island mission - were living in the Bass Strait area, where Victorian, Tasmanian and non-Aboriginal cultures intersected, and where fire-making skills may have conceivably been given to the Tasmanians for the first time. Further, several writers also consider that 'Musquito', the 'Sydney Black' who led a bushranging resistance gang in the 1820s might have also passed on new fire-making skills.⁸⁵ For these reasons almost all the evidence for making fire with wood in Tasmania is generally deemed unreliable. Gott concludes that 'virtually all of [the evi-

⁸⁰. Westlake 'Notebook 3': 24.

⁸¹. Westlake 'Notebook 6': 54. Westlake later noted from Tasman Smith: 'Fire used very hard and dry sticks. I'm always [sic] *understood* that one was held still and the other was rubbed straight across'; Westlake 'Notebook 6': 60.

⁸². Westlake 'Notebook 6': 82.

⁸³. Westlake 'Notebook 6': 23.

⁸⁴. Westlake 'Notebook 6': 106. In another variation, James Galagher, another Channel resident, told Westlake that the Aborigines 'got fire by twirling a crooked stick like handles of a ground stone'. Westlake seemed to doubt this description, adding the question 'Australian?' next to a sketch he made and further noting that the 94-year-old was renowned as 'a great liar' (Westlake 'Notebook 6': 101).

⁸⁵. Gott (2000: 4) quotes C Lord; Sculthorpe 1990: 35. Walker suggests that another 'drill' method may have been learnt by 'Australians' (Walker 1900: 5).

dence for fire making] is open to the objection that it could have been learned from contact', especially considering the 'mixed nature of the Bass Strait communities'.⁸⁶ Although apparently not mentioned previously in this context, it is also pertinent to consider the possible influence of the seven New South Wales Aboriginal men who were employed to assist in capturing Tasmanian Aborigines between 1829 and 1831, initially by John Batman and later by Anthony Cottrell and GA Robinson.⁸⁷

While south-eastern Australian Aborigines may have passed on their knowledge of fire making to Tasmanian Aborigines from about the 1810s to the 1830s, seemingly no writer has questioned the feasibility of these transactions. As it has been noted, the Aboriginal women in the Bass Strait might have taught their sealer partners how to make fire. It is conceivable that one or more of these women were from what later became Victoria. But how possible was it for this potentially Victorian knowledge to then filter to, and spread across, mainland Tasmania so that a range of Europeans, such as Davies, Rayner and Cotton could witness (or at least hear about) this method there, possibly from early in the colonial period, and assume it was Indigenous? It is perhaps more conceivable that Musquito may have passed on his knowledge of fire making via his group of Tasmanian Aborigines who ranged the country between Risdon and Pittwater in the early 1820s.⁸⁸ But could one man, during the tumult of this period, plausibly have passed on his knowledge of fire making to all the other Tasmanian Aboriginal people whom Europeans saw make fire? This seems more likely than the seven New South Wales Aboriginal men passing on their knowledge of fire making. During the one to two years they were engaged to assist in the Black War, they only came in contact with the Tasmanians as assistants to their captors. It is possible that fire making might have been witnessed by Tasmanians in such meetings, but it is unlikely that these were appropriate settings for such an exchange to take place. Indeed the opportunities for different Tasmanian Aboriginal groups to meet and reciprocally share new skills such as fire making may have been equally sparse during this time.

In Philip Jones's study of fire making across Australia, many descriptions are very similar to those recorded in Roth, Westlake and other accounts, especially the fire-drill and stick-and-groove methods. While this may suggest that the Tasmanians learnt these techniques from south-eastern Australian Aborigines, it may also reinforce the validity of the Tasmanian practices. It is possible that south-eastern Australian Aborigines may have influenced how Tasmanian Aborigines made fire rather than passed on a completely new skill. The description Mr Blyth offered to Westlake of an 'old way' of making fire suggests that change did take place, but it also reinforces the idea of a pre-contact method. While a new variation might have been learned from Aborigines from outside Tasmania, tribal groups within Tasmania who previously might have had relatively little contact with each other until the tumult of colonisation, may also have

^{86.} Gott, personal communication with author, 17 July 2001.

^{87.} Campbell 1987: 30, 57–61. These seven men included Warrora (or John Pigeon), Yunbai (or John Crook) who worked for John Batman from 1829 and Macher (or Mackey) Willang (or John Stewart), Quanmerner (or Joe the Marine) and William who arrived between 1830–1831. With the exception of William, these five men continued to work for Batman after his departure to Port Phillip in 1835.

^{88.} Ryan 1996: 79, 87.

shared their own specific fire-making techniques, and considered the learned variations 'new'.

Westlake recorded several eye-witness accounts, which admittedly do not date from explorers or early colonists, but Plomley, in 1993, agreed that the Westlake papers include testimonies of people who 'saw the Tasmanians while some of the fullbloods ... were still alive and held views on firemaking by the natural Aborigines'. Plomley concurs with Breen that the 'burden of proof' should not rest with historical characters 'unable to present their case'. 'To fail to observe something', Plomley concludes, 'is far from claiming that it did not happen'.⁸⁹ Even so, Plomley in 1966 and Jones in 1977 put more faith in the one entry in GA Robinson's journal of 28 December 1831, because it appeared to be testimony from a man who had spent more time than any other European with traditional Tasmanian Aborigines. This is true, but does Robinson's journal entry in fact state the Aborigines could not make fire?

'No more was the fire lost in our land'

In his 1992 article, Shayne Breen points out that the people Robinson travelled with were often unwilling to tell him everything about their culture, and often deceived him with misinformation. Breen imagines what knowledge Mannalargenna and Woorady might have been protecting and wonders 'if the carrying of firesticks was restricted to initiated men' (since the 'chief always' carried it), then perhaps so too was fire making. Breen wonders if fire was made in a 'special ceremony' in which the myth they spoke of - 'Parpeder' and the 'two men in the sky' - was 're-enacted'.⁹⁰ Breen also mentions another reference in Robinson to Aboriginal women using hot sand to ignite grass. The sealer Munro told Robinson that he, with another man, wanted to capture a young Aboriginal woman from Preservation Island. They had seen the smoke from her fire, so went to get her. When they got there, she hid, so they put out her fire with seaweed, knowing that 'as black women will obtain fire from the hot sand by means of grass; when her fire was out she must either come to the boat or go back to Gun Carriage'. Munro had set a trap: if the girl returned to the sand to get fire, she would be caught. That 'black women will obtain fire' may imply that men make it another way and further that the girl in the story did not have the 'authority'.⁹¹

Brough Smyth noted that among Victorian Aboriginal people it was 'probably that experts only used the sticks for getting fire'. Should a smaller group of Aborigines leave the main camp 'unaccompanied by fighting men' they may 'have had often to endure cold, when by carelessness or accident the fire they carried was extinguished'.⁹² Philip Jones notes that in some Australian Aboriginal communities both men and women made fire, but in others 'it seems that only men had the right to make it'. Jones wonders if the origins for this division are found in several Australian Dreaming stories in which women first had fire, but it was wrested from them by men, who then owned the art of making it. Jones points to a translation of a funeral ceremony from western

⁸⁹. Plomley 1993: 270; Breen 1992: 40; Gott 2002, the title of which is 'Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'.

⁹⁰. Breen 1992: 42.

⁹¹. Breen 1992: 42.

⁹². Brough Smyth 1878: 396.

New South Wales in which it was said that 'women can make no fires'. Jones considers whether this knowledge was also limited to adults, noting that in northern New South Wales, Langloh Parker wrote in 1905 that 'no Kamilaroi boy who had not been to a Boorah [initiation ceremony] would dare to try to make fire'.⁹³

While Breen reads Robinson's journal entry of 28 December 1831 and assumes these people are reticent in divulging details of a sacred ritual, Rhys Jones and Plomley (in 1966) assume they are wilfully demonstrating their ignorance. This ignorance is presumed not only by Mannalargenna's explanation of having to eat raw meat and look for fire from another mob if his fire brand were extinguished, but by his reference to the 'two men in the sky' and by Woorady's 'Parpeder' who 'first gave the natives fire'. It is as if the sky were the only source of fire, in the form of lightning, while the Aborigines had no artificial means to make it. The same conclusion was drawn by other contemporary writers who recorded the fire myth. James Backhouse and George Walker, two English Quakers who were sent to observe and report on the conditions in the Australian colonies from 1832 to 1838, noted that:

the aborigines of [Van Diemen's Land] had no method of obtaining fire before their acquaintance with Europeans. They say they first obtained it from the sky, probably by this meaning from lightning. They preserved it by carrying firesticks with them.⁹⁴

In his subsequent book, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, Backhouse attributes this story to the Aboriginal man Proper who travelled with the missionaries from Launceston to Flinders Island, although Gott wonders if the statement might in fact have come from Darling, the mission's superintendent.⁹⁵

Lieutenant Pascoe, who visited Flinders Island from 1837 to 1843, told James Backhouse Walker that he was once 'out with a black on a mountain in Flinders' when he asked the Aboriginal person to 'make fire by rubbing wood'. 'The black', however, 'could not understand him' and said 'star tumble down, make fire'.⁹⁶ That the sky was the only source of fire for the Tasmanian Aborigines is also echoed decades later in the words of Mrs Sarah Miller, the daughter of Fanny Cochrane Smith, who told Westlake in 1910:

Father used to question them how they had fire. [Flint and steel and dried punk off the tree.] All that ever they could tell him was that their 'father give it them' – they believed very much in a supreme being. This was *always* their belief before meeting the whites. I can remember Trucanini and she said could never give any account of how they got fire ... Fire was always carried about by them. The first thing at a camp was light a fire and keep it going till they had to start again. Punk is a white fungus in sheets ... *Never* ... hear mother or father say that used to get fire by getting rubbing pieces of wood together, but *only* in questioning older natives heard them say that their 'father give it them'.⁹⁷

⁹³. Jones 2008: 9.

⁹⁴. Plomley 1987: 241. Backhouse reiterates this point in his Flinders Island diary: 'they kept their fire by carrying ignited sticks with them wherever they went. It is said they first obtained fire by the effect of lightning' (Plomley 1987: 230).

⁹⁵. Backhouse 1843: 99; Gott 2002: 653.

⁹⁶. Roth 1899: 84.

⁹⁷. Westlake 'Notebook 6': 114–115.

Mrs Miller remembers the customs of the 'older natives' by recalling their tradition of talking about the fire myth whenever questioned about how it was made. Just as Woorady told Robinson 'PARPEDER gave fire', Mrs Miller tells Westlake 'Father give it to them' – a 'supreme being'. Just as Breen suggests Mannalargenna and Woorady (who came from the same country as Trukanini) were purposefully oblique in their answers to Robinson on fire making, so perhaps is Mrs Miller in response to Westlake's questions. Given her detailed knowledge of native foods and spiritual customs, she may have known how fire was traditionally made, but also did not want to tell. Moreover, her brothers, Tasman and Fred Smith, clearly remembered how they thought their traditional Aboriginal ancestors made fire – by rubbing two sticks across each other; Tasman Smith also remembered seeing his mother doing this. While Mrs Miller does not mention this, she does describe fire being made with 'Flint and steel and dried punk off the tree'.⁹⁸

It is also possible that the meaning of the fire myth has been repeatedly misinterpreted. A more complete version of the myth appears in Joseph Milligan's 1859 article in the *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, reproduced by Roth, in which the following 'legend' was 'related by a native of the Oyster Bay tribe':

My father, my grandfather, all of them lived a long time ago, all over the country; they had no fire. Two black fellows came ... on the summit of a hill they were seen by my fathers, my countrymen ... seen standing; they threw fire like a star – it fell among the black men, my countrymen. They were frightened – they fled away ... after a while they returned – they hastened and made a fire – a fire with wood; no more was the fire lost in our land. The two black fellows are in the clouds: in the clear night you see them like two stars.⁹⁹

This appears to be similar to the story Mannalargenna told Robinson in which 'two men in the sky first gave the natives fire'. It may also be the same story told by Proper to Backhouse and Walker, by 'the black' of Flinders Island to Dove and by Trukanini, and the 'older natives' to Mrs Miller's father. This legend points to a Dreaming time 'a long time ago' when Aborigines had no fire, in contrast to their present time with fire. As Woorady, Mannalargenna and Proper apparently said, this story refers to the 'first' time their people got fire, but not necessarily how they continued to get it. At that initial moment of seeing fire the people fled in fear, but 'they returned – they hastened and made a fire – a fire with wood'. After this initial 'fire with wood' was made, 'no more was the fire lost in our land'. Was the 'fire with wood' made by lighting a fire stick or by creating a fire with two pieces of wood? This crucial difference could easily have been lost in the confusion of translation, or may have been purposefully left obscure. We do not know what the Aborigines – whether the 'native of the Oyster Bay tribe', or Mannalargenna, Woorady or Proper – actually said; nor do we know what questions they were attempting to answer; nor how well the parties understood one another.

⁹⁸. Plomley has excised the note made by Westlake in square parentheses without indication. His edited version of Mrs Miller's statement opens as: 'Father used to question them how they had fire. All they could ever tell him was that their "father gave it them" (they believed very much in a supreme being)' (Plomley 1991: 61).

⁹⁹. Roth 1899: 84–85; Milligan 1859: 274.

Myths for the origin of fire from around the world predominantly refer to fire first coming from the sky. In Greek mythology Prometheus steals fire from Jupiter, and brings it to earth. There are also Dreaming stories across Aboriginal Australia that tell of fire coming from the sun, or from a bird in the sky, although most refer to fire coming from the land. However, Philip Jones explains that the stories all share, to a degree, a 'common structure', also found in the Tasmanian fire legend:

Fire, and the secret of making it, was once in the possession of an individual, or a privileged few. Its subsequent theft, by a covetous individual, leads to the inadvertent release of fire into the landscape, so that it becomes available to all people.¹⁰⁰

This idea of a 'secret' of fire making may have been remembered in some Aboriginal cultures, including Tasmania, where only one group of people had the authority to make it. Tylor observed that, because of the preponderance of 'Prometheus-legends' around the world, the idea of fireless peoples is another myth that has been promulgated for 'ages' with Tasmania being only a recent example. The very idea of a fireless people would, Tylor admitted, 'be of the highest interest to the ethnographer' as it would demonstrate an important evolutionary step to those 'races who can produce fire', especially since making fire is, in his opinion 'an art which, once learnt, would hardly be lost' (although Rhys Jones considered that it could be). Tylor was unconvinced that any known peoples were unable to make fire, and that any such claim had always been made 'without any sound basis'.¹⁰¹ Brough Smyth agreed with Tylor, stating that observers such as Dove had not considered the importance of their statements, nor provided sufficient evidence. He noted that while 'it is considered proper in Europe to describe [the Tasmanians] as the most degraded amongst all the races of mankind', the 'skill' they displayed in other aspects of their lives 'would lead one to suppose that the art of making fire was known to them as to other savage peoples in a similar condition'.¹⁰²

Fire in the rain

All these considerations point to why Robinson's journal entry of 28 December 1831 is not an incontrovertible statement that the Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire. But there may be another, far more mundane, reason that he did not see it being made: the passage is qualified by the clause 'They said if their fire went out by reason of rain'.

Making fire might have been impossible in wet and cold weather.¹⁰³ Melville, writing in 1851, thought the Aborigines made fire by rubbing a stick in a groove of wood, but added that 'it was difficult at times to obtain fire by this means, especially in wet weather'.¹⁰⁴ William Buckley, who lived with the Victorian Wathaurang from 1802 to 1836, found making fire in winter almost impossible:

In summer months fire is very easily obtained by rubbing together two sticks they call Dealwark. They sometimes carry these unlighted fire-sticks about with them,

¹⁰⁰. Jones 2008: 3.

¹⁰¹. Tylor 1964: 249.

¹⁰². Brough Smyth 1878: 397.

¹⁰³. Ian Hunter, a Wurundjeri man from Victoria, told Beth Gott it was impossible to make fire using wood in wet and cold conditions (Gott 2002: 651).

¹⁰⁴. Roth 1899: 84.

wrapped in a sort of covering made of opossum hair. In the winter months they are often much distressed for fire, and suffer greatly from hunger and cold.¹⁰⁵

It was late December – summer – when Robinson asked the Aborigines what happened if rain doused their fire brands. They were walking near Lake Echo in the lakes region of Tasmania's central plateau. It is rarely hot there and often raining. On 12 and 13 December 1831 Robinson recorded there had been rain, snow and hail. Two days later it snowed again, and hailed the day after that. From 18 to 20 December there were heavy winds and rain. Pleasant weather persisted for another five days, and then two days before Robinson asked the question about fire making, it was again wet and windy.

The difficulty of making fire in Tasmania led James Calder to conclude the Tasmanian Aborigines were 'ignorant of any method of procuring fire', since he thought, 'no amount of friction could possibly ignite the woods of this colony'.¹⁰⁶ James Fenton assumed Calder was referring to the hardness of Tasmanian woods, asserting in 1884 that the Aborigines 'were ignorant of any artificial means of procuring fire: indeed it would be difficult to ignite the hard woods of the island by friction'.¹⁰⁷ Roth, possibly assuming that Calder was referring to the wetness of Tasmanian woods, stated that the Aborigines made fire with timber, but that 'ignition could probably only be produced in hot dry weather'.¹⁰⁸

Fire brands, made out of slow burning tinder, such as bark, were designed to burn for a long time and stay alight even while travelling on water rafts or in wet weather.¹⁰⁹ On 9 November 1831, Robinson had found it

amusing to see the chief in the heavy rain naked walking in advance ... streaming his lighted torch against the wind and the rain. As I was acquainted with its meaning it was the more amusing. This experiment was intended to stop the rain.¹¹⁰

Thomas Bock's painting of Mannalargenna shows him holding a smouldering fire brand. Melville wrote that the Aborigines 'generally, in their peregrinations, carried with them a fire-stick, lighted at their last encampment'.¹¹¹ Scott, Fenton and Jorgenson made similar observations.¹¹² Thomas Dunabin told Westlake that the Aborigines had to 'to work very hard', to get fire, adding that 'old hands say this was the last resort; would always carry a piece of fire'. Other informants agreed that the Aborigines would never let their fire brands expire.¹¹³ Philip Jones quotes Surveyor Robert Austin who recalled of the Pindjarup people of south-western Australia (a similarly wet area in winter): 'If the necessary timber for manufacturing these firesticks ever proved at all unsuitable through wet, or scarce, the lighted sticks would be carried along under the

¹⁰⁵. Jones 2008: 4; Gott 2002: 652; Morgan 1967: 68; Brough Smyth 1878: 396.

¹⁰⁶. Roth 1899: 83.

¹⁰⁷. Fenton 1884: 94.

¹⁰⁸. Roth 1899: 83.

¹⁰⁹. Roth 1899: 84.

¹¹⁰. Plomley 1966: 509.

¹¹¹. Roth 1899: 84.

¹¹². Scott 1873: 25; Fenton 1884: 94; Breen 1992: 41.

¹¹³. Westlake 'Notebook 4': 109, 32, 101; 'Notebook 3': 59.

men's or women's cloaks'. A small fire was kept burning in every Aboriginal camp, and women lit fire-sticks from these fires to carry when the group moved on.¹¹⁴

Since it was so common for Aboriginal people to carry burning fire sticks, it was not unusual for observers to never see fire being made. Brough Smyth noted that Victorian Aboriginal men and women 'always carried a lighted ... brand' when they left their camp, and that 'consequently ... white men who have lived with the Aborigines, and who have become acquainted with many of their practices, are unable to say how fire is procured' other than to 'state vaguely that two sticks are rubbed together'.¹¹⁵ This was even the case in drier regions of Australia. Philip Jones explains that during the Elder expedition into Western Australia from 1891 to 1892, Helms observed that all the Aboriginal groups they encountered carried fire sticks, but he failed to convince any of them to show him how fire was made. In their case, soft, pithy materials, such as the grass tree, were unavailable.¹¹⁶ This may explain why Robinson first saw fire being made by Aboriginal people in Victoria.

It was not only the Tasmanians who had to travel to another group to get fire if their fire sticks were extinguished. Echoing Mannalargenna's words to Robinson, William Buckley in Port Phillip found that if his group's fire sticks went out while travelling, they had to wait until they could find another mob with fire so 'we were again able to make fires to cook our food'.¹¹⁷ Anthropologist Norman Tindale found that Aboriginal people in South Australia's Adelaide Plains and Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas sometimes had to travel long distances to replenish their fire.¹¹⁸ Even in Lake Eyre, one of the driest regions of Australia, missionary JG Reuther recorded these phrases from the Aboriginal people of Lake Eyre: 'kindle (rub) a fire today; tomorrow the wood may be damp' and 'come here with your firestick; the rain has extinguished my fire', meaning the 'obligation to provide fire was undoubtedly strong; to refuse to comply with this request would certainly jeopardise relations'.¹¹⁹ As Mannalargenna told Robinson: 'They must give fire and sometimes they would fight afterwards'.

Philip Jones considers that if Aboriginal people in wetter regions of southern Australia were temporarily unable to make fire, then it is conceivable that 'local conflict or shifts in alliances' could lead to people being unable obtain fire from their neighbours, and therefore 'fire-making skills could gradually diminish within an expanding region, ultimately to the limits of islands such as Kangaroo Island or Tasmania'.¹²⁰ This is essentially Rhys Jones' thesis: that people isolated from potential new ideas, could, over several generations, lose essential skills and technologies.

While this may be a possibility, particularly in Tasmania where Aboriginal people were seemingly unable to make fire in wetter seasons and regions, there is equally no conclusive evidence that they had completely lost the skill. Sylvia Hallam warns 'that the use of a fire-brand did not signify inability to ignite a fire'.¹²¹ To state that the Tas-

¹¹⁴ Jones 2008: 4; Roth 1902: 66.

¹¹⁵ Brough Smyth 1878: 396.

¹¹⁶ Jones 2008: 38.

¹¹⁷ Morgan, 1967: 43; Jones 2008: 4.

¹¹⁸ Jones 2008: 5.

¹¹⁹ Jones 2008: 38.

¹²⁰ Jones 2008: 5.

manian Aborigines could not make fire in the rain is quite different to stating that they had forgotten or never knew how to make it.

Contrasting images

Notwithstanding evidence to the contrary, it was Rhys Jones' passionate and energetic prose that captured and then persuaded a wide audience into accepting as fact his argument that Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire. Perhaps Jones cast aside the contrary evidence not only because he was convinced by Plomley's footnote, but because he was seduced by the very idea of a fireless people. The hypothesis fitted into, and indeed helped shape, his vision of a society in cultural decline due to their biogeographical isolation. The smouldering fire stick for Jones symbolised, on the one hand, a traditional society unable to make fire, while on the other hand, it was the tool he imagined the Tasmanian Aborigines used to control and manage their landscape. It was Jones, after all, who coined the term 'fire-stick farming' in a famous article from 1969, a term that is now part of the Australian lexicon. That article popularised the notion that for hundreds of generations Aborigines had deliberately set fire to their land to clear it for hunting, gathering, travelling and living, an idea foreshadowed by Tindale in 1959, and extended by Hallam in 1975.¹²² While Jones considered the practice universal to Australia, he was first inspired by his research in Tasmania; from Robinson's journals, Jones learned that the Aborigines 'set fire to the bush as they walked along'.¹²³ The first page of Jones's 1969 article carries Bock's painting of Mannalargenna with his fire stick.

It makes a degree of sense that a people who could not create a flame would make wide use of fire, since with perpetually-burning fire there is far less risk of it being completely extinguished. It then follows that, without a need to make fire, the art of making it would, in time, be lost. What emerges from this logic, however, are two contrasting pictures of traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal life: a people with power over their land and a people passively at its mercy. In 1969 Jones allows Mannalargenna control over his land with fire, but a few years later, in 1977, he is denied the ability to make it.¹²⁴ But in both contrasting pictures Jones offered radical and ground-breaking new pictures of Aboriginal Tasmania. As John Mulvaney reflects, Jones, by introducing the idea of firestick farming, allowed white Australians to see Aboriginal people not as passive nomads, but as active shapers of their world.¹²⁵ But in the case of Tasmanian Aborigi-

¹²¹. Hallam 1975: 44; Jones 2008: 5. Breen also makes this point: 'if one reason for carrying fire was to preserve it, this should not be taken as evidence that the Tasmanians could not make it' (Breen 1992: 41).

¹²². Jones 1969: 224–228. Tindale wrote that: '[M]an probably has had a significant hand in the moulding of the present configuration of parts of Australia. Indeed much of the grassland of Australia could have been brought into being as a result of his exploitation'. Tindale continues that firing the land may also have had such 'a profound effect on the distributions of forest ... that true primaevial forest may be far less common in Australia than is generally realised' (Tindale 1959: 36–51). Hallam, with tribute to Jones, extended his notion of 'fire-stick farming' arguing that the parklands that the first European settlers found ideal for grazing had been created by Aboriginal fire regimes (Hallam 1975: 71–77). For further discussion, see Horton 2000: 70–101, who argues that the 'fire-stick farming' thesis put forward by Tindale, Jones and Hallam is fundamentally flawed.

¹²³. Harris 2001: 55–60; Mulvaney 2001: 19–22.

¹²⁴. Jones 1969, 1977a.

nes, Jones found evidence that defied the base rule of progression in evolutionary theory. For Jones the Tasmanian Aborigines were a fireless people; and thus represented a culture in slow degenerative decline. While anthropologists such as Roth and Tylor had considered the Tasmanian Aborigines 'rude savages', as Tylor put it, both insisted they could make fire. For Tylor and Roth, the Tasmanian Aborigines were modern representatives of Palaeolithic man, and thus represented a cultural evolutionary beginning.¹²⁶

Conclusion

Almost all the historical sources on fire making from as early as 1773 support the idea that the Tasmanian Aborigines made fire. The few 19th century sources to state that they could not were evidently influenced either by a Tasmanian Aboriginal myth in which fire is said to come from the sky (Milligan, Dove, Backhouse and Walker) or by the hardness, and possibly wetness, of Tasmanian timbers (Calder and Fenton). Both of these factors make Robinson's journal entry in late 1831 highly ambiguous: Mannalargenna was perhaps unwilling to divulge what may have been a secret ritual related to a mythical story, or was unable to make fire in the rain, or both.

It was not, however, until the late 19th or early 20th century that Tasmanians, recorded by Walker and by Westlake, testify to having seen traditional Tasmanian Aborigines making fire. It is for this reason that Gott and Sculthorpe, among others, consider it plausible that the Tasmanian Aborigines may have learned to make fire from south-eastern Australian Aborigines after colonisation. For this to be possible, however, a small number of outsider Aborigines must have been able to disseminate quickly their fire-making knowledge to different parts of Tasmania, predominantly during an extremely tumultuous time in the colonial period. Moreover, the French and English explorers must have all been mistaken in their explanations of the stones they found carefully stored in baskets – a collective interpretation that Plomley considered, in 1993, to be 'impressive'. Moreover, as Gott, Breen and Plomley (following Breen) note, just because fire making was not witnessed earlier in Tasmania's historical record, does not mean the Aboriginal people could not make it.

Plomley's revised opinion was informed in part by his own reappraisal of Westlake's informants as important and reliable sources of traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. Sculthorpe notes that Westlake's reports make it possible that fire was made in Tasmania using a grass-tree drill, albeit a technique that might have been introduced by south-eastern Australian Aboriginal people.¹²⁷ The continuity in fire-making

¹²⁵ Mulvaney, 2001: 20, 21.

¹²⁶ William Flower (1878) foreshadowed the idea that the Tasmanian Aborigines may have degenerated. In the late 1920s to mid-1930s Henry Balfour, Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, pre-empted Jones' thesis of cultural degeneration in an unpublished manuscript, 'Stone Implements of the Natives of Tasmania'. He wrote: 'The Tasmanians must have become isolated and immune to culture-contacts, when Bass Straits were formed ... This culture remained stagnating and may even possibly have retrogressed'. It is possible that Jones, who according to the museum's correspondence files read this manuscript, may have been (if unwittingly) influenced by it, although he does not reference Balfour in his later work (Balfour c1930: 6; Jones, letter to Derek Roe, 3 May 1966).

¹²⁷ Sculthorpe 1990: 36.

descriptions from Walker's informants using such a method (and other earlier sources) to Westlake's is indeed noteworthy. It is most obvious in the interviews with Aboriginal Islanders by whom this information had possibly been inherited along with other Indigenous traditions. As I argued in 'The polemics of eating fish in Tasmania', these testimonies should be given a sympathetic hearing not only because it is respectful to Tasmanian Aboriginal people, but because it is also scholarly to do so. The Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) testimonies on making fire in the Westlake papers add considerable weight to an already large body of corresponding historical evidence that overwhelms the sparse and ambiguous contrary sources.

However, Plomley's 1966 conclusion that the Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire has had a far-reaching impact. It convinced Rhys Jones whose ground-breaking archaeological work influenced almost all subsequent scholarly work on Aboriginal Tasmania. But the idea that the Tasmanian Aborigines could not make fire was never more than supposition.¹²⁸ While the contrasting claim that they could make fire has never been an absolute certainty, it is the far more logical and probable conclusion.

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¹²⁸. Breen 1992: 41; Tylor 1964: 249.

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The fourteen powers referendum of 1944 and the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs

Charlie Fox

The 1967 federal referendum, which gave the Commonwealth government power to legislate for Aboriginal people and count them in the national census, is celebrated as a turning point in the Aboriginal history of Australia. Given the disinclination of Australians to change the Constitution, it is rare to find such apparent unity in Australian politics, with over 90 per cent of the voting population answering 'yes' to the two referendum questions. Although the passage of time and a history of both advances and retreats in Aboriginal policy have led to a more measured assessment of its impact, many people still regard the referendum as a high point in Aboriginal people's struggle for human rights. They see it as a moment of great symbolic and political importance, a significant step in the transition from the politics of citizenship to the politics of Aboriginal self-determination and as the realisation of a long-held dream for a truly national Aboriginal policy, a dream that began as early as Federation itself.¹ However, 1967 was not the first time the Australian people had been asked to pass control of Aboriginal affairs to the Commonwealth by referendum. Clause N of Section 2 of the so-called 'fourteen powers' referendum held in August 1944 – the Curtin Labor Government's attempt to clothe itself with extra powers in order to fully administer its plans for post-war reconstruction – asked the Australian people, as part of that process, to agree to the transfer of power over Aboriginal people to the Commonwealth. The referendum failed and so did the Aboriginal clause. It was a casualty of the government's insistence that all fourteen powers be voted on as one and this meant that power over Aboriginal people remained with the states for a further 23 years.

This article sets out the history and explores the debates surrounding the inclusion of the Aboriginal clause in the 1944 referendum and tries to estimate its importance in the heated arguments about the referendum, post-war reconstruction and the extent of Commonwealth powers. It supports existing arguments that the government added the clause to an already existing list only after representations from the Association for the Protection of Native Races (APNR) and similar bodies. The paper argues that the Aboriginal clause was placed last on the list of powers to be transferred in the referendum – underlining its status as an afterthought – and, in the national and state debates

¹. Attwood and Markus (2007, chapters 8 and 9) set out both sides of the argument about the benefits the referendum brought to Aboriginal people.

about Commonwealth powers in the wider referendum campaign, it was generally marginalised, overshadowed by seemingly weightier issues such as repatriation and employment. Finally it argues that there was a substantial degree of support for the clause among all political parties and, curiously, it was this almost universal support that caused it to be so little discussed.

The historiography of the Aboriginal clause

There are three historiographical contexts for the Aboriginal clause in the 1944 referendum: the histories of the Second World War, citizenship and the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs. In none of the books on the home front during the Second World War is the Aboriginal clause mentioned, even though some writers, such as Hasluck, discuss the referendum at length. Similarly, political biographies of Australia's wartime leaders – Curtin, Chifley, Evatt, Menzies and Page – fail to mention it, although their authors were all interested in the referendum as a whole.² Historians who write about Aboriginal people and World War Two have done better, with Peter Biskup perhaps the first to discuss the Aboriginal clause. In a chapter on the war in *Not Slaves, Not Citizens*, he argues that its inclusion in the referendum must be seen in the context of what he regards as a new wartime idealism about the position of Aboriginal people in Australia and the drive by the Labor Party for the centralisation of power in Canberra, one manifestation of which was the liberalisation of social welfare for Aboriginal people.³ Richard Hall (while not mentioning the referendum) also concludes that a new and more generous thinking about Aboriginal Australians emerged during the war, as a result of interaction between black and white Australians.⁴

In histories of Aboriginal people and citizenship rights, the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs comes into clearer focus. Chesterman and Galligan describe the events in bare outline, but mistakenly separate the 1944 referendum from the 1942 Commonwealth-State constitutional convention (see below), when in fact they were part of one process. They also overestimate the strength of the arguments against the proposal.⁵ Contrary to the position put by Biskup, Peterson and Sanders suggest that the wartime Labor governments did little to improve Aboriginal people's welfare or rights. They describe the Aboriginal clause in the 1944 referendum as little more than a concession to Aboriginal activists, although it is not clear who these activists were or why the government would make such a concession.⁶

Attwood and Markus and their collaborators give the fullest account to date of the Aboriginal clause, in their history of the 1967 referendum, the first part of which is a history of attempts to federalise Aboriginal control. They contextualise it in the long history of demands for federal control; they show that it was inspired by representations from the APNR; they reproduce key documents from the debates; and they repeat the argument that the 1944 referendum was defeated because the government amalgamated all the powers as one.⁷ In their account and in similar writings, however, the

2. Day 2001; Tennant 1970; Ross 1977; Lee 1983; Page 1963; Hazlehurst 1979; Perkins 1968; Golding 1996; Porter 1993; Buckley, Dale and Reynolds 1994.

3. Biskup 1973: 197–201.

4. Hall 1977, chapter 1.

5. Chesterman and Galligan 1997: 154.

6. Peterson and Sanders 1998: 13.

Aboriginal clause is no more than a step along the tortuous path to citizen rights and the 1967 referendum. Its specificity, place and time are secondary to its position on this continuum. Fiona Paisley's comprehensive account of the arguments supporting federalising Aboriginal affairs in the 1927-1929 Commonwealth Royal Commission on the Constitution represents a model account of one moment in the history of attempts to federalise Aboriginal affairs, contextualising the place of the Royal Commission in contemporary discourses on race and gender.⁸ As Paisley does with the Royal Commission, I situate the referendum in its place and time. I contend that the history of the Aboriginal clause is much more complex than previously has been supposed and needs to be examined in the broader history of the fourteen powers referendum and the debates about post-war reconstruction. However, this article differs from Paisley's in that it is less about contemporary discourse on Aboriginal people and more about the history of the Aboriginal clause in the referendum as a whole.

The history of the referendum

The history of the fourteen powers referendum began in 1942, when Curtin's first government announced grand plans for radically augmenting its powers in the post-war world. It already had extensive wartime powers under the Defence and National Security Acts, but while these were adequate for the prosecution of the war, constitutionally they could only last for six months after the war was over and were therefore inadequate for the peace. In October 1942 the Attorney-General, HV Evatt, introduced a bill into the Federal Parliament for a referendum to alter the Constitution to give the Commonwealth greater powers. The Bill, entitled the Constitution Alteration (War Aims and Reconstruction) Bill, proposed that the people be asked at referendum to transfer powers over repatriation, employment, production and markets, goods and services, prices, profiteering, the encouragement of population, national works, improvement in living standards, transport (including aviation), national health and fitness, housing and child welfare.⁹ It also proposed to write into the Constitution the so-called four freedoms – freedom of speech, expression, religion and freedom from want and fear – enshrined in the Atlantic Charter, the agreement concluded between Britain and the United States of America in 1942 to develop policies for the post-war new order. The Curtin government mixed this international agenda with Australian politics to shape its own vision of the post-war world. With his role in the creation of the United Nations well known and celebrated, Evatt in particular believed that the post-war new order could only be won and safeguarded by international reforms and agreements. The Atlantic Charter was part of this internationalist agenda and, although it was not binding on the wartime allies, Australia signed up to it. Instituting the four freedoms was also good politics: sufficient riposte, the government hoped, to those who believed that the referendum was a naked grab for power.¹⁰

The proposed Bill, however, was criticised for the vagueness of some of its clauses and met with opposition from the states, including the Labor states. The government

7. Attwood and Markus 2007: 11-12.

8. Paisley 1998.

9. Evatt 1943: 115.

10. Evatt 1943: 162-164. For more argument on the relationship between the Australian government and 'the United Nations', see Hasluck 1970, chapter 8.

shelved the referendum bill and settled on an alternative course permitted by Section 51 (xxxviii) of the Constitution by requesting the states to transfer voluntarily those powers it wanted. It called a Constitutional Convention for November 1942, at which Curtin and Evatt met with premiers and federal and state opposition leaders, to hammer out an agreement on the powers to be transferred. Much to the surprise of the delegates, Evatt submitted a rearranged set of powers for discussion, and this included a clause to give the Commonwealth government the power to make laws for 'the people of the aboriginal race'.¹¹

The convention was an often-heated affair – a festival of bluff and counter-bluff, manoeuvrings and machinations, but out of it came surprising agreement. The government was forced to compromise on some of its aims, but the opposition of the United Australia Party (UAP) and Country Party to the wholesale transfer of powers was undercut by a successful proposal from the Tasmanian Labor premier that the powers be voluntarily transferred for a total of seven years (subsequently reduced to five) on the signing of the armistice. A drafting committee – consisting of Evatt, Billy Hughes (UAP) and the six state premiers – drew up legislation incorporating the new list of powers to be transferred. The delegates approved this unanimously and state representatives undertook to take it home and shepherd it through their own parliaments by the end of January 1943. For Curtin's government this was to be an all-or-nothing affair: unless all the states signed up to the full list of powers, it would re-consider the option of a referendum. With state premiers and opposition leaders all supporting the proposal, the federal government had some grounds for optimism. It waited patiently for the state parliaments to come to their decisions.¹²

Unfortunately, it had overlooked the conservative state upper houses. Queensland and New South Wales, both governed by Labor and without difficult upper houses, passed the required legislation in short order. Both South Australia (with a UAP government) and Western Australia (with a Labor government) had conservative upper houses and passed severely truncated versions of the fourteen powers bill. The Country Party government in Victoria passed its Bill, but late in the debate it added a rider that it would only become operational if all other states passed the Bill agreed to by the Convention. In Tasmania the process came further unstuck: piloted through the lower house by the Labor government, it was thrown out by an opposition-dominated upper house. Political manoeuvres by the Tasmanian government failed to overcome the deadlock and the whole arrangement collapsed.

The Curtin government therefore proceeded to its final option. In February and March of 1944, six months after its sweeping victory in the 1943 general election (it won 49 of 74 seats in the House of Representatives and a majority of eight in the Senate),¹³ it introduced the Constitution Alteration (Post War Reconstruction and Democratic

11. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1942.

12. The best account of the history of the referendum is in Hasluck 1970: 528–540. The powers sought to be transferred were: 1. Repatriation; 2. Employment and unemployment; 3. Marketing of commodities; 4. Companies; 5. Trust, combines and monopolies; 6. Profiteering and prices; 7. The production and distribution of goods; 8. Exchange and investment; 9. Air transport; 10. Railways; 11. National works; 12. National health; 13. Family allowances; and 14. The people of the Aboriginal race.

13. Day 2001: 396–397.

Rights) Bill of 1944 to set up the machinery for the referendum. Crucially, it required that all the clauses be voted on as one. Apparently Evatt and Chifley insisted upon this, having frequently argued that all the powers were related and it made little sense to separate them. As Curtin said during the referendum campaign:

The powers ... are complementary. If they were divided and only some were accepted, it might be that the powers rejected would prove in the opinion of the High Court, the very ones required to give effect to the wishes of those who voted for the other powers.¹⁴

Menzies ridiculed the strategy. As reported in a Perth speech, '[h]e, for one, refused to believe that the repatriation power ... was interwoven with, for instance, the Commonwealth control of aborigines'.¹⁵

As time passed, the consensus found at the Convention evaporated. The federal opposition, which had previously signed up to the transfer of powers, attacked the legislation for the referendum when it came before parliament and advocated a 'no' vote at the referendum. State UAP and Country Party leaders did the same, although during the referendum campaign divisions surfaced. As Waters has shown, there were divisions within both the UAP and Country Party with some elements advocating a 'yes' vote.¹⁶ Curtin was disappointed but not surprised when, on 19 August 1944, the referendum was comprehensively defeated.¹⁷

Several reasons have been put forward to explain the failure of the referendum. Contemporary sources argued that the 'spectre of industrial conscription' after the war did most to damage the 'yes' case. A desire to be free of increasingly irksome wartime controls was significant in Queensland, where they had been most oppressive. There were suggestions that Curtin was lukewarm about the referendum and did not campaign as hard as he might have (though he was ill for much of the campaign) and that the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was split over the question of Commonwealth powers, especially in New South Wales, where Jack Lang and his Australian Labor Party (Anti-Communist) supported the 'no' case.¹⁸ Historians largely concur with these views. Hasluck argues that by August 1944 the war had been won and people did not want wartime controls to continue.¹⁹ Buckley and his colleagues agree, but also suggest that putting all the questions as one was a 'major tactical blunder'. Yet, as they also say, the government was entitled to think it had a chance, given the apparent unanimity of the 1942 convention and the unrealised possibility that the UAP and Country Party might support it.²⁰ On the other hand, Kylie Tennant attributes the failure to the coincidental heavy-handed campaign against the press by Arthur Calwell, then Minister for Information.²¹ Another common argument attributes the failure to Australians' reluc-

14. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August 1944.

15. 'Report of Menzies' meetings in Perth', in 'Referendum: material requiring reply', Attorney-General's Department, series A467, barcode 99555, National Archives of Australia (NAA), Canberra.

16. Waters 1969.

17. *The Age*, 24 August 1944.

18. *The Age*, 21 August 1944.

19. Hasluck 1970: 539–540.

20. Buckley, Dale and Reynolds 1994: 198–199.

21. Tennant 1970: 160.

tance to change the Constitution and, although this is a judgment coloured by subsequent failures, by 1944 the record was already strongly against change.²² Yet, as Rowse rightly points out, it is unwise to generalise about 'the people's' opposition to the referendum and to constitutional change. After all, 46 per cent of the population voted 'yes' in 1944, and substantial minorities have supported every unsuccessful referendum.²³

Would a vote on the Aboriginal clause alone have passed?²⁴ Jack Horner suggests that the referendum question 'asked too much of uninformed white people and explained too little'.²⁵ This argument, however, seems unlikely, as we will see.

The origins of the Aboriginal clause

Agitation in support of the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs has a long history, going back to 1901, when it was proposed by Western Australian parliamentarian Hugh Mahon.²⁶ As Paisley shows, it was an important point of debate at the 1927–1929 Commonwealth Royal Commission on the Constitution, with the commissioners divided on the question.²⁷ By the 1940s it had become, as Attwood and Markus say, 'an article of faith' to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal humanitarian organisations alike.²⁸

When Evatt proposed his original referendum bill on 1 October 1942, there was no Aboriginal clause; by the time of the Convention just six weeks later, it had been included. This is surprising given that both the Minister for Social Security, Ted Holloway, and the Minister of the Interior, Joseph Collings, had been approached by humanitarian organisations over the matter, but had rejected it, arguing nothing could be done until after the war.²⁹ Along with Biskup, Attwood and Markus attribute responsibility for the initiative to the representations of the APNR and its president, Sydney anthropologist AP Elkin, who by this time had considerable influence in Canberra.³⁰ It was his vision of assimilation that had so impressed John McEwen, the Minister for the Interior in the pre-war Lyons government. Tigger Wise has suggested that in the late 1930s Elkin, McEwen and JH Carrodus, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, had written the first overtly assimilationist policy in Australia, thus changing the direction of Aboriginal policy forever.³¹

Although the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs had been put on the political agenda by non-Aboriginal humanitarians and Aboriginal organisations many years previously, it seems clear that the Aboriginal clause for the Convention was initiated by

22. See for example Galligan 1995: 111.

23. Rowse 1998: 71–72, 81.

24. See for example Bennett 1989: 10; Chesterman and Galligan 1997: 157.

25. Horner 2004: 14.

26. See for example Biskup 1973: 87–89.

27. Paisley 1998.

28. Attwood and Markus (with Edwards and Schilling) 1997: 11.

29. A Grenfell Price to Dr Evatt, 6 January 1942 in Attorney-General's Department, Post War Reconstruction, Australia Internal, Australian Natives, series A989, barcode 185256, NAA, Canberra.

30. Biskup 1973: 199; Attwood and Markus 2007: 11–12.

31. Wise 1985: 143–145. For more discussion on the relationship of Carrodus and Elkin, see Markus (1990), who points out that in the early 1930s the relationship between them could be both strained and cordial.

the APNR. The organisation wrote to the Prime Minister and Attorney-General before the Convention proposing that the new clause be added to the list and contacted like-minded organisations to lobby similarly, and this they did.³² One of these may have been the Victorian Aborigines' Uplift Society (AUS). In early 1943, its president, Gillespie Douglas, wrote to Carrodus, claiming credit for having suggested in 1939 that he, as an office bearer in the Victorian UAP and president of the AUS, had persuaded the Victorian UAP that a referendum should be held to transfer powers, with an addendum that the states voluntarily transfer their powers over Aboriginal people. He concluded:

I believe that it was because of my resolution that, subsequently, when the framework of the Powers Bill was being discussed in Canberra, that the control of aborigines by the Commonwealth was inserted as one of the vital points.³³

The letter is interesting both for Douglas' assertion that the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs was part of UAP policy in Victoria and for the fact that its author straddled humanitarian and orthodox politics. Apart from the eerie similarity to what actually happened, there is, however, no other evidence that the government introduced the Aboriginal clause because of Douglas' initiative.

Similarly there is no evidence of the political discussions that led to the adoption of the clause by those planning the convention and precious little material about the discussions in the Canberra bureaucracy. In December 1942, however, Carrodus wrote a very irritated note to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department demanding to know the origins of the proposal to include the Aboriginal clause:

This Department would appreciate any advice you may be in a position to furnish regarding the discussions which led to the inclusion of 'Aborigines' as one of the matters in respect of which the States are prepared to give the Commonwealth the right to legislate. I shall also be glad to learn whether information available as to the extent to which it is proposed that the Commonwealth should exercise control over the aborigines in the states.³⁴

This letter seems to show that Carrodus and his department had effectively been sidelined.

Elkin and the APNR had been long-standing proponents of the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs³⁵ and so the arguments Elkin set out for the referendum campaign in

³². Minutes of meeting held at the Bible House 20 October 1942, and 16 February 1943. Group 55, series 1. APNR minutes of meetings, APNR Collection, University of Sydney Archives, Sydney; A Brown, Hon Sec, Victorian Aborigines' Groups to Miss Swann, 20 November 1942; Hon Sec, APNR to Rev J Sexton, Adelaide and Mr Albany Bell, Perth, 16 November 1942; Hon Sec to Dr HV Evatt, Attorney-General, 10 November 1942, APNR collection, group 555, series 5, folder 1942, APNR collection, University of Sydney Archives, Sydney.

³³. Gillespie Douglas to Rt Hon John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia, 27 August 1943, Control of Aborigines, series no A472, barcode 101465, NAA, Canberra.

³⁴. JH Carrodus to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 10 December 1942, 'Control of Aborigines'; see also Secretary, Prime Minister's Department to Secretary, Attorney-General's Department, 16 February, 1943; and Secretary, Attorney-General's Department to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, January 1943, Department of Interior file 'Control of Aborigines', series A472, barcode 101465, NAA, Canberra.

³⁵. Elkin 1934.

1944 in his *Citizenship for the Aborigines: A National Aboriginal Policy* were not particularly new. The first point he raised concerned Australia's international reputation. No matter that the Commonwealth had no constitutional power over most Aborigines, it was nevertheless held accountable internationally. Indeed, Australia could expect little sympathy after the war for its claims to its mandated territories and colonies in Papua and New Guinea unless it improved its record on its own Indigenous population. (Like other critics of Commonwealth policy Elkin consistently linked the position of the Aboriginal people to the position of the Indigenous people of Melanesia, in whom the APNR and Elkin himself took particular interest.) Elkin also argued that Aboriginal tribal and social boundaries differed from existing state boundaries; and differed too from what he called the three regions characterised by the degree of European settlement – the so-called isolated, marginal and closely settled regions. Hence it made no sense to administer Aboriginal affairs on a state-by-state basis. As the third strand to his argument, he said that the states all legislated on Aboriginal matters differently and used different definitions of Aboriginality. Finally, he argued that the attitudes to Aboriginal administration, whether by missionaries or government, differed across the states and would be much better centralised as one policy.³⁶ Then followed the statements one associates with Elkin the publicist: the vision of the cultural assimilation he had been promoting for years; the ten principles which should underpin a national government policy; the practical needs of a national Aboriginal policy; the extent to which a new national policy should make use of existing humanitarian organisations; and the need for consistent definition of Aboriginality.³⁷ Elkin's arguments clearly set the scene for the government's campaign on the Aboriginal clause.

The 1942 Convention and debates in the states

There seems to have been a broad consensus at the 1942 Convention that Aboriginal affairs should pass to the Commonwealth. This can be inferred from the fact that there was little debate about it. In introducing the list of powers to be transferred, both Curtin and Evatt referred to the exclusion of Aboriginal affairs from the federal Constitution as 'curious' and Evatt, without naming names, referred to the 'strong representations' that had been made to him to include it.³⁸ The only other delegate to speak on the question was Alexander Mair, the New South Wales opposition leader, who said:

In my opinion this is so much padding. I do not wish to speak disrespectfully of those from whom we have taken this country. I may be considered harsh, but I believe the best way in which to treat them would be to set aside for their use and benefit, a part of the country and keep white people out of it.³⁹

^{36.} Elkin 1944: 9–10.

^{37.} Elkin 1944: passim. Elkin also had a fall-back position: 'convergence', in which the Commonwealth government would pay most of the costs of Aboriginal administration but administration itself would remain with the states. Thus the Commonwealth and states' policies would 'converge', see Gray 1998: 56–57.

^{38.} Convention of Representatives of the Commonwealth and State Parliaments on proposed Alteration of the Commonwealth Constitution (hereafter Convention) 1942: 9 (Curtin), 178 (Evatt).

^{39.} Convention 1942: 102.

He did not, however, explicitly reject the clause. Evatt responded that 'the trouble is that there is no uniformity as between the various states on the matter'.⁴⁰ In the committee stage of the conference, while there was strong argument about some other clauses – and a great deal about the Cosgrove amendment limiting the powers to seven years – there was none about the Aboriginal clause.⁴¹

Once the Constitutional Convention was over, the debate moved to the states, as each state parliament was asked to pass the necessary legislation to hand the fourteen powers to the Commonwealth for the agreed five years. Here the apparent unanimity achieved in Canberra fractured. Generally it could be said all state Labor governments (Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania) and Labor oppositions (Victoria and South Australia) supported the referendum *in toto*. On the other hand, UAP and Country Party leaders reneged on the Canberra deal (Victorian Premier Dunstan inserted his qualification, probably once he knew that the Tasmanian upper house would reject the Bill)⁴² while their domination of the upper houses in Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania ensured that the originally-agreed-to list of powers would fail. In South Australia and Western Australia the bills were passed but with a reduced number of powers and other powers watered down. Yet, in all states except Tasmania, the Aboriginal clause emerged unscathed from the debates about the range of powers to be transferred.⁴³

In state parliaments debate raged over two issues – the changes the proposal would make to the federal compact and the shape of post-war Australia – in which discussion of the Aboriginal clause was muted or non-existent. In the Queensland debates the Aboriginal question was not mentioned at all.⁴⁴ In the Victorian parliament there was little discussion. Premier Dunstan was prepared to pass control to the Commonwealth but thought the issue was 'inconsiderable' in Victoria. H Thonemann, a UAP member from Melbourne who had pastoral interests in the Northern Territory, agreed that the issue was largely irrelevant in Victoria, but concluded that the federal government had done badly in the Northern Territory and so did not deserve to be entrusted with national control of Aboriginal people. Labor Party speakers did not mention Aboriginal people at all.⁴⁵

The situation was similar in New South Wales. After an interjection by an Independent member, Christopher Lethbridge, that the clause was not important to post-war reconstruction, Premier William McKell replied that 'strictly I am opposed to it, but it is difficult for one to argue that it is outside the scope of post-war reconstruction', especially since Aboriginal people had been doing such excellent work for the war effort. Another Independent, Donald McDonald, agreed that power over Aboriginal

⁴⁰. Convention 1942: 102.

⁴¹. *The Age*, 26 November 1942; Convention 1942.

⁴². *Victorian Parliamentary Debates* (VPD), session 1942–3, vol 214: 2562. The Victorian government introduced its qualification on 27 January. The Tasmanian Legislative Council rejected the bill on 3 February (*West Australian*, 28 January and 4 February 1943).

⁴³. Waters 1969.

⁴⁴. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* (QPD), vol 130: 1385–1515.

⁴⁵. VPD, session 1942–1943, vol 214: 2096 (Dunstan), 2303–2304 (Thonemann). Thonemann also produced a pamphlet entitled *The Referendum? How should you vote?* (Thonemann 1944).

people might be passed to Canberra, but held out little hope of its usefulness, as the 'poor aborigines' were living 'the last moments of that dying race'.⁴⁶

In South Australia, UAP Premier Tom Playford and the leader of the Labor Opposition, Robert Richards, both supported a 'yes' vote on the Aboriginal clause. Playford thought it 'strange' that the Constitution specifically excluded Aboriginal people from Commonwealth powers and the arguments of humanitarian organisations (supporting transferring the power) were 'probably correct'. He further commented that the Commonwealth government had a good record in the Northern Territory and could be entrusted with the national responsibility.⁴⁷ The only other South Australian reference to the debate was by a local member who thought the transfer of powers over Aboriginal people should, along with several others, be open-ended, and not restricted to five years.⁴⁸

The debate in Tasmania was different because of the common belief that the power was irrelevant since there were no Aboriginal people in the state. The Aboriginal clause was not raised in the parliamentary debates at all. An editorial in the *Hobart Mercury* supporting a 'yes' vote, however, argued that the clause should have been voted on as a separate question and was not sufficient grounds on its own for anybody to support the referendum. There was nothing in the editorial to suggest that it was a Tasmanian issue.⁴⁹

Only in Western Australia did the Aboriginal clause cause political controversy. The first action of the state government was to send the legislation for the transfer of all fourteen powers to a four-member select committee, comprising the premier, one of his ministers, the leader of the opposition and the leader of the Country Party. The Committee sat for several days, heard many witnesses and produced a divided report. Most of the evidence concerned the usual issues of the Commonwealth-state relationship and the post-war future, but several witnesses spoke at length about the Aboriginal clause. By virtue of its large Aboriginal population, Western Australia claimed a special role in this part of the debate. The evidence given to the Select Committee both reprised and rehearsed the wider debates and was split mainly on the issue of who should control the day-to-day running of Aboriginal affairs. Local humanitarian groups forcefully supported Commonwealth control and so advocated a 'yes' vote: indeed, one submission from the Organisation for Reconstruction called for a root-and-branch adoption of the Atlantic Charter, in effect calling for self-determination for Aboriginal people.⁵⁰

The Commissioner of Aboriginal Affairs, Francis Bray, however, wanted the state to retain the power to control Aboriginal people and get more money. Bray put strongly anti-centralist arguments. A central government, he argued, would be unable to

46. *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates* (NSWPD), session 1942-3, vol 169: 1316 (Premier), 1345 (McDonald).

47. *South Australia Parliamentary Debates* (SAPD), House of Assembly, session 1942-3, vol 2: 1388, 1406-1407 (Richards).

48. SAPD, session 1942-3, vol 2: 1420 (Rudall).

49. *Hobart Mercury*, 10 August 1944. The information on the parliamentary debates comes from the *Mercury*; there was no Hansard for parliament at the time.

50. Select Committee on the Commonwealth Powers Bill, report and evidence, Western Australia, Premier's Department file, Commonwealth Powers Bill, consignment 5716, file no 21/44, Public Records Office of Western Australia (PROWA).

respond quickly to changing events; a Labor government might insist on Aboriginal pastoral workers being paid, which would lead to their expulsion from stations; the position of native reserves and the network of police protectors would be threatened; the education of 'light coloured and de-tribalised' natives might also be affected; the state would lose its power to 'discipline' Aboriginal people and might find itself dominated by Commonwealth parliament, which, of course, was based in the east. Bray also raised the question of exactly whom the Commonwealth would control, as the definition of Aborigine differed from state to state. He himself thought that 'the colour' or 'half caste' question, as he called it, was more important than the 'Aboriginal question', by which he meant issues relating to 'full-blood Aborigines'.⁵¹ A major part of his submission was an annotated 'wish list' of all he wanted for his department, which he thought could be obtained through Commonwealth subsidy of £3 for every £2 from the state. From extra office staff to improvements to institutions like Moolla Bulla station in the north and Carrolup native settlement in the south, to training and subsidies for clothing, his list totalled £94,350 at a time when the Western Australian Aboriginal budget was about £50,000 a year.

In the Western Australian parliament, finance was the government's main argument. Premier Willcock claimed that, even though the amount had doubled in the last seven years, only limited money was available for Aboriginal affairs; the Commonwealth with its greater financial resources could do much better.⁵² The large number of Aboriginal people in the state and the state's small financial base clearly spurred the government to seek the transfer. He made much of the 'fact' that while Tasmania had no Aboriginal people, and Victoria had but a few, there were over 20,000 in Western Australia. Thus it would be inequitable (if Aboriginal welfare were to become a national issue) for Western Australians to disproportionately pay for their upkeep.⁵³

The leader of the Country Party offered the more traditional Western Australian response by endorsing Bray's view, which doubted the wisdom of handing control to people 2,000 miles away in Canberra.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the UAP was reluctant to hand over control to the Commonwealth because, as the opposition leader claimed, it had no notable achievements in the Northern Territory:

With regard to the aborigines, I cannot for the life of me see why we should inflict upon these poor creatures - whom I will call our black brothers - Commonwealth Government control. I have not noticed that Commonwealth Government control of the Northern Territory - which has continued for approximately thirty years - has improved the conditions of the aboriginal inhabitants. ... It seems to me that there has definitely been no improvement in their conditions; there might have been some retrogression therein.⁵⁵

⁵¹. Select Committee on the Commonwealth Powers Bill, report and evidence, Western Australian Premier's Department file, Commonwealth Powers Bill, consignment 5761, file no 21/44, PROWA.

⁵². *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* (WAPD) 1942-3: 2100.

⁵³. WAPD 1942-3: 2806.

⁵⁴. McDonald, WAPD 1942-3: 2124.

⁵⁵. Mr Watts, WAPD 1942-3: 2110-2111.

Another argument peculiar to Western Australia was that the 'trust' the British government had imposed on Western Australia on the granting of responsible government in 1890 required Aborigines to remain a state responsibility. On the granting of responsible government in 1890, after initially refusing to give Western Australia control of Aboriginal affairs, the British government prescribed an annual sum of money to be spent on Aboriginal affairs. Such a 'trust' should not be willingly relinquished to the Commonwealth.⁵⁶

Seeking the best of both worlds – more money while retaining control – the Western Australian opposition proposed an amendment to the bill, requiring the Commonwealth to finance Aboriginal affairs while the state continued administration of it. That the UAP amendment failed in the Labor-dominated lower house was expected, but that it also failed in the Legislative Council – after the casting vote of the UAP President produced a draw – was surprising. Another short and ambiguous amendment, which added the phrase 'in cooperation with the State', passed the upper house on the voices, and the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs was incorporated into the overall bill.⁵⁷

The referendum

Once the state debates had concluded and it became clear that the Tasmanian Legislative Council had scuppered the consensus from the convention, the action shifted back to Canberra, where the government introduced the bill to initiate the referendum. Now the opposition parties felt free to oppose the transfer of all the powers to the Commonwealth. There was a little more debate on the Aboriginal clause than there had been in the state parliaments and a similar level of relative support. In the House of Representatives Evatt repeated his observation about the 'curious exception' and observed that 'such an anomaly would be all the greater in the post-war years when Australia will be assuming special responsibilities towards the native population of the South West Pacific'.⁵⁸ Australia's international reputation and the possibility that scrutiny of its Aboriginal policies could undermine its claim to post-war control of post-war Pacific territories had clearly become paramount to the government's case. Lesley Haylen, a Labor member from Victoria, who directed the government's publicity for the referendum, was also alive to the post-war international context, observing that 'after the war Australia may have other dark-skinned people under its mandate or control, and unless the aborigines are properly cared for this country would be subjected to criticism levelled at Hitler and his followers when they oppress the minority populations under their control'.⁵⁹ The Independent member for Henty, Arthur Coles, criticised the government for doing little for Aboriginal people in Northern Territory and suggested that assimilation was the answer to the Aboriginal problem: 'The people of the aboriginal race should be granted full citizenship rights such as have been granted to the Maori people of New Zealand'.⁶⁰ The leaders of the Country Party, Arthur Fadden and Earle Page, both pointed out that every mainland state had agreed to transfer the power over

56. The Premier, WAPD 1942-3: 2806.

57. WAPD 1942-3: 3083.

58. *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates* (CAPD) vol 178: 152.

59. CAPD, vol 177: 1106.

60. CAPD, vol 177: 1268.

Aboriginal people.⁶¹ This was important because they also argued that the government was seeking too many powers and should have restricted itself to a smaller, less contentious number. Menzies agreed:

Most people will support the power relating to 'the people of the aboriginal race' although they will have some doubt as to whether it is in its nature a five-year power and not a permanent one. I say no more about it because, whether the proposal be for five years or permanently there can be no doubt that the welfare of the aboriginal race deserves far more attention in the future than we have given it in the past.⁶²

In opposing the referendum bill in parliament Menzies moved an amendment that would have struck out several powers but would have preserved the Aboriginal question intact.⁶³ During the referendum campaign he reiterated his belief that the care of Aboriginal people 'should not only be a national responsibility but that it should be so in perpetuity'.⁶⁴ Attwood, Marcus and Gray both doubt his sincerity in this, claiming that Menzies never favoured increasing Commonwealth powers under any circumstances, but here Menzies was on the record as arguing the need for greater powers and, at least in this campaign, consistently supported the case for Commonwealth control of Aboriginal affairs.⁶⁵

The terms of the debate were repeated in the Senate. Dorothy Tangney, the Labor Senator from Western Australia, argued that 'the treatment which these poor people have received is a blot upon our national life and none of us can be proud of the record of the Commonwealth in that regard'.⁶⁶ During the debate the argument was repeated that the Commonwealth in the Northern Territory had failed to do any better than the states and therefore the states should be left with responsibility.⁶⁷ Little that was new was added at this stage, although the debate did provide an opportunity for federal parliamentarians to reiterate their positions. The bill as a whole passed through both houses and the government set the date for the referendum for mid-August 1944.

The referendum campaign began in June 1944, but it is clear from a survey of the advertisements in the daily press, on radio and in other publications produced by both sides that the Aboriginal clause played little part in the campaign. Nowhere in the *Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, or the *West Australian* was it mentioned; nor did it appear in any report of meetings, letters to the editor, editorials, speeches or opinion pieces. There was a small flurry of interest (no more than five letters) in the *Adelaide Advertiser* after federal UAP member of parliament and historian Grenfell Price wrote a letter supporting federalisation (which he long advocated), but pointing to a woeful lack of interest in parliament in the issue of Aboriginal people.⁶⁸

61. CAPD, vol 177: 1043-1044 (Fadden), 1078 (Page).

62. CAPD, vol 177: 466.

63. CAPD, vol 177: 1027-1028.

64. 'Report of Menzies' meetings in Perth', in 'Referendum: material requiring reply', Attorney-General's Department, series A467, barcode 99555, NAA, Canberra.

65. Attwood and Markus 2007: 12; Gray 1988: 70, but see Menzies in the *West Australian*, 7 August 1944.

66. CAPD, vol 178: 1899.

67. CAPD, vol 178: 1865 (Senator Wilson), 1899 (Senator Mclean).

68. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 29 July, 2 August, 9 August, 14 August and 18 August, 1944.

A typical government advertisement advocating a 'yes' vote read:

By voting yes ... you will secure –
 Full employment for all
 Economic security for servicemen and women
 Stabilised prices and markets for primary producers
 Modern hygienic homes
 Family endowment and widows' pensions
 Free health and hospitalisation and other social services
 Stabilised cost of living by eliminating profiteers and black markets
 National development instead of economic depression.⁶⁹

Evatt summed up the 'yes' campaign in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 14 August:

Our objective must be to make full-time employment for all the rule in peace-time, not only during the supreme crisis of war; to help the trader by maintaining the highest possible level of purchasing power; to safeguard the interests of the housewife, and to protect her against the profiteer; to guarantee the continuance of stable prices and conditions to the primary producer; to carry out housing and national works throughout Australia; to safeguard Australia, first against inflation, which is ruinous to all persons on salaries, wages and pensions, or other fixed incomes, and second, against the usual sequel of inflations, deflation and depression and their mass unemployment, poverty and the dole.⁷⁰

The Aboriginal question was nowhere to be seen.

Those arguing the negative case did no better. The 'no' advertisements concentrated on allegations of industrial conscription, overweening regulation, the prospect of dictatorship and the unregulated powers of anonymous, unaccountable bureaucrats. They argued that the Commonwealth already had the powers it needed, that prosperity would arrive after the war no matter what the government did and that a referendum should not be held in wartime. The only variation on these themes came from South Australia where the centralisation of power in Canberra was an issue.⁷¹

Both sides used commercial radio, and transcripts of nearly 100 commercial radio broadcasts can be found in Department of Information files given to the Commonwealth Censor for vetting. Speakers from a wide range of organisations – the ALP, Victorian Country Party, Communist Party, Henry George League and the Constitutional League among others – and a few interested individuals participated. No Aboriginal or humanitarian organisation was amongst them. The Aboriginal clause was mentioned only once, by a Labor speaker who criticised Menzies' argument that the Aboriginal clause could have been passed if voted for alone.⁷²

^{69.} This was in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 July 1944, in '1944 referendum on post-war reconstruction and democratic rights', in Department of Information, series no C394, barcode 1810343, NAA, Sydney. This file contains dozens of such advertisements placed in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and some country newspapers in New South Wales.

^{70.} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 1944.

^{71.} This summary is taken from the collection of advertisements ('1944 referendum on post-war reconstruction and democratic rights', in Department of Information, series no C394, barcode 1810343, NAA, Sydney).

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) did a little better. For example, the transcript of a speech given by Curtin on the local ABC station in Perth shows how alert he was to local sensibilities: 'If there is one thing which is a Commonwealth matter, it is the welfare of the aborigines. At present those states which have the most natives incur the largest financial responsibility, which is to the detriment of WA'.⁷³ In another broadcast, this time for the 'no' case, on the Melbourne ABC station, Harold Holt showed no such sensitivity, effectively excising Aboriginal people from the Australian people:

As for the care of the aborigines – while of direct importance to that race, what action taken for their welfare could have any appreciative effect on the social conditions of the Australian citizen?⁷⁴

Only in government pamphlets and notes produced for speakers at public meetings do we find any real discussion of the Aboriginal clause. The government planned to distribute about ten different pamphlets, three million in all, to households. While several pamphlets ignored the clause,⁷⁵ one promoting the 'yes' case pointed out that the Commonwealth government had already begun to make provision for improved social security for Aboriginal people, and that '[p]ower to further this humanitarian development is needed if we are to live up to the principles of the Atlantic Charter'. It went on to argue that the fourteen powers were so interrelated as to make it impossible to vote for them individually, although, in the interests of reader comprehension, it separated the powers into four categories: social security, jobs, homes and farming. Clause 14, the Aboriginal clause, was lumped with clauses 1, 2, 12, and 13 under the heading 'social security', as if social security were the only heading of relevance to Aboriginal affairs.⁷⁶ Another 'yes' pamphlet, printed by the New South Wales Trades Hall, summoned 'decency' and 'democracy' to the side of a 'yes' vote on the Aboriginal clause.⁷⁷ In a question-and-answer pamphlet produced by the Perth branch of the ALP, Evatt linked recognition of the particular conditions of Aboriginal people in Western Australia with a recognition of their contribution to the war effort.

⁷². GL Dethridge, August 1944, 'Copies of publicity material relating to the referendum of 19 August 1944', series no A11745, barcode 259384, NAA, Canberra.

⁷³. Referendum speech broadcast on national station, no name or date. Found in Western Australian Premier's Department file, Commonwealth Powers Bill, consignment 5761, file no 21/44, PROWA.

⁷⁴. Transcript, 'After the War, then What? The Referendum and the Constitution', ABC Series, Department of Post War Reconstruction, series no AN 989, barcode 185609, NAA, Canberra. These debates were run by the ABC for so-called 'listening groups', which were then edited for broadcast. Holt was debating Cyril Chambers for the 'yes' case.

⁷⁵. For example see 'Alteration to the Constitution: Federal Referendum, Case for and Against', 1944, Government Printer, Perth, found in Western Australian Premier's Department file, Commonwealth Powers Bill, consignment 5761, file no 21/44, PROWA.

⁷⁶. 'You and the Referendum', Pamphlet by the Department of Information for the Commonwealth of Australia, nd. Found in Western Australian Premier's Department file, Commonwealth Powers Bill, consignment 5761, file no 21/44, PROWA.

⁷⁷. Citizens' Yes Committee, Trades Hall, Sydney, nd, in Ephemera Collection, National Library of Australia (NLA), Canberra.

Does the Commonwealth recognise that Western Australia has the greatest aboriginal problem of any State and will this State, therefore, figure in the forefront of any schemes for the betterment of the Aboriginal population?

Definitely, yes. We have a responsibility to both aboriginals and half-castes, many of whom are today doing their part in many ways in the war effort.⁷⁸

There were two sets of speakers' notes for public meetings provided to supporters of the 'yes' case. The first dealt with broad questions concerning the issue of Commonwealth powers and ignored the Aboriginal clause. The second dealt with each power individually, so necessarily the Aboriginal power was mentioned, but in the same general terms – the need for a national policy and the justice of the federalisation proposal.⁷⁹

The 'no' campaign pamphlets either ignored the Aboriginal question or simply reiterated what had been said already in state parliaments. The only pamphlet to put a different case was written and produced by the Victorian UAP member, HE Thonemann, who repeated his argument in parliament that the Commonwealth had done badly in the Northern Territory and did not deserve the power.⁸⁰ It proved impossible to find speakers' notes for public meetings for the 'no' case.

It is significant that nowhere in its public discourse did the government set out what it would actually do with new powers for Aboriginal people, a lacuna that was pointed out more than once by humanitarian organisations.⁸¹ Similar organisations kept up correspondence with the government throughout the campaign, making suggestions on future policy.⁸² Further, it is worth noting the almost complete absence of both humanitarian and Aboriginal organisations from the public campaigns. There are no references to the campaign in the minutes of the APNR, other than a decision to spend £20 to distribute Elkins' *Citizenship for Aborigines* to interested parties.⁸³ On the whole, humanitarian organisations seemed not to use the public domain; they seemed content to confine their cases for the clause to their own pamphlets and booklets. For example, Tom Wright, a Sydney communist and supporter of the Aboriginal cause, produced a second edition of his 1939 pamphlet, which called for federalisation 'to ensure a uniform policy'.⁸⁴ If the Aboriginal organisations used the public domain,

78. 'As a Loyal Western Australian You Should Vote Yes', TG Davies, Labor Campaign Director, Western Australia, in 1944 Federal Referendum, Ephemera Collection, NLA, Canberra.

79. Speakers' notes, compiled for speakers who wish to advocate for the referendum. Found in Western Australian Premier's Department file, Commonwealth Powers Bill, consignment 5761, file no 21/44, PROWA.

80. Thonemann 1944.

81. South Australian League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half Caste Women to Acting Prime Minister, 5 June 1944, in Prime Minister's Department, Control of Aborigines, series no A 472, barcode 101465, NAA, Canberra.

82. See for example M Sawtell, to Prime Minister, nd [but mid 1944]; Gillespie Douglas to Right Honourable John Curtin, 27 August 1943; Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, London, to the Right Honourable Prime Minister, 30 June 1943, in Prime Minister's Department, Control of Aborigines, series no A 472, barcode 101465, NAA, Canberra.

83. J Burton, General Secretary, Methodist Overseas Mission to Miss R Swann, Secretary APNR, APNR Records, folio 1944. Otherwise see the minutes of meetings in the APNR collection, group 55 series 1, University of Sydney Archives, Sydney.

84. Wright 1944: 31. This was an updated edition of a 1939 pamphlet.

then their involvement was rendered invisible. This may have been because their voice was excluded or because their leaders were pre-occupied with other issues. There was no sign of the surviving leaders of interwar Aboriginal politics: William Cooper of the Australian Aborigines' League had died in 1941, John Patten of the Aborigines' Progressive Association was working for the Civil Construction Corps in the Northern Territory, while his colleague, William Ferguson, seems to have been immersed in his work with the New South Wales Welfare Board.⁸⁵

The fourteen powers referendum was defeated by a majority of 56 per cent to 44 per cent. Despite the support of their state governments, both Queensland and New South Wales voted 'no', Queensland overwhelmingly so. Victoria voted 'no' by a tiny margin, Tasmania by a large margin.⁸⁶ South Australia and Western Australia both voted 'yes'. The Western Australian vote was a surprise, since just 11 years earlier Western Australian voters had voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Commonwealth. Service personnel, who formed a separate electorate, voted 'yes', probably persuaded by the government's arguments that it needed a definitive power over repatriation. The referendum therefore failed on two fronts: a majority of states opposed it, as did a majority of people. The Aboriginal clause disappeared from sight.

Ben Chifley's Labor government had two further opportunities to take on power to legislate for Aboriginal people: the 1946 referendum to give the Commonwealth extra powers over social services (which passed in every state) and over marketing and industrial employment (both of which passed in only three states and therefore failed); and the 1948 referendum on increased powers over rents and prices (which failed in every state). Attwood and Markus suggest that, by 1946, the moment had passed. Chifley had apparently lost interest and although his Minister for the Interior, HV Johnson, was keen, state Labor premiers were now not.⁸⁷ After the 1946 referendum, a disappointed Gillespie Douglas wrote to Elkin that 'the ministry as a whole is ... apathetic or hostile to the idea of taking over the burden of the Aborigines throughout Australia', and he may have been right.⁸⁸ Douglas had become cynical in respect of the 1944 promises as well, claiming in the *Melbourne Herald* that the Aboriginal clause was 'merely a bait to catch votes for the questions of permanent importance'.⁸⁹ In 1988 Paul Hasluck accused the government of using the failure of the 1944 referendum as an excuse for inaction later.⁹⁰ Chesterman and Galligan seem equally cynical. They argue that if the government really believed the clause was important, it would have sought an amendment to Section 51 (xxvi) of the Constitution, the section that excludes the Commonwealth from legislating for Aborigines.⁹¹ That Menzies never reconsidered the

⁸⁵. For Ferguson, see Attwood and Markus 2004: 23; *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 1981. For Patten, see *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 1988. None of the histories of contemporary Aboriginal organisations or biographies of leaders – for example Markus 1988; Horner 1974; Attwood and Markus 2004 – mention the referendum.

⁸⁶. *The Age*, 24 August 1944.

⁸⁷. Attwood and Markus 2007: 12.

⁸⁸. Quoted in Attwood and Markus 2007: 12.

⁸⁹. *Melbourne Herald*, 25 June 1946.

⁹⁰. Hasluck 1988: 72.

⁹¹. Chesterman and Galligan 1997: 133–154.

issue, despite 16 years as Prime Minister, also speaks eloquently about his ongoing commitment to the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs.

Summing up

The history of the Aboriginal clause in the fourteen powers referendum raises several questions. The answer to the question 'Why it failed?' is clear: when the referendum as a whole failed, so did the Aboriginal clause. Did the referendum campaign throw up any new arguments about Aboriginal people and government power? For the most part, existing arguments about the future of Aboriginal people were recycled in the debates, but given a contemporary spin. The view that Australia had international and humanitarian or social justice obligations to Aboriginal people was promoted, especially among humanitarian and Aboriginal organisations, but the war and declarations like the Atlantic Charter gave a specific language and a potent symbolic appeal to war-time demands for the Aboriginal clause. Pointing out that Australia's post-war colonial ambitions in the Pacific might hinge on Commonwealth control of Aboriginal affairs was also an important new argument. That Western Australia suffered financially because of its large Aboriginal population and therefore might expect to benefit from a national commitment to Aboriginal welfare was also new, although the idea may have already existed in Western Australia; the argument for Western Australia as a special case was clearly recognised by both Curtin and Evatt. Finally there seems to have been widespread acceptance of the argument that, as Aboriginal people had played a role in the defence of Australia during the war, Australia owed them a debt which could be repaid by including them in post-war reconstruction.

As to the question of what persuaded the Curtin government to adopt the Aboriginal clause, Biskup correctly points out the importance of the centralisation of power in the ALP's platform, and so the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs could easily be incorporated.⁹² Arguments that the Commonwealth should apply its humanitarian principles to Aboriginal welfare may also have been important; after all, the government had recently liberalised and expanded Aboriginal welfare. Indeed, the two were explicitly linked in government pamphlets.⁹³ It may also have regarded Aboriginal people as workers, exploited by pastoral and other interests and therefore in need of protection. According to Horner, Mick Sawtell, a left-wing activist and supporter of Aboriginal people in New South Wales, once observed of New South Wales Premier McKell, that 'any reform propaganda [regarding Aborigines] had to be put in terms that McKell could understand, that is to say, of raising the social standards of the workers'.⁹⁴ It may have been that the government was trying to avoid international criticism of Australia's plans for its colonial possessions after the war. Paul Hasluck, then working in the Department of External Affairs, was well aware of what he called 'international interest in the welfare of dependent people and the clear indication that, in the post-war settlements, the treatment of native races is likely to be made the subject of international discussion'.⁹⁵

⁹² Biskup 1973: 197-201.

⁹³ 'Constitution Alteration Official', Attorney-General's Department, special file 44, bundle 100, item 2, series no A467, barcode 99493, NAA, Canberra.

⁹⁴ Horner 2004: 114.

It is possible, too, that many politicians simply did not know or had not thought about the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the Commonwealth's purview and, once it had been pointed out to them, agreed that it was an anomaly that should be remedied. Curtin and Evatt thought it 'curious'; Playford called it 'strange'; McKell prefaced his remarks in the New South Wales parliament by saying 'there is a complete absence of power in the Commonwealth Parliament today'.⁹⁶ If so, it speaks volumes about their limited knowledge of the position of Aboriginal people in the Constitution.

One final question concerns the importance of the Aboriginal clause in the debates about the fourteen powers. The answer must be that it was marginal. There are several possible explanations for this. The first may be that Australians were indifferent to the question. Hasluck suggests that there was a hiatus in interest in Aborigines during the war, manifest in their absence from public discourse, parliamentary debates and post-war planning in the Commonwealth bureaucracy.⁹⁷ Horner might have been right to say that Australia was not ready for the transfer of such a power. Another explanation may have been that the Aboriginal clause was irrelevant, marginal to the debates and in the face of the seemingly great issues raised, was simply overwhelmed. Harold Holt may have been right in asserting that the Aboriginal power had nothing to do with the wider issues. Indeed, Professor Kenneth Bailey, seconded from Melbourne University law school to help with the campaign, wrote in a long draft paper about the Aboriginal question:

Nobody would place this power in the same category as the powers that must underpin [sic] at the centre of any plan of national reconstruction – eg powers with respect to employment and prices, or production. But few will deny that the care of aborigines should be a national responsibility.⁹⁸

The third and most likely possibility was that, while most other clauses in the referendum were contentious, the Aboriginal question was not and so did not merit special mention because there was widespread support for it. As Fadden and Page both suggested in the Commonwealth debate on the second referendum bill, every mainland state government had supported it, as had the leaders of all three political parties in Canberra. If this is so, then in the long campaign for the federalisation of Aboriginal policy, the fourteen powers referendum was truly a wasted opportunity. Although the humanitarian and Aboriginal organisations continued to lobby governments on the virtues of federalisation,⁹⁹ it took 23 long years of agitation before the Holt government finally agreed to a new referendum and the federalisation of Aboriginal affairs became a reality.

^{95.} Paul Hasluck, Memorandum on Commonwealth Administration of Native Races, External Affairs Department, Post-War Reconstruction, Australia Internal, Australian Natives, series A989, barcode 185256, NAA, Canberra.

^{96.} NSWPD, vol 169: 1316.

^{97.} Hasluck 1988: 73–74.

^{98.} 'Referendum Campaign, The 14 powers: Why they are necessary for re-construction', 17 January 1944. Constitutional Alteration, series no M 1504/1, barcode 111602, NAA, Canberra.

^{99.} Attwood and Markus 2007: 12.

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George Coolbul: imagining a colonised life

Malcolm Allbrook

The lives of George Coolbul and Henry Prinsep intersected briefly during the six years between 1866 and 1872, when Prinsep employed Coolbul as a stockman on his properties near Bunbury, 140 kilometres south of Perth. We know a great deal about Prinsep, a prominent citizen of the colony and a prolific artist who, between 1898 and 1907, was Western Australia's first Chief Protector of Aborigines and in this position the chief architect of the notorious *Aborigines Act* 1905. The Battye Library of Western Australian History holds a large collection of Prinsep's papers: diaries covering his colonial life from his arrival from England aged 22 in 1866 until his death in Busselton in 1922, letters from his wide circle of family and friends in England, other colonial posts and Western Australia, reminiscences and memoirs and over 1,000 photographs, sketches and drawings.

Of Coolbul, by contrast, we know virtually nothing and what we do know is through the eyes of Prinsep in his various guises as pastoral employer, church-going humanitarian and artist. Their period of interaction was well before the systematic collection of intrusive government information – initiated by Prinsep and perfected by his successor AO Neville who, over his long tenure as Chief Protector (1915–1940), instituted a system of record keeping that brought almost every Indigenous person in Western Australia into a panopticon of government surveillance, their relationships documented, their movements and most personal details catalogued, commented upon and evaluated.

Aboriginal people of Coolbul's era largely escaped this obsessive documentation, but as a consequence have almost disappeared from the historical record, along with their responses, resistance and accommodation, the way they lived, worked and died. Given Prinsep's later role in establishing the legislative regime that laid the foundations for administrative intrusion into Aboriginal lives, it is a little perverse that he has become Coolbul's unwitting biographer. Yet his imperfect and culturally-blinkered record provides a framework from which to imagine a colonised life and identify strategies Coolbul adopted as he tried to function within a new regime while trying to maintain a measure of pre-colonial independence for himself and his family.

I came across Coolbul while reading the diaries of Henry Prinsep as part of my doctoral research into his life as a member of a large and widely dispersed imperial family.¹ During Prinsep's first few years in Australia, Coolbul, together with another Aboriginal man, Charlie Neeribun, and some other Nyungahs,² feature regularly in Prinsep's ultimately unsuccessful endeavours to turn around the fortunes of his Cal-

cutta-based father's Western Australian properties by supplying timber and horses to Indian markets.³ Later I viewed the small bound collection of five pencil and crayon drawings by Coolbul held by the Art Gallery of Western Australia. These drawings, selected and bound by Prinsep into a volume entitled *Western Australian native art*, are visually startling, full of life and movement.⁴ Four of the five drawings show aspects of life on the properties, various animals and white people on horseback. A blue horse (Figure 3.1) drawn on lined paper is a fine study of the animal frozen in the act of pacing. Coolbul has captured a moment in the movement of the animal, its head slightly thrust forward, ears and eyes, tail and legs providing the impression of fluid movement. Other studies of horses in motion are featured in two smaller drawings displayed on facing pages of the album (Figure 3.2). The top drawing, which appears to have been cut from a larger page and glued into the album, shows a white man, in hunting attire carrying a whip. It is drawn in red, white and blue. The impression is of speed and harmony between rider and animal. The horse's plaited mane, its ears and tail and the rider's plumes fly out in the wind. The rider is perfectly mounted in the saddle, controlling the movement of the swift animal through softly held reins. In the lower drawing, the horse trots nobly, with a white woman in side saddle superimposed over the horse's image. Coolbul has drawn the woman's clothing in detail. She wears a long riding habit, with a high buttoned bodice, plumed riding hat and goggles, her hair braided and wound into a mat at the back. The woman resembles Prinsep's drawings and photographs of his young wife Josephine (nee Bussell), by all accounts an excellent rider who looked 'divine on a horse'.⁵ Coolbul's drawing of a red kangaroo and blue hunting dogs (Figure 3.3) is another vivid depiction of movement displaying the final moments of a scene that the artist must have witnessed many times. The figure of the kangaroo, small compared with the pursuing dogs, is in silhouette, while the two dogs close in, their sharp teeth bared, ears laid back, on the point of making their kill. The final drawing (Figure 3.4) on a large folded page is quite different from the others. Here, four horses and an unmounted white rider are gathered around what appears to be a fenced yard which encloses two trees. The finely drawn horses are all in silhouette, unsaddled and unbridled, either walking or standing. The rider, in red jacket, white side-buttoned riding breeches, boots, spurs and helmet and holding a long stick, is unmounted, perhaps thrown from one of the horses. The rough wood fencing is viewed as if from

1. Allbrook 2008.

2. Contemporary south-western Aboriginal peoples identify and refer to themselves as Nyungahs, a convention followed in this essay. Within the culturally contiguous south-western block, a number of inter-related language groups have been identified by various non-Aboriginal ethnographers and linguists over the period of colonisation, although the terminologies vary considerably. Following Thieberger 1993, the language group of the south-western coastal area from Bunbury to Augusta is Wardandi, the coast and hinterland from around Bunbury north to around Mandurah is Binjarub, and the Swan River area Wajuk.

3. His father, Charles Prinsep, held the post of Advocate General in the East India Company until his retirement to England in 1854. While in India Prinsep senior invested heavily in Singapore, Van Dieman's Land and Western Australia. From 1838 he steadily added to his Western Australian holdings, which eventually covered 23,500 acres. He did all this without visiting the colony.

4. Coolbul, 'West Australian native art, 1868-1869: book of pencil and crayon sketches'.

5. Brockman, 'Reminiscences, 1872-1956'.

above, laid out flat around a space blocked in blue crayon, from which the two trees with their weeping boughs protrude. The meaning of the drawing is unclear. There is no scale or compass orientation, no discernible top or bottom, right or left, suggesting that it was drawn while flat on the ground, with the artist adding features as he rotated the page or moved around it.



Figure 3.1 (above) and Figure 3.2 (below).



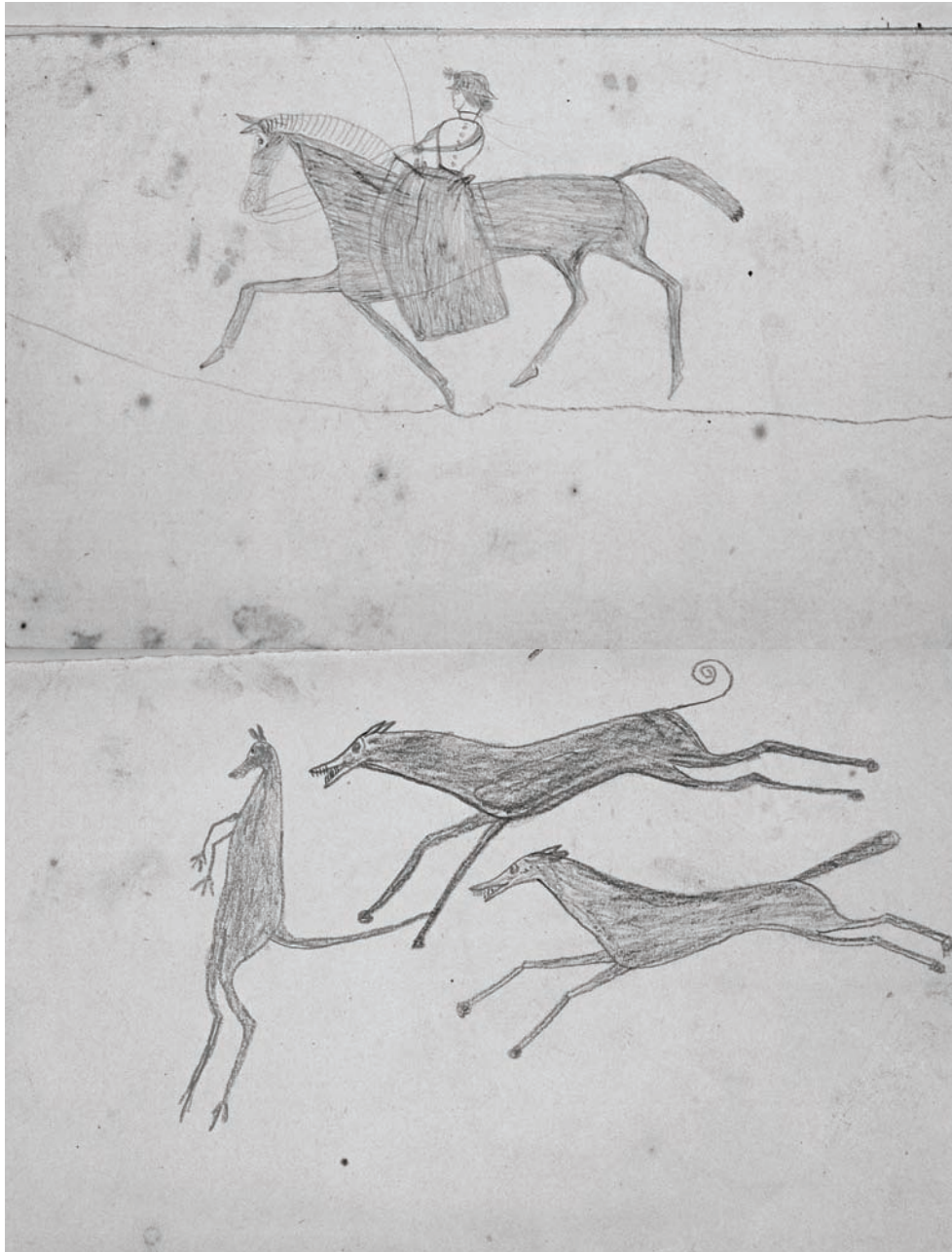


Figure 3.3.



Figure 3.4.

Prinsep's brief foreword to the volume gives little information about Coolbul or the context in which the drawings were produced. He tells us only that:

The drawings in this book are few among many drawn by a West Australian native known as George Coolbul, of the Vasse district during his service with me on a horse station at Prinsep Park, Dardanup in 1868 and 1869. He came to an untimely end in 1871 being speared through the body by another native during a feast which prevented his further progress in art.⁶

Prinsep provides no indication of Coolbul's artistic motivations. There is nothing in the drawings to explain what Coolbul was seeking to convey: none of the interpretive notations by the white patrons of Native American 'ledger book' artists, nor of the 'artistic and ethnographic collaboration' between Billinge and Daisy Bates in early 20th-century Broome.⁷ Unlike the 19th-century Aboriginal artists William Barak and Tommy McRae, he did not sell his work to colonisers.⁸ Coolbul's art was not known or appreciated by a white audience (beyond Prinsep himself) at the time of its production. Beyond the obvious conclusions that he was strongly influenced by the colonial context in which he lived and worked and that he made use of introduced forms and materials, the meaning of Coolbul's art remains inaccessible. The inability to illuminate the meanings of Coolbul's work, as well as the likelihood that what remains represents but a tiny sample of his total output, suggests that his drawings should be 'under-interpreted', as Andrew Sayers advocates, 'in acknowledgement of the impossibility of ... selecting a meaning from a range of possible and often divergent meanings that might be attached to any of them'.⁹ Instead they should be viewed, as Howard Morphy proposes, as 'sources of historical understanding and as works of art in their own right'.¹⁰

From Prinsep we learn that Coolbul was a man 'of the Vasse' and thus probably a member of the language group known as Wardandi, whose country stretched from Bunbury along the coast and hinterland as far as present day Augusta.¹¹ As the Swan River Colony expanded southwards from 1839 and as the Bussell and Molloy families spread out northward from their original holdings at Augusta in 1830, his country was encroached. Wardandi country was certainly appealing to the colonisers, being fertile and well-watered, with a temperate climate and well-tended by its traditional owners, as Lieutenant HW Bunbury found when he rode through the area in 1839 and large numbers of men followed him through this country. Bunbury also found abundant game and fish, lush vegetation and a maze of native tracks. Colonisation of the area ensued rapidly after Bunbury's visit, so that by the end of the 1840s farms covered much of the coastal strip between Perth and the nascent settlements at Bunbury and Busselton.

Early colonial policies towards Indigenous peoples were characterised by ambiguity, seeking simultaneously to protect Aboriginal people under the British rule of law while guaranteeing the imposed proprietary rights of the colonisers.¹² The attitudes of humanitarian colonisers such as John Garrett Bussell, a man of the church who became Prinsep's father-in-law in 1869, epitomise these contradictions. On the one hand he advocated policies of non-violence and benevolence towards the region's Aboriginal people but, on the other, he saw them as unpredictable, unknowable and in need of a firm colonial hand to guide them from a state of savagery to civilisation. 'They are here at present very peaceful', Bussell wrote in 1831, 'and yet there is something that makes one shudder when he crosses unawares in his path the naked Lord of the Forest'.¹³ Early

6. Prinsep, 'West Australian Native Art, 1868-1869', Foreword.

7. Callaway 2002; Coyne 2005: 199.

8. Sayers 1994; Morphy 1998.

9. Sayers 1994: 10.

10. Morphy 1998: 355.

11. Thieberger 1993.

12. Biskup 1973: 11.

13. JG Bussell quoted by Shann 1926: 93.

relationships between the family and the traditional owners were fraught and anxious, with John's sister Bessie reporting how in 1837 'the natives really completely beset us':

They nearly drive me out of my mind. I am obliged to stand around and watch them, and when I am able to return to my lawful labours I find myself thoroughly tired. To me now it seems sacrilege to breathe the name of native in an hour of rest, it is so fraught with fatigue, fear and anxiety.¹⁴

Family members responded with increasing violence to the expectations of the traditional owners that they share their food and resources, threatening to shoot a woman believed to have stolen salt-cellars to make spear tips, and holding a child hostage against the return of flour allegedly stolen by her father in 1834.¹⁵ Charles Bussell, in particular, was strident in his condemnation of a Swan River colonial government that he thought was preoccupied 'with the natives' interests' over those of the colonisers, expressing a widely held view that its military action at Pinjarra in 1834 against the Murray River Nyungahs had been 'properly severe' and made them 'peaceful and even useful to the European'.¹⁶ In June 1837, nine Aboriginal people were killed at Busselton by a party, which included Lenox Bussell, in retaliation for the spearing of their servant Dawson in the arm. Bessie wrote that she feared 'more women were killed than men' and that later her brothers 'Vernon and Alfred went down to the estuary, and saw that the natives had been afraid to return and bury their dead. So they left their cows and came home for spades to perform this last office for them. They threw in the dirt and laid the sods carefully over like an English grave.'¹⁷ The violence continued in 1840, when John Garrett Bussell put aside his humanitarian leanings to participate in a posse to avenge the death of George Layman, a settler at Wonnerup near Busselton. At least seven Nyungahs died 'in the confusion', and an unknown number of others were wounded.¹⁸

The Rev John Wollaston, who arrived to establish his parish at Picton near Bunbury in 1841, appeared to accept prevailing European views that there was little chance the Nyungah population would ever reconcile themselves to the loss of their lands and domination by a new regime, agreeing that it was 'not beneficial' to 'encourage them about the premises, unless they are employed. They are of too rude a nature to bear it'.¹⁹ He supported the efforts of colonial officials, such as Protector of Natives Charles Symonns and local Constable Edward Hester, to use the threat of removal to the prison on Rottnest Island to control the Nyungah population and the removal of children from the 'baneful influences of heathen customs', and from 'the evil example of the white people of the common sort', so that they could be educated at the cost of settler families, who might then employ them as domestic servants.²⁰ By 1846, the combination of introduced illnesses, such as influenza and venereal disease, and violence had effectively decimated the Indigenous population, who thereafter were not considered a

14. Bessie Bussell quoted by Shann 1926: 104.

15. Shann 1926: 97-98.

16. Shann 1926: 111.

17. Shann 1926: 107.

18. Shann 1926: 119.

19. Wollaston nd: 82.

20. Wollaston nd: 82-83.

threat to the colonising project. Many years later, Prinsep's daughter Carlotta was able to sanitise her family's early relationships with local Aboriginal people by ascribing the violence that had occurred to the moral debasement of the traditional owners and the intemperate actions of a few lower class whites. Colonisation, she believed, had proceeded smoothly and brought 'very little trouble ... except when my grandfather [JG Bussell] was away for a time, when there was some trouble from the blacks learning how good the white man's food was, would often steal it'. She added that:

It must have been a great temptation to them after the life they had been accustomed to, a sort of 'hand to mouth' existence. There was trouble at Wonnerup when Mr. Layman was killed, but that was his own fault, because he pulled a blackfellow's beard, a terrible insult.²¹

This then was the context in which Coolbul lived his life. Born probably around the time white people first came to the region, he was likely to have directly experienced the violence of contact, observed the way his old people responded to the threats of colonisation and witnessed the transformation of his lands and his people's way of life. By the time Prinsep arrived in 1866, Coolbul had been working on the stations for some years, along with a number of other country men and women such as Timbal, whom Prinsep would later encounter in later life in his role as Chief Protector, 'Kitty', a young woman employed in the house, and Tommy Cattle, who later was the main informant for colonist Jesse Hammond's book on Aboriginal people, *Winjan's People*.²² The day after his arrival, Prinsep met his station workforce of '5 English, 1 Hindu and 2 native Australians, Coolbool (George) & an object called Nooky'. He described the Aboriginal workers as 'funny fellows, who would always burst their boilers as it were with two big shouts of laughter for the first 3 days or so that I knew them', which Prinsep took to be 'their way of showing bashfulness to a stranger'.²³

Coolbul and Charlie Neeribun figure prominently in Prinsep's management of the station and through them he became aware of other Aboriginal people, who lived nearby in the hills to the east of the properties and outside the colonial economy. Sometimes he would hear 'howling and screaming a mile & a half away through bush'.²⁴ The homestead was visited by families coming in from the bush for meetings nearby, allowing Prinsep to observe their dancing and use of the 'kyle or boomerang'.²⁵ On one level, he found them a source of entertainment and sustenance: he learned to throw the boomerang and they supplied the homestead with wild game. Prinsep attempted to learn Nyungah words, writing up a 'short list of aboriginal words' for clothing, livestock, water and food, an activity that suggested curiosity or the need to acquire a language of command.²⁶ Soon after his arrival, Prinsep bought new work clothes for Coolbul and Neeribun, commenting that Neeribun looked 'a great swell in his new shirt, boots & trousers ... instead of his dirty kangaroo skin'.²⁷ Despite their importance to the station

21. Brockman, 'Reminiscences, 1872-1956', no page numbers.

22. These people are identified by WB Mitchell, who managed the Prinsep properties before Henry's arrival, in his wages book.

23. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 3 June 1866.

24. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 22 September 1866.

25. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 8 June 1866.

26. Prinsep, 'List of aboriginal native words'.

27. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 15 June 1866.

economy as hunters, horse-breakers and stockmen, they were paid less for their work than European labourers: Prinsep's budget for 1870 allocated £60 for a stockman, £36 for a 'native [station] man', and £25 for a 'native helper'.²⁸ Labour was a chronic problem for Prinsep, and he regularly remarked on the poor attitudes and 'surliness' of the European men in his employ. Coolbul and Neeribun too caused him problems – they would be absent without his permission for long periods or in trouble for drunkenness and fighting. Prinsep tried to show he was boss with mixed success. In May 1869 Prinsep recorded that 'Neeribun appeared at sundown inebriated & got more troublesome, until I had to eject him forcibly'.²⁹ Some months later, 'I had to use my fists at the native huts and scatter them as they were fighting and squalling'.³⁰ This was not long after he noted that:

Coolbul was troublesome in the evening & I was hiding for him and chasing him with a stockwhip all about the fields. He called out for his spears but the other blackfellows knew too well not to give them to him. It was fine fun in the moonlight but he was too wary and swift tho' I very nearly had him once or twice.³¹

Prinsep's diaries show little appreciation of the circumstances of the Indigenous people nearly 40 years after the colonisers' arrival, but they do hint at the complexity of relationships on the stations. They focus on Coolbul and Neeribun as workers, while their kin are framed as exotic, mystifying but often troublesome presences in the landscape.³² In sharp contrast to his detailed accounts of the Europeans in the area, there is little obvious curiosity in Prinsep's account about the Nyungah people around him. The words or views of Coolbul and his kin are rarely recorded: they are simply 'funny fellows', valuable but erratic and troublesome workers. He was familiar with some of the Nyungah kin networks, naming many individuals in his diary, but their presence was incidental; they were simply there, a people without a history and devoid of family and cultural context, in Pratt's words, a 'speechless, denuded, biologized body'.³³

Nonetheless, from the records of Prinsep and other members of his family, a far more nuanced image of the circumstances of the Nyungah populations emerges than one that characterises them solely in the depths of colonial disease and despondency. Men like Coolbul and Neeribun and their families were attached through employment to local farmers and so were closely associated with the colonisers. As well as working for the white man, they appear to have mediated contact between the settlers and those of their kin who remained outside the white sphere. It is clear that family groups gathered regularly on Prinsep's properties for ceremonies, meetings and sometimes burials.³⁴ Similarly, individuals often came to the homestead to visit Coolbul and Neeribun. Carlotta Prinsep later recalled how on the visits of one such man, Burman,

28. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 28 October 1869.

29. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 30 May 1869.

30. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 21 August 1869.

31. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 21 July 1869.

32. Pratt 1992: 6.

33. Pratt 1992: 53.

34. Prinsep records, for example, in October 1866 his observations of 'old doctor's grave' near the homestead, a 'thatched hut with a small paling around it, inside of which was a set fire, ready for his ghost to light if it felt cold, some spears & a wommera or throwing stick & in front of all to the west his grave'.

she would sit with him on the grassy banks of the river and share the sweet, freshly cooked fish:

Burman so black with bundle of long spears, his 'cooter bage' made of possum skin & his large cloak ... made of Kangaroo skins neatly sewn together with a bone needle & kangaroo tail sinews. His head bound tightly with a wide band of string made from the fur of the possum skins all rolled together into one long string & well greased & rubbed with 'Wilghi', a sort of paint ... composed of grease coloured with ochre, charcoal, ashes or pipe-clay.³⁵

Apart from employed men like Coolbul and Neeribun and unattached ones like Burman, other groups of Aboriginal people filled Carlotta's childhood on the family stations. A large and mostly unidentified group of 'natives' lived in camps, worked every now and again as farm workers but were often noisy, drunk and unruly and lived in squalid circumstances. These were people who rarely worked for the farmers, but were provided with basic rations by the white families and moved around the region. Carlotta remembered such people as 'nuisances', always demanding food, quarrelling, 'shouting & screaming that used to frighten the children'.³⁶ A smaller group of known and named people had been with the Prinseps since early childhood and had sometimes been raised 'almost as one of the family'. Some of them continued to live near the homestead as adults, providing general labour for the family in return for some pay and keep. According to another family memoir recorded by John Milward, many local settler families had close relationships with Aboriginal people, who were 'adopted' as children and grew up as companions for the settler children.³⁷ He was, however, obviously sensitive about such relationships and wrote that they were 'very hard for the younger generation to understand'. But he insists they were based on mutual respect. The Nyungahs were not 'servile slaves', but were respected as men, stockmen and equals and in turn gave respect 'without any sense of inferiority'. At the same time, he writes of 'short, sharp' punishments, of treatment as 'naughty and unreliable children', and conveys an obvious sense that Nyungah workers were, despite being portrayed as 'members of the family', expected to submit without question to the authority of their patrons.³⁸

By the 1870s relationships between the district's ever-growing settler population and the now largely dispossessed traditional landowners had come to be based on the harsh benevolence of what Mary Anne Jebb has called 'pastoral paternalism', a 'complex dynamic between violence and protection ... which was an enduring characteristic of station culture and life with a white Boss' in which those who had survived the initial onslaughts of colonisation and remained in their country had 'learned the rules of occupation' and 'found a place that assured their survival'.³⁹ Prinsep's account suggests that even with increasing white domination of their world, it was still possible for Nyungahs to move around their traditional country and escape, if only for a short time, the growing constraints on their movement.

35. Brockman, 'Reminiscences, 1872-1956', no page numbers.

36. Brockman, 'Reminiscences, 1872-1956', no page numbers.

37. Milward 1992: 53-54.

38. Milward 1992: 54.

39. Jebb 2002: 26.

Coolbul's drawings suggest an additional dimension to the relationship between black and white that does not occur in Prinsep's diaries. While we cannot be certain of his motivations, Coolbul's acute observations of animals and European ways do suggest an interest in things that were unfamiliar and perhaps unfathomable to him and his kin. In all likelihood it was his interactions with Prinsep the artist that kindled his interest in drawing, an interest Prinsep encouraged by supplying him with paper, pencils and crayons. Prinsep spent much time at his easel and derived enormous pleasure from painting and drawing, and it is certain that Coolbul would have had plenty of opportunity to observe the way his boss went about his art and the results of his work. We can speculate that Coolbul's interest in art might have been a way of engaging Prinsep's interest, of exploring other dimensions to the employer-employee relationship. A shared interest in art might have been a way of developing understanding, exchanging values and encouraging respect from a boss who displayed little obvious interest in anything Aboriginal people had to offer. It is also possible, as Morphy speculates, that Coolbul's art represented a way of bringing the unfamiliar world of the coloniser into an Aboriginal frame of reference, 'of incorporating them within Aboriginal ways of understanding the world and making them a part of an Aboriginal universe'.⁴⁰ Still another possibility comes from Brenda Croft's observation that Coolbul's kangaroo and dogs may symbolise the colonial relationship, in which 'the native fauna under attack operate as the symbol for the Indigenous observer: already out of the picture'.⁴¹

The fact that Coolbul's drawings are but a small sample of the artist's total output, however, suggests that they tell us as much about Henry Prinsep as about Coolbul. Because the subjects of the drawings are all European, it is intriguing to imagine what might have been discarded in Prinsep's final selection, to wonder whether, like William Barak or Tommy McRae, Coolbul might have drawn images of his Nyungah country men and women going about their traditional business or scenes depicting the violent history of his people's subjugation by the colonisers. The reasons these particular drawings were included in the album are open to speculation, but do suggest an assimilationist interest: that the drawings were seen by Prinsep as curiosities, as examples of what someone like Coolbul could achieve when exposed to the 'civilising' influence of colonisation. It is even possible that Prinsep selected these drawings because they were trivial or sentimental: that the man and woman on horseback were Prinsep and his wife, while the blue horse might be a drawing for a child, perhaps the baby Carlotta, who, as we have seen, spent much of her childhood with Aboriginal men and women around the homestead. Conjectures like these lead to the uncomfortable conclusion that, as Morphy suggests in his discussion of the art of Albert Namatjira, the Coolbul collection might constitute 'as much as a denial of Aboriginal art as a recognition of it'.⁴²

The disjuncture between Prinsep's treatment of Coolbul as worker and Coolbul as artist becomes particularly apparent in his dispassionate reporting of the artist's death. There was, he recorded in March 1872, 'a great row amongst the natives' camped near the homestead.

40. Morphy 1998: 62-63.

41. Croft 2002: 39.

42. Morphy 1998: 22.

Bejine came up to accuse Neeribun of spearing Geo. Coolbul through the belly, but Charlie denied it. However I took Charlie's nag ... & rode down to the camps at [illeg.] where I found poor George very bad, the spear had gone right through him to the left of the navel. The women were lamenting & nursing him. ... I sent Bejine with a letter to P. Clifton asking him to send [Doctor] Lovegrove & a policeman. When I returned I found Mr. Charlie [Neeribun] had decamped. I was glad of this because he had served us for many years formerly & I should not like to have been instrumental to his conviction which would only have been founded on native assertions. Poor George I think will not recover tho' James Maguire says he has known similar cases before with sorcery [sic]. Lovegrove and [Police Constable] Slack came out at about 1.30 & we went to examine George, who was in great pain. Decided to send him into Bunbury. Lovegrove bandaged and washed him & gave him some Dovers powders to ease his pain & then we returned to dinner ... Mack went up to put George in the cart & just as Lovegrove was leaving Mack returned saying George was dead. Lovegrove & I rode down to see the body & met a large number of about 20 natives armed with spears & painted going in search of Charlie. I told them not to spear him but to bring him bound to Bunbury or tell the police. We found poor Kitty, George's pretty wife in a great agony of grief & about 4 other women singing their dirges over his body. We told them not to bury him until [Resident Magistrate] Mr. Pearce Clifton has seen him tomorrow morning.⁴³

Prinsep, a Justice of the Peace, attended the inquest the next day and was keen to protect his worker Neeribun from conviction. Witnesses testified that he had speared Coolbul, but this was dismissed as 'founded on native assertions'. The inquest exonerated Neeribun, finding that Coolbul 'met with death from spear wound inflicted by person or persons unknown. There was no material evidence to show Charlie had done it, tho' we all thought so'.⁴⁴ Two days later, a huge storm brought down a tree at the back of homestead, and it landed 'where George and Kitty generally lay'. Later, Prinsep came across 'a lot of natives, strange tribe, on the road in the moonlight & expected to hear something about Charlie'. Finally in April 1872:

We were disturbed by Burman & Gippy, two native relatives of Coolbul, who was killed. They were in great agitation from mingled grief & wine, & swore Charlie's death which I strenuously warned them against. Burman ... mentioned having noticed some words flying along the telegraph wire about George's death, to Fremantle where he was, & when he went to the office, sure, the words were written down exactly the same.⁴⁵

Thus Coolbul died like so many of his country men and women un-mourned by a colonial system that seemed to regret only the passing of a valued if troublesome worker. Prinsep lived on until 1922 and is remembered for his art, his public service and contribution to the social and cultural life of colonial Western Australia. On his death he was eulogised as 'an old colonist', 'one of the State's oldest and best known residents', 'always polite, always courteous, always kind and wishing to be helpful', 'a Christian gentleman of the old school'.⁴⁶ By this time, Coolbul's traditional country was

43. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 7 March 1872.

44. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 8 March 1872.

45. Prinsep, 'Diaries', 7 March 1872.

46. *The West Australian*, 21 July 1922; *West Australian Church News*, 1 August 1922.

covered by farms, the Nyungah families shut out of their traditional economy, relegated to the status of pauper and, in Haebich's words, 'branded as social outcasts as well'.⁴⁷ Prinsep himself played no small part in this decline in status and respect in his later role as Chief Protector of Aborigines, designing and advocating laws which today lead many West Australian Aboriginal people to rank him second to AO Neville on the scale of 'devils incarnate' responsible for their oppression.

The story of men like George Coolbul, concealed as it is behind the words and images of the coloniser, shows that Nyungahs did not simply succumb to the steady erosion of their society. Coolbul and his compatriots consciously adopted strategies to resist the increasingly intrusive colonial regime and survive as a people by absenting themselves from the demands of the boss to maintain cultural and family obligations, by making their society invisible to the new regime, by showing their lack of respect for a boss who viewed them as lesser beings and by coming onto their country and using it against the demands of the coloniser. Thus, another story arises from the bleakness of colonisation and the *Aborigines Act* of 1905, another story that speaks of survival, cultural strength, regeneration and the determination of individual Nyungahs to resist a hated system that interfered with almost every element of their lives. Their resistance, as Nyungah authors Kim Scott and Hazel Brown write, took many forms: it 'was trying to avoid conquest ... adapting different strategies to maintain certain values as others fell away. Resistance was merely surviving, and in such circumstances there must have been a lot of slippage, a lot of compromise and shifting ground.'⁴⁸

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Celebrated at first, then implied and finally denied: the erosion of Aboriginal identity in circus, 1851–1960

Mark Valentine St Leon

Circus in a modern form was first presented in London in the late 18th century. Philip Astley (1742–1814), a former cavalryman, gave open-air displays of trick riding in 1768 in a ring within a roped-off field at Lambeth on the southern side of the Thames. These displays were eventually enclosed, roofed over and given in a building, which he called Astley's Amphitheatre.¹ The establishment was popularly referred to as 'the circus', a word used at the time to describe the open-air circular recreational riding tracks in and around London.² The ring, the essence of the circus experience, was a primordial device for grouping an audience around a spectacle of human activity.³ On the other side of the world, Australia's Aboriginal people employed the same device for ceremonies such as a corroboree, the earliest performances by Aborigines to be witnessed by Europeans.⁴ Astley's remained the international centre of circus well into the 19th century. By the early 1800s, provincial Britain was served by numerous circuses of various sizes and reputations, which travelled by road.⁵ These companies and others on the Continent, the newish United States and eventually in the new colonies of Australia mimicked Astley's programs. Also mimicked were the exquisite equestrian pantomimes devised by Andrew Ducrow (1798–1842), the principal equestrian, lessee and manager of Astley's from 1825 until his death.

Despite the popularity of circus entertainments in 19th-century England, circus performers inherited the inferior social standing of itinerant entertainers. They were not only placed towards the lower end of the English social hierarchy but also at the lower end of a hierarchy within the world of entertainers.⁶ These were people 'of no place and no order of life'.⁷ Similar observations could be made of some early Australian circus

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1. Speaight 1980: 31ff.
 2. Speaight 1980: 34.
 3. Ramsland with St Leon 1993: 6.
 4. Broome 1995: 171.
 5. Croft-Cooke and Meadmore nd: 127.
 6. Saxon 1978: 34.
 7. Carmeli 1995: 213ff; Saxon 1978: 34.

families as many were established by former convicts and other marginalised people such as former tinkers, chimney sweeps, bootmakers and hawkers.

Circus blacks

Many black performers were observed in British circus in the early 19th century and several were prominent as artists and managers.⁸ The international character of circus, then as now, placed more emphasis on physical skill than on identity while the public attached little importance to matters of race.⁹ The 'Negro' or mulatto rider (to use the language of the day), Joseph 'Mungo' Hillier, was a longstanding protégé of Ducrow.¹⁰ Another famous 'Negro' performer of this era was the equestrian, William Darby, better known by his *nom d'arena* of Pablo Fanque.¹¹

Entertainments of a circus nature were among the manifestations of contemporary culture gradually transplanted to the new Australian colonies. A ropewalker named George Croft, a former convict, performed on the stage of Sydney's Theatre Royal as early as 1833.¹² In April 1847, Croft opened a short-lived amphitheatre at Moreton Bay, the penal settlement where Brisbane now stands.¹³ In July 1841, Italian gymnast Signor Luigi Dalle Case arrived in Sydney unannounced with a small troupe that included two, presumably black or mulatta girls, aged 12 and 8, whom he had somehow procured from the Bahia region of Brazil. The girls exhibited feats of 'strength, tumbling and tightrope dancing'.¹⁴ In Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) in December 1847, the publican and equestrian Robert Avis Radford opened his Royal Circus in Launceston and entertained audiences there and in Hobart Town over the following two years.¹⁵ There is no evidence that Radford presented any Indigenous people as performers at any stage, possibly because there was no 'exploitable native labour' in the colony.¹⁶

From 1850, the focus of colonial circus activity shifted to the mainland with fixed location 'amphitheatres' opened in both Sydney and Adelaide later that year and in Melbourne the following year.¹⁷ Black, but non-Aboriginal, performers were strongly represented in the 'Astley's Amphitheatre' that was opened in Melbourne late in 1854 by the entrepreneur GBW Lewis. Lewis's elephantine company, imported from London, included three ropewalkers, all 'men of colour'.¹⁸ They were Billy Banham, Harry Walker and George Christoff. The advertising for this Melbourne version of Astley's Amphitheatre touted Banham as the 'first rope dancer in the world' and that he could 'throw back and forward somersets, feet to feet, on the tight rope, a feat which astonishes those in the profession much more than those who pay to visit the arena'.¹⁹

8. Saxon 1978: 331–332.

9. Saxon 1978: 332–333.

10. Saxon 1978: 147–148.

11. Saxon 1978: 332–333; Turner 2003: 20.

12. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 December 1833, advertisement.

13. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 1 May 1847.

14. *Sydney Gazette*, 21 August 1841; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1842.

15. *Cornwall Chronicle*, 29 December 1847, advertisement.

16. Hartwell 1954: 63.

17. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 1850, advertisement; *South Australian Register*, 18 October 1850, advertisement; *Benalla Standard*, 14 November 1879.

18. *Sydney Sportsman*, 8 January 1908.

During this engagement and his subsequent ten-year sojourn in Australia, Banham deployed the *nom d'arena* of his famous uncle, Pablo Fanque.²⁰

Despite the not infrequent arrival of performers from England, the United States of America and elsewhere by the 1850s – and performers moving from one troupe to another – the colonial circus proprietor was deprived of immediate access to the large pools of organised professional talent readily found in cities such as London, Paris or New York. Maintaining his company's strength and diversifying its program was therefore a constant challenge. In reviewing a performance of a visiting circus early in 1852, for example, a Goulburn, New South Wales, critic highlighted the need for 'two or three [more] performers [to] ... prevent ... delay between the parts and ... diversify the entertainments'.²¹

To satisfy the demands for both performers and novelty, circus proprietors sought attractive, suitably-proportioned juveniles to train as quickly as possible as acrobats or equestrians. As in England, an apprenticeship system was introduced in the early Australian amphitheatres to redress the colonial shortage of performers.²² The induction (or adoption) of children into 'apprenticeships' (however spurious) remained an established practice in Australian circus as late as the 1920s. Circus proprietors typically procured juveniles and youths from less-privileged backgrounds – typically, they were abandoned or illegitimate or both.²³ As apprentices, young people were inexpensive, physically and mentally adaptable, controllable, welcomed by audiences and commercially exploitable over long periods. Of the known 'apprenticeships' of white children, few arrangements were contractually documented. As for non-white (mostly Indigenous) children, none of the known 'apprenticeships' was evidenced by contract (whether actual or anecdotal).²⁴

Identity celebrated, c1851–1865

Novelty is the lifeblood of any entertainment form. However, the content of a program is determined as much by what can feasibly be delivered to an audience as by what public taste might demand. In this initial period of involvement in Australian circus, Aboriginal performers contributed to satisfying audience expectations of novelty. As a result, their presence in Australian circus was celebrated in this formative period, as Australian society was radically transformed from a penal past into a modern, commodity-based economy.

For want of an audience, the early circus troupes gradually abandoned the comfort of the amphitheatres to follow the people along ill-formed roads onto the gold diggings.²⁵ As a result, the first peripatetic circuses were organised. The early travelling

19. *The Age*, 23 January 1855, advertisement. In the vernacular of the day, the term 'first' meant 'premiere' or 'outstanding'.

20. Turner 1995: 99.

21. *Goulburn Herald*, 3 January 1852.

22. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 1850, advertisement; *New York Times*, 17 February 1881.

23. King 1989, unpublished transcript of interview.

24. Broome 2001: 95.

25. Circus amphitheatres were in existence in various guises in Sydney (1850–56) and in Melbourne (1852–56). After short-lived initial success, they proved uneconomic and from 1853 (Sydney) and 1855 (Melbourne) the amphitheatres were gradually converted to theatres.

circus proprietors also discovered a new source of children for 'adoption' or 'apprenticeship' – the so-called 'half-castes'. These children were the result of unions, voluntary or forced, between white men and Aboriginal women.²⁶ A New South Wales Legislative Council Select Committee heard in 1845 that there was almost no inclination for white men to form permanent relations with their black concubines.²⁷ Although commentary is by no means unequivocal, the overall picture obtained is that the 'half-castes' at this time were the outcasts of both races. Among tribes in South Australia and Victoria, it was observed that 'half-castes' were destroyed at birth. In Western Australia in 1873 children and 'young persons of mixed blood' could be frequently seen 'utterly neglected and abandoned' and left to a life of 'ignorance ... vice and depravity'.²⁸

Early in 1851, in his circus erected outside a Parramatta inn, the English circus man, Henry Burton, presented an 'Indian' rider on his program. Since the presence of *genuine* Indian performers in Australian circus was rare indeed – two jugglers in 1862 the only ones to come to notice – we may conjecture that Burton's 'Indian' of 1851 was in fact an Aborigine and, if so, the first Aborigine to appear in colonial circus, indeed in any genre of the European performing arts.²⁹ However, the identity of Burton's 'Indian' remains unknown: he may have metamorphosed into Burton's 'Little Nugget' a few months later, as detailed below, but we lack confirmation.

Why would Burton present a Aborigine as an 'Indian' and not as an 'Aborigine'? Would the presence of an Aborigine on his program detract from the image of his company? Possibly, since racist attitudes had grown by 1850.³⁰ Was the term 'Indian' an acceptable contemporary descriptor for an Aborigine? Possibly, because some of the first settlers, conversant with the British colonial experience in North America, had described Australia's Aborigines as 'Indians' in their journals.³¹ Would the term 'Indian' better connect with Burton's colonial audience? Possibly, because for a time, the native-born of the colony of New South Wales were numerically stronger than the immigrants, free or otherwise, and we may speculate that a representative of 'the jewel' of the British Empire may have aroused more curiosity than an 'Aborigine', 'half-caste' or otherwise.³² In any case, how would a 'half-caste' be presented in a circus? In this era, half-castes were not the cause for remark that they would become within a generation or two. Ethnographic interest remained focused on Aborigines as relics of the Stone Age. If Burton's 'Indian' was the first Aborigine to appear in circus, he may have also been the first documented example of Aboriginal identity ambivalence, which, by the turn of the 19th century, bedevilled Australian society.

Burton reached the Turon River diggings with his circus troupe in July 1851, after trekking overland for several weeks from Maitland by way of Mudgee.³³ He remained with his circus in the vicinity of Bathurst and Sofala for over a year. At Bathurst in August 1851, a juvenile 'half-caste' performer named 'Little Nugget', made his first

26. Broome 2001: 59.

27. Reynolds 2005: 102–103.

28. Cannon 1973: 66; Reynolds 2005: 106, 110–111.

29. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1851, advertisement.

30. Broome 2001: 95.

31. Petersen 2000: 132ff.

32. Vamplew 2007: 10.

33. Salmon 1904.

appearance with Burton's troupe. About seven years old, he was described as a 'manly little fellow of exquisite proportions', who leaped on and off his cream-coloured pony 'with pleasure in all directions; sometimes running by his side when at full speed, and vaulting with surprising nimbleness on his back'.³⁴ The record shows that the boy was born near Dubbo about 1844, the son of a white labourer named William and an Aboriginal woman known only as Mary Ann.³⁵ The following month, Burton's star performer, the equestrian, acrobat and ropewalker, John Jones, left to open his own circus at Sofala.³⁶ Jones took several of Burton's performers with him including 'Little Nugget' who was given, or took, the name of his new mentor and was now known as 'Billy' Jones. Under other billings such as 'Master Parello Frank' and 'Master Pablo', as well as 'Little Nugget', the juvenile Billy's splendid performances became a feature of Jones' circus troupe in the following years. Billy's performances on the goldfields were still the cause of remark more than 40 years later when a columnist of the Sydney magazine, *The Bulletin*, reminisced:

[Jones'] circus tent consisted of side walls only and the lights were made of fish tins filled with mud and some fat and rags in the centre ... [Billy Jones] was 'carried' round by a rider standing up on a horse. The rider had tights, but Billy was dressed in trousers and shirt and was barefooted. The diggers of the Turon threw a large sum of money into the ring as a reward for his pluck. Later on, in Melbourne, £1,000 was offered [to John Jones] for the boy and pony by a speculator. [John Jones] replied: 'No, we have not got to slavery out here yet'.³⁷

Due to floods in the Bathurst region, John Jones returned to Sydney in May 1852 to appear in Malcom's Amphitheatre in York Street with 'his talented company and stud of horses' as well as 'his two aboriginals', 'Master Parello Frank' [Billy Jones] and Master Bruce.³⁸ They remained with Malcom nearly four months and the two boys were prominently featured, now unashamedly promoted to the Sydney public as 'Aboriginal'.³⁹ In September 1852, Jones and his troupe, including the two Aboriginal boys, travelled overland to Melbourne to take up an engagement 'at the top of Bourke Street' in the Olympic Circus of the American, John Sullivan Noble.⁴⁰ Jones followed Noble to Geelong where they erected a circus of 'canvas and wood' in Ryrie Street.⁴¹ Billy continued to develop as a performer and, as Master Parello Frank, gave a 'benefit' performance in Geelong in February 1853, when he performed on horseback, jumped

34. *Bathurst Free Press*, 6 August 1851, advertisement.

35. New South Wales Registrar-General 1906, Death, William Jones, circus performer, no 7920; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1906; *Referee*, 11 July 1906; *New York Clipper*, 15 September 1906. See also the Australian Dictionary of Biography for entry on Billy Jones.

36. *Bathurst Free Press*, 25 October 1851, advertisement. In 1865, Jones adopted the professional *nom d'arena* of 'St Leon'; he was my great-great-grandfather.

37. *Bulletin*, 9 March 1895.

38. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 1852, advertisement. The name 'Parello Frank' was an adaptation or editorial misspelling of 'Pablo Fanque', the professional pseudonym of the famous black British circus artist of the day, William Darby.

39. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August 1852, advertisement.

40. *Argus*, 11 October 1852, advertisement.

41. *Ovens & Murray Advertiser*, 22 December 1877; *Geelong Advertiser*, 1 December 1852, advertisement.

through hoops, over garters and canvases, danced upon the tightrope and did a Sailor's Hornpipe, skills no doubt imparted to him by his mentor, John Jones.⁴²

In Jones' Circus at Mudgee in 1858, Billy's dance on the tightrope was favorably compared to 'the celebrated Pablo Fanque, whom he bids fair to rival'.⁴³ Each afternoon before the evening's performance, Billy drew the attention of outback townspeople to Jones' circus by walking a rope, purportedly 300 feet in length and up to 70 feet above the ground, stretched from a tree stump to the centre pole of the tent.⁴⁴

As other peripatetic circus troupes emerged during the gold-rush period to serve an increasingly diverse (and cosmopolitan and affluent) population, the novelty of presenting juvenile Aborigines as circus performers spread. In 1853 Ashton procured a young Aborigine from the Tamworth area. He gave the juvenile the name of Master Mongo Mongo probably after the British black performer 'Mungo' Hillier. Ashton trained Mongo Mongo to perform his 'many and daring feats on horseback' in under two years.⁴⁵ Mongo Mongo was among a troupe of Aborigines that Ashton briefly presented when he visited the Hanging Rock diggings, near Uralla, in 1854.⁴⁶ The following year, when Ashton took over the lease of Malcom's Amphitheatre, the performance of the 'Australian black' was depicted in the *Illustrated Sydney News* which described him as 'truly a wonder ... [who] reminds one of other lands from the beauty of his riding'.⁴⁷ Mongo Mongo might have continued to enjoy colonial fame had it not been for his sudden death, apparently at the age of 20 from natural causes, while travelling the Illawarra with Ashton's troupe in 1856.⁴⁸

'Ever willing to secure new performers at an apprentice's wages', and known to 'knock a back somersault out of a black in three lessons', Ashton regularly apprenticed juveniles as performers and 'turned out several good 'half-caste' performers'.⁴⁹ Alexander Alkana, 'an Aboriginal boy from Moreton Bay', was one of Ashton's company in 1858.⁵⁰ From the 1850s to the 1870s, Ashton presented at least one or two Aboriginal (in most cases probably 'half-caste') performers on his program.

Ashton's Aboriginal 'apprentices' probably cost him little or nothing apart from board and keep and, in the absence of protective legislation, may have been readily procurable. In New South Wales for example, where Ashton concentrated most of his touring activity, the practices of 'baby-selling', adoption and trafficking in children,

42. *Geelong Advertiser*, 7 February 1853, advertisement.

43. *Mudgee Liberal*, 6, 13 July 1858.

44. *Adelong Mining Journal*, 16 October 1858, advertisement; *Wagga Wagga Express*, 9 July 1859, advertisement.

45. *Goulburn Herald*, 12 November 1853; *Illustrated Sydney News*, 6 May 1854, 23 June 1855; *Bathurst Free Press*, 13 January 1855. A 'Master Mungo' is also noted in JS Noble's Olympic Circus in Sydney in 1852, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 1852, advertisement.

46. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 6 May 1854. The identity of the other members of the troupe is unknown.

47. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 June 1855.

48. *Illawarra Mercury*, 7 July 1856; New South Wales Registrar-General 1856, Death, Mongo, no 3234.

49. Wirth 1925: 9-10; Wirth 1933.

50. *Ararat & Pleasant Creek Advertiser*, 23 January 1858; *Albury Border Post*, 20 May 1858.

Aboriginal or white, were not seriously addressed until the passage of the *Child Welfare Act* in 1923. *The Destitute Children Act* (New South Wales, 1866) and other similar child welfare legislation failed to protect Aboriginal and 'half-caste' children,⁵¹ nor did the legislation prevent the procurement of white children by circus proprietors. Of the several references uncovered to 'legally formalised' adoptions and apprenticeships of children by colonial circus proprietors, none pertain to Aboriginal or 'half-caste' children.

There was a pronounced decline in goldfield activity after 1854.⁵² With the growing diversification of entertainment in the larger colonial capitals of Sydney and Melbourne and with the constant pressure to deliver novelty to their audiences, the permanent circus amphitheatres that opened in the early 1850s became viable once again, and all were transformed by 1856 into more conventional theatres.⁵³ Rather than spelling the end of a colonial circus industry, these changes encouraged the industry to re-invent itself as fully peripatetic. We might even say 'nomadic', given the serendipitous manner in which the early circus routes developed as itinerant showmen explored their new territories. The itinerant circus proprietor was largely relieved of the burden of constantly delivering novelty in artistic programming. As the entertainers who travelled early modern Europe and the American frontier had already discovered, it was easier to change audience than repertoire. As a result, novelties – such as Aboriginal equestrians – enjoyed a longer life on the road than would have been the case in a fixed amphitheatre.⁵⁴

Of whatever 'degree of mixture', Aboriginal performers initially enjoyed some status in this increasingly peripatetic Australian circus industry. Far from concealing their employment, circus proprietors such as Ashton, Jones and a few others actively celebrated their presence on their bills, if only one or two at a time. Why? A fundamental reason certainly lies in a continuation of the English circus custom of presenting a token black or mulatto performer on the program. A second reason lies in the upsurge in free immigration during and after the gold rush period, producing audiences for whom the sight of an Aborigine, even a 'half-caste', was an outright novelty (for a time at least). A third reason lies in the protective, paternalistic attitude of early circus proprietors towards the young Aborigines who redressed, to some extent, the chronic shortage of performers.

In the same era, larger numbers of Aborigines helped overcome severe labour shortages on country stations.⁵⁵ In so doing, they shared for a time in the white man's recreations. Many, for example, became capable cricket players under the patronage of paternalistic station owners and managers. Aboriginal interest in cricket was sufficiently strong in the 1860s and 1870s to lead to the formation of Aboriginal cricket teams that played on the premiere colonial cricket grounds and even toured England. While many spectators undoubtedly came to see these players out of racial curiosity, the Aboriginal cricketers, like their counterparts in circus, garnered considerable

51. Thinee and Bradford 1998.

52. Cannon 1971: 210–211.

53. Irvin 1985: 173, 277–280; *Argus*, 14 April 1857, advertisement.

54. Burke 1994: 97.

55. Mulvaney and Harcourt 1988: 52.

respect for their abilities.⁵⁶ The employment of a small number of Aborigines in areas of sport (cricket) and entertainment (circus) by the 1860s was a foretaste of the limited career choices that Aborigines faced in the white man's world until well into the 20th century.⁵⁷

In linking their fortunes to the circus, Aborigines were also unconsciously joining a 'class' of people who, in mother England, had been legally and socially classified for centuries as vagabonds and mountebanks.⁵⁸ These classifications had no natural application in the new colonial context of circus, but the attitudes associated with them gradually surfaced with the first large waves of free immigration. Such attitudes were commonly articulated and fostered by the journalists and editors among the new arrivals. By the late 1860s, in some country towns 'hawkers' and 'travelling Jews with trinkets, organ-grinders, German bands, Ethiopian serenaders, circuses, electro-biologists, and people of that class', previously welcomed, were 'felt to be great nuisances'.⁵⁹ To counter such negative perceptions, circus proprietors went to some length to legitimise their reputations in the eyes of the emerging middle class by emphasising the good taste and refinement their entertainments offered. Visiting Adelaide in 1862, for example, circus proprietor Henry Burton assured 'parents and guardians' that his performances would be 'conducted with that due regard to propriety and delicacy that has hitherto characterised this establishment'.⁶⁰

Identity implied, c1865-1900

While colonial circus proprietors continued to 'apprentice' and train Aboriginal (as well as white) children as performers, they also had to increasingly accommodate and reflect shifting middle-class values, as well as realising their own pretensions of respectability and legitimacy. Furthermore, by the late 1870s, there were growing calls for long-overdue innovation in programming.⁶¹ The unabashed presentation of Aborigines in circus – a polite novelty in the 1850s and the early 1860s – began to fall out of step with emerging bourgeois sensibilities. The pinnacle of promoting performers as Aboriginal may have been reached in 1865 when, visiting Adelaide, Ashton presented his 'half-caste' performers, Master Callaghan and Combo Combo as 'The Aboriginal Brothers'. A thorough review of colonial circus advertising shows that thereafter the words 'Aboriginal', 'black' or 'half-caste' rarely appear in promotional material.⁶² Instead, oblique terms such as 'coloured' or 'Brazilian' were used to imply, rather than announce, the presence of Aborigines.⁶³ The 1870s proved to be the last decade in which the presentation of Aborigines in colonial circus would be positively promoted. In this section, I will explore how colonial circus proprietors negotiated the emerging gap between audience expectations and what circuses could deliver.

56. Vamplew and Stoddart 1994: 69–70.

57. Cashmore 1982: 213–221.

58. Broome with Jackomos 1998: 47ff.

59. Cannon 1973: 247.

60. *Advertiser*, 4 January 1862, advertisement.

61. *Australian Town & Country Journal*, 19 June 1875; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 November 1878, advertisement.

62. *Register*, 27 March 1865, advertisement.

63. *The News*, 3 July 1875, advertisement; *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 7 July 1874, advertisement.

One of Ashton's 'Aboriginal Brothers' of 1865 was still travelling with Ashton as late as 1879 when he performed a 'back somersault over a nine-foot banner on a galloping horse' at Wilcannia.⁶⁴ The other 'Aboriginal Brother', Combo, after several years with Ashton, travelled Victoria with Barlow's Circus in 1871 and toured Queensland with St Leon's Royal Victoria Circus in 1876.⁶⁵ That Combo was able to move between these troupes suggests either that his freedom was unfettered or that the services of talented Aboriginal performers were actively traded between circus proprietors, possibly for consideration.⁶⁶ Combo was long remembered as 'one of the best riders and acrobats' seen in the colonies.⁶⁷ He was 'taken' from 'the Gracemere run' (a large pastoral station outside Rockhampton) when 13 or 14 years old by Ashton. Did 'taken' mean 'stolen', 'adopted' or something else? We cannot say. Combo died in Brisbane in 1877 in 'rather straitened circumstances' at about 27 years of age.⁶⁸

St Leon's presented another Aborigine on its program in 1876, Tony Hargreaves, better known as Master Antonio and later as 'Tony Tony'. St Leon's promoted neither Combo nor Antonio as 'Aboriginal', but Antonio was regularly billed as 'The Coloured Infant Prodigy'.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, inside the tent, the Aboriginality of these performers was plain for all to see, as were their exceptional abilities as performers. A Rockhampton journalist patronisingly described Combo as 'a coloured gentleman',⁷⁰ while to another observer he was 'a black boy of the darkest dye'. Antonio was capable of warping and weaving his body into extraordinary shapes and forms.⁷¹

A contemporary of Combo and Antonio was the young Aboriginal performer, Edward Campbell, presented by Ashton as 'Antonia, the Brazilian horseman' in Grafton in 1874. He performed one of Ducrow's most famous pieces of horsemanship, 'The English Fox Hunter', an act typically presented in traditional English riding costume.⁷² The contradiction of a swarthy 'Brazilian' performing in top hat and tails does not appear to have upset outback audiences. Campbell was fatally injured while performing in Ashton's Circus at Fernmount on the Bellinger River in 1881.⁷³ A 'clever and deserving young man' who had been in Ashton's employment for a decade, Campbell's death cast 'a gloom over his comrades'. He was just 25 years old.⁷⁴ After Edward Campbell's death in 1881, we do not read of an Aboriginal performer in Ashton's Cir-

64. *Wilcannia Times*, 24 July 1879.

65. *Ovens & Murray Advertiser*, 1 August 1871, advertisement; *Northern Argus*, 25 April 1876, advertisement; Pattison 1939: 89.

66. According to the *Illawarra Mercury*, 7 July 1856, Ashton had earlier allowed Mongo to travel to the Peel River to visit his parents, after which Mongo voluntarily returned to Ashton's service.

67. Wirth 1925: 9–10; Wirth 1933; *Ipswich Observer*, 26 January 1876.

68. *Daily Northern Argus*, 10 October 1876; *Uralla & Walcha Times*, 21 July 1877.

69. *The News*, 3 July 1875, advertisement. St Leon's 'Master Antonio' was, presumably, a different identity to Ashton's 'Master Antonia' of the same era.

70. *Northern Argus*, 1 May 1876.

71. *Illawarra Mercury*, 20 August 1875; *Maryborough & Dunolly Advertiser*, 10 February 1879.

72. *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 7 July 1874.

73. Frank Jones, letter filed in FitzGerald Papers, MS Q285, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

74. New South Wales Registrar-General 1881, Death, Edward Campbell, no 8354; *Bulletin*, 23 July 1881; *NSW Government Gazette*, vol 4: 5782.

cus again until 1888 when a contortionist, placed well down on the bill, toured Queensland with the company.

The most popular circus performers, like the most popular circus companies, accumulated reputations over many years. The major Aboriginal identity in Australian circus in the latter half of the 19th century was unquestionably William 'Billy' Jones (c1844-1906), the 'Little Nugget' of Burton's Circus in 1851. He appeared with almost every Australian circus of note as equestrian, juggler, acrobat, rope-walker and ringmaster. Visiting Hobart with Foley's Californian Circus in 1866, Billy walked a rope stretched from the top of the circus pole to the Theatre Royal on the other side of Argyle Street, at a height of about 50 feet (15 metres) to the cheers of the people below.⁷⁵ The performance left such an impression on spectators that he was readily recognised by many when he next visited Hobart in 1884 as ringmaster of St Leon's Circus.⁷⁶ Such was his standing as a circus man that news of his death in Sydney in 1906 was reported as far away as New York.⁷⁷ Billy Jones' obvious Aboriginality was neither promoted nor concealed by his various employers and was no barrier to his popularity among either the public or the profession.⁷⁸

In the same era, as Cashman notes, segregated work practices were instituted on country stations.⁷⁹ Apart from the ubiquitous Billy Jones, the major colonial circus company in the 1880s, St Leon's, did not carry any Aboriginal performers. The apparently reduced reliance on Aboriginal performers during the 1880s may also be explained by the expansion of protection, control and containment of Aboriginal people in New South Wales (the major touring area for most circuses) in this era: the creation in 1878 of the first Aboriginal reserves and missions; the appointment of a Protector of Aborigines in 1881; and the establishment, in 1883, of the Aborigines Protection Board, which would come to have increasing control over the lives of some 9,000 Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Anecdotally at least, it would appear that the few Aborigines inducted into circus life in the 1890s were procured in Queensland. It is also worth noting that, in this same era, the ranks of Australian circus performers were enriched and replenished with artists who arrived with the large American circuses and Japanese acrobatic troupes, but who chose to stay in Australia and join local companies.

Alick Orlandi was known in North Queensland by his native name, 'Reka'. Probably in 1893 or 1894, he 'left' his tribe and joined Gus St Leon's Palace Circus as it toured Queensland, just a few years ahead of the *Aborigines Act* (Queensland, 1897) which would have deprived him of any freedom of movement or association.⁸⁰ At the time *The Bulletin* patronisingly observed that Aborigines were exhibiting 'an unhallowed desire to go into the show business wherever they could'.⁸¹ By the time the Palace circus opened in Tamworth in February 1896, Orlandi was billed as the 'great African somersault turnover [who] throws double somersaults over 13 chairs clearing 25 feet'.⁸²

75. *Mercury*, 7 June 1866.

76. *Mercury*, 14 February 1884.

77. *New York Clipper*, 15 September 1906.

78. *Bulletin*, 23 May 1896.

79. Vamplew and Stoddart 1994: 70.

80. Broome with Jackomos 1998: 167-168.

81. *Bulletin*, 10 October 1896.

82. *Tamworth News*, 11 February 1896, advertisement.

Orlandi 'possessed a magnificent physique' and executed the remarkable feat from a solid block of wood. At Greta a few months later, however, he slipped and landed head first on the ground with a sickening thud.⁸³ He died from his injuries soon afterwards.⁸⁴

Between 1886 and 1918, Aboriginal oppression increased as many reserves were broken up to satisfy settlers' demands for more land. By the turn of the century, most colonies had adopted legislation that deprived Aboriginal Australians of their freedom. Already deprived of the complexities of their own culture, Indigenous people were either confined to reserves or relegated to the fringes of country towns. In New South Wales in 1915, new legislation gave the Aborigines Protection Board the power to round up Aboriginal youths of mixed descent, especially girls, remove them from their parents and place them in apprenticeships or other forms of training.⁸⁵ Aboriginality had become something to be 'denied, repressed, expelled and forgotten'.⁸⁶

Identity denied, c1900–1960

In this third period, Aborigines continued to play an important role in Australian circus. Aboriginality was neither overtly celebrated nor surreptitiously implied. It was instead denied – either voluntarily surrendered or actively repressed by unrelenting social and market imperatives. It is an era within living memory and so we can reconstruct to some extent the ways in which Aboriginal performers denied (or were denied) their identity. I turn now to consider the lives of the two most conspicuous Indigenous performers.

Robert West (c1881–1943)

Robert Benjamin Sooby (c1856–1949), the son of a London cab proprietor, landed in Australia in the 1860s as a 14-year-old. A liaison with a 'half-caste' Aboriginal woman named Charlotte Smith, led to the birth of a son, named Robert Sooby after his father, at Maitland in about 1881.⁸⁷ Although Sooby raised his Aboriginal son as his own, the boy was no longer welcomed when a white widow agreed to marry the elder Sooby. At Gunnedah, around 1891, Sooby 'apprenticed' his son to West Bros Circus conducted by an Englishman, Adam West. From the Wests, the young Bob learned everything about circus and became 'a fairly good rider'.⁸⁸ Just as Billy Jones had adopted his mentor's surname, so Bob adopted the name of West.⁸⁹ Although light-skinned, his 'bit of dark blood' was obvious and, in the recollections of one old Australian circus man, he possessed 'a dash of the tarbrush'.⁹⁰ Bob West did not learn to read or write well. Visiting Narrabri with Foley's Circus in 1906, he was described as 'a most daring horseman' who 'delighted the audience' with his bareback riding.⁹¹ By November 1908, Bob West had taken to the road with his own circus, also called West Bros Circus. There is no ear-

⁸³. *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 17 August 1896.

⁸⁴. *Armidale Chronicle*, 26 August 1896.

⁸⁵. Broome 2001: 87.

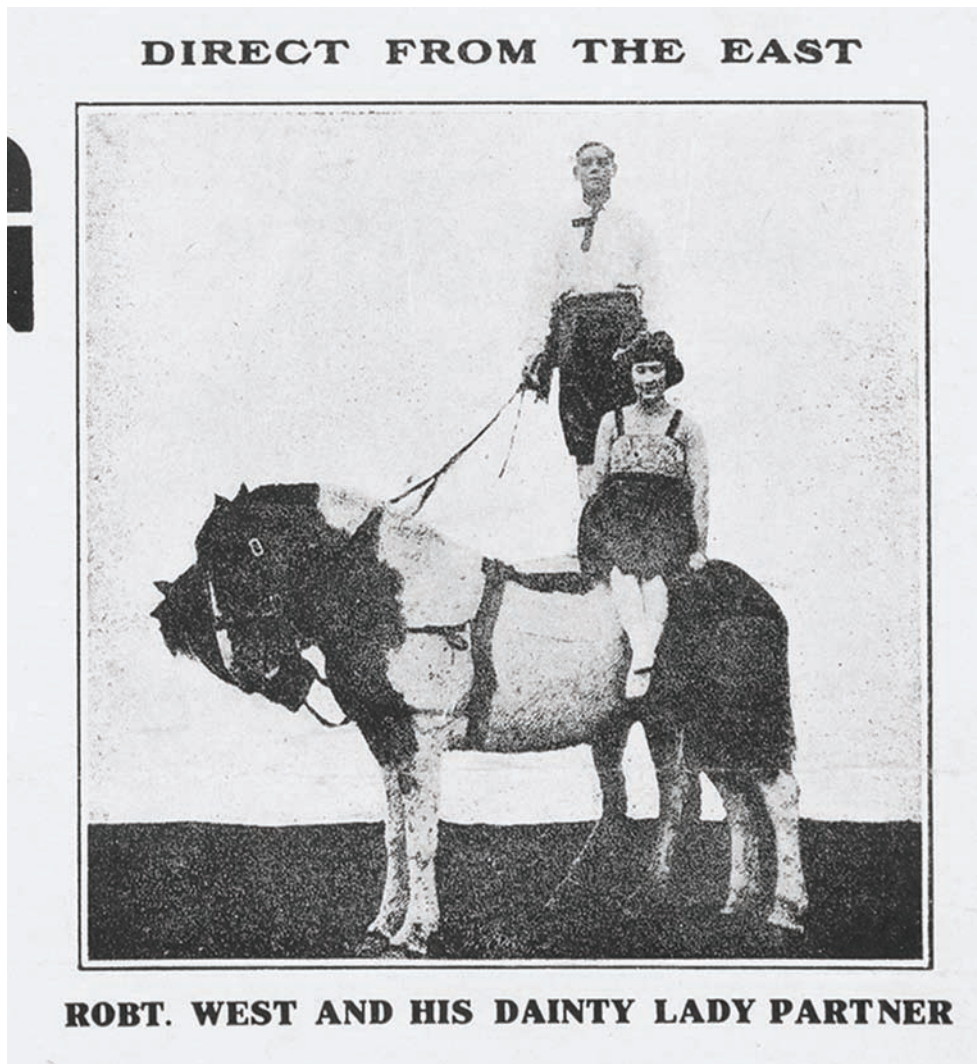
⁸⁶. Broome with Jackomos 1998: 67ff; St Leon 1993: 37ff.

⁸⁷. West, Philip, personal communication, 9 July 2002, Narooma.

⁸⁸. St Leon 1984: 117.

⁸⁹. Gill, Kitty West, personal communication 25 May 2008, Cairns.

⁹⁰. King 1989, unpublished transcript of interview.



Robert West and his dainty lady partner, a Melbourne girl named Mary Davenport, who became the second Mrs West. This photograph dates from c.1919–20 and was reproduced on a poster for Sole Bros Circus in 1921. (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.)

lier example known of a circus conducted by an Aboriginal person. At Wentworth that month, he claimed to have 'the largest circular tent in Australia ... brilliantly illuminated with gas jets'.⁹²

^{91.} *Narrabri Age*, 20 July 1906. The Narrabri connection is at variance with the family recollection of a Maitland birthplace but may support the claim, as yet unverified, that West was actually a cousin of the Colleanos.

^{92.} *Federal Standard & Western Districts Advocate*, 25 November 1908. From Wentworth, the circus proceeded to Pooncarie, Menindee and Broken Hill.

Something of a 'canvas casanova', Bob's first marriage in 1903 to Lucy O'Neill, a costume maker in FitzGerald Bros Circus, produced two daughters but the marriage ended in divorce in 1923. His second marriage to Mary Davenport, the daughter of a Melbourne boot-maker, at Wilcannia in 1928, produced nine children.⁹³ In the summer of 1934-35, Bob and Mary West and their children were part of the last circus to travel across the Nullarbor Plain by wagons, with horses, donkeys and mules trailing behind. The crossing from Ceduna to Norseman took three and a half weeks. The family spent nearly four years travelling Western Australia before returning to South Australia by the overland route. The circus gave its last performance at Martin's Creek near Maitland, New South Wales, in May 1940.⁹⁴ The family settled at West Tamworth where Bob died in 1943.⁹⁵ His younger children attended school 'as soon as we settled down' because a good education was 'the one thing Dad wanted us to have'. In keeping with the times, West appeared to 'resent' his Aboriginality and concealed his true ethnicity from his children, telling them they had 'Spanish blood'. Some of his younger children, none the wiser, only found out about the 'Aboriginal thing' from Bob's widow Mary shortly before she died in 1988.⁹⁶

Cornelius 'Con' Colleano (1899-1973)

Towards the end of the 19th century, Cornelius 'Con' Sullivan was a boxer and itinerant boxing troupe showman. At Narrabri in 1894, he married 16-year-old Julia Robertson,⁹⁷ the daughter of William Robertson, a shearer and a native of the West Indies island of St Thomas (now one of the Virgin Islands) and Julia Robertson (*nee* Saunders), a 'half-caste' Aboriginal woman from Wee Waa.⁹⁸ In time, ten children followed: four boys and six girls. At Lismore in December 1899 the Sullivans'



When touring Western Australia, Bob West combined his circus with another run by the Miller ('Milo') family for a few months about 1937. (Philip West, Narooma, NSW.)

⁹³. New South Wales Registrar-General 1903, Marriage, Robert West Sooby and Lucinda O'Neil, no 564.

⁹⁴. *North Shore Times*, 4 March 1987; West, Philip, personal communication, 21 June 2008, Narooma.

⁹⁵. New South Wales Registrar-General 1943, Death, Robert West Sooby, no 13400.

⁹⁶. West, Philip, personal communication, 21 June 2008; Mervyn King, in St Leon, 1984: 265.

⁹⁷. New South Wales Registrar-General 1878, Birth, Julia Robinson, no 17526; 1894, Marriage, Cornelius Sullivan and Julia Robinson, no 5188. Julia's name was later recorded as Vittorine Julia Robinson.

⁹⁸. The presence of a West Indian in the Australian backblocks intrigues. It may be that Robertson was a sailor who jumped ship in Australia and made his way into the obscurity of the outback.

third child was born, known, like his father, as 'Con'.⁹⁹ Between 1907 and 1910, the family settled at Lightning Ridge, where the growing children received some schooling and learnt basic circus skills. The children 'didn't have a marvellous education but they could all read and write and add up'.¹⁰⁰ A preponderance of daughters probably put an end to any plan that Con Sullivan may have had to continue in boxing and so he turned instead to circus. Late in 1910, the family started touring northern New South Wales with its own circus,¹⁰¹ using the professional name of 'Collino' (later spelt 'Colleano'). The name was possibly inspired by an American troupe of acrobats, The Kellino Family, who visited Australia in 1897.¹⁰² This Latin sounding name capitalised on and conveniently camouflaged the swarthy appearance of the Sullivan children.

By late 1912, the young Con Colleano, then 13, and an older brother were accomplished acrobats and ropewalkers.¹⁰³ The Colleano family further honed their circus skills by joining established circus companies such as Ashton's (1913) and Eroni Bros' (conducted by the Perry family) in 1914-15. When the Colleano boys were not performing in the circus ring, they boxed in their father's sideshow after the show each night. Interviewed in 1987, George Perry (c1896-c1989) recalled how 'young Con' was billed as 'The Boy Wonder' taking on all-comers up to 15 years of age.¹⁰⁴

Sufficiently endowed with circus skills and experience, the Colleanos organised their own circus and started out once again, from Winton with 'just a few wagons and horses', probably in the spring of 1915.¹⁰⁵ Members of the Matthews family (Aboriginal cousins of the Colleanos) also took roles in the circus. Family members filled multiple roles in the ring performance to minimise the need for employed artists. To create the impression of a much larger troupe and one that was imported, family members assumed a number of pseudonyms: the siblings Bonar, Winnie, Con, Kate and Maurice Colleano performed as acrobats billed as 'The Royal Hawaiians'; Winnie Colleano was the trapeze artist, 'Senorita Sanchez'; Con Colleano was the wirewalker, 'Zeneto'; Winnie and Kate Colleano were the double trapeze act, 'The Marasetta Sisters'; and Kate Colleano was the rider, 'Miss Katherine'.¹⁰⁶ None of these names conveyed anything 'Aboriginal', and the illusion created of a circus replete with foreign exotica addressed to some extent the Australian public's insatiable demand for imported artists. Only a few years earlier, the Sydney magazine, *The Theatre*, had lamented the tendency of Australian audiences to pay 'outsiders [non-Australians] more for giving them less' as well as theatrical managers who grovelled 'to cater to these un-Australian Australians' instead of developing domestic talent.¹⁰⁷ The billing of 'The Royal Hawaiians', consistently used in the Colleano advertising in the approximate period 1916-20, was borrowed from a troupe of genuine Hawaiian singers and dancers, which visited Australia in 1911.¹⁰⁸

99. New South Wales Registrar-General 1900, Birth, Cornelius Sullivan, no 4386.

100. Tremain 1987, unpublished transcript of interview.

101. *Warrald Standard*, 28 November 1910, advertisement.

102. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 December 1897, advertisement.

103. *Hillston Spectator*, 14 December 1912.

104. Perry 1987, unpublished transcript of interview.

105. St Leon 1984: 100.

106. *The Western Star*, 10 February 1917, advertisement.

107. *The Theatre*, 1 February 1909.

The appearance of Aboriginal girls in Colleano's All-Star Circus (as it soon became known) was itself striking. Of the Aborigines and half-castes known to have performed in Australian circus up until this time, none was female. The written and spoken record neglects to tell us why circus proprietors failed to 'apprentice' or 'adopt' Aboriginal girls or young Aboriginal women. Suitably proportioned females (whatever their ethnicity) were in such short supply in Australian circus that the more slender young male performers often dressed in drag to impersonate equestriennes and trapeziennes.¹⁰⁹ While protective reserve managers and missionaries probably dissuaded girls from joining these morally dangerous institutions and saved them for lives of domestic service, such measures would not explain the fate of abandoned 'half-caste' girls found beyond the reserves and missions.

Country newspapers, as well as the show business magazines of the era (such as *The Theatre*, *Australian Variety*, and *The Hawklet*) were consistent in their praise of the Colleano circus and its program. Country people could not fail to be impressed by any circus which (from 1918) was conveyed by rail, carried a band of 14 musicians and its own electric lighting plant.¹¹⁰ If Australian journalists knew of or perceived the family's Aboriginal origins - and it is hard to imagine that they did not - they were silent on the matter. Within Australia's circus community, on the other hand, the family was highly regarded



Poster for Sole Bros Circus used on its first New Zealand tour of 1921. (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.)

108. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 1911, adv

109. Pattison 1939: 91.

110. *Western Star*, 10 February 1917; *Australian Variety*, 11 October 1918.

but unequivocally remembered as 'Aboriginal'. As George Perry said, 'They was all good people ... but people didn't treat them as Aborigines'.¹¹¹

The feet-to-feet forward somersault on a tightwire is one of the most difficult and dangerous feats in circus performance because, as he tucks his head and turns his forward somersault, the performer loses sight of the wire and his feet have to find it. The perfection of this supreme feat took Con Colleano about five years of experimentation. At practice in Sydney in 1919, Con brought off his first forward somersault, possibly the first time the feat had ever been achieved on a *wire* (as distinct from a rope) and probably the first time by anyone since the renowned Billy Banham.¹¹² It would still be some years before he could sufficiently refine the trick for public exhibition. In the meantime his back somersaults on the wire were sufficiently thrilling: the South Australian governor and his wife rose from their seats after Con's performance one Friday evening in Adelaide in 1921 and rushed into the ring to 'personally congratulate' him after his vice-regal performance.¹¹³

Rising rail costs forced the closure of Colleano's All-Star Circus early in 1923. The Fuller vaudeville circuit and later the rival Tivoli circuit soon engaged the family.¹¹⁴ Each circuit comprised vaudeville theatres in the major cities of Australia and New Zealand. As contemporary publicity shows, neither circuit actively promoted the Colleano family's Aboriginality. Indeed, the Tivoli management presented the eight acrobats of the family in Arabian costume, an implied imported act, The Akabah Arabs.¹¹⁵ On his own, Con Colleano was paid the extraordinary salary of £60 a week for his tightwire performance – in an era when the most capable Australian circus performers received only £5 a week.¹¹⁶ *The Theatre* described Con Colleano's act at Fuller's Sydney theatre in May 1923:

Colleano's dancing on the slackwire at Fuller's Theatre is the prettiest thing to watch. His small feet twinkle gracefully in *pirouette* and *entrechat* alighting always on the wire with an effortless sureness that disguises the difficulty of the act ... Colleano's dressing is admirable. His slim figure and almost Italian [sic] darkness of face and hair are fittingly set off by the white satin suit ... His forward somersault is his star act.¹¹⁷

Late in 1923, the Colleano family left Australia for vaudeville engagements in South Africa, England and the United States. In September 1924, Con Colleano made his successful American debut at the New York Hippodrome.¹¹⁸ With a nod to the silent screen hit of *Blood and Sand* and its swarthy bullfighter hero, Rudolf Valentino, Colleano had by then incorporated the pseudo-Spanish bullfighting ambience that remained the trade mark of his act for the remainder of his career. In 1925, Con secured an engagement with America's largest circuses, Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey. While at first promoted to the American public as 'the Australian wizard of the wire',

111. Perry 1987, unpublished transcript of interview.

112. *Daily Mirror*, 3 September 1919.

113. *Everyone's*, 4 January 1922.

114. *Everyone's*, 14, 21 March 1923.

115. *Theatre*, 2 April 1923.

116. St Leon 1984: 205.

117. *The Theatre*, 1 May 1923.

118. *Variety*, 1 October 1924.

the novelty value of 'Australian' was soon fully depreciated. By the early 1930s, he was heralded in the Ringling publicity as a '*caballero* ... from a famous Spanish family of circus performers', and his Aboriginal mother was transformed into 'a Spanish dancer whose parents had come from Las Palmas'.¹¹⁹ With Ringling in 1933, Con drew a weekly salary of US\$375 – about £150 – and other benefits, such as his own apartment on the circus train, well in excess of any other performer in the circus.¹²⁰ Touring Europe during the winter off-seasons, Colleano performed before enthusiastic audiences in Germany in December 1934, Adolf Hitler among them, as the 'Mexican tightwire wonder'.¹²¹

As the lucrative American and European circus, vaudeville and fair circuits kept Con and other members of the Colleano family in regular employment throughout the 1920s and 1930s, news of their activities gradually vanished from Australian show business columns. When Con Colleano gave the final performance of his career in Honolulu in 1960 and died in Miami, in 1973, neither milestone came to the attention of the Australian press.

While Con Colleano never privately referred to himself as a Spaniard, he never publicly referred to himself as an Aborigine, although he was certainly aware of the fact. The misinformation permitted Con to enjoy privileges that otherwise might have been denied him. For example, he was issued a Reichspass allowing him to freely enter and depart Nazi Germany.¹²² He was able to assume American citizenship in 1950 (describing himself as 'white' on the citizenship document), although full citizenship rights were not extended to Aborigines at home until the passage of reforming federal and state legislation in the 1960s.¹²³ During a failed attempt to retire to Australia in 1956–57, Con Colleano briefly held a publican's licence for a hotel at Forbes, although the sale of alcohol to Aborigines in New South Wales was not legalised until 1963.¹²⁴

Conclusion

While Aboriginal performers made a valuable contribution to Australian circus, they were not represented in large numbers before the emergence of the Colleano and West families and their subsequent progeny. There were as many as 3,000 circus performers active in Australia over the period 1851–1960 and at least several hundred active at any one time by the first decade of the 20th century. The proportion of Aboriginal performers amongst them was by no means large – perhaps between 2 and 5 per cent of all active performers throughout Australia at any one time, but roughly consistent with the proportion of Aborigines in the total population.¹²⁵

In circus, Aboriginal people found an accommodation with Europeans that could not be found elsewhere: equality, security and esteem, and a medium through which they could meaningfully engage with white society. But unwittingly, Aboriginal circus

119. Kelley 1931.

120. Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey, Payroll manifest, 1933.

121. Scala Theater, Berlin, program, December 1934: 10–11, 20; St Leon 1984: 213.

122. *Pix*, 29 January 1938.

123. Broome 2001: 182.

124. *Forbes Advocate*, 6 July 1956.

125. Vamplew 2007: 4.

performers had joined the company of people who were also marginalised and who for centuries were ranked at the lower end of the social scale. To maintain its social acceptability, circus had to constantly re-align itself with evolving social standards and expectations. If emerging Australian society marked down whatever respect and appreciation it may have once had for Aboriginal identity, then circus had to reflect the signals imparted. Thus, while the transition was by no means smooth, the prized figure of Burton's 'Little Nugget' of 1851 – the barefooted and obviously Aboriginal outback urchin – had metamorphosed by the 1920s into the cosmopolitan 'Wizard of the Wire' whose Aboriginality was camouflaged by a contrived Spanish heritage that satisfied the imperatives of Australian and, later, international show business.

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Rough riding: Aboriginal participation in rodeos and travelling shows to the 1950s

Kathryn M Hunter

On Saint Patrick's Day 1906, 3,000 people, including the Governor of New South Wales, squeezed into a 'tight little box of an arena' in Sydney's Rawson Place to watch a rough riding competition between two of the most famous riders of the time: Lance Skuthorpe, 36, and Billy Waite, a 23-year-old Aboriginal man. For this contest they had the choice of six horses, including the most notorious buckjumper of the day, 'Bobs'. A scroll trailed down over the railing beside the Governor, listing the 800 men who had been thrown by Bobs. The *Evening News* wrote that Waite was in his prime as 'a first-class horseman'. According to the newspaper, Waite was 'as clever as a fox terrier' and 'as active as a panther', because 'he disdains to crawl through the slip-rails [vaulting them instead] and jumps from the ground into the saddle on a bucking horse'.¹ According to historian Jenny Hicks, it was 'the match of the universe'. Skuthorpe, 'even at 36 years of age, was considered to be Australia's best buckjump rider', while Billy Waite was considered 'to be the only other man at the time in his class, and Bobs to date was unriden'.² According to Waite:

By the time I was on him three quarters of a minute I was leg weary and sick and I lost my seat ... It was the roughest ride I ever struck with an English saddle. Bobs is a tough 'un. I've ridden some warm mokes in West Australia, but they soon give in. With Bobs, the longer you stick to him, the worse he gets.³

In front of a capacity crowd Waite rode all three of Skuthorpe's horses, and Skuthorpe rode Bobs to a standstill. Skuthorpe, who refused to ride the other two mounts, forfeited the competition, and perhaps the £1000 prize money, to Waite (though there is some doubt that the prize money ever existed).

This was both a typical scene and an unusual one. Across eastern Australia in buckjump competitions, Aboriginal riders showed their style. This particular competition was unusual for the large amount of prize money offered and because it happened within a stone's throw of Central Railway Station. This was also a 'celebrity event'; the arena was packed with Sydney-siders, including the Governor of New South Wales, and hundreds more had been turned away at the gate. This competition featuring a

1. *Evening News* cited in Pollard 1966: 132.

2. Here 'unriden' means that no one managed to stay on Bobs. Hicks 2000: 46-47.

3. Billy Waite in *The Referee* cited in Hicks 2000: 46. See also Pollard 1966: 131-135.

celebrity Indigenous rider who stood to win £1000 was most unusual perhaps because it was held shortly before the most repressive and damaging 'protection' legislation was introduced in New South Wales in 1909. The spectacle of a packed audience and an admiring press focusing on an Indigenous man entering the ring that day was perhaps a more intense version of a regular feature of life throughout rural eastern Australia in the first half of the 20th century: the rodeo, in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal horsemen pitted themselves against each other and against the horses.

This article is a preliminary investigation of the participation of Aboriginal men in rodeo in 20th-century eastern Australia. Drawing on the work of Richard Broome and Alick Jackomos on sideshow alley and tent boxers, as well as on that of Peter Iverson on Native American rodeo, I began to explore Indigenous participation in travelling shows and more specifically rodeo up to the 1950s. Aboriginal participation in shows was very clear, despite the transitory nature of shows and the resulting slim, fragmented evidence. What I managed to garner from the fragments I found mainly in the popular press of the day reinforces Richard Broome's argument in respect of Aboriginal tent boxers that '[a]lthough these performances of power by Aboriginal men might be transitory and subsequently overlaid by experiences of injustice and discrimination ... [they] contributed positively to the fashioning of Aboriginal self-esteem and identity in a difficult cross-cultural world'.⁴ Broadly speaking, the skills acquired by Indigenous men in the cattle industry, particularly horsemanship, were displayed at bush carnivals (later to be known by the American term 'rodeo') and became both features of sideshows and performances in their own right. Aboriginal and non-Indigenous stockmen alike used these carnivals as a way of supplementing their incomes, sometimes with considerable prize money. From my research to date, Aboriginal men who participated in these carnivals and shows found varying degrees of acceptance amongst other riders and showpeople. Aboriginal amateur riders, vying for prize money sometimes found admiration and acceptance in the ring, while professional show riders, by and large, seem to have found community and acceptance that extended beyond the ring to dining tables. They participated to display their athleticism and skill and to earn respect. As Broome has argued for Aboriginal tent-boxers, 'race was transcended by the magnetism of ... [their] masculinity' and, in this specific case, by Aboriginal men's horsemanship.⁵ As with boxers, however, the associations between Indigenous men and rodeo were not all positive. On the one hand rodeos were exhibitions of Aboriginal prowess, prestige and prize monies, while, on the other hand, there was the inevitable reinforcement of the connection between Indigenous masculinity, Nature and physicality. Indeed, these performances cannot be separated from the 19th-century context of displays by and of Aboriginal people that emphasised primitivism and savagery through a focus on Aboriginal bodies and 'traditional' skills.⁶

The ambivalence with which Europeans regarded even their most admired Aboriginal workers and companions was evident within the world of horsemen even up to the 1950s. Other authors have documented the difficulty some non-Indigenous people had reconciling their experiences of companions and workers who were dutiful and

4. Broome 1996: 2.

5. Broome 1996: 17.

6. Poignant 1997; Scott and Laurie 2007; Sampson 2000.

often became integral parts of the family, with the dominant cultural and historical view of Aboriginal people as cunning or untrustworthy. This is especially obvious in cases of Aboriginal domestic service where Indigenous women cared for white children and were a significant source of emotional support for white women, yet could be treated poorly and paid a pittance.⁷ The Roughriders' Association magazine, *Hoofs and Horns*, showed this ambivalence by dividing Aboriginal men into 'station blacks' – those it regarded as having successfully assimilated (albeit in a limited way) – and 'wild blacks', those who had not, those who remained outside the pastoral industry. It must also be noted that their regard for Aboriginal horsemen and the offer of equal prize money to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous riders did not translate into a concerted push for equal wages for Indigenous pastoral workers.

This article is concerned with Aboriginal men's experiences. While it has been well documented that Aboriginal women were stockworkers and horsewomen,⁸ this did not, as far as I have been able to ascertain, translate into Aboriginal women's participation in bush carnivals or in the separate Aboriginal buckjump events.⁹ *Hoofs and Horns* often reported results from women's rough riding and other events like Flag Racing, but, curiously, the participants were exclusively non-Indigenous. As the 20th century wore on, women worked less as stockworkers in southern Queensland and New South Wales, and this may be one reason for their absence as riders in shows. Given the legislative pressures on Aboriginal families, it may also be that women were reluctant to do anything that might attract attention to themselves or their children. For the purposes of this article, the experiences of Aboriginal women and their absence from the prestige horse events is a reminder that masculinity was a powerful force in rodeo.

Aboriginal participation in the cattle industry is not a simple story. Conditions in the industry varied enormously across Australia between the 1890s and the 1940s; historians have documented examples of poverty and exploitation among Aboriginal cattle workers, but they also document stations with generous rations and a strong community spirit.¹⁰ Peggy Brock has argued that Indigenous interaction with pastoral industries in southern and central Australia, while allowing for the maintenance of cultural and religious practices, did not bestow advantages on Aboriginal workers. She suggests that pastoralists 'did not directly interfere with the way their workers organised their lives ... [but that] literacy and numeracy skills which might allow Aboriginal workers to change their working conditions were not imparted'.¹¹ Heather Goodall writes that, because of a shortage of white labour, Aboriginal pastoral workers in New South Wales had achieved largely peaceful relationships with pastoralists in the latter part of the 19th century and that by the turn of the 20th century they constituted roughly a third of the New South Wales pastoral workforce. Pastoralists gained tal-

7. See for example McGrath 1987; Walden 1995.

8. See for example May 1994: 51–52; McGrath 1987; Reynolds 1990; Brock 1995: 102–114; Kidd 2006. See also a story about teenage Aboriginal drover, Irene Turner, in *Hoofs and Horns*, September 1951: 47.

9. See, for example, a report on the Negri Races which detailed the 'events for both blacks and whites' and the winners of the 'black boys' section', *Hoofs and Horns*, November 1951: 51.

10. McGrath 1987; May 1983; May 1994; Reynolds 1990; Bolton 1981.

11. Brock 1995: 107.

ented and willing workers cheaply during this period that Goodall calls 'dual occupation', in which Indigenous people continued to have free access to their traditional lands through their work. When white labour became more readily available in the 20th century, however, pastoralists pressed home their advantage and traded access to land through continuing employment for poor or non-existent wages for Aboriginal workers.¹² Aboriginal groups continued to do stock work for a variety of reasons, which included the challenge to maintain group esteem and identity and, more pragmatically, to remain as close to traditional lands as possible and to take advantage of white labour shortages.¹³ Aboriginal stock workers would be denied equal pay with white workers until the late 1960s.¹⁴

The focus of the historiography of Aboriginal participation in the cattle industry has been on work and the relationships, formal or otherwise, to land. Involvement in pastoralism, however, also led to participation in competitive displays of stockmen's skills. Jenny Hicks has argued that wherever in the world there was a large cattle industry, rodeo events naturally developed. In Australia, by the 1890s, 'rough riding had become such a popular spectacle that it began to grow in two separate but intricately entwined directions': one, the weekend bush carnivals for horsemen and women from stations and properties that eventually became rodeos; and the other the rough riding exhibitions and competitions that were public entertainment in towns and cities along with travelling circuses, Wild West and buckjumping shows. These shows had permanent touring staff and invited local challengers from the audience to participate.¹⁵ Aboriginal men used travelling shows and bushmen's carnivals as ways of supplementing meagre (or non-existent) wages. In both amateur and professional touring shows, Aboriginal riders could gain approval and admiration unknown outside the ring.

Aboriginal performers and horsemen had long entertained non-Indigenous audiences. Shows and spectacles in Australia provided an arena in which Indigenous people demonstrated skills and courage that were much admired, albeit mediated through notions of primitivism and the 'upside down world' of the circus, and they formed a context within which Aboriginal rough riders' performances were understood by non-Indigenous people. Mark St Leon's documentation of Australian circus history reveals Aboriginal trick-riders and acrobats in the earliest of the colonies' circuses, together with performers impersonating other of the world's Indigenous peoples.¹⁶ It is difficult in the 19th and early 20th centuries to divorce Aboriginal horsemanship and performance from the wider context and meaning of Aboriginal display. Aboriginal participation in spectacles was often understood through tropes of primitiv-

12. Goodall 1996: 57–66. Peter Iverson argues a similarly mixed relationship between Native Americans and cattle ranching. He argues that 'cattle ranching could contribute to tribal identity and individual self-esteem' (Iverson 1994: 13–14).

13. See McGrath 1987 and, for an international perspective, Iverson 1994.

14. McGrath 1987: 122ff.

15. Hicks 2000: 21–22. See also Iverson and MacCannell 1999: 5–6 for a similar description of the origins of Indian rodeo.

16. In 1857, for example, James Ashton appeared during a performance as 'Blackfoot, the Native American Indian' (Cannon 1997: 39). For further detail on the history of Australian circus, see Mark St Leon's article in this volume. See also Ramsland 1993.

ism and 'wildness'. In the late 19th century, Aboriginal people were displayed in formal and theatrical ways, often alongside animals, in various 'Wild Australia' shows and 'Ethnological Congresses', which capitalised on the exotic appeal of Indigenous peoples.¹⁷ In the Ethnological Congress of Barnum's Circus in 1883 a troupe of nine Queensland Aborigines led the Grand Parade with the Zulu troupe and Jumbo the elephant.¹⁸ The purported characteristics of Aboriginal people were announced in advertisements as a combination of bloodthirstiness to be feared and of outstanding bushmanship to be admired. RA Cunningham touted his Aboriginal troupe as 'RANTING MAN EATERS!' and 'veritable blood-thirsty beasts' but also as 'Queensland Black Trackers' and 'celebrated bushmen'.¹⁹ The 'Wild Australia' shows tended more towards the depiction of Aboriginal bush skills and weapon displays. Archibald Meston, Southern Protector of Aborigines in Queensland in the 1890s, put together a 'Wild Australia' show, which performed before the Queensland Governor, Lord Lamington; and in 1901, Meston took his troupe to Sydney for the re-enactment of Cook's landing.²⁰ These shows featured Aboriginal artefacts and weaponry, Wild West-type enactments, and large Aboriginal men (their physique always drew comment) who danced, re-enacted frontier skirmishes and staged mock fights using native weapons.²¹ While displays of Aboriginal 'traditional' skills and the theatre of frontier conflict continued into the 20th century, the conflict depicted was no longer necessarily between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Influenced heavily by the American Wild West Shows, shows like 'Wild Australia' featured in its Pageant of Empire performances in London 1911, 'Exciting Kangaroo Chase by Australian Aborigines', "'The Horse Thief": A dramatic scena [sic], illustrating realistically, the fate meted out to Outlaws of the Bush' and, for its grand finale, 'The Kelly Gang'.²²

At local agricultural and horticultural shows Aboriginal people were put on display but also actively participated in these community events.²³ Aboriginal people voluntarily displayed a variety of skills and ceremonies at shows and were often paid for doing so. In 1853, for example, 'the annual "corroboree" held in Queanbeyan, New South Wales, was watched by two-thirds of the town's population, who paid sixpence a head to Jimmy Taylor [a Ngunnawal man] for the privilege'.²⁴ In Wentworth, New South Wales, 'the town's aborigines danced a corroboree to celebrate the inaugural agricultural show in 1885'.²⁵ Sisters Maisie Kelly and Hazel Vale said that Aboriginal displays were regular features of the Armidale Show, school shows and fundraisers in the late 1930s. The displays contained traditional elements such as boomerang-throwing and corroborees, but could also include popular songs played on the concertina, piano, steel guitar and violin.²⁶ Aboriginal musician Ted Thomas recalled his early

17. For discussion of these see Walker 1997; Poignant 1997; Scott and Laurie 2007. For a discussion of World's Fairs see Greenhalgh 1988.

18. Poignant 1997: 28.

19. Poignant 1997: 29.

20. Walker 1997: 39-40.

21. See Sampson 2000, Appendix H.

22. McConville nd: 11.

23. See for example Scott and Laurie 2007.

24. Jackson-Nakano 1994: 47. See also Broome 1995: 171.

25. Mant 1985: 109.

days in a 'gum leaf band' in the 1920s. The band toured Victoria extensively and played at the Palais Royale in Melbourne to an audience of white people 'in big ball dresses'.²⁷ Increasingly, Aboriginal performers melded traditional practices and music with more contemporary skills, instruments and songs, but their motives of earning an income and garnering admiration were constant.

Within this wider context of performance, then, rodeos, travelling shows and bush carnivals featured in the lives of many people. Rodeo and buckjumping competitions often coincided with the circuit of travelling shows and in the 1930s, in particular, local Agricultural Show associations in south-eastern Australia organised rodeos as part of the entertainment.²⁸ The cross-over between rodeo and other kinds of shows was such that I have been reluctant to separate out a more narrowly defined idea of rodeo or buckjumping competitions. Tom McNeven, an Aboriginal drover and station hand, recalled going to town at 'showtime' as a child to see buckjumping shows featuring European performers Tex Morton, Kitty Gill, Lance Skuthorpe, Lance Jnr and Violet Skuthorpe.²⁹

In oral accounts and reminiscences of Aboriginal stockworkers there are recurring narratives linking work and displays of horsemanship, and many men interviewed about their working lives described rough riding. Tom Roberts grew up in northern New South Wales and began going to buckjumping competitions as a young man.³⁰ Billy Crawford said his brother Cyril Crawford 'was a good horseman', who rode in the show at Walcha, winning the buckjump competition before going to Armidale, where he was beaten by Billy Cleveland, 'a dark bloke ... from Queensland'. Crawford, who spent his time trying his luck in the boxing tent, also recalled his uncle Billy Lovelock as a great buckjump rider who rode 'in the yards', but never in shows.³¹ Clarrie Grogan also grew up 'mad on rough riding', but he too chose to perform in the boxing tent.³²

A further recurring theme in reminiscences about rough riding was the story of the 'star rider'. While not all stories about star riders can be substantiated, many Aboriginal men were referred to in this way. When Richard Broome tried to flesh out the life of an itinerant Aboriginal man known as 'Mulga Fred', the most substantive extant information he found was of his career as a whipcracker and rodeo rider.³³ Mulga Fred began his career with Bronco George's Buckjumping Show in the early 1900s, before joining the Mulder Brothers' Show in 1908 and then moving to Billy Kinnear's Buckjump Show as their star rider about 1911.³⁴ As a professional rough rider, Mulga Fred

26. Maisie Kelly and Hazel Vale (nee Archibald), interviewed by Chris Sullivan 1990. Maisie and Hazel are descendants of the New England groups, Nganyaywana, Dainggatti and Gumbainggir.

27. Ted Thomas, interviewed by Chris Sullivan 1987.

28. See for example advertisements for the Patriotic Sports Carnival and Maitland Show, *The Referee*, 14 February 1900; posters for the Albury Show 1932, *Border Morning Mail*, 2 September 1932; Grills 1994: 73, 86 for examples from Lance Skuthorpe and Jack Stanton's shows.

29. Tom McNeven, interviewed by Chris Sullivan 1991.

30. Tom Roberts, interviewed by Peter Byers 1987.

31. Billy Crawford, interviewed by Chris Sullivan 1989.

32. Clarrie Grogan, interviewed by Kevin Bradley and Peter Ellis 1990. Clarrie became a professional boxer.

33. Broome 1998: 1-23.

was successful and much admired. 'One persistent story about [him] is that he won the 1911 Melbourne Coronation Buckjumping Carnival, staged to celebrate King George's ascension to the throne', Broome cautiously noted,³⁵ but, as with other aspects of Mulga Fred's life, this claim could not be substantiated. Something of the life of Gunditjmara man Jackie Lovett is also illuminated through his reputation as a 'star rider'. His cousin, Iris Lovett-Gardiner, wrote of him: 'He used to ride for Tex Morton in the rodeos. He was the star rider there for three years. He was the best balanced rider they had ever seen.'³⁶ Jackie Lovett's ride at the St Arnaud rodeo was the subject of photos in *Hoofs and Horns* in 1948, captioned 'Jackie Lovett, the coloured rider from Heywood'.³⁷

Several other Aboriginal riders were mentioned in *Hoofs and Horns* for their superior ability. In 1948 King Costello, 'that fine horseman' and 'this smiling aboriginal':

drew the notorious *Mandrake* in the first round of the Open. The big grey had thrown three riders of a travelling rodeo at the Ingham Show a few weeks before in a £25 challenge contest, and excitement ran high as folk waited to see King try conclusions with this mighty buckler. However, *Mandrake* slipped and fell soon after leaving the crush, and King was partnered with *Victory Roll* for his re-ride. I fancy this horse was only ridden once before ... However King proved too good for *Victory Roll* after a great tussle, and rode himself into a ride on *Fantan* in the final.³⁸

Tommy Dodd, 'a tall, lanky, jet black aborigine', was brought to the attention of *Hoofs and Horns* by the manager of Etadinna Station who claimed that 'no horse could throw him'. Tommy's skill was confirmed by others in the district, 'and there are some very well-known horsemen among them ... [who] maintain he is really "good"'. The article reminded readers that 'Tommy was the boy who rode *Token* to a standstill at Barrow Creek with spurs and you can ask anybody who has been around that way about it. They say it was the greatest exhibition of buckjumping they had ever seen'.³⁹ The report on the Gympie Rodeo of 1948 noted that the 'winner of the Wide Bay Championship Buckjumping was the veteran coloured rider, Peter Byers, whose age is in doubt, but he is believed to be well in the 50s. Peter is a finished rider and a good showman whose antics are well-known and appreciated by the local crowd'.⁴⁰

As Colin Tatz has shown, sporting ability has ensured that some Aboriginal men have been recorded by history, even if their biographical details have not. While not necessarily 'star riders' there are many more Aboriginal riders whose names, and sometimes little more, have survived in the historical record because of their skill on a bucking horse. Some of these horsemen are noted by the names Europeans gave them, and nothing further is known about them: Harry Phillips or 'Old Mudgee'; 'Black Tracker'; 'Cliff', 'a mixture of Malaysian and Aboriginal' and 'Mick' who had his leg broken during a display of riding for Sir Sidney Kidman's birthday and so couldn't attend the dinner to which Kidman had invited all his staff.⁴¹ Other Aboriginal riders

34. Broome 1998: 4.

35. Broome 1998: 4.

36. Lovett-Gardiner 1997: 45.

37. *Hoofs and Horns*, June 1948: 13, August 1948: 12.

38. *Hoofs and Horns*, October 1948: 43.

39. *Hoofs and Horns*, August 1950: 37.

40. *Hoofs and Horns*, January 1948: 37.

appeared in the photographs of *Hoofs and Horns* where some were named and others not. The caption under a picture of 'Scobie, a 15-hand gelding, highly prized as a bronc horse on the mustering camp at Keeroongooloo cattle station' named the rider as 'Upperty, King of the Cooper tribe and a fine horseman and cattleman'.⁴² Alwyn Kennedy, Alec Iffley, Bob White, Peter Byers, Walter Mailman and 'his brother' (unnamed) all appeared in various photographs in the magazine during the 1940s.⁴³ These photographs were occasionally of posed groups of competing riders but, more often, they were 'displays' of buckjumping, and bullock and steer riding.

The most photographed and reported upon Aboriginal amateur rider of the 1940s was Johnny Cadell. Born at Adelaide River near Darwin (possibly of Larrakia or Woolna descent), Johnny was the son of a noted horseman, Jack Cadell.⁴⁴ Johnny learned buckjumping while working as a stockman with Ted Lowe, an ex-Queensland champion. By the age of 24, Johnny was considered one of the best riders in Australia and featured in the regular *Hoofs and Horns* column 'Wild Horses and the Men who Ride Them'.⁴⁵ Over the next five years, Johnny Cadell's photo appeared in *Hoofs and Horns* five times including on the occasion in 1950 that he 'scored highest points in the first round of the Australian buckjumping championship' at the Barossa Valley Rodeo, and as the demonstrator for a full-page article entitled 'How to mount correctly'.⁴⁶ Even though Johnny was the most recognisable Aboriginal rider to *Hoofs and Horns*' readers, in this article he is referred to simply as 'a smart stockman', but still the magazine's use of him reinforces the link between display riding and work.

Queensland rider Billy Waite, whom we met at the outset, was probably the best known of the professional rough riders during the early decades of the 20th century. Jack Pollard writes of him:

Waite was considered in [Lance] Skuthorpe's class among roughriders. He was said to have polished his skill by climbing trees in the bush when unbroken horses were about, falling onto the backs of the animals other blacks manoeuvred under the trees, riding them without rope or bridle ... In the show ring one of Waite's acts was to creep about on his hands and knees like a cattle dog after several wild horses had been released. He would move after a horse and with perfect timing [bite] the horse's hind leg like a cattle dog heeling an animal, ducking to miss the ferocious kicks.⁴⁷

While no other source mentions these aspects of Billy Waite's life or act, he was considered Skuthorpe's equal. But, after the 1906 contest with Skuthorpe, Waite's exact movements are difficult to trace. Pollard claims that Waite rode for Skuthorpe in the years before the First World War, but it is not clear exactly when. Waite went out on his own for a brief time and there is a record of Waite's Buckjumping Show appearing in

41. Tatz and Tatz 2000: 233; Pollard 1970: 157; Grills c1994 Oram 1992: 7; Bowen 1992: 10.

42. *Hoofs and Horns*, January 1951: 49.

43. See *Hoofs and Horns*, May 1946, October 1948, January 1949, September 1949, October 1949, December 1950.

44. See *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* 1994.

45. *Hoofs and Horns*, March 1946: 2.

46. See *Hoofs and Horns*, May 1946: 3, December 1947: 44, June 1948: 11, June 1950: 41, 'How to mount correctly', December 1949: 42.

47. Pollard 1970: 37-38.



From the pages of *Hoof and Horns*, 1951, by permission of the National Library of Australia.

June in 1908.⁴⁸ Billy Waite also toured India with Phillip Lytton's Australian Buck-jumpers in 1910 when the entire company was purchased by Alf Neave to perform at London's Crystal Palace at the Festival of Empire Pageant in 1911. As well as riding, Waite gave stockwhip and bullock whip demonstrations including one with the 'largest stockwhip in the world' at 60 feet and weighing almost 27 lbs.⁴⁹ What became of Billy Waite after the tour of England is not known. Hicks reports that Waite went to America from England and is thought to have died there.⁵⁰

While Aboriginal horsemen were admired and, in some cases, regarded as some of the finest riders of the early 20th century, the ambivalence towards Aboriginal people in general was also apparent in this milieu. There seems to have been an imaginary divide between 'station blacks' – those who could ride horses and were part of the pastoral workforce – and those who were referred to as 'wild blacks'.⁵¹ Dawn May suggests that there was a physical divide between these two groups in that '[b]y the end of the [19th] century the physical condition of permanently employed station blacks was better than that of blacks leading a traditional lifestyle in the bush ... Besides being better fed, those on stations had access to some medical facilities, rudimentary as they were.'⁵² May also points to the stubborn ambivalence in European attitudes towards the pastoral workforce. While colonists regarded Aboriginal companions as 'an insurance policy', seeing them as 'most useful servants in the bush, [they] get up the horses in the morning, light fires by night, and know by a sort of instinct if there are any wild blacks in the neighbourhood of their camps', Aboriginal workers were nonetheless never entirely trusted.⁵³ There were similar feelings in the horsemen's community. Lance Skuthorpe's biographer notes that while Lance used horsebreaking techniques supposedly learned from Aboriginal people, his brother Amos slept with a revolver strapped to his wrist. Amos Skuthorpe was old enough to remember the revenge killings of local Aboriginal people following the murder of Jack Durack, and the memory of the sudden eruption of racial violence had a lifelong effect on the Skuthorpe brothers.⁵⁴

Further evidence of this ambivalence can be found in the pages of *Hoofs and Horns* right up to the 1950s where it is difficult to reconcile the treatment of Aboriginal horsemen with the magazine's reporting of other Aboriginal people. The horsemen, although often referred to in paternalistic ways, were reported in the magazine fairly and with due coverage of their skills and winnings. Other articles, however, were disparaging and openly racist, perpetuating myths and stereotypes of the frontier. Proximity to the ring determined attitudes, it seems. The 'mid-point' between these two positions was a story that appeared in 1948, 'You can pick your horse', describing the muster of wild horses for breaking:

48. St Leon nd.

49. McConville nd: 8; Hicks 2000: 51-52.

50. Hicks 2000: 52.

51. For an agrarian version of this divide, see McCann 2005: 11-12.

52. May 1994: 49.

53. May 1994: 54; Henning in May 1994: 54.

54. Pollard 1970: 29.

It was interesting to watch the boys choose their best friends for the months to come. Some went for speed, some went for style. But old Charlie, black Charlie, waited his turn; bare-footed, ragged, whiskered and torn-pants Charlie, great rider in his day.⁵⁵

Charlie chose last and so had to choose from the most difficult (but in this world, the most admired) horses: 'The big hearts that tick inside The Banjo and Digger and the like make great transport – if you can stay up top – and Charlie reckoned he was the man to ride them and, what is more, he aimed to ride the best horses in the plant'. Charlie's Aboriginality was obviously an advantage in the eyes of the author:

There must be a sort of understanding between men like the old nigger and horses like The Banjo – the way they talk to each other with attitudes of heels and grunts from time to time; it's not the English language but it's a language, and they both understand it.⁵⁶

When Charlie's work with the three difficult horses was done, 'no one yelled or chiked or bragged ... but deep down we dipped our lids to the greatest of them – the man who rides his rodeo far out on the plain and alone'.⁵⁷ In this tale, primitivism was integral to Charlie's horsemanship, but it was specifically that horsemanship that was redemptive and admired.

In the following years a number of 'historical' articles about Aboriginal people began appearing in *Hoofs and Horns*. They were savagely racist, telling of Aborigines who had 'turned rusty and were killing white fellows and their cattle'. One story described white mounted police hunting Aboriginal people down: 'Each horseman singled out a blackfellow and appropriated him as his own particular meat'. Instead of killing a Koorie who had confronted a mounted officer, they rewarded his 'bravery' by taking him prisoner and placing him 'on the chain'. The story continues: 'This blackfellow was subsequently taught to ride and to perform police duties ... He turned out to be one of the smartest and most trustworthy of Dana's celebrated detachment of Black Police'.⁵⁸ It seemed that for writers and readers of *Hoofs and Horns*, the mark of Aboriginal capacity to be 'civilised' was the mounting of a horse. Horsemanship was civilising and display of those skills allowed admiration and transitory respect.

This research began as an attempt to illuminate the participation of Indigenous men in rodeos and travelling shows, and has raised more questions, perhaps, than it answers. Agricultural shows, touring shows and their attendant sideshows were shared spaces in southern Queensland, rural New South Wales and Victoria. Rural people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, competed and participated in, and watched and enjoyed the range of events on offer. The history of these spaces, however, remains largely separate. Histories of Aboriginal participation in the cattle industry focus on work, both domestic labour and stockwork, and on the strategies Indigenous people employed to maintain their links with land. Aboriginal sportsmen have been paid some attention by scholars of Aboriginal Australia, and horsemen have also appeared in histories of the cattle industry and horseracing.⁵⁹ These studies have made Aboriginal

55. *Hoofs and Horns*, April 1948: 50.

56. *Hoofs and Horns*, April 1948: 50.

57. *Hoofs and Horns*, April 1948: 50.

58. *Hoofs and Horns*, October 1949: 49.

participation in sport and their sporting success visible as well as illuminating the broader, often repressive, context within which they competed. On the other hand, scholars of leisure, recreation and agricultural shows – of which sports such as horse-racing and buckjumping, boxing and athletics formed a significant part – have largely focused on non-Indigenous rural communities and spectators. They argue that these forms of leisure strengthened reciprocal ties between neighbours and were integral to community building, and that from the early 20th century they represented an expression of modernity in rural life.⁶⁰ Indigenous participation in these activities, however, has only been tangential to these studies, thereby effectively excluding Aboriginal sport and leisure from notions of community building and from modernity.⁶¹ Scholarship on Indigenous life in the early 20th century has shown that legislation introduced from the late 1880s attempted to control most facets of Aboriginal life, including movement, employment, marriage and, most notoriously, child rearing. Rather than community building, Indigenous people experienced a splitting of their families and communities and escalating pressure on their by-now meagre land ownership. Heather Goodall, Richard Broome and Gillian Cowlshaw, for example, have all demonstrated the bleak legislative, social and economic conditions of Aboriginal people in rural areas but, importantly for my purposes here, they have also provided evidence of Aboriginal lives continuing to be lived with spirit, imagination, humour and insight.⁶² This, it seems, occurred in the crevasses and spaces of the metanarrative of legislative and cultural oppression. Rural life had many such crevasses, created in part by the need for labour and the ability and willingness of Indigenous people to fulfil that need. Some of these cracks and spaces were the opportunities for recreation, competition and spectatorship that were available, albeit unequally, to both black and white. Aboriginal horsemanship was widely recognised and found a home in the multi-racial world of shows, both professional and amateur. These were many-layered events worthy of much more investigation, but from this preliminary excursion some tentative conclusions may be drawn. As Broome found in the case of boxing tents, roughriders' masculinity and horsemanship transcended racial stereotypes at bush carnivals and rodeos, and Aboriginal stockmen used these competitions to display their skills, supplement their incomes and to compete on equal terms with white riders. The broader social agenda of assimilation seeped into this world through the pages of *Hoofs and Horns*, where 'wild blacks' were disparaged and 'station blacks' were normalised, even admired. The stories of shows can also tell us a little more about 20th-century discourses of civilisation and primitivism, and importantly about the gendered availability of admiration, recognition, reward and respect.

59. Tatz 1995; Tatz and Tatz 2000; Corris 1980; Broome 1995; Broome 1996; Broome 1998; Broome with Jackomos 1998; Maynard 2002; Davis 2005.

60. See for example McQuilton 2001; Hunter 2004; Darian-Smith and Wills 2001; Waterhouse 2005.

61. The exceptions to this are the work of Richard Broome and Alick Jackomos on tent boxing and sideshow alley. See Broome 1995; Broome 1996; Broome 1998; Broome with Jackomos 1998. More recently, see Davis 2005 on contemporary rodeo in the Kimberley.

62. I am thinking particularly here of Heather Goodall's discussion of Aboriginal farms and reclamation of reserve land in Goodall 1996; Broome, 2005; Cowlshaw 1999.

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The northern Wathawurrung and Andrew Porteous, 1860–1877

Ian D Clark

The operation of the Central Board and the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in Victoria has been studied by Marcard, Penney and Clark.¹ There are numerous studies of particular stations and reserves that existed during the operation of the Board; for example, Lake Condah, Framlingham, Ebenezer and Coranderk.² A third tier of study relates to particular individuals and, though these studies are not expressly concerned with their responsibilities as 'Honorary Correspondents' to the Board, they nevertheless discuss relationships with Aborigines.³ This paper adds to these studies by concentrating on one of those correspondents, Andrew Porteous.

The Honorary Correspondent Scheme operated in Victoria from 1860 to 1868 under the Central Board to Watch over the Interests of Aborigines, and from 1869 to 1904, under its successor, the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines. 'Honorary Correspondent' was the term preferred by the Board, until its replacement in 1871 by 'Local Guardian'. Honorary correspondents were appointed by the Board in districts where Aboriginal people lived, particularly in regions that were not served by a government mission station or reserve, or a church-run mission station. Their primary role was to requisition and distribute basic supplies to the Aboriginal peoples living in their neighbourhoods. Another important role of the correspondent to the Board was providing information on the lifestyles of the Aboriginal peoples, and births and deaths. Initially, the Board sent a series of circulars of questions to each correspondent, and their replies were often selectively published in Board reports. Information from some circulars, particularly if it concerned spatial organisation and language, was published by R Brough Smyth, the Secretary to the Board, in his 1878 two-volume publication on Victorian Aborigines. In the introduction to this work, Smyth alludes to the fact that when he commenced as secretary to the Board in 1860, 'it seemed to me to be my duty to collect information respecting the customs of the people who had formerly owned the soil of Australia ... I did not know then that I was commencing a work which would engage all my leisure for many years, and entail upon me a large amount of labor in

1. Marcard 1963, 1964; Penney 1997; Clark 1999.

2. For Lake Condah, see: Massola 1963, 1970; Cole 1984. For Framlingham, see: Barwick 1979, 1981. For Ebenezer, see: Werner 1964; Robertson 1992. For Coranderk, see: Shaw 1949, MacDonald 1964; Massola 1975; Barwick 1972, 1998.

3. Gannan 1970; Blake nd.

correspondence alone'.⁴ Penney has noted that the procedures for the appointment of Honorary Correspondents do not appear to have been encoded by the Board.⁵ Her observations are that correspondents were clearly important members of their community – prominent pastoralists, magistrates, medical practitioners or police officers. Many of these men, or at least their stations, were in regular contact with local Aboriginal people.

Many of the honorary correspondents had been in continuous occupation of their stations from the early 1840s and had forged positive relationships with local Aboriginal clans. Some correspondents – such as Colin Campbell at Buangor, Charles Gray at Nareeb Nareeb, and Henry Godfrey at Boort – had been identified by local clans as reincarnated former clanspeople or *ngamadjidj*. My analysis of this identification is that it had a significant impact on the association between Campbell and Gray and the local clans.⁶ Their cordial interaction remained for many years, with local clan members employed and living on the stations, and sometimes being buried in station cemeteries. Cordial relations with squatters also ensured that Aboriginal people were able to continue to adhere to traditional spatial imperatives, such as the Aboriginal sense of place that ensured that people would want to die in their home countries, and would want to work on squatting stations that were formed on their traditional estates, so that whilst working for Europeans they were also caring for and using the resources of their natal clan.⁷ The Nareeb Nareeb *gundidj*, the Djabwurrung clan centred on the Nareeb Nareeb pastoral run, although dispossessed in 1840, continued to maintain its relationship with its estate through Barringbittarney, the clan-head, who lived on the station until his death in 1878, when he was buried in the station cemetery. This pattern was replicated across the state, and from 1870, when the Board began to attempt to concentrate the Aboriginal people of Victoria on to select stations and reserves, it permitted the older folk to remain in their traditional lands.

Andrew Porteous was associated with the Clyde Company, and in the early 1840s was the manager of the Carngham station when it was leased by Philip Russell.⁸ In 1853, when Russell Simpson leased Eurambeen from Alexander Campbell, Porteous became manager of the station. In August 1859, in partnership with Philip Russell and James Aitken, Porteous purchased Langi Willi (formerly Bamgamie), 21,364 acres on Mt Emu Creek, near Skipton.⁹ The nature of the partnership is unknown, but it is understood Russell was the major shareholder and Aitken was station manager.¹⁰ Porteous was appointed an honorary correspondent in 1860 and in correspondence with the Aboriginal Board his location is given variously as Carngham in 1861, Mount Emu in 1866 and Pretty Tower, Stockyard Hill from 1869. It is not known if Porteous lived at the same address during his tenure as Honorary Correspondent and Local Guardian. The Parish map of Carngham reveals that Andrew Porteous purchased land in the

4. Smyth 1878, vol 1: v.

5. Penney 1997: 47, 49.

6. Clark 1998: 136. For other discussions of this phenomenon, see Swain 1993; Reynolds 1981. Reynolds' study remains the most detailed Australian-wide study.

7. Clark 1998: 106–111.

8. Roger Porteous, pers comm, 15 May 1999.

9. Spreadborough and Anderson 1983: 85.

10. Anderson 1969: 102.

township of Carngham in December 1863 and in partnership with his older brother, James, in August 1855.¹¹

Pretty Tower was selected from the western part of the St Enoch's (called Stockyard Hill in the early 1840s) estate in 1866 by Thomas Ralph Oddie and his brother James. According to Anderson, Pretty Tower is a corruption of *petit tours*, meaning 'a little spring'.¹² The only habitation then to be seen was on the south bank of Pretty Tower Creek, and was a thick-walled, one-room stone hut with a shingle roof, the home of a St Enoch shepherd and his large family. Thomas Oddie had been pasturing sheep in partnership with Andrew Porteous since 1864, beginning with land belonging to the Oddie brothers (part of which was subject to a mortgage to Charles Kernot). In December 1866, Porteous selected land under the *Land Act* 1865. He took further land in May 1869. At the end of March 1873, Thomas Oddie and Porteous decided to end their partnership. Andrew Porteous died from 'dropsy' on 1 March 1877, aged 63 and is buried in the Carngham cemetery.

The Carngham district formed part of the country of the Wathawurrung speaking Aboriginal peoples. The clan belonging to Carngham, the Carringum *balug*, was in 1841 reduced to one adult male, Narnemoon, who had joined with the Gulidjan people at Lake Colac.¹³ Carngham is a corruption of Carringum. During Narnemoon's absence, his clan estate was occupied by clans from neighbouring *wurrung* (languages): Beeripmo *balug* (from Mt Cole) and Ngutuwwul *balug* (from Mt Langi Ghiran) (both Djabwurrung), and Galgal *balug* (from Mt Mitchell and Burnbank, aka Djadjawurrung).¹⁴ It is no surprise that in the late 1860s when the Mount Cole people were no longer supplied with rations by Colin Campbell at Buangor, that they began to visit the Carngham district's honorary correspondent, Andrew Porteous. In many respects, they were continuing an association that had been active from at least the early 1840s.

James Baillie, the squatter at the Carngham run of 30,000 acres adjoining the township of Carngham, encouraged Aboriginal people to visit his station. Baillie's neighbour, Katherine Kirkland of Trawalla station, disapproved of his relationship with Aboriginal people, and considered him too kind to them, especially when he allowed them to visit his own hut. In 1841, when GA Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate (1839–1849), visited Urquhart's Mount Emu station, the station adjoining Carngham, he met with members of the Beerikwart *balug*, the local clan. Robinson learned that at this establishment the best possible understanding with the Aboriginal people had existed from its beginning, where they were encouraged and made useful. The station manager, Glendinning, was spoken of in the highest terms, and was called Jacky Jacky by the Aboriginal people. Robinson noted that there were only six Beerikwart people left: two women and four male youths, and they sheltered at Urquhart's Mount Emu and Linton's Emu Hill stations.¹⁵

Wathawurrung clans adjoining the Carringum *balug* included the Beerikwart *balug* belonging to Tarrekurrumbeet (Mt Emu); the Burrumbeet *balug* at Burrumbeet

11. Victoria Department of Crown Lands and Survey 1938.

12. Anderson 1969: 106.

13. Clark 1990: 320.

14. For a discussion of this probable incident of succession, see Clark 2006.

15. Robinson's journal entry for 5 August 1841 (Clark 2000).

and Learmonth lakes; the Keyeet *balug*, a Burrumbeet *balug* sub-group or patriline associated with Mt Buninyong and Black Hill; and the Wongerrer *balug* associated with the headwaters of the Wardy Yallock River. By the 1850s 'traditional' clan labels were rarely used by non-Aboriginal people in western Victoria and the Beerikwart *balug* had become known as the 'Mount Emu tribe', just as the Beeripmo *balug* and Ngutuwl *balug* had become known as the 'Mount Cole tribe'. The Keyeet *balug* had become known as the 'Buninyong tribe', and the Burrumbeet *balug* the 'Ballarat tribe'.

Penney has noted that Aboriginal people in Victoria were used to clustering around pastoral stations and towns where supplies were more freely available to them.¹⁶ They were also using Central Board depots as centres for social gatherings to maintain their social networks. In many cases, the local guardians offered employment to the Aboriginal peoples under their care. Stores were distributed on a weekly or twice-weekly basis. Penney's analysis is that few family groups received supplies from depots. Single people or groups of individuals were better able to take up seasonal work, and to travel to depots to get supplies and to manage on far less rations and clothing. As the non-mission Aboriginal population declined, Penney noted that:

many moved onto missions, others died, and those frequenting depots grew older and became more individualistic. Some married couples remained together, but none travel with children. The few photographs that remain which show such people always depict a camp of aging adults and never are there any children. These people rarely married, as few suitable partners of the 'right' background could now be found. They clustered around a favourite camp site close to a depot for regular supplies and became attached to their Honorary Correspondent who treated them as part of the larger station family in most cases.¹⁷

Porteous found that he was unable to induce the Aboriginal peoples in his district to remain for any length of time, as they preferred to travel from place to place in small groups. His practice of distributing rations twice weekly may also have contributed to their unwillingness to be stationed in the one place. During very wet winters when it was difficult for them to pursue traditional hunting practices, they camped for longer periods near his home station. This residential pattern of travelling in small groups from place to place is confirmed in the 1863 inquest into the death of Old Donald, of the Mount Emu tribe, who died from hydatids in the liver, at Carngham, 23 October 1863, at which Porteous stated that he had known Old Donald for about 22 years. 'He was a widower, with a son now living at the camps of the Mount Emu tribe in the neighbourhood.' James Miller, a member of the Mount Emu tribe, stated that three months earlier he had been stockriding for Mr Clapperton at Amphitheatre and since then he had been living with his tribe camping in different places in the district.¹⁸

Francis Ormond, a settler at Borriyallock, replied to the 1859 Victorian Legislative Council's Select Committee on Aborigines. The information he furnished provides us with useful detail of the lives of the Aboriginal peoples of the Ballarat district. Ormond

¹⁶. Penney 1997: 71.

¹⁷. Penney 1997: 70.

¹⁸. Coroner's Court inquest files, item 1863/928, VPRS 24, Public Record Office of Victoria (PROV). Inquests into Aboriginal deaths are a very valuable source of information, but they are often neglected in historical studies.

estimated the Mount Emu tribe consisted of 17 members with slightly more males than females. Their ages ranged from 20 to 50, and there were two children, a 13-year-old girl, and an 11-year-old male 'half-caste'. He stated that in the years 1853–55, a good many deaths had occurred from venereal disease and accidental deaths by fire whilst in a state of intoxication. Several had died from pulmonary consumption. According to Ormond the Mount Emu tribe lived mostly on the charity of settlers, supplementing their living by catching fish and shooting wild fowl that they sold for money to buy rum. They were employed in sheep-washing, harvesting and cutting wood and were paid in money for these services.

Porteous reported in March 1862 that amongst the people in his district 'habits of intoxication are unfortunately too common, not diminishing, rather increasing'.¹⁹ He gave the Ballarat and Mount Emu Aboriginal population as 63. Porteous reported in 1865 that the:

Mount Emu tribe are pretty comfortable and well contented with provisions and clothing, but can't be induced to remain for any length of time in one place. They prefer roaming about from place to place, depending on charities, and when hard pressed they return for a supply of the Board's stores. The tribe generally roams about in small bands of from 10 to 12 individuals. This may be accounted for the tribe being composed of the remnants of four tribes, viz, Mount Emu, Mount Cole, Ballarat, and Wardyallock tribes. They occasionally meet all together, but it is their custom for each tribe to travel by itself.

The tribe still continue to make possum rugs, and, if steady, might make a good living by it, as they generally get 20s. to 30s. for each rug, which they can make in 14 days. The women also employ themselves in making baskets and nets, which they sell to the Europeans. A few of the young men are generally employed on stations, and receive a small remuneration, but all they receive, both for labor and opossum rugs, is spent on intoxicating liquors, and I fear that they will not leave off this evil habit unless prohibited from visiting the gold fields and are allowed to settle on some portion of land where they would take an interest in improving it.

A number of the tribe have requested me to apply to the Government to reserve a block of land near Chepstowe for their use, where they might make a paddock, and grow wheat and potatoes, and erect permanent residences. I believe most of the tribe would remain permanently there if land was reserved for their use; their hunting is in the neighbourhood, and there is plenty of water. The young men seem to be very anxious about it; I believe this has arisen from hearing of the comfort and happiness of the Aborigines at Coranderrk.

It would be little or nothing for the Govt. to reserve two sections for a year or two while the tribe lasted. A few more years will see them extinct. In the early part of this year, seven youths were sent from this tribe to Coranderrk. They left Carngham at three o'clock a.m. in a spring cart, to get the first train from Ballarat, and by nine o'clock the same morning, the parents of four of the youths took the road and followed their children, and by slow but continued marches found Coranderrk, and their children comfortable and happy under the care of Mr Green. The parents remained at Coranderrk for upwards of 4 months, and then returned to inform the tribe of the comfort and happiness they had witnessed in the blackfel-

¹⁹. Central Board (CBA) 2nd Report 1862.

lows' township as they called it. On hearing their story, which was very interesting, the king made up his mind to take the whole tribe, and go to see the blackfellows' township; and I have been informed that the Hopkins tribe intend to join them, and proceed to Coranderrk. I think Mr Green might be able to persuade them to leave all the youths of this tribe to be instructed, and should the aged of the tribe prefer to return to their own localities, I think the Board should endeavour to have a block of land reserved for their use, that they might be enabled to imitate the industry they had seen at Coranderrk.²⁰

The government did take action to provide a reserve for the use of the Aboriginal people in the Carngham district. In September 1865, the Secretary of the Central Board, R Brough Smyth, sent a letter to the President of the Board of Land and Works requesting the reservation of a block of land for the use of the Aboriginal people of the Carngham district. The preferred site was to the east of, and adjoining, Sections xv and xiv Parish of Chepstowe. File notes record that the land formed part of a common on Baillies Creek. There were no departmental objections to this request being met.²¹

William Thomas, the Guardian of Aborigines, in his journal dated 17 March 1866, records an instance when he was visited by 14 of the Mount Emu people at his Merri Creek residence, en route to Coranderrk.²² In October 1866, Andrew Porteous reported that the Mount Emu tribe still preferred to roam about in small bands, from station to station and the various goldfields, returning at short intervals for a supply of the Board's stores. They continued to hunt possum and make rugs, for which they found a ready market, and the women also continued to make nets and baskets.

About 8 months ago, the chief of the tribe, with a number of others, visited Coranderrk, and stayed there for a few weeks. On his return, he described everything that he had seen, and he thought that the arrangements at Coranderrk were a great improvement on the former habits of the blackfellows. Some of the young men of the tribe, after seeing, and I suppose practising a little of the industry at Coranderrk, when they returned, were very anxious to get a job of fencing, so they could do it as well as the whitefellows. I have since seen some of them at work fencing, and doing the work very well. The aged of the tribe cannot be induced to remain at work more than an hour or two at a time. I still continue to supply the Board's stores in small quantities, what will do them for a few days only; although I have not known any of them to barter away their rations, yet if they had a larger quantity in their possession at one time I believe they would give it away for grog. The number of the tribe at present, as entered in my book, is 57.²³

Guardian William Thomas has an interesting entry in his journal, dated 25 January 1867, in which he records a visit from Marmbarmin (aka Davy) of the Mount Emu tribe. Marmbarmin had been shearing and harvesting for Porteous at Carngham, and he informed Thomas that Porteous wished him (Marmbarmin) to return from Melbourne and get two women who were living with some white men in their tents at the

20. CBA 5th Report 1866.

21. Registered inward correspondence to the Surveyor General, Board of Lands and Works, unit 4, item L1865/10538, VPRS 2896, PROV.

22. Thomas Papers, vol 5, Mitchell Library.

23. CBA 6th Report 1869.

Fiery Creek (Beaufort) gold diggings. Marmbarmin gave Thomas an 'awful account of drunkenness and disease' at the Fiery Creek and Ararat diggings.²⁴

In September 1867, Porteous reported that the condition of the 47 Aboriginal people in his neighbourhood was unchanged. They continued to hunt seasonal game and fish in lakes and creeks where fish was available. They sold possum rugs and fish, and with the proceeds they bought themselves rations, and clothing such as hats, handkerchiefs and boots. The tribe seldom gathered together but travelled from station to station in bands of six or eight.

During the month of July last, it being wet and cold, a large number of the tribe camped with me, and the Board's stores were very acceptable, as the weather was such they could not hunt. Since then they have been travelling amongst the stations, only a few calling for rations. I have made no change to the manner of distributing stores. Each man receives a blanket, one serge shirt, one twill shirt, and a pair of trousers, and each woman a blanket and one dress; and to prevent them disposing of any article, I invariably brand each with oil paint. When they are camped with me I supply each twice a week with a small quantity of rations, and when they leave or make a call for rations, I give each about 10lbs of flour and 3lbs of sugar, with a proportion of tea, and 1/2lb of tobacco and 1/2lb of soap.²⁵

Porteous informed the Board that he had received a letter from the Borough Council of Buninyong, requesting him to send as many Aboriginal people as possible to Buninyong, as the Borough Council was determined to stage a grand corroboree on the arrival of His Royal Highness Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in December 1867. Porteous stated that he had replied to the Borough pointing out the dangers and risks to Aboriginal people by allowing them to congregate near any large town. He cited as a proof of his concerns, an incident that occurred the previous summer when the Mount Emu and Hopkins tribes met at Ballarat, and gave a public corroboree. The Aboriginal people got so intoxicated for about a week that two of the Mount Emu tribe died shortly after returning to their district, and many others lingered in a sickly state for months. For this reason, Porteous informed the Board that he declined to comply with the request unless it had the sanction of the Central Board.²⁶ I have not been able to confirm if this corroboree took place.

Andrew Porteous reported in November 1869 that the Aboriginal people in his district were continuing their commercial activities, selling possum skin rugs, and fish, and shearing and harvesting.

The rations I supply, as usual, to all that are staying here. I give twice a week to each adult about 4lbs of flour, 1lb sugar, 2oz. tea, one fig of tobacco, a small piece of soap. When they are leaving or make a call I give them about 8 days' supply. They still hunt and make a number of rugs with the opossum skins, which they sell at from 10 to 20 shillings each, according to size. They also fish, when fish can be had, and sometimes offer fish for sale; they still indulge in intoxicating drink when they can get it. I believe that all the strong, healthy men of each tribe earn as much money during shearing and harvest season as would purchase sufficient

24. Thomas Papers, vol 5, Mitchell Library.

25. CBA 6th Report 1869.

26. CBA 6th Report 1869.

clothing and keep them half the year. This is the very money that keeps them and the whole tribe in intoxication for weeks, and then they apply for food and clothing from the Board.²⁷

Porteous reported in June 1871 that 30 people were continuing to receive aid from him: 17 men, aged from 30–65, and 13 women aged from 35–65. These people continued to follow their occupations of fishing, hunting and making possum rugs which they bartered for stores and alcohol. Porteous advocated the adoption of a pass system to regulate and restrict Aboriginal peoples' presence in townships. He believed they had no business to transact in towns other than to beg for grog and risk being arrested under the Vagrancy Act. Porteous suggested that as the Aboriginal people had no hunting field or fishing river within these towns that they should apply to the local guardian for a day pass if they have anything to sell within a town named on the pass. This system of spatial control had existed during the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate when Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson introduced passes in June 1840: non-local Aboriginal people returning from Melbourne to their home country needed signed letters from Robinson, William Thomas the assistant protector responsible for the Melbourne District, or the Port Phillip District Superintendent CJ La Trobe, which were to be shown to squatters to ensure safe passage. Passes were also necessary if Aboriginal people wanted to enter townships.²⁸ This system continued in the Protectorate until at least December 1844 when some Wathawurrung at Buntingdale Wesleyan Mission approached Thomas for passes allowing them to visit the Gulidjan at Lake Colac. The Wesleyan missionaries were preventing them from visiting the Gulidjan, and they explained to William Thomas that '[i]f no let them go to see Lake Colac kooling molocko all blackfellows leave Mr Tuckfield and no more sit down there'.²⁹

In May 1872, Porteous reported that Aboriginal spatial habits were continuing to be adhered to. In February 1873, he reported that he supplied stores to 14 males and 11 females. Two men had left the district: King John had gone to Framlingham, near Warrnambool and David Smith had gone to Coranderrk. Both men intended to make these stations their homes.

The tribe is mostly composed of old feeble men and women, who are by nature restless, and though they had every comfort, they would not stay long in one place but continue wandering from place to place. They are at no time short of both food and clothing. They still continue to make baskets and opossum rugs, and hunt and fish as usual; and even the old and feeble cannot be induced to stay where they can have plenty to eat and drink. They will be off on a hunting or fishing expedition. The whole tribe is on one of those expeditions just now, and has not been here for some weeks.³⁰

In July 1874, Smyth reported that the number of Aboriginal people receiving aid from the Local Guardian at Pretty Tower remained at 14 males and 11 females.³¹ Board reports reveal that no stores were distributed to Aboriginal people between 1 January

27. Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) 7th Report 1871.

28. Clark 1998: 236.

29. Thomas Papers, vol 3, entry for 6 December 1844, Mitchell Library.

30. BPA 9th Report 1873.

31. RB Smyth, Memorandum to Sir GF Bowen, 18 August 1874, Governor's Office – special files, 1854–1900, VPRS 1095, PROV.

1875 and 30 June 1877.³² Andrew Porteous died on 1 February 1877. His stepson, John Dempsey Porteous, in a letter sent to the Board, dated 3 March 1877, informed the secretary of the death of his stepfather.

Any stores or goods belonging to the Board over to any person whom you may authorise to receive them. I see by the books that your late guardian has advanced to the aborigines flour and tea in excess of what has been received from the Board accounts of which I believe you have been furnished with.³³

Andrew Porteous had been distributing to his Aboriginal friends, flour and tea in excess of the supplies he had received from the Board.

Andrew Porteous enjoyed a significant relationship with the northern Wathawurrung from the early 1840s until his death in 1877. This is reflected in his willingness to employ Aboriginal labour and to allow them to reside on his Carngham property. The Aboriginal people of the district were given free access to his land, but despite his best efforts, he could never persuade them from continuing their adherence to their 'traditional' spatial organisation, that of semi-nomadism in small hunting and gathering 'bands'. When, from 1860, Porteous became an honorary correspondent to the Central Board, he distributed food and clothing rations on a regular basis. The Wathawurrung came and went as they pleased; they refused to be concentrated on one station despite being able to receive regular rations. They lived for short periods on his station when it suited them, and the able amongst them were employed when the station required extra labourers. Employment included such station tasks as sheep-washing, harvesting, cutting wood, stockriding, breaking in horses and other labouring jobs. They supplemented their wages by fishing and shooting wildfowl and other game. The Wathawurrung continued to make and sell possum skin rugs, for which they received between 20 to 30 shillings. Each rug took two weeks to make. Fish, as well, were sometimes sold to Europeans. The Wathawurrung women made baskets and nets and sold these to Europeans. It is highly likely that some of these baskets, nets and rugs are held in private and public collections throughout western Victoria.

During the time of Porteous' guardianship (1860-77), the Wathawurrung and Djabwurrung peoples lived in and travelled around the district as small groups, loosely referred to as the Mount Cole, Mount Emu and Wardyallock 'tribes'. Large gatherings were occasional; the usual praxis was for groups of about a dozen people to travel by themselves. The northern Wathawurrung bands travelled around their traditional lands in patterns that were probably consistent with pre-European times, but goldfields often proved to be disruptive locales for the Wathawurrung. The Wathawurrung lived for periods of time at the various diggings in their district and numerous men died after falling down mine holes when in a drunken state, others died by fire when in a state of intoxication. Some Wathawurrung women lived with European diggers. Commentators noted that during the 1850s, in particular, Aboriginal deaths from venereal disease were commonplace.

³² BPA 12th Report, 1876; 13th Report, 1877.

³³ Local guardian, Carngham, 1877, Correspondence relating to various Aboriginal stations 1869-1957, series B 313, box 2, item 16, National Archives of Australia.

There are many undercurrents in the relationship between the northern Wathawurrung and Andrew Porteous and the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Porteous' paternalism, so typical in the latter part of the 19th century, is seen in his attempts to restrict the civil liberties of the Aboriginal peoples in the Ballarat district. He attempted to prevent them from entering townships, and advocated a system of passes to ensure that only Aboriginal people with 'legitimate' reasons would be permitted access to towns. Disrespectful of Aboriginal freedoms of movement and association, Porteous believed the Wathawurrung had no business to transact in townships, except begging for grog and making them liable to arrest under the Vagrant Act. There were neither hunting fields nor fishing rivers in these townships, and if the Aboriginal people had anything to sell, then Porteous advocated they should apply to a local guardian for a day pass that would allow them lawful access. He also sought to prevent their participation in a corroboree as part of a civil welcome to the Duke of Edinburgh. Yet, despite these efforts, the Wathawurrung showed a fierce determination to live as they pleased and visit the places of their choosing, such as pastoral stations and gold fields.

The northern Wathawurrung found a ready market for some of their traditional material culture. Possum-skin cloaks were sold for between 20 to 30 shillings and baskets and nets, and fish and wild fowl were also sold to Europeans. The monies received from these sales were used to buy rations, clothing and alcohol. The younger people, however, turned to European forms of employment such as stockriding, breaking in horses, sheep washing, shearing, harvesting, cutting wood, fencing and general labouring.

In early 1865, seven children were taken to Coranderrk, and their parents left Carngham determined to visit the Aboriginal station and satisfy themselves that their children were well cared for. They remained at the station for four months. Upon their return to Carngham, and the information they passed on about the 'blackfellow's township', the rest of the northern Wathawurrung visited Coranderrk. When they returned, they petitioned Porteous to apply to the Board for a block of land at Chepstowe for their use. Their application was ultimately successful. Porteous welcomed this action, seeing it as little or nothing for the government to reserve two sections for a year or two whilst the tribe lasted. He believed the northern Wathawurrung would be extinct within a few years.

In the 1870s, the Board reported that it was neither practicable nor humane to compel the 'old natives against their inclination to abandon the localities where they were born, and to which they are strongly attached, but the children are being removed one by one and sent to the stations, where they are well cared for and taught in schools'.³⁴ After Porteous' death in 1877, no one was appointed to replace him as guardian, and the Board rationalised its operations by concentrating Aboriginal people onto government stations. It permitted the old and frail, many of whom resisted attempts to force them to move, to remain in their traditional lands where they were cared for by police officers and residents. The Chepstowe Reserve was closed in 1901 when the land was handed back to the Department of Lands, on the assumption that 'all the Aborigines of that district were all dead'.³⁵ The Department of Lands was

³⁴. BPA 11th Report 1875.

³⁵. BPA 37th Report 1901.

clearly mistaken: there were numerous Wathawurrung people still living on country on pastoral stations, on Aboriginal stations such as Coranderrk, and elsewhere in Victoria.

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‘Save the people’: ES Parker at the Loddon Aboriginal Station

Heather Holst

Edward Stone Parker was the Assistant Protector of Aborigines for the Loddon district of the Port Phillip Protectorate from 1839 until the Loddon Station was disbanded on 1 March 1850 along with the Protectorate system. Many scholars have written about the Port Phillip Protectorate and some have also written about attempts to reconcile Christianity and humanitarianism towards Aboriginal people with the process of colonial land acquisition.¹ However, the simple and very material question, ‘Who got what?’ seems worth asking. This article asks this question of Edward Parker and the Djadja Wurrung people who lived at the Loddon Aboriginal Station in the context of public and personal events throughout the period of the Protectorate and the following periods of gold rush and settlement.

Born the son of a tradesman who would have had little hope of acquiring land or high position in England, Parker would become a parliamentarian, a magistrate, a member of the Royal Society of Victoria and of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria and holder of an extensive land estate, the former Loddon Protectorate, which he occupied until his death in 1865. Although a small number of Djadja Wurrung people were allowed to stay on a very small part of this land under terms set by Parker and the government after the Protectorate closed in early 1850, in 1864 they were obliged by the government to move off this land to Coranderrk. Just one year later, Parker died at this property which he had occupied as his own for nearly 25 years. This paper argues that Parker’s original protection project was overwhelmed by widespread, powerful opposition to Indigenous rights, by the impossibility of insulating reserves from the impact of European settlement and by the constraints placed on Parker by the needs of his large family.

The first stage of Parker’s career as a protector was inspired by the English anti-slavery movement and Parker’s firm Christian commitment to working with Aboriginal people. He acted with commitment and physical courage when he established the Loddon Protectorate. This was followed by a more uncertain stage of compromise and

¹. Accounts of the Port Phillip Protectorate include Kenny 2007; Broome 2005; Reynolds 1990, 1998; Mitchell 2004; Edmonds 2006; Rae-Ellis 1996; Clark and Heydon 2004; Christie 1979. Kenny, Reynolds, Christie and Mitchell have looked particularly at the humanitarian and Christian aspects of protection.

expedience as he struggled to keep the station in existence in the face of increasing family pressures, the criticism of colonial society, and a colonial government that begrudged expenditure on Aboriginal interests and that suspected its officers of poor work. By the time the Protectorate closed, Parker had moved into a third stage in which he apparently decided to fight for personal possession of the land in a variation on the self-interest of the squatters. Even at this stage, he may have felt that he was holding land for the benefit of the Djadja Wurrung, but there is also evidence of personal gain.

The first stage: setting up the Loddon Station

Parker had begun working life in London by following his father into the printing trade. A devout Methodist, he became a Sunday-school teacher and then undertook training for the ministry but this candidature ended in 1828 when he broke the strict conditions controlling probationers by marrying Mary Cooke Woolmer, the eldest daughter of a Congregational minister. This incomplete ministry training may have proven significant when Parker became an Assistant Protector. While he was in a position very similar to a Methodist missionary and undertook preaching and pastoral work as if a minister, he was without the full training and ongoing institutional backing that provided some guidance through the difficulties encountered 'in the field'. Mary and Edward Parker had six sons over their next ten years in London during which time Parker turned fully to teaching. His granddaughter, Grace Porter, would claim in the 1960s that he had been training for the medical profession, but no other accounts support this contention.² He was placed in charge of the Methodist Day School in Greater Queen Street, where he was employed in 1838 at the time of his appointment as one of four Assistant Protectors for the Port Phillip district.³

Parker was active in the English anti-slavery movement, the springboard for all five men who took up the roles of Protector and Assistant Protectors of Aborigines in the Port Phillip district.⁴ While much of the anti-slavery program had been achieved with the abolition of slavery in 1807, the ambition of raising native peoples to the level of Europeans remained an unfinished task. Many proponents believed that conversion to Christianity was a crucial step in realising the full inclusion of native peoples in the 'brotherhood of man'. Christian conversion was also a key part of the thinking of the 1837 House of Commons Select Committee on Native People which argued that conversion along with the provision of food and other services was just recompense for the seizure of native peoples' land.⁵

Joseph Parker, the eldest Parker son to survive into adulthood, gave his recollections of the family's voyage from England, to the Castlemaine Association of Pioneers and Old Residents in 1891 when he was 60 years old. 'I do not care to parade my merits or those of my ancestors before the public', he claimed, before proceeding to do exactly that:

2. Letter from Grace Porter to Edgar Morrison, 11 November 1965, record no 479.8.

3. Nelson 1974; Cannon 1983: 365. Cannon puts the date of appointment at December 1837.

4. O'Connor 1991. Robinson was on Flinders Island at that time and had already distinguished himself with the Colonial Office by his actions in Van Diemen's Land. Of the four assistants, Parker was one of three schoolmasters and the fourth, Sievwright, was an army officer.

5. Reynolds 1998: 39.

My father having been appointed by Lord Glenelg, then Minister for the Colonies [sic], to proceed to Australia as Protector of Aborigines, the sturdy Londoner might have been seen on the 30th April, 1838, wending his way to the Port. By his side was his wife who, like Rachael, was weeping for her children, not knowing what their destiny would be. Behind them were their six little sons. Soon were the pilgrims on board the barque 'Elizabeth'...⁶

The Parker family duly arrived in Sydney and took ship several weeks later for Melbourne with the other Assistant Protectors and their families. The Assistant Protectors experienced considerable tension with Chief Protector Robinson, the Colonial Secretary and the Governor about the terms on which they would embark. These disputes about timing of departure, supplies and payment made the Governor remark of Parker and Dredge in particular, 'a disposition is expected not to make difficulties but to overcome them'.⁷ The Governor's expectations, however, were demanding of these family men. He expected that they be 'constantly moving about with the different Tribes of Natives and not remain fixed at one station'. A ration rate for each member of the household was ordered in the same letter, showing both that funding disputes began before the men had set foot in Port Phillip and that the Governor was well aware of the wives and children for which each of these men were responsible.⁸

After some delay, Parker went north-west to search for a suitable site for his station. Mary Parker travelled part of the distance with her husband and then stayed with the children at a camp at Jackson's Creek in 1839 and 1840.⁹ At the end of March 1840, Parker had the following 'Presents for the Natives' in his possession at this camp: '17 tomahawks; 70 fish hooks; 36 table knives and forks; 11 sailors knives; 5 pocket knives; 3 hanks of twine; 3 cotton handkerchiefs; 18½ dozen blue glass beads; 42 looking glasses; 5 tin plates; 3 caps; 3 old muskets; 4 spades; 1 mortising axe; 1 mattock; 1 broad axe'.¹⁰

Mary was about 33 years old at this point, 12 years married to Parker and just about to give birth to her only daughter. As Joseph Parker told it many years later, this seventh child, Emma, was born in the, "'palace of self-denial" on the verge of the Black Forest'.¹¹ Instead of moving further away from Melbourne into the Loddon district, Parker made this his own camp for about 18 months; a decision which caused further tensions with his superiors who wanted their men in the field immediately. Robinson does seem to have had some sympathy with the Parkers, conveying to Superintendent La Trobe that they would move on 'once Mrs Parker has recovered', although taking a slightly long-suffering tone as if he were trying to get the reluctant Parker to behave to the letter of his orders.¹²

Following an unsuccessful attempt to set up in Neereman, close to Laanecorrie north-west of Castlemaine, Parker settled on a site for the Loddon Protectorate at

6. Joseph Parker in Castlemaine Association of Pioneers and Old Residents 1996: 25.

7. Cannon, 1983: 459; Governor's minute, 28 May 1839.

8. Thompson to Assistant Protectors, 14 December 1838, VPRS 4409, Public Record Office of Victoria (PROV).

9. Morrison 2002: 26.

10. Quarterly return of government servants in the employ of Assistant Protector Parker from 1st January to 31st March 1840, box 133/8, H13880, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

11. Business and Professional Women's Club nd: 5.

present-day Franklinford in 1841. Crown land was set aside for the Protectorate in between present day Daylesford and Castlemaine. There was an inner reserve of one square mile (640 acres) for cultivation and a five-mile radius for 'the Hunting Ground of the Natives'. No other stations were allowed within a five-mile radius of this inner reserve and every care was expected to be taken to select sites 'as far as possible from the settled districts of the Colony'. The Colonial Secretary wrote a reply to Parker's request for a homestead reserve on the Loddon that outlines all this, but it planted the seeds of confusion as to whether the purpose of these 'inner reserves' was mainly cultivation by Aboriginal people or mainly a homestead for each Assistant Protector. The letter also noted:

As every effort ought to be made to induce them to engage in the pursuit of agriculture or regular labour, the extent of their Hunting Ground should be progressively curtailed instead of increased:- and it is for this reason that His Excellency proposes to make the inner reserve a permanent and the outer reserve a temporary one.¹³

The Protectorate site on the Loddon had rich agricultural soil, plentiful water and magnificent views and Parker thought that he could have both the Mount Macedon and the Djadja Wurrung people there.¹⁴ Although he had made acquaintance with Aboriginal people around Mount Macedon in his first months at Jackson's Creek, this ambition was not realised since the new station stood in Djadja Wurrung country. Like the other Assistant Protectors, Parker received an annual salary of £250 as well as the use of supplies, the land, bullocks and the labour of the Aborigines and assigned convict servants.¹⁵ Parker fairly quickly depastured his own as well as the government's sheep on the run.¹⁶ He also had a makeshift homestead of four rooms with a bark roof built on the new station.

This dwelling was replaced two years later by a more substantial mud-brick house of eight rooms, but Mary Parker did not long survive the period of rougher living. She died at the age of 35 when her husband was away as he so often was for his work. Perhaps she died of complications from a miscarriage as her childbearing history would indicate she may well have been pregnant again. According to her son Joseph's 1916 account:

On one of those darkest of dark nights on the 11th October, 1842, at midnight hour, when we were all in bed, I heard a distressing noise in Mother's room. I

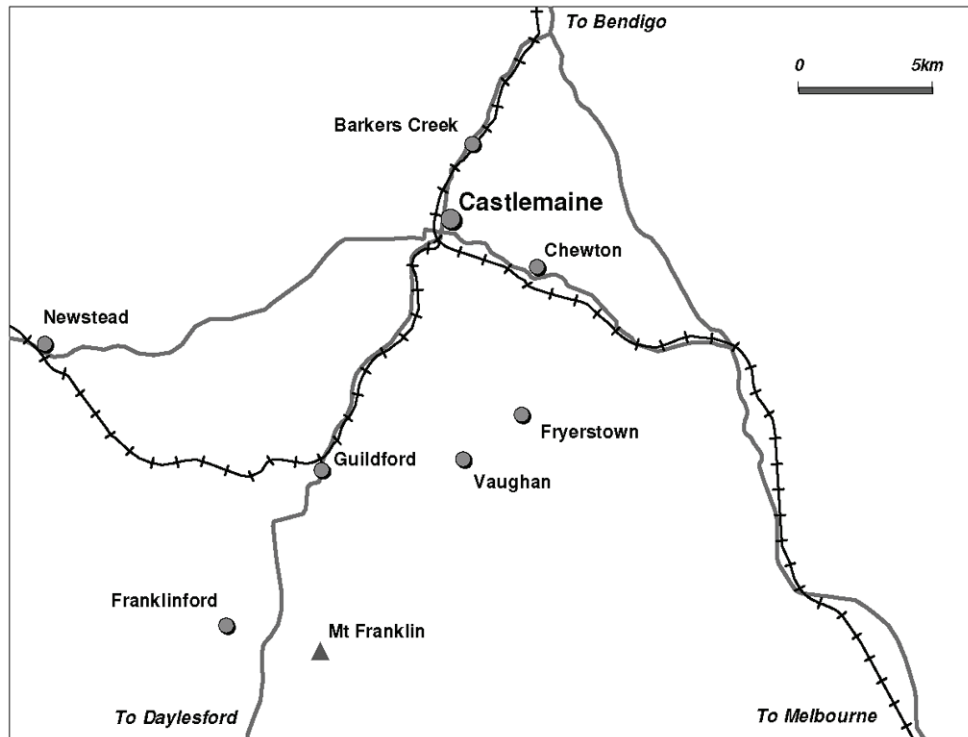
12. Robinson to La Trobe, 3 October 1839 and 23 September 1840, in Registered inward correspondence to the Superintendent of Port Phillip district, relating to Aboriginal Affairs, 1839-51, VPRS 10, PROV (hereafter VPRS 10, PROV); Cannon, 1983: 688.

13. Thompson to La Trobe, 28 April 1840, VPRS 10, PROV.

14. Culvenor (1992: 25-27) reproduces a letter from Parker to Robinson of 26 January 1841 stating Parker's approval of the new location and his intention to join the two groups.

15. Rae-Ellis 1996: 151; Quarterly return of government servants in the employ of Assistant Protector Parker from 1st January to 31st March 1840, box 133/8 H13880, State Library of Victoria (SLV). Parker was given two assigned servants, Thomas Davenport and James Moryce. Parker to La Trobe, 1841/1072, VPRS 10, PROV, requesting a replacement for his assigned servant who had obtained a ticket-of-leave.

16. Culvenor (1992: 31) cites letter from Grimes of Mount Macedon to La Trobe, 24 July 1848, which is one of many in the contests between pastoralists over land.



Mt Franklin and surrounding district.

called my brothers, and rushed for the mission doctor, but to no purpose, for dear Mother was dead, and we youngsters were left orphans, Father being away in Melbourne at the time, and he had to be brought back with all possible haste ... The lamentations of the blacks were something to be remembered ... all refused food and kept up a wailing for forty-eight hours.¹⁷

Mary's younger sister Charlotte, in response to Mary's letters, was aboard ship from England to provide assistance and company, although she arrived too late to help her sister.¹⁸ Parker married his second wife Hannah Edwards in 1843, about a year after Mary's death.¹⁹ Hannah was the daughter of a local Franklinford farmer and had come to the district from Somerset with her family. Prior to the marriage, she had been employed in the Parker homestead as seamstress and, in all probability, as part-time nursery maid.²⁰ Hannah bore six children, three boys and three girls, although two of the girls died in infancy.²¹ As Parker had already fathered six sons and one daughter with Mary, this brought his surviving family to nine sons and two daughters.

17. Joseph Parker from *Mount Alexander Mail*, 22 and 24 June 1916 in Morrison 2002: 309-310.

18. Charlotte Woolmer later married a local Franklinford man, William Bumstead, and lived at Franklinford until her death in 1902.

19. Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages, 1838-1888, no 896.

20. Morrison 2002: 65.

21. Morrison 2002: 65.

It is worth paying attention to these details of Parker's private life for their bearing on his public life. Having brought his young family across the world to live with few comforts on the Port Phillip frontier, his worst fears must have pressed close when Mary died just four years after leaving London. This was the woman Parker had forgone the ministry to marry and was the mother of his seven young children, now suddenly left motherless in an isolated, often hostile place. Just over three years later, his eldest son, also named Edward Stone, died at the age of 18 at Franklinford, an occurrence that is curiously unremarked in the Parker family history, but which must also have been terribly painful.²² It must have been a harsh predicament for a man torn between demanding work and the needs of his bereaved young family. Apart from quickly marrying the capable Hannah, Parker took other actions in the period after Mary's death that seem to mark a shift from a hard-striving intention to do everything possible for Aboriginal people towards a strategy of making his own luck.

The second stage: consolidating on the Loddon

Having settled at the Loddon Station, Parker's task was to carry out his protecting role with the local Aboriginal people while also protecting the whole enterprise from its detractors. In the second part of the task, he was joined by Protector Robinson and the other Assistant Protectors, with several of whom he had competitive, hostile relationships.²³ He did, however, have friendly and cooperative relationships with Tuckfield of the Buntingdale Mission and the Moravians who were preparing to establish the Lake Boga Mission.²⁴

Parker's nearest neighbours were squatters on the five stations that adjoined Loddon station: Smeaton Hill (west of Daylesford); Tarrengower (around Newstead); Bough Yards (around Guildford and Fryerstown); Holcombe (Glenlyon and Dry Diggings) and Corinella (around Hepburn Springs).²⁵ Relations varied, but Parker would be engaged in a series of boundary disputes, endemic among the early New South Wales squatters whose land acquisition depended as much on the boldness of their claim as on the official paperwork. The first years of the Protectorate had been marked by violent clashes between Aborigines and squatting interests, which Parker had been charged with investigating, but this was not a feature of his subsequent years on the Loddon.²⁶ These 'collisions', as the official correspondence called them, were a source of tension between Parker and his neighbours.²⁷ A letter from Parker to the squatter

22. 'Parker letters and photographs', MS 8174, MSB 423, SLV. Edward Stone Parker junior died on 23 November 1845.

23. Most notable were Parker's disputes with Sievwright, whom he would accuse of attempting to seduce Mary, his first wife, in a letter to La Trobe that strengthened the case for that man's dismissal. Rae-Ellis 1996: 167 and 190-191; Arkley 2000: 330-332, 344-345, 362, 430, 443-446 and 448-449; unregistered correspondence regarding the suspension of Charles Sievwright, VPRS 4397, PROV.

24. Morrison 2002: 66-7; Kenny 2007: 86-87.

25. Culvenor 1992: 2.

26. Cannon 1983: 668-696.

27. Robinson to La Trobe, 1840/1013, VPRS 10, PROV: enclosing depositions collected by Parker relating to 'Monro's collision with Aborigines'; Parker to La Trobe, 1841/627, VPRS 10, PROV: enclosing deposition regarding attack in Mount Macedon district.

Learmonth about wheat and stock, however, has the tone of equals on friendly terms with each other.²⁸

The line between the government service and private enterprise aspects of Parker's work was indistinct from the station's early years and this type of blurring would open him up to accusations of dishonest dealings. Not all these accusations were made by opponents of the Protectorate. In 1846, Assistant Protector William Le Souëf claimed that Parker was often in Melbourne, rather than attending to his official duties, because he was speculating in land with two Melbourne businessmen, and that Parker obtained a favourable contract to sell cattle and sheep to the government through his connections to Robinson and La Trobe.²⁹ What is certain is that there was a lot of bitterness and rivalry between the Assistant Protectors. As early as the start of the 1840s, Parker and William Thomas were the only two of the original four Assistant Protectors still employed. Sievwright had been dismissed and replaced by William Le Souëf and Dredge had resigned.

Another uncomfortable question was raised about Parker's business dealings when his own and the Loddon Protectorate's wool bales were mixed together when sent to Melbourne. This caused what Rae-Ellis describes as 'a major fracas in the auditor's department' that was not resolved by 1850, when the Protectorate closed. Rae-Ellis believes that Robinson and Parker often colluded in making fraudulent returns to the government on expenditure, Aboriginal attendance and Protectorate activities.³⁰ The Protectorate system fell from favour with the government during the 1840s so much that by 1847 La Trobe would write that Parker was 'doing no more than any other settler and less considering the money it cost'.³¹

The third stage: ES Parker, landholder

The period beginning immediately before the closure of the Port Phillip Protectorate and extending over the next 15 years was the most clearly self-interested of Parker's career. The loss of his appointment as Assistant Protector must have been hard. He had fought to keep the Protectorate going, had lost his first wife in the effort and had a large family to support. In the midst of one of the most vicious scrambles for land and wealth that Australia would witness, his hardships must have seemed unjust when compared to the prosperity of his squatter neighbours. In this situation he appears to have decided to make the most of what he had; and what he had was the land, house and stores at the Loddon Station and his reputation as an expert on Aboriginal matters.

When the Loddon Protectorate closed in March 1850, Parker was granted a pastoral licence to the parcel of land it had occupied.³² He also successfully argued for the retention of equipment, stores and stock that had been the property of the Protectorate so that he could direct their use in the interests of the Aborigines. In this respect he managed better than Dredge, his fellow Assistant Protector, whom the government pursued for the cost of a bullock after his resignation.³³ Parker wrote many letters from

28. Parker to Learmonth, 23 March 1846, MS 11191, MSB 387, SLV.

29. Arkley 2000: 444–445.

30. Rae-Ellis 1996: 222.

31. La Trobe quoted in Rae-Ellis 1996: 222.

32. Culvenor 1992: 3.

1849 until his death in 1865 urging that he be allowed to retain the land.³⁴ For example, in December 1849 he wrote to La Trobe,

Referring to the intimation received from Your Honour, that the ground occupied at present as an Aboriginal Reserve on the Loddon, would probably be reduced, and the surplus land let for the benefit of the aborigines, I beg most respectfully to solicit Your Honour's favourable consideration of my application for permission to occupy the ground to be vacated, without encountering the risk of any public competition for the same. I am anxious, less for my own sake than for the sake of the native with whom I have so long been connected, to remain in the District that I may continue to employ such influence and facility of access as I may possess with them for religious instruction. I have hitherto been shut out from every opportunity of obtaining a station for my family. I am willing to pay for the occupation of the ground, any sum as may be fixed as rental by Your Honour, or the Commissioner of the District. And I should feel myself bound by every obligation, to render the utmost aid in my power for the success of any future measures or arrangements adopted by Her Majesty's Government for the benefit of the aborigines.³⁵

Joseph Parker made it all sound rather easier on his father's part and clearer in the demarcation between government station and private farming in his 1916 reminiscences:

When the Aboriginal Station was abolished, Father was offered a Licence for the Reserve (sixty-two square miles), which he accepted. We then moved our quarters to the foot of Mount Franklin, where we established our homestead, and commenced farming and grazing.³⁶

Educating the children was one of the main duties outlined by Lord Glenelg when the Protectorate was first established.³⁷ Nevertheless, Parker did not open a school at Franklinford until the Protectorate was about to close. James Bodkin had been appointed 'schoolmaster and constable' in 1841, though some education was offered prior to this date.³⁸ La Trobe thought that Parker and the other Assistant Protectors should have put schools before the cultivation of their land, but Robinson, like Parker, held out for extra funding to employ teachers.³⁹ Parker's comprehension of the importance of children to his mission and his willingness to take them from their families is apparent in his 1853 report to the Colonial Secretary. The school at Franklinford was central to this:

I deem it now quite practicable to extend the operations of the school by sending round the country on the Loddon, Avoca and &c., to collect the children belonging to the different tribes, and particularly several half-castes who must be now

33. Robinson to La Trobe, 4 September 1840, VPRS 10, PROV. Regarding £15 they wanted Dredge to return for the cost of the bullock that was part of the provisioning of the Goulburn Protectorate.

34. Parker to Surveyor-General, VPRS 2894. Parker sent letters about licence renewal at least on 31 March 1856, 18 March 1857, April 1859, 6 February 1860, 17 July 1861, 2 September 1861 and 17 August 1862.

35. Parker to La Trobe, December 1849, VPRS 10, PROV.

36. Morrison 2002: 220.

37. Rae-Ellis 1996: 151.

38. Parker to La Trobe, 1841/1104, VPRS 10, PROV.

39. La Trobe to Robinson in 1847 and Robinson 1844 in Rae-Ellis 1996: 222.

reaching an age when their habits may be fixed for life if left without instruction among their uncivilized relatives. The Schoolmaster has expressed his earnest wish to undertake such an expedition if he can be furnished with the means of conveying the children to school and suitably rewarding the parents.⁴⁰

Parker was adept at promoting his ideas to government and at requesting funding. By 1853, the Protectorate had been closed for three years and Parker needed justification for his continued occupation of the site. This school would continue to operate until the remaining Aboriginal people were removed to Coranderrk in 1864, despite criticism of the condition of the school, of poor attendance and the allegation that the schoolmaster's tuberculosis was very likely to have infected his pupils.⁴¹ Perhaps this criticism was part of the systematic denigration of the protection project as this school produced at least one very able student in Ellen who was literate and proficient in needlework and who makes another appearance later in this account.

The Parker family story insisted on the popularity that Edward Parker enjoyed among the Aborigines. Here is Joseph Parker's description of his father's impact on Aboriginal people when he first came to Melbourne in 1839,

On seeing Father, they immediately came round him, and bowed down at his feet and regarded him with marked reverence and respect. A bystander seeing this, remarked to Father that the 'darkies' appeared to regard him as a divine person. Father certainly did have some special influence over them, a power he carried with him until the day of his death.⁴²

Joseph told another story about his father's influence with the Aboriginal people:

One fine morning, early in 1841, a party of nine men, all mounted and armed to the teeth, came up expecting to find us all killed and eaten, but their surprise was great when they found us all safe and happy, save and except the results of their own actions. The leader of the party, in addressing my father, wondered how he and his family survived in the midst of so many 'savages', as he termed them. My father replied by saying that he resorted to acts of kindness and proper treatment. ... 'Here is my ammunition,' said my father, drawing from his pocket a small Bible; 'there is my convincing element, and up to date it has not failed me'.⁴³

These accounts of an uncanny, almost divine influence now seem exaggerated but apparently proved quite convincing to the colonial government, and certainly this belief in the power of Christian practice was preferable to the conviction that Aboriginal people must be controlled at gunpoint. Parker based his claim for retaining the land on several arguments: the debt owed to the Aborigines; the debt he was owed for his public service; his ability to keep Aboriginal people under control; and a sort of pre-emptive property right because he had held the land for ten years.

In late 1853 the Legislative Council again considered the future of the land reserved for the Loddon Protectorate and confirmed that Parker could continue to hold

40. Parliament of Victoria 1853.

41. Attwood 1999: 41.

42. Joseph Parker from his 1916 newspaper reminiscences quoted in Morrison 2002: 308.

43. Joseph Parker's address to the Castlemaine Pioneers and Old Residents Association, 26 June 1891, in Castlemaine Pioneers 1996: 126–127. Joseph Parker gave an almost identical version of this incident in his 1916 reminiscences for the *Mount Alexander Mail*.

the station 'for the benefit of the Aborigines' and as a measure of 'due regard to his position for past services, and the influence, which he undeniably possesses, with the tribes frequenting it'.⁴⁴ In that year Parker was appointed to the Council of the University of Melbourne and in the following year, he was appointed to the Legislative Council.⁴⁵ He would later be appointed as Inspector for the Denominational Schools Board from 1857 to 1862.⁴⁶ From 1855, demand for land by the people who had flooded into the district for gold meant that at least part of the Protectorate Reserve was subdivided, although it is certain that 640 acres close to Mount Franklin remained, 'for use by a small number of Aborigines who wished to continue farming'.⁴⁷ A letter from Mr W Wilson of Castlemaine to the Chief Secretary in late 1859 inquires about the timing of the expiration of Mr Parker's lease on his run and its likelihood of renewal. The response by the Commissioner for Crown Lands was that Parker would be given preference for the land.⁴⁸

In 1860, Parker could still be found leasing 10,000 acres for grazing, although that year he apparently did not reapply for a lease renewal as much of the run had been reserved for commons and mining.⁴⁹ He was still coming under suspicion for misuse of government property in 1860; this time sparked by a letter to the Surveyor-General at Castlemaine and signed, 'A Native'. The anonymous writer questioned the use of government rations at the station and the conduct of Parker's junior colleague, the school teacher Judkins. The writer accused Judkins of not earning his wage and keep as, they claimed, he was busy working his own farm rather than teaching the children.⁵⁰

Parker renewed his annual lease applications from 1861, generally pleading that he be allowed advantageous terms because of his good works and peculiar hardships. He often also understated the desirability of the land in question in this correspondence. For example:

I have the honour to apply for a renewal of my licence to depasture stock on such portions of the Mount Franklin Aboriginal Reserve as may be unsold or unappropriated for commonage or mining.

I beg respectfully to remind you that I have held a depasturing licence for this area since the year 1850.

The application should have been made at an earlier period, but from the utter uncertainty whether any portion would be left after the appropriation of farmers' and diggers' commonages. The quantity of available pasture is very limited, consisting mainly of densely wooded ranges.⁵¹

Parker had been quite inexact about the land he still held, describing some of it as his 'commonage right' and other as used for 'depasturing' as well as the central 784 acres

44. Parliament of Victoria 1854.

45. Nelson 1974.

46. Nelson 1974.

47. Culvenor 1992: 3.

48. Parker to Commissioner of Land and Works, 4 January 1860, Registered inward correspondence of Surveyor-General, VPRS 2896, PROV.

49. Culvenor 1992: 19-20.

50. Morrison 2002: 272.

51. Registered inward correspondence of Surveyor-General, 17 July 1861, VPRS 2896, PROV.

that he held.⁵² This confusion was partly the product of Glenelg's original directions that were ambiguous about the inner and outer reserves. The pressure for selection land finally reduced Parker's land holdings in 1862 when the Board of Land and Works recommended that the land be auctioned, 'at an upset rental of £125 per annum containing about 10,000 acres in accordance with the 98th section of the Land Act 1862'. The Board also noted that the land had not been included in the list of runs and therefore the occupant (Parker) had not been paying the rate.⁵³ He had been paying at most £100 per annum for the entire holding throughout the 1850s.⁵⁴ Joseph and Edward Parker had each also selected 640 acres of land at Glenlyon, adjoining Mount Franklin, in the early 1860s.⁵⁵ Perhaps this was a contingency plan should Parker's pleas for the Mount Franklin run fail.

The Parker house would become quite solid, according to the Parkers' granddaughter. Grace, the daughter of Mary's only daughter Emma, wrote of the old Mount Franklin 'homestead' and its library and of her mother having a governess.⁵⁶ The property was rated for an annual value of £32 during the 1870s and described as 'house of wood and farm Mount Franklin'.⁵⁷ Emma C Parker owned the property at least until 1873 but it must have been another Emma in the family as this seventh child, Emma Mary Parker, would marry James Williamson in 1860.⁵⁸ This house has not survived although a small stand of poplars marks its former position just off the road from Daylesford towards Castlemaine with sweeping panoramic views across the ranges.⁵⁹ This was the second house site, established when the Parker family moved up the run towards Mount Franklin after the Protectorate was disbanded. Parker and his son Joseph always referred to this address as 'Mount Franklin', making it sound like a pastoral holding. This is where Parker died in 1865, 15 years after the closure of the Protectorate and a year after the removal of the last Djadja Wurrung people to Coranderrk, yet with much of the land and improvements still within his possession.⁶⁰

Hannah Parker survived her husband by 28 years, dying in 1893 at the age of 75 after probably remaining in the Mount Franklin house.⁶¹ The details of property and will are scant: the probate papers for Parker's estate valued his possessions as not

52. Registered inward correspondence of Surveyor General, 17 August 1862, VPRS 2896, PROV.

53. Registered inward correspondence of Surveyor General, 8 September 1862, VPRS 2896, PROV.

54. From 1851 to 1853, Parker paid £60 rent annually according to the Audit Office, Parliament of Victoria 1854.

55. Daylesford Historical Museum index of landholders. Joseph also had a 'house of wood and garden' at Franklinford, Shire of Franklin rate book, Daylesford Historical Museum.

56. Porter to Morrison, 11 November 1965, 479.8.

57. Shire of Franklin rate book, Daylesford Historical Museum. The rateable value was based on the annual rent that would be due if the property was leased, not on the market value if sold.

58. Morrison 2002: 17.

59. Conversation in August 2005 with members of the Daylesford Historical Society and inspection of their Mapinfo database of early landholdings.

60. *Mount Alexander Mail*, 28 April 1865.

61. Parker family gravestone, Franklinford Cemetery. Funeral notice of Hannah Parker in the *Mount Alexander Mail*, 14 March 1893. It is not certain that Hannah was still living at the house on the former protectorate. She could have been living elsewhere in the district with another member of her large family.

exceeding £184/10/-, which is a remarkably low figure for a man of his stature and dealings.⁶² Either his large family cost a lot to keep, or Parker may not have actually ever *owned* much property, even though he had the *use* of a great deal of public estate. When Parker made out his last will, he gave his occupation as 'Landholder'.⁶³

There are intriguing continuities between Edward Parker's career and that of his son, Joseph, and his nephew, Shirley Waldemar Baker. Joseph stayed peripherally involved with Aboriginal affairs, arguing when he could for the re-establishment of a protectorate-style system and hinting at his own readiness and fitness to play a leading role.⁶⁴ Joseph Parker finally found a similar project in the 1890s when he was appointed overseer of the Glenlyon Village Settlement, a Christian-socialist 'back to the land' experiment aimed at improving the poor of Melbourne. It was hoped that people would acquire land by the application of their own labour, but the financial terms were harsh and it ended up disbanded and heavily in debt.⁶⁵ Edward Parker's nephew, Shirley Waldemar Baker, undertook the land and moral improvement project on a far larger scale than his cousin Joseph. Baker lived with his uncle at Franklinford during his Wesleyan missionary training. His training complete, he was sent to Tonga where he became a favourite of the King, reorganised the country's land and tax laws, was appointed Prime Minister, formed a break-away version of the Wesleyan church of which he declared himself head and became very wealthy. He was eventually removed by the British who were alarmed at his interference in their trade, lost heavily on the New Zealand stock market during the 1890s depression and returned to Tonga in much reduced circumstances for his final years.⁶⁶

Parker's thoughts on Loddon Station

In an 1854 address to the John Knox Young Men's Association, Parker gave a demonstration of his expertise on Aboriginal affairs and laid out his project.⁶⁷ Delivered ostensibly to educate the audience, this lecture was also very much a performance that consolidated Parker's eminence as an expert and a 'good' man of charitable principles and actions. This reputation was of direct material benefit to Parker and he seems to have been quite conscious of it as a significant asset. Parker explained to his audience that colonial acquisition and Aboriginal protection need not conflict:

But let every Christian man, and especially every Christian young man rise, and say with one voice, to the government, to the legislature, and the nation; occupy the land, till its broad wastes, extract its riches, develop its resource, if you will; but, in the name of God and humanity, SAVE THE PEOPLE.⁶⁸

⁶². Probate of Edward Stone Parker, VPRS28/P0000/60, PROV.

⁶³. Parker's will, VPRS28/P0001/11, PROV, is undated, and is there no date for the will given in the probate papers, VPRS28/P0000/60, PROV. Curiously, his death certificate gives his occupation as 'printer', presumably how Joseph Parker advised it be recorded in his capacity as next of kin. Dr Daniel gave the cause of death as 'general dropsy after rheumatic gout' on 26 April 1865.

⁶⁴. Parliament of Victoria 1877-78: 31.

⁶⁵. *Mount Alexander Mail*, 26 April 1893; Cannon 1967: 193.

⁶⁶. Rutherford 1969; *Sun*, 28 May 1955.

⁶⁷. Lecture delivered by ES Parker on 10 May 1854 to the John Knox Young Men's Association at Mechanics' Hall, Melbourne, published later that year and reproduced in Morrison 2002: 281-305.

To hold the two compatible in 1854 in the Loddon district seems a remarkable conviction. This was one of the peak years of the gold rush that caused so much further harm to Aboriginal people, and attempting to hold this pressure back by means of a relatively small reserve of land amid high density settlement seems very optimistic. Parker's message to his audience was that *he* was a saviour of the people and that land exploitation by the colonisers did not conflict with this saving. Robert Kenny takes Parker at his word, admiring his passionate conviction to the preservation of the lives of Aboriginal people.⁶⁹ This article does not argue that Parker was indifferent or that he did not abhor the destruction of life, but it does contend that Parker's proposals generally had an element of career advancement.

His own station was run on the basis of colonial development mixed with saving the Aborigines, he told the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Welfare in 1858:

I now wish to make a statement as to my experience in civilising the Aborigines: There are at present settled, immediately in sight of my residence, TWO families who hold land under the authority of the government; they have been farming on their own account since the year 1852, they are two married men with their families. ... They have erected decent residences for themselves; have cultivated the soil; have taken several crops, and, in the entire habits and associations of their lives, are in no respect different from our ordinary peasants.⁷⁰

Antoine Faucherey's late 1850s photographs show the Aboriginal farmers assembled outside their bark and log house.⁷¹ Two of the mature men in the pictures were probably Tommy Farmer and Dicky, who had been granted a Crown lease in 1852 on 21 of the 10,000 acres held by Parker at that stage. The others were probably people who also lived at the farm, including Lankey and Ellen, but who did not have the same official recognition as holders of the land. Later they were granted 100 guineas for seed wheat, working bullocks and tools.⁷² Tommy Farmer was born Beembarmin (or Beernbarmin) around 1831.⁷³ Morrison thinks Beembarmin and Yerrelluk (Dicky) were taken into Parker's household in 1841 at the first Loddon station site after their fathers were killed in a conflict with the 'Goulburn tribe'.⁷⁴ Perhaps their fathers died this way but there is little doubt that there would have been other family members to care for these boys and that Parker's 'bringing them in' was opportunistic. Adopting orphans was a practice that Parker had successfully suggested become government policy.⁷⁵ Acquiring Aboriginal children for white households was widespread, meeting mixed desires for obedient workers, to conduct social-religious experiments and for pleasant companionship.⁷⁶

68. John Knox Young Men's Association lecture in Morrison 2002: 305.

69. Kenny 2007: 62-63, 79, 98.

70. Evidence given by ES Parker to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Welfare, 17 November 1858, reproduced in Morrison 2002: 274.

71. Reilly and Carew 1983.

72. Barwick 1998: 50. It is difficult to tell from Barwick's account just when this grant occurred, but probably in between 1859 and 1861, seven to nine years after the land grant.

73. Attwood 1999: 41; Barwick 1998: 50. Attwood thinks he was born in 1827 but Barwick thinks it was 1831.

74. Morrison 2002: 261.

75. Thompson to Robinson, 3 December 1839, VPRS 10, PROV.

76. Reynolds 1990: 165-191.



Group of Aboriginal men, women and children at Parker's station c1857–1859 by Richard Daintree. By permission of the State Library of Victoria (H84.167/42).

Morrison wonders if Farmer and Dicky's adoptions predetermined their chance to farm.⁷⁷ Attwood believes that it was their conversion to Christianity.⁷⁸ By the early 1850s when this Aboriginal farming experiment commenced, Parker needed as many arguments as possible to stay in possession of the former Protectorate. Farming had mixed results for those involved. Of substantial benefit was the refuge that the farm provided for other clan members and visiting Aboriginal people.⁷⁹ However, the farmers themselves fared badly: Lankey died when he fell down a mineshaft at nearby Yandoit in 1855; Farmer's wife Norah died in Castlemaine Hospital and Dicky died of tuberculosis at Mount Franklin in 1862.⁸⁰ Although Parker reported the farm as a success to the Colonial Secretary in 1853, managing to include the remark that his family had helped the Aboriginal farmers to get in the crops, a less flattering story emerged in Farmer's evidence to the 1877 Royal Commission on the Aborigines.⁸¹ When asked about the reason he moved from the farm to Coranderrk, he answered, 'Well, this piece of ground I had I lose all my team, my bullocks. I lent it to Mr Parker and they took the lot of bullocks I had, and lose nearly all my bullocks.'⁸² Morrison has looked at

77. Morrison 2002: 235.

78. Attwood 1999: 39.

79. Parliament of Victoria 1877-78: 31.

80. Attwood 1999: 41.

81. Parliament of Victoria 1877-78: 29. Parker was still claiming the farm as one of his successes in 1858, 'Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Welfare', reproduced in Morrison 2002: 274.

Farmer's evidence to the Commission and quotes Farmer as saying: 'My own people camped around and eat me out'. Farmer's account of the failure of the farm can be read simply as other Aboriginal people needing to eat. Morrison, however, takes up Joseph Parker's insinuation that these people were unwilling to work and were taking advantage of those who were, completely ignoring Farmer's further testimony about Parker using and then losing his bullocks. Morrison makes a conjecture about goldminers taking the animals and concurs with Joseph Parker's explanation for the failure of the farm: that apart from Farmer, the Aborigines just died.⁸³

In establishing Aboriginal people as farmers, Parker took the belief in work as a civilising strategy further than many other missionaries and protectors did in south-eastern Australia at that time.⁸⁴ Reynolds also noticed Parker's inclination to get 'his' Aborigines working, citing Parker's advice that they, 'should be made to feel that their occupation is for their own benefit, rather than for the benefit of the employer. They appear generally to feel that they owe us nothing and that they are under no obligation to work.'⁸⁵ The Colonial Secretary's early direction to the Assistant Protectors to get the Aborigines working had been clear. With this in mind, Parker may have been producing good politics as much as good workers.

Removal to Coranderrk

Ellen, a young Djadja Wurrung woman of about 13 years of age, was a member of one of Parker's ideal peasant farming families still living at his station in 1863. Her father was Yerrelluk (Dicky) who had just died and her mother was Beibie (Eliza), who was also still living there. Ellen had been taught by Mr and Mrs Judkins at the Aboriginal school at Franklinford and could read, write and do needlework. When the Prince of Wales married in 1863, the Kulin at Coranderrk ceremoniously presented wedding gifts for Prince Albert and birthday gifts for Queen Victoria to the Governor at a public levee in honour of the royal family. In a related gesture, the Djadja Wurrung, part of the same Kulin people, sent the Queen two letters written by Ellen and a collar she had crocheted. The departing Governor's wife was also sent one of Ellen's crocheted doilies. The Queen replied with her thanks, particularly asking Ellen to make it known to her people that she was concerned for their welfare.⁸⁶ The Queen's concern was warranted. Twenty-five years of contact with white people had already killed large numbers of the Indigenous people of central Victoria, with the goldrushes accelerating the spread of disease and alcohol.⁸⁷ Ellen herself died in 1874 at the age of 24 or 25, following the deaths of her three children from tuberculosis.⁸⁸ The other Kulin people from Coranderrk had a more satisfactory response, although the timing may have been a happy coincidence, of the gazettal of land for the Coranderrk reserve.⁸⁹

^{82.} Parliament of Victoria 1877-78: 31.

^{83.} Morrison 2002: 241.

^{84.} Mitchell 2004: 225.

^{85.} Reynolds 1990: 96.

^{86.} The text of most of the Queen's letter is reproduced in Lydon 2002: 83-84.

^{87.} Cahir and Clark 2004: 14-15. Attwood describes estimates of a halving of the Djadja Wurrung population during the decade of the protectorate's operation as reliable, Attwood 1999: 36.

^{88.} Barwick 1998: 67.

By 1864, apart from one Aboriginal adult, only children remained at Franklinford. As already noted, other Djadja Wurrung people used the station as one of their camps but the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines was keen to close Franklinford as an Aboriginal reserve in any form and to move the remaining people to Coranderrk. This was carried out in 1864.⁹⁰ The presence of Willie Parker, a 'half-caste from Loddon' in the Coranderrk records is an interesting element in the Parker family tree, although he would have almost certainly taken the surname as a gesture of reciprocity and respect or for want of another suitable European surname rather than being actually related. Willie Parker survived longer than many of the people who moved from the Loddon to Coranderrk, although by late 1882 he was hospitalised with lung disease.⁹¹

Parker was in the habit of taking orphaned Aboriginal children into his household from his earliest time in the colony of Victoria when he took in a boy called Kolain whom he found in Melbourne. He was with the Parkers at their Jackson's Creek camp in 1839 and 1840, where Parker claimed stores on his behalf: 'Flour (100 pounds), meat (662/3 pounds), tea (331/3 ounces), sugar (121/2 pounds), soap (162/3 ounces)'.⁹² In 1916, Joseph Parker wrote, 'After the abolition of the Protectorate, Father demanded that some provision be made for this youth, when he was taken away by the government, and I have never heard of him since'.⁹³ Kolain was by then hardly a 'youth' and went to Coranderrk with his wife Harriet in 1864. Both were dead by 1870.⁹⁴ It should not have been too difficult for Joseph Parker to keep in touch with Kolain after he went to Coranderrk, but perhaps his father's death just a year later interrupted such contact.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Parker's personal circumstances combined with the frontier and settlement circumstances of that time and place produced this outcome. Parker was an Englishman with a government appointment who arrived on the frontier at the right time to be part of the land acquisition that was occurring all around him. It appears that this circumstance eventually prevailed, despite an earlier concentration on Aboriginal protection rather than land acquisition. In matters of land, Parker would come to act most like the squatters in fighting for his own interests ahead of all other claimants, although he apparently thought that this did not conflict with protecting Indigenous people.

Parker argued that Aborigines need not inevitably die out, although he believed that they were in some natural way weaker than Europeans and unusually susceptible to harm. That is, Parker was required to protect the people so Parker should retain the land on the Loddon. With the stated aim of fostering an Aboriginal peasantry, he supervised a small Aboriginal farm which, along with a belatedly established Aboriginal school, supported Parker's argument for retaining control of the former Loddon Protectorate.

⁸⁹. Barwick 1998: 66–67. There is a fuller discussion of the significance of this gesture in Lydon 2002: 82–85.

⁹⁰. Attwood 1999: 42–45.

⁹¹. Walter c1865; Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, 1 November 1882.

⁹². Account of provisions issued to one Aboriginal orphan male child, box 133/8 H13879, SLV.

⁹³. Joseph Parker quoted in Morrison 2002: 308.

⁹⁴. Barwick to Morrison cited in Morrison 2002: 262.

Also, perhaps he *was* owed something for his efforts and the personal losses he had endured. George Robinson could return to England with a good pension and divide his time between Bath and the Continent, but Edward Parker still had to finish raising a large family. Parker could also have returned to England or moved away to Melbourne or taken up his selection land, but he was no longer a young man. Parker's best option was to stay on the Loddon trying to continue his protecting career and to obtain what government appointments he could in the much more hostile environment of post-goldrush Victoria. Parker may have genuinely believed that his land interests were secondary to those of the local Aboriginal people but that he chose to describe himself as 'Landholder, Mount Franklin' and that he and his son were so assiduous in promoting his works does suggest that self-interest became a strong element. This self-interest was endemic in colonial Victoria and Parker was obliged to be worldly if he was to protect his family.

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‘Killing with kindness’: Daisy Bates and New Norcia

Bob Reece

Daisy Bates, née Margaret Dywer, was baptised a Catholic on 21 October 1859 together with her twin brother Francis at Roscrea, County Tipperary, Ireland, and, after losing both parents by the age of five, was educated by sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary until the age of about 20. Shortly after her arrival in Townsville, Queensland, in January 1883 as an assisted immigrant, she proclaimed herself an Anglican and became in time a rabid critic of the Catholic Church, particularly its political role in Ireland and Australia. After contracting three marriages in 15 months between 1884 and 1886 and giving birth to her only child, Arnold Hamilton Bates, she spent the five years from 1894 working as a journalist and librarian in England before arriving in Western Australia in September 1899. There she was reunited with her second husband, the drover Jack Bates from Nowra, New South Wales, and 12-year-old Arnold, with the purpose of taking out pastoral leaseholds in the Murchison district. When these plans went awry and her relationship with Jack failed, she had little choice but to return to Perth and journalism, working as a freelance contributor to *The Western Mail* and other journals while Arnold attended Christian Brothers College, St George’s Terrace.

On board the *Stuttgart* to Fremantle, one of Bates’ companions had been the ageing Fr Angelo Martelli who told her about the Aborigines of the north of Western Australia and the work of the Trappist fathers at the Beagle Bay mission in the Kimberley that Bishop Matthew Gibney of Perth had established in 1890. It was no doubt through Martelli that she was introduced to Gibney, whom she then accompanied in August 1900 on a four-month visit to Beagle Bay, where the Trappists were on the verge of failing after most of their number had returned to France. Gibney always accepted her word that she was an Anglican but on a number of occasions confessed to her that if he had not known better, he would have sworn that she was a Catholic.

Beagle Bay was no lady journalist’s outing. On arrival, she was given a hoe and put to work weeding the mission’s banana and sugar cane plots and cleaning out the wells. Her main responsibility, however, was to humour the ageing bishop in his toils and act as chainman for him in the survey of 10,000 acres of coastal land set aside for the mission by the Western Australian government. It was also at Beagle Bay that she first became acquainted with the Aborigines and was imbued with a desire to understand their complicated pattern of social relationships. Observing with keen interest the

linguistic and other investigations conducted by Abbot Nicholas, she described herself as 'bitten by the virus of research'.¹

Back in Perth, she began work on a number of articles for a British magazine describing the Beagle Bay mission.² When the mission was attacked by a former New Norcia employee, B Fitzalan Howard, in the *Morning Herald* in March 1901,³ she stoutly defended it, thereby earning Gibney's gratitude.⁴ Rejecting Howard's claim that the Beagle Bay Aborigines' religious training was 'as fully comprehended by them as a parrot understands the phrases taught it', she wrote:

So far from such being the case, I found on inquiry amongst the women ... that their knowledge, 'sufficient unto their salvation', was clear, though childlike. They believed in the Father, in Christ who died for them, and Who only wanted them to be good, and they acted up to that belief, in so far as the morality of their lives was concerned, in their truthfulness, their honesty, and their simple piety. Can the most learned theologian do more?⁵

Privately, however, she was highly sceptical of missionary endeavour, believing that the Aborigines would never abandon their traditional beliefs and that their repetition of prayers and hymns was no more than a 'patter' designed to fool the missionaries and guarantee a regular supply of food. In April 1907 she told John Mathew, a Melbourne Presbyterian minister and prominent ethnologist with whom she had a professional correspondence for some years:

... there are abstract 'soulful' terms elaborately translated, which the natives could never understand, however civilized they might be.

Let me give you a prayer of a native who was in the Beagle Bay mission for 12 years. It is 'Our Father' and part of 'Hail Mary':

Our faader wart in ivvin al'-o-wyd bid'yd
nim, thyk min kum, dy will be done arness
isstiss neven ... ernest tomson fra deliverer
prime eebil e-men.

Hail Mary
Elmeree ful a gress lo dçree fleesh tara
Past bridden Jesus.

'Well', she continued, 'I suppose the missionaries are pleased to hear that patter but it is as meaningless to the natives as it looks to me'.⁶ Meeting the Anglican Bishop Arthur Thomas in Adelaide in 1914, she shocked him with her frank views about the prospects of converting Aborigines. What she told him went something like this:

Now I am Anglican, and keep the same faith that was instilled into me as a child, by which I mean I neither reason nor question. I just believe and trust - yet to me

1. Bates cited in Reece 2007: 36.

2. Bates 1902-03; see also *The Woman*, 27 November 1909 and 28 January 1910.

3. *Morning Herald*, 30 March 1901.

4. Gibney to Bates, 6 April 1901, Papers of Daisy Bates, MS 365/97/150, National Library of Australia (NLA).

5. *Morning Herald*, 5 April 1901.

6. Bates to Mathew, 17 April 1907, Papers of Rev John Mathew, MS 9290, LaTrobe Library.

that travesty of religion, whether Lutheran or R.C. which is contented with outer mouthings, meaningless to the native, is a mockery of God. The native has his own code of right and wrong, morality and immorality and there can be no deceit, hypocrisy, or false seeming in any native community.⁷

Three more things at Beagle Bay had also left a deep impression on her: the first was the incidence of cannibalistic infanticide; the second was the impossibility of keeping the mission girls away from the Asian pearling crews during the lay-up season; and the third was Gibney's willingness to marry a young Aboriginal girl of about nine to a grey-haired old man to whom she had been promised under traditional custom.⁸

It cannot have been long after returning from the north that Daisy became interested in visiting New Norcia in order to write something about it for the newspapers, including Gibney's own *Western Australian Catholic Record*, no doubt asking him to facilitate matters. Gibney duly wrote to Abbot Fulgencio Torres in August 1901 to seek his permission for an invitation to be offered:

A lady named Mrs. Bates who lives at the Club Hotel - West Perth, and who has taken a very deep interest in the treatment of natives of the North West is desirous to know how they are treated at the New Norcia Mission. She has already written most interesting articles on the matter to English Journals, and is at present engaged in contributing more. Though she wishes to see New Norcia, she is not disposed to go unless at your invitation - the which [sic] if given shall be gladly accepted. If you would kindly appoint the day on which you could conveniently meet her by sending a personal invitation to 'The Club Hotel', West Perth. I am sure her visit would have most beneficial results.

M. Gibney

P.S. Observe that Mrs. Bates is not a Catholic.⁹

Torres, whose English was still rudimentary, sent Gibney's letter back to the Bishop's Vicar-General, Fr Anselm Bourke, at St Brigid's, West Perth, for advice but Bourke, whose relationship with Gibney was becoming strained, was uncooperative, purporting to be protective of the newly installed Abbot. From the letter that he wrote to Torres, Bourke appears to have formed the impression that Mrs Bates was not someone who would wait patiently until invited. Indeed, he seems to have believed that her trip to the Kimberley with Gibney reflected her determination rather than the Bishop's convenience:

I do not think I need write [to] Mrs Bates on your part. She is a very active person and if she wishes to go to New Norcia she will get there by invitation or otherwise. She was with the Bishop all through his journeyings at Beagle Bay and it must have been inconvenient for him at times in the bush. However, Mrs Bates is interested in the natives and wishing to go to that place - she went. The good lady is now living in a hotel near to St Brigid's. Were I to give her your invitation it

7. Bates to Thomas Giffen, 5 December 1916, SC AA 23/1 [plastic envelope], South Australian Museum Archives.

8. Bates 1985: 127.

9. Gibney to Torres, 19 August 1901, folio no 00770, Papers of the Benedictine Monastery, New Norcia (New Norcia Archives).

would perhaps give [her an] excuse for too many calls and thus occasion loss of time to those who are busy and have very little time to spare.¹⁰

The monastery chronicler recorded that on 18 October 1901, 'A lady came to visit the Mission; seems to be a photographer'.¹¹ And an anonymous 'Lady Visitor' then spent 24 and 25 December 1901 there, publishing an account of her observations in *The Western Mail* a few weeks later. Whether the 'Lady Visitor' was Daisy Bates is impossible to say, although *The Western Mail* was to be the most important outlet for her writing and she is thus a strong candidate. Altogether, the article seems to have been a fair account, the venerable English-speaking Spanish monk (probably Fr Bertran) who received her at the monastery gates saying that she was the first woman writer to make a visit. Emphasising that '[w]e are here to help the natives, not white people', he told her that she should not write in too 'high-flown' a style.¹²

The 'Lady Visitor' remarked that the health of the Aboriginal population was good but that alcohol caused the men to fight fiercely among themselves with wooden 'sticks', something which she observed herself during the festivities on Christmas Day.¹³ She mentioned that Moora magistrate Charles Davidson sometimes had to be summoned from his property six miles away to hear cases and order punishments consisting of substantial fines or banishment. As the Aborigines described it, some men were 'put on the road'. Altogether, she believed that 'the white man's intoxicants afford the greatest difficulty the monks have to contend against'.¹⁴ What she did not mention was the monastery's reasonable policy of giving out a ration of a pint of wine a day to men involved in physical labour, such as harvesting.

The 'Lady Visitor' was greatly taken by Abbot Torres' striking appearance ('his style of face may be seen in the works of the masters') and obvious intellectual powers. However, she also remarked on the notable difference in attitude displayed by the Aborigines towards him by contrast with Bishop Salvado:

Father Torres cannot speak English, but can read it and no doubt very soon will be able to converse with the natives. He governs them now with his eye, and they seem to stand a good deal in fear of him. They do not love him as they loved Bishop Salvado. The band instruments are locked up because the natives say 'noo play since the Bishop goo away'.¹⁵

In addition to writing articles for the Perth newspapers and journals, Bates sold post-card photographs of Aborigines she had taken up north and at the government reserve near Cannington. Established by Premier John Forrest in 1899, this had become a sanctuary for some of the remaining full-descent Bibbulmun people of the south-west. There she met Guillermo Monap or William Monnup (Mon'nop), a Victoria Plains man of the Ballaruk intermarrying class who became an important informant and the subject of biographical portraits she was to publish in *The Western Mail* in 1908 and 1909.¹⁶

10. Bourke to Torres, 21 September 1901, folio no 00770, New Norcia Archives.

11. Chamberlain 2001: 88.

12. 'A Lady Visitor' 1902.

13. This was confirmed by the monastery's chronicler, Fr Faisto Curiel, in his entry for 25 December 1901 (Chamberlain 2001: 88).

14. Chamberlain 2001: 88.

15. Chamberlain 2001: 88.

Wearing his distinctive dingo totem headdress, Mon'nop also appeared on a number of photographic postcards produced by Perth's Rome Studio, no doubt at her instigation, in connection with a corroboree that was conducted by him at Cannington in March 1907, the last of its kind in the Perth area.¹⁷ Bates obtained extensive linguistic and other information from Mon'nop and two other Victoria Plains men, also encouraging Mon'nop to 'execute' a unique series of coloured drawings of traditional weapons, tools, clothing and food plants.¹⁸

There is an entry for Mon'nop in Neville Green and Lois Tilbrook's *Aborigines of New Norcia*¹⁹ and he has been the subject of a useful study by the art historian Mary Eagle,²⁰ so there is little point in repeating his fascinating story here. However, his marriage in November 1866 to New Norcia-born Scholastica Manguglian was celebrated with great ceremony and it is clear that they were seen by Salvado as a model couple who would set an example to their people.²¹ They were accordingly allocated one of the 21 two-room stone cottages that he had recently built for the resident Aborigines around the church. Mon'nop for some years played an important part in the mission's farming activities. Bates' account of his subsequent unsuccessful attempt to marry a woman called 'Nyungara' throws some interesting light on Salvado's determination that the traditional marriage laws of the Bibbulmun should be respected:

The Bishop ... called Monnop up to him. Monnop, then a fine upstanding black-bearded weea'ban'dee (young bachelor) stood out from amongst his fellows. The Bishop perused the supplementary register and proceeded to read out Monnop's father's and mother's name and class, and that of their children. Then he looked up Nyungara's pedigree and read it aloud to Monnop, but made no comment upon it, other than to request Monnop to accompany him to the girl's house,

16. Bates 1908 and 1909.

17. Bates 1907. It is clear that as well as being a corroboree master, Mon'nop was a *bulya* (*boylya*) man, possessing considerable magical powers.

18. The 21 coloured drawings by Mon'nop, together with Bates' detailed annotations, are part of the National Library's Papers of Daisy Bates (NLA MS 365/30/96). Four of the drawings were reproduced in Croft with Gooding 2003: 38-39. However, they located him as coming from the Swan River area (pp 32-33) while at the same time reproducing a photograph (*The Western Mail*, 27 February 1909) which clearly identifies him as from the Victoria Plains and citing Bates' own account placing him there (p 23). Croft also wrote (p 33) that the same image was reproduced 'as a truncated, faded photograph on the cover of a publication of Daisy Bates' writing on Indigenous people of the South West'. In fact in 1938 Bates used a fine print of the photograph prominently in her *The Passing of the Aborigines* (opp p 30). Croft went on to claim that the Aboriginal artist Christopher Pease's 1999 painting based on the same cropped photograph 'has released Monnop from his unwelcome role as an accessory to Mrs Bates' writings on Indigenous people of the South West' (p 33). Extensive linguistic and other cultural information obtained by Bates from Mon'nop and two other Victoria Plains informants can be found at NLA MS 365/42/178-186, 187-217, 218-257 and at NLA MS 365/73/34-37, 249-258, providing most of the data now extant for the traditional culture of the people of the Victoria Plains and no doubt much of the evidence for a Native Title claim lodged in August 1997 which has since been registered (Federal Court, file no. WAD6192/98; see also National Native Title Tribunal 2002). Bates was the vital 'accessory' to the recording of this information and drew upon it for her manuscript 'The Native Tribes of Western Australia' which remained unpublished until 1985 when the National Library of Australia produced a version under the same name, ably edited by the late Dr Isobel White. Mon'nop is referred to on pp 52 and 290.

where Nyungara waited with the assembled girls. Nyungara was commanded to stand out of the ranks, Monnop, who was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, keeping beside the Bishop.

Monnop was asked: 'Do you like this girl?'

'Yes, my lord, I do,' said Monnop.

'Well,' said the Bishop, 'here in my book Tondarup and Tondarup are cousins, and Ballaruk and Ballaruk are cousins. Tondarup marry Ballaruk all right, but Ballaruk marry Ballaruk [is] wrong. You can't marry each other; you had best part; I can't allow it.'²²

If Bates' story is true,²³ the event described should have taken place after the death of Scholastica Manguglian in December 1889. However, he is recorded as having left the mission in 1886. Furthermore, born in 1847, Mon'nop would not then have been the 'young bachelor' that Bates described. And, by this time it is highly unlikely that Salvado would have been trying to keep up the old marriage rules because of the influx of Aboriginal people from other parts of the colony in response to government encouragement. According to the Rev. James Flood, Mon'nop had never been interested in marrying again. He was so disgusted and hurt when Scholastica Manguglian ran away with another man that he left the mission for 20 years, only returning when she was long since dead:

'It is a wonder', said someone, 'you did not get married, Monop [sic], during these years'. 'Although', the black replied, 'I knew my wife was buried in the cemetery up there, yet I had had enough of women and I was afraid to venture a second time'.²⁴



William (Guillermo) Mon'nop, his first wife Scholastica Manguglian (Nangulan) and her sister Cayaranon, at the time of their wedding in 1866. New Norcia Archives 73459P.

19. Green and Tilbrook 1989: 88.

20. Eagle mentions the drawings as having been made in 1907 by Mon'nop at Bates' instigation but does not indicate their location (Eagle 2002: 53).

21. Their marriage on 25 November 1866 was described at some length in *The Inquirer*, 3 December 1866.

22. Bates 1909. Surprisingly, Bates, who would certainly have approved of Salvado's decision, made no mention in this article of Fr 'Miro' (Cobane) the matchmaker who, George Russo tells us, 'looked after the courtship and marriage arrangements for the girls from 1865 until his death in 1908' and was bound to have been present as well (Russo 1980: 166).

23. Dom Bernard Rooney (personal communication, 3 July 2008) has suggested to me that the name 'Nyungara' was made up by Bates simply to sound authentic. Its literal meaning is 'Nyoongah men', which makes its use as a personal name nonsense.

Bates suggested that after Salvado's arrival, not only was the enforcement of the old marriage laws completely abandoned at New Norcia, but no proper records were kept to forestall bigamy (to which, as we have seen, she herself was no stranger). In her biographical sketch of Fanny Balbuk, the last full-descent woman of Kar'gatta (Karrakatta), the Bibbulmun name for the Mount Eliza area of Perth, Bates reflected on the naïveté of the New Norcia priests who had obligingly officiated at some of the seven weddings of Balbuk to her various suitors during her exile in the Victoria Plains. The 'unwitting priests ... did not remember they had seen her before', she wrote in 1936, and the fame of Fanny Balbuk's furious temper (she had once killed a sister-in-law) was so well known that 'none of the New Norcia natives dared to tell'.²⁵ In fact, according to Green, no records have been found of Fanny marrying anyone at New Norcia, so it appears to be one of Bates' 'tall stories'.²⁶

There is no evidence of what transpired during Bates' visit to New Norcia in 1903. The monastery's chronicler for that year left no record and she may have been mistaken in her recollection. However, it is clear from the two long articles on the mission's history that appeared 25 years later in the Melbourne weekly, *The Australasian*, under the title 'New Norcia Benedictine Monastery: a record of heroism' that she had met Abbot Torres and the monks and taken detailed notes of their conversations.²⁷ By 1903, Torres had read most of the records of the previous 50 years and was well versed in what had happened during Salvado's and Serra's time. In addition, Fr Martinez and others who had been with Salvado could have told Torres stories about him. Through her reading of the 1854 French version of Salvado's memoirs as part of her initial research for the Western Australian government, Bates was well acquainted with his missionary philosophy and the information he had recorded about the Aborigines of the Victoria Plains.

Bates' first documented visit to New Norcia in late February 1904 was brief and she stayed with the Davidson family at nearby 'Glentromie' station.²⁸ Writing to Fr Planas on Saturday, 21 February, she told him that the mission girls were giving her a tame kangaroo which she was going to present to Governor Sir Frederick Bedford's daughter. Accordingly, she requested accommodation overnight before going on to Gingin the following Monday. Abbot Torres obligingly sent a mission buggy to pick her up.

Bates claimed to have witnessed one of the last matches of the New Norcia cricket team against the Perth team at the Perth ground on 7 March 1905, casting herself as a key source of encouragement after a poor first innings. However, there is no independent evidence that Daisy Bates attended the match. She made the claim in a 1924 article about the New Norcia cricket team and it may well be that some 20 years after the 1905 match she was exercising journalistic licence or simply conflating a number of matches between New Norcia and Perth.²⁹

24. Anon (Flood) 1908: 86. Mon'nop took up with Sarah Upona at least five years before his first wife's death in December 1889 and they had two sons. There is no record of a marriage. Clearly, there needs to be a more careful examination of Mon'nop's chronology in order to resolve these glaring inconsistencies.

25. Bates 1938: 70-71.

26. Dr Neville Green, personal communication, 15 May 2008.

27. Bates 1928.

28. For an account of the Davidsons, see Georgeson 2006: 41-42.



New Norcia Cricket Team, c1905, pictured with the Victoria Plains team. Mon'nop, standing second from the left, played in the original New Norcia team of 1879. Reprinted from *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest* by Rev Joseph Flood.

When Bates made what was certainly her longest and most important visit in late November 1908, she had been employed for four years by the Western Australian government to collect information about the Aborigines and had developed a reputation through her extensive writing and public speaking as an authority on the subject. Consequently her visit was recorded by chronicler Fr Henry Altimira as a notable event:

Sat 28: Mrs Bates, an official of the government [appointed] to collect data relating to the Australian Aborigines, or rather those of Western Australia, telegraphed from Moora that she is going to come to this Mission, arriving very late. She asks that the sulky be sent to receive her in Mogumber. Her wishes will be carried out.

²⁹. In her 1924 article Bates told the story of the cricket team's first matches in Perth and Fremantle in 1879 when Mon'nop won the day at Fremantle with a magnificent running catch (Bates 284). Bates took this story from an account by Anon (Flood) 1908: 10. Strangely, Mon'nop does not appear in the photograph of the first New Norcia team, but in the second (see Green and Tilbrook 1989: 162-163). Bates' account of the 1905 match includes the following description of her own encouragement to the team after a poor first innings:

'Are you going to let the white man beat us?', I asked. I always pretend it was the 'us' that did the trick. When play resumed, runs came fast. All the old frenzy of the corroboree was put into the game. Every approach to the big score of the white players was greeted with shouts from the spectators, and as the numbers went up and up and finally passed the white men's score the excitement of the crowd was overwhelming (Bates 284).

According to the *Morning Herald's* report, however, the Perth team won the match despite the New Norcia team's plucky second innings recovery (*Morning Herald*, 8 March 1905). It is also recorded that the Aboriginal cricketers won the two other matches in the Perth series and the return match at New Norcia (Anon (Flood) 1908: 111-112).



Girls of St Joseph's orphanage, New Norcia, with their pets, c1905. Reprinted from *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest* by Rev Joseph Flood.

Sun 29: The Rt Rev Father Abbot received Mrs Bates in St Gertrude's College and not in the monastery parlour, as she wished. This famous woman appointed by the Government of W.A. to investigate and write about what is true and supposed about the language, customs etc of the Natives of this State, showed herself better informed about the behaviour of our Natives than we might have guessed. She said that the Natives who have left the Mission voluntarily or forcibly did so because the Rt Rev Father Abbot did not *allow them to live in the way they liked*. She says that they, instead, give as their whole reason that they did so because *the Father Abbot does not love them*. Mrs Bates adds that the Bishop [Salvado] was more accommodating with the customs of the Natives – perhaps too much so. She showed herself perfectly aware that the girls in the old times had a *holiday* each week, which they spent in the bush, where they used to meet the boys away from the vigilance of those who had charge of one group and the other. In short, she made it known that she was observing the difference there was in the way the Natives of this Mission were being treated from how they lived before, and she praised it with total frankness.³⁰

From Bates' own report on her visit in early December 1908 to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Charles Gale, we know that she had spent the previous few months in the north-east and Murchison districts interviewing Aboriginal informants and then returned to Perth.³¹ The aim of this tour, together with earlier visits to the goldfields and the south-west, was to collect information on what she called 'pedigrees' (genealogies), language, social classification and other aspects of Aboriginal society for

³⁰. Trans for the author by Fr David, OSB, New Norcia (emphasis in the original).

³¹. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

incorporation in a burgeoning manuscript entitled 'The Native Tribes of Western Australia'.³²

For three days she had waited at Moora for a reply from nearby 'Walebing' station, where she understood some Aborigines were working, to a request for a buggy to pick her up. When the owner, Henry Lefroy the younger, finally sent a telegram to say that he was 'too busy to attend', she remarked that it was the only 'discourtesy' she had experienced during her entire tour.³³ Arriving by train at Mogumber station at 6 pm on 28 November, she was driven in a mission sulky the 15 miles to New Norcia, where she arrived at 8.30 pm.

That she expected to be received by the Abbot in the monastery's parlour speaks of her sense of her own importance at this point. As Fr Altimira attested, her public lectures and newspaper articles had by then made her something of an authority on the Aborigines. Far from being a 'government official', however, she was in fact employed on a lowly junior clerk's wage of just eight shillings a day with a travelling allowance of seven shillings a day. Her government 'office' was a tiny cubby-hole in the Registrar-General's Department. She had always been prone to exaggerate her own status and importance, but Fr Altimira (and presumably Torres himself) was clearly impressed by the extent of her knowledge and gratified by her endorsement of the new regime's policy towards the Aborigines.

Torres had only recently returned from a four-month visit to the Kimberley district to establish what became known as the Drysdale River mission at Napier on Broome Bay. Confronted by the dramatic decline of the Aboriginal population of New Norcia, Torres had decided to make Drysdale River the new focus of Benedictine missionary activity, to make New Norcia monastery the mother-house for further Benedictine communities in Australia and to maximise the commercial potential of its estates for the necessary financial support.³⁴ To this end, he disposed of about 90 per cent of New Norcia's land, held mostly in pastoral leaseholds, had paddocks fenced for holding sheep and purchased mechanical harvesters and other equipment to increase



Rt Rev Fulgentius Torres DDOSB, c. 1905.
Reprinted from *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest* by Rev Joseph Flood.

32. Bates 1985.

33. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

34. Erickson 1971: 67.

productivity and reduce labour costs.³⁵ He employed a Chinese gardener who, he said, was able to do the work of four Aborigines. Torres encouraged the small resident adult Aboriginal population to find work on neighbouring farms, while maintaining the two orphanage schools for Aboriginal girls and boys, St Joseph's and St Mary's. At the same time, he embarked on an ambitious plan to build residential schools for the sons and daughters of Catholic rural families. By the time of Bates' visit in November 1908, the girls boarding school, St Gertrude's, was operating, while the construction of the boys school, St Ildephonsus, was well under way. In other words, New Norcia was no longer intended primarily 'to help the natives', but as a monastic and educational institution to which the Aborigines were only an appendage.

Sensing this, and perhaps frustrated by the diminished work opportunities, some of the adult Aboriginal men began to develop feelings of hostility towards New Norcia. At midnight on 31 December 1906 after what been an extremely hot day, more than 30 Aboriginal people descended on the settlement, banging tins, calling out, smashing four windows of the boys' orphanage and allegedly destroying earthenware pipes and a water tank. The police were sent for and three men – Emmanuel Jackamara, George Shaw and Lucas Moody – were charged and brought before magistrate Davidson on 11 January 1907. Despite their earlier plea to the Colonial Secretary to be tried in Perth where they claimed they had a better chance of obtaining justice, Davidson found them guilty and sentenced them to three months' imprisonment.³⁶

The source of the crowd's anger may have been the *Industrial Schools Act* (1874) which gave the monastery the power of legal guardian over any Aboriginal child (up to the age of 21) voluntarily 'surrendered' by their parents, a measure for which Salvado had strongly pressed.³⁷ Some of the parents may thus have been unhappy about Torres' restricting their access to their children, wanting to leave them and take them away as it suited them.³⁸ At the same time, there was difficulty about the issue of rations and blankets to Aborigines no longer employed by the mission but who could not find work elsewhere and were not entitled to the government subsidy.

Whether Bates was aware of this incident when she arrived two years later in 1908 is not clear, but it seems unlikely that Torres and the monks would have hidden it from her. In her own brief report of her six-day visit, she wrote:

Nov. 29. Worked in native cottages. Derby, Carnarvon, Northam and Esperance halfcastes now living in cottages. Some old New Norcia district halfcastes gave me information respecting other pedigrees of natives who were known to them. Went to the native school [St Joseph's] where I found several girls who had not forgotten their old Native Class Divisions.³⁹

³⁵. According to Anna Haebich, New Norcia's land was reduced from almost 967,000 acres to just over 100,000 acres by 1909, Haebich 1988: 16–17.

³⁶. For details of the case, including witnesses' depositions and the men's letters to the Colonial Secretary, see State Records Office of Western Australia, 3005 Files – Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1907/0108 and 1909/0505. Anna Haebich (1988: 17–19) provides a general account of the trouble and its origins but identifies the wrong year. The subject merits closer investigation.

³⁷. Russo 1980: 188–192.

³⁸. According to Green and Tilbrook (1989: xix), the Aborigines 'stormed the orphanage to free their children', but there is no clear evidence to support this claim.

In a subsequent letter to the Colonial Secretary asking for the reimbursement of costs incurred in her travels, she also revealed that she had given a shilling each to seven 'old natives' for them to buy stores.⁴⁰ Far from being charity, however, this was payment for information they had provided. When she had begun her fieldwork, she had not thought 'that I should have to pay so much, and to every individual native whose advice I sought, but I found by experience that I could gain nothing from them without paying for it'.⁴¹

What transpired in the conversations between Bates, Torres and others was not recorded (the Abbot did not keep a diary for this period), but we do know that Torres spoke to her about his recent travels in the north, something she would have understood better than most people because of her time there. We also know that he presented her with a copy of a recently-published book on New Norcia by Rev James Flood, an Irish priest who reputedly had been sent over from Melbourne in 1904 (as some other priests were) to cure a drinking problem.⁴² From the chronicle entry, it appears that Bates expressed her approval of Torres' new regime and was critical of some of Salvado's more permissive policies, notably the weekly semi-supervised 'holiday' in the bush for the boys and girls from the orphanages. At the same time, she evidently believed that the exodus of many of the remaining adult Aborigines was due to the fact that Torres made them feel unwelcome.

Most importantly, it was on this 1908 visit that Bates probably recorded in her notebooks a good deal of the surviving genealogical, linguistic and other information relating to the fast-disappearing traditional culture of the New Norcia people (whom she called 'Nyeerggu') which was duly integrated into 'The Native Tribes of Western Australia'. However, it was from Mon'nop (dingo walking in single file) and his sister Bin'narian (dingo digging) at Cannington Reserve some time earlier that she recorded the 'Dreaming' legend of Nyeerrgu-water and the origins of the dingo totem. In an article in *The Australasian* in January 1925 (which was repeated with a little more detail in the same newspaper six year later), Bates prefaced her account of the legend by suggesting that the Aborigines had found dingoes already in residence when they reached the Victoria Plains and that they became an important part of their diet, necessitating restraint on its consumption by means of a totemic tabu.⁴³

The essence of the legend is that in the *Nyitting*, or 'ice-cold times', two large dingoes travelling northward from Balbarup (Bridgetown/Manjimup area) discover two men throwing boomerangs in the bush and promptly eat them. Subsequently, feeling thirsty, they search for water, the female dingo being successful after digging a long tunnel in the earth. Two Aboriginal *mulgar guttuck*, or sorcerers, Beenjerri and Jirgabi,

39. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

40. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

41. Bates to Under Secretary, 20 April 1909, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

42. Anon (Flood) 1908. Flood died in 1931 and an obituary appeared in *The Record*, 8 August 1931.

43. It is now well established that the introduction of the dingo by the Aborigines was fairly recent, dating back to not much more than 5,000 years ago (Breckwoldt 1988). Consequently it cannot have been present at the time of the first Aboriginal settlement of the Victoria Plains which was at least 30,000 or 40,000 years ago.

subsequently visit the site and learn the story from the spirits of the two dingoes who have in the meantime turned into stone at the mouth of the tunnel:

And Beenjerri and Jirgabi said to the spirit dogs: 'We will keep the laws you made, and we will tell all our *moorurt* (relations) to keep them when they come to sit beside Nyeerrgu water, and the dingoes will be our *bo'ringur* (elder brothers, totems), but as it was the mother dog who found the water, we must all follow the mother dog and not the father dog. He 'comes behind'. [In other words, the mother's line of descent was to be followed, not the father's.]

All Beenjerri's and Jirgabi's people from that time were dingo totems, and because the water was sweet and good that the woman dog had brought, they never ate the mother dog. Only male dogs were eaten.⁴⁴

The legend goes on to relate what happens to a hungry young man out hunting who defies the tabu and kills and eats two female dingo pups. Chased by thousands of dingoes across the plain, he finally climbs a huge tree only for them to dig it out at the roots. Left behind to this day are the great holes they dug and little red pebbles which are the drops of blood that splashed everywhere when he crashed to earth, still clinging to the tree.

The moral of the legend is that female dingoes and pups should never be killed and that people who wish to drink from the spring should enter the cave absolutely naked and never touch its sides for fear of diabolical punishment. Before drinking, men were required to strike the water with their *marra gobbul* (palm of their hand) and women with their *goor'deen* or *yor'la* (wooden or bark scoop) to make the water follow them to the *taa'*, or entrance of the tunnel. According to Bates, Salvado himself attested to the power of the legend not long after his arrival at New Norcia. Travelling home from a hunting expedition with a group of Aborigines, they reached Nyeerrgu-water, a tunnel cave with a permanent spring. Unwilling to take off his clothes but assured by his companions that as a *jangga* (returned spirit), he would not be harmed, Salvado entered the cave and brought back water for his companions who had been following him in single file.⁴⁵

In his own account of the religious beliefs of the people of the Victoria Plains, Salvado recorded what was clearly the same incident:

A large number of natives came to see me one evening asking for water. The first ones took all I had and drank it, and the others, about fifteen of them, asked me to go to the pool nearby to get some for them. I showed them the bucket, and told them to go themselves. They all fell silent, and no-one dared to take the bucket, or tell me what they were afraid of, until, about an hour later, one of the said respectfully: 'N-alla cape uoto cherchet cuaragn: nunda uoto quaragn iuad.' ('If we go and take the water we will be killed, but if you go, you will be alright.') I quickly saw that they had some superstition on the subject, and said that I would go with them, with the idea of banishing their false fears. As I went off to the pool or stream, they made me go ahead, and all followed me in single file, in deep silence. While they were quenching their thirst, I started to move away, but immediately they shouted, 'Nanap, nanap' ('Stop, Stop!'), fearing that I was going to leave

44. Bates 1925.

45. Bates 1925.

them on their own. As we began to go back to the hut, they ran ahead and preceded me, again in single file, so that I came last. When I reproached them for their superstitious ideas they replied condescendingly: 'Nunda tonga but' ('You don't know anything about it!').⁴⁶

Dom Bernard Rooney has suggested that Bates' legend is no more than a fanciful re-working of Salvado's published anecdote,⁴⁷ but the names and other details she provides suggest authenticity. What she called 'Nyeergu-water', the tunnel spring that is the focus of the legend, has long been known as 'Nergo well', probably taking its name from the Nyungah word for mosquito.⁴⁸ She also related in her re-worked account that the totemic tradition had come to an end in 1913 with the death of Mon'nop and Bin'narian.⁴⁹ With their passing, the stones that held the *jangga*, or spirits, of the ancestral dingoes split and broke, allowing them to follow Mon'nop and Bin'narian to *Kurannup-Nyeerganup*, the Bibbulmun after-world, 'where all the dingo totemists had gone before them'.⁵⁰ For all its poetic appeal, this postscript sounds more like the work of her imagination.

What transpired on Bates' last visit to New Norcia in the first half of 1912 is not known as there is no record. At that time she had just parted company with the two other members of the Cambridge University anthropological expedition, AR Radcliffe-Brown and Grant Watson, and was no longer employed by the Western Australian government. Subsequently, unable to secure the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, she moved in stages from Perth to Eucla, then to Fowler's Bay in South Australia for four years and finally in September 1919 to Ooldea Siding on the newly-completed Transcontinental Railway.

Bates had no further communication with New Norcia until August 1935 when she was about to leave Ooldea and begin writing up her ethnographic material in

⁴⁶. Stormon 1977: 129. Salvado made no reference in his memoirs and notes to the dingo totem in the New Norcia area. In all probability, it was the familial totem of one of the six local 'skin' or intermarrying groups. He called the Victoria Plains people *Murara*, also referred to as *Mourin* and *Maura*, probably taken from their name for a pool in what became known as the Moore River and where the mission was finally located (Russo 1980: 150) and also the likely origin of the name of nearby Moora township. The surveyor Philip Chauncy who made a visit there referred to the New Norcia area as *Mourin* ('Tales of the Australian Natives', *Melbourne Church News*, 28 March 1868). Salvado at no time used the name *Nyeergu*, which was employed by Bates for both the district and its people. Bates' general term for the people of the Victoria Plains was *Yangur/Yabbaru Bibbulmun* (Bates 1985: 54). The linguistic sub-group of the south-west Nyungah language to which the Victoria Plains people belonged, *Tjapanmay*, was identified by Wilf Douglas (1968: 1-3). In more recent times, the name *Yuet* (*Juet*, *Yued*, *Yowat*, *Yuat*) has been used for the Victoria Plains people, perhaps reflecting the designation originally given by Norman Tindale in his 'tribal' map of Australia of 1940, which identified the Victoria Plains area as *Juet/Juat* (Tindale 1974). There is no previous historical record of the use of this apparently unlikely but not untypical name, which is derived from the Nyungah exclamation *yuwat*, or *yuward*, meaning 'no!'. RM Berndt wrote that 'The Aborigines [Salvado] came among in 1846 were the Yuet (Juet) who occupied the area around New Norcia and Moora' (Berndt 1977: 270). Since Tindale and Berndt, the name has become common currency and, as we have seen above (footnote 18), has been accepted by the Aborigines of the area who have used it in a Native Title claim. It may be a case of life imitating anthropology.

⁴⁷. Dom Bernard Rooney, personal communication, 22 April 2008.

Adelaide for *The Advertiser* with the assistance of the journalist, Ernestine Hill. Writing to Abbot Catalan, she sought information about the progress of the mission since her last visit: 'a kindly statement from you, as to the progress New Norcia has made during the years between, as to the seminaries for boys, and girls etc. [and] ... the poor dying native "children"'.⁵¹ Referring to Bishop Gibney as well, she continued: 'You have both followed Christ's own pitying law, which I myself have humbly tried to follow during my thirty five years service amongst them'.⁵²

Describing the Moore River Native Settlement established by Chief Protector AO Neville at nearby Mogumber in 1918 as 'a mistake', she was pleased that the Abbot had been in touch with its management. Indeed, she observed that 'If you were to justifyingly take over the castes [sic] at that settlement there might be less pain and trouble to its poor inmates, but I realise that they would be a great responsibility for you. Their condition makes me very sad'.⁵³

She sought information about the group 'waters' (homelands) of the adult Aborigines then remaining at New Norcia, including the relatives of 'the last of the Nyeer'gu (New Norcia) dingo totem men', Mon'nop and Bin'narian. In fact, she told Catalan, she would have liked to obtain the totem and group 'waters' of all 125 Aborigines she understood to be at New Norcia but realised that this would have meant a personal visit which was now beyond her.

Finally, she offered a paean of praise for the work that had been done by the Benedictines:

With all and every care your own Mission, the Drysdale and other missions give them, they are a dying race and I love to think of your Drysdale Mission working and making their passing easier for those poor cannibals of that far northern area. If anyone could have made a purely aboriginal 'province' your Mission would have accomplished it in the years of steady progress but Bishop Salvado and father Garrido and all those fine men of the Mission's early years realised that they could not stem the tide and their natives passed on and your forbears made them happy in their passing which is what I have tried to do through my years of service to them.⁵⁴

48. Dom Bernard Rooney, personal communication, 23 May 2008. Located about 20 kilometres to the east of New Norcia and not far from the town of Yerecoin (whose name is also most likely a derivative of Nyeergu), the well was visited by the author in the company of local Yerecoin farmer, Clive Duggan, and postgraduate student Derek Jowle on 18 May 2008. Nergo Well is a circular pool of about 10 metres diameter, now entirely covered with a thicket of tall rushes and with no sign of a tunnel or of the stone footings sometimes built by the monks at other wells. There are, however, the remains close nearby of jam wood slabs which may have been used to line the top of the well or for a windlass. While there is nothing resembling the holes dug by the dingoes in the legend, there are pebbles or lumps of red haematite to be found nearby.

49. Bates recorded that Mon'nop died at Guildford in early 1914, Bates 1985: 52. In fact, he died aged 65 on 27 September 1913 at Perth Hospital and is buried in a communal grave at Perth's Karrakatta Cemetery. So far, the details of the death and burial of his sister, Bin'naran (Beenaran), have not been found.

50. Bates 1931.

51. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

52. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

53. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

While she professed to remember Bishop Salvado with great affection, she had probably never met him. She had arrived in Fremantle from England on 7 September 1899 and he was to depart for the last time for Rome on 30 November 1899. Always inclined to mythologise her past, Bates was now beginning to believe her own wishful thinking.

When Abbot Catalan duly sent her some up-to-date information, together with a copy of Rev Flood's book and a pamphlet on the Drysdale River Mission, she was delighted.⁵⁵ On 5 October 1935 she wrote to him:

I cannot express the pleasure I felt in renewing contact with New Norcia friends. I had spent so many happy days there given the absolute freedom of the place and hearing from the late Dr Torres and Farther Martinez so much of Benedictine history. When I read your kindly letter yesterday, the impulse came up on me to fly over to New Norcia and greet old, and make new, friends. Your mission and the dear and now dead Trappist Mission have been close to my heart always, as in your dealings with our diocese under the jurisdiction of New Norcia was extended to Southern Cross.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, she required further information and photographs in order to bring her account of New Norcia up to date.

After the publication of her book, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia*,⁵⁷ in late 1938 she sent a copy to the Abbot, telling him how much she wanted to visit New Norcia again and renew her friendship with 'dear little Brother Vermundo [Veremundo]' (if he was still alive), Frs Miro and Ramiro, Fr Planas, the five musicians 'and many others'.⁵⁸

While she admired the work of Salvado and Torres, Daisy Bates never faltered in her belief that Christian missionary endeavour with traditional Aborigines was ultimately futile. Moreover, in *The Passing of the Aborigines* (itself her epitaph for the whole race and culture) her fatalistic remarks about the Aborigines of New Norcia suggested that even the best-intended kindness was fatal:

Children of the woodland, dwelling in squalor that could not be avoided in their stone-walled houses, closed in from the air that that was their breath of life, in the heart of summer and the dank cold of winter, they lost all touch with their native earth. They slept on beds – but they could not learn cleanliness. They wore clothing – and developed chest complaints and fevers. They died and the dead were carried out of the little houses, and others went to live in them – a superstitious people with a horror of the dead, there they too died. Alas for the poor 'little brothers of the dingo' – civilization was a cloak that they donned readily enough, but they could not wear it and live.⁵⁹

54. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

55. Catalan to Bates, 24 September 1935, Daisy Bates Papers, MS 365/07/429–430, National Library of Australia.

56. Bates to Catalan, 5 October 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

57. Bates 1938.

58. Bates to Catalan, 26 March 1939, folio 01411, New Norcia Archives.

59. Bates 1938: 67.

In her last letter to Abbot Catalan of 5 December 1941, written from Wynbring Siding in South Australia where she was vainly attempting to resume the work she had given up six years earlier at Ooldea, she enclosed yet another copy of her book, telling him: 'I have such charming memories of the old Monastery of thirty or forty years ago that I am a very frequent "Dream Visitor" in the quiet Evening of my Life'.⁶⁰ She also remembered her old informant Mon'nop as 'a quiet and useful old fellow in his day'.⁶¹ During the last ten years of her life her memories of New Norcia were no doubt a mixture of sadness at the passing of the Victoria Plains people and happiness that she had found at the monastery a microcosm of the old European Catholic civilisation to which she had been introduced as a child by the sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary at Roscrea, County Tipperary.

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⁶⁰. Bates to Catalan, 5 December 1941, folio 01374, New Norcia Archives.

⁶¹. Bates to Catalan, 5 December 1941, folio 01374, New Norcia Archives.

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Notes and Documents

Oral histories of childhood and playlore: the Aboriginal Children's Play Project, Museum Victoria

Kate Darian-Smith

The Aboriginal Children's Play Project (ACPP) comprises a unique and highly significant oral history collection documenting the experiences of childhood, games and growing up in Indigenous communities in urban and rural locations across a 50-year span. It consists of almost 70 recorded interviews, some stretching for up to two hours, that were conducted in the mid-1990s with Aboriginal children, teenagers and adults. The collection also includes some photographic material, interview transcript summaries and fieldwork datasheets. Located in Museum Victoria, as part of its expansive Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC), the Aboriginal play collection is a valuable, but hitherto unknown, historical resource for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and researchers.¹

The ACPP was initiated in 1991 by the noted folklorist, author and academic June Factor as part of the ACFC, which she founded in the 1970s and donated to Museum Victoria in 1999. Factor had obtained a grant from the Stegley Foundation, which covered the costs of the interview and fieldwork program. The overarching aim of the project was to collect oral interviews that focused on the playlore of Aboriginal children (activities initiated by children themselves), as well as playlore that was *for* and *about* children (initiated or directed by adults for children). This focus on play marked a departure from previous, albeit limited, research undertaken on the experiences of childhood in specific Aboriginal communities, or where Aboriginal children's activities have been primarily perceived in relation to the acquisition of adult skills and knowledge.

¹ The Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC) was donated to Museum Victoria in 1999 and is among the most comprehensive collections of folklore for and about children internationally. The ACFC consists of more than 10,000 files and documents listing children's games, rhymes and other kinds of children's folklore; photographs and other audio-visual materials; and play artefacts and specialist collections. It was the first Museum Victoria collection to be placed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World register. See <<http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/Infosheets/Australian-Childrens-Folklore-Collection/>>

In selecting participants for the ACPP, the interview program sought to include Aboriginal people of different ages, and those living in a range of urban, rural and regional locations so as to record the diversity of experiences of childhood across geographical place and generations. A non-Indigenous interviewer, Judy McKinty, was appointed to the project and she followed up on initial contacts provided by the then Koori Education Officer at Museum Victoria, Joy Sellars, and drew upon the assistance of other Aboriginal community leaders. McKinty found that the responses to her requests for interviews were greeted with generosity and that a 'snowball' effect occurred as those interviewed suggested family and friends who might be interested in contributing.

Interviews were conducted around Victoria: in Warrnambool (including Framlingham Aboriginal Settlement), East Gippsland (including Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust), the Healesville area in central Victoria and in suburban Melbourne. They were informal in structure, and were recorded – usually audiotaped, but sometimes via written notes – in homes, workplaces, schools and outdoors. Those interviewed ranged from children aged as young as four years, through primary and high school age, to adults; the two oldest participants were respected elders aged in their 70s. In some instances, group interviews were conducted and these tapped into shared reminiscences across and between generations. The majority of participants had grown up in Victoria, although a handful had spent their childhood years in New South Wales, at La Perouse in Sydney and in rural towns. The collection provides insight into childhoods spent in places ranging from Cummeragunja Mission to inner-city Fitzroy in Melbourne, with memories that not only reflect on experiences of hardship and racism, but also attest to the strength of community bonds, the ties with culture and the centrality of family life. And because these are oral accounts, there are many fine yarns and stories about the pleasures and fun, and the occasional bewilderments and hurts, of childhood.

As an oral history collection, the ACPP documents various experiences of school, with many of those interviewed reporting on the discrimination they were accorded by non-Indigenous teachers and sometimes students – although there are also a few accounts of teachers who offered inspiration and support. Activities that occurred in the school playground included 'hanging out with friends', imaginative games, building cubby-houses and climbing trees. There are descriptions of organised sports, such as football, cricket, rounders and netball and, for younger respondents, basketball and baseball. Games mentioned that were popular include marbles, string games, skipping games and rhymes, yo-yos, hopscotch, chasey, clapping games and team games such as Red Rover, British Bulldog, What's the Time, Mr Wolf? and Cowboys and Indians. Many participants reported that while girls and boys, and older and younger children, did not play together in the school playground, they certainly did so out of school. At home, many games were taught to children by parents and older siblings.

The ACPP also provides a record of the objects that were incorporated into children's play. Things like bikes were purchased, while other things were made by parents, relatives or the children themselves. Participants have strong memories of playing with homemade toys, including bilycarts (remembered in great detail), dolls, little cars formed out of clay, shanghais constructed from saplings and old tyre tubes, tin rollers where a can is pulled along by a piece of string, and kites fashioned from

brown paper and string. Other everyday objects could be transformed through imagination: for instance, old brown beer bottles stood in as 'students' or 'customers' in games of schools or shops, and sheets could be 'wings' when pretending to fly. Daily chores also offered some opportunities for play, so that the collection of firewood could lead to games with twigs and sticks. Singing and music, whether listening or playing an instrument like the guitar, are recalled as favourite pastimes for some. Some participants also mentioned listening to radio serials and watching television. Younger respondents indicated that they liked to play board games at home and spent time playing with electronic toys such as Nintendo and on computers. Pets, including dogs, cats, birds and even domesticated possums, are also remembered, across all ages, as companions and the source of amusing incidents.

Many older participants recalled playing in the bush and swimming in rivers with other children as well as fishing, trapping rabbits and gathering food (fruit, mushrooms, grubs, eggs and so on) with adults. There are some accounts of using mud and stones for artwork, or painting bodies with ochre. These times spent in the bush are seen – across the collection of interviews – as among the highlights of childhood, as are the stories that were told to children by adults. Some of the Aboriginal participants who are now parents and grandparents reflected on the differences between children's play in the late 1990s and that of earlier decades. For example, Sandy Atkinson, who was born in 1932 and grew up at Cummeragunja Mission on the New South Wales side of the Murray River, reflected that during his childhood, unlike today, 'older people had a fair bit of control' over the behaviour of children and young adults. Recognising the difficulties in comparing children's play between generations, Atkinson nonetheless felt that he enjoyed a greater sense of freedom during his childhood at Cummeragunja than that experienced by his own children.² This theme of carefree days is, not surprisingly, emphasised more by older interviewees. Those who were interviewed while they were still at primary or high school are recounting their daily lives and contemporary experiences – talking about their present rather than their past.

An overview of some of the material contained in one interview provides a glimpse of the depth of social history contained within this remarkable oral collection. Sisters Irene Swindle and Josephine Smith, interviewed at Coranderrk Koori Cooperative in Healesville, Victoria in 1996, remembered a childhood spent initially at Deniliquin in rural New South Wales, briefly in Sydney and later at Healesville. At Deniliquin, the family lived on the fringe of the town along the riverbank, in a house made of kerosene tins with a dirt floor. There was an icebox for a fridge; fruit and vegetables would be purchased from an old Chinese man with a horse and cart; and the girls would be sent to the dairy to get a billy of milk. They spoke of schoolground games like skipping, Fly and Beetle (games played with sticks), Drop the Hanky, Leap Frog and Tiggy. Activities at home, some taught to the girls and their siblings by their parents, included Dots and Dashes, Hide the Penny and a variation of Noughts and Crosses played on drawn-up cardboard with buttons as markers. Other games involved putting penny and two-bob coins in sequence on fingers, and doing puzzles that were printed

² John 'Sandy' Atkinson, interviewed by Judy McKinty at the Koori Heritage Trust, 1 July 1997; Tape and Summary Transcript of Interview held in the ACCP, Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria.

on the back of matchboxes. Along with other children, the two sisters spent much time at the river, where they would see who could remain under water for longest or dive for a bottle or tin thrown into the water. When asked if any distinctive Aboriginal games were played, the sisters recalled that they made 'mud switches', where a ball of mud or clay was skillfully flicked from the end of a flexible tree branch.

My own research on children's play in school playgrounds from the 1950s to the present indicates that many of the games that were played at school and at home by ACPP participants are similar to those remembered by non-Indigenous informants who were children during the same historical periods.³ The broader social and cultural context for such play was, of course, often very different for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous children. When the American children's folklorist, Dorothy Howard, visited Australia in 1954-55 to survey Australian children's play activities, she was very interested in Aboriginal children's play practices, including their use of string games and other toys. Howard visited the government school near the La Perouse Aboriginal Reserve on Botany Bay and observed Aboriginal boys and girls.⁴ But despite Howard's early interest in playlore, including that of Aboriginal children, the documentation of children's play in Australia is patchy. In this sense, the ACPP collection is a significant resource – not just for Aboriginal histories, but also for understanding Australian playlore as a barometer of cultural values and of children's extraordinary capacity for creativity and linguistic, technological and cultural adaptation.

At the time of the original ACPP interview in the 1990s, participants stipulated their preferred conditions for any future research and public use of their recorded interview and associated visual materials. For several reasons, the majority of participants elected to apply some form of access restriction. The transfer of the ACPP to Museum Victoria in 1999 meant that, because the Museum had no direct agreement with the interviewees, all the original access arrangements were frozen. With the aim of making the oral histories open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and researchers, as well as to its curatorial, exhibition and promotional staff, in 2006 Museum Victoria successfully sought additional funding from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria to re-contact individuals and their families to secure formal permission for access to the material.

The original interviewer, Judy McKinty was contracted to undertake this task and she worked with Museum staff from its History and Technology Department (where the ACFC is located) and its Indigenous Cultures Department to compile a list of participant contact details, and to develop a consent form and information sheet. The new consent form has an option for participants to appoint family representatives to be responsible for access arrangements in the event of the participant's death. Following the lengthy period of locating the interviewees, which McKinty acknowledges

3. This research-in-progress is funded by an Australian Research Council Grant LP0669282 'Childhood, Tradition and Change: a national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's folklore', in association with the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria.

4. Darian-Smith 2005: 32.

unfolded through a combination of 'persistence, patience, goodwill and serendipity',⁵ permission forms were eventually signed with almost all the original participants.

McKinty has commented that during the interviewing done in the 1990s, as well as when she re-contacted participants almost a decade later, she asked individuals about their hopes for the future use of the interview materials:

Unfailingly and unanimously, they replied that they would like the information to come back out in the community in some way, so that they can share it with their families, and particularly so that the children can learn about their own culture, and how childhood was in the past.⁶

From August 2008, researchers and other interested community members are able to consult the ACPD materials (in line with access requirements) at Museum Victoria. This marks the first step in bringing this remarkable oral history collection to wider attention. This collection makes it possible for Aboriginal children's play to be more centrally incorporated in the historical record and for the continuity, change and adaptation so evident in these varied and engaging accounts of Aboriginal childhoods to be appreciated more fully.

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⁵. McKinty 2008: 1.

⁶. McKinty 2008: 3.

Not tigers – sisters! Advances in the interpretation of historical source spellings for Dhudhuroa and Waywurru

Christina Eira

Introduction

Two major language groups of north-east Victoria are approaching an important milestone after ten years of research, analysis and community language planning. The current language worker, Tom Kinchela, is at the final stages of preparing a dictionary for the Waywurru and Dhudhuroa Language Program, complete with cultural notes, photographic illustrations and a linguistic introduction. This represents a very significant advance in the possibilities for these languages, as neither has been spoken as an everyday language for several generations. Because of this, the work has relied heavily on written documents of two main types: (i) historical sources of 19th century speakers such as 'Joe' Mul ler min ner and 'Black Mag', as recorded by GA Robinson, Thomas Mitchell, RH Mathews and others, and (ii) recent analysis of these sources by linguists, primarily Barry Blake and Julie Reid. The work of the communities and their language workers has included collation and analysis of all available wordlists and, crucially for the present paper, the development of an orthography which represents the sounds of the languages in a way satisfactory to their new community of speaker/learners. One of my tasks as consultant linguist has been the phonological analysis of each word in the database (around 1,000 in total) in order to respell it in the community orthography.

This implementation of the orthography has necessitated a re-evaluation of both historical sources and the reconstructed spellings previously proposed in the academic arena. While the majority of these reconstructed spellings¹ have been confirmed and hence simply transcribed into the new orthography, advances have been made in the interpretation of quite a number of words, with the benefit of an extended period of

¹ Blake and Reid 1999, 2002. Note that in Blake and Reid's work, the label Pallanganmiddang is used, according to the main word list (GA Robinson) for what the community now call Waywurru. See discussion under the following section.

study and access to a wide range of sources. In particular, incorporation of GA Robinson's syllable and consonant cluster breaks has been highly pertinent to the reinterpretation of several grapheme sequences. This, together with analysis of some of the more consistent spelling choices by individual collectors and comparison across different collections, has now given rise to a much clearer and more definitive identification of more than 60 forms. The purpose of this paper is to discuss this reanalysis of the historical sources, maintain currency of the updated forms of the words in the academic community, and present the new community-developed orthography.

It will be of interest to preview just one example of the updated pronunciations as reflected in the new spellings before moving to a general background of the two language groups. (I will use italics throughout to denote current community spelling, while angle brackets < > denote historical and academic source spellings. Slash brackets / / and square brackets [] are used for International Phonetic Alphabet according to standard linguistics conventions, to indicate phonemic and phonetic transcriptions respectively.)

The Waywuru word *dika* 'sister' was reconstructed as <tayiga> /taiga/ in Blake and Reid (1999). Historical sources list <ti.ger> (Robinson), <tiega> and <tiga> (Mitchell). It should be kept in mind that the collectors were relying largely on the spelling conventions of English for their records. In this light, while /taiga/ is a feasible reconstruction for <ti.ger>, it seems less likely for <tiga>. Taking <tiega> into account clearly eliminates /aɪ/ as a possible first vowel, especially when compared with other uses of <ie> by Mitchell: <jiemba> *djimba* 'star', <tierah> *dheerra* 'tongue', and <yiera> *djirri* 'man, person'. Hence, not /taiga/ but *dika* 'sister'.

The Waywuru and Dhudhuroa language groups

The Waywuru and Dhudhuroa language communities are working in collaboration on their distinct, but related, languages. With a northern border of the Murray River, the territories of the two groups share a north-south border from around Wodonga, with Waywuru to the west, featuring the Ovens River, and Dhudhuroa to the east, featuring the Mitta Mitta (see map).

While the name 'Dhudhuroa' (in various forms including Theddora) is well known for this language, the name for Waywuru has a more chequered history, labelled Pallanganmiddang (Pallanganmiddah, Pal-ler an mitter) in two of its main word lists as well as in the major academic sources to date. There are many questions around original names for the languages and peoples of this region in general,² and so the terms used in this paper reflect current community decisions and usage. Although representatives of Waywuru people accept the designation *Pallanganmiddang* as applied to their language records (as observed at a series of language planning meetings), they consistently use the term 'Waywuru' (or sometimes 'Waveroo') to refer to themselves. In the present, 'Waywuru' has become the term conventionally

² Wesson 2000.



Waywurru and Dhudhuroa approximate locations. Map courtesy Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages.

used in the community for the language also. Wesson (2000) reproduces the various references to the name as found in historical sources.

Given the likely reality of linguistic relationships prior to colonisation as well as the status of the 19th-century records, it has been most appropriate to assign each name not so much to a single, clearly-defined language as to a linguistically coherent range of language. For this purpose, all available data was analysed into two language groups of similar internal composition in terms of lexicon and some grammatical items. The Waywurru group encompasses sources labelled Pallanganmiddang, Upper Murray, Minubuddong, Kilure, Yackandandah and Wangaratta, as well as some unlabelled wordlists collected under the names of Robertson, Andrews and Yackandandah Bank Museum. The Dhudhuroa group subsumes the lists labelled Dhudhuroa and 'Barwidgee, from Wodonga along Upper Murray'. Although it is possible that in some cases these lists did reflect identifiable dialects with identifiable groups of speakers, similarities between lists and dissimilarities between the groups which emerge (compared also with other languages/language groups of the area) are sufficient to assert a basic division into two language groups without controversy.

Different researchers' assessments of the level of shared vocabulary may vary slightly, due to fine differences of emphasis and implementation of criteria for 'same' and 'different' words. However, the overall outcome for language identification purposes is the same. Blake and Reid (1999) assess the sources in our 'Waywurru group' as sharing between 61 and 90 per cent of their vocabulary (my figures 64%–88%,

and just over half between the Murdock (Wangaratta) list and the others), and only 10.7 per cent with the Dhudhuroa sources overall. Blake and Reid (2002) record common vocabulary between the Dhudhuroa and Barwidgee lists at 62 per cent (my figures 58%), but 30 per cent between Barwidgee and Pallanganmiddang. This suggests that the Barwidgee list may have been drawn from a dialect on the border between the central areas of the two languages – but in any case shows a significantly greater alignment with Dhudhuroa.³

A community orthography

Community research into the Waywurru and Dhudhuroa languages has been under way formally since 1997. In the process of that research, language workers Lisa Arnold, Pettina Love and more recently Tom Kinchela developed an orthography in alignment with phonological analysis of collated sources. The final version, completed through consultation with Traditional Owners, community members and myself, is summarised in the tables below. This orthography is now in use for preparation of speeches, songs and various materials, including a dictionary in the last stages of publication.

Table 1: Summary of orthography: Consonants

(Tabulated according to traditional articulation – see notes below)

		apical		laminal		dorsal
	labial	alveolar	retroflex	dental	palatal	velar
stop	b	d	rd	dh	dj	k
nasal	m	n	rn	nh	ny	ng
lateral		l	rl	lh	ly	
rhotic		rr				
approximant	(w)				y	(w)

Notes:

- (1) Although at least two rhotic phonemes are likely historically, the distinction between them is not recoverable from available sources. There are a very small number of exceptions to this. For example, the place name *Wangangarra* is spelt in English 'Wonnangatta', suggesting an original rolled or tapped rhotic. Words such as these are annotated with explanatory notes in the forthcoming dictionary.
- (2) Palatals are now generally pronounced respectively as the affricate [tʃ], and consonant clusters [nj, lj].
- (3) The retroflex and laminodental series are being re-taught as target articulations, but it is too soon to make a statement about actual community norms of pronunciation.
- (4) While it is accepted that voicing is not distinctive, articulation now alternates between [+vce] and [-vce + asp] rather than [+vce] and [-vce], as presumed for the historical language.⁴

³ Blake & Reid (1999) suggest both this explanation and the possibility that it is a mixed list.

⁴ The conditions for the contemporary alternation approach a free alternation. It is unclear at this stage whether a more predictive environmental conditioning was in effect for the historical language.

Table 2: Summary of orthography: Vowels

Vowels	Graphemes	Examples
a	a	<i>bandjina</i> 'baby, child' (Dh) ⁵
a:	aa	<i>yaaka</i> 'reed spear' (Dh)
e	e	<i>bedha</i> 'mosquito' (WW)
e:	eh	<i>kehkoa</i> 'black ant' (Dh)
i	i	<i>maliwa</i> 'swan' (Dh)
i:	ee	<i>birreedba</i> 'damper' (Dh)
ɔ	o	<i>morroka</i> 'young man' (WW)
o:	or	<i>borbangka</i> place name, interpreted as 'meeting of the waters' ⁶ (WW)
u	u	<i>kunarru bununa</i> 'runaway' (WW)
u:	uu	<i>dudhuu</i> 'canoe' (Dh)

Notes:

- (1) The long vowel /o:/ is the contemporary target pronunciation – it may have been lower historically.
- (2) The spelling of /o:/ gave rise to much discussion, and several options were discussed – none of them free from difficulties. The problem for the above choice is of course contextual ambiguity between <or> and <o> + retroflex. It was decided to resolve this by use of a dot for the long vowel where necessary, as in *bikor.nba* 'net bag' (Dh). Fortunately, this ambiguity is relevant to only six words in the database.
- (3) In word-final position, /u:/ is more likely to be pronounced [u:].

The orthography above implies a phonological analysis which differs to some extent from that of Blake and Reid (1999) and Blake and Reid (2002).⁷ Firstly, in terms of the consonants, my analysis fills out the inventory to include the full contrast set of retroflex, dental and lateral consonants. Blake and Reid list the retroflex, dental and palatal laterals as only tentative for Waywurru, and omit them from the inventory for Dhudhuroa. Secondly, for the vowels, we accept the five-vowel system implied by RH Mathews, rather than the reduction to /a u ɪ/ in BR-Dh (BR-P maintains a five-vowel distinction for Waywurru).

It should be understood that these differences are related more to project decision-making than definitive phonological analysis, as the evidence for either analysis is somewhat thin on the ground. The evidence which supports these decisions is discussed below.

⁵ The abbreviations Dh(udhuroa) and W(ay)W(urru) will be used from this point.

⁶ See Wesson 2001.

⁷ Henceforth BR-P and BR-Dh respectively.

Lateral consonants

The main evidence for inclusion of the retroflex lateral is the verbal suffix *-darli* (meaning unknown). I suggest a retroflex in this suffix on the basis that (i) Robinson emphasises the lateral <pay.woo.dal.le> (WW), as RH Mathews also seems to in his Dhudhuroa list <butta'le>, and (ii) all other examples in the historical sources involve an <arl> spelling. The spellings <l.l> and <'l> exemplify some of the various means that language collectors resorted to, to indicate their perception of something unfamiliar to them. There are, however, issues for the morphological analysis assumed above for <butta'le>: firstly, that the suffix appears otherwise to be restricted to Waywurru, and, secondly, that removal of the putative suffix appears to result in a monosyllabic stem, although this cannot be certain.

The only possible evidence for a dental lateral is *balhelhua-yawarro* 'old man kangaroo' (WW). This word is fairly problematic to interpret overall, in its single appearance as <pahlélhwahöwerōw>.⁸ I suggest that <hl> and <lh> may be attempts to represent the dental lateral, by analogy with English *th*.

For the palatal lateral, there is again only one piece of evidence, in *molyan* (WW). The source spelling in this case is <moilun>, obtained from a manuscript by J Wilkinson (surveyor).⁹ I have taken this spelling to indicate a perceptual modification of the vowel in anticipation of the following palatal. Although this evidence is decidedly meagre, there is certainly a case to be made for assuming a complete set of laterals for Waywurru rather than missing one slot.

In the case of Dhudhuroa, clearly the evidence for a full contrast set is somewhat lacking, limited to a single tentative retroflex lateral in one word. As these two language groups are working together, however, it is useful to present a single unified orthography, even if the lateral graphemes in question are only used for Dhudhuroa in loanword contexts.

Retroflex series

Blake and Reid (1999 and 2002) suggest the occurrence of at least the retroflex stop and nasal, but remain cautious.

Evidence for the retroflex lateral is discussed above. The stronger evidence for the stop and nasal is also to be found in Waywurru. Good candidates include:

Waywurru: *kordi* 'one' (<korde, kore.de, guddee> - Robinson)

marndanye 'brains' (<marn.dung.e, maren.dung.e, marndunye> - Robinson)

Dhudhuroa: *kurdawunga* 'one' (<kurrawunga, kurdawung-a> - RH Mathews)

Robinson's three variations on the medial consonant for *kordi* can be taken as an attempt to signal 'an unfamiliar type of d', as can Mathews' <rr> and <rd> for the cognate. Similarly, Robinson's variation between <marn> and <maren> seem to indicate a retroflex nasal - although parallel evidence in the Dhudhuroa sources is difficult to find. It has been decided at community level to employ an orthographic

⁸ Mathews nd a, collected by Mitchell.

⁹ Wilkinson 'Surveyor's field book'.

series *rd*, *rl*, and *rn* at this stage, in order to maintain the awareness of a series characteristic of Australian languages in general, and very possibly of at least Waywurru, if not Dhudhuroa.

Vowels

Similarly to their treatment of the consonant inventory, Blake and Reid leave the analysis of Waywurru vowels open to a greater degree than in their Dhudhuroa analysis. This is due to the significantly lower level of data available for Waywurru. However, as they note, the Dhudhuroa sources do use five vowel symbols to represent the language. Given that some other languages of Victoria are accepted as having five vowels,¹⁰ we have preferred to give RH Mathews and others the ‘benefit of the doubt’, maintaining five vowels for both languages. This obviates the necessity of making sometimes arbitrary adjustments to the records available.

Similar principles apply to the listing of long vowels. That long vowels are used in both Waywurru and Dhudhuroa seems beyond doubt (see below). Whether they are phonemic is another question. Our database lists –

<i>waarri</i> ‘bark’ (WW)	[wa:Rɪ] ¹¹	TMC ¹² waaree
<i>warri</i> ‘hut’ (WW)	[waRɪ]	RC war.re
<i>weengka</i> ‘dog’ (Dh)	[wi:ŋka]	RMA wingga, weengga, M45 wehnga, whunga, wihngah, wihngah
<i>wingkilai</i> ‘whistle’ (Dh)	[wiŋkilai]	RMA winggillai ¹³
<i>boroko</i> ‘internal organs’ (WW)	[bɔ:kɔ]	RC po.or.go, TMC boogu
<i>bokong</i> ‘bogong moth’ (WW) ¹⁴	[bɔ:kɔŋ]	RC bugung, RJ bogong

Clearly the evidence for a length distinction as such is somewhat sparse – given that the only potential minimal pair may well represent a single (polysemous) word – given that ‘huts’ are made of ‘bark’.¹⁵ Nonetheless, there are quite a number of words which are better represented orthographically as having long vowels. By this I mean that (i) collectors represented certain words with unambiguously long vowel articulations and (ii) current community members are accustomed to length distinction from English, so that (iii) it would be misleading to speaker/learners to eliminate representation of length when it is clear at (at least) a phonetic level in the sources. Examples in addition to the above include *dudhuu* ‘canoe’ (Dh) (M15 <doothooh>, MEC <doothoo>) and *bororkor.lor* ‘quail’ (M15 <bööröogöölöo>). This position implicitly

¹⁰ See for example Bowe and Morey 1999; Hercus 1986.

¹¹ R represents an unspecified rhotic.

¹² See under the next section for source abbreviations.

¹³ Note that *(l)ai* is an imperative suffix.

¹⁴ The latter word is shared between both languages, with possible variations.

¹⁵ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

counters the usual assumption that the best orthography is phonemic, with the justification that the primary target for the orthography is people who are learning the language from an English base. A minimal level of phonetic detail, it is hoped, may assist this group in the retention of apparent variation of phonemes in particular words.

Two-vowel graph sequences are employed in the implementation of the orthography, such as *ai* (*bakulai* 'arise' - Dh), *ia* (*biarra* 'gum tree' - WW), and *ua* (*burranda* 'bad, poor' - WW). These sequences are not intended to represent diphthongs but disyllables. The option, usually taken up in orthographies for Australian languages, of including a glide <w> or <y> in between the vowel graphs, was discussed, but the abbreviated spellings listed here were ultimately preferred. The exception to this rule is the sequence *iye* (as in *biyeba* 'fight' - Dh), which was selected to avoid confusion with an English pronunciation of *ie* as in 'lie' or 'piece'.

One diphthong, <ay> /ei/, is, however, included, despite its unlikely occurrence in the historical language, according to the monophthong-only pattern usual in Australian languages. In the contemporary language, this diphthong is established in the pronunciation of *Waywurru*, and is spreading to a small number of other Waywurru words (*baynka* 'spear thrower', *daydha* 'sky', *payorro* 'magpie'). The pronunciation of *Waywurru* alone necessitates a representation for /ei/ in the orthography.

The graph sequences *ay* and *ai* are included in the community descriptive orthographic tables, to avoid confusion between the two. Both are listed as 'combined vowels'.

Reevaluating the sources

The historical sources referred to are as follows:¹⁶

Dhudhuroa

M45 A response by JFH Mitchell to John Mathew's language and culture surveys, designated as 'Barwidgee language from Wodonga along Upper Murray' (Mathew nd a).

M15 A response, probably also by JFH Mitchell, to John Mathew's language and culture surveys, apparently recopied by Mathew in a manuscript entitled 'Vocabulary of Australian Aboriginal language' (Mathew nd b).

MEC A wordlist provided by JFH Mitchell and incorporated into an extensive comparative table in John Mathew's *Eaglehawk and Crow: A Study of the Australian Aborigines including an Inquiry into their Origins and a Survey of Australian Languages* (Mitchell 1899).

RMA RH Mathews' 1909 article 'The Dhudhuroa language of Victoria' (Mathews 1909).

RMM Manuscript notes for the above article (Mathews nd).

¹⁶ The codes listed here will be used from this point. See BR-P and BR-Dh for a more detailed account of the major sources.

Waywurru

MSM A wordlist provided by WL Murdock labelled 'Wangaratta', published in *Science of Man* (Murdock 1900).

RC Collected papers of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Aboriginal Protector. These are available in a four-volume publication edited by Ian Clark (2000a).

RD Robinson, GA 1849, *Duplicate Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1849 with Appendices Attached* (Robinson 1849).

RJ The journals of GA Robinson, Chief Aboriginal Protector. These are available in a six-volume publication edited by Ian Clark (2000b).

TMC A wordlist provided by TW Mitchell entitled 'Upper Murray', included in EM Curr's work, *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia and the Routes by which it Spread itself over that Continent* (Mitchell 1887).

TMS A wordlist provided by TW Mitchell entitled 'Tangambalanga: Pallanganmiddah tribe', printed in R Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, vol II (Mitchell 1878).

As stated in the introduction, my analysis for the most part confirms that of Blake and Reid, so that in the majority of cases only transliteration into the new community spelling system has been required. In this section, I will focus only on those items for which I have been able to update the phonological analysis.

In the sections below, one example is given for each type of revised analysis. A full list of newly analysed words can be found in the Appendix.

Response to phonemic analysis

It will be clear from the discussion in the third section above above that a number of revisions arise from our analysis of the phoneme inventories of the two languages, such as:

<i>deerra</i> (WW) 'summer'	RC teer.rer	BR-P tirra	long vowel
<i>kobalo</i> (Dh) 'short, low'	MEC koblo, M15 453 cobbo, RMA kubbalo	BR-Dh gabalo	/ɔ/ rather than /a/ ¹⁷

Conservative principles

In general, in this project I have erred on the side of caution in my interpretation of collector spellings. Given that relatively little is known about the phonology of the languages of this region, we have wished to avoid eliminating from the language in its implementation in the community any feasible possibilities suggested by collector spellings. In some cases this has overridden the principle of aligning the form of a word

¹⁷ In this case, BR-Dh do use <o> at the end of the word, but their preference for a three-vowel analysis leads them to interpret the sources' <o> and <u> as /a/ in the first syllable. In our system we select /ɔ/ as not inconsistent with RH Mathews' <u>.

with (sometimes better attested) cognates.¹⁸ In addition, we did not wish to lose the possibility of significant variant pronunciations of a given word. Hence my analysis of some words is more conservative, in the literal sense, than that of Blake and Reid:

<i>bulana</i> (WW) 'sick'	RC bul.lan.ner	BR-P balana, bulana
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In this example, given the natural tendency for collectors to refer to familiar English spellings, I have selected / u / over the alternative reading, /a/, by analogy with words such as 'bulrush', 'bull' or 'bulwark'.

In some cases, this conservative working position is evident regardless of our extension of the phoneme inventory.

Robinson's syllable and consonant cluster breaks

The single most important feature of the historical sources informing my analysis is the marking of syllable and consonant cluster breaks by Robinson. This allows several types of revised analysis:

Number of syllables

<i>biarra</i> (WW) 'gum tree'	RC pee.are.rer	BR-P piarrerra
<i>daiarra</i> (WW) 'fishing net'	RC ty.er.rer	BR-P djarra

Without the syllable/consonant cluster breaks, words such as 'peearerer' could easily be interpreted as <piarrerra>. Robinson's original notation, however, clearly indicates three syllables, not four. Similarly, the initial component of <ty.er.rer> is now readily understood as /daɪ/, rather than the single phoneme /ɕ/.

/nk/, /ŋ/, /ŋk/

<i>karrinkadhi, karrinkarru</i> (WW) 'coohe, shout, call'	MSM karringaroo RC kar.in.gad.de	BR-P karring(g)arru
<i>morrangurro</i> (WW) 'man, dirty blackfellow'	RC mor.rang.oor.ro	BR-P morrang(g)urra

The breaks resolve the query noted in BR-P as /nk/ in the former type of case and /ŋ/ in the latter.

¹⁸ It should be noted that, due to community consciousness of possible distinctions between their languages and related languages, combined with a lack of thorough historical reconstruction for languages of this area to date, I have not taken a comparative analysis further than what has been readily available to me through Blake and Reid's published work.

In one case, the relevant syllable breaks are provided, not by Robinson, but by RH Mathews:

nawiyu (Dh) 'sun' RMA nau'-i-u, MEC noweyu BR-Dh nawiu, nawayu

The analysis <nawayu> is quite feasible for <noweyu>, but less so for Mathews' <nau'-i-u>. Both the break and the choice of <i> indicate a clear auditory distinction between the vowels of the first two syllables, rather than a reduced second vowel harmonious with the first as suggested by <nawayu>.

In a number of cases, Robinson's break marks act as contributors to a revised analysis in the context of other information:

Vowels

<i>marndanye</i> (WW) 'brains'	RC maren.dung.e, marn.dung.e, marndunye	BR-P ma(rre)ndanye
<i>winu</i> (WW) 'veins'	RC win.u	BR-P wayinu
<i>dika</i> (WW) 'sister'	RC ti.ger, TMS tiega, tiga	BR-P tayiga

In *marndanye*, the breaks marked together with the apparent emphasis on the <r...n> sequence suggest /n/, and of course a single syllable. This kind of graphemic emphasis was often the only recourse of collectors of Robinson's era in representing the unfamiliar retroflex series (see discussion of the retroflex lateral under *Lateral consonants* above). For <win.u>, the implications of English spelling conventions for <win> seen as a separate element strongly indicate /win/ rather than /wan/. For the explanation of *dika* 'sister', see the first section.

Comparing collectors' spellings

For some items, I have revised the reconstructed spelling by revisiting the comparison of alternative spellings found across historical sources:

<i>boa</i> (WW) 'dog'	RC bor TMC boa	BR-P bawa
<i>munda, monda</i> (WW) 'thigh'	RC mone.der, TMC munda	BR-P munda, manda
<i>ngadjba</i> (Dh) 'sing'	RMA ngutchbai, ngatchbai, MEC gudba	BR-Dh ngatjbai, gadba

Given GA Robinson's consideration for syllabic representation, <bor> suggests that BR-P's disyllabic interpretation overstates the status of the two vowel positions suggested by <boa>. While /ɔa/ is an unusual sequence, and certainly not expected as a diphthong, the frequency of the <oa> sequence in the sources triggers our conservatism principle - particularly since it appears to feature in the language name *Dhudhuroa*. While the exact form for 'thigh' still remains uncertain, Robinson's <mone.der> rules out the possibility of /a/ as the first vowel. For words such as *ngadjba*, given that 19th-century collectors very commonly mishear initial /ŋ/, it is a

fairly safe assumption that its appearance word-initially in one source is to be accepted over its non-appearance in another. In much the same way, the palatal stop is also commonly interpreted by English speakers as the alveolar, so that the palatal is a safe analysis of the second consonant.¹⁹

Similarly, sometimes comparisons of different forms based on the same root have been the key:

<i>bandju, bandjun</i> (WW) 'track (of foot); road'	RC pun.joo TMC bunjun	BR-P bandju, bandjan
<i>ngurru, yuungurru</i> (WW) 'plenty'	RC noor.ro, TMC yuungurru	BR-P nurru, yung(g)urru

Although the second vowel of <bunjun> alone is ambiguous between /a/ and /u/, the <oo> of <pun.joo> confirms an interpretation of /u/. Following the same logic as for *ngadjba*, I have selected *ngurru* as more likely given the appearance of /ŋ/ word-medially in what appears to be a derivative form.

Occasionally, the recording of a particular word in both languages confirms its form in each. In the following example, /ŋk/ as distinct from /ŋ/ is overtly specified as a 'hard g' in M15:

<i>bangkonowo</i> (Dh), <i>bangkowo</i> (WW) 'hungry'	M15 bungunowo (Dh), TMC bungowonabee (WW)	BR-Dh banganowo (Dh), BR-P bang(g)owo (WW)
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Some forms have been revised simply through a cross-check of the most common usage of a particular grapheme combination by a given collector:

<i>buarranda</i> ²⁰ (WW) 'bad'	RC poor.ander (cf po.or.go 'bowels') ²¹	BR-P purranda
<i>wundju, wundja</i> (Dh) '	RMA wũndyu, wũndyu (cf wũrura-dyaua 'ground goanna')	BR-Dh wundju, wandya

¹⁹ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this aspect of *ngadjba* to my attention.

²⁰ Or possibly *buarrandha*, as *-ndha* is tentatively proposed as a suffix (meaning uncertain).

²¹ From this evidence, it seems likely that Robinson's own pronunciation of 'poor' was the diphthongised form of some English varieties.

Finally, a small number of revisions have seemed to me uncontentious, though their earlier reconstruction may have been related to cognate forms which we have placed at lower importance:

<i>darrangkarra</i> (Dh) ‘white’	RC durrunggurra	BR-Dh darrangarra
<i>niu</i> (Dh) ‘teeth’	MEC niyu, M15 nēēyu	BR-Dh niyu, nayu
<i>wurridba</i> (Dh) ‘peppermint (tree)’	M45 wooréetbah	BR-Dh warritba, wurritba

Conclusions

Reclaiming language from a primarily archival base is a constantly unfolding process which must respond to successive waves of research, priorities and goals of the language community, and new approaches to analysis. The initial analysis of the Waywuru and Dhudhuroa lexicons by Blake and Reid is fundamental to the recent layer of analysis and decision-making represented in the dictionary about to be released. The processes described in the present paper build on that initial research, revisiting what are probably the same historical sources²² through a number of standard methods such as comparison across collections, but also with a stronger focus on the syllable break indications in the manuscript sources of Robinson. In addition, a reanalysis of the phonology of each word in the collection, and a chosen principle of conservatism in regard to possible variation have altogether resulted in the updating of a significant number of words as represented here. This paper has emphasised the need to remain open to new analyses in the language revival process, as well as presenting the new orthography devised by the community for spelling the whole of the lexicon.

Acknowledgements

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²² It is not always fully clear in Blake and Reid (2002) which exact manuscripts are referred to.

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Ann Curthoys launches *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*¹

It's my very great pleasure to have been asked to launch this book. I think it's a book for the future, for future scholarship in Australian history and Indigenous Studies. Not only are the authors historians and anthropologists at the beginning of their careers, but their work builds on the insights of older scholars, and of the society around them, in new and exciting ways. Their work will be valuable for researchers and readers for many years to come.

When I agreed to launch the book, I knew it would contain interesting empirical material in the field of Aboriginal history, for that is what the journal *Aboriginal History*, and its monograph offshoots, typically does. For over 30 years now, the journal has consistently been a site for new scholarship. Anyone who teaches Australian history or Indigenous Studies knows that this is where you have to go to get the detailed studies needed if we are to know our own history. I also knew it would not be conventional history, for again the journal has always tried to cross disciplinary boundaries, to produce forms of knowledge which combine historical with linguistic, archaeological, and anthropological approaches. And it was no surprise to me that the book would be interested in the variety of experience around the country, from the Northern Territory to Tasmania, from the cities to the bush. This is what the journal *Aboriginal History* traditionally does.

But what *was* a surprise, I think, was how well these early career scholars carry it off. These essays don't simply add a little bit of new knowledge here and there – many of them radically revise our usual understandings, suggesting new interpretations, and asking new questions. Before explaining this further, I want to talk first of all about these authors.

When you look at the information on the contributors at the beginning of the book, you are struck by the fact that they were nearly all doctoral students when they wrote their chapter for this book. They come from all over the country – five were studying at The Australian National University, as was the originator of the book, Mark Hannah, while the other six were elsewhere, at the University of Western Australia, Queensland, Monash, the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney. You also notice that nearly all of them have now finished their studies and moved into various careers. So we have here a book which demonstrates the power of some new scholars at the beginning of their careers as historians and anthropologists and social scientists.

¹ *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, Ingereth Macfarlane and Mark Hannah (eds), Aboriginal History Monograph 16, 2007



Contributing authors Denis Foley, Jillian Barnes, Thalia Anthony, Naomi Parry and editor Ingereth Macfarlane at the launch of *Transgressions*.

The book kicks off with a wonderful essay by Shino Konishi. The brief to the authors was to emphasise the ‘writerly aspects of creative thinking, promoting the portrayal of character, alternative prose styles and inventive narrative forms’. Shino does this admirably. She begins: ‘Francois Peron was my first’. By this she means her first historical romance. Peron was a member of the Baudin expedition of 1800–1803, and his comments on Australian Aboriginal people were often very derogatory. Shino describes how she moved from simply dismissing his ideas as offensive and ridiculous to trying to engage with him, to understand his ways of thinking and feeling. ‘Without realising it’, she says, ‘I have developed a relationship with him, and like all romances it is turbulent. At times he appals me and I detest him.’ Peron’s negative comments on the Aboriginal Tasmanians at first seem to be fuelled by his bitter disappointment that they were not the noble savages that Rousseau had promised; they had become, Shino muses, perhaps ‘merely innocent unfortunates caught in the crossfire, purely a means to Peron’s end of proving that Rousseau was a charlatan *philosophe*’ (p 5). But no, she goes on, perhaps ‘his vitriolic fire was not sparked by Rousseau alone, but also fanned by the Tasmanians’, whose cool indifference to him he could hardly believe; he had the ferocious anger of the jilted lover. The best part comes at the end, as Shino asks again, why *she sympathises* with this man. ‘As an Indigenous historian’, she says, perhaps she, too, has had ‘idealistic fantasies about Aboriginal society, and [has] attempted to impose this romanticised vision on the historical record’. She, like him, may have misinterpreted the agency of 18th-century Aboriginal people. Having recognised what she

was doing, she is now free, she says, to 'fall in love with the Tasmanians and other Indigenous historical figures all over again'.

The theme of romance is also important in Jinki Trevillian's chapter, about the loves, marriages and sexual relationships of the people she interviewed of Cape York Peninsula, a cohort of people who were born around the First World War and came to adulthood during the Second. Their ideas, she says, about love and romance are explored in story and song. Conventional history, Jinki suggests, might be good at understanding the social and legal contexts of relationships, but it has more trouble with the emotional aspects of the romances themselves. 'It is', she says, 'the difference between a musical and a documentary; both forms tell a story about people and the world but in the musical the story is augmented by emotional outbursts of song'. Oral histories, like those she conducted, she believes 'are like musicals'. From this starting point we come to learn about the separation of girls and boys in mission schools and the effects this had on their adult relationships; the disruption of Aboriginal marriage laws by the missionaries; the importance of song and dance in the interactions between Aboriginal, Islander, and visiting American troops. We also learn about the attempts by government to prevent interracial marriage and interracial sex, even while the cohabitation of white men and black women was commonly tolerated throughout the Cape.

Missions and missionaries are quite a theme in this collection. Angelique Edmonds considers the impact of the Church of England mission at Roper River, in the Northern Territory. In the modern communities affected by the mission, both Christian and traditional kin-based Aboriginal orientations of relatedness continue to co-exist. Devin Bowles writes about the impact of the missionaries at Mapoon at around the same time, and the ways in which the Aboriginal people there creatively adapted Christianity and redefined the Christian notion of moral transgression for themselves. Jessie Mitchell also writes about missionaries, but her stories are a century earlier, in Victoria and New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s. These early missionaries are significantly less powerful figures, often lacking much economic power or government support or social acceptance. Jessie warns us that these missionaries were rather different from those who came later. Few of them saw Aboriginal people as a doomed race, though they were horrified by the death and disease they witnessed around them, and few regarded Aboriginal men as a sexual threat to white women. They rarely tried to arrange respectable Christian marriages, as so many missionaries were to do later. They *were* concerned, though, about what they saw as sexual immorality and what they understood to be the lending or prostitution of Aboriginal women to European men, and they were 'keen to implement systems of bodily and mental surveillance and control' (p 231). In short, she makes us realise how the relationship of missionaries to Aboriginal people changed considerably over time.

Three chapters consider the history of Aboriginal leadership. Kathy Lothian reminds us, in a well told story, of the importance of the ideas of Black Power in the Tent Embassy of 1972. Dennis Foley talks about Aboriginal leadership in the figures of Pemulwuy, Mosquito and Windradyne, and connects the historical record to the oral history accounts in his own family about the attacks on the Wiradjuri in the Bathurst region in the 1820s in an interesting way.

Musquito reappears in Naomi Parry's excellent essay, a painstaking reconstruction of Musquito's life and especially of the way he has been remembered, or in her argument, misremembered. Musquito came originally from the Middle Harbour and Manly area, and was involved in hostilities between Aboriginal people and settlers in the Hawkesbury area. For his role he was exiled to Norfolk Island for eight years and then sent to Launceston. In Tasmania he worked for settlers, and also helped in recapturing bushrangers. He became part of the so-called 'tame gangs' outside Hobart, bands of Aborigines who had become disconnected from their own people, some of whom had spent their childhoods in white households. Musquito's group consisted of 20 or 30 men, women and children, subsisting on kangaroos, possums and oysters. As violent clashes accelerated during 1824, Musquito came to be known as a leader of the Aboriginal attacks on white settlers, though Parry says evidence of his involvement is limited. Musquito and another man were captured and tried for murder, with neither allowed to speak in his own defence, call witnesses or brief counsel. When journalists and historians began from the late 1830s to write the story of the Black War and the destruction of the Tasmanian Aborigines, some of them depicted Musquito as the ring-leader, an outsider who stirred the Tasmanian Aboriginal people into action. While others saw it differently, this was the version that has been passed into Australian folklore. In recent times historians have all seen Musquito as a leader; some, like Dennis Foley in this collection interpreting him romantically as a resistance fighter, and others, like Keith Windschuttle, as an outsider on a violent crime spree. Lyndall Ryan, though, saw him as the leader of one band but not of the Aboriginal movement as a whole. Parry concludes that historians have fitted his life to their narratives.

Finally three chapters focus on Indigenous - non-Indigenous relationships in new ways. Jane Mulcock looks at the questions of non-Indigenous belonging, and of non-Indigenous people's desire to be seen as Indigenous, as belonging, as from nowhere else. Where a number of commentators have been critical of these desires, seeing them as seeking to appropriate Indigeneity for other purposes, Jane focuses closely on those instances where Indigenous people have been somewhat sympathetic to these desires, seeing them as perhaps a basis for greater respect, and also paying serious attention to birthplace as a marker of belonging and identity. Her material is from Western Australia. She quotes David Mowaljarlai, a Ngarinyin elder who said to the Federal Court in the context of his native title claim: 'We don't want to hurt you because you were born here in Australia, so you belong in Australia. But you have to learn about the culture of Australia so you know your own belonging, your naming and your identity. ... The law for this land is recorded in this land. We can teach you that law. That way you won't be strangers in your birth country.' While I still retain doubts about the appropriative nature of some desires for Indigenous belonging, and think all non-Indigenous people do need to come to terms with their having come from somewhere else, I also think that Mulcock through her fieldwork approach has brought new insights to the discussion. And as she says, 'like them or hate them, settler discourses of belonging and indigeneity are probably here to stay' (p 77).

Thalia Anthony explains pastoralist-Aboriginal relationships in the Northern Territory from around 1900 to 1966 with originality and clarity. She says this was a unique relationship in which both pastoralists and their Aboriginal workers deviated from government control. Pastoralists created their own jurisdiction over Aboriginal people,

bypassing the assimilationist tendencies of government policy, and allowing Aboriginal people to practise customs and ceremonies and retain connections to country. On the other hand, this arrangement maximised pastoralists' capacity to exploit Aboriginal labour and pay minimal wages. The state, recognising the economic value of the cattle industry, was largely complicit. This whole system, however, depended on pastoralist need for Aboriginal labour, and came to a sudden end with the mechanisation and equal pay changes of the 1960s. This all made a lot of sense to me, and provides a way of reconciling the very negative accounts of some oral histories and historians with the much more positive memories of this period recounted by others.

I've saved one of the best chapters till the end. It is also about the Northern Territory in the mid-20th century. This is Jillian Barnes's discussion of the use of the photographic image of Gwoja Tjungurrayi, otherwise known as One Pound Jimmy. We all know it as the classic image of an Aboriginal man's head and shoulders, used on Commonwealth stamps in the 1950s, and familiar to us in tourist promotions and magazines like *Walkabout*. Barnes not only traces the capturing and use of this image from the 1930s to the 1960s, but also explores the life of the man whose image it was. Tjungurrayi, she shows, though represented as the original wild Aboriginal man outside western civilisation, was in fact as a young man a survivor of the Coniston killings of 1928, who subsequently worked for several years as a miner and then spent most of his life working for pastoralists within or near his ancestral country. As tourism grew in the area, he became known to visitors as a man with encyclopaedic knowledge of his Dreaming country, and came to insist on proper payment and acknowledgement for his services. Anthropologists and writers frequently sought him out to gain access to his unsurpassed knowledge of Warlpiri-Anmatyerre country. He became a living keeper of totemic sites, and he was driven by a desire to pass on the Law. Three of his sons became leading figures in the Western Desert art movement, including his adoptive son Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, and the knowledge Tjungurrayi passed on to them was important for the art they developed. Barnes acknowledges the work of Vivien Johnson, an expert on the Western Desert Art movement, in drawing attention to these connections, but her own research adds a great deal to the story.

In terms of their brief, to produce new histories written in new ways, these authors do remarkably well. Nearly all have uncovered new material, and present new ways of understanding Indigenous history. The subtitle 'critical Australian Indigenous histories' is well deserved. In terms of writing in new ways, some are perhaps newer than others. Kathy Lothian has two narrative voices, one much more scholarly and in the past tense, the other more direct and in the present. Shino Konishi imagines herself in relation to her subject. Jinki Trevillian's extensive oral histories sing to us from the page. Taken as a whole, these essays remind us strongly of what John Docker and I described in *Is History Fiction?* (University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2006) as the double character of history, both rigorous scholarship grounded in the evidence and a form of literature, with narrative, character, and plot.

These essays were originally drafted in 2003, at the height of what we now describe as the History Wars. That is, an atmosphere that for early career scholars was stimulating perhaps but also intimidating and highly politicised. To make a mistake could be seen as ideologically driven falsehood, even lying. It seemed to us when we completed *Is History Fiction?* in 2005 that the mood of literary experimentation had been

suppressed. It is a credit to these authors that they have continued to forge their own paths some, like Naomi Parry, responding directly to the critics of 'black arm band history' but most developing stories from either their own experience or their more general intellectual and emotional engagement with Indigenous histories. This book, and other recent scholarship like it, indicates perhaps that history will always retain its double character, and neither aspect can be suppressed for long. It is, as a practice, intrinsically looking both to art and science.

In the hands of early career writers like these, I think Indigenous history is in good health - critical, lively, responsive and interesting. I recommend the book to you, and declare it launched.

Gleebooks, Sydney
20 June 2008

Susan Upton launches *Culture in Translation: The Anthropological Legacy of RH Mathews*¹

Robert Hamilton Mathews, my great grandfather, was born in 1841 – soon after his parents emigrated from Northern Ireland. He died in 1918, aged 77, and is buried in Parramatta. He married Mary in her mother's home in Tamworth. I wear her wedding ring.

Their first born was Hamilton – my grandfather – followed by Georgiana, whose middle name was Transit, as she was born in the year of the Transit of Venus. Then came Gregory, Australie, Mary, William and Robert, totalling nine children in 13 years, one of them stillborn. The names Robert and Hamilton have been handed down since: my brother is Robert, and my sister and our first cousin both have Hamilton as a middle name.

Robert and Mary's third child, Gregory, was a renowned ornithologist, and the National Library has a significant collection of his work, which marries well with his father's collection. Australie, their fourth child, died before she was six, and neither of their surviving daughters married. From RH and Mary's four surviving sons, in my generation there are only four of us: my sister and brother, a first cousin and me.

Our family always knew Robert Hamilton Mathews as 'Old RH' or sometimes 'old RHM'. Many Aboriginal people knew him as 'Miranen', meaning 'well-liked man'. Although no-one in the family has any proof, it is known that on numerous occasions among Indigenous people he was given many of the privileges of an initiated man.

My father Frank remembered his grandfather very warmly, even though old RHM died when my father was 15. He said his robust grandfather, who was a qualified surveyor, had intense concentration, a lovely sense of humour and was very good indeed with children providing they were not too shy. He was also very good at languages, mathematics and astronomy, the latter being very useful when he was surveying new areas. As well, RHM was a good draftsman, that being invaluable for copying the Aboriginal rock art he saw on his anthropological expeditions. Old RH sang a number of Aboriginal songs, but my father wasn't sure who had transcribed them.

Old RH had pastoral interests. He didn't inherit any money, and so all he had he'd earned. In 1882, when he was 41, he and Mary went overseas for a year: first to New Zealand, and then through the US and Europe. Later, all four sons went to The Kings School in Sydney and Aunt 'Georgie' was sent to a private girls school in Sydney.

¹ *Culture in Translation: The Anthropological Legacy of RH Mathews*, Martin Thomas (ed), Aboriginal History Monograph 15, 2007.

When he was about 50, old RH more or less retired as a surveyor and for the rest of his life devoted himself to his anthropological work. Many of you will remember Bill (WC) Wentworth, a Member of Parliament and the first Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Knowing of my mother Janet's musical ability, he asked her to research and record some Aboriginal music before it died out. The Institute for Aboriginal Studies supplied her with a tape recorder and tapes and off she went. The family was extremely impressed and astounded, for here was a woman who'd lived a privileged life for her 50 odd years, heading off to places unknown and with little physical comfort at all. If she was referred to a particular person as an informant and he was in jail, she would sit and record with him there. She loved the work.

My mother started her investigations on the far south coast of New South Wales, and quickly realised that to learn and understand the music, it was essential for her to learn and understand the culture and some of the language of the areas where she was researching. When she introduced herself, quite a number of the older people, especially the men, asked if she was related to 'that old Mr Mathews' or 'Miranen'. When she said that he was her grandfather-in-law, she was immediately welcomed, was warmly accepted and everyone willingly co-operated with her in her quest for knowledge. We are all extremely proud of her and her achievements.

Our family is delighted that Martin Thomas has undertaken such unremitting investigation and research into old RH. I have very much enjoyed my frequent contact with Martin since 1999 and we all have learned an enormous amount about our ancestor from Martin's work. Martin, congratulations; you're wonderful and good luck in your future endeavours. No matter where they take you, I will always value our friendship.

National Library of Australia
17 October 2007

A tribute to Colin Campbell, an elder of the Ngaku clan and the Dhunghutti nation (1942–2008)

*Delivered at a graveside service in Kempsey in the Macleay Valley
22 February 2008 by John Williams*

Colin, known to all as 'Cody', asked me a number of years ago and again quite recently to give the eulogy in the event of his passing and I accepted on the basis that he would do so for me in the event I preceded him. We were the same age and sadly the task has fallen to me, but what a privilege it is to share with all here today why this man stood so tall in our midst.

Cody was born on the Aboriginal verandah ward at the Kempsey District Hospital, which was itself a stark reminder of the die that was cast from birth for Aboriginal people in this town: right from the cradle he experienced the disparity and injustice that were the hallmarks of colonial dispossession.

Cody told me that his earliest memory as a child was at the Burnt Bridge Reserve in Kempsey, swinging on the front gate beside the manager's cottage watching people present their passes for permission to visit their relatives: another early indelible imprint upon the mind of a small boy of the intrusive control over Aboriginal lives and society.

But Cody also recalled happy childhood memories at Burnt Bridge: close family ties; collective community discipline and shared communal responsibility; experiencing the genuine camaraderie with people sharing their meagre rations and joint incomes with those in greater need; and the freedom to enjoy the 1,000 acres of bush on horseback, before the bulk of the Aboriginal reserve was sold to a local dairy farmer for \$5,000 in the 1950s.

On a happier note, as late as last week Mary Lou Buck and other family members returning from Canberra personally relayed the news about the belated National Apology to the Stolen Generations. This was a reassuring occasion for which Cody and all Aboriginal communities had waited so long and it was fitting that he lived to witness it. It was indeed a moment of historical significance and, with the world closely watching, it could be said that Australia had finally come of age.

Whilst Cody was always optimistic and welcomed this momentous symbolic occasion, this important apology by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Commonwealth government and so many Australians of good will – as appropriate and moving as it was – still cannot undo the two centuries of destruction and upheaval of so many nations, communities and families that made up Aboriginal Australia. As Cody stated in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission document in 1997: 'Reconcilia-

tion is a two-way process and total recognition of all areas of dispossession should be acknowledged and compensated for in a fair and just manner’.

As the cedar cutters came through the Macleay Valley in the early 1830s, followed by squatters, graziers and finally townfolk, Aboriginal people were increasingly moved from their ancestral lands. And during the 1840s, in response to further incursions into their hunting grounds, scattered resistance by the local Aboriginal inhabitants was met with severe reprisals, in spite of regulations providing for the protection of Aboriginal people. In 1856 a mercenary contingent of Moori police, camped at Belgrave Falls, brought the courageous defiance of the dispossessed of the Macleay Valley to an abrupt end at Nulla Nulla Creek, west of Willawarrin – a victory achieved through the help of black trackers.

For the historian and casual reader this may be a mere note of some historical interest, but for the Aboriginal communities of the Macleay Valley the subsequent dispossession and dislocation were devastating: they undermined their very society and way of life. The irreparable damage of dispossession done to communities, and to families like the one represented here today, is still felt as succeeding generations experience the effects of grief and trauma and economic disadvantage, all factors which undermine the building blocks of Aboriginal families and society. Its relevance for us here today is that Burnt Bridge Aboriginal Reserve, together with the reserves at Bellbrook and Kinchela, epitomises this passage of Aboriginal history in the Macleay.

We also should not underestimate the effect of the inexpressible aching void on Cody, having witnessed Aboriginal Law being severed from his ancestral country and the Dhunghutti language forbidden. The final act, bereft of conscience, was that of the colonisers actually seeking the demise of the Aboriginal people by deliberately attempting the genocide of the Aboriginal race. Is it any surprise that dysfunctional consequences resulted from such a blatant denial of basic human rights?

Let us not be mistaken here as this is not hyperbole or embellishment for there is well documented government evidence that this was the actual purpose of the Stolen Generations policy and the reasons for homes like Kinchela Boys Home, built on one of three former Aboriginal reserves on the Macleay and situated in the pristine valley of the lower Macleay, just on the outskirts of town on the road to South West Rocks.

The confidence in the words of the Protection Board’s Chief Investigator is quite evident, when he stated that there would be no need for expanding Aboriginal reserves in the future ‘as the only solution of this great problem [was] the removal of the children; the old people will have passed away, and their progeny will be absorbed in the industrial classes of the colony’.

It is not a matter of being political at such a time of sadness, but the opportunity to affirm that Cody, like many of you here today, witnessed this passage of history and to acknowledge that Cody’s actions as a leader in his community was to defy every attempt to further intrude upon the rights and dignity of his people.

Cody told me about the punishment at the Burnt Bridge Reserve for being caught speaking the Dhunghutti language and how his uncles had told him how they fled when recruited for initiation because they did not want to be removed from their families on the mission. What an agonising decision. But this was calculated policy because

the prohibition of language was the key to undermining Aboriginal Law, religion and society, it being so essential for instruction and conveyance of knowledge and culture.

It was in this context that Cody was very concerned in the late 1980s when the teaching of Aboriginal languages – introduced by elder Pop Pacey and Ruth Campbell Maruca at the Ngaku Aboriginal Pre-school in South Kempsey – was stopped after departmental instruction.

Another important point Cody made to me, which has been lost on historians, was that economic independence was sought by Aboriginal people at the Burnt Bridge Reserve. Cody told me that he clearly remembered during his childhood observing an operating saw mill which employed many men and provided technical skills. The mill became so successful and competitive that it threatened the saw mill run by non-Aboriginal people in the town and after a complaint to the authorities the Burnt Bridge Reserve timber mill was closed. The successful agricultural farms on one of the Fattorini Islands, both former reserves, and on land at Rolland Plains, also suffered the same fate. Hunting and gathering for wholesome food was officially forbidden and dependence on food rations – with their dangerous dietary implications for current health problems – became the regimented order of the day.

In the current biased debate about the dependency of Aboriginal people on welfare, it is a forgotten fact that the Aboriginal people's attempt to enter the market place was thwarted as they were excluded from the economy of this country, never choosing dependency upon these enforced intrusions into their autonomous life styles. This historical context was known to Cody and its being glossed over today as a matter of political pragmatism concerned him greatly.

When Cody was 16, he moved to Sydney seeking employment opportunities but returned to Kempsey in 1974 to work with Aboriginal community organisations and for the rest of his life he gave untiring committed service to bridging gaps within the community and tirelessly working to achieve a better life for all Aboriginal people. He became the regional manager of the Mid-North Coast Regional Aboriginal Land Council and was repeatedly voted by his peers to the Regional ATSIC Council to represent his people and community as a man who had gained their trust and respect.

It was during the early months of 1980 that Cody and I met, as he was striving to acquire housing for his community. The extent of the racism that he experienced as we sought to buy homes throughout the town was unbelievable. People rudely denied access to their homes; doors were slammed in our faces as the vendors refused to sell their properties. We were told that even if they did sell their homes in 'white enclaves' to the Aboriginal community they would be shunned by the town folk for doing so. We were told by reliable people of good will that they had been solicited to actually sign a petition to stop Aboriginal people moving into their particular areas. Intimidated people who had agreed to sell were harassed until they took their properties off the market. There was even a death-threat letter. I remember Cody kindly assisting one genuine woman who had already exchanged contracts. She told us that she had suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of the relentless harassment. She was being called every hour of the day and night with loud whistles over the telephone and her children were being ridiculed, abused and bullied at school. Cody caringly cancelled the binding contract out of respect for this genuine, well-meaning lady.

It was within this degrading and overwhelming oppression that Cody revealed his maturity, patience and great stature as a leader of his people. He was not embittered and did not retaliate in kind. He did not stoop to the level of ignorance but he stood tall as a proud Ngaku-Dhungutti man as an example of integrity, courage and honour.

To bear out his exemplary status and sheer wisdom, let me share with you a personal experience that revolutionised my own thinking and philosophy. One day he came into my office in Kempsey accompanied by a non-Aboriginal officer from the Aboriginal Development Commission. The officer waxed long about how he was going to bring millions of dollars, jobs, opportunities, housing and business enterprises to the Aboriginal community in the Macleay Valley and Kempsey. Cody then excused himself, as he had work to do, and asked the officer to talk further to me about possible business enterprises and housing development propositions. When Cody left, this man, not knowing who I was or my close association with Cody, then berated the Aboriginal community with some of the worst racist remarks imaginable. He stated he would not be putting any funds into the area, as he couldn't trust Aboriginal people with money. I let him dig himself deeper into his hole of deceit and, when he left, I immediately rang Cody and told him I had urgent worrying business about his visitor. I am sure Cody already knew the outcome and some six hours later he casually strolled into my office and when I anxiously explained to him how racist this man was. Cody calmly responded: 'Don't you realise that I know that he is a racist, but look how far he has come'.

His remarkable response was so startling. I had been educated in ethics, studying the non-violent resistance philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, yet here was a man that would even accept being discriminated against for the self-development and maturation of his racist opponent. I was stricken dumb by respect and sheer admiration. The significance of his philosophy was so profound. I know of no equal, other than Nelson Mandela, who patiently respected his abusive prison guards for 26 years and finally won them over to his all inclusive philosophy.

Cody could always see the best in others when I could see nothing other than man's inhumanity to man. Presumptuously, I had thought my western university education was sufficient to address all significant issues one confronted in life. Alas I had to learn from this Indigenous exemplar that my education was deficient when placed beside this man's understanding and example. Let us not be misunderstood here: not for a moment did Cody condone racism, for he was its sharpest critic, but he did not have the capacity to hate those who racially vilified him. He hated racism with a passion, but not the racist.

Cody was also a patient and wise educator of cultural values and protocol. I remember him coming into my office one day very agitated and upset with the *Macleay Argus* newspaper in hand with its front page dramatically indicating that the Kempsey Shire Council planned to bring a bulldozer into Burnt Bridge Reserve to cut off the water supply as the underground pipes were all leaking. I impetuously responded 'Cody, they can't do this; I will stand in front of the bulldozer'. Cody responded by quietly asking, 'Has any one asked you to stand in front of the bulldozer?' 'No', I replied. He continued, 'Keep working on these maps and finding the parcels of land available as potential land claims. When they find out you're one with us, then your use in this area will be limited and then you can come and stand with us in front of bulldozers.' I had to

learn that it was 'his' and 'your' struggle, and not mine; and if I were to work with the Aboriginal community, then it could only be on that basis. It was a lesson I needed to be taught from the outset and every time I have considered working in a particular position within the Aboriginal community over the past 25 years, I always sought Cody's advice and direction, for I was but a tool that could be used for his people.

Cody was a man of utter integrity; he was a man without a price. I remember Cody telling me of an event when the Ngaku Aboriginal Housing Cooperative bought, through my real estate practice, four town houses in east Kempsey. There was much town opposition and municipal resistance, as this was the first Aboriginal land holding in an otherwise white enclave. Shortly before settlement, he had been approached by a distinguished owner of a house nearby who, feeling that the land values would depreciate, passed Cody a brown paper bag with \$5,000 for his own use. The bag was passed straight back without comment. How many of us have a price? Whether cash, hidden commissions, furthering our career, a better position, a higher place on a priority list or a position on a board to enable personal advantage. Cody had no price. He could not be bought. His position on boards was for the betterment of his people – not for power or for personal advantage but for the advantage, better conditions and additional resources for all his people and community.

Cody was unpretentious, unassuming, humble and unaffected by one's station in life. Yet these egalitarian values concealed a depth of wisdom, patience and understanding seldom encountered in society. He surely walked tall amongst us and yet because of his humility and laidback persona, his greatness as a person and thinker were sometimes overlooked. He was a wise and mature person who did not have the capacity to hate, not even those who misunderstood his vision and good will for all his people in a divided community. In all our discussions, even during the last weeks, the community's interests, not his, were always paramount. One can see why he was my mentor and my dear friend and why he was a friend to so many of us.

A few years ago, in the early hours of the morning, Cody rang me very distraught. He was reading the Dhunghutti dictionary, which I had managed to have copied for him and, seeing the footnotes by the respected initiated elder John Quinlan from Kempsey, he realised that so many of his slang words were actual words from the Dhunghutti language. Like the elusive shadow of a passing cloud, he felt that he had just missed out on retaining his native tongue and culture. He felt so close and yet so far from the essence of his Aboriginal birthright. He felt cheated, betrayed, by an uncaring dominant culture that denied him retaining his own language, so essential for regaining his own cultural tradition.

He was therefore, regrettably, a man in transition. A transition from community traditional cultural practice, which just eluded him by a generation, to the contemporary Aboriginal scene whose future and direction were now governed not by external forces and removal of Aboriginal children but by financial determinants – a future dependent upon pragmatic competitive manoeuvring and the professional development of the 'submission' into an art form to obtain limited funds. Yet, Cody knew that if all that is achieved through this process is that the Aboriginal community becomes a mere black replica of white society, then it has dismally failed.

I know that I speak for all of us here when I say that we will miss Cody so much. Personally he was my inspiration and guide and my dearest friend. My exposure whilst in Kempsey to this man's courage and strength as a resolute and diplomatic leader of his people in an uncaring and racist divide assisted me in learning how best to try and serve humanity - a service in which he so naturally and unconsciously attained the ultimate. To those whom Cody touched, we are all the better for having had that privilege. May we allow all that Cody stood for remain with us like a spark within to assist us in our own pilgrimages as we face the inevitable continuing struggle that lies ahead.

Cody was also a proud member of the Dhungutti nation. He was on the Dhungutti committee that achieved the first successful Native Title claim on the Australian mainland, following the successful Mabo decision. It was a decision that made the Dhungutti a name of international significance and that gave Cody great pride that his people's traditional claims on the Macleay had been recognised by the wider community.

Cody was a man of conciliation. He did not make circles to exclude others by drawing people out but he made circles to include others by drawing people in. He magnanimously and selflessly sought to accommodate all who genuinely sought the best interests of the Aboriginal community. At the same time he offered a challenge to forget old wounds and to come together and create a new future for Aboriginal people. Cody cared for everyone with personal sincerity and empathy. It is something for which we must be most grateful and humbled and honoured to have been chosen to have shared time with this caring human being.

In 1959 Teresa Clements, of the Ulupna Tribe, was buried at Cummeragunja on banks of the Murray River. She was the grandmother of Dr Naomi Mayers, Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern, who attended her funeral service as a teenager. Teresa, or Yarmuk in her tribal language, was the last to speak the language of Cummeragunja fluently. Following the service, a poem was written by a visiting journalist, Michael Thwaites from the Melbourne *Argus*, and I have received permission from Dr Mayers to quote the poem for this eulogy, as it appears so fitting with regard to Cody.

Yarmuk of the Ulupna tribe

A worn-out body laid in quiet earth,
Grey watching gums, a wattle's throb of gold,
The unhurried river hollowing its path,
Wind in the grass - what more is to be told?

You, last of all that knew your tribal tongue,
Sleep now with them in this ancestral ground.
Above your grave the towering, ancient wrong
Speaks in a silence pregnant and profound.

Besides your grave I stand, among your folk
Who loved this land before the white man came.
Burned by the burning words you never spoke,
I ask forgiveness for my people's shame.

For named and nameless ills your people bore
From us, who killed by bullet, axe and pride,
For our stone blindness; for the day we tore
In Kindness name your children from your side.

What could we answer if your ghost should rise
To curse our children's children from the grave?
You rise - but with redemption in your eyes
Before we knew to ask it, you forgave.

A fire of truth and love was lit by you
Who, unembittered, fought with bitter fate.
We took the land and life your fathers knew,
You never claimed your heritage of hate.

But poured your life, in spite of death and hell,
For those you loved, the world you longed to see.
Rest quiet in this place you loved so well,
And let the wakeful spirit wander free.

Now to that father of all human kind,
In whom you trusted, gallant, tireless, tied,
We give, with you, our strength and will and mind
To win the world your warrior heart desired.

And now it is our turn to make the circle complete and to release Cody back to the earth in the Country he loved so much. Farewell to a bold Ngaku and Dhunghutti Warrior. Good bye, dear friend and friend of us all.

Lois Joan Tilbrook (1943–2006)

Lois Tilbrook (née Howell) was born in the Brunswick area south of Perth, where she was brought up by her grandmother. After finishing high school at Collie, she matriculated through a College of Technical and Further Education in Perth and then completed a degree in Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. After graduating, she moved to Singapore with her first husband, where she lived for a short time, studying sociology at the University of Singapore and doing some teaching herself until the failure of their relationship. They had one son, who returned to Perth with her but later went back to live with his father. Joining the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare as a District Officer, Lois met Harvey Tilbrook, a descendant of a pioneer settler family from Kellerberrin. They were married in 1971 and had a daughter the following year. In 1973, Lois completed an MA thesis on the social adaptation of Aboriginal girls living in a Perth hostel, together with a Diploma in Education. In 1975 she was appointed as Lecturer in Anthropology at Mt Lawley College of Advanced Education (CAE), which had initiated a pioneering program of Aboriginal teacher education (ATEP), as well as courses in Aboriginal Studies for non-Aboriginal education students, with Commonwealth government support. Her first research project was a study of Aboriginal children of the Moora area, north of Perth, which prompted her first publication in 1977. Securing a large grant from the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1978, she established the South West Aboriginal Studies Project (SWAS), with the aim of collecting and collating genealogical and other oral information about the Nyungah people of Western Australia's South-West, together with photographs and other documentation. A number of Aboriginal interviewers were employed to work at centres in the South-West and a substantial database was gradually assembled and displayed to provide wide community access.

Together with her senior non-Aboriginal researcher, Anna Haebich, she published a useful bibliography of published writings on the Nyungah. A travelling exhibition was taken as far as Albany where it attracted intense interest. This material was to provide the basis for her ground-breaking social history, *Nyungar Tradition*, which was joint winner of the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Non-Fiction in 1983 and is now a collector's item. Continuing demand for the book, particularly by Aboriginal people because of its unique collation of genealogical information, has led to its being made available on the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) library's website. In 1982 Lois became a member of the committee responsible for the Aboriginal volumes of the *Dictionary of Western Australians* project initiated by Rica Erickson and went on with Sylvia Hallam and Neville Green to compile two of these with the assistance of research funds provided by AIATSIS. In the meantime she had enrolled to write a doctoral thesis at the University of Western Australia under the supervision of Dr Robert Tonkinson and Dr David Trigger on the



Lois Tilbrook by courtesy of A Larsen.

nature of contact between European settlers and the Nyungah of the Swan River area from the mid-1820s until 1860, the first in-depth study of its kind in Western Australia. Completed in 1983, which was also the year of her husband Harvey's death, this unfortunately remains unpublished.

Lois's interest in and talent for art had always been very strong, and this led her to write the notes for the Art Gallery of Western Australia's published catalogue of the paintings by a locally stationed British military officer, Richard Atherton Ffarington, of Aboriginal life in the South-West in the 1840s. She also assisted the New Norcia Benedictines in an exhibition of their collection of works brought from Europe by Bishop Rosendo Salvado. In December 1988, Lois left Mt Lawley College and subsequently moved to Sydney with her new partner. There she became the first recipient of the Miklouho-

Macleay Centenary Fellowship to research the 19th-century collectors who contributed to the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney. She then left to live in Cambridge, England, where she worked mostly in sculpture while attending classes in Art History at the Courtauld Institute in London. She also took out a qualification in psychotherapy and established her own home-based practice. It was there that she died of cancer in December 2006. As well as her important artistic legacy, Lois's memorial consists of her substantial addition to the social history of the Nyungah through SWAS and her various publications, together with the affection of many of the Nyungah people with whom she worked. At the launch of *Nyungah Tradition* in 1983, Lois had learned for the first time from a relative of Harvey's that his grandfather was himself a Nyungah from the Busselton area.

Bob Reece
Murdoch University
Western Australia

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Book Reviews

Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters edited by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 240 pp, Cultural Studies Series, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2007, \$35.00.

Sovereign Subjects draws together 12 essays about Indigenous sovereignty by Indigenous scholars. Gathered in the first collection of its kind, these essays protest the failure of Labor and Coalition governments, Australian courts and academics to respect Indigenous rights as politically, culturally and individually sovereign people/s. They do so at an important moment, when the Rudd government seems poised to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Mobilising law, post-colonial literature, history and politics, each essay stakes a claim to sovereignty – a sovereignty that scholars and politicians may not recognise, but which they should not dismiss.

The book is broken into four parts. In 'Law matters', Irene Watson exposes native title and the 'patriarchal white model of ATSIC' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) as parodies of rights 'cannibalising' Aboriginal society (Chapter 1). Philip Falk and Gary Martin argue that the bases of Indigenous sovereignty – land rights, economic resources, rights of cultural heritage, customary law, education and a treaty – pose no real threat to Australia's integrity as a sovereign nation (Chapter 2). Henrietta Marrie protests the theft and destruction of Indigenous sovereignty over ecological knowledge by scientists and farmers (Chapter 3).

In 'Writing matters', Indigenous scholars of literature invite us to rethink the notion of sovereignty itself. Philip Morrissey uses Inga Clendinnen's *Dancing with Strangers* to exemplify hidden colonialism, Eurocentrism and self-protection in the work of well-meaning settler writers. He does so to remind us of the daily violence done to Indigenous sovereignty understood as a 'corporeal fact' rather than a 'political strategy' (Chapter 4, p. 73). Tracey Bunda finds 'sovereign positions' in Indigenous women's writing wherein 'big, black, bold and centred' Indigenous women 'exist to counter the coloniser' by protecting themselves and their kin from colonial scrutiny (Chapter 5, pp. 75, 85). Aileen Moreton-Robinson shows how John Howard's discourses of territorial sovereignty, borders, nation and unity 'write off' Aborigines, redoubling the erosive effects of colonialism on Indigenous people in Australia (Chapter 6).

In 'History matters', Tony Birch shows that left-wing Australian historians are complicit in the 200-year-old effort to 'exterminate both the physical and social body of Indigenous people from national historical memory' (Chapter 7, p. 110). Gary Foley tells a history of the Australian Labor Party's historical and continuing campaign against Indigenous self-determination (Chapter 8). Wendy Brady asks us what sort of national sovereignty could lead the Australian public to assume that 'equal opportunity' justifies the destruction of 'Indigenous land title rights'. Land, she argues, is

essential to Indigenous existence. It is 'embedded in the fabric of our being and spirituality and that forms our identity' (Chapter 9, p. 151).

In 'Policy matters', Maggie Walters catalogues the recent Neo-Liberal onslaught against Indigenous rights in Australia – the abolition of ATSIC, the stagnation of Indigenous Australian health, the mainstreaming of Indigenous services, and the 'new racism' (Chapter 10). Steve Larkin argues for Indigenous sovereignty over research into Indigenous health (Chapter 11). Darryl Cronin reminds us that 'welfare dependence' and Howard's call for 'mutual obligation' are two prongs of a very old strategy of settler colonialism that robs Indigenous people of control over their lives and their labour (Chapter 12).

This collection should be widely read. Its power lies less in new ideas, history and legal argument than in its sustained intervention into current cultural politics in Australia. The act of gathering Australian Indigenous scholars together to intervene in academic and political debates about Indigenous rights results in a powerful call for Indigenous self-determination in every spectrum of Indigenous life. As a whole, this book is a very accessible and telling reminder of the way that settlers both in academia and government continue to deny Indigenous sovereignty. Its most important contribution, in my view, is the refusal of its authors to allow the academy, the courts or politicians to define what sovereignty means. They confront us instead with what sovereignty should, could or does mean to them and to Indigenous communities. Sovereignty here is Indigenous separateness, it is Indigenous self-hood, it is a political agenda, it is a legal right, it is Indigenous identity. In its every iteration, *Sovereign Subjects* declares that Indigenous sovereignty is extant and under attack by the Australian settler state.

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Lisa Ford
Division of Law
Macquarie University

Civil Rights: How Indigenous Australians Won Formal Equality by John Chesterman, xiii + 357 pp, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2005, \$24.95.

The term 'civil rights' conjures images of mass protests, restaurant and bus protests, and passionate speeches – all acted out in an American context – with no reference to Australia. This is partly a tribute to the power of American film and also of the extraordinary legend of Martin Luther King, which is only recently undergoing a reevaluation. Yet in the last 50 years Indigenous Australians also experienced a massive change in their civil freedoms as longstanding federal and state discriminatory legislation was dismantled between the late 1950s and 1960s and, in the case of recalcitrant Queensland, into the 1970s. John Chesterman seeks to supplant the US civil rights movement in our minds by telling the Australian story. His mission, however, is not a narrative of

change, which he does well, but to investigate and analyse how this change came about. His argument challenges what he detects as an indifference to this rights movement in mainstream histories and the tendency to explain it as a product of the assimilation policy and as initiated as a matter of course by governments. To the contrary, Chesterman argues that like the American case, rights were won from mostly reluctant governments, by activists – black and white – whose rhetoric of freedom appealed to international conventions and played on a growing concern over Australia's international reputation.

Chesterman's book is a comprehensive account of the gaining of civil rights. It is a complex story, clearly told, ranging over both federal and state spheres and most issues. It was one fought over a period of several decades with no one moment of victory, no stand out leader, no 'I have a dream' speech, to give drama and purchase to the story. As with the achievement of white male democratic rights in Australia over 100 years earlier, the Australian civil rights story lacked a moment that gave it a narrative coherence for, as Chesterman rightly points out, the 1967 Referendum was not a civil rights landmark. Yet despite this lack of drama, Chesterman tells an engaging story of the changes. He also argues convincingly that in all spheres, with perhaps the exception of South Australia during the Don Dunstan era, governments were pressured into granting civil rights by numerous activists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who quoted chapter and verse of United Nations conventions.

Chesterman's arguments are supported by a wealth of documentation from government archives, although the lack of other sources leaves the activists as shadowy figures. Occasionally the overarching approach of the analysis by necessity misses some of the local nuances. For instance, although he refers to activist submissions, he attributes the reformist Victorian legislation of 1958 to the desire for administrative efficiency. However, this overlooks the long campaign by Aboriginal and other activists against the Protection Board and, perhaps surprisingly, Henry Bolte's own determination to change the Act.

Chesterman's book is valuable not only for telling this story, but because he evaluates the 'liberal promise' of this movement to end discrimination. Pertinent to this is his discussion of the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the debate over differential treatment and special rights, which so exercised the minds of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party and Prime Minister John Howard's Coalition Government. Chesterman adds to the debate on Aboriginal disadvantage and concludes that Australian governments have perceived civil rights mostly in terms of a paradigm of 'formal equality' rather than 'substantive equality'. This, he argues, is why the notion of rights has not been seen by many as relevant to the situation of Aboriginal disadvantage, and why interest has been almost entirely in individual rights and equality of opportunity, rather than Indigenous rights and equality of outcome. Chesterman sees this being played out in a context of an Australian preference for power being located in government not the court, and a related antipathy to a bill of rights. Intended or not, he points out that this preference has maintained the hegemony of the settler majority, who may not win in court but who will always win in parliament.

All these issues are clearly and cogently argued in a readable and important book, which is fully referenced and well indexed. It has been professionally produced by University of Queensland Press.

Richard Broome
La Trobe University

Rights and Redemption: History, Law and Indigenous People by Ann Curthoys, Ann Genovese & Alexander Reilly, xvi + 278 pp, University of New South Wales Press, Kensington, 2008, \$49.95.

Rights and Redemption seeks to do a number of things. It provides an insight into areas where Aboriginal people have sought to use the Australian legal system to secure rights and recognition. It critiques the way in which the law engages with the history and traditions of Aboriginal people in those contexts. Finally, it seeks to make a case for the particular role historians can play in those contexts. In my view the first of those three endeavours is achieved very well, the other two slightly less so.

The authors look at five broad areas where Aboriginal culture and history have been analysed and dissected in courts of law in attempts to achieve justice and recognition on the terms of the dominant culture. Native title occupies three chapters, starting with *Mabo* and then exploring the role of historians and historical evidence in ten further cases reviewed for this book. *Yorta Yorta* dominates the discussion for its pivotal role in interpreting s223 of the Native Title Act and thereby setting the evidentiary benchmark for future cases, and also for the court's controversial approach to history (without the involvement of any expert historians). Many other cases are canvassed, including *Bennel*, *De Rose*, *Risk* and *Rubibi*.

One chapter each is devoted to other important court cases. During the 1990s, the question of whether Aboriginal people were victims of genocide was taken to court unsuccessfully in two attempts to have the Australian government held responsible for past and present actions. The attempts by individuals to obtain some recompense for the suffering they experienced as a result of having been removed from their families were also largely unsuccessful, although that chapter does end with the successful *Trevorrow* case of 2007. In that case the plaintiff was awarded compensation for psychological suffering caused by his unlawful removal as a child. The Hindmarsh Island affair, already well documented,¹ is also discussed. In that case Ngarrindjeri people sought to protect an area of significance to them by using available heritage legislation. They failed in the attempt and the developers then tried to sue the consultant anthropologist and a Commonwealth minister for damages they felt the protection process had caused them, also unsuccessfully. The final case study concerns legal challenges among Aboriginal people of each other's Aboriginality in relation to ATSIC elections in Tasmania.

1. Bell 1998 and Simons 2002.

While personally familiar with the native title issues and Hindmarsh Island, the other cases were new to me and made for very interesting and accessible reading. The authors' critique of the approach of lawyers and especially judges to history addressed some important points, but overall left me somewhat dissatisfied. The main shortcoming is that much of the critique is structured around the straw horse of a black letter legal approach to history that is argued to undermine any attempt at a genuine, contextual engagement with history. In Chapter six the authors develop two concepts around which they pursue this critique: 'redemptive history' and 'legal history'. Redemptive history refers to history's power to provide a narrative of the past that allows past injustices to be acknowledged and by doing so can cause actions to be taken in the present that re-establish some form of genuine justice. For redemptive history to work in the Australian context a key ingredient is that it must allow for and actively draw on the oral histories of Aboriginal people. It seeks to provide the context in which the paper trail commonly associated with Anglo-European history can be understood. Legal history, on the other hand, refers to historical inquiry conducted by lawyers, or at least entirely on terms determined by the law, in which the textual record is considered to be the final word, self-contained and not requiring further context. Within this approach to history the work of one observer (Curr) of 19th-century Yorta Yorta people can have more evidentiary weight than the testimony of all the contemporary Yorta Yorta people put together. Similarly, in the *Cubillo* stolen generation case this approach to history enabled the thumbprint of an illiterate mother on a departmental consent form to be interpreted as her informed consent without consideration of the context in which that print would have been obtained.

I share the authors' concern with this judicial approach to history, including the historical ethnographic record, which often becomes 'gospel' before the court. What I found less compelling was the proposition that there is such a thing as 'legal history'. The court of law is generally a very conservative environment, and existing precedents, be they legal or historical are not readily dismissed. The authors' research itself, however, revealed numerous instances where judges have taken an approach that leads to 'redemptive history'. *Trevorrow*, *Rubibi* and *Shaw* are just some of the examples canvassed in this book. Rather than treating those cases as exceptions to the common legal approach, I think the book could have been enriched by providing a more nuanced analysis of what may have led some judges to take a more contextual and, in the authors' view, more appropriate approach to history. Was it personal predilection? I noticed, for example, that Justice O'Loughlin (who featured in three cases) seemed consistently to take a 'legal history' approach, while Justice Merkel (who also featured in three cases) took a 'redemptive history' approach just as consistently. Was it perhaps the nature of the arguments put before the court? This fundamental aspect of the legal process is not discussed at all in the book, but the approach taken by different judges in different cases may have been determined largely by the arguments put by the opposing parties. In native title cases, it is certainly the case that when the respondent parties do not oppose a claim, judges commonly take a very relaxed approach to evidence, looking only for essentials.

Regarding the contribution historians can make to the legal process, I am aware from my own workplace that lawyers frequently view history with some skepticism. The authors' interviews with judges confirmed that many judges struggled to see what

interpretive expertise historians added that judges themselves did not have. There is no doubt that historical research is considered valuable, especially in the complex cases concerning Aboriginal land rights, heritage and identity that are discussed in this book. But many lawyers view the historian's usefulness as being his or her expertise and persistence in accessing and collating archival information so as to make it available to the court. They are more circumspect about acknowledging historians as experts who can interpret and analyse the collated information in ways that others, especially lawyers, could not. The premise behind this view is that facts should speak for themselves, at least the kinds of facts that historians deal with, which are most commonly government and other historical files.

The authors, understandably, argue that historians do provide special expertise and techniques in interpreting documents. Apart from making such statements, however, I did not really find any examples in the book that made me understand what those techniques might look like. It seemed to me from the cases discussed that different historians had different approaches to interpreting the historical record, not unlike the different judges. The reception the expert historian met from the judge seemed to depend more on the judge's approach to history, than on the historian's. Thus, while one judge was dismissive of a historian's contextual history, another embarked on an exercise of contextual history all on his own, bringing into the discussion documents not referred to by any party.

Despite these minor criticisms on my part, this is a clearly written and well researched book that should provide essential reading for anybody involved in the legal arena of Aboriginal affairs or anybody wanting to understand this area of interaction between Aboriginal people and the dominant society. The legal arena is perhaps the dominant battlefield of the ongoing colonisation of Australia and this book provides many insights into the experience of Aboriginal people in this field and into the manner in which Anglo-Australian culture continues to struggle to understand and formally recognise Aboriginal culture and our historical treatment of Aboriginal people.

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Kim McCaul
Adelaide

In the Name of the Law: William Willshire and the Policing of the Australian Frontier by Amanda Nettelbeck and Robert Foster, 127 pp, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2007, \$29.95.

Mounted Constable William Willshire has received considerable attention from Northern Territory historians, most notably Austin Stapleton who, as the authors of this new

book point out, defines Willshire in terms that the man himself would have approved.¹ Gordon Reid and Bill Wilson remember him mainly as a ruthless killer of Aborigines in the cause of pastoral expansion during the 1880s and early 1890s.² Reid does note his uncharacteristic concern for sick, blind and crippled Aborigines at Alice Springs and Wilson implicitly questions his mental balance. However, like other historians who have touched on Willshire's life, they consider him briefly as a small player in a much wider narrative. This new book examines the man and the forces behind him with a new depth and, for the most part, clarity. The book begins with the Kaytetye attack of February 1874 on the Barrow Creek telegraph station, which resulted in the deaths of two telegraphists and, in the indiscriminate police-led revenge that followed, the killing of between 50 and 90 Aborigines. This set a precedent that lasted until public outrage forced an end to such barbarism after the Coniston massacres of 1928; and it implicitly sanctioned many a secret killing by pastoralists in clearing the land of Indigenes to make way for cattle. Such murders continued in remote areas of Central Australia long after the cattle-killing and revenge cycle on the older stations had shaded into the era when local Aborigines became a vital station labour force. Wholesale killings of Alyawarr people at Frew River and Ooratippra around the time of Australian Federation illustrate this point.

Into this volatile Centralian scene came Willshire, transferred to Alice Springs in 1882 after six years of police service in South Australia. In 1884 he was authorised to raise a native police force. With the aid of this band and the solid backing of Centralian pastoralists, he and his closest collaborator, MC Erwin Wurmbrand, became the main Aboriginal exterminators of the region. Central Australia's most authoritative historian, Dick Kimber, has estimated that at least 500 and possibly as many as 1000 Aborigines were shot within a radius of 300 kilometres from Alice Springs between 1881 and 1891. Willshire's men probably accounted for the majority. Willshire survived an official inquiry in 1890, apparently unscathed, basically because the hearsay evidence of his missionary accusers was discounted. But in the following year he was arrested, taken to Port Augusta and tried for the murders of two Aboriginal men, known to whites as 'Donkey' and 'Roger', at Tempe Downs station. Despite overwhelming evidence that Willshire had ordered his troopers to kill these men, he was acquitted – a shameful episode in the legal history of South Australia. Yet he had become an embarrassment to the government. They could not risk returning him to the Centre and did not want him anywhere near Adelaide. In 1893 he and Aboriginal trackers were sent to the Victoria River district to track cattle killers. His methods there followed his earlier practice, but with less success in the broken, bush-clad Victoria River Downs country than he had enjoyed in the Centralian plains. He asked for a recall, was granted it in 1895, lingered in the South Australian police until 1908, then resigned to become a night watchman until his death in 1925.

In the Name of the Law follows Willshire's police career from beginning to end; but the main – and most telling – sections of the book examine carefully the evidence given at the 1890 Inquiry and at Willshire's 1891 murder trial, plus Willshire's own writings. These consisted of three short books, *The Aborigines of Central Australia* (1888), *A Thrill-*

1. Stapleton 1992.

2. Reid 1990; Wilson 2001.

ing *Tale of Real Life in the Wilds of Australia* (1895) and *The Land of the Dawning* (1896). All this material is well placed within the context of its times. The grim connotations of white frontier attitudes emerge clearly from the contemptuous dismissal of Aboriginal evidence in the 1890 inquiry and Willshire's murder trial, in the solid backing given him by the pastoral lobby and in the general adulation that greeted his release. This adds to a solid body of known evidence. Most fascinating is the author's insight into the man himself. Cold killer he certainly was, utterly contemptuous of Aboriginal society, loathing what he called the 'mongrel half-caste ... born for the gallows', yet reluctantly admiring of Aboriginal bush skills. As Nettelbeck and Foster show clearly, he was deeply enmeshed in the kinship bonds of his Aboriginal troopers and desperately anxious to be seen as an authority on the society he did his best to destroy. As for his mental balance, he could condemn Aboriginal women as lazy and slovenly, yet fantasise about their sexuality in the wildest terms. His contemporary – and the man who arrested him in 1890 – MC William South, thought him possibly insane. Nowhere does that impression become clearer than in the ravings of Willshire as 'Oleara' in his fantasy of the Aboriginal maiden 'Chillberta' in the grossly misnamed *A Thrilling Tale of Real Life*, or in his bizarre rhapsodies in *Land of the Dawning* about smiling Aboriginal beauties emerging from the rocks after Martini-Henry rifles had killed their men.

There is much more to read in this book on the intertwining Willshire with frontier society; and all who wish to understand that era should read it for its perceptive and wide-ranging analysis. We will probably never know more about Willshire – I suspect we have not yet unravelled all the threads of his mind and times and laid bare the forces that drove this terrible man. It might be well to balance the picture by recalling that not all pastoralists were like Willshire's backers – witness Jim Parker who protected the survivors of the Barrow Creek massacres on his Bushy Park station – and most of the police were not like Willshire. Perhaps the assessment of boss drover, Matt Savage, a hard man and no lover of the law, is not far off the mark. 'Some were mighty strange characters', he said, 'yet most of the troopers did try to be fair in their dealings with the Aborigines'; as fair, that is, as white law would allow.

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Alan Powell
Charles Darwin University

The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution, 2nd edition, by Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, viii + 188 pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007, \$34.95.

This is a revised, expanded and improved version of a book originally published on the 30th anniversary of the referendum in 1997. Its original strengths remain: the contextualisation of the 1967 referendum within the long trajectory of campaigning for constitutional amendment dating back to 1910; detailed discussion of the decade-long struggle of Indigenous and pro-Indigenous activists to persuade the government to hold a referendum on both Section 51(xxvi) and Section 127 of the Constitution; attentiveness to the disjuncture between the referendum's legal consequences and its mythological status as the moment of Aboriginal citizenship; and the well-chosen collection of original documents comprising the second half of the volume (now made more reader-friendly by providing page references to the documents from Attwood and Markus's historical analysis in the first half). The new edition incorporates research findings from the last decade of scholarship on the 1967 referendum and on pro-Indigenous political activism more generally. It also, helpfully, adds an index.

The main difference between this and the earlier edition is signalled by the change of sub-title. The 1997 version, entitled *The 1967 Referendum, or When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, dwelt upon misunderstandings of the consequences of constitutional amendment, both by campaigners at the time and in subsequent memorialisation. Although that theme is still present, the new subtitle indicates its demotion in favour of extracting a positive meaning from the 1967 referendum. Attwood and Markus now argue that the referendum should be appreciated as a significant step toward the recognition of distinctive rights and entitlements for Indigenous Australians; and that this agenda of differential rights and entitlements was the primary aspiration of the leaders of the campaign for constitutional amendment in the 1960s. As they acknowledge, their arguments on these points have been strongly influenced by the work of Sue Taffe, the leading historian of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) which dominated the campaign for constitutional amendment from 1958 until victory in 1967.

There can be no doubt that the FCAATSI leadership did entertain ideas of distinctive Indigenous entitlements, and Attwood and Markus are right to draw attention to the fact. Yet they also acknowledge that FCAATSI seldom mentioned distinctive Indigenous entitlements in their public utterances during the referendum campaign, preferring to base their campaign rhetoric on appeals to equal rights and equal citizenship. Attwood and Markus do not adequately address the resultant tension between what voters were led to believe they were voting for in 1967 (equal citizenship for Aborigines) and what these historians would like their votes to be celebrated for (distinctive entitlements for Aborigines). Particularly in the final chapter, they vehemently denounce the ideal of precise equality of legal rights, singling out for special censure one of its leading exponents, former Prime Minister John Howard. Yet their own earlier chapters indicate that this was the ideal on which the campaigners for a 'yes' vote in 1967 based their appeals to the public. Rather than attempting to distill the significance of the referendum into an affirmation of distinctive Indigenous entitlements, it would be more in keeping with the evidence adduced by Attwood and Markus to acknowl-

edge that the referendum result is open-ended. The 90.77 per cent 'yes' vote was a clear public endorsement of the broad principle of Aboriginal inclusion in the Australian nation; but on how that inclusion should be achieved – whether by legal equality, by special temporary entitlements to remedy socio-economic disadvantage, or by recognition of enduring legal particularity – the referendum was necessarily inconclusive because these alternatives were seldom aired in public at the time.

Understanding why there was so little public debate over these alternatives, despite the fact that the leading 'yes' campaigners endorsed the special entitlements option, demands attentiveness to an issue treated far too lightly by Attwood and Markus. Unique among Australian referenda, there was no organised campaign for a 'no' vote. This gets just one fleeting mention in Attwood and Markus's text, plus a few more in the documents in the second half of the book. Yet not only was the absence of a 'no' campaign causally connected with the unparalleled magnitude of the 'yes' vote, it also suggests that at the beginning of the 1967 referendum campaign there was already broad community support for the general principle of Aboriginal inclusion in the nation. Moreover, the absence of a 'no' campaign decisively shaped both the 'yes' campaign (facing no organised opposition, FCAATSI and its allies were seldom forced to explain their agenda in any depth or detail, so the campaign barely rose above the level of sloganeering) and its subsequent memorialisation (since no alternative narratives about the meaning of the referendum were generated at the time, it was inevitably the story of the 'yes' campaigners – that it signified equal rights and citizenship – that was remembered). Additionally, the lack of organised opposition offers the most compelling explanation for the fact that the leaders of the 'yes' campaign sought special benefits or entitlements for Aborigines but seldom publicly advertised this objective in the course of the campaign. They kept quiet because the absence of an oppositional campaign allowed them to stay within the safety-zone of slogans and platitudes.

Attwood and Markus are far from unique in overlooking the significance of the absence of an organised negative campaign. Indeed, all extant studies of the 1967 referendum, whether by historians, political scientists or former activists, either totally ignore this fact or skate over it with the barest of mentions. It is a significant weakness that this otherwise excellent study maintains that tradition. Hopefully, by the time Attwood and Markus compile their next edition for the 50th anniversary of the referendum, that omission will be remedied.

Reference

Attwood, Bain and Andrew Markus (with Dale Edwards and Kath Schilling) 1997, *The 1967 Referendum, or When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Russell McGregor
James Cook University

A Man of All Tribes: The Life of Alick Jackomos by Richard Broome and Corinne Manning, 298 pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006, \$39.95.

Richard Broome and Corinne Manning have written an impressive biography of Alick Jackomos, a remarkable man whose contribution to cultural understanding in Victoria has been very important. Alick Jackomos, the son of immigrants from the Greek island of Castellorizo, was born in Carlton in 1924 and died in 1999. The biography chronicles his life based around his parents' fish-and-chip shop in inner Melbourne, his war service, his years as a tent wrestler; his marriage into and immersion in the Aboriginal community; public service in Aboriginal affairs; and finally his extensive collecting of Aboriginal cultural history and genealogies.

Although described as 'a man of all tribes' and a 'gubbah-iginal', a person who is both gubbah (European) and Aboriginal in understanding, one of the tensions that pervaded his long association with the Victorian Aboriginal community was his non-Aboriginality and the emerging militancy in Aboriginal activism that sought to exclude non-Aboriginal people from Aboriginal affairs. And this was despite the fact that he married a Yorta Yorta woman in the face of significant opprobrium from his Greek family, and raised three children in the Aboriginal community. There is a growing body of literature that examines the tensions Indigenous people and people of mixed-descent experience in terms of acceptance and integration into non-Indigenous mainstream society – Henry Reynolds' texts *With the White People* (1990) and *Nowhere People* (2005) are examples, but little has been published on the lack of acceptance and integration of non-Indigenous people within Indigenous society. But to dwell on this would be to overstate the frequency with which these frictions ruptured the otherwise harmonious and reciprocal relationships Jackomos and the Aboriginal community enjoyed.

Alick Jackomos was involved with the Victorian Aboriginal community from the early 1930s until his death from cancer in 1999. To use words that were used to describe Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson by western Victorian communities in 1841 who were surprised at his knowledge of Aboriginal society 'he was like a black man for knowledge'. For any researcher of 20th-century Victorian Aboriginal history, genealogy, and community politics it is almost impossible to avoid reference to Alick Jackomos. His vast collection of some 4,000 photographs and extensive genealogies (some 525 family trees) compiled during a lifetime spent with Victoria's Aboriginal community will remain an important resource for generations to come. Alick Jackomos' legacy is a profound one and people with an interest in 20th-century Victorian community political history will welcome the publication of this biography.

References

- Reynolds, Henry 1990, *With the White People*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria.
– 2005, *Nowhere People*, Penguin, Camberwell, Victoria.

Ian Clark
Ballarat University

The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story by Peta Stephenson, 250 pp, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007, \$39.95.

Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia by Regina Ganter (with contributions from Julia Martinez and Gary Lee), 280 pp, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, \$54.95.

In the midst of the flurry of celebrations marking the centenary of Federation in 2001, the 100th anniversary of the passing of one of the first pieces of legislation in the new federal Parliament did not go unnoticed. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* introduced the infamous dictation test that was designed to exclude migrants from entering the new nation at the whim of the administrators of the day. This legislation formally marked the beginning of the White Australia Policy in the new nation, reflecting the sentiments, particularly against Asian immigration, that had been fuelled by a range of interests including the trade union movement in all states. It took most of the 20th century to dismantle the policy yet the residue of its impact was still being experienced during the latter years of Prime Minister John Howard's government with, for example, the introduction of a stringent Citizenship Test.

Australia's Indigenous community experienced the new nation's abhorrence of the possibility of a coloured nation when state governments introduced policies of segregation and assimilation which rested on hopes for the eventual absorption of Aboriginal people into a white nation. It was only in the 1970s, that some of the more blatant discriminatory policies targeting Australian's Indigenous population were removed after the 1967 referendum and with the passing of the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

It is in this context that the growing academic interest in connections between Asian and Indigenous Australians has emerged, initially very cautiously and in small voice, but more recently with confidence and from all quarters. Covering a range of content and quality - from the telling of stories or yarning around the hearth and gatherings of sympathetic supporters, to recollections shared at small conferences, to academic discourses, refereed journal articles and doctoral dissertations - a different social environment has spawned new works which challenge the old binary view of Australia as black and white. More Indigenous Australians now recognise connections across ethnic affiliations and a path to identity that embraces black, white and everything in between. Indigenous Australians who previously were strident in their quest for recognition of their black identity are now more relaxed in 'claiming' their ethnic inheritance from a variety of sources. Acknowledgement of the multiple identities and ancestries of Indigenous Australians fosters an inclusiveness that paradoxically speaks up against the assimilationist views of white Australia because it challenges the idea that there is one cultural entity into which one can be assimilated.

There are many ways of being Indigenous in Australia, just as there are many ways of being Asian in this country. When this recognition occurs there is a sense of liberation from white constraints, including attempts to force assimilation, probably similar to the sense their Indigenous and non-Indigenous (including Asian) ancestors gained when they chose to interact or intermarry. This subtle form of resistance that evokes a sense of 'mutuality' that goes beyond hierarchies, has precedents in South-

East Asia.¹ It is no wonder, then, that Asians and Indigenous Australians were drawn together and took advantage of opportunities to interact, cohabit and settle together in spite of opposition from government authorities and the wider community.

Regina Ganter's *Mixed Relations* was born of Ganter's earlier work on the history of pearling in the Torres Straits.² *Mixed Relations* presents a broad sweep of the history of Asian-Aboriginal connections in the north – across Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, Ganter's 'polyethnic north', where Indigenous people's long association with Asians predates European settlement of Australia. The collection and processing of trepang or sea cucumber for the Chinese market, fishing, pearling and later mining brought adventurers from the Indonesian archipelago, South-East Asia, East and South Asia to northern Australia.

Presented in larger format and in hardcover, this volume appears to have been designed as an accessible 'coffee-table' style publication. There are eight chapters which deal thematically with the milestones in Asian-Aboriginal associations in the North. Chapter 5, 'Ethnic policy and practice in Darwin', is attributed to Julia Martinez, herself of Asian and Aboriginal ancestry, but unfortunately I found it impossible to discover anything about this author in the book.

The stories that Ganter presents, gathered from people of Asian-Aboriginal background and well illustrated with photographs and maps, tell of hardship, survival and triumph in the face of legislative prohibitions. The situations in which these families lived were complex – social relationships were seriously hampered by interventionist government policies, there were crises of identity, betrayal, denial of identity and the need to hide Aboriginal identity and to 'pass' as Asians in order to gain the best outcome for their families. There were also innumerable individuals and families who never denied their Aboriginal identity and who therefore lived under the legislative strictures controlling Indigenous communities in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Ganter uses these anecdotes from families with a range of experiences to illustrate the history of Northern Australia from 'coloured' eyes.

Peta Stephenson's *The Outsiders Within*, is about 'the triangular relationship between Asians, Aborigines and White Australians' and is a very different book from Ganter's. Its great value is the subtlety of Stephenson's argument and the intellectual rigour with which she presents her thesis. Stephenson moves beyond the narration of legislative oppression of Asian and Aboriginal people and anecdotes from their lives, to an analysis of what this means for Australia – what this tell us about Australia's history and emergence as a nation. While it celebrates 'the refusal of the law's victims to be victimised ... the strategies, at once psychological, social and practical, employed to survive these curtailments of liberty', it is firmly anchored in the contemporary context. (p. 5)

The term 'outsiders within' reflects the complexities faced by 'those who live the Indigenous-Asian experience' – the degrees of 'outsideness' and 'insideness', the permeability of boundaries between outsiders and insiders, the symbolic identification in the imagination of a nation concerned about its whiteness. Stephenson's narrative in

1. Scott, 1998.

2. Ganter, 1992.

nine chapters, hinges on what she identifies as four critical 'moments' in Australia's history – the first, when the trepang trade was outlawed by the South Australian government in 1906; the second, when state legislation outlawed Indigenous-Asian alliances; the third, when the Second World War heightened Australia's fear of an Asian invasion and the threat of Aboriginal collaboration with the Japanese; and the fourth, when Pauline Hanson's maiden speech in the House of Representatives in 1996 raised the spectre of Asian and Aboriginal threat to her own (and white Australia's) values. Each 'moment' is handled in two chapters – one drawing from traditional historical sources, and the other from Indigenous oral and contemporary artistic (cultural performance) sources.

I found the second half of the book compelling and satisfying, probably because of its contemporary relevance. Chapter 7 (Where are you from?), which deals with the national imaginary of the post-1980s which culminated in Pauline Hanson's maiden speech, offers a new context for the discussion of Asian-Aboriginal identities, while Chapter 8 (Detoxifying Australia) analyses ways in which the damaged or toxic relations between Indigenous and Asian Australians and other (white) Australians are being rehabilitated through cultural production by Asian and Indigenous Australians in art, literature, musicals, comedy and plays. These and the final chapter which offers the metaphor of reunions as a way to the future, bring new and insightful analyses to contemporary Australia and possible directions for the future. Here the enduring presence of storytelling and humour, from both Asian and Indigenous perspectives, and their value in healing relationships shines.

Peta Stephenson's thoughtful analysis of the complexities of Asian-Aboriginal relations and their place in shaping Australia today is a valuable contribution to Australian historiography. It brings new insights and a fresh perspective to the topic.

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Christine Choo
University of Western Australia

Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle by Roslyn Poignant, 320 pp, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2004, \$59.95.

In this important book, Roslyn Poignant draws on over a decade's painstaking research in libraries and archives across three continents, to tell the story of two groups of Aboriginal people from neighbouring North Queensland communities who, in the late 19th-century, found themselves performing as living ethnological curiosities in circuses, popular exhibitions and museums across North America and Europe. What is

especially remarkable about this book is that Poignant did much of the research for it as a private scholar, enjoying limited institutional support and funding.

Poignant writes of embarking on writing the history of these Aboriginal performers after encountering an uncaptioned studio photograph of a man, woman and child in the archives of the Royal Anthropological Institute. They were posed in costumes with the man and boy holding weapons clearly suggesting the image was taken to be reproduced and sold as a souvenir of their show. Poignant was struck by how this photograph vividly captured their troubled expressions, disrupting the commercial and quasi-scientific intents of the image. It was to be, she writes, the 'spark that ignited the slow fuse of research' resulting in this study (p. 6). However, in 1993, the research unexpectedly gained new fire and ethical importance with Poignant's involvement in the repatriation from a closed Ohio undertaking business of the embalmed body of Tambo, a man among the first group of people taken from North Queensland. By this time Poignant knew from Walter Palm Island, a senior lawman of the Manbarra people of Palm Island, that Tambo was his great grandfather and was known to have died after he and his companions had been pressed into performing on the North American circus circuit. In fact they had been a star attraction of PT Barnum's *Ethnological Congress of Strange Savage Tribes* during 1883, before being toured around dime museums in northern US states, and then exhibited in various European cities.

In the first chapter, Poignant rescues these Aboriginal travellers from two centuries of stereotyping as nameless savages though carefully analysing surviving portraits and contemporary anthropological reportage, notably a detailed study made in 1884 by two leading figures of the Brussels Anthropological Society. Poignant confirms the language groups to which these people belonged and maps their probable kin-relations. She also shows how in obvious and in more subtle ways the travellers continued to observe customary law through their captivity.

Chapter 2 explores the background to these people becoming living ethnological curiosities far away from their ancestral country in coastal North Queensland. Poignant provides a concise yet informed account of the effects of pastoral ambition and the violent taking of land on the region's Indigenous societies. The lives of Tambo and his fellow travellers were typical in that they lived between two worlds, keeping right ways alive yet forced to seek work on local cattle stations or pearling and bêche-de-mer boats. However, frontier conflict gave rise to cultural representations of the Aboriginal inhabitants of North Queensland that led to them being seen as a new commodity in what, by the 1880s, was a lucrative metropolitan market in exhibiting Indigenous peoples as primordial savages.

Chapter 3 focuses on Tambo who, with those were to be his fellow performers, was taken from North Queensland by RA Cunningham, one of numerous itinerant showmen and theatrical agents who eked out a living touring American circus and variety performers round Australia. Cunningham we learn cut a deal with PT Barnum to tour these Aboriginal people as a tribe of Australian Cannibals – 'beyond conception most curious to look upon' – in his travelling *Ethnological Congress*. On the question of why they agreed to go with Cunningham, Poignant argues that all we can say about the circumstances of their decision must be speculative; but she presents a strong case for

seeing them as having sought to escape the hardships and dangers of fringe camp life on the outskirts of Townsville, Ingham or other coastal towns.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 tell of the experiences of these Aboriginal travellers in North America and Europe. In the process, Poignant has much to say about Barnum's exploitation of public curiosity in so-called freaks of nature, wild men and the savage races of mankind that illuminates important connections between the exhibition of these 'living curiosities' and the contemporaneous evolution of anthropological science. She alerts us to how permeable the boundaries between entertainment and science remained even some 20 or so years after the institutionalisation of the discipline within the western academy.

Chapter 7 follows on, offering the most interesting, moving and disturbing chapter of this book. Poignant investigates the circumstances in which four of the travellers died – in Paris and in the German cities of Chemnitz, Darmstadt and Sonnborn – from what appears to have been a virulent strain of tuberculosis. In doing so, she draws attention to signs that one death provoked questioning of Cunningham's morality in continuing their captivity. This valuably complicates our understanding of the reception of ethnological spectacles, suggesting that we would do well to see that they could, at times, elicit more ambivalent responses than scholarship on the subject to date has generally assumed. The chapter also traces the fate of the remains of these people, providing richly contextualised insights into how and why European anatomical communities eagerly sought to acquire Aboriginal Australian skeletal and soft tissue during the 1880s.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 continue the story of the three surviving travellers, and their probable deaths far away from their ancestral country, before turning to the story of a second group of Aboriginal men and women who left Townsville with Cunningham in 1892. The experiences of this group, exhibited as King Bill and his company, proved much harder to reconstruct, though again Poignant has done much to piece together their experiences, to recover their identities and work out their possible familial relationships. We also learn how this second band of travellers, exploited by Cunningham through North American and Europe, sought to maintain their dignity and culture. At least two of them were to return to Townsville after being repatriated from London by Queensland's Agent General in 1898. The book closes, appropriately, with a reflective chapter on the homecoming of Tambo's embalmed body and the return of his spirit to Manbarra country.

This is a magnificent book that blends meticulous archival research with rich ethnographic insights to tell an unknown story in our colonial past for a wide readership. It has much to say that is new and important for historians of Aboriginal-settler relations and 19th-century colonial cultures. The University of New South Wales Press is also to be congratulated on matching Poignant's scholarship with numerous and necessary images of high quality.

Paul Turnbull
School of Humanities
Griffith University

Aboriginal Plant Collectors: Botanists and Australian Aboriginal People in the Nineteenth Century by Philip A Clarke, 191 pp, Rosenberg Publishing, Dural Delivery Centre, 2008, \$39.95.

The declared aim of this book is to 'explore the impact of Indigenous people upon the European discovery of Australian plants, most particularly during the 19th century'. This aim has been interpreted in a very wide sense. The book intermingles a history of Australian exploration, settlement and plant collection with accounts of Aborigines who acted as guides to the country and its plant resources. Many Europeans gave little or no acknowledgement of their debt to the knowledge of Indigenous people, but the author has been at pains to seek out evidence for the possible transmission of information from Aborigines to Europeans. The book is attractively illustrated with historical and contemporary pictures, and is fully referenced, so it could fall between the categories of 'coffee table' and 'text'. At the end of the volume are endnotes, references, a common names index, a botanical names index and a general index.

The first two chapters deal generally with relationships between Indigenous people and early explorers and settlers, which often led to the adoption of bush foods and medicines when other supplies ran out. The necessity to cure or prevent scurvy meant that fresh greens were sought by the Europeans. John White, the first fleet surgeon, was warned in 1788 by Aborigines not to eat a fungus, but was not dissuaded from the green 'wood-sorrel'. Tasmanian settlers adopted the Aboriginal practice of tapping the sap of the Cider Gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii*) which after natural fermentation made an 'intoxicating drink'. (The description of the sap by the author as 'resin' is incorrect.) Aromatic plants, particularly Eucalyptus and related species, were readily adopted from the Aborigines as medicines. In this chapter the author might well have given credit to the work of James Dawson and his daughter Isabella who, as settlers in Western Victoria, collected and published much plant and language information obtained from local tribes, but failed to have specimens botanically identified.

The chapter 'Making plant names' is very interesting. It discusses how the English-speaking invaders coined common names for an unfamiliar flora, and occasionally took Aboriginal names from various regional languages and anglicised them as common names. This builds on the well-known book by Dixon and others, *Australian Aboriginal Words in English* (1990). *Santalum acuminatum* was called Native Peach because of its red colour and hard wrinkled stone, but it is usually called Quandong, probably a version of *guwandhaang*, from the Wiradjuri language of central New South Wales. The use of Aboriginal names can result in confusion - the Queensland name *oondoroo* has been given by mistake to *Solanum simile*, a southern Australian species which does not occur in Queensland; in that state *oondoroo* was another *Solanum* species, *S. esuriale*. The name originally given to *S. simile* in South Australia was *quena*.

A single plant species can have many common names, some of quite local coinage, so common names are very unreliable identifiers. One person's 'Pattersons Curse' is another person's 'Salvation Jane' (*Echium plantagineum*). It is perhaps surprising that the author has chosen throughout the text to identify a species by a single common name; this forces the reader to keep consulting the index at the back of the book to find out the true species name. For historians this might not be a problem, but for gardeners and botanists it is annoying.

The author then goes on to devote single chapters to some of the well-known plant collectors and explorers and how they were helped by Aboriginal people. The chapter headed 'George Caley in New South Wales' starts with a full history of Australian plant collecting from the 18th century onwards, but it was not until Caley's arrival in 1800 that we find credit given to a named Aboriginal guide - Moowattin. Caley found him particularly useful in climbing trees to get specimens, and for collecting local language names. Alan Cunningham arrived as a botanist in 1816, and on his many travels employed Aboriginal guides, but seems to have been content to make his own observations rather than seeking out Aboriginal knowledge. Resident plant collectors such as James Drummond and Georgiana Molloy, living in close contact with their local tribes in Western Australia, received much valuable information about the surrounding plants.

A whole chapter is devoted to Leichhardt's exploration and contribution to plant knowledge, but strangely, Major Mitchell's extensive explorations are ignored. His Aboriginal guides, his illustrations (particularly of Turandurey and her child), his observations of Aboriginal people and his care to collect and document plants are surely worthy of attention in a book such as this.

Chapter 8 is devoted to Ferdinand von Mueller. While undoubtedly a very important plant collector, he had little interaction with Aboriginal people, but identified and documented specimens of plants used for various purposes by Aborigines which were sent to him by many collectors. He also prepared a list of plants which could have been used by Tasmanian Aborigines, but without any direct contact.

The chapter on inland explorers is largely concerned with the Burke and Wills expedition, which resulted in the explorers' deaths while subsisting on the Nardoo fern, *Marsilea* species. The author provides an excellent discussion of the use of the Nardoo spore cases as a food. It is likely that Burke and Wills, lacking the skills of Aboriginal women in preparing Nardoo, succumbed to the thiaminase in the spore cases, which deprives the body of vitamin B1. A final chapter, headed 'The study of Aboriginal plant use' brings together brief accounts of some early investigators of the phytochemistry of Australian plants, and some 19th-century compilers of information such as Brough Smyth, Edward Curr, Walter Roth and Joseph Maiden whose books are invaluable references today.

A word about the indexes: although the reference list is very comprehensive, it seems to contain entries to which there are no references in the text. Donald Thomson has three entries in references, but no entry in the general index, and similarly for Major Thomas Mitchell. The copious endnotes may refer to these, but it would be useful to be able to find where the authors are mentioned.

The author has given us a book somewhat different from its title and aim. As well as showing the impact of Indigenous people upon the European discovery of Australian plants, it attempts to cover a history of European encounters with the Australian flora. It is difficult to show that all of these involved the passing-on of Aboriginal knowledge. Nevertheless for the general reader this history is a useful picture of Euro-

pean attitudes to both the unfamiliar flora and the Indigenous inhabitants, and for the researcher the extensive endnotes provide a mine of information.

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Beth Gott
School of Biological Sciences
Monash University

Writing Heritage: The Depiction of Indigenous Heritage in European-Australian Writings by Michael Davis, 380 pp, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Kew, Victoria, 2007, \$39.95.

In 1925 ethnologist Henry Basedow predicted that much Indigenous heritage – ‘habits, laws, beliefs and legends’ – was doomed to extinction while Aboriginal ‘bones, stone artefacts and wooden implements would remain in our museums for ever’. This view of a fragmented Indigenous cultural heritage remains a popular one. In this book, Michael Davis describes the textual representations of this heritage from the latter part of the 19th century.

The reviewer, involved in heritage conservation since Justice Hope’s Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate in 1973, found this book to be a valuable compendium of extracts from all the major collectors, offering analysis of ideas about the Indigenous material culture that they were collecting. Its chronological arrangement allows the reader to see the development of ideas, theories and competing interpretations – the theorists versus those living with Indigenous groups. It traces the role of private collectors – amateur field naturalists with a growing fascination with Indigenous materials – through to the university-trained ethnographers, anthropologists and last on the scene, archaeologists, often working as public collectors for museums. It fleshes out the personalities and tantalising debates presented a decade earlier by Tom Griffiths in *Hunters and Collectors* (1996) about the excursions of Victoria-based collectors to central Australia.

Davis uses both private and public sources: diaries, journals and personal correspondence and official correspondence and reports, legal materials and other published records. This range enables Davis to delve into contested interpretations of the material, such as the debates between the Melbourne private collector, Stan Mitchell, and Fred McCarthy of the Sydney Museum.

Some themes are dominant throughout the writings – the desire to find ‘authentic’ heritage in ‘pristine’ traditional societies untouched by European influence and the influence of ideas about primitivism, hence the focus on the Northern Territory where the ‘real’ Aboriginal Australian was to be located. The notion of an ‘authentic Aboriginality’ led to concerns about recording the ‘dying race’ and, from the 1920s, to calls for protection of rapidly disappearing Aboriginal artefacts as part of ‘national heritage’. This was obviously needed given the example of RM Wishart and Fred Smith in 1932 at

Willaura in western Victoria recording 'our best find ever' when they 'picked up 1700 stone implements in one day' (p. 230).

The shift in European perception of Indigenous objects as ethnographic items to works of art is also traced from Baldwin Spencer's purchase in 1912 of Oenpelli bark paintings, through to the 1955 Northern Territory legislation to protect native objects and more recently, legislation to protect Indigenous designs through copyright. The slow emergence of the European realisation that artefacts needed to be considered and valued in the context of their place of origin and meaning to their designers/creators is also a powerful theme in the selected writings.

Throughout European writing about Indigenous societies, terms such as 'relics', 'antiquities', 'curiosities' and 'monuments' were used, while today's language of policy refers to 'heritage', 'culture', 'art' and 'artefacts'. The earlier terms Davis believes masked or denied Indigenous heritage as a living force. Today's legislation for national heritage requires iconic places of outstanding significance to all Australians. Yet again this is an appropriation of locale and its significance from the Dreaming for those of that place, those with obligations to care for that country.

The book is arranged in three parts. The period of 'wonders and curiosities' covers compilers such as JC Cox, F Carrington, PW Bassett-Smith, R Brough Smyth; collectors such as the Horn Expedition's looting of a *tjurunga* storehouse at Haast Bluff; recognition of rock art from George Grey (1841) in the Kimberley wandjinas, to WD Campbell's surveys of Port Jackson rock carvings (1899) and Walter Roth's description of Cooktown mural paintings (1898); and classification of stone tools by DL Stirling and AS Kenyon (1900). This section of the book includes the dominance of Baldwin Spencer's emphasis on classification in ethnographic recording and collections with Frank Gillen of the native tribes of central Australia remained for over two decades, along with their interest in recording sacred ceremonies compared with the 'ordinary corroborees'. It also outlines the growth in knowledge through fieldwork, research and publication is described and the role of anthropologists, such as AP Elkin and EWP Chinnery, in calling for a shift in policy for protection of Aboriginal lifestyles.

Part Two addresses the period from the 1930s to the late 1960s and illustrates the continuing obsession with collecting, classifying and displaying authentic artefacts in the search for meaning of lost relics of a 'dying race'. Fascination with Aboriginal art continued, with living artists such as Albert Namatjira being favoured at the same time that Charles Mountford was advocating training in stone-age art. Calls for preservation continued driven in part by new discoveries such as those arising from the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land which was coordinated by Mountford. Collections and research became institutionalised and legislation for preservation was passed in the Northern Territory in 1960 due to concerns about vandalism at Ayers Rock, and in South Australia in 1965, highlighting protection of stone arrangements on Observatory Hill in the Emu Reserve.

The final part (only 30 pages in length) examines the history of attempts to recognise the intangible elements of Indigenous heritage through surveys of sacred sites (especially by the Berndts) and the greater role of the Commonwealth after the 1967 referendum. The arts-related domain of government led attempts to protect 'Aboriginal folklore' from 1973 but legislation for this never eventuated. Instead the suite of herit-

age-protection legislation from the mid 1970s is described and the most recent (2003) is noted. The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, intellectual property rights, Mabo and native title, competing views over ownership of the past and Indigenous heritage are all briefly canvassed.

The latest heritage efforts concentrate more on processes of consultation and resolution of competing claims rather than on considerations of meaning of heritage significance. Despite the now accepted link between place as a source of living heritage and art, artefacts, customs, language and the indivisibility of this heritage for Indigenous people, legislation is still fragmented with place-based protection separate from protection of movable cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage.

The obsession with classification remains. The Australian government's National Heritage List must be of places of 'outstanding heritage value to the nation' to distinguish between places of state or local significance. Consequently after more than four years of operation, there are only 11 places listed primarily for their Aboriginal significance.¹ Fortunately this includes the great extent of Burrup Peninsula rock engravings that were previously unprotected. In addition, the List contains all of Australia's World Heritage properties including the four with Indigenous values of world significance. It would be interesting to see what places readers think should be protected by the highest level of legislation given the long history of calls for protection outlined in Davis' book.

As a policy specialist with the Parliamentary Library's information and research service, Davis is familiar with the intertwined history of collectors' trips, publications, legislation and so on. However, the reader would be well served by the provision of a timeline of key dates, as the periods of activity do not neatly fall into exact chronologies.

This book is a fine introduction to the raising of European consciousness of Indigenous heritage from the later 19th century. A more detailed examination of the disputes, delays and the major players in Indigenous heritage protection over the last decade is now required.

Reference

Griffiths, Tom 1996, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.

Jane L Lennon, AM
Brisbane

¹ The 11 National Heritage List places at 10 June 2008 are: Brewarrina Fish Traps; Cyprus Helene Club - Australian Hall Day of Mourning; Kurnell Peninsula Headland; Myall Creek massacre site; Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape - Mt Eccles Lake Condah; Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape - Tyrendarra area; Mt William Stone Hatchet Quarry; Dampier Archipelago (including Burrup Peninsula); Recherche Bay (north-east peninsula) Area; Hermannsburg Historic Precinct; Wave Hill Walk Off Route, see <<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/index.html>>

The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections edited by Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby, xvi + 596 pp, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2008, \$49.95 (hardcopy), \$39.95 (eBook) or \$6.99 (per eChapter).

When I was growing up in Victoria and my parents took us for drives in the country, we would often stop for morning tea beside the road where there was some welcome shade – and where there was also, frequently, a stone cairn. I would wander over and look at the inscription. They were simple pillars of rough stones, and over one hundred of them were built in the first decades of the 20th century to honour and mark the paths of European explorers across Victoria. Where their plotted routes of exploration crossed with modern roads or features, these piles of stones were built and cemented into place, thus inscribing lines of European discovery and catching the landscape in a net of settler history. The unveiling of the explorers' cairns were occasions for speeches about country life, immigration and defence. Sometimes local Aboriginal identities were incorporated into the ceremony, generally those identified as 'the last of the tribe'. The cairns therefore acquired a triumphal air in their linear march across the land they claimed.

One of the leaders of this 'memorial movement', as it was called, was Alfred Kenyon, an engineer, historian and collector who is mentioned by John Mulvaney in his chapter in this book. Kenyon was one of those collecting enthusiasts who, in the first half of the 20th century, avidly gathered and removed Aboriginal stone tools from the field. Truck loads of them were piled up in the National Museum of Victoria, and together they formed another kind of cairn. While monuments were being erected to European explorers across the landscape, collectors were removing the field evidence of Aboriginal occupation and piling up tens of thousands of stone tools into a sort of central memorial cairn to 'the stone age'. While one set of cairns was inventing places for the European imagination, the other cairn was leaching the landscape of Aboriginal meaning and disassembling Indigenous place.¹

For me, this story became a powerful example of how a collection can be an artefact in its own right, as Leonn Satterthwait argues in the opening essay in this volume. That is to say, apart from the meanings of their individual constituents, collections as a whole have a weird and distorting – but real – integrity. In the case of Alfred Kenyon and his fellow stone tool collectors, it's possible that the stone tools had more meaning *en masse* than they did individually, that it was the sheer volume of them and the fact of their aggregation and displacement that was most important to the people who gathered them.

This important book analyses the collecting of Indigenous artefacts and tries to see collections whole, as artefacts in their own right. How were they amassed and why? In what ways are collections of material culture expressions of the personality of the collector and in what ways do they represent or misrepresent the people who made the objects? When it comes to Indigenous material objects, the white collector was often better documented than the artefact itself or the culture it was expected to embody. In the study of museum collections, one has to try hard to look beyond the collector. But in order to see around or beyond or through the collector, you need first to understand

¹ Tom Griffiths, 1996, chapters 3 and 7.

him or her, to factor them in before you factor them out. And, of course, the collectors are indeed a fascinating study in their own right.

By analysing diaries, correspondence, captions and the collections of objects themselves, this book tries to take us into the minds of the collectors. What motivated them? What was their passion, their quest, their obsession? For great collectors do live and work on the edge of madness. There are glimpses of madness in here, examples of 'collecting mania'. 'Get all the native things you [can] and as many as possible', John Tunney was told by the director of his museum. I am 'annexing all I can lay hands on', wrote James Field to Baldwin Spencer in 1903. And there are examples of curatorial nightmares too, such as the accidental and irrevocable separation of objects from their labels, a dismaying chasm sometimes opened up by circumstance. David Kaus records that, when Norman Tindale listed Herbert Basedow's collection, he found the artefacts in one pile and Basedow's labels in another. How mute the orphan object can be! And how demanding and educational is the writing of a caption. John Mulvaney has a quote from Baldwin Spencer that every museum scholar will appreciate. Writing in 1900, Spencer confessed: 'there is nothing like trying to arrange a big collection for revealing to you your colossal ignorance: when you sit down to write a descriptive label then you begin to realize how defective your knowledge is'.

These essays take us into museum basements and storage rooms, and out into the field; they sit us down in the dust so that we can witness the barter and exchange over objects, the trade in ideas, words, stories and things that led to Indigenous artefacts crossing the frontier, and eventually making their way into museums for research and display. What was lost and what was gained in that process? Museums are the most privileged window on this cross-cultural transition, in both the past and the present. In some ways museums encapsulate the frontier still, for they are the chief sites of barter and exchange over the material culture of others and ourselves. Of course they are therefore institutions with histories of exploitation and appropriation and violation. Many collectors stole or bullied artefacts from Aborigines. But museums also allow us to move towards a positive sense of the frontier as a shared space – and on that frontier, collectors, both private and institutional, played a fundamental and sometimes creative role. The moral complexities of frontier life emerge clearly in these encounters. Many Indigenous objects and crafts were generated by the economics of cultural exchange, and Aborigines could gain some fragile power through the patronage of collectors. Collecting or barter, as Elizabeth Willis shows in her chapter, could, for some white collectors, be a sympathetic way of drawing Aboriginal people into a new economy. In the words of Philip Jones, another of the contributors to this book, the frontier was 'less a line that separates than a zone that unifies, a zone capable of generating new and potent forms of culture'.²

So, in studying the collector and in analysing the collection as an artefact, in opening up the museum basement to our scrutiny, this book makes a significant contribution to Australian history and to cross-cultural studies. And it does so at a time when museums have undergone a fascinating revolution in ethics and sensibility. As the editors note in their introduction, many major Australian museum displays of Abo-

² Philip Jones, 1996.

iginal material culture remained unchanged throughout much of the 20th century, still caught in the thrall of nineteenth-century typologies. This began to change swiftly in the 1980s. Early collectors never imagined that Indigenous people would actually see their own objects in state and national museums. Now they not only see them; they are very often the curators of them. In some cases they have reclaimed them. The essays in this volume chart that intriguing and exciting transformation of museums from imperial trophy-houses to Indigenous keeping places.

And here's the paradox explored by this book. Collectors, although they sometimes promulgated negative images of primitive Indigenous cultures, were also often the leading edges of the white conscience. There is a passionate defence of Baldwin Spencer by John Mulvaney in this book, where he reminds us that we need to see Spencer's collecting in the context of his time, and that he was unusually sympathetic and enlightened for his generation. Kate Kahn, in another chapter, shows us how WE Roth, although he used terms and concepts unacceptable now, was nevertheless 'a man ahead of his time'. Lindy Allen, in her fascinating study of Donald Thomson, shows us a collector trying to compile as complete a picture of Aboriginal lives as possible, systematically and devotedly bartering material and intellectual treasures with 'tobacco, fish hooks, wire and flour'. The book also reveals the way that collections indeed have lives of their own and sometimes undermine the explicit purposes of the collectors – and so, objects gathered as relics of a doomed race are used today by contemporary Indigenous people to renew a living culture. And so Alfred Kenyon, a man who scraped the landscape clean of Aboriginal material culture and celebrated European triumph in its place, would be stunned by the uses Aboriginal people have since made of items in his collection.

In some cases, the collector's collection has had to be reconstituted, such as Ian Coates achieves for Harry Hillier whose ethnographic collections are held in at least six museums in Australia, England, Scotland and the United States. Or as Louise Hamby does for Lloyd Warner, whom she dubs 'the reluctant collector' but whose gathered objects from Arnhem Land are nevertheless spread around the globe across nine different institutions. So, it is possible for the following sequence to arise: a collection is made, then it is physically dispersed, then it is intellectually reconstituted, and then, some of it might be actually repatriated as Aboriginal people rediscover it. Now, that's the kind of exciting and convoluted journey – into the field, back into the museum, across the world and back into the field again – that an interest in collections can take you on.

This book about collectors and collections is itself, of course, a collection – and therefore an artefact in its own right. It has an excellent introduction by the three editors, Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby and its authors come from every Australian mainland state and territory, and one from the United States. The great ethnographic collectors are mentioned or studied in depth here, and some of the lesser known too – Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, WE Roth, the Strehlows, Norman Tindale, Donald Thomson, Ursula McConnel, Charles Mountford, Lindsay Winterbotham, Frederick McCarthy, Ronald and Catherine Berndt, John Helder Wedge, Charles Joseph La Trobe, John Hunter Kerr, Otto Siebert, Henry 'Harry' Hillier, John Tunney, Herbert Basedow, Edmund Milne, Lloyd Warner, Helen Wurm, Edward Ruhe and John Kluge.

In an address given at the National Library of Australia in 1974 in honour of the collector Rex Nan Kivell, Bernard Smith urged Australian historians to 'seek a more balanced, a more archaeological, a more humanist view of our history'.³ And one way of doing that, he felt, was to take more interest in our nation's great collectors, those people whose material legacy would wield an influence upon Australian historical scholarship 'comparable [in Smith's words] to that exercised by the great collections of the Renaissance'. Bernard Smith celebrated the boundless and often eccentric curiosity of such collectors, and their faith in the materiality of culture. And so does this book. It turns our attention to people who were often marginalised by professional disciplines, yet who were keenly attuned to the 'archaeological side of our history'; they knew and celebrated 'the sensuous enjoyment of material things'; they were determined to engage in difficult but rewarding cross-cultural exchange.

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Tom Griffiths
The Australian National University

Archaeology to Delight and Instruct: Active Learning in the University Environment edited by Heather Burke and Claire Smith, 288 pp, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California, 2007, \$29.95.

Heather Burke and Claire Smith, who are archaeologists based at the University of Adelaide, have edited a timely addition to the teaching of theoretical issues in archaeology in the undergraduate classroom. The main aim of this volume is to lobby for a greater use of active learning strategies (as opposed to passive lecturing) in the communication of theory in archaeological teaching. To this end they have developed a number of themes around a range of instructional strategies illustrated by their contributors.

The instructional strategies employed by the editors include role-playing, simulations, games, hands-on learning, creativity and critical reflection. Chapters particularly indicative of each strategy are reviewed in order to give the prospective reader a feel for the style, content and effectiveness of such approaches to archaeological learning. In Morag Kersel's example, debate is used to explore the complexities and nuances of one of the more politically charged archaeological issues today: repatriation. Kersel uses the case of the Elgin/Parthenon (depending on your perspective) marbles housed in the British Museum. Using a polarised and student-managed debate is an excellent technique that allows a thorough exploration of the issues involved. While Kersel provides

³ Bernard Smith, 'History and the collector', in his *The Death of the Artist as Hero: Essays in History and Culture*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 95-100.

advice on how to deal with a waning debate, I have found, using a similar approach, that assigning roles and a formal sequence reduces the need for the lecturer's intervention, thus allowing the students more 'freedom' to pursue their own arguments. I have found it extremely effective to have initial 'staters' set the respective cases followed by 'provers' that develop the main arguments for each side. Intervention from the opposing sides is not permitted. After the arguments have been explored by each side the 'attackers' have an opportunity to tackle the main arguments and proofs of the opposing sides. The use of debate, as Kersel suggests, allows for a much closer and critical engagement with the topic at hand. When I have used this teaching strategy to explore repatriation of Australian Aboriginal human remains and associated mortuary material culture, I have found the students often empathise with their assigned positions, whether they agree with them or not.

In terms of simulations, one of the most popular archaeological teaching tools is the simulated excavation. Bradley Bowman and Glenna Dean's chapter relays their experiences with such an approach. Bowman and Dean run a program that aims to couple the act of excavation to analysis, interpretation and ethics. They argue that it is too easy to teach excavation techniques through simulated digs for, unwittingly, absolutely wrong outcomes. The authors of this chapter describe in some detail the structure of their program and the goals of each stage. The first things their students learn before they even begin to think about excavation is an appreciation of the way in which artefacts tell of time and change through an archaeological deposit. Students are taught the value of preservation of archaeological sites and the value of artefacts as something that transcends current market prices. Only then are they permitted to become involved in the excavation of a simulated site; a site seeded with the types of artefacts with which the students have already become familiar. During the excavation phase the usual set of skills and techniques are taught with an emphasis on thorough recording of artefacts and other materials and subsequent analysis back in the lab. The way in which the program is structured, especially the initial familiarity with the culture period in question, allows for more informed student inferences when they come to interpret the site. Without incorporating theory within our simulated excavations we could be simply training the next generation of (more sophisticated) looters.

Gail Higginbottom (p. 78) makes the point that '[u]niversity students choose to learn, they want to know ... [and] [a]dding an element of fun is one of these ways'. Gail introduces the age-old strategic card game as a fun technique which pulls together the disparate themes of archaeological theory as well as facilitating better student retention. Higginbottom (p. 70) draws on research that suggests student preferences for 'stimulating games that [require] the use of logic, memory, visualization, and problem-solving'. As with the use of student-managed debates, the employment of a card game, where regular suits are substituted for archaeological theories, personalities, famous quotes and so forth, encourages the students to engage with the relevant literature in order to give themselves an edge during the game. There is certainly a great deal of scope in having the students design the theme and art work of the cards themselves, thus deepening their involvement, and no doubt improving their learning experience. While I have never used card games in my own teaching, I can see great value in the technique.

Within the theme of 'hands on teaching' Martin Wobst takes the somewhat esoteric approach of using the toilet as the focus of a field outing. Wobst's explorations of

the humble toilet include 'our image of person, status, power, gender, and privacy' (p. 207). While I was somewhat skeptical at first, I quickly became a convert and only regret the fact that it would be difficult to incorporate such an outing in my own courses. However, one of Wobst's other uses of the material culture of toilets may prove to be more applicable, in my case at least. I, like most that have tried to instil the feeling of vast tracts of time in my students when dealing with the geological and historical timescale, have usually resorted to the quite ineffectual clock analogy: *Homo sapiens* arrived in the final eight seconds I seem to recall. Wobst has used a technique of using standard issue toilet rolls, and their individual sheets, as measure of time. Typically it takes about nine rolls of toilet paper to encompass the entire history of the earth with one sheet being the equivalent of 1,000,000 years. This is a fun and interesting chapter with a very important message regarding the role of material culture studies. Whatever the final outcome of a field excursion to the local public toilet, assuredly it will be an experience that will remain with the student for some considerable time. And even more assuredly leave them with a greater appreciation of how material culture can transform humans, rather than the other way round.

Caryn Berg addresses the theme of creativity by presenting an exercise that uses creative writing as an archaeological learning tool. Berg discusses an approach where students develop a creative narrative, with a focus on a fictional individual, based upon a more traditional review of archaeological data from the academic literature. Berg argues this exercise facilitates a greater appreciation of humanity in both the past and present and also allows students to explore alternative interpretations of archaeological data sets. Berg has modified the exercise over time in response to student feedback but the consensus seems to be that the exercise is pedagogically effective and also, importantly, fun. Archaeology and creativity have certainly had an interesting relationship over the years with the archaeological exploits of now famous fictional characters such as Lara Croft, Indiana Jones and Ben Gates no doubt informing much of the public's understanding of archaeological endeavour. While some may suggest there is enough creative narrative in some forms of academic archaeological writing, it would, nonetheless, seem a useful educational approach.

Patricia Ruberstone writes to the theme of critical reflection in her chapter reviewing innovative ways to teach in the archaeology of death and mortuary practices. Actively teaching and researching in this area myself I was somewhat surprised by the apparent ambivalence of North American archaeologists to teaching on this topic. Ruberstone spends some time defending the relevance of having such courses in the undergraduate curricula and then proceeds to discuss the use of the scrapbook as a remarkably effective tool for engendering student critical thinking. The scrapbooks that her students are required to construct are composed of a series of articles sourced broadly (magazines, newspapers, academic papers and so on) and intended to inform a series of themes associated with death. The students are then required to write short interpretative essays on these themes, informed by their collected clippings. Ruberstone argues that the scrapbook approach facilitates a much closer and, importantly, critical engagement by students with the chief themes explored in the course and also brings the various aspects of the archaeological study of death into the present, thus creating a greater sense of relevance to the students.

While I am not certain that traditional lectures will disappear anytime soon as a teaching method, technological changes that include the facility to audio-visually record lectures and place them in university intranet sites is certainly affecting traditional lecture attendance in many tertiary institutions. However, such technological advances do not provide any pedagogical advantages other than allowing student flexibility in catching up with missed lectures. The overriding theme of this volume is that more innovative, engaged and fun teaching activities and scenarios are imperative if improvements are to be made in the ways in which we teach and students learn. This book really is a must for anyone involved in teaching archaeology, whether they are at the beginning or well into their careers.

Marc Oxenham
School of Archaeology and Anthropology
The Australian National University

The Archaeological Survey Manual by Gregory G White and Thomas F King, 152 + 36 pp, Left Coast Press, Inc, Walnut Creek, California, 2007, \$US29.95.

This book is based on long and extensive experience of archaeological work in the United States. As a result it is well worth reading and pondering though of moderate practical use in the field for somebody working in Australia. Its value here would seem to be mainly as a teaching tool, a guide to important and useful strategies, containing numerous reminders of aspects and avenues often forgotten or just not considered.

The early chapters deal with definitions and the history of archaeological surveys in North America and are interesting in terms of comparisons with Australia. Chapters 3 to 8 deal with equipment and survey basics, for example maps, coordinate systems and GPS (Global Positioning System). For those working here, there are guides more relevant to Australian conditions. If, however, you are planning to work outside Australia, it could be very useful to consider how things may be done elsewhere and what questions to ask about such matters before you start.

Chapters 9 to 13, 'Fieldwork' and Chapter 14, 'Professionalism' are of general interest and to my mind important to read, certainly if you are fairly new to the field and hoping or planning to do fieldwork. Experienced archaeologists may also find useful reminders of matters to consider and examples to make them smile or groan over shared problems. For those who teach archaeology this would be useful material to provide the students for reading and discussion.

Some major points are relevant for a number of reasons. Great stress is laid on the need for very thorough background research: what has been done in the area before, what has been written up - or not, and why, where information might be found in public or private records, what types of data was each researcher/team setting out to look for and what might they have ignored for lack of interest or knowledge. What was the expertise of the researcher or team? How were data recorded? What was actually noted and seen to be of interest? If nothing was found, was it because only a limited set of data was looked for? Or because the expertise to note other types of data was lacking?

This set of questions brings out the need for practitioners to have access to complete archaeological reports, not just digitised summaries or site lists, as has sometimes been suggested by heritage authorities holding the reports. We need to know, in detail, what was thought and what was done. The book may be useful when such matters have to be argued with authorities – or when consultants need to argue for time to do such background research. It also emphasises our duty to be explicit about the what, why and how when writing reports.

The authors provide numerous sources of information going beyond reports held by state authorities and so on. Though these lists relate to the United States, they are useful in triggering our imaginations to find and access similar less official sources here. This is a book worth reading but not to be lugged about in a backpack.

Laila Haglund
Balmain

Protecting Çatalhöyük, Memoir of an Archaeological Site Guard by Sadrettin Dural, with contributions by Ian Hodder, translated by Duygu Camuruoglu Cleere, 160 pp, Berg Publishers, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California, £40.00.

This is Sadrettin Dural's story as a site guard at Çatalhöyük, the famed Turkish Neolithic archaeological site, also well known for a recent focus from the international Mother Goddess community. From the nearby village of Küçükköy, Sadrettin starts life as a farmer, but also works as a taxi driver, before financial difficulties result in his taking on his role as a guard and guide at Çatalhöyük. This is in 1993 when Ian Hodder begins new archaeological excavations.¹ Before that the site had been fenced off from the local community, its trenches lying open since James Mellaart's well-known excavations in the early 1960s.

Sadrettin's understanding of the past of his region is probably fairly typical of the attitudes of rural Turks of his generation. In his own words, he outlines his growing relationship with the site, its discoveries and his growing understanding of the scientific approach of the archaeological team. He shows a keen curiosity and willingness to learn about the archaeologists' work and how people lived at the site 9,000 years ago. His questions demonstrate a focus on the individual life in that past, why and how people behaved the way they did – so different to today: why was the disabled individual buried in the 'rubbish tip', how did individual families actually live and relate to each other in the closely packed dwellings of that time? His speculations contrast with archaeological research posed of the site.

Dural's experiences at the site are interwoven with his life story, and in telling this he uses traditional parables and village stories to draw explanations and how to respond – lessons in life. A mistaken trust in business colleagues results in his ending up in prison, a shameful experience partly mitigated by a visit from the Çatalhöyük

¹ Hodder 1996.

archaeological team, a recognition outside his cultural experience and one that stresses the different world views.

Ian Hodder is known for his commitment to engage with community views, especially in his work at Çatalhöyük; his interview with Dural included in the book, demonstrates this. Hodder locates this approach in current post-processual reflexive archaeology. He has argued strongly for an acceptance of community interpretations of Çatalhöyük – the multivocality currently prevalent in interpretations of archaeology.² He has, however, shown an unwillingness to privilege the ‘local community’ over other communities, such as the Goddess interest in this site,³ that perhaps sits uncomfortably in an Australian context.

The book is short and easy to read. Even so, I found the overly simple English at times disconcerting, even patronising, but can only assume that this reflects the style of the writer, rather than imposed by the translator, Duygu Camuruoglu Cleere. Whilst an account of one individual’s relationship with a single archaeological site, this book serves to raise our awareness of the different perspectives local communities bring to the archaeological past.

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Marilyn Truscott
Canberra

². See for example Hodder and Berggren 2003.

³. Schaffer et al 2006?.

Review

Papunya Art

Papunya Painting: Out of the Desert exhibition presents a powerful selection of early Papunya canvases dipped in the rawness and beauty of the country of the Pintupi spirit. Presence is palpable in the gallery space. The painted ground of the desert shakes with presence that jumps off the canvas and dances towards the audience. Curator Vivien Johnson has honoured the artists' intent to communicate their grounded spirituality by situating these works in their cultural and historical contexts. The Pintupi stories of person, place and spirit in country form an intangible web suspending the paintings in meaning as they travel through different times and spaces. Acquired by the Aboriginal Arts Board in the 1970s and 1980s, these paintings have been in the custodianship of the National Museum of Australia since 1990 and now, after more than 30 years in seclusion, this unique collection has emerged into the light (Johnson 2007: 30).

In the early 1970s the Pintupi were a people displaced from their home country. They had walked or ridden from the west on the backs of welfare trucks over hundreds of kilometres into the government settlement of Papunya. Uta Uta Tjangala and his son-in-law Tim Payangka Tjapangarti, two of the first painters, walked into the ration station at Haast Bluff in 1958, later moving to live at Papunya. Uta Uta then assisted Jeremy Long of the Northern Territory Welfare Branch in locating and bringing in other Pintupi from Lake Mackay, Yumarri and the Kintore Range (Long 2006: 33). His intention was to remove his people from the range of rockets blasting from the British atomic test site at Woomera. By the late 1970s the destructive effect of settlement life on Pintupi people, cut off from their spirit country, had become obvious. Uta Uta and other senior Pintupi were instrumental in moving families back to outstations on their traditional lands. During the years of exile the Pintupi artists kept alive their connectedness to the country of their spirit through painting.

Ironically, the clash of the colliding worlds at Papunya ignited the wildfire of the Western Desert art movement. The Pintupi may have been forced to move from their land but their spirits remained rooted in the hidden aquifers of their country. The artists drew on the subterranean desert water to paint the stories of their country that flowed unstoppable onto any boards or canvas they could find. The Pintupi had decided to state their claims to country and share their rich heritage with the new whitefellas by deploying the tools and pigments of the west.

The first paintings in 1971 were personal communications to Geoff Bardon, a young teacher, who asked them to tell him their stories and provided them with

brushes, acrylic paint and canvas. Geoff remembers it as a conversation, a struggle to convey meaning:

Until December 1971 the art had been mesmerisingly, the great first climactic articulation of the painting men's creativity; I asked constantly that the artists not only use their own story-representations but also develop them so as to make clear the meaning of a ceremony or act, sometimes in a conventional way, subsequently in a less conventional and more innovative way; also, I sought from the artists an intensification of the motifs, the idea of a 'big mob of men', a 'big fella ceremony'. (Bardon 2004: 29)

Cross-cultural articulation of meaning is difficult as perception and value are the results of long acculturation in a specific place and time and communication relies on shared metaphors of meaning within a common language. Marcia Langton reminds the art viewer that within Aboriginal Australia there are several iconographic languages that have to be learned in order to appreciate the art of different peoples and places and that merely looking is not enough. Art is a place of contextualised language: 'viewers of Aboriginal art expect that looking at the work will itself reveal its value and meanings [but] responding to the paintings requires work - the work of scholarship, research and paying attention, just as we cannot understand Renaissance art merely by looking' (Langton in Myers, 2005: 24). To expect Western Desert art to be immediately and universally understood as a simple hybridity, an adoption of western techniques to convey traditional knowledge is not sufficient to experience the Pintupi life-force in these Papunya paintings.

Papunya painting evolved as a series of dynamic conversations that moved outwards from the close confines of the Papunya painting room in ever widening circles until these conversations included the world.

We can now see much more clearly the likelihood that from the perspective of the Aboriginal men who sought to paint it was an opportunistic chance to *speak*, the intuitive colonising of a coloniser who had the sympathy, the heart to listen, to ask, and most of all to see! (Issacs 2004: 206)

The inner circle of meaning was held firstly by the Pintupi male artists, and then their neighbouring kinsmen who negotiated appropriate graphic representations of the meaning of their shared Dreamings. Secondary circles of meaning were discussed by the men with the young male art advisors Geoff Bardon, Peter Fanin, John Kean and Andrew Crocker. The outer circles of meaning are usually all that is available to art buyers and the art gallery visitors who rely on the brief annotations art advisors attach to the paintings.

The museum context provides an opportunity to amplify the levels of meaning and appreciation of these early Papunya artworks for the general public. The exhibition visitor is taken on a journey tracing the story of Papunya paintings becoming recognised as fine art. From 1974 to 1981, the period covered by the exhibition, Aboriginal art was valued primarily as ethnography. Papunya acrylic paintings were not considered 'authentic traditional' art nor were they seen as modern art free of the ethnographic tag. Being unclassifiable they were rejected by both museums and art galleries. It was only through the foresight of Bob Edwards, the director of the Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) a federal government body formed in 1973, that a collection of these early Papunya

paintings was acquired and in 1990 was transferred to the custodianship of the National Museum of Australia.

The exhibition presents the paintings in the artists' temporal framework referring to the 'times' of each manager of Papunya Tula. After Geoff Bardon left Papunya in 1972, Peter Fanin took on management of the newly incorporated Papunya Tula Artists. During 'Peter Fanin time', 1972–75, the paintings were marketed as 'authentic ethnographic art'. A label was designed to assure the public that Papunya painting was both ethnographically coherent within the Western Desert tradition and was high art. During this time the Aboriginal Arts Board supported and promoted Papunya art by commissioning large canvases for its national and international exhibitions.

'Dick Kimber time', 1975–77, was a time when the fledgling art movement needed to establish strong financial and cultural guidelines. Controversy over the value and meaning of Papunya art needed to be resolved. In 1972 Dick Kimber warned the Aboriginal Arts Board and Peter Fanin that potentially serious problems could arise because of the inclusion of secret sacred symbols in some early paintings. Kimber had spoken with the Papunya men who expressed their concerns about painting Tjukurpa or Dreaming that spilled into others' country: 'This Tjukurpa, you can't cut it, you can't make a fence across it, you can't make a road, this Dreaming track it goes there, those Walpiri men are painting there, that one belongs to me too' (Kimber pers. comm., June 2007). Kimber assisted the senior men to resolve these issues with their Western Desert neighbours through ceremonies of reparation.

The process of transformation from a secret sacred art to a public art was continuing and being refined during the 1970s. Geoff Bardon had witnessed the beginnings of this in the painting of Johnny Warrangkula Tjupurrula:

The cave and the Water Man became more directly comprehensible. I felt that as we talked and he painted Johnny was clarifying and giving new life to an archetypal form. Moreover, he was showing, with supreme brilliance, that archetypes were being modified and changed, sometimes even omitted from a representation; and he was making his own rules stylistically and iconographically. His work and that of Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri followed from what is least understood about the Western Desert art from 1971 to 1973: *that seemingly it was being secularised*, so that a multitude of stories could be generally seen; that the adaptability of the hieroglyphics and the way an individual artist could change the forms and still make them understandable was becoming a cultural acceptance. (Bardon 2004: 32)

When John Kean took over as manager of Papunya Tula in 1977 the transformation continued; the artists were consciously painting for the national and international western audience. Kean, fresh out of a Melbourne art school, presented the painters with the larger canvases popular with the art worlds of New York, Sydney and Melbourne. The artists responded with expanded vision, conveying their knowledge of Tjukurpa without revealing secret sacred Law; their paintings were like 'deeds of title' (Johnson 2007: 89).

'Andrew Crocker time', 1980–81, heralded the complete shift from ethnographic art to 'art for art's sake'. Crocker's definitive statement at Papunya Tula exhibitions assumed a sophisticated art audience able to appreciate the Western Desert aesthetic:

Much could be said about the genesis of the Western Desert school and also of its role in the artists' society. I think that for the purposes of this exhibition the paintings should be allowed to exercise their own aesthetic appeal and that explanations of content and symbolism be best kept to a minimum. (Johnson 2007: 95)

It appears, however, that the public appreciation of the Western Desert aesthetic is not as sophisticated as Crocker assumed. Art critic Robert Nelson suggests that white Australians are still struggling to 'grasp the secret knowledge at the heart of Aboriginal art' (Nelson, 2006:17). This is instructive as it reveals that 35 years after the first acrylic canvases emerged from Papunya and took the modern art world by storm, western art critics' continue to debate how to understand modern Western Desert art. It is no longer separated from mainstream art as an ethnographic curiosity but neither can it be simply categorised as 'abstract art' in the western tradition. Western Desert art remains enigmatic to a western eye because it is not just 'art for art's sake'. Its artistic symbolism and iconography arise from a far more ancient tradition in which art has always been an integral expression of a holistic religious ontology.

Exhibiting the Papunya paintings in their full glory as magnificent works of art in a museum space allows texts, films and photographs to weave a communicative context around the works encourages informed appreciation. The artists sang the flesh and spirit of their creation ancestors quivering with life into the painted marks on their canvases with the intent to make their power and presence real to the audience. This performative interaction between the Papunya paintings and the viewers is made possible by the intentional space of the exhibition. The desire of both curator and artists is to communicate the vividness of Pintupi relatedness to country. To communicate the feeling of being in desert country the museum gallery has been transformed through low lighting and warm earthy coloured surrounds into a sacred performance ground designed to focus attention on the painted marks of power in the Pintupi artworks.

On entering the exhibition space a visitor moves from light to dark, from the bright daylight glass and metal towering entrance hall of the National Museum of Australia through an unassuming door into a softly low-lit cavern. The body and mind are called to attention by a Pintupi voice alerting them that they are crossing into another country. In this Western Desert world English is a foreign tongue and the visitor's ears and eyes need to be attuned to another aural and visual language.

The exhibition hangs in a high-ceilinged hall and, like the Big Painting Room tin shed at Papunya it resembles a cave. The soft dark surrounds focus the eye on the brilliantly coloured paintings glimmering in beams of low light. The sounds of Pintupi men talking and singing comes softly from a film booth, while in the centre of the vast space a group of children and parents sit around a large light box on which Western Desert symbols are depicted and interpreted to be traced by children's hands. The scene is reminiscent of a campfire around which children sit with elders learning to trace their

graphic language in the sand. The exhibition space feels alive with the presence of the painters, just as Geoff Bardon described them in the painting shed:

The incredible vitality of the Western Desert art became a veritable flood of brilliant paintings; the men in groups about the darkened, cave-like interior of the galvanised iron circle of a shed, singing and roaring out to their creations and attaining a confraternity of four tribes; forms radiating into new forms, and conceptions of place and subject matters being set down definitely, technical problems with many of the Pintubi being overcome.' (Bardon 2004: 29)

The paintings have a quality that transcends cultures and languages: audiences around the world are awestruck by the power and sacred presence in these great works of art. The paintings tap into the common human desire to connect with something greater than ourselves, the immensity and beauty of land and home country. The collective unconscious responds to symbolic language at a deeper level than words, allowing viewers to feel the breath of the Dreaming ancestors that shimmers over the Western Desert. The painted ground of the Papunya canvases is a thin porous membrane between the tangible and intangible worlds of the animated flesh of country.

The Museum 'cave' provides a sacred space in the secular western world that encourages quiet reflective attentiveness to the creativity of the human spirit. The Papunya exhibition space, like an ancient painted cave, is a place to retreat from the daily business of hunting and gathering sustenance for our bodies to focus on the sustenance of our souls, the precious gift of the Pintupi to the nation and the world of their vibrant living art signifying human meaning in landscape, human presence and connectivity to place.

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Ann McGrath
Australian National University

Contributors

Malcolm Allbrook has recently completed a doctoral thesis through Griffith University, entitled 'Imperial Family: The Prinseps, Empire and Colonialism in India and Australia'. Before embarking on the thesis, he worked mainly with Aboriginal land rights and health organisations in the Kimberley, Gascoyne, Murchison and Perth. He is currently a freelance historian based in Fremantle.

Ian D Clark is an Associate Professor in Tourism in the School of Business at the University of Ballarat. He has been a Research Fellow in History at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Manager of the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre in Halls Gap and Senior Researcher with the former Victorian Tourism Commission. His areas of interest include Victorian Aboriginal history, toponymic research and Indigenous tourism. He is an avid collector of the music and memorabilia of Ella Jane Fitzgerald.

Ann Curthoys is Manning Clark Professor of History at The Australian National University. Her books include *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (2002) and, with Ann Genovese and Alexander Reilly, *Rights and Redemption: History, Law and Indigenous People* (2008).

Kate Darian-Smith is Professor of Australian Studies and History at the University of Melbourne and President of the International Australian Studies Association. Kate is currently involved in three Australian Research Council projects, including 'Childhood, Tradition and Change: A National Study of the Historical and Contemporary Practices and Significance of Australian Children's Playlore'.

Christina Eira has worked for several years with Aboriginal communities reviving their languages, and is currently the Community Linguist for the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. The research aspect of this role focuses on a practical analysis of languages undergoing revival which synthesises historical and contemporary usage for present-day purposes. In parallel with this goal, Christina is engaged with the theoretical development of linguistics in light of these emergent language situations and changes in professional practice in regard to collaborative, community-based research.

Charlie Fox teaches Australian history at the University of Western Australia. Apart from an ongoing interest in Aboriginal history, his research interests include the histories of work and unemployment (on which he has published three books) and intellectual disability.

Heather Holst is a PhD student at the University of Melbourne and teaches on a sessional basis at Australian Catholic University as well as working in the homelessness policy unit of the Victorian public service. Her research focuses on home and homelessness, with her PhD work taking the Victorian town of Castlemaine as a case study.

Kathryn M Hunter teaches Australian History, race relations in the Pacific region and environmental history at Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Her research has been in the area of gender and rural life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a rich and varied field. She is the author of *Father's Right-Hand Man: Women on Australia's Family Farms in the Age of Federation, 1880s to the 1920s* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004) and *Line of Sight: A History of Hunting in New Zealand* (Random House, forthcoming 2009).

Bob Reece is Professor in History at Murdoch University, Western Australia. Together with Niel Gunson and the late Diane Barwick, he established *Aboriginal History* in 1977. His most recent book is *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2007.

Mark St Leon is a freelance university lecturer who teaches in the area of accounting, economics and management. He formerly served with the Australia Council, the federal government's arts funding and policy advisory body, where was the administrator of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board. A descendant of one of Australia's earliest circus families, he received his PhD from the University of Sydney in 2006 for his dissertation, 'Circus and Nation'. The thesis will be published in an adapted, illustrated form by Miegunyah Pres in October 2009.

Rebe Taylor completed her Masters of Arts in history at the University of Melbourne in 1996 and her PhD in history at The Australian National University in 2004. Her book, *Unearthed: The Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* (Wakefield Press, 2002), won the South Australian Premier's award for non-fiction in 2003 and the Victorian Premier's Award for a First Book of History in 2004. Rebe is now an Australian Research Council Fellow at the Australian Centre, the University of Melbourne. Her project, 'From Race to the Genome', explores the history of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people within the scientific imagination.

Susan Upton is the great granddaughter of renowned anthropologist RH Mathews and daughter of the respected musicologist, Jane Mathews.

John Williams researches Indigenous health issues for the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern.

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Footnote style

1. Rowley 1971: 107. See also Barwick 1981.
2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
3. Fison and Howitt 1880: 96-108.
4. *Evening Mail*, 12 March 1869.
5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

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