Notes and documents

‘Making a difference’: tributes to Peter Malcolm Clark 1955–2004

Obituary compiled by Isabel McBryde

Introduction

Peter Clark was someone who truly ‘made a difference’, giving that much-used phrase new meaning. His life and actions were fundamental to so many significant developments in his professional fields, and in local community life.

This life was tragically shortened, but its legacies will be lasting. His work had a seminal influence on policy and practice across the spectrum of archaeology, cultural heritage management and land and natural resource management in south-western New South Wales, the region he loved and understood so well.

At the personal level there is the lasting affection and respect everyone who knew him had for this unassuming, but brilliantly effective man. Many will remember lives changed by his support or guidance.

His experience and personal integrity made him a valued adviser to the different interest groups within the area. From his own rural family background and professional expertise he understood the particular concerns of each group, and of the government agencies. He could thus offer astute, informed counsel, and often resolved difficult, confronting situations.

Regional Aboriginal groups especially valued his advice. They recognised his long-term commitment to assisting them realise their hopes for greater direct involvement in decision-making on matters concerning their cultural heritage. His role in arguing the need for training and employment for Aboriginal staff in the government agencies with which he worked was very significant. The tributes from Aboriginal groups speak to how important he had become to them over the years. Their sense of loss is deep.

Peter Clark commanded an extraordinary range of technical and academic skills, directed to an extraordinary range of intellectual interests and administrative responsibilities, as well as to community projects in Sunraysia.

The following tributes come from Peter’s family, Aboriginal groups and from colleagues in land management and academic research – Bill Tatnell of the Lower Murray
Darling Catchment Management Authority, Luise Hercus of the Australian National University and Stephen Webb of Bond University. They demonstrate the breadth, and highlight the diversity, of Peter’s achievements, especially his contributions to our knowledge of the region’s Aboriginal past and environmental history, and his support for the Aboriginal people there today.

Tributes

From Bill Tatnell

Bill Tatnell, Peter’s colleague in the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Management, and now Program Manager with the Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority, surveys Peter’s important work in land and natural resource management with government agencies based at Buronga in south-western New South Wales.

Peter the pilot: ‘Pete, we want to go over there, how do we get there?’

Peter the pilot. ‘Pete, we want to go over there, how do we get there?’ How often did landholders, managers, staff and community people discuss resource management problems with Peter and emerge with the pathway to solving them.

Never a ‘yes man’ for government, Peter had an inner strength and the capacity to work beyond the day-to-day call of public service, to develop what he saw was important for natural resource management into the future. By the time others became aware of a problem, he was already developing and using the tools to meet the challenge. This approach took determination, hard work and creativity. He was prepared to stand up for what he knew was right. If necessary he was prepared to put his job on the line for what he believed in. When he was piloting ‘the plane’ he was taking his responsibilities seriously.

Peter believed in the importance of establishing a strong information base which saw him spearhead the technical development of the best regional natural resource GIS system in New South Wales. Peter recognised early the power of spatial information at catchment scales while others were still scratching their heads trying to find the ‘on’ switch of the computer. He used the information creatively by combining his extensive and detailed knowledge of the catchment and its history to produce a foundation for many projects.

Peter had an important role in the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area in the years following its listing in 1981. The establishment of any World Heritage Area is a long, involved process. Nobody knew the Willandra Lakes as well as Peter, a result of his years of study, reconnecting the landscape with its human and natural history.

The formation of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area represents the stage where Peter was able to bring together and hone his skills in archaeology, natural resource management, and his understanding of the needs of landholders, Indigenous owners and government. To bring such a vision to fruition was an enormous exercise, in which Peter had a pivotal and crucial role. Peter established clear pathways for resolving the maze of complex scientific and administrative issues in
a way that no one else had before. The concept of people living in, and being inte­
gral to, the World Heritage landscape was born. The concept of a human-free wil­
derness was finished. His work is, and will remain, a foundation for this area of international significance.

Peter was involved in the nationally recognised Southern Mallee project from the concept design through to implementation of land use agreements. 110,000 ha of private conservation reserves were established which has allowed the expansion of dryland farming. Peter’s contribution to the concept of the private conservation reserve owned and managed by landholders and supported by all interest groups is acknowledged.

Outside the Department Peter’s vision and expertise were important to many Sun­raysia organisations, such as the SunRise 21 Committee on which he served since 1994, appointed by the Murray Darling Basin Commission. He also inspired the Inland Botanic Gardens to expand into the Barkindji Biosphere in 2001 and, using satellite imagery, identified potential sites for a proposed solar tower. This ability to run with an idea and inspire captures the quintessential Peter Clark.

Peter was a technical wizard. No one needs reminding of his interest and abilities in things technological. He was passionate about machines and a genius at getting things working.

Flying commercial from Albury to Sydney, Peter turns to me and says ‘the engine on the right wing has stopped but don’t worry, the pilot has turned it off to protect the engine because of low oil pressure. I reckon he’ll veer left and land at Canberra’. Peter had been listening to the engine and suspected trouble before it was shut down. We landed in Canberra.

Pete could have chosen to promote himself and seek promotion elsewhere to higher office. The fact that he did not says a lot about him as a person. He valued the personal relationships he had developed over 30 years in Sunraysia, he had established a successful turf business and had himself grown roots. The mallee landscape and Murray Darling Rivers got hold of him, he had become an integral part of the place.

Peter is respected and will be remembered for his rock solid approach to life, his enthusiasm, his energy and his goodwill to everyone. This is reflected in these words from the Barkindji Elders: ‘Peter was a very special person who we learned to work with, love and respect.’

Bill Tatnell
Program Manager for the Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority
From the Aboriginal custodians of the Willandra Lakes region

The Aboriginal custodians of the Willandra Lakes region are important participants in the management of this World Heritage area. There is an Elders Council and local Aboriginal members of the Scientific and Technical and Community Management Committees. Their role is a strong one. Its development owes much to Peter Clark’s vision and support over the many years since he first came to Mungo National Park in 1979.

*Mary Pappin sends this warm tribute on behalf of the Aboriginal custodial groups for the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area.*

The Three Traditional Tribal Groups would like to acknowledge the late Peter Clark’s contribution to the establishment of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area in bringing people together, particularly the Aboriginal custodians. This was at a time when he was a young man, he found his way around the Aboriginal communities, talking to the Elders, and made an effort to understand their cultural concerns for the land. He was one who helped establish a prominent place in the management of the Willandra for the 3TTGs the Mutthi Mutthi, Barkindji, and Ngiyampaa people. While reconciliation is a much talked about word now, Peter was working towards reconciliation right from the start.

He arrived in the area in the late 1970s as the National Parks Resident Archaeologist. This was the time when he initiated a lot of consultation with the Aboriginal Elders from south-western New South Wales. He will be greatly missed by the Mutthi Mutthi, Barkindji, and Ngiyampaa peoples of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area.

Mary Pappin
c/- Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area Executive Officer
NSW National Parks, Lower Darling Area

Research: Field work with Luise Hercus in the Simpson Desert

Over several years from 1983 Peter joined linguist Luise Hercus in expeditions to relocate and record the wells (*mikiri*) used by the Wangkangurru for generations before they left the desert late in the nineteenth century. Mick McLean *Irinjili*, in many interviews told Luise of life in the desert, the importance of the *mikiri*, and the story-lines associated with them. Luise and Peter worked together to relocate this cultural landscape of stories, people and archaeology. It was exciting for them to visit these storied places, often with people of Wangkangurru descent. Peter’s archaeological and geomorphological skills gave the study a new dimension which Luise greatly valued. A joint paper on the 1983 fieldwork was published in 1986.¹

¹. Hercus and Clark(e) 1986.
Luise pays tribute to Peter’s insights in this note on the first field trip.

Peter played an essential role in three separate expeditions to the central Simpson Desert, visiting the *mikiri* (wells), which were the only permanent water supply for the Wangkangurru people who once lived there. On the first trip some of the people we were with announced on arriving at the second well ‘once you have seen one you have seen the lot’. Though sorely tried, Peter never lost his cool with them, to him the archaeology and the environment of each had a different story to tell. He immediately spotted the bone fragments of small marsupials now extinct in the area, and noticed the variations in the distribution and nature of stone tools. His enthusiasm was catching, as was his vision of what were likely to be particularly ancient sites – so much so that for the rest of the trip even the people saying ‘once you have seen one you have seen the lot’ began to show flickers of real interest. He had an unequalled understanding of how Aboriginal people lived in the past and the present.

Luise Hercus
School of Language Studies
Australian National University

Research: Field work with Stephen Webb in the Lake Eyre Basin

Steve Webb writes of Peter as an archaeologist, his magnificent recording and survey work in the Willandra and his contribution to Steve’s long term project with John Magee on humans and megafauna in the Late Quaternary landscapes of the Lake Eyre Basin.

Peter Clark: a Renaissance man

I knew Peter Clark for over 25 years until his untimely death on July 1st 2004. We first met at the Australian National University when I was an undergraduate and he was the Departmental Technical Officer, running four-wheel-drive courses. He had been an undergraduate himself in the Prehistory and Anthropology Department at the ANU and was convinced that students would enjoy their fieldwork better and be safer if they knew how to properly operate a four-wheel-drive, so he initiated this course. He had worked on various archaeological sites with Departmental staff, and was familiar with archaeological methods, was a capable photographer and had skills in casting stone tools and bone. In March 1979 he applied for a position as resident Archaeologist at Lake Mungo National Park in western New South Wales. For over a decade Lake Mungo and the other five main lakes in the Willandra region had been the focus of archaeological attention. It was here that the oldest dates for human occupation in Australia had been found, as well as burials that spoke to us about the people who had lived in the region during the last Ice Age.

Peter’s skills were recognised by Parks and Wildlife and he got the job. His appointment was a turning point in the story of Mungo because he was ideally suited for the position. As resident archaeologist, Peter had the advantage of immersion in the special landscape that the Willandra presented. He did not let that advantage go; he enhanced it with some of his very special talents. To live out at Mungo alone at that time required a good deal of self-sufficiency and Peter was nothing if not self-sufficient. His family were graziers and Peter had grown up with his brother Roger on a property outside Boorowa, New South Wales. He
made and fixed things from a very young age because he really wanted to know how things worked and it was a challenge to pull things apart and put them back together again. Over the years his inquisitiveness endowed him with prodigious capabilities in handling and repairing all kinds of mechanical equipment. In recent years his skills for repairing the unrepairable reached a level where many believed he could get a bucket of nails moving. Living out at Mungo, Peter had to maintain the power generator, fix and drive all kinds of four-wheel-drives, trucks and tractors, make sure windmills were pumping water, maintain roads and tracks as well as continue his archaeological responsibilities. Moreover, he maintained a base for those who wanted to work out there.

He actively encouraged others as much as he could to get involved with the Willandra region. He literally lit up when people said they wanted to follow up some project or other and he was always willing to provide ideas, projects and as much support as was possible.

Peter's view of archaeology was a holistic one. His ability to see the landscape, the people and how the two interacted was uncanny. He could not visit a site without seeing the people, their activities and why they were there. In his view it was essential to appreciate the interaction of people and landscape to understand the site properly.

For example, he undertook analysis of a range of different hearth types in order to establish what they had been used for and what had been cooked in them. His eyes would widen as he explained what had gone on at this or that site that had once been a camp on the edge of a large Ice Age lake. His animated gestures, first pointing to the archaeological debris then out to the surrounding landscape, brought the two together and described the way things were likely to have happened as he drew the onlooker into the ancient landscape. He was able to do this because of the time he could spend studying the area, his innate bush skills, his good nature and personal enthusiasm for his work. They were highly infectious.

The results of Peter's extensive site survey within the Willandra as well as the information he gathered from excavations he undertook produced an extensive and rich tapestry of data. In a short time he realised that the whole region was an archaeological site, and as such it had to be correctly managed from the start, particularly in terms of site inventory. There was obviously a great deal of information out there and he could see that it required a system of recording that would last, be adaptable and be user-friendly. It had to be developed as quickly as possible because he could literally watch valuable archaeological remains weather away in weeks or months. He developed a series of 'Site designation areas' that could be overlayed onto the five major lakes, a group of smaller lakes and the interconnecting Willandra Creek. Sites were allocated codes within each area and Peter recorded site type, artefact typology, faunal contents of sites, the distribution of burials and, where he could, the age of the site, either deduced stratigraphically or through radiocarbon dating. In this way he recorded over 200 archaeological sites and shell middens including 130 burial places. Unfortunately, most of these have since eroded away or have been reburied by drifting sand. Much of Peter's data remains unpublished although he assembled it into several large reports for the NSW Department of Environment and Planning, and the Western Lands Commission of NSW.

By the time the Willandra Lakes region had been listed as a World Heritage Area, Peter's extensive knowledge of the region's archaeological and geomorphological heritage as well as its ecology made him an important adviser on issues regarding
its future management. Peter was always so willing to share his knowledge, particularly if it was for the good of the Willandra. This included his inspiration to have a Visitor Centre at Mungo; his energy and enthusiasm were behind many of the displays presented there.

Peter worked closely with the local Aboriginal communities. During his time at Mungo, his innate honesty, forthright manner and plain speaking, explaining issues or interpreting Willandra's heritage, as well as his obvious feeling for the land, helped build a special trust between him and members of those communities. He supported their efforts to gain some control over management of their cultural heritage and maintained a continuous liaison between them and non-Aboriginal organisations and interest groups. Aboriginal people in the area saw Peter as a friend who they could talk to about the future of their cultural history that was embodied in the Willandra. They knew he was someone who would try to help them in their endeavours and in whom they could put their trust. Their trust in him came from their ability to seek and secure answers from him and understand what he had to say as well as his ability to understand and always seek their point of view. His skills in these issues helped on many occasions to bring together the Aboriginal and scientific communities on matters that may otherwise have kept the two groups apart. His passing is sadly felt in the Indigenous communities today.

Peter left Mungo National Park in 1984, but he remained crucial to Willandra management and work with Aboriginal communities in his new position with Western Lands Commission, later part of the Department of Land and Water Conservation, now the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources.

His legacy was much more than that of a local archaeologist in residence or an outstanding regional land management administrator. His ability to explain things simply and clearly helped him network with landholders, traditional owners, various government agencies as well as academics from a variety of institutions and with an equal variety of interests. His quiet but confident nature, heartfelt attachment to the land and the archaeology and his good-natured and straightforward approach to people had warmed him to a wide variety of agencies, organisations and individuals. In fact, I see Peter as a central hub from which a myriad of spokes projected, drawing together a whole variety of research areas, land care agencies, Indigenous aspirations and friends.

Peter and I next worked together in the field at the end of the 1980s when he joined a network of people interested in working in the Simpson Desert and around Lake Eyre on megafauna, Late Quaternary landscapes and the signals for human interaction between these. These themes appealed to Peter, as did the fact that the work would take place in a scientifically little-known region.

He was a great softy for gadgets, radios, various electronics, miniature brazing guns, four wheel drive motorbikes, giant torches, most of which we were very grateful for at certain times. Peter actually enjoyed repairing punctured tyres at the end of the day and even designed a rig similar to those in professional tyre outlets which was fitted to his tow bar for heaving flat tyres off. He liked hard work; he always worked like a 'drover's dog' but he enjoyed every minute whether repairing tyres, engines or loading grass at his turf farm.

He had learned how to fly and had bought himself a Cessna 172. His skill as a pilot was invaluable. As a pilot he was careful, skilful and cautious, just as he was in everything he undertook. His abilities were often tested to the full by some of
the ‘runways’ he had to use in various places across the desert. Travelling in the air with him brought the vastness and grandeur of the desert to full life. It also allowed us a low-level look at the terrain. We needed to know what was ahead, where to go, the quickest way to a particular point and to discover places that we did not know about. In this he was ‘our mantle of safety’.

His flying time was short compared to the time he spent helping us in our ground surveying and other work. During the last few years he abandoned flying and came out with his own tailor-made vehicles equipped with gadgets, boxes, fridges, cupboards and even electrically pumped water from a faucet.

As with all such field work groups, in the evenings we would sit around the campfire and talk about the day’s achievements, failures or puzzles. Peter’s input was always more than useful, usually bringing a new slant to problems or issues. He was never afraid to have ‘arm waving’ debates about issues in prehistory. His philosophy was that we should put everything on the table for discussion and not enter into debate with a limited outlook bound by the present evidence alone. After all, how often do we see that today’s evidence has been turned over or surpassed by tomorrow’s discoveries. Peter had seen that in the Willandra on many occasions.

Peter was genuinely one of nature’s gentlemen, but it was not until after his passing that I fully appreciated how much he had done for others and how generous he had been with his time and ideas, helping a whole range of organisations and individuals. Moreover, I did not realise how strong the bond between us had become over the years. Peter had a compartmentalised life that reached into many disparate areas. He was a successful businessman (although he would not have described himself that way); he held a very responsible position in a NSW government organisation. He was a much loved member of his family, and uncle not only to his own nephew and niece but to other children (like mine) over the years. He was a friend you could rely on and whose ideas and judgement were worth listening to. In many ways I regarded him as a brother. I don’t know how many more evening campfires I may be allowed to sit beside but however many there are, the spirit of Peter Clark will always be there with me by the fire.

Stephen Webb
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Bond University

The NAIDOC Week Award, accepted by Roger Clark on Peter’s behalf

At the memorial service for Peter Clark at Mildura in July 2004 his brother Roger Clark received on his behalf the special NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee) Award, initiated by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resources Management. All Peter’s family are justly proud of this award. It recognises the special nature and lasting value of his work for, and with, the Aboriginal Communities of the Murray/Darling region. Sadly Peter did not live to learn of the award. It would have meant so much to him. I am grateful to Peter’s family for sharing their delight in the award, and providing details of its citation.
The NAIDOC Week Award citation:
Department of Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resources Management  
NAIDOC 10 April 2004  
Best Aboriginal initiative presented to Peter Clark, Buronga Office.  
In recognition of Peter’s commitment and support to the Aboriginal people of this Department and for his significant contribution to the development of partnerships with the Aboriginal community of the lower Murray Darling catchment.  
‘Peter was a very special person who we learnt to work with, love and respect.’  
The Barkindji Elders

My own memories of Peter remain strong. They span exactly thirty years, from his first year at University. I taught him then and in later years, a wonderfully enthusiastic and talented student who became a valued, inspiring colleague and friend. We shared much in archaeology and long years of committee work. With all his friends I shall miss intensely his wise advice, his acumen, calm good humour in difficult times, his generosity and non-judgemental understanding of others. The Willandra will always be for me a landscape made precious by memories of Peter.

Isabel McBryde  
Australian National University

Acknowledgements
Special thanks are due to Peter’s family and those friends who responded with Peter-like generosity to the urgent suggestion that we present tributes to Peter in this volume of Aboriginal History, due to go to press. I am also grateful to Ingereth Macfarlane for her understanding and practical support.

Reference
Minoru Hokari 1971–2004

The passing of Dr Minoru Hokari, one of the brightest and most innovative young scholars working in Australian Indigenous history research, is a tragic loss to the field. Minoru — or Mino to his friends — had a spirit of adventure and a creative intellect marked by a flexible, imaginative style. While studying economics at Hitotsubashi University, Japan, he began to dream of living with an Australian Indigenous people, a dream he was deeply satisfied to have fulfilled. His 1996 Master of Economics research was on 'Aboriginal economy and cattle labour: economic history of the Gurindji people' — a somewhat unusual choice at the renowned and often business-oriented campus of Hitotsubashi.

In order to make his studies more interactive, Minoru Hokari obtained prestigious scholarships to study in Australia. Minoru was a distinguished scholar from a young age. In 1991, he won a scholarship for overseas education from the Josui-kai Committee of Hitotsubashi University, then in 1994, a first category scholarship from the Japan Scholarship Foundation, followed in 1996 by a Rotary Foundation multi-year ambassadorial scholarship, and a research fellowship for young scientists from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. He remarked to me that his parents, Mr and Mrs Nobuo Hokari, never stood in his way, providing computers and other practical support to enable him to continue his work. He commenced his Doctor of Philosophy at the University of New South Wales and completed his thesis — 'Cross-culturalizing history: journey to the Gurindji way of historical practice' — in January 2001 at the Australian National University's Centre for Cross-cultural Research. His parents flew to Canberra to attend Minoru's graduation.

After much hard work amongst the Gurindji people, Mino made exciting breakthroughs in understanding their historical stories. Mino never ceased to be amazed that the Gurindji had enabled his far-off aspirations to come true; he viewed his learning experiences from Indigenous teachers as one of his life's great privileges. His modes of fieldwork transport amused the Gurindji community, as he first arrived across great distances on a small motorbike and, on a later visit, returned in a bright orange four-wheel-drive Landcruiser he dubbed 'Pumpkin'.

As a rebellious youth, Mino had been pleased to get away from some of the expectations of Japanese culture. He knew that, as a talented young man, he was heading towards life as an economist or a businessman. However, rather than gaining wealth in these fields, Dr Hokari soon found himself sitting on desert ground, listening in a respectful fashion to Gurindji teachers, learning their language, and collaborating with their elders as equals. Mino was willing to sit down and live for lengthy stints in very basic conditions alongside his new teachers — fellow historians as he understood them — in remote areas of northern Australia. Although not seeking and even sceptical of religious beliefs, Dr Hokari was humbled and thrilled to be invited to watch Indigenous ceremonies and to be taught and mentored by their leading philosophers and historians.

One of Mino's main teachers was Jimmy Mangayarri, affectionately known as 'Old Jimmy', who passed away before Mino's thesis was complete. During Mino's final illness, a particularly aggressive form of lymphoma, Mino often looked at the photo of
his ‘number one’ teacher, that old Gurinji man who seemed to know the full extent of Mino’s mission even before he did. The Gurindji people had been pleased to have a young Japanese man in their midst. They explained to him that their country had called Mino into it, in order for him to take their stories and their messages back to Japan and to other Asian nations.

When Minoru first arrived in Australia he spoke limited English, but when mistakes were pointed out, he found these not just entertaining but hilarious. Minoru charmed the people he met. His sense of fun made him popular in any company, whether among leading scholars, Indigenous university students or Gurindji elders. He was sincere, conscientious, open to new people, experiences and cultures and deeply committed to historical scholarship. Greg Dening, who Minoru greatly admired, described him as a ‘handsome’ and ‘elegant young man’.

It was my great privilege to have been Minoru’s supervisor throughout his thesis. Deborah Bird Rose, Professor Ann Curthoys and many other mentors also assisted its development. I will never forget Mino’s joy and excitement when he read his extremely enthusiastic examiners’ reports. His voice took on a peculiar high-pitched tone, yet it was as though he could embrace the world.

Mino was passionate about funk and other varieties of late-night live music and his peers who joined him in a postgraduate workshop at the Centre for Cross-cultural Research remarked that he was ‘cool’ and possibly the ‘coolest’. He had a style about him and a joie de vivre that was palpable. Other students at International House at the University of New South Wales relied on Mino for assistance with Japanese, and for friendship. This institution has now named a scholarship in his honour. After Mino graduated, he readily agreed to mentor Japanese students at the Australian National University. He had many close friends in Australia and Japan who he greatly valued. In his last year, on a huge email network that his sister Yuki dexterously managed, he warmly and poetically thanked all for their friendship.

Minoru organised a diverse range of conferences and programs: in Japan these were the All Japan University Business Strategy Conference (1991) and Annual Conference of the Research Institute of Universities, ‘Towards multi-ethnic and Multi-cultural Japan’ (2002). At the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University in Canberra, it was ‘Locations of Spirituality: “Experiences” and “Writings” of the Sacred’. He worked as an interpreter, and as a translator of several academic texts for Japanese and English audiences. The Daguragu community government council asked him to act as their historical consultant. He was a research assistant for the Asahi Shim-bun newspaper company, an editorial supervisor and a research consultant and interpreter for the National Museum of Japanese History, the Kampo Museum in Kyoto, the National Museum of Australia and for Dr Caroline Turner in Canberra. Research topics ranged from history, nature, and curatorial research on Indigenous art, to the pop-culture surrounding the Japanese outlaw Ishikawa Goemon, who was notoriously executed in a cauldron of boiling oil.

Minoru’s writing was in strong demand in both Australia and Japan, and in the few years after he completed his doctorate he published numerous academic articles in leading journals, in both English and Japanese. Themes ranged widely, from the Gurindji mode of historical practice, anti-minorities history, globalising Aboriginal rec-
onciliation, and reading oral histories, to ‘history happening in/between Body and Place’. His writing was clear and to the point; some of it had a poetry, a gentleness and wisdom that makes it profoundly moving. He was an energetic paper-giver and several further articles are still in press. Although he eschewed reading theory himself, his work was often praised for its theoretical insights.

Although Dr Hokari gained Australian residency, and published his innovative writing in both Australia and Japan, it is significant that his first book, Doing history! Paying attention to the historical practices of Indigenous Australians, was published by Ochanomizu Shobo in Japan in 2004 and therefore first reached the Japanese speaking people of the world. It is a playful, whimsical opus of integrity, imagination and breathtaking audacity. Another somewhat different book that he based on his doctoral research and prepared in English, awaits publication.

Determined to fulfill his dreams and accepting his mission to take the Gurindji story back to Japan, Mino worked in a conscientious fashion until the very last days before his passing. He chose to remain in Australia for treatment and although his parents were based in Niigata, Japan, and his sister Yuki in New York, they made many trips to Australia to be with him, and attended him throughout his illness. He died at 32 years of age at St Vincent’s Hospice in Fitzroy, Melbourne.

Minoru Hokari learnt how to communicate across multiple languages, across multiple cultures, and across many historical trajectories. As well as speaking Japanese and English, he had a basic understanding of the Ngumpin language family spoken at Daguragu.

Mino’s sense of fun and his humility will not be lost; they are clear in his writing. Here are the last paragraphs of his doctoral thesis (2001):

I feel that I have been writing a long letter to whoever you are, reader. I wanted to share with you how challenging but enjoyable it is to perform cross-cultural practice. I also wanted to share with you how apparently impossible but still possible it is to ‘communicate over the gap’. Above all, I wanted to share with you the teachings from the Gurindji country ...

It is up to you whether you shift your being fully into the Gurindji historical reality (if you think you can), or firmly reject it. An alternative choice is, as I have been struggling through this thesis, trying to find a way of being ‘cross-cultural’. I believe cross-cultural practice, by definition, cannot avoid the risk of destabilising one’s own cultural framework. Otherwise, what is the point of calling it ‘cross-cultural’?

I threw a petal.
Let’s wait for the bang.

Ann McGrath
Australian National University
The Minoru Hokari Memorial Scholarship

The Australian National University has established the *Minoru Hokari Memorial Scholarship*, which will assist a postgraduate scholar to conduct fieldwork with Indigenous Australians. For details about making a donation, contact:

Ann McGrath
Email: ann.mcgrath@anu.edu.au
Website: www.hokariminoru.org/e/scholarship-e/scholarship-e.html.

Yuki Hokari, Mino’s sister, has posted full details including donation forms on the website www.hokariminoru.org. The first award will be made at about the time of Mino’s birthday in July 2005.
Queensland's exceptional approach to cross-race marriage?: a reply to Katherine Ellinghaus (2003)

Tim Rowse, Mark Hannah and Len Smith

Katherine Ellinghaus urges us to make comparisons in order to generate questions about the history of Australian approaches to the assimilation of Aborigines.¹ Her first comparison is between Australia and the United States. Compared with that settler-colonial nation-state, 'assimilation' in Australia has been more widely understood and practised as the biological absorption of the mixed race population than as the cultural assimilation of the entire Aboriginal population. Her paper highlights one mechanism for supervising 'absorption': the state's regulation of marriage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. On this point, Ellinghaus compares the seven jurisdictions (not mentioning the Australian Capital Territory) within Australia. She asks two questions:

1. Why did some Australian governments legislate the power to regulate Aborigines' marriages, and some not?

2. Among the three that adopted this form of colonial authority, why did two (Western Australia and the Northern Territory) use it to promote marriages between Aborigines and whites, while Queensland used it to discourage such marriages?

Tackling the first question, Ellinghaus argues persuasively that one reason that Western Australia, Queensland and the Commonwealth (in the Northern Territory) assumed authority over Aboriginal people's marriages was that policy-makers feared that Aborigines would marry non-whites from Asia and the Pacific and produce 'coloured' children. Marriage among varieties of 'non-whiteness' would thus continue the 'coloured' threat to the population ideal of 'White Australia'. In states (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania) where there were relatively few Asians or Pacific peoples, this feared population scenario was less likely and so it was not in the minds of legislators and officials who drafted 'protection' laws. In Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, the preferred mechanisms for promoting the desired interbreeding of Aborigines with whites were to disperse Aboriginal enclaves by closing reserves, to disallow half-castes' residence on reserves, and to separate 'half-caste' children from their natural parents.

Ellinghaus' explanation of variation among Australian approaches to ensuring 'inter-breeding' draws attention to legislators' and officials' opinions about the possible threats to a White Australia population. She makes little use of population data. She could well argue that the crucial point is not the actual composition of the population, but the legislators' and officials' perceptions of the likely future population dynamics of their State or Territory. However, she implies that these perceptions had some basis in fact when she quotes from the 1901 Census for Western Australia, the 1911 Census for

¹ Ellinghaus 2003.
the Northern Territory, the 1891 and 1901 Censuses for Victoria, and a Queensland government estimate of the numbers of Melanesians in that State in 1906, to indicate the prominence or otherwise of non-White, non-Aboriginal peoples in those jurisdictions.

It would not have hurt Ellinghaus’s argument had she used population data systematically. The following table compares the non-European and not Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander proportions of each State/Territory population in 1901, 1911 and 1921.

Table 1: Percentage of the total Australian population who were non-European and non-Aboriginal in 1901, 1911, and 1921, by jurisdiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The definitions of non-European and non-Aboriginal are not consistent through this time. For 1901, the figures have been derived by assuming that those born in the following nations were not white or were regarded as non-white by other Australians: Turkey-in-Asia, Lebanon-Syria, Palestine, Iran (Persia), Other West Asia, Afghanistan, India (including Goa), Ceylon, Burma, British Malaysia, Hong Kong, Other British, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Other Asia, South Africa, Mauritius, Egypt, Other Africa, Norfolk Island and Papua, Fiji, Other Pacific. Some of the migrants from these countries and regions would have been white (which would make the 1901 percentages overestimates); on the other hand, some non-white, non-Aboriginal persons enumerated in the 1901 Census would have been born in Australia (which would lead to underestimation). On balance, we suspect that our 1901 figures tend to overestimate the ‘non-white’, non-Aboriginal Australian population, but we assume that the differences between jurisdictions — the point of this table — would not be affected by that tendency. The figures in the 1911 and 1921 columns use the Census classifications of ‘non-European’ races, excluding the ‘Aborigines’. For 1921, the figures have been rounded up or down.

Ellinghaus’s argument is consistent with these figures: the three jurisdictions with the highest estimated percentages of non-Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander, non-whites were also the three which legislated senior officials’ authority to allow or disallow Aboriginal marriages. However, it would appear that by 1921 the ‘problem’ of too many potential non-European spouses was diminishing — without any corresponding diminution (as we show below) of the policy-makers’ impulse to regulate Aborigines’ marital choices.

Some interpretive questions remain. Not all of the marriages contemplated by ‘aboriginals’ or ‘natives’ in these three jurisdictions were subject to the colonists’ authority. The governments were initially more worried about women’s choices than

about men’s. In Queensland the Act applied to females from 1901 to 1939 and then to both sexes until 1965. In Western Australia females were subject to the power from 1905 to 1936, both sexes from 1936 to 1954. In the Northern Territory from 1910 to 1953, only females had to get permission to marry. From 1940, the Commonwealth Minister acquired an additional power to regulate Aboriginal marriage and divorce in the Territory, but no regulations were promulgated under this power. For only five years (from 1957 to 1962) Northern Territory ‘wards’ of both sexes were subject to officials’ power over their choice of spouse.

If the legislation of power over Indigenous marriages was motivated by concerns about the racial composition of the population, then we would expect men’s marital choices to be regulated as well. Perhaps the authorities assumed that few if any non-Aboriginal women (white or not) would consider marriage to an ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘native’ man. If that was the legislators’ assumption, why did it change (in the 1930s in Queensland and Western Australia, in the 1950s in the Northern Territory) when men’s marital choices also came under legislative control?

Perhaps the original desire to regulate Indigenous marriage was not only a concern about the race of progeny. Perhaps policy-makers were also worried that ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘native’ women were likely to be exploited by men of other races, and were not so worried about ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘native’ men. The later extension of marriage regulation authority to men has still to be explained. And what are we to make of the fact that when Western Australia and Queensland extended their regulatory powers (in 1936 and 1939 respectively), they did so not only by including ‘native’ men, but also by including marriages within the Aboriginal community?

Ellinghaus’s second question is about the use to which the three jurisdictions put their powers over marriage. On this point, we make two comments. First, her discussion does not cover the entire period in which each jurisdiction possessed the power to regulate marriages. Rather, she tends to privilege the periods in which Roth, Neville, Bleakley and Cook were senior officials. Since her inquiry is about the techniques that were marshalled to pursue a policy of ‘absorption’, it would be interesting to know whether that power fell into disuse after World War II, when governments began to turn towards a version of assimilation that emphasised the cultural transformation of all Indigenous Australians, whatever their genealogy.

Second, her differentiation of Western Australia and the Northern Territory (using the power to promote ‘absorption’) from Queensland (using the power to discourage ‘absorption’) is not grounded in quantitative data. At the very least, we would need to know the number of applications for permission to marry across the White–Aboriginal divide and across the Asian/Pacific–Aboriginal divide, in each jurisdiction, and the number of such applications that were successful. We could then compare success rates for such applications and infer that relatively high success rates for White–Aboriginal applicant couples indicated a more positive disposition towards ‘absorption’ among officials in that jurisdiction. As far as we know, no-one has yet made such calculations and comparisons. (And even if we knew those rates they would be open to alternative interpretations: high rates of success could mean that in a State/Territory where permission was usually withheld few applied unless they were encouraged to believe, by informal contact with officials, that their application had a very good chance
of succeeding. Knowing the rates would be necessary but not sufficient, for the argument that Ellinghaus wishes to pursue.)

Do we know anything about the success rates of applications for Aborigines to marry across the race boundary? Ellinghaus herself acknowledges that in Queensland, the exercise of this power changed over time. As she says in her footnote 72:

Until 1916, under the Protectorships of Roth and Howard, in the first few years of Bleakley’s office, the majority of marriages approved were to Pacific Islanders. From 1917, the majority of approved marriages were between Aboriginal men and women, or ‘half-castes’ (presumably descended from European and Aboriginal parentage). By 1928, only marriages between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men or men of mixed descent were approved. In the following decade growing numbers of such marriages took place (reaching a peak of 113 in 1936), while there were at most one or two cases of interracial marriage between Aboriginal women and other ethnic groups.

Without knowing what kinds of proposed marriages were disallowed by the authorities, we can draw no conclusions about the tendencies of official policies in Queensland. That Queensland was ‘exceptional’ in its use of these powers is not demonstrated by the data presented by Ellinghaus.

One of the authors of this comment (Hannah) is currently researching the Queensland files on marriage permissions for his PhD thesis. For the period 1917-1928 he has found major problems with the data. A very large number of files generated by the processing of applications for permission to marry do not properly identify the caste or nationality of the applicants. Hannah has learned to distrust Bleakley’s Annual Reports as a source for describing the actual use of the marriage authority. Bleakley portrayed himself as a staunch opponent of inter-racial marriage, but was, in practice, very unpredictable, managing inter-racial marriage applications in a highly personalised manner. Indeed, Hannah has come to the view that although successive Chief Protectors expressed concern that Aboriginal women ought not marry Asians, they still did marry Asians, and Pacific Islanders were preferred spouses, especially in Roth’s era (1898–1906). On several occasions, Roth expressed concern that the Commonwealth’s 1901 Pacific Island Labourers Act (which compelled the repatriation of Pacific Islanders after December 1906) would leave fewer potential spouses for Aboriginal women displaced by settlement. The official policy in Queensland after 1901 was to deny Japanese and Chinese men permission to marry Indigenous Australians, but governmental practice was not necessarily consistent with that policy, Hannah has found.

What of the two jurisdictions that Ellinghaus thinks were more committed to ‘absorption’ — Western Australia and the Northern Territory? As Ellinghaus shows, AO Neville (Chief Protector 1915–40) is on record as an advocate of ‘breeding out the colour.’ But did Western Australian officials look kindly upon Aboriginal applications to marry White non-Aborigines? Has anyone researched this State’s files over the 49 years in which the power to regulate ‘native’ marriages existed, to calculate the rate of approval of such applications? We are not aware of any data that summarises the Western Australian practice of marriage regulation.

In the Northern Territory, Chief Protector CE Cook (1927–39) saw himself as a promoter of ‘absorption’ and Ellinghaus quotes him to that effect. What do we know about Cook’s use of the marriage power?
In 1918, the Commonwealth’s *Aboriginals Ordinance* replaced the *Northern Territory Aborigines Act* 1910. While the Ordinance continued the marriage regulation power (S.45 ‘No marriage of a female aboriginal with any person other than an aboriginal shall be celebrated without the permission, in writing, of a Protector authorised by the Administrator to grant permission in such cases’), it also specified ways that ‘half-castes’ could cease to be ‘Aboriginals’. Effectively, the Ordinance allowed half-caste men to exit controls over ‘Aboriginals’ upon their 18th birthday (with provision for exceptions), while half-caste women would exit the controls by marrying and living with ‘a person substantially of European descent’. Thus the Ordinance gave the ‘half-caste’ woman an incentive to marry a certain kind of person, but it also obliged half-caste women to get permission before making such a marriage. This gave the Protector power over any ‘half-caste’ woman who wished to marry a ‘half-caste’ male (if he was not under the Ordinance), coloured male or European male — to name the three racial categories. The capacity of the Ordinance to regulate half-caste men was soon increased by amendments. In 1924 the age at which half-caste youths got out from under the Act was raised from 18 to 21 (*Aboriginals Ordinance* no. 2 1924). In August 1927, the *Aborigi­nals Ordinance* was amended to empower the Chief Protector to declare ‘Aboriginal’ any half-caste over 21 judged ‘incapable of managing his own affairs’. The annual reports do not tell how many adult ‘half-caste’ males were so declared. As this category — the male ‘Aboriginal’ — expanded, the pool of men whom a female Aboriginal could marry *without permission* was expanded. However, there remained an incentive for women to marry out of their ‘Aboriginal’ status, and for that step permission was required.

If we can believe Dr CE Cook’s annual reports, 69 women in the nine years July 1929 to June 1938 owed their emancipation from the *Aboriginals Ordinance* to his author­ising their choice of spouse; but only 38 of these women married Europeans, so absorption, in the genetic sense, could not have been the only rationale for these per­missions. And we do not know from Cook’s annual reports how many applications there were, so we cannot express this number as a ‘success rate’. However, when we consider that the half-caste female population of the Territory was only 237 in June 1938, it would appear that Cook exercised his powers in a relatively liberal fashion. His reports mention refusing 10 applications, some of them from European men.

Towards the end of her paper, Ellinghaus remarks that the laws about Aboriginal marriage ‘actually grew from quite different concerns in the different states’. We agree, and we think that until there are more data, from the archives, on how the marriage authorisations were actually used in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, it is too early to generalise about the uses of this power and to nominate as ‘exceptional’ the practise of any jurisdiction, period or official.

Reference


A response to Rowse, Hannah and Smith

Tim Rowse, Len Smith and Mark Hannah have opened up discussion on some key issues about historical research in their response to my 2003 paper ‘Absorbing the Aboriginal problem’. They point to a fundamental truism about the history of government policies concerning Aboriginal people: the separation between political rhetoric and reality. I welcome the opportunity to clarify my reasons for focusing on politicians’ visions of the future and not the intricacies of race relations in each Australian colony, State and Territory.

Rowse, Smith and Hannah correctly identify my use of sources which provide evidence about legislators’ and officials’ opinions: pieces of legislation, parliamentary debates, and chief protectors’ reports. As I stated in my introduction, I was interested in ‘how the incorporation of Aboriginal people into mainstream Australian society was imagined by those who created the many pieces of legislation’.¹ My use of small amounts of population statistics, drawn from publications of the period, was intended to demonstrate that legislators’ and officials’ opinions about the how the racial landscape might look in the future were based, among other things, on their perception of the numbers of non-white, non-Aboriginal people in each State. I appreciate the suggestion that population statistics would be a rich source for a new study of the extent of absorption in the northern and western regions of Australia. A systematic analysis of population data was, however, never my intention. I am encouraged by the fact that the statistics cited by Rowse, Smith and Hannah support my argument that States, Territories and colonies which had relatively large numbers of non-white, non-Aboriginal populations such as Asians and Pacific Islanders were those which created legislation that allowed the strongest control of Aboriginal women’s marriages.

My characterisation of Queensland as the ‘exceptional’ case did come from three Chief Protectors’ ideas on the implementation of the clause in the Queensland Aboriginals Protection Act 1901 allowing them some control of Aboriginal women’s marriages. Walter Roth and Richard Howard both described how their decisions about whether or not to grant Aboriginal women permission to marry were based on issues of morality and economic independence rather than absorptionist ideals. It is significant that John Bleakley, Chief Protector from 1914 to 1941, saw Queensland as pursuing a separate agenda, especially after he became familiar with the policies directed at Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in his report of 1929.² After participating in the 1937 Aboriginal Welfare conference, Bleakley wrote that discussion at the conference ‘emphasised that Queensland’s cross-breed problem was probably more complex than that of any other State … and the views of most of the authorities on the subject in this State disputed the wisdom of measures to encourage the absorption of these breeds’.³ These

¹ Ellinghaus 2003: 184.
² In 1929 the Commonwealth government commissioned Bleakley to report on Aboriginal Affairs in the Northern Territory. Anna Haebich (2000: 195) records that Cecil Cook vehemently opposed many of the ideas expressed in Bleakley’s 1929 report and ‘publicly condemned the Queensland administration for leaving “half-castes” to grow up as Aborigines’. Warwick Anderson (2002: 238–9) also sees Bleakley’s policies as opposed to those of Cook and Neville, characterising him as ‘not so committed to their biological assimilation’.

men were not imagining the absorption of Aboriginal people into the white population in the same way as their colleagues in other Australian States, colonies, and Territories, even if, as Rowse, Smith and Hannah point out, population statistics show that they were facing a similar ‘problem’. In-depth archival research such as Mark Hannah’s will certainly move our understanding beyond the administrators’ imaginings and into the realm of the actual administration of marriages. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, a comprehensive study of the administration of marriages in specific localities reveals a sharp divide between official government policy and what actually happened at the local level. In Victoria, for example, officials were able to control marriage even without legislation targeting interracial marriage.4

But such a study was not my objective in ‘Absorbing the Aboriginal problem’. Rather, I wanted to make a contribution which enhanced our understanding of the racial visions espoused by officials and legislators during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Charting shifts in official thinking past World War II would be a fascinating but very different project.

Rowse, Smith and Hannah wonder why Aboriginal women remained the primary targets of the legislation. As the bearers and primary carers of young children, women have historically been the focus of unequal attention when legislators turned their attention to marriage. As Ania Loomba argues in her examination of the key features of the ideologies of colonialism, the ‘spectre of miscegenation most graphically brings together anxieties about female sexuality and racial purity’.5 Many white men knew all too well during this period of Australian history that the responsibilities of fatherhood are much easier to throw off than motherhood. Hence it is not surprising that Aboriginal women were targeted in efforts to control absorption. The question of the broadening of the legislation to include men in Queensland and Western Australia in the late 1930s (and, in the post-war period, in the Northern Territory) is an interesting one, but does not affect my argument about absorption. I suspect this shift points towards several inter-related phenomena. Government officials began to realise that mixed-descent children could be produced by parents who were both of mixed descent themselves, not just by the more common coupling of the earlier period: white men and Aboriginal women. The increasing efforts of Aboriginal fathers to regain custody of their children, described recently by Victoria Haskins, might also have contributed to this recognition.6 Finally, it points to an even greater effort to control Aboriginal people, as the multi-racial population became more complex and the Aboriginal Welfare conference of 1937 put ‘absorption’ on the national agenda.

My paper aimed to open debate and discussion about how we might understand policies aimed at Aboriginal people from a national and international comparative perspective. I undertook much of this research while debates about the stolen generations dominated the public arena. During this time the issue of ‘intentions’ took on a particular resonance as white Australians struggled to come to terms with a national history of

dispossession, genocide and exploitation that had previously been described in benevolent terms. It was this wider issue that I sought to address, perhaps too implicitly. As anyone who has examined the vast, incomplete and often misleading or confusing records of Australian government treatment of Aboriginal people knows, the way in which broader policy initiatives played out was unique at every local and regional level. But this should not prevent scholars from attempting to understand the ideologies which shaped the discourses of administrators and bureaucrats. Investigation of these is an important part of our effort to search our national conscience. Without knowing them fully, we will not be able to begin to come to terms with the past.

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References


