Introduction

*Aboriginal History* Volume 19 had the theme of colonial and post-colonial interaction between indigenous peoples and 'outsiders'. It compared the historical experience of people in North America, New Zealand and Australia. The papers in this volume consider similar issues but with a regional focus, concentrating on south-eastern Australia. This part of Australia, with its rich environments, experienced both the earliest and most concentrated settlement by European colonists, resulting in severe social dislocation and dispossession for its large Aboriginal populations.

Given the intensity of the demographic impact and the nineteenth century assumption that such societies of 'native peoples' could not survive the colonial encounter, the culture and history of the Aboriginal communities of the south-east were long regarded as lost to all but 'salvage' ethnographic records. They remained neglected in anthropological and historical research. The anthropologists directed their studies elsewhere, to the people of the desert and the north. Both Radcliffe-Brown, and later Elkin, did fieldwork in northern New South Wales and were impressed by the strength of cultural continuity there, including language and ceremony. Yet they still sent most of their students to research elsewhere. At the same time the historians concerned themselves with questions of colonial history as social and economic 'progress'. Most ignored the 'shared experiences', the term used by editor Elspeth Young when introducing Volume 19, for the diverse interactions between indigenous and settler societies. The indigenous component was assumed to have been either 'lost' or incapable of contribution to the new Australia.

So the lives and culture of the surviving societies of the south-east remained hidden historical worlds awaiting exploration. Here I adapt the term with which Deborah Bird Rose presents so eloquently her research on Aboriginal-settler encounters in northern Australia. What was ignored until recent decades, and so remained hidden to 'outsiders', included the cultural knowledge and historical memory among older people of Aboriginal communities in the rural south-east. It also included the rich historical material in official records as well as in the more traditional range of historical sources. From these sources researchers could both discover the history of encounters and reconstruct historical ethnographies, provided they asked the right questions.

Those who did not ignore the people of the south-east, such as linguist Luise Hercus and anthropologists Diane Barwick and Jeremy Beckett, demonstrated not only the possibility but also the richness of the work to be done in collaboration with these communities. So we became increasingly aware of the important social history of Aboriginal lives and cultural responses to living in the new worlds of the colonial and
post-colonial south-east. These are now seen as major themes for Australian historians (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) concerned with colonialism, cultural history and questions of national and cultural identity. Such issues underpin the discussion of case studies in several papers in this volume (see especially that of Byrne).

Collectively the papers in this volume demonstrate both the richness of recent research on the south-east, and its relevance to issues of contemporary social and historical concern. Further, the archives hold many as yet unstudied major sources for long known and oft-cited historical events (see Lydon on Kangaroo Creek). As well they provide insights into the personal realities of life on the colonial frontier (see papers by Breen, Clarke and McDonald) and in rural areas a century later (Broome and Horner).

Perspectives from non-historical disciplines also bring new historical insights. Musicologists and linguists working together present to us songs and their historical context, from singers of the past (see Hercus and Koch, also McDonald). Linguistic analysis of word lists can open up the otherwise ‘hidden history’ of a Kaurna woman (see Amery’s paper). Broome’s study of tent boxing illumines the reality of Aboriginal lives, and the ambiguities of interaction in showground sports of the mid-twentieth century. In considering aspects of continuing traditional practice in the same period, Horner shows this operating in the context of communities actively protecting their cultural identity.

Readers will notice that this volume is not divided into Parts 1 and 2 as were previous issues. The division was part of the requirement for the Book Bounty, a support which unfortunately is no longer available to us. However we shall still maintain our tradition, reflected in part 2 of that division, of welcoming contributions focused on texts and primary source materials.

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