Aboriginal History

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RH Mathews’ documentation of a rock art site near the Hawkesbury River, New South Wales. Field Book No. 1 in NLA MS 8006/3/2. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.
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RH Mathews and anthropological warfare: on writing the biography of a 'self-contained man'

Martin Thomas

Introduction: the biographical lacuna

It is now almost three decades since AP Elkin published in Oceania a three-part article titled 'RH Mathews: his contribution to Aboriginal studies'. Recently I have been pursuing my own research into Mathews, gathering material for a book that Elkin, had he found the time, might well have written: a biographical study of the surveyor-turned-anthropologist. To use a term that Mathews once employed for extracting information from informants, I have found it a process of 'long & patient hammering'. Although Mathews' anthropological career, which lasted from the early 1890s until his death in 1918, gives him presence in a wealth of documentary records, he remains a difficult quarry for the biographer.

The problems I have encountered in coming to grips with his life history are due in part to his extreme reticence in all matters personal. In the words of his son William, RH Mathews was a 'self-contained man'. In that regard he substantiates a sage observation on the part of Claude Lévi-Strauss — that a calling to anthropology allows an individual in 'an initial state of detachment' to find advantage when approaching different societies 'since he is already halfway towards them'. In his own society Mathews was probably long inured to a degree of personal and intellectual isolation, though it was undoubtedly exacerbated by his exceedingly hostile relations with other members of the small anthropological fraternity in Federation-era Australia.

Without wanting to pre-empt the narrative that follows, one point must be established from the outset. (To do otherwise would perpetuate the confusion that has so clouded his reputation.) This is to say that Mathews was the victim of some extremely unsavoury treatment at the hands of his contemporaries — treatment which, if exposed}

1. Elkin 1975a,b, 1976.
today, would be enormously damaging to the perpetrators’ reputations. AW Howitt and W Baldwin Spencer, two of his most illustrious contemporaries, formed a compact between themselves that Mathews’ numerous publications should never be cited or even acknowledged. This is documented in a letter Spencer wrote to the Queensland ethnologist WE Roth in 1903:

He [Mathews] has a most remarkable faculty of mixing up the [marriage] classes & is a perfect fraud which once in Sydney I had the pleasure of telling him. Howitt & myself have agreed to ignore him and I am glad to see that you do the same.\(^5\)

Although Spencer and Howitt each broke their rule on a few occasions, subjecting him to unembarrassed castigation, the usual policy (apparently also shared by Roth) was to treat Mathews as a non-person. Never did they dignify his work by debating his ideas or specifying the grounds for their objections. Consequently, it is difficult for the historian— as it may have been for Mathews himself — to isolate the reasons for their contempt. The feuding was energised by the long tradition of Sydney-Melbourne rivalry and further augmented by an extreme sense of territoriality about who had prior claim to the study of particular tribes. There were also differences in the approach to kinship study, a major concern during this period. Mathews vehemently rejected the ‘group marriage theory’\(^6\) — a notion to which Howitt and Spencer were famously wedded.

Although the evolutionary anthropology practised by Spencer, Howitt and their colleague Lorimer Fison became severely tarnished with the rise of functionalism, the reputation of the Sydney-based Mathews never entirely recovered from the mauling it suffered at the hands of his Victorian rivals. Subsequent researchers, eager to distance themselves from the ‘amateurs’ who had pioneered the discipline, did little to evaluate, let alone resuscitate, the work of their forebears. Elkin, who befriended various amateur ethnographers (including EJ Enright, a rare friend of Mathews), was something of an

\(^5\) Spencer to Roth, 30 January 1903, in Box 1A/Roth 13, Sir Baldwin Spencer Manuscripts, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

\(^6\) His rejection of group marriage dates from the publication of Mathews 1900: 570.
exception in this regard, but he made an unfortunate practice of exploiting these allegiances in his own professional stouges. This was the case in his first defence of Mathews, published in 1956. Elkin argued that the surveyor-anthropologist's standing had been deliberately eroded by AR Radcliffe-Brown who nonetheless adopted 'the results of much which Mathews had accomplished'.

Elkin's defence of Mathews was quite convincing (and it echoes later criticism that Radcliffe-Brown treated Daisy Bates in similar fashion). But as an attempt to salvage Mathews' reputation, Elkin's commentary was anything but efficacious. The problem lay in the context of his assault. This near-accusation of plagiarism appeared in nothing less than the obituary he wrote of Radcliffe-Brown, a text that discarded all the conventions of the genre. So scathing was Elkin's attitude towards his one-time mentor that it 'scandalised the profession by its virulence'. Elkin's later articles on Mathews have proven more enduring, although possibly their many insights were compromised by the author's controversial standing for his social and political views, and for his own involvement in internecine feuding that in some ways resonated with the unfortunate experiences of his subject. The three-part study did little to convince Diane E Barwick, who in 1984 made a damning appraisal of Mathews, criticising his Victorian research for perpetrating a 'sometimes ignorant and sometimes deliberate distortion [that] has so muddled the ethnographic record ...'. Barwick claimed that from 1898 Mathews 'contradicted, ridiculed or ignored' the 'careful ethnographic reports' of Howitt for whom he had an 'almost pathological jealousy'.

Whatever the merits of Barwick's critique of Mathews' publications on Victoria (which she was certainly well qualified to address), I cannot help but wonder at the personalised tone of her attack and its deliberate one-sidedness. Can one talk legitimately about 'pathological jealousy' on the part of Mathews without considering the 'pathology' of his rival, a man who traded as a disinterested scientist, yet who was willing to disregard as irrelevant the entire corpus of the most prolific commentator on Aboriginal life in south-east Australia — his own area of specialisation? This too might smack of jealousy (to make a generous interpretation). If, at one level, Barwick's attitude seems symptomatic of the fractiousness that continues to poison anthropology as a profession, I suspect that it also reflects a pronounced, indeed gaping, absence in the history of the discipline: the lack, since Elkin, of serious study of the surveyor-anthropologist.

It is an inescapable reality that biographies play an important role in fleshing out the anthropological history. Julie Marcus has demonstrated this convincingly with her vivid portrait of Olive Pink. In the wake of her book, it becomes very difficult to dismiss Pink as the troublesome maverick or outright nutcase who has often been depicted. Thinking about Mathews' typecasting as a self-aggrandising fraud, it is worth noting that Barwick's partiality was undoubtedly influenced by Come wind, come weather, the biography of Howitt by his descendant, Mary Alice Walker. Her book is

one of several life histories concerning Australia's anthropological pioneers. Baldwin Spencer was the subject of the exhaustive biography by DJ Mulvaney and JH Calaby, published in 1985.13 Daisy Bates, who stands as something of a national icon — partly for her curiosity value — has, unsurprisingly, also been the subject of several books. Although none of these studies is exactly hagiographic, their influence confirms a broader pattern in historiography. Because of its partiality, its unapologetic concern with the course of a single life, biographical narrative can be easily relegated as an adjunct to the main business of historical inquiry. Yet this apparent marginality belies the profound impact that the literary reconstruction of past lives can have upon even sceptical interpreters. Tigger Wise has written quite a critical book about Elkin, but still it assists the historian in addressing the anthropological history from his point of view.14 Although we may not share Elkin's outlook, the very fact that he has been reconstituted in textual form almost obliges us to assume something of his subjectivity as we form our impressions of his influence and milieu. It follows, therefore, that omissions in the biographical record will also influence the overall perception. Certain actors appear bathed in light, while others — often no less significant — continue to lurk in the shadow.

If all this seems a rather artless way of justifying my project, there is a caveat of sorts. Certainly, my intention in this essay is to begin the process of filling a 'gap' in the current literature by expanding on what has hitherto been written about the life and times of RH Mathews. Yet in doing this I have attempted to squarely countenance the problems posed by his 'self-containment'. Rather than pretend that any life story can be systematically reconstituted if the biographer's torch is shone with sufficient skill, the mercurial qualities of Mathews' character have forced me to consider the artificiality of all biographical constructions. By acknowledging this artifice — this cultural specificity — it becomes possible to think in very different ways about Mathews' publications and archival records: the fragments that give him meaning in the present day. Reading the conundrum of RH Mathews is a way of extending his own experiments in what we now call cross-cultural research. We can negotiate the material and intellectual exchanges that occurred during his unique attempt to bring the customs and traditions of Aboriginal Australia to an international readership — a process that also marked his authorial coming-into-being. For all the difficulties he poses as a subject, Mathews' legacy is an extraordinary record of Aboriginal culture, created at a time of great sorrow and despair at the loss of land and traditions. Mathews' self-defined trajectory as an anthropologist was propelled by indefatigable energy and passion, just as it was compromised by hubris, ambition and intrigue. If nothing else, a reading of RH Mathews makes for a compelling story.

Re-evaluating Mathews' significance

The basic elements of Mathews' life history have been set out in the Elkin articles and also in Isabel McBryde's contribution to the *Australian dictionary of biography.*15 In the following pages I have drawn further information from a biographical sketch in manu-

script form, recently acquired by the National Library of Australia. This important source is attributed to William Mathews (1883–1967), the sixth child of RH, and appears to be based on discussions with his father in his later years.16

Robert Hamilton Mathews was born at Narellan, south-west of Sydney, in 1841. He died at Parramatta in 1918. His family were protestants who at the time of his birth had recently emigrated from Northern Ireland. Most of his childhood was spent on a pastoral property at Breadalbane near the town of Goulburn. The education of Mathews and his siblings was entrusted to a private tutor, although sometimes his father, a graduate of Queen’s College, Belfast, contributed to their tuition. Aboriginal people (possibly of Gundungurra descent) lived on or near the Mathews property and he once stated that ‘black children were among my earliest playmates’.17 Around 1855 the young Robert met a surveyor called John F Mann who was working along the Great Southern Road.18 Intrigued at his activities, the boy devised his own games in imitation. He later related how he made a surveyor’s chain from bark and played at measuring the country with an Aboriginal friend.19

As a young man RH Mathews was involved in various rural activities including a droving expedition into Queensland. He had opportunities to meet with and observe Aboriginal people during these years. But his original interest in surveying never diminished and eventually he took formal training in the profession, passing his final exams in 1870. Then followed ten hard years doing government and private surveys in central and western New South Wales. He married Mary Bartlett of Tamworth in 1872 and began a family. They had seven children altogether, one of whom died quite young. Two of the sons became prominent. The eldest, Hamilton B Mathews (1873–1959), joined his father’s profession and eventually became surveyor-general of New South Wales. The third child, Gregory M Mathews (1876–1949), became internationally renowned as an ornithologist, bibliophile and publisher of the 7000 page Birds of Australia (1910–27), a modern work to rival Gould. In a memoir dating from 1942, Gregory explained that through astute management of his surveying practice, RH Mathews had, by the age of forty, amassed ‘a competence and could call himself an independent gentleman’.20 The family settled in Singleton in 1880 and two years later Robert and Mary travelled the world, leaving their children with a nanny. This was the only time that RH Mathews ever left Australia. After his return in 1883, he seldom worked full-time as a surveyor. He was a Justice of the Peace which allowed him to preside as a magistrate at local courts. He was also a district coroner and was sufficiently versed in legal practice to publish Handbook to magisterial inquiries in New South Wales (1888) which marked his début as an author. Mathews was also involved in various business dealings around Sydney, one of which — a failed mining venture — cost him a large sum of money

18. The connection is interesting because Mann, like Mathews, was a member of the Royal Society of New South Wales who published ethnological articles (for example see Mann 1885).
20. GM Mathews 1942: 12.
although he was by no means ruined financially. Because his sons were enrolled at the King’s School in Parramatta (then the western edge of Sydney), the family moved there in 1889. Mathews resided at the one house in Hassall Street, Parramatta, until his death.

Anthropological interests developed after the move to Parramatta. His first paper was published by the Royal Society of New South Wales in 1893. From that time he became fully immersed in the study of Aboriginal society. His interests are documented in his 169 anthropological publications. Significant insights into his working methods can also be drawn from the diaries, letters, notebooks, drafts and inchoate scribblings that fill fourteen archive boxes in the National Library of Australia.

Despite its relative abundance, the archival material epitomises the problem that Mathews poses for biographical interpretation. The records are so bereft of self-reflection that they give little indication as to why he embarked on this time-consuming and expensive project. Elkin remarked that ‘[t]he surveyor, the ethnographer, made a great and basic contribution, but the philosopher was seldom in evidence’.21 Concordant with this observation was a deep reluctance to ‘philosophise’ about himself. Consequently, the archival record is lacking in inner dialogue, a trait that says much about the scientism of this formative phase in anthropological history, just as it reflects how white masculinity was moulded and constructed during the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Mathews’ papers are historically important for what they reveal about his working methods. Frequently they include the names of Indigenous informants which are often lacking in the published articles. But there are very few descriptions of his human interactions and only minimal explication of the quarrels and controversies that won him notoriety. In this regard the Mathews archive is a surplus of bones served up with the barest minimum of flesh. The traces that Mathews left for posterity are reminiscent of a washed-up carapace.

These difficulties might explain why Elkin never developed a full biography. But other aspects of his account are less easily explained. I should preface the following criticisms by emphasising that the value of Elkin’s articles is still considerable, for he had an understanding of Mathews that in some respects can never be surpassed. As well as being friendly with Enright, to whom Mathews had been a mentor, Elkin’s early work in South Australia led him to settlers with whom Mathews had directly corresponded in his quest for ethnographic data.22 This said, there are aspects of Elkin’s description of anthropology’s emergence that make his account something akin to a mythological project. He drafted biographical sketches of the ‘ten persons whom I am regarding as “founders” of social anthropology in Australia’23 alongside Mathews he included LE Threlkeld, William Ridley, Lorimer Fison, AW Howitt, George Taplin, EM Curr, John Mathew, WE Roth and W Baldwin Spencer — a list which, though generally sound, is certainly quixotic in its gender-specificity. The omission of Daisy Bates, for all her foibles, is particularly startling. (She and Mathews actually corresponded from 1905 until 1911.)

In mustering this ensemble of founding fathers Elkin did acknowledge that Howitt and Fison joined ranks with Professor Spencer to form a ‘close, or indeed closed, group’, but in so doing he says nothing of their real attitude to Mathews. The latter is eloquently encapsulated in letters Spencer wrote to Howitt. They contain putdowns that are exquisitely venomous. In 1907 Spencer referred to Mathews as ‘that miscreant’ who put him in the invidious situation of whether to ‘admire most his impudence or his mendacity — they are all of a very high order and seldom combined to so high a degree in one mortal man’. E Morris Miller, who became influential in psychology, penned an eyewitness account of the bodily effect upon Spencer of reading a Mathews article. ‘He was convulsed at Mr Mathews’ audacity.’ Elkin would not have seen these letters, but he knew their essence, for the feuding was evident in sources he consulted. Mathews’ own articles reveal the basic narrative: that hostility between himself and Howitt festered for years until finally the boil erupted in 1907 with an unseemly spat in the letters pages of Nature. Elkin’s ability to overlook this seething antagonism is part of a more general failure to account for the social (or, to put it more aptly, antisocial) context that distinguishes the emergence of Australian anthropology. The failing is exacerbated by Elkin’s bubbling enthusiasm for the unpaid devotees who did so much to pioneer the discipline. The impression created is of a golden age in collegial culture, a happy and enlightened fraternity united by scientific interest, the likes of which bore no resemblance to anything Mathews experienced and which Elkin, as I have already suggested, infamously failed to incubate in his own milieu.

One would think that some account of the disagreement between Mathews and the Victorians should grace the anthropological history — for its gossip value if nothing else! But the omission has had serious consequences. I doubt that Barwick could have written off Mathews in the way she did if Elkin had given some account of Spencer and Howitt’s actions. Her dismissal is symptomatic of a still lingering suspicion about the value of his research. Kevin Blackburn drew heavily from the Mathews legacy in his 2002 article on ‘Aboriginal nations’, although he warned the reader that Mathews ‘frequently used the work of Howitt and other early Australian anthropologists without acknowledgment’. The sole problem with this accusation is that Blackburn provided not a single shred of evidence to substantiate the claim. (Would he have had the courage to say this about a living writer?) What Blackburn makes evident is just how much mud has stuck to the surveyor from Parramatta. The image of a petulant and untrustworthy researcher has become so enshrined in the anthropological folklore that it can be uncritically regurgitated whenever occasion demands.

25. Spencer to Howitt, 15 August 1907, in MS 9356/Box 1049/7(b), AW Howitt papers, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.
26. Miller to Howitt, 13 August 1907, in MS 9356/Box 1049/7(a), AW Howitt papers, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.
27. These include a denunciation of Mathews in Spencer 1904: 380 (note) and the arguments in Howitt 1907 and 1908.
28. See Mathews 1907b; Howitt 1907; Mathews 1907c.
Aspersions like Blackburn's reflect a deep discomfort. The frequent lack of primary evidence forces practitioners in a now professionalised field of Aboriginal studies to grapple with the inevitably imperfect deliberations of their amateur antecedents. Mathews, for instance, is sometimes dismissed for his lack of fieldwork: a criticism doubly flawed. Firstly, it overlooks his frequent visits to Aboriginal camps and reserves (documented in extant diaries). Secondly, it upholds the type of live-in fieldwork practised by Malinowski as the inviolable model against which all cross-cultural research should be measured. Not only is it anachronistic to bemoan the fact that the pioneers of Australian anthropology did not go and live as ‘natives’ (an idea that would have seemed ludicrous to them), but it obscures the unique methods that people like Mathews developed from their own finite resources.

The fact that Mathews made extensive use of correspondents is similarly seen as problematic. These unpaid contributors to the anthropological cause were white settlers in remote locations who spoke to local Aborigines about their beliefs and traditions. The results were written up in letters and sent to Parramatta through the penny post. From a professional perspective it might seem ridiculous that untrained farmers, mission managers or policeman should be hacking away at the ethnographic coalface. But to Mathews this was not an unreasonable proposition. His own background in surveying had given him insights into the primacy of land in Aboriginal culture — even though, ironically, he had contributed as a minor player to Aboriginal displacement through his role in subdividing properties and laying out towns. The legacy of this experience was that Mathews knew the Australian backblocks personally. He had a range of contacts and a degree of authority through his position as coroner and magistrate. He also recognised that areas such as western New South Wales contained heterogenous and sometimes interactive communities. On a station with a large contingent of Aboriginal workers, interpersonal exchange could be the rule rather than the exception. Quotidian relations between settler and employee gave rise to a realm of knowledge which, if properly tapped, could allow a researcher to access traditions that were ancient and endangered.

It should be kept in mind that Mathews inhabited a culture which acknowledged the potential of well placed and observant amateurs to make real contributions to science. Although it was difficult to inspire settlers to assist him, the results were sometimes impressive — as can be seen in some of Mathews’ work on northern Australia. His own travels were largely confined to the south-east of the continent, so he depended entirely on a correspondent when he wrote about elements of the Tjingili language in the Northern Territory.30 When the linguist N Chadwick appraised the results in 1972, he concluded that the vocabulary ‘is truly excellent for its period’.31 This was possible because some of Mathews’ correspondents were fairly fluent in Aboriginal languages. Although unorthodox in contemporary terms, his attempts to plumb settler understandings of Aboriginal Australia must be seen as a distinct and innovative phenomenon. His persistent inquiries gave rise to a vast discursive record that has, to date, been largely unexplored. The letters he received, many of which survive among the National Library papers, constitute a unique historical resource which, among other

30. Published in Mathews 1900–01: 86–9.
things, represents an extraordinary survey of white people's attitudes to race and colonisation. Recent collections of Spencer's correspondence, edited by Mulvaney and collaborators, have done a genuine service in revealing the potential of such resources. They expose the interests, the insights and the prejudices of devoted ethnological correspondents along the colonial frontier.32 The hundreds of letters in the National Library's RH Mathews papers are equally fascinating. They originate from every Australian colony except Tasmania. As much as they reveal the gulf between cultures, they also provide evidence of interracial intimacy. An isolated woman described how Aboriginal midwives assisted at a premature delivery — how they tied the umbilical cord with 'rabbit fur made into string'.33 A South Australian correspondent gave detailed description of circumcision and subincision. The information was correct, he assured Mathews, 'as those boys have all been attended to by myself with ointment &c. to get the wounds healed up quickly'.34

Message sticks and offprints

A fascinating example of exchange between Mathews and a correspondent involved a country policeman who proved spectacularly successful as an ethnological researcher. James S Miller, with whom Mathews enjoyed a prolific correspondence, was a constable stationed at various localities in north-western New South Wales including Cobar, Goodooga and Bourke. For more than a decade he collected data and occasional artefacts which he dispatched by mail to Parramatta. For this service he was awarded in two separate articles with the Mathews equivalent of the Holy Grail — public acknowledgment. 'Mr. Miller displayed great patience and industry in dealing with a difficult subject, and it is hoped others will follow his example', was the first blunt statement of thanks, published in 1897.35 Others would buckle under the Mathews regimen, but Miller remained loyal to the point of sycophancy, carrying out often exacting labour that was quite extraneous to his official duties.

While Mathews maintained a flow of letters and offprints of his own articles (or 'pamphlets' as he often called them), Miller reciprocated by collecting information and occasional examples of material culture. Over a four-month period in 1895, at which time he was stationed at the tiny settlement of Goodooga north of Brewarrina, he sent to Mathews a blackfellow's shield, a stone tomahawk and the first of a collection of message sticks.36 The latter formed the subject of an article published in 1897. Message sticks, according to Mathews,

are highly interesting as showing an attempt by a primitive and uncultivated people to develop some method of communicating their thoughts to persons at another place by means of symbols. Speaking generally, the stick is given to the messenger to assist him in remembering the heads of the message by connecting

33. Gourlay to Mathews, 9 July 1900, in 8006/2/1, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
34. Walker to Mathews, 6 January 1899, in 8006/2/1, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
35. Mathews 1897c: 292.
36. Documented in correspondence from Miller to Mathews in MS 8006/2/8, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
them with certain pictures, marks, or notches cut upon it, which are explained to
him before he sets out on his journey. The stick also serves as his credentials,
being a confirmation or guarantee of the genuineness of the message. \(^\text{37}\) Mathews described the message sticks he had been given, and how their carriers would advance across the country to advise neighbouring communities about corroborees or other events.

The direct exchange between pamphlets and message sticks suggests a certain equivalence between these items. Yet the two categories of object have been treated very differently in ethnographic discourse and display. If looking for a message stick these days, you will most likely find it in a museum cabinet. This is indeed the case with one message stick formerly owned by Mathews which his son Gregory donated to the Australian Museum in 1929. \(^\text{38}\) A message stick, being Aboriginal and being made of wood, is immediately regarded as an artefact. But there is something in the magic that Westerners attach to writing that prevents us from discerning in a book or pamphlet its basic materiality — even though paper is derived from the same substance. So what is the basis for our differing forms of treatment? Is there anything in Mathews’ description of a message stick that could not be said of one of his own booklets? It too communicates through the inscription of ‘marks’ or ‘notches’ on a surface. It too travels along trade routes. And like the message stick, the ethnographic text provides evidence (too often uncritically accepted) of the ‘genuineness of the message’.

To emphasise the materiality of the ethnographic document runs the risk of sounding a platitude. Yet saying it seems necessary because the anthropological enterprise, which deceptively presents itself as the modelling of one culture by another, but which fundamentally concerns the confluence and manipulation of various and typically dissimilar informational flows, is rarely acknowledged for what it is by those who make the most extensive use of the early anthropological legacy.

If we are to get outside the paradigm of old anthropological conflicts and assumptions, we must abandon the conceit, sacred to the early ethnographers, that their documentary productions provided mirror images of Aboriginal culture: that they were essentially mimetic. Although they might give data about particular language groups, communities, sites and traditions — some of it reliable, some less so — the ethnographic legacy will remain stubbornly elusive until such time as its material qualities and the conditions of its production are understood.

By recognising the internal logic of Mathews’ ambitious attempt to synthesise direct interview and observation with the accounts of other published writers and those of his numerous correspondents, one can appreciate the scale and scope of his ethnographic practice. Although his collection and dissemination of data were always a little piecemeal, it is possible to chart a rough periodisation in his spheres of interest. The rock art of the greater Sydney region provided initial inspiration. He published extensively on this subject through the 1890s. Simultaneously, he took great interest in the male initiation ceremonies of eastern Australia, documenting rituals which, in the 1890s, were sometimes being held for the last time. As early as 1897 he could claim,
probably with only slight exaggeration, to have given ‘tolerably comprehensive
descriptions of the types of initiation ceremonies practised by ... tribes occupying about
three fourths of the total surface of New South Wales, and reaching ... into
Queensland’.39

In the decade from 1900 Mathews’ major concern was kinship study. He pub­
lished scores of articles on tribal divisions and the rules governing marital alignments.
During the same period he published articles on 23 different Aboriginal languages, the
majority from southeast Australia. (Further linguistic documentation was included as
appendices in other publications.) He also documented mythology, or ‘folklore’ as he
usually called it, not all of which was published. Mathews made important contribu­
tions to the understanding of material culture, writing about everything from carved
trees to cooking methods and ceremonial objects. Unsurprisingly, his productivity
declined as old age advanced. In 1909, when he was nudging 70, Mathews began what
now seems his anthropological swansong: a series of five articles on the material cul­
ture of death and mourning in western New South Wales.

Of course many criticisms can and should be made of Mathews’ research and
exposition. His work is often frustrating because language, kinship and myth are sepa­
rated into different categories as though he were oblivious to the interconnectedness of
all these phenomena. Yet one could argue that such interpretive work is our responsibil­
ity not his. Mathews saw his role principally as a reporter — and there was always too
much to report. Exhibiting a bushman’s scepticism of all things highfalutin, his work
lacks the evolutionary theory, the obsession with hierarchy — both between and within
racial groupings — that makes his competitors’ writings so challenging today, particu­
larly for Aboriginal readers. Mathews never expressed maudlin sentiments like those of
Spencer and Gillen dating from 1899: ‘all that can be done is to gather the few remnants
of the tribe into some mission station where the path to final extinction may be made as
pleasant as possible’.40 Nor did he make any utterance remotely comparable to
Howitt’s repulsive claim that ‘you can’t make a silk purse out of a “sow’s ear” or an
industrious, thrifty sober member of society out of the immediate descendant of a long
line of savages’.41 On the whole, Mathews’ tone is value-neutral, although sometimes
his enthusiasm for his subject seeps through. An initiation ceremony is described as ‘a
great educational institution for the admission of the youths ... to the privileges, duties,
and obligations of manhood’.42 Customs are deemed ‘highly interesting’.43 The lan­
guage group of Wiradjuri he considered a ‘great nation’.44 In 1896 he fondly recalled a
survey he had made in southern Queensland and time he had spent with Kamilaroi
people ‘listening to their legends and their songs, and studying their wonderful class
system [of regulating marriage]’.45

42. Mathews 1907a: 5.
43. Mathews 1905: 1.
44. Mathews and Everitt 1900: 265.
45. Mathews 1896a: 137.
John Mathew, the ethnologist and Presbyterian minister from Melbourne, with whom Mathews was sometimes confused, once wrote to him: 'I recognise, like yourself that there still remains a good deal of anthropological material, valuable and untouched, in ground supposed to be worked out'. It was an astute observation which says much about the enduring relevance of Mathews' ethnography. Even within the Sydney Basin, he found that the residents of La Perouse and the small encampments along the Hawkesbury could give detailed accounts of language and culture. Through many parts of south-east Australia it is a simple and undeniable fact that RH Mathews was the only writer of his period to take any note whatsoever of the local Aboriginal culture.

Mathews in ethnographic action

William Mathews was a witness to his father in ethnographic action, though he replicated the old man's reticence when it came to writing his personal experiences. Fortuitously, some of the recollections he had shared with family members were recorded onto tape in 1971 by Janet Mathews (1914–1992) who was married to William's nephew (and thus RH's grandson) Frank Mathews. Janet worked for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies as an ethnographic sound recordist, developing her own reputation for cross-cultural research. During an interview with her husband in which memories of RH Mathews were documented, she explained how William, or Uncle Bill, as they knew him, was sometimes taken to the Aboriginal settlement of La Perouse on Botany Bay where he was left to wait while his father was working.

The children would play around, sometimes for so long they'd get rather tired of it and Uncle Bill at one stage thought, oh, he wished the old man would hurry up and go home so he popped along and looked inside and saw old Mrs Timbery who was one of his best Dharawal informants sitting on a box, [and] your grandfather was sitting on a box with his notebook and his pencil, writing very hard. They were both smoking pipes and Uncle Bill was waved away and they just had to go and wait.

Family memories of an esteemed forebear are likely to be sanguine. But the traces of an evidently affectionate relationship can also be found in the Mathews notebooks which contain pages and pages of linguistic and other data attributed to Mrs Timbery at La Perouse.

Janet Mathews' own work, another considerable feat of cultural documentation, was partially indebted to the example set by her grandfather-in-law — as she explained on the tape cited above. Along the south coast of New South Wales where she worked extensively from the 1960s, RH Mathews' name was still remembered by Howard Timbery and other Dharawal descendants. Herbert Chapman, who was also among her principal informants, testified that RH Mathews had been known on the coast as 'Miranen' (meaning 'well-liked man') and had personally gone through the rites of initiation. Although Frank Mathews rejected out of hand this tantalising claim, I do not share his certainty. RH did testify that he 'always received the complete confidence

46. Mathew to Mathews, 4 May 1908, in MS 8000/2/11, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
47. Frank Mathews interview, AIATSIS Archive Tape 1954.
of the chief men, and thus gained admission to their secret meetings'.\(^{49}\) This was confirmed by WJ Enright who once accompanied Mathews on a visit to an Aboriginal camp near Port Stephens, north of Sydney. Enright told how Mathews was 'at once received by them as one of the initiated' while he 'remained in the camp “with the women and children,” as they jocularly expressed it'.\(^{50}\) Whether the question of Mathews' reported initiation can ever be firmly resolved seems doubtful. But the fact that he said nothing of it does not eliminate the possibility. Had he sincerely gone through this sacred ritual, he would have been bound not to discuss it.

Whether he personally went through the rites, or whether he gained acceptance because he was recognised as an elder and lawman in his own culture, Mathews certainly did become learned in the rituals of male initiation. His descriptions of ceremonies alone would have made a quite substantial book. A few of these events he witnessed personally, but others were already fading into memory. This was the case with the main south coast ceremony Mathews documented, a rite known as the *Bunan* which, like most initiations, occurred in forest clearings. The *bunan* described by Mathews occurred near Coolangatta Mountain at the mouth of the Shoalhaven River near Nowra. It had last been held in the 1880s. Not until 1895 did Mathews' 'native guides' carefully lead him around the site, describing the ceremony in considerable detail and pointing out to him the by now 'faint, indistinct forms of animals' which had been sculpted into the soil of this sacred space.\(^{51}\)

Work such as this, which is still read attentively, opens up a curious aspect of the Mathews conundrum. Although there has been a lack of research into his life and work, there is no absence of material that draws extensively from what he wrote. These uses range from language recovery projects to native title research, from cultural heritage management to local history. As much as they have been spurned, Mathews' writings have provided fuel for other interpreters. Tindale is a major example of this. According to his bibliography, 120 of Mathews' publications were consulted while drafting the boundaries of Aboriginal Australia.\(^{52}\) The ramifications have been substantial. Tindale, of course, provided the template from which the boundaries for land councils and kindred institutions were drawn. To understand Mathews and his significance is anything but an academic question. For better or for worse, his collation of data has directly influenced the cultural and political organisation of contemporary Aboriginal Australia.

### Conversion and controversy

The most prolific anthropological writer of his period, RH Mathews left a unique and in some ways an eccentric corpus. In the quarter century from 1893 until his death he published more than 2200 pages of ethnographic observations. Even when allowance is made for the repetition of some data, this remains a daunting statistic. Owing to the great number of papers and their often repetitive nomenclature (sometimes the same titles were used for different articles), the Mathews opus is also a bibliographer's night-

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\(^{49}\) Mathews 1904: 203.

\(^{50}\) Enright 1899: 115-16.

\(^{51}\) Mathews 1896b: 330.

\(^{52}\) Tindale 1974: 371-5.
mare. Confusion about the number of Mathews publications has been common. Some scholars have been led astray by John Greenway's habit of listing appendices as individual articles in the *Bibliography of the Australian Aborigines*. My own searching (fairly complete at the time of writing) has yielded 169 anthropological publications. Six were small books or pamphlets, some self-financed and all published in Australia. The remaining 163 appeared in periodicals. (Just two of these were co-authored.)

Mathews began his anthropological career by contributing to local forums. But the colonies (and then the Federation) possessed insufficient journals to accommodate his prolific output. He quickly realised that interest in Australian Aborigines was so strong that his writings might attract an international audience. Of the 163 journal articles, 66 were published in Australia and 97 in other countries. Except for a few pieces in *Science of Man*, a local anthropological magazine, Mathews' Australian articles appeared in the wide-ranging scientific journals of various royal societies. Overseas, he published mainly in the leading anthropological publications of Britain, France, Austria, Germany and the United States (see Appendix).

So how did RH Mathews, a rural surveyor without so much as a university qualification, become an internationally published author with work translated into foreign languages? The answer lies in the intellectual culture of the small 'royal societies' that had sprung up in colonial centres throughout the British empire. By considering Mathews' involvement in the Royal Society of New South Wales, it is possible to get a sense of the ways in which Aboriginal art and tradition were constituted as objects of scientific knowledge. There are also the seeds of Mathews' authorial ambition and a taste of the controversies that dogged his publishing career.

For many years it has been recognised that in his early days as an ethnographer Mathews ran into serious trouble with colleagues in the Royal Society. The year 1894 should have been his *annus mirabilis*, for it brought to this unknown scholar the imprimatur of serious recognition. In this year he won the Society's bronze medal and the sum of £25 for a prize essay on 'Rock paintings and carvings in New South Wales'. That something soured what should have been a considerable triumph is indicated by the fact that the Royal Society of New South Wales, which ordinarily published prize essays as a matter of course, never printed Mathews' entry in its annual *Journal and Proceedings*. Typically, Mathews himself left only the most inadequate explanation of this puzzling omission. A note in his manuscripts suggests that 'owing to the great length of the paper' it became 'uncertain' whether the Society could ever accommodate it. There must have been an extensive correspondence concerning this and other Mathews entanglements, but it has not survived in his own papers, raising the question of whether embarrassing documents were deliberately purged. I have been able to reconstruct the chronology only through the records of the learned societies implicated.

54. Mathews co-published with WJ Enright in 1895 and MM Everitt in 1900.
55. A number of the European articles were published in French or German. A translator is credited in most of the French articles. This is not the case with the German. Even so, it is doubtful that Mathews wrote in any language other than English. Drafts (in English) of most of his German publications survive in the National Library of Australia manuscripts.
56. 'Rock paintings and carvings of the Australian Aborigines [draft]', in MS 8006/5/11, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
Mathews' ethnological conversion — and I use the term advisedly — had its seed in early 1892. The location was the hamlet of Milbrodale, about twenty kilometres south of Singleton, where Mathews was making a routine survey for a farmer named Benjamin Richards. As William Mathews recounted the Milbrodale experience, his brother Hamilton was assisting their father when someone on the farm told them 'of the existence of a rather striking aboriginal painting of a human figure in a cave in the vicinity'. In this way Mathews' attention was drawn to one of the great Aboriginal art sites of eastern Australia, a representation of the creation hero or 'great spirit' known as Baiame (his spelling).

It is not altogether surprising that Mathews, on seeing this huge, painted image, was inspired 'to make an accurate copy of it'. Few observers would be unaffected by the painting in that sandstone shelter. Baiame is stunningly depicted in red and white ochre. His eyes are large and almost luminous, and his arms are extraordinary. They are greatly exaggerated in proportion to the rest of him, extending laterally from the torso, reaching across the wall of the cave, so as to measure five metres from fingertip to fingertip.

In later years, Mathews would do much to chart Baiame's exploits on Earth, documenting myths, ceremonies, landforms and mythic journeys associated with the great spirit. His interest undoubtedly reflected that of his informants, but it also underscored his own biographical narrative, for the encounter with Baiame really was the fulcrum upon which his life shifted. Having drafted what was actually quite a crude sketch of the figure, Mathews went further. In October the following year he shared his observations in an address to the Royal Society of New South Wales. For 17 years he had been a member of this small though influential scientific organisation, a body inspired by — though quite separate from — its august London namesake. But this was the first time he had ever given a paper.

The presentation was published as 'Rock paintings by the Aborigines in caves on Bulgar Creek, near Singleton' in the Royal Society's annual Journal and Proceedings for 1893. Accompanied by drawings and a map of the locality, it concerned both the Baiame site and another nearby cave containing hand stencils. While revealing some residual knowledge of Aboriginal customs, this first ethnological publication is quite prosaic. Mathews states unashamedly that he has confined himself "as much as possible to descriptions only of these drawings, and ... not attempted to connect them with the myths and superstitions of the Australian aborigines'. With the benefit of hindsight

there is a certain humour in his remark that he will leave these more detailed questions 'for those better qualified to follow them than I am, or have more time at their disposal'.59 As events transpired, he would, for the remainder of his life, have very little time for anything else.

The way in which this isolated documentation of an Aboriginal site became the entrée to a much larger project is explained by William Mathews. After his father had presented his Royal Society paper, he was approached by WD Campbell, also a surveyor, who had been ‘collecting material for an essay on that particular phase of the Aborigines’ art for the purpose of competing for the bronze medal and prize of twenty five pounds which had been offered by the Royal Society for the best paper on the Aboriginal Rock Carvings and Paintings in New South Wales’.60 Until then Mathews had not thought of entering the competition. But the reception of his paper had been encouraging and he eventually resolved to work quickly to prepare an entry by the competition deadline of 1 May 1894.

As Mathews realised, the Hawkesbury sandstone that forms the bedrock of the Sydney Basin provided the material for a distinctive regional style of rock art. In the Sydney region alone, 875 rock shelters containing motifs painted in pigment have been recorded. There are almost as many engravings on exposed rock platforms.61 This rich artistic legacy was created by the traditional Dharug-speaking communities who took

advantage of the abundant expanses of flat sandstone when they created what were often complex series of pictorial engravings. These carved outlines of people, animals, artefacts and spirit ancestors, some isolated and others presented in dispersed arrangements, represent the most spectacular and distinctive aspect of Sydney’s Indigenous art. Europeans from the time of the First Fleet had been moved to comment on, or reproduce in their notebooks, the rock art they observed along the Sydney foreshore. But it was only in the late nineteenth century that men including WD Campbell, who had so warmly encouraged Mathews, and RJ Etheridge Junior, a curator at the Australian Museum and also a Royal Society member, were moved to attempt some systematic documentation. This is the climate in which Mathews was working in late 1893 and the early months of 1894.

From Mathews’ notebooks and later published articles it is possible to get a sense of the increasing fervour with which he went about the task of ‘collecting’ (by which he meant documenting) rock art. Initially he started slowly, visiting a site at Dural, north of Parramatta, in November 1893. This day trip was squeezed in around a glut of surveying work. Over the Christmas period he went to Rylestone, west of the Blue Mountains. In early 1894 he scoured the Sydney area, documenting sites at Botany Bay where he was directly assisted by Aboriginal inhabitants of La Perouse. He found other sites at Howes Valley and more near the Hawkesbury River, north of the city. To ensure impartiality, each entrant to the competition was required to adopt a nom-de-plume and it seems to have been a custom in the Royal Society to choose a name in Latin. Waggishly, or perhaps not so waggishly, Mathews styled himself Caesar aut Nul-lus — ‘Caesar or no one’.63

The prize essay does not survive intact in the RH Mathews papers, but manuscript evidence suggests that it described 50 caves and 70 ‘rock drawings’. Rough handwritten notes are extant and they run to at least 89 pages.65 The sheer comprehensiveness of his entry must have been a significant factor in his winning the prize. Nothing in the Royal Society archives supports Mathews’ contention that the essay was deemed so long as to be unprintable. Although it was hefty, a contribution in the order of a hundred handwritten pages was hardly unheard of in the journal.66 The totality with which Caesar’s triumph metamorphosed into Mathews’ embarrassment can be mainly attributed to his unquenchable thirst for publication — the beginning of what Spencer irreverently dismissed in a letter to WE Roth as that ‘interminable series of papers’.67

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63. Rough Minutes: Council Meetings 1892–95, in unnumbered Records, Royal Society of New South Wales, Sydney.
64. An 18-page manuscript headed ‘Aboriginal rock carvings and paintings’ is annotated ‘Read before the Royal Society of N. S. Wales August 1 1894’ (in MS 8006/5/11, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra). This must have been a condensed version of the original, presented on the evening he received the award.
65. ‘The Aboriginal rock pictures of Australia [draft]’, in MS 8006/5/11, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
66. The proof of this is the Royal Society of New South Wales’s publication of Mathews 1904. This, Mathews’ longest article (reprinted as a book in 1905), runs to 183 printed pages.
67. Spencer to Roth, 30 January 1903, in Box 1A/Roth 13, Sir Baldwin Spencer Manuscripts, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
The first signs of trouble appeared in late March 1895, some eight months after the award of the prize. The minutes of the Royal Society of New South Wales reveal that the issue of duplication was raised by TW Edgeworth David, the eminent geologist and president of the Society. He informed the council that on 12 July 1894 a rock art paper by Mathews had been read at the Royal Society of Victoria and subsequently published in their journal. The text published was practically a condensed form of the prize essay and the illustrations were 'identical'. David stated that 'he had written to Mr. Mathews asking for an explanation by return of post, but no answer had, as yet, come to hand'.

Figure 3: Mathews' documentation of a rock art site near the Hawkesbury River, New South Wales. Field Book No. 1 in NLA MS 8006/3/2. Courtesy National Library of Australia.
The New South Wales Society was unimpressed, but at that stage took the view that the winning essay 'must be published'. In addition to the explanation sought from Mathews, a letter was sent to the Royal Society of Victoria alerting its council to the incident. The inquiries yielded contradictory information: a statement from Mathews that he had forewarned the Victorians of a possible New South Wales publication; a denial from them that he had done any such thing. The Sydney Society resolved that a decision concerning the fate of Mathews' paper would be delayed six months, perhaps hoping that this would place an acceptable interregnum between Mathews' unacceptably similar papers. The delayed publication in no way affected Mathews' enthusiasm for his new 'pet study' (as he once described his anthropological habit to Daisy Bates). With the essay prize in the bag, he was now collecting all sorts of ethnographic data, especially on initiation ceremonies. A paper titled 'Aboriginal Bora held at Gundabloui in 1894' became his second essay published by the Royal Society of New South Wales.

The primary data for this paper had been collected by a police contact in the north-west of New South Wales. Even so, the Gundabloui essay was an impressive piece of research which marked a turn from material culture to ceremonial activity. But to the councillors at the Royal Society, Mathews' new paper became evidence of a disturbing pattern. A few weeks before the society was due to reconsider the publication of the prize essay in 1895 came more unwelcome news. A paper by RH Mathews titled 'The Bora, or Initiation Ceremonies of the Kamilaroi Tribe' had been published in London’s *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*. The text was almost identical to that of 'Aboriginal Bora held at Gundabloui in 1894'. As if things were not bad enough for the anthropological convert, it quickly transpired that Mathews had published another rock art paper, this time in the journal of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Queensland Branch). Letters were dispatched to Brisbane and London to ascertain whether Mathews had advised these journals that the Royal Society of New South Wales had a prior claim to material they had published. Both replied in the negative.

Although explanations were demanded of Mathews with each new revelation, he seems to have been cheerily oblivious to the storm that was brewing. As the council of the Royal Society of New South Wales sought to manage an imbroglio that now spanned Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and London, Mathews was busily submitting new work for their consideration and inquiring regularly about the publication date of his prize essay. This unconcern supports, at least to some degree, an otherwise errone-

71. Mathews 1894.
72. Mathews 1895.
74. Mathews 1894–95.
ous account of the affair in William Mathews' manuscript. He claims that the charge of duplication was due simply to his father's naive enthusiasm. In the rock art matter this seems possible. My analysis of Mathews' early rock art publications suggests that the amount of duplication was fairly limited. Generally Mathews discussed different examples of rock carvings and paintings in his various papers, but owing to the generic similarity of the artwork itself and the formulaic way in which he described it, they give a strong impression of repetition.

The repetition of that first bora publication represents Mathews' most severe act of duplication during his early period. (There were similar, though uncontested occurrences, in the last years of his life.) The two articles, as the Royal Society pointed out, were 'almost identical'. That almost is itself incriminating, for if Mathews had been simply ignorant of scholarly conventions, considering himself entitled to publish his research as he pleased in different parts of the world, surely he would have submitted the original article verbatim rather than changing the title, dropping the historical preamble that commences the earlier paper, and making various inconsequential alterations in phraseology. During this period the demand for original articles was taken very seriously. It was strengthened by the strong competition between various learned societies.

The outward changes Mathews made to his article do not conceal the reality that it was the same bora being described in both publications: an event organised in 1894 by Kamilaroi people on the Moonie River near the town of Gundabloui 'about ten miles below where it is crossed by the Queensland boundary'. That the paper was snapped up by the prestigious Journal of the Anthropological Institute is a clear indication of the value attached to Mathews' research. Interestingly, the referee who recommended publication was no one less than EB Tylor, the doyen of British evolutionary anthropology. The fact that Mathews managed to survive this and various other scrapes is an indication that although he was proving a difficult customer, the perceived value of his work outweighed the complications. He was effectively let off with a letter of warning from London. By late 1896 the matter of duplication was sufficiently resolved for Mathews to be appointed a Corresponding Member of the Anthropological Institute. This entitled him to complimentary copies of the journal and other privileges enjoyed by fellows.

The allegations of duplication were more vexing for Mathews' colleagues in the Royal Society of New South Wales. They were evidently dissatisfied with the letters he wrote to justify his conduct, rebuking him in 1895 by refusing even to consider his essay on message sticks. (Eventually it was accepted by the American Anthropologist.) On the matter of the still-to-be published prize essay, the council decided on 30 October 1895 that 'as Mr Mathews has published so much of his paper with the publications of

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other societies' it was only fitting 'that his paper should be returned'. Mathews protested that they might at least publish part of his essay but his entreaties were useless. The matter disappears from the records with a further letter from Mathews to the executive of the Society which, though bizarre, is a likely indication of the root of the trouble. In his missive Mathews made mention of the list of members that appeared in the opening pages of each year's Journal and Proceedings of the Society. Those who had published papers in the journal were distinguished by the letter 'P.' beside their name, followed by a numeral designating the number of publications. The minutes record that Mathews requested that his 'Prize Essay might count as having been published in the Society's Journal; and that P.4 instead of P.3 might be inserted before his name in the new list of members'. Not surprisingly, the councillors were 'unable to accede to his request'.

The anthropologist as pamphleteer

Before 1898, when the rift with the Victorian triumvirate became apparent, Mathews had quoted their work generously and approvingly (a courtesy that neither Spencer, Howitt nor Fison ever paid to him). In an expression of camaraderie that now seems incredible, Mathews in 1897 went so far as to refer to Howitt as 'my friend and fellow worker'. Between Mathews and Spencer relations had also been cordial for a time. The two corresponded briefly and Spencer, an honorary secretary of the Royal Society of Victoria, is listed as having communicated the two papers Mathews published in the society's journal in 1896. In his capacity as honorary secretary, Spencer would have known about the charges of duplication when they first emerged, but he did not use them against Mathews at the time.

As Mathews explained to ES Hartland, the major figure in folklore studies with whom he corresponded, 1898 was the year when Spencer decided to do 'all he could to injure me'. The hostility, according to this letter, resulted from Mathews turning his ethnographic attention to the Northern Territory — terrain that Spencer had already claimed for Gillen and himself. In an act that may have compounded the offence of this 'intrusion' — and which the Victorians undoubtedly discussed — 1898 was also the year in which Mathews (initially with great respect) suggested in print that Howitt had 'evidently been misinformed' when he claimed that descent among certain tribes in southern Queensland was reckoned through the father.

From that date the warfare barely ceased. A full three years after Mathews' death, Spencer lambasted his work. For years his complaints against Mathews had travelled

82. Mathews 1897a: 285.
84. Mathews 1896a,c.
86. Mathews 1898a: 330.
87. Spencer 1921: 2.
the world. Like those dyes used to trace the course of underground currents, the blackening of the surveyor’s name can be used to map the powerful network of epistolary relationships maintained by the man, twenty years his junior, who became his nemesis. Outwardly he ignored Mathews, but behind the scenes there was frequent chatter about the ‘miscreant’ from Parramatta. In two letters written in 1898 Spencer complained about Mathews to the Royal Anthropological Institute of London. One was deemed so ‘personal, & uncalled for’ that it was not read at council, but it proved efficacious since it led to Mathews’ corresponding membership of the society being rescinded on a technicality.

Spencer’s smear campaign reached the very top of the discipline in 1903 when he complained to JG Frazer, the mighty author of The golden bough, that ‘Mr M. pours out so many papers that writers at home [meaning the Mother Country] who cannot know anything of the way in which he gets his information are apt to think that he is reliable’. Later character assassination must have followed, for a letter survives from 1908 in which Frazer says to Spencer:

As for that fellow R. H. Matthews [sic], of course I shall not even mention him or any of his multitudinous writings. He wrote to me twice in a tone which showed the character of the man. I did not answer his letters and shall hold no communication with him.

This hostility is evidence of Mathews’ unwitting envelopment in a separate anthropology war — the bitter dispute between Frazer and another high profile Briton, Andrew Lang. Spencer, who was steadfastly aligned with Frazer, had been infuriated when, in 1903, he read Lang’s claim that Mathews was the most lucid and ‘well informed writer on the various divisions which regulate the marriages of the Australian tribes’. While Lang supported Mathews, as did NW Thomas, who used his work approvingly in Kinship organisations and group marriage in Australia (1906), Mathews never benefited from the powerful overseas patronage enjoyed by Spencer, Howitt and Fison. (Hartland did not enjoy such prestige because he was aligned with folklore study which, unlike anthropology, never became professionalised within the academies.) The efficacy of Spencer’s campaign against Mathews is demonstrated by Frazer’s four volume Totemism and exogamy (1910), a work that draws extensively from Australian material. Mathews had published scores of articles on totems and marriage customs. But he rated not a footnote in Frazer’s text.

88. Council Minutes, in Records, Royal Anthropological Institute, London. Entry for 8 March 1898. Although the author of the letter was not named in the minutes, he was identified as the honorary secretary of the Royal Society of Victoria.
91. Frazer to Spencer, 19 April 1908, in PRM Box 5/Frazer 70, Sir Baldwin Spencer Manuscripts, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
93. Lang 1903: 38.
94. Consequently, Mathews was not cited by Freud who drew heavily upon Totemism and exogamy in Totem and taboo (1913). Of course Howitt and Spencer were cited. So was the Australian ethnographer ALP Cameron, a minor figure compared to Mathews.
Irrespective of the problems he presented as a personality, the treatment meted out to Mathews was scandalous. It makes a complete mockery of the scientific pretensions of his adversaries. Surely it is a most basic precept that a ‘scientist’ will evaluate any contribution to the discipline on objective principles and not dismiss it because of scuttlebutt transmitted through the old boys’ network. My own reading of Mathews’ opus, coupled with a knowledge of the bulk of his unpublished papers, confirms the substantial justice of a remark by Ian Langham, the historian of kinship studies, who claimed that although ‘many of his papers are repetitive, the amount of original material contained therein is still sufficient to entitle Mathews to a front ranking among the pioneers of Australian anthropology’.95

That his isolation resulted in added need for rigour is one of the surprising admissions that Mathews communicated to Hartland. There were positives, he suggested, to the way he had been marginalised.

Ever since 1898 the fact has been thrust upon me that Spencer and Howitt looked upon me as ‘the opposition candidate’ and never lost a chance of doing me an injury. I was thus kept continually ‘on my mettle’ and took every precaution — double precautions — to keep my statements unassailable. When I found it necessary to amend any of my results I did it immediately, so as not to give my enemies a chance of correcting me. I referred and re-referred the information sent me by old residents of Central Australia back to them for further sifting and inquiry ... I was the ‘head and front’ of the investigation and my men worked and re-worked under my directions. This has been going on for 13 years (since 1894) as shown by my pamphlets. I had the warning continually before me that any mistake of mine would meet with no mercy. When my men differed from S[pencer] & G[illen] I sent them copies of what S & G had said and asked them to try again — to check and re-check.96

Mathews’ claim that the climate of hostility necessitated extra diligence on his part was no doubt accurate. But the effect of this anthropology war was not always positive. Mathews’ authorial voice became ever more strident as the years progressed. He denounced the Victorians for minor oversights and developed a tendency to footnote only himself. Without a research culture of respectful criticism, he failed to develop major monographs. Instead he persisted with that ‘interminable series of papers’.

Within the closed circle of the triumvirate, the Victorians certainly assisted and promoted each other. Mulvaney has described Spencer’s exertions in encouraging the ageing Howitt to synthesise his disparate articles and notes into The Native tribes of south-east Australia (1904) which was published by George Macmillan, a friend of Spencer’s from Oxford days.97 Mathews, in contrast, had no joy whatsoever when he submitted a manuscript to the same publisher in 1906. He voiced his suspicions to Hartland: ‘I think they submitted it to Howitt or Spencer, who it is needless to add would condemn it to make room for their own books’.98 This could only have added to the

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insult of Howitt's hefty tome, for it contained a travesty of omission greater even than Frazer's. Howitt may have started earlier, but Mathews had long overtaken him as the most prolific ethnographic commentator of south-east Australia. Imagine his indignation when he discovered that not one of the 819 pages in *The Native tribes of south-east Australia* so much as mentioned his name. Mathews complained about this and other matters in his 1907 letter to *Nature* and finally Howitt took the bait, responding in the following terms:

I learnt from Mr. Mathews's letter that he has sent 'more than one hundred contributions to various scientific societies.' I have only met with two of them, neither of which recommended itself to me by its accuracy. It is therefore difficult to understand how I can have 'ignored' statements of which I am ignorant.100

It was a bare-faced lie. Howitt had been receiving the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* and the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* through all the years of Mathews' publishing. Mathews referred to this forcefully in his rejoinder.101

Even with an awareness of this mistreatment, it would be easy to dismiss Mathews, with his early tendency to duplicate findings, and his petty ambition to have 'P.4' instead of 'P.3' beside his name, as a creature of vanity who published to the point of promiscuity. This might even be the case: initially I thought so when I obtained copies of his correspondence with the editors of the *American Anthropologist* and the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, his principal fora in the United States. Seeking data on his theories or methodology, I was initially bemused to find letter after letter packed with inquiries about the fate of manuscripts and pedantic instructions about the reproduction of graphics. There were also his endless requests for offprints of articles — the 'separates' or 'pamphlets' as he called them. It is a subject that recurs throughout this correspondence. Typical is this letter to the American Philosophical Society written in 1897:

As regards separates, the Anthropological Society at Washington always supply me with 50 reprints of every paper they publish, which are sent through the International Exchange of the Smithsonian Institution. In addition to this they send me a free copy of the monthly or quarterly part of the journal in which my paper appears.102

He also raised the subject with Daisy Bates in a letter that has the flavour of a pep talk.

Did the Geographical Society in Melbourne send you any 'separate copies' of your contribution? You are entitled to either 25 or 50, whichever number is sanctioned by their rules.103

This preoccupation with the fine detail of printing, the all-important acquisition of separates, seems symptomatic of a man who practised in a methodological void. But his concerns acquire a logic of their own if we remain sensitive to the paradigm in which he

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99. Mathews 1907b.
100. Howitt 1907: 81.
worked. Mathews the amanuensis can then be identified as Mathews the maker, and his preoccupation with printing and pamphlets will be seen not as a sign of methodological poverty but as an instance of his method in action. Once this is recognised he will be known as the artisan who drafted manuscripts with his pen and paper then supervised their mechanical transformation into a bundle of pamphlets. From this perspective the ethnographic enterprise assumes a unique guise. Although Mathews seldom gained money from his activity (just a few shillings here and there by selling pamphlets), his function was to oversee an economy of his own creation, a system that involved collection, production, transformation, exchange and return. Tempting as it is to look at the notation in his field books and seek similitude between it and the culture he was writing about, the interpretation will be suspect unless we acknowledge a more cardinal reality: that the page of writing is the sign not of imitation but of transformation. The reality is that the ethnographer's labour is a form of production; that it turns out objects as tangible as the output of any artisan's workshop. That the final stage in the process — the dispatch of a published offprint to the place from whence it came — could be a generative moment, the beginning of a whole new cycle, is clearly articulated in another letter to the American Philosophical Society in which he justified his constant anxiety about reprints.

As this article will only occupy a little over a page of your journal, I beg to submit that as soon as the 'separates' are struck off, that half of them be sent to me by the direct mail instead of through the 'International Exchange'. I am making this suggestion because the separates will be very light, — and I am particularly anxious to get the 'reprints' soon so that I can distribute them among the white residents of the Northern Territory in the hope of inducing them to collect similar information respecting other tribes.104

To estimate that Mathews received an average of 50 offprints of everything he published is probably conservative. Although, as he pointed out to Bates, some societies supplied only 25 copies, others were prepared, on this matter, to indulge the authors who received not a penny for their work. In 1898 Mathews acknowledged receipt from the American Philosophical Society of ‘100 copies of my paper on Australian Divisions, for which I thank you very much’.105 Other papers, like his substantial ‘Ethnological notes on the Aboriginal tribes of New South Wales and Victoria’ (1904) he had reprinted as a book, in a larger edition, at his own expense.106 But even if his 170 ethnological articles (to use a round figure) are multiplied by the modest estimate of 50 reprints the Mathews opus would have yielded a stockpile of 8500 items. When, in the 1960s, Mathews' grandson Frank began to count the residue (which he had inherited), he found 3000 'booklets'. If that number remained after his death, Mathews must have distributed thousands in the course of his life.

‘Pamphlets duly read for which many thanks’, wrote a correspondent from Port Lincoln, South Australia in 1899.107 The line is repeated with countless variations throughout the Mathews correspondence. Who didn't receive his pamphlets during that

106. Mathews 1905.
quarter-century he devoted to anthropology? He posted them to new journals when offering his services as a writer. He sent swathes of them to the public libraries in Melbourne and Sydney, taking pains to ensure they were individually catalogued. Missionaries, postmasters, telegraph operators, policemen and any number of farmers in remote or not-so-remote parts of Australia were bombarded with letters and offprints. Sending a pamphlet or two was a way of creating a sense of reciprocal obligation when he 'cold-called' denizens of rural Australia, many of whom were amused rather than inspired by his suggestion that precious leisure hours might be devoted to collecting information about 'natives'.

ES Hartland and WHR Rivers certainly received offprints. He probably sent some to Durkheim, for Mathews’ long essay from 1904, published in the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, was cited several times in *The elementary forms of the religious life* (1915). Durkheim could have even read the article without Mathews’ agency, for strange as it may seem, the New South Wales journal was in no way inaccessible to a scholar resident in Paris. If it seems curious that a semi-retired surveyor from Parramatta could manage, with apparent ease, to locate and correspond with learned bodies around the world, the key lies in the list of 'Exchanges and Presentations' printed in the back of the Royal Society’s annual. In the year 1895, for example, the Royal Society of New South Wales exchanged publications with 400 institutes, libraries and learned bodies around the globe. Mathews could read any of their publications in the Royal Society library while a reader in Paris, if searching for the Society’s *Journal and Proceedings*, could find it at 39 institutions or libraries in that city alone.108 Mathews’ cycling of data from his base in Parramatta was but a tiny cog in the great machinery for the distribution of knowledge. With its circular flow between centre and periphery, it was a sign of modernity’s grip, hardening on the world.

**Coda: a glimpse from the margin**

For three decades after his death, what survived of Mathews’ personal library and papers remained in family hands. Then, in the 1950s, Hamilton Mathews allowed Elkin to borrow a trunk full of material — manuscript items and key books — which had been stored in Wollongong.109 This loan lasted for a quarter of a century and only after something of a tussle did the Mathews family secure the return of most manuscript items. Eventually they were donated to the National Library of Australia. The borrowed books, however, followed a different path. They remained in Elkin’s possession until 1974 when he gave them to the Rare Books collection of Sydney University’s Fisher Library.110 Among the 27 volumes once owned by Mathews are presentation copies from foreign luminaries including Arnold van Gennep, EA Crawley and Andrew Lang. There are also major publications by Mathews’ Australian enemies con-

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107 Higgins to Mathews, 19 September 1899, in 8006/2/1, RH Mathews papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.


110 Certificate of donation and related material in AP Elkin papers, University of Sydney Archives: 130/9/130. Elkin’s request that the books be known as the ‘Mathews Collection’ was never granted. Fisher Library has catalogued these items as part of the Elkin Collection.
taining marginal annotations which display a candour never exhibited in his diaries. Knowing Mathews once declared that if Howitt and Fison ‘had never been born, it could not have made an atom of difference to my work’,111 there is both pleasure and fascination in perusing his copy of Howitt’s The native tribes of south-east Australia (1904), the book that snubbed him so comprehensively. The comments written in the margin include: ‘No, no!’, ‘Bunkum’, ‘Rot’, ‘Nonsense’, ‘Bosh’, ‘Not so!’ and, very occasionally, ‘Correct’.

While shedding some light on the dispute between the anthropologists, this volume also provides insight into the way Mathews was perceived in eastern Victoria and the culturally connected coastal communities in southern New South Wales where he was better known. As a point of principle, it seems, Mathews’ spelling of Indigenous words differed from Howitt’s. But he could have only been referring to the same thing when he annotated a page on which Howitt described those persons who were known by the Kurnai of Gippsland as the Birraark. A pencilled note states: ‘Birrarak is the name given to me by the natives’.112

The lack of reflexivity in Mathews’ records is such that I am reliant on his arch­enemy’s description to convey an understanding of what this name might have meant to the people who bestowed it. Howitt claimed that the Birraark:

combined the functions of the seer, the spirit-medium, and the bard, for he fore­told future events, he brought the ghosts to the camp of his people at night, and he composed the songs and dances which enlivened their social meetings. He was a harmless being, who devoted himself to performances which very strikingly resembled those of the civilised ‘mediums.’ A man was supposed to become a Bir­raark by being initiated by Mrarts or ghosts, when they met him hunting in the bush; but, that they might have power over him, he must at the time be wearing a Gumbart, that is, one of those bone pegs which the Australian aborigine wears thrust through the septum of his nose. By this they held him and conveyed him through the clouds.113

From Howitt’s description it is clear that Birraarks were highly esteemed and widely known in the broad community. He names eight who were living in Gippsland when whites arrived in 1842, although none had survived by the time he started his ethnographic research in the 1870s. Several individual Birraarks were remembered by Howitt’s informants who related numerous observations, all of which enliven an understanding of how Mathews’ documentary project might have been construed in Aboriginal terms. As a medium between the living and the dead, a Birraark could travel from one realm to the other at will. He conveyed messages and information about the movements of friends or enemies who had died and he could also bring material benefits, the makings of a feast, as happened, for example, when ‘the Mrarts informed them of a whale stranded on the shore’. Not only was the Birraark a leader of ceremonial activities during large inter-communal gatherings, but through his media­tion with ghosts he brought songs and dances into the world of the living.114 Here is

111 Mathews 1904-05: 74.
112 Howitt 1904: 391. The annotated copy is located at Elkin Collection 262, Rare Books, University of Sydney Fisher Library.
113 Howitt 1904: 389.
rare and compelling evidence of how Mathews was regarded in an Aboriginal community. As a person who moved between worlds he could facilitate the transmission of understandings. In that intermediary capacity he evidently encouraged a two-way traffic in ways of speaking, singing and moving.

With this suggestive image, the Mathews story can be closed (at least for now). As a biographical subject he is heavily obscured, as if by fumes. It is a mixed cloud that enshrouds him. The still-lingering gun-smoke from the anthropological warfare is infused with that of the screen he put about himself to ensure his self-containment. With the passage of time, the sense of Mathews communicated in the journal articles is suggestive of a fragile visage. The authorial voice, a projected version of own likeness, has become his death mask. In that respect it recalls — and arguably embodies — the profound irony that underlies his ethnographic enterprise. In some ways Mathews acted as though he was an intermediary between the living and the dead. His Herculean feat of documentation was predicated on the impending disappearance of the people he described. As he once said to an American editor, 'Now is the time to locate the different nations, while the blacks are still alive, and not in a few hundred years after they are all dead, as is done with most races'. Like many things human, Mathews' survey of Aboriginal humanity is full of contradictions. The death mask becomes the thing with which we grapple when interpreting his life, while descendants of the very people whose anticipated demise stimulated his research can now be counted as attentive readers.

Acknowledgements
An honorary Harold White Fellowship at the National Library of Australia in 2002 allowed unparalleled access to RH Mathews' writings and papers. Sarah Walpole generously provided archival records from the Royal Anthropological Institute in London. Thanks also to Kate Khan, John Mulvaney and Naomi Parry for sharing material from their own research.

Appendix: Number of publications by RH Mathews, in periodicals by country (based on a survey of 163 journal articles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Journal/Magazine</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (renamed in 1900 Queensland Geographical Journal)</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science of Man</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td></td>
<td>American Antiquarian</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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'A better chance'? — sexual abuse and the apprenticeship of Aboriginal girls under the NSW Aborigines Protection Board

Victoria Haskins

Between the two World Wars in New South Wales, under the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board, Aboriginal girls and young women were taken from their families to be placed as indentured domestic workers in white household under a so-called apprenticeship scheme. This article examines this policy, for an apparent paradox emerges. Despite a rhetoric of protection, of giving Aboriginal girls 'a better chance' than they would otherwise have had if they remained with their communities, the records reveal an usually high illegitimate birth rate to girls in apprenticeships, while close examination shows the authorities made no effort to stem what amounted to a pattern of sexual exploitation of these young Aboriginal servants.

Aboriginal oral histories recount the authorities' indifference with a sense of embattlement. As one man explained in the 1980s:

The hard part was that they didn't like us after the girls ... They'd come and get 'em and take 'em away. They'd have 'em down there for twelve months and they'd get 'em into trouble and they'd be comin' back with white babies. That's what we were up against. That's true that is.1

From the time Aboriginal activist Fred Maynard railed against the Board's policy in the 1920s — 'They are trying to exterminate the Noble and Ancient Race of sunny Australia ... What a horrible conception of so-called Legislation'2 — an Aboriginal view of a sinister motive behind the apprenticeship policy has been documented. 'At the age of fourteen our girls [are] sent to work — poor illiterate trustful little girls to be gullied by the promises of unscrupulous white men', Koori spokeswoman Anna Morgan stated in 1934, 'We all know the consequences. But, of course, one of the functions of the Aborigines' Protection Board is to build a white Australia.'3

Nor was such a view restricted to those who were losing the girls of their communities. Earlier that same year, a white woman by the name of Joan Kingsley-Strack told

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2. Maynard to an Aboriginal girl, 14/10/27, Premier's Department Correspondence Files (hereafter PDCF) A27/915.
an audience of elite white Sydney women, members of the conservative Feminist Club, that the Aborigines Protection Board ‘deals wholesale with young aboriginal girls’. Strack had been an employer of no less than three Aboriginal domestic apprentices through the Board between the years 1920 and 1934. ‘They are taken from their natural protectors, their parents, to work in homes in the suburbs of Sydney and elsewhere’, she informed the ladies of the Club. ‘Any degenerate white renegade can prey on them and escape the law, while the unfortunate girl, instead of receiving protection from the Aborigines Board, is dubbed a devil, a fiend and a liar’.

The question of whether or not the past policies of Aboriginal child removal constituted ‘genocide’ has been debated, but the related issue of the high pregnancy rate for Aboriginal wards placed in domestic service has been only gingerly touched upon, reflecting the very painful and sensitive nature of this topic. Dealing with this fraught and suppressed history raises complex issues. Recuperative interpretation tends to strip testimonies of sexual abuse of agency and authority; yet, as Deborah Rose pointed out in her study of frontier relations, even if we recognise the agency of individual women in engaging in sexual relations with white men, we cannot overlook the fact that ‘incarceration, coercion and lack of redress’ run through such relations. Especially, indeed, when it comes to Aboriginal girls forced from their communities and compelled to indentured labour, where sexual activity of Aboriginal girls could be read as submission, negotiation, or resistance equally (even simultaneously). But, as Rose also argues, in the end it is the secondary child removal by the state, of the children born to women in essentially coercive sexual relations, that defines interracial sex as genocidal.

My purpose is neither to interrogate the experiences of the Aboriginal apprentices nor to explore the definitions of genocide in this context, however. Under pressure, the Aborigines Protection Board would sheet back the responsibility for ‘protecting’ Aboriginal girls ‘morality’ to those who engaged the apprentices. As a descendant of one woman who availed herself of State-supplied Aboriginal domestic labour, I have undertaken to interrogate the claims she made, that the Board was in fact not only fully aware of the sexual exploitation and impregnation of girls in service, but colluded in and condoned it.

My great-grandmother Joan Strack started out being typical, in many ways, of those ‘well-heeled upper-middle-class ladies who took black domestics’ described by Aboriginal historian James Miller. (For Miller, also, it was these self-centred, uncaring white mistresses who were largely to blame for the pregnancies of their naive young charges, including Miller’s grandmother.) She had engaged two Aboriginal apprentices who were both taken smoothly from her charge by the Board, the first after giving

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birth to an illegitimate child and the second after Joan appealed to police to warn off a man whose advances to her worker she considered inappropriate. Obligingly supplied with yet a third apprentice by the Board, Joan was horrified when this young woman, Del, confided that she had been repeatedly sexually assaulted by her last employer's son. She was even more horrified to find that the Board's response was to dismiss the apprentice's very serious allegations out of hand, insisting she hand her over to them. Galvanised into a long running battle to expose what she was now convinced was the real menace to Aboriginal women, the very body set up ostensibly to protect them, Joan would go on to become active in the Aboriginal citizenship movement of the late 1930s, until the crushing committal of her fourth and final Aboriginal worker, a woman formerly employed as an apprentice by Joan's mother, to a mental asylum.  

Dismissed at the time as an absurd woman who had got 'mixed up' in a 'matter that was not very nice', the records Joan left on her death in 1983 attest to the Board's inaction and indeed malpractice in response to sexual abuse of various individual women. The story of her failed campaigns for justice for Aboriginal apprentices also highlights the inability of a white mistress to prevent such exploitation in the face of Board intransigence. However, further research reveals a wider, even systematic, pattern of sexual abuse and impregnation of Aboriginal apprentices. If it was the case that the Board, members and administrators, tolerated and condoned this generally, then the apprenticeship policy might indeed be construed as a deliberate attempt by the State to breed out the race.

The apprenticeship scheme

The Aborigines Protection Board was from the outset quite straightforward in its aim to use the apprenticeship system to 'absorb' Aboriginal girls into the white working-class. Fair-skinned Aboriginal girls were first indentured to this end from Warangesda mission in 1893, and others sent out from government-controlled reserves, most notably Brewarrina. The Board secured legislative powers to arrange apprenticeships in 1909, subject to the provisions of the Apprentices Act 1901, requiring either parental consent or a court finding of neglect. In 1915 the Board secured additional powers to indenture Aboriginal children where parental consent was withheld, without recourse to court. This had been an irksome requirement, given that the object was to remove the children from their communities but 'the difficulty of proving neglect where children are fairly clothed and fed is insurmountable'.

The removal and apprenticeship legislation was directed overwhelmingly at female Aboriginal children from its inception until the 1940s, and in the argument for

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10. See Haskins 1998a, 2001. 'Del' is a pseudonym used to protect the privacy of her family.
13. Seventy-two per cent of the children taken between 1912 and 1928 being girls, though Aboriginal boys could also be taken from their parents and indentured (usually as farm hands); Goodall 1995: 81–4, 1990: 6; Haskins 2003: 107; NSW Aborigines Protection Board (hereafter APB) Ward Registers.
such extraordinary powers in 1915, the Board made their concerns explicit. The apprenticeship policy had been formulated on the understanding that Aboriginal girls began reproducing at around fourteen years of age, 'and so the thing went on year after year with the result that the half-caste and white population was increasing'. Annual reports threatened that the number of lighter-skinned people on the reserves was 'increasing with alarming rapidity' and would eventually become a 'positive menace to the State'. The aim was to 'put things into train on the lines that would eventually lead to the camps being depleted of their population, and finally the closing of the reserves and camps altogether'. Colonial Secretary JH Cann told the Legislative Assembly in 1915, that it was 'not a question of stealing the children, but of saving them', then went on:

If we give the board the powers I am seeking to bestow under this amending bill these half-caste children will be given a chance to better themselves and instead of the Government being called upon to maintain stations all over the state for the protection of the aboriginals, the aboriginals will soon become a negligible quantity and the young people will merge into the present civilisation and become worthy citizens.

But a 'chance' of what, exactly, to 'better themselves', would the apprenticed girls be given, as their people became a 'negligible quantity'? The implication was that Aboriginal girls in apprenticeships would be prevented from having babies — unlike in their communities where, it was claimed, they 'never had a ghost of a chance to keep respectable' and where a 'young girl 13 years of age [might] be an asset to an aboriginal woman' — and that this was the reason behind the Board's determination to take control of them. But as a Labor MP indicated in his response to Cann's call to support the bill — 'There is no desire for the white community to become a mixed race' he said — there was a certain ambiguity behind the Board's proposed strategy to do so by forcibly inserting their young women of child-bearing age directly into white households.

Despite fierce debate the bill would go through with an overwhelming majority, because there was bipartisan support for the aim of breaking up the reserves, and in contrast to alternative methods (segregation or, in an extreme imagination, forcible sterilisation) apprenticeship of girls was relatively politically and practically feasible, riven with contradictions as it was. Throughout the nineteenth century, domestic service had been seen as an ideal method of moral reform for wayward girls and single mothers (notwithstanding the fact that the bulk of recruits to prostitution were originally domestic servants). Standard practice in NSW since 1801, the apprenticeship of

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15. APBR 1911; also APBR 1910.
17. NSWPD 1915b: 1951.
20. This query has been raised when the subject of this paper has been publicly presented, and was raised by one of the two anonymous referees for this paper. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully rehearse the possibilities of the sterilisation alternative. Suffice to say that as far as can be determined, it seems nobody raised that possibility at the time — at least nobody in government or on the Aborigines Protection Board.
poor white girls to service derived from a 500 year old British state tradition. But by the turn of the century, domestic service was falling out of favour for those white girls considered unsuitable progenitors of the white race. While other white wards were still apprenticed in New South Wales, those classified as physically, mentally, or morally defective were restrained at the Industrial School for Girls. Apprenticing of inmates from this last remaining large institution for girls in the State dropped off rapidly from the late 1880s and was 'virtually obsolete' by 1920. The conflict between environmental and hereditary theories of child welfare was only partially obscured by the construction of these girls as being particularly resistant to reform (and thus requiring segregation and incarceration). Implicit in the State's reluctance to apprentice these young women was the idea that their sexuality could not be controlled within the context of domestic service.

At the same time Aboriginal girls were forced into domestic service. The Cootamundra Home, the 1909 apprenticing legislation, and the campaign for increased removal powers, had all been constructed on the initiative of a Board member George Ardill, a religious philanthropist with an old-fashioned belief in 'saving' unmarried mothers and their children by putting them to work. But only a month after being appointed to take control of all matters regarding the Cootamundra Home, Ardill resigned from the Board, just before it was overhauled by the Chief Secretary. Reconstituted in April 1916, Board members now represented the departments of the Colonial Secretary, Public Health, Education, and Agriculture, as well as retaining the head of the Police as the chairman. Two politicians, one from either side of the House, were also retained as members. This new bureaucratic Board announced that henceforth all Aboriginal girls 14 and over were to be compelled to go into service, and were only to return to their communities temporarily, if at all, for 'a holiday' during which they had to reside with Board staff, and were to be encouraged to marry and move off the reserve with their husbands. The following year, 1917, the State Children's Relief Board president, Alfred Green, was appointed to the Board, thus facilitating the transfer of fair-skinned reserve children removed under the Board legislation to his department.

Reiterating an earlier caution against placing 'the full blooded and dark coloured' children in situations at a distance from their communities, the Board had made one qualification to the new blanket policy of apprenticeship of girls. 'Unless inquiry discloses the fact they are moral and reliable', girls aged 16 and over were not to be placed in domestic service. This was subject, however, to the proviso that a Home should be

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26. APB Minutes 6/1/16; 10/2/16; 17/2/16.
27. APB Minutes 6/4/16, Clipping, Sydney Morning Herald (hereafter SMH), 6/11/16, in AP Elkin papers box 67 item 1/12/138; see also Goodall 1982: 81. See also APB Minutes 9/3/23.
30. APB Minutes 6/4/16; see also 15/3/15.
established in Sydney to cater for girls who had proved ‘unsuitable’ in service, were ‘immoral’, or were ‘weaklings without proper protection on Reserves’, and for ‘very young children and infants’ (that is, their babies).\textsuperscript{31} This qualification suggests a preference for incarcerating Aboriginal girls whom the Board thought might be likely to become pregnant in domestic service.

Yet at the same time the Board decided to discontinue utilising Ardill’s Home for unmarried mothers and their children (which had provided for some of the children of apprentices up to that point\textsuperscript{32}), his home being considered ‘undesirable’ for reasons not stated.\textsuperscript{33} Immediately afterwards the Board’s secretary was directed to arrange an interview between the State Children’s Board head Green (who was not yet a Board member) and the Protection Board’s Chairman to discuss establishing a Home for girls ‘unfit for domestic service’ — and nothing further was heard of the matter.\textsuperscript{34} Some years later Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton, a white woman, would write to the Board offering to establish a Home for Aboriginal girls considered ‘unsuitable’ for apprenticeship, with the support of the Aborigines Inland Mission. The Board was implacably hostile. It repeatedly requested police reports and surveillance of her Home (which functioned in Sydney in 1924 and 1925) and sought legal advice on having it closed down.\textsuperscript{35} No such Home under the control of the Board ever eventuated.

Various accounts confirm that the policy of removal was pursued aggressively throughout the inter-war period, Aboriginal communities around the State being emptied of all their adolescent girls.\textsuperscript{36} The degree to which the policy had shifted to one of rigorous bureaucratic efficiency aimed at clearing reserves can be measured by fact that most girls on the Board’s Ward Registers had been institutionalised on grounds of simply being of an age to place in apprenticeships — even those removed ostensibly for other reasons were almost immediately sent out to service.\textsuperscript{37} Yet there was no need to compel girls into indentures. Despite claims of ‘idleness’ on reserves to justify this aggressive State intervention, Aboriginal women had commonly worked as servants in local townships since the earliest years. After the Board was established, independent domestic work remained an option preferred by young Aboriginal women, allowing for family obligations while providing a valuable income and some flexibility of choice.\textsuperscript{38}

Now such independent arrangements could be and were suddenly cut short.\textsuperscript{39} Apprenticeship gave the Board maximum control, allowing it to place workers when

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} APB Minutes 6/4/16.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Walden 1991: 120–1.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Letter accompanying policy statement, AC Pettitt to Chief Secretary, 3/4/16, enclosed in APB Minutes 6/4/16.
\item \textsuperscript{34} APB Minutes 11/5/16.
\item \textsuperscript{35} APB Minutes 23/1/25, 25/4/25, 21/7/25; see also Goodall 1982: 229, 231–4; Goodall 1996: 151–2; Maynard (forthcoming).
\item \textsuperscript{37} APB Ward Registers; see also Walden 1991: 50, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{39} APB Circular to Managers 13/5/18, in Hankins 1982: 6.1.10; see also Morgan 1994: 63–4; Walden 1991: 69.
\end{itemize}
and where it chose, and controlling their access to their home reserves. Apprenticeship also gave the Board unprecedented control over the girls' wages — both rates and disbursement — an important reason for the Board’s preference for apprenticeship.\(^{40}\)

The requirement on apprentices and ex-apprentices to apply to the Board, the station manager, or the local police for access to their wages on a piecemeal basis ensured their submission to these authorities, while the artificially low wage rates — substantially lower than those earned by independent workers, and not brought into line with those paid to Child Welfare Department apprentices until 1941\(^{41}\) — ensured their continued poverty and dependence, and the removal of their children in turn. Apprenticeship meant that both the earning capacity and reproductive capacity of Aboriginal girls were denied to their communities.

**Criticism of the policy**

In 1914 during the Parliamentary debates it was clearly stated: ‘it has been the policy of the Board not to allow children, many of whom are almost white, who have been removed from camp life to return thereto, but to eventually merge themselves in the white population’.\(^{42}\) By the mid-1920s the Board was subject to a barrage of media scrutiny of the apprenticeship policy. It was said Aboriginal girls locked up in private households were being prevented from meeting and marrying potential husbands, thus ‘making it difficult for many more to be born’. The Board was forced to defend itself; its aim was to prepare the girls for marriage to young Aboriginal men by giving them domestic training beforehand, and with a taste for a higher standard of living thus instilled they would want to leave the reserves with their husbands when they did marry. The ‘possibilities’ for the girls’ marriage was reduced by being in service, a Board official acknowledged, but ‘prey to dissolute whites’ on the reserves, they still ‘had a better chance under the present system’. At any rate, he concluded, ‘extinction was ... inevitable’.\(^{43}\)

The Board had apparently anticipated such criticisms at the outset of gaining the 1915 amendment legislation, recommending a training home ‘for lads’ be established, as well as ‘facilities’ for girls to meet and marry ‘decent hard working young men of their own color [sic]’.\(^{44}\) And in 1918, having already noted some press criticism of their ‘methods’, the Board was stung to respond to an enquiry regarding two girl apprentices: ‘Decided to fully set out the reasons for their removal ... and point out the policy of the Board was the uplifting of the girl by placing her in service with respectable families give [sic] them proper domestic training, making them useful citizens & wives for their abor. brother’.\(^{45}\) But considering that by their own admission the Board were driving young Aboriginal men off reserves into itinerant labour and homelessness\(^{46}\)

\(^{40}\) Select Committee on Administration of Aborigines Protection Board [SCAAPB] 1940: 71; see also APB Minutes 6/10/10. For wage control see APBR 1897, APBR 1904, APBR 1905, also NSWPD 1910: 4549.

\(^{41}\) Walden 1995: 200; Walden 1991: 70, 91; Aboriginal Welfare Board (hereafter AWB) Minutes 21/1/41; proposed regulations accepted following meeting, AWB Minutes 25/2/41.

\(^{42}\) NSWPD 24/11/14: 1354.

\(^{43}\) SMH 29/10/24: 12; see also SMH 9/1/25: 8; 10/1/25: 16; 11/2/25: 16.


\(^{45}\) APB Minutes 8/2/17; 3/4/1918.
indeed the Boys’ Home that was established eventually in 1924, Kinchela Boys’ Home, would be imposed on what had been a flourishing independent Aboriginal farm) it is hardly surprising that the girls at Cootamundra Home, awaiting their placement out in service, were encouraged to look forward to marrying a white man, and thus effect their own disappearance. ‘There is a good chance that you will marry a white man’, they were told, ‘and your children will be lighter and they will get caught up with a white man and their children will be lighter until they are completely white and that’s how the Aboriginal blood will be bred out.’

In practice many of the apprentices were held in service for years after their four-year indentures had expired. The Board did not inform apprentices that they were entitled to leave, and appeals by apprentices or their families to the Board for return to their community, even after four years, were treated with suspicion and in some cases refused. In 1920 the Board directed station managers to actively organise marriages for Aboriginal apprentices ‘holidaying’, the ‘only solution’ to the problem of the young women becoming restless and refusing to work after a period of four to six years. Like the recommendation endorsed the year before with regard to protest against child removal at Cummeragunja station, that girls taken should be allowed to return at age 18 if they desired ‘to marry an aboriginal’, it shows the Board only prepared to concede returns of apprentices to marry in expedient circumstances.

In her address to the Feminist Club in 1934, Joan Strack had spoken with disgust of how ‘when an aboriginal girl gets into trouble, or summons enough courage to ask the Board for the money she has earned, and which is held in trust for her, she is sent for a “holiday”’. In May 1926, the Board had, once again, considered the question of ‘permitting girls to return to their own districts on completion of service’. They decided to approve the ‘principle’, of allowing girls after five years’ completed service to spend a ‘holiday’ on their reserves, to allow her the opportunity to marry. Not coincidentally, it was at this same meeting that the Board decided the appropriate way to deal with the application for her trust monies by Joan Strack’s 26-year-old apprentice Mary Hollis was to offer her such a holiday. (Mary did go on this holiday, that being the condition of her receiving £5 of her trust monies, but she promptly returned to Joan Strack and began working for her independently.) Six years later, Joan Strack’s second worker (at 19 years also beyond the age of apprenticeship) and another apprentice, employed by Joan’s mother, would both be sent to a distant and strange reserve expressly to be married off, after their employers called in the police to intervene in their relationships with

47. Goodall 1996: 142.
49. APB Ward Registers; APB Salary Registers; APB Minutes, 24/9/14, 1/10/14, 15/10/14, 26/11/14; SCAAPB 1940: 71; see also Walden 1991: 81.
51. APB Minutes, 25/6/19, 30/10/18, 14/5/19.
52. ‘Smith’s Weekly, c. October 1934, ‘Are Abos getting a fair deal? Scathing attack on officials’.
53. Not her real name. Name has been changed to protect the privacy of her family.
55. Haskins (forthcoming).
men. The return of at least half of the girls, in the end, to Aboriginal reserves, was no more than a mopping-up operation for difficult older girls.

Those who got pregnant in service were less likely to return, especially if they were younger. Most would go back into apprenticeships, their child, if it survived, transferred at birth to the care of the Child Welfare Department. Some Aboriginal women believed that this removal was 'so that the white men in the house were not blamed'. It meant, also, that an Aboriginal servant could go straight back into a white household, sometimes the same one.

One of the more tragic cases concerned a 15-year-old apprentice brought to Sydney from a rural situation to give birth. The tacit sanction of the Board was demonstrated not only by the return of the girl to the same place (her baby died soon after birth) but in the fact that following her own untimely death there, the same employer was able to acquire the services of at least another two apprentices, one of whom was also 'taken to Hospital'.

Fred Maynard, head of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, had written to the girl asking for the particulars, telling her he would 'do [his] very best to ventilate the whole case'. Intercepting the letter the Board forwarded it to the Premier, not to assist the young woman, but to alert him to the dangers of allowing an Aboriginal protest organisation to exist. Maynard's 'illogical views' were likely to 'disturb' the Aboriginal people, they argued.

'Listen, girlie, your case is one in Dozens with our girls, more is the pity', he had written.

God forbid, these white Robbers of our woman virtues seem to do just as they like with down right impunity and, mind, you, my dear Girl, the law stands for it. There is no clause in our own Aboriginal Act, which stands for principles for our Girls, that is to say that any of these white fellows can take our girl down and laugh to scorn, yes with impunity that which they have been responsible for — they escape all their obligations every time. If a white girl get into trouble, by one of their own By laws they are immediately obliged to pay down [the] lump sum of £20 & then 12/6 when the child is born until that child is 14 years of age. What about our own poor Australian Aboriginal girls. Are they not worthy of protection, same as white girls. The Laws of the Aboriginal Act say not. ... I trust your case will be an eye opener to all of our sisters, throughout your district, as to the position of the White Man, under their so called civilized Methods of Rule, under Christianized Ideals, as they claim of Civilizing our people under the pretence of love.

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57. APB Ward Registers.
60. APB Ward Registers; APB Salary Registers.
61. Maynard to an Aboriginal girl, 14/10/27; E B Harkness, Memo to the Premier 'Matters Relating to the Aborigines of New South Wales', PDCF A27/915.
62. Maynard to an Aboriginal girl, 14/10/27, Premiers Dept Correspondence files, NSW A27/915. See also Goodall 1996: 166.
Nearly 15 years on, after the Protection Board had been reformed and renamed the Welfare Board, Aboriginal activist Pearl Gibbs publicly protested at the frequency of girls becoming pregnant in service, and the failure of the Board to ‘take steps to summon the father and compel him to support his child’. She would tell listeners in a radio broadcast that she did ‘not know of one case’ where steps had been taken ‘to compel the white father to support his child’. The apprenticeship policy and the unabated sexual abuse would continue into the 1960s: in the end the scheme was finally dismantled, not because of the incidence of such pregnancies, but because of the declining demand for maids.

‘Protection’ in practice

There is no doubt the Board knew of the high rates of pregnancies to girls in service, and was aware also of cases of alleged sexual abuse and rape. The Board’s own records indicate a significant rate of pregnancy for Aboriginal wards in service. Figures calculated from these records (see Table 1) show that around 11% of all apprenticed girls on the records became pregnant during their indenture. Some 17% of girls apprenticed to urban situations at some time became pregnant. In contrast, there was only a 5% pregnancy rate for girls who only ever worked in rural positions: while the highest pregnancy rate was for girls employed both in the city and in the country during their apprenticeship, this might be explained by the prompt transfer to distant country positions of girls who became pregnant in urban situations. Although the Board was aware of what at least appears to be the increased vulnerability of urban domestic workers to illegitimate pregnancy, it nevertheless placed over half of all girls in Sydney situations at some stage of their apprenticeships, and a quarter worked only in the city. Not only were a much higher proportion of girls than boys placed in apprenticeships, but they were also much more likely to be sent to the urban areas: indeed much more likely to be apprenticed out, 73% of girls removed being indentured compared to 27% of boys removed.

These statistics, based upon limited and inadequate records, are suggestive only. They do not account for girls taken outside the years 1912 to 1928, and many girls apprenticed out directly from Aboriginal stations and even from Cootamundra Home were not recorded. They do not account for those who had miscarriages. Nor do they account for those engaged in sexual activity that did not culminate in pregnancy, but on the basis of these pregnancy rates we must assume that the incidence of sexual exploitation was also extraordinarily high. Recollections of ex-Board apprentices con-

63. Report of Meeting called by the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship, 25 January 1941, 1–3; JKS papers 8: 7; Pearl Gibbs, radio broadcast, 2GB Sydney and 2WL Wollongong, 8 June 1941, in Attwood & Markus 1999: 96.
64. Mellor and Haebich 2002: 190–1.
65. Using the same sources, Inara Walden has calculated that only 8.6% of all female Aboriginal wards became pregnant. The reason for the discrepancy is that Walden measured the numbers of women pregnant against the numbers of female wards recorded in total (including those who died before being sent out), whereas I measured them against the numbers of females recorded as actually being in service. The discrepancy is also maximised by the fact that Walden found a total of 49 women leaving employment pregnant (possibly a simple error), whereas as I found records of 59 such cases. See Walden 1991: 119; Walden 1995: 203. Goodall (1982: 150) estimated a pregnancy rate of ‘at least’ 7%.
Table 1: Pregnancy rates of female Aboriginal apprentices recorded in service in New South Wales 1916–38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apprenticed</th>
<th>Total number of girls</th>
<th>Girls recorded pregnant</th>
<th>Percentage of girls recorded pregnant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in city b</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country b</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only in city</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only in country</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in both city and country</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total apprenticed</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>11.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: APB Ward Registers.

a By ‘recorded pregnant’, I refer to those wards who were recorded as having given birth to a child during or immediately after their employment.

b See Table 2.

Table 2: Comparative rates of urban and rural employment of New South Wales Aboriginal apprentices recorded 1916–28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total (100%)</th>
<th>Percentage of all girls apprenticed (514 = 100%)</th>
<th>Percentage of all boys apprenticed (192 = 100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of wards</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wards apprenticed</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>(73%) (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in city</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>(95%) (5%)</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in country</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>(67%) (33%)</td>
<td>(98%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In city only b</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>(98%) (2%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In country only</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>(58%) (42%)</td>
<td>(93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In city and in country</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>(94%) (6%)</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: APB Ward Registers 1916–28

a Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

b Apprentices employed in households at Penrith and in Leura (a suburb of the Blue Mountains) have been classified as working in the urban area. Of the 133 apprentices classified as working in the city only, four were employed at Penrith and one at Leura (all girls). As only two of these did not work at any other time in the city proper, their inclusion makes negligible statistical difference. Apprentices employed in country towns, including Newcastle and Gosford, have been classified as working in the rural area.
sistently show not only pregnancy, but sexual harassment, assault and violence were common experiences, to the extent that the fear of such sexual abuse dominated. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry found comparable rates nationally (17.5%) for Aboriginal witnesses reporting sexual abuse following removal.\footnote{67}

Inara Walden found the annual birth rates for the apprentices to be 'slightly higher' than those for single white women in NSW at the same time.\footnote{68} Comparisons with non-Aboriginal State wards in domestic service would be more pertinent, but are difficult to make, research in this area having yet to be done. Margaret Barbalet's work on the State girls of South Australia in the same time period throws up some interesting contrasts. While Barbalet argued persuasively that wards in service were vulnerable to rape during 'an age when working-class girls seem to have been regarded as easy prey for middle-class men', she also found that actually 'only a very small percentage (less than 1 per cent) of girls actually gave birth to an illegitimate child'.\footnote{69} A lower rate even than that Walden found for single white women, this difference may have at least as much to do with the vigilance Barbalet noted on the part of the authorities, as it did with the Aboriginal wards' added burden of racial oppression.

For regardless of race, pregnancies were actually most likely to be the result of sexual relations with the men of the household in which female wards were employed as servants. As Walden commented, it was 'surprising' that the Aboriginal girls' pregnancy rates should be higher than those for single white women, given the severe restrictions of the wards' social lives. They 'had little opportunity to have sexual relations with men outside the family they worked for'.\footnote{70} Barbalet stated definitively that most sexual assaults took place in the homes where the white wards worked, 'most commonly' by 'the master of the house'. But as she pointed out, those wards were prepared to report such incidents of assault to the State Children's Department 'out of indignation'.\footnote{71} For Aboriginal apprentices in NSW, such indignation was not an option.

Barbalet found it most notable that in the area of 'sexual morality' the South Australian State girls were treated by the State Children's Department with 'protectiveness and concern,' an attitude that 'reflected and enforced the social mores of the time'. Not only did employers and the general community apparently share such concern, but the South Australian State Children's Department actively pursued fathers for mainte-

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item[66.] The Board's regime was from 1883 to 1940, but its Register of Wards accounts only for girls placed in Cootamundra Home between 1912 and 1928. The apprenticeship system actually applied to all Aboriginal girls, but there are no surviving records for the majority of workers. I have personally uncovered numerous cases of girls working in 'apprenticeships' whose removal and indentures even in this period were not registered: sometimes, even when their trust fund records have been made. Likewise cases of pregnancy were not always documented.
\item[69.] Barbalet 1983: 92, 94, 239.
\item[71.] Barbalet 1983: 90.
\end{itemize}}
nance, enabling mothers to keep their babies, with some girls going so far as to ask the Department for help in securing more generous maintenance payments.72

The scenario for an Aboriginal girl in service under the NSW Aborigines Protection Board provides a stark contrast. Girls who alleged sexual abuse at the hands of their employers (or indeed any white man) were treated with intense suspicion by the Protection Board, and could be sent to the Industrial Girls institution, which was notoriously harsh, or to an equally fearsome mental asylum.73 Del believed that the Board would have her sent to a ‘reformatory’ if she dared name her real attacker. Indeed the Board’s Homefinder who visited her after Joan Strack spoke to the Board on her behalf, accused her of being a ‘sexual maniac’, and threatened to put her in an asylum.74 Pregnant apprentices were also treated punitively, if they dared name a respectable man as the father.75 Meanwhile the Board resisted investigations of such claims, not only against men like the Board manager who fathered his wife’s servant’s child (whom the Board reluctantly and belatedly investigated only after realising that the matter was known beyond the reserve, the girl having been quietly removed some months earlier),76 but against any white man who harassed, assaulted, or impregnated an Aboriginal apprentice. And unlike the South Australian State Children’s Department, the Board had no enthusiasm for pursuing white fathers for maintenance.

Under the Board’s 1909 legislation, the Board was mandated to lodge a claim for maintenance from ‘any near relative’ for the costs of ‘any child of an aborigine under sixteen and over five years of age’ (the lower age limit would be dropped in the 1915 amendments), to be paid to the Board by court order. This special power (not available to the State’s Child Welfare Department until 1939)77 was subject to the provision that:

in any proceedings in respect of the maintenance of an illegitimate child, of which the defendant is alleged to be the father, no order under this section shall be made –

(c) upon the evidence of the mother, unless her evidence be corroborated in some material particular; or

(d) if the court is satisfied that at the time the child was begotten the mother was a common prostitute.78

Affiliatory State legislation establishing an unmarried mother’s right to support from the putative father of her child did exist (the Infant Protection Act of 1904 or the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act of 1905), under which Aboriginal mothers could have alternatively sought orders. But such assistance would have flown in the face of Board practice generally towards Aboriginal women, which revolved around minimising their autonomy. Regardless of the effectiveness of the mainstream legislation, or even whether or not apprentice mothers wanted such maintenance from fathers themselves, the fact is that having been empowered to lodge maintenance claims for

75. SCAAPB 1940: 10, 19.
77. Holland 1986: 89, 92.
78. NSW Aborigines Protection Act 1909.
itself, the Board was unlikely to help them to get exclusive orders on their own behalf.\textsuperscript{79} The controversial 1904 paternity legislation (to prevent infanticide) had been another of Ardill's initiatives; perhaps it was his concern with prosecuting fathers of the children in his care that had made his Home 'undesirable' in 1916.\textsuperscript{80} Certainly McKenzie Hatton's association with Maynard and the AAPA made her Home a threat to the Board (by revealing their inaction) in this regard.\textsuperscript{81} There is little evidence of the Board pursuing maintenance claims against fathers at all — even for itself. The Board's cash books (again incomplete, dating from 1911 to 1929, with substantial breaks in between) show paternal maintenance payments coming in to the Board in three cases only, where the young mothers had, coincidentally, all placed their baby with the same foster carer.\textsuperscript{82} Three other maintenance suits were noted in the Ward Registers; in these cases the maintenance payments might have been paid to the mother herself. But it is unclear whether the Board itself initiated or assisted action in any of the above cases. In one other instance, the Board records note that there was 'no corroborative evidence to compel the father to support' an apprentice's illegitimate baby, suggesting that they had at least considered taking some action here.\textsuperscript{83} But generally it would appear that the Board was not eager — at least not since they attained the legislative powers — to seek maintenance from white fathers. This was even where the father was definitely known to the Board.\textsuperscript{84}

But the Board was not above virtually profiteering from their pregnant charges. Arising out of eugenic preoccupations, a Federal baby bonus of £5 (introduced in 1912) was available to all Aboriginal mothers who did not have 'a preponderance of Aboriginal blood'.\textsuperscript{85} In 1914 the Board had endeavoured to receive such payments itself, and by 1915 at least some mothers were being forced to make their claims through the Board, the Board's stated aim in securing the bonuses being to 'retain a proportion' in order to 'cover [the] cost of assisting Aboriginal mothers.\textsuperscript{86} Given that the Board spitefully directed that women on reserves who received the bonus were not to be given clothing or the services of a midwife,\textsuperscript{87} we can assume that these are the kind of costs the Board sought to recoup, and that not much of the 'balance' might have been paid to the mother. But the pregnant apprentice was clearly the most vulnerable to the Board

\textsuperscript{79} If any order had been made in respect of a child under the existing mainstream legislation, the orders to the Board were to be 'rescinded or amended'.
\textsuperscript{80} Radi 1979: 91; see also Walden 1991: 121.
\textsuperscript{81} Goodall 1996: 151–2.
\textsuperscript{82} NSW Aborigines Protection Board Cash Books. There was one other record of paternal maintenance payments: an Aboriginal father was supporting his children who had been placed in Cootamundra Home. I am indebted to Don Elphick for his generosity in sharing his research of these records.
\textsuperscript{83} Ward Registers.
\textsuperscript{84} Ward Registers, Cash Books. See also Walden 1991: 121; Haskins 2003. One of the anonymous referees for this article draws our attention to a case in the minutes, where the Board did claim maintenance from a white father: APB Minutes 19/4/1894, 26/4/1894, 31/5/1894. Predating the Board's legislative base, it belongs to the pre-bureaucratic phase of Board administration.
\textsuperscript{86} APB Minutes, 6/8/14.
\textsuperscript{87} APB Minutes, 3/9/14.
claiming and then keeping the baby bonus on her behalf. In 1917, when one employer sent the bill for her apprentice's confinement to the Protection Board, the Board refused to pay (it would set a 'bad precedent') and instead, forwarded the young woman's maternity bonus to her employer to cover the cost. 88 This example indicates that the Board was claiming the payment in the case of eligible pregnant apprentices, and suggests that the Board usually retained the bonuses in their entirety. And for those who did, against the odds, return to Aboriginal reserves with their children, the Board made certain that any money they received through the State Government's Family Endowment scheme (instituted in 1927) was paid directly to Board. By the time the Federal Family Endowment and Maternity Allowance replaced these payments in the early 1940s, the Board had accumulated £4679 in their coffers. 89 By such means the dependence of Aboriginal apprentice mothers was assured.

Certainly, a State policy which condoned the impregnation of Aboriginal women by white men and the subsequent removal of their babies to be brought up as 'white' would have been entirely confounded by legal action being taken against the white fathers and support given to the Aboriginal mothers. But even if the Board's inertia might not seem in itself altogether surprising, more perplexing is the steadfast commitment to the apprenticeship policy, where it was apparent the Board was unable to provide them any redress or, indeed, protection, against pregnancies to white men. Was this what they had in mind, when they talked of a 'better chance'?

Illegitimate pregnancies were practically an occupational hazard of service in nineteenth and early twentieth century Anglo-Saxon culture. 90 In Australia, where 'slaveys', as they were colloquially known, were regarded as fair game for male sexual advances, Aboriginal girls' vulnerability was compounded by a long-standing racist construction of their sexual availability to white men. 91 From the time the apprenticeship policy was first formulated the Board had been aware of the risk to Aboriginal domestic workers. Victorian missionaries back in 1882 had protested against their government's proposed apprenticeship policy, arguing that in their experience, servants had often returned to the stations pregnant to 'white men'. 92 Speakers against the amendments in the 1915 parliamentary debates had all pointed out that Aboriginal servants were particularly vulnerable by their isolation from families and effective support. 93 The 'problem' of indentured servants returning pregnant, and therefore 'useless', to the institutions from whence they came dated back to the times of transportation, 94 but the concern of these speakers, like the Victorian missionaries, was that apprenticeship would actually increase the population the Board sought to decimate.

As dissenting MP, G Black put it:

88. APB Minutes, 29/3/17.
89. APB Minutes: 30/11/28, 1/2/29, 28/6/29, 16/8/29, 17/12/29, 3/6/30, 31/7/30, 20/12/39; see also Harwood 1984: 51, 53, 55.
If you have a large number of half-castes it is due to the boarding-out system. They take young gins from the mothers and send them to stations where there are a number of hands, sons of the owners of the stations, and other men working there. Very often these girls are practically left to the mercies of these men ... It often happens that the mistress of the home and all white women are absent from the station for two or three days ... During their absence these poor unfortunate black girls are left to the mercy of the men on the station, and the result is the increase of the half-caste population, and the ruin of the girls who are subject to this treatment. The whole system is absolutely wrong.95

No doubt with such criticisms in mind, the Board provided an unusually long statement in its first annual report after the gaining of the amending powers, concerning the 80 girls it had placed in situations. Some of them had ‘made great improvement’ it was reported, ‘largely due to the strict supervision under which they are kept’. All ‘in and around Sydney’ had been visited at ‘regular intervals’, those showing a ‘tendency to lapse into their old careless ways’ being called on ‘monthly’. The home of ‘every applicant’ for a servant had been inspected, and the reader was assured that the girls were ‘employed by people who help to uplift them in every possible way’; meanwhile, ‘No complaint from either mistress or maid has ever been too trivial to be investigated, and the result has been a proper understanding on all sides’.96

But in the rural areas, Board inspections were limited to occasional ‘inquiries’ by Board managers or police, if they happened to be near where the girl was working.97 In fact visits by the female Homefinder to girls in Sydney were similarly sporadic and superficial — indeed in Joan Strack’s experience, they only occurred in the event of a problem being brought to the Board’s attention by the employer.98

And as for complaints made by ‘either mistress or maid’, in 1915 there is no record of these, but in September that year the Board undertook to investigate claims made by a station manager, that Aborigines were being taken advantage of by employers in terms of their wages, and ‘that a girl had been tampered with by an employer’.99 The wages issue was followed up,100 but regarding the claim of sexual abuse there was no further direct reference. In the next meeting, however, it was suggested that all girls in Cootamundra Home should be examined and provided with a certificate of health before being placed in service, and that the Health Department should ‘facilitate the examination of girls brought straight to Sydney from reserves’.101 In 1916 a Board regulation made medical examination and a certificate ‘as to their condition of health, and freedom from contagious or infectious diseases’ mandatory for all girls before being placed in situations.102 Such examinations being code for pregnancy, venereal disease, and even virginity checks, one might speculate that this precautionary measure — which protected employers and the Board rather than the girls — constituted the

96. APBR 1916.
97. SCAAPB 1940: 10, 19.
99. APB Minutes, 16/9/15.
100. APB Minutes, 16/11/15.
101. APB Minutes, 23/9/15.
102. APB Minutes, 6/4/16.
Board's singular response to any 'investigation' of the sex abuse claim that may have been made.

The 'good fella missus'

It is worth noting that both the dissenting MP Black, and the Board in their 1915 report quoted above, implied that the real protection to Aboriginal girls from sexual exploitation could and would be provided, not by the authorities, but by their white mistresses alone. Indeed at the 1937 conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal authorities, the New South Wales representatives made it clear that they subscribed to this view.

The subject of the pregnancy rates of Aboriginal girls in service had been raised by the Victorian representative. His Board's 'principal difficulty' was that girls in service returned pregnant or with children. 'The half-castes get into the hands of degenerate whites, and that is the end; they go on breeding in the same way', he complained. Acknowledging that they 'had much the same difficulty' in his home State, Western Australian administrator AO Neville reassured the eastern authorities that the policy of taking the apprentices' babies away neutralised the threat: 'these children grow up as whites ... [and] the mother goes back into service so it really does not matter if she has half a dozen children'.

The New South Wales representative, Board member and bureaucrat EB Harkness, was more reticent. 'We also have a system of taking girls in the early adolescent stage and training them for domestic service...’, he told the others.

These girls reach quite a high standard. Unfortunately, of course, if they go back to the old surroundings, they revert to old habits, and particularly to the lower moral standard, and become the mothers of illegitimate children early in life ... I have taken a girl into domestic service. She is intelligent, industrious, and clean, and submits to reasonable discipline. I do not think if she were to go back to her station she would revert to the old standards, but, of course, one never knows.

He referred his audience to the Board's secretary, who he said would ‘amplify’ his statements. Pettitt, put on the spot, said somewhat offhandedly that 'statements' had been made ‘from time to time about aboriginal girls in domestic service becoming pregnant. In New South Wales, we throw the responsibility on the employer for the physical and moral well-being of the apprentices.’

‘As a matter of fact, the number of girls who get into trouble is negligible’, he continued blandly (and quite untruthfully):

We consider that if we can keep them away from the dangers of camp life until they reach the years of discretion we are doing good work. They are employed in the country and in the city, and we are very careful in the selection of the homes into which they are introduced. In the cities there is a constant demand for them from the best class of suburb, and we never have any difficulty in finding places for them.

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There were in fact significant differences between the ‘frontier’ administrations controlling large Aboriginal populations, and those of the more densely white-populated eastern States, despite there being a shared strategy of removing, institutionalising and indenturing young Aboriginal women. Since the late 1920s the WA State government under Neville, and the Commonwealth government in the Northern Territory under Dr Cecil Cook, had been pursuing policies of controlled miscegenation between fair-coloured Aboriginal women and white men as a way of achieving biological assimilation, and these policies involved the removal and indenturing of Aboriginal girls.\(^{107}\) Here, as Russell McGregor has argued, a ‘policy’, in the sense of ‘a systematic course of action endorsed and pursued by those charged with authority over Aboriginal affairs’, was initiated not by politicians but senior bureaucrats — given rising public concern over the ‘half-caste problem’, the politicians were circumspect about openly supporting such policies.\(^{108}\) Although, of course, much feminist critique of Aboriginal administration actually focused on Aboriginal sexual abuse and child removal in the frontier regions,\(^{109}\) the fact that such critique emanated and drew its support from the south-eastern urban centres arguably made the bureaucrats of Victoria and New South Wales as coy as they were on the subject of Aboriginal sexual abuse. As a demonstration of how feminist criticism of administrative policy could derail initiatives, there was the example of the response of several conservative women’s organisations in Victoria to a federal government proposal to put fair-skinned South Australian girls through the Victorian indenturing system in 1934. The women’s groups were outraged: this was an ‘insidious attempt’, they declared, ‘to mingle with the community women of illegitimate birth, tainted with aboriginal blood, the offspring of men of the lowest human type’.\(^{110}\) Such adherence to eugenicist and racist principles complicated the white feminist response to Aboriginal child removal,\(^{111}\) even as the success and continuation of the apprenticeship system hinged absolutely on the willing participation of white middle to upper class women as employers.

This inescapable fact held true for the frontier regions as it did for the south-east, but in the latter there was no comparable historical and ongoing dependence by white women on Aboriginal labour. Although, as Walden points out, a servant shortage still existed in the urban areas,\(^{112}\) the white mistress here who participated in the Board’s apprenticeship scheme was not doing so out of necessity. The decision to engage an unknown Aboriginal girl as a servant, most commonly as a nursemaid, was indeed remarkable, considering not only the racism of the times, but the Board’s public justification of its policy on the grounds that the girls came from ‘contaminating’ and ‘vicious’ communities, and were inherently immoral.

That a number of suburban Sydney women (admittedly a small number) could and did take Aboriginal apprentices into their homes reflects the ubiquity of what


\(^{109}\) See Paisley 1997, 2000; Lajke 1996.


Madeline Macguire has called the ‘good fella missus legend’. This construction of the role of the white mistress as ideal guardian of Aboriginal female sexuality derived from a popular mythologising of pioneer and frontier life that held sway in middle-class urban Australian culture throughout the Board’s regime. An index of class status ascribing an honourable, indeed virtuous role to white women who utilised cheap Aboriginal labour, a desire to cast themselves in such a light undoubtedly underpinned the willingness of white women in Sydney to engage Aboriginal apprentices through the Protection Board.

But such a role was particularly farcical in the situation where the white employer functioned in fact as agent and monitor of a State policy of absorption. The distant nature of the typical domestic service relationship, in the first place, was not such that an Aboriginal servant could easily confide in her mistress (especially if the man of the household was the father of her child). White women were themselves abusive and brutal towards their servants, and there is no doubt that many would have been prepared to ignore the sexual abuse of their servants, and welcome the Board’s prompt removal of pregnant workers. As Bobbi Sykes said back in 1975, ‘White women notoriously remain ignorant’ of the rape of black women, as well as the argument that this was justified because lighter skinned children were easier to assimilate, ‘because they are denying to themselves even that the children are being fathered by their husbands, sons, brothers, and employees’. Nor could even the most earnest employer comprehend the severe pressures upon Aboriginal girls in service, let alone the Board’s agenda. The response of one white woman, the daughter of an employer of a number of Board apprentices, to the placing of one of her mother’s workers in a mental asylum, was probably typical. ‘As far as we could see all that was wrong with her was that she didn’t know how to say NO to the low down white men who wanted to take advantage of her’, she told interviewer Jack Horner.

In fact the mistress who did try to fulfil her obligations would not be supported by the Board. Although directed to report immediately to the Board if her charge appeared in moral danger, the Board’s response was at best dismissive and at worst punitive. The girl herself would be subjected to a stern, even vituperative personal lecture delivered by the Homefinder. Any further notifications and the Board simply transferred the apprentice to another position, sent her to be ‘married off’, or took disciplinary action against her. No investigation whatsoever would be made, but if the employer had been cooperative, she would be offered a replacement.

Not all were cooperative — having acquiesced to the peremptory removal of her two previous apprentices, Joan Strack refused to relinquish Del until an investigation was made. By that time, Joan had been threatened by the Board’s Homefinder with a libel action, on bringing the allegation against an employer’s son before the Board’s

117 Horner/Adams correspondence, PMS 4179.
administrators. Suspicious of corruption on Lowe’s part, she appealed to a Board member (EB Harkness), and was then visited by the police who attempted to ‘arrest’ Del. Attempting to go to the top, to the Board’s Chairman, Joan was met instead by the Deputy Police Commissioner Mackay, who told her the police chief could not ‘waste his time over trivial matters of this kind’. When she persisted, Mackay warned her again of libel. But the Board was powerless to take Del from her, or to prevent her from making damaging public statements, with Del beside her, against their policy. So in 1936 the Board gained further legislative amendments — drafted and circulated at a Board meeting two years earlier, in the midst of this battle over Del — enabling them to terminate the employment of any worker who had taken refuge with a sympathetic employer, and remove her. An employer who persisted in protesting would only lose the services of her worker, and if she continued long and loud enough, she would be marked as an enemy herself.

The penalty for the Aboriginal apprentice was of course much higher. For her employer’s lack of cooperation, and her own audacity in seeking her assistance, Del was insulted and harassed by Board officials, and penalised well into the future — the Board vindictively refused to remit her wages for years after her return to her family, on the spurious grounds that her pocket-money book was not in order. ‘You want to see Mrs Strack about that’, the Board secretary AC Pettitt informed her nastily. ‘Any how’, Del told Joan about it later, ‘I said I didn’t want anything to do with the Board they did a lot of dirty things to me. and the less I have to do with them the Better’.

We can only guess how many comparable testimonies are hidden behind the Board’s unreliable statistics. Documented evidence of the Board’s complacent attitude towards the abuse of Aboriginal girls is rare. The Board, of course, was motivated to conceal and suppress such evidence, and in fact its records make no mention of Del’s allegations or of the complicated machinations that followed. Nor do such shameful, painful stories tend to survive via the customary oral tradition of family memories. Del’s story survives only by the fortuitous circumstance of my great-grandmother hoarding her personal papers, and, even so, is a difficult history to recount. But her experience was not isolated, of that we may be certain.

**A policy of sexual exploitation**

Benign neglect, or malicious intent — what lies behind the paradoxical fact that a policy designed to supposedly ‘protect’ Aboriginal girls from producing mixed-race children, could yet result in such high rates of illegitimate pregnancy for its charges? The strongest statement in this regard comes from a Link-Up NSW publication, where the subjection of Aboriginal girls to sexual assault and rape are described as ‘the true consequences of APB policy’ and that, given ongoing criticism and the high rates of pregnancies of the apprenticed workers, ‘the Board’s continuing trust of White employers is inexcusable’.

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120. APB Minutes 1/12/33, 11/1/34.
122. Letter, Del to JKS, 29/12/37: JKS Papers 7:3-5 NLA MS 9551. Del’s wages were finally paid out in 1938: Letter, Del to JKS, nd (c.mid- to late 1938): JKS Papers 7:3-5, NLA MS 9551.
123. See Haskins 1998b. This article is published with the full and informed consent of Del’s son.
It may be hard to grasp that Board policy could have been so malevolent as to knowingly, even purposefully, expose Aboriginal girls to sexual abuse. But the subjection of girls to sexual advances of white men and concomitant pregnancies was hardly an unforeseen, unremarkable side-effect of an otherwise satisfactory policy, and the extreme reluctance of the Board to take any steps to counteract such abuse — to the extent even of attacking a white employer who attempted to draw its attention to the problem — suggests it was a little more deliberate than has been hitherto acknowledged. Cover-up and denial of sexual abuse (at least and undoubtedly not only in Joan Strack’s experience) extended to the highest level of the Board, and when it came down to it, the bureaucratic heads on the Board as much as the day-to-day Board functionaries Lowe and Pettitt understood that the pregnancy rates of Aboriginal servants were never going to be a reason to discontinue the apprenticeship policy, let alone to jeopardise its success by investigations and prosecutions.

Aboriginal apprentices were not the only State wards, or indeed domestic servants, to have been sexually exploited, but the significance resides in the context in which that took place, to an extent that appears unusually high: the policy of absorption. Absorption was the premise which linked the rhetoric of ‘a better chance’ to the reality of the pregnancy rate. But this could not be openly acknowledged because to do so would have alienated the white women whose participation as employers was crucial to the success of this policy. White women were to be the agents of the Board policy of absorption — and the scapegoats. The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board colluded in, condoned and indeed encouraged the systematic sexual abuse and impregnation of young Aboriginal women in domestic apprenticeships with, I contend, the ultimate aim of eradicating the Aboriginal population.

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Becoming anthropological: a cultural biography of EL Mitchell’s photographs of Aboriginal people

Joanna Sassoon

Introduction

As a form of documentary evidence, photographs are complex and challenging. They are a material representation of a frozen moment in time, but what they are of is only one of the many possible meanings that encircle them as a photographic object. This complexity is reflected in debates about the sources of photographic meaning which have shifted from a focus on content alone to analysing interactive relationships between image content and the photographic object’s context. While John Tagg sees that it is the ‘discursive system’ in which a photograph is embedded that contributes to its meanings,1 this paper explores individual actions and institutional practices behind the placement of photographs in specific contexts which then frame photographic meanings.2

Along with debates about the sources of photographic meaning, there has been further exploration of the nature of the photograph as an ‘original’ object. Whereas a photograph was once seen as a singular item, this paper builds on Joan Schwartz’s argument that they are one of many multiple originals produced from a single negative, each with their own meaning emanating from the contexts in which they are found.3

As Igor Kopytoff has argued, in order to understand objects it is necessary to look at their life history through the cycles of production, exchange and consumption.4 What constitutes the extent of the life of an object is open to debate. This paper follows ideas developed in recent life histories of photographs.5 In a similar vein to an object which ‘becomes rubbish’ when it is discarded later ‘becoming archaeological’ on rediscovery, this tracks a ‘long life history’ of a group of photographs of Aboriginal people by the Western Australian commercial photographer EL Mitchell from their time of taking to the present. Combining a long life history of a photographic image with the idea that

5. For example, see Pinney 1997 and Poole 1997.
there are multiple original photographs containing the same image opens up new ways of tracing how photographic meanings accrue according to the contexts in which they are found.

This is a cultural biography. It recognises that 'at the heart of the notion of biography are questions about the links between people and things; about the way meanings and values are accumulated and transformed'. In taking the 'long life history' approach to a study of a group of photographs, this paper follows the idea that the life of an object continues beyond its original purpose of creation. As Arjun Appadurai wrote:

We have to follow things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their use, their trajectory. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things.

What the marketplace and researchers do with and to photographs is only part of the many relationships across the ongoing lives of the objects. What happens to photographs once they enter cultural institutions is another part of their life that influences the way they may be understood in future. Thus, the lives of materials are in the hands of human agents, many of whom remain anonymous under the cover of institutional practice. This paper analyses the long lives of multiple original photographs from their production, through their ongoing consumption, and to their preservation, and interrogates the role cultural institutional practices play in the ongoing life histories of photographs.

The challenges at the core of this paper are twofold. One rests with the moments when institutional practices fix a single label to a photograph which over its life has accrued a plurality of meanings. The other argues for an equal status for photographs with other forms of material culture, and for this to be translated into institutional practice. Many of Mitchell's photographs of Aboriginal people have 'become anthropological' over time through the way they have been consumed and the manner in which they were circulated and exchanged. They have equally 'become anthropological' through institutional practices that surrounded them at their point of preservation and which influence their new trajectories. While this does not change the material nature of the photograph, this paper shows the cultural processes by which a group of photographs of Aboriginal people 'become anthropological' at particular points in their lives, and investigates ways in which this meaning has become ascribed.

The photographs
The photographer EL Mitchell first visited Australia with his family from Bradford, UK as a young child for about five years from 1884. He migrated to Australia in 1899 aged 23 where, for the next ten years, he moved between Sydney, rural New South Wales and Queensland eking out his living from photography. After several years taking pho-
tographs across Western Australia he opened a studio in Perth in 1912/13 which he operated until the Depression forced its closure in 1931. His transition from itinerant, migrant photographer in New South Wales to international image-maker of Western Australia and official photographer to the Governor of Western Australia is a story that shows the intersection of the nature of his photographs with political agendas at a specific moment in Western Australian and Australian history. It is also a story of international distribution networks for his photographs, about the relationship between Mitchell as a man of empire and the imperial vision contained within his photographs, and a trade across the British empire within which his photographs became enmeshed.11

Several thousand topographical, portrait, rural, urban, sporting and industrial photographs provide evidence of Mitchell’s travels through New South Wales, north Queensland and Western Australia during his photographic career. Amongst this work are approximately 200 photographic prints, negatives, lantern-slides and published reproductions of Aboriginal people taken in distinct phases of his professional life. While their subject is Aboriginal people, they neither portray a homogenous picture of life over the period in which he was photographing, nor were they all taken under the same commercial conditions.

Mitchell’s first known photographs of Aboriginal people taken between 1907 and late 1908 are from the northern Atherton tablelands region in Queensland.12 He photographed Aboriginal people in a range of active contexts including coffee picking, spear fishing, dancing, and near their dwellings. It is likely they were taken as a speculative venture; some were published in the pictorial newspaper the Queenslander, and much later they appeared in adventure narratives. After Mitchell moved to Western Australia these photographs were published in the pictorial newspaper the Western Mail although their geographical specificity was lost from the captions. His photographs of Aboriginal people in Western Australia were taken in distinct phases and geographical zones. The changes in their content and style reflect some of the political contexts surrounding the lives of Aboriginal people and the shift in the nature of his photographic practice from speculative ventures towards commissioned works. Equally, these changes are likely to reflect his own ideas relating to Aboriginal people as he moved from travelling in northern Western Australia to being based in metropolitan Perth.

His first series from northern and eastern regions of Western Australia are dated between 1908 and 1912. Unlike his Queensland photographs there are very few that survive showing hunting and gathering activities, but his Aboriginal subjects stand in more passive poses, demonstrating, and at times recreating, aspects of culture for the viewer. They are enslaved within prisons or in chains, standing outside ‘humpies’ or displaying visible signs of leprosy. His northern photographs show his desire to represent a pre-contact and pristine notion of Aboriginality in order to record a ‘dying culture’, and his work in Southern Cross bears influence of earlier anthropometric pho-

11. For a more detailed discussion of the intersection between his life and the lives of his works, see Sassoon 2001.
12. These dates are estimates from a combination of dated Masonic Lodge cards which show his movements, and publication dates of his Queensland photographs in relation to the first publication of his later Western Australian photographs.
tographic traditions of Huxley. Like his topographic work of this time, it is probable his Aboriginal photographs were taken as speculative ventures. Photographs from his early series of Aboriginal people in Western Australia were first published from late 1909 and, although the majority were taken by 1911, they were repeatedly published in the *Western Mail* until the early 1920s, to set the ‘savage’ against ‘civilisation’ for an imperially focussed readership (Figure 1). Over time a selection of these works was widely disseminated across a range of published formats including postcards, books, encyclopedia and government publications.

Once he had established his studio in the Perth metropolitan area, Mitchell did not photograph Aboriginal people for over ten years. This silence is similarly noted in art of the period, and is likely a reflection of contradictory policies of assimilation and isolation of Aboriginal people. For example, while he had clients including the New Norcia Mission who had responsibility for the lives of Aboriginal people, it seems their commissioned photographs of mission activities did not include Aboriginal people as they had done in the 1860s. In the South-West where he travelled extensively for topographic and industrial commissions, Aboriginal people were for the most part ‘out of sight, out of mind’ in reserves often a considerable distance from the major wheat-belt farms that he was photographing. Aside from issues of compliance with being photographed, access to the reserves to photograph Aboriginal people would have required official permission, and it is unlikely that his major clients — government, private landholders and the newspapers — would have purchased such photographs.

There are only two sets of photographs of Aboriginal people that Mitchell is known to have taken once he opened his studio in Perth, both of which were created under contract. Firstly, in 1918 he was commissioned by the *Western Mail* to photograph an exhibition corroboree organised specifically for the visit of the French Mission to Western Australia. In style these photographs show more formal poses designed to highlight aspects of the public ceremony and the physicality of the people carefully selected for the occasion to reinforce their primitive condition. Cropped versions of this series were published in school texts and adventure narratives. Secondly, he created a set of photographs of the Moore River Mission in the early 1920s (Figure 2). These negatives became part of the Government Print photograph collection, and were likely to have been taken under contract for the Aborigines Department. This set included street-scapes, interiors, group photographs, and views of activities at the Mission, and is clearly supportive of the contemporary palliative and assimilation policies of government. Photographs from this series were published in the *Western Mail* and received widespread use in government publications. More recently they have been placed in exhibitions which include the Western Australian Museum Indigenous exhibition *Katte Djinoong*, and formed the basis for screen-sets for the film *Rabbit-proof fence*.

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14. For a discussion of his topographic work in the north-west of Australia see Sassoon 1999.
16. For a history of the experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia see Haebich 2000.
Aborigines of Western Australia.

Figure 1 EL Mitchell. ‘Aborigines of Western Australia’. *Western Mail* Christmas 1917
Figure 2 EL Mitchell. 'Scenes at the Moore River Settlement' Western Mail 8 November 1923
Serving anthropology

Mitchell’s photographs of Aboriginal people were created as speculative commercial ventures or were specifically commissioned. The only direct textual source for Mitchell’s intended meanings of the photographs survive through captions he inscribed in the image area of his works. On occasions these texts reveal the geographical origins of the people, while the rhetoric of captions such as ‘Queen’ and ‘Beauty’ show his awareness of how to use captions to shift photographs taken within the conventions of ethnographic photography to become popular postcards. More broadly, Mitchell’s photographs reveal his interest in the physical nature and form of the body of Aboriginal men and occasionally women. However, while his representations echo some of the contemporary styles of photographs in circulation, the settings in which he photographed people at times visually confuse the picture and can be seen as a metaphor for his own ambiguities of stylistic adherence. For example, some photographs specifically focus on the physical nature of body cicatrices, though these are posed against vegetation giving a variegated background against which it is hard to see the body (Figure 3). In another series, he photographs people posed in classical mock fighting stance, thus representing ideas relating to Aboriginal ‘native primitivism’, while the models he chose often conformed to a classical notion of the ‘body’ (Figure 4).

Mitchell’s photographs are a rich source of ethnographic information as they show clear details of artefacts such as shields, spears, boomerangs and headdresses. They provide cultural information for those with knowledge of its interpretation, though Mitchell himself did not record this information on his negatives or prints. The tone of his captions and their pictorial style suggest that they were not taken with anthropological intent, nor were they created as part of expeditions, and most circulate outside the strict discourse of anthropology. In spite of not being created specifically to produce anthropological information, the photographs contain features which have made them attractive for anthropological uses almost from the time they were taken.

The content and style of Mitchell’s photographs were contiguous with the dominant political ideologies of the time. In a kind of visual apartheid, his photographs of Aboriginal people outside their dwellings show their isolation from any European structures, and thus reflect the clear separation of community spaces at the time. Equally, he rarely photographed Aboriginal people alongside Europeans, and these photographs are taken in specific situations where the structures of racial difference and social and disciplinary control are particularly well defined, such as in gaols. In these photographs, Mitchell often used strong perspective lines to emphasise the colonial context he was photographing, and the clear sight lines leading the viewer through the photographs serve both to involve the viewer in the image and to reinforce power structures (Figure 5). Thus, through looking at broad patterns, it is possible to see that Mitchell’s photographs comply with and serve to reinforce the dominant government policy that Aboriginal people be separated from the rest of society.

While investigating why Mitchell’s representations are as they are, it is as important to note what is absent from his photographs as what is present. In contrast to many

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Figure 3 EL Mitchell. 'Nor-West native' c1909. Published in Porteus 1929 with the caption 'Body scarring for ornamentation — A Kimberley native. "He explained that these had been made by his 'Dadda' with a glass-bottle knife."

(See page 121).

Plate XVIII.

Body scarring for ornamentation—a Kimberley native. "He explained that these had been made by his 'Dadda' with a glass-bottle knife."

Figure 3 EL Mitchell. 'Nor-West native' c1909. Published in Porteus 1929 with the caption 'Body scarring for ornamentation — A Kimberley native. "He explained that these had been made by his 'Dadda' with a glass-bottle knife."
TYPES OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

1. Arunta woman and child. The mother is going out into the scrub in search of seeds and roots for food, carrying a digging stick in one hand and balancing a pitcher on her head.

2. A Broome native and his child with boomerangs, the aboriginal weapon, in their hands.

3. Arunta medicine man, showing the enmachka or "devil's hand" on the forehead and a design on the body, with the black line representing the kurungka or "evil one.

4. Wooden image from the "Devil Devil House" which the natives believe protects them from ghosts and other evil spirits.

Figure 4: EL Mitchell 'Nor' West natives' c1909. Published in Encyclopedia Britannica 1929 with page caption 'Types of Australian Aborigines'. Top right photograph with the caption 'A Broome native and his child with boomerangs, the aboriginal weapon, in their hands.'
taking photographs during this time, Mitchell does not appear to have photographed Aboriginal people of mixed descent, nor people living on the periphery of towns and cities or on reserves, preferring to concentrate on what was colloquially known as the ‘pristine and primitive full-blood’. Likewise, no photographs survive showing Aboriginal people in the domestic work environment, similar to those which survive in private collections, nor did he appear to take commissioned studio portraits of Aboriginal people wishing to show their successful assimilation into broader society.19

An absence of specific details of place or names of the subjects of the photographs, and his focus on the ‘primitive’ aspects of the body and material culture, lends support to the notion that Mitchell saw Aboriginal people more as a type or race than as individuals. In this sense, the way in which he posed and captioned his photographs served to shift the readings of the Aboriginal subjects to becoming mere objects. The nature of their content and the style of representation meant that his photographs were suitable for extensive use by government,20 and were equally able to serve the needs of contemporary anthropology.

**Becoming anthropological**

Mitchell’s photographs of Aboriginal people were clearly a commercial success, with many of his works first published in the popular press (Figure 1). In the first ten years of their life, and while they remained ostensibly under the control of the photographer,

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19. For examples of the family and commercial photographs showing a broad range of contexts and experiences see Haebich 1988; Tilbrook 1983; Aird 1993.
20. See for example Western Australia, Immigration and Tourist Department 1912; British Association 1914; Anonymous 1920.
these photographs received wide currency in a range of contexts including the popular press, government and commercial publications, and tourist and missionary postcards. Through these many contemporary uses they became a formative influence on how a wide variety of local and international audiences envisioned Aboriginal people. The contextual message of most of these uses was consistent — Aboriginal people were either too primitive to survive, or were in need of missionary and government assistance to 'smooth the dying pillow'. Over time, multiple original prints were moved from the control of the photographer and into state and federal government photograph collections housed in Australia and across the British empire, which has enabled international access to this material. Consequently, the meanings of many of these photographs have changed since they were first taken as they have moved across a wide range of published genres and contexts.

While there is no evidence that Mitchell was employed to take photographs on, or that he even accompanied, formal anthropological expeditions, it did not take long for some of Mitchell’s work to ‘become anthropological’ through their incorporation in the products of anthropological fieldwork. September and October 1910 saw two leaders of international anthropological expeditions competing for space in the local newspaper. The Swedish zoologist Eric Mjoberg stopped in Perth during his expedition which took in both Queensland and Western Australia, and which was both ethnographic and zoological in its focus. While the Mjoberg expedition produced some of its own photographic records, publications that resulted from this expedition contain photographs derived from a range of photographers, including EL Mitchell. The Cambridge University Ethnology expedition similarly combined natural science and anthropology. Its leader was the anthropologist Radcliffe Brown, its British expeditioner EL Grant Watson a biologist, and its local ethnographer was Daisy Bates. Aspects of the expedition’s story, which have become the stuff of legend, have been told elsewhere. In itself, the Cambridge Expedition produced little visual data of record. However, while Mitchell did not accompany either expedition, photographs taken by him first ‘became anthropological’ through their use in formal and informal publications that emerge from those associated with these expeditions.

Daisy Bates sold written work to the Western Mail amongst other publications. Much of the Western Mail format includes illustrations and texts running parallel and there are only occasional insights into how the editor constructed articles around access to specific photographs. In one letter from the editor to Bates it was suggested:

I have four views of the Wilgie Mia Mine. I think you could write a good article about it ... I am sending the views with this letter and will be glad to have the article as soon as possible.

21. These are held in the Australian Museum in Sydney.
24. For a listing of her newspaper articles, see the National Library listing of the Daisy Bates collection, NLA MS365.
25. Letter Robertson to Bates, 30 April 1908 Daisy Bates collection, NLA MS365 97/587. Most of the extant photographs of Wilgia Mia were taken by W Kretchmar.
While it is not clear if Bates and Mitchell ever met, the newspaper published some of her written work in association with his photographs which he likewise sold to the newspaper. Bates was clearly attracted to Mitchell's work, and she preserved newspaper cuttings of Mitchell's published photographs which were acknowledged to him and the same photographs are found in both their collections.\(^{26}\) Whatever the process behind their common placement in the newspaper, the combination of Mitchell's photographs with Bates' texts presented a powerful message relating to the 'last remnants of a dying culture'.

Embedded by association with Daisy Bates through her articles in the \textit{Western Mail}, Mitchell's photographs were also used to create a sense of the period in the posthumous publication of her major work \textit{The native tribes of Western Australia}.\(^{27}\) As part of the research for illustrations to include in this work, the editor Isobel White made an effort to use photographs with which Daisy Bates was familiar, or which were contemporaneous with her Western Australian sojourn. For example, in one letter to the Battye Library in Perth, the National Library wrote that:

Mrs Bates published numerous articles in the Western mail, many of which were illustrated with photographs taken by E.G. Rome, E.L. Mitchell, C.E. Farr and others. Many of these photographs relate directly to people and events described in \textit{The native tribes of Western Australia}, and we are therefore anxious to include them in the book.\(^{28}\)

Thus, it was through evidence of the photographs' prior associations with Bates' popular articles preserved in her archive, that Mitchell's work later became anthropological to lend an air of authenticity to Daisy Bates' text.

Over time, the quality of Mitchell's work received recognition through its exposure in publications in Western Australia and, in the absence of a formal government photographer in Western Australia until 1929, he was its main de-facto.\(^{29}\) To fulfil an international demand for images of Australia, and to service the political needs of the immigration imperative, Mitchell supplied multiple original prints for placement in official government photograph collections. From the Western Australian and Commonwealth government collections, his work spread through official international networks to the Agent General for Western Australia, and through the Commonwealth Immigration Office collections in Melbourne to the Australian High Commission in London and its consulate in New York. Thus the international trajectory which enabled the ongoing lives of these photographs was created.

Mitchell's photographs moved into the sitting rooms and minds of the children of the British empire through the translation of the output of anthropological expeditions into an adventure narrative, and their seepage into school textbooks.\(^{30}\) Designed for older children, EL Grant Watson published in Britain an account of his adventure on Radcliffe Brown's expedition as \textit{With the Aborigines}, a part of a series on travel and exploration produced by George Philip.\(^{31}\) Written with 20 years hindsight, this account

\(^{26}\) For example Daisy Bates collection, National Library NLA MS365/94.
\(^{27}\) White 1985.
\(^{28}\) NLA to Battye Library 29 April 1982. National Library internal publication files.
\(^{29}\) Sassoon 2004.
\(^{30}\) For example see Browne 1929.
becomes the site of adventure where 19th century colonial attitudes are reiterated for the next generation of empire builders. While the specific output of the Radcliffe Brown expedition was visually barren, Watson's publication incorporates photographs by Mitchell which provide a citation to the original expedition, and reflect racial attitudes of that period. To authenticate the experience of being there, and to enhance the text for an imperial audience, the book is illustrated with caricatures whose themes and compositions derive in part from Mitchell's photographs. In what may be a coincidental echo back to the personnel on the expedition, Watson selected photographs which shared common authorship with those used by Bates in her articles. Watson's source of the photographs was the Australian High Commission in London, which made available officially sanctioned images of Australia for migration and propaganda purposes. The placement of Mitchell's work in this collection shows the extent of the access to, and circulation of, his work across the empire, as well as the empire's desire for this kind of imagery.

How Mitchell's original captions for the photographs were rewritten in the international context reveals the nature of the official image-making of which they were part, as well as how they were organised and retrieved (Figure 6). For example, originals of one photograph survive with Mitchell's caption 'Nor'West natives'. Once in the Commonwealth Immigration Office, the caption on the back returned the photograph to a generic image of an 'Australian Aborigine', and another original held in the Exclusive News Agency collections, which originally came from the Commonwealth collections, was filed under 'Australasia-Australia-Types-Aborigines-men'. Thus from its original regional ascription, one photograph became a generic national symbol in the hands of the Commonwealth, and another was placed within the domain of physical anthropology. Simply re-writing captions is one demonstration of how different contexts can frame the meanings of multiple originals of the same photograph.

The year 1929 was an important one for Mitchell's photographs and provides evidence of how the dissemination of multiple originals resulted in his material 'becoming anthropological'. One photograph was published in association with three taken by Spencer and Gillen as a full page plate in the entry relating to Australian Aborigines in the co-ordinate of imperial knowledge, the Encyclopedia Britannica (Figure 4). This photograph was obtained from the London based Australian High Commission collection, and the caption printed in the encyclopedia suggests the specific original print acquired had a more geographically specific caption 'A Broome native ...' than that originally ascribed by the photographer 'Nor'West natives'. Two years later, a selection of Mitchell's photographs was published in an anthropological text resulting from an internationally funded expedition to the Kimberley. Stanley D Porteus' work The Psychology of the primitive is illustrated with a mosaic of photographs from commercial photographers alongside amateur snapshots taken during fieldwork. Amongst the 70
photographs reproduced in this book, seven are attributed to Mitchell, though only four were definitely taken by him (Figure 3).

The mix of photographs attributed by Porteus to Mitchell, though not necessarily taken by him, are similar to those appearing in an album of Aboriginal photographs created by Mitchell. It is highly likely that Porteus obtained copies of Mitchell’s photographs directly from the photographer when he visited Perth. However, there remains the possibility that Porteus had been introduced to Mitchell through AO Neville, then Protector of Aborigines, and surrogate controller of anthropological research in Western Australia. Neville was himself a collector of photographs of Aboriginal people. Porteus sought to define the status of Aboriginal people on the hominid evolutionary scale. His work combines a racy adventure narrative under the patina of science, and frames Aboriginal people as primitive through the use of then outdated psychological and physical tests. His selection of photographs, in particular of scarified bodies, serves to reinforce this picture of ‘the primitive’ and his use of captions ensures this message is clearly communicated to the reader. Porteus captions one photograph with a fictitious explanation in order to create the impression that ‘he was there’ when the photograph was taken. Mitchell’s original caption in the image area was ‘Kimberley native’. Por-

teus’ caption contains echoes of this and reads: ‘Body scarring for ornamentation — a Kimberley native. “He explained that these had been made by his ‘Dadda’ with a glass-bottle knife.”’ Without knowing that the photograph was taken at least seventeen years prior to Porteus’ expedition to Australia, the caption is an effective device in creating an impression of an ethnographic present.

**Mitchell’s own framing mechanisms**

The way material is managed in cultural institutions is central to framing their ongoing meanings, and documentation styles have a profound effect on the research potential of material. In essence, such practices become a sign for the manner in which such institutions value and understand photographs. As Holtorf writes ‘The material identities ascribed to things are not their essential properties but the result of relationships of people and things; their very materiality is potentially multiple and has a history.’ The mechanisms for ordering materials are often institutionally defined: libraries, art galleries and museums impose their own order on materials, whereas archives preserve the relationships inherent during their time of use. Nevertheless, they are equally products of human relationships and agency. The histories of how Mitchell’s photographs have been handled in custodial institutions shows a trail of fixing meanings which have been fluid from their time of taking, and the power of contextual associations to change these. In saying this, the history of how Mitchell’s photographs are categorised by institutions begins inside his own studio.

Despite the lack of documentation associated with his photographs, there are a few surviving clues to give some indication as to how Mitchell organised his own collections, and how his perceptions of his own work changed over time. The survival of this information has been more by individual chance than intent, as on entering custodial institutions his original negatives and storage boxes were for the most part destroyed along with any textual evidence they contained. There are differences between how he stored his prints and his negatives, and in part this may relate to how the different forms are used – negatives for production and prints for viewing, selection and display. Some of his negatives were stored chronologically in their order of creation, though most were stored by subject in an order he constructed while in his studio.

According to surviving box-labels, Mitchell separated his topographic from his Aboriginal negatives, even when they were taken in the same region or town or at the same time. Thus, streetscapes of Southern Cross, a Western Australian town, were stored apart from photographs of Aboriginal people from the area. Why he did this is open to speculation, although as a commercial photographer it may have been the way clients asked for material as part of selecting work from viewing material in his studio. This separation by subject content has influenced the histories of the different parts of his negative collection since his studio closed, and their placement and contemporary management in custodial institutions.

One of the few formats to discipline free-floating photographic prints into a narrative structure is the photograph album. An album brings items which may have

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35. Porteus 1931: plate VXIII.
37. These boxes are held in private collections.
originally been seen as separate together into a new and deliberate order. Through a combination of a fixed order of viewing and accompanying captions, an album can lend insight into the values accorded to specific photographs by its creator and reveal meanings that emanate from relationships as a result of the chosen order of the album. Where albums created at different times by the same person survive, it becomes possible to see shifts in the meanings of the photographs between the albums over time.

Mitchell’s work survives in a range of photograph albums created for commercial, official, and personal purposes. Two albums, one of the north-west, and one of Aboriginal people, appear to have been made by him for his own purposes, and provide evidence for some of his private conversations with his photograph collections. Through the relationships he constructed between photographs, these albums provide insights into how he saw at least parts of his work, rather than how his negatives were stored for practical retrieval, or his work interpreted by others. They also reveal how his views of his photographs changed over time and how they rest as aspects of his personal memory of both people and places.

Mitchell’s personal album of the north-west contains only photographs that were taken by himself. In contrast to the way he stored his negatives, the overriding order of the album is chronological, and it mixes photographs of places, industries, and Aboriginal people across the pages. This, along with similar styles of photographic paper, means the album is likely to have been constructed close to the time of taking the photographs. Mitchell may have spent time making this album because these photographs had immediate personal meaning. It is possible that he stored these photographs in this way because of his own growing awareness of the marketplace for his work. He may have recognised that what he was taking was important, that few others were recording it in the same way or with similar quality, and that they therefore might gain in commercial value over time. Equally, Mitchell may have created this album because much of the subject matter he was photographing would have been unfamiliar to him and he may have wanted to record his northern adventures for his personal remembrance.

While many of Mitchell’s extant photographs of Aboriginal people remain loose and dispersed across a range of collections, one surviving album lends insight into aspects of his way of seeing a subset of Aboriginal photographs. The album contains 109 photographs of Aboriginal people, but it differs from his northern album in several respects. There is a range of styles of photographic paper and the album includes photographs taken as speculative ventures and for specific commissions, over a period of nearly 20 years. Mitchell’s photographs are placed alongside works by other photographers and over time the authorship of some of these has become confused with that of Mitchell, who was the likely supplier to various authors and publishers. Thus, the

40. This album is privately owned, held in Perth Western Australia.
41. Western Australian Museum album 87/08.
42. For example in Porteus 1931 the author attributes to Mitchell photographs taken by others. The album contains photographs taken by JT Kilfoyle, a Kimberley pastoralist for whom he undertook some developing and printing, PK Freeman and Mary Durack. Letter Mitchell to Alice and Sid Tidswell, Claremont, WA, 23 February 1948. Australian Joint Copying Project Reel (AJCP) M2760 II/1109.
album becomes an indicator of people with whom he had contact, as well as demonstrat­ing an underlying trade in photographs of Aboriginal people, of which he was part.

The variation in printing and photographic paper styles, and the range of photographers included, suggest that the album was created long after Mitchell’s photographs were taken. Mitchell hints at this when he wrote to his sister in 1953 that ‘the Governor wants to see my collection of Abo photos which I have mounted into an album’. It is highly likely that the album held in the WA Museum is the album to which Mitchell is referring. While it is unclear when this album was constructed, it appears to have been compiled once the photographs had ‘become historical’. While some of the same images appear in both albums, they are used in different ways. A comparison of these albums provides the opportunity to explore how Mitchell reflected on and changed the meaning of his works over time.

While his northern album was ordered chronologically and geographically, his Aboriginal album involved rearranging prints by subject within the category of Aboriginal. The separation of his Aboriginal work may have occurred because he had time to reflect on the importance of changing political and cultural contexts. Equally, the placement of Aboriginal photographs into a separate album mirrored the way his negatives were stored, which in itself was likely a response to market demands for this specific subject matter.

Rather than providing a chronological or geographical context, Mitchell carefully ordered his Aboriginal photographs to emphasise their visual rhetoric and styles. He intentionally juxtaposed photographs to highlight particular facets of the photographs — for example to emphasise physique, or those containing strong perspective lines. At one level Mitchell may have seen that these photographs had ‘become historical’ during his own lifetime. From the way the album is constructed, it is equally likely Mitchell saw they had, over time, ‘become aesthetic’. Whether he saw them as having ‘become anthropological’ is another issue, though as will be discussed, he himself used some in ethnographic contexts and he saw them as separate enough to have a series placed in the Western Australian Museum in 1913.

**Preserving the label ‘anthropological’**

Decisions, which for the most part remain undocumented, are made at specific points in the lives of objects and determine the very survival of material. As Edwards writes of museums specifically, although the same applies to all custodial institutions, ‘museums are, of course, actively involved in selection, classification and reclassification as essential mechanisms of truth production’. Once photographs enter custodial institutions their meanings are framed simply by virtue of moving from representing the

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43. Letter Mitchell to Alice and Sid Tidswell, Claremont, WA, 12 April 1953. AJCP M2760 II/133.
44. While the act of photographing creates something that is instantly historical by virtue of the moment in which the photograph is created has passed, in this context, the term ‘historical’ refers to the passing of decades rather than seconds.
45. See for example Holtorf 2002 or Sassoon 2001 for discussions of the consequences of an object being defined as worthy of preservation.
present to representing the past – that is, they ‘become historical’. Materials are overlain with the ‘clerical apparatus’\(^{47}\) of a subject scheme which is critical in framing the way photographs are retrieved and used. Writing labels on materials has long lasting consequences as the practices of custodial institutions fix what has, up until this point in the lives of objects, been more fluid. As such, this process of fixing categories becomes a sign of institutional understandings of the material under their care, and as has already been discussed, multiple originals of Mitchell’s photographs were categorised differently according to the context in which they were found. Once in custody, the history of Mitchell’s archive reveals how its integrity and history has been overwritten by raw institutional practice.

Mitchell’s studio collections are widely scattered across private and institutional collections with the only apparent logic of its dispersal being that of how his collections were originally organised in his studio. Prints appear in a range of government and private collections, as surviving evidence of the widespread distribution of multiple originals of his work. About 100 negatives, mostly of Aboriginal people and Queensland landscapes, which were purchased privately through an auction in England from an untraced Belgian owner in the 1990s, remain in private ownership. A similar cache of negatives was purchased in Perth on the open market in the early 1990s and is now in private hands. His personal album of north-west photographs is in private hands without provenance, passed to the current owner by a relative whose relationship to Mitchell has yet to be traced. A group of topographical negatives and prints, which includes some personal snapshots, was purchased by an individual after advertisements for sale were placed in the Perth press in the 1970s.\(^{48}\) This collection was lent for copying to the State Library in Western Australia, then on-sold to a commercial organisation, only to be returned to a public institution when there was a perceived threat to its long term preservation due to changes in company ownership. There are also substantial collections of his work in the National Library of Australia, the Royal Geographical Society, London – donated by V Scott O’Connor following a visit to Western Australia — and prints returned to Western Australia from the Agent General’s collection in London.

The largest cache of several hundred of Mitchell’s topographical negatives found its way into the State Library in Perth prior to his death in 1959, where they have yet to made publicly accessible.\(^{49}\) Thus at its rawest, institutional practice means this material remains invisible. The original negative boxes along with Mitchell’s own labels, which were the records of his storage order, were destroyed by the custodial institution, thus rendering this once ordered series a free-floating collection of negatives. Another significant part of his archive, including a large number of loose prints, his guard book of his early newspaper publications, Masonic Lodge cards, and his album of Aboriginal pho-

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48. It is likely this occurred after the death of his wife in 1972.
49. They are part of a homogenous collection of about 100,000 glass negatives which remain undocumented, inaccessible and effectively unknown. Their identity as Mitchell’s negatives has been subsumed under the authority of the collector, Dr Battye. In 1997, this portion of the glass negative collection was seen as a low priority for being made more accessible. Team Leader, Battye Original Materials Team, pers comm 12 September 1997.
tographs, was passed to the Western Australian Museum many years after Mitchell’s death by the son of his former neighbour. Since being donated to the Museum, this part of his archive has undergone a further series of transformations through internal practices that have had a long-term effect on the future research potential of this material.

The keenness of the Western Australian Museum to collect photographs is documented from the late 1890s. Almost since its inception, the Museum had employed a collector to gather natural history specimens, particularly from the north of Western Australia. John Tunney often took field photographs of the specimens, and also photographed Aboriginal people though apparently with limited success. Commissioning Tunney to take field photographs is indicative of the local awareness of the rising importance of collecting documentary photographs for the museum collections.

By the time ‘photographs’ appeared as a separate heading in its annual report in 1901/02, about 294 negatives were recorded in the Museum stock. The subjects of these negatives included ‘birds and nests’, ‘aborigines’, ‘museum’, ‘West Australian scenery’, ‘Kimberley’, ‘caves’, and ‘miscellaneous’. The photographers remain for the most part anonymous. While there was a keenness to commission and collect photographs, how they were understood by the Museum can be deduced from the manner in which they were described in accession registers. The earliest entries for photographs in 1903 were as perfunctory for objects as for photographs. Its entry of ‘9 photographs’ from C Bader falls between 40 casts of carvings from French Caves, and two glass spearheads. 1910 seemed a better year for Museum documentation of photographs with individual descriptive entries for each of eight photographs of Aboriginal people donated by the photographer W Kretchmar and 14 donated by Gerald Hill. However, only a few years later the entries returned to their prior brevity with photographs relegated once again to a status below that of objects, if accession descriptors are used as a sign of museum thinking. Eighteen photographs by Mitchell were received by the Museum on 18 August 1913, and their register descriptions can be seen in one sense as a preface to how the Museum later undervalued the large donation of Mitchell’s materials. The four entries in the register prior to the photographs were individual descriptive entries for spears: one with a head made of brown earthenware, one with a heavy wooden head fitted to lighter shaft, one with a carved head and shaft in one piece, and one carved ornamental head and shaft in one piece. The next entry, no. 5534 is for ‘18 photographs of Australian Aborigines’.

While collecting of material continued through the 20th century, it was only with the 1960s mineral booms that there was a new phase of professionalisation in the Museum’s curatorial activities. In the absence of formal documentation, the Western Australian Museum collecting policies of the 1970s in relation to photographs can only be deduced from correspondence. For example, in 1971 a curator explained to a potential donor that ‘In general we do not keep documents and photographs at the Museum, preferring to pass them on to the Battye Library.’ In 1974 the ideas relating to collect-

50. Western Australian Parliamentary paper 1901/2.
51. Western Australian Museum undated a.
52. Western Australian Museum undated b.
ing appear to have shifted as another curator wrote 'These old photographs are very welcome as they can be re-photographed and blown up for use in backgrounds for displays'. Only a couple of years later it was stated that 'At the Museum, we place our emphasis on the collection of objects associated with our State's history and documents and photographs are dealt with by the State Archives'. In the absence of formal policies, these letters serve as markers of how photographs were understood in the museum at this time. They show a picture of internal confusion as to whether the institution was or was not collecting photographs and an ambivalence as to what purpose they may eventually serve.

While at one level custodial institutions such as museums, libraries and archives imply secure long term preservation of objects and documents, at another level this does not necessarily apply to the ephemeral and contextual relationships that are critical to ensuring the preservation of meanings. The lives of Mitchell's materials once in custodial institutions are in themselves instructive as to the influential role institutions play in shaping meaning. Once accepted into the Western Australian Museum in 1987, Mitchell's 'archive' was fractured by subject and form showing little respect for the importance of its provenance. This may be due to the general lack of sensitivity of museum practice towards preserving archival meaning, or the emerging political contexts raising questions about the management of materials relating to Aboriginal people. However, the fragmentation of Mitchell's archive is also an indicator of the value placed on photographs as a form where individual content is seen as paramount over recognising the archival value of groups of related photographs. The life that Mitchell's archive follows within the Museum begs the question as to whether multi-format archaeological assemblages from the same site would be treated in a similar manner.

Once in the Museum, different parts of Mitchell's archive followed different trajectories. Defined by their content as 'social history' and therefore outside institutional collecting parameters, the loose topographic and industrial photographs were transferred to the State Library, along with all other documentary and associated ephemeral material. Once in the State Library the remnants of the archive continued to be fractured and disseminated according to standard library practice which, like museum practice, values the individual object above less tangible archival relationships. The photographs were transferred to the Pictorial collection, the guard-book to the Manuscripts collection, and the Lodge cards to the Ephemera collection. The integrity of the archival anchor was undermined through the separation and movement of materials.

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54. Letter 11 December 1974 Western Australian Museum Photographs – General, Western Australian Museum file 283/7/1.
58. Since the research for this paper was completed, Mitchell's Lodge cards in the State Library of Western Australia have undergone a new phase of life. All the non-Western Australian material has been transferred to other organisations, and Mitchell's Western Australian lodge cards are now part of a general Freemasons listing. Thus their provenance in relation to Mitchell has now been entirely destroyed.
within and between the custodial institutions. Thus, one consequence of 'becoming historical' is that Mitchell's archive lost its provenance and integrity to become a dislocated series of collections.

Amongst the material donated to the Museum was the aforementioned album containing photographs of Aboriginal people. While parts of the Mitchell archive 'became historical' through transfer to the State Library, this album was separated from the rest of the material and retained within the Museum. No doubt simply because of its subject content the album was transferred to a department whereby its label was written as 'anthropological', and joined 18 other photographs by Mitchell recorded in the Ethnological register as being received by the Museum in 1913. As has already been discussed, these photographs were not taken with anthropological intent but for commercial ends, and thus their description as 'anthropological' does not necessarily reflect their meanings at the moment of production. This is not to say that the meanings of photographs remained fixed for the photographer during his own lifetime. As has already been discussed, over time, and as these photographs became historical, Mitchell saw them as being aesthetic and distinctly separate from his topographic and industrial prints. As will be seen, he also saw them as anthropological through his own use of them in his private exhibition. However, the labelling of the album as 'anthropological' at its point of preservation privileges the patterns of consumption of multiple originals of some of the photographs and the trajectories of some of their lives over their contexts of production. This in itself raises questions as to the fluidity of photographic meanings which then become fixed at a particular moment by institutional practice.

### Exhibiting anthropology

Relationships between collecting and documentation practices in custodial institutions and the research potential of material are close. How material is organised and retrieved becomes the first citation in a new cycle of 'institutional meaning-making', of which another component is exhibition practice. With the organisation of material culture as another expression of a way of seeing the world, Mitchell's photographs of exhibitions of Aboriginal artefacts provide evidence of uses of his photographs in exhibitions where other records are scant. Thus these photographs present the opportunity to explore a double layer of semiotic meaning. Equally, his photographs have been used in exhibitions which cover a long period of time, and which reflect the labels written on the materials after they entered the Museum.

Alongside his photographic work, Mitchell was an amateur collector of Aboriginal and Malaysian artefacts, geological specimens and, in later life, stamps. Though he may have originally collected these for personal interest or to supplement his photographic record as to the 'state' of Aboriginal culture, in later life he was aware that they had accrued monetary value. He also recognised the exhibition potential of his own collection, though this may simply be a natural extension of his personal narrative of possession. In a 1913 letter he provides the context for a photograph of the interior of his house:

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59. Western Australian Museum undated b.
Since you were here I have built a house at Mt Lawley & have fixed up a room for when you take your next trip to W.A. ... have likewise added a den or smoke room or as the wife calls it 'the museum' as I'm filling it with curios that have not been unpacked for years.61

How Mitchell displayed his ethnographic collections in his personal 'museum' lends credence to ideas about difference between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' contained within his broader photographic work, and is reflected within its physical organisation. One photograph of his 'museum' which was likely to have been taken to send to his family in England, shows his photographs within a homogenised artistic display of artefacts from Malaysia and Northern Australia (Figure 7). Within the room, the objects juxtaposed against the chintz of empire style furniture reinforce his notions of the 'primitive' reflected in his photographs of Aboriginal people. The internal separation of his museum from the mantelpiece display of his family and Freemasons photographs is another sign of his desire to distinguish himself from 'the other'. Thus, the politics contained within his œuvre and his studio organisation – framing people as types, and the separation of Aboriginal people from other social and cultural engagement – is replicated in his own private ethnographic exhibition.

In a more artifact-rich and artistic exhibition in the home of a significant private collector, West, the arrangements likewise aestheticise objects from different parts of

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Australia (Figure 8). In this context, while Mitchell’s photographs had the potential to add informational value to the exhibition, their function remained decorative. Mitchell’s photograph of West’s exhibition was published in the *Western Mail* around the same time ethnographic displays were being re-organised at the Western Australian Museum, and therefore one can see the replication of private and public exhibition practices.

Exhibitions were one key function of the fledgling Western Australian state Museum. Despite an ongoing lack of funding, this was an activity that was taken seriously. However, after many decades of limited funds, David Ride’s initial observations of the Museum in 1957 included noting somewhat unsympathetically that the displays ‘combine many of the worst aspects of nineteenth century clutter with the best of modern practice’.62 The museology collection held in the Museum library attests to successive directors being up to date with international museum literature while residing on the edge of Empire, and directors were also active in debating museum trends in the newspapers.63 Determined to maintain international exhibition practice, it was

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63. Newspaper clipping books, Western Australian Museum Archives.
noted in the Trustees minutes of 1910 that during his sojourn in Perth as part of his ethnological expedition,

The Director reports that Prof A.R. Brown has spent six weeks in examining and re-arranging the exhibits in the Ethnological Gallery, and was to write a guide to the collections.64

There is no record of this guide, though in 1912 it was reported that the ‘Ethnological Gallery has been entirely re-arranged by Mr Glauert in the manner advised by Mr. Alfred R. Brown.’65 In the 1915/16 annual report of the Museum it was noted that:

The Ethnological Gallery is now exclusively Australian in character, Western Australian specimens being utilised wherever possible. Complete series have been prepared to illustrate the daily life, industries, manners, customs, arts and religious beliefs of the primitive aboriginal inhabitants of this State. The educational and instructive value of the typical specimens exhibited has been amplified by means of numerous photographs and descriptive labels.66

It may be a sign of limited resources, or a lack of frequency in changing exhibitions, more than a lack of sense of recording its own activities that no photographs of these early exhibitions have yet been traced.

With museums described as a cultural ‘add-on made possible by the presence of social and economic surplus’,67 it was only with the mineral booms of the 1960s and the 1970s that the Museum budget began to expand and new exhibitions could be imagined. Keen to achieve international exhibition standards, the Museum saw that ‘a basic hurdle to be overcome is the almost total ignorance of the subject [Aboriginal culture] and the resultant prejudice based upon this ignorance’.68 To this end, an important imperative was to reverse the trend that ‘Almost all Museum displays of an ethnographical nature eventually become centred upon things and not people’.69 The groundbreaking Patterns of life exhibition70 reversed this trend, and photographs were used as a key representational tool about human activity. While many of the photographs in this exhibition derived from anthropological fieldwork in the 1940s and 1950s, Mitchell’s photographs of recreated cultural practices were used. In providing functional and social contexts for the artefacts, enlarged photographs were placed in the backs of the cabinets.

Since its incorporation into the Anthropology collection of the Museum, Mitchell’s photographs from the Aboriginal album have also been used in the Museum’s most recent Indigenous exhibition, Katte Djinoong, which includes ethnographic, historical and contemporary stories. With the introduction of digital technology and thus mosaic-style enlargements, their placement in the exhibition shifts from their function as informative backdrop in Patterns of life to front of house wallpaper to provide fleeting contextual decoration. In line with its institutional accessioning practices, Mitchell’s

64 Trustees of the Western Australian Museum 8 January 1910.
65 West Australian, 6 September 1912.
66 Western Australian Museum 1915/16.
67 Harris 1989: 133.
68 Internal memo 5 April 1972, Anthropology displays Western Australian Museum file 74/72.
69 Internal memo 5 April 1972, Anthropology displays Western Australian Museum file 74/72.
70 Lofgren: 1975.
photographs used in this exhibition remain enmeshed in the broader discourse of anthropology rather than being returned to their historical contexts. Captions are invented to add context to the stories contained in the exhibition, but they overwrite the original intent of the photographer.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{After-thoughts}

Mitchell’s photographs ‘became anthropological’ as a consequence of the relationships between the ideas they contained and the context of contemporary political and cultural agendas. As Edwards writes in relation to photographs, ‘material in circulation is active in the meaning making of culture’;\textsuperscript{72} and Mitchell’s photographs have also played an active role in shaping attitudes towards Aboriginal people according to the contexts in which they have been placed, preserved and used. During the ebb and flow of the long lives of Mitchell’s photographs, meanings changed for the photographer himself, and institutional practice has been an active agent in the processes of other forms of making meaning. As Roslyn Poignant writes ‘a single image that is separated from its historical anchorage becomes temporarily free; it ‘floats’ and invites objectification, which opens the way to uses that fetishise and stereotype’.\textsuperscript{73} The separation of a single album from the archive of related photographs and other forms of materials resulted in a new label being written. Its placement in the Museum context now limits the viewer to seeing the album within single stereotypical frame as ‘anthropological’, and its relationship to the broader context of Mitchell’s \textit{oeuvre} has been rendered invisible.

This cultural biography shows the way that meanings and values are accumulated and transferred through human activity. However, cultural institutions have a particular responsibility to ensure that the meanings contained within and surrounding objects retain their potential fluidity and complexity. A specific challenge in managing photographs is to ensure that their status as objects is given equal weight compared with other forms of material culture held in museums, libraries or archives. The power of cultural institutions lies in the capacity to release the research potential of photographs by documenting the complexity of the materials. However, as this study shows, in the process of ‘becoming anthropological’, Mitchell’s photographs of Aboriginal people have lost their history.

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Rethinking William Thomas, ‘friend’ of the Aborigines

Liz Reed

Summary

In this article I argue that William Thomas, who was appointed to be one of four Assistant Protectors of Aborigines in the Port Phillip Protectorate (1839–1849) has become known as ‘friend’ of the Aborigines of that colony largely because of having written himself into the historical record in that role. I examine the ways in which interrogations of ‘whiteness’ offer ways of rethinking Thomas’ friendship and suggest a more complex range of attitudes and representations made by him which have contributed to enduring tropes of ‘the Aborigine’.

Introduction

Assistant Protector and later ‘Guardian’ of Aborigines, William Thomas is ‘known’ to have been a friend of Victorian Aborigines. Thomas was one of four Assistant Protectors appointed to the Port Phillip Protectorate, 1839–1849, with George Augustus Robinson as Chief Protector. Following the disbandment of the Protectorate, he was retained as Guardian of the Aborigines, and was appointed as official visitor to all the reserves and depots established by the Board of Protection after 1860, remaining in this position until his death in 1867. Thus Thomas spent a considerable portion of his life being the friend or ‘Good Father’ of the Aborigines, as they purportedly called him.1 We ‘know’ this because Thomas in his writings told us so, over and over, thereby creating a ‘memory’ of himself. Following Thomas, historians have utilised the extensive primary sources he created2 and his friendship with the Aborigines has become an uninterrogated historical ‘fact’. Thus Henry Reynolds in his examination of those he

1. Bride 1969: 397. Thomas frequently wrote of his popularity with ‘the natives’ who ‘have become much attached to me’, locating this attachment as resulting from his having ‘slept among them, dressed and washed their wounds, and administered medicines’ (see Cannon 1982: 594–95). That is, he centred himself as the figure of virtue towards whom ‘the natives’ were suitably grateful.

2. Thomas’ papers include journals, reports, correspondence, sermons and lectures, as well as detailed census material, drawings and maps. The majority of his papers (1834–1868) are held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, consisting of 23 microfilm reels that are also available at the Matheson Library Music Multimedia section at Monash University, Clayton, where I have accessed them for this article. There are other assorted sources by Thomas held, for example, in the State Library of Victoria and the Public Records Office, Melbourne.
called ‘white humanitarians’ noted with approval that men such as Thomas were not ‘armchair critics’ of 1830s and 1840s attitudes towards Aborigines, but had ‘close personal contact with Aboriginal society’. Such close contact was seemingly valued by William Thomas as positioning him as a moral and historical authority on the Aborigines; for example an 1858 letter detailing the ‘manners and customs of Aborigines’ railed against supposed experts on these topics who — unlike him — ‘have had little or no intercourse among them [and] have completely bewilder’d the world’.

The William Thomas papers offer marvellous insights into the period in which he and other colonial officials engaged with their orders from Britain, the settlers in Victoria, each other, and the Aboriginal people. His diverse writings in the forms of reports and correspondence to the Chief Protector or other officials, his census collections, and his journal entries conveyed a range of information on colonial practices of surveillance of Aborigines, but also suggested his personal attempts to learn and understand language, place names, and Aboriginal conceptions of land and land boundaries. His reports on Aboriginal geographical boundaries which were ‘judiciously defined by Rivers, Creeks & Mountains’ suggested an appreciation of a ‘universal’ belonging by all ‘tribes’ at the same time that his indication of the occupation by the ‘two Melbourne Tribes’ of 3,684 square miles at his ‘coming among them in 1838’ conveyed a palimpsest reading of colonial land occupation. Along with some of the other officials of the time, he was a strong advocate of Aborigines being able to testify in court. His interest in what he understood to be Aboriginal land boundaries also reflected a desire to make these conform to European ways of seeing the landscape. His writings on connections to land were often a part of his census-taking routine, and thus may also be regarded as a means by which he conveyed ownership of ‘his’ Aborigines to the Chief Protector and other colonial authorities. By traversing the land in search of Aboriginal bodies to be named and listed, Thomas also engaged in an exercise of inscribing his European presence on **terra nullius**.

As well, I argue that his extensive correspondence illustrates an attempt on his part, in this critically important early period of colonialism in Victoria, to ‘appeal to a common whiteness [amongst the] European settlers’. He was frequently concerned about the ‘disagreeable’ presence of whites in the Yarra encampment in September 1839, and the temptations and disruptions caused to his Sabbath efforts by ‘disgusting whites’ who encouraged Aboriginal women to dance at a corroboree on a Sunday night. Such accounts suggest the desire to ‘protect’ whiteness, the decorum of which Thomas was concerned to maintain. I argue that, importantly, he also established and/or nourished a number of tropes about Aborigines. These tropes have had a dynamic relationship with, and intersected with and sustained others that followed his period. Among these were the doomed race, the childlike race, the prostitute, the violent male, the drunkards, the grateful unfortunates, and the trope of the long-suffering and self-

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4. Thomas M/F 5883: CY3131: 22 June 1858.
5. Thomas M/F 5883: CY3105: 17 February 1864.
less white supporter. It is these tropes which I am seeking to deconstruct in my reading of his papers. My focus in this article is the 1830s and 40s, the early period of the Port Phillip Protectorate and its foundational inscribing of colonialism on the Indigenous landscape and people in Victoria. I am seeking to peel back the layers of Thomas' friendship with the Aborigines and suggest some ways that the more complex dimensions of their interactions might be read.

Thomas manifested the habit of whiteness that locates being human as being white. As Richard Dyer has reminded us, such an equation 'secures a position of power',9 which was something that Thomas did not question. Indeed, throughout his writings the normality of whiteness was central to his perceived right (and appointed duty) to name, categorise, watch over and record, extend or withdraw approval, and represent Aborigines as always childlike but also variously savage or docile and capable of 'civilisation'. Thus, following Dyer, I am suggesting that Thomas was unaware of his own 'raced' identity and how this gave him the power to construct and represent the world in whiteness' image. Given the 'enormous variations' in white power, humanitarianism such as Thomas' was not a contradictory impulse, but a manifestation of how white power 'reproduces itself regardless of intention ... overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal'.10 I will argue that Thomas was indeed a 'friend', in the context of his official role and his manner of carrying out his duties. However, in important ways he framed not only the contemporary discourses of race relations but provided the parameters within which ongoing responses to Aborigines would be shaped and resonate in the present.

I begin by examining the contours of the friendship between Thomas and his 'subjects'. I then draw on critiques of the power of whiteness offered by, for example, bell hooks, Homi Bhabha and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, to suggest ways in which Thomas' interactions with Aborigines provided crucially important foundations of surveillance and control. Although refined and reshaped, these continue to frame governmental and media discourses, as well as articulations and actions of non-Indigenous supporters. Insofar as Aborigines in colonial Victoria responded to and thereby also negotiated the friendship of which Thomas boasted, which I believe is what he did, they used it and Thomas for their own subaltern purposes.

Thus I locate Thomas' friendship as a manifestation of what Bhabha has suggested as the 'pleasurable' effect of colonial surveillance, what he describes as the very 'pleasure in 'seeing'".11 As Bhabha indicates, such pleasure is dependent on 'the active consent which is real or mythical ... (but always real as myth)'12 of the object of its desire, in this case, the Aborigines whom Thomas would 'protect' and be the friend of. I argue that as players in the mid-1830s humanitarian movement that prompted the British Colonial Office's establishment of the Port Phillip Protectorate as the 'solution' to its colonising errors, Thomas and his peers fetishised Aboriginal men and woman and made them hostages to their own fears, desires, fantasies and vanities. Most damagingly Thomas et al made Aborigines the site of their contestations concerning who had the greater

knowledge, authority, understanding and friendship in relation to ‘their’ Aborigines (as they frequently referred to those under their spatial control within the districts to which they had been allocated to perform their ‘protective’ duties).\(^\text{13}\)

My own subject position as a white female beneficiary of colonialism, as well as within the academy where I remain in a privileged position of ‘knower’,\(^\text{14}\) is one of the imperatives behind my attempt to suggest a counter-reading of Thomas’ papers in order to loosen the constraints of binary readings of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘friend’ or ‘foe’ in colonial relationships. I am concerned with the continued tendency of white historians and others to uncritically identify historical actors such as Thomas as ‘good whites’ in post 1788 history. Perhaps this is largely because recently contested meanings of Australia’s ‘past’ appear to have been waged with unspoken agreement by both ‘sides’ that these are questions of white academic ownership. The absence of Indigenous people, largely, from the public debates that have been held between Windschuttle and his opponents is arguably a response to the perception that this is really about white men arguing with each other. Such an observation was made by Aileen Moreton-Robinson during a session of the ‘Melbourne Conversations at Fed Square’ in June 2003, and on the same occasion another Indigenous academic reported that at that time no Indigenous historians had been invited to participate on panels debating Windschuttle. With everything else in the historical record bitterly fought over, the privilege of whiteness in Australia has remained unexamined and unscathed, and as John Maynard has observed, ‘the whole thing has degenerated into an exercise of political and intellectual point-scoring with little thought or compassion for the Aboriginal suffering in the past, or for the scars of that horrific impact that remain deeply embedded in the Aboriginal psyche’.\(^\text{15}\)

Some observations about the Protectorate and Protectors

Whatever else may be said about the Assistant Protectors, they were well provided for by the state, being paid 250 pounds per annum plus rations that were higher than the going rate around Melbourne.\(^\text{16}\) This did not prevent a sustained and varied range of complaints about pay and conditions, about which they were able to demonstrate an otherwise rare unity.

Vivienne Rae-Ellis in her study of Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson observed that ‘as a group ... [the six Protectors] presented few admirable qualities and a collection of flaws large enough to arouse the suspicions of the most generous observer’.\(^\text{17}\) The better educated and well-connected Thomas was not averse to pulling class-based rank on Robinson whose self-consciousness about his lower class status and mannerisms was exacerbated by the intense rivalry between them. Their initial solidarity in the face of settler opposition to the presence of the Protectorate was soon

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\(^{13}\) Thomas’ writings frequently contained phrases such as ‘I had not seen some of my blacks for three months’, or designated more specific notions of his special relationship, eg ‘on this day many of my Blacks and the Goulbourne tribe ...’, see Thomas: M/F5883: CY3131, 22 June 1858.

\(^{14}\) Moreton-Robinson 1999: 30.

\(^{15}\) Maynard 2003: 144.

\(^{16}\) Cannon 1982: 453.

\(^{17}\) Rae-Ellis 1988: 192.
overcome by their contest over who possessed the greater understanding of the Aborigines, expressive of the contestation over Aboriginal bodies that has remained a constant in 'race relations' in this country.

Rae-Ellis argued that although some of the Protectors 'cared for and grew to love the Aborigines, each one, with the exception of Thomas, put his own interests first and the interests of the tribes last'. Her comparative sympathy for Thomas may arise from the selflessness she saw in the evidence left behind by him — his 'fatal mistake' of telling the truth about the manifest failure of his attempts to 'protect' the Aborigines. Certainly Thomas did not relish from frequently supplying those in authority over him with tales of uncontrolled drunkenness and vice on the part of the Aborigines and his inability to prevent or control such behaviour. This genuine concern about a compelling problem reflected Thomas' doubtless humane attitude but also served as a device by which he 'centred' himself in the narrative and the meanings and processes of 'protection'. Moreover, Thomas' depiction of Aborigines' behaviour when intoxicated as 'so outrageous ... [that] they are more like maniacs' foregrounded Aborigines as deviant and uncivilised, resonating with present day discourses of 'problem' drinking which locates such behaviour as particularly Indigenous. The main concern Thomas appeared to wish to convey in this communication was that his attempts to intervene on such occasions prompted him to 'hold my life upon a very slender thread'. His request for police to be ordered to watch the house of the apparent supplier of liquor was seemingly secondary to his desire to foreground threats to his personal safety in such circumstances.

Thomas' frequent admissions of his failure to prevent such regular 'lapses' and what these represented within white society — as well as possibly revealing a naive honesty — may also be seen as providing the opportunity for him to represent himself as the bearer of a more difficult task than the other Protectors with whom his ego was in competition. Silence on their part may have enabled Thomas and others to believe that only he took his responsibilities seriously and was an honourable if foolish man who was prepared to admit his shortcomings. Indeed within the more private space provided by his journal, Thomas was inclined to locate his absence of success within the orders he was given, suggestive of a desire to provide his own absolution in the personal observations thus provided. 'Orders are orders and must be obeyed' he wrote in response to what he perceived as an unreasonable instruction to proceed to Mount Macedon to deal with 'disturbances'. It is unclear from this journal entry as to whether his frustration with 'orders' arose from the lateness in the day on which he received them, the fact that he was to proceed 'alone without any weapon' or because as he observed with more reason, 'What in the world can Government think a man can do alone, unknown to the Blacks'. Indeed, blame was more ubiquitous. Thomas responded to a 'truly appalling' scene of sickness where he and other Protectors were

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22. Thomas M/F 5883: CY2946, 9 November 1839.
unable to provide even a blanket, by suggesting that 'Could the British Parliament or His Excellency have felt our feelings, they could certainly never have placed us in such a position without means.'

By locating responsibility or blame externally, both to himself via his journal and to the Chief Protector and others via his official reports and correspondence, Thomas was able to retain 'the high moral ground' for his fearsome honesty in admitting his failings which were really the result of the inadequacies of his superiors and the manner in which the Protectorate was organised and funded. Such explanations thus provided a further distancing from having to question his own participation within the performance of 'protection'. Being able to blame others gave him the opportunity to represent himself in ways that he clearly found admirable and comforting. At the same time, his apparent conviction of the certainty of the virtues of bringing Christianity to people he referred to as 'poor heathen[s] of this our adopted land', provided him with occasions for 'mournful reflection' of a most narcissistic kind. Whilst to all intents and purposes writing about those in his care, Thomas maintained his position at the centre of his reports and correspondence, situating himself as the all-knowing and caring (underpaid) Assistant Protector.

Thomas no doubt believed that his friendships with Aborigines occurred on his terms. Clearly he sought to frame such friendships according to the patterns of living and working with which he was able to persuade Aborigines to comply (or appear to comply for their own strategic purposes). Regardless of his humanitarian role and his own personal sympathies or perhaps because of these, Thomas was inevitably strongly implicated in the shifting power relationships of the late 1830s–1840s in colonial Victoria. Much of what he wrote was in the way of ethnographic notes on the behaviour of Aboriginal people, his gaze upon them being characteristically framed by the normalcy of all things European. Thus for example, he recorded in his journal in November 1839 that the 'few natives here are as our family. As soon as we are up they are up and about us ... Had service with them it is astonishing what attention they pay.' Little did it occur to him that such occasions enabled colonists to be subjected to the ethnographic gaze of the Aborigines whereby knowledge of 'whiteness' could be gained. As bell hooks has argued, 'black people' have acquired a ""special"" knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people in order to help them 'cope and survive in a white supremacist society'.

'Gellibrand ... called himself my brother', or 'The blacks ... were very fond of me'

Thomas' journal entry for 23 March 1839 recorded his arrival on the scene after the first fight since the setting up of the Protectorate. Among the many wounded was 'Gellibrand who called himself my brother'. A couple of months later Thomas constructed Gellibrand as 'tame' and wrote him into history as a friend to whom he was 'fatherly'. Thomas' account (partly written in a form of pidgin English) was of Gellibrand arriving at his tent door on a cold May morning, bearing firewood, which elicited Thomas'

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27. Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 3 November 1839.
28. hooks cl992: 165.
response 'good fellow, you Gellibrand'. Gellibrand's intended entry to the tent was prevented by Thomas' information that 'I said my lubra not up', at which what might be interpreted as a moment of male bonding was recorded: 'he laugh'd heartily and went out'.

Gellibrand later breakfasted with him and Mrs Thomas, both of them pressing tobacco and potatoes on him ('Mrs T. filled his pockets full of Potatoes') in response to Gellibrand's information that he was going away for five days. Their desire to make Gellibrand resemble them and conform to patterns of what Thomas termed 'going out' and return to their paternal and maternal control was fetishised in his journal. Here he observed that he and his wife had always made 'this poor fellow ... comfortable to our ways', and that 'he would show no wish to the contra'.

Gellibrand had 'bent his knee with us, shaved and wash'd himself, and one Sunday evening brought 3 other blacks to our evening service'. Thomas interpreted such mimicry as an acceptance of 'civilised' ways, whereas an examination of these journal entries, two months apart, reveal little about Gellibrand beyond what may be interpreted as customary behaviour towards visitors to his country as well as an attempt to assimilate Thomas to Aboriginal reciprocal ways of behaving. As well, Gellibrand was incorporating Thomas as 'brother' into a formalised relationship whereby he could relate not only to him but to other kin in ways that conformed to Aboriginal custom. Thus Gellibrand can be read as the principal historical actor here; he understood Thomas to carry some of the authority of the colonisers and was seeking to utilise their relationship in order to maintain his own authority in responding to his presence.

Thomas, though, could only see it through his European eyes which centred him as the figure around which other actors (including his 'lubra') revolved. His configuration of his relationship with Gellibrand (and indeed of all the Aborigines with whom he came into contact) reflected habits of whiteness which (as hooks argues) enable white people to believe 'they are seen by black folks only as they want to appear'. Thus Thomas was able to imagine Gellibrand's relational responses to his presence as evidence of an evolving dependence. Its pleasurableness was heightened by frequent reminders to himself that his 'sable Brother Gellibrand ... honour[ed] us with his company at breakfast'.

Even when a baby was named after Thomas' 'lubra Suzannah', he was unable to see anything beyond a desire to please him in this action.

Thomas was not alone in being 'brother' to Aboriginal men, suggesting the pervasiveness with which Aborigines sought to negotiate colonial relationships. His journal on 22 January 1839, just a few weeks after his arrival in the colony to take up his appointment presented a particularly exotic (and perhaps also homoerotic) portrayal of a 'particularly fine young man' among a number of 'fine young men' encountered on his way to Melbourne. This young man's 'majestic appearance' was enhanced by the 'clean blanket [worn] down to his legs', and his 'dignified and frank' looks as well as his well-spoken English, 'remarkable' because of its 'correct pronunciation'. Particularly striking, though, was the softness of this young man's speech, which was 'in fact more

32. hooks cl992: 169.
33. Thomas M/F 5883: 2604: 1 May 1839.
34. Thomas M/F 5883: 2604: 7 November 1839.
like that of a female — clearly a memorable early meeting, during which Captain Lonsdale was identified by the young (nameless) man as 'his brother'.

Similarly Assistant Protector James Dredge in March 1839 identified 'a fine athletic [Bonurong] man ... who calls himself my brother and names himself 'Mitter Dredge' as one of the wounded in 'a commotion amongst the blacks' which was only alleviated by his 'presence amongst them ... all day'. The mimicry involved in taking identities such as 'Mitter Dredge' was entirely missed in the desire of these white men to promote themselves as possessing the necessary traits of character to be able to deal with the Aborigines.

White fantasy tropes in Thomas' writings

One of Thomas' major fears revolved around his inability to control the behaviour of Aborigines and whites in relation to alcohol. His representation of this 'problem' in his writings was arguably a significant contribution to attitudes forming among officials and colonial society and framed the alcohol trope which, as Marcia Langton has suggested, continues to absorb white Australians in public discourse, and has provided a device by which a national ignoring of the 'real problems associated with misuse of alcohol' has been achieved. As Langton has noted, 'the image of the “drunken Aboriginal” ... predated the ready availability of alcohol to Aboriginal people'. Indeed, the illicit supply of alcohol was one of William Thomas' chief concerns about which he unsuccessfully sought police intervention. Whilst the genuine depths of Thomas' concern are clear, the fact that unworthy white men were involved in the traffic of alcohol for a variety of pecuniary and sexual motivations can be seen as threatening to the social world that he sought to create in which his control of dependent Aborigines was secure. I argue that there was more at work in white humanitarians' almost obsessive concern about alcohol and Aborigines — that the principal focus was really on the 'bad' whites who supplied the alcohol. As Richard Dyer has reminded us, 'bad' behaviour on the part of white people signifies 'failing to be “white”'. Those Aborigines who consumed alcohol, and behaved 'like maniacs' on the other hand, were fulfilling the stereotype-in-the-making of the 'drunken Aborigine'. So embedded was this trope by 1839 that the absence of any 'drunken cases' was noteworthy for inclusion in Thomas' journal on 25 November, indicative of how (as Dyer has argued) when a 'black person ... is good', this is experienced by whiteness as 'a surprise', given the power of black/white morality that is racially located within discourses of whiteness.

The doomed race trope was already in 'the colonial imagination' by the 1820s. Thomas appears to have joined other colonial observers in what Russell McGregor has identified as the 'irresistibly attractive ... notion of inevitable Aboriginal extinction'.
Whereas from the comfort of the Colonial Office in London James Stephen was able to make more insightful observations about the only real solution to colonisation being to 'teach[ing] [Aborigines] the art of war and supplying them with weapons and munitions — an act of suicidal generosity which of course can never be practised', Thomas and his peers — on the ground in Victoria — were inclined to centre themselves in their discussions of the 'doomed' Aborigines. That they were presiding over the inevitability of the demise of the Aborigines was not something they questioned; rather, they seemed intent on writing themselves into its historical record.

In a lengthy and wide-ranging report to Chief Protector Robinson early in 1840 Thomas articulated a number of the tropes investigated here, as well as continuing his just advocacy for the admission of Aboriginal evidence in legal cases. This report provided an amazing mish-mash of positive and negative views and representations of 'savages' who 'live in the greatest harmony among themselves', and firmly located Thomas as the ethnographic expert, concerned among other things about the 'inevitable crisis' of extinction. The imposition of European patterns of existence were touted by Thomas as a 'half way [meeting with] their erratic habits', such as encouraging Aboriginal men to 'occasionally pursue' hunting. To this end he proposed the establishment of an asylum — under his control — that would achieve the trinity of 'shelter' for the 'infirm', the civilising benefits of education for the young and employment for the 'industrious'. Such an establishment would, Thomas added, leave the Aborigines 'without an excuse' and 'as a nation the British character exonerated'.

Linked to the trope of the doomed race was that of the childlike race, fond of Thomas and selected other whites. Aborigines viewed as children marked absence: not civilised, not Christian, not settled and industrious. Positive childlike attributes were what Europeans encouraged as dependence and affection for kind people like Thomas. Thomas' recording of Aborigines in the Arthur's Seat area being 'delighted at my coming down, more so as I told them I was going to live among them', legitimated both his own presence as well as European occupation of Aboriginal lands as a matter of natural progression. Indeed the entire Thomas family was welcomed by 'lubras and children' upon their arrival at Tubberrubabel, another indication of attempts to incorporate them into Aboriginal patterns of occupation. The obvious affection of many Aborigines for Mrs Thomas, particularly on the part of some of the women, was a matter of pride for Thomas, not the least because of the insulting behaviour towards her on the part of Robinson from time to time. That such affection may
also have carried the potential for a gendered negotiation between these women was characteristically missed by him. Instead, Mrs Thomas's virtues were displaced onto her husband, with Thomas congratulating himself in his journal for 'the blessings of a good wife'.

Perhaps the most explicit linking of the perceived inherent childlike character of Aborigines and their acceptance of the white presence among them was Thomas' observation in the lengthy report to Robinson in late 1839, that 'when they attach themselves to a white person their affection knows no bounds', in spite of their more 'savage' inclination (as he (mis)understood it) to 'soon forget their dead'. In this telling passage, it was the presence of whites/ness amongst the Aborigines of the Westernport district that was privileged. Their 'boundless affection' for whites might thus be interpreted, I argue, as a device that encouraged colonial officials such as Thomas to believe that their presence had become accepted as normal by the Aborigines. So determined was Thomas to inscribe this 'affection' upon colonial relationships that his census of births and deaths among the Westernport Aborigines that accompanied his report to Robinson, included in its 'remarks' column the note that a Bunurong man named Kurnboro, aged 41 and married was 'much attached to whites'.

Like children, though, Aborigines were also described by Thomas as 'impatient, greedy folks', when waiting for food to be provided by him, who were also devious, feigning illness in order to obtain government provisions. Thomas apparently saw no contradictions in such observations, in spite of the extent and manner in which the provision (or otherwise) of food represented power and control for the colonisers.

Intersecting the childlike and doomed race tropes was the prostitution of Aboriginal women by 'their' men, perhaps the most enduring, insulting and damaging stereotype. Not only did this continuing European construct of Aboriginal gender relations facilitate oppressive state practices such as the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and the gendered focus of the policy of assimilation but it has been perpetuated in the 'history wars' by Keith Windschuttle as well as by 'sympathetic' white academics. Although increasingly contested, for example by Tracey Moffatt's film Nice coloured girls and Shayne Breen's response to Windschuttle in Whitewash, the trope of prostitution arguably owes much to early writers such as Thomas. His lengthy report on Westernport Aborigines in 1840 praised their fondness as parents, describing 'many' of them as 'as constant and domesticated in their way, as in civil society'. He tempered these positive attributes that apparently placed them in some alignment with 'civilisation', with a reminder that 'debauchery and exchange of wives' was also common. His accounts of 'prostitution' frequently placed him at their centre, as the

52. Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 10 December 1839.
55. Thomas M/F 5883 CY2604: 6 September 1839.
56. Thomas M/F 5883 CY2604: 24 September 1839. Another contemporary trope of 'welfare bludgers' in the making, perhaps?
57. See for example Goodall 1995: 75-99.
60. Thomas M/F 5883: CY3802: August 1839–February 1840.
saviour of individual Aboriginal women from white men who would procure them. The women were effectively peripheral to his account, its focus being on 'the blacks [who] were willing to accommodate'\(^6^1\) such white men and upon himself as powerless to prevent this.\(^6^2\)

Indeed, the inability to order life around him according to his precise wishes produced one of the most extensive tropes of Thomas in this period, which I'll call 'poor me'.

As noted, all Assistant Protectors complained bitterly and frequently about the insufficiency of their salaries. Other complaints related to their unwillingness to carry out the tasks which they had known were to be theirs when appointed, particularly removing themselves and their families to 'the bush'. Some worried about the effects being 'removed from civilisation' might have on their children, 'without the smallest hope of attaining the commonest education', as well as the hardships for their wives without servants.\(^6^3\) So afraid was William Thomas of the sexuality of Aboriginal women and men and of their customary fighting to settle sexual matters, that he 'sent [his] daughter from the encampment for safety' in December 1839 because 'these people are lustfully as savage as ever and not to be depended on'.\(^6^4\)

It is clear that much of Thomas' self pity was connected to his concern for 'his' Aborigines, and therefore also frequently intersected with his feelings of superiority towards and conflict with the authorities, in particular the Chief Protector. Occasionally his sympathy for himself arose from his concern for his wife who was at times poorly and rudely treated by Robinson to the extent that this made her ill. As Thomas' 'help-meet' — and for his communications with Aborigines — his 'lubra', Mrs Thomas' presence enabled his writings to maintain their focus resolutely on himself — as he protested the treatment of her. Not that he was alone in this, James Dredge also lamented his 'dreadfully depressed ... mind' as well as his wife's suffering from ill health, and the general circumstances of life encountered in the colony, the decision to take up his Assistant Protector position clearly being perceived as a disastrous one.\(^6^5\)

A frequent complaint of Thomas was the inadequate provision of blankets for the Aborigines, expressive of the poor planning of 'protection' by the British Colonial Office, which should 'never have ... placed [Thomas and his colleagues] in such a position without means'.\(^6^6\) As a signifier of control and bodily inscription, blankets require further examination; for Thomas their absence provided the occasion to demonstrate the benevolence of the Protectors in giving the 'blankets from our own beds',\(^6^7\) thereby shifting the focus from the shivering Aborigines to the generous white men. Such accounts of individual sacrifice were frequent in Thomas' journal, one being occasioned by a description of a visit of a 'particularly attractive' widow and her three children to his tent. Thomas might have had a bit of an eye for attractive Aboriginal women who — like this one — were often the recipients of 'some beads', which he did not merely give,

\(^{6^1}\) Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 13 November 1839.
\(^{6^2}\) Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 9 November 1839
\(^{6^3}\) Cannon 1982: 428.
\(^{6^4}\) Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 17 December 1839.
\(^{6^5}\) Cannon 1982: 428.
\(^{6^6}\) Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 5 May 1839.
\(^{6^7}\) Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 10 May 1839.
but ‘put [them] on’. His concern at this meeting was that he was running out of supplies, which was at odds with his mission to ‘civilize, protect and see that their wants are supplied ...’. Instead, the complaint poured out to his journal was that ‘One third of my income will unavoidably be spent upon these poor creatures. What influence can ever be obtained in the absence of means?’ Indeed, such ‘absence’ was a source of considerable misery for Thomas causing him to identify the Aborigines he offered his friendship to as ‘a great tax upon me and much reducing] my salary’. Perhaps welcoming the opportunity to question Thomas’ supposedly self-sacrificing nature, Chief Protector Robinson, no doubt also frustrated by his constant complaints, observed with some perspicacity that Thomas gave charity then complained of it.

Most often, though, Thomas’ self-pity was unrelenting in its representation of the ‘awful life I lead’ which was his most favoured phrase for expressing it. Whilst the cause of much of his self-pity was the ‘misbehaviour’ of Aborigines and white men alike, especially organised around the tropes of drunkenness and sexual immorality to which he contributed, he also suffered because of an absence of respect and response on the part of colonial officials. His communications were ‘treated with contempt’ by Police Magistrates, the pain this caused him arguably arising as much from the failure of these white men to demonstrate the superior value of whiteness.

Thomas’ final self-pitying words on his first year as ‘friend’ of the Aborigines were contained in a lengthy letter to Robinson in October of 1839. Enumerating the frustrations caused by the lack of cooperation from the police magistrates, following which he reiterated that the Aborigines ‘have become now much attached to me’, it was Thomas who was badly done by in this account. Reminding Robinson — whether consciously or not — of his class superiority over him and of his ‘circle of pious esteemed friends [and] livelihood [derived from] a genteel profession patronised by the nobility and gentry’, the complaint reached a crescendo of anger, as Thomas ‘might have held a situation in America of 700 pounds per annum but refused it’. His despair occasioned by these assorted slights and missed opportunities — in spite of his assurance in the same paragraph that in choosing to ‘engage in the Aboriginal cause ... It was not the mere salary that brought me here’ became inextricably linked with his trope of the doomed race. Thus, in linking his inability to carry out his friendship with the Aborigines with what he perceived to be ‘a mystical cloud of hapless bodings hanging over’ them, Thomas appeared to be wishing both to suffer the same fate as ‘his’ Aborigines, and to provide an explanation for the culpability of other whites in this. In doing so, he was able to maintain what appears to have been a complete ignorance of his complicity in the colonial project that had brought him to Port Phillip.

68. Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 30August 1839.
70. Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 8 November 1839. The fact that Thomas himself recorded this observation made by Robinson adds strength to the argument about the depth of Thomas’ self-absorption with his hard life as ‘friend’ of the Aborigines.
71. Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 9 and 11 November 1839. A variation on this phrase was ‘what an awful existence’, see for example Thomas M/F 5883: CY2604: 22 November 1839.
72. The fact that Thomas himself recorded this observation made by Robinson adds strength to the argument about the depth of Thomas’ self-absorption with his hard life as ‘friend’ of the Aborigines.
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An essay in disappointment: 
the Aboriginal–Jewish relationship1

Colin Tatz

One can make much of the parallels and metaphors in the Aboriginal and Jewish experiences, and a few writers have done so. Andrea Goldsmith talked about ‘expulsion, massacre, genocide, eternal scapegoats’, with ‘Jews and black Australians being equally experienced’ in such matters.2 Evan Zuesse, a lecturer in modern Jewish history, perceived ‘a shared universe’, ‘an enormous commonality’, especially in their historical experience, their rootedness in land, in the centuries of attempted assimilation.3 Djiniyini Gondarra, a Uniting Church minister in Darwin, saw a unity in nomadism, in spirituality, the dreaming, and what he calls ‘ceremonics’.4

But, beyond metaphor, is there a relationship between Aborigines and Jews? Should there be one? Yes, I would argue very strongly that there is and should be, given the moral imperatives incumbent on all Jews. The five chapters of the sayings and teachings of the Jewish Sages, often referred to as the Ethics of the Fathers, insist that there are certain moral duties involved in being a Jew. For example, tikkun olam is a mandate to Jews, wherever they may be, to try to heal, to mend, to repair a flawed world. In the first century of the Common Era, Hillel (the Elder) and Jesus (the Jew) after him, made that very plain.

This kind of moral imperative was exemplified by a group of Aboriginal people after the night of 9 November 1938, ‘Kristallnacht’, which was to that point in time the most violent public display of antisemitism in German history. A Nazi-organised pogrom, the ‘Night of Broken Glass’ changed Jews from being a stigmatised group into a ‘minorité fatale’. At least 7500 Jewish businesses were destroyed, 191 synagogues were burned down, 26,000 Jews were taken to concentration camps and 91 were murdered.5

There was instant world reaction to this prelude to the Holocaust. And, in faraway Melbourne, the Australian Aborigines’ League, with not a single Jewish member, passed a

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resolution protesting against Germany's treatment of Jews, particularly after 'Kristallnacht'. More than that, they took their protest statement to the German Consulate, where they were denied entry.⁶

This unsolicited and spontaneous protest was revealed when Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre recently dedicated a plaque in memory of this expression of solidarity.⁷ But have there been similar Jewish expressions of care about Aboriginal experiences? In spite of what may look like a contrived paradigm, we need to look, however briefly, at Jewish participation in the African-American fight for civil rights and in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Certainly, differing geographies and demographies were, and are, involved; but the issue here is to arrive at a judgment on the claims about heavy, even disproportionate, Jewish involvement in Aboriginal affairs. Further, these respective political climates also tell us something about the opportunities for, and limits to, activism in race relations.

Jews and Mississippi

Jews were heavily engaged in the American civil rights movement, beginning with their core membership in WE du Bois' National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. Jews participated in every major anti-racism organisation thereafter. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL), founded in 1913, was based on fighting antisemitism and all other forms of racial prejudice, and even in today's poisoned relationships, discussed below, the ADL persists with a 'Blacks and Jews Conversation' program.

American civil rights politics was, and is, violent, even murderous. Several Jews were seriously injured in the Montgomery civil rights movement between 1954 and 1960 and two Jews were killed by the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi in 1964. The involvement of Jewish students in what was called the New Left (race) politics was remarkable. About one-third of the students who went to Mississippi in 1964 were Jews, and between one-third and one-half of 3000 American campus radical activists were Jews. Many Jewish heads were cracked by Mayor Richard Daley and his police minions in the Chicago of 1968, and Jewish radicals became household names, as with Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, in the farcical Chicago Seven trial.

Why this extraordinary attention to the plight of black Americans? Percy Cohen argued that white supremacy policies and practices 'aroused a moral sense of obligation which some of these students had acquired from their parents and/or their teachers; and it gave their search for a moral commitment a direction to follow'.⁸ There were, of course, contextual factors that influenced both Jewish and non-Jewish student activism: the use of illegitimate violence against blacks in the southern states; guilt and sympathy arising from the conditions that led to black revolts in the north; the escalation of campus protests and the matter of free speech; increasing knowledge of the poverty that was pervasive in most of black America; the escalation of the war in Vietnam; and the concomitant growth of the Peace Movement.

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6. Reported in the Melbourne Argus and the Age, 3 December 1938.
The breakdown between Jews and African-Americans began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1965, author James Baldwin urged the end of the special Jewish-Black relationship, not because he disliked Jews but because, with the growth of the Black Panthers and the Black Power movement in general, he foresaw an emerging antisemitism from his people. He was right, of course. It wasn’t long before a serious antisemitism and an equally serious Jewish racism began to emerge. Some of it was ideological and political; much of it was plain economics, with senior Jewish educators seen as blocking the paths to promotion of black teachers. There was also the accusation against Jews of being ‘slum landlords’. Black Islam was on its way to becoming a form of Radical Islam, preaching all manner of dire statements about, and treatments of, Jews.

It was an innocent Melbourne rabbinical student, Yankel Rosenbaum, who brought about the end of this hitherto close Black–Jewish relationship. In August 1990, a car in a Lubavitch motorcade in Crown Heights (New York) accidentally knocked over two black children, one of whom died. A private Hassidic ambulance service arrived, took away the by now surrounded and endangered driver, an act that left local African-Americans furious at this seeming preference for attending to white safety. A cry of ‘Get the Jew!’ led to the fatal stabbing of Yankel, who happened to be in the vicinity. With his murder and the ensuing three-day riot, Jewish–Black relations hit rock bottom.

Jews and apartheid South Africa

Even though Nelson Mandela ‘found Jews to be more broad-minded than most whites on issues of race’, the majority of South African Jews went along with the apartheid system, prospered by it, voted for it, and condemned those of their sons and daughters who opposed it.

The Jewish Board of Deputies in Johannesburg was the last of the denominational institutions to condemn apartheid. Only in the early 1990s did ‘organisational’ Jews voice an opinion on a system that some Methodists had begun attacking even before World War II; by the 1950s, individual Anglicans, like Father Trevor Huddleston and later Bishop Ambrose Reeves, had become vociferous. Catholics, a small minority in South Africa and much discriminated against in the land of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), were articulate. Two prominent DRC theologians — Dr Beyers Naude and Professor Albert Geyser — lost their jobs for condemning apartheid as a blasphemy on Christianity.

A number of Jews had fought within the system as members of parliament, jurists, journalists, unionists, medical practitioners, academics. Others joined what became banned illegal organisations, whether socialist or communist in ideology or just simply

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9. Shlomo Katz (1969) edited a significant symposium, run by *Midstream* magazine, on both sides of this divide.
groups of men and women who sought some form of social justice in a society so manifestly unjust.

The infamous ‘Treason Trial’ began in December 1956 — ironically, in the old Pretoria Synagogue — and focused almost entirely on the ‘subversive’ nature of the Freedom Charter, a document calling for human rights, equal rights before the law, the right to work and security, and the right to share in the country’s wealth. After many withdrawals of indictments, the trial ended in the unanimous acquittal of the remaining 28 accused in March 1961. Twenty-three whites were accused at the start, of whom 14 were Jews. Eight of the nine defence team were Jewish. Among others, five white people were indicted for sabotage at the ‘Rivonia Trial’ in 1964, and all were Jews. Over the years, dozens of individual Jews were involved, one way or another, in opposing that nightmare world of ‘the South African way of life’.

What is of enormous significance is that at the height of those trials, the Jewish Board of Deputies — the roof body representing Jewish organisations and communities — and the editors of Jewish newspapers denounced those Jews as ‘not being representative’ of the Jewish community, and of not even belonging. They were branded as apostates. People like Joe Slovo, Julius First, Ruth First, Baruch Hirson, Rowley Arenstein, Denis Goldberg, Harold Wolfe, Arthur Goldreich, and James Kantor were, in a word, traitors to both a revered ‘South African way of life’ and to an ethical, upright Jewishness. They were seen as having deserted their Jewishness.

Gideon Shimoni has published a profound analysis of Jews in the apartheid years entitled Community and conscience. He examined individual and communal behaviour, concluding that ‘although there is nothing in this record deserving of moral pride, neither does it warrant utter self-reproach’. This was, he declared, ‘characteristic minority-group behaviour — a phenomenon of self-preservation, performed at the cost of moral righteousness’.\(^\text{14}\) My judgment is harsher than Shimoni’s, much stronger in condemnation of this loss of moral righteousness by the community leadership. But, I have to remind myself, this was a vigorously, vehemently antisemitic society — and an unceasingly violent one.

Not unsurprisingly, in the new ‘Rainbow Country’, Jewish organisations, writers, and journalists now proclaim the quintessential Jewishness of these traitors-turned-folk-heroes. In his published interviews with 27 former activists, Immanuel Suttner welcomes them back, ‘these worthy South Africans, socialists, communists or liberals’, and yes, ‘these worthy Jews’.\(^\text{15}\)

There were different forces, factors, and motivations that led to such activism and such bravery. First, there was the gross, the blatant, and the hypocritical in South African life, in Jewish South African life, that cried out for some change. Second, there was an obvious dissonance between Jewish ideals and Jewish behaviour. Third, there was the haunting feeling that only by the thinnest of one’s skin was a Jew considered white, and only just white enough, to enjoy legal, political, economic, and occasionally, social privilege in that antisemitic society. Fourth, there was an unconscious or subconscious realisation that no matter what their apparent acceptance, Jews never really belonged

\(^\text{14}\) Shimoni 2003: 276.
\(^\text{15}\) Suttner 1997: 3.
there. Among historians of Jewish South Africa, only Milton Shain has been willing to state that obvious point, as evident from the titles of some of the chapters in his book on South African antisemitism — 'From pariah to parvenu', 'Shirkers and subversives' and, significantly, 'Outsiders and intruders'. Their whiteness was just barely salvation or redemption in a society so suffused by hate.

In a real sense, those radicals were fighting as much for their Jewish survival, for some Jewish moral commitment, as for African, Indian, or Cape Coloured liberation. Perhaps, for all their high profile and overt Jewishness, South African Jews had to prove points about themselves — in contrast to an Australian Jewry that was certainly less visible, much less 'noisy', but more secure, more certain in itself and about its place in the mainstream?

In the new South Africa, paralleling the anti-Jewish sentiments of many African-Americans, there is now a rampant anti-Zionism/antisemitism from the African National Congress, some less than flattering comments from Nelson Mandela, and a variety of radical Islamic movements among the Cape Coloured people. Jews are portrayed as members of the oppressing class, a people of wealth and privilege, both there and in Israel.

The Jewish tradition in Australia

As with all racial minorities who have struggled in Western states, Aborigines and Islanders have needed help from several key sources: a sympathetic media; a parliamentary presence, however small, to press for changes within the legislative framework; a lobby and/or activist group to pressure for change; legal counsel; an economic helping hand; friends in academic places who not only research but who lend or use their work for change in the status quo; and a focus of attention and a presence in the nation's material culture.

Can we locate a political, legal, economic, cultural, academic, or even a social connection between Aborigines and Jews that is worth reporting? Which Jews, what kind of Jews, have been involved, in a serious and substantial way, and over a reasonable measure of time, in the affairs of Aborigines and Islanders? With which of the many different Aboriginal societies have they been involved?

In answer, it has to be said that Jews can be guilty of self-delusion and of distorting reality. In 1992, Evan Zuesse contended that 'Jews have continually been involved in efforts to understand and to aid in the Aboriginal struggle, far out of proportion to their overall numbers. Any significant Jewish presence at all in Aboriginal matters, of course, is already a disproportionate involvement, considering that Jews form only 0.5% of the total Australian population.' On Tuesday evening, 27 May 1997, 13 Jewish leaders, mainly lawyers, met with six Aboriginal leaders during the Aboriginal Reconciliation Conference in Melbourne. All present wanted to foster continuing cooperation between the two communities. An ensuing press release declared that 'the stolen generation was deprived of its precious gift of inheritance'; that not to accord the Stolen Children

inquiry serious consideration was ‘a blatant abrogation of moral responsibility’; that the 
‘removal of children comes within the international legal definition of genocide’; and 
that the Jewish community ‘is concerned for the moral welfare of Australia’. Several of 
the Jewish team talked about the tradition of Jewish concerns for Aboriginal 
Australians.19

Tradition implies a strong historical foundation. And linkage. We need to examine 
such claims against the realities, not to mount a case for or against Jews but to under­
stand why their contribution to Aboriginal affairs has been so disproportionately low, 
especially from 1900 to the 1980s.

The media
The media have been the best friends that Aborigines have, at least since the mid-1960s. 
Over the years, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Commission) ran many items 
on national radio, either reporting adverse conditions or recognising the need for 
change. ABC television, from the 1970s — particularly Four Corners and the forerunner 
of the 7.30 Report, This Day Tonight — was often the first to break stories about every­ 
thing from the flogging of girls at Hope Vale Mission to serious problems arising from 
atomic weapons testing at Maralinga. No Jewish journalists, few as there were, were 
engaged in these broadcasts and programs.

The broadsheet press, at least in the 1970s and 80s, was more pro- than anti-Abo­ 
iginal. Again, not many Jews have been senior journalists. Over the past three decades, 
Michael Gawenda and Sam Lipski have written editorials or features, and Vic Alhadeff 
has raised Aboriginal issues in his editorship of the Australian Jewish News in Sydney. 
Occasionally, Aboriginal issues have been touched on by several broadsheet column­
ists: the late David Bornstein and Henry Mayer, and later, Elizabeth Wynhausen and 
Adele Horin. In the past five years, Robert Manne has had a major Aboriginal agenda, 
particularly on the Stolen Generation and ‘the black armband’ view of history. But there 
has been nothing like the sustained, dedicated campaigning of Jack Waterford in the 
Canberra Times, and Debra Jopson and Tony Stephens in the Sydney Morning Herald.

The legislatures
Our eight parliaments have had a number of Jewish members. Federal parliament has 
had fifteen Jews since 1901; New South Wales, 31; Victoria, 22; South Australia, seven; 
Western Australia, six; Queensland, four; and Tasmania, two. Four or five others may 
have been Jewish. Several made contributions to many public issues but not specifically 
to Aboriginal reforms.

Barry Cohen, in his earlier parliamentary years and as ALP Cabinet Minister 
under Whitlam, was concerned on several fronts, particularly on environmental mat­
ters that affected Aborigines. The most notable contributor has been Peter Baume, a 
very ‘wet’ Liberal, who was a sympathetic Minister for Aboriginal Affairs from 1980 to 
1982. As has always been the case since 1969 (when Bill Wentworth became the first 
Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs), this portfolio remains outside of cabinet 
and is the lowliest of all ministerial portfolios on the totem pole. Baume’s small ‘l’ lib-

eral views were never going to gain much yardage in a conservative government. Later, in 1989, he wrote a strongly worded dissenting report to the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Aboriginal Affairs, criticising Labor Minister Gerry Hand’s dealings with the Aboriginal Development Commission and his methods in establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission (ATSIC).

The pressure groups

Regrettably, the era of independent pressure groups working on behalf of the Aborigines came to an end in 1972. Labor’s accession to federal power promised much, and several major pressure groups — none reliant on state funding — bowed out. Politicking, such as it was and has been since then, has had to be conducted by hundreds of Aboriginal legally incorporated bodies — like the land councils, the medical and legal aid services — all of them dependent on government funding, on government registration as incorporations, and therefore either restrained or muzzled. Attacking the very source of their dependence has become a Herculean task, something the pre-1972 groups didn’t have to contend with. Their problem was being tarred as socialist, or worse, communist.

To assess Jewish involvement in this politicking, we need to look, however briefly, at some of the major issues in Aboriginal history since Federation.

Establishing missions in remote parts of the continent, isolating Aborigines and Islanders both legally and geographically, was a focus during the 1900s. The 1910s continued a tradition of ambiguity from the colonies: assimilation as one answer, through the establishment of ‘assimilation homes’ like Cootamundra Girls’ Home in New South Wales (NSW), and extreme segregation as another response, such as the penal settlement of Palm Island in Queensland. In the 1920s, assimilation ‘havens’ were established at Colebrook Girls’ Home in South Australia and Kinchela Boy’s Home in NSW, while massacres occurred at Forrest River Mission in Western Australia and Coniston Station in the Northern Territory.20

By the 1930s, some public concern resulted in the formation of the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) in Victoria in 1932, followed by the Aborigines Progress Association (APA) in 1937. But it was in this decade that the eugenicist fantasies of OA Neville in Western Australia, JW Bleakley in Queensland and Dr Cecil Cook in the Northern Territory flourished. These were the bureaucrats who, together with Professor Baldwin Spencer a decade earlier, saw the solution in letting the ‘full-bloods’ die out in inviolable reserves, pushing nice-looking ‘half-caste’ and ‘quarter-caste’ girls into marriage with white men (so that the colour gene would quickly disappear), and removing ‘mixed-blood’ children from natural parents to be raised in assimilation homes, to the point where, said Neville, it ‘would be possible to eventually forget that there were ever any Aborigines in Australia’.21 The Australia Day Protest in Sydney on 26 January 1938 was a significant event, a day of mourning and a day on which the first major all-Aboriginal conference was held while mainstream society celebrated the landing of Captain Cook in 1788. War preoccupied the 1940s, but significant black reactions

20. All of these events are described in Horton’s 1994 Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia.

were occurring in the west with the Pindan Movement, the Pilbara Aborigines who, between 1946 and 1948, went on strike for an adequate wage.\textsuperscript{22}

To my knowledge, not a single Jew was involved in any of the events, protest actions, establishments, statutes, judicial or parliamentary enquiries.

An embryonic public consciousness of Aboriginal conditions was just visible in the 1950s. The National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) was founded in 1957 to promote a day and a way of focusing mainstream attention on Aboriginal communities.\textsuperscript{23} In the same year, the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) began operating in Melbourne as both a welfare service and a political lobby group, with Pastor Doug Nicholls as the key Aboriginal figure in the movement. Within a year, the AAL persuaded other advancement organisations, churches, and trade unions to affiliate under a federal banner, in a national body originally known as the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA), later amended to include Torres Strait Islanders, and thereafter known as FCAATSI. For 21 years this body engaged in pressure politics for a better deal for Aborigines, which included federal voting rights for Aborigines and Islanders in the early 1960s, equal wages for equal work in the Northern Territory cattle industry in 1966, a referendum in 1967 to have Aborigines included in the national census, and for the Federal government to have legislative power on Aboriginal affairs (a state power in the constitution), some restitution for Aborigines caught in the Maralinga atomic testing site, better education and health, the return of the Mapoon people to the land from which they had been moved at gunpoint in 1963, and so on. There was a great deal of overlap between AAL and FCAATSI executive office-holders between 1958 and 1970, the 'golden years' of this kind of pressure group politics when perhaps more battles were won than lost.

In that time, I was an adviser to FCAATSI and the AAL (from 1961 to 1970) and represented the AAL (even though not a member) on that appalling administrative creature, the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board, from 1965 to the end of 1967. I was, so to speak, the participant researcher. Only one Jew was active in both the AAL and FCAATSI — the late Lorna Lippman. Other Jewish members of FCAATSI were Hans Bandler — always supportive of his wife, Faith — Emil and Hannah Witton, and Len Fox, who wrote on Aborigines, on one occasion with Faith Bandler. This was the era of Aboriginal activists, the men and women who raised public awareness of the Aboriginal condition. Prominent were Joe McGinness, Faith Bandler, Charlie Perkins, Stuart Murray, Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), Bill Onus, Doug Nicholls, Mick Miller, and Chicka Dixon. It was also the heyday of white colleagues like Don Dunstan, Gordon Bryant, Stan Davey, Barry Pittock, Jack Horner, Alick Jackomos, Barry Christopher, Frank Engel, Doris Blackburn, and Jewish Lorna Lippman.

The Queensland government promoted a tame citizens group in 1961, One People of Australia (OPAL), as an antidote to FCAATSI. In 1963, Sydney Aborigines, tiring of some of this white-dominated advancement activity, established a self-help and service body, the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs (FAA). No Jews were involved in either organisation.

\textsuperscript{22} Horton 1994: 868-9.

\textsuperscript{23} Now known as NAIDOC, celebrated for a week each July.
The activists
In the late 1950s, Irene McIlwraith, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, campaigned strongly about discrimination and living conditions in Walgett (NSW), a town which began to achieve some prominence then, and which has remained as a living legacy of past policies and practices.

In 1961, a movement known as ABSCHOL (Aboriginal Scholarships) had begun in all universities. It started as a small Christian unit of the Australian Union of Students who collected funds to enable Aboriginal university attendance. Realising that teenagers were not finishing school, ABSCHOL sought funds to keep them there for as long as possible, usually by giving cash incentives to parents. The organisation soon became 'political', involving students in protests about land rights and similar issues. Federal initiatives under Labor led FCAATSI (briefly renamed at the time as the National Aboriginal and Islander Liberation Movement) to believe that they were redundant, and in 1972 the movement ended. A handful of Jewish students were involved in ABSCHOL, and two Victorian (Jewish) social workers, Phillip Boas and Colin Benjamin, were key directors.

In 1965, with the help of the Reverend Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel, some 30 Sydney University students, led by Charlie Perkins and Jim Spigelman (Perkins's right-hand man), undertook a 3200 km bus tour of northern NSW towns. They 'sat-in' in protest at racial discrimination in cinemas, bars, and swimming baths. These Freedom Riders — including Spigelman, Wendy Golding, Judith Rich, and four other Jewish students — clashed, on occasion violently, with local residents, but in the longer term this remarkable event ended apartheid in the arena of social facilities.

The 1967 referendum, falsely presented and touted by the Federal government and much of the media as a 'new deal' and as 'citizenship rights' for Aborigines, was won overwhelmingly, partly because radical FCAATSI and the conservative government joined hands in promoting a yes vote.25

The mid-1960s to the early 1970s were important in Jewish community life. Dozens of Jewish students were (disproportionately) involved in New Left politics, especially at Melbourne and Monash Universities. Philip Mendes has chronicled this political activity, especially its opposition to the Vietnam War.26 I taught some of the leaders and was acquainted with several of the vibrant group who opposed not only that war but also the 1971 Springbok rugby union tour of Australia; who were involved with the anti-Israeli and antisemitic stances that arose with the Arab–Israeli war; who founded *Survival* magazine to combat those sentiments; and who fought antisemitism on various fronts. *Tikkun olam* was present in their universalism, in their rebellion against the internal Jewish community 'principle' of not getting involved 'in a form of

25. It was in fact a clumsy attempt by Prime Minister Harold Holt to have a 'popular' question placed alongside one likely to be defeated, in this case, a question seeking approval to increase the number of House of Representatives members without a corresponding increase in the number of Senators. The Aboriginal question was heavily marketed as 'a new deal' — but it was, in essence, nothing of the kind — and was overwhelmingly supported, to the extent of a 90% 'yes' vote; the nexus question was badly defeated.
ethnic politics completely unacceptable to and alien to Australian political culture'.

Yet in all this mending of the world these young people could find no place or space for Aborigines, north or south, remote, rural or urban.

Why were all these Jewish boys and girls not involved in Aboriginal matters then? Where are they now? Only two are active: Robert Manne is very much involved with Aborigines in his work on the Stolen Generation, and Ron Brunton appears to do his utmost to disparage significant Aboriginal issues such as land rights and the forcible removal of children.

Aborigines erected a Tent Embassy on the lawns outside (old) Parliament House in Canberra in 1972. (It remains in place, despite repeated political and regular police batterings and governmental decisions to cut off such services as electricity.) A stroke of genius, its message was too clever, with the great majority of Australians not reading the message that Aborigines were foreigners in Australia and were as much entitled to an embassy in the capital as any other nation. The founders were essentially the Aborigines from Sydney’s FAA. No Jews were involved.

In the 1980s, no Jewish involvement was apparent in the Aboriginal movement to link up with children removed in earlier decades, nor in the Gurindji struggle for equal wages and land in the Territory, nor in the 1988 protests at the bicentenary celebrations.

The lawyers

In 2002, the Australian Jewish News, in a feature on ‘Jews and Aboriginal Reconciliation’, depicted Jews ‘at the forefront of the battle for Aboriginal reconciliation, particularly in the legal field’. It emphasised Jewish empathy, and said a great deal about not having ‘to tell Jews about human rights’; about the role of Jewish lawyers, especially the late and celebrated Ron Castan QC, in Aboriginal land rights cases; about Jews helping in the early days of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Fitzroy; about the role of the [now] NSW Chief Justice Jim Spigelman in the 1965 Freedom Rides; and the pro-Aboriginal advocacy of Justice Marcus Einfeld. In one fell swoop, this feature was, in miniature, a laudation of the Jewish–Aboriginal relationship.

In the late 1960s, a Methodist missionary from Yirrkala in the Northern Territory, Ron Croxford, came to the Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs (CRAA) at Monash University to consult with the late Elizabeth Eggleston, Professor Louis Waller, and me about the possibilities of pursuing Aboriginal land claims in civil court. Partly out of that advice to the group that Croxford represented came the first land claims in court, Mathaman and Others in 1969 and Milirrpum v Nabalco in 1971. In 1964, I had founded and was director of CRAA as a ‘balance’ (or complement) to the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, later AIATSIS), which had been created solely to retrieve the past but to eschew research into any ‘matters affecting the contemporary life of Aborigines’. CRAA began as an applied research and action unit. Today it operates as a student service and race relations education body, as well as a research centre, re-named the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies (CAIS).

27 Mendes 1993: 143.
28 20 December 2002.
The land rights era began with the significant cases mentioned above, with Justice Woodward’s commission of inquiry into land rights, and with the enactment of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act in 1976. Soon after, a notorious event in Western Australia became international news when the state government, under Sir Charles Court, sent in a military-style armed convoy to ensure compliance with an order that a petroleum mining company, Amex, be permitted to drill on a known sacred site (known to contain no oil) situated on Noonkanbah, the Aboriginal-owned cattle station. In 1977, the Liberal Party did its best to disfranchise illiterate Aborigines in the West. Jews were not involved; nor did they protest against the 1975 decision to mine uranium in Arnhem Land, nor were they involved in the attempt by a small group of prominent Australians to lobby for a treaty with Aboriginal people.

Only two Jews have headed parliamentary or judicial enquiries into Aboriginal matters. Justice Marcus Einfeld delivered a scathing report in 1988 on Aboriginal conditions in the border towns of Goondiwindi, Boggabilla, and Toomelah, and I directed a project that examined the social impact of uranium mining on Aborigines in Arnhem Land between 1978 and 1984.

Jewish lawyers Ron Castan and Jack Fajgenbaum were involved in several of the many land rights cases from the early 1990s. Justice Michael Kirby’s oration for Castan in 1999 was a magnificent tribute to his work on the Mabo and Wik cases.

The four founders of the unofficial but effective Aboriginal legal aid service in Melbourne in 1964 were two Jewish academics at Monash University: Louis Waller and me, (the late) Elizabeth Eggleston, and Colin Campbell, a practising barrister in Oakleigh. After Labor won the Federal election in 1972, government-sponsored services began. It was then that Ron Castan, among others, began a remarkable career of legal engagement on the Aboriginal behalf. Several lawyers, including the late Peter Tobin and later Phillip Segal, were involved in the early years of legal aid, with Segal serving for at least two decades in western NSW. But there is simply no evidence to claim a ‘tradition’ and a ‘continuity’ of Jewish engagement, and certainly none at the Jewish institutional level.

The academics

In 1964, the federal government established the AIAS, a statutory body of 100 academics charged with ‘recording the disappearing aspects of Aboriginal life before it is too late’. Of the original founding and specially appointed members, only Ruth Fink and I were Jews.

In 1966, the North Australian Workers Union (NAWU) sought to have Aborigines included in the Northern Territory (Cattle Station) Award, an agreement which left all Territory Aborigines working for about one-tenth of a white pastoral worker’s wage.

30. The original Aboriginal Treaty Committee comprised Dr HC ‘Nugget’ Coombs, Dymphna Clark, Judith Wright McKinney, Professor CD Rowley, Eva Hancock, Professor WEH Stanner, Hugh Littlewood and Stewart Harris.
Following intensive fieldwork, (the late) Fred Gruen — a Dunera boy — and I supplied research information to the NAWU on cattle station awards and conditions.  

Anthropologists Andrée Rosenfeld, John Bern, Ruth Fink, and David Trigger have long been associated with Aboriginal work, as ‘reconstructionists’ and (most of them) as activists assisting in mapping for land claims. Warren Shapiro, Fred Myers, and Faye Ginsberg, all American, have done notable work here as anthropologists. Peter Ucko and Carmel (White) Schrire (a former South African) are noted prehistorians; and Ucko, a London Jew, took AIATSIS by the scruff of its conservative neck when, as principal in the 1970s and 1980s, he turned that body’s attention fully to contemporary health, education, social history, and uranium issues. Among the social psychologists, Ron Taft co-authored a book on race attitudes in the 1970s. The historian-archivist, Peter Biskup, published an important work in 1973, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens*. Medical scholars have been surprisingly few, with Max Kamien’s work on *The Dark People of Bourke* the one significant analysis. Social scientist Andrew Markus has, since 1990, written works on Australian race relations, the 1967 referendum, and on the struggle for Aboriginal rights. Historian Paul Bartrop has incorporated Aboriginal issues in his eclectic work. Anthropologist Jon Altman (Israeli born, New Zealand educated) has made Aborigines in the economy his special field. Linda Briskman has recently published *The Black Grapevine*, a significant contribution from a social work specialist to the literature on the Stolen Generations.

The business community
Jews have been essentially metropolitan people. There was some rural experience when World War II refugees were allowed into Australia on condition that they resided in rural towns for a period. In the northern tablelands of NSW, a few properties were owned or leased by Jews and there are several Aboriginal Cohens in the north, with such ‘Christian’ names as Esther and Jacob, doubtless a legacy of the tradition by which menial Aboriginal staff were ‘given’ the owner’s or the property’s name.

The urban relationship has been as rare, with many, if not most, Jews never meeting, let alone employing, Aborigines. There has never been occasion for economic or labour competition, as in the United States, and there has been no significant Aboriginal tenancy of Jewish-owned apartments.

Jewish philanthropy has only rarely (and only recently) stretched to Aboriginal enterprises or institutions. The Rona Tranby Project, an important and recent gift, assists in the recording of Aboriginal oral history.

The writers and artists
I dwell a little on a few Jewish writers and painters because they both capture and convey images and emotions better than most.

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In 1921, Peretz Hirschbein, the famed Yiddish novelist and dramatist, visited Sydney and Melbourne. He was stunned by the White Australia outlook, the brutality of attitudes to Aborigines and their landlessness, and by the trauma and sadness in those Aborigines he met. Certainly, he wrote, this land would have had more appeal for him 'if the 60,000 native born children of the land would have had their place, as was their right'. From what he'd been told, 'in no other young country have the indigenous people been so brutally treated by whites'.

38
Another Jewish–Aboriginal connection dates back to the noted English writer on London Jewry, Israel Zangwill, who broke with Zionism in the 1920s and founded the Jewish Territorial Organisation — to create a Jewish homeland, wherever possible, outside of Palestine (a place deemed too difficult and too bitter to contemplate). In the 1930s, the Melbourne philanthropist Isaac Jacobs espoused Zangwill’s Territorial cause, seeking approval for a kibbutz of 800 German and Austrian Jewish refugees in South Australia, an idea supported by the state premier but vetoed by the Federal government. However, there was no consultation with, or discussion about, Aborigines.

The London-based Freeland League, established in 1935, wanted to buy 7 million acres in the East Kimberleys, to support at least 50,000 Jews. Dr Itzhak Nahman Steinberg — the first People’s Commissar for Justice after the Russian Revolution, but soon after a refugee from Lenin — arrived in Australia in 1936 to pursue this dream. The Kimberley scheme was well supported by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the NSW Labour Council, and the Perth unions. Churches offered support, as did the Western Australian premier. The Canberra Times, the Age, and the Sydney Morning Herald opposed what the Australian Worker supported, namely, ‘a generous working class contribution toward the solution of the terrible refugee problem’, a ‘haven for the victims of fascist ferocity’. Again, there was no concern for the lands occupied by Aborigines or for Aboriginal viewpoints — only the usual stereotyping and their diminution as people.

In 1933, another Jew arrived to promote a Jewish resettlement scheme in the Northern Territory. Melekh Ravich, renowned Yiddish poet, writer, and critic, was the father of the artist Yosl Bergner. In 1937, JNL Kadimah published Melekh’s essay ‘Northern Territory Journey, 1933’. The blacks in Australia cannot be regarded as the owners of the land’, he wrote, because ‘they belong to the very lowest level of civilization.’ Amid much talk of wild, unmusical, frightening, opium-loving, and prostituting people, their future lay in being allotted ‘several thousand square miles of land’ where they could be taught ‘to plough and sow, and thus the Aboriginal issue would be solved’. However, in Arnold Zable’s account of Ravich, he shows the poet’s compassion and liking for the Aborigines he worked and rode with in the Territory.

Melekh’s younger brother, Herz Bergner, wrote several novels, including Light and Shadow, in which we see some empathy for the outcast Aborigines. Yosl Bergner, born in Vienna but raised in Warsaw, came to Melbourne as a 17-year-old in 1937. Melekh had earlier brought photos of Aborigines from his Territory visit. To Yosl, ‘they looked exactly like Jews, dispossessed people’. Yosl lived and worked in Melbourne, in textiles, at the markets, and in that Melbourne Depression he ‘saw Warsaw with its poverty’. He befriended Judah Waten, the novelist and short story writer who had come to Perth from Odessa in 1914. ‘Everything I paint’, said Yosl, ‘has an element of displacement.’ Yosl and his artistic colleagues were intent not only on social realism but with a concern for social injustice, with a fight for liberty and life against tyranny.
and reaction'. And so he painted Aboriginal scenes against a background 'with what I imagined was happening in Poland'. His canvases carried titles such as 'Village on Fire', 'Looking Over the Ghetto Wall', 'Fathers and Sons', the latter a portrait of depressed loneliness, of the Jewish/Aboriginal father who cannot protect his sons.

Yosl joined the Australian Labour Company because, being an alien, he was ineligible for the regular army. He was stationed at Tocumwal, on the New South Wales–Victoria border of the River Murray. There he painted 'Tocumwal Camp', and later, at the significant Anti-Fascist Art Exhibition in Melbourne in 1942, he presented poignant and powerful works titled 'Aboriginal Man' and 'Two Women'. A later painting, 'Prisoners' created a stir: it showed Aboriginal station workers, striking for higher wages, chained to a tree. It was based on a photograph he had seen of a Western Australian arrest (doubtless a reference to police harassment of the Pindan Group, referred to earlier). Another powerful image was 'Aborigines are Coming to Town', town being Melbourne, a place decreed out of bounds to most rural black people at that time. 'Attitudes were very, very rough, unjust, you know', he said. At this point, he believed that he beheld two people of two very different cultures now unified; he kept comparing Polish ghetto Jews to the Aborigines he was seeing in country Victoria and NSW.

Apart from the federal politicians and city editors, there was one vociferous Australian critic of the Kimberley/Northern Territory proposal — AP Elkin, professor of anthropology at Sydney University and, in that era, the only torch-bearer (with his bête noire, Professor Donald Thomson) for the Aboriginal cause. Despite, or in spite of, a Jewish paternal grandfather, Rabbi Moses Elkin, grandson Adolphus was an austere, severe, imperious, ordained Anglican. He objected strongly to this Jewish presence (much more so than to any other 'white' presence), fearing its impact on Kimberley Aboriginal life and culture. Curtin's Labor government vetoed the Jewish Kimberley scheme in 1944.

Judah Waten, the indomitable communist, was a poet, novelist, and short-story writer. His story collection, Alien Son, has become a classic in Australian literature. Waten influenced Bergner on many issues, possibly on Aboriginal matters, but his stories are essentially the experiences of Jewish migrant families in Australia. 'Black Girl' tells of Lily Samuels (the choice of surname was no doubt deliberate) who lived in 'a derelict place because they were unable to find accommodation in any other part of the city and because they were aborigines'. It is a poignant and compelling story of black–white relationships, and of white sexual attitudes to 'girls of colour'.

Born in Hungary in 1915, David Martin was a successful and admired poet and novelist who came to Australia as an adult in 1949. For a while he lived in a bush town where his wife was the schoolteacher. His children's novel, Hughie, told the story of an Aboriginal boy in such a place. I have found only one poem by Martin on an Aboriginal theme, 'Mission Station, North Queensland', written between 1953 and 1955. It captures the appalling attitudes and conditions prevailing then:

Yes, they mean well. They love the Simple Black.
(I love my cat, that wayward little creature!)

44. Waten 1952.
45. Martin, no date.
With humble pride they point to every feature:
Drainage is good. We're pulling down the shack.
We've stamped out hook-worm, promiscuity,
And would do more, but ... such a shiftless pack.

But that was all. In the field of Australian literature, one looks for Jewish writers on Aboriginal themes: but none leap, let alone peep, out of several anthologies. In editing *Shalom*, Nancy Keesing pointed out 'that there are not, and never have been, many Australian Jewish writers of fiction'. Where Jews and Aborigines do interact in a compelling way is in the works of two non-Jewish writers, Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) and Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975), a subject dealt with at some length by Healy (1989).

Fay Zwicky, noted poet, teacher, and critic, comes closest to explaining the silence of the Australian-born Jewish writer. She talks of 'democratic repression', the bland Anglo-Saxon context, 'the babble of speech masking a dumb void', 'a landscape without a human being in it'. It was reading the confident, assertive Jewish-American novelists like Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, and Phillip Roth, that helped her articulate an awareness of self and helped her overcome uncertainty about her own Jewish identity and its meanings. 'To have compulsions in the Anglo-Saxon world ... is to be marked out as a freak, an alien and unwanted voice'. It was the 'probing Quixotic honesty' of the American Jewish writer that enabled her to find her own voice 'and the courage to speak'.

Of the 80 authors presented in three Australian-Jewish writer anthologies, only Andrea Goldsmith addresses Aborigines in general and my questions in particular. This fifth-generation Australian describes her search not so much for identity as for certainty. In this journey, she finds Jewishness in books and in texts rather than in people or prayer: 'My Jewishness I have found in books, my Australian-ness, when it existed at all, was little more than a whiff of eucalyptus.' But she seems never to have been moved by the daily doses of Aboriginal highs and lows in the major newspapers, on radio or television, by the often appalling events in local Fitzroy, Framlingham, or Lake Tyers. Only when she visited Uluru, Kata Tjuta, and Kings Canyon in the Northern Territory — the great symbols of traditional Aborigines — was she able to ask the key question:

I've never before felt my white Australianness so strenuously and I've never wanted it less. Why, I wonder, when I have identified so closely with other outsiders, have I not with Aboriginal Australians?

Goldsmith doesn't answer her question, but at least she wonders.

Since 1988, Arnold Zable has been engaged in matters Aboriginal, writing in newspapers and in his short stories, at times reflecting on the parallel voyages of Jews and Aborigines in search of memory and place. He has assisted the Wurundjeri people

49. The Hammer 1988 book (*Pomegranates*) has inflated the number of writers by collecting just about anything and everything written by Jews, even by non-Jews on Jewish themes. The Keesing 1978 and Jacobs 1999 books at least present accomplished and recognised authors.
of Victoria in recording their history, and produced a CD-ROM, with Wurundjeri elders, detailing a history of Melbourne’s Aboriginal peoples. His elder brother, Benny, has been active as friend and artist in Aboriginal communities for many years. The Zables come from the same Polish, socialist, radical, Yiddish-speaking line as the Bergners and Ravich, with a world outlook very different from that of the assimilationist German and Anglo-Jews in Australia.

The dearth and the disappointment

Since the Jewish record is, indeed, thin — and let me say, in conclusion, that it verges on the anorexic — there must be some explanation, particularly when the Australian record is compared with Jewish participation abroad.

One can speculate on the reasons. First, Jewish settlement from 1788 never impinged on, nor was juxtaposed physically with, Aborigines. In both America and South Africa, Jews and blacks have always been interwoven and interconnected, while most Australian Jews have been able to live a lifetime without encountering an Aborigine or Islander in the flesh.

Second, many Jewish communities need to be ‘expedient’, to ascertain just what is or isn’t good for Jews and to act accordingly. Their very marginality, which makes for this kind of protective behaviour, in turn makes for an empathy with other marginalised peoples, as shown in some strong Jewish activism in the United States and South Africa. The record of ‘official’ Australian Jewry, apart from a very small group of diverse individuals, shows a sustained expedience, a reluctance to get involved in contentious issues generally, let alone those affecting other marginalised peoples. The question is whether Australian Jewry needed to be as expedient as the South Africans.

Third, the Jewish struggle for recognition of religion, which came readily enough, was not comparable to the black experience of seeking ‘human-ness’ and freedom from physical fear.

Fourth, there was never any labour or occupational conflict, let alone business competition.

Fifth, pre-war Australians had no demonstrable interest in anything Aboriginal. Dying out, or extreme segregation, or social and economic assimilation for ‘half-castes’ in urban areas was their destiny. Apart from a handful of bureaucratic eugenicists, a squadron of remote missionaries, three or four anthropologists, perhaps two journalists, one or two literary voices, and a small clutch of painters, no one expressed any interest in Aborigines, and certainly not in Islanders.

Compared with the United States and South Africa, no raging social or political dynamic cried out for change. There were no observable strikes on cattle or sheep properties. (There were, but since these disruptions didn’t take the traditional form of strike, with slogans and placards, no one recognised them for what they were.) No unions, militant or otherwise, worked on behalf of Aborigines. To the contrary, the unions opposed Aboriginal economic or wage progress at every turn. The left wing of politics,

socialist or communist, was virtually mute on Aborigines. Why, then, should Jews have been visible, active or audible?

Sixth, it has been suggested that perhaps Jews relate only to minorities who share an experiential struggle for civil rights, as with black South Africans and Americans, and that Jews somehow have not related, or do not, relate to hunter-gatherer societies. There is, indeed, a veritable galaxy of Jewish anthropologists concerned in, and with, San Bushmen, Canadian and American First Nations people, and the Inuit.52 These scholars have had to battle more than vicious Jim Crow laws in American and South African legislatures. They have struggled in the more difficult ideological ring, fighting against the 'scientific racists' who constantly seek out the ineradicable racial gene that justifies the hierarchy of the races, the superior 'white race', the corrupting 'Jewish race', the inferior 'black race', the 'primitive aboriginal races'.

Finally, Jews in Australian academe are no longer a rare species, but they were thin on the ground in the first three decades after World War II. Those in university life tend to be in the professional fields of law, medicine, engineering, and architecture. Those few Jews who have entered the arts and social sciences and who have had 'compulsions' (as Zwicky calls them), who have cared, or cared enough, to work in what 'tradition' calls 'the struggle', are few in number.

So much for possible explanation. But reality is the issue. In the 1950s, the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism passed supportive resolutions, as did the Jewish Democratic Society and the Sydney Jewish Left in the 1980s. My contention about dearth rests on the absence of **any sustained engagement and action**, not on the presence of resolutions, of gestures or symbols of support, however well meant. To my knowledge, these organisations did not provide money or manpower.53

Changes have occurred on many fronts these past two decades and more Jewish interest has surfaced. Some of it is in the form of anti-racism programs, such as those established by the Albert Dreyfus unit of B'nai B'rith, the Anti-Defamation Commission of B'nai B'rith, and the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne. Well-intentioned, they have yet to be tried, tested, evaluated.54 Much of present community action remains at the level of 'multicultural' events, somewhat shy and hesitant 'matzo ball—bush tucker' lunch meetings of the cultures. In 1994, an important article appeared in the now defunct quarterly journal, *Australian Jewish Democrat* — Peter Wertheim's 'A Jew-

52. One can begin with the illustrious German, Franz Boas, the legendary Belgian, Claude Levi-Strauss, and continue with Sol Tax, Max Gluckman, Meyer Fortes, through to Richard Lee, Harvey Feit, Michael Asch, Phillip Tobias, among many others, and end with the incomparable Hugh Brody.

53. In all my years of intimate contact with the AAL and FCAATSI, from 1961 until 1971, I saw no visible sign of support from Jewish organisations, official or Left-inclined. Faith Bandler has several tales to tell about the absence of Jewish support.

54. In the mid-1970s I conducted 'race relations' education programs in the Bachelor of Education curriculum at the Armidale Teachers College and the University of New England. After some five years of trials, using, in the main, prominent Aboriginal intellectuals and artists as educators, and two years' full-time evaluation of their effectiveness, the net result was that the 'good attitudes' developed in the program soon enough 'switched' when teachers were pitched into actual teaching situations in outback towns. The town's culture overwhelmed them. Nothing has changed in 30 years, and I remain sceptical of such efforts.
ish perspective on social justice — in which he argued the case for Jewish advocacy on Aboriginal issues. Several symposia have been organised by Jews anxious to know ‘what can we do?’ and ‘how can we contribute?’ At an evening of this kind in Sydney in 2003, Pat O’Shane told the large Jewish audience to hang its head in shame at its record of support for Aborigines.

A few Aboriginal scholars have shown an interest in Jewish life and history, one or two in a hostile way, seeing the Palestinian plight as their more appropriate metaphor. The alleged similarities and empathic aspects of Jewish–Aboriginal religio-history have not attracted scholars from either side.

Most of the many Jewish audiences I address still react in the manner of non-Jewish audiences. They are usually hostile as they question expenditure on Aborigines, when they disparage all land rights claims, when they blame Aborigines alone for all the physical, social, health, and economic ills that beset them. I always hope that Jews will have moral insight and outlook; the fact that they don’t continues to disappoint.

Unlike the United States and South Africa, there is, as yet, no Islamic movement that has attracted diverse Aboriginal communities. There is no vicious anti-Israel and anti-Jewish rhetoric, let alone physical abuse of Jews or their property. Unlike the black peoples of the United States and South Africa, there is no obvious reason for Aborigines to have any hostility towards a people they almost never meet, nor work with, nor visit socially, nor play games with, nor borrow money from, nor whose apartments they rent. Aborigines have rarely been subjected to the centuries-long tradition of Christian antisemitism and have no millennium-long baggage of contempt for Jews. In turn, one has to say that Aboriginal communities and organisations have not targeted Jewish institutions or philanthropists for support.

Some Jews, sometimes many Jews, have opposed racial injustice in the United States and South Africa. Some have raged against it, fought it, gone to jail for it, even died for it. They have been both revered and excoriated by fellow Jews for their value stance. What little passion or commitment there has been in Aboriginal affairs has come largely from those born outside Australia, from those like Yosl Bergner, who were sensitised to insight by the experiences of their own immediate environs at their point of emigration. When Bergner saw Fitzroy and Tocumwal, he saw Warsaw.

In the end, one has to be both disappointed and perhaps uncomplimentary. Unlike South Africa and the United States, there has been no violent race politics in Australia. Activists and supporters have had no need to fear a Mayor Daley in Chicago or a terroristic secret police force in Pretoria. There was never a life and death struggle, a life and detention struggle, as with Ruth First and her 117 days in solitary confinement, her death by postal bomb. In a climate of peaceful politics, and for the most, in a climate of polite politics, there could, and should, have been more interest and more activism by Australian Jews, not less.

Acknowledgements
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Patrick Bernard O'Leary and the Forrest River massacres, Western Australia: examining ‘Wodgil’ and the significance of 8 June 1926

Kate Auty

Lynch mobs rather pointedly do not keep accounts: in a sense, they seek to negate history itself.¹

In June 1926 in the river, plain and ravine country of the Forrest River district of the Kimberley, Western Australia, some carvings on the limbs or trunks of two trees of indeterminate genus and age formed one of the impermanent residues of a police patrol’s actions at police camp No 2. The 1927 Royal Commission of inquiry into alleged killing and burning of bodies of Aborigines in East Kimberley, and into Police methods when effecting arrests was established to inquire into what had occurred throughout that patrol.² In the current ‘history wars’, controversy is overtaking the Report of the Royal Commission.³

The 1927 Wood Royal Commission heard evidence from, amongst others, Reverend Gribble, the man who ventilated the rumours about the deaths; Inspector Mitchell, the Aborigines Inspector who travelled some of the route of the police patrol; Police Inspector Douglas, the officer in charge of the investigation; Detective Manning, who assisted Douglas; non-Aboriginal members of the police patrol; and two Aboriginal people who travelled with the police. The members of the police patrol were Constables Regan and St Jack, soldier settler station owner Leopold Overheu, local civilians Patrick Bernard O’Leary and Richard Jolly, and visiting veterinarian Daniel Murnane. Each gave evidence. Nairn, the legal representative of the police party, called some other witnesses. Three of the Aboriginal trackers who travelled with the police party, and who had made statements which contradicted the police versions of events, failed to attend the Commission. These witnesses had been held at the Wyndham police

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¹ Dray 2002: viii.
² Wood 1927. I refer to questions in Wood’s Royal Commission into the alleged killing and burning of Aborigines in the East Kimberley in 1926 (Western Australian Parliamentary Papers 1927, no 3) as ‘RC 1927 q xxx’ throughout this text; references to page numbers appear as ‘RC 1927 p xxx’.
station until just days before the Commission arrived. They escaped, and Constable St Jack conducted the unsuccessful search for them. The trackers' statements were put into evidence but, because of their absence, the witnesses were not cross-examined. The Royal Commissioner, Wood, did not have legal counsel to assist him. Inspector Douglas acted as counsel for the police force, Mitchell for the Department of Native Affairs, and Gribble for the Australian Board of Missions.

Published histories of the activities of the police party and of the Royal Commission have argued that a number of Aboriginal people were killed by the police and civilians, and their bodies burnt beyond recognition. The more recent revisionist history, principally advanced by Rod Moran, contests this conclusion. He argues that the primary protagonist of the atrocity narrative, the Reverend Gribble, was unhinged and that he 'fabricated', and then ventilated nationally, the allegations against the police party. It is suggested by Moran that Gribble did this to avoid exposure of his alleged profligacy with Aboriginal women by St Jack who was aware of his conduct. The work of Halse discloses some of the history to which Moran refers, but it remains unexplained why St Jack failed to make these allegations in the Royal Commission or in the subsequent committal hearing. These allegations were in fact never put to Gribble in cross-examination, it only ever being suggested that Gribble was reputed to encourage cattle killing. No witnesses were called to support these allegations although Nairn could have done so, as he did in respect of other matters. In essence the revisionist history of the Forrest River allegations centres on discrediting Gribble and debunking the other evidence.

Some facts are agreed. In May 1926 Constable St Jack of the Wyndham police assisted Overheu, soldier settler of Nulla Nulla station, to disperse a gathering of Aboriginal people at a place called Durragee Hill south of Nulla Nulla. St Jack and Overheu subsequently found the speared body of Hay, Overheu's soldier settler partner, when they came in to the station after the raid. Overheu called for a police patrol to deal 'drastically' with Aboriginal people. In early June 1926 a police party comprising St Jack, Regan, Murmane, Jolly (a wharf labourer), and soldier settlers Overheu and O'Leary, who had an interest in Galway Valley Station, together with seven Aboriginal people (Sulieman, Joe, Jim, Frank, Charley, Tommy and Lyddie) conducted the first part of the police patrol which sought out Hay's killers. The party was armed and provisioned with 500-600 rounds of ammunition and 42 horses and mules. It was alleged by Gribble that, in this first part of the patrol, a number of Aboriginal people were killed and their bodies burnt at GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie, and in a ravine west of Mowerie. This is disputed by the revisionists.

5. Moran 1999 (throughout the text).
6. RC 1927 q 268–269.
7. RC 1927 q 2463–2464.
9. RC 1927 q 1838.
10. The second part of the patrol to a place called Dala, north of the Forrest River Mission, continued in July 1926. That part of the patrol involved only St Jack and Regan and fewer 'trackers,' and did succeed in arresting the wanted man, Lumbia. I do not discuss this section of the patrol here.
A map of the area under investigation was provided to the Commission. A reconstruction of the Commission’s map is produced below. Some dispute has now arisen about its accuracy.\(^{11}\) This exhibit may well have been the ‘sketch’ produced to Constable Regan on two occasions during his evidence.\(^{12}\) On neither occasion did he dispute its contents. Counsel for the police, Nairn, did not explicitly dispute the map\(^{13}\) until the Commission was in its final days in Perth, a considerable geographical and chronological distance away.\(^{14}\)

Exhibits comprising bone fragments, charred teeth and buttons were collected along the route of the police party, and submitted for testing. Only from the items collected at Mowerie, where three women were reputed to have been chained to a tree, killed and burnt, and where three discrete piles of ash and groups of teeth were found, did this testing confirm human remains. Of the 22 teeth found there, the government pathologist observed, ‘I am of the opinion that the teeth are human’.\(^{15}\)

The Wodgil trees

Some of the police camps were marked. Only camp No 2, also known as Youngada and Wodgil, will be discussed in this paper. Wodgil was an important stop in the patrol’s progress as this was the camp from which it is alleged four Aboriginal men and three women were said to have been led away to their deaths at GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie. Wodgil was some six or seven miles from GoteGoteMerrie.\(^{16}\) My interest is in a number of carvings on the trees at Wodgil and the explanations which were advanced as to their meanings and origins. The carvings are, in my view, a code for something, for which the hitherto accepted explanation is inadequate.

In examining the carvings on the Wodgil trees I rely upon the scant testimony of those who recorded their observations. There was no photograph taken and no diagram made. The chief investigator, Douglas, later to become Western Australian Police Commissioner, provided no diagram. Douglas’s role in the investigation should be carefully examined, given his use of amateurs to examine sites and his subsequent criticism of their efforts (see below); his failure to take into evidence, as an exhibit, a bullet found by his subordinates at another site;\(^ {17}\) and his failure to relinquish for prompt examination hair samples found on a stone near one of the improvised ovens\(^ {18}\) when he must have understood the importance of continuity of exhibits and of forensic evidence generally in such a case. The Western Australian police force had just been through a not dissimilar, most painstaking investigation involving tracking, missing (non-Aboriginal) persons, and burnt remains in Kalgoorlie.\(^ {19}\) Detective Manning, Douglas’ second in charge, was one of the primary investigators in both cases.

\(^{11}\) Moran 1999.
\(^{12}\) RC 1927 q 673, q 687.
\(^{13}\) RC 1927 q 385.
\(^{14}\) RC 1927 q 2584.
\(^{15}\) RC 1927 pp 15–16.
\(^{16}\) RC 1927 q 1341–1528, see map.
\(^{17}\) See RC 1927 pp 20, 48, 53, 56, Buckland and Donegan’s testimony.
\(^{18}\) RC 1927 q 1266–1268, from September 1926 to March 1927.
\(^{19}\) Purdue 2001.
What was the testimony about the carvings on the trees at camp No 2? One tree was scored with 'Wodgil, 8-6-26, and a broad arrow with “P” on the lower part'. Also carved into that tree were 'No 2' and a star. It was above the star that four bullet-holed cartridge box lids were tacked with horseshoe nails. Douglas described carvings, but thought, contrary to Gribble, that it was 'very unusual' for the police to 'brand their camps' with the police broad arrow. He formed this view even though police camp No 3 also had a tree carved with the police broad arrow and the date, 10-6-26, which was never disputed by the police party.

The second scar tree at Wodgil was marked with 'a circle with the letter “L” in it’. Mitchell saw, cited and ordered those letters consecutively as ‘O. [and then] L.’

21. RC 1927 q 158, Gribble's evidence, my italics.
22. RC 1927 q 449 and RC 1927 p 67 citing his own (Douglas's) report about the site.
23. RC 1927 q 312.
25. RC 1927 q 158, Gribble's evidence.
after which he 'added [his] initials'. This evidence more than any other configured these letters as initials in that order. It was not unusual for bushmen to mark trees with their initials.

Other observations included 'signs' and tracks. Mitchell thought the Wodgil trees showed 'signs of natives having been tied up', but he saw 'absolutely no sign of suspicious circumstances'. Douglas concurred. It was missionary Gribble and Aboriginal Pastor James Noble who connected, by tracks, Wodgil to GoteGoteMerrie where they found evidence of fire and an oven (see below). The tracking was always going to be problematic. This was due to many factors which included delays in undertaking the tracking; conflicts in the Aboriginal testimony about it; contemporary views about its reliability or lack of it; and the manner in which the skill of the Aboriginal tracker might be managed in the field, and later as testimony. Moran rejects its veracity. Douglas initially appeared to accept the tracking when investigating the route with Sulieman, one of the subsequently missing witnesses. The Commissioner accepted both the statement of Sulieman and the tracking evidence of Noble, whom he described as a man of 'great acumen and ability'. In doing so, he implicitly rejected Douglas' assertion that the tracking was illusory. It was at GoteGoteMerrie that an 'improvised oven' was located at which it was alleged four men's bodies were burnt. Mitchell not only saw the improvised oven but also evidence of an 'intense fire' and a heat-split rock. The Commissioner initially intended site visits if conditions were 'favourable', stating he would visit GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie. Eventually Wood visited only one site, that of Dala, which caused him to hotly confront Sergeant Buckland about his evidence of its physical characteristics. About GoteGoteMerrie the Commissioner concluded the following:

27. Eg Makin 1972: 103; Taylor 2002: 249; Stuart 1923: 64.
28. RC 1927 q 355.
31. RC 1927 p ix.
32. RC 1927 p 11, Gribble’s evidence (throughout). Such references to burning Aboriginal people was not new, nor is it isolated to Western Australia (see Millis 1990, on the Myall creek murders, and Schultz and Lewis 1995: 49 on Humbolt River). At the Roth Royal Commission (1905, Western Australia) Boondungarry, an Aboriginal prisoner at the Wyndham Gaol, gave evidence that Jack Inglis and police constable Wilson caught him for alleged cattle killing and 'they said they would shoot me. Inglis put a cartridge into his rifle, poked it at me, and said and said he would burn me at a rock. It frightened me and I then said I did kill a bullock'. Another prisoner giving evidence at the Wyndham Gaol also stated that Inglis told a man called Larry, 'Now you tell the truth. If you don't I will burn you in the fire' (Roth 1905). Chris Owen (2003) describes at least two occasions when East Kimberley settlers resorted to burning Aboriginal bodies (no matter how amateurish or cavalier about being exposed). As a means of destroying evidence this method featured in the Western Australia gold inspectors murder case in Kalgoorlie in early 1926 (Purdue 2001) and again in the Snowy Rowles murder case in the early 1930s (Walker 1993). Burning corpses to destroy evidence was a feature of Arthur Upfield’s Western Australian detective story The sands of Windee. Fire is a heavily symbolic attribute of many lynchings (Dray 2002: 79, 93, 94, 181).
33. RC 1927 q 358.
34. RC 1927 q 1238. There the Commission expressed that intention on 11 March 1927.
35. RC 1927 q 1907. There the Commissioner expressed that intention on 22 March 1927.
Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of the trees.

(1) A small tree to which prisoners had apparently been chained; (2) Near the tree a ledge of rock darkly stained and showing signs that efforts had been made to clean up the declivity; (3) Stones removed and edges of rock chipped; (4) Forty feet from the tree in the bed of the river a large hole, described as an improvised oven, where a fire had been made and flat stones had been used to keep in the heat; (5) A large flat stone placed over the hole and a log on top of the stone; (6) In the ashes of the fire fragments of bone; (7) In a shallow pool nearby, pieces of skull and other bones.36

Wodgil camp site is an important part of the narrative because of its centrality to the police operations. Its emblems are important for what they might invoke about this centrality. Perhaps these carvings looked a little like the representation in Figure 2.

I have always been struck by the oddness of the word Wodgil and I have previously considered and engaged in conjecture about its meaning in isolation from the other carvings.37 I wondered whether Wodgil might be connected with the word Waugul, meaning Rainbow Serpent, used to represent Dreamings or the demise of Aboriginal people. Moran, obtaining a copy of my unpublished letter and quoting its contents out of context, has made a number of observations about my early conjecture. Most significantly for this essay, however, he described the carving Wodgil as a 'minor aspect of police camp No. 2'.38 I do not agree with him about this and, locating the

36. RC 1927 p vi, reflecting the evidence of Gribble, Mitchell and Noble who also acted as tracker.
word Wodgil with the other carvings at police camp no 2, I think it can be demonstrated that Moran is wrong about its insignificance.

First it is necessary to look at what is said about Wodgil. Aborigines' Inspector Mitchell stated in evidence to the Royal Commission:

I took particular notice of the name Wodgil because it was a strange name to find there and I wondered how it got there. I asked the natives if the name had any local significance but they did not know the name. It is a southern name.\(^\text{39}\)

Mitchell never elaborated upon this evidence. He seemed surprised that word was on that tree in that place. Moran suggests that Mitchell 'guessed'\(^\text{40}\) it was a southern word 'because the local Aborigines did not know what it meant', but Mitchell simply said, Wodgil 'is a southern name'. Mitchell did not guess, he stated it unequivocally.

It was not until Patrick Bernard O'Leary, the penultimate witness from the police patrol, gave evidence\(^\text{41}\) that the carvings were claimed and an explanation provided. Of the police patrol only Murnane gave evidence after O'Leary.\(^\text{42}\) O'Leary swore:

One of the party made a damper that was a bit doughy. In the bush I make a sort of damper called Wodgil. I made one and I do not think the others had seen that kind before. A Wodgil is a little star — all points. I thought it would be a good name for the camp.\(^\text{43}\)

He also swore he carved the wrong date on the tree at Wodgil. Acting as legal counsel for the Aborigines Department, Mitchell asked no questions of O'Leary about these matters.

In 1994 I thought it important to note that police patrol members St Jack and Overheu both denied knowing this name for police camp No 2, and they did so in exactly the same words, swearing 'I do not know the name of it'.\(^\text{44}\) It is a little matter, but is it minor?

Contrasting the evidence of these three now, the denials of St Jack and Overheu are less arresting than O'Leary's unselfconscious inclusiveness. He incorporated the 'others' through an unspoken discussion about naming a damper, and hence a campsite. 'One' of the party, not O'Leary, made the unsuccessful doughy damper. The 'others' had not seen one like it before. O'Leary explained Wodgil, but in doing so, he made any explanation of the camp site both shallower and denser and more and less incomprehensible. This was a small group of white men — six in all. They were camped in close proximity to each other, no doubt maintaining some distance from the Aboriginal trackers. These men ate and slept together, shod horses, packed and unpacked horses, and distributed tasks. They were a unit. Who were O'Leary's 'others' and why did none of them recall how the camp was named?

\(^{38}\) Moran 1999.
\(^{39}\) RC 1927 q 355, my italics.
\(^{40}\) Moran 1999: 170 fn 4.
\(^{41}\) RC 1927 p 33.
\(^{42}\) RC 1927 p 58.
\(^{43}\) RC 1927 q 1139, my italics.
\(^{44}\) RC 1927 q 783, St Jack; RC 1927 q 919, Overheu.
EXAMINING 'WODGIL'

What else does the careful reader learn from O'Leary? In claiming 'the marks', he claimed all the marks. Why did he carve an 'all points' star and the word Wodgil when he said they meant the same thing? Why did he carve 8-6-26 there, when the party later repudiated it as the wrong date for making camp there? Why not ask someone about the date if he was uncertain, particularly when he was taking the trouble to carve it on a tree? St Jack said he was keeping a journal, Regan said he kept a record in the early stages of the patrol on discarded statement sheets. O'Leary gave two answers about getting dates wrong: 'the man in the bush often makes mistakes about the dates' and 'dealing with my mail I often make mistakes in the date'. Both answers suggest the absence of any other person to correct the error. An inquiry could have corrected the date carved. People in camp would surely notice. Such emblems as cultural icons are carved for the whole party, not just an individual. Ask yourself why O'Leary would claim to have carved the police emblems when there were two police in the camp? The letters 'O' and 'L' might be his heraldry; he claimed them, perhaps they were. O'Leary was asked a total of 53 questions. Even on this small number of questions and answers, the Commissioner formed the view that O'Leary 'obviously lied to the Commission'. Aboriginal trackers, some now absent, had stated that O'Leary was observed by a large fire at a site where Aboriginal people had been taken by members of the police patrol. His response to this blunt allegation was 'I deny everything'.

The meanings of these carvings were not minor. Wodgil was either a one-day camp or a significant base camp and focal point of the police patrol. It was either impossible to capture, footwalk, kill and burn people; or there was ample time. As the Commissioner observed, 'many things might happen in two days'. O'Leary's testimony that he carved the date and then his repudiation of it as correct is the lynchpin of the police version of events at this site.

In another seemingly minor matter, O'Leary's voluntary police statement, which he made without the assistance or interrogation of Douglas, contains a reference to Wodgil. The document is typed, amended in some places, and signed. He calls the camp Wodjil. He spells it with a j, not a g. Although other errors are corrected in this statement, this is not. In that same statement he wrote 'I do not remember any date'. The statement was not put to him when he gave evidence.

Historians will no doubt find other fine details in the passages of the Commission's Report and interpret them to mean various things. In the face of O'Leary's authorship of the scar trees at Wodgil, taking them as a bloc, or as a formulaic memorialisation, what might they mean? Such name and date carvings litter the
Australian landscape. They memorialise dead explorers, travellers killed by Aborigines, men who died of thirst, and lost children. On battlefields such emblems memorialise lost mates. They are the remnant of relationships. The cicatrised trees were for Hay — surely? Could these two scarred trees really signify a damper; an error; and police too timid or busy or uninterested to carve their own mark?

If the scar trees were a memorial, the question becomes, why the failure to own them? Absences in texts have been the subject of much recent scholarship, and it is suggested that absences can be ‘so stressed’ that the ‘intentionality and purpose’ of such absences is itself arresting. The very effort to hide or silence provides an interpretive space. Douglas and Nairn struggle with what to call the camp site, adopting an interchangeability of the names ‘No 2 camp’, ‘Youngada’, and ‘Wodgil’. What can be made of the evidence of the actual participants in the patrol?

Jolly, ‘labourer’, went first, giving evidence in Darwin. He conferred with Nairn after receiving a coded telegram from St Jack directing him to meet Nairn at the Koolinda. Jolly had left Wyndham four days after the patrol, later travelling to Darwin. He swore that he did not know the campsite was called Wodgil. He did not see anyone ‘mark’ the tree, although the ‘police may have done so’. He was, technically, not a member of the police. He shot some horses ‘that day’, at Wodgil, but no one asked him if he tacked any cartridge box lids to the tree with the nails. The word Youngada was unknown to him. Natives were not sighted at GoteGoteMerrie or Mowerk ‘if’ the police patrol passed those places, and he would ‘probably have forgotten them’ if he heard those names, or any other native names. Jolly collapsed Wodgil with other native names. In his testimony he did not separate the word from Aboriginal names or claim its non-Aboriginal authorship. No mention is made of O’Leary’s carvings, or an ‘all points’ damper, even though Jolly was at one time camp cook.

Back in Wyndham, Reverend Ernest Gribble, legal counsel for the Australian Board of Missions and the Forrest River Mission, gave evidence next. Letters, reports of rumoured shootings, and mission journal entries (his and others’) were cited.
GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie were recorded as atrocity sites on 30 June and 3 July 1926 and Ungulgie was recorded on 6 July, the last day of the police patrol. That was the day that Gribble, accompanying Regan, took Lumbia, the man who killed Hay, into Wyndham. On 7 July 1926 in Wyndham, O'Leary threatened Gribble, saying 'If I ever catch you on my tracks in any nigger business I will put a bullet in you'. No rumours about atrocities were yet circulating or officially reported. Gribble described the carvings on the two trees as Wodgil, 8-6-26, 'a circle with the letter 'L' init', P, the broad arrow, no 2, and another attempt at initials made with horseshoe nails. Much later he described the cartridge box lids. He sighted an 'oven' and bone fragments at GoteGoteMerrie and three piles of human teeth in the remains of a fire at the base of a tree at Mowerie. Mowerie was where three women were said to have been taken from Wodgil. O'Leary and St Jack were said to have tended a large fire at the place. Through Gribble, Nairn challenged the veracity of Aboriginal informants and trackers but he did not contest the carvings, the date gouged or, later, the cartridge lids. Douglas, investigator, primary witness, and now also counsel for the police department, disputed the names of those who were missing presumed dead. He used the names 'no 2 camp' and 'Youngada' for the Wodgil camp. When he asked Gribble: 'Suppose someone else had been camped there and had left cartridge box lids?' Gribble responded: 'I doubt whether anyone else would put up the broad police arrow'. Douglas moved on. After his first day's testimony Gribble was again threatened by O'Leary. No sanction was imposed. Gribble returned to the witness box the next day. Wodgil was not mentioned.

Mitchell was next. He heard rumours from natives about women being killed on 21 July. Gribble's reports came later, on 29 and 30 July. Thirteen days later (2 August 1926) Mitchell travelled to Youngada/Wodgil. There he noted the symbols Wodgil, 8-6-26, the police broad arrow and P on one tree, and 'O L' on another. In his report, which he later repudiated, Mitchell said he observed signs of 'natives' chained around one Wodgil tree. When Gribble reported rumours that women had been killed on 23 August, Mitchell submitted an official report. He advised Sergeant Buckland at Wyndham police station and returned to the mission. Buckland was later described as 'less than candid' and an 'unreliable and unsatisfactory witness'. An improvised oven at GoteGoteMerrie and evidence of a fire and charred teeth at Mowerie were outlined.

69. RC 1927 q 150.
70. RC 1927 q 155.
71. RC 1927 q 156.
72. RC 1927 q 157-158, 30 July and 6 August.
73. RC 1927 q 158, supporting journal entry 26/8/1926, evidence given on 1/3/27.
74. RC 1927 q 2338-2353.
75. RC 1927 pp 7-8.
77. RC 1927 q 305, 306-308.
78. RC 1927 q 312.
79. RC 1927 q 318.
80. RC 1927 q 321, 323, 2 March 1927.
81. RC 1927 q 355.
82. RC 1927 q 355 reported 18 August 1926.
83. RC 1927 q 357.
84. RC 1927 q 358.
in Mitchell’s report. His investigation caused him to conclude that three horses but no humans were tracked away from the Mowerie fire site, ‘to where we knew the police camp [Wodgil] had been’, but he could not swear the tracks took a direct route. He did not back track the country between the GoteGoteMerrie oven and Wodgil. Quizzed by Nairn about the accuracy of the tracking Mitchell denied having said that Aboriginal people had been taken from Wodgil to GoteGoteMerrie. Wodgil was now being used repeatedly in Nairn’s questions. His strategy was to continue critiquing the tracking, the age of the ‘tracks’, and the difficulty of the terrain. Mitchell was not asked a single question about the Wodgil trees.

Douglas was then called. Discussion of his sworn evidence should be understood in context. His field reports from September 1926 were highly critical of the police patrol. His subsequent evidence was markedly supportive of the patrol’s version of events. He had a history of investigating matters in the northwest. He had patrolled with Western Australian police sergeant Pilmer, famous for violence against Aboriginal people. Douglas’ first involvement with the patrol was when he spoke to Murnane, who left the patrol in mid-circuit (19 June 1926). Douglas discussed the patrol with Murnane and Buckland. After doing so, and with no clear indication that the patrol was now only looking for one man, Douglas directed the special constables be disbanded, leaving only St Jack, Regan, and their trackers to continue. Douglas nevertheless swore that he first heard of rumours about the conduct of the police patrol from Buckland on 23 August 1926. He got to Wyndham five days later, and on 28 August he went to GoteGoteMerrie with Gribble. The tracking was very imprecise. Where Mitchell spoke of an ‘oven’, Douglas found ‘indications of a fire’. He complained about site contamination. He found no evidence at GoteGoteMerrie of a police camp, or the

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85. RC 1927 p x. The features of Buckland’s evidence which were most unsatisfying were his false denial about finding a bullet in a tree at Dala (RC 1927 q 554, cf RC 1927 q 1743, and see Donegan’s evidence about q 1957–1959) and the repudiation of that place as a camp site (RC 1927 q 569, RC 1927 q 585–586) before the Commissioner’s visit. That visit made it plain that this site was a good camp site. Buckland and Constable Donegan, his subordinate, were both rejected as unsuitable to assist in the police inquiry in 1926 (RC 1927 q 2380). Buckland, an experienced police officer, gave as the explanation for failing to advise the Commission of locating a bullet in a tree at an alleged atrocity site (RC 1927 q 554) that it was noted in his report but was an ‘omission’ in his evidence and that it ‘was quite an oversight’ (RC 1927 q 1743). It should be noted that he only ‘confessed’ the evidence when he was recalled to explain not giving it earlier. It is odd also to think that, upon being presented with bone fragments from a creek bed at one of the alleged atrocity sites, he simply threw them on the bank and left them there (RC 1927 q 1611). Buckland is also cited in another collection of Aboriginal oral histories as having replaced Aboriginal bone fragments with kangaroo bones in a murder investigation which involved his Aboriginal brother-in-law who had allegedly killed another Aboriginal man (Shaw 1981).

86. RC 1927 q 358, 28 August 1926.
87. RC 1927 q 358.
88. RC 1927 q 358.
89. RC 1927 q 371.
90. RC 1927 q 390.
91. RC 1927 q 397, 404.
92. RC 1927 q 395, 403, 404.
93. RC 1927 q 386–387.
94. RC 1927 q 2614.
chaining or shooting of ‘natives’. Between GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie Douglas saw only one single woman’s track. At Mowerie there had been a fire, and there he found fragments of ‘what appeared to be charred bone [and] also what looked like teeth’. ‘Wodgil or Youngada’, where 42 horses and mules had been hobbled and grazed, was only ‘suggestive’ of a police camp, even though we know the police broad arrow was carved on a tree there. This he thought ‘unusual’. He failed to observe the circle and the letter L. The bullet-holed cartridge lids are not mentioned. He saw no signs of a chain around the tree at Wodgil. Douglas said ‘there was nothing more distinctive about Youngada than about the other [camps]’. He returned with Constable Donegan and tracker Sulieman on 5 September 1926. ‘Youngada’ was surrounded by horse tracks which went in ‘all directions’, north and ‘about south-west’. None followed a definite route from ‘Youngada’ to GoteGoteMerrie. Tracks quickly became ‘obliterated’, and those exiting Mowerie to the southwest did not proceed in the direction of ‘Youngada’. In a direction remarkable for its stupidity in a man of such experience, Douglas ‘suggested’ that Gribble ‘send his natives out’ to investigate Dala, the last police camp. Donegan, whose evidence the Commissioner found unsatisfactory, was asked no questions about this visit to Wodgil.

Douglas’ field reports were informed by Sulieman’s first-hand experience of the patrol. These field reports, together with the missing Aboriginal trackers’ statements, were exhibited much later and at a time when Douglas was unlikely to be recalled. In the reports he complained of local non-Aboriginal obstruction. He recorded sighting the residue of large fires at GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie where ‘human remain’ were burned. He reported being confident that the ‘whole’ of the police party were within a few miles of the fires. His actual evidence contradicted this simple report. In giving evidence Douglas adopted and adhered to the police version of two separate, split patrols for three days after the Wodgil camp. This was untested by any significant

96. RC 1927 q 506, q 530, Buckland’s evidence, 19 June 1926.
97. RC 1927 q 441.
98. RC 1927 q 441.
99. RC 1927 q 441.
100. RC 1927 q 442.
102. RC 1927 q 451.
103. RC 1927 q 451.
104. RC 1927 q 490.
105. RC 1927 q 490 11 September 1926.
106. RC 1927 q 453.
107. RC 1927 q 453, 455.
108. RC 1927 q 453, 455.
109. RC 1927 q 456.
110. RC 1927 q 457. The enthusiasm with which Douglas conducted this investigation is questionable. He did not visit Dala where only Regan and St Jack and trackers were later camped, even though rumours of atrocities were circulating and he was concerned about amateurs contaminating sites (RC 1927 q 460, 464 cf RC 1927 q 470). One reason he gave for not doing so was an appointment to take O’Leary’s statement. Douglas missed this appointment. He gave a second reason which was inconsistent with this, stating that ‘I had met with a slight accident to my foot — we decided we could not be running here, there, and everywhere on native rumours’ (RC 1927 q 470).
Douglas' field report recorded 'sixteen natives ... burned in three lots' along the route of the police patrol.\textsuperscript{116} He was confident that both St Jack and Overheu lied to him, 'denying' any knowledge of the Wodgil camp.\textsuperscript{117}

Douglas accepted Sulieman's version of events that Wodgil was a two day camp; that five males and four females were brought to Wodgil; and that four men and three women were taken to GoteGoteMerrie. On the way one man was shot by tracker Joe and his body burnt. Douglas also reported horse and mule tracks about half a mile from Wodgil leading directly to GoteGoteMerrie. Sulieman told him that St Jack and O'Leary stayed one night at GoteGoteMerrie and were next seen by a large fire at Mowerie. Sulieman told him the 'natives' were 'in the fire'. A tree at 'No 3' camp, proximate to Mowerie and the ravine where nine people perished, was similarly marked with an arrow (the police mark), No 3 and the date of 10-6-26. Sulieman told him that nine people were taken away by O'Leary, Regan and Murnane. Horse tracks were seen and followed in and out of a ravine west of Mowerie. There the remnant of a large fire was seen to which timber had been dragged, from 'all around'. The terms of reference of the Commission did not include this site, being 'west of Mowerie', not at Mowerie. These terms of reference were drafted by the Commissioner conferring with the Under Secretary of Law and the Commissioner of Police in December 1926 and January 1927, at a time when Douglas' report was available.\textsuperscript{118}

During the Commission hearings Gribble asked Douglas — 'Did you find any other place with indications similar to those found at GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie?' Douglas replied 'I found a fire some miles beyond Mowerie with some bones and seashell burnt',\textsuperscript{119} 'possibly 20 miles west to south-west from Mowerie'.\textsuperscript{120} Dimensions of the fire were not mentioned. A tense exchange followed and Douglas denied a

\textsuperscript{111} RC 1927 q 460. Douglas' evidence on this point is nonsensical. He was engaged in an investigation into the potential for murder charges against police. He was confronted with a story of killing and burning at Dala. He was shown some bone fragments. He told Gribble to send one of his 'boys' out but stated he gave no instructions to the 'boy'. He stated that he thought the scene would be 'left intact' 'so that we could view [the site] ourselves' (RC 1927 q 472). He did not think any bones would be brought in. No explanation was sought for why Douglas suggested sending an Aboriginal 'boy' out to do what was essentially a police investigator's job. It is curious that Douglas' suggestion or direction was not discussed with Detective Manning, who was with him at the time. Douglas' record-keeping in respect of forensic continuity gives an indication of the extent of the inadequacies of this investigation in that he could not be specific about the date he received the parcel of bones — it could have been 1 or 2 of November 1926 (RC 1927 q 460).

\textsuperscript{112} RC 1927 p xi.

\textsuperscript{113} Donegan initially advised the Commission that he would be unlikely to find the bullet retrieved from the tree at Dala. He was sent to find it and produced a bullet. There is absolutely no certainty of the forensic continuity of this evidence from collection at Dala to production at the Royal Commission (see RC 1927 pp 53 and 56).

\textsuperscript{114} RC 1927 p 67, Manning in Perth on 5 May 1927. Other important investigation records were not required at all. Manning, who visited none of the police camps, was excused from producing his notebooks or diaries even though he, together with Douglas, had taken statements from the significant Aboriginal witnesses. Presumably he had some input into who was interviewed and how these interviews were conducted.

\textsuperscript{115} RC 1927 q 451, 453.

\textsuperscript{116} RC 1927 p 67, 21 September 1926.

\textsuperscript{117} RC 1927 p 67, 23 September 1926.
conversation with Gribble in which it was put that he, Douglas, vacillated about the need for an inquiry. The Commissioner queried relevance and the ravine west of Mowerie was not mentioned again. He had previously observed that it was 'hopeless' to wait for witnesses Windie and Sulieman.

Douglas' evidence is unsettling and partial. He did not repeat his confident reports that St Jack and Overheu were lying about the Wodgil site. He was asked no questions about disbanding the special constables on 19 June 1926. Although no information other than Murnane's preceded that direction, Douglas never gave any evidence about that conversation. It was odd to reduce the numbers at that time as natives (plural) were still being sought. Murnane required a 'large party' for a comfortable night's sleep and St Jack thought local Aboriginal people 'hostile'.

It was only after Murnane left the party that Gribble advised Regan — who then advised St Jack — that they sought a single man called Lumbia whose whereabouts was known. Murnane's reason for leaving the patrol was, he said, work requirements. Perhaps Sulieman was lying when he told Douglas that Murnane and O'Leary remained overnight at the ravine west of Mowerie. Perhaps those who placed Murnane in a raiding party were lying or in error, and that was why they reverted to the police version of events which distanced Murnane from the action? Great care should be taken in unpacking Murnane's tour of duty. What did he say to Douglas which caused the disbanding of the civilians and special constables?

Douglas' evidence is a pared version of events. The carvings at Wodgil suggested that 'possibly the police had been camped there and that someone had been carving'. Sulieman, tracker with the punitive party, guide to Douglas over the contested ground, is simply a nameless 'native tracker'. Even this field trip, investigating rumours of police killings, was truncated as he was 'not equipped to follow [tracks] for any distance'. Only amateurs, and Nairn, the police party's legal counsel, questioned him.

118. RC 1927 p iii, terms of reference, clause 2; WAPRO 430: 5374/1926.
119. RC 1927 q 2310, 2313.
120. RC 1927 q 2312.
121. RC 1927 p 62.
122. RC 1927 q 2331, 25 May 1927.
123. RC 1927 q 2030.
124. RC 1927 q 2233–35.
125. RC 1927 q 853.
126. There is conflict about how this information was gleaned by Regan — his journal and St Jack's are at variance with each other. St Jack recorded that Gribble gave Regan the information, Regan swore that he got it from natives. The Commissioner was unimpressed with Regan's testimony on this point, saying, '[This testimony] shows you are not very accurate in your evidence' (RC 1927 q 1170). St Jack's allegedly contemporaneous journal is of little value. In his evidence to the Commissioner, St Jack invited the Commissioner to prefer his sworn evidence, where it conflicted with this journal, even though the journal was said to have been written up at the time of the patrol and the hearing was many months later. He told the Commissioner his evidence was preferable as it was the product of more recent 'brushing up' (see St Jack's evidence RC 1927 q 776–777).
127. RC 1927 p 68.
128. RC 1927 q 450, my italics.
129. RC 1927 q 451.
130. RC 1927 q 445.
In his other role as counsel, Douglas was also light on. His questions of police witnesses lacked incisiveness; contrary versions of events were not put; he joined Nairn in attempting to debunk ‘rumours’; and he was derisive of, and argumentative with, Gribble and other witnesses. Douglas was not a fool, however, and a careful reader might wonder what impact his certain knowledge of Sulieman’s absence as a witness had upon the testimony he gave. With Sulieman absent his statement lacked authority, and Douglas’ reliance upon his tracking was, ultimately in a court environment, insupportable.

Buckland said he had ‘done as much native hunting as has any man in the Kimberleys’. He engaged and then, on Douglas’ direction, disbanded, the special constables. Buckland asserted that Murnane did not leave the patrol out of ‘disgust’. First hearing rumours about the conduct of the police patrol in July, Buckland only reported them to Douglas on 24 August 1926. Satisfied by St Jack’s and Murnane’s blanket denials of the rumours, he dropped the inquiry. Again the reason for disbanding the special constables was not interrogated. In the initial stages of the investigation Douglas expressed a lack of confidence in Buckland (and Donegan) and asked for two southern detectives. He was allocated one — Manning.

Regan gave evidence after Douglas and Buckland on Thursday 3 March 1927 and briefly into the next day. St Jack and Overheu gave evidence on Friday 4 March. Of the three, St Jack was never recalled. The missing trackers had been gone all week. The Commissioner was not told until the following Monday after much of the non-Aboriginal evidence was already before him, where it would remain uncontroverted by any other sworn, inculpatory testimony.

Regan knew the word and the camp Wodgil. It was a one-night camp and they were there on 6 June. The camp was called and spelt Wodgil both in his non-contemporaneous journal and where it appeared three times in his statement. O’Leary put the police ‘P’ and the date 8-6-26 on the tree, but Regan did not know about the letters ‘O’ and ‘L’. Regan swore that O’Leary must have got the date wrong because the police party left Nulla Nulla station on 5 June 1926 and camped at Jowa that night, after which they camped at Wodgil one night, 6 June. The patrol did pass near Wodgil when returning to the mission for supplies. The word Youngada was foreign to Regan. Aboriginal people were not located at or near Wodgil, or footwalked from

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131. RC 1927 q 526. Buckland is claimed to have shot the Aboriginal ‘outlaw’ Jandamarra in the 1890s (Pilmer 1998; Idriess 1952, cf Pedersen and Woorunmurra 1995).
132. RC 1927 q 511.
133. RC 1927 q 530, 24 June 1926.
134. RC 1927 q 537.
135. RC 1927 q 542.
136. RC 1927 q 548–550. Although Buckland initially swore that he had spoken to ‘members’ (plural) of the police party he contradicted himself two questions later by stating that he could only speak to St Jack (RC 1927 q 550, my italics).
137. RC 1927 q 622.
138. WAPRO 430: 3412/1926, initialled 22 July 1926.
139. WAPRO 430: 5374/1926, 18 October 1926.
140. RC 1927 q 624–626.
141. RC 1927 q 629.
142. RC 1927 q 667–668.
143. RC 1927 q 630.
Wodgil to the oven at GoteGoteMerrie. He swore ‘[t]here were no tracks of my party’ between the two sites. O’Leary’s ‘star like’ damper was not mentioned. Wodgil was not claimed for O’Leary’s damper. Wodgil, as a word, was bunched with other Aboriginal words.

St Jack took the stand after having been out in search of the missing trackers. He may not have been aware of the evidence which had been given by Regan. He initially maintained the ‘lie’ he told Douglas. He did not know the name of the Wodgil camp and ‘[the] country near the camp you [the Commissioner] call Wodgil’. When Regan’s evidence that No 2 camp was Wodgil was put to St Jack, he simply replied ‘Yes’. No cross-examination teased out the discrepancy. St Jack did not see anyone mark a tree (or trees) at this ‘second camp’ and he did not see carvings of the police broad arrow ‘P’ or the date 8-6-26. St Jack appears from the transcript to embark upon a rush of descriptive narrative about the patrol’s route immediately after he was invited to acknowledge Regan’s use of the word Wodgil. The Commissioner seemingly detecting retreat from controversy, drew St Jack back to the carved date 8-6-26. St Jack repeated his answer — ‘I saw no mark’. He then bluntly asserted that the date was wrong. Asked whether Wodgil was on a river, he stuck to his guns, swearing, ‘I do not know Wodgil, but no 2 camp was on the bank of a river bed’. Two questions later he ignored a reference to Wodgil.

St Jack’s statement left no room for slippage. He stated: ‘I do not know of any camp where the name Wodgil was cut in a tree and as far as I know none of our party carved any such name in a tree in any of our camps’. Other contradictions are also difficult to explain.

Overheu, like St Jack, declined to use the word Wodgil. He did ‘not know the name of [that camp]’ neither did he ‘remember’ carvings. When asked if he saw the letters ‘O’ and ‘L’ and other marks he simply said ‘no’. At loggerheads, the Commissioner surmised it was ‘safe to assume’ the police were camped at Wodgil. Asked ‘[H]ow long did you stay at Wodgil?’ Overheu said ‘[A]t no 2 camp we stayed only one night’. Overheu’s family was from the south of the state, but he never claimed Mitchell’s ‘southern’ word Wodgil. His statement contains complete denials: ‘I do not remember a camp known as Wodgil. I do not know this country. I have not been over it before’. Such a stressed absence.

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144 RC 1927 q 671.
145 RC 1927 q 689, my italics. Much later Regan’s telegram to his mother in Kalgoorlie was exhibited and there he said ‘[P]rospects doubtful can only hope for the best …’ (RC 1927 p 80).
146 RC 1927 p 88.
147 RC 1927 q 783.
148 RC 1927 q 862.
149 RC 1927 q 793.
150 RC 1927 q 784.
151 RC 1927 q 785.
152 RC 1927 q 793.
153 RC 1927 q 795.
154 RC 1927 q 795.
155 RC 1927 q 796.
156 RC 1927 q 804.
157 RC 1927 q 806.
Only two Aboriginal witnesses remained to give evidence — Mulga Jim McDonald and Lyddie. Both rejected the inculpatory statements they had made to Manning and Douglas. Mulga Jim described Sulieman as ‘frightened’,\(^{167}\) ‘gammoning’ (making things up),\(^{168}\) and as having ‘cleared out’.\(^{169}\) His sworn evidence supported the police party on all materially conflictual points. Contrary to his and Regan’s statements he said that Regan’s reinforcements met St Jack at the station Nulla Nulla, not at police camp No 1, Iowa. Contrary to Douglas’ report he said that after camp No 2 the party split into two segments, patrolling separately. Contrary to Jolly’s seemingly untutored evidence, he swore that Murnane remained in camp with him during what was said to be the one and only joint party raid on an Aboriginal camp. The Commissioner cleared the court. Jim continued unaffected. His testimony ran for 44 questions.

His statement is not annexed to the Royal Commission Report but it survives in archives.\(^{170}\) In one passage he says ‘[F]rom [Nulla Nulla] station we found out which way Overheu and Constable St Jack had gone and we started out after them, we got to their camp the same day’. This was No 1 camp, not Nulla Nulla. A note that ‘next day we had a look around to see ... natives’ is amended to read ‘that night ...’. The statement asserts that police patrol ‘stayed two days’ at camp no 2 — that is Wodgil.\(^{171}\) Yet, when giving evidence he swore that Wodgil was not a two-day camp.\(^{172}\) His statement also contradicts the police version of events, as he states that the patrol only split when Murnane returned to town — not before.

Mulga Jim’s ability to lie was told and retold around his own community:

Mulga Jimmy was on that big shooting turnout [at Forrest River] as one of the police boys helping them do it, among the two or three police boys there ...

\(^{159}\) One example will suffice, although a close reading of the text elicits others. Regan, in his statement of 18 October 1926, said that when his party arrived at Nulla Nulla station to link up with St Jack, ‘I sent Frank out in search of St Jack’. Frank’s statement of the same date says that Regan sent him out to St Jack with a ‘letter for Overheu’. This version of events is also supported by Joe, who later resiled from his statement and adopted a contrary story which was consistent with the police version of events. The police version of events we are asked to accept is that Regan’s party met St Jack’s party at the station and they all went out together. This disparity is not explained by ‘mistake’. Someone is telling lies, and why would it be Frank and Regan, particularly if Regan’s earliest and (given memory lapses over time) arguably more accurate version could be said to be contrary to his interests?

\(^{160}\) RC 1927 q 919.
\(^{161}\) RC 1927 q 920.
\(^{162}\) RC 1927 q 921.
\(^{163}\) RC 1927 q 922.
\(^{164}\) RC 1927 q 923, my italics.
\(^{165}\) Erickson 1986.
\(^{166}\) WAPRO 430:5374/1926, 22 October 1926.
\(^{167}\) RC 1927 q 1041, 1046.
\(^{168}\) RC 1927 q 1061.
\(^{169}\) RC 1927 q 1073.
\(^{170}\) WAPRO 430: 5374/1926, 13 October 1926.
\(^{171}\) WAPRO 430: 5374/1926, 13 October 1926, my italics. This statement is also explicit in describing the arrest of Lumbia. He stated, contrary to Regan and St Jack’s versions of events, that there were no police present at that arrest.
\(^{172}\) RC 1927 q 1051-1052. He also stated that the next camp was a ‘two day’ camp.
They had the big Supreme Court in Perth, and it was dinkum, they shot them all right, the two policemen St Jack and Donald Regan from Turkey Creek and Halls Creek, but the detective couldn’t catch old Mulga. They tried and tried and tried but no. The judge laughed and said: ‘Righto, out you go Mulga. Yous the biggest liar under the sun but out you go, we can’t catch you.’ And he walked out.175

Lyddie was called after Mulga Jim and immediately before O’Leary. She now worked for Billy Weaber of Ning Bing station which was reputed to be a place of shootings and exploitation of Aboriginal girls.174 Her evidence is controlled, but the oddest of the Commission. She swore she made no police statement, as ‘she had a sore throat’.175 Manning and Douglas were both present when they took her statement. Alternatively, she swore she made a statement which bore no resemblance to that which she signed with her cross. In the end her evidence was that no one was captured176 and no one was put on the chain.177 In recanting her statement which inculpated the police patrol she contradicted herself, so that: Overheu did not tell the police and white men to ‘shoot’ the blackfellows;178 five men and four women were not brought into camp;179 the police did not take a group to the bush and return without them.180 Only one point remained unchallenged. She said ‘we camped two nights on the big river’.181 No one asked if this was at camp no 2 — Wodgil.

O’Leary gave evidence next. His tracker Charley was not present as O’Leary allowed him to go ‘walking’ from November 1926 to March 1927.182 He claimed to have executed the carvings as already noted.183 The following exchange occurred about the date on the Wodgil tree:

Q 1102: The mark on the tree is 8/6/26. Would that be the date? — (O’Leary) I do not think it was the date when we were there.

Q1103: Then why did you put the 8th if it was not the 8th? — (O’Leary) I thought it was the date. I did not ask anyone.
In final submissions Nairn later claimed the initials ‘O’ and ‘L’, explaining that the wrong date had been carved by a ‘backwoods man living 300 miles from Wyndham’, the sort of man who ‘loses all count of days’.

Of the police patrol Daniel Murnane gave evidence last. He had remained in contact with Overheu by telegram and letter. He had limited time to confer with Nairn when he met him on the boat at Derby where he gave evidence, about which interview the Commissioner was critical. A ‘place called Youngada’ was unknown to him. In his testimony Wodgil was initially ‘no 2’ camp. He later agreed he knew the name Wodgil. He said nothing about O’Leary’s source for the name.

2166. Commissioner — Tell me what took place after leaving Jowa [No 1 camp]?
— We reached no 2 police camp on the following night [my emphasis].

2167. Commissioner — Do you know the name of it? — I do not know the native name of any place we visited.

2168. Commissioner — Was it Youngada? — I have never heard the name before.

2169. Commissioner — Was it Wodgil? — I know the name “Wodgil.” That is the camp I refer to. We camped there the night after camping at Jowa.

Murnane was not asked the origin of the word Wodgil.

If when the patrol arrived at Wodgil it was coming on for dark, O’Leary had little time for carving before leaving next morning at 9 am, which was when O’Leary said they left. If, as O’Leary states, the patrol arrived at Wodgil ‘after the dinner hour’, does this mean at night or late afternoon or just after lunch. No questions addressed this potential conflict between Murnane and O’Leary. For Murnane ‘no 2 camp’ was a one-day camp. [W]e remained [at Wodgil] that night and left the following morning.

His hasty exit, as with St Jack, was checked by the Commissioner:

2171. Commissioner — I do not want you to get away from Wodgil quite so quickly. A mark was made on a tree there, together with the letters “O. L.” and a date. Do you remember that? — (Murnane) I remember O’Leary’s carving ‘Wodgil’ on the tree, but I cannot tell you whether he put his name or the date.

Murnane denied knowing the ‘native names’ GoteGoteMerrie and Mowerie, but he acknowledged travelling west of Wodgil when they left the camp.

The bullet-holed lids on the tree were not claimed explicitly by anyone, even though they were an intrinsic part of the iconography. The cartridge lids assumed some distasteful portents if there was any reliable evidence about four men and three women being led away from Wodgil to their deaths. Nairn warned against drawing adverse inferences. The Commissioner reflected:

184 RC 1927 p 85.
185 RC 1927 p 85.
186- RC 1927 q 2144, q 2168.
187 RC 1927 q 2147; q 2166.
188 RC 1927 q 2169.
189 RC 1927 q 1144, O’Leary’s evidence.
190 RC 1927 q 1143, O’Leary’s evidence.
191 RC 1927 q 2170.
192 RC 1927 q 2170, my italics.
193 RC 1927 q 2190.
194 RC 1927 q 2189.
One sees these things nailed up. Do they mean anything or do they mean nothing? It is such an unusual thing to find four cartridge cases nailed up on a tree in the bush miles out.\(^{195}\)

He then asked rhetorically, '[W]hy should it be this particular tree?'\(^{196}\) They, like the carvings, were a physical manifestation of the patrol, at a place where the patrol had been. Positioned above the all points star and the word Wodgil, they were of the patrol. They may not have been claimed, but neither were they denied.

Wodgil was police camp 'no. 2'. The fragmentation and then thickening to confusion of the narrative, the isolation and collapsing of the carved icons from/to each other, and the attempts to put distance between selves and the artefacts of the chase/hunt, all contributed to my continuing anxiety about the meaning of these odd, isolated, important and yet meaningless expressions of group or individual endeavour.

I decided to take a different tack. Instead of asking what meaning could be attributed to the icons, perhaps there was some clue about what the carvings meant if I examined the group for whom, or in whose presence, they were carved. I was not convinced that anyone would scar these trees in this elaborate way, whilst engaged in this hunt, to represent a damper. This gang of men were in search of what they believed to be a group of murderers. When they left Wyndham the townsfolk were clamorous against Aboriginal people. Yet, of all those clamouring, only six men joined up, of whom two, the police, were not volunteers. What explained people not volunteering to go? What explained the enthusiasm of those who did ride out from Wyndham?

The non-volunteers, Constables St Jack and Regan, were both in their early twenties and both came from the south of the state. Regan, a 'young man' in charge of Turkey Creek police station,\(^{197}\) was in charge of the patrol (Buckland's evidence). His non-contemporaneous journal entry speaks of him 'assisting St Jack'\(^{198}\) but that was not the official understanding. St Jack, in the force 'twelve months or a little more',\(^{199}\) had been 'out on one trip before'.\(^{200}\) It was Regan who took the doctor and the coroner out for the post-mortem on Hay. He returned to Nulla Nulla with reinforcements a few days later.\(^{201}\) He had a couple of days, ample time, to equip himself properly for the patrol. His failure to take a journal is inexplicable. In an excess of caution(?), Buckland told them 'to be very careful about the use of firearms'.\(^{202}\) St Jack and Regan had to go.

Dick Jolly, a wharf labourer kitted out in ten-gallon hat and long spurs, joined up because he was out of work and 'it was a matter of bread' to him (Jolly's evidence). Although he said the patrol 'was the talk of the town', particulars were never sought from him.\(^{203}\) Later Overheu reluctantly agreed there was 'quite a considerable feeling ... against the blacks for killing cattle'\(^{204}\) and they were regarded as a 'black menace'\(^{205}\)

\(^{195}\) RC 1927 p 85.
\(^{196}\) RC 1927 p 85.
\(^{197}\) RC 1927 q 511.
\(^{198}\) WAPRO 430: 3412/1926.
\(^{199}\) RC 1927 q 514.
\(^{200}\) RC 1927 q 515, Buckland's evidence.
\(^{201}\) RC 1927 q 511, 600.
\(^{202}\) RC 1927 q 517.
\(^{203}\) RC 1927 q 35.
\(^{204}\) RC 1927 q 1794.
\(^{205}\) RC 1927 q 1830.
but he rejected the suggestion this feeling was ‘intense’. Jolly did not know the country and he had no experience of ‘tracking natives’. Jolly intimates he did it for the money. His service on a carefully selected 1924 jury, crafted to acquit one of Hay and Overheu’s white employees of an axe attack upon an Aboriginal man, is not mentioned. Jolly might not know the country, but he had helped out before. This time he would be paid, at least.

Murnane volunteered ‘twice’, just as he had for service in World War I. Some thought he joined the patrol to get in touch with his work as a veterinary officer investigating the buffalo fly problem.

Murnane said he went of his own free will. Hay was the first white man to make him ‘thoroughly welcome’ in Wyndham, taking him out to his station, providing him with a launch and plant.

I considered it would be only a very small return if, when he met his death, I endeavoured to catch the man who had killed him.

Surprisingly, Overheu, Hay’s partner, was oblivious to this connection. He did not know why Murnane joined up but attributed it to studying for his work. Mur- nane described claims that he said the patrol was ‘worse than the war’ as a ‘wicked and downright lie’. Further, it did not indicate ‘cowardice’ that the party was so well armed because he, O’Leary, Overheu and Hay were all returned soldiers. Ironically, until Murnane cited war service as a bond between the group, outsiders would have no means of knowing about this.

Overheu, returned from the dispersal at Durragee Hill, joined up at the request of the police ‘to assist them to carry beef ... [provide] packs ... [and] ... give any assistance [he] could’. He would assist with the horses which together with mules numbered 42. In a letter dated 29 May 1926 Overheu wrote to his father ‘I am going to pilot the police out and give them any assistance possible so as to make the place safe for myself in the future’. His skill as a pilot was debatable, as he told the Commission that he had not travelled more than ten miles west of Nulla Nulla or two or three miles north of Jowa, police camp no 1.

206. RC 1927 q 1832.
207. RC 1927 q 32.
208. RC 1927 q 36.
209. see WAPRO 653:294/24, Douglas to Commissioner of Police 17/12/1924; Gribble papers AIATSIS.
210. RC 1927 q 511.
211. Murnane WWI Service Records.
212. WAPRO q 512.
213. RC 1927 q 2132.
214. RC 1927 q 932.
215. RC 1927 q 939.
216. RC 1927 q 2227, 2228, 2229.
217. RC 1927 q 2235.
218. RC 1927 q 2235.
219. RC 1927 q 933.
220. RC 1927 q 938.
221. RC 1927 q 1834, my italics; see Daily News 8/7/26.
222. RC 1927 q 933.
O'Leary joined up because the police needed volunteers and were 'short of horses', of which he had nine.\textsuperscript{223} Without these, however, the plant was hardly inadequate. Like Dick Jolly, O'Leary left a little local history out. He had previously kitted out and travelled with a 1921–22 police patrol, protecting Constable Cooney and raiding camps investigating the death of 'half caste' Annear.\textsuperscript{224} Being paid £44 for this work,\textsuperscript{225} O'Leary might have gone along in 1926 for the money. In 1921 O'Leary made an effort to be the first to find Annear's body, having gone out to search for it as, he said, he hoped to retrieve a .38 pistol he had leant Annear. When he located Annear he had a serious abdominal spear wound and a .38 pistol wound in the middle of his forehead. This is an interesting way for a seriously injured person to kill himself — one might ponder whether a bullet in the mouth or the temple would have been easier to self-administer given the stomach wound. No one appears to have queried it at the time. Interestingly, one Aboriginal oral history of the Forrest River killings suggests that

the natives ... sat round a rocky basin facing the middle, chained by the neck. When this was ready some black trackers and white men went around and shot one after another in the forehead with a revolver.\textsuperscript{226}

The evidence about individual motivations for volunteering is scant and lacks even the depth which can be demonstrated by a cursory examination of some local history. How and why did Jolly get on to that jury? How and why did Murnane make his connection with Hay? What involvement did Overheu and O'Leary have with each other? Was it about money? About work? About scientific study? Was this little band of volunteers a random collection of individuals?

Two brief observations suggest the connections were infinitely deeper. Murnane provided a clue late in the hearings when he spoke about returned servicemen. Nairn provided the other when he cited O'Leary's history of being 'one of the earliest Anzacs'\textsuperscript{227} as a reason why he would not travel under an assumed name\textsuperscript{228} or undertake previous collisions 'with natives'.\textsuperscript{229} This war service, an early Anzac history, was an impressive personal attribute. Anzacs were honourable, virile, vital, heroic.\textsuperscript{230} Surprisingly, these attributes were not further promoted in the hearing. I asked myself what sort of veterans were they? Why did Nairn know as much as he did and why did he drop it? Why had someone felt the need to tell him of O'Leary's background? A search of war service records elaborates this ruptured narrative.

\textsuperscript{223} RC 1927 q 1101.
\textsuperscript{224} WAPRO 430: 7871/21, 18/1/1921, Cooney's statement. An inquiry into the matter which has been described as an investigation failed to find anything to support allegations of police shootings of Aboriginal people during some stages of this patrol which arguably commenced in 1921 and concluded in 1922 (WAPRO 430: 7871/1921). See Moran 1999; Green 1995; Halse 2002.
\textsuperscript{225} O'Leary Veteran's Affairs file, National Archives of Australia D363/50.
\textsuperscript{226} WAPRO 430: 5374/1926, Notes by journalist Tony Thomas of a conversation between Ronald Morgan and Reim 1968 (this name should be Roheim, an anthropologist visiting the region at that time).
\textsuperscript{227} RC 1927 q 2291.
\textsuperscript{228} RC 1927 q 2288.
\textsuperscript{229} RC 1927 q 2289 and see RC 1927 q 2622, q 2630.
\textsuperscript{230} Eg Gerster 1992; Seal 2004.
First I examined the history of the deceased. Hay was a Gallipoli veteran and he lost his life close to Empire Day, 24 May 1926, and less than a month after Anzac Day, 25 April. Enlisting on 5 October 1914 at the age of 37 years and 3 months, just under the cut-off point, Hay was one of the first to do so. He said he had served for two years in the Boer War with the Brabant's Horse and Intelligence Department. With Brabant's from 12 July 1900 to 30 November 1901 he was no doubt engaged in many skirmishes. In 1914 Hay enlisted in the prestigious 10th Light Horse Regiment, a 'cut above the infantry' comprising the 'sons of every well known pastoralist or farmer in Western Australia'. The war service records do not disclose any such connections for Hay. Hay was a surveyor's assistant from Bunbury. However, he was related to John Forrest, the former Premier of Western Australia, federal Defence Minister, and Baronet, because his grandmother, Mary Hay, was the sister of Forrest's wife. There was also a second link into the Forrest family. Hay's mother's sister, Alice O'Neil, was the wife of George Forrest, John Forrest's brother. Given the Forrest family connections it would have been surprising if Hay had not enlisted in the 10th Light Horse. The Forrests were intimately involved in 'opening up' the north-west. These central, highly significant, Western Australian political, minor royalty and gentry connections arguably assist in explaining a number of things about Hay, his death, and the establishment and conduct of subsequent inquiries. The importance of these family connections is elliptically introduced into the Royal Commission investigation when Nairn spoke in a quietly outraged tone of Hay's 'relatives' concern about rumours that Hay had interfered with an Aboriginal woman before his death. Like so much else in this story, one is left to wonder whether this cagey reference to the Forrest family connection was in fact lost on those engaged in the parlour drama unfolding in the Royal Commission hearings.

Hay shipped to Egypt with the 10th and there he remained for most of the Gallipoli campaign and his war. From February 1915 to September 1915 he was a transport sergeant at headquarters. He was not present at the landing at Anzac in May, as he was hospitalised with influenza three days before embarkation. He was still at headquar-

231. See Hay's World War I service records. Hay does not appear in the Australian Boer War index as fighting in any capacity in any of the Australian contingents (Wallace 1976; Murray 1911). He enlisted with the 1st Regiment, Brabant's Horse at Elandsfontein, South Africa on 12 July 1900 as a trooper, was engaged in operations against the Boers in the Orange Free State and Transvaal and discharged at Cape Town on 30 November 1901 as a sergeant. He was awarded the Queen's South African Medal with clasps Cape Colony, Transvaal and South Africa 1901 on 2 February 1907 (London (UK) Public Record Office Series Attestation papers WO 128 and Medal Roll WO 100). Interestingly, Richard Henry Pilmer who also ultimately served as a police officer in the Kimberley was a member of the Third Western Australian Bushman's Contingent, rising to the rank of Company Sergeant Major (Murray 1911). Equally intriguing is the research which shows that Pilmer was actively and energetically disliked by his men as a petty disciplinarian and martinet (Chamberlain and Droogleever 2003: 50–51).

233. Gerster 1992; Olden nd.
236. WAPRO acc 864D.
237. RC 1927 q 2281.
238. Hay World War I service records, 18/5/1915; Olden nd.
ters in August when the 10th Light Horse, his unit, was obliterated at the Nek. When he did get to Gallipoli on 3 October 1915, he stepped on the back of a trench and was hospitalised for either a sprained, dislocated or fractured ankle. His medical board papers are now ‘lost’. The injury to his ankle resulted in him being listed ‘wounded in action’ with the 10th. He was discharged in December 1915 having served a total of five days at Gallipoli. Others in the Kimberley at that time — Evans, Salmond and Rust — each served with the 10th Light Horse. Many years later Salmond described interracial interaction in the region at this time in the following way:

It was no good being noble and dead. The natives had been brought up knowing nothing but killing. In spite of the wailing and singing over dead relations a life meant nothing to them. All they could understand was savagery and strength ... strength is the only way to get their respect. We’d just come back from [WWI] in which we were taught to kill. And when it came to a showdown we were the stronger.

For these men, killing had been learned conduct and brute strength was one of the factors which kept the frontier stable (for them).

Hay’s death and the investigation have been for the most part expunged from the Commission report. The incident was explicitly excluded from the terms of reference, but Hay remains insinuated in the rationale for the patrol which followed. Volunteering to locate the killers of a member of the 10th Light Horse was arguably not an insignificant commitment or a minor matter for others who had served in World War I. So, what of the motivations and war service records of the others in the punitive party?

Overheu’s family was connected by marriage to Baron Ferdinand von Mueller who was intimately connected to Baron Forrest during his time as an explorer. That is not their only tie. Overheu, age 21 years, enlisted on 17 August 1914. This made him, like Hay, one of the first to enlist, a claim he never made at the Commission. He previously served with the 25th Light Horse. He disembarked at Gallipoli on 3 August 1915. In early August and again in late September his war service records show that he was taken off the peninsula for treatment for VD (as were many others). The general evacuation was under consideration when he returned to Gallipoli. In 1916 he had recovered and was promoted to bombardier, then staff sergeant at the Australian Records Section 3rd Echelon 2nd Field Artillery Brigade. In March 1918 he was rejected by the Australian Flying Corps as ‘unfit in any capacity’ for training as a ‘flying officer, pilot or observer’. He returned to Australia in October 1918.

Murnane, clerk, was 18 when he joined up in Victoria in July 1915, embarking in September 1915. He shipped to Gallipoli in the 2nd Depot Unit of Supply on 14 November 1915, enduring one of the dreadful winter months there before the general evacuation was under consideration when he returned to Gallipoli. In 1916 he had recovered and was promoted to bombardier, then staff sergeant at the Australian Records Section 3rd Echelon 2nd Field Artillery Brigade. In March 1918 he was rejected by the Australian Flying Corps as ‘unfit in any capacity’ for training as a ‘flying officer, pilot or observer’. He returned to Australia in October 1918.

239 Hay World War I service records, 9/10/1915, 15/10/1915, January 1916.
240 Olden nd: x.
241 Ronan 1964: 121.
242 Jebb 2002.
244 Bourke 1999.
245 Erickson 1986.
246 Crowley 1971.
247 Overheu World War I service records.
248 Overheu World War I service records see entries for 22 August – 6 September 1915.
evacuation. Murnane was discharged in 1919. Although he served at Gallipoli he was not the mythical marvellous Anzac specimen in that he was only 5 ft 6 inches (1.68 m) tall. He was unscarred at the time he enlisted, unlike Hay, who declared a 'scar front of right shoulder, a tattoo mark outside right arm, two bullet wounds left upper arm'. Murnane's record was exemplary. There are no absences without leave, no courts martial, and his progress through the ranks was steady if uninspiring. He received his Gallipoli Star at the University of Melbourne at Parkville in September 1921, requested his Victory Medal in December 1923 and was also awarded the British War Medal. It is ironic that Murnane, the least physically prepossessing of these Anzacs, was the one to claim the Anzac tradition at the Commission hearing.

O’Leary, labourer, enlisted in December 1914 at the age of 32 at Gympie, Queensland, in the 5th Light Horse 2nd Brigade, first reinforcements. He was not amongst the first of this group to enlist. He declared a scar on his inside left thigh, but made no mention of having his nose and jaw broken at the age of 19 years. Shipped for the Dardanelles on 14 May 1915, he was one of the first Anzacs, just as Nairn said he was, disembarking in time for the Turkish onslaught on 19 May. Queensland Light Horsemen reportedly merited Chauvel’s special praise for their ‘coolness and grit’. Perhaps O’Leary was one of them. When the Turks started burning their dead on 24 May, leaving a ‘sickly stench’ in the air, O’Leary was at Gallipoli. O’Leary might have been at Quinn’s Post on the morning of 29 May when heavy attacks were launched by the Turks, resulting in 200 Australian casualties in four and a half hours. Paradoxically, at Quinn’s Post O’Leary would be only metres from Ernest Gribble’s son, Jack, a 19 year old, 6 ft 2 inches (1.88 m) former militia trainer, who enlisted in November 1914 and who was seriously wounded at Lone Pine shortly after embarked in August 1915. During his service O’Leary added to his scars. He was ‘slightly wounded’ but not hospitalised on 28 June 1915, and he was also wounded on 19 July 1915. He was transferred to England in October with enteric fever. In May 1916 he was returned to active service and in August, awarded 144 hours for being AWL. He was again wounded ‘in action’ in the same month and hospitalised for mumps in late 1916. Finally, he was detailed as a cook until May 1917; and then placed on ‘light duties’ for three months. During his service he was court-martialled for assault, convicted and sentenced to 56 days. Wounded in the thigh and arm in France in June 1917 he later sustained a gunshot wound to the ‘great toe’ in October 1917, an injury notoriously self-inflicted. He was discharged in December 1917. He served in the 49th Regiment after

249. Murnane World War I service records. Previously rejected for unfit teeth, he was on this occasion armed with a letter from his parents approving overseas service. Murnane’s mother’s signature looks remarkably similar to his own, it is deft and authoritative, more so than his father’s (Murnane World War I service records). The document is signed at Boisdale State School.

250. O’Leary World War I service records. He gave his mother in Kalgoorlie as his next of kin and his birthplace as Ballarat. He was 5 foot 9 inches high, weighed 159 lbs had a dark complexion, grey eyes and brown hair. He gave as his religion ‘RC’ (O’Leary World War I service records).

251. National Archives of Australia D363/50 M 32405.


255. National Archives of Australia D363/50 M 32405.
transferring from the 5th Light Horse during the Gallipoli campaign. Whatever action O'Leary missed as a result of being hospitalised or gaoled, he was familiar with the absolute horror which war entailed, the death, injuries and dismemberment, the stench of rotting bodies, and the smell of burning flesh. He is the only member of the 1926 police party who has a war grave commemoration.\textsuperscript{257} He died in South Australia on 20 August 1958.

It is perplexing that these histories are absent from the Commission hearing. When introduced, they are given scant regard and then ignored. The events of 1926 were populated by a dead Anzac and a posse which included Anzac veterans in pursuit of the offender(s).\textsuperscript{258} It was said of Anzacs that these men sustained fervent loyalties and ‘would never forget the dead’.\textsuperscript{259} Surely Hay’s death reignited memories of mate­ship and loss, and unifying views of betrayals by post-war governments? This connective tissue was not easily sundered. The narrative had sinew. Nairn knew enough about it to get O’Leary’s history right. What part did it form in his instructions? The 10th Light Horse positioned Hay in a legion of honour. The ‘Queenslander’, O’Leary was still periodically citing the 5th Light Horse as his unit in the 1950s in spite of having transferred to the 49th Battalion in 1916.\textsuperscript{260} Before embarking from Australia, Overheu had been with the 25th Light Horse. Only Murnane, the last to go to war and the last to give evidence, but the first witness to claim the history, lacked the \textit{éclat} of the others. These men arguably maintained the ‘grand companionship of great-hearted men’.\textsuperscript{261} However this story is told, the shared war service record still, momentarily, in that brief passage of Murnane’s evidence, would have been representative of ‘reckless valour in a good cause’.\textsuperscript{262} The brief acclamation was celebratory, but cautiously contracted and then shelved. The question was — why?

The rewards for war service were for some — like Hay, Overheu, and possibly O’Leary — a soldier settlement block, and a pension if they were lucky. Hay received a 25% pension. O’Leary struggled to obtain his pension over a number of years. For some

\textsuperscript{256} The Field General Court Martial record shows that that O’Leary was sentenced on 29 January 1917. O’Leary’s bench comprised Colonel Kirkwood (21st IBD), Captain Dodds (5 Northumberland Fusiliers) and Lieutenant Chaffey (Adjt 2nd ADBD). At Etaples on 20 January 1917 he was alleged to have struck the neck of the AIF Regimental Police Private Briggs with his fist whilst Briggs was in charge of a prisoner. It is noted O’Leary pleaded guilty, stating that he was ‘very sorry’ but the police had his ‘brother in charge’, and he ‘did not wish him to be put in the guard room on account of his age’ and the police would not let him go. ‘His brother’, who was causing a disturbance in the canteen, got away. O’Leary apparently asked no questions of the witnesses and he had made no statement (O’Leary World War I service records, court martial transcript). Searching for this brother in the records was unproductive and it remains unclear whether this was a figure of speech.

\textsuperscript{257} In what is typical of the enigma of the man, I have been given two sites for his war grave. His ashes are not at the War Graves Section Niche Wall 102, Niche H/16 at Pasadena Adelaide, but they are at wall no 115 A (bottom row) position 11 in the Derrick Gardens Cremation Walls (War Graves Section, Defence Department).

\textsuperscript{258} See also the recent work of Wilson and O’Brien in \textit{Aboriginal History} 2003 vol 27 about Light Horse involvement in the Coniston killings in the Northern Territory in 1928.

\textsuperscript{259} Gammage 1981: 266–8.

\textsuperscript{260} National Archives of Australia D363/50 M 32405.

\textsuperscript{261} Rule 1933.

\textsuperscript{262} Laffin 1959.
the rewards were acknowledged in the campaign medals they received. These would include the Victory Medal, the British War Medal and the 1914–1915 Gallipoli Star.

Views about medals varied. Bushman Bill Harney never applied for his, but the same could not be said for Hay or the 1926 volunteers. Hay, writing from Nulla Nulla station, belatedly requested his Victory Medal. Murnane and Overheu appear to have collected their three medals.

O’Leary’s family was still agitating for his Gallipoli Star in the 1940s. On 30 April 1945, days after Anzac Day, his sister wrote:

During the last nine years we have repeatedly tried to locate Pte O’Leary through the Parish Priests of various South Australian districts where we thought he may be, but without avail. His last request to us was to try and get his medal for him. Unfortunately, during a fit of mental depression brought on by unfair military treatment regarding the granting of a 5/- pension our brother P. B. O’Leary tore up his discharge … The above 5/- pension has never been accepted or collected by my brother, so you can see the military authorities are very much in Pte O’Leary’s debt. As each Anzac day is celebrated we feel the injustice greatly, in the fact that a medal such as the Gallipoli [sic] Star, which our brother fought so bravely for and thereby carries a life long incapacity, should for a matter of small detail be withheld.

The release of the Star was not approved as O’Leary’s sister had no written authority. O’Leary’s ‘last request’ is not reflected in his South Australian repatriation file, and neither is his mental health breakdown. Were the stories apocryphal?

In a strange parallel with O’Leary’s description of the Wodgil damper, the 1914–1915 Gallipoli Star is officially described as a ‘bronze four pointed star with its uppermost point replaced by a crown. Across the face of the star are two crossed swords with blades upwards and hilts protruding to form four additional points of the star’ [my italics]. The star on the Wodgil/Wodjil tree was ‘all points’, but without a diagram we will never know what it looked like.

In the light of the war service of these men, did this ‘all points’ star at Wodgil/Wodjil really represent a damper? Having unearthed the Gallipoli war service of the dead man and of some of the 1926 volunteers, is it still possible that O’Leary told the Commission the truth about what that carving of the all-points star meant? When making an assessment of O’Leary’s evidence about this matter, should we keep in mind the Commissioner’s commentary on his evidence more generally? Should we consider that O’Leary was almost daring the Commission to confront him with what the carving actually meant? Did he have reason to engage in a complex game of near-concealment in a Western Australia still celebrating and regretting one of the great war-time tragedies — the slaughter of the 10th Light Horse at Anzac?

Assuming for a moment that the star gouged in the tree is a Gallipoli Star, its symbolism is stark and highly significant for Hay, O’Leary, Murnane and Overheu. How much more compelling is this explanation of its symbolism than that proffered by O’Leary? Adopting this suggestion, it is not immediately clear why O’Leary concocted such an elaborate story about the star not being a Gallipoli Star. At the very least, this

263 Gammage 1981: 272, citing Harney.
264 Hay World War I service records, 6 May 1925.
265 O’Leary World War I service records, my italics.
266 National Archives of Australia D363/50 M 32405.
other explanation for the all-points star unsettles the claim that the word Wodgil also describes the damper. The failure of any member of the police party to independently and explicitly support O'Leary’s stated explanation about carvings and their meanings further destabilises the tale.

If these two emblems, the star and the word, are unsettled by this thicker description of the participants and their histories, does this affect the explanation of any of the other carvings? It now feels odd to suggest that the other carvings might retain the meanings attributed to them by O'Leary. These carvings have always just ‘been’. What if they are not?

For one reason or another, commentators have accepted O'Leary’s explanation of this elaborate carving project. It is almost delicate in its detail — careful and intricate carvings scored into a tree in a very limited time. O'Leary’s claim of ownership of them is supported by the assertion/assumption that he carved his initials. O'Leary explains the initials and the wrong date on the Wodgil trees. Is this really a puzzle? Not a lot hinges on his construction of events — or does it? Confronted with O'Leary’s blanket denials about mass killings and the time to commit them, little would seem to be gained by cross-examination.

What of the initials? Mitchell organised and ordered them and they became, in the imagination of the Commission, O'Leary’s. Everyone adopted the ordering — O and L. O'Leary adopted this regimen. Yet, Patrick Bernard O'Leary’s initials are actually not O and L. They are P B O. Why did O'Leary not carve P B O, or an O with a P inside the circle. Or, given that people in the district referred to him as Barney O'Leary, as he sometimes signed himself, why not carve an O with a B in it? What is apparent about those letters is that, as initials, they equally accurately represent Leopold (Rupert) Overheu. Overheu, however, failed to claim the letters. Perhaps he signed with relief when the Commissioner put them to him consecutively as ‘O-L’, after which he was asked virtually no questions about Wodgil. These letters were carved on the second tree, alone, a separate cenotaph. They do not form part of O'Leary’s elaborate tableaux centred on the fictional Wodgil/Wodjil damper. It is possible that two people carved the trees. O'Leary or Overheu might have carved the tree with the letters O and L. Whoever carved them had a lot of carving to do if he was carving both trees, as the carving was ‘neatly done’. What if O'Leary carved the letters and someone else — it could have been Murnane or Overheu (they both had Gallipoli Stars) — carved the other memorial? If it was Overheu who carved the Wodgil tree, why was so much trouble taken to distance him from it? Surely this was not just because he had called for a patrol to deal ‘drastically’ with the natives? That was everybody’s sentiment.

The use to which the Wodgil camp was put is the clue. Every non-Aboriginal police witness said it was a one-day camp and there was therefore no time to commit atrocities. The carved date on the tree is therefore important. The other carvings could be just ‘marks’. The Aboriginal witnesses, some of whom would never give evidence, said it was a two-day camp. Aboriginal witnesses cannot be right. Nairn said ‘[N]o

269. RC 1927 q 920.
270. RC 1927 q 920–923.
271. RC 1927 p vii, RC 1927 q 158.
reliance can be placed on natives.\textsuperscript{273} Those inculpatory statements suggesting Wodgil was a two-day camp were one thing; their evidence, if they were actually called, was diametrically opposed to that assertion. Those who were not called, as they could not be found, have left us only their statements. They do not all say Wodgil was a two-day camp. Was it? Does the date on the tree suggest it was? And if it was, how much time was there for shooting and burning?

How could one ever authenticate the wrong date? A small and otherwise very insignificant detail from a file completely external to the Royal Commission and police investigation provides the answer. Anyone examining the Royal Commission on the available facts, from the usual sources, adopting the system of hierarchies advanced throughout that story would not look here. One of the war service histories, from which we have been consistently (and deliberately?) distracted provides the answer. It is such a small detail, that when I initially noticed it I could hardly believe what I was reading. The connection would only be made by someone reading both the Commission and the war service files — they had to be seen together. I initially failed to comprehend the significance of this minor note. The detail was simply unimportant, and even routine, without some knowledge of this Commission and its ruptures. I warrant, however, that this detail was intimately known to the members of the police patrol. It has been silently, insistently concealed but waiting in the archives for someone to make a connection. Arguably all of the members of the patrol knew this fact, and no doubt each of them hoped that it would not require explanation, as they sat and waited their turns to give evidence about the Wodgil/Wodjil camp. No wonder there was so much denial, or such an arresting silence.

In response to question no 4 of the Attestation paper of persons enlisted for service abroad in the service records of each of the four veterans is noted their age: Hay, 37 and 3 months; O'Leary, 32 years and one month; Murnane, 18 years and one month; and Overheu, 21 years. Overheu exceeded the requirements of the form. He wrote down his birthday. It was 8-6-93.

The little lie about O'Leary's wrong date is not a minor matter. Every non-Aboriginal member of the police party gave evidence, about which they were oddly uniform, that they had stayed at Wodgil one night, 6 June 1926. They said the patrol moved off on the following morning, splitting into two parties. O'Leary — for reasons which are, like so much else about this story, not clear — said the patrol might have been at Wodgil on 7 June but not 8 June.\textsuperscript{274} The Aboriginal trackers would never be able to con-

\textsuperscript{272} Although tracker Frank Comberoo could not be located for the Commission hearing, he was traced and presented at the committal of St Jack and Regan, where he gave evidence about the second part of the patrol to Dala which supported the recanted evidence of Jim. Frank was never cross-examined about his statement in which he said, possibly not understanding the significance of this, that the Wodgil camp was a two-day camp (RC 1927 p 65). In other respects Frank's statement was exculpatory of the police. The passage of his statement which relates to O'Leary is in high English and reads: 'I did not go away from any camp at any time with Constables Regan, Barney O'Leary, Murnane, and Tracker Charlie [O'Leary's tracker] with any natives on a chain. I did not see O'Leary or any of the white men go away from any of the camps with any native prisoners on a chain, nor did I see any of the white men of the party light any big fires in the bush' (RC 1927 p 65). Frank Comberoo gave as his employment tracker for the police at Turkey Creek, which was Constable Regan's police station.

\textsuperscript{273} RC 1927 p 88.
tradict this because they would not know the actual calendar date, even if they were strangely and uniformly clear about Wodgil being a two-day camp. If even any members of the police party were still at Wodgil carving on the 8 June 1926, they had ample time to catch, footwalk, kill and burn those who were missing, and they were certainly not off in two different groups combing different parts of the country unsuccessfully looking for ‘niggers’.

If the star is for Gallipoli, the initials representative of either of two men, and the date for the partner of the dead man’s birthday, the bullet-holed cartridge lids potentially acquire the sinister meaning attributed to them, ‘as a warning’. If the carved date was correct, there was time for the perpetration of the alleged killings. And the trees at Wodgil were potentially memorials to the (f)act. The Gallipoli Star contextualises not just one and then the other Wodgil carvings, but also the furious vengefulness with which this patrol was conducted.

Whatever else happened at Wodgil, Overheu, or one of the party, carved his birth date on that day, not on 6 June. Overheu was not mistaken about that date. As recently as 29 May he had written a letter to his father expressing his need for a ‘strong force’ to ‘make the place safe’. He dated that letter. Overheu was an orderly man. He gave no evidence about being a bush man who forgot dates, about getting dates on his mail wrong. Overheu assisted others in the region with their bookwork. He had a head for numbers.

Leopold Overheu did not get the wrong date at Wodgil. He got it right. At the Commission he volunteered no evidence about Wodgil. In his evidence he did not metaphorically flee the place as St Jack and Murnane had, he simply never went there. Nairn’s examination of him concentrated on vilifying Aboriginal witnesses, including the missing man Tommy, on criticising the mission for assisting ‘blacks’; and upon the question of cattle killing, the issue which Overheu wished to see included in the inquiry. In his statement of 22 October 1926, Overheu made no reference to the Wodgil camp. ‘Camp No 2’ was, like tracks in the sand, obliterated. No one pressed him, in the making of his statement or in his evidence, about this camp or any of the lethal symbolism of the carvings.

Like so much else about this patrol and this inquiry Overheu’s other evidence is perplexing and insistently unconvincing. Did he really ‘not know’ why Murnane, a co-recipient of the Gallipoli Star, volunteered twice for the expedition to find Hay’s killer(s). Could he seriously ‘not remember’ the carvings on the Wodgil trees of,

274. RC 1927 q 1105.
275. RC 1927 q 2342–2343.
276. RC 1927 q 1834, 1835. In evidence he could not ‘remember using the phrase’ as his ‘memory was not so good’ (RC 1927 q 1836–1837), but the letter was before the Commission. He then swore that he only meant that they should ‘all be arrested and sentenced to more than seven days gaol’ (RC 1927 q 1849). To the Commissioner this was a ‘wild statement’ (RC 1927 q 1812) but to Overheu’s counsel ‘it was a case for drastic action’ (q 1840).
278. RC 1927 q 1965–1973
279. Moran 1999: 164. A Royal Commission into the cattle industry in the Kimberley was called in 1928, but Overheu did not give evidence.
280. RC 1927 q 932.
amongst other things, his birth date, two lonely letters which might be his initials and, possibly, a diagrammatic representation of the shared war service medal?²⁸¹

So, to return to where this inquiry started: what of the word Wodgil? As Mitchell said, Wodjil is a southern word. It is the native word for thickets dominated by one or other of several species of acacia ... with a mixture of shrubs and small trees, including hakeas, grevilleas and casuarina species. To the early settlers, before the days of applications of trace elements, wodjil indicated ‘poor country’.²⁸²

Overheu understood this reference. He came from the south, his station was going ‘bung’.²⁸³ This was ‘poor country’. O’Leary might have regarded his soldier settlement station, Galway Valley, as poor country, as he was dependent on ‘sustenance pending productivity of land’ in 1923 ‘to help me keep myself’. By 1932 he was ‘unemployed’ and by 1945 he was working in South Australia as a trapper.²⁸⁴ Regan and St Jack also came from the south. A number of members of the police patrol might have known it meant poor country — why not just say so? Was it necessary to develop a complete fictive world for the word?

Finally, was this patrol worse than the war for these ex-servicemen? Was the carving of the Gallipoli Star the last great hurrah? Was the chosen method of despatch a .38 bullet in the middle of the forehead — the method sometimes adopted in the battlefields of France? I doubt we will ever know the answer to those questions. I think we can be confident that Wodgil was a police camp on 8 June 1926 in spite of the persistent denials of the police patrol members. And, as the Commissioner observed, a lot can happen in two days.

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²⁸¹. RC 1927 q 920.
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EXAMINING 'WODGIL'

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Battle Camp to Boralga: a local study of colonial war on Cape York Peninsula, 1873–1894

Noelene Cole

The history of the Cook district in north-eastern Australia illustrates the Queensland government’s difficulties in maintaining colonial settlement in the remote north and the determination of Aboriginal people to resist the gold, transport and pastoral frontiers. Expeditions of Kennedy (1848) and the Jardines (1864) foreshadowed disastrous patterns of colonisation on Cape York Peninsula. In each case the resolve of the intruders, if not their rifle power, was matched by tenacious Aboriginal resistance. William Hann’s journey into southern Cape York Peninsula in 1873 was of less epic proportions, but the pattern of conflict with Aborigines was sustained, and the consequences of the expedition unprecedented. Hann’s report of mining potential led to JV Mulligan’s discovery of ‘payable’ quantities of alluvial gold on the Palmer River. In spite of Mulligan’s warnings of ‘the great distance, the mighty rivers to cross ... the approaching wet season’, and the need for constant vigilance to protect ‘the horses and ourselves from the blacks’, the news drew thousands of prospectors from the south and overseas. In economically depressed Queensland the Palmer gold rush was welcomed as ‘salvation’.

As predicted, the forces of nature and Aboriginal resistance wreaked havoc on the miners. Edward Palmer of Gamboola station later reflected: ‘The golden news from the far northern diggings was of a most glittering nature, but there was a reverse side ... in the hardships and privations endured.’ A major reverse side was the disaster of race relations. Following well-entrenched patterns in Queensland, the process of colonisation became a cross-cultural struggle with the features of a ‘situation of war’.

In analysing the nature of the conflict in the Cooktown–Palmer region, historians have identified as key issues:

1. Carron 1849; Jardine 1867.
5. The Palmer goldfield had an estimated population of 19,500 in 1877: see Kirkman 1980.
• the devastating environmental and cultural impacts of alluvial mining;9
• the failure of the Queensland government to avoid an established pattern of conflict;10
• the intensity and duration of Aboriginal resistance;11
• varied impacts of the mining, transport and pastoral frontiers;12
• the role of the Native Mounted Police.13

As argued by McKenna, ‘The questions asked by historians in the 1970s still need to be asked today’.14 Therefore this study extends the research of Hughes, Kirkman and others by focusing on an area between Cooktown and the Palmer River which was profoundly affected by the mining, transport and pastoral frontiers.15 It draws on a range of data to review policies, strategies and engagements associated with the process of colonisation in this area from 1873 to 1894. The strength of resistance provides a central question in this research — which strategies and conditions made Aboriginal resistance so effective?

The study area centres on the old settlement and police camp of Boralga and its sphere of influence which extended from the Laura River to the Kennedy, Normanby and Deighton Rivers, east to the Hell’s Gate track and south to Laura (Figure 1). The connections of contemporary Aboriginal people with this area and with stories and people of the ‘wild time’ motivated this case study. In a community archaeology project, Aboriginal Elders from Laura identified places which they consider to have historical significance: old homesteads, police stations, graves and railway sidings. At a few sites, detailed recording was undertaken, as at Boralga (locally known as ‘Brolga’), which is well known to Laura people through their work in the police force and cattle industry. Results of the project were published as an archaeology report which linked the recording of places with family stories.16 Background historical research evolved into a deeper investigation — hence this paper. This study is therefore an offshoot of the community project, and as such has been enriched by the shared memories and insights of local people, in particular George Musgrave, Tommy George, the late Mrs George and Danny Banjo.

Before the gold rush

The rich coastal and riverine environments of tropical Cape York Peninsula supported a large Indigenous population, although population density was lower inland where rainfall is less reliable.17 Archibald Meston estimated the Indigenous population in pre-contact times to be ‘probably 20,000’ north of the 17th parallel.18 Bruce Rigsby suggested a figure of ‘probably less than 10,000’.19 Mike Morwood identified ‘high

population levels (and) intensive resource use' as features of the recent system of Aboriginal land use in Cape York Peninsula.20

At least twelve different languages were owned and spoken by the clans of the region, which includes what is now Lakefield National Park.21 Clans were the primary land owning and land using groups, whereas the language-named ‘tribes’ of today are believed to represent post-contact social formations.22 For example, the Kuku Thaypan people are descended from clans who spoke Thaypanic and related languages.23 Clans who spoke varieties of Guugu Yimithirr occupied coastal lands north and south of the Endeavour River and west to Battle Camp.24 Walter Roth used the term ‘Koko Warra’

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to describe ‘various mutually-friendly groups of natives wandering over the hinterland south and east of Princess Charlotte Bay, speaking within certain limits similar dialects and practising similar usages and customs’. However, Rigsby has concluded that the term ‘Koko Warra’ refers to a number of distinct clans and languages such as the Sugar-bag Bee language which was spoken towards Laura. The cultural network included clans of the North Kennedy, Normanby and Laura Rivers, as well as clans who spoke varieties of Guugu Yimithirr, Lamalama, Olkola and Kuku Yalanji languages respectively. As personal multilingualism was another important regional characteristic, members of the various clans were (and are) able to speak, or at least understand, languages of their neighbours.

The land was organised in hundreds of countries which were owned and used according to a complex system of law, rights, responsibilities and spiritual associations, all of which were vested in clan estates. Aboriginal people moved within this region in ‘appropriate and customary ways’. Their hunter-gatherer-fisher economies entailed seasonal cycles of activities which were in harmony with the tropical monsoon climate. In the wet season people sought relief from heat, flooding and mosquitoes on the plateaux and ranges, although these upland areas could be visited throughout the year. The dry season (May to October) was the time of movement, ceremony and social interaction.

The rivers were central to Aboriginal economies and lifestyles. Journals of various European travellers record how, in the rich habitats of the Normanby–North Kennedy river systems, Aborigines caught fish (using traps, ‘poison’ plants, weirs, nets, spears and hollow logs), gathered foods (such as waterlily roots, shellfish and eggs), hunted animals, constructed huts, burned the grass, followed pathways, made camp fires, cooked in stone ovens and stored their fishing nets, spears, dillybags, clubs and axes. The high density of Aboriginal settlement is evident in Mulligan’s description of ‘a regular township’ of ‘about one hundred gunyahs or more’ near the Kennedy River. Another example is a ‘fishing station’ on the Normanby River near Battle Camp: The blacks must have had a good many large barramundi judging by the heaps of scales lying about. Six dome-shaped gunyahs, 4 feet high and 6 in diameter, were still standing.

Importantly, ‘rivers were major corridors or paths of interaction’. The importance of waterways is reflected in the association of cultural sites with water resources.

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25. Roth 1910: s.3.
33. See records of Hann 1873; Mulligan 1873 quoted in Pike 1998: 37–40; Jack 1922 vol II: 474–518; Corfield 1923; Roth 1901: s.15.
and the frequency of aquatic motifs (such as fish, crocodiles and freshwater tortoise) in local rock paintings.\textsuperscript{37}

The *Aboriginal Land Claim to Lakefield National Park* has documented the connections of Aboriginal people with the general area of this study.\textsuperscript{38} For example, the Magarrmagarr-warra clan estate took in Boralga.\textsuperscript{39} In 1877 Sub-Inspector O'Connor of the first Lower Laura Native Mounted Police detachment referred to the impressive appearance, prosperity and courage of local Aboriginal people, but made no comment on language/s or identities: 'The Blacks are very numerous and plucky as a race they are tall and well made and fat — they have only the wommera-spear as a weapon of defence or offence, but these they can throw nearly 200 ... yards.'\textsuperscript{40}

**From gold to cattle**

In October 1873 a Queensland government party disembarked at the Endeavour River to journey to the Palmer River to proclaim the goldfields. The group included Northern Roads Engineer A Macmillan, Gold Commissioner H St George, around 90 prospectors and a detachment of Native Mounted Police led by veteran officer Sergeant Armstrong.\textsuperscript{41} The officials were mounted, others were on foot, many in the party were armed.

Charles Heydon wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1874 questioning the methods used in this crucial period, at which point 'permanent relations between the two races were to begin': 'Can it be possible that the leaders had received no instructions as to the treatment of the natives, and the importance of establishing friendly relations and treating them with kindness?'\textsuperscript{42} Apparently no such instructions were issued, as can be seen in the progress of St George's expedition.

Events of this journey include the now legendary battle of the Normanby (at Battle Camp).\textsuperscript{43} William Webb, a member of the expedition, described the fate of Aborigines in this unequal combat: 'Thereupon the blacks ran away and were pursued as far as a large lagoon, and all that went there stayed there.'\textsuperscript{44} Later at the Kennedy River: 'A lot of blacks were shot while we were at this camp. I do not know why, as they had not interfered with us.'\textsuperscript{45} Another expedition member, J Hogg, also recalled an attack on 'a big mob of blacks' on the Kennedy River: 'It was decided to disperse them at once and for this purpose the troopers rode ahead.'\textsuperscript{46} When Mulligan met fierce Aboriginal resistance on his second Palmer expedition in 1874, the scene was set for
war: 'After three times being repulsed ... they made a fierce rush at us as we were leaving the camp. I never saw blacks so determined ... They will however, for the future, know the effect of the rifle in this locality.'

Proclamation of the gold fields was followed by the rapid development of roads and settlements to support the diggings. Macmillan's hastily surveyed route became the rush track (Palmerville Dray track). A mail station established at a crossing of the track on the lower Laura River, half way between Cooktown and the Palmer (a distance of some 140 miles or 225 kilometres) became an important staging post. Harry Jones occupied land there at 'Boralga', and opened a public house and butcher's shop. Chinese market gardens and wet season holding yards for stock were established nearby.

In 1875 a telegraph station was constructed a few miles east of the crossing.

An immediate effect of the gold rush was a boost to the north Queensland cattle industry. Mobs of cattle were driven north from Mount Surprise, thus extending the industry to the base of Cape York Peninsula. Palmer noted that 'very few breeding cattle were brought out, but some small runs towards Cooktown were stocked with cattle, the country consisting of open timbered ridges of only a second-class description, but fairly well watered.'

Meanwhile, St George was complaining of inadequate police protection on the goldfields where 50 to 80 new prospectors were arriving every day. The Cooktown Herald called for more police detachments to prevent attacks and 'atrocious murders' by Aborigines along the routes to the Palmer. Following the usual Queensland government practice of appointing Native Mounted Police units to 'newly settled country', a detachment was installed at Boralga by December 1875 (Figure 2).

The settlement of Boralga

Sub-Inspector O'Connor of the first Lower Laura detachment described the Boralga landscape as:

Very flat, thickly covered in places with cabbage tree — also with numerous large and small lagoons ... with the exception of one or two sand ridges the country is all submerged during the wet season the flood marks ranging on the trees from two to twenty-five feet ... There is no country that can be called good (10) ten miles below these Barracks to the sea on account of its flooded nature.

Historical maps show the features of Boralga — the river, Boralga Swamp, tracks to the Palmer, Jones' Public House (Boralga Homestead), 'Chinese huts', the Police Pad-

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47 Mulligan 27 May 1874, quoted in Jack 1922 vol II: 426.
48 'GP' 1942: 29.
49 Corfield 1923; Stephens 1972; see also Embley's plans 1883 (Queensland Department of Natural Resources DNR).
52 May 1983: 139; see also Cilento and Lack 1959: 249.
54 St George to Sec. Works and Mines 2/4/1874 QSA WOR/A83.
55 Cooktown Herald 11/11/74 (JO).
57 Cooktown Herald 1/1/1876; Corfield 1923; Plan of Laura River 1877 QSA A/40117.
58 O'Connor to Police Commissioner 1/12/1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77.
PLAN
of
LAURA RIVER.

n.m.P. District of the
Lower Laura, thus:

Scale
16 miles to an Inch

Figure 2: O'Connor's plan of Laura River, 1877. Queensland State Archives A/40117
dock, the Native Mounted Police camp and the telegraph office (Figure 2 and 4). O'Connor's plan of the 'Police Reserve' shows an area of 238.5 acres (96.5 hectares) which extends a little north of the telegraph line to the Laura River, with the police camp and swamp in between (Figure 3). The substantial nature of the camp is indicated by its scattered remains which were mapped in 2000, confirming general features of O'Connor's 1877 plan (see Figure 5). The buildings included troopers' huts (Figure 6), an officer's residence, blacksmith's forge, constable's cottage and store sheds (Figure 7). As well as traces of these structures, the remains include scarred ironwood trees and stone artefacts which may pre-date the police camp. At the periphery of the site a cemetery contains the graves of Alexander Mann, speared by Aborigines in 1875, and Peter McDermott of Laura Station who died in 1884 after a fall from his horse.

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59. Eg see Plan of Police Reserve on Laura River, Plan of NM Police Paddock and Plan of Laura River 1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77; Plan of Cook district 1883 QSA A/41364.
60. Plan of Police Reserve on Laura River 1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77.
61. Cole et al. 2002; JO Neg. 57328 may depict the tent phase of the camp.
62. JO Neg. 66439.
Figure 4: Plan of Cook district showing Laura, Little Laura and Deighton Rivers, police paddock and telegraph reserve, McDermott and O'Beirne's station (Laura station) and various tracks to Cooktown, 1883. Queensland State Archives A/41364
Figure 5: Plan of the remains of the Lower Laura native Mounted Police Camp (after Cole et al 2002)
Figure 6 (above): Detachment of Native Mounted Police, Lower Laura. Note troopers' huts in the background. John Oxley Library Neg. 66439

Figure 7 (below): Sub-Inspector Marrett and wife in front of their residence, Lower Laura, c1882. John Oxley Library Neg. 61221 (Marrett collection)
Lower Laura Native Mounted Police camp was staffed by an officer, constable and around eight troopers. The composition of the detachment in 1884 (a Sub-Inspector, six troopers and 21 horses) altered little over the next decade. The first Lower Laura troopers were recruited from the south (Fraser Island), because it was assumed that strangers would be unsympathetic to local Aboriginal people and less likely to desert. In fact, trooper defections were very common in north Queensland. There were also Aboriginal women and children residing at Lower Laura, and it is likely that they were captured from local Aboriginal groups by the police. Members of the first Lower Laura detachment achieved some fame when they were sent to Victoria to assist in tracking the Kelly Gang.

Located near a river and a 'fever-ridden swamp', Boralga required its occupants to endure heat, humidity, floods, mosquitoes and isolation for many months of the year. As mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria (known as 'Gulf' or 'Palmer' fever) were a common cause of illness and death in the settler population, it is likely that life at Boralga took its toll in terms of health, morale and efficiency.

The pastoral frontier
The Palmer gold rush was shortlived and by 1879 most of the miners had deserted the region. Less spectacular gold deposits were eventually mined at Coen, Normanby, Batavia and Alice Rivers, but pastoralism continued as a major focus of European settlement in Cape York Peninsula.

In spite of falling cattle prices at the end of the 1870s, there was a flurry of applications to license crown land around the Laura River for pastoral purposes. Fox Vale on the Little Laura River was licensed in 1877, although the area had been stocked with cattle somewhat earlier. In 1879 Peter McDermott and Fergus O'Beirne were licensed to operate the Laura run and Donald Mackenzie was granted leases at Lakefield in the early 1880s. Olive Vale, Battle Camp, Breeza Plains and the Deighton runs were licensed around the same time. In 1882 Harry Jones applied for a licence for Boralga which he had occupied for some years.

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63. Staffing was typical of other police camps: see Queensland Police Department 1982.
64. Seymour to Col. Sec. 20/12/1884 QSA A/40310 Col. Sec. 9064/84; Travelling Inspector report 23/12/1894 QSA A/41364 149S, 01864/94.
67. See abductions recorded by Binnie 1944; Jack 1922 vol II: 483; Hogg nd; May 1983.
69. Queensland 2/1/1897.
70. Fever was endemic in the white population: see E Maunsell quoted by Holthouse 1985: 1-2; Johnston 1977; Cilento and Lack 1959: 203; Corfield 1923: 70; Lamond to Police Commissioner 18/5/1897 QSA A/41230 06033/97; Lamond to Police Commissioner 19/5/97 QSA A/41230 06088/97; see also Hill 1907: 69; Whittington 1964–65: 515.
The completion in 1888 of a railway from Cooktown to Laura Terminus (Laura Government Township) resulted in the decline of the Palmerville track and Boralga. The telegraph office was relocated to Laura which became a transport hub for the Peninsula. Due to pastoralists' agitation about the presence of Aborigines on their leases, the location of the police camp at Lower Laura continued to be strategic into the 1890s. However, in 1894 Lower Laura was closed, Laura Terminus police station was reopened, and other police camps maintained to protect pastoral interests and sporadic mining enterprises to the north. The buildings at Lower Laura were dismantled and recycled. Earl later described the abandoned site: 'On the sloping rise on the brink of a fever-stricken swamp, are dotted the derelict huts of a one-time large native police station ... The district became so subdued that the need for the station ceased to exist.'

The land came under various pastoral leasing arrangements before it was included in Lakefield National Park in 1979. In 1972 Ernie Stephens noted that ‘few people ... knew of the existence of an old police camp’ on the Laura River. Jerry Shepherd, a police tracker from Laura, guided Stephens to the site where they found ‘old yard posts to take rails (and) ... the old posts and ant bed floors of various buildings’.

Policing the Cook district

In the colonial period, Indigenous matters were administered by the Colonial Secretary for Queensland; frontier policy was managed by the Commissioner of Police and enacted by the Native Mounted Police force. It was understood by the settler community that police were in charge of relations with Aboriginal people. Hence geologist Robert Logan Jack wrote to the Colonial Secretary requesting that ‘an officer of native police with a few troopers should accompany the (survey) party for the double purpose of protecting the horses and taking charge of the relations of blacks and whites’.

Composition of the Cook police network varied according to the frontier situation. Over the years, the Cook police district included police camps at Lower Laura, Normanby, Puckley Creek, Upper Laura (Butcher’s Hill), McIvor River, Eight Mile, Frome, Coen and Palmerville, all supervised by a District Inspector based in Cooktown (see Figure 8). At least four police camps existed around Cooktown in 1888 — the Eight Mile, Normanby, McIvor and Lower Laura. Locations were selected for strategic reasons. As with pastoral homesteads, many police camps were situated near rivers or lagoons, a practice which probably contributed to the high incidence of fever.

78. QSA A/41364 149S.
79. Eg Coen gold fields operated sporadically from 1878: see Bolton 1972: 257–60; Coen police records date from 1890 QSA A/41229.
80. Queensland 2/1/1897.
84. Jack 1922 vol II: 521.
85. Nott to Hamilton 19/9/1888 QSA A/41230, 7194/88; Upper Laura Native Mounted Police camp. at Butcher’s Hill also existed at the time.
86. Eg see Murray to Police Commissioner 11/12/1890 QSA /A41229-48S, 4392/91.
The operation of the police network resembled a military campaign. In dealing with ‘depredations’ (resistance by Aborigines) ‘double’ detachments could work together. Flying detachments’ could move as required. Equipment and materials were transported from one base to another; camps were closed and reopened, downgraded and upgraded according to the needs for settler protection. The process can be seen in Inspector Murray’s recommendations to move the Lower Laura Barracks to the Lower Normanby and the Coen Barracks to Archer River, following his assessment of the pattern of cattle and horse stealing and the location of Aboriginal wet season camps.

87. Travelling Inspector to Commissioner of Police 12/12/1893 QSA A/41364 149S, 12, 435/93.
Police operations were also based on British military style equipment and routines. Snider rifles were used throughout the frontier period and Martini Henry rifles were added from 1884. Substantial arms were held at Lower Laura even at the end of the police camp’s life in 1894:

Arms and Appointments: 12 S.C (Snider Carbines) 4 M.H.C. (Martini Henry Carbines). 3 Revolvers — serviceable.

Ammunition 170 R of S.C 140 R M.H.C and 50 R of revolver — sufficient.

Police uniforms included the distinctive peaked cap which became a symbol for the troopers in local Aboriginal sign language and rock art. Troopers wore the caps to distinguish them from local Aborigines, as can be seen in a case of mistaken identity at the Lower Laura crossing: WH Corfield, a packer to the goldfields in the Palmer days, described how he was about to fire at Aborigines before realising that they were from the Lower Laura detachment: 'The boy I saw running, went to get his uniform cap to denote a trooper.'

Official records are sparse for the early frontier period, but the paper trail does indicate the efforts and resources required to operate in such a remote location. Most records relate to the construction of buildings and fencing, and the maintenance of staff, uniforms, stock, firearms and ammunition, drays, boats, ploughs, saddlery and forges. Multiple records survive of minor transactions such as the acquisition of blacksmith's bellows. Sadly, such accountability was not applied to core operations such as the activities of police patrols. Although we cannot be sure whether policy, remoteness and/or natural disasters are responsible for the lack of key records for Lower Laura, a similar deficiency has been identified elsewhere. The 'breaking up' of police camps appears to have complied with the secretive, military style ethos of police operations.

Although it is difficult to track frontier engagements in detail, insights are available in a scattered archive of correspondence and reports, personal memoirs, drawings and photographs, newspapers, journals and books. However, witness accounts of frontier conflict may vary, as in reports of Battle Camp and the Strau murders. Some newspaper accounts appear to repeat events already reported, possibly to keep the pot of racial conflict on the boil. Hughes argues that the editors ‘believed they were involved in a state of open warfare’, a belief which would have contributed to a sense of fear in the settler community.

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89. See Lamond 1949: 32; for typical equipment see Travelling Inspector report 23/12/1894 QSA A/41364 149S, 01864/94.
90. QVP vol 1 1875: 617; QVP vol 1 1885: 543.
93. Corfield 1923: 70.
94. See QSA A/41364 149S.
95. Queenslander 1 May 1880: 560; Reynolds 1998: 111.
96. See Lamond 1949; Mulvaney 1989; Reynolds 2000; Fitzgerald 1982.
97. For Battle Camp see Kirkman 1978; Hughes 1978.
98. Eg Cooktown Herald 21/10/1874; Corfield 1923; ‘GP’ 1946; ‘Sundowner’ 1947; Hughes 1978: 110; Shay and Shay 1995 discuss the Strau inquest.
Bush patrols

Lower Laura camp was located strategically close to the roads, telegraph and cattle stations which it was required to protect. However, movements beyond Boralga were limited by the severe climate and terrain. O'Connor noted that the country downstream was ‘impassable for nearly five months’ of the year.  

The lack of natural pastures in the dry season meant that stock feed had to be imported and travel was restricted.  

The difficulties are evident in a report of a patrol to Laura: ‘Several miles of this patrol travelled on foot — horses being in too poor condition to carry us and country almost destitute of grass the whole way’. Rocky ground and sharp wattle tree stumps created treacherous conditions for horses, especially in the plateau country to the east.  

Protection of the Hell’s Gate track located some 36 miles away would have been limited by such factors. As Lower Laura police were expected to patrol a vast pastoral district which extended north to Breeza Plains, south to Maytown and west to the Kennedy River, they were hard pressed to visit cattle runs several times a year.  

Native Mounted Police detachments could be commissioned as escorts or to protect travellers ‘who had a reasonable claim’. However, the core duty was to conduct ‘bush patrols’ to contain Aborigines. These forays were often in response to settler complaints of ‘depredations’ in which case Aborigines were vigorously pursued, sometimes over long distances, and ‘dispersed’, ie shot. WH Corfield’s description of the Lower Laura detachment ‘dispersing blacks’ at the Kennedy River reflects the brutality of most accounts. Aborigines allegedly responsible for killing two of Corfield’s horses were tracked for days by the detachment with O’Connor, Corfield and a corporal bringing up the rear. After they had finished shooting, the assailants set fire to the Aborigines’ possessions (spears, woomeras and dillybags). It appears that the sole survivors of the group pursued were some old women ‘who had knocked up the previous evening and could not make the camp’.  

O’Connor was reportedly involved in the massacre of Aborigines at Cape Bedford ‘in retaliation for the near fatal spearing of two whites’. The incident was investigated by Bishop Hale of the Aboriginal Commission and later by journalist R Spencer Browne. An earlier reprisal led by Inspector Coward to avenge the Strau murders was reported by the Cooktown Herald.  

100 O’Connor to Police Commissioner 1/12/1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77.  
102 Garroway to Police Commissioner 22/11/1904 QSA A/41596, 18594/04.  
103 G Musgrave (Kuku Thaypan Elder), Ang-grarra Aboriginal Corporation, pers. comm. 1999.  
104 See O’Connor to Police Commissioner 1/12/1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77; see also plan of Laura River 1877 QSA A/40117.  
105 Police Commissioner to Col. Sec. 20/12/1884 QSA A/40310 Col. Sec. 9064/84.  
106 Hill 1907: 75; Jack vol II: 522.  
108 Corfield 1923: 64.  
111 Cooktown Herald 28/10/1874; see also Corfield 1923.  
Willy Long of Laura related how his parents survived an attack on Olkola people led by the 'officer in charge of Musgrave police station'. As in other incidents in which peaceful rivers and lagoons were turned into massacre sites, Aborigines fled to a swamp where they were shot. The victims may have belonged to one of five camps in the Coen area reported to have been massacred in 1889 by a formidable force of forty, comprising three police detachments and volunteers led by Sub-Inspector Urquhart. Such reprisals continued until at least 1896, as indicated by Culpin's account of events which followed the death of pastoralist Mackenzie: '[The Aborigines] were tracked to a camp on the Normanby river, where a good many found a final resting place.'

A feature of police patrols was the abduction of Aboriginal women and children, a practice which was an ongoing source of 'trouble between whites and blacks'. Harry Mole (who later became a police tracker at Laura) was 'brought in as a child by members of a punitive expedition who had slaughtered virtually all of his people, the Gugu-Warra tribe'. The attack took place at Jack Lakes, north of Boralga. Corfield described how his friend Sub-Inspector O'Connor captured an Aboriginal boy of about six years of age while 'dispersing some blacks'. O'Connor 'gave' the boy to Corfield. The manager of Rocklands station near Camooweal obtained a child in a similar manner:

One of my boys named Oscar, this boy I got at Cooktown in 1887 & he has been with me ever since & when I got him he was a thorough myall ... he was somewhere about 9 or 10 years of age then ... the police got him for me.

**Justice on the frontier**

Kirkman has shown that, from the gold rush days, police used confrontational methods to manage race relations. The approach is illustrated in JH Binnie's account of police terrorising Aborigines in the Palmer days:

The police and black trackers would go out immediately and round the distant tribe — usually about 100 in number. They generally had to do some shooting when they first met the mob to frighten them; then they would get two girls and tie each one to a tree, about 100 yards apart, and keep them tied up until they both told the same story about the crime.

Parry Okeden's 1897 report reveals that the approach was retained over two decades: '[The Native Mounted Police] has apparently confined its operations to retalia—

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118. Malone to Police Commissioner 26/9/1911 QSA A/44857.
121. Corfield 1923: 59.
123. See Kirkman 1978: 122-4.
124. Binnie 1944: 11-12 (Binnie wrote of his life on the Palmer 1876–82).
tory action after the occurrence of outrages and seems to have dropped all idea of employing only merely deterrent or conciliatory methods'.

If police attempted conciliation they were likely to be met with vigorous local opposition. For example, Sub-Inspector O'Connor (of Lower Laura) was criticised in the *Cooktown Courier* for negotiating with Aborigines in 1879, a strategy which was rendered virtually impossible by the attitudes of pastoralists. The situation is reflected in a complaint made in 1884 by the District Police Inspector to the Police Commissioner in a letter which defends Sub-Inspector Marrett against pastoralists' allegations of inefficiency: 'It is utterly hopeless for him (the Inspector) to expect the good feelings of the majority of his neighbours — humanity is unrecognised — their creed extermination of the natives.'

In the same vein Police Commissioner Seymour advised the Colonial Secretary that the pastoralists expected police 'to pursue and shoot down' Aborigines who speared or disturbed cattle. In 1885 Seymour indicated that he recognised the reasons for Aboriginal resistance in the Cook district, but it appears that government policy was untransformed by this report:

The condition of the blacks on the coast and in the interior of the Cook district has been a matter of some concern. Settlement has advanced on the tribes so rapidly that they have lost their hunting grounds and have been deprived of the only means of existence. The consequence has been the committal of depredations requiring that many complaints have reached the Department.

As British subjects, Aboriginal people were entitled to the protection of the law, but, as (later) admitted by the police, they 'probably were hunted whenever seen'. Settlers usually took the law into their own hands, apparently secure in the knowledge that they were immune from prosecution. After Logan Jack's request for a police escort was refused, he engaged 'boys' who, he claimed, shot and killed two Aborigines near the Normanby in 1879. Jack later wrote: 'I hold myself free of responsibility for what happened when we were forced to take the law into our own hands'. Pastoralist Edward Palmer stated that 'The white pioneers were harder on the blacks in the way of reprisals when they were forced to deal with them for spearing their men or their cattle or horses even than the Native Police'. Pastoralists used poisons as well as rifles to kill Aborigines, as indicated in reports of multiple Aboriginal deaths caused by the consumption of poisoned food obtained from cattle stations.

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125. QVP 1897 vol 11: 16.
127. H Fitzgerald to Commissioner of Police 5/3/1885 QSA COL/A422, 1840/85, quoted by Haviland and Haviland 1980: 122; see also QSA A/40310 Marrett, CB Police Staff file.
128. Seymour to Col. Sec. 20/12/1884 QSA A/40310 9064/84 Col. Sec. 9064/84.
129. QVP 1885 vol I: 543.
130. See Kidd 1997: 3.
131. Evans 1999: 189 notes that Aborigines were unable to act as witnesses in Queensland law courts until 1887.
135. See also Loos 1982: 57, 61.
From the gold rush days, Aboriginal children and adults were kidnapped to be exploited by settlers for labour and/or sexual purposes. Carriers to the goldfields were said to be serious offenders,\textsuperscript{118} pastoralists pressured police to round up Aborigines for station work,\textsuperscript{139} and Cooktown residents conspired with settlers 'in outside districts' to abduct Aboriginal children.\textsuperscript{140} Roth noted that the latter practice had been 'going on for years, and with the exception of one or two cases ... without good result to the children' (as) 'prostitution and disease usually follow'.\textsuperscript{141}

Official policy stated that 'In every case the same law applies to blacks as to white and if the officers go beyond the law they do so at their own risk'.\textsuperscript{142} However, Laura school teacher Millais Culpin portrays a prejudiced system which was at one with the racist attitudes of the settler community:

The police now after this tribe will report to headquarters that they 'dispersed' the niggers but will give no real account of the affair. If some busybodies down South were acquainted with the affair the police would probably be tried for murder. If a nigger kills a white man & is brought up in the Supreme Court he is almost sure of acquittal. Then the usual plan is for the police to escort him back to his country & accidentally 'lose' him on the road, so that justice is done in spite of the law.\textsuperscript{143}

In the 1890s the Aboriginal child known as Oscar of Cooktown drew a picture of Aboriginal prisoners chained to a tree.\textsuperscript{144} As late as 1899 police complained of the absence of a cell at Laura where prisoners were chained to a tree, sometimes for two days.\textsuperscript{145} In 1913 Ethel Culpin wrote that the 'native 'Lock up' is very crude — Built of timber — the prisoners are chained up inside'.\textsuperscript{146} Apparently the structure was gone by 1924 when a traveller recorded that Laura 'had no lock-up, only a yard where native prisoners were chained to trees.'\textsuperscript{147} The practice of chaining Aboriginal prisoners was retained well into the 20th century, as George Musgrave (now over eighty years of age) recalls seeing Aborigines forced to walk 'in chains' across the Peninsula.\textsuperscript{148}

**Resisting the frontier**

The establishment of Boralga near important waterways followed a characteristic pattern of colonial settlement that inevitably provoked conflict with Aboriginal land owners. However, the tragic outcomes of the battle of the Mitchell River and Battle Camp demonstrated the futility of open combat against mounted opponents with high powered guns. Instead, Aborigines waged guerrilla warfare to target the Palmerville...
Track and Douglas’ Hell’s Gate track (a pack track to the gold fields used from March 1874). Miners, teamsters, lone and group travellers and their stock were vulnerable, particularly at night when packs, tents and drays provided poor protection from spears which could be projected with accuracy and force from some distance. Aborigines laid ambushes by rolling logs across tracks and planting stakes in wheel tracks. The *Cooktown Herald* opined that miners were having to ‘enter into guerrilla warfare, and risk their lives against the sable foes, who were immeasurably their superiors in tactics and bush fighting’. Such tactics were extremely effective on the remote Hell’s Gate track where, according to Mulligan, ‘Many a Chinaman and many a white man lost his life ... by the blacks’.

At the Lower Laura crossing, Aborigines attacked from the cover of dense vegetation on the river banks. Mail contractor John Hogs fleisch, who operated a mail station at Boralga crossing before the establishment of the police camp, was said to have been attacked by Aborigines at the crossing on at least two occasions. The *Cooktown Herald* wrote that during one such ‘ambush’, ‘Hogs fleisch’ (sic) was forced to flee, ‘the blacks having taken possession of the river and its banks’. Alexander Mann (buried in Boralga cemetery) was fatally speared in the area in February 1875. In January 1876 the *Cooktown Herald* was pleased to report that, as part of an upgrade in the capacity of the Native Mounted Police force ‘in accordance with our frequent and urgent arguments to that effect’, Sub-Inspector O’Connor was to be installed with troops ‘at the Laura’ which, according to the *Herald*, ‘had been made such a notoriously noted spot by the blacks’.

**Adapting European materials**

As early as 1874–75, Aborigines had used steel to manufacture axes, spear points and digging sticks and glass to fashion flakes and blades. In 1877 O’Connor observed: ‘They have tomahawks made of all kinds of iron such as: bolts, pieces of tines (sic), guard irons — old chisels.’ In Aboriginal camps O’Connor found ‘different parts of European clothing; legs of trousers, sleeves of coats etc, made into dillybags’. Mulligan reported the use of ‘tomahawks made out of one inch iron’ on ‘Kennedy country’, and ironwork was stripped from European graves at Boralga. Telegraph wire removed by ‘the blacks at the Laura on the old Palmerville Road’ may have been used to make spear points. Jack noted the ingenuity with which Aboriginal people recycled materials: ‘As a rule, the natives fashion, with infinite pains, such inconsidered

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149. *Cooktown Herald* 21/10/1874.
152. Strike 1988: 2 quoted the *Cooktown Herald* 3/2/1875 and *Cooktown Courier* 12/6/1875 (Barry Strike is a descendant of J Hogs fleisch).
155. Hann 1873; Hogg nd; *Cooktown Herald* 11/11/1874.
156. O’Connor to Police Commissioner 1/12/1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77.
157. O’Connor to Police Commissioner 1/12/1877 QSA A/40117 File 1449, 4072/77.
160. *Cooktown Courier* 25/1/1879; Coen residents claimed that Aborigines removed telegraph wire to make weapons, QSA A/41229, 4553/91.
trifles of old irons and shovels, broken pick-heads, scraps of iron hoops, ship's bolts, telegraph wire, cart-wheel tires and the like into weapons and implements, with which they perform prodigies in the way of tree-felling, etc.\textsuperscript{161}

Although such adaptations delivered economic benefits, their cultural impact is unknown. It is possible that this was significant, given the social effects of the displacement of stone axes by steel axes in Yir Yiront culture of western Cape York Peninsula.\textsuperscript{162} The appearance of stencilled steel axes and paintings of pigs, horses and policemen in Laura rock art represented innovations which pointed to significant cognitive adjustments as Aboriginal society was confronted with exotic species and materials and a new world order.\textsuperscript{163}

**Secret strategies**

Aboriginal elders have explained that sorcery paintings played a role in the war against the police.\textsuperscript{164} In one powerful composition, 'lines drawn from the head of a repainted snake to the foot of one police painting were said to put the poison in the policeman'.\textsuperscript{165} In another, a figure of a policeman is depicted in a prone position (a sign of death) as if he had been thrown from his horse. Recently, Aboriginal elders of the Laura district recorded stories of the 'wild time' which relate how other secret strategies were used by Aborigines to outwit the police.\textsuperscript{166}

**Resisting pastoralism**

Pastoralists had selected the best areas, constructed homesteads on prime water frontage, and were determined to exclude Aborigines, although this was illegal according to licence conditions. The fearful reactions of Aboriginal people encountered in 1879 by Logan Jack near the Normanby River point to the perilous nature of their situation.\textsuperscript{167} The impact of virtual exclusion from important water resources was particularly severe in a region of erratic, monsoonal rainfall. Water holes were polluted by stock,\textsuperscript{168} and customary subsistence activities around rivers and lagoons were disrupted, as were hunting and land management practices such as grass firing on the alluvial plains.\textsuperscript{169}

In response, Aboriginal people were driven to make greater use of the semi-arid plateau country which they had occupied periodically for thousands of years.\textsuperscript{170} Here there are springs associated with sandstone aquifers, spacious rock shelters and a variety of plant resources, some of which, like figs and nonda plum, are available in the dry season.\textsuperscript{171} These rocky refuge areas were beyond the range of police in the dry season.

\textsuperscript{161} Jack 1922 vol II: 502.
\textsuperscript{162} Sharp 1952.
\textsuperscript{163} Cole 1995.
\textsuperscript{164} Trezise 1968, 1985; see also Loos 1982; Cole 1995.
\textsuperscript{165} Trezise 1993: 51.
\textsuperscript{166} Cole 1999.
\textsuperscript{167} Jack 1922 vol II: 486, 488, 491, 494.
\textsuperscript{168} Binnie 1944: 12 notes water pollution by cattle.
\textsuperscript{169} For evidence of Aboriginal use of aquatic foods see Hann 1873; Mulligan quoted in Pike 1998; Jack 1922; Corfield 1923; importance of grass firing is noted by Mulligan, quoted in Pike 1998: 109–10.
\textsuperscript{170} Morwood and Hobbs 1995; Cole 1998.
\textsuperscript{171} Morgan et al. 1995: 13; Morwood and Hobbs 1995.
due to lack of feed for horses and in the wet due to boggy conditions.\textsuperscript{172} The remoteness from settler activities is evident in Mulligan’s observation of 1881: ‘There is a lot of useless country lying between the Normanby and Laura Rivers, and the Cooktown and Palmer Roads. I question if any white man has ventured over this; the Native Police may have done so.’\textsuperscript{173}

In the 1880s, it is likely that Aboriginal clans depleted by ‘dispersals’ and abductions were reduced to smaller, fewer and less viable groups. Apparently Aboriginal people still moved around Boralga,\textsuperscript{174} but their strategic use of the upland areas became critical to survival, as indicated in oral history and archaeological evidence which testify to the sustained use of this country in the post-contact period.\textsuperscript{175} Mulligan, who journeyed along Hell’s Gate track in the early 1880s, made a series of important observations which support this evidence.

In 1881 Mulligan noted that the Aborigines had ‘taken possession of’ the rugged plateau lands in between the Normanby and Laura Rivers:

There can have been nobody along it for years, judging by the way the blacks have taken possession of it now. In many places they have built little townships right on the road, and have the highway blocked frequently by trees chopped down for ‘sugarbags’. Their tracks and tomahawks brands are plentiful, but they themselves keep under cover.\textsuperscript{176}

Further along the track Mulligan observed:

This is a great stronghold for the blacks, judging by their camps and late tracks. To-day there seemed to be plenty of water in places that were bar-bound, at which the darkies camp, and no doubt find this a good refuge for them.\textsuperscript{177}

Mulligan returned to Hell’s Gate track in 1883:

Up on top of this tableland, rough as it was, it was actually alive with kangaroos and wallabies, and also blacks, who had regular townships along Hell’s Gate Track. This was a great rendezvous for the blacks. The rough nature of the country and the plentifulness of the marsupials was quite what they wanted, seeing that there was no longer traffic on Hell’s Gate Track.\textsuperscript{178}

\textbf{Cattle hunters}

Aborigines had speared horses from the gold rush times, a strategy which was described by the Cooktown Herald as an ‘outrage’.\textsuperscript{179} With the expansion of pastoralism, cattle hunting became an important resistance strategy.\textsuperscript{180} Parry-Okeden noted

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{172} See Seymour to Colonial Secretary 20/12/1884 QSA A/40310 9064/84 Col. Sec. 9064/84; Fitzgerald to Police Commissioner 5/3/1885 QSA COL/A422 1840/85.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Mulligan quoted by Pike 1998: 83.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Fitzgerald to Police Commissioner 5/3/1885 notes that police patrolled through Jones’ Boralga run ‘interviewing the Deighton and Normanby Blacks’ QSA COL/A422 1840/85.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Trezise 1968, 1971; ‘Tramp’ 1936: 27 refers to Aboriginal use of ‘secluded mountains’ of the Normanby River district as vantage points during the ‘Palmer days’.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Mulligan quoted in Pike 1998: 82.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Mulligan quoted in Pike 1998: 83.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Mulligan quoted in Pike 1998: 94.
\item \textsuperscript{179} \textit{Cooktown Herald} 5/4/1876; see also Reynolds 1982: 107; Corfield 1923; St George to Secretary Works and Mines 2/4/1874 QSA WOR/A83.
\item \textsuperscript{180} See also Reynolds 1982: 163–6.
that Aborigines considered cattle 'their lawful prey', but pastoralists viewed raids on cattle as theft which caused them serious economic disadvantage.\(^{181}\)

As always, the wet season hampered police and pastoral activities, providing safer conditions for Aborigines to move around.\(^ {182}\) In 1890 Inspector Murray wrote that the owner of Lakefield Station had found large Aboriginal camps full of cattle bones in areas which could not be reached in wet weather.\(^ {183}\) Murray called for additional troopers and advised against shifting the Laura Camp, in view of the scale of attacks on cattle around the Deighton and Laura.\(^ {184}\) Another letter reported that the Lower Laura and Eight Mile detachments were working to recover stolen firearms which were being used by Aborigines to shoot cattle.\(^ {185}\) This reference to Aboriginal use of guns appears to be most unusual, but police noted that 'it was becoming a very general thing for blacks to steal firearms now.'\(^ {186}\)

Police were frustrated by the impact of cattle hunting and the endless conflict between pastoralists and Aborigines. A letter to the Police Commissioner recommends that the area north of the Mitchell River be made a territory for the Aborigines, because 'as long as whites are on their country there must be war between them'. Without increased police protection, 'the squatters will have to quit their holdings, it is much to be regretted that the Peninsula was ever opened for settlement'.\(^ {187}\)

Pastoralists continued to agitate for protection between the Laura River and the Coen, but the Police Commissioner blamed some of the problems on the pastoralists themselves: 'They keep very few hands on their runs to look after their stock and they generally look to the police to see that their cattle are not disturbed'.\(^ {188}\) In 1892 cattle hunting continued at Breeza and Lakefield stations and a trooper was speared.\(^ {189}\) Pastoralists demanded the installation of a police camp at Coen or on the lower Normanby near Breeza station, but the District Inspector argued that Lower Laura provided a better base from which 'all that part of the country can be much easier reached.'\(^ {190}\) In 1894 the Travelling Inspector warned against closing Lower Laura as 'the Musgrave detachment would not be able to keep the Aboriginals in check in that large and broken tract of country extending from the Laura River to Princess Charlotte Bay — The Aborigines are very numerous'.\(^ {191}\)

In 1894 the typical work force on cattle stations in the Laura district included two or three Aboriginal workers described by whites as 'black boys'.\(^ {192}\) The term 'black boy'

\(^{182}\) Murray to Police Commissioner 6/6/1890 QSA A/41229, 7389/90; see also Balser et al. to Police Commissioner 29/7/1890 QSA A/41230, 8718/90.
\(^{183}\) Murray to Police Commissioner 2/8/1890 QSA A/41364, 8342/90.
\(^{184}\) Murray to Police Commissioner 6/6/1890 QSA A/41229, 7389/90.
\(^{185}\) Murray to Police Commissioner 2/8/1890 QSA A/41364, 8342/90; note that Corfield 1923: 59 refers to the use of 'rusty rifles' by absconding Aboriginal troopers.
\(^{186}\) Seymour to Colonial Secretary 3/3/1891 QSA/A41229-48S 2344.91.
\(^{187}\) Fitzgerald to Police Commissioner 18/8/1892 QSA A/41229, 8427/92.
\(^{188}\) Corfield to Police Commissioner 15/8/1890 QSA A/41229-485, 8827/90.
\(^{189}\) Culpin 29/12/1893 in Mackeith 1987: 47.
was defined by a contributor to the *Queenslander*’s 1880 forum on race relations as ‘servants who get no wages’, a typical example of the ‘loathsome and horrible system of dealing with our blacks’. Their fate was similar to that of other Aboriginal children and adults of the Cook district who were forced into situations of unpaid domestic and bush labour. Such people were characterised by police as ‘semi-civilised’, since they spoke English and had experienced life on the fringes of white society.

The small number of Aboriginal workers on cattle stations reflected their mistreatment by pastoralists and the general hiatus in cross-cultural relations. It was not unusual for abused Aboriginal workers to abscond and/or seek revenge. Trezise recorded Caesar Lee Cheu’s story of a ‘Gugu Warra’ man named ‘Hero’ who was exploited as a station worker, escaped, worked again and was flogged by a pastoralist. Hero speared the pastoralist and took to a life on the run. In 1890 a thirteen year old Aboriginal worker was charged with the murder of pastoralist Harry Jones. It was said that Jones ‘worked the boy too hard and ... had threatened to shoot the lad’. The District Inspector, in discussing abuse of Aboriginal station workers, conceded that this ‘in some way account(s) for the native hostilities’. The violent deaths of pastoralists Jones of Koolburra (formerly of Boralga), Donald Mackenzie of Lakefield, Ferguson of Mentana, E Watson of Pine Creek and Charles Massy of Lallah Rook were symptomatic of the bitter and protracted pastoral–Aboriginal conflict on Cape York Peninsula.

End of the ‘wild time’

Although Aboriginal groups had been able to adapt traditional lifestyles, making forays into resource rich areas, occupying remote locations, raiding huts and hunting stock, in the long term these strategies were unsustainable. The difficulties are reflected in reports of large, semi-permanent camps on the Laura, Deighton and Kennedy Rivers. In 1892 Millais Culpin described such a camp on the Laura River: ‘About 1/4 mile from here is the camping ground of a tribe of over 100’. A photograph taken of Aboriginal men lining the Laura railway bridge c.1892 probably depicts occupants of this camp, as well as people who worked in Laura or on local cattle stations. The transitional state of Aboriginal society of the 1890s is apparent in the mixed appearance of the group — many of the men are holding spears, some are dressed in European clothing (Figure 9).

Pressures on Aboriginal people did not abate, as indicated by the Inspector of Police in 1894: ‘If they (the blacks) commit depredations they will be punished and

194. See Haviland and Hart 1998: 4; see also H Fitzgerald to Commissioner of Police 5/3/1885 QSA COL/A422, 1840/85 for evidence of such exploitation.
195. See Murray to Police Commissioner 6/6/1890 QSA A/41229, 7389/90; Whiteford to Lamond 4/5/1897 QSA COL/142.
199. May 1983: 71 quoting the *Queenslander* 13 September 1890.
203. JO Neg. 31561.
As the longstanding government policy of ‘dispersing’ large groups of Aborigines was not abandoned until the late 1890s, it is not surprising that the river camps were fluid in composition and location. Aboriginal people evidently continued to move around in groups, joining river camps from time to time. This mobility is indicated in a petition of 1894 which complained of large numbers of Aborigines making periodic visits to Laura. One of the last records from Lower Laura reports a patrol to the Aboriginal camp on the Laura river, apparently in a futile search for labour for the sugar industry: ‘There were very few blacks to be found and none suitable for plantations.’

By the 1890s imported diseases were endangering Queensland’s Aboriginal population. Venereal diseases which were apparent in Cooktown in the 1880s were reported in ‘outside’ districts in the 1890s. For example, the newly appointed Police Commissioner Parry-Okeden noted signs in the Coen district of ‘diseases that invariably follow the adoption of the vicious habits of the whites.’ Nevertheless, there were
still groups of Aboriginal people who were able to maintain, under immense duress, relatively free-ranging lifestyles and possibly adequate standards of health and well-being into the 1890s.\textsuperscript{211} It is likely that health problems increased in association with the increasingly sedentary and impoverished conditions of the later fringe camps.\textsuperscript{212} By 1913 for example, the camp on the Laura River had descended into poverty.\textsuperscript{213}

Eventually, most Aboriginal people of the area ‘came in’ to camps on the fringes of Laura and other towns, or on local telegraph or cattle stations.\textsuperscript{214} However, for some Aboriginal people the process was delayed until after the turn of the century. In 1900 it was reported that Aborigines were still disturbing cattle, firing grass and camping on water holes on Butcher's Hill Station (on the upper Laura River). The groups were described as ‘the Coco Minnies and the Coca Warras tribes (who) come over the head of the Deighton and from Maytown’.\textsuperscript{215} Trezise noted that one Aboriginal family came in to Maitland Downs station possibly around 1910.\textsuperscript{216} Aboriginal elders informed Trezise that the area between the Laura and Deighton Rivers was the ‘last stronghold’ of wild Aborigines.\textsuperscript{217} Evidently the tradition of rock art in that area continued in this area after the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{218} There are no records of the fate of these resilient people, but Trezise wrote that ‘In 1965 the informants were reluctant to enter this country in case some of these wild people still remained.’\textsuperscript{219}

Missions had appeared around Cooktown in the 1880s, but their operations were restricted by their inability to produce food and reluctance of Aborigines to come in.\textsuperscript{220} The Lutherans failed to extend their mission to the ‘crowds’ of Aborigines in the hinterland, even though they were inspired by this challenge.\textsuperscript{221} It is unlikely that Aboriginal clans of the Normanby-Laura area were affected by mission activities until the late 1890s, when large scale ‘removals’ to missions and reserves were authorised by the government.\textsuperscript{222} Around that time, the appointment of local trackers, awarding of king plates and distribution of rations to Aborigines on a regular basis represented a final systematic effort to bring remaining ‘wild’ Aboriginal people of this area under control.\textsuperscript{223}

\begin{footnotes}{211}Whiteford to Lamond 24/7/1897 POL/J20 10,634/97.
212 Reynolds 1978: 254 notes the uncertain food supplies and poor nutrition of fringe camps; Ethel Culpin in Mackeith 1987: 97 described the destitute nature of the occupants of the Laura camp in 1913.
213 Ethel Culpin in Mackeith 1987: 97 described the destitute nature of occupants of the Aboriginal camp at Laura in 1913.
215 Earl to Police Commissioner 3/3/1900 QSA A/41364. 05169/00.
220 Haviland and Haviland 1980.
221 Haviland and Haviland 1980: 128.
223 Roth 1898: 1; Lamond report on inspection of Laura Police Station 6/5/1897 PM Commissioner of Police inward correspondence 05,884/97, previous letter no. 147.97; 96.9571 Cook; Lamond to Police Commissioner 3/6/97 QSA POL/J20, 7104/97; Blake 1998: 61; see also Haviland and Hart 1998: 4.
Overview of conflict strategies

Ross Fitzgerald identified 'white frontier attitudes and the relatively high Aboriginal population' as sources of the racial violence in north Queensland, but the duration and ferocity of the conflict points to powerful motivations on both sides of the frontier.

A major consequence of 'white frontier attitudes' was the management of race relations by the Commissioner of Police. Another was the failure of police to conciliate with Aborigines or to contain the lawlessness of pastoralists and other new settlers. Although economic and demographic aspects of the frontier changed from 1873 to 1894, the policies of the government towards Aborigines failed to alter. Public complaints about alleged settler and police brutality aired in the *Queenslander* apparently had little impact on the Cook Police District. It is obvious that the distance from Brisbane (some 1500 miles or 2415 kilometres) enabled the government to ignore criticism of frontier policy for years.

The unusual longevity of Lower Laura police camp was due to its strategic location across the mining, transport and pastoral frontiers. However, it is likely that problems created by isolation and geography undermined the efficiency of the police. As regular officers could not transfer to the mounted corps (although the reverse could occur), the limited staffing pool of the Native Mounted Police gives the impression of being isolated and overworked. Aboriginal resistance, debilitating local conditions, ill health and ongoing complaints of new settlers may have affected police morale.

In the role of overseeing the destruction of Aboriginal society, Lower Laura Native Mounted Police camp was partially successful, as some local clans were obliterated, and the pastoral industry prevailed, if precariously. In the 1890s the sparse population of squatters struggled on, 'holding the land by a tenure scarcely more secure than that of the Aborigines themselves'. The substantial costs of maintaining protection led to serious suggestions that settlers abandon Cape York Peninsula.

Hughes has concluded that 'no one can be sure exactly how many whites died' on the Cooktown transport frontier. It is equally difficult to quantify Aboriginal deaths over the colonial period. From 1873, unknown numbers of Aboriginal men, women and children of the Cook district were shot, captured, poisoned, sexually assaulted, infected with virulent diseases and/or exploited by police, teamsters, packers, miners, government officials, farmers, pastoralists and others. The economic base and assets of Aboriginal society were systematically destroyed.

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226. See also Kirkman 1978.
227. See also Hughes 1978: 109 who noted that 'fever and desertion' impaired the efficiency of the Native Police.
229. Bolton 1972: 93; Hughes 1978: 103 stated that 'perhaps if the settlement had been closer, the duration of Aboriginal resistance would have been shorter'.
230. See above; a similar recommendation appears in 1896, QSA A/41590 360 S ‘WK’ 29/7/1896.
Reynolds correctly asserts that historical evidence of Aboriginal attitudes to the frontier is totally inadequate, but the Aboriginal position may be inferred in the nature and tenacity of Aboriginal resistance. The size and cohesion of the Indigenous population and the prosperity of local clans provided a basis for a bold and steadfast defence on several fronts (the transport corridors, new settlements and the gold fields). The profile of resistance to pastoralism indicates the capacity of clans to regroup and adapt while maintaining valued identities, customs and beliefs. Unlike on the Palmer goldfields where miners were scattered across the landscape, new settlers in the Laura–Normanby area were mainly confined to the grassy lowlands and river valleys. Hence the proximity of ‘wild’, inaccessible country to which Aboriginal people were long connected, and the prevailing monsoon climate to which they were well adapted, were important factors which supported the Aboriginal defence. In a possibly associated strategy, casual attachment to semi-permanent river camps provided a means of maintaining continuity with age-old patterns of land use on resource-rich waterways as well as a degree of independence and nutrition.

Rowley concluded that the process of Aboriginal people ‘coming in’ to European settlements could not occur until ‘only dispirited groups remained’. This situation developed at Cooktown very early in the frontier period, while in the rugged Palmer area the process was delayed until after 1880. The timing was even later around the Laura River where groups of Aboriginal people continued to maintain a clandestine presence on pastoral holdings in the 1890s and possibly later. Ultimately, integration with the cattle industry and local towns enabled many Aboriginal families to maintain their connections to land.

In attempting to compare ‘cosmological landscapes’ of European pastoralists with those of Indigenous people of Cape York Peninsula, Veronica Strang identified ‘affective values’ which characterise Kunjen engagements with land, for example: continuity of residence, cognitive encompassment of one area, collective identity, inalienable land ownership, cosmological structures related to local environment, economic sustainability and detailed local knowledge. This complex type of land tenure which has material as well as spiritual dimensions, sustained Aboriginal society throughout the colonial period.

**Historical significance of Boralga**

The Native Mounted Police network eventually vanished from Cape York Peninsula. The meagre material legacy is evident at Lower Laura, one of the most substantial and durable of its establishments.

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232. See Reynolds 1972: 34.
233. Kirkman 1978: 130, citing Loos 1976 notes the influence of geography on the mining frontier; Evans 1999: 37 notes that Fraser Island provided a refuge to Aboriginal people of the Wide Bay district.
234. Reynolds 1978: 254 states that fringe camps which had access to the sea or large rivers ‘had a much better chance of maintaining a reasonable level of nutrition and ... independence’.
‘Brolga’ remains a place in the landscape of local history and memory, with deeply felt connections to local people and the tracker and cattle station traditions. As a post-contact heritage place, the historic settlement of Boralga demonstrates a significant pattern of Queensland's colonial history, an epic story of Aboriginal resilience and the violent appropriation of Aboriginal lands. Boralga also testifies to the transience of frontier values and settlements and the significant challenges faced by new settlers. A few posts, graves and relics serve as a memorial of Queensland's failure to prevent another colonial war.

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Introduction

Frontier conflict has been a hotly contested issue in recent Australian historiography, particularly in the recent 'history wars' debate whose most public representatives have been seen to be the revisionist historian Professor Henry Reynolds on the one side, and the author and publisher Keith Windschuttle on the other. On both sides of this debate, the terms on which contemporary scholars can identity and document a history of frontier conflict have been discussed, asserted and challenged. For instance, the recent book *Frontier conflict: the Australian experience*, which arose from a forum held at the National Museum of Australia in December 2001, is an example of the controversies that arise around the very boundaries of historiography.\(^1\) In particular, controversy surrounds the methods by which, and extent to which, Aboriginal deaths in frontier conflict can be enumerated by contemporary historians, and the extent to which that conflict can be identified as warfare. That volume, which includes contributions from Reynolds, Windschuttle and another 13 scholars of Australian frontier history, is organised around a series of questions that address this issue in different ways: What happened? How do we know? How do we remember? How do we tell?

It is clear to all researchers of this area that the extent of frontier conflict and its status as documentable event — what happened and how do we know? — are amongst the most controversial questions in contemporary Australian historiography.\(^2\) Yet although undoubtedly important, these are not the only critical questions. Just as important in understanding the culture in which such events could arise are the other questions: how do we tell, and how do we remember? In a recent essay, Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe identify this as the process of ‘not simply attempting body-counts’ but ‘attending thoughtfully to the atmosphere of acceptable terror which surrounded these disturbing episodes’.\(^3\) Firstly, then, in what terms was frontier conflict told? For example, how covert was its expression or, contrastingly, how openly was it acknowledged? Secondly, what echoes do those forms of telling leave, to resonate in contemporary social memory?

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2. For example, in Victoria, see Clark 1996.
The central Australian frontier

A considerable focus of the 'history wars' debate has been the surreptitious nature of frontier conflict between settlers and Aboriginal people; deaths and other forms of social destruction are clearly difficult to quantify when they take a covert form, recorded on paper privately, euphemistically, or not at all. But, at different times and in certain contexts, conflict was amply recorded. Its reality is a key theme in hundreds of official documents written and sent between police officers, Protectors of Aborigines, colonial governors and colonial secretaries. In the first half of the nineteenth century, conflict was frequently discussed in such official documents as a pressing problem, both legal and ethical. Yet by the late nineteenth century, most of the Australian frontiers had receded and, in a confident mood of national consolidation, were being turned into the material of pioneer reminiscence. At such a time, when the notion of the 'active frontier' was becoming the theme of popular late-colonial adventure fiction, a contested frontier was just opening up in central Australia. In what terms was this later frontier imagined, administered and — in an official capacity — reported by those who 'made' it?

Mounted Constable William Wiltshire was Officer in Charge of the Native Police in the Centre from the time of the force's establishment in 1884 until his suspension from the police force on a charge of murder in 1891. A fellow officer who patrolled with the Native Police between 1884 and 1888 was Mounted Constable Erwin Wurmbrand. To a significant degree, these officers represented the authority of colonial law for the vast region around Alice Springs, reaching west into Arrernte country around the MacDonnell Ranges and south into Larinjka country. Both their names would become associated with a violent and legally flexible model of frontier policing. How did these policemen perceive their duty as monitors of the central Australian frontier and, in their records of patrols, how did they reconcile its violence in terms of the rule of law? As their official reports of the mid-1880s will show, they seemed to regard themselves as being at the spearhead of a special zone of warfare. This was not a zone of warfare openly declared as such, but nonetheless it was one in which a sense of strategic engagement with a recognisable enemy is openly and repeatedly articulated.

The term 'warfare' is, of course, amongst the most contested of terms to be argued over in the context of frontier historiography, not only because of its consequences for how we understand the national past, but also because of the dilemmas implicit in defining the terms that would justify its usage: what intent, what degree of political organisation, what scale does use of the term require? Yet 'warfare' may well be the best word to describe the mindset, as well as the tactics, employed on this, as on some of Australia's earlier colonial frontiers. In his recent book The Australian frontier wars, John Connor elaborates on the tactical dimensions of frontier conflict in early colonial Australia 'that can only be defined as "war": settlers and soldiers fought Aboriginals with guns, and later, with horses and trackers, and Aboriginals fought settlers and soldiers with attacks on station property, cattle and homesteads. By the time of the
Centre's expanding frontier military expeditions could not be conducted against Aboriginal people, who according to South Australia's proclamation were legally declared British subjects, but an assumed atmosphere of warfare is evident in the language, views and actions recorded in Willshire's and Wurmbrand's official reports of patrols of the 1880s. These reports illustrate that policing freedoms granted to those in charge of 'the rule of law' functioned on a discretionary basis — and, importantly, on an anticipatory basis — in the service of Aboriginal pacification.

That the police should perform this service seemed to be widely acknowledged, not just by an isolated and relatively unchecked officer like Willshire, but also by the pastoralist community whose interests he served during the later 1880s. This truth was prosaically summed up by one of the Centre's pastoralists, Robert Warburton, at the end of that decade. Any new stage of frontier expansion, he wrote, is 'difficult and will be until the blacks knuckle under — but not before — when you have subdued them you can be as kind as you like to them — its [sic] only the same old story of pioneer settlement over and over again since Australia was first settled by white men'.

Willshire's reports of the mid to late 1880s enumerating Aboriginal fatalities (men shot dead often, seemingly, without an earnest attempt to make arrests and without warrants to do so) were received and filed without comment by the Sub-inspector of Police in Port Augusta, Brian Besley, and the Commissioner of Police, William Peterswald, in Adelaide. This suggests an implicit sanction in the early phase of the Centre's pastoral expansion by the police administration. When the deaths of three Aboriginal men during one of Willshire's early patrols around Powell's Creek in the further north apparently drew enquiries from the Adelaide-based Protector of Aborigines, Edward Hamilton, Willshire's superior officer Besley — also Sub-Protector of Aborigines — responded that the incident had 'occurred a long way beyond the boundary of any district'; that he considered it 'impossible for you to obtain the information from any other source [than Mounted Constable Willshire] for sometime to come'; and that these considerations would 'probably justify what would otherwise be considered irregular'. In other words, as the police historian Bill Wilson has argued, the history of the Centre's policing in this decade was not just one of individual but of 'institutionalised violence'. The role performed by the Native Police under men like Willshire and Wurmbrand was performed 'aggressively' and 'with minimal controls'.

During the decade of the 1880s, the Centre was a space of sparse white settlement and, relative to European presence, dense Aboriginal occupation. The Overland Telegraph Line had been completed in 1872 and now linked the continent from south to north. It was, as Daniel Headrick puts it, a 'tool of Empire' that in the coming decade would provide a departure point for exploration and pastoral expansion, and mark the beginning of permanent European settlement. Even so, in the early years of the 1880s established pastoral stations were few and distantly scattered. Yet hopes for more
extensive stocking of the Territory were strong. With the annexation of the Territory to South Australia in November 1863, 200,000 hectares of the region had been made open for lease, and since that time its stocking with cattle had increased several-fold.

It was not only economic opportunity that the Centre presented. In 1877 the Hermannsburg mission had been established west of Alice Springs by Lutheran missionaries, who would, in the coming decade, prove to be a thorn in the side of the police. In all these senses, the Centre in the 1880s was a space not yet 'arrived', in terms of an established colonial infrastructure. Yet a sense of its national potential was strong at this late point in the century, when the vision of nationhood was being clarified into a recognisable form for European Australians.

The Native Police force

By 1884, the need for greater police protection for newly established settlers in the Centre was a clearly understood agenda. The handful of stocked stations that existed in the extensive country of the interior was by then familiar with Aboriginal retaliations on occupations of their country: at the Top End in September, four miners had been killed on the Daly River in a much publicised case of Aboriginal aggression, and two station employees were attacked at Anna’s Reservoir and the homestead burned down. Throughout 1884 pastoral entrepreneurs had petitioned the Chief Secretary and the Commissioner of Police for greater police presence in the interior in order to check Aboriginals from ‘making raids on the outlying cattle stations and spearing the cattle and horses’. Police support, to this end, was regarded as an economic necessity for the region’s expansion: ‘I would respectfully urge the immediate necessity of protection for the settlers’, wrote one petitioner. ‘The heavy expenses and risks of settling the northern Country are in themselves causes of anxiety — but this further danger ... is one which seriously retards progress.’ To the degree that ‘benefit to the natives themselves’ was considered in these petitions, it was done in the light of an understood frontier culture in which settlers take matters into their own hands and ‘the natives are invariably the greatest sufferers’; a ‘sufficient display’ of ‘the force of law’ would ‘transform them into peaceable assistants in the occupation of the country’. Another petition, from 18 undersigned lessees and station managers, was more frank about the fact that a state of guerrilla warfare existed in the interior districts, and that a Native Police force was a necessary means of confronting ‘native offenders’ on their own terms: ‘A great area of said country is composed of ranges, hills, and rough ground quite inaccessible to mounted men, and to dislodge or capture native offenders from these fastnesses — to which they retreat after they have committed any depredations — they require to be met with equal cunning and strategy, and this would obtain by

16. Willshire (1888) refers extensively to trouble with cattle killing at the Anna’s Reservoir, Glen Helen, Owen Springs and Undoolya stations in the early 1880s.
18. Willshire to Besley, 17 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
19. Petition to the Chief Secretary, 14 July 1884, GRG 24/6/1480/1884.
20. Gordon to Peterswald, 13 October 1884, GRG 5/2/828/1884.
22. 14 July 1884, GRG 24/6/1480/1884.
employing Native trackers.'23 Such petitions for a Native Police force were also clear that, in terms of the rule of law, 'the Commanding trooper [would] have to exercise discretionary power — there being but few opportunities of cooperation such as are possible nearer civilisation southwards'.24 In more than one of the pastoralists' petitions, Mounted Constable Willshire was recommended as such a force's commander. Regarded as already 'having been especially energetic and successful'25 since his arrival in the Centre in 1882, and already 'possessing the confidence of all the settlers in the vicinity,' he was urged as 'the most suitable man'.26

That a Native Police force would service the interests of pastoral security and expansion was a perception unambiguously shared by police administrators. Recommending the establishment of a Native Police force in the Centre in August 1884, Besley imagined that it 'could then patrol to the various stations and the sight of them would keep the Blacks in check — They could also meet the Queensland Police occasionally — and thus open up the country lying to the east of Barrows Creek to the Herbert River, where the country is very good.'27 The Commissioner of Police equally acknowledged the need for enhanced police protection in the interior against 'the depredations of the natives', and assured his petitioners that the matter was under the consideration of the Government.28 He also concurred with the suggestion that Willshire was 'very well qualified to be the leader of a party for this purpose'29 Despite some administrative cautiousness about the precedent for 'unfavourable comment' that Native Police violence had accrued in Queensland,30 a Native Police force for the central Territory was authorised and established before the year's end, with Willshire in charge.

At the same time, as the missionaries at Hermannsburg had witnessed, Aboriginal people also required protection from the settlers, and — at least in theory — this recognition was entered into the documented discussion of the Native Police force's role. On 30 December 1884, a month after the Native Police force was authorised, the Protector of Aborigines Edward Hamilton wrote to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, reminding him of the economic as well as the moral benefits of gaining Aboriginal people's goodwill in the Centre. Enclosing a letter he had received a week previously from the Hermannsburg missionary Reverend Schwartz, expressing concern for the ill treatment of Aboriginals,31 Hamilton urged

the desirability of some steps being taken to protect these Aborigines from arbitrary and oppressive ill treatment at the hands of European settlers and their employees. There is little doubt but acts of this nature frequently occur and they

23. Willoby and 17 others to the Chief Secretary, 2 October 1884, GRG 24/6/2479/1884.
24. Murray, for the Barrow Creek Pastoral Co., to the Chief Secretary, 23 October 1884, GRG 24/6/2423/1884.
25. Willoby and 17 others to the Chief Secretary, 2 October 1884, GRG 24/6/2479/1884.
26. Murray for the Barrow Creek Pastoral Co., to the Chief Secretary, 23 October 1884, GRG 24/6/2423/1884.
27. Besley to Peterswald, 4 August 1884, GRG 24/6/1480/1884.
29. Peterswald to the Chief Secretary, 29 October 1884, GRG 24/6/2423/1884.
tend to establish ill feeling, and lead to outrages on both sides involving the Government in a costly and inglorious struggle with the Blacks, who if they were treated with a little more justice and forbearance would doubtless live amicably with and prove of much use to the pioneer settlers of these remote localities.32

He suggested that police presence in the interior be adequately resourced and that ‘more frequent Police patrols be made through these districts’ so that Aboriginal people, as well as settlers, would receive the law’s protection.33 Sub Inspector of Police Besley responded with the reassuring comment that ‘when the Native Police have been fairly established at the Alice Springs a continual patrol shall be kept up ... [which] will have the effect I am sure of keeping the Europeans, as well as the Blacks in check’.34

In an ideal sense, then, the Native Police force’s function was to provide a ‘check’ on both Aboriginal and European ‘outrages’. It is unlikely, though, that such statements had anything other than a rhetorical function. As Queensland’s example had already shown, the Native Police force had not so much a peace-keeping as a paramilitary function that was specific to frontier conditions, and that was directed entirely against Aboriginal ‘cattle killers’. That this was broadly understood, both by the pastoralists who petitioned for the force’s establishment and by the police administration that responded to them, is indicated by the terms on which the Native Police force was established and resourced.

It is also indicated by the extended freedoms for anticipatory policing that were granted to the Native Police force some three years after its establishment. Hitherto, police patrolling powers were limited to responsive measures, and the Native Police force did not have the freedom to take anticipatory action. However by 1887, with the slow but gradual expansion in settlement, pastoralists were again petitioning the South Australian government for police ‘to have liberty to patrol the district at any time, by this means they could pop in on [the Natives] when least expected’.35 In an open letter to the press this same petitioner, the owner of Tempe Downs station, stated his sense of affairs more directly:

Are we, as stockowners, justified in instructing our managers and men to ruthlessly shoot these natives ... We are not allowed to do this and rightly too. But what are we to do? ... One of three things must come about, & that right speedily.
1. we must leave the country & dispose of the stock that are left.
2. we must take the law into our own hands & dispose of the natives as opportunity offers.
3. or we must have proper police protection to successfully carry on the development of the interior.36

Asked for his response, Willshire argued that expanded rights of the Officer in Charge of Native Police to freely patrol any region ‘where the blacks are nearly always

32. Hamilton to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 30 December 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
33. Hamilton to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 30 December 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
34. Besley to Peterswald, 19 January 1885, GRG 5/2/61/1885.
35. Chewings to Peterswald, November 1887, GRG 5/2/631/1887.
doing something wrong ... would give more satisfaction than the usual way of waiting ... untill a report came re some offence'. The request for expanded police patrolling freedoms was granted, as were additional resources for the Native Police force. It was clear, then, that the frontier officers who patrolled with the Native Police were not called upon to honour an administrative rhetoric about monitoring European as well as Aboriginal 'outrages'. Rather, their role was to respond to — and, from 1887, anticipate — the needs of the pastoral industry in enforcing Aboriginal subjugation.

Writing the patrols

Just three weeks before Besley rhetorically stated that continual police patrols would keep 'the Europeans, as well as the Blacks in check', Mounted Constable Erwin Wurmbrand wrote to him from the Alice Springs police station with an official report of a patrol he had just completed into the western MacDonnell Ranges, in pursuit of Aboriginals implicated in a recent attack on three employees at Glen Helen station. His report indicates, both in a cultural and a tactical sense, a general view that a state of localised warfare existed between the police and Aboriginal people.

The patrol lasted three weeks, and the party included two settlers, four Native Police officers, and eleven horses. Wurmbrand's report of their expedition proceeds as follows. Hearing at Glen Helen that men involved in the attack were camping nearby at Hermannsburg, the police party surrounded the mission station's camps and, moving just before daybreak, followed Wurmbrand's instructions 'to close circle gradually and clear all the wurleys of their inmates regardless of age or sex'. Three men suspected of involvement in the Glen Helen attack were arrested and chained together by the neck, and a march with the prisoners was begun back to Glen Helen. They followed the Finke River to a point where

several gullies intercept the chain of hills, one of which the prisoners selected as the most suitable to attempt and possibly effect an escape.— At 6pm we reached the above mentioned place, and there the prisoners, who during the whole journey had continually been conversing in an undertone — made a sudden rush for the rocks.

Recognising 'the futility of my attempt at recapture' Wurmbrand ordered the party to fire: 'Prisoners are dead.' The police party continued its search for more offenders to the north-west, around Mount Sonder. On the fourth day, they tracked to an Aboriginal camp. 'A cloudy sky and a slight breeze favoured my further approach to reconnoitre and I found the camp situated in a rough gully inaccessible on horseback, the wurleys as usual widely scattered. It was nigh on day break when we cautiously facing the wind crept on the camp.' The police party had prepared for a silent approach by dismounting and removing their boots, but despite their caution, the camp was alarmed: 'the trackers instantly called on them in their own language to surrender but a flight of spears was the savages reply.' In the resulting volley of bullets, four Aboriginal men were shot dead; 'the rest seeing their leaders fall immediately made for rocks, — our bare feet, sorely tried by sharp stones & Spinifex, favoured the fugitives, who were

37. Willshire to Besley, 21 November 1887, GRG 52, 631/1887.
38. GRG 5/2/631/1887.
39. Wurmbrand to Besley, 26 December 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 004651.
soon out of reach & sight.' The police party burned the camp's huts and goods, and would have continued the search for further offenders, but abandoned the action 'on a/c of our scanty supply of very inferior rations having completely run out'. The party returned to Alice Springs with a tally of seven Aboriginal deaths and no successful arrests. Wurmbrand concluded his report with the view that if more police were available to continually patrol the MacDonnell and neighbouring ranges, the blacks 'would soon be pacified. At the present they are well aware that a white man is no match for them in their rocky haunts.' Wurmbrand to Besley, 26 December 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 004651.

Two days after responding to the Protector of Aborigines' suggestion for more police patrols in the interests of Aboriginal as well as European protection, Besley forwarded this report from Wurmbrand to the Commissioner of Police, who perused and returned it. It was filed in the first days of 1885. In the last days of that year, Wurmbrand wrote again to Besley requisitioning Native Police supplies for the year to follow, including the 'absolute requirement' of revolvers, 'as a rifle in a mele ... is a great hindrance'. In a climate of economic curtailment in the colony, he also justified the important role of the Native Police:

Hitherto the native Police has done their work to the advantage of the settlers, having checked the outrages by Natives to a great extent ... I also trust that my commanding officers are satisfied as to the efficiency of the Native Police Force, although they may have experienced annoyance by unfounded & unjustified reports charging us with unnecessary severity. — I acknowledge now, as I have done in my previous reports, that sometimes stringent measures had to be adopted, measures which may seem even harsh to people, who do not know what the savages up here of capable of doing.

Although he drew attention to 'the extraordinary form of the requisition', the Commissioner of Police approved it in the new year.

Much more than Wurmbrand, Willshire was a prolific writer, and he expressed both his personal and his professional views on frontier policing openly and expansively. For Willshire, civic duty was clearly and inextricably tied to the project of pastoral expansion and, through that, to the project of new nationhood. In this sense, Willshire was not an imperialist: he was, he wrote, an 'Australian native', a man 'born under the Southern Cross'. He clearly identified himself, then, as a member and forerunner of the nation-to-be which would find its imaginative fulfilment here, in the heart of the continent. His experiences as a police officer in the Centre — or at least his imaginative reconstruction of them — are documented in several books published between 1888 and 1896. A mixture of ethnography, memoir, political polemic and adventure romance fiction, these provide a fascinating supplement to his official police reports, and flesh out his identification with a potent form of nationalism that, from the 1870s, was becoming the theme of popular fiction. In the first of his books, The

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40. Wurmbrand to Besley, 26 December 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 004651.
41. Besley to Peterswald, 21 January 1885, Peterswald to Besley 26 January 1885, GRG 5/2/72/1885.
42. Wurmbrand to Besley, 27 December 1885, GRG 5/2/198/1886.
43. Wurmbrand to Besley, 27 December 1885, GRG 5/2/198/1886.
44. Peterswald to the Chief Secretary, 16 March 1886, GRG 5/2/198/1886.
45. Willshire 1891: Preface.
46. See Dixon 1995.
Aborigines of central Australia, he clarifies his sense of duty as a frontier policeman: he represented not so much 'the law' as the process of development, which would lead inexorably to 'the extension of pastoral enterprise and settlement'. Both his literary writings and his official police reports indicate that Willshire saw himself as stepping confidently into the transitional space of the Centre, imaginatively adopting the status of those earlier heroic figures of the colonial frontier, the explorer and the pioneer, but empowered by the law to oversee — more than that, to affect — the region's transformation through Aboriginal pacification.48

Possibly there is little in this that seems surprising. What is more surprising is the extraordinarily frank sense that there is indeed a frontier war to be won, which seeps through the official reports of his patrols. These reports were forwarded to the Sub Inspector of Police, circulated within the police administration, and filed. Three months before the establishment of the Native Police force, in August 1884, Willshire was required to undertake an expedition to Anna's Reservoir in response to the burning of the homestead and an attack on two station employees. His official report to Besley on this expedition is characteristic, both of his frank admission of the reality of frontier warfare, and of an assumed understanding that this reality framed — and in fact exceeded — the rule of law.

Although the report begins with lip service to the formal objective to 'try and arrest the principal offenders', it proceeds readily into a description of violent struggles waged and won. He describes how he and his party pursued tracks 'over range after range' until eventually, 'on the 7th day out, things began to look warm'. Finding a camp recently vacated, 'with five puppies and any amount of weapons', they 'burnt and smashed them all up and killed the dogs watered our horses at a rockhole and proceeded on'. When that night they tracked to an occupied camp, the police party's approach was planned around the best potential for unexpected attack:

3am saddled up quietly kept no fire that night and no talking but led the horses up to foot of range ready to attack camp at daylight we made a rush full gallop [up] some small hills and observed the natives running up with weapons in hand a bigger adjoining hill, Price and I to the front soon had 6 bailed up and our trackers telling them to drop their spears but they said they would not and sent about a dozen 10 foot spears whizzing at us ... [I] went straight for [one] who turned neatly and struck me with his boomerang he ... was escaping when a bullet from a snider rifle brought him to the ground, after the affray was over I called the men together and enquired what each had done when one of the trackers told me he had shot Slim Jim dead this was good news to me knowing that Slim Jim was the leader at the burning of the Station and also the principle ringleader of cattle killers.49

The impression from this scene that the battle is against a dangerous and known enemy is belied by the next, in which it is clear that the police party's attack is against a whole (now ransacked) social community: 'I believe there were about 100 women and children around us when the fight was over all yabbering away at the same time I

47 Willshire 1888: 8.
48 In doing so, he later writes, 'I achieved an infamous eminence which I never deserved in doing duty assigned to me amongst murderous aborigines' (Willshire 1896: 5).
49 Willshire to Besley, 17 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
marched the whole lot down off the range and made them show where the water was.' As the leader of the conquering party, however, Willshire is mindful of chivalry: 'all my party were manly fellows and treated the Lubras and piccaninnies with kindness we then discharged them and returned to water our horses'.

Given that this is his official police report, Willshire shows a strikingly operatic taste for the drama of battle and its success. Reporting on the pursuit of more cattle killers during the same expedition, he writes: 'as soon as they saw us they ran through the Mulga scrub towards the Reynolds Range we took to them as fast as we could ... on this occasion the notorious cattle killer Jimmy Mullins was brought down by a Spencer rifle the rest narrowly escaped'. Two days later on 7 September 1884,

another batch of niggers was seen amongst them was "Boko" for whom I held a warrant my tracker tried to take this fellow alive but I think "Boko" could handle his waddy too well ... the tracker was in a terrible rage at being got at by a wild nigger so he levelled his rifle and "Boko" came toppling down from rock to rock and landed at the trackers feet.

Despite these successes with the rifle, Willshire's sense that he is engaged in a frustratingly difficult form of frontier warfare is suggested by his grudging respect for his enemies' elusiveness: 'I may here state that the natives both at Anna's Reservoir and Owen Springs are getting worse instead of better in my opinion they don't care about death a bit then [take] refuge in the big high ranges and without a fellow [being] most particularly smart he wont even be able to get a shot at them.'

The personal significance such campaigns held for Willshire is expressed in these official police reports to his superior, whose sympathetic ear he assumes. In September 1884, the same month as his Anna's Reservoir expedition, he undertook an expedition to Undoolya station in pursuit of cattle killers. His report on this patrol offers, again, a surprisingly indiscrete view of the pressing need to 'get' more natives than has hitherto been achieved, as well as his own personal success in doing so. 'I desire to draw the Inspectors attention to this that there have been cattle stations up here this last 8–9–10 years and the natives have killed hundreds of cattle very few natives have been got at and I ... have always got at the natives I wanted even in their pet ranges ... nothing stops me but the want of water and that seldom occurs for when in hot pursuit after niggers you are bound to fetch water. I have been successful I know but I had to work hard for it.'

The report of this particular expedition records his pursuit of tracks along Trefeena Creek until coming upon 'natives close to a big range'. Finding themselves under a volley of stones, spears and boomerangs, Willshire and a tracker 'got behind big rocks and now and again got a shot at them'. Three Aboriginal men were shot dead and four others wounded, according to his report. The rest 'got away from us'. Who is to say whether or not these men were the cattle killers Willshire sought? The question seems to be irrelevant in light of his sense that the whole region itself is at stake, and that his duty in making it secure is to undertake a symbolically powerful series of

50. Willshire to Besley, 17 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
51. Willshire to Besley, 17 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
52. Willshire to Besley, 17 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
53. Willshire to Besley, 29 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
punitive campaigns. This is intimated by Willshire's anticipation of campaigns yet to come: 'now the next thing', he writes to Sub-Inspector Besley, 'is the Owen Springs country the natives are now killing valuable horses this I deem unbearable and for it they shall be punished'.

This report concludes with his request to organise and lead the Native Police force, if and when it should be established. '6 trackers and one smart man who knows how to work them and knows the country ... would soon give satisfaction to all ... should a native force be organised I trust that the Inspect. will consider what I have done and my experience amongst the natives though I have only been here 2 years.'

Besley made his approval of Willshire's work clear when he forwarded this report of the Undoolya expedition to the Commissioner of Police with the comment that '[Willshire's] perseverance and courage well deserves our commendation'. Despite Peterswald's rather dry rejoinder that 'this would have been a much more interesting narrative if the writer had not put himself so prominently forward', Willshire was duly appointed Officer in Charge and within the month had completed his first formal patrol in that role. Willshire was accompanying six Native Constable recruits to Palmerston (Darwin) in December 1884 when he was directed to respond to cattle killing in the region of Powell's Creek and issued with warrants for four known offenders. The outcomes of that expedition are documented in a telegraphed report to Besley. No arrests were made but the deaths of three Aboriginal men, shot resisting arrest, are recorded. Willshire concludes this report with a comment on the success of this, his first expedition as Officer in Charge of the Native Police: 'The trackers worked well, and their obedience to instructions was conspicuously observed'. Having fulfilled his responsibility to commit those Native Constables to the command of Inspector Foelshe in Darwin, Willshire returned to Alice Springs where he recruited the Native Police force that would patrol the Centre over the coming years.

Neither the Sub-Inspector nor the Commissioner of Police saw anything to reproach in the police reports they received from the Centre through the 1880s. In fact there is every indication that Besley, as the immediate recipient of these reports, considered these Constables in outlying regions to be doing an excellent job. More locally at Hermannsburg, however, the missionaries were more sceptical, and did not

54. Willshire to Besley, 29 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
55. Willshire to Besley, 29 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
56. Besley to Peterswald, 28 October 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
57. Peterswald to Besley, 14 November 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
58. Peterswald to Besley, 14 November 1884, SAPHS 920/1884.
59. Willshire (by telegraph) to Besley, forwarded to Peterswald, 10 December 1884, SAPHS 803-1006/1884.
60. Willshire (by telegraph) to Besley, forwarded to Peterswald, 10 December 1884, SAPHS 803-1006/1884.
61. Besley to Peterswald, 28 October 1884, SAPHS 803-1006/1884. Besley also lent his support to Mounted Constable Samuel Gason, who had led the 1874 punitive expedition in response to the Barrow Creek telegraph station attack that resulted in potentially dozens of Aboriginal deaths. When Gason retired from the police force and applied for a government billet, Besley wrote a recommendation affirming that 'he was an excellent and courageous Police officer much respected by officers & men' (18 September 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319).
forget that the presence of the police in the interior was intended, at least in theory, to protect Aboriginal people as well as pastoral interests. Within six months of the establishment of the Native Police force under Willshire, Reverend Kempe wrote to the Protector of Aborigines complaining not so much about the violence of the settlers, as his colleague Schwartz had done the previous year, but about that of the police. Responding to Hamilton’s assurance that ‘a police force at Alice Springs shall be established to keep both the Europeans and the Blacks in check’, Kempe wrote: ‘Whether from this measure shall arise any good for the natives is rather doubtful as long as there is nobody to control the actions of the police troopers. The only difference will be that the natives are now shot down by policemen whilst before the other whites did it.’ In his letter he raises the case of the three chained Aboriginal prisoners shot dead en route to Glen Helen by ‘a police trooper’ (Wurmbrand) five months before. Kempe visited the site where the bodies still lay and expressed disbelief at Wurmbrand’s reported events:

the natives informed us the 3 natives were shot down by the whites. We went there & convinced ourselves from [of] the truth of this statement. Now we expected directly the whites would say they tried to escape & so they did when we asked them. But who can believe it? Who can believe that they broke the strong chain? Who can further believe that escaping they kept together? One should think, if it happened that they got unfastened the chain, they would run away in every direction, but the bodies were lying on one heap & exactly as they were tied together.

Kempe’s letter was forwarded by Hamilton to the Commissioner of Police, who sent it back to Besley for investigation. Besley sought further information from Mounted Constable Daer, who was stationed at Charlotte Waters and had spent some time patrolling with Wurmbrand. Daer’s comments cast no new light on the matter: ‘I know nothing of the alleged shooting of blacks by a police trooper, during my residence in the Interior when my duties have brought one in to collision with the natives I have always tried to avoid taking violent measures.’ The correspondence was forwarded to Wurmbrand, still at Alice Springs police station, who respectfully directed the Inspector back to his original report. The case rested there.

As Daer’s comments suggest, other Mounted Constables who worked the Centre in this period did not establish the same kind of reputation for violence as did Willshire and Wurmbrand. For instance, as Mulvaney has pointed out, Constable Daer and his colleague Ernest Cowle (who was posted to the Centre not long before Willshire’s departure) seem to have preferred instilling fear of the whip rather than of the rifle as their method of remote policing. In the last year of the century, Cowle wrote to Baldwin Spencer, for whom he had become an ethnographic collector, ‘I am not advocating shooting, for a moment, in the so called good old style, but they should be made to respect the law of the Land that has been taken from them, and it would be

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62 Kempe to Hamilton, 13 April 1885, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
63 Kempe to Hamilton, 13 April 1885, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
64 Daer to Besley, 4 June 1885, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
65 Wurmbrand to Besley, 5 June 1885, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHIS 000319.
66 Mulvaney et al. 2000: 35. Also Daer to Besley, 11 August and 6 September 1887, GRG 5/2/475/1887.
better for them.\textsuperscript{67} At the same time, it would be a mistake to regard Willshire and Wurmbrand simply as aberrations of a more benign frontier culture. To recall Robert Warbarton's pragmatic acknowledgement of frontier conditions, a potential phase of conciliation might come once 'the blacks knuckle under — but not before'.\textsuperscript{68} The huge regions under isolated patrol meant that civic officers of Willshire's or Wurmbrand's temperament and sense of duty, backed by the law and legitimately in charge of weapons, supplies and men, had few limits on their authority, which during the phase of subjugation was significantly unfettered by the infrastructure of bureaucracy.

The shifting frontier

By the turn of the last decade of the nineteenth century Willshire's autonomy was on the wane, along with the initial thrust of the unstable frontier. The era of aggressive Aboriginal pacification in the Centre was gradually moving into an era of anthropological survey, marked by events such as David Lindsey's Elder Scientific expedition in 1891 and Baldwin Spencer's Horn Expedition in 1894. More directly, Aboriginal people were now proving to be indispensable to the pastoral industry, as the 1891 visit of the Pastoral Lands Commission found.\textsuperscript{69} In the shifting climate of the new decade, Willshire's activities came under a new degree of surveillance. After repeated complaints by the missionaries at Hermannsburg, a government inquiry was held in 1890 into policing measures in the Centre, although in their report of that inquiry, the commissioners found no cause to reproach the police.\textsuperscript{70} But in February 1991, Willshire directed his Native Constables to shoot dead two Aboriginal men close to the Tempe Downs head station, and subsequently burn the bodies. He held no warrants for their arrests. Willshire's report on the episode was received not by Besley but by the recently appointed Attorney General, Robert Homburg, who was disconcerted by inconsistencies in it and ordered an inquiry into the case. In the years since Willshire had been forwarding his patrol reports, this was the first time an inquiry was to be held into Aboriginal deaths under his command. At the end of the inquiry, in April 1891, Willshire was arrested on a charge of wilful murder. He was tried in July, but acquitted. On his reinstatement into the force he was keen to return to the Centre, but at the Commissioner of Police's behest, he was eventually posted much further north, to the Victoria River. Arguing for Willshire's transfer to the Northern Territory Police in early 1893, Peterswald commented that it would be advisable to 'give him a station in the Bush on the first opportunity that offers, as though a source of trouble in a station down country I believe he would be a useful man in the interior'.\textsuperscript{71} The culture of the frontier in the Centre, clearly, had changed, but Willshire could still be considered the man for the far-flung countries. The potential ironies of the discretionary rule of law that had pertained through the 1880s were not lost on fellow 'Northerners'. After Willshire's murder trial, a supporter wrote: 'The Government employ M.C. Willshire for a certain duty, they

\textsuperscript{67} Mulvaney et al. 2000: 128.
\textsuperscript{68} Warburton to Gordon, 22 May 1890, GRG 1/1/395/1890.
\textsuperscript{71} Peterswald to Saunders, 30 March 1890, SAPPHS COP 304/1893.
supply him with revolvers, rifles, and ammunition in abundance, and ... [when] these weapons [are] used for the benefit of the country the officer in charge becomes a felon.'72

What is notable is not just that officers of the law like Willshire and Wurmbrand would regard the frontier as a special zone of police/Aboriginal warfare. It is also that they were enabled, indeed resourced, to do so by a far-distant police bureaucracy which shared with most of colonial culture an orthodox understanding that frontier conditions were both difficult and different from those of the settled districts, and which accordingly allowed for a discretionary flexibility in the rule of law. This was so in spite of the administration's awareness of the notorious reputation of earlier Native Police forces in Queensland and New South Wales and a commensurate recognition (at least in theory) of Aboriginal rights to legal protection. It held true as long as that flexibility did not force itself unduly on the notice of the authorities (as it did eventually in Willshire's case) to the degree of requiring intervention.

The first significant sign of how a discretionary policing procedure would operate in the South Australian controlled Territory came with conflict in the north, on the Roper River in 1875, where a telegraph station master was killed and two others were wounded. Paul Foelsche, the Darwin-based Inspector of Police, gave instructions to the punitive police party to identify and capture anyone belonging to the guilty parties, and also included a clause which allowed for circumstances that strictly legal regulations could not accommodate: 'I cannot give you orders to shoot all natives you come across but circumstances may occur for which I cannot provide definite instructions.'73 A discretionary understanding of legal form is also implicit (though, no doubt, not intended) when Besley forwarded to Peterswald the report of Willshire's patrol to Undoolya (three Aboriginal men shot dead, four wounded, no arrests) with the comment that 'his perseverance and courage well deserves our commendation'.74 The same understanding is implicit when, a few weeks later, he forwarded the report of Willshire's patrol to Powell's Creek (three shot dead, no arrests), with the notation that Willshire had had instructions 'to act as the law provided'.75 When Willshire published his last book The land of the dawning in 1896, he summed up his frontier policing career in these terms:

I am proud to be able to submit to paper that the Government at the time told me as the officer of police parties to go out and do as the law provides in such cases. I worked hard ... and now I say, "All's well that ends well".76

The central Australian frontier in social memory

A question that remains is how these events have been remembered in continuing social memory. In contemporary histories of frontier conflict, Willshire's and Wurmbrand's names arise as exemplars of a culture of the acceptable violence that pertained in late colonial central Australia.77 This is not the only form of remembrance, however.

74. Besley to Peterswald, 28 October 1884, Far Northern Division journal, SAPHS 000319.
75. Besley to Peterswald, 10 December 1884, SAPHS 803-1006/1884.
77. This is not the only form of remembrance, however.
Willshire of Alice Springs, a biography paying glowing tribute to the work performed and the hardships endured by Willshire and the colonial police, was published by Austin Stapleton in 1992. In the 1980s, the decade which commemorated Australia’s bicentenary, Willshire’s story was twice revived as a feature subject for popular newspaper articles, which appeared under such headings as ‘Historical feature’ and ‘This was Australia’, and which brought back the colonial frontier as a theme of historical reminiscence. Though mindful of the unacceptability of violence for contemporary audiences, these feature articles are noticeable for the service to which this violent history is put in nostalgically recalling a colonial romance with the country. In a feature article titled ‘Rebel mountie tried to tame frontier’, published in the Sydney Sun in 1980, a uniformed Willshire gazes from the page over the span of a hundred years, and his history’s institutionalised violence is subsumed to the recreation of a frontier adventure narrative which Willshire himself might have written:

In charge of a frontier police post, the adventurous 27 year old rebel had found his niche. Despite a love of notoriety and exaggeration, [he] won respect for his personal courage and attention to duty ...

He was kept busy investigating settler[s’] complaints against aggressive tribesmen determined to drive out the white men and their cattle. Some holdings were abandoned. A typical patrol with native horseboys and packhorses took about three months to cover 3,000 kilometres of rugged wilderness ... Eternal vigilance was necessary to counter ambush and dawn attacks.

Settlers took the law into their own hands, though deploring the need. Not a man among them went unarmed. Willshire was appointed to train a native police force. The first batch of six recruits learnt the care of equipment and horses, and to shoot accurately, and the one-time rebel turned them into useful, well-disciplined men.

Willshire’s story has also entered the genre of tourist magazines that today invite 4-wheel-drive explorers to discover the secrets of the Centre and its formerly inaccessible frontiers. Owen Springs and Undoolya Stations, formerly sites of Willshire’s violent patrols, are now advertised for off-road and quad bike adventure tours, and Willshire’s former police camp at Boggy Hole on the Finke River is ‘one of the most popular remote camps in the area’.

The sources for some of these contemporary recollections are probably Willshire’s own books, which recreate the once-violent frontier as a theme of adventure narrative. His official reports tell a similar but less glorified tale, and may, in fact, invite an intention not to remember but rather to forget. Copies of his and Wurmbrand’s reports of their patrols with the Native Police, and Besley’s receipts of them, are contained in a journal of correspondence for the police’s Far Northern Division between 1884 and

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78. As one piece puts it, ‘William Willshire is not much read today because the exultation with which he gloated over the slaughter of Aborigines would scarcely appeal to late 20th century readers.’ Daily Mirror 20 June 1985: 32.
80. 4X4 Australia, March 2004: 94–9. The Boggy Hole police station ruins are described as ‘a stark reminder of a violent past’, and interestingly, Willshire is described as being charged for the murder not of two but ‘of six Aborigines’.
1890, now held in the South Australian Police Historical Society archives. Attached inside the front sleeve of this journal is a note, dated 1972, from a reader who thanks the journal’s donor for its use, and offers comment on its contents. The reader expresses concern for the journal’s future, partly because many such original documents no longer exist, but partly because of the social pain that exposure of the contents could cause: ‘There is one extract which refers to the police shooting of prisoners — how would that be in print? ... some of the information in [old Journals] is not fit to be put on public display.’81 This reader’s concerns raise, in particular, the two questions with which this discussion began: how are events such as these told, and how are they remembered? Underpinning these questions is perhaps another, one that resonates in much of the debate around Australia’s history of frontier conflict. It asks not only what happened, or how those things are told and remembered. It also asks what, in the service of remembrance, is forgotten?

Acknowledgement

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Skirmishes in Aboriginal history

Peggy Brock

In late 2002 Keith Windschuttle published *The fabrication of Aboriginal history*, and suddenly the subject of the writing and researching of Aboriginal history was being discussed daily in the press, on the radio and television.\(^1\) The book was widely reviewed, opinion pieces were written about it, and seminars and public debates organised to discuss its controversial claims.\(^2\) Windschuttle set out to write a revisionist history of early encounters between Aboriginal people and colonists in Van Diemen's Land in which he questioned the level of violence and mortality of Aboriginal people in the early contact period. Windschuttle also attacked the historians whose research he challenged, accusing them of fabricating evidence to support their interpretations of the past. I will not venture along this embattled path, often referred to as 'the history wars'. Windschuttle's views are set out in detail in his book and on his web page.\(^3\) Two recently published books, *The history wars* (taking up the military metaphor) and *Whitewash: on Keith Windschuttle's fabrication of Aboriginal history*, put an alternative view and present a critique of Windschuttle's work.\(^4\) As much of this commentary points out, the debate about 'Aboriginal history' is not so much about the Aboriginal past as about an Australian national history. Windschuttle is quite explicit on this point: '[T]he debate over Aboriginal history goes far beyond its ostensible subject: it is about the character of the nation and, ultimately, the calibre of civilisation Britain brought to these shores in 1788'.\(^5\) Macintyre argues that this controversy is just the latest in a series of debates surrounding Australian history and historians as the interpreters of Australian identity. Krygier and van Krieken in *Whitewash* also focus on the political aspects of Windschuttle's position throwing his accusations against 'revisionist' historians' lack of objectivity back at him. Marilyn Lake, in the same volume, suggests that rather than taking racial and national identities in colonial history as given, we should be striving for an approach in which the identities of coloniser and colonised are analysed as evolving through their mutual encounter.\(^6\)

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2. See the Australian Council of Professional Historians Association's website for historian Cathie Clement's commentaries on these debates, http://www.historians.org.au/discus/
Revisiting the subject of ‘Aboriginal history’ now the media frenzy has died down (although not disappeared), it is clear that the Windschuttle-generated debate, while broad in its implications — the Australian national character and identity as it is reflected in the past — is only narrowly focused on certain aspects of Aboriginal history. Through his attack on the integrity of historians researching Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, Windschuttle has forced these historians onto the defensive, and in the public eye the argument becomes an esoteric one about footnotes and body counts on the frontier.\(^7\) The adversarial nature of the controversy makes it difficult for substantial issues, such as the nature of genocide and whether it applies to the Australian situation, or the nature of early encounters between Indigenous peoples and colonists, to be debated at other than a superficial level.\(^8\)

While Windschuttle has succeeded in drawing public battle lines over certain aspects of historiography, ongoing skirmishes over the contested nature of the researching and writing of Aboriginal history continue. It is noteworthy that during the recent highly charged controversy, few Aboriginal voices were heard in the media, although some Indigenous historians have critiqued Windschuttle’s book and the debate it initiated in review articles. Vicki Grieves noted that despite Windschuttle’s attack on Tasmanian (and by implication all) Aboriginal people, they were sidelined, rather than central, to the debate:

To be caught in Australian political crossfire is symptomatic of the position of Indigenous Australians in Australian society over the past four decades at least. While the perception is that we are willing captives of the left, then we are often the targets of warriors of the right, such as Windschuttle. His argument with us may, or may not, be incidental (is the jury still out on this one?). It is extremely damaging generally, as it reiterates the colonialist, racist attitudes we have been chipping away at for some time.\(^9\)

Another Indigenous historian, John Maynard, noted ‘Historically, the Aboriginal political voice was silenced and in the contemporary setting it continues to be. This point is exemplified in the largely white “history wars” debate.’\(^10\) Jill Milroy, a Palkyu-Namal woman and Head of the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia, claimed at a symposium in Perth to mark the launch of *Whitewash* that this debate was of no interest or relevance to Aboriginal people. She went on to say that with no formal qualifications in history she had been excluded from the profession, and was therefore free to be an Aboriginal historian in an Aboriginal way. Although these charges were not debated that evening, they reflect a long-lived discussion about the researching and writing of the Aboriginal past. It is this and associated issues of methodology and authorship which I want to revisit here.

‘Aboriginal history’ means different things in different contexts. To Windschuttle, Aboriginal history is about the interactions between British colonisers and the

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Aboriginal people they encountered. He rejects the possibility that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people had a history before European interventions. He claims they had no social organisation or territorial base and were so depraved that their survival was accidental. Many other historians, while not condemning Aboriginal people to be a ‘people without history’, also research the interactions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and refer to their field of study as Aboriginal history. Bain Attwood has suggested that this creates a paradox in which university-trained historians write about a past in which Aboriginal people are active participants, but the historians are inevitably constrained by their own intellectual and cultural values. While they may present a view of the past which takes account of Aboriginal perspectives and values, they will inevitably be different from their own:

Academic historians are barely familiar with the phenomenology, epistemology and ontology of the indigenous peoples of Australia whose behaviour we seek to interpret; instead, we tend to force Aborigines into our culture’s paradigms of reason and logic, and equate them with ourselves in psychological terms so rendering them intelligible in our terms.

Attwood is grappling with issues raised by the Annales School historians in their development of mentalité — historians’ ability to understand the intellectual and cultural underpinnings of distant societies, whether that distance is temporal or cultural. Attwood goes on to argue that academic historians apply Eurocentric concepts to the Aboriginal past and suggests, following poststructuralist analyses, that history is a European concept, so the whole project is an extension of the colonial past we seek to represent. Attwood’s article was published in the same year as Windschuttle’s book *The killing of history*, in which he criticised such post-structuralist approaches to history and argued for an empirical methodology which he then pursued in *The fabrication of Aboriginal history*.

Other Australian historians have tackled the contradictions inherent in interpreting the Aboriginal experience of colonial and neo- (or post-) colonial Australia using a range of paradigms. Before the recognition of Aboriginal history as a field of research, several historians in the mid-twentieth century, including Hasluck, Grenfell Price and Foxcroft, wrote about the policies which governed Aboriginal people’s lives. Aboriginal people did not figure as active characters in these studies. These historians and the anthropologists (particularly AP Elkin) who influenced them, were strong advocates of assimilation policies in which people of mixed descent would become incorporated into mainstream society, as would their history. Hasluck and Grenfell Price noted that Aboriginal people had been subject to violence and appalling treatment in the past, although Hasluck was very careful about introducing such issues into his account: ‘These cases have been cited, not for sensationalism, or to give undue prominence to the story of violence, but as a reflection of public opinion [of the time].’ Three decades later the political scientist CD Rowley published *Aboriginal policy and*

practice which, while concerned with policies and their implementation, was much more forthright than the earlier historians had been about the negative impacts of administrative practices and racial prejudice on Aboriginal people. Soon after this, Peter Biskup’s Not slaves, not citizens considered government policies in Western Australia. Biskup made his viewpoint clear:

This book is not primarily about the aborigines of Western Australia. It is about the ‘aboriginal problem’ — the unending debate among white Western Australians, going back to the early days of settlement, about how the original inhabitants of the country should be subjugated, tamed, exploited, controlled, protected, preserved, bred out, uplifted or developed. In other words, the book will tell the reader, if he is an Australian of European origin, as much about himself and his society as it will tell him about aborigines. In a modest way the book is also a study in colonialism, using the term in its widest sense: Australia, like the Union of South Africa or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, ‘contains its colonial problems within itself’.

By the early 1980s, historians were moving beyond an investigation of policies which impacted on Aboriginal people to a consideration of Aboriginal responses to policies and practices. For the first time Aboriginal people were presented as active participants in their own history. These historians tried to avoid Attwood’s paradox. They made clear they were not speaking on behalf of Indigenous people, or writing from an Aboriginal perspective. Reynolds articulated this approach on the first page of his book:

The other side of the frontier examines the Aboriginal response to the invasion and settlement of Australia during the hundred years or so between the late eighteenth century and the early twentieth. It is a white man’s interpretation, aimed primarily at white Australians in the hope that they will gain an appreciation of the Aboriginal part in the history of the continent during the last two hundred years.

Reynolds’ disclaimer does not necessarily exempt him from the implications of Attwood’s paradox and Jill Milroy’s claim against academic historians, or from the view that only Aboriginal people can research and write about the Aboriginal past because their lived experience and the understanding of that experience cannot be accessed by non-Aboriginal historians.

The notion that history can only be written by the subjects of that history derives from nationalist ideas that history is the teleological narrative of the nation or people and only they can articulate the essential essence of that historical experience. Many indigenous peoples have adopted this paradigm as a means of asserting their autonomy and separate identity within settler societies. Indigenous identity as national identity is reflected in the Canadian term ‘First Nations’, which establishes both the prior existence (as opposed to that of newcomers) of Native Canadians and their nationhood; and Aboriginal usage which refers to cultural or regional groupings as nations - the Koori nation or the Yorta Yorta nation. At the same time as Aboriginal

people make claim to an identity as peoples (nations), some align themselves with the history of Indigenous peoples around the globe arguing that the history of First Nations in Canada or Maori in New Zealand/Aotearoa resonates closely with the Australian Aboriginal experience. They perceive themselves as sharing a common history of oppression as colonised people within nation states. These two forms of Indigenous identity — the national and international — look back to a pre-colonial past and forward to an international movement of Indigenous peoples, at the same time placing Aboriginal people outside Australian history. This suggests a different sort of paradox from that proposed by Attwood. In this paradoxical situation historians of Australian history may present Aboriginal people as an essential part of our national history, while nationalist Indigenous historians consider themselves separate from the nation state and its history.

From the late 1970s Aboriginal people began publishing their own accounts of the past, generally in the form of life histories — autobiographies and family or communal biographies. Some conform to the nationalist idea of Aboriginality, but most place themselves within the context of Australian history. Histories narrated by Aboriginal people tend to be centrally about kin and community, yet as a body of work they cover a wide range of experiences and knowledge. Indigenous authors come from a variety of backgrounds as is reflected in their writings. They include bureaucrats, politicians, activists, domestic workers and housewives, community leaders, 'stolen children', stock workers, artists and sportspeople. These writings are personal, as they come out of lived experience and oral accounts handed down from one generation to the next, rather than being based in archival research. While individual authors tend not to generalise from their own accounts, or use them as a basis for analysing the broader Aboriginal past, this growing literature does present a cross section of Indigenous knowledge and illustrates the impact of past policies and practices on the lives of individuals, families and communities. In presenting a wide panoply of Aboriginal experiences past and present, these accounts reflect the pervasive influence of non-Aboriginal society which has insinuated itself into so many facets of Aboriginal existence. In these histories Aboriginal individuals, families and communities are encapsulated in a society which puts up barriers to their incorporation into mainstream society, while applying strong assimilative pressures on them. The method of research and the perspective of these authors is different from the approach taken by academic historians, but they present another side of the historical coin, not an entirely different historical currency. The context of government policies and legislation may not be emphasised as it is in many academic accounts, yet the impacts of colonial policies and racial attitudes are clearly reflected in the everyday lives of these people.

Indigenous academic historians are beginning to publish and enter the historiographical debates. The Centre for Australian Indigenous History has two Indigenous historians — Gordon Briscoe and Frances Peters-Little — on its staff, and

22. See Attwood 1994 for a succinct overview of Aboriginal approaches to recalling and writing about the past; also Broome 1996.
the University of Newcastle has a number of Indigenous historians, including John Maynard and Vicki Grieves, who are undertaking research in Aboriginal history, ranging from regional histories to Aboriginal convicts, sports history, and the history of Indigenous health.25

The debates about Aboriginal history are not only about which past and whose past, but equally about how to research it. In 1969 Peter Corris aligned the emerging field of Aboriginal history in Australia with North American ethnohistory.26 He points out that it is a methodology rather than the subject matter of research. Ten years later Isabel McBryde, an archaeologist, traced the origins of ethnohistory in North America and saw potential for its use in Australian based research.27 Ethnohistory developed out of a cross-disciplinary approach to the research of the past of societies which are/were non-literate, or left few written records. The two main disciplines which inform ethnohistorical research are history and anthropology, although archaeology, geography, linguistics and related methodological approaches are also utilised. This cross-disciplinarity has been facilitated by changes in the disciplines themselves. The anthropologist Krech argues that 'Despite misgivings on both sides, anthropology and history have greatly influenced each other in recent years. The argument that all history is atheoretical, particularist, ideographic, and moralistic and that anthropology is theoretical, generalising, nomothetic, and value free is no longer tenable'.28 Historian James Axtell made an early attempt to define the interdisciplinary field of ethnohistory by suggesting that ethnohistory is a 'form of cultural history or a sub-discipline of cultural anthropology' which produces 'scholarly offspring who bear the diachronic dimensions of history and the synchronic sensitivities of ethnology.'29 Axtell also makes the important point that ethnohistory is a product of scholars' attempts to analyse the interactions of two societies and cultures, where each society is understood on its own terms, rather than the frontier-view in which the inevitable clash of cultures results in one society (the Indigenous) being doomed to extinction or irrelevance.30

Ethnohistorians investigating the history of societies that did not generate extensive written records have experimented with a range of sources to supplement these documents. Photographs, maps, archaeological data, linguists' and anthropologists' field notes are important sources. Oral accounts are frequently used, and are particularly important when researching societies where they have been the main means of communicating knowledge of the past. The process of collecting oral

25. Gordon Briscoe 2003; Maynard 1997, 2002. These and other Indigenous scholars are contributing book reviews of Aboriginal history to a range of journals, including Aboriginal History and Labour History. A recent issue of Studies in Western Australian History, is another strong indication that Indigenous historians are forging a place for themselves in document-based, as well as oral-based historical research. Most of the articles were written by Indigenous postgraduate and undergraduate students Milroy, Host and Stannage 2001.

26. Corris 1969. In this article Corris states that, 'The simple fact is that there is as yet no history of an Aboriginal tribe, or of the Aborigines of any of the Australian states, or indeed any published historical study which keeps aborigines firmly in the foreground rather than the settlers, missionaries, or policy makers who had dealings with them' (1969: 202).


testimonies can have an important influence on the written history which develops from it as scholars encounter different historical discourses and ways of remembering the past. In *Life lived like a story* Julie Cruikshank recorded the life histories of three women of Athapascan and Tlingit ancestry in the Yukon Territory of Canada. Through this collaborative process her interests, 'shifted away from an oral history committed to documenting changes in social reality and toward an investigation of narrative forms for talking about, remembering and interpreting everyday life.' Many Australian ethnohistorians, such as Peter Read, Deborah Bird Rose and Mary Ann Jebb have had similar experiences as they recorded and used life histories as primary texts in their research.

In North America, as in Australia, Indigenous peoples were first studied by anthropologists. Ethnohistory grew out of anthropology rather than history. Anthropologists dealing with American Indian land claims realised that they needed to access written sources used by historians and incorporate a temporal dimension into their research. About the same time historians began researching the past of indigenous and non-Western peoples. They found that anthropologists had gone before them, and as Axtell indicates, adopted some of their conceptual frameworks and methods. Ethnohistorians in the USA and Canada investigate the past of indigenous peoples of the Americas — not just in the United States and Canada, but in Central and South America as well. Thus ethnohistory describes a methodological approach, indicating the subjects of research without defining them in racial, ethnic or nationalist terms. It does not prevent the ideological battles recently waged over 'Aboriginal history', but it might clarify issues for non-practitioners as well as practitioners by clearly separating the means of researching the past from its particular focus.

Corris was unsuccessful in his early attempt to have Australian historians adopt a similar approach to that taken in North America. Structural-functionalist anthropology predominated in Australia until quite recently. In the mid-twentieth century historians were influenced, not by anthropological concepts of culture, but by anthropologists' advocacy of assimilation for those people of mixed descent they considered de-culturated. AP Elkin worked tirelessly to have this policy implemented. He set out his theoretical premises in a 1951 article, 'Reaction and interaction: a foodgathering people and European settlement in Australia,' and advocated assimilation in many pamphlets and other writings. Historians, as we have seen, moved from investigations of policies regarding Aboriginal people, to a consideration of the impacts of policies on Aboriginal people. There was little integration with anthropological methodology or its conceptual frameworks.

Diane Barwick, an anthropologist from Canada, was perhaps the first to show Australian scholars how an ethnohistorical investigation could be undertaken, in her

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35. Elkin (1951) makes an interesting comparison with the cultural anthropology of his American contemporaries such as Edward H Spicer who criticised Elkins' 'invariant sequences' (Spicer 1969: 541).
research of Aboriginal communities in Victoria. Her focus on urban and agricultural Aboriginal people was an important development in Australian anthropology with its preoccupation with 'tribal' people whose Aboriginal culture was considered still to be intact. The historian Henry Reynolds' work was an early example of historical research influenced by anthropological concepts of Aboriginal kinship, social organisation, gender roles and warfare in his interpretation of those sources. By the late 1980s both anthropologists and historians were reflecting ethnohistorical influences in their work. The historian Ann McGrath's study of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry of the Northern Territory and the east Kimberley epitomises this approach both in her research methods and her writing. She used a variety of source materials to supplement the written record, including many interviews which she collected while undertaking fieldwork among the communities she wrote about. Her book does not have a strong chronological narrative, but rather is organised thematically, influenced by anthropological cultural concepts. Mary Anne Jebb's recent book on the pastoral industry in the Kimberley adopts a similar approach. Jebb lived and worked with Kimberley communities over a number of years, collecting oral testimonies to produce a richly textured analysis of Aboriginal involvement in the industry.

On the other side of the disciplinary divide, anthropologists were turning to archival sources in their research. David Trigger's *Whitefella coming* and Diane Austin-Broos' work on the Arrernte at Ntaria/Hermannsburg, are examples. Both these anthropologists studied Aboriginal people in mission environments. They undertook fieldwork, but put this in the context of the earlier mission days. Before the 1970s anthropologists had tended to view Christians as inauthentic and non-traditional Aborigines. In his published work CP Mountford, who undertook research at Ernabella Presbyterian Mission in Central Australia in 1949, ignored the mission environment and failed to mention that some of his Pitjantjatjara informants were Christians. Many anthropologists began historicising the context of their field-based research. Deborah Bird Rose's representation of interracial violence in the Victoria River region of the Northern Territory is a well known exemplar. Rose puts the accounts she collected within her own historical narrative structure to illustrate the cruelty and exploitation of life in the early pastoral industry.

The growing interest in oral history has encouraged historians, linguists and anthropologists to work closely with Aboriginal individuals and communities to assist them in bringing their accounts into the public domain. This assistance comes in many forms, but most commonly it involves interviews with Aboriginal historians, which are then transcribed and edited. Some of these histories are presented as first hand accounts by the Aboriginal author, others are integrated into an analytical or

37 Reynolds 1981.
38 McGrath 1987.
42 Rose 1991. Peter Read (Read and Japaljarri 1978) and Jenny Green (Rubuntja and Green 2002) have used similar methods.
interpretive framework established by the non-Aboriginal author. Bruce Shaw, Mary Anne Jebb, Stephen Muecke, and Bill Rosser have assisted in producing published firsthand accounts by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal authors such as Sally Morgan, Herb Wharton and Jackie Huggins have fulfilled similar functions by presenting accounts of close relatives or fellow workers. As previously mentioned some scholars have contextualised Aboriginal accounts within an historical narrative provided by the non-Aboriginal co-author. There are also more conventional Aboriginal autobiographies and biographies being produced where the intervention of an editor or co-author is not always explicit.

The publication of these Aboriginal historical accounts has revolutionised the common understandings of the past by personalising trauma and oppression, as well as presenting Aboriginal humour and strength in the face of great difficulties. In ethnohistorical and methodological terms it also raises questions about authorship and Attwood’s concern that ‘we tend to force Aborigines into our culture’s paradigms’. Is the authentic Aboriginal voice lost in the publication processes of transcription, editing and interpretation? There was some early debate about the status of translation following the publication of Bruce Shaw’s books in which he rendered Kimberley kriol into Aboriginal English. Since then transcribers and editors have grappled with methods that reproduce accounts verbatim, while making them accessible and intelligible on the written page. Similar issues have arisen in publishing Native American life histories. David Murray, in his book *Forked tongues* suggests:

Individuals in an oral culture have no context for the conception of autobiography which has been developed in literate cultures, and which depends on a set of interrelated common assumptions about the nature of self, its relation to history, its relationship of authorship to a text, and the concept of authenticity and authority which goes with this. The creation of an Indian autobiography has, therefore, required either the ability of a particular Indian to comply closely enough with standards of written English ... or, much more commonly, the collaboration of several people — the subject, a white editor or anthropologist, and often another Indian acting as translator.

Another American scholar, Arnold Krupat, has categorised Native American writings to help identify the authorship of an ‘autobiography’:

Autobiographies by Indians’ are individually composed texts written by the person whose life is described; ‘Indian autobiographies’ on the other hand, are not ‘self-written’, but are ‘bi-cultural composite composition[s]’ involving translators, editors and other interventions to produce the text.

One way out of Attwood’s paradox is to follow the lead of Murray and Krupat and make both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authorship and the process of research

43. Eg Shaw 1983; Munro with Jebb 1996; Roe with Muecke 1993; Rosser 1985, 1990.
45. Rose 1991; Read and Japaljarri 1978; Rubunija and Green 2002.
47. Attwood 1994: 133.
explicit. Informed readers can draw their own conclusions about provenance and authenticity of research.

Nevertheless, there are practical and serious problems of cross-cultural misunderstandings where Kriol or Aboriginal English are used. A recent example is Keith Windschuttle's mishearing of Peggy Patrick's account of a massacre in the Kimberley which her grandmother narrowly survived. Patrick's first language is Gija. Windschuttle understood her to be recounting her mother's account of a massacre which occurred in 1915 before she was born, rather than her grandmother's (rendered as 'mum mum' in her Kriol) memories of the massacre. He then claimed that as Patrick's mother was not alive in 1915, she had made up her account. This misunderstanding is no doubt largely due to Windschuttle's refusal to recognise the intercultural nature of Aboriginal history or to use ethnohistorical methods in his research, but it is also indicative of a general expectation among the public that historical accounts must be accessible and in a form of English they readily understand. This draws us to the question 'for whom is Aboriginal history written?'

Some Aboriginal writers use their histories to sustain an Aboriginal identity at the community level; others argue for an identity as a people; a few perceive their role as educators of the wider Australian society. Many Aboriginal intellectuals and politicians such as Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Mick Dodson, Aden Ridgeway, Patrick Dodson and Peter Yu are very conscious of how the past has influenced the present, but do not engage with the writing of history. Aboriginal Australia has not produced an historian who has played a similar role to the Native American historian, Vine Deloria Jr. who published *Custer died for your sins* in 1969. He gave an Indian account of American Indian history in which he not only criticised previous histories, but wrote an openly politicised interpretation of Indian experiences. He claimed:

> Most books about Indians cover some abstract and esoteric topic of the last century. Contemporary books are predominantly by whites trying to solve the 'Indian problem.' Between the two extremes lives a dynamic people in a social structure of their own, asking only to be freed from cultural oppression. The future does not look bright for the attainment of such freedom because the white does not understand the Indian and the Indian does not wish to understand the white.

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52. Patrick 2003; Clement 2003.
55. Huggins 1998: 1-2. She takes the view that although Aboriginal people are sick of the role of educators of the wider Australian community, they still maintain that role. See also Rosser 1990; Fels 1993; Ginibi 1994.
56. Marcia Langton is an anthropologist and Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies at Melbourne University; Mick Dodson was one of the Commissioners and authors of the *Bringing them home report* and is now Professor of Indigenous Studies at ANU; Noel Pearson is a lawyer who was deeply involved in the negotiations with the Keating government over native title legislation; Patrick Dodson was Chair of the Reconciliation Council; Aden Ridgeway is a Democrat Senator in Federal Parliament; and Peter Yu was Chair of the Kimberley Land Council and involved in negotiations over native title legislation and other land rights issues.
Deloria was activated by the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s. That era produced poets and fiction writers such as Kevin Gilbert and Mudrooroo as well as songwriters and performers in Australia, rather than Indigenous historians. One reason Aboriginal historians have been slow to adopt historical or ethnohistorical approaches to research (other than their relatively recent access to higher education) is a deep suspicion of the written sources on which academic historians rely. James Miller, who used the archives to research his book *Koori: a will to win*, found the records Eurocentric:

However when the white men who held positive attitudes wrote about the Kooris whom they met, they interpreted events in their European way of thinking. When they wrote about injustices being committed against the Koori, they in fact wrote about injustices as Englishmen would understand the term. Rarely is the Koori point of view found in old documents.

Henrietta Fourmile argued colonial control has continued through governmental control of the archives which has denied easy access to Aboriginal researchers. Jackie Huggins, one of a small handful of Aboriginal historians who engage with academic history, while concerned about the ethnocentrism of much Australian history has taken a more conciliatory approach. She echoes some of the concerns Deloria highlighted in 1969 in relation to the writing of American Indian history, yet she recognises that non-Aboriginal historians can make a positive contribution to Aboriginal history and has worked cooperatively with some of them:

I think it is the responsibility of every historian, particularly if they are doing Australian history, to make some kind of commitment to the inclusion of Aboriginal people. Exclusion is a sorry story, but I would not want to be included if people didn’t go about the process in a culturally appropriate way ... I think to say that writing about Aboriginal people is too hard is a great cop-out. If historians feel they have no position to speak from concerning Aboriginal people then just don’t do it rather than stuff it up.

Eve Fesl, an Aboriginal linguist, while deploring what she has termed the conspiracy of silence regarding the Aboriginal past, decided to correct the biases of the written record by analysing the way language has been used to misrepresent and justify white supremacy over Kooris. She deconstructs terms such as ‘protection’, ‘assimilation’ and ‘reconciliation’ to show the reality behind these benign words.

Most of these Indigenous researchers in Australia have tended to challenge historians from outside the profession to ensure that historical research does not continue the colonial legacy. They write consciously for an Aboriginal readership with a hope that non-Aboriginal people will read and understand them.

The early non-Aboriginal scholars of Aboriginal history, as we have seen, wrote to inform non-Indigenous Australians. They wanted to introduce them to a view of Australia which had been hidden from them for much of the twentieth century. They were always careful to position themselves as ‘white’ historians writing for a ‘white’

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58. While Mudrooroo’s Aboriginality is now disputed, he was accepted as an Aboriginal voice at the time.
60. Fourmile 1989.
readership and did not presume to put an Indigenous perspective or represent the Indigenous experience. They wanted Australians to know what their society had done to Aboriginal people, and how Aboriginal people had responded to them. Few historians working in this field would agree with Attwood’s position of 1989, ‘While sympathetic to the “Aboriginal cause” I have not worked in close contact with Aborigines or been politically involved in any extensive sense … [I] am dubious of the extent to which our study of the past can be an agent of social and political change.’

History is inherently political as we read our contemporary identities into the past. The emergence of Aboriginal history within Australian history both reflected changing public attitudes within Australian society and influenced those attitudes. The historians of the mid-twentieth century reflected the assimilationist attitudes of their era. Paul Hasluck’s career exemplifies how historians can influence political change as he moved from history and journalism into politics where he developed and implemented assimilation policies as the federal Minister for Territories from 1951 to 1963. The histories of the 1970s, while still focused on policies, presented them not as colonial policy but as an aspect of Australian history, which Biskup and later Reynolds suggested told Australians about themselves and their society. The changes in historiography reflected changes in attitudes and policies towards Indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities in Australia. By the mid-1980s and into the 1990s, as historians became more conversant with ethnohistorical research methods and conceptual frameworks, their work investigated Aboriginal society and Aboriginal responses to forced and unforced change. They asked more diverse questions of their historical records and the subjects of study expanded to include Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry; the role of Christian missions and Aboriginal responses to Christianity; the complexities of interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples — including the attractions of European foods and tobacco; gender relations within Aboriginal society and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; and race relations and the politics of race in Australia. These historians continued to write for a non-Aboriginal readership, but many worked closely with the Aboriginal communities they were researching with the aim that their research would be of interest and assistance to these communities.

During the period in which Aboriginal history emerged there was increasing public disquiet at the social and economic disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal people. Historians helped to show that this disadvantage was the result of historical factors, rather than social dysfunction. They participated in the debates on

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64. Attwood 1989: 142.
65. As Attwood’s contribution to current debates suggests even he has not been able to remain above the fray (Attwood 2003).
66. Hasluck 1988. See also Geoffrey Partington 1996. The historian Don Watson, who was Prime Minister Paul Keating’s speechwriter is credited with influencing policy towards Aboriginal people (Watson 2002).
68. Eg three recent books on the Kimberley: Jebb 2002; Choo 2001; Crawford, 2001. My own research in the 1980s was done at the request of Aboriginal communities wanting assistance with community histories eg Brock 1985 and Brock and Kartinyeri 1989.
how to address this disadvantage by contributing to commissions of inquiry such as the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The bringing them home report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission followed the early investigations of historian Peter Read and others into the removal of mixed descent children from their families. The High Court decision which recognised the existence of native title within common law was influenced by historical research both in Australia and elsewhere in the British Commonwealth. The current attack on Aboriginal history and the historians who work in this field also reflects the changing political climate in Australia. Aboriginal history has been characterised as ‘black armband’ history, a phrase coined by the historian Geoffrey Blainey and taken up by Prime Minister Howard. This is not, as a naive reader might suppose, a reference to the many Aboriginal people who died through violence, disease or neglect over the last 200 years, but to a view of the Australian past which is perceived to focus on negative aspects of that history, rather than the laudatory view which was able to turn even military defeats into something positive.

This parallel discussion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal historians implies that there are not only different methods used by these historians but that they have such different understandings of the past that the development of a single historiography may not be feasible, let alone desirable. But is there a view which is identifiable Aboriginal, to which all Aboriginal people adhere, with its own ‘phenomenology, epistemology and ontology’ which has continued through 200 years of colonial contact? If one considers Aboriginal life histories as a genre, one finds huge variation in the life experiences described and the way these experiences are expressed. There is a shared experience as subjects of colonisation, a sense of exclusion from mainstream Australian society, and a sense that any achievement is an achievement against the odds, but this does not constitute an Aboriginal ontology. It is tempting to see a continuation of the binaries of the colonial experience — the ‘white’ dispossession of Aboriginal lands; the segregation of Aboriginal people from ‘white’ society; the taking of Aboriginal children by governments and churches — in the production of histories of that past. But the recent debates about Aboriginal history make clear there is no single non-Aboriginal point of view. Equally there are debates among Aboriginal people about the legacies of the past and their implications for current policies affecting Aboriginal people. Marcia Langton believes the new generation of non-Indigenous Australians, ‘are able to relate to the Aboriginal world in a less troubled way than their parents and they are almost oblivious to Australia’s blinding colonial legacy of white supremacy and race hatred’. Even if Langton’s optimistic view is realised, the debates about Australian identity, and who constitutes the nation will continue, as will tensions over rights to

69. These historical reports were later published in McGrath 1995.
71. See particularly the judgement of Deane and Gaudron JJ in Bartlett 1993.
72. See Macintyre and Clark 2003 for an excellent discussion of the interaction between historians such as Geoffrey Blainey and Keith Windschuttle and politicians, particularly the Prime Minister John Howard, especially chapter 7.
75. Thomas (1994: 106) voices disquiet over such simplifications of complex processes, as does Lake 2003.
land. What is less certain is who will be the participants in these debates. Will Indigenous people continue to be caught in the crossfire, or will they feel empowered to be part of the debate about how our past has informed our present? Will the right to speak be a given, rather than a right for which Indigenous historians must continue to fight? In 1977 James Axtell wrote in his justification of ethnohistory as a legitimate field of scholarship in America that it must not be seen as a ‘faddish’ response to Vine Deloria’s books or radical American Indian politics. In Australia in the early twenty-first century Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians must ensure that ‘Aboriginal history’ encompasses radical and conservative Indigenous insights.

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77 Langton 2003: 80.


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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 integral to, the World Heritage landscape was born. The concept of a human-free wilderness 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 *Injili*, 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-
conciliation, 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's 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

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\(^1\) 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>
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</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

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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

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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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Book reviews

Trauma trails — recreating song lines: the transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia by Judy Atkinson, 400pp, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2002, $29.95

A reflection by the river

A man by the name of Kev works an oyster barge on the Hawkesbury River, NSW. From time to time he helps my family out, carrying stuff up the river. Kev has Aborigi­nal family lines in his life stream. He has a complex inter-woven Australian history of place and blood, like many of us. He reckons he’s a bit of a mongrel. Slow spoken in a muddy sort of way and quiet as a mangrove, Kev doesn’t make a fuss about physical or mental pain. But he did remark, the other day, that carrying cement up hill from the river was getting a bit much and he had started to do a TAFE course in social work. He had his mind on young kids in trouble. He reckoned the teacher wanted him to write an essay on the stolen generation but Kev was shy to tell her that he didn’t know much about the stolen generation idea. One thing led to another and Kev said ‘Someone said you knew about that sort of thing’. Did I have anything he could read? I said yes, and went and dug out a few things. I gave him my review copy of Trauma trails.

He kept the books I gave him for quite a long time. He said the Trauma trails one was the best, he could understand the stories in it. Especially when Lorna, Len, Mary and the others were talking about their lives (in the chapter on the We Al-li healing pro­gram). He knew what that was about. It was a good book and thanks. He wasn’t sure about ‘all the psychoanalysis’ though. It was a bit deep. I replied that Freud had said that a case history should read like a story and that psychoanalysis was only about lis­tening to family stories that people have forgotten and helping them to remember again. It’s about tracking the patterns that are there. It’s not that deep.

Kev said he didn’t know much about ‘transgenerational trauma history’. What did I think about the author’s idea that all this stuff might have gone back 100 years or more and people like him might still have it in their systems? I said that the family his­tory that Professor Atkinson had tracked through six generations for an eight-year-old Aboriginal boy in trouble was worth paying the $30.00 for the book, alone (p 185).

Kev was a bit quiet. I said that I thought we had forgotten a lot and that Professor Judy Atkinson’s book was about the feelings that had been lost or stolen away. I said his­tory wasn’t just about the facts. Kev knew a lot of stories about the Hawkesbury people and we both knew some of it was muddied up, but what affected people was not just the facts of who shot who and who burned whose house down on the Point. I said that maybe what really got in the guts of people were the feelings that people had about those facts. It was the emotion and attitude that went with the stories that got passed on
down to the kids’ gut feelings about life and death. I said that I reckoned that Professor Atkinson and Mary’s mob at We Al-li were trying to do that, they were trying to turn the facts inside out like shelling peas or gutting fish, so you could see what it felt like inside the skin of facts. Kev responded that some people said fish didn’t feel pain. A bit later he added ‘Some people used to reckon that blacks didn’t feel pain, that blacks didn’t have feelings. The people in the trauma book had feelings...’

Even Professor Atkinson had feelings.

I told Kev that some blackfellas I know reckon that whitefellas don’t have feelings, but in truth the Europeans had had a lot of pain in their history too, and that a lot of it had happened around the border country of Germany and Russia and people were still hurting. And killing each other because of it. I said I reckoned the Freud mob had been trying to sort out their own trouble and history in a German/Jewish kind of way and Judy Atkinson mob were trying to do the same thing in Murri country, in a mongrel sort of way. Both Kev and I reckon that ‘mongrel is good’ and that’s a fact of life. Black and white history is all mixed up and it’s going to take some real mongrels to insist on sorting it out.

We both thought that the We Al-li healing group had done a good job to lay things out the way that they did, but Kev reckoned it might take him a couple more years to work his way through what it all meant. I said ‘Too right’ but I had to have the book back to write something for this review.

This slow conversation took about an hour. I reckon if Judy Atkinson can get such a conversation going with a good man like Kev then she’s done an admirable job for both of us. That’s why I recommend this book to anyone who has a tough mind and is willing to engage themselves in the psychological history of this country and be cut open a bit.

The book itself

Trauma trails is a record of ground-root research activities in the psychological experience of coming into being in places of rage, violence, despair, confused thinking and ‘attacks on linking’. It is about the issuing forth of traumatic memory, and about the moves made among groupings of multi-racial Australian people who are trying to think about it and find their way through to self-healing. It is a documentation of psychic pain.

The book provides:

• An eloquent introduction to the ‘feeling landscape’ of the project and its purpose, by way of a personal transgenerational dream.

• An exposition of the intent and method of the research, establishing the project’s course as following an attitude of deep listening or dadirri. (This was perhaps first made ‘famous’ by Rose Ungunmerr.) This Indigenous Australian ‘technique’ of placing oneself in an attitude of carefully paced, receptive, global attentiveness, while actually listening to someone, will be familiar to

1. Petchkovsky and San Roque 2000.
psychotherapists who have also cultivated a lineage of deep listening of the kind rediscovered by Freud and developed further by Carl Jung.

- An exposition on, and demonstration of, the manner in which traumatic experience is repeated and reactivated from one generation to the next. This section develops the argument that current psychological disorders and disorders in relationship within and between families and across and between the racial borderlines can be seen as a consequence of experiences in previous generations. It affects everyone with an Indigenous history or Indigenous association. A comparison can be made to the experience of WWI and WWII and Vietnam veterans, Holocaust survivors and others who have suffered the systematic assaults of ethnic obliteration. The Australian experience can be placed, therefore, in a kinship of systems of transgenerational trauma.

- Experiential case material is frankly and unequivocally presented by selected people of multi-racial Indigenous descent who have passed through the group process facilitated by Atkinson and her project. From these histories of experience the attentive reader can draw their own conclusions on how the psychic pain of Indigenous/settler confusion has seeped into the Australian mentality and how our own culturally determined psychic defense systems have been constructed.

- Experiential record of the discoveries of how cure, self healing and restoration of self from the vices of trauma are being worked out and worked through. There are some beautiful and moving pieces, there are quotable paragraphs and there are indications and guidelines implicit for those who work in the same field. In particular, I want to emphasise the book’s acknowledgment of ‘place’ as being an essential factor in trauma reproduction and in the healing of trauma.

- The conclusion is modest, not messianic, and the bibliography of *Trauma trails* is wide ranging, complex and very useful for anyone wanting to study such an approach.

I assume that for Judy Atkinson and her associates this book is a kind of text or basis for a continuing program manual. But it is not a ‘colour in the dots’ manual or a ‘save yourself from your history by following my steps’ job. Professor Atkinson does not flinch from pointing out that those of us who purport to heal others need also to heal ourselves. There are some simple and eloquent discoveries recorded here as to how ‘counsellors’ discovered that they had to deal with their own business first. This of course is exactly the same ethical discovery as that made by Asklepios in the Greek healing tradition and by Freud/Jung and many subsequent practitioners: ‘Physician heal thyself’.

Anna Freud developed her understanding of the repertoire of psychological defense systems from her analysis of children during the period of the rise of the Nazi depredations in Europe of the 1930s. Melanie Klein, fierce analytic theorist raised in the same geography, was similarly investigating the roots of destructiveness, envy, hatred and reparation while the European countries were at war and Jews, Poles and gypsies were being obliterated. Sabina Spielrein, Russian Jewish student and confidante of Jung, wrote a seminal paper ‘Destruction as a cause of coming into being’ before she was shot, probably by the Germans.
These three eastern European women were exiles in their time and all three subsequently have contributed enormously to the understanding of the suffering and repair of the traumatised human psyche. It is perhaps no wonder then that in Australia, Judy Atkinson, a woman of German and Aboriginal descent should be turning her attention to these very same issues in her antipodean homeland. To some Judy may be driven, vociferous and fierce. But perhaps to Anna, Melanie and Sabina she would be recognised as a sister in adversity.

As a psychotherapist with much experience of Indigenous life and death I take the position that the formation of an authentic Australian psychotherapeutic practice will be achieved only when the psychological realities of Indigenous Australians are recognised and worked into our theory and method to the benefit of all. Australian Indigenous life, death and history, if accepted, will eventually remake our understanding of our national psyche.

I recommend this complex, well-composed and emotionally satisfying book to anyone who has an interest in improving the quality of Australian psychological work. While it is a psychotherapist's book, it may also add, for historians, an appreciation of psychological history and the place of psychological experience in history.

I could also add that one purpose for Australian history is to know one's self.

References


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In Rights for Aborigines Bain Attwood has made a major contribution to the study of Indigenous struggles for justice. Though he seeks to adopt a case study approach rather than attempt to write 'a comprehensive history of campaigns for rights for Aborigines in Australia' (p xiv), he has nevertheless produced an impressively broad-ranging analysis of the ways in which Indigenous Australians and their non-Indigenous supporters have, since the nineteenth century, fought for justice for Indigenous people. The study begins with the Kulin protests to remain on their land at Coranderrk near Melbourne from the 1860s, which Attwood labels 'the first example of sustained indigenous protest in Australia' (p 6, an endnote explains his reasons for not including Tasmanian protests in this equation). Attwood describes in great detail many significant moments of Indigenous protest in Australia: the Day of Mourning in 1938; the background to the
Cumeroogunga walkoff in 1939; the search for equal rights nationwide in the 1950s and 1960s; the Yolngu fight for land at Yirrkala in 1963; the fight that year to gain ownership of land at Lake Tyers in Victoria; the Gurindji Wave Hill walkoff in 1966; the 1967 referendum; and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972.

The level of detail in which these important events are retold make this book an important part of the historical record. Attwood’s research is thorough, as ever, and his writing manages to piece together the historical evidence into a very readable narrative.

As well as adding significantly to the historical record, there are two central themes that exist throughout the book that make it an important contribution to the way in which both Aboriginal history and Australian history more generally will continue to be written and conceived. The first concerns the respective role played by Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists in the search for justice for Indigenous people. The second concerns the relationship between the search for civil (or equal) rights and the search for the recognition of the more radical Indigenous rights (primarily the recognition of rights to the land).

At the outset Attwood makes clear that he believes other historians (like Heather Goodall and Peter Read) ‘have done very important work in recovering the part played by Aboriginal people but they have probably exaggerated both their autonomy and power in the Australian political domain’ (p xiii).

That non-Indigenous people played significant roles in the various protests articulated throughout the book will surprise few. More novel is Attwood’s forceful argument that ‘the rise of land rights cannot be understood in any other context than one in which relationships were forged between Aboriginal people of remote, northern Australia and white activists from settled, south-eastern Australia’ (p 260). The danger here of course, as Attwood is aware, is that the written record, on which historians are so reliant, will tend to overplay the role of non-Indigenous activists. But Attwood’s argument is carefully made and well supported.

The other significant theoretical issue engaged by this important book concerns the relationship between the search for civil rights as opposed to the search for Indigenous rights. One needs to be careful (and Attwood is) about assuming the assimilationist intent of those Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who sought equal or civil rights for Indigenous people. Although the granting of civil rights was in keeping with the official policy of assimilation, that did not mean the policy was responsible for the removal of overt racial discrimination from Australia’s laws, nor did it necessarily make assimilationists out of civil rights activists.

When people like William Cooper pushed for equal rights in the 1930s did this evidence a prioritising of this kind of right over the pursuit of Indigenous rights (as some would argue), or was it a case of Cooper formulating his claims to suit a given political environment? Attwood suggests the latter, and I would agree. The same question arises in relation to the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, and there is a temptation to view the activists here, particularly the non-Indigenous ones, as apologists for assimilation. As Attwood tells us, this assumption is often mistaken. Indigenous rights took over in the mid 1960s to become the dominant discourse in Aboriginal protest movements at the same time that pro-Aboriginal rights organisations
began to be dominated by Indigenous people (and Attwood is careful here to note that 'there was no necessary relationship between these changes', p 312).

While seeking to restore, to some extent, the role played by non-Indigenous activists in struggles for Indigenous justice, Attwood reserves special praise for those non-Indigenous people who displayed a willingness to listen to, and help bring about, the desires of Indigenous people. Here people like Donald Thomson, Anna Vroland, Stan Davey, Frank Hardy and Barrie Pittock stand out, amongst other non-Indigenous players, many of whom allowed little space for the articulation and realisation of the aspirations of urban, or at least non-remote Indigenous people. Attwood's discussions about the motivations behind a variety of non-Indigenous people's involvement in Aboriginal affairs are often enlightening, although some attempts to suggest psychological reasons for this involvement are a little overdrawn.

On a minor critical note, I found the decision sometimes not to capitalise the 'a' in the noun 'Aborigines' and adjective 'Aboriginal' to jar, even though Attwood was seeking to distinguish between the 'original inhabitant' meaning of the words, and the specific reference to Indigenous Australians. Few people actually now make that distinction, and indeed it is becoming an ever harder one to be consistent about (to illustrate this problem, on p 112 Attwood refers to 'aboriginal culture', and on the next page to 'Aboriginal culture').

But this is a small point. One of the strengths of this impressive book is the way Attwood shows that sometimes disparate sites of protest merged through a process of 'narrative accrual' (a term Attwood adopts) to form a broad political program for change. In the land rights struggles of the 1960s Attwood shows that by talking about histories, protagonists staked claims for very present political demands: 'by telling histories they eventually made history' (p 260).

The telling of contact history has, of course, in recent years itself become fraught terrain, with its own very present political implications. One might term this debate, which has been conducted to a large degree by non-Indigenous historians and writers, as a response to the question: 'what have non-Indigenous Australians got to be sorry about'? Frontier conflict: the Australian experience originated as a forum in December 2001 and was a specific response to criticisms of the National Museum of Australia after its opening that year (and in particular its 'Contested frontiers' exhibit). The forum provided the chance for many historians to respond to Keith Windschuttle's trenchant criticism not only of the Museum, but of the work of contact historians, who he argues have deliberately overstated the number of Aboriginal frontier deaths. The forum took place after the publication of a series of articles in Quadrant by Windschuttle, although it was held before publication of Windschuttle's book The fabrication of Aboriginal history, volume one. Since that time we have also seen the publication of Robert Manne's edited collection Whitewash: on Keith Windschuttle's fabrication of Aboriginal history.

Nonetheless, Frontier conflict is still an important contribution to this debate. The introduction provides a very helpful and considered overview of the ways in which Australian history writing has been reconceptualised in the past 30 years (the rise in status of oral history is particularly relevant in the context of this book), and the editors here draw out the political implications of different ways of viewing Australian history. There are 15 chapters in this attractively produced book (as well as a number of illustra-
tions) which cover the following: specific historical incidents (Lyndall Ryan, DJ Mulvaney, Jan Critchett and Raymond Evans); historical methods (Henry Reynolds, Richard Broome, Windschuttle himself, Alan Atkinson and Deborah Bird Rose); remembering (Tom Griffiths and David Roberts); and reconstructing histories (Geoffrey Bolton, Attwood, Ann Curthoys and Graeme Davison).

The level of violence that existed on Australia’s frontier remains an important historical topic worthy of further research, but it is perhaps time, as Attwood suggests (p 182), ‘to move on’ from the heated political environment in which debates about frontier violence have recently been conducted. As Tim Rowse has said (quoted on p 23), ‘it is arguable that the current controversy about the extent and causes of frontier violence does not matter much because it is incidental to the really important story that indigenous people lost ownership and sovereignty without ever consenting to that loss’.

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Shadow lines by Stephen Kinnane, 414pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2003, $29.95

Can biography give a better picture of the past than history? Perhaps on a subject like the lives of a white man married to a Miriwoong woman in interwar Perth it can. Breaking free of the frustrations of fragmented archives, and getting inside people’s heads, Stephen Kinnane is able to draw on oral history and the love and trust of family and friends to paint a satisfyingly whole picture of the multicultural, strictly controlled society that was Western Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century. The book may be called Shadow lines, but the experience for the reader is more akin to having the past brought into a bright, clear focus, a perspective that does much for cross-cultural understanding of an important part of our nation’s history.

Kinnane’s work contributes to the growing body of work that is unearthing and exploring cross-cultural relationships in Australia. Shadow lines tells the story of Kinnane’s own grandparents, Edward and Jessie, who fell in love against the unforgiving background of AO Neville’s regime of control in interwar Western Australia. Jessie was a stolen child, Edward an English migrant; their marriage was a lesson in tolerance, persistence and staying power. Kinnane’s sympathetic portraits of his grandparents’ lives offers an irresistible look into the choices, pressures and belief systems available to two very different people living in the early decades of the twentieth century.

But this book is more than just the story of one marriage, or one family. Reading Shadow lines is a particularly fulfilling experience for a historian, or anyone who has tried to tell the story of Aboriginal Australia from the records and files left behind by the government departments who controlled indigenous people. Such ‘double-edged’ archives, as Kinnane terms them, tell only half the story. Aboriginal perspective sometimes appears, and can always be guessed at, but is often elusive amongst the coded biases of the past. What Shadow lines does so well is to draw together traditional historical research, and thoughtfully, explicitly, compare it to the stories and reminiscences of
people who had personally experienced the control of the Western Australian Aborigines Department. By the end of *Shadow lines*, the reader feels as if they have been close to the whole story, and it is a moving experience.

Kinnane’s meticulous research and a talent at reading between the lines of the official records are evident from the first chapter. Using the briefest of references, he is able to spin out the detail, to imagine the stories behind the short sentences. As he says himself, ‘[a]lthough the sentences might be spare, reading these records is like deciphering a code. To be chained and dragged a hundred miles was described as being ‘escorted’. To live in a camp with your family was deemed to be ‘neglected’. To have fairer coloured skin than your mother meant ‘suitable for removal’ (p 25). Kinnane is also alive to the pitfalls of engaging in oral history about a contested past and, indeed, *Shadow lines* is as much a story about telling controversial history as it is a family story. Kinnane leads the reader through the many fractured perspectives he needed to navigate in telling his grandfather’s story, in which he had to respect interfamily conflicts, and the formalities engendered by his own subject position as well as the minefield of cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Historians of Australian race relations often find themselves talking in vague terms of ‘boundaries’ and ‘borders’. *Shadow lines* offers a deeper understanding of these concepts. It shows how an Aboriginal woman’s life could be altered by random ideas of race difference, how borders can exist both spatially and in the imagination, in the past and in the present and of course how racial boundaries could be overcome by people’s feelings for each other. Kinnane promises his readers early in the book a revelation of ‘the narratives of tragedy, love and friendship that manage to cut across ... dominant boundaries, if only fleetingly’ (p 139), and this is, wonderfully, not an empty promise.

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*Ngarla songs* by Alexander Brown and Brian Geytenbeek, 192pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2003, $24.95

*Ngarla songs* joins Brandenstein’s *Taruru: Aboriginal song poetry from the Pilbara* (1976), Dixon and Koch’s *Dyirbal song poetry* (1996) and the two collections by Dixon and Duwell (1990, 1994) as one of the few collections of Aboriginal songs readily available to the wider public.

*Ngarla songs* is a bilingual collection of *yirraru* song texts — public anecdotal songs composed for pleasure — by eleven Aboriginal composers from the Pilbara area in Western Australia. It is the result of collaboration between a Ngarla man, Alexander Brown, the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre and the Summer Institute of Linguistics linguist Brian Geytenbeek. The book begins with a background to the publication and description of Ngarla country and culture. We learn about the range of Ngarla song genres and how these fit into everyday life; however we are left wondering whether the song genres are still performed or composed today, or whether non-traditional genres have surpassed them in popularity.
The body of the book is devoted to the 68 song texts, grouped by composer. The presentation of song texts is similar to those in von Brandenstein (1976), with their Ngarla transcription of the song text on the left hand page, and the English translation on the right hand page; yet *Ngarla songs* is much more beautifully designed, with warm black and white line drawings. Those interested in the subject matter of Aboriginal songs, or Aboriginal culture and history of the Pilbara will find this book interesting and insightful.

The song texts convey the extensive knowledge Ngarla singers and translators have of their country, and of how everyday life relates to the Dreaming. The book shows that songs are an expression of emotion; not by direct reference to words for feelings, but through reference to place names, Dreamings, people’s behaviour and historical events that are all associated with particular emotions. The authors show that Ngarla songs, like other traditional Aboriginal songs, use vocabulary from many languages, and allusive language.

Through the use of endnotes the authors make every effort to provide contextual knowledge in order for the reader to obtain the subtle meanings that the songs convey to native speakers, and more specifically, to the people who know the composers. They provide notes where the English meanings of the translated words do not give enough information to grasp the full meaning of the vernacular words in the song. For example, the authors explain that the words translated as ‘instruments’ on page 65 are ‘items in the sorcerer’s tools of trade’. The authors show how composers use language that has the ability to hint at things through ‘overtones’ — the semantic associations — of the words in the songs. Sometimes more contextual information could have been provided. For example the translated song on page 71 has the final line ‘Karnkulypangu was the cause of this (storm)’, and the authors state that ‘Rain was Karnkulypangu’s totem’. Yet we do not know if Karnkulypangu is an ancestral being or a person, and if so, how (s)he relates to the composer. Numerous other language words are used in the translations with no explanation of what they refer to, or with morphological variation that is not explained (p 39). A list of vernacular language words used in the translations with explanations would have assisted in understanding the song texts. Linguists and musicologists may be disappointed to find that there is no morphological glossing, information on phonology or the spelling system used for the transcribed song texts, or musical transcriptions. Music is the defining dimension of songs. Presentation of the rhythm and melody would enable a deeper appreciation of the songs and complement the beautifully presented lyrics.

The authors pick up on a widespread feature of Aboriginal song, what they refer to as ‘staggered recycling’ in many Ngarla songs (p 9). This refers to the mismatching of metrical lines and grammatical lines, where the metrical line begins with the final section of the previous grammatical line. It would have been interesting to hear more about the differences between these two forms of the song, which they refer to as the sung verse and the written form. For example, how much of the line is carried over, and in how many songs? Many Aboriginal songs are constructed so as their text fits with particular rhythmic structures, and some songs have requirements on the number of syllables per line, and numbers of lines per song. Some song texts are set to a repeated melody, and there are regular points in the text where the melody starts and ends. Knowing about these aspects of the songs is left tantalisingly out of reach. Let us hope...
that this will be the subject of further work on Ngarla songs, and that a recording will be available.

_Ngarla songs_ is a book of Aboriginal people's own observations of the changing world around them. There are few books that collate such personal and Aboriginal driven accounts of history.

References


Myfany Turpin

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Looking for Blackfellas' Point: an Australian history of place by Mark McKenna, 269pp, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, $39.95

Without beating around the bush, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point* has so many facets to the narrative and moves so effectively from detailed close-ups to national perspectives that no matter what you expect to find in a history of place, your needs should be met. In 1978 when research into the impact of the timber industry on the natural, historical and Aboriginal values of the Five Forests of the south coast of New South Wales was initiated, it was manifestly apparent that there was no adequate historical account for this region. The absence of a local history made any reconstruction of the Aboriginal landscape of the Bega valley tenuous to say the least. *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: an Australian history of place* by Mark McKenna is overdue and substantially fills this void.

Blackfellas' Point is a riverside landmark on a small block of land on the fringes of the Bega Valley that the author recently acquired. Mark writes this account from the perspective of coming to historical terms with the 'ghosts of the past' that reside in his new locale as well as in the historiography of Australia. The local history of the Bega Valley is situated within contemporary historical discourse through a coherent discussion of the 'black arm band' versus 'white-out' perspectives of Australia's past. The reader is comfortably introduced to the politics of reconciliation and is able to reflect upon national tensions in the light of the richness of local historical sources that are emerging. Here McKenna explores the identity of non-Aboriginal society and offers his consideration of how and why Australians are disconnected from the history of dispossession. He laments the aggressive process of colonisation that inexorably leads to a 'sort of gradual eviction'. The author has a particularly detailed account of how contemporary historians came at last to be concerned with Indigenous issues. On p 62 McKenna pays homage to WEH Stanner and his seminal 1968 Boyer Lecture *After the dreaming — the 'great Australian silence'*. 
Ultimately, thinking about the way in which settlers sought to explain the dispossession of Aboriginal Australians and invent their past gives the reader a better appreciation of the gulf that separates the historical memory of one culture from another.

That the author has mined a variety of source materials is reflected in a 1988 quote from a political speech given at the small inland village of Bomballa. When addressing the gathering there was an assertion by a local politician that the tribes exterminated one another, a reflection of the still powerful 'myth of Aboriginal self-destruction', and that the colonists had little to do with the demise of Aboriginal communities! This rhetoric when placed alongside the remarkable demographic change in the local scene, with two Aboriginal families living in the small timber and fishing town of Eden in 1968 exploding to fifty in 1993, offers some indication as to why there are tensions in such a rapidly changing scene. McKenna matches the demographic information with moving personal accounts of the recent plight of small coastal communities such as Eden and the devastating blow brought on by the closing of the fish cannery. He continues with a discussion of the sense of physical isolation and economic insecurity this raises as well as the stigma of unemployment as a 'public and social embarrassment'.

It is mandatory that the reviewer 'discover' some obscure point to comment on thus demonstrating their authority over the subject. It took me a long time to find one, but footnote 29 (p 236) refers to the Carbago Chronicle of 19 May 1933 when the old Tarlington homestead was torn down. The article states that bricks were found between the walls indicative of a defensive measure. I suggest that this represents a once relatively common form of early colonial construction, referred to as 'cob', where the space between the studs was filled with brick, the practice being derived from England and Ireland, where the space was filled with cobbles or a mixture of straw, clay and wicker.

Records of local court proceedings were at times placed on the front page of south coast newspapers — perhaps because little else happened locally — and feature glimpses of the mind-set of colonial society and reflect black and white interactions. For instance, in 1954 a Bega man Harry Burton was fined 10 pounds for 'having wandered in the company of an Aborigine'. Harry stated that he had been living with the woman and was astounded to find out that there was a law against it.

I found myself getting very angry as I read McKenna's book. So much of his material comes from readily available sources such as newspapers that one wonders what local historians have been doing for the last 100 years other than creating a myth of settler society. Even if you decide not to buy this book, go to a bookshop and read McKenna's recounting of Emily's story about the homicide of an infant child of Aboriginal and settler stock in the Bega Gazette of 1869. No doubt, when you have finished these four pages (p79–83) your perspective on settler society will have changed and the inadequacy of traditional local histories will be manifestly apparent.

Brian Egloff
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Contested country by Patricia Crawford and Ian Crawford, 238pp, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 2003, $38.95

Before reviewing this book, I imagined it to be a study of Aboriginal/White relations in the Northcliffe area of Western Australia, rather in the style of other recent ‘belonging’ studies.\(^1\) Instead it is an environmental history of the once dense karri and jarrah forests of south-western Western Australia. The contestants of this country were the British, the Federal and Western Australian Governments, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), conservationists, Group Settlers, farmers, woodchippers and greenies. The Murrum people, and, later the Nyoongah conservationist protesters from Perth, do not enter the story very much at all, and when they do the Murrum are victims rather than contestants.

The opening chapter on pre-invasion Murrum land use is written by Ian Crawford, (the rest of the book is written by Patricia). He presents a useful account of Murrum land use, which succeeds in his aim to ‘reposition Aboriginal history in the Northcliffe narrative’, but is somewhat static. On p 43, for example, he writes the not very enlightening and somewhat dated summary: ‘The Nyungah way of life had evolved over 50,000 years to reach a balance with nature’.

The account which follows, from the invasion to the present, is a sad story of state and local interest groups trying to impose their own landuse patterns on the forests, with the environment all too frequently coming a long second.

Group Settlement (in which gangs of British migrant workmen would work collectively under a foreman to clear the land before settling on their own blocks) began in the 1920s, out of the British Government’s desire to settle its excess population in what it clearly still thought of as the colonies. Very foolish Western Australian optimism encouraged British planning. The scheme, as is familiar to historians of Australian immigration, and well told here, failed abjectly. While 400 to 800 healthy Murrum people lived in the Northcliffe area in the 1820s, one hundred years later the same area could scarcely support 400 malnourished Group Settlers, and this after a huge expenditure of resources and energy. Many of them wanted to leave, which the Murrum did not. Millions of pounds had been spent turning good karri forests and productive Aboriginal country into bad dairy farms. Even after the folly of clearing the forests became apparent, money was still thrown into the scheme. Between the World Wars, fifteen million pounds was spent on Group Settlement, only five million of reafforestation. Nothing illustrates more clearly the ill-founded optimism of Western Australians that the forests would last forever, nor the British Government’s attitude to Australia as an expendable back paddock, assessments which successive state governments seemed all too ready to accept. Both the account of, and the research in the written records, for these dismal proceedings is first rate.

Unfortunately the evidence used by the authors for the venture is mostly in written form. Crawford relies on some oral history (she cites seven formal interviews, a workshop and a number of personal communications) but these do not count for much before the combined weight of seventeen pages of citations from manuscript collec-

\(^1\) Graham (ed) 1994; McKenna 2002; Read 2000; Watson 1998.
tions, films, fictional writing, theses, government records and a huge collection of sources primary and secondary. That's a pity because at least two gaps in our historical knowledge are not filled by this account. The first are post 1960s loggers and foresters in comparison to the much more articulate greenies, 'ferals' and conservationists opposed to them, who are well represented in the book. An extensive consultation with some of the former would have rectified this.

The other serious gap is the information about the Murrum people themselves. Certainly they appear in this post-invasion narrative much more frequently than in most local, and some environmental histories, but often only to vanish again. Crawford notes that 'It is likely that Aboriginal people were involved in droving throughout the south west in the late 19th and 20th centuries, though they are mentioned only casually in the [written] sources' (p 57). Indeed. On page 87 she notes that there probably were Aboriginal people in the Northcliffe area when the groupies arrived, 'but their presence was only rarely mentioned'. Exactly. She then writes 'In the south-west the plight of Aboriginal people during the Depression was far worse than that of the group settlers, although it has received little attention’ (p 116). In connection with the 1950s, she notes that ‘from the drovers we know that a few Aboriginal people were still around the area’ (p 115). This is what oral history can reveal, and much more. Some detailed and useful references are drawn from Anna Haebich’s massively researched *For their own good*, but in short, those wishing to know more about the Murrum in the south-west should not begin with this book. That’s a pity because so much not only remains to be found out, but can still be found out, and of course, amongst living Murrum it is well known already. In many other parts of Australia, a huge amount of what we know about Aboriginal working conditions, living areas and institutional life, for example, has been drawn not only from oral interviews per se, but by piecing together fragments of many dozens of interviews, in the same way that historians of print sources piece together many pieces and fragments to compose as complete a story as they can. It’s there to be discovered and disseminated: that’s a fundamental point of Mark McKenna’s prize-winning 2002 *Looking for Blackfellas’ Point*. Who would have imagined, in 1970, what rich and detailed records of nineteenth century Aboriginal Sydney would emerge, of the Dharuk, Gundangara and Eora peoples whose histories remained in the memories, stories, artefacts, photographs and personal collections of their descendants? The disseminated post-invasion history of Indigenous Sydney began to emerge as soon as White and Aboriginal historians began to seek out these stories and to publish them, generally collaboratively. It’s still happening: only very recently has a Ku-Ring-Gai Land (northern Sydney) Council been established in an area where most Whites imagined that the Indigenous people had left no descendants for a hundred years.

On page 7 Patricia Crawford writes,

What was the relationship of Aboriginal people to the south-west environment? Although Murrum people no longer lived there, what could be learned from Nyoongah traditions and the historical records relating to the land between the Warren and Gardner Rivers?

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I doubt if in fact it can be assumed that Murrum people left the area. It is much more likely that some part-descent Murrum people live there still, some identifying openly, some identifying only to immediate family, and some not identifying at all — but they carry their history still and, we hope, one day they will allow others to share it.

The authors may reply: but this is an environmental history, the Murrum people and later the Nyoongah people who came from Perth to protest about the destruction of the forests played only a small role in that history. Perhaps. That’s what historians used to say about women’s role in Australian history generally until women spoke up for themselves to demand their rightful place, and before historians embarked on formal programs to fill the gaps.

This is a sympathetic, though somewhat saddening, study of the destruction of the south-west forests and the fight for control over them, not least because so little was achieved in the place of the mighty forests. The authors are compassionate to all the protagonists, not only to the environmentalists. The Murrum too receive both consideration and sympathy, but they remain shadowy. A further study will need to correct this, it is certain that the information is there.

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Aboriginal stars of the turf by John Maynard, 144 pp, Aboriginal Studies Press for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, revised edition 2003, $21.95

When I came across this title, I wondered who would be featured. Darby McCarthy, who was well known in the 1960s, was the only Aboriginal jockey I could think of. In fact Maynard writes about 25 Aboriginal jockeys, including two women. The book is dedicated to one of these women, Leigh-Anne Goodwin who died as a result of a racefall at Roma in 1998.

When one considers the prominence of Aborigines in the cattle industry, it is surprising that more have not become jockeys. Twenty five is a surprisingly small number compared to the number of Aboriginal boxers and footballers. The training and riding of racehorses has usually been carried on by people with few qualifications who were often exploited, another reason why one might have expected more Aborigines to have
been employed in that area. It does not come out in the book, but I wonder how many Aboriginal people were employed as strappers, an underpaid and non-unionised form of employment until a generation ago.

The main point to come out of the book is that until Darby McCarthy, jockeys of Aboriginal descent did not admit to being Aboriginal if they could get away with it. As Maynard puts it (p 24):

The result of this intensive assault on Aboriginal culture and identity was responsible for why many Aboriginal people felt ashamed of the colour of their skin. To be identified as Aboriginal was to leave oneself open to persecution, denigration and prejudice.

The first Aboriginal rider to find fame was Peter St Albans who rode Briseis to victory in the 1876 Melbourne Cup at the age of 13. The first to gain a national and indeed an international reputation was Rae 'Togo' Johnstone. He rose to prominence as a leading rider in Sydney in the 1920s and was frequently suspended for various offences including not allowing his mount to run on its merits, and betting. Jockeys are not allowed to bet. After the 1929 AJC Derby he was suspended for using his mount as a pacemaker to help the chances of the favourite, which he had backed. Since the favourite was Phar Lap, Johnstone needn’t have bothered to help. Johnstone went overseas, but was refused a licence in England. He was granted a licence in France and he won the French jockey's championship in 1933. He spent the war years in Vichy France and Monte Carlo. At one stage he was imprisoned by the Italian authorities, and later he was imprisoned by the Gestapo but escaped. After the war he continued riding with great success including winning three English Derbies.

The most famous Australian jockey of the thirties and forties was David Hugh Munro, better known as Darby Munro. Like Johnstone he was frequently in trouble with the stewards, and like Johnstone he was not referred to officially as Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal. However, given his swarthy appearance, he was 'a black bastard' and 'a black bludger' when he was beaten on a favourite (p 54).

The author devotes a chapter to his own father, Merv Maynard, who rose to success in New South Wales in the 1950s. Remarkably he rode until he was 62. In 1952 with the death of King George VI, the King’s Cup, a race that rotated annually among the major clubs, became the Queen’s Cup and Maynard rode the winner. As the winning jockey, Maynard had expected to meet Princess Elizabeth, but she was detained in England. Forty years later when Queen Elizabeth was coming to Australia, Buckingham Palace rang to say that the Queen wanted to meet the rider who had ridden the winner of the inaugural Queen’s Cup and in February 1992, 40 years later, Maynard got to meet her.

Darby McCarthy rose to fame in the 1960s winning big races in Brisbane. His real name was Richard Lawrence McCarthy but he was nicknamed 'Darby' after Darby Munro. After a period riding overseas, he returned to Australia in 1968 and rode with great success in Sydney. I remember seeing him win both the AJC Derby and Epsom at Randwick on the one day in the spring of 1969. Unfortunately, after that his career went downhill. The nadir was a disqualification for allegedly being involved in stopping the favourite in a race at Hamilton. After several appeals the disqualification was reduced and finally expunged from his record, but the period of enforced inactivity and the
damage to his reputation spelled the end of his successful career. He also had problems with alcohol and drugs prescribed to keep his weight down. However, he remains the first top jockey to be recognized as Aboriginal and proud to be Aboriginal.

There was one other prominent Aboriginal jockey of the 1960s and 1970s and that was Frank Reys who was numbered in the top half dozen riders in Melbourne during that period. He is best remembered for winning the Melbourne Cup on Gala Supreme in 1973. In the press he was always referred to as Filipino. He came from around Cairns and he appears to have had both Filipino and Aboriginal ancestors.

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In this work, Hayes-Gilpin makes a plea for analyses of rock art and of gender, both often treated as marginal, to be incorporated centrally into archaeological studies. She provides a number of case studies taken from various regions of the world to demonstrate how new insights on the past may be gained by integrating rock art — indeed many of the studies provided prioritise the evidence of rock art — and examining social practice in relation to its production and use from a gendered perspective.

In her introduction the author emphasises the distinction between the social construct of gender and the biological category of sex. While in human societies both frequently coincide, in many cultures gender is also assigned to non-biological aspects of the environment — landscape, objects, natural phenomena etc. Her case studies show that such gendered ascription does not necessarily imbue these with actual sexual connotations, nor do they necessarily relate in any obvious way to gendered divisions or usage within human societies. In fact gender inversions may occur as among some peoples of south-western North America, where powerful female localities are foci for male shamanic practice, and boys initiation required the production of symbols of feminine power, while female ritual involved the invocation and painting of a powerful male spiritual symbol (p 123).

More significantly, Hayes-Gilpin argues, by engendering our stories of the past we are led to problematise their subliminal masculinity, and enrich — not necessarily replace — our central (white middle class male) positioning by the inclusion of female and other marginal perspectives. Even the structuralist studies of Leroi-Gourhan and Laming who interpreted palaeolithic cave art in terms of male and female principles merely seek to elucidate symbolism encoded in the imagery but could not, within the structuralist framework, consider its implication to the gendered nature of palaeolithic society.

The sequence of chapters is essentially thematic discussing aspects such as the identification of gender in imagery, who made the art, its social or ritual context, the sacred and engendered landscape. Australian examples do not feature despite the highly gendered nature of much Australian Aboriginal social and ritual practice. This absence clearly reflects the paucity of gendered studies in Australian rock art analyses.
It is now widely recognised that material culture, including art, does not merely depict or evoke concepts, but is an active component, which both expresses *and* mediates cultural values and practice. This view pervades much of the book, and particularly informs Hayes-Gilpin's discussion of south-western Pueblo rock art in which she presents much of her own research on imagery relating to girls' initiation ceremonies i.e. the overt expression of the transformation of individuals from childhood to gendered adult (and also from one age category into another). The status of 'maiden' can be identified in the rock art from a very distinctive hairstyle adopted during this stage. Hayes-Gilpin shows how through myth and art its overarching symbolic importance serves to engender many other aspects of the south-western Pueblo world, well beyond the immediacy of a 'maiden's' gendered social role.

Most of the analyses discussed in the book rely on ethnographic information to arrive at considerations of gender relations as expressed and mediated through the art, and it is questionable how far this approach can be extended into deep prehistory. The antiquity of the 'maiden' image, for instance, may be inferred from other factors such as the antiquity of the rock art and related motifs on pottery. On such evidence Hayes-Gilpin postulates that the overall symbolism of 'maiden' has significant antiquity, but she also warns against too easy an assumption of the continuity of meanings in imagery, particularly when other archaeological data indicate significant cultural transformations such as in subsistence, settlement etc.

The only social and gendered study of fully prehistoric rock art presented is Esther Jacobsen's very detailed analysis of Siberian rock art and archaeology. This work is not widely known in Australia, and Hayes-Gilpin's précis offers an interesting insight into Jacobsen's analysis of the developments in the iconography and location of rock art through a series of major cultural changes as evidenced from other archaeological data. Jacobsen's analysis leads her to presents a history of the — gendered — conceptual transformations that accompanied the more usually recognised changes in subsistence, settlement and social hierarchy. In this admittedly very condensed rendition of Jacobsen's analysis many statements are inevitably qualified with 'probably', 'perhaps', etc. Ultimately, the interpretations presented still depend on ethnographic data of recent shamanic societies, and of some of the underlying beliefs and practices that persist from earlier periods.

With the examples presented in this book, Hayes-Gilpin has demonstrated that considerations of rock art from a perspective of social praxis may enrich archaeological interpretations and lead to greater insights on a range of cultural constructs beyond the symbolism of the imagery itself. However, the extension of perceptual interpretations into deep prehistory remains problematical even where continuities of material evidence obtain. In its wide ranging selection of case studies the book introduces the reader not only to a variety of rock art manifestations and contexts, but also to aspects of gendered rock art studies that may inspire the search for new developments in local rock art research.

Andrée Rosenfeld
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This well written book is an insider’s account of the Aboriginal condition in Australia over the first four decades of the twentieth century. Its author, Gordon Briscoe, was the first Aboriginal person to earn a PhD in history in Australia, from the Australian National University where he now researches in the Indigenous History Program, Research School of Social Sciences. His life stretches back to the period under study, and his youthful experiences, especially adolescence in an institution for ‘half-castes’, gives him the necessary insight into the Aboriginal situation then and since. His personal knowledge of many of the actors in this story is supplemented by thorough archival research. Given the history of Aboriginal counting and health, the book is surprisingly good tempered, often leaning over backwards to be fair.

The book’s central focus is on Aboriginal health, a subject which should remain one of this country’s major concerns. Much of the approach is demographic and hence stresses the need for counting. Counting means identification, which requires some agreement on identity. That agreement was often a shifting one, especially as, during this period, the identity decided whether a person was part of the official population of Australia or not. Those with more than half Aboriginal ancestry were until the 1971 census excluded as being non-Australian. Nevertheless, as a result separate counts were made, and this book could not have been written without them. The search for a statistical identity is also related to the even more important issue of grasping the meaning of ‘Aboriginality’. The choice of the author to restrict his study to Western Australia and Queensland is fair enough. Confining attention to two sets of continuing archives allowed depth to be achieved. Such archival continuity did not exist in the Northern Territory where the administration changed from that of South Australia to the Commonwealth during the period.

Briscoe’s major theme is the survival of the Aboriginal population, which he argues — and can prove statistically — was assured by the beginning of the twentieth century. This is at odds with, for instance, Len Smith’s conclusion that numerical decline came to a halt only in the 1930s. Although Briscoe cites Daisy Bates copiously, he finds it hard to forgive her for calling her 1938 book The passing of the Aborigines, and referring to them as ‘a vanishing race’. He believes that even in 1788 at least some of the Aboriginal people were resistant to smallpox and that general resistance to disease was probably sufficiently great to avoid decimation of the population. Thus he seems to be more on the side of Radcliffe-Brown’s 1930 estimate of pre-contact numbers than Butlin’s 1983 radical multiplication of that number, paralleling the new and much higher estimates of the indigenous pre-contact population of the Americas. Thus, Briscoe argues that the European invasion of Australia spelt disaster but not a Holocaust. The case for nineteenth century populations being higher depends on overestimates of the uncounted ‘outback’ populations in such areas as Cape York, the hinterland of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Arnhem Land, and the Kimberly.

The book’s analysis brings out the relative scarcity of females in Western Australian birth cohorts born before 1900, and in Queensland those born before 1880. The author attributes this to the more severe impact of colonisation on females than on
males, but the mechanics of this are not spelt out. The cause may be the relative under-counting of women or their disappearance on marriage into the wider society, or it may be explained by the nature of pre-contact society.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aboriginal people died of diseases of poverty, displacement and inadequate treatment: tuberculosis, pneumonia and sexually transmitted diseases (bravely called ‘venereal disease’ by Briscoe who refuses to follow the pedants to STDs and then STIs). Hookworm affected one-fifth of the population. In remote areas the providers of modern medicine were faced with the situation that their theories of disease causation and cure were quite different from those of their patients. In the late nineteenth century an awful but slow-killing disease, leprosy, arrived, with either Chinese or Macassan origins. The photographs of its victims in the book are horrifying. So were the reactions of governments, fuelled by the fact of its rapid spread among the Aboriginal population and the fears of the outback white population that it would spread to them. Lock-up, prison-like hospitals, usually on off-shore islands, were established. Daisy Bates was rightfully shocked to meet a group of sick lepers, manacled and chained together, limping as prisoners to the coast for shipment to the islands.

Slowly, leprosy, hookworm and venereal disease were brought under control. Life expectancy rose so that later in the twentieth century the cause of death would come to be dominated by degenerative diseases, striking often at frighteningly young ages. We are now willing to spend more on Aboriginal health, but this may be due less to enlightenment than the fact that between 1913 and 1998 the Australian real per capita income quadrupled and our real national income multiplied by sixteen. In the latter part of the period being surveyed the Depression of the 1930s struck. This meant widespread loss of Aboriginal employment, especially in the pastoral industry, with resultant movement to mission stations, government settlements, and makeshift camps on the fringes of towns. Briscoe, with reason, regards the last as the most socially degrading, but whether health was better or worse there is not certain.

The book is beautifully produced by the Aboriginal Studies Press. Lena Campbell from central Australia has created for the cover a marvellous painting, ‘Honey Ants’. The photographs bring home the grim story of Aboriginal health. Nothing, however, is perfect. Although the bibliography is in alphabetical order by surname, the printing of first names and initials before the surname, renders it confusing.

Dancing with strangers by Inga Clendinnen, 324 pp, Text Publishing, Melbourne Australia, 2003, $45.00

Inga Clendinnen, like Greg Dening, belongs to that generation of ethno-historians who had a major impact in the field of history in the 1970s and 1980s, especially with respect to Pacific and American studies. A well-known specialist of the Spanish conquest in Central America, Clendinnen established her reputation with two important books:
Ambivalent conquest: Maya and Spaniards in Yucatan, 1517-1570 (1987) and Aztec: An Interpretation (1991). The first was a thorough study of the 'conquest moment' and its effects on both conqueror and conquered; the second focussed on the pre-conquest Aztec world with an aim 'to discover something of the distinctive tonalities of life as it was experienced in the city of Tenochtitlan in the early sixteenth century, on the eve of the Spanish conquest'.

Clendinnen says she came to the field of Australian history 'late in life and fortuitously' (p 3). In approaching it she adopts a comparable perspective, focussing on the very first moments of the Australian colony with the aim of recovering something of the life of those she calls 'the Australians', that is, the Aboriginal people. Read in the light of her previous studies, Clendinnen's Dancing with strangers provides evidence of her continuing interest in the study of early confrontations between Europe and the societies of the just discovered New World. In transferring her historical competency from the study of the Spanish conquest in sixteenth century Central America to the study of the British conquest in eighteenth century Australia, she attempts to understand the actions, reactions and thinking of those 'newly discovered'.

Right from the introduction of Dancing with strangers, however, she underlines the limits of studying the Australian case:

Working on the Mexico of five hundred years ago, I was able to retrieve something of the Indians' thinking as to what was happening in their sacred unseen worlds from the elaborate descriptions of ritual life collected from native lords, and detailed Spanish reports of the transformations in Indian ceremonial life over the first fifty years of colonisation. That kind of reconstruction is impossible for my own country, where contact began a mere two hundred years ago, not least because after the first few years the Australians ceased to be of much interest to the British, while in Mexico the friars remained committed to the pursuit of souls (p 4).

Clendinnen is referring to the diversity of sources available on the Indian world to the historian working on the period of the Spanish conquest: the codices transmitted to the Spaniards, pre-colonial paintings and objects left intact despite many being destroyed during the period, transcripts of songs, myths and stories written by Indian scribes after the conquest, or inquiries led by friars with the collaboration of noble Indians, of which one of the most famous resulted in the publication of the General history of the things of New Spain, written between 1577 and 1580 by the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún. Nothing of that sort existed in Port Jackson. Aboriginal societies were non-literate, their sacred world 'stored in landscape, artefact, dance and story' as Clendinnen notes. No inquiry conducted later under English missionaries' initiative resulted in the equivalent of the Florentin codex in Mexico, or Malo's Haleoles or Kamakau's books on ancient Hawaii traditions. 'In my view the sacred world of the Australians in 1788 — world of mind and spirit ... — is closed to us outsiders. My interest therefore focuses on the Australian's secular life'.

Because of the lack of sources, Clendinnen could not apply to the Port Jackson material the same type of 'cultural analysis' she formerly used on Indian pre-conquest society when recovering ancient beliefs, representations, cosmogonies and hierarchies. In the light of the main sources available on the Port Jackson case, she decided to focus on the narratives written by those she called 'the informants'. These are British officers
of the First Fleet, among them the 'big five'; Captain Arthur Phillip, Captain John Hunter, Captain-Lieutenant Watkin Tench, Captain David Collins and Surgeon-General John White. This meant that she had to work within the limits of what these men could actually observe or understand about the Aboriginal world: material culture, men's and women's physical appearance, aspects of social practices, interactions with the newcomers and only a very limited number of elements regarding religious beliefs and practices.

Clinging exclusively to these written sources, Clendinnen curiously ignores the contributions from other disciplines, such as modern archaeology or linguistics, to be found in the work of Jim Kohen and Ron Lambert, Isabel McBryde, Anne Ross, Val Attenbrow and Arthur Capell. She also makes no reference to the ethnographical information accumulated throughout the nineteenth century from various parts of eastern New South Wales; material that could have been useful for the understanding of the groups at Port Jackson.

Clendinnen limits the scope of her inquiry to the written sources of the first nine years of the British presence, but adds two final chapters covering the period 1795-1840 based on the journal of Mrs Charles Meredith. She looks at what happened through the eyes of officers fascinated by their encounter with the 'other', the 'Indian', the 'savage', the 'native'. The 'other' was not yet called 'an Aboriginal' and was never then called 'an Australian'. The word 'Australian' was used from the 1820s onwards and was reserved for locally-bred whites, as Mrs Meredith wrote in her journal (quoted by Clendinnen p 281). However, to escape the stereotypes associated with the word 'Aboriginal' Clendinnen chooses to use 'Australian' instead, considering that it 'is what they undoubtedly were' (p 4). This, however, is misleading for the word 'Australian', just like 'Aboriginal', is a colonial construct and historically inappropriate for first inhabitants. Clendinnen could easily have used local Indigenous names of groups instead, but she deliberately preferred to establish a distance from common usages by introducing a confusion into the naming.

Dancing with strangers is about Aboriginal people's contact with members of the First Fleet. The aim of the study is to reconstitute the different acts and scenes of early Port Jackson by way of a thorough analysis of British/Aboriginal interactions. There is also a desire to retrieve Aboriginal agency and meaning. Several books have been published or republished over the past few years on this topic and with the same objective. Tales from Sydney Cove by Kate Challis, written in 1951, was republished in 2000. When the sky fell down by Keith Willey was published in 1979. Peter Turbet's book, The Aborigines of the Sydney District before 1788, first published in 1989, was re-edited in 2001, and Bennelong by Keith Vincent Smith, was also published in 2001. The topic is, therefore, not new. Clendinnen's book has nevertheless received the warmest praise, winning the NSW Premiers' prize for non-fiction for 2004. Among the many compliments for Clendinnen's prose, commentators stressed the novelty of the approach taken. This needs some analysis.

One of the strengths of Clendinnen's narrative is without doubt its capacity to make the society of Port Jackson live again through a detailed and dynamic description of events and actors. According to the principle of a 'travel account', it follows the course of the local history and precisely describes the different phases of British-Abro-
original relations. Clendinnen endeavours to interpret thoroughly the meaning behind actions and behaviours. She revives in her narrative central Aboriginal actors, such as Arabanoo, Baneelon, Barangaroo, and Colbee. They appear as the main characters of the scenario, progressively discovered by the reader in all their complexity. Clendinnen’s main effort consists in recovering their agency and motivations in the complex and tragic situations they confront: the intrusion of newcomers, the outbreak of smallpox, the drying up of local resources and, finally, the profound disruption of their world. Far from being passive victims, these men and women act and react to the British presence with a political and personal agenda. Much like Keith Vincent Smith in his book *Bennelong*, Clendinnen describes Baneelon as an essential ‘go-between’ who acts as a political leader, attempting to take advantage of his privileged relations with the British in general, and Governor Phillip in particular, in order to impose negotiated relations and compensations. Much like Smith again, she interprets the famous scene of ‘spearing the Governor’ as a ritual payback fortuitously and quickly organised by Baneelon as reparation for past wrongdoings by the intruders, opening the opportunity for new alliances. The idea of Baneelon organising a ‘ritual’ ‘fortuitously and in two hours time’ on a territory (Manly) that was not his own (Baneelon was a Wangal from Parramatta), with only one spear-throw by another ‘stranger’, is an interpretation that could be seriously discussed and challenged.

In general, however, Clendinnen’s interpretation of Baneelon’s role as a negotiator trying to establish a new balance of power between local groups and intruders is interesting and convincing. Baneelon is portrayed as attempting to uplift his position in his own world, within the limits imposed by others, in particular by elders whose presence can only be guessed at. Interpretation of the Aboriginal power game is a central issue in Clendinnen’s narrative, but other domains of action, such as gender relations, are illuminated as well. From Clendinnen’s description emerge powerful feminine figures such as Barangaroo, and fresh insights into what is called ‘Australian sexual politics’.

To retrieve from British descriptions clues as to Aboriginal ‘autonomous actions’, Clendinnen ‘cultivates’ what she calls ‘deliberate double vision’ (p 119) which consists in distancing herself from the ‘natural’ meaning of actions as given by the observers. (This is close to what the field of subaltern studies calls ‘reading against the grain’.) Cross-checking information provided by several officers’ accounts, the author carefully investigates facts, chronology and actors’ actions.

Clendinnen develops a particular focus on historical sources: the context of their production, the status and point of view of their authors. Most of the First Fleet officers’ journals have been too often used by historians as neutral sources, when working on the early years of the colony. Clendinnen, on the other hand, pays special attention to each narrative and narrator: who saw what, and in what circumstances? She is one of the few to notice, for instance, that Watkin Tench, considered one of the finest and most reliable observers of Port Jackson, described events he had not actually seen, but only obtained through hearsay (p 114). One particular case concerns the spearing of the Governor where, as she notes, most historians have used Tench’s narrative as the main source of information for the scene. Her special attention to the historical sources explains why Clendinnen chooses to start her story with chapters devoted to the ‘big five’, in order to provide the reader with some insight into their personality, position...
and opinion. She takes into serious consideration the fact that the First Fleet journals were written by different people, each with their own personal character, points of view, intentions and motivations. This may appear obvious, but First Fleet journals have far too often been treated as 'equal and interchangeable', regardless of the particularities of their authors, as Clendinnen points out.

This methodological perspective leads Clendinnen to pay equally close attention to the British and to the ‘Australians’ in Port Jackson; including an anthropological concern for a better understanding of the meaning of acts, actions and reactions. One of the originalities of her book resides precisely in this effort of grasping both sides of the story, both societies present at that time. Chapters on ‘discipline’ and ‘sexual politics’, which put into perspective British and Aboriginal conceptions of justice, punishment, women and violence are among the most stimulating ones. Clendinnen does not consider each side en bloc, but mentions the complexities due to internal divisions and unequal positions. Port Jackson’s world cannot be reduced to a confrontation between British and ‘Australians’, but must be seen as a complex social place made of officers, sailors, soldiers, convicts and Aboriginal people from different groups and with different personalities, each one with his or her own cultural and social references, and all of them interacting. Clendinnen’s perspective reminds us of the beautiful work of Greg Dening in the field of Pacific history. In both cases, the novelty of the analysis does not reside in what is said about the ‘other’, but in the investigation of the encounter as such, the mutual understandings and misunderstandings and the peculiarities of the Europeans of the time.

On several occasions Clendinnen exposes her difficulty in apprehending Port Jackson’s culture and society. About ‘British sexual politics’, she writes: ‘I confess I find the early colony’s smooth techniques of managing sexual matters among its elite at least as opaque as the Australians’ (p 154). About flogging ‘It seems that what is judged reprehensible violence is a cultural matter. We are disconcerted that men like Watkin Tench or John White — men we judge to be kind, men we have come to like, men who in some sense we think of as forebears — could watch those hangings and floggings unmoved. Australians were horrified too’ (p 190). Convict society ‘on the whole is not a society we will easily understand’ (p 185). However, to attempt to do so Clendinnen uses several major references on eighteenth century British history, Pacific history and Australian penal history, such as the works of Greg Dening, Douglas Hay, John Hirst, Alan Atkinson, John Currey, NAM Rodger, Ann Salmond and of course EP Thompson.

Clendinnen provides us with a dynamic description of social relations in Port Jackson, including details on interactions among the convicts, between convicts and Aborigines, between convict women and officers. But her main focus remains British officers’ interactions with Aborigines in general, and with those later called the ‘come in’ Sydney people in particular.

Governor Phillip is on centre stage, described as a remarkable political tactician, patient and curious towards the ‘natives’. He was ready to put an enormous amount of time and energy into his relations with his Aboriginal acquaintances, although he was simultaneously struggling with his task as Governor in charge of a starving and isolated community of convicts and soldiers. His home, the Governor’s house, open to his ‘native friends’, became a central place for conversations and exchanges that are vividly
described by Clendinnen. But Phillip was also stuck in the contradictions inherent in his role and mission, having to maintain friendly relations with local people on the one hand, and develop British occupation and settlement the other. Competition and violence were soon at the heart of the story.

Clendinnen starts her epilogue as follows: 'During an early and relatively benign phase of their imperial adventure the British — or rather the selection of them we have just met — chanced to encounter in Australia one of the few hunter-gatherer societies left on earth' (p 285). By using words such as 'benign' and 'chance' she characterises the peculiarity of the period and context of the First Fleet meetings with Aboriginal local groups of Port Jackson. It was a period and context still deeply influenced by the previous experiences of James Cook's circumnavigations and discoveries. In many ways the First Fleet officers were acting in Port Jackson towards Aboriginal people as scrupulous 'observers', willing to participate in the building of a scientific knowledge and concerned by the survival and the protection of the 'primitive society' they met. As members of an educated elite, they tended to transfer to convicts the whole responsibility for wrongdoings carried out against local people. Some of them understood the relationship between the brutal intrusion of 1000 newcomers and their effects on local resources and Aboriginal way of life, but all were obviously deeply convinced of the legitimacy of their imperial mission.

Throughout her book, Clendinnen shows a profound admiration, affection and even love for the officers of the First Fleet, Watkin Tench in particular. But she fails to describe in detail the world they belonged to as soldiers and members of a British elite. Their background, previous experiences, knowledge and intellectual references, political ideas and so on remain in the shadow. The author uses instead a surprisingly sentimental approach that does not, I think, help the reader to understand these men, their actions and attitude with respect to their role in Port Jackson and their implication in an ineluctable logic of colonisation. During this 'relatively benign phase of imperial adventure', as Clendinnen notices, Aboriginal people in Port Jackson experienced a tragedy not so much because of a direct military violence exerted on them, but because of the situation itself, the massive intrusion, the disruption of their way of life, the break out of smallpox, the high mortality and famine. Colbee, Baneelon, Barengaroo and the others were the surviving members of dismantled groups. Substantial aspects of their experience are very difficult to analyse, because these experiences remained 'unseen' and untold by the 'British informants'. However, most of these officers having experienced other colonial situations, especially in America, knew the effects of European colonial power on small and vulnerable communities and they could perhaps have anticipated the consequences of their imperial mission and presence in Port Jackson. But apart from the young astronomer Dawes who resisted participation in any punitive expedition, the others stayed faithfully attached to their duty.

With a good deal of sensitivity, Clendinnen concludes that 'Fast evolving colonial situations demand swift responses. Our two main protagonists, Phillip and Baneelon, were given no space for reflection, revision or even explanation of their positions. Both of them failed, hence engendering their personal and their own people's suffering; a suffering that is still of actuality today. They cannot be blamed for that failure' (p 286). What defeated them, in the end was 'the depth of cultural divisions'. More than that,
however, they were defeated by a whole system of power and domination from which Baneelon as victim and Phillip as agent could not escape.

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Blood, sweat and welfare: a history of white bosses and Aboriginal pastoral workers by Mary Anne Jebb, 364pp, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 2002, $34.95

Mary Anne Jebb's Blood, sweat and welfare is an exploration of the evolving relationships between Aboriginal people in the northern Kimberley and the non-Indigenous people who settled in their country. Her work focuses on people who 'mostly spoke the Ngarinyin language', since they also 'spoke or understood neighbouring languages' (p 6). The events that Jebb refers to in this work are mainly focussed on those that occurred in the country of these Ngarinyin speakers, 'the central and northern ranges area north of Derby' (p 6). As Jebb shows, European pastoral settlement in this region was underpinned by both informal and formal kinds of governmental support, frequently to the detriment of local Aboriginal people.

Jebb begins her account with the beginnings of pastoral settlement in the area, occurring from 1903 onwards, and chronicles the climate of fear produced among Aboriginal people in the early days of pastoral settlement. Jebb traces the structural conditions underlying much of the early frontier violence towards Aborigines, through to the era in which the pastoral frontier 'settled down' and Aboriginal men and women in this region became workers on pastoral stations. Here, Jebb produces substantial evidence to support the view that the pastoral industry in the north Kimberleys was substantially reliant on Aboriginal labour. Jebb then looks at the effects of the introduction of welfare payments for Kimberley Aborigines with respect to both their 'employment' in the pastoral industry and the viability of that industry itself, once 'bosses' were required to pay equal wages to Aboriginal workers. These themes are the blood, sweat and welfare of the title, and provide much of the structure of the work.

In exploring her themes, Jebb draws on historical and archival sources as well as oral accounts of these periods provided by a number of Kimberley Aboriginal people. In relation to the 'early days' of gardia ('whitefella') arrival in this part of the Kimberley, many of the Aboriginal people who relayed their experiences of this era of history to her experienced it directly, or were closely related to those who experienced this period directly. The incorporation of their versions of history, and indeed their voices in the text, gives this material immediacy and impact that an analysis of historical records alone could not possibly produce. In addition, it is evident that much of the direction and focus of Jebb's archival research has emerged through the oral narratives she has been entrusted with by her Indigenous informants.
This work makes manifest the hidden histories that reveal the complexity of interactions among and between Aborigines and Europeans, extending from the early days of pastoral settlement in this region, and stamping their presence on contemporary relations. These are not relations that can be described in simple dichotomous terms, as Jebb's work clearly shows, and she seeks to 'avoid oppositional modelling of contact relations which relegates Indigenous people to either victim or resistance status' (p 13). She is, I think, successful in achieving this aim, illustrating the relational dialectic between Aborigines and non-Aborigines that shape, transform and inform the ongoing dialectic. In this, she is also successful in drawing together the major themes of this work, ultimately showing that welfare in this region can be seen 'as an extension of a colonial relationship in which Aboriginal people are active and interested but less powerful' (p 13).

This is a scholarly and accessible work that has been finely researched and crafted; it details an important history that is deserving of such a fine-grained treatment. It contains many nuggets that will attract the attention of different readers, and I have not attempted to detail those that caught my own eye here. It will appeal especially to those interested in Australian Aboriginal history, and makes a significant contribution to a deeper understanding of Indigenous people in the north of Australia today, especially of Aborigines whose historical experiences were those of a 'station mob'.

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**Crossing boundaries: cultural, legal, historical and practice issues in native title** edited by Sandy Toussaint, 234pp, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2004, $39.95

This book tries to make sense of the place where legal tradition and legal practice meet the academy, under the complex and fraught operating conditions of contesting native title. The authors speak from their experience of what happens when cultural, historical and anthropological studies meet the positivism of the law in the Federal Court. Judges require that expert witnesses be independent and apolitical, while at university the humanities and social sciences have for decades been moving towards accepting the subjectivities associated in the construction of knowledge, that one can never truly be objective in research.

In native title courts, anthropologists, historians and other professionals have to establish an authority that is independent from the native title claimants, so they do not leave themselves open to the charge that they are acting as advocates. Lawyers, on the other hand, operating legitimately as advocates for the claimants, engage the services of experts to write reports. If the report is not in the best interest of the client, it can be suppressed through legal privilege.

Confused? Consider the position that native title law has placed native title claimants in: they have to prove to the courts a continuing connection by a particular people to a particular place through the practice of traditional laws and customs since before colonisation. Linguist Patrick McConvell in his chapter explores the complex shifts,
changes and consistencies in language and place and law which native title claimants have to explain to the courts.

The book is based on papers given at the two-day national conference Crossing boundaries: anthropology, linguistics, history and law in native title held at the University of Western Australia in 2000. In Justice Robert French’s chapter on evolving native title law he includes the 2002 Miriuwung Gajerrong and Yorta Yorta judgements. There is also an Afterword which includes, briefly, the implications of the 2002 judgements.

In its structure this book is explicitly a cross-disciplinary exercise. The nineteen contributors are primarily anthropologists and lawyers and are joined by a few historians, and the Federal Court judge and linguist already mentioned. Veronica Strang writes about representations of identity that are required of Aboriginal people by the legislature. David Trigger discusses the positioning of anthropologists in the courts. There are issues of confidentiality when fieldwork notebooks are subpoenaed (Jan Anderson, Carolyn Tan); the cultural mindset of judges and the use of cultural stereotypes in courts (Wendy Asche); and, three chapters about working on the Miriuwung Gajerrong native title claim written separately from the perspective of a lawyer (Michael Barker), an anthropologist (Will Christensen) and a historian (Christine Choo).

At the heart of the book is the legitimacy of knowledge. David Ritter and Francis Flanagan give a quick introduction to critical legal theory which challenges the legal norms and institutions everyone is contorting themselves to be relevant to. The validity of oral knowledge compared to written historical records comes up, as do other different cultural norms and systems of thought. Native title is an imperfect system. If you want to know more about how it is for professionals working in native title practice, this book provides an excellent range of readings.

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Les jardins du nomade: cosmologie, territoire et personne dans le desert occidental australien by Sylvie Poirier, 291 pp, Lit Verlag, Germany 1996, approx. $55.00

University of Toronto Press will publish an English edition of Les jardins du nomade sometime this year under the title A world of relationships: itineraries, dreams and events in the Australian Western Desert. The original title translates as The nomad's gardens, a metaphor that aims to invoke the images of cultivation and creation. The nomad's gardens are the ancestral itineraries, their named sites and associated ceremonies: complex networks of social, ritual and territorial affiliation and responsibility that define the poetics and the politics of local knowledge. By means of a process of reinterpretation and reinscription, these gardens are cultivated, renewed, enriched or left fallow. The metaphor captures one of Poirier's key images: that the Kukatja are active agents, gardeners, in and of the tjukurrpa, or the Dreaming.

The book is the result of three years among Kukatja and other Western Desert people at Balgo and surrounding outstations in northeast Western Australia. Poirier returned to the Balgo area three times between 1980 and 1994. She began as chef in the kitchen that serviced the white community staff, but already she collected ethnographic material that was used by the anthropologist Fred Myers in a land claim. Later she returned as an anthropologist, carrying out fieldwork in her own right. While she initially came to Balgo a single woman, on her return she was married with a child. This breadth of interactions within the community would have led to a wide variety of experiences that, together with her intimate and warm association with the people and her apparent facility with the Kukatja language, are tangible in her writing. This intimacy, however, in no way detracts from her anthropological task as she applies lucid and insightful etic analysis to some of the most fundamental emic concepts of her hosts.

Poirier discusses many aspects of Kukatja society and ritual. Ethnographic insights are found on almost every page. Among Western Desert ethnographies she mainly refers to the classic study by Myers, whose Pintubi informants have close ties to Balgo. In building on his and other work, Poirier regularly highlights differences or adds depth. She discusses classic ethnographic topics, such as the kinship system and the composition and role of local groups, as well as issues of more contemporary relevance, such as the process by which ‘fallow’ land is taken over, the outstation movement and cases of people re-establishing their association with country after a 30-year absence.

While the book's scope is wide, its central concern is change, transformation and continuity of the tjukurrpa and its ceremonial sphere among the Kukatja, of course largely from the women's perspective. Poirier seeks to penetrate the social dogma of the tjukurrpa as being immutable, to demonstrate its dimension of openness. She argues that Myers was wrong to suggest that Western Desert people are less innovative than other Aboriginal societies. They simply deny innovation more vehemently than others. The emic discourse of permanence has hidden change from view.

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1. The two main groups at Balgo are Kukatja and Walmatjarri, but other people living there identify as Mandiljarra, Ngarti, Pintupi, Tjaru and Wangkatjunga. Like Poirier, I will use Kukatja here for the sake of simplicity.
The foundation for that discussion are the dreams or, as Poirier calls it, the oneiric experiences of the Kukatja people. Her collection and careful contextual placement of approximately 30 oneiric accounts is a remarkable ethnographic contribution in itself. It addresses a gap identified by another scholar of the Kukatja, Peile, who felt that in Aboriginal studies generally 'little attention has been paid to what may be called the "ordinary" dreams of men and women'. Poirier’s analysis focuses on the cultural context, meaning and pragmatic social application of dreams, called *kapukurri* by the Kukatja.

Dreams are actively sought and used by Kukatja for many purposes:

- they are a source of knowledge of future events, such as the arrival of relatives or the location of game the next day;
- they are used to cause, diagnose and heal illness, and discover the source of other mishaps;
- they are used to visit distant sites or people;
- they are the space where offences against ancestral laws are punished by the appropriate ancestors;
- they can provide the opportunity for people to meet or conduct ceremonies in their collective dream; and, Poirier argues,
- they are most valued as a way of receiving new mythic-ritual elements from the ancestors, both mythological and human.

In this last capacity, *kapukurri* are fundamentally channels of revelation and tools of transformation. All transformation of the forms of permanence, i.e. of the *tjukurrpa* and its ceremonial reflections, is essentially validated through dreams as the transmitters of the ancestral word.

Dreams are the time-space of encounter between humans and *tjukurrpa* beings, and between humans and deceased ancestors. From these encounters flows creativity, as dreamers are taught new songs or dances and are informed of changes to the Dreaming tracks. A new site may be added, for example, following a dream where the relevant *tjukurrpa* being was engaged in previously unknown acts at the site.

The individual dreamer’s role is only passing. Poirier describes, by way of specific examples, the processes that newly dreamed segments go through to become part of the accepted body of ‘Law’. It is clear that as part of that process the dreamer and the oneiric event itself are rapidly removed from the social consciousness. This process is facilitated by a number of factors, such as the merging of elders with *tjukurrpa* beings in general discourse and the shallowness of historical and genealogical information. These factors hinder any serious inquiry into ‘what was’, and make it impossible to assess the duration of any given *tjukurrpa* track.

By contrast, Poirier is able to document changes to women’s ritual, because her data was obtained over several years. From one visit to the next, a certain ceremony had

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3. Peile 1997: 115. Peile’s work was published after *Les jardins*, but he himself had died some time before. When acknowledging Peile, Poirier expresses the hope to see his extensive manuscripts in print soon. His descriptions of dream experiences and related concepts among the Kukatja substantiate Poirier’s observations, but they form only a small part of his seminal work.
gained new sections and lost others that she had previously recorded. Poirier also describes the process of ceremonial transmission, from generation to generation and from community to community. The ceremonies she observed are part of a ceremonial exchange network connecting Balgo to far-flung places. They contribute to the supra-regional identity of the Western Desert.

The Kukatja, Poirier argues, do not draw the same distinctions between dream, waking state and mythological narrative as Europeans. At times, it can be difficult to distinguish whether a person is recounting a dream, a personal experience or a tjukurrpa segment, especially among the elders.

In the Western Desert, she argues, prevails a vision of being in the world where all that is perceived, dreamed, experienced and imagined inserts itself into a supple and open reality. The desire for social cohesion and avoiding conflict and mutual embarrassment is so strong that people do not challenge each other’s accounts of events; every idiosyncratic version of an experience is no more or less true than another. Equally, when people discuss tjukurrpa stories they apparently do not seek in any way to gauge the element of ‘redescription’ or personal fantasy of the narrator.

Although illustrated by detailed examples, this account is not easily reconciled with another image of Western Desert society, where contestation of tjukurrpa accounts is part of public discourse and group politics. It is most certainly not intended, but it would be possible to read Poirier’s account as if the Kukatja lived in an entirely relativistic world, with no concept of delusion and mistake, or right and wrong. When applied back to the major discussion on changes to tjukurrpa tracks and rituals one can quickly see how this line of reasoning could confirm some of the worst European suspicions, which assert that Aboriginal claims about the significance of sites are merely opportunistic reactions to areas of land becoming commercially valuable.

Of course, this is not what Poirier is saying. She is at pains to point out that innovations cannot be gratuitous or individualised, but must be based on the logic of the tjukurrpa and be affirmed through collective processes. From the emic perspective, changes to stories or ritual are not seen as human creations at all, but rather as pre-existing tjukurrpa realities that simply had not been discovered by humans before.

There is, however, a certain tension in Poirier’s dealing with this topic, which arises from the intrinsic conflict between her European sense of history and that of the Kukatja. While for the Kukatja changes to the tjukurrpa are the result of ‘revelation’, for Poirier they are examples of ‘innovation’, often based on socio-political reasons. Thus, numerous tjukurrpa tracks have been ‘re-routed’ as people left the desert and settled at mission and pastoral stations. According to Poirier, such ‘innovation’ is traditional, for it is precisely that openness and inherent creativity, which permits the dynamic reproduction of traditions and ancestral responsibilities.

Throughout her work, Poirier writes ‘innovation/revelation’, presumably to show that the two are the same thing regarded from two different cultural vantage points. The substantial discrepancy between ‘innovation’ and ‘revelation’ however, is not that easily overcome. The problem is that Poirier ultimately applies no theoretical frame-

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work by which to explain the key element in change: the oneiric experience. In her most detailed discussion of the topic she expresses the view that innovative dreams, *kapurkurri*, involve creative actions by individuals during states of half-sleep or, in the inverse, half-waking.

The Kukatja by contrast, and like most other Indigenous people, consider *kapurkurri* to be the result of a person’s spirit leaving the body and having diverse experiences in that liberated state. In their view, the environment where *kapurkurri* take place is objective and inhabited by deceased ancestors and *tjukurrpa* beings. There are numerous examples of the objective nature of that experiential dimension, most strikingly the cases of two or more people meeting in their dreams and engaging in collective activities. Poirier points out that these shared and communicative dreams do not fit with the European idea of the impermeable individual and the dream as something that comes from the individual alone. However, they correspond logically with the Western Desert view of the human being as part of a larger whole (*waltja*). While this explanation makes sociological sense, it does not shed any light on the empirical question: how do the dreamers meet and share the same dream content? It seems impossible to fully comprehend the innovating oneiric experiences of the Kukatja as long as that question cannot be answered.

Poirier amply demonstrates that there are complex social processes involved in turning an individual’s dream into social reality. The antiquity of these processes cannot be doubted and thus the innovation of the kind shown by Poirier is clearly part of the traditional make up of the Western Desert society. With that comprehensively and eloquently demonstrated, the precise workings of the oneiric experience are, for the time being, perhaps secondary.

References


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5. That this is the principal way in which Indigenous people explain dreams was shown by Bourguignon 1972.
Contributors

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### The Sally White – Diane Barwick Award

The Sally White – Diane Barwick Award of $1000 is presented annually by the Board of Aboriginal History to a female Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tertiary student who is about to start or is already studying for an Honours degree.

The Award can be used for any appropriate research-related purpose.

Candidates are invited to apply in writing at any time for selection in April of the following year.

Please apply to Aboriginal History Inc.
PO Box 3827, Canberra ACT 2601.
Contact Robert Paton 0419 736459 for further details.
Information for authors

Articles less than 7,000 words in length are preferred, but submissions of articles up to 10,000 words will be considered. Please submit one hard copy and keep one. An electronic version of the paper is also requested, without embedded scans, in Microsoft Word or RTF format. Footnotes should be as brief as possible and numbered consecutively throughout the paper. References should be arranged in alphabetical order by author's last name and include full publication details as given on the title page of the work. Arrange works by the same author in chronological order. Tables and maps should be submitted in final form and accompanied by a list of captions and credits (if applicable). Do not send scans or photocopies taken from books or other publications; only original photographs, maps or other illustrations will be accepted. If you provide illustrations in the form of scans, these must be 'high resolution' (600 dpi) and suitable for printing. Do not paste them into your text document. All scans must be in separate tif or jpeg files. If accepted for publication, authors are responsible for obtaining copyright clearance for any figures and photographic images that are reproduced. Web citations should include full address and date accessed. Authors should follow the usage of the Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, 6th edition, John Wiley and Sons, Canberra, 2002.

Footnote style

2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
4. Evening Mail, 12 March 1869.
5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

Footnote numbers are placed after punctuation marks in the text.

References


Cowlishaw, Gillian 1999, Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas: a study of racial power and intimacy in Australia, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, N.S.W.


Trangamar, ER 1960, 'Stories of the past: Mulga Fred', reprinted in Coleraine Albion, 4 & 11 February.
Aboriginal History Monograph Series

Published occasionally, the monographs present longer discussions or a series of articles on single subjects of contemporary interest. Previous monograph titles are:

Peter Sutton, *Country: Aboriginal boundaries and land ownership in Australia*, 1996
Link-Up (NSW) and Tikka Wilson, *In the best interest of the child? Stolen children: Aboriginal pain/white shame*, 1997
Diane Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, 2001
Dennis Foley and Ricky Maynard, *Repossession of our spirit: traditional owners of Northern Sydney*, 2001
Gordon Briscoe and Len Smith (eds), *The Aboriginal population revisited: 70,000 years to the present*, 2002