

## **'Karoo : Mates' — Communities reclaim their images**

Heather Goodall

Aboriginal researchers were looking for a title when they put together a booklet showing the 1938 Brewarrina photographs from the Tindale Archive, held by the South Australian Museum, as they prepared for the 'Back to Brewarrina' weekend in 1994. After a lot of discussion, they decided to call it 'Karoo', a word often heard in greetings all along the river and deriving from a term for a kin relationship.<sup>1</sup> For them this word has broadened its meaning to encompass wider networks. It is now used, they felt, more like the term 'mates', suggesting companionable friendship, which was the English word they chose to stand next to it in the title. Their choice of 'Karoo : Mates' reflected their affectionate warmth towards the people themselves but also their sense of the bonds across and beyond families, linking the people in those old photographs not only with tradition but with change, with both the present and the future.

Photographs are now well recognised as treasured objects among Aboriginal communities and there are a growing number of insightful and sensitive explorations of the ways in which Aboriginal people create meanings about the past and the present through photographs. But the work of Margaret Somerville,<sup>2</sup> Gaynor Macdonald<sup>3</sup> and others have each been reflections on established Aboriginal uses of photographs which had been developing over some time and of which the analysts had only recently become aware. We have seldom been able to consider what happens when a whole body of photographs suddenly becomes available. How are the images seen and used? What stories can they be made to tell? And by whom? Because it is of course not only for Aboriginal Australians that photographs can be made to tell stories.

Photographs have played a key role, as Nicholas Peterson has pointed out,<sup>4</sup> for settler Australia in constructing its narratives of itself. Photography took over from naturalist drawing as colonising scientists tried to stabilise and categorise the Indigenous peoples in the new colony. Ethnographers and anthropologists have used photography

---

1. This word is common to Ngiyampaa, Yuwalaraay and Gamilaraay languages, at least, and is heard frequently as an affectionate greeting amongst peers. An alternative spelling would be *garu*. A common greeting all along the river, (among men) is 'Yaama, garu!'

2. Cohen and Somerville 1990: 138-155.

3. Macdonald 2003: 225-242.

4. Peterson in Donaldson and Donaldson 1985.

for a range of research methodologies and a large body of critical literature has grown up, reflecting on the shift from biometric recording to powerful evocative statements like the northern Australian images of Donald Thompson, all of which nevertheless raise questions about the positioning and objectification of the photographer's subjects as the 'other'. Most recently, historians including myself have drawn on images to go beyond illustration in order to generate stories of the past.

This paper sketches the way one section of the most famous of the settler/scientific photographic archives, made under the direction of anthropologist Norman Tindale in 1938-39, has been reclaimed by Aboriginal communities in north-western New South Wales. While long available for scholarly research, the Tindale images have only recently become available for public use, partly as a result of Aboriginal research and pressure for release in not just individual but collective forms. The subsequent republication of the photographs can be read to tell not one but many stories, some about the past and some about the future. The choice by the Brewarrina researchers to give the name 'Karoo : Mates' to their collection suggests a fruitful way to understand the relationship between archives and the communities from whom they have been generated.

It is important here to warn those who may be distressed that these pages contain photographs of the dead, as well as an account of the way their stories continue to live.

\*\*\*

These photographs were taken as part of the large field survey conducted by the South Australian Museum and Harvard University in a study coordinated by Norman Tindale to establish the distribution of tribal groups in Australia. He had a strong interest in challenging the prevailing racism and mythologies about Aborigines as rootless nomads by recording contemporary Aboriginal people's perceptions of land and language affiliations and, ultimately, creating a map which would demonstrate these affiliations.<sup>5</sup> He did not personally supervise all the photographs, and he himself is not remembered by people who were residents of the large settlements where his photographs were collected. Instead Aboriginal people today, who were children in 1938, recall glimpses of the young people who actually carried out the survey, photographing residents of the big stations and recording brief notes on their language, 'tribe' and place affiliations.

The camp was a tent off to one side of the Aboriginal houses and there are no memories of shared times after work or on the riverbank. Although the field notes do not reveal any close relationship, each photographed person was asked about their language affiliation and relationships, from which a genealogy was prepared for each family, with notes on the side of complex diagrams. Overall the archive includes the photographs, a file card record associated with each person photographed, an estimation of their 'caste' and a genealogy for each of the major families to which many of the photographed people had contributed. At least some of the family tree material, according to Aboriginal people who are reviewing it today, probably reflects half

5. Philip Jones, South Australian Museum, nd, Norman Barnett ('Tinny') Tindale on South Australian Museum site, <http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/page/default.asp?site=2&page=tindale>, accessed 16 September 2006.

understood communications and misheard words, with a few guesses on the part of the researchers and the occasional piece of tactful dissembling by Aboriginal informants. In just a few key situations in Brewarrina, one of which I will discuss later, the young staff took down verbatim what the Aboriginal person being photographed wanted to say, and then a startling, powerful first person voice comes through.

\*\*\*

### **The Aboriginal research project and its people**

This project was initiated by members of the communities in north-west New South Wales who had a connection to Brewarrina from 1938, when the photographs were taken. The early contact with the South Australian Museum where the collection was housed had been begun in particular by George Rose and Joey Flick. George Rose was a senior Yuwalaraay man, shearer and co-founder of the Aboriginal Legal Service in rural New South Wales. He was from Walgett and had been a boy at Brewarrina at the time the photos were taken. Joey Flick was from Collarenebri, further upstream on the Barwon, and his mother was Isobelle Walford, who had, like George, been a teenager at Brewarrina in 1938 (figs 1 and 2). With young children of his own, Joey was acutely conscious of the absence of local educational resources for Aboriginal children. From his employment in the public service in both the Northern Territory and New South Wales, Joey understood bureaucratic practice from the inside and was

a tenacious researcher and community advocate. George and Joey undertook the project on behalf of the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service for whom they were seeking return of the whole set of photographs from the area.



Fig 1: George Rose with Tombo Winters, 2002, Collarenebri. Both were moved as boys from Angledool to Brewarrina in 1936. Photo: the author.



Fig 2: Joey Flick, 2002, Collarenebri. Photo: the author.

In a series of visits, Joey and George felt they were under suspicion from Museum staff, who would only allow them to view the photographs and genealogies under supervision. Joey felt the photographs and other material were not well prepared for display, particularly not as a group, in that they were more-or-less jumbled together in a box and had little contextual information. The incoming Native Title process was being widely debated at that stage, eventually to be established under the Federal *Native Title Act* of 1993. The early indications were that this process was going to retain a strong emphasis, derived from western legal conventions, on documentary evidence and biological descent. Not unreasonably, this troubled many people, both members of the Aboriginal community and researchers alike because it was so different from Indigenous traditions of oral transmission of kinship knowledge and the broad cultural as well as biological bases for land and kinship affiliations. There appeared to be a concern among Museum staff that the often unverified material in the genealogies, in particular, might be used inappropriately as evidence in legal proceedings before the Native Title Tribunal. There was also an anxiety about privacy legalities which was reflected in Museum requirements which privileged individual or tightly-defined biological family searches of photographic and other material rather than community-wide searches. To this day, the South Australian Museum's guidelines for requests to view photographic and other material instruct researchers to inquire only about photographs of people directly related to the researcher.<sup>6</sup>

The goal which George Rose and Joey Flick had in 1992, which was to take home the photographs of a whole community, was not consistent with the approach the South Australian Museum wanted to take at that stage. With rising frustration George and Joey withdrew to reconsider their strategies for repatriation.

Around a year later, Joey reactivated the attempt to bring the photographs home, this time in conjunction with Roy and June Barker who were then living in Brewarrina and managing the Aboriginal Cultural Museum on the banks of the Barwon River there. Roy and June had each a long history of community cultural work: Roy spent his childhood at Brewarrina in the 1920s and 1930s, where his father Jimmie was the station handyman and later wrote a celebrated account of his memories.<sup>7</sup> June's father Duncan Ferguson had been a key lay preacher at Brewarrina and her grandfather Bill Ferguson was a major political activist in the 1930s. Together they were planning a commemorative gathering in Brewarrina on the site of the old Protection Board station to take place on the mid-year long weekend in 1994. In the previous decade there had been a series of community activities along the Darling River, as the land rights movement and other campaigns encouraged people to nurture the invaluable collective memories which resided in their older members. These were more easily shared in visits to the old sites of shared experiences. Many had taken the form of the 'Back to ...' events, in which Roy, June and Joey had all taken part and they were aware of the role which photographs had in stimulating memories and getting conversations flowing. So they were, if anything, even more determined to have the photographs returned as a group, rather than in piecemeal fashion, individual by individual. Moreover, while the focus was on the particular local event, the whole reason for the long weekend camp was that the

6. <http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/>, accessed 16 September 2006.

7. Mathews 1977.

people who had been at Brewarrina in 1938 now lived across the region and had strong links with the other major communities which the Tindale recording team had visited along the river, from Menindee to Boggabilla. So Joey, Roy and June wanted the whole region's photographs returned in a group, not just town by town, let alone individual by individual.

Over this year, Joey Flick felt that the South Australian Museum had matured in its attitude. It was now more welcoming of Aboriginal researchers and community members, better organised in its viewing arrangements and more receptive to proposals to repatriate photographs as a collective rather than as individual images. The negotiations were still complex, as the South Australian Museum worked with the community researchers to ensure that the privacy of individuals who may be affected by unreliable genealogies would be effectively protected. This time, eventually, the community was successful in securing repatriation of the images, in a block, with the Brewarrina Cultural Centre being the official recipient along with comparable organisations in the other major towns in the region to which community members were affiliated.

Having brought the collection home, Joey, June and Roy were then faced with the decision of how to present them for the 'Back To Brewarrina' weekend. The issue was one of selection and exclusion, not of the images themselves, which were all included, but of the written material which displayed the Tindale project assumptions and goals. The Aboriginal decision was that the genealogies should remain unpublicised and available only to family members while the field notes were of widely varying length and quality. They hoped that the images themselves would not carry the burden of the survey team's incomplete understanding of what they were being told. Their aim was to spark memories and start conversations and so, with support from another Walgett man of Joey's generation, Bob Morgan, then heading up Jumbunna, the University of Technology Sydney's Indigenous unit, the images were printed as good quality reproductions on heavy paper, to withstand being handed around many times over. They were laid out in as plain a manner as possible, limiting the textual accompaniment to the person's name, their age as recorded by the Tindale team at the time of the photograph and the number allocated to that photograph in the archive.

So the booklet played its part in a memorable Brewarrina weekend and did indeed start lots of conversations. It has continued to be passed around from hand to hand in the area and forms the nucleus of many plans to gather smaller family or local histories in which to use the photographs. I will return to the ways in which the communities of the north-west have read and used these photographs, but first I want to consider two other approaches to this collection of photographs as they appear in 'Karoo : Mates'. What meanings might we draw from such a selection and arrangement? The variety of ways in which this plain, almost austere publication can be understood tells us a lot about how yielding photographs are to various readings. And it suggests the ways in which varied outcomes can arise from different contextualisations and questions. I'll sketch out two such readings here, although there are many others, and then consider the ways the communities have used these photographs. Not only does each approach suggest different meanings to be drawn from the photographs, but each bears a different relationship to time.

### 1. A reading at 'face value'

A direct observation, a reading 'at face value', is the sort of reading which many researchers often have to make of photographs found in old albums, in random personal debris, or in the formal archive but without any provenance. Ross Gibson has explored some of the ways we can imaginatively reconstruct the context and meaning of such uncontextualised images in his work with early archival photographs and more recently with forensic archives.<sup>8</sup> Were the images able to escape the burden of assumptions which the survey team may have imposed on their production?

There are things to be learnt just from looking at these Tindale photographs as a set of individual pictures, even though they tell us little about anything except the split second in which the shutter was open and the film exposed. The numbering system is sequential, with only a few gaps, and apparently indicates the order in which the photographs were taken.<sup>9</sup> It seems from this archive sequence (as is confirmed by the survey field notes) that the order in which the photographs were taken arose from the contingencies of the day's events for each person. Who happened to be walking past to go the store or to school or to go fishing at which time? They were the ones called in to be photographed next in line. Few of the people in the photograph look relaxed but nor are they reticent. Most stare back steadily at the photographer, not cowed but nevertheless cautious and skeptical (fig 3). Only some of the children are smiling. We can suspect there was little emotional affinity between subject and photographer, although the researchers may just have told everyone not to smile.

These photographs are largely full-frontal and close-up images. This positioning of the subjects makes them markedly different to those taken by anthropologists TG Taylor and R Jardine in 1924 in similar rural areas, where full frontal and profile shots of the same individuals were taken with the obvious intention of recording skull proportions and facial shape.<sup>10</sup> An interest in physical and biological anthropology is still evident in later New South Wales work, such as the investigation into the social outcomes of racial mixture, as is evident in even the culturally oriented work by Marie Reay and Grace Sidlington in their New South Wales fieldwork in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>11</sup> The Tindale survey team recorded their impression of 'caste' for each person photographed and were clearly also concerned to track the course of racial mixture (through the genealogies) and its manifestation in physical appearance. However, the photographs and notes are notable for the absence of forensic and dehumanising 'profile' and 'head measuring' images like those of Taylor and Jardine. Despite acknowledging that Tindale was still very much concerned with physical race it is also important to recognise the influences on anthropological photography which arose from outside anthropology and instead from developments in wider popular and journalistic photography. In fact the Tindale images are much more of the type of direct 'documentary' shots taken by Walker Evans for *Fortune* magazine in 1936, when he made his frank and confronting photographic records of Alabama sharecroppers in the Depression.<sup>12</sup>

8. Ross Gibson 1992.

9. Personal communication, Joe Flick Jnr.

10. Taylor and Jardine 1924.

11. Reay 1945; Reay and Sidlington 1948.

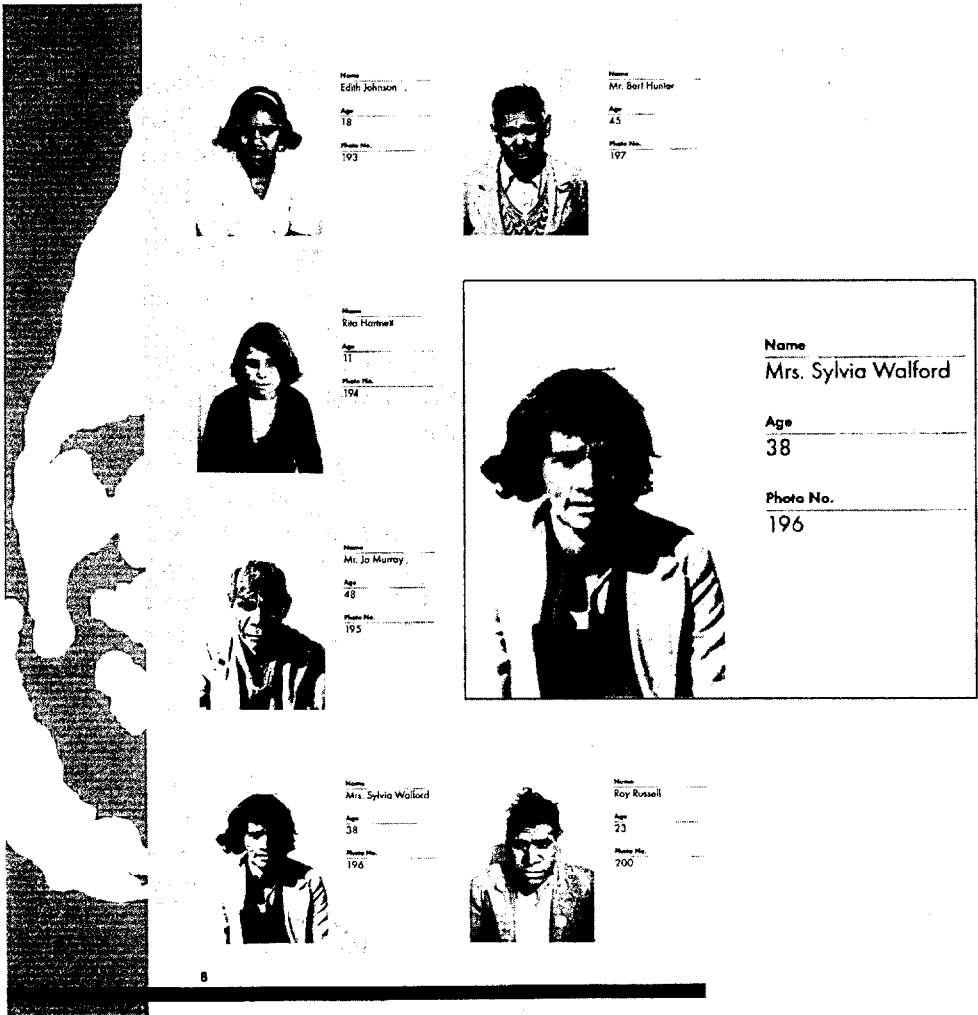


Fig 3: A page from 'Karoo : Mates', detail of Mrs Sylvia Walford, Joey Flick's grandmother. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

Even so, a notable difference lies here too. Walker Evans posed his subjects in ways which showed them surrounded by and interacting with the objects of their daily lives, however impoverished and threadbare their homes might appear to city audiences. The people captured in Tindale's collection are not only photographed without visible homes and domestic objects, they are divorced even more significantly from the surrounding lands and from any family. In only one or two photographs of children is there more than one person portrayed. So while the intention of these photographic recordings was not anthropometric, there is nothing else to invest meaning to these images apart from considerations about the physical diversity of phenotype, nothing,

12. Published by James Agee as *And Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 1941.

that is, except the intense, suspicious and direct gaze of the subjects. What we know of the goals and outcomes of Tindale's work suggest strongly that he was sympathetic to the Aboriginal people whose photographs he was recording, but these cautious stares suggest there was little close communication with people there. Certainly those people who were young at the time remember only an awkward sort of joking relationship with the young researchers.

The photographs are of excellent quality. This reflects Tindale's successful recruitment of Harvard University financial support for his field survey, which he had long hoped would demonstrate the affiliations of Aboriginal people with particular places and record them in photographs, where and as they lived in the present, rather than seeking to reconstruct some romanticised past. His equipment was first class: this was the latest technology, the most modern machine of 'modernity', brought to the service of observing Aborigines. The resulting sharp, clear images seem to magnify the sense of tension in the recording situation.

## 2. *A historian's reading*

Thinking about interpreting this archive made my own approach as a historian more visible to me. I have tried to locate the images in their surrounding time and place, aware particularly of their context which was the momentous impact of the Depression and the reorientation it caused to Protection Board policy. As an active researcher in the 1980s and later, when I became aware of these images, I was using the archives to reconstruct the policies of the Protection Board as they were implemented on the ground at Brewarrina and trawling through the written records generated by Tindale's Anthropological Survey. But I was just as eagerly recording oral histories. So my knowledge of the context for these images included the community memories of the photographed person's life and activities in Brewarrina itself and their impact on others. The story I tell from these images is therefore at the intersection of a conventional archivally-based training with the community sources of memory and retelling. Nevertheless, the outcome is 'historical', pinned to a particular time/space and a chronology, in a way which becomes more evident in the comparisons I will draw later with community approaches.

The first thing that I noticed in contextualising the images in their chronology was that the survey had, completely by accident, recorded the effects of the Board's major policy shift: from the dispersal of Aboriginal populations prior to 1934 to the enforced transfer and 'concentration' as the Board termed it, of the populations already living on smaller reserves and settlements. The story is written in the photographic recordings, embodied in the faces of the people all photographed in the same place in the short space of time of the survey (fig 4). Catalysed by the unemployment crisis of the Depression, the Board decided to enforce moves, beginning to implement them from 1934, although it only had authorising legislation from 1936. It forced the transfer of the members of three communities into Brewarrina station, from Quambone in 1934, Angledool in 1936 and Tibooburra in 1938.<sup>13</sup> In Brewarrina they lived closely and uneasily with the previously established station residents. Tindale's field survey covered four states, all with different policies, and its activities bore no relation to the

<sup>13</sup>. A detailed account of this series of enforced moves can be found in Goodall 1996: 193–218.



**Brewarrina families**

Name Richard Howell  
Age 54/64  
Photo No. 201

Name Mrs. Una Hartnett  
Age 30  
Photo No. 207

**Tibooburra family**

Name Malachi Barnes  
Age 45/58  
Photo No. 202

Name Harry Hartnett  
Age 37  
Photo No. 208

**Quambone families**

Name Alfred Carr  
Tom Carr  
Age 9yrs & 6mths  
6yrs & 6mths  
Photo No. 203-04

Name Mrs. Lexie Murray  
Age 44  
Photo No. 209

**Angledool family**

Name Mary Carr  
Grace Lee  
Age 9yrs & 10mths  
7yrs & 10mths  
Photo No. 205-06

Name Mrs. Eileen Howell  
Age 28  
Photo No. 210

9

Fig 4: The concentration impact. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

NSW Board's policy: its presence and recording of the outcome of that policy shift was happenstance. Photographed as they were in random order, each page in 'Karoo : Mates' turns out to contain images of families from a number of these 'concentrated' populations. Some pages have people from all four communities. Alongside the old Brewarrina families like the Gordons and the McHughes can be found those from Quambone, the Carrs and the Carneys among others, who were the first to be moved in the 1930s. Then the Angledool population were dumped there in May 1936, bringing the Walfords (Joey Flick's family), the Hardys, the Fernandos (George Rose's family), the Trapmans and others, around 120 people in all. And finally the Tibooburra mob came, shifted in during 1938, some 150 Wankumara-speaking people from a distant location near the South Australian border and a very different cultural group.

Secondly, the anthropological survey photographs had, again by accident, shown some of the key figures in the communities' resistance. Some of them, like Ike Handy and George Dutton, were ordinary people who have been remembered as those who either risked their own security or, more frighteningly in those days of 'kids' collecting',<sup>14</sup> risked the security of their families to voice their own and their community's anger at the enforced transfers. Others, like Granny Helen, were people who refused to swerve from their accustomed ways and in doing so offered an assertive and defiant face to the disorientation of the rough journey and the ill-prepared makeshift accommodation that greeted each lot of new arrivals when they got off the trucks.

**Ike Handy** (fig 5) was an African-American married to an Aboriginal woman and he and his family used to camp outside the Angledool station fence so their children could attend the school. Ike was literate and so he had been asked by the Angledool Aboriginal community to scribe their letter of protest to the Protection Board. He read out some of the letter to his family, and his daughter Donnas remembers the issues that were of such concern:

The bit of it Dad was reading out [said] that the people didn't want to move from the mission because that's where they were getting work and everything like that. The men were known on the stations, every man sort of had a station. Old Henry Hardy and all of them were regulars out there, see, so if they went to Brewarrina where would they go? See, they'd have to get used to be on Yarrawon and Gillgowan but they already had Brewarrina men. So that's the reason why they didn't want to go, see. They put that down there — an excuse that they didn't



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Mr. Handy  
  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
58  
  
Photo No. \_\_\_\_\_  
180

Fig 5: Ike Handy. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

<sup>14</sup> One of the colloquial phrases used to describe the New South Wales Protection Board power to act *in loco parentis* and to summarily remove any Aboriginal children from their families, 'to send to service' or 'for being aboriginal' and indenture them for four years.

want to go. And they had their people buried in the cemetery there. Dark people are like that, you know, they don't like leaving their dead ... people they like to get buried there with them, see. ... I reckon that'd be a strong reason because they've got their own little cemetery up there.<sup>15</sup>

The move was pushed ahead. Amidst threats and tears those Angledool families who felt most threatened — those with young children — were hustled onto the trucks with what belongings they could carry. They eventually arrived at Brewarrina at 11 o'clock at night. There are many memories with conflicting details about the arrival, but everyone who was there remembers how very cold it was. Jack Barker, then a Brewarrina Station teenager, recalled the scene as the trucks pulled up, with people climbing down, wrapped in thin, Board-issue 'Gubby' blankets, searching for wood to light fire buckets against the cold.<sup>16</sup> The priority, however, was not to get warm but to find a house. Henry Hardy and a mate jumped off the truck as soon as it stopped, leaving their families to help themselves down, while they rushed over to the row of tiny, half completed houses to select ones next to each other and at the end of the row for quietness. Jack Barker has described the houses in similar terms to Henry's:

They had two-roomed tin shacks half built for 'em. They was about 10 feet by 20. And they had windows made out of tin afterwards, but they weren't on 'em till afterwards, so they had just the holes. No doors and no windows. They got here about 11 o'clock at night. They wasn't completed them huts! ... Cement floor and no beds.<sup>17</sup>

Those who had protested against the move but who had been forced to come anyway were not forgotten. The Murris who had drafted the letter of protest were called up to the Manager's office, where the manager and the Board's Inspector Smithers abused them and threatened them with expulsion from the station (without their families) should they continue such activities. Ike Handy too was warned that he would be closely watched.<sup>18</sup>

**Granny Helen** was not a spokesperson. She was a frail, tiny old woman, believed to be around 90 years old in 1938 (fig 6). She too had been brought down from Angledool on that cold night in May 1936. But Granny Helen carried history with her. The survey team noted on the brief notes about her that she was 'taken when they were shooting the Aborigines'.<sup>19</sup> She was one of the Yuwalaraay who had a strong role in sustaining traditional knowledge. At Angledool she was one of the people frequently heard singing traditional songs and the one who had overseen the rituals that accompanied events like burials. Isobelle Walford remembered Granny Helen as someone 'who was always welcoming people' who came onto her home country at Angledool.<sup>20</sup>

She seems to have tried to fulfil the same role in the confusion of the arrival at Brewarrina. Some people, like Jack Barker, have a vivid memory of Granny Helen on

15. Interview with Donnas Barker, conducted by author, July 1994, Dubbo.

16. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

17. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

18. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

19. Record number 168, Tindale Archives, recording interviews with residents of Brewarrina Station.

20. Interview with Isobelle Walford Flick, conducted by author, 1996, Dubbo.



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Mrs. Helen  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
90  
Photo No. \_\_\_\_\_  
168

Fig 6: Granny Helen. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

the first night the Angledool people arrived. Others, particularly those arriving from Angledool and so perhaps caught up in the confusion, do not recall her activities that night but they do remember her doing similar things later. As Jack Barker recalls, he and his younger brother Roy were allowed to go and see the newcomers. He remembered how cold it was because they had to wear their dressing gowns and slippers, and they felt the sharp contrast between their comfort

and the bewildered Angledool arrivals:

We pestered Mum to go up there. And we was nice and warm, because we had our slippers and dressin' gowns on. And we run up there, and they was unloading these people, all gettin' off these trailers up there, these semi-trailers, with Gubby blankets. And it was a cold winter's night! So anyway they gathered up wood there, and it wasn't very long they had 8 or 10 fire buckets around the flat there, they're all going! They were pouring petrol on'em like this, lightn'em! They had 'em all going! And when they had the glare of the light, here's old Granny Helen out there, and she's givin' a big corroboree, middle of the night in the cold weather! And she's singin' a song in the lingo and corroboree'in' too, on her own. It was the first time we seen a corroboree like that, an old woman on her own. She's making her own songs and corroboreein' too! Gee we got a great kick out of that!<sup>21</sup>

The Tibooburra community of 150 people was shifted without warning from the 'corner country' on the border of South Australia to Brewarrina in 1938. **George Dutton**, a Wangkumarra man, did not arrive with his family but he was there by the time the survey team arrived and so his photograph is in the archive too (fig 7). He had been working on a property outside the town when word reached him that his family had been forced onto the trucks to go to Brewarrina. He was furious that he had to leave his job in such a hurry and it meant as well that he did not have time to collect the £75 owing to him. Months later, when the Tindale researchers came to Brewarrina station, George Dutton had still received no reply to his letters asking about sending the money on. He told the researchers what he thought when they asked him for his family connections and, for once, perhaps shocked by his anger, they copied his words down verbatim. This account is direct confirmation of the memories of both Angledool and other Tibooburra people that state that the most powerful weapon which the Protection Board held over people was its threat to their children:

Object to idea of being brought from Tibooburra. Want to go back and will soon go back. Nothing here for a man to do.

<sup>21</sup>. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

The treatment we get here is no good. We can do better in Tibooburra. Much more meat there, better conditions. We should be treated for bad eyes in our own country, not taken away to a strange country.

No work here for us. On the Paroo, I can get work.

We [were] told that if we did not move to Brewarrina they would take our children away from us. That's the only reason why we came.<sup>22</sup>



Name	George Dutton
Age	50
Photo No.	143

Fig 7: George Dutton. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

These three strong individuals confront us from the pages of the 'Karoo : Mates' book, challenging the photographer, and we the viewers standing still further behind, to consider that they too have a statement to make.

So these are the stories which can be told by gathering the rich sources of the historian's archives and the community's memories around the images. It allows us to reimagine the time and its changes as far as the historian's craft can recompose that dynamic web. These stories from the past have often been welcomed in north-western Aboriginal communities, whether they are tragic or funny or inspiring. However, they remain locked into a bounded time frame, anchored by the skills of historical research into a fixed and dated position, whatever the lessons and examples which might be drawn from them in the present.

The community chose different ways to use the images, ways which unlocked that boundary around the time of the photographs and linked them through into the present.

### 3. A community reading

The weekend at Brewarrina in 1994 was marked by many conversations over the photographs, in which people talked over the images and made connections which took each photograph outside the artificial sequence of the Tindale recording session. The first way in which this happened was that people discovered photographs they did not know had existed, and in some cases this was the only known or surviving photograph of a family member. Floods and fires and mobility take their toll on family photographic collections, despite the fact that Aboriginal people in New South Wales now treasure photographs despite continuing customary burning, among many families, of the possessions of those who had passed away.

So for some people, this archive represents something very different from the documentation of the Tindale survey team. It offers a new chance to glimpse a loved one: to

<sup>22</sup>. Record number 143, Tindale Archives, recording interviews with residents of Brewarrina station. Jeremy Beckett has discussed George Dutton's experiences in his essay (Beckett 1978).

reclaim them by drawing them in again to a family and to extend the sense of resolution among family members that they have linked themselves to a wider network of kin. Once these photographs became accessible to individual family researchers, a decade or so ago, they were copied and brought literally into the family through albums or through additions to the carefully husbanded collections of photographs in boxes or trunks, standing on dressing tables or hanging on walls. Margaret Somerville and Patsy Cohen, writing about Patsy's community at Ingleba, and Gaynor Macdonald writing about Wiradjuri communities, have each described with warmth and insight how these collections of photographs have been used to build and rebuild a sense of living networks between people now separated through time and space.<sup>23</sup>



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Mona Winters  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
32  
Photo No. \_\_\_\_\_  
241

Fig 8: Sisters Sylvia Walford (left) and Mona Winters (right), the daughters of Ada Woods and George Fernando Snr. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

One of the numerous examples from the Tindale collection was the photograph of Joey Flick's grandmother, Sylvia Walford. There is only one other photograph of her, taken of her as a young teenager with her sisters, again in an institutional setting, by the Protection Board at Cootamundra Girls Home to which most of the siblings were removed. In the Tindale collection she is photographed alone, like the other adults. But the survey team also happened to photograph one of her sisters, Mona Winters, who had also been forced to move down from Angledool with her children. Repatriating the whole collection meant that these two photographs of siblings could be brought together. They could also be seen in the context of the community in which they lived as adults (fig 8). While, like every one of the adults photographed, Sylvia and Mona are looking skeptical and cautious, their families do not emphasise this quality when they talk about or show the photographs now. When these images are seen in rows printed on the pages of the Tindale archive booklet, you are struck by their note of suspicion of the photographer. But when I have seen them since in frames on family walls or carefully placed in albums, this seems to have receded. Certainly the families' own sense of having brought these images back to be among relations has coloured the way they are

<sup>23</sup>. Cohen and Somerville 1990; Macdonald 2003.

seen and read, to override the tension between the survey team and their subjects with the closeness of past and present family ties.

Another example of a recomposition which had not been achieved before the return of the Tindale archives as a collection is that of the family of Ike Handy, who had played such a prominent role in the response to the Angledool move. There are few occasions when all the members of an Aboriginal family were photographed simultaneously in the 1930s. While the survey team had a research methodology of making a synchronic, 'slice of time' image of the community, the value of this approach to the families is different. It offers a rare chance to see how everyone looked at the same time, as a family unit. So even though they were photographed separately, the collective display of the images allowed the family to be reconstructed. Here Ike can be seen with his second wife, with Donnas — his older daughter from his first marriage — and his three younger children from his second marriage (fig 9). The warmth in the expressions of Donnas and her little brother lighten the impression of the more sombre images of their parents.

The desire to reassemble families by reorganising the photographs was common. In the conversations during the 'Back to Brewarrina' weekend, many people talked over who was related to whom and drew broader, extended kin relationships between the people in the photographs and the people living in communities today. Gaynor Macdonald's work is a valuable insight into how photographs have become a part of sustaining kin relationships and indeed, of reinforcing them against the pressures of contemporary lives which threaten to stretch them to breaking point.<sup>24</sup> The collective display allowed a rich opportunity to teach and learn about the complex relationships of family, marriage and extended affiliation in a similar way to other sites of lived community experience which engage with memory, such as the Collarenebri Cemetery.<sup>25</sup> The cemetery offers something similar because families go to such lengths to bring people 'home' to be buried, so learning the names and stories of those buried there allows an understanding of the relationship of family to place. There are some outsiders buried there, and the position of their graves suggests a great deal about the nature of relationships past and present, but the cemetery nevertheless includes only those outsiders whose death in Collarenebri was so lonely that no family could take them away to another home, and so the Collarenebri Aboriginal community claimed them and drew them in.

However, the observation that Aboriginal people have been seeking primarily to recreate social relationships which echo tradition, like kinship, is not the only way to understand how people create a sense of historical meaning for themselves. Jeremy Beckett argues that Myles Lalor, for example, rejects the expectation that he will tie his life to the meaning inherent in places, and particularly those of his birth country. Instead, Beckett argues, Myles Lalor takes up the challenge of his life lived in many places and makes them meaningful by the stories he recounts of them.<sup>26</sup> His autobiographical 'oral history' uses places as the structuring framework for his narratives, but he generates their meaning out of the relationships he has in them, not by references to an established tradition of meanings and law for the place itself.

24. Macdonald 2003.

25. Goodall 2001: 72–96.

26. Beckett 1996: 312–322.



Fig 9: Ike Handy and his family, including his daughter Donnas, lower right. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

The recognition of historical process, and the active role of Aboriginal people as history makers in building links between people and between people and places, is made possible in the case of the Tindale archive because of the collective nature of its repatriation. It shows the images of all those people taken at the same time, shoved together by a combination of Depression economy and Protection Board policy. When the collection is worked on through the community approach of building links over time between the living present and the past, this offered a view of even broader networks, of peer groups defined by generation, gender and child-rearing age who lived together at the settlement despite coming from different families, different locations and different languages. As individual images, the photographs from the archive offer the capacity for tracing biological and classificatory kin over time and space. But shown together, the archive allows something else: the tracing of the powerful networks forged in the shared experiences, hardships and enjoyments of historical change over recent generations. Some of these became family networks, as some of the children — Angledool's Sylvia and Mona Fernando for example — grew up to marry people with whom they had shared a childhood in Brewarrina. So families who would later become in-laws can be seen as the new arrivals would have first seen them. Others, however, never become part of the kinship network but their lives were nevertheless locked into those of the other mission residents by the events they went through together because



of the Protection Board's policies. The choice of 'Karoo : Mates' as the title for the booklet makes real sense in this light. The images allow an understanding not only of kin networks but of the shared histories which bind the north-western communities together even more broadly.

## Conclusion

Since the 'Back To Brewarrina' weekend in 1994, Roy and June Barker have strengthened their use of photographs to consolidate and extend this ongoing community conversation about both kin and mates. They have moved to Lightning Ridge where they operate a small cultural museum at the front of their long residential block, in which some beautifully presented displays of photographs and other material items of community significance can be found. They are, however, enthusiastically focused on being mobile and sustaining the links between the families and communities now spread between the half-dozen key townships in the area.

Roy and June can be found whenever there is any community event, such as the Music Festival at Brewarrina in the later 1990s in which I caught up with their travelling community stories display. They have arranged Tindale photographs from Brewarrina and the other key town-

ships at which they were taken, with others found in the archives and in family collections, on large display boards which allow detailed annotations to be fixed next to and sometimes inscribed onto the copied photographs. The large displays invite people in to look at them and chat, and there are always many people absorbed in exploring the images closely and talking with others around them about who they have found in the pictures (fig 10). Roy and June continue to work from the 'Karoo : Mates' book, taking it with them on their regular visits to *Yetta*, the low-security prison established near Brewarrina to allow Aboriginal people serving jail sentences to do so in a rural area not too far from home. This book, June feels, allows people to find their ancestors and their histories and so to work on the way they are connected to the past and the present.<sup>27</sup> Roy and June have taken the reclaiming process further than a static publication. As they and Joey Flick had hoped when they brought the collection back home, the images



Fig 10: Community members closely exploring the photographs at Roy and June Barker's display of community photographs, Brewarrina, 1996. Photo: the author.

<sup>27</sup>. June Barker, personal communication, 19 April 2006.

are now at the centre of a constantly stimulated network of conversations and interactions across the region.

Joey Flick has continued to research images and to develop ways of working collaboratively with communities to allow the stories which images tell to become revitalised through contact with their communities. He has had a particular role in relation to precious images which relate to the Quambone community, whose people were shifted to Brewarrina in 1934 but many of whom have returned to their Weilwan country. His careful role in researching with the community their knowledge of and feelings about photographs taken at the public parts of a ceremony in 1898 was an essential first step in allowing the photographs to be used respectfully and in accordance with the community's wishes. In a moving and sensitive book, the results of that research are now available online, in a simple publication which reflects the strong support of the Quambone community.<sup>28</sup> Through the *collectively-focused* work of Roy and June Barker and of Joey Flick, not only have the extended and interlocking communities of the north-west been offered a body of resources under their control, but they have become active partners in the ongoing work of reclaiming and reinterpreting those images, linking them in once again to the lives and futures of their people.

On reflection over the three possible ways, among many, in which the Brewarrina photographs might be read, the collective nature of the images in the Tindale archive has been the key to its most fruitful reclaiming. It is a collection of photographs of kin but, just as importantly, of the broader concept understood as *mates*. It is not only traditional or even biological kinship which has generated the most complex and active readings, it has been the historical and lived experiences which these people had shared and which continue to link their descendants. The photographs speak not only for themselves but to each other, and so when clustered together they tell a different story from the story they tell when they are individualised.

There is an important parallel here with documentary archives, held in both Commonwealth and State archive offices. It suggests the problems of narrowing access to image or documentary archives down to direct family, as has been the practice over many years now for State government controls over various collecting institutions, such as the New South Wales State Archives in which Aborigines Protection Board and Welfare Board records are housed. There is no question that the notes and particularly the genealogies in the Tindale archive are flawed, but that is a reality which is best addressed by strong and active accompanying educational programs, generated with community involvement, about the conditions of creation of the records and about how to read all archives critically. The embarrassment of reading negative 'welfare' assessments of people's character and behaviour is, once again, best addressed by strongly supportive and community-engaged educational programs which identify the political advantages gained by government officials in the cultural politics of colonial control, coming right down to the present.

The uneasy suspicion to be read in the faces of those people photographed in the Tindale survey has been softened and moderated by their reclamation and repositioning as 'Karoo : Mates' within the living communities in the north-west. By the same

28. Steve Miller [Education Officer, Aboriginal Projects] 1999, *Sharing a Weilwan story*.

process, alongside their technical, formal historical and aesthetic readings, other forms of documentary records might be open to constructive and creative reinterpretation. The 'Karoo : Mates' images and archives tell stronger and more 'alive' stories if they are able to be considered both individually and collectively. They belong, in the most productive way, not only to direct kin but also to their wider community of *mates*.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the assistance and inspiration of the great researchers who brought the Brewarrina photographs home and created the 'Karoo : Mates' book — Roy and June Barker, George Rose Snr and Joey Flick. I have been greatly assisted also by the valuable comments of the anonymous reviewers for this journal, which have allowed the article to be developed more fully.

## References

- Beckett, Jeremy 1978, 'George Dutton's country', *Aboriginal History* 2(1): 3–31.
- 1996, 'Against nostalgia: place and memory in Myles Lalor's "oral history"', *Oceania* 66(4): 312–322.
- Cohen, Patsy and Margaret Somerville 1990, *Ingleba and the five black matriarchs*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Donaldson, T and I Donaldson (eds) 1985, *Seeing the first Australians*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Gibson, Ross 1992, *South of the West: postcolonialism and the narrative construction of Australia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Goodall, Heather 1996, *Invasion to embassy: land in Aboriginal politics, 1770 to 1972*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- 2001, 'Mourning, remembrance and place: a study in the significance of Collarenebri Aboriginal cemetery', *The Public History Review* 9: 72–96.
- 'Karoo : mates' 1994, Photographs taken at Brewarrina Mission June 30 to July 14, 1938. Reproduced from the Tindale Collection. Research Joe Flick, June and Roy Barker. Funded by Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre, University of Technology, Sydney.
- Macdonald, Gaynor 2003, 'Photos in Wiradjuri biscuit tins: negotiating relatedness and validating colonial histories', *Oceania* 73: 225–242.
- Mathews, Janet (ed) 1977, *The two worlds of Jimmie Barker*, AIATSIS, Canberra.
- Miller, Steve 1999, *Sharing a Weilwan story*, with additional material from Tamsin Donaldson, Joey Flick, Brad Steadman and Ann Stephen, Powerhouse Museum Sydney, [http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/publications/wailwan\\_education\\_notes.pdf](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/publications/wailwan_education_notes.pdf)
- Reay, M 1945, 'A half caste Aboriginal community in north western New South Wales', *Oceania* 15(4): 296–324.
- Reay, M and G Sidlington 1948, 'Class status in a mixed-blood community', *Oceania* 18(3): 179–208.
- Taylor, TG and R Jardine 1924, 'Kamilaroi and white: a study in racial mixture', *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 58: 268–294.