



Port Stephens Region, New South Wales

WITH THE BEST WILL IN THE WORLD: SOME RECORDS OF EARLY WHITE CONTACT WITH THE GAMPIGNAL ON THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL COMPANY'S ESTATE AT PORT STEPHENS

Damaris Bairstow

European settlement of Australia was to change for all time the traditional life of its indigenous people. Whilst the more violent incidents should not be forgotten, European contact with the Aboriginal people was not always marked by conflict and ill intentions.¹ Some, in the nineteenth century, saw Australia as a new land, recently raised from the sea. This accounted for there being so much sandy soil and for the flora, fauna and indigenous people, none of which had yet developed into the higher orders of the north.² England was judged to hold to

the great and magnanimous principle of planting a colony in the most remote region of the world, in order to civilize the natives and make that country beneficial to mankind.³

These views were common to educated English gentlemen such as those dispatched to govern the giant London-based enterprise, the Australian Agricultural (AA) Company. This paper explores the record of black-white relations in one region of New South Wales, the area between Port Stephens and the Manning River that was granted to and under the control of the AA Company.⁴

What follows is not intended as a balanced research paper. It is a series of quotations from the records of the Company's officers, especially Robert Dawson,⁵ and other contemporaries. Incidents may have occurred which were not reported to those who are quoted here, but there is no reason to suppose that the records lie. With the possible exception of James Macarthur, whose aim was to discredit Dawson, these were men and women of probity.

Damaris Bairstow is an historical archaeologist in private practice in Sydney; 37 Grasmere Road, Cremorne, 2090.

¹ In the course of research into European settlement of Port Stephens, NSW, the author found forgotten and unpublished contemporary records of the Gampignal people. See Bairstow 1985.

² Blair 1879, p.222; Pinkerton 1802, II, p.471.

³ Delano 1817, p.448.

⁴ On the AA Company, see also Atchison 1973 and Pemberton 1991.

⁵ Robert Dawson (1782-1866) was appointed to found the Company's estate. In this he would have the guidance of a colonial committee of shareholders with expert knowledge of local conditions. Unfortunately for Dawson and for the Company, the committee appointed comprised Archdeacon Scott whose position made it inappropriate for him to act, Captain Phillip Parker King RN whose naval commitments kept him at sea, James Macarthur, son of John Macarthur Snr., Hannibal Macarthur, James' cousin and James Bowman, James Macarthur's brother-in-law - the 'Family Committee' - with whom Dawson was to fall foul. Dawson arrived in NSW in November, 1825. In 1828 the Family Committee succeeded in having him dismissed. Dawson returned to England where he published his *Statement of ... Services ... as Chief Agent of the Australian Agricultural Company*, an embittered defence of his conduct. His more reasoned and extensive work, *The Present State of Australia* was published in 1830. The book is filled with Dawson's delight in the countryside and in its 'sable' inhabitants, the concept of the 'noble savage'. For those who know it, the book has become the major contemporary account of the Gampignal people. (Flowers 1966; Court to Committee 10/12/1825 with Encl. AA Co. Records)

The land and its people

Two rivers discharge into Port Stephens from the north: the Myall close to the coast and the Karuah further inland. This was the land of the Gampignal, part of the Worimi. Although speaking the same language, different clans occupied the two rivers, each tending to stay within their own territories with little contact between them. There is evidence to suggest that the Karuah Aborigines feared those on the Myall and by 1826, when the A.A. Company settlers first came to Port Stephens, Europeans had ample reason to fear the latter.

The Myall was rich in timber. Sawyers and fellers had been employed to procure it. In the words of H.T. Ebsworth who arrived in Port Stephens in the middle of 1826:

These were generally desperadoes, emancipists as they are called, and not unfrequently Convicts accompany them, the whole superintended by an overseer, who is generally selected as a fit leader for this kind of banditti. These people were the first who came in contact with the natives; they contrived to conciliate them when they could make them useful as guides, or in procuring them kangaroos and other game; but they were sure to give the natives some cause for offence ere long, either by shooting, striking them, or taking away their Gins (wives), and the consequences were what would naturally have been expected. These wild men lay in ambush, and speared their oppressors whenever they could, and in return the sawyers were obliged, for their own protection to shoot them on all occasions that presented themselves, 'till at length the Blacks obliged them in many instances to abandon their stations; they then went in search for others, where they again created the same kind of evils, which were followed with similar results.⁶

Other reports echo Ebsworth's. The accounts which the Aborigines gave R. Dawson of the timber getters

were disgusting and even terrible. Several boys and women were shown to me whose fathers and husbands had been shot by these marauders for the most trifling causes one, for instance, for losing a kangaroo dog, which had been lent him for the purpose of supplying the white savages with game.⁷

As a result the Myall aborigines had become

exceedingly hostile towards white men, with whom they had once been upon good terms, and ... acts of violence had been committed on both sides. One of the consequences was that the natives inflicted vengence [sic] upon almost every white man they came in contact with, and as convicts were frequently running away from the penal settlement at Port Macquarie to Port Stephens ... numbers of them were intercepted by the natives and sometimes detained, whilst those who fell into their hands and escaped with life, were uniformly stripped of their clothes.⁸

The reputation of the Myall River Aborigines was well known. Oxley's party had been attacked at Seal Rocks in January, 1818. Dawson, before his departure for Port Stephens, was warned 'against the savage and treacherous conduct of the tribes, who were said to be

⁶ A Letterbook ... kept by H.T. Ebsworth ... 1826, ML. B852-2, pp.43-5. Henry Thomas Ebsworth (c.1806-1853) arrived with Dawson in 1825 in NSW to act as secretary for the colonial committee but was forced to return to England in 1826 due to ill health. He became clerk and later secretary to the Company.

⁷ Dawson 1831, p.21.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.42.

GAMPIGNAL AT PORT STEPHENS

more ferocious and mischievous in this spot than in any other known part of the colony.⁹ His encounter with both the Myall and the Karuah Aborigines proved to be otherwise.

First settlement, 1826

In January, 1826, Dawson set off to inspect the land along the Karuah River which had been recommended as the site for the Company's grant. At Newcastle he hired an Aboriginal guide, Ben, who was a member of the Karuah clan. The Karuah people, being further from the sea and transport routes than those on the Myall, had less contact with Europeans and therefore less reason for fear or aggression. Through Ben, Dawson met delegates from the tribe. His record of this encounter reveals his 19th century paternalism, but it reflects also mutual good will and the policy of appeasement. Dawson told the delegates that he

should be glad to see the whole tribe at Port Stephens; that [he] intended to remain there, and would protect them ... and take care that nobody should hurt them; that if they would sit down with me as my brothers, [he] would also be a brother to them, and would give them food and clothing, and lend them muskets to shoot kangaroos with ... We thus separated, with every demonstration of kindly feeling and confidence on both sides.¹⁰

The 'kindly feeling and confidence' of the Aborigines was soon confirmed. Having selected what was to become the village of Carrington as the site for settlement, Dawson instructed his men to build bark huts.

As soon as we had raised the frames for some of our intended inhabitations, we were sadly at a loss for bark to close the sides and cover the roofs.

Seeing their plight, Ben brought a dozen of his fellow tribesmen to assist. They having received each a small hatchet, set to work in good earnest, and brought such a quantity of bark in two or three days as would have taken our party a month to procure. Before a white man can strip the bark beyond his own height, he is obliged to cut down the tree; but a native can go up the smooth and branchless stems of the tallest trees, to any height, by cutting notches in the surface large enough only to place the great toe in, upon which he supports himself, while he strips the bark quite round the tree, in lengths from three to six feet. These form the temporary sides and coverings for huts of the best description. ...

Whatever difficulties I might have to encounter, in the first instance, from the wants, restless dispositions, and complaints of the white population, of almost every age and sex, whom I was about immediately to introduce to this new peaceful place, I felt no ordinary degree of pleasure and relief on experiencing such prompt and effective assistance from the natives.¹¹

The good will of the Company's personnel was soon to find response even among the Myall River Aborigines. In the course of the next two years, several Port Macquarie escapees arrived at Carrington, all

in the most pitiable condition, naked, wounded, and nearly starved. They all told a similar tale; that no hostility was exhibited towards them by any other tribes than those inhabiting the coast about Cape Hawke and the river Myall,

⁹ *ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp.18-19.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp.19-20.

near both of which the timber-cutters were at work, and that the natives were exasperated in the highest degree against them.¹²

In contrast the Company's servants, by and large, were spared. Two emancipist sawyers in the Company's employ, lost near the Myall, were captured by armed Aborigines. They, too, were stripped of their clothes, but their shirts bore the AA Company stamp. Seeing this 'the blankets and jackets were all returned instantly, and the sawyers were conducted to the nearest stock station, where they all took tea cordially together.'¹³ On another occasion a convict was lost and picked up by Myall River people. Again in Dawson's words, 'they took the greatest care of this man as soon as they found he belonged to me, and brought him home.'¹⁴ Whilst we have only Dawson's account of these incidents, Henry Dumaresq, in an interview with the Company's Court of Directors in November, 1827, praised Dawson for his amicable relations with the Aborigines which had 'enabled him to bring together in harmony hostile tribes.' Dumaresq added, 'the natives ... have not taken even a cob of corn.'¹⁵ Dawson's policy of appeasement bore fruit.

Tommy

Overshadowed by the notorious Myall Creek massacre twelve years later, the murder on the Myall River has faded into historical obscurity. In 1826, Tommy, an eight year old Aboriginal boy, was murdered by a gang of timber getters. In Dawson's words:

To accomplish this barbarous act they enticed the lad to a lonely part of the river, where they strangled him ... and then threw him into the water; having, as they afterwards confessed, put him out of the way to prevent his telling tales in his communications with the natives, with whom they were at variance.¹⁶

Pennington, the gang superintendent, 'a most respectable, although unfortunate settler', who had befriended the boy and discovered his body, came to Carrington for assistance. In his capacity as magistrate, Dawson set out to arrest the culprits. Four men were committed to trial in Sydney: John Ridgeway, Thomas Chip, Edward Colhurst and a man called Stanley who had escaped but was tried in his absence. These men were white. All were convicted and sentenced to be hanged.¹⁷

In contrast to the press coverage given to the massacre on Myall Creek, the report of this trial commanded but a couple of sentences.¹⁸ Whether this was because the trial was considered un-newsworthy or whether the editors had been instructed not to inflame public opinion at a time when the press was also reporting that tribes were massing along the

12 *ibid.*, p.42.

13 *ibid.*, p.303..

14 *ibid.*, p.146

15 Information given by Dumaresq to Court, 29/11/1827, AA Co. Records. Henry Dumaresq (1792-1838) came from a military family and had been educated at the Royal Military College, Great Marlow. He had been appointed military secretary to General Darling and accompanied Darling to NSW as his private secretary. Dumaresq was AA Company commissioner at Port Stephens from 1834 until his death in 1838. There is little report of black-white relations in the Company records of this period but there was no ill treatment. The missionary, James Backhouse, a pro-Aboriginal admirer of Threlkeld's work at Lake Macquarie, visited the estate in July, 1836, and commented on the good treatment of the Aborigines at Carrington. His only criticism was of the Company's lack of effort to 'civilise' them. Although another visitor, the pious Charlotte Anley, was more concerned with the treatment of prisoners, she also makes no mention of mistreatment of the Aborigines. By this time, however, although the tribes to the north survived in number, there were few Aborigines left at Carrington. (Gray 1966; Backhouse 1843, pp.400-1; Anley 1841, pp.62-3).

16 Dawson 1831, p.43.

17 *ibid.*, pp.41-44.

18 *The Australian*, 23/9/1826.

GAMPIGNAL AT PORT STEPHENS

Hunter River cannot now be known. Political considerations may have been the reason for the six months delay in fixing a date for execution. As it transpired, the death sentences were not carried out.

A date was fixed, and a place, Carrington, that the Aborigines might see that 'white man's justice' applied also to whites. While the scaffold was being built a group of Myall River Aborigines entered one of the Company's outstations and demanded blankets and flour. Spears were thrown, and an unarmed shepherd wounded. White resentment was aroused. Dawson, apprehensive of the effect the execution would have on the settlement, especially among the convicts who formed the majority of the population, requested a further postponement. The sentences were reduced to life imprisonment on Norfolk Island.¹⁹

Tony

Tommy's murder had occurred well away from the Company's settlement and involved none of the Company's personnel. The shooting of Tony, a Carrington Aborigine, by Byron, a convict constable in the Company's employ, was closer to home. Again Dawson acted immediately. He

issued a warrant for the constable to be brought up at a certain hour the next day, handcuffed, and in the custody of two armed soldiers, wishing to make as much display as possible on the occasion, to prove to the natives that I wished and intended to protect them.²⁰

This was done in the presence of 'the natives ... who fixed themselves to be spectators of the scene.'²¹ The shooting, however, had been accidental. Byron was returned to Sydney without further punishment, and this seemed to satisfy the Aborigines who had no thirst for revenge.²²

The tribe moved into the bush so that Tony's funeral could take place according to tribal ritual away from European presence.

During their absence, our people expressed themselves sorry that the blacks had gone away, as they could get no water carried for them from the spring, or obtain any fish without them. The procuring of bark, too, for repairing old and erecting new huts, was at a stand. In short, the value of these poor, inoffensive people, was never so highly estimated and felt as when they were gone; and their return was consequently hailed as a benefit restored to the settlement at large.²³

The settlement consolidates, 1827

The settlers had become heavily reliant on the support of the Aborigines.

Their services had almost become necessary to the families in carrying water, collecting and chopping firewood, and supplying them with fish, which they did in abundance. The native women and children were constantly in, or loitering about the doors of the huts, where it was quite common to see a black woman dressed up with an old gown or cap, and dandling in her arms the infant of a white woman; while others, especially young girls, frequently assisted their white neighbours at the wash-tub. Native children of both sexes

19 Dawson 1831, pp.231-3, pp. 259-60.

20 *ibid.*, p.87.

21 *ibid.*, p.89.

22 Minutes of a Meeting of the Colonial Committee, 15/9/1826, Macarthur Papers, ML. A4314.

23 Dawson 1831, p.88.

too, were often seen at their games in all parts of the establishment with the white children; and it was no unusual thing to see a black man, for short periods, at one end of a saw, and a white man at the other, working together with as much cordiality as if they had both been of the same colour and nation.²⁴

Aborigines under white supervision built the first washpools for the Company's sheep. They picked the wool clean from seeds. They collected the marine shell that was needed for lime.²⁵

Several natives attend us regularly; our Boat's Crew consists of six most excellent fellows, who handle the oar with the expertness of experienced seamen; others are employed as messengers; some attend at table; in short we find them useful in every department. Our little black Gin is an excellent washer.²⁶

For Dawson, they

acted as ... guides on every occasion, not only when [I was] on horseback, but also in the boat, in which they frequently rowed me up the rivers and various creeks, accompanied often by only one white person. So good an understanding subsisted between us ... that had it been necessary, I should have had no hesitation in trusting myself alone with them in any situation. The assistance which I derived from them, whether as guides or labourers, exceeded any thing I can describe; and the satisfaction this afforded me, as well as the pleasure I received in the society of these cheerful and obliging people, supported me greatly in the daily performance of the arduous and anxiously responsible duties which I had taken upon myself.²⁷

These services were not coerced.

It is true that I generally had a considerable number employed, and could get any work done by them which I required; but they were not always the same people. Several hundreds were in the habit of visiting us at different periods, and I placed no restraint upon any of them, there were always enough who were willing, as a temporary change and a little novelty, to supply the places of those who had become tired of labour.²⁸

In order to render them easy and happy, it was necessary to prevent them from entertaining an idea that they were under unreasonable restraints; and I took care always to inform them, that if they wished to leave me and return to the forests, they could do so whenever they pleased ...²⁹

I never forgot that they have not been brought up to work; that they will not labour long at a time; and that if too much is expected and exacted, their friendship will soon cease for us.³⁰

Dawson, however, had no doubts of the superiority of the European way of life.

Nature prompts all to the gratification of their animal propensities; to those happily born in civilized life the charms of social intercourse, and the

24 *ibid.*, p.100.

25 Examination of Charles Hall, 26/5/1828, ML. A4322; verbal communication by Jas. Macarthur to Court, 10/10/1828, ML. A4318; Ebsworth 1826, p.41.

26 A Letterbook ... kept by H.T. Ebsworth ... 1826, ML B852-2, p.59.

27 Dawson 1831, p.28.

28 *ibid.*, p.157.

29 *ibid.*, p.155.

30 *ibid.*, p.94.

GAMPIGNAL AT PORT STEPHENS

gratifying communication of intellect, soon fix their hold on the mind; while the untutored savage has no source of enjoyment open to him save the uncontrolled exercise of his liberty, and the unchecked pursuit of selfish pleasure ...³¹

One ought never to forget that they are the untutored children of nature ... Like children, they must be treated with firmness and kindness, and suffered to have a holiday in the woods, to indulge in their old habits, whenever they ask for it ...³²

To maintain a friendly intercourse with them - to humanize them, as it were; to do them all kindness in my power in return for our interference with their country; and to receive an equivalent in their labour for the food which was given to them, were all I aimed at: and the result fully equalled my expectations.³³

This is the attitude of Enlightenment coupled with the Protestant Ethic and contemporary Eurocentredness. The childlike Aborigine could be educated and, whilst never to become the equal of the European, could be brought to a state of grace. The difficulty lay in

The mildness of the climate, the great facilities of obtaining food in every part of the forest, the attractive freedom and pleasures of a hunter's life ... which rendered it extremely difficult to attach them to any one spot.³⁴

While Lady Parry included the Aboriginal women amongst those to be enlightened, she was to express the same difficulty:

I do not see scarcely any hope of civilizing them ... If we can only attach one or two of them, & teach them, they may teach others, but they do not like to remain long together in one place & having first to make them understand your language increases the difficulty.³⁵

A mastery of the English language was, it seems, a condition of Enlightenment.

To the Australian-born James Macarthur, the Aborigine was neither childlike nor innocent but an affront to the sensibilities of civilised men. On Christmas night, 1827, the Aborigines performed a corroboree at Carrington for the entertainment of the Europeans. Macarthur was not amused:

Such exhibitions when removed from their proper scene, the Forest, become truly disgusting. As I did not chuse to be a spectator, I retired early to our tent. I was shortly afterwards followed by Mr. Cordeaux, who could not refrain from expressing his indignation at the brutality of exposing a young & well educated female to the pollution of such a scene. Mrs. Croasdill, he said, had been obliged to pass amidst this band of inebriated & highly excited savages to her chambers; even there it must have been quite impossible to exclude out the sound of their indecent revelry. I have more than once had

31 *ibid.*, p.268.

32 *ibid.*, p.94.

33 *ibid.*, p.157.

34 *ibid.*, p.156.

35 I.L. Parry to C. Martineau, 10/6/1830, SPRI, Ms 438/25/3. Dawson was succeeded as Commissioner of the AA Co. in 1829 by Sir Edward Parry RN (1790-1855). In 1803 Parry joined the Royal Navy where he gained preferment under the patronage of Admiral Cornwallis. By 1810 he had been promoted to Lieutenant. After the end of the Napoleonic Wars the Admiralty turned its attention to the North-West Passage, and for more than a decade Parry was involved with a series of expeditions. In 1829 he was knighted for services to Arctic exploration. In 1826 he had married Isabella, daughter of Sir John Stanley later first Baron Stanley of Alderley, by whom he had ten children. Parry had been chosen for his ability to command. His wife was an added bonus. Most of the record from this period comes from Lady Parry's letters to her sisters in England. These were personal letters, not for publication. (Parry 1967).

occasion to feel for this lady's situation & blush for Mr. Dawson's insensibility.³⁶

The lady in question does not appear to have been consulted. Her reaction may have been more akin to that of the young Lady Parry who was to watch a corroboree three years later. She wrote to her sister:

Some of them [were] quite without covering, others very decent according to Indian fashion, but as I said before you are not at all shocked by the black people & scarcely notice that they are not clothed but are more inclined to admire their straight limbs.³⁷

Tucked away in the Company's records are more ominous reports. At the bottom of the Return of Sick from April to July, 1826, after 84 cases of lung complaints, gastric cases and ophthalmic diseases are four cases of venereal disease - 4.7%. In the following nine months the percentage rose to only 7.4% or 20 venereal cases out of 269 sick, an increase which could be accounted for by the increased numbers of convicts and emancipists. The convict population had risen from 29 in May, 1826, to 204 by April, 1827, emancipists from 8 to 55. In the same period the number of free men, Company officers and indentured servants, had risen from 21 to only 42, the majority of these being stationed at Carrington. Aboriginal women working for the Company were protected from interference. Those in the Aboriginal camps were not. There seems to have been no violation of the tribal women during the first year or more of the settlement but as convict numbers grew, discipline began to break down. It was difficult if not impossible to enforce discipline upon convict shepherds isolated in the bush. At the end of 1827, James Macarthur was writing of 'familiarity' between the European men and the tribal women and of 'disease' as the consequence. While there are no figures available for the period of his visit, in the first three months of 1828 recorded cases of venereal disease had risen to 51.9%, 54 cases of syphilis and 14 of gonorrhoea out of a total, including accident victims, of 131. A report later in the year recorded 17 venereal cases then being treated out of a total of 28 (60.7%). First convicts and, soon after, free servants were prohibited from entering the camps. Severe penalties were imposed for disobedience but diseases had already spread among the Aboriginal women.³⁸ By March, 1828, they had, according to John Macarthur,

already put a stop to the increase of the black population inasmuch as there is not a single black infant to be seen in the arms of a mother.³⁹

Though John Macarthur was deliberately discrediting Dawson, it is clear that the prohibitions were too late. Dawson himself had foreseen some such harm to the Aboriginal people.

The increase of society, and the spread of the branch establishments of the Company, necessarily occasioned a more promiscuous communication between white people and the native than was useful to the latter; and as no

36 Journal kept by Mr Jas. Macarthur at Port Stephens, 25/12/1828, AA Co. Records. Until the middle of 1827 James Macarthur had concurred 'in the most favourable report upon the good management of Mr. Dawson' but receipt of a letter in June in which Dawson stated that he was no longer prepared 'to make the Company's grant a burial ground for all the old sheep in the colony' changed his mind. In fact the only member of the committee Dawson named as selling him old ewes was James Bowman, but the accusation was enough for the 'Family Committee'. The Macarthurs closed ranks to achieve Dawson's dismissal. (Committee to Court 30/4/1837, Dawson to Jas. Macarthur 30/6/1837, AA Co. Records.

37 I.L. Parry to L.D. Stanley, 13/5/1830, SPRI, Ms 438/25/82.

38 Returns of Sick at Port Stephens, 24/4-24/7/1826, 24/7/1826-30/4/1827, Newcastle University Archives B157 & B300; 23/1-20/4/1828, ML. A4328; Report of Dr. Nisbet on the Hospital, ML. A4323; Notices posted by Dawson at Port Stephens, 1/2/1828, ML. A4321; General orders, 10/5/1828, ML. A4322; Journal kept by Mr Jas. Macarthur at Port Stephens, A.A. Co. Records.

39 Jno. Macarthur to Court, 26/5/1828, ML. A4322.

GAMPIGNAL AT PORT STEPHENS

beneficial system for their amelioration could be carried to any extent, unless they were removed to a distance from vicious society, and placed under the eye of a zealous, humane person, employed for that purpose only, every day's experience convinced me that the character of the natives would retrograde in proportion to the increase of European population, which at that place could not be of the best description.⁴⁰

Reports of venereal disease cease suddenly. The effects on the Aboriginal population would not have ceased, though the absence of any mention of disease among the natives by Parry, who succeeded Dawson in 1829, and his wife's acceptance of Aboriginal women both at the settlement and with her small children suggest that the Macarthur reports, even if basically true, must be limited to Aborigines in the bush with whom Lady Parry had little contact. Communication between convicts and Aborigines no doubt lessened with the return to the government of nearly a hundred of the more recalcitrant prisoners and the discharging of almost the entire emancipist workforce during 1828. Contracts with twenty of the more unruly indentured servants were also terminated.

The settlement expands

In April, 1828, Dawson's appointment was suspended by the colonial committee with whom he was at variance. With his departure from Port Stephens, relations with the Aborigines in the hinterland deteriorated.

From Dawson's records it is clear that a different Aboriginal group occupied the centre of the Company's grant, the land from Johnston's Creek to the Gloucester River.⁴¹ AA Company exploitation of this land had only just begun when Dawson left. As the Company's flocks increased, sheep were moved on to the tribal lands to the north. Sheep were in the care of shepherds, one shepherd to each flock, two or three flocks being grazed together. Isolated in the bush and often unarmed, these men felt vulnerable.

By May, 1828, there were reports of Aborigines becoming 'troublesome' to shepherds at the outstations but it was not for over a year that any major incident occurred. On the 7th August, 1829, a convict shepherd was killed and the following day Carl Rantzsch, a free shepherd, was speared. An armed party was sent north. The Aborigines fled into the bush but one was shot, by an Aboriginal tracker who may have acted out of fear since he was on the land of another clan, but he was under European command. J.E. Ebsworth, who had been given temporary control of the estate, expressed no dismay over the incident. Indeed, he hoped 'it would serve as a warning.'⁴²

The reasons for these attacks are not recorded, but later incidents followed a pattern and the pattern is a classic tale of misunderstanding with tragic consequences. The Company issued flour and blankets to some of the clans. The records are not clear as to which groups were considered entitled to them since some whose lands had been taken were excluded. The groups to the north seem to have received nothing, yet it was their land which now was being invaded. Doubtless they too felt entitled to share the white men's goods and were angered when their requests were refused. All later attacks followed a refusal to hand over flour or blankets. Retaliation was aimed at frightening off the Aborigines and comforting the shepherds. Whilst hardly to be described as appeasement, the Company's policy of non-molestation remained firm. Reprisals occurred only after attack and attacks were few.

⁴⁰ Dawson 1831, pp.224-5.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.118-19.

⁴² J.E. Ebsworth to Brickwood, 17/9/1829, ML. A4326. James Edward Ebsworth (c.1805-1874) was first cousin to H.T. Ebsworth. He served the AA Co. from 1827 until 1851, rising quickly to second-in-command.

In August, 1830, an emancipist shepherd was speared after refusing flour to a band of between 14 and 20 Aboriginal hunters. Again an armed party was sent in pursuit. As the Aborigines fled, the Company men opened fire killing one and wounding several others. Whether the shooting was by an Aborigine or a European is not recorded, but the group was under the command of Field, the free constable stationed at Carrington.⁴³ Three years were to elapse before another incident occurred. This time a free shepherd, James Henderson, was killed. The Aborigines responsible could not be traced but, in Parry's words:

the Blacks which accompanied our party could not be constrained from killing some others whom they met with, as belonging to the same tribe [as those responsible].⁴⁴

No action was taken against the Company's trackers nor against the Company officers who commanded them. The murder of black by black passed with little comment. The reaction of the London Board, as expressed in their immediate reply to Parry's report, was that they hoped no 'ill consequence' or 'bad feeling' between the settlers and the Aborigines had resulted.⁴⁵ Official policy was still one of appeasement. As it transpired, this was the last such incident on the estate. In May, 1835, a sheep was stolen and an overseer beaten at an outstation near the Gloucester River. Soldiers were sent to the scene, but the Aborigines having fled across the Company's boundary were not pursued.⁴⁶

These outbreaks were all in the north of the estate and the 'wild blacks' of the north were contrasted with those around Carrington both in Parry's Journal and in his wife's letters home.

The natives here are very superior ... and are a fine race of people ... I never saw a more harmless race of people than these blacks appear to be, though they tell me that they are not all as harmless and quiet as they appear to be in this place ... You may ... trust them with anything, & they make very safe and useful messengers to different parts of the settlement. If you lend them a gun or boat to get game or fish, they are sure to bring them home safe with the produce of their labour.⁴⁷

In later years, 'troubles' near the Gloucester were reported from time to time,⁴⁸ but these troubles involved only the loss of some stock. In 1840 a young Aborigine was brought before the magistrate at Stroud and duly reprimanded for having speared a cow, which seems to be the height of retaliatory measures taken. Phillip Parker King, the Company's then commissioner, when reporting the matter to his London superiors, advised:

the Blacks are well conducted, and very kindly treated by us and are very useful ... You may rest assured, Gentlemen, that every one of your Servants in authority are [*sic*] disposed to do every thing they can to second the philanthropic views of the Government towards ameliorating the condition of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Country.⁴⁹

43 E. Parry, Journal, 2/8, 3/8, 7/8/1830.

44 *ibid.*, Journal, 19/6/1833.

45 R. Hart Davis to Parry, 10/12/1833, AA Co. Records.

46 Dumaresq to Court, 12/6/1835, AA Co. Records

47 I.L. Parry to L.D. Stanley, 13/5/1830, SPRI, Ms 438/25/82; I.L. Parry to M.M. Stanley 25/5/1830, SPRI, Ms 438/25/275.

48 Court to King, 10/4/1840; Court to Ebsworth, 19/4/1844, AA Co. Records.

49 King to Court, 24/8/1840, AA Co. Records. Phillip Parker King, the son of Philip Gidley King former Governor of NSW, was another naval officer. Between 1817 and 1821 King was employed surveying the Australian coast. On each voyage King came in contact with Aborigines. There are many references in King's journal to exchanges of gifts but only one of hostilities, when his men opened fire after being

GAMPIGNAL AT PORT STEPHENS

But the best will in the world did not save the Aborigines. Their land had been usurped, their society shattered. The tragedy is reflected in the words used in Company correspondence. The 'pleasure' Dawson gained from the 'society' of the Aborigines had changed under Parry to a policy of non-molestation. By 1840 King sought only to 'ameliorate the condition' of the surviving people.

Aboriginal numbers were dwindling. Europeans had brought diseases other than venereal. William Scott, who was born in Carrington in 1844, recorded that in his youth measles decimated the clan there. Furthermore,

the tribe did not multiply as it must have done in earlier times. There were few young boys growing into adolescence and the bora ceremonies were beginning to die out. By the time Scott left Port Stephens in 1873, the Aborigines, who had once been variously numbered at between three and six hundred, 'had dwindled to about fifty members. Perhaps there were fewer than that.'⁵⁰

There are no Aborigines now at Carrington. The bora ground survives as does a tree bearing the scar from a bark canoe. Both are protected by legislation in a way that those who attended the bora ceremonies, who built the canoe, were not.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Abbreviation:

AA Co. Records

Australian Agricultural Company Records, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, incorporating the ANU Archives of Business and Labour, Australian National University, Canberra.

ADB

Australian Dictionary of Biography vols 1 and 2, 1966-7, ed. D. Pike, Melbourne.

ML

Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

SPRI

Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

Anley, Charlotte 1841, *The Prisoners of Australia*, London.

Atchison, J.F. 1973, Port Stephens and Goonoo Goonoo: A review of the early period of the Australian Agricultural Company, PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.

Australian (newspaper), Sydney.

Backhouse, J.A. 1843, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, London.

Bairstow, Damaris 1985, The Australian Agricultural Company at Port Stephens: An archaeological contribution to history, PhD thesis, University of Sydney.

Bennett, G. (ed.) 1928, *The Port Stephens Blacks: Recollections of William Scott*, Dungog, NSW.

Blair, D. 1879, *The History of Australia from the First Dawn of Discovery*, Glasgow.

Dawson, R. 1831, *The Present State of Australia*, 2nd edn, London.

Delano, A. 1817, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels*, Boston.

attacked. There was no killing on either side and King's party withdrew to the ship ('King, Phillip Parker 1967; King 1827).

⁵⁰ Bennett 1928, pp.8-9, 34, 42. William Scott, the son of the storeman at Carrington, was born at Carrington and spent his childhood there. His only playmates were Aboriginal. Scott's reminiscences were edited and there could be omissions, but it is doubtful if any are relevant. Bennett, the editor, was deeply concerned with the fate of the Aboriginal people on the Port Stephens estate. This was the reason for publishing the memoirs of the old man in 1928. (Hodgson to Court, 8/12/56, AA Co. Records.)

ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1993 17:1

- Flowers, E. 1966, 'Dawson, Robert', in *ADB*, vol. 1, pp. 298-300.
- Gray, N. 1966, 'Dumaresq, Henry ... and William John', in *ADB*, vol. 1, pp. 333-5.
- King, P.P. 1827, *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia ...*
London.
- 'King, Phillip Parker' 1967, in *ADB*, vol. 2, pp. 61-4.
- Parry, A. 1967, 'Parry, Sir William Edward', in *ADB*, vol. 2, pp. 315-16.
- Pemberton, P.A. 1991, *The London connection: The formation and early years of the Australian Agricultural Company*, PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.
- Pinkerton, H. 1802, *Modern Geography*, vol. 2, London.