Aboriginal History

Volume twenty 1996
Aboriginal History Incorporated

The Committee of Management and the Editorial Board
Peter Read (Chair), Rob Paton (Secretary), Peter Grimshaw (Treasurer/Public Officer),
Neil Andrews, Richard Baker, Ann Curthoys, Brian Egloff, Geoff Gray, Niel Gunson,
Luise Hercus, Bill Humes, Ian Keen, David Johnston, Harold Koch, Isabel McBryde,
Diane Smith, Elspeth Young.

Correspondents
Jeremy Beckett, Valerie Chapman, Ian Clark, Eve Fesl, Fay Gale, Ronald Lampert,
Campbell Macknight, Ewan Morris, John Mulvaney, Andrew Markus, Bob Reece,
Henry Reynolds, Shirley Roser, Lyndall Ryan, Bruce Shaw, Tom Stannage, Robert
Tonkinson, James Urry.

Aboriginal History aims to present articles and information in the field of Australian
ethnohistory, particularly in the post-contact history of the Aborigines and Torres
Strait Islanders. Historical studies based on anthropological, archaeological, linguistic
and sociological research, including comparative studies of other ethnic groups such
as Pacific Islanders in Australia will be welcomed. Issues include recorded oral
traditions and biographies, narratives in local languages with translations, previously
unpublished manuscript accounts, resumes of current events, archival and
bibliographical articles, and book reviews.

Editors 1996
Isabel McBryde, Editor and Luise Hercus, Review Editor

Aboriginal History Monograph Series
Published occasionally, the monographs present longer discussions or a series of
articles on single subjects of contemporary interest. Previous monograph titles are D.
Barwick, M. Mace and T. Stannage (eds), Handbook of Aboriginal and Islander History;
Diane Bell and Pam Ditton, Law: the old the new; Peter Sutton, Country: Aboriginal
boundaries and land ownership in Australia; and Link-Up (NSW) and Tikka Wilson, In
the Best Interest of the Child? Stolen children: Aboriginal pain/white shame.

Aboriginal History is administered by an Editorial Board which is responsible for all
unsigned material in the journal. Views and opinions expressed by the authors of
signed articles and reviews are not necessarily shared by Board members. The editors
invite contributions to either the journal of monograph series for consideration;
review will be commissioned by the review editor.

All editorial correspondence should be addressed to Aboriginal History, Box 2837
GPO Canberra, 2601 Australia.

Subscription information: ABA Solutions, fax and phone 02 6253 3603, email
abasolutions@netinfo.com.au

Acknowledgement
Aboriginal History Inc. gratefully acknowledges the support of the Department of
History, The Faculties, The Australian University in the production of this volume.

© Copyright Aboriginal History Inc., Canberra, Australia. Apart from any fair dealing
for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the
Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process
whatsoever without the written permission of the publisher.

Pagemade by Tikka Wilson
Printed in Australia by ANU Printery, Canberra
ISSN 0314-8769
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title and Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Broome</td>
<td>Introduction to Theatres of power: Tent boxing circa 1910–1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob Amery</td>
<td>Kaurna in Tasmania: A case of mistaken identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip A. Clarke</td>
<td>Early European interaction with Aboriginal hunters and gatherers on Kangaroo Island, South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denis Byrne</td>
<td>Deep nation: Australia’s acquisition of an indigenous past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayne Breen</td>
<td>Human agency, historical inevitability and moral culpability: Rewriting black–white history in the wake of Native Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luise Hercus and Grace Koch</td>
<td>'A native died sudden at Lake Allallina'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Lydon</td>
<td>'no moral doubt...': Aboriginal evidence and the Kangaroo Creek poisoning, 1847–1849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry McDonald</td>
<td>Evidence of four New England corroboree songs indicating Aboriginal responses to European invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Horner</td>
<td>A letter from Jack Horner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livio Dobrez</td>
<td>Review article: Ethnography—Who needs it? Little Eva at Moonlight Creed and Other Aboriginal Song Poems by Martin Duwell and R.M.W. Dixon (eds) and Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media and Technological Horizons by Eric Michaels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reviews

- Fate of a Free People by Henry Reynolds |
- Edward Koiki Mabo: His Life and Struggle for Land Rights by Noel Loos and Koiki Mabo |
- Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government by Nicholas Thomas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Native Tribes of South-East Australia</td>
<td>A.W. Howitt</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century</td>
<td>Andrew Sayers</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighters from the Fringe</td>
<td>Robert A. Hall</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle and Crow: An exploration of Australian Aboriginal</td>
<td>Johanna M. Blows</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Bundjalung People</td>
<td>Ruby Langford Ginibi</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Aboriginal Tasmanians (second edition)</td>
<td>Lyndal Ryan</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scars in the Landscape: A register of massacre sites in</td>
<td>Ian D. Clark</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Victoria 1803–1859</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets</td>
<td>Jakelin Troy</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyirbal Song Poetry. The Oral Literature of an Australian</td>
<td>R.M.W. Dixon and Grace Koch</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainforest People</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kie Daudai: Notes and Sketches from Cape York</td>
<td>Edwina Toohney</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Opal that Turned into Fire and Other Stories from</td>
<td>Janet Mathews</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Wangkumara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentials of Statistical Methods, (Version 2 History</td>
<td>T.F. Hutchinson</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Archaeology)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey in Time: The World's Longest Continuing Art</td>
<td>George Chaloupka</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition, the 50000 Year Story of the Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Art of Arnhem Land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In editing this volume I have been grateful for the support of Editorial Board members and others who refereed papers, also of Luise Hercus, Review Editor. For production I am indebted to Tikka Wilson's special skills and expertise, while Richard Barwick prepared many of the illustrations for reproduction, as well as designing the cover with his usual flair. My sincere thanks to all involved.

Isabel McBryde
Theatres of power: Tent boxing circa 1910–1970

Richard Broome

Eighteen years ago I first journeyed into Aboriginal history through a study of sport and racism in the context of Aboriginal participation in boxing. I interviewed over twenty Aboriginal boxers and some white managers, in three capital cities and on several reserves, and researched the sporting press from the 1930s. My research, which came to focus on the professional ring career of Aboriginal boxers who produced a highly disproportionate fifteen per cent of Australian professional champions since 1930, was published in 1980 in volume four of this journal. In this article I included just one paragraph on the Aboriginal experience of boxing tents, despite gathering many oral memories. I argued somewhat hurriedly; that tent boxing was a 'tough life' for Aboriginal boxers, full of hard work and with the potential for physical damage. While former Aboriginal boxers looked back on a 'free, matey and prestigious life in the tents...in the long run it was a debilitating life'.

These words mirrored the views of Peter Corris, who in one chapter of his history of boxing in Australia, Lords of the Ring, argued that 'tent boxing shows were places of exploitation and abuse'. Corris claimed that some fighters were badly mismatched by the tent boxers, and some fought too long in the tents. He believed tent boxing could be dangerous because of the demand for action to satisfy paying customers. Besides, the work was hard, often entailed long hours, and the boxers were managed by strict contracts which favoured the tent owners. Tent boxing was, he believed, the hard end of a tough game.

While Corris is to some extent correct in these views, it is a more complex story than this. Fifteen years on, I wish to recant my views expressed above, and oppose Corris's grim version of life in the tents. Through teaching, researching and reading Aboriginal history since 1980, reading the works of English Historian E.P. Thompson, and also listening to my colleagues in women's history, I have developed a stronger sense of power from below and the agency held by Aboriginal historical actors.

This awareness of Aboriginal agency has led to new and deeper readings of those original twenty interviews (and some recent follow-up interviews), for neither Corris nor I had explored the internal power dynamics of the boxing tents. I will now focus on those relationships, exploring boxing tents as places of cross-cultural drama and performance. By seeing the tents as theatres, and the boxers as performers acting out mostly predetermined scripts, the tent fighters are placed in the active rather than the passive mode. This suggests more complex readings of their actions. I will now argue, that Aboriginal tent fighters were part of a multi-layered theatre of power in which they were not only victims of white power and racial discourse, but also agents and manipulators of that power and discourse. Although these performances of power by Aboriginal men might be transitory and subsequently overlaid by experiences of injustice and discrimination in reserves, country towns and other situations, these transitory tent performances contributed positively to the fashioning of Aboriginal self-esteem and identity in a difficult cross-cultural world. Tent boxing produced heroes and an heroic edge to Aboriginal community history.*

**Life in the tents**

Tent boxing emerged around 1900 with the rise of boxing as a legal sport. Boxing of the bare-knuckle variety had flourished in Australia but was illegal throughout the nineteenth century. With the adoption of gloved contests and the Queensberry Rules in the 1880s, a qualified acceptance of boxing in clubs and private schools emerged. By 1900 boxing stadia in Australian capital cities attracted committed fans. Audiences grew with the efforts of modern entrepreneurs like John Wren and Hugh D. McIntosh except that the 'decent' people and Protestant churchgoers largely stayed away. The huge publicity surrounding the racially-based Burns–Johnson fight in Sydney in 1908 for the heavyweight championship of the world heralded the 'golden age' of Australian boxing, which with few checks, lasted until the 1950s. Boxing troupes in travelling tents flourished in this era.

Jimmy Sharman's boxing troupe was not the first to operate but it became the longest serving and best known. Sharman, one of twelve children of a Narellan timber cutter, became a successful boxer in the Riverina area winning all but one of about 80 fights before the near death of an opponent Jack Carter, at Wagga in November 1911, steered him into boxing tent promotion at the age of twenty-one. At least a dozen other significant troupes operated over the next half century: most notably those of Roy Bell,
Johnny Shields, Tom O'Malley, Les McNabb and Smally Higgins in the early years and from the 1940s, Harry Johns, Bill Leach, Snowy Beryl and Mrs Ellison, Major Wilson, Sandy and Selby Moore, and Harry Paulsen in Tasmania. Tents operated in the West as well, one early promoter being Mickey Flynn, with whom Albert Facey boxed in 1914. Facey toured with Flynn into South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. Arthur Corunna and Jack Davis earned money as tent boxers during the 1920s and the hungry thirties respectively in south-west Western Australia. Many others, such as that run by George Primmer in the Warrnambool area, had a brief and more localised lifespan.

The more permanent, well-known troupes travelled from southern Australia in summer to north Queensland in winter and back again, following the annual calendar of 500 country agricultural shows, carnivals and rodeos which spanned all but the Christmas season. They sometimes stopped in towns where there was no show but which promised an audience mustered from the surrounding district. This was called by the showmen, 'still-towning'. A half-a-dozen troupes ranged the countryside at any one time. As Jimmy Sharman II or 'Young Jimmy' as he was known around the shows, recalled: 'There was so many shows, there, like we all used to work together, like each one had their own territory and you'd never trespass, so therefore you know, you used to help each other when you possibly could and we used to like to see that all the shows had boxing troupes to keep the game alive.' The accompanying map, compiled with the assistance of Jimmy Sharman II sets out the seasonal route of his boxing troupe in the 1950s. In any one year, Sharman's troupe visited about 100 shows in successive regions throughout the year. Within each region the randomness of the show dates meant there was often a mad dash from one part of the region to another—mostly at night—to set up for the next show. Most were one day affairs. The troupes were popular and much sought after by the agricultural show committees. As Sharman II added: 'all you needed was a merry-go-round, a knock-em down, and a boxing troupe and you had a show'.

The troupes were an important nursery for both boxers and fans. The showmen, especially Sharman, would spot likely fighters for the city stadium promoters and encourage the sport by featuring boxing stars in the troupe. Aboriginal Australian professional champions Ron Richards, Jack Hassen and George Bracken had their first fights in the tents as did white Australian champions Billy Grime, Mickey Miller and Jackie Green. However, many Aboriginal youths, young men, even ex-champions, joined the boxing troupes simply to earn a quid, and engage in an exciting life. Jerry

---

* Jimmy Sharman II interview, Sydney, 23 August 1978. Sharman II denotes Jimmy Sharman, son of the Jimmy Sharman who began a boxing tent in about 1910. Sharman II worked the tents from the mid 1950s until the closure of Sharman's line-up in 1971.
* Ibid.
* Ring Digest, April 1952.
THE SEASONS OF JIMMY SHARMAN'S TENT TROUPE IN THE 1950s*

* Compiled from Show dates in the Outdoor Showman 1954 - 55 and with the assistance of Jimmy Sharman
Jerome and 'Black Paddy', who both fought in Sharman's tent during and just after the First World War, were among the first Aboriginal tent boxers and hundreds followed over two generations. Many also sought to escape the poverty and discrimination then experienced by most Aboriginal people in country towns and on Aboriginal reserves.\(^{14}\) Each of the troupes had six to ten boxers. From the 1930s about half of them were Aboriginal fighters.\(^{15}\) Some joined when they were 16 or 17, others when older. 'Banjo' (Henry) Clarke from Framlingham near Warrnambool, claimed he joined Harry Johns' troupe when fifteen years old. He recalled of his decision: 'You just go. If you can use your dukes [fists] you just go, you know and they test you out in a big shed in the yard. If you can fight they say "righto you'll do, you'll do" or he would say to someone "learn a bit more so you will be able to join me"—this was in his backyard in Melbourne'.\(^{16}\) Others might be recruited in country towns or met there by pre-arrangement as the troupe moved through. Some stuck at it a week, most a whole season, and many stayed for two or three years.

Most found it a hard life for the boxers were 'usefuls' as well. Their itinerary incorporated stops at dozens of towns. At each stop the equipment would have to be unloaded from the truck, often in quick time, so that the tent, line-up board and ticket-booth could be ready for a show that night. This process was repeated again and again. As George Bracken, Australian lightweight champion recalled of his time with the Sharmans in the 1950s: 'most of the time you were travelling, all the time you know, you'd do a show in one place one night and that night you'd pull down the tent and it wouldn't be until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and next time you wouldn't get there till lunchtime and you'd have to pitch the tent up again to open that night. That night you'd have to pull it down again and go somewhere else...with a hamburger in your hand'.\(^{17}\) Jimmy Sharman II recalled that they might not sleep much for days when doing 'one-night stands'.\(^{18}\)

Their living conditions were spartan but varied—as were the memories about them. Boxers in some troupes slept under a blanket in the sawdust of the tent floor. However, others snoozed in a fitted-out van, and Paulsen and Sharman's boxers slept on fold-up iron beds. Most tent bosses slept and ate with the men, but Harry Johns was noted for seeking the comfort of nearby hotel accommodation.\(^{19}\) Leo White, a white Australian light-heavyweight champion of the early 1950s who boxed briefly in the tents, doubted whether tent fighters had three good meals a day.\(^{20}\) Certainly Ern McQuillan, a leading professional boxing trainer who knew Sharman well, stated 'the tucker they eat you wouldn't eat yourself. I wouldn't eat it. I've been out and seen


\(^{15}\) Alan Moore interview, Brisbane, 29 August 1978; Sharman interview.

\(^{16}\) 'Banjo' (Henry) Clarke interview, Warrnambool, 14 August 1978.

\(^{17}\) George Bracken interview, Sydney, 23 August 1978.

\(^{18}\) Sharman interview.

\(^{19}\) Jackomos follow-up interview 1994.

\(^{20}\) Leo White interview, Melbourne, 21 January 1979.
them.31 Billy Primmer, a white boxer from Warrnambool who travelled to Bendigo with one troupe in the 1940s, recalled that the tent boss 'treated them [his boxers] like dogs. He'd go down the street and buy a bag of pies, they wouldn't even be hot pies and this was when I was up there and I seen it with my own eyes. He would just go around and say "catch Jack" and he would throw 'em at them. You either caught them or dropped them on the ground. That was their meal, and that was the way he used to treat them'.32 However, Alick Jackomos who travelled with a number of tents for years, said the bigger ones had their own cooks and that the troupes of Sharman, Roy Bell, Harry Paulsen and Sandy and Selby Moore provided good stews and steaks, but few desserts. He admitted that pies might be given when on the road or during the pressure of setting up.33 None of these memories recall differential treatment between black and white boxers in food, accommodation or even wages (see below).

The life of a tent boxer was one of travel punctuated by intense activity. They travelled a third of the week, pitched and took down the equipment, and fought in the tents on average several days a week. At country shows there were between three and eight sessions or 'houses' over the day and evening, while at the big city shows there were ten to twelve 'houses' each day. Each 'house' contained three fights or two fights and a wrestle. A number of boxers remembered fighting three to five times a day, more at the city shows. Billy Primmer recalled that he and his brother had 35 fights between them over three days at the Bendigo Show. Tent promoter, Jimmy Sharman II, gave a much more conservative estimate in 1978, claiming: 'Sometimes they'd do a couple of fights a day, sometimes a fight a week, all depends on the itinerary of the shows but the capital [city] shows they'd always have two or three fights a day...the more fights they had the better they liked it. They liked to be seen in action.'4

It is unclear how much tent fighters were paid as some interviewees were either vague or cagey on this matter. Their wages were probably similar to the basic wage of the time (about £3–£4 in the 1930s, £5–£7 in the 1940s and £10–£13 in the 1950s), but there were of course no sick or holiday payments.26 Some tent boxers who fought around 1950 said they received £1 a day, others £1 a fight. The latter is unlikely for the average boxer, given the prize money and expenses the showmen had to pay. Several white boxers claimed Aboriginal boxers were paid less than other fighters. Billy Primmer stated that while he got £3 a fight in the 1940s the Aboriginal troupe members received £1.28 There may have been a differential of skill or bargaining skills involved in this case or the fact that Primmer was a casual fighting only those shows in the Warrnambool region. However, Bobby Sinn, an Australian featherweight titleholder in the 1950s claimed he received £50 a day while Elley Bennett, also an Australian champion, received only £10 a day. Sinn, who did not identify as being of Aboriginal descent, was probably a harder bargainer, and also his term with the tents was as a casual star-performer. He said Alfie Sands a main event Aboriginal fighter received £1.0.0 per day.29

---

21 Ern McQuillan interview, Sydney, 29 August 1978.
24 Sharman interview.
26 Primmer interview
27 Bobby Sinn [Wills] interview, Brisbane, 1 September 1978.
However, Alan Moore who took over his father's (Selby Moore) tent in the early 1960s believed the payments which included keep, board (such as it was), travel and gear, were reasonable. Certainly, the Moores used to pay their boxers out of season, which was quite unusual. Alick Jackomos, a Greek Australian wrestler in the tents of the 1940s, and who has been within the Victorian Aboriginal community since marrying into it in the 1940s, believes payments to boxers were made on their level of skill and their bargaining skills rather than their ethnicity.

However, while some showmen were fair in the treatment of tent boxers, others were full of tricks to reduce payments to a pittance, or even to nothing. One ploy was to tell a young boxer he could not be paid to fight as he was an amateur. Instead, the promoter promised to write to Merv Williams, the Sporting Globe's boxing editor, and have him featured in the paper to help his career instead. But such news was rarely published. The boxers were controlled by a tight contract, and a 'good behaviour bond' of £50. They breached it if they fell sick, were injured or drank to excess, and had expenses deducted from any wages owing. The general practice regarding wages was that all payments were held by the boss until the end of the tour—only the stars were treated differently. This practice ensured the boxers did not leave during the tour and it was a paternal effort to get them to save. Leo White recalled Sharman I continually urging his boxers to save. His son, Jimmy Sharman II, stated they gave the boxers pocket money on request but held the rest so they would not 'finish up broke.' Indeed, he claimed that his father (Jimmy Sharman I) paid the balance to some young Aboriginal boxers in front of the youth's parents upon his being returned home at the end of the tour. However, boxers felt this system could be abused by the owners. 'Banjo' Clarke recalled:

Jimmy Sharman would pay you well, but old Johnsy, Oh [Harry Johns] he got out the book and he'd say, oh well we pulled up at this such and such a place, and we bought dinner there and dinner here, and we bought you this and that and in the end you know, instead of him owing you money, you owed him money. When you are miles away from home you won't leave him, you have to stick with him to get back home.

Alick Jackomos agreed that deductions could be easily inflated. Also, if it was claimed a boxer broke his contract, or did so, he would not receive any of these withheld payments.

Jimmy Sharman I had a wide reputation of being a 'straight shooter', but also of being a tough disciplinarian who rarely drank and who would not tolerate much 'boozing' in his boxers. Those who drank to excess or played up in other ways were sacked. However, Billy Primmer who travelled with the tents on only a few occasions

28 Moore interview.
29 Jackomos follow-up interview 1994 and research on the Sporting Globe's boxing columns.
30 Corris, Lords of the Ring, p. 86.
31 White and Sharman interviews, and follow-up interview with Sharman 3 January 1996.
32 'Banjo' Clarke interview.
33 Alick Jackomos interview, Melbourne, 28 November 1979.
34 Corris, Lords of the Ring, p. 84.
Erwin 'Tiger' Williams (the Black Bomber) playing at Sylvia Paulsen's 25th birthday celebrations, Launceston, 1954 (Sylvia Paulsen, Launceston).
Harry Johns' Line-up Board, Dimboola Regatta early 1950s. From left to right: Harry Johns, Monty Faye, Danny Marks (from Dimboola, who also fought as 'Johnny Wilson' the Maori), Alick Jackomos, and three unknown Aboriginal fighters (Alick Jackomos, Melbourne).
recalled one incident over money in which Sharman I appears to be less than honourable. At Bendigo in the 1940s, Primmer claimed Sharman I sought to pay him and his brother, half of the £3 a fight agreed on for their 35 fights. However, Sharman's main fighter, Aboriginal boxer Erwin 'Tiger' Williams (the 'Black Bomber'), a friend of the Primmers, 'took Jimmy by the throat and shook him and shook him — and said he wouldn't work for him again if he didn't pay. Anyhow, it finished up we got paid'. Primmer claimed that Sharman's son, Jimmy II, was less hard-nosed adding: 'I have worked for him'. George Bracken agreed Sharman was hard, but claimed you had to be in business, especially given that some of the tent boxers were 'no-hopers'. Alick Jackomos who had years of experience in a number of tents, believed the Sharmans paid their boxers fairly and looked after any ill or homesick boxers, even paying their fares home in genuine cases. On a score of ten, Jackomos ranked the Moore's tent at 10, Sharman's at 9 and Harry Johns at 5. Buster Weir, an Aboriginal tent boxer of the 1950s and Iris Gardiner, then 'Tiger' Williams's wife who travelled with him for some years, both agreed pay and conditions were fair. Nobody forced the boxers to go, they added, Aboriginal youths and men became troupe boxers of their own free will.

Differing opinions are held about this boss or that boss, but there is no dispute about who was the boss. The troupe owners had the power of bosses, but also the authority of 'fathers' and managers. They acted as daily guardians of the boxers under their care for months on end, mostly out of concern for the needs of their business. The boxers slept in, ate in, and fought in their tents, obeyed their rules, and asked them for pocket money to see a show or attend a dance. If the boxers aspired to fight in the city stadiums they relied on the tent owners, especially if it was Sharman I, to put in a good word for them with the matchmakers and promoters. The boxers both respected and feared these men, and depended on them like fathers when hundreds of kilometres from home. Some of this relationship stuck years later. Jimmy Sharman II said when he visited the Mereeba Rodeo in 1978, more than thirty former Aboriginal boxers of a decade or more earlier, visited him for a yarn. 'They'd make sure they'd come to see me when they were sober...it goes to show they've got some respect for you'. These Mereeba meetings with Sharman continued over the years to recent times.

Despite the arduous life and the indifferent financial returns, most Aboriginal boxers basically enjoyed their several years spent in the tents. The experience provided them with some earnings, much excitement and camaraderie among the boxers: black and white. Alan Moore, son of tent owner Selby Moore and a tent boxer himself, recalled he and the other boxers would go shooting, catch bush tucker and do mad stunts together, such as surfing a tyre pulled behind a car. Others stressed the 'educational' value of travelling beyond one's 'beat'. 'Banjo' Clarke recalled 'travelling around to a lot of different towns, meeting a lot of good blokes and locals—they would look after you, take you to their homes and things like that'. 'Banjo' never ventured

---

35 Primmer interview.
36 Bracken interview.
39 Sharman interview and follow-up interview.
40 'Banjo' Clarke interview.
beyond Victoria in the 1940s, but others travelled interstate and stayed for years. 'Muscles' (Ray) Clarke of Framlingham recalled of the early 1950s: 'After we'd finish our session and that, we went out and had a drink amongst ourselves and with people we got to know around the tents. We'd drink in their houses and in the pubs. Or go to one of the houses and a girl would say "would you like to dance" and we would go to the dance hall. So you had a pretty good social life.' "Muscles' Clarke remembered courting a white girl whom he considered marrying. The tent boxers were part of the travelling show people's community, were popular among the local Aboriginal community, and to an extent among the white rural working class as they provided new conversation about town and were young, dashing, adventurous types.

For the boxers, tent boxing was a stage in their getting of wisdom and in the making of their manhood. They challenged or were challenged on a daily basis. As Jimmy Sharman II chuckled, 'Shiner' Austin, a young Warrnambool boxer with the tents, just wanted to get a 'cauliflower ear' caused by the breaking of the cartilage membrane of the outer ear. He would beg opponents to 'hit me on the ear' and eventually achieved his aim—and his ideal of manhood.4 Boxing to these young men was about status and power, as well as a good life. Indeed, power lay at the very heart of the experience for all the participants in the boxing tent world—although the bosses and boxers also valued the money they made. There were three arenas of that power: the line-up board; the pitch outside the tent; and the fighting mat.

On the line-up board

Another show was mounted. It had been marked on the calendar for a year and once the town was reached, the sleepy fighters were roused out of the truck, and the tent, line-up board and ticket booth raised. Prior publicity in the local paper and show posters had promised the troupe's imminent arrival. Shopkeepers had been given free tickets for placing posters of the troupe in their windows. One piece in the Warrnambool Standard of 11 November 1948 announced the annual Koroit Show 'featuring Sharman's Boxing Troupe headed by the KO King, "the Black Bomber". £10 paid to any man a show who can fight "The Bomber" 5 rounds'. Rex Talo, light-heavyweight and heavyweight champ of Samoa would be there, as well as Tom Saga a middleweight, and Sam Motu, welterweight amateur champ of Samoa—now turned pro. The locals knew what to expect, for this ritual was part of their calendar too—only the cast might vary from show to annual show.

By afternoon, after the crowd had built up, it was showtime. The troupe mounted the platform outside the tent and as the bell jangled or the drum was beaten, the boxers chorused 'hey, hey, hey'. Soon people were expectantly drawn to the pitch, the area outside the tent. Boys pushed for a good view. Up there on the line-up board were familiar yet dangerous sights. Here were men oozing quiet aggression, dressed in gaudy coloured boxing shorts under tattier grey or maroon gowns (until the 1930s they wore ankle to waist boxing tights and long-sleeved tops called 'combinations'). Bare chests, plump pectorals and chest hair, might be glimpsed as they strutted and posed. Behind them were large banners, painted canvas backdrops ablaze with the name of the troupe,

41 'Muscles' (Ray) Clarke interview, Framlingham, 16 August 1978.
42 Sharman interview.
and painted images of great fighters who had performed in the tent or other universal champs. Words heralded their deeds. The drum kept its rhythmic beat. Signs announced a 2/- or 3/- entrance fee and Rud Kee, of Sharman's troupe, or another ticket seller, fingered the rolls of gaudy coloured tickets.

The troupe was introduced by the boss of the tent. Perhaps first the star, who might be an Aboriginal Australian champion—either Jerry Jerome, Ron Richards, Jack Hassen, Elley Bennett, Dave Sands, Ritchie Sands, and George Bracken—or perhaps a white Australian champ, such as Mickey Miller, 'Kid Young' (Leo White) or others. To see a champ close-up, thrilled the crowd in the years before television and the existence of highly illustrated sporting publications. There were also state champions and main event fighters such as the Aboriginal men: Alfie Clay, Teddy 'Rainbow' (McGinness), the five other Sands brothers—Clem, George, Ritchie and Russel—the Grogan brothers, Harry and Clarrie, Arthur Larrigo, and Jackie Ryan [Blow]. There were also promising 'prelim boys'—such as 'Shiner' or 'Nulla' Austin—and any one of scores more Aboriginal fighters sufficiently talented to take on most locals at country shows. Usually almost half on the line-up board were Aboriginal fighters. As 'Banjo' Clarke stated:

It was the easiest thing in the world for an Aborigine to get into a boxing troupe. They would grab them before they'd grab a white bloke. They were a drawcard. You know, you see Aboriginals on the Board and then a lot of people would come in to see the Aboriginals fight. You see most of the troupes they all got Aboriginals. They thought they were better fighters and they were wild looking blokes up on the Board.

Other racial/ethnic groups were there too: Islanders, Phillipinos and Maoris. Three of Sharman's long standing regulars were Tommy Otari, a Queenslander of Islander extraction dubbed 'The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel'; Rud Kee of Chinese descent who worked with the troupe in various capacities for 35 years; and Erwin 'Tiger' Williams from Woodenbong Reserve in northern New South Wales, known as 'the Black Bomber'. Such a mix of boxers was calculatingly designed to create a reaction in white supremacist rural towns and capital cities. Racial competition gained an instant response to minds steeped in evolutionary frames of the 'survival of the fittest' and of Social Darwinist racial hierarchies.

The boom of the drum, the brilliance of the banners and backdrops, the gaudy outfits of the boxers, and the promise of action, all attracted the attention of the crowd. The boxers also focussed the gaze of the crowd, male and female, on their bodies. Boxers are especially schooled in body language, rehearsing time-honoured moves as they do before mirrors, carefully crafting their bodies into a pose identical to those of boxers in the glass-framed photographs around the walls of the gymnasiums—figures frozen as on a Grecian urn in poses of fists and jaws, leading feet and shoulders, heads tilted, and

---

41 Ryan was a non-identifier when I interviewed him claiming Maori descent and did not appear in my earlier article as Aboriginal, but his son shortly afterwards came out proudly as being of Aboriginal descent, Courier Mail, 22 July 1979.

42 'Banjo' Clarke interview.

43 Much work is to be done on racial ideas in twentieth century Australia, but see Andrew Markus, Governing Savages, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1990, chap. 3; and the surveys conducted in the 1960s by Lorna Lippman in Words or Blows. Racial Attitudes in Australia, Penguin, Ringwood, 1973, especially chap. 12.
eyes fixed on the camera. It is the boxers' stare that is memorable—the direct eye contact they use before the bell to assert dominance over their opponent. As Henry Collins a boxer from Cherbourg put it: 'as soon as you go up and they introduce you to the man. You look a man straight in the eye like that. If your eye drops you know he's got you but if his eye drops you know you've got him'.

Day after day the tent boxers acted these roles of masculinity and dominance. Day after day the novices in the troupe learned to assume the postures of power as they transformed themselves from shy Aboriginal youths to tent boxers. Day after day they performed in the theatre of power that was tent boxing. Up there on the line-up-board they felt the power of the boxer's role, looking down as they did from on high over the crowd that was being gullied by their performance and the words of the bosses. They assumed some of the power of the boxing greats featured on the painted backdrops. The boss extolled their ring virtues and proclaimed them 'a great little fighter' or 'pound for pound the best around'. To young men, especially Aboriginal men from deprived and controlled backgrounds, these were moments of power that developed their self-esteem and shaped their identity.

Occasionally the performance faltered. Alan Moore recalled a time in his father's tent in the late 1950s:

When fighters come on they normally take their dressing gowns off and strip down and the body's a big deal with them you know. A big chest, it's like a little black bantam rooster...so this one particular bloke, he was sort of like a little bantam rooster, he'd strut around, well I know I used to do that. I'd take my gear off and walk around, I'd leer at people you know do all these shitty things. And this bloke started there off with his gown like that and all the people started laughing and he looked down and he had no trousers on! Straight back outside—and you imagine what it's been like, everyone piddling themselves, all the women laughing, so Dad said when they all calmed down, not a bad fighter, but a little absent-minded.

It was at this point that the power of the troupe boss was displayed as he began to work and direct the crowd. At country shows where the crowds were lighter, the showman boss had to do some 'draggin', by patter and gesture to draw in the crowd. All tent bosses were renowned as spruikers. Sharman also used song. His regular drawcard, Erwin Williams, would confuse his image as 'the Black Bomber' by playing guitar and singing 'Paper Doll', 'Ned Kelly' and the like. A Maori boxer might do a more threatening haka. After songs, dance, the noise of bells and drums, and perhaps an exhibition spar or shadow boxing on the Board, the showman would work the crowd further with wise cracks and spiel. As 'Banjo' Clarke recalled and photographic evidence supports: 'No matter what they were doin', even watching the ring events in the arena, they would all come and stand around the boxing tent and listen to the cheek that was goin' on and see one another gettin' pushed around.' The boss's eyes would scan the crowd and he would cry out: 'who'll take a glove? Who'll take a glove? You're a pretty

---

46 Henry Collins interview, Cherbourg, 6 January 1979.
47 Moore interview.
48 'Banjo' Clarke interview.
hefty-looking customer. What about coming inside? Bowl my man over in three rounds and I'll give you a "fiver". If my man cannot stop you in three I'll give you two pounds!49

The line-up board and the pitch

Much of what transpired next had been carefully planned by the wily showman, rehearsed by his boxers, and acted out time and again on the dusty showgrounds of endless country shows. As he called out challenges: 'Are you a woodcutter or something? Come up here!', a gee would step forward. He was a member of the troupe who had arrived in town the day before, or he was a local lined up by the showman through contacts, to work with the troupe for a fee. The skills of the gee gave an air of truth to what was about to take place and drew on the rivalry of local boxer versus the intruders into the local community's space. The gee drew on the opposites of native versus stranger, country versus the city, of amateur versus professional. At other times there might be a mock dispute between two gees in the crowd and the showmen would invite them to 'step inside' to settle the matter. All this made the crowd begin to yell with excitement. Sometimes the gee would pose as a more exotic opposition. Jackie Ryan, a Queensland feather and lightweight champion of the 1950s, and of Aboriginal and French descent, sometimes toured as a gee posing as a 'Greek boxing champion'. He would yell 'Greek' (words taught him by Alick Jackomos), from the crowd so effectively, that he was often invited to the local Greek restaurant after the show.50 Alick Jackomos did a similar routine as a wrestler. Following these negotiations the gee would mount the Board. The first bout, for the first 'house' of the day, was arranged.

There were always unplanned challenges from the pitch by local youths or men intent on trying themselves out. It was a badge of manhood (or evidence of drinking in the nearby beer tent) to take on a troupe boxer. To be able to brag for months that you took on a tent boxer and stayed on your feet—or won—or that you went three rounds with an Australian champ or the 'Black Bomber', was the stuff of which local reputations could be made. And besides, there was promise of money—a week's basic wage if you won and more than half that if you stayed on your feet. There never seemed to be a shortage of young men 'to have a go', especially when showmen like Sharman encouraged locals to settle grudges in the tents, a practice that was 'particularly dangerous' remarked Peter Corris.51 Up they would go onto the Boardwalk to be barracked or given cheek by their mates. There never seemed to be a shortage of a paying crowd either, as photographic evidence and oral history affirms, for by now the audience was stirred up and fingering the entrance fee in their pockets.

The other rivalry that was drawn upon by the showmen was racial. This was inevitable as hierarchies of dominance in Australia at this time were racial as well as based on class and gender. Race infused all aspects of boxing. The sporting press was embedded with stereotypes of Aboriginal boxers, who allegedly did not train because they were inherently lazy and inconsistent, who went 'walkabout', who could not handle money, who were of dubious intelligence, who had no heart, who were lovable

50 Jackie Ryan interview, Brisbane, 1 September 1978.
but unreliable. For instance, it was an agreed practice in the game, that where possible you matched black against white. It was claimed that two Aborigines would not fight hard as they were mates. Even some Aboriginal boxers agreed with that proposition despite the evidence of ‘ding-dong’ all-black battles to the contrary. Ern McQuillan, the Sydney trainer of Jack Hassen, Tony Mundine and many other Aboriginal fighters, stated in 1978: ‘I’ve run a lot of fights, I used to be match-maker at the Sydney Stadium for years, and I’ve never put two Aboriginals together, they don’t try as hard, but put them with a white man, you know, they show out more, plenty of fire’. Eddie Gibbons, a Warrnambool matchmaker of the 1940s told me: ‘if you’ve got two niggers playing, you never get a good game out of two niggers’. The play on racial opposites was the reason why the tent operators were so keen to employ Aborigines first, when many other employers at that time hired them last. The presence of Aboriginal boxers made it easier to fill the tents with a white audience perhaps wishing to see them beaten. Mavis Thorpe Clark claimed that while Doug (later Sir Doug) Nicholls, the Northcote football star, was with Sharman’s tent in 1931, ‘he had more bouts than any other member of the troupe. Everyone wanted to challenge the Aborigine—sometimes just with the intention of downing “a cheeky nigger”. Fight after fight; as long as the crowds filled the tent, no let-up’. And the racial competition worked both ways. The *Sporting Globe* in July 1949 commented that when Sharman’s troupe arrived in Charters Towers ‘there was a queue of colored boys clamouring for fights against his boxers’.

Yet racial feeling in boxing could be a complex and ambivalent emotion. Most tent bosses hired Australian and state champions—some of whom were Aboriginal fighters—to box exhibitions on tour. During the 1950s Australian titleholders Dave Sands, Elley Bennett, Jack Hassen, Russell Sands, Bobby Sinn, George Bracken and Harry Grogan all toured for a time in the tents as did state champions Alfie Clay, Jackie Ryan, the Sands brothers and others. These boxers, in particular Dave Sands and George Bracken, were genuinely idolised by most Australians. Sands could stop traffic when on a training run in Sydney, until his tragic death in a road accident in August 1952 ended his career on the eve of a world title chance. George Bracken, with movie star looks, received many proposals of marriage from white Australian women, while men admired his boxing skills developed by trainer Leo White. Thus, Aboriginal tent boxers could induce mixed feelings in their audiences.

Such ambivalence was not only accorded the stars. Alan Moore, who inherited his father’s (Selby) and uncle’s (Sandy) tent in the 1960s, revealed more complexities in the scripting of tent boxing performances when he recalled of the staging of bouts:

Yes, they loved them, loved them, but there was only one way to do it and some of the promoters around Australia don’t sort of think along those lines. You shouldn’t

---

53 McQuillan interview.
54 Eddie Gibbons interview, Warrnambool, 15 August 1978.
57 Bracken interview.
have two Aboriginals fighting if possible, because (people like Dad you know he was a superstar at this) two boongs fighting really don't give a bugger who wins, well subconsciously, whether they're doing it consciously or not doesn't matter...We used to have a white guy the bad buy and a little dark bloke the good guy, quiet and unassuming. The Australians love the underdog.

[Why did you always pick the white guy to be the rough bad guy? I asked]

Because the Aboriginal blokes used to be nice quiet little fellows, not all of them, but the majority of them were nice quiet unassuming little blokes, not loud-mouthed and so on...The crowd loved them not knowing that it was not true as could be, but very, very entertaining, extremely entertaining.\(^{58}\)

Aboriginal tent boxers were simultaneously victims and agents of prevailing racial stereotypes. They were hired because they were dark-skinned and 'wild looking blokes' who would elicit stereotypical responses in the white crowds, who would pay to see them fight and hopefully be beaten. Yet the scripts of the tent theatre allowed them to challenge, manipulate and parody the dominant racial discourse. Aboriginal tent boxers were sometimes good guys and heroes in the dramas acted out on the Board as on the mat. They were also a cohesive part of the mixed race team of the boxing troupe—admired by their bosses, matey with the other boxers. Thus race was transcended by the magnetism of the boxers' own masculinity which impressed the audience, and also by the power of the scripts that constructed often admirable roles for them as gees and troupe boxers.

Many people it seems were taken in by this theatre of tent boxing judging by the crowds and the number of tents that plied the show routes over sixty years. These shows appealed as much to women as to men. Alan Moore estimated forty per cent of the audience inside were women, Alick Jackomos recalled it could be fifty percent, and Jimmy Sharman II said there were 'heaps' of women. Photographic evidence of crowds outside the tents reveal a significant proportion of female onlookers. Children were there too—especially boys—some of whom successfully sneaked under the flaps of the tent—despite patrols—as the crowd surged in. Only the decent people who considered the tents too low to be patronised were absent. 'Banjo' Clarke remembered that the banter and challenges between the Board and the pitch would 'get all the crowd stirred up and they'd be racin' to get into the tent. He'd [the showman] con them in just like that. Mass hysterical like, you know—they were conned right in like sheep. Once one started headin' for the gate the rest would follow'.\(^{59}\) And so it went for five or more sessions each show day. Some of the crowd would return session after session so engrossing was the performance. And with each session the Aboriginal boxers felt part of this performance of power—the power of conning, the power of showmanship, and the power of leather laid on flesh.

Once inside the tent the crowd jostled for position. As the fighting began, they began to yell; and push; and shove. Leo White exclaimed in amazement thirty years later, how professional men, businessmen and others 'would go mad in there...they would be screaming and roaring and all that...I'd see a man like who had a lot of blood

\(^{58}\) Moore interview.

pressure, and he'd be jumping up and screaming and roaring and shaking. The atmosphere inside the tent was intense as the crowd pressed in and around the fighters. Boxers sometimes felt the thud of an umbrella on their shoulder as it was wielded by an over-excited fan. Alick Jackomos recalled having his back ripped open in Tasmania by a nail-file wielded by an over-zealous female onlooker. The crowd yelled, their nostrils tantalized by sawdust mingled with sweat, as they and the boxers worked themselves into a lather of activity and emotion. There was nothing quite like it for both boxers and audience.

On the mat

The fighting took place not in a ring with ropes, but on a mat, and not always in a tent, but sometimes behind a hessian fence. Only a few tent owners, such as Harry Paulsen who operated in Tasmania, and Les Renalf, bothered to erect a proper ring. The mat was 22 feet (almost 7m) square (at least in Sharman's tent), with plenty of sawdust underneath. It formed a great training ground said Jimmy Sharman II, 'because you just had to go in and fight, you couldn't back-pedal or run around and try and bounce off the ropes, you just had to stand up and fight and that's how, early in the piece, that's how you learn.' The boss was the referee and he also kept time for the three, three minute rounds.

When two troupe boxers were fighting—one of them being a gee—there were great antics that had been rehearsed and performed many times. The boxers were able to catch a punch on the glove near the face and make it look as if a blow was taken, they could slip and roll with a punch, feign grogginess and wobbly knees, do a somersault after a seemingly big blow and take a dive onto the mat. As Red Mitchell, a South Australian titleholder who worked in the tents during the interwar years with many a gee, recalled:

We used to tear into each other, throwing terrific punches. Many of them were open-handers, landing on the shoulders, time was wasted as one was sent sprawling among the crowd—there were no ropes—and everyone was too excited to note that a round was cut short. I've been down in the sawdust more often than I have on the canvas, but no one would be hurt. But don't mistake me; we gave the crowd good value for money.

Similar staging happened with a local boxer who agreed to be a gee, although the moves may not be as well rehearsed. Alan Moore said that the referee, who was also the tent boss, would talk to the boxers when in the clinches to help the gee work along. All this action further extended the agency of the boxers as they manipulated, conned, and played to the audience.

Things were tougher for the tent boxers when they were up against a smart-fisted local intent on making his reputation by beating a tent boxer. Again, they might be in for a hot time if their opponent had been drinking and was aggressive, although their

---

60 White interview.
61 Jackomos follow-up interview.
62 Sharman interview.
63 White and Clarke interviews.
64 Australian Ring, December 1961.
skills might be impaired. These were known in the game as 'takes'. These opponents were made more formidable by the working rule that the locals had to win, at least early in the day, to encourage more locals to come forward at the next 'house'. To save face, the local challengers had only to be 'on their feet' by the final bell, in order not to lose. Thus the local—tough as he might be for the troupe boxer—was nursed along by the boss-referee. The boss whispered in his tent boxer's ear, in words 'Banjo' Clarke remembered: "take it easy" (looking up at the clock), "take it easy this round" (he would whisper), "let him hit you, then go down, go down" (he would whisper), and sometimes you don't feel like going down." Occasionally the local became even more aggressive if the tent boxer feigned grogginess or went to the canvas, and so the local came in for 'the kill'. It was then that the boxer's performance could be a punishing one.

Still holding 'the party line' in 1978, Jimmy Sharman II told me all the fights were 'fair dinkum'. However, my informants who boxed in the tents admitted otherwise. Jimmy Sharman II, interviewed by me more recently, admitted as much obliquely, adding that to say more would give the game away. However, some fights could become 'fair dinkum'. Even pretend show fights had an element of danger as some punches failed to be slipped and were taken full on. Stan Lowe of Warrnambool, who had over 300 amateur fights said: 'I had about three or four fights in the tents. I didn't like tent fighting. If you are not there to be fair dinkum, you get hurt a lot easier'. 'Banjo' Clarke, his uncle, agreed, chiming in: 'You are there to put on an act, and when you are putting on an act you can't fight properly'.

Most dangerous of all was that tent boxers rarely fought opponents of exactly the same weight and size. At times they opposed men much heavier than themselves. Jackie Ryan, a lightweight (62 kg), recalled having to fight a big pearl diver in North Queensland who weighted about 90 kgs. Ryan, the Queensland champion, intended to flatten him in several scientific punches to avoid trouble, but Sharman told Ryan, the diver had to win the fight. When Ryan protested, Sharman said, 'You want to get back to Brisbane don't you?' So Ryan had to cop it for two rounds. 'I'd have to catch his big right handers two feet out from my body and try to take the impact'. On other occasions a fight got out of hand as both boxers became 'fair dinkum'. At Balmoral in the Western District of Victoria, 'Banjo' Clarke was fighting a local man, who urged on by the crowd, became very aggressive. Clarke responded in kind but was told to take it easy by Harry Johns' tent manager. However, as Clarke came under more pressure, a tent boxer stepped in, took over as referee, and said 'fight it'. Clarke recalled: 'Jesus what a brawl...The two of us got in a clinch and we fell on the ground and he started punching me on the ground. And I got stuck in, I got on top and I was into him. And the people they nearly tore the tent down when I won. They were that savage'.

While Jimmy Sharman II believed tent boxing 'made them men', George Bracken believed some of the troupe boxers were used up in the tents:

---

65 Jackomos interview.
66 'Banjo' Clarke interview.
68 Ryan interview.
69 'Banjo' Clarke interview.
I can remember three or four fellows that were in trouble at the time when I was with them, they ended up punchy you know, nice fellows too, you know, but they ended up punchy, and got on the grog, mainly because they didn't have a bit of finesse to make them good enough to slip into Stadium fights or anything like that, but they were just kept there as knockabouts.70

Although some were damaged by years in the tents it was a good experience for Bracken. He learned how to slip a punch and it showed you what could happen if you didn't have your head screwed on right'.1 Bracken had started in the tents beating the drum, watching his idol Jack Hassen, the Australian lightweight champion, but later when Bracken starred in the tents himself as lightweight champion, Hassen was by then just one of the troupe fighters.

Fortunately most tent boxers came and went after only a few seasons. But Erwin Williams, 'the Black Bomber', a main event fighter in the Melbourne Stadium in his early years, stayed for twenty years in the tents. Although Billy Primmer believed he was a 'little knocked around', Alick Jackomos, a tent wrestler with Sharman, is emphatic that the 'Bomber' was never knocked out, nor did he ever see him knocked to the ground. Both the Bomber's wife at the time, and tent boxer, Buster Weir, agreed that he was never knocked about. All of them confirmed that Williams was a skilled stadium main event fighter who could look after himself. Jackomos and others maintained that the tent promoters looked after their stars.72

Although Sharman and others had a reputation for avoiding damage to their regular and star fighters, some became 'punchy' from a career in boxing of which tent-fighting was but a part. Peter Corris states there were no deaths in Sharman's tents during thousands of fights but ascribes this to good luck rather than good management.73 Alick Jackomos could not recall any major injuries during his time in various tents in the 1940s and 1950s, but saw innumerable cut eyes, cauliflower ears, and admitted a few may have taken too many punches.74

After the bell

The tent performances all but ended in 1971, when new boxing laws were introduced in New South Wales which limited boxers to one fight a week following a medical clearance, and made a month's lay-off mandatory after a knock-out. Sharman's tent was closed down by Jimmy Sharman II in 1971 after sixty years of performing in the business.75 His son, Jimmy Sharman III, later staged performances, but in the theatre world. Other tents folded after the demise of Sharman's troupe except for Fred Brophy's tent which still thrives in outback areas of the North after emerging just at the time the others met their demise. It was almost inevitable that the world of television entertainment, the rise of competing leisure pursuits, and greater sophistication through education, would have led to the demise of most of the tents in any case. The boxing

70 Bracken interview.
71 Bracken interview.
72 Primmer interview, Jackomos follow-up interview, Gardiner and Weir interviews.
73 Corris, Lords of the Ring, pp. 84–85.
74 Jackomos follow-up interview.
tents were part of the old world of English popular sports and pastimes that was being marginalised by modern spectator professionalized sport from the late nineteenth century onwards.76 What then did Aboriginal men get out of tent boxing?

Aboriginal tent boxers inevitably had a mixed experience. They, like all tent boxers, experienced spartan conditions under paternalistic bosses who kept them under tight control—even to the point of managing their wages. There is some evidence that they were paid less than white troupe boxers but whether through racism or lack of assertiveness on their part is unclear. And unlike white tent boxers, they were caught up in a racist discourse that shaped the fights they had, their opponents, and the very outcomes of those fights. Yet there was a strong camaraderie between the tent boxers themselves no matter what their background. And none of the boxers referred to many racial incidents in the tents during their interviews with me. Certainly their performances could work against the racial discourse. Some of them were stars who were lauded by all the audience, and some were posed as the 'good guys' in inter-racial bouts. Tent boxing—and Aboriginal sporting activities in general—created racial ambivalence, at a time when such ambivalence existed in few other social contexts in Australian society.

Tent boxing offered young Aboriginal men the chance to travel, to meet other Aboriginal and white Australians, and to experience the capital cities. As 'Banjo' Clarke commented: 'I think it gave me confidence. To be able to talk to people'.77 It also placed potentially more cash in their pockets than they might have earned at home. Most liked the experience, the travel, the mateship in the tents, the friends made en route. Many even had some degree of affection for the boss which is the usual case in paternal relationships. It was an experience they said they would repeat. They had much the same feelings as soldiers do about war—it was a hard, even dangerous life, but one of intensity and mateship. Also, they contested whites on more or less even ground, and when they beat them they felt triumphant. As Henry Collins remarked of boxing whites in non-tent tournaments at Kingaroy in Queensland: 'I felt good when I knocked white blokes out. I felt good. I knew I was boss in the boxing ring'.78

Above all, the nature of tent boxing as a performance in which they were key players is crucial to understanding their experience. Aboriginal tent boxers were an active and indispensable part of a confidence-trick that made them feel superior to the white audience being gulled. They also became heroes to their own people, who turned out to see them on the line-up board or who claimed a connection to them. Jimmy Sharman I stated in 1946: 'in Queensland, where we strike most Aboriginal fighters, it became a joke the way they all claimed relationship to Jerry Jerome'.79 And they remained heroes to those who listened to their yarns of the tour when they returned home and for years afterwards. In this way boxing formed part of an Aboriginal rendering of their post-white contact history. As performers, Aboriginal tent boxers travelled the country and played roles which reshaped their existing self-image as

77 'Banjo' Clarke interview.
78 Collins interview.
79 Sporting Globe, 30 March 1946.
victims, into something more positive. In these performances they crafted their bodies into that of the fighter. They covered themselves in silken shorts and flashy robes, and paraded the Board to the beat of drums, as men to be reckoned with. From that came—if they escaped damage on the mat—a sense of themselves that was different to the image they had developed back on the mission or in the fringe camp. As Peter Berger has written: 'identity is not something "given", but is bestowed in acts of social recognition.'* These Aboriginal men were recognized by themselves and others, both black and white, as someone: they were boxers! This role was reaffirmed every time they donned their robes, mounted the line-up board, stepped onto the mat and shaped up. To a degree, through memory and stories, they have carried that image of themselves evermore.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Inga Clendinnen, Alick Jackomos and Bill Murray for their perceptive and enthusiastic comments on drafts of this article. Alick Jackamos has since become a collaborator on a pictorial history of tent boxing with me, soon to be published as a book.

Richard Broome teaches Aboriginal and Australian history at La Trobe University. He is the author of numerous articles and five books, including Aboriginal Australians (1981, 1994) and with Alick Jackamos, Sideshow Alley (in press). He is currently writing a history of Koori people in Victoria.

References

Argus, 18 April 1936.
Australian Ring, December 1961


Bracken, George. Interview with the author, Sydney, 23 August 1978.


Clarke, 'Banjo' Henry. Interview with the author, Warrnambool, 14 August 1978.

Clarke, 'Muscles' Ray. Interview with the author, Warrnambool, 16 August 1978.


Collins, Henry. Interview with the author, Cherbourg, 6 January 1979.

*Commonwealth Year Book*, no. 45, 1959.


Gardiner, Iris. Interview with the author, Melbourne, 18 August 1995.


Jackomos, Alick. Interview with the author, Melbourne, 28 November 1979 and follow-up interview 8 November 1994.


McQuillan, Ern. Interview with the author, Sydney, 29 August 1978.


Moore, Alan. Interview with the author, Brisbane, 29 August 1978.


*Ring Digest*, April 1952.

Ryan, Jackie. Interview with the author, Brisbane, 1 September 1978.

Sharman, Jimmy II. Interview with the author, Sydney, 23 August 1978, follow-up interview, Sydney 3 January 1996.

Sinn [Wills], Bobby. Interview with the author, Brisbane, 1 September 1978.


*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 and 14 November, 15 December 1911.


Weir, Buster. Interview with the author, Melbourne, 14 August 1995.

White, Leo. Interview with the author, Melbourne, 21 January 1979.

Williams, Merv. Interview with the author, Melbourne, 29 July 1977.
Kaurna in Tasmania: A case of mistaken identity

Rob Amery

Until now, a list of some eighty words has been considered to be part of the corpus of material on the languages of Tasmania. Plomley, the most comprehensive source on the documentation of the languages of Tasmania,\(^1\) attributes these Kaurna words, compiled by Charles Robinson, the son of George Augustus Robinson, to the Ben Lomond area of north-east Tasmania.\(^2\)

In this paper I will demonstrate that these eighty words are irrefutably Kaurna, the language of Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains of South Australia. Further, I will put forward a probable explanation as to how these words came to be included within the Robinson papers. Further I will identify the Kaurna woman who was the probable source.

Kaurna words first noticed within Tasmanian materials

Early in 1993, I first noticed the Kaurna word *kauwe* 'water' written as *cow.we* when flicking through Plomley's 1976 *A Word-list of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages*. Over several decades of painstaking work, Plomley has collated almost all of the words ever recorded on the languages of Tasmania. Plomley compiled his wordlist from the records of at least thirty different observers, gathering together all the words from the various sources and listing them under an English headword. So under the word for 'water' for instance, Plomley lists words recorded by these different observers and has taken care to specify the source, location and informant, where such information is available. *Cow.we* seemed out of place amongst the other words recorded for water. It was shorter than most of the other Tasmanian words which are often polysyllabic. Variants of other terms for water were given by a number of observers, whereas *cow.we* stood out on its own. Interestingly, other words *lar.cun.er* and *la.un.er* for water which are cognate with other Tasmanian languages are provided also for the Ben Lomond language. No other Tasmanian words for water were remotely similar to *cow.we*. I didn't think much of it at the time. At that stage I suspected that it might have been a Kaurna word that

---

\(^1\) Plomley 1976.

\(^2\) This list of Kaurna words is insignificant in number relative to the total corpus of Tasmanian materials. Plomley (1976) lists some 1400 English head words. Under each of these head words are numerous alternative terms and minor variations of spelling as recorded by the different observers of the various Tasmanian languages.
Figure 1  Kaurna wordlist from Plomley (1976:459–61)

WATER

cow.we
  cow.we
lay.gen.ner
  n / jb : gar : water
lay.kun.ner
  pr : cr : water
lar.cun.er
  bl : cr : water
la.un.ner
  bl : cr : water

legana
  o : jj : fresh water
  e : bmm : fresh water
  n : bmm : fresh water
  — : ar : water
  — : lh : water (fresh)

boue lakade
  dl : gm : eau

liena
  oyb : mj : freshwater
  b : rb : water

lien’ eleebana
  oyb : mj : fresh water

ly.en.na
  oyb : bd : water

lye.an.ner
  e / sl : gar : water

liénérè
  b — s : mj : fresh water

line.nér
  b : st : water

lii (abbreviation)
  b : st : water

lii ner
  br / lr : cr : water

lini
  — : jj : freshwater

lii.nur.ter
  ps : cr : fresh water

lii
  ps : cr : water

ly.arel
  n / pb : gar : water

ly
  — / lj : gar : water

lia
  se : pl : water (fresh)

lia winne
  — : nw : mj : fresh water

liawenee
  b — s : mj : fresh water

liawenee
  b — s : mj : cold water

liech (/w — nw : mj : fresh water

liemkaneck
  oyb : mj : drop of water

lietinna
  oyb : mj : cold water

lee.na
  oyb : bd : water

leena
  b : rb : water

leni
  e : bm : water

lerui
  e : jj : fresh water

li l.onghaté
  — : nw : mj : fresh water

me.nude.de.ker
  wp : gar : water

mo.ked.ner
  o / min : gar : water

mökkenur
  — : sn : water

mökkinur
  wöörünar

mökka
  — : sn : bring the water

mookaria
  oyb : sc : water

mikzany
  b — s : mj : drop of water

moker
  — : s : mj : water

moker (x)
  — : s : mj : water

moka
  n : jj : fresh water

ch : bm : fresh water
  pd : gar : water
  mho : cu : water, water vessel
  — : jj : fresh water
  w : bm : fresh water
  — : lh : water (fresh)
  mogo
  w : jj : fresh water
  wc : gar : water
  cg : gar : water
  wc : gar : water
  ri : gar : water
  ri : gar : water

(a) Running water
kukkamena
  kukkamena meena
  oyb : mj : trickle

lia tarigtena
  oyb : mj : flow

lia teruttena
  truggara
  — : s : mj : trickle

(b) Warm water
lay.gun.ner
  lay.gun.ner tow.érer.tune.ner
  cp : gar : water boil, water hot

lialuguhrana
  lialuguhrana
  — : s : mj : warm water

liena
  liena peonya
  oyb : mj : warm water

liena
  liena peonyack
  oyb : mj : warm water

(c) Wash (to)
leg úrnér
  war.ân.le.nig.ger.ér
  b : st : wash

legûrnér
  — : sn : wash
had been introduced to Tasmania by Tasmanian women or sealers who had associated with Kaurna women on Kangaroo Island.

During the course of 1994, again I had cause to work from Plomley. I noticed that a number of other words collated by Plomley were similar in form and meaning to Kaurna words. Words like you.co 'whaleboat', wal.le 'house', me.you 'man' and tin.to 'sun' quickly came to my attention. None of these words bore any relationship to other Tasmanian words either. So I began to make a more methodical search, page by page. I soon realised that all the Kaurna words were said to come from the same region, Ben Lomond, in north eastern Tasmania, with the recording attributed to either Charles Robinson or George Augustus Robinson. I found that I was often able to predict which word within a given list was a Kaurna word, irrespective of whether I was familiar with that particular Kaurna word or not.

Some of these words stood out from the corpus of Tasmanian words in other respects too. A number began with the letter i, yet Tasmanian words beginning with i are exceedingly rare. They are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robinson's Kaurna</th>
<th>Kaurna, according to Teichelmann &amp; Schürmann (1840)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.tho</td>
<td>'give' ngaityo 'mine'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.tho</td>
<td>'me' ngaityo 'mine'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.char.ne</td>
<td>'tired' feeble; tired ngaityanna 'weak; faint'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.char.le</td>
<td>'father' ngaityerli 'my father'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.chie</td>
<td>'mother' ngaityai 'my mother'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.chu.ung.er</td>
<td>'brother' ngaityo yunga 'my brother'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.chi.yuck.er.nu</td>
<td>'sister' ngaityo yakkana 'my sister'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.thoe.ar.mi.ther</td>
<td>'my wife' ngaityo ngammaitya 'my woman'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.thoe.moker.un.der.re</td>
<td>'forget' ngaityo mukandari 'I forgot mine'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The term given for 'forget' is absolutely convincing because it consists of several meaningful parts in Kaurna. The relationship terms too are complex and involve the word ngaityo 'my' used in combination with another word. For instance, Robinson's i.char.le 'father' is equivalent to the Kaurna word ngaityerli which is glossed by Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) as 'my father; contraction of ngaityo yerli [ngaityo 'my' yerli 'father']'. Further, nin.co.ar.mi.ther 'your wife' = ninko ngammaitya 'your woman' contrasts with i.thoe.ar.mi.ther = ngaityo ngammaitya 'my woman' above, thus adding further weight to the argument.

---

1 Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840), which includes approximately 2,000 vocabulary entries, and Teichelmann (1857) are the most comprehensive and reliable sources on the Kaurna language. A comparison with modern recordings in neighbouring related languages (eg Nukunun) indicates that they represented most but not all sounds in the Kaurna language and were reasonably consistent in their spellings. Accordingly, Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840), henceforth abbreviated to T&S (1840), is used as the point of reference for comparison with Robinson's wordlist.

2 It is easy to imagine how confusion between 'give' and 'mine' might arise. Robinson might have been gesturing with a motion of the arm towards himself in trying to elicit the word for 'give' whilst this might have been misinterpreted by Kalloongoo as 'mine'.

3 Robinson's 'mother' is equivalent to the Kaurna word ngaityai which is glossed by Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) as 'my mother; contraction of ngaityo yerli [ngaityo 'my' yerli 'father']'. Further, nin.co.ar.mi.ther 'your wife' = ninko ngammaitya 'your woman' contrasts with i.thoe.ar.mi.ther = ngaityo ngammaitya 'my woman' above, thus adding further weight to the argument.
Furthermore, a great many Tasmanian words commence with l and r. However, Kaurna words never begin with l and r. As I had observed with _cow._we many of the other Kaurna words were also short two syllable words. Tasmanian words are more often three syllables or longer, though two syllable words are certainly present.

Most importantly however, the Kaurna words usually bore no relationship whatsoever to the other Tasmanian words recorded for that particular item. Plomley lists 56 of the 80 words separately. Where he has associated the Kaurna word with other Tasmanian words, the resemblance is usually not close. For instance, Plomley has associated Kaurna _wung.car.ne_ 'speak' (T & S wanggandi) with Oyster Bay _munkannára_ 'eloquent'. These words are not especially close in either form or meaning. Kaurna _yar.ter_ 'country' is listed with _troun.ter, trout.ter_ and _troune_, presumably on the basis of the end of the word. This is one of the few cases where the Kaurna word is grouped together with a Ben Lomond word. So _yar.ter_ and _troune_ 'country' have been regarded as variants of the _same word_ in the _same language_ by Plomley, yet there is nothing in common between the two forms. All the vowels and the consonants are different.

The Kaurna word _wilto_ 'hawk' (T&S, 1840) is perhaps the closest in form and meaning to Plomley’s groupings which involve a Kaurna word recorded by Robinson:

| wil.to.de | b: gar | 'hawk' |
| weelaty  | b - s: mj | 'eagle' |
| will.to  | bl: cr | 'hawk' |

(= Bruny Island; gar = George Augustus Robinson; b - s = Bruny Island - southern tribes; mj = Joseph Milligan; bl = Ben Lomond; cr = Charles Robinson; T & S = Teichelmann & Schürmann, 1840)

The first two are clearly variants of the same word written with different English conventions representing a word something like [wilati] when written phonetically. Linking _wil.to_ [wiltu] with these two words however involves the introduction of a vowel in between the l and t and a vowel change u -> i. The resemblance is not particularly close.

After making these observations of Plomley (1976), I suspected that the Kaurna words constituted a separate wordlist, so I pursued the original handwritten wordlists held in the Mitchell library in Sydney. I found that the Kaurna words did indeed constitute a separate wordlist (Figures 2,3,4). Below, the Kaurna words transcribed by Robinson are listed according to the order in which they appear in Plomley 1976. Plomley has ordered his wordlists alphabetically according to his English headword.
Figure 2  Handwritten Kaurna wordlists (Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Sydney)
Figure 3  Handwritten Kaurna wordlists (Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Sydney)
Figure 4 Handwritten Kaurna wordlists (Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Sydney)
The nearest identifiable counterpart or related words from Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) are listed alongside each of Robinson’s Kaurna words:

**Robinson's Kaurna Wordlist as compiled by Plomley (1976)**

(\(bl = \text{Ben Lomond}; \ cr = \text{Charles Robinson}; \ gar = \text{George Augustus Robinson}\))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robinson's 'Ben Lomond'</th>
<th>Kaurna (T&amp;S, 1840)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yar.to.yar.to</td>
<td>'baby'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>war.ken.ner</td>
<td>'no good'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will.to</td>
<td>'hawk'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pull.you.ner</td>
<td>'black'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you.co</td>
<td>'whaleboat'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tin.yare.ro</td>
<td>'boy'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cu.re</td>
<td>'not far off'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par.cull.ar</td>
<td>'cold'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caw.y.he</td>
<td>'come'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me.yo.cow.y</td>
<td>'they are coming'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yar.ter</td>
<td>'country'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mu.re.car.ne</td>
<td>'cry'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>win.co.parl.der.re</td>
<td>'dead'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car.thud.er.lo</td>
<td>'long way'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mo.tar.ne</td>
<td>'eat'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.char.le</td>
<td>'father'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.chie</td>
<td>'mother'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.chu.ung.er</td>
<td>'brother'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.chi.yuck.er.nu</td>
<td>'sister'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cull.ar</td>
<td>'fire'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.thoe.moker</td>
<td>'forget'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mun.car.re</td>
<td>'girl'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.tho</td>
<td>'give'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none.ta</td>
<td>'go, go away'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nummi</td>
<td>'good'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mo.in.ter</td>
<td>'hill'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(this word was mis-transcribed by Plomley - should be mo.eu._ter — see original)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me.ther</td>
<td>'hot'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wal.le</td>
<td>'house'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you.ro.rin.ne</td>
<td>'hunt'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bl: cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of Teichelmann & Schürmann's glosses have been reduced or abbreviated for the sake of clarity.
Wat.tar cut.ter 'island' bears some similarity to Gaimard's (1833) wategakal 'island' and a striking resemblance to the Raminjeri word wäteakattauwe 'small rocky island' (Meyer, 1843: 106), though Meyer records another word Kukakungar for 'Kangaroo Island'. -auwe is a productive suffix in Raminjeri meaning 'belonging to'. Kaurna has watte 'middle; midst' and wattingga 'between', so perhaps wat.tar cut.ter means 'in the middle of Kangaroo Island'. However, as we shall see, George Augustus Robinson records an almost identical form wat.ter.ker.ter which he also glosses as 'an island'. The etymology of this word is inconclusive.

Whilst Teichelmann & Schürmann's wattewatte is perhaps not too close to Robinson's war.rer, similar words have been recorded in neighbouring languages. Note wara 'rat' in Narrunga and wanda 'rat' in Ngadjuri.

Wyatt lists nanto boorka 'an old hoary male kangaroo'. There is some resemblance to Ngarrindjeri mikurri 'bandicoot (spotted)' (Taplin, 1879: 126) and to the word murucurlu recorded on the inside cover of Sturt's Journal 13/9–30/9/1845 as 'Native name of animal <sic> got from the Natives on the Park land 20th Augt 1845' (noted by David Nash). These resemblances remain inconclusive.

Whilst no similar term was recorded by Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) similar words have been recorded by other observers of Kaurna. Note cur-tah 'scrub, bush, underwood' (Piesse, 1840) and keria 'a forest' (Wyatt).

'Yound' is an English dialectal variation of 'yond' or 'yonder' which would translate as nguntya. Presumably the glossing of this word as 'yound' was the result of a misunderstanding on Robinson's part. Yal. ler.me.yoe definitely looks like a compound where meyu 'man; person' is the second element.
mum. yer  'rain'  bl: cr  manya  'cold; rainy'
car.re.car.re  'get up'  bl: cr  karri karri  'stand up!'
mu.ne.ne  'run'  bl: cr  murrendi  'to go; walk; travel'
clu.po.lar  'salt water'  bl: cr  kopurlo  'sea water'
(two words were mis-transcribed by Plomley—should be cu.po.lar - see original)
un dar.ne  'very ill'  bl: cr  ngandandi  'to be ill; sick; feel pain'
muck.car.ne  'sing'  bl: cr  makkandi  'to shake, quiver in the legs as in dancing'
ta.car-na  'sit down'  bl: cr  tikkarnal  'sit down!' (you plural)
won.ta.ne  'sleep'  bl: cr  wendendi  'to lie down'
underne  'very ill'  bl: cr  ngandandi  'to be ill; sick; feel pain'
muren di  'to go; walk; travel'
kopurlo  'sea water'
(two words were mis-transcribed by Plomley—should be cu.po.lar - see original)

In addition, cue.wer 'crow' appears in the handwritten manuscript, but seems to have been inadvertently omitted by Plomley. It is clearly another representation of kua 'crow' which appears in T&S (1840).

Robinson also records two short sentences, only one of which is included within Plomley (1976):

1. I.tho.nin.to.pie.ar.re.rer.war.rer  'Do you understand my talk?'
cf corresponding Kaurna sentences constructed following similar forms in Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840):

\[
\text{Ngaityo nindo paiarendi warra?} \quad \text{Do you understand my talk?}
\]

and

\[
\text{Ngaityo nindo paiari warra?} \quad \text{Did you understand my talk?}
\]

2. yun.char.le.nin.co.what.te  'What's your name?'

'What's your name?' has been recorded by Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) and Teichelmann (1857) as:

\[
\text{Ngaityo nindo paiari warra?} \quad \text{Did you understand my talk?}
\]

\[
\text{Ngaityo nindo paiari warra?} \quad \text{Did you understand my talk?}
\]

\[
\text{Ngoorto a frog'. Robinson had difficulty in transcribing the initial 'ng' sound. It is just possible that in this instance he wrote it as 'y', though in all other cases he simply left it off.}
None of these accord closely with Robinson's version, though the segment *nin.co* clearly relates to *ninko* 'your'. The German Kaurna sources record the words *narri* 'name' and *mityi* 'name' used by people in the north and at Encounter Bay. However, Wyatt (1879: 21) records *wattte* 'name' in accord with Robinson's *what.te*. That leaves the first half of the expression, *yun.char.le* which bears a slight resemblance to *ngaintya* 'what', remembering that Robinson is unable to transcribe initial 'ng'. There is a suffix in Kaurna -*rli* 'to resemble; -like'. Perhaps Robinson's *yun.char.le* is equivalent to *ngaintyarli* 'which might translate as what like?'. However, this form with the -*rli* suffix attached is not found in any of the Kaurna sources.

Almost all the words recorded in Robinson's wordlist have clear and readily identifiable counterparts in Kaurna. However, there are a few words eg. *war.rar.te* 'tadpole' and *mo.ker mo.ker* 'kangaroo rat' for which terms were never recorded by Teichelmann & Schurmann (1840) or by other observers. Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) record *kanto* 'bullfrog' but did not record *yulto* 'frog', which appears in Robinson.

For most of these vocabulary items appearing on pages 159-164 of the Robinson manuscripts, another Ben Lomond word is also recorded by Charles Robinson in addition to the Kaurna word. The Kaurna words appear quite out of place within the wordlists published by Plomley for the reasons given earlier. The true Ben Lomond words are more similar to other Tasmanian words and many have clear cognates with other Tasmanian languages. For example, Charles Robinson gives both *le.brune* and *zoa.le* for 'house'. *Le.brun.ne* is clearly cognate with words recorded by a number of observers as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GA Robinson</th>
<th>lee.brun.ne</th>
<th>'hut, house'</th>
<th>(Piper River, NE Tas)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GA Robinson</td>
<td>lee.brun.ne</td>
<td>'hut'</td>
<td>(Port Dalrymple, Nth Tas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA Robinson</td>
<td>lee.brun.ne</td>
<td>'house'</td>
<td>(eastern tribes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA Robinson</td>
<td>le.brun.ne</td>
<td>'hut'</td>
<td>(northern tribes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterling</td>
<td>leebrine</td>
<td>'house'</td>
<td>(Piper River)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milligan</td>
<td>leprena</td>
<td>'house, hut;'</td>
<td>(Oyster Bay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorgenson</td>
<td>leprena</td>
<td>'hut'</td>
<td>(eastern tribes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backhouse</td>
<td>lepreenie</td>
<td>'breakwind, house, hut, place of rest'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker</td>
<td>lyprennny</td>
<td>'house'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milligan</td>
<td>lebrina, lebra</td>
<td>'house, hut;'</td>
<td>(west. or northwestern tribes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterling</td>
<td>lo'penarne</td>
<td>'house'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorgenson</td>
<td>tama lebirinna</td>
<td>'hut'</td>
<td>(northern tribes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorgenson</td>
<td>tama lebeerinna</td>
<td>'breakwind, hut'</td>
<td>(Circular Head, NW Tas)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numerous other words for 'house' are recorded from across Tasmania, but none of them are anything like *wal.le* 'house'.

Similarly, Charles Robinson gives both *te.wer.rut.len.ner* 'wind' and *war.re* 'wind' as Ben Lomond words. *Te.wer.rut.len.ner* is clearly related to words recorded by other observers, but *war.re* 'wind' stands out on its own.
The evidence pointing to these words cited above being Kaurna is very strong indeed. The morphological evidence discussed on page 2 is overwhelming. Even the minimal sentence data provided is analysable to a large extent. This added to the fact that almost every word occurring in the list can be accounted for with a clear counterpart in Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) provides irrefutable evidence that the wordlist in question is in fact Kaurna.

The context in which Robinson's Kaurna wordlist was recorded

Plomley attributes the recording of thirteen wordlists to Charles Robinson, including two which he says belong to the Ben Lomond area of north-east Tasmania. These vocabularies appear in notebooks and on sheets of paper. Plomley observes that in relation to Charles Robinson's materials 'it should be noted that the lists are not always clearly labelled as to tribal origin (and possibly are not always properly associated in the collation), and that some are not labelled at all'.

Robinson's Kaurna wordlist is compiled on pages 159, 160, 163 and 164 of the Robinson Papers Volume 64, Part 6. There is in fact no indication on these manuscript pages themselves as to when, where and from whom the words were recorded and which language they were thought to be. However, within the same volume on preceding pages, in what appears to be the same handwriting (i.e. Charles'), the wordlist on page 101 is headed 'Benlomond' with the later addition in George Augustus Robinson's handwriting 'Jan' 1838 F.I.' and on page 105 'Charles'. Plomley notes this (1976: 21) and has assumed, perhaps on the basis of these notations on preceding pages, that the Kaurna words also belong to the Ben Lomond area. Jumbling and re-ordering of the original manuscript has perhaps also contributed to the mis-identification of the Kaurna wordlist. Whilst Plomley attributes the majority of the Kaurna words to Charles Robinson, several are attributed to his father George Augustus Robinson. This is curious as all the words belong to the same wordlist and are written in the same handwriting which is definitely not that of George Augustus Robinson.

According to Plomley, Charles Robinson arrived in Tasmania in 1826 at the age of nine years. He accompanied his father on expeditions to round up the remaining Tasmanians in 1830, 1832 and 1833/34. He then lived on Flinders Island with his father, who was appointed commandant of Wybalenna, the Flinders Island Aboriginal

---

14 These page numbers have been written over the top of the original page numbers which are faint and illegible. Page 163 for instance, appears to have been originally numbered 42.
15 The numbering of Charles Robinson's wordlists is confusing. Some pages have three different numbers on them. It would appear that the page numbers provided here have been added at a later date. In the 'Benlomond Jan 1838 F.I.' wordlist referred to here bears the original numbering of pages 1 to 10 numbered in the opposite corners as in an open notebook. The numbers added later are 101 to 104, 113–114, 117–118, 115–116 in that order, thus jumbling the original ordering of the wordlist. Library microfilm frame numbers at the bottom of the pages are 837–840, 849–850, 853–854, 851–852 following the same sequence of the numbers added later.
settlement, from October 1835 to February 1839. Charles Robinson's wordlists were most likely compiled at Wybalenna from material elicited from residents there.

But how did so many Kaurna words come to be recorded at Flinders Island and become part of the Tasmanian corpus? To answer this question we must turn to history and Robinson's journals in particular.

The historical context

Frequent movements of Aboriginal people from Albany to Bass Strait, and occasionally even further afield were associated with the frenzied activities of sealers and whalers during the early part of the nineteenth century.\(^{18}\) This activity actually preceded any official white settlement in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.\(^{19}\) The sealers obtained Aboriginal women for their sexual favours but also for their assistance in hunting of seals and other game and to collect bush foods for them. Some women were kept in a state of slavery. The women were obtained chiefly from Tasmania, but also from Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Occasionally Aboriginal men were also living with sealers and engaged in their sealing activities, including a number of Aboriginal men from Port Jackson (Sydney). Hence, there was frequent contact between indigenous Tasmanians and Kaurna people from the coastal region south of Adelaide as well as with members of other Aboriginal groups from the southern coasts of mainland Australia.

\(^{18}\) Whaling and sealing activity extended as far as Amsterdam and St Paul Islands, roughly midway between Western Australia and South Africa in the west and to the South Island of New Zealand and its surrounding islands in the east. It is known that occasionally Tasmanian women accompanied sealers to Amsterdam and St Paul Islands in the Indian Ocean. For instance, five Tasmanian women and three children accompanied sealers to St Paul on the *Hunter* in 1825. From St Paul the women went to Ile de France (Mauritius). One woman and a child died there. Another child was allowed to remain there with his father, a sealer. The other women and child returned to Tasmania via Sydney in March 1827. (Plomley, 1987, p. 280) In 1832 Backhouse, a Quaker who visited Flinders Island, came across some Tasmanian women who knew some French which they had learned in Mauritius. (Plomley, 1966, p. 686)

\(^{19}\) The sealing industry in the Southern Ocean closely followed Flinders' and Bass's salvage mission in 1797 of the *Sydney Cove*, wrecked in the Furneaux Islands in Bass Strait. On his return to Port Jackson, Flinders reported on the abundance of fur seals on islands in Bass Strait (Plomley & Henley, 1990, p. 2). The first Australian sealing vessel operating in Bass Strait sailed in 1798 (Cumpston, 1970, p. 73) The sealers and whalers themselves seem to have left no written records chronicling their activities. Most were illiterate. However life in the southern oceans can be pieced together from the writings of passing observers and records of shipping movements to and from the ports of Sydney and Hobart. Cumpston (1970) documents several voyages each year to Kangaroo Island by sealers and whalers from 1803 onwards when the American ship, the *Union* sailed to Kangaroo Island and spent more than four months there whilst building a second ship and sheltering from the winter. It is possible that sealing vessels could have visited Kangaroo Island prior to its 'discovery' by Flinders in 1802 (Nunn, 1989, p. 11f). An American ship, the *Elligood* is known to have reached King George Sound (Albany) in 1800 and it is likely that the ship also visited Kangaroo Island (Cumpston, 1970, p. 7). The larger American Nantucket ships provided a more or less reliable supply line and transport for the sealers, though many sealers traversed the southern ocean along vast stretches of the Australian coast in open whale boats. Much of what we know about the activities of the sealers comes from the journals of George Augustus Robinson published by Plomley (1966; 1987).
Kangaroo Island was visited frequently by sealers, as it was the main source of salt used for curing the seal skins. It was established as a base for unruly elements of the sealing industry, some of whom were runaway convicts. Because Kangaroo Island was beyond the reach of the law and because it appears to have been uninhabited by Aboriginal people for the last 2,000 years, it served as a safe haven for the sealers, who were able to kidnap Aboriginal women from Tasmania and the mainland and then retreat there without fear of reprisal from the women's husbands and kin. We know for sure that both Tasmanian women and Kaurna women were present on Kangaroo Island. Most likely the first Aboriginal women on Kangaroo Island were Tasmanians. Peron (1816) notes that 'the traders, who visited the island [Kangaroo Island] brought with them a Tasmanian lubra for a consideration'. The captain of a passing ship [Sutherland] reported in 1819 that Europeans living on Kangaroo Island who 'have carried their daring acts to an extreme, venturing on the mainland in their boats and seizing on the natives, particularly the women, and keeping them in a state of slavery, cruelly treating them on every trifling occasion'. Later, it would appear that Kaurna women were the most numerous amongst the Aboriginal women on Kangaroo Island as the result of local kidnapping operations carried out on the mainland, principally in the Rapid Bay–Cape Jervis region where the coast was more sheltered. Like the Tasmanian women, South Australian women were also transported over a vast area across the Southern Ocean. Specific accounts probably represent just the 'tip of the iceberg' since few accounts were written and few records survive from this era.

Philip Clarke discusses the early interaction between the sealers and whalers and Aborigines in the southern oceans, focussing on Kangaroo Island. He notes that 'in 1820, there were an estimated fifty sealers with about a hundred Aboriginal wives and children, living in the Bass Straits to Kangaroo Island region'.

Some of the Kaurna women kidnapped from the southern Kaurna region ended up living with sealers in Bass Strait. In 1831, Robinson noted that there were Aboriginal

---

21 In 1822 a sealer was encountered on the South Island of New Zealand. 'The man Stuart had come from Kangaroo Island with a wife of the country and two children to settle in New Zealand; but having with his family been taken prisoner by the natives [Maoris], he had adopted their customs [and] was employed by the chiefs...as a pilot...for finding all the different hiding places of the Americans' (Cumpston, 1970, p. 63). It is unclear exactly when this woman, likely to have been a Kaurna woman, went to New Zealand. It is also known that in 1823 another woman from Kangaroo Island (possibly a Kaurna woman) was stranded on the South Island of New Zealand for a period of eight months with her small child. The other members of her sealing party belonging to an American ship, the General Gates, had been killed by Maoris. This South Australian woman returned to Sydney in April 1824. (Cumpston, 1970, p. 66). It is possible that these two accounts refer to the same woman, though the dates suggest otherwise.
22 Clarke 1994: 3.
Figure 5  The extent of sealing in the Southern Ocean
women from Kangaroo Island present on islands in the Kents Group in the eastern Bass Straits, north of Flinders Island. One of these women, Emue or Emma, was a Kaurna woman who was living with a sealer named John Anderson, alias Abyssinia Jack. Anderson told Robinson that:

[he] has a black woman living with him, which he got from off the main on the coast of New Holland opposite to Kangaroo Island and has lived with her ever since. Says he has ten children by her, five of whom are alive. Got a black boy from the main, son to this woman, about four years since.

On 23rd July 1836, Robinson reports that:

Corporal Ramsay returned to the settlement from the Sisters Islands [immediately to the north of Flinders Island] having removed the sealers, who offered no resistance. They had been on the islands about a fortnight...They had two boats. Abyssinia Jack had charge of one with some Hew Holland women and also VDL. [Tasmanian] women named [ ]. The New Holland women were the same that had been stolen from their country adjacent to Kangaroo Island by George Meredith jnr of Oyster Bay...The sealers had several halfcaste children on board of their boats. There were three men in the boat, Abyssinia Jack, Everett and another...Abyssinia Jack and another sealer stop on Woody Island. They reported that there was three men on Gun Carriage [island adjacent to Woody Island in between Flinders and Cape Barren Islands]. They had with them several New Holland women.

In 1837 Emue was still living with Anderson, then on Woody Island, in between Flinders and Cape Barren Island. Robinson's journal entry of 10 January 1837 contains the following:

Woody Isle:

Abyssinia Jack and three women native of New Holland; one with Everett one infant; with Abyssinia a woman Emue and three children; a woman native of Spencers Gulf has been left by Dutton, this woman has a boy by a black man, she wishes to leave the sealers.

This latter woman, Kalloongoo, also named Sarah by the sealers and renamed Charlotte by Robinson, is crucial to the story of Robinson's Kaurna wordlist. Plomley's annotations to Robinson's journal for 1 June 1837 note that:

Corporal Miller left the settlement on the morning of 31 May for Woody Island and reached there that evening. He was accompanied by two aboriginal women, Rebecca and Matilda. On arrival at Woody Island, Miller interviewed the one sealer there, John Anderson, who told him that sometimes another sealer lived there too, but that he had 'gone to port'. There were two native women and three children on the island, of whom one woman and two children belonged to Anderson. The other woman, after talking to the women from the settlement, was willing to quit the island on the understanding that she would be conveyed to her own country, i.e. New Holland. She was known as Sarah or Charlotte, and was about twenty years old.

---

23 Robinson in Plomley; 1966: 327, 335.
On June 1st 1837, Kalloongoo was brought to Robinson's settlement at Flinder's Island and remained there until the 25 February 1839 when she was taken by Robinson to Port Phillip (Melbourne). Whilst at Flinders Island, Kalloongoo lived in Robinson's house and worked for him as a domestic servant, and thus is the most likely source of the Kaurna wordlist. It is most likely that Charles Robinson recorded the wordlist somewhere between June 1837 and February 1839, as he was in constant contact with her during this period.

On arrival at Flinders Island, Kalloongoo gave a lengthy account to Robinson of how she was kidnapped and her subsequent life with sealers on Kangaroo Island and in Bass Strait. In addition she provided specific details of her origins. Her interview with Robinson, as recorded in Robinson's journal for June 2nd 1837, is provided here in full:

Interrogated the woman who arrived last night from Woody Island; result as follows—(1) KAL.LOON.GOO, (2) COW.WER.PITE.YER, (3) WIN.DEER.RER alias Sarah an aboriginal female of New Holland, the point opposite to Kangaroo Island, the west point of Port Lincoln. Was forcibly taken from her country by a sealer named James Allan who in company with another sealer Bill Johnson (this man was drowned subsequent to my visit to Port Philip) conveyed her across to Kangaroo Island where she remained for a considerable time until she was seized upon by Johnson and forced on board the schooner Henry J Griffith owner and master and brought to the straits, when Johnson sold her to Bill Dutton, who had subsequently abandoned her. She had a child by Dutton a girl which he took away with him. The woman states that at the time she was seized and torn from her country, Allan the sealer was led or guided to her encampment and where her mother and sister then was by two blackfellows her countrymen but not her tribe and who had been living with the sealers on the island [Kangaroo Island]. Said the blackfellows came sneaking and laid hold of my hand; the other girl ran away. The white man put a rope around my neck like a dog, tie up my hands. We slept in the bush one night and they then tied my legs. In the morning we went to the boat. They took me then to Kangaroo Island. She remained there a long time until she was brought away in the schooner [Henry owned by J. Griffith] to the straits. She said there were several New Holland [mainlander] black men on Kangaroo Island. Said two of them died from eating seal; her brother died also from eating seal. Said the sealers beat the black women plenty; they cut a piece of flesh off a woman's buttock; cut off a boy's ear, Emue's boy. This woman [Emue] is now on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. The boy died in consequence of his wounds. They cut them with broad sealer's knives. Said they tied them up and beat them and beat them with ropes. Bill Dutton beat her plenty. Said the sealers got drunk plenty and women get drunk too. Said the country where she came from was called BAT.BUN.GER [Patpangga = Rapid Bay] YANG.GAL.LALE.LAR [Yankalilla]. It is situate at the west point of St. Vincents Gulf. Said that Emue's brother was her husband. It is on the sea coast; there is a long sandy beach with three rivers. MAN.NUNE.GAR is the name of the country where she was born. Kangaroo island is called DIRKI.YER.TUN.GER.YER.TER; WAT.ER.KER.TER, an island. (YAR.PER, a hole; called the hole in the cartilage of her nose YAR.PER.) (1) WHIRLE (2) WHIR.LE, house. Fire, KIR.LER. Wood, (1) NAR.RER (2) NAR.RAR.

28 This account of cruelty given by Kalloongoo is closely corroborated by Anderson's and Constable Munro's versions of the same events documented by Robinson some years earlier in 1831 (Plomley ed. 1966, p. 357, 360, 462, 1010).
This aboriginal female of NH KAL LOON GOO has a hole through the cartilage of her nose. She relates the following circumstances in reference to her removal from Kangaroo Island. She said one day the schooner *Henry* John Griffith master and owner came to Kangaroo Island. Allan was away at this time at another part of the island. Said that Johnson tied her hands and feet and put her on board of the schooner, when he and Harry Wally came away in the schooner to the islands in the straits. A sealer Harry Wally assisted in tying her. Subsequently Johnson sold her to Bill Dutton by whom she had a female child a girl. She had had a male child by a Sydney black a sealer. This child is the one now with her and is about five years of age. Bill Dutton stopped on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. He has left about ten moons, has gone away and married a white woman. He took his child the girl with him. She had heard this. He has gone whaling. The boy was born at a rock near to the Julians. She had the girl first by Bill Dutton. Said she was a big girl when Allan took her away from her own country. In answer to a question, ‘do you like this place’, she said ‘yes’! ‘Do you want to go to Woody Island?’, ‘no, it is no good place, there is nothing there at all’. She got little to eat. Bill Dutton beat her with a rope. She was glad she had got away. In answer to several questions about God she answered she never learnt him, she did not know. The woman’s boy is about five years of age and is very interesting child. The features are European cast, thin lips and small features, and appears intelligent. So also does the mother. The woman’s features are similar to the boy’s. So soon as it was known at the native settlement that a New Holland woman had arrived all the native inhabitants were in motion and an evident excitement was created. Several of the native men came to my quarters but the greater part kept away from bashfulness. Before breakfast I walked with her to the native cottages and introduced her to the aborigines, and she met with a hearty welcome from those generous and simple hearted people. She appeared much delighted with her reception and there appeared a reciprocal feeling between this stranger and the resident aborigines. She brought a bitch and two pups with her. This morning she drew her rations from the store and was put on the strength of the establishment from yesterday the first of June inst. Much curiosity prevailed on the part of the aborigines, and constant visits was made throughout the day at my house to see the stranger. About noon her son arrived in the boat. I shewed the various kinds of work performed by the male aborigines, the cultivated land, the fencing, the road making, and the large heap of grass collected by the females, their knitting and domestic work, with the whole of which she appeared highly delighted and said she should like to learn to work like them. At 6 pm she accompanied me to the evening school and here she appeared to be quite overcome with astonishment at what she witnessed. This was a new scene, an epocha she had not possible conceived. Here she beheld people of her own colour engaged at learning what she could not comprehend, native children teaching native men and women. Heard the whole in one united chorus singing the praises of God, of that being of whom she had not heard and of whom she acknowledged she had not the slightest conception. All was wonder to her poor untutored mind. I shall not easily forget with what astonishment she looked when the congregation began to sing, and it appeared equally a matter of surprise to her when the native men stood up to pray. She said she wished to learn and I instructed her in the alphabet, I suppose the first time in her life.
3 June Sat

This morning the aboriginal female of New Holland was brought to the office and interrogated by the Commandant in the presence of the storekeeper Mr L Dickenson and Mr Clark the catechist and which was signed by those gentlemen and is herewith annexed by which it will be seen that this poor creature has been cruelly treated and left in total ignorance of the Being of a God. She made the statement and answered the questions without the least embarrassment....This evening Charlotte was again surprised at what she witnessed at our family worship. On the arrival of this woman a new name was given her i.e. Charlotte in lieu of Sarah by which latter she was called by the sealers, and it has been my practice to give new names to all who join the settlement from this class of individuals. She is very docile and quiet and appears industrious. She this day cleaned out my office.29

Kalloongoo, a Kaurna woman from the region south of Adelaide, and not from Port Lincoln

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to clear up a point of confusion inherent in Robinson's journal entry, and perpetuated in a number of secondary sources published since. Robinson's interview with Kalloongoo quoted above begins with the statement that 'KAL.LOON.GOO, (2) COW.WER.PITE.YER, (3) WIN.DEER.RER alias Sarah [is] an aboriginal female of New Holland, the point opposite to Kangaroo Island, the west point of Port Lincoln'. Cumpston referring to this journal entry of Robinson's reiterates that 'Dutton had obtained a New Holland woman (from Port Lincoln) named Kal.loong.oo (Sarah/Charlotte)'.30 Barwick also referring to Robinson's journal, this time for 9th January 1837, makes the statement that two of the women on Gun Carriage Island in the Furneaux Group between Flinders and Cape Barren Islands 'were certainly from Port Lincoln'31 and cites personal communication with Plomley that 'Kalloongoo or Sarah (then renamed Charlotte) was originally kidnapped from Port Lincoln (where she had been married to a brother of the woman Emue or Emme who became the wife of the Abyssinia Jack' alias John Anderson').32 Mollison, also drawing on Robinson's journals, refers to Kalloongoo as coming from Port Lincoln.33

However, later in the interview with Robinson, Kalloongoo 'said the country where she came from was called BAT.BUN.GER [Patpangga = Rapid Bay] YANG.GAL. LALE.LAR [Yankalilla]. It is situate at the west point of St. Vincents Gulf. Rapid Bay and Yankalilla are located to the south of Adelaide, north of Cape Jervis. The reference to Kalloongoo coming from Port Lincoln then is probably due to Robinson's lack of knowledge of the geography of the South Australian coast. Robinson recorded this interview in 1837, one year after the establishment of the South Australian colony, when Port Lincoln was nothing more than a name and a dot on a map. The town of Port Lincoln was not surveyed until 1840.

31 Barwick 1985, p. 212.
32 Barwick 1985, p. 231.
33 Mollison 1976.
The language data recorded by Robinson in this interview further confirms that Kalloongoo was a Kaurna speaker. The words recorded are readily identifiable as Kaurna words recorded by Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robinson's Journal</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>T &amp; S (1840)</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yap.per</td>
<td>'a hole'</td>
<td>yappa</td>
<td>'hole'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whirle; whir. le</td>
<td>'house'</td>
<td>wodli③⁴</td>
<td>'house'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kir.ler</td>
<td>'fire'</td>
<td>gadla③⁵</td>
<td>'fire'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nar.rer; nar.rar</td>
<td>'wood'</td>
<td>ngarra</td>
<td>'piece of burnt wood, stump, stick'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The name recorded for Kangaroo Island, Dirki.yer.tun.ger.yer.ter, is possibly a misunderstanding. Kalloongoo might have said tikki yertangga yerta 'lived on the land (on) the land', possibly meaning that she came from the mainland. Wat.tar.cut.ter is also recorded for 'an island' in Charles Robinson's wordlist, whilst a similar form watttegakal is given by Gaimard (1833) for 'island'. Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) document Karta as the name for Kangaroo Island, though they did not record a word for 'island' in general.

James Allen, Kalloongoo's abductor and master on Kangaroo Island, was engaged in the sealing industry from 1817. However, she must have been kidnapped some time after 1823 since her co-abductor, William Johnson was on board a sealing vessel, the Alligator in 1823. In 1831, Johnson told Robinson that he had been sealing for seven to nine years. She would have been transported from Kangaroo Island to Bass Strait aboard the Henry sometime between March 1829 and March 1834. We can say this because the Henry was launched in 1827 and made her first voyage to Kangaroo Island in March 1829. The Henry made at least seven voyages to Kangaroo Island before she was wrecked at Portland in September 1834.

We can use additional information to pin down the date even further. Plomley and Henley estimate that Sophia, Kalloongoo's daughter to Bill Dutton of Portland, was born about 1830. Dutton first went sealing in 1828 and was landed at Portland Bay (in Victoria) in December of that year. Note that in 1837, Robinson reported that at the time Kalloongoo had a son, Johnny Franklin, who was estimated to have been five years old, so Johnny Franklin would have been born in about 1832. It is also known from Kalloongoo's interview that Johnny Franklin was born on a rock near the Julia Percy Islands near Portland and that Sophia, was born before Johnny Franklin. So for Sophia

---

③ Non pre-stopped forms recorded in other sources: worli 'house' (Teichelmann, 1857); wer-lie 'house' (Williams, 1840); werle 'house' (Wyatt, 1879); walle 'house' (Gaimard, 1833) are closer to Robinson's whirle 'house'.
④ Similarly, other observers record non pre-stopped forms garla 'fire' (Teichelmann, 1857); cur-la 'fire' (Williams, 1840); kerla 'firewood' (Wyatt, 1879) again more closely approximating Robinson's kir.ler 'fire'.
⑤ Plomley, 1966, p. 1013
Figure 6  Localities referred to in Kalloongoo's story
to have been born before Johnny Franklin in about 1830, it is most likely that Kalloongoo was transported to Portland in the *Henry* on its first voyage to Kangaroo Island in 1829.

Kalloongoo herself was thought to have been about twenty years old in 1837. If that was the case, she would have been a child when she was abducted. However, that in itself would not have been unusual. Robinson’s journals document many cases of sealers kidnapping children and keeping them as slaves for many years.

Kalloongoo was reported to be still in Port Philip (Melbourne) in 1842, where she appears to have been a close friend of Trucanini. In 1840 they had gone off together and were living with two shepherds at Point Nepean at the entrance to Port Philip Bay. Following the killing of two whalers by a group of Tasmanians that Robinson had brought to Port Philip, Trucanini and the other Tasmanians were sent back to Flinders Island, but Kalloongoo and her son, Johnny Franklin, remained at Port Philip.

Emue or Emma, Kalloongoo’s sister-in-law is generally assumed to come from Port Lincoln also, though Mollison, under the Anderson Family genealogy, states that she was of the Narrinyeri Group, South Australia. It is not clear on what basis Mollison claims that she was Narrinyeri. More likely she was Kaurna, though it is possible that she belonged to the neighbouring Narrinyeri (Ngarrindjeri) group. Later Mollison, drawing on Robinson’s journals, refers to Emue as originating from the mainland opposite Kangaroo Island, and still later as coming from Spencer’s Gulf. Emue had undoubtedly been abducted earlier than Kalloongoo because, as quoted earlier, in 1831 she was said to have 10 children to Abyssinia Jack, five of whom were with her on Gun Carriage Island. It is extremely unlikely that she had 10 children between 1823 and 1831. It seems that George Meredith Jnr was Emue’s abductor:

23 July 1836
They had two boats. Abyssinia Jack had charge of one with some New Holland women and also VDL women . . . The New Holland women were the same that had been stolen from their country adjacent to Kangaroo Island by George Meredith Jnr of Oyster Bay.

Emue died at Woody Island in December 1837.

The importance of Robinson’s Kaurna wordlist
The existence of an early Kaurna wordlist recorded far from Kaurna territory is an interesting, but not unique phenomenon. The first Kaurna wordlist ever to have been transcribed was recorded by a French zoologist, M. Gaimard, aboard the *Astrolabe* in King George Sound (Albany) in south west Western Australia. This wordlist of 160 words was also recorded from a Kaurna person taken there by sealers in 1826. At the

---

40 Plomley, 1987, p. 695
41 Rae Ellis, 1981, p. 100
42 Rae Ellis, 1981, p. 119
43 see Barwick, 1985, pp. 212, 231 and Mollison 1976.
44 Plomley, 1966, p. 327
45 Plomley, 1987, p. 366
46 Barwick 1985, pp. 231
47 Gaimard, 1833
same time Gaimard also recorded a Tasmanian wordlist. However, Gaimard's Kaurna wordlist is the topic of another paper.48

As we have seen, almost all of the words in Robinson's Kaurna wordlist are already known to us in more reliable sources, especially Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840). How then is Robinson's Kaurna wordlist important?

Firstly, there are several words, yul.to 'frog', war.rar.te 'tadpole' and mo.ker mo.ker 'kangaroo rat' in Robinson's Kaurna wordlist which were not recorded in any of the other Kaurna sources. In fact, no term for 'tadpole' is recorded in the other Kaurna sources, though a different word, mudatj 'tadpole' is recorded in Narrunga, a closely related language. Occasionally, an additional form of an existing word, such as yar.to yar.to 'baby' related to yerthondi 'to grow' has been recorded. At other times Robinson's recording gives an additional slant or another meaning of a word recorded by Teichelmann & Schürmann. Par.cu.lar 'cold' compared with bakkadla 'hoar frost' is an example of this, though it could also be the result of misunderstanding.

Charles Robinson's transcriptions break the words into syllables, a practice both he and his father use regularly in transcribing Tasmanian words. Robinson has consistently omitted to write the initial velar nasal [N] irrespective of the following vowel.49 Vowels are transcribed inconsistently. The letter i is used for the diphthong [ai] as in i.thoe = ngaityo 'my' and for the vowel [i] as in tin.to = tindo 'sun'.

The letter u is used for the vowel [u] as in 'put' as well as the vowel [go] as in 'but'
The Kaurna vowel [i] is transcribed variously by the letters i, e, ee, er and a
The Kaurna vowel [a] is transcribed variously by the letters ar, er, u, e, a and i
The Kaurna vowel [u] is transcribed variously by the letters ou, u, ue, o and oe

The diphthong [ai] is transcribed as i, ie, yhe and y

Note for example:

\begin{verbatim}
  i.thoe          = ngaityo        'I'
  pie.ther.pull.ta = paityabulti 'old woman'
  caw.y.he        = kawai         'come'
  me.yo.cov.y     = meyu kawai    'men are coming'
\end{verbatim}

The diphthong [au] is transcribed as ow, whilst the diphthong [ui] is transcribed as ue.

Robinson sometimes inserts a vowel within a consonant cluster. Note:

\begin{verbatim}
  none.ta          = nurnti         'away'
  ule.ta           = ngulti         'night'
\end{verbatim}

For some unknown reason, the final i vowel following t is transcribed as i in both these words.

Consonants too, are transcribed inconsistently. The alveopalatal stop [ty] is transcribed as ch and th. The alveopalatal nasal [ny] is transcribed as n.y and ne.y. The velar stop [k] is transcribed variously as c, k, ck, ck.c and g. Sometimes consonants are transcribed by a single consonant and at other times by a double consonant. It is

---

48 Amery, forthcoming

49 The i initial Kaurna words appear to be the only ones to appear in Plomley. This oddity caused Plomley (1976, p. 22) to question the accuracy and authenticity of Charles Robinson's transcriptions. He attributed these i initial words and other forms such as me.you 'man' to the influence of English.
interesting that Robinson almost always transcribes stops as voiceless. Only rarely does he employ d or g and then it occurs mostly following a nasal. B appears not to be used at all in his transcription of Kaurna words.

In a few cases, Robinson's transcriptions can actually help in working out how to pronounce the word. For example, Robinson's transcription mu.rer.car.ne 'cry' indicates that the 'r' in muerkanidi 'to cry' is pronounced as an 'r' sound and the 'ur' sequence is not pronounced as in English slur. The spelling me.ther 'hot' tends to indicate that the 'd' in the word me.dea 'heat, flame, hot etc' is pronounced as an interdental stop [th]. It is difficult to know whether a 't' or 'd' in Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) is pronounced as an interdental [th] and alveolar [t] or a retroflex stop [rt].

Where Teichelmann & Schürmann have recorded a number of terms meaning more or less the same thing, Robinson's wordlist tends to indicate which terms were more commonly used, or which were commonly used by the southern Kaurna. Robinson's Kaurna wordlist provides additional evidence for the existence of a distinctive southern dialect, distinct from the dialect recorded by Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840). There are a number of grounds for this:

1. It features the word mu.rane.ne 'run'. Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840) cite murrendi as a southern dialectal form as opposed to padnendi used in the north. Gaimard (1833) also records mourenn 'flee, run away'.
2. The present tense affix would appear to be -ni in the southern dialect of Kaurna as all the verbs recorded by Robinson are listed with a final ne. There is no indication of the d in the present tense -ndi suffix recorded consistently by Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840). This is corroborated by other sources such as Gaimard and Wyatt.50
3. The infrequent use of prestopping (eg. Robinson's cu.ll.ar 'fire' c.f. T&S gadla 'fire; Robinson's walle 'house' c.f. T&S wodli 'house' etc.). Forms of these words without prestopping also appear in Gaimard and Wyatt. Prestopping is much more prevalent in dialects and languages to the north (eg Nukunu, Parnkalla), but is entirely absent in Ngarrindjeri to the east.

The existence of Charles Robinson's Kaurna wordlist has even more important linguistic implications for the languages of Tasmania. We know with some certainty the precise pronunciation of many of the Kaurna words he recorded. So this wordlist provides a good check on the quality and accuracy of Robinson's transcriptions and insights into the ways in which he tends to or prefers to represent sounds, or indeed to omit sounds altogether.

For instance, in a Tasmanian word transcribed by Charles Robinson, we simply don't know whether 'u' should be pronounced [u] as in 'put' or [g] as in 'but'. However, it may be safe to assume that final 'er' is pronounced [g] or [ ] as in English 'butter' for this is the case in every instance of his Kaurna transcriptions. However, Kaurna does not allow consonant final words, so it might still be possible for Tasmanian words to end with an 'r' sound.

Similarly, George Augustus Robinson is known to have also recorded words from Victorian languages in the 1840's. In the same way, these records may assist in

50 Garimard 1833; Wyatt 1879.
interpreting his work on Tasmanian languages. It is worth noting from the few Kaurna
words George Augustus Robinson recorded, his transcriptions differed significantly
from those of his son Charles. Note:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charles Robinson</th>
<th>George Augustus Robinson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cull.ar</td>
<td>kir.ler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wal.le</td>
<td>whirlie ~ whirl.le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ar.rer</td>
<td>nar.rer ~ nar.rar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>war.tar cut.ter</td>
<td>wat.ter.ker.ter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'fire'
'house'
'wood'
'island'

Significantly, George Augustus transcribed the initial velar nasal in *ngarra* 'wood' as 'n'
where Charles consistently omitted it.

However, despite his failings, this paper to some extent rehabilitates Charles
Robinson's standing as a recorder of Tasmanian languages. Plomley, noting aberrant
features in his recordings, is very critical of their quality and of Charles Robinson
himself:

The following points suggest that little reliance can be placed upon Charles
Robinson's work—

(a) In several places the record is incomplete, the English meanings of the
aboriginal words having been omitted; as well, there is sometimes confusion in the
record; and different copies may show differences of spelling of the native word.
(b) In a number of cases the word recorded appears to be wholly or partly a
corruption of English (perhaps representing the 'pidgin' used by (some of) the
natives on the settlement). The following appear to be such corruptions—
1. Words beginning with 'i', and particularly with 'i.tho(e)' (? = I so).
2. Some words beginning with 'o'.
3. Words such as 'me.you' (= man).
4. Words beginning with 'no' and with 'no i', which are English negatives.

Charles Robinson appears to have been handicapped in the compilation of his
vocabularies by a lack of schooling and by a want of intelligence. Unless a word is
supported by other records, it would probably be best to disregard it.51

Most of these 'corruptions' and some of the putative 'pidgin' features, though not all, are
accounted for by the Kaurna wordlist. Points 1 and 3 levelled against Robinson can now
be discounted entirely. It is now up to specialists of the Tasmanian languages to reassess
the value of the remainder of Charles Robinson's work.

Conclusion

The linguistic evidence within Kalloongoo's interview with Robinson and within the
wordlist itself provides irrefutable evidence that Kalloongoo was a Kaurna woman and
was not from Port Lincoln as Robinson himself and a number of other sources suggest.
Nor was Emue or Emma from Port Lincoln, being Kalloongoo's sister-in-law she was
either Kaurna or from a neighbouring group. The historical record can be reliably
corrected in this respect.

It is remarkable that we should still be turning up 'new' wordlists of Kaurna to
augment known historical sources. Robinson's Kaurna wordlist remained unidentified

51 Plomley, 1976, pp. 21-21.
or mis-identified for so long because it was included with Robinson's Tasmanian materials and there was a total absence of any notations on the pages themselves which would identify the source.

Whilst most of the words recorded in Robinson's Kaurna source are well known, the wordlist does provide several additional terms that have not been elsewhere recorded and does provide solid evidence for a distinctive southern Kaurna dialect. It also provides solid evidence for Kaurna country extending down to Cape Jervis. The status of this region as Kaurna country has been questioned recently by the publication of Berndt's book _A World That Was_ which includes a map with Ramindjeri territory extending right up to Noarlunga on the southern outskirts of the city of Adelaide. Berndt's sources were Ngarrindjeri, interviewed this century. His map represents a post-contact reality from a Ngarrindjeri perspective and points to a movement of Ngarrindjeri people into an area that was depopulated of its original inhabitants.

Perhaps even more interesting than the words themselves are the historical events surrounding the wordlist and the movement of Kaurna people over vast distances during the pre-colonial historical period.

It is possible that other obscure historical sources on the Kaurna language may surface in the future. In the absence of speakers of the language, any attempts to reclaim and relearn the Kaurna language necessarily rely totally on these historical sources. It is remarkable just how much progress can be made by piecing together information recorded more than one and a half centuries ago.

**Acknowledgements**

To Philip Clarke my thanks for 'opening the door' to the literature on sealing and whaling and for access to a pre-publication copy of his paper. I also thank Julie Tree, Librarian at SSABSA, and the staff of the Mitchell Library in Sydney for their assistance in gaining access to some of Robinson's handwritten manuscripts and for facilitating permission for their reproduction here. Ian Clarke kindly gave advice regarding their interpretation. I thank Richard Barwick and Isabel Mc Bryde for assistance in the preparation of maps appearing in this paper. Most of all, I thank Jane Simpson and Mary-Anne Gale for their many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Rob Amery is currently completing a PhD in Linguistics at the University of Adelaide where he is researching efforts to relearn and revive Kaurna, the language of the Adelaide Plains, from nineteenth century sources. In 1997, with the support of the Kaurna people, he introduced a course in Kaurna linguistics at the University of Adelaide.

**References**


---

52 Berndt's 1993: 304.


Clark, Philip forthcoming, 'Early European Interaction with Aboriginal Hunters and Gatherers on Kangaroo Island, South Australia.' *Aboriginal History,* this volume.


Mollison, B.C. 1976, *The Tasmanian Aborigines Vol.3 Part 1 Tasmanian Aboriginal Genealogies, with an Appendix on Kangaroo Island.* Psychology Department, University of Tasmania.


Wyatt, William 1879, 'Some account of the Manners and Superstitions of the Adelaide and Encounter Bay Aboriginal Tribes with a Vocabulary of their Languages, Names of Persons and Places etc.' reprint from *The Native Tribes of South Australia* Adelaide, E.S. Wigg & Son in Parkhouse (ed.) *Reprints and Papers relating to the Autochthones of Australia,* Parkhouse, Woodville, 1923.
Early European interaction with Aboriginal hunters and gatherers on Kangaroo Island, South Australia

Philip A. Clarke

The earlier written history of European settlement in Australia generally portrays the Aboriginal inhabitants as being at best inconsequential or at worst a hindrance to the development of a Western nation. For instance, early this century, Blacket gave his impression of the role of Aboriginal people in the early years of European settlement in South Australia by saying ‘These children of the bush...gave the early settlers much trouble.’ Similar opinions of South Australian history were later provided by Price and Gibbs. However, elsewhere modern scholars, such as Baker and Reynolds, are putting forward views that Aboriginal people had important roles in the setting up of the British colonies across Australia. They demonstrate that the contribution of Aboriginal people to the colonising process has been an underestimated aspect of Australian history. Following this argument, I am concerned here with assessing the importance of Aboriginal hunter/gatherer knowledge and technology to the early European settlement of South Australia. Kangaroo Island is where the first unofficial settlements were established by European sealers, who brought with them Aboriginal people from Tasmania, and obtained others from the adjacent coastal areas of South Australia. This is an important region for the study of the early phases of European interaction with Aboriginal people. Thus, this paper is primarily a discussion of how and what European settlers absorbed from Aboriginal people and their landscape. The period focussed upon is from the early nineteenth century to just after the foundation of the Colony of South Australia in 1836.

European expansion into southern Australian waters

In 1791, vessels returning to England from New South Wales took word of schools of whales in Australian waters. This set in train a rush by British and American whalers. The colonies in Australia offered whalers a chance to make a profit that they would not otherwise make if simply whaling, by taking cargo on the outward journey. By the early 1800s, the worldwide marine industry was booming. Whales were a major source of oil

1Blacket 1911, p.163.
2Price 1924; Gibbs 1969.
3Baker 1989; Reynolds 1990.
4See Finney 1984, p.58. Starbuck (1878 [1964]) provides tables showing returns of whaling vessels sailing from American ports. From this it is clear that in the 1790s, the Pacific Ocean emerged as a major whaling area.
used for candle wax, lamp fuel, lubricant and soap. The bone was also used as umbrella frames, hoops beneath dresses, stiffening corsets and for firing in potteries. Seal skins were required by merchants for trade in China, and for the fur-hat factories in England. Shoes in the Australian colonies were also sewn from seal skins. Whaling and sealing were such important parts of the early economy of New South Wales that Governor King attempted to restrict the operations of hunting crews in eastern Australia to those operating from his colony, in particular excluding those run by non-British interests. Because of this, foreign vessels were forced into concentrating on regions, such as southern Australia, that were at that time beyond colonial authority. European exploration, both official and unofficial, went hand in hand with economics.

Given the importance of marine industries to the Australian economy, it is not surprising that the first European settlers in South Australia were sealers and whalers. A small mixed population of European and Aboriginal people had grown in the region several decades prior to the formation of the Colony of South Australia in 1836. These were European men and their Aboriginal labour force, initially working out of Bass Strait and Van Diemen's Land (now called Tasmania). Known generally as Straitsmen, they represented a wide range of national and racial backgrounds, being castaways from whaling and sealing boats that were owned by American, British and French companies. Some of these vessels were possibly in southern Australian waters searching for seal colonies and whales at the same time as the first recorded European visit to South Australia by Matthew Flinders in 1802. Unoccupied islands, such as Kangaroo Island and those of Bass Strait, provided a safe haven to establish depots (Figure 1). Sealing was an activity that suited the small scale operations of European people living in fairly isolated conditions, as only the cured skin was required could be easily stored. The Straitsmen who eventually settled on Kangaroo Island became known simply as

---

[5] In this paper, the white explorers and settlers are referred to as Europeans, although they would have seen themselves differently as English, French, American etc. Nunn (1989, pp.27–48) provides an account of the earliest European settlement on Kangaroo Island.
[6] Detailed accounts are provided by Finnis nd; Nunn 1989; Plomley and Henley 1990. Cawthorne (1926) provides a fictional account of the whalers and sealers on Kangaroo Island. Cumpton (1970) has records for over 500 people who had visited Kangaroo Island before official settlement in 1836.
[7] For accounts of the earliest European visitors to South Australia, see Flinders cited in Gill, 1909, pp.110–112, Moore 1924, pp.83–87; Blacket 1911, pp.11,12; Nunn 1989, p.11. R. Langdon (Advertiser, 29 December 1956) considered that American whalers may have been in South Australian waters in 1800. Flinders (cited in Cumpton, 1970, pp.6–14) thought the marks of a fire on Boston, Thistle and Kangaroo Islands may have been caused by an early visit by the French explorer La Perouse.
[8] The pre-European occupation of Kangaroo Island is discussed by Tindale 1937a,b; Tindale and Maegraith 1931; Lampert 1979; Draper 1988. The occupation of the islands in Bass Strait is discussed by Jones 1974. Also see Tindale 1974, Tribal Map.
Islanders. These lawless people, living beyond colonial authority, have been described as the ‘banditti of Bass Strait’.  

With the growing scarcity of seals in Tasmanian waters during the second decade of the nineteenth century, sealers in the eastern colonies increasingly focused their attention on what were then outlying regions, such as southern South Australia. From about 1811, some Sydney-based sealers even went as far as Macquarie Island between Tasmania and the Antarctic Circle during the sealing season. In 1820, there were an estimated fifty sealers, with about a hundred Aboriginal wives and children, living in the Bass Straits to Kangaroo Island region. At the South Australian end, colonies of the New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus fosteri*) and the Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) had been largely missed by the early wave of sealers. In 1830, sealers were reported to be based on Thistle Island and other islands in Spencer Gulf. About this time, a sealer and his two Aboriginal wives and family lived on Saint Peter Island off Denial Bay on the western coast of Eyre Peninsula. Across the border of South Australia into Victoria, sealing stations were operating from 1828 at Portland Bay, also before the official settlement of that colony. In the early 1830s, permanent whaling establishments were based on Kangaroo Island. In 1835, there were at least seventy six Australian ships engaged in deep-sea whaling from the eastern colonies. In South Australia, Europeans had ranged along much of the coastline before the official settlement of 1836.

**Early European settlement on Kangaroo Island**

The first physical contact that Aboriginal people in the southern coastal regions of South Australia had with Europeans occurred with whalers and sealers based on Kangaroo Island. Here, European settlement began with a number of extended visits. Captain Isaac Pendleton, a New York whaler on the *Union*, wintered at American River on Kangaroo Island with his crew in 1803 while building another vessel, the *Independence*. Some months earlier he had been told about the advantages of the island during a chance meeting with French explorer Nicholas Baudin of *Le Geographe*.

---

13Barwick 1985, p.185.
14Nunn 1989, p.22.
15Blainey 1977, p.106.
18‘The Australasian, 8 November 1902.
20Nunn 1989, p.45.
Figure 1  Possible whale movements and the distribution of whaling stations in southern South Australia prior to 1836 (after Clarke, 1994).
at King George Sound in Western Australia.\textsuperscript{23} The first long term stay on Kangaroo Island by Europeans was possibly by Joseph Murrell, put in charge of a gang of six sealers at Harvey's Return in 1806.\textsuperscript{24} Their time there was longer than they had anticipated; they had to exist almost entirely on wild animal meat until the men were found three years later. The value of previously uninhabited islands, such as Kangaroo Island, is shown by the fact that Murrell and his crew are believed to have been later killed by Aboriginal people when their boat was wrecked on the coast of New South Wales in 1816.\textsuperscript{25} Another early resident of Kangaroo Island was Robert Newman, who arrived there about 1814.\textsuperscript{26} A visitor to Kangaroo Island was Peter Dillon, who collected salt from December 1815 to March 1816.\textsuperscript{27} One of his crew was Thompson, reportedly a Portuguese man who had previously been on Kangaroo Island and nearby islands for seven years. In 1817, Hammond reported that thirteen Europeans had been living on Kangaroo Island, subsisting on wild birds.\textsuperscript{28} George Fifer was another European reportedly living on the island in 1817.\textsuperscript{29} However, the details of how and where on Kangaroo Island these early settlers lived are generally poorly known.

Kangaroo Island's first permanent European residents arrived in 1819, among them George Bates and the self-styled 'Governor' Henry Wallen.\textsuperscript{30} The Islanders lived chiefly in the north eastern part of Kangaroo Island. This section of coastline provided a refuge from the fierce southern seas that lashed the south coast of the island.\textsuperscript{31} From their bases on Kangaroo Island, the men in their whale boats were able to visit sealing colonies that were located at places such as Thistle Island in Saint Vincent Gulf.\textsuperscript{32} The Islander community that developed comprised men who had shunned mainstream society, particularly sailors who had 'jumped ship'.

As the whaling and sealing industry in the southern seas grew, Kangaroo Island became a major stopping point for all vessels in the area. The island was useful to passing ships for replenishing supplies of fish and kangaroo meat, fresh water for drinking, and wood for burning.\textsuperscript{33} For those who became established on Kangaroo Island, trade from passing ships was based on island products such as animal oil, whale bone, animal skins and fresh vegetables. Skins in particular, were a major product of the island. For instance, a Captain Hart, who frequently traded with the Islanders, took

\textsuperscript{23}Plomley and Henley 1990, pp.6,7.
\textsuperscript{24}Finnis nd; Kostoglou and McCarthy 1991, p.58.
\textsuperscript{25}Nunn 1989, p.23.
\textsuperscript{26}Plomley and Henley 1990, p.13.
\textsuperscript{27}Cumpston 1970, pp.39,40.
\textsuperscript{28}Sydney Gazette, 15 April 1817.
\textsuperscript{29}Plomley and Henley 1990, p.13.
\textsuperscript{30}Accounts of Bates ('Fireball Bates') and Wallen (variously known as Walley, Waller, Warlans, Warland and Wharley) are given by Leigh 1839, pp.123–126; Bull 1884, p.5; Tolmer 1882, vol.1, p.318; vol.2, p.7); Finnis nd; Cumpston 1970. Bull's dates of arrival differ from other sources, suggesting that Bates came to Kangaroo Island much later than Wallen, in 1824 not 1819.
\textsuperscript{32}Advertiser, 27 December 1886.
\textsuperscript{33}Early resources of Kangaroo Island are discussed by E.L. Bates cited in Kingscote Country Women's Association, nd, p.23; Osterstock 1975, p.36.
away 7,000 skins in 1832. Salt was another early export from Kangaroo Island. From ships passing through, the Islanders obtained a variety of consumer articles, such as alcohol and tobacco. Some runaway convicts found their way to the southern sealer settlements where they sought a passage from passing boats. Kangaroo Island was effectively an unofficial outstation of Van Diemen's Land (settled in 1803). Many of the vessels stopping at Kangaroo Island were on the way to or from Launceston or Hobart.

Aboriginal occupation of Kangaroo Island

Although Australia's second largest offshore island, and a mere fourteen kilometres by sea from the mainland, Kangaroo Island does not appear to have been occupied by Aboriginal people for some time prior to European settlement. In 1802, when English explorer Matthew Flinders visited Kangaroo Island, it was surmised that the place was uninhabited due to the absence of smoke and the tameness of seals and kangaroos. In the following year, French explorer, Nicholas Baudin, visited the island, which he called Ile Decres. Baudin was accompanied by a team of zoologists, among them Francois Peron. In the account provided by Peron, he supports Flinders' assertion by saying 'No trace of man's stay here can be discerned on the shores...' We must therefore assume that Kangaroo Island was uninhabited by Aboriginal groups at the time of the first recorded visits by Europeans. In contrast, the mainland opposite the island was perhaps one of the most heavily populated regions of Australia.

Due to the geographical and social isolation of living on remote islands, there were no European women in the early settlements of sealers. This created a high demand amongst the Islanders for Aboriginal women (Figure 2). Some of the captains of trading vessels, knowing this, brought with them captured Aboriginal women to be traded for goods with the Islanders. One report says 'the traders, who visited the island occasionally, brought them a Tasmanian lubra for a consideration'. Some of these women had evidently been obtained from their Aboriginal husbands in Tasmania, exchanged for the skinned carcases of seals. It is likely that the first women on Kangaroo Island in the historic period were Tasmanians, reflecting the early historical connection between southern South Australia and Tasmania.

In spite of some movement of Tasmanian women to Kangaroo Island, the Islander's desire for wives eventually led to excursions to adjacent mainland regions. In

---

34 G. Bates in Observer, 14 September 1895. Captain Hart became a successful merchant and politician in South Australia. He was premier of the colony on three occasions (Blacket, 1911, pp.431,432).
35 Observer, 15 January 1898 and 20 May 1899. This trade in salt was still going on in 1844 (Southern Australian, 24 September 1844).
36 Plomley and Henley 1990, p.20.
37 Flinders 1814.
38 Peron 1816 [1979, p.181].
39 Advertiser, 20 March 1880.
Figure 2  Tasmanian Aborigines and early colonists on Kangaroo Island in 1836 (Leigh, 1839, p. opp. 104).
1819, it was reported by a passing ship captain that there were several Europeans living on the island who:

have carried their daring acts to an extreme, venturing on the mainland in their boats and seizing on the natives, particularly the women, and keeping them in a state of slavery, cruelly treating them on every trifling occasion.

On one expedition to obtain wives, a party of five Islanders crossed to the mainland, leaving two Aboriginal women, whom they had already caught, hunting and fishing on the island. Landing at Cape Jervis, probably on the northern side which is protected from both the prevailing winds and the heavy swell, they walked across country to Lake Alexandrina. Their method of capture was to wait until morning, when the Aboriginal men had gone hunting, and then rush in, grabbing the women and tying their hands behind their backs. Back at Hog Bay on Kangaroo Island, the women would be released. As the marauding trips grew in frequency, the mainland Aboriginal populations became more wary, and the risk to the Islanders increased. On one trip to Cape Jervis, Aboriginal people waited until the Islanders were about five kilometres inland and then attacked. One Islander was speared in the foot, but escaped with a slight wound. The stories of Islander raids on the mainland populations have been enshrined in Lower Murray mythology.

Although the earliest known woman on Kangaroo Island appears to have been Tasmanian, the number of women there from coastal South Australian regions grew steadily. The core Aboriginal population on Kangaroo Island included women from Eyre Peninsula, the Lower Murray, and the Cape Jervis to Adelaide Plains region. The population may also have occasionally included people from Yorke Peninsula.

However badly treated the women were, the mode of their capture and subsequent treatment, appears to have much in common with Aboriginal practices in the pre-European period.
On Kangaroo Island, the Tasmanian women and their children appear not to have mixed well with Aboriginal people from the South Australian mainland. For instance, the Tasmanians on Kangaroo Island apparently considered that their own hunting and gathering skills were superior to that of all others.\(^{48}\) For this reason, these women and their children generally went on expeditions alone. The Tasmanians apparently retained the use of their language, some words of which were still known by their descendants during Tindale’s fieldwork there in the 1930s.\(^{49}\) The total population of Kangaroo Island was estimated at about two hundred people in 1826, although this figure probably includes all the men working on boats in the southern coastal region of South Australia.\(^{50}\) The Aboriginal women had important roles on the island, acting as labourers, hunters, wives, trackers, garment makers and food gatherers.

**Hunting and gathering technology on Kangaroo Island**

Reports on Islander lifestyle from passing ship captains and early colonists, indicate that it was considered to have had much in common with that of the Aboriginal people. For instance, in 1819 it was reported by Sutherland that there were several Europeans living on Kangaroo Island who were like:

- complete savages, living in bark huts like the natives, not cultivating anything, but living entirely on kangaroos, emus and small porcupines, and getting spirits and tobacco in barter for the skins which they lay up during the sealing season. They dress in kangaroo skins without linen, and wear sandals made from sealskins. They smell like foxes.\(^{51}\)

The boots of these Islanders were also sometimes made from wallaby skins.\(^{52}\) Their cloaks consisted of a number of skins stitched together in Aboriginal fashion.\(^{53}\) One report from a colonist arriving at Kangaroo Island and meeting Islanders for the first time said ‘The two islanders—clothed in opossum skin shirts, and with coats, trousers, and boots made of the skin of the red kangaroo—were mistaken for savage inhabitants of the new country.’\(^{54}\) The sealer’s practice of having several Aboriginal wives would have strengthened the first assumptions of official colonists that the Islanders were all Aboriginal people.

Islander subsistence relied heavily on the hunting and gathering skills of their Aboriginal work force, as agriculture was not extensively practised until after later official settlement. In 1819, after Bates and Wallen had occupied Kangaroo Island, a Tasmanian woman named Dinah proved of ‘greatest value to them in their hunting expeditions through the scrub.’\(^{55}\) Sealing was also an activity in which the Tasmanian

---

\(^{48}\) Basedow 1914, p.161.

\(^{49}\) Tindale 1937a, p.36.

\(^{50}\) Australian, 9 March 1826.

\(^{51}\) Sutherland cited in Moore, 1924, p.121.

\(^{52}\) Nunn 1989, p.83.

\(^{53}\) Hobart Town Gazette, 12 June 1826. This description compares well with a Yorke Peninsula wallaby skin cloak (A6409 in the South Australian Museum.

\(^{54}\) Advertiser, 27 December 1886. The Hobart Town Gazette, 12 June 1826, has another account of ‘savages’ on Kangaroo Island.

\(^{55}\) Advertiser, 27 December 1886.
women were able to use skills from their homeland. An Aboriginal woman, originally from the mainland, was in the habit of always carrying a 'peculiar' shaped club with her for hunting. The skins of kangaroos, wallabies and seals were important commodities for island trade. In 1831, it was recorded that the sixteen to eighteen men living on Kangaroo Island were in the practice of gathering on a certain day once a year at Nepean Bay to barter their skins to traders (Figure 3). The reliance that some Islanders had upon the hunting efforts of the Aboriginal women continued long after official settlement in 1836.

The Kangaroo Island flora and fauna had much in common with coastal southern Australia and Tasmania. This would have enabled the Aboriginal women brought there to transfer easily their previously acquired hunting and gathering skills. During the early years of European occupation of Kangaroo Island and other nearby islands, the familiarity with the Australian landscape possessed by the women gave them greater access than Europeans to the natural resources of the island. To capture wallabies, the Aboriginal women on Kangaroo Island made hunting nooses. These were necessary, as it was difficult to use firearms for the capture of animals, such as marsupials, hiding in the dense thickets of Kangaroo Island. The nooses were about 46 cms long, with the string woven from canvas thread. Each noose was stretched onto two small forked sticks put across wallaby pads to catch the head of an animal, choking it to death. The women checked these traps at sunrise, usually returning with the carcases around nine or ten o'clock in the morning. The wallabies were skinned, the pelts stretched on wire or stick hoops, then bundled into lots of fifty. The tails were boiled, the skin scraped off, and then cooked in ashes before being eaten. The sinews drawn from the tails were used to sew wallaby skins into rugs and coats.

Trips in whale boats were made by Islanders to collect eggs of the 'mutton bird' on Althorpe Island, and to kill seals in the caverns along the Kangaroo Island coast. Mutton-birding was apparently a practice that sealers in Bass Strait had gained from Aboriginal women when seals became scarce. In 1838, when some whalers were stranded in the Rivoli Bay district of the South East of South Australia, they invited 'pretty girls' from the local Aboriginal community to row with them in a boat to Penguin Rock to catch fat birds that frequented that spot. Wild pigs were another source of food. It seems likely that pigs existed on Kangaroo Island as early as 1803,

---

56 Plomley and Henley (1990, p.19) provide an account of the seal hunting techniques used by Tasmanian Aboriginal women along the eastern coast of Tasmania.
59 A. Tolmer in the Southern Australian, 24 September 1844 reprinted Observer, 28 September 1844.
61 Leigh 1839, p.104; Cumpston 1970, p.172; Nunn 1989, p.84.
62 The 'mutton bird' referred to here is probably the short-tailed shearwater (Puffinus tenuirostris) or a related species. Reudiger (1980, p.53) refers to seal hunting.
63 Ryan 1981, p.70.
64 Stewart cited in McCourt and Mincham, 1977, pp.78,79.
after the introduction of a boar and sow by Baudin. A passenger of the *Cygnet*, which arrived at Kangaroo Island with settlers in 1836, remarked that the sealers used ti-tree leaves as a tea supplement. A ‘bush tea tree’ was also used as a medicine to ‘purify’ the blood. Indigenous fruits were made by Islanders into puddings and jam. One of Wallen’s wives reportedly used medicinal and sorcery objects such as stone charms. With the aid of the Aboriginal people, the natural environment provided the Islanders with most of their basic needs.

The Aboriginal women on Kangaroo Island retained some of their preferences for certain types of food, some of which Europeans would probably not have utilised. For instance, one early visitor to the island, who was taken on a duck hunting expedition near Cygnet River, reported:

They had come to a clearing in the scrub where they saw some large ant-hills which were broken into pieces. The newcomer soon learnt the reason for this, as he watched the lubras in the party make quickly for other termite nests from which they broke off large lumps, then shake out the teeming ants into each other’s hands cupped together. They squeezed the crawling insects into a ball, and with much laughter and evident enjoyment, conveyed them to their mouths and munched them up.

Another example is provided by a resident who claimed that an Aboriginal woman on the island, probably not Tasmanian, had ‘grizzled’ hair in which she carried grubs, her great delicacy. The women, who in Aboriginal fashion generally went on expeditions without the men, were not restricted to the sheltered northern parts where the Islanders in the main based themselves. The Aboriginal women often went on extended expeditions along the southern coast where kangaroos, wallabies, possums, fish and shellfish were found in abundance. In 1869, there were still three Tasmanian women on Kangaroo Island who lived ‘by their wits and their waddies’, preferring to hunt for themselves rather than to accept government rations. The use of Aboriginal stone technology by the Islander population is well illustrated by the existence of archaeological remains of Tasmanian-type stone artefacts at their former campsites around the island (Figure 4).
Figure 4  South Australian Museum display panel, 'Evidences of Early 19th Century Occupation of Kangaroo Island' from the 1930s: a,d,e—flint tools; b—food remains; c—handmade domino piece; d—marsupial jaw bone tool.
The dominance of the Aboriginal mode of subsistence is evident in the seasonal patterns of early life on Kangaroo Island. In 1826, a report on the Islanders said that 'When the fishing season for seals is over, these men, with the native women and their offspring, amounting in all to about 40, retire into a valley in the interior of the island, where they have a garden and huts.' The movement of the Islanders away from the coast during autumn was to avoid the fierce winter weather along the coast. Their summertime activities included hunting seal pups and collecting mutton bird eggs. Both types of animal breed in summer months. This summer/coast—winter/inland movement of people was similar to the pre-European movements of coastal Aboriginal people of Tasmania and southern South Australia.

The reliance upon Aboriginal hunters increased with time, as game became scarce from over exploitation. The last Kangaroo Island emu (Dromaius minor), which differed physically from the mainland species, was reportedly killed by the Aboriginal wife of an Islander several years before official settlement. The kangaroos and wallabies eventually retreated back into the thick scrub, making hunting by shooting difficult. The settlers arriving on Kangaroo Island in 1836 noted the apparent absence of the animal after which the place was named. The Kangaroo Island kangaroo (Macropus fuliginosus fulinginosus) had been hunted down to numbers so low that it was still considered extinct earlier this century. Although the density of people actually living on Kangaroo Island was low, the pre-1836 inhabitants nevertheless made their mark upon the landscape. When the official settlers arrived in the newly proclaimed colony of South Australia, the region had already suffered an ecological disaster due to European and Aboriginal activity on Kangaroo Island.

The important economic role of Aboriginal people on Kangaroo Island in the pre-colonial years is noted by many sources commenting on Islander life. Although the Aboriginal captives, whether from Tasmania or the mainland, were just as new to Kangaroo Island as the whalers and sealers, they quickly developed a close relationship with the island's landscape. In the 1870s, there was evidently a site on the island that

---

7Hobart Town Gazette cited in Finnis, nd.
7Plomley and Henley (1990) discuss the seasonal aspects of sealing. Ryan (1981, p.70) says that mutton bird egging was a late summer activity in the Bass Straits.
7Clarke (1991; Ellis (1976) provide accounts of Aboriginal movements in the Adelaide area; Foster 1983 for the Lower South East; and Hiatt 1967–68 for Tasmania.
7R. Montgomery Martin cited in Moore, 1924, p.114. Blakers et al (1984, p.2) provides a historical account of the emu. The South Australian Museum has on display a reconstruction of what the Kangaroo Island emu looked like (Register, 12 February 1926). Slater (1978, p.14) claims that the last Kangaroo Island emu probably died in the possession of Empress Josephine of France in 1822, having being given two of the three live emus that were brought back by Peron. However, the record of R. Montgomery Martin would put the extinction of this species closer to the early 1830s.
7Nunn 1989, p.55.
7Dutton 1960, p.172.
7G. Bates (cited Observer, 14 September 1895) blames bushfires and hunting for the depletion of marsupial numbers. Wood Jones (1923–1925, pp.257–261) reports on the 'extinct' status of the Kangaroo Island kangaroo. However, this species survived and is once again common (Strahan, 1983, pp.248,249).
7One report (Advertiser, 27 December 1886) claims that Aboriginal women did much of the manual work on Kangaroo Island.
local inhabitants still referred to as 'the old black woman's potato-ground'. Whether this refers to a spot where yams were collected, or a place where potatoes were grown is not known. In all food-gathering activities, the labour and skills provided by Aboriginal women were significant.

The relationship between Islanders and mainland Aboriginal people

Some of the early encounters between the sealers and mainland Aboriginal groups were violent, and yet there is evidence that the relationship between them was complex. The violent clashes described above during the Islander expeditions to obtain wives, were balanced by the amicable relations that allowed the early employment of Aboriginal people in sealing activities. For instance, in June 1833 the sealer John Jones sailed from Launceston in the Henry, reaching Kangaroo Island in July:

He met a tribe of natives on Cape Jervis, consisting of ten families. Five of the men worked for him occasionally, and two were with him constantly for near five months. They were very useful, and willing to work for a trifling remuneration. To the two who remained with him long he gave pistols, powder, and shot; to the others slop-clothing. He saw their women and children only at a distance, and saw no other natives on the rest of the coast along Gulf St. Vincent; but their fires were very numerous.

Even at this early time, Aboriginal people were being incorporated into the world economy through their participation in the marine industries controlled from the northern hemisphere. Aboriginal people in the Cape Jervis area, through their interaction with the Islanders, were the first Aboriginal groups in South Australia to gain experience of Europeans.

A European who worked north along the Fleurieu Peninsula coastline before official settlement was Meredith, a Kangaroo Island-based sealer. He arrived at Kangaroo Island with another sealer, Jacobs, about 1827. In 1835, despite advice from other Islanders, he moved to the Yankalilla district along Saint Vincent Gulf. He had with him an Aboriginal team, consisting of a Tasmanian woman named Sal and two male Aboriginal youths from the mainland. Sal was his wife and the youths were being trained to assist in the sealing activities of the Islanders. However, they eventually killed Meredith, using his boat for their own hunting and gathering expeditions along the coast. The Islanders then feared being attacked by Aboriginal people from the mainland, due to a threat by an Aboriginal man named 'Encounter Bay Bob' that he was going to cross to the island in the boat and kill all the white people. Eventually the boat concerned came adrift and was destroyed. The killing of Meredith was further proof that the prudence of the sealers in basing their activities on previously uninhabited parts of the landscape, such as Kangaroo Island, was well founded.

---

83Observer, 13 April 1870.
84Jones 1835 [1921, p.74].
85Meredith was based at Western River on Kangaroo Island (Cumpston, 1970, p.119). An account of Meredith and Big Sal is given by Leigh (1839, pp.155-157; Thomas Willson Observer, 7 October 1871. Barwick (1985, p.231) incorrectly assumes that Meredith was murdered near Port Lincoln. See also Bull 1884, p.6; Tolmer 1882, vol.2, pp.6-8; Plomley and Henley 1990, p.54.
Some encounters between Islanders and Aboriginal groups from the mainland indicate the partial integration of the sealers into Aboriginal society. For instance, on one visit to the mainland, the Islander Bates assisted an Aboriginal man with a spear protruding from his stomach. He cut out the spearhead, sewing up the wound. The victim apparently recovered soon afterwards. On a longer stay on the mainland, Bates was ‘made a member of the tribe by being thrown on his back, and having all the males jump on his body in succession’. This appears to be a form of initiation ritual. Another Islander, Wallen, participated in the mourning ceremonies of Aboriginal people on one visit to the mainland. Through their possession of Aboriginal wives from the local groups and their involvement in ceremonial life, these Islanders were therefore to some extent incorporated into the Aboriginal kinship system.

In the period before 1836, some Aboriginal people from the mainland travelled widely. For example, an old Aboriginal man from the Cape Jervis ‘tribe’ was taken over to Kangaroo Island with his son, and later returned. Other Aboriginal people, such as Condoy and his niece Sally from Cape Jervis, also made early trips to the island. The latter was part of a crew on a sealing vessel in 1828 at King George Sound in Western Australia, along with another Cape Jervis person, Harry, and two Tasmanians, Dinah and Mooney. In 1831, Robinson noted there were Aboriginal women from Kangaroo Island in the sealing stations of the Kent Group in the eastern end of Bass Strait. Similarly, two Port Lincoln women were reportedly on Gun Carriage Island, a small island between Flinders and Cape Barren Islands in the Furneaux Group. This early movement of Aboriginal people would have broadened their experience with other Aboriginal cultures and given them greater knowledge of the geography beyond their own cultural boundaries.

The sealers living on Kangaroo Island appear to have had the best relations with the people from the Cape Jervis region, probably because this area was their chief landing spot on the mainland. Due to the treacherous nature of the seas off the southern coast of Fleurieu Peninsula, only the coastline sheltered by Kangaroo Island itself was safe for crossing in small boats. When the Islanders travelled to the Lower Lakes, this was primarily done across country from here, along the Inman Valley. Sturt’s published map of the region in 1833, highlights the openness of this valley in contrast to the rugged southern coastline of Fleurieu Peninsula (Figure 5). Some of the Aboriginal men from the Cape Jervis district eventually became whalers who worked in the Encounter Bay area after official settlement. In general, the Aboriginal people in this part of

---

n E.L. Bates cited in Kingscote Country Women’s Association, nd., p.23.
n Advertiser, 27 December 1886.
n Leigh 1839, p.160.
n Advertiser, 27 December 1886.
n Thomas 1925, p.46.
n Cumpston 1970, p.87.
n Barwick 1985, pp.211,212.
n See end note 138.
southern South Australia Murray had more favourable experiences with the early Europeans than those elsewhere, such as Eyre Peninsula and the Coorong.95

The links that the Islanders had with mainland populations occasionally proved very useful to the colonial powers in eastern Australia. For instance, in 1831 after Captain Collet Barker failed to return from swimming across the Murray Mouth (Figure 6), his companions located the previously mentioned Aboriginal woman, Sally, at this time living among Aboriginal people at Cape Jervis.96 She had been recognised by one of the ship’s crew as having been on a sealing vessel at King George Sound in Western Australia three years earlier. Sally could speak English ‘tolerably well’, and suggested to them that the Kangaroo Island sealers could help.97 Eventually, a party which included two seamen, Barker’s servant, Sally and her ‘uncle’ Condoy, and the sealers Bates and Wallen, crossed to Cape Jervis in the sealers’ whale boat. From here, they travelled over land to Lake Alexandrina, which Bates had already crossed on an earlier trip before Sturt had discovered it.98 They then constructed reed rafts in an Aboriginal manner, and travelled to the inside of the Murray Mouth where Barker had disappeared.

At the Murray Mouth, the cunning and experience of the Islanders was put to use. It is recorded that:

Here Bates formed a daring plan for obtaining some information on this subject [Barker’s disappearance]. In the darkness of night he and his mates surprised a camp of natives. Bates acted the part of the orthodox ghost, dressed in a white sheet, and his costume and dismal groans so frightened the blackfellows that as soon as awake they fled in all directions. A young girl of about 16 bolted straight in Warley’s [= Wallen’s] arms, and he at once secured and gagged her. From her they learnt that Captain Barker had been speared by the natives and his body hidden in the scrub....The black girl was claimed by Warley as his property and lived with him at Hog Bay, assisting him to hunt.99

The fate of Barker was in this way discovered. Apparently after swimming the River Mouth, he had been tracked by three Aboriginal men. The latter had waited until they were certain Barker was unarmed, then killed him.

Although the reasons for the attack are not clear, it is possible that Barker was mistaken for a sealer from Kangaroo Island, and killed in reprisal for earlier overland raids by Islanders. The Aboriginal people in this part of the Lower Murray by this time clearly knew about Europeans. For instance, when Sturt travelled along the elbow of the River Murray at Goolwa towards the Mouth in 1830, he remarked that the local

---

97 Report by Dr Davis 1831 [1921, p.24]).
98 Gill (1906) claims that the sealer Bates had discovered Lake Alexandrina before Sturt. See Mayo 1937, p.76).
99 *Advertiser*, 27 December 1886.
Figure 5  Fleurieu Peninsula and the Murray Mouth as shown by Sturt (1833)
Figure 6  Aboriginal tracks recorded by early settlers, and the paths of Sturt and Barker (Clarke 1994)
Aboriginal people were 'perfectly aware of the weapon [gun] I carried, for the moment they saw it, they dashed out of their hiding place'.

It is possible that wife stealing had created disputes between the Islanders and the Aboriginal people living near the Murray Mouth. Nevertheless, without the assistance of the Islanders and their Aboriginal companions, it is doubtful whether the circumstances of Barker's disappearance would ever have become known. Bates and Wallen received payment for their services in obtaining information.

In spite of the dangerous exploits of the Islanders, their life on Kangaroo Island was generally 'luxurious and lazy' with Aboriginal people doing the bulk of the work. A large dwelling built at Antechamber Bay was the Islander's main depot. A considerable fluctuation in Kangaroo Island population levels is evident in the scant records of the pre-colonial period. In 1831, Robinson listed the names of thirteen Aboriginal women he knew to be living with sealers on the island. In 1833, Captain Jones claimed that there were seven Englishmen living on the island, with five Aboriginal women. In 1836, when the colonists reached Kangaroo Island, a settler thought there were six sealers on the island with a number of wives. In apparent conflict with this, an additional report at the time claimed that there were eight European men and sixteen Aboriginal women living on Kangaroo Island. Another settler from 1836 said that the average number of wives each sealer had was three. Here, one man reportedly had three wives and no children, another had the same number of wives and twenty children. An exact account of all the Aboriginal people taken to Kangaroo Island will never be possible, as there are no detailed records of arrivals, departures, births or deaths before 1836.

The use of Aboriginal skills by official colonists

The first of the five ships bringing British colonists to South Australia reached Kangaroo Island on 27 July 1836; the colonists were surprised at the harshness of the new landscape. Upon landing, the settlers were helped by the Islanders to locate drinking

---

100 Sturt 1833, vol.2, p.166).
101 There was clearly tension between the Islanders and particular Aboriginal groups due to wife stealing. For instance, the Kangaroo Island sealer, Nat Thomas, had expressed fear in meeting the mainland relatives of one of his wives (Bull, 1884, p.32).
102 Hahn (1838–1839 [1964, p.132]) provides a different account, claiming that Aboriginal people killed Barker for the shining compass which he had tied to his head. He states that had Barker given the Aboriginal people the compass, he would not have been killed.
103 Advertiser, 17 December 1886.
104 Ibid.
106 J. Jones 1835 [1921, p.75]). The names of the white men he listed were Walley [= Wallen], Nathaniel Thomas, James Allen, William Day and William Walker. There were two men he did not name.
108 Hart cited in Cumpston, 1970, p.127). Hart lists the Europeans as Nathaniel Thomas and George Bates living at Antechamber Bay; William Day, James, Henry Walley (Wallen) and a young Englishman at Pelican Lagoon; and William Cooper and Peter Johnson at Nepean Bay.
109 Observer, 15 January 1898.
water to replenish their supplies, and were sold or bartered wallaby skins and meat that had been caught by Islander women. On 21 August 1836, Colonel Light arrived at Kangaroo Island from England on the Rapid. Light gained geographic information concerning the location of bays on the mainland from the Islanders. The Islanders also described to the settlers the climate of the region. They informed Light of the mistake in attempting to settle on Kangaroo Island, suggesting that land to the north of Cape Jervis would be more suitable than either the island or Encounter Bay.

The relatively open 'grasslands' on the eastern side of Saint Vincent Gulf, north from Cape Jervis, impressed many of the colonists, particularly when it was compared with the dense brush of Kangaroo Island. For instance, it was said that at this time the Rapid Bay district on the mainland 'everywhere resembled a gentleman's park—grass growing in the greatest luxuriance, the most beautiful flowers in abundance...'. It is ironic that the distinction between the two landscapes was largely due to firing practices of the Aboriginal inhabitants. While the mainland was well populated, the island lay beyond the reach of Aboriginal hunters and gatherers. Therefore, the landscape created by Aboriginal people in the pre-European period had an unintended effect of directing settlement towards the eastern Saint Vincent Gulf region.

The settlers who arrived on Kangaroo Island in 1836 employed the Islander Bates to do some hut building in their holdings there. Light hired other Islanders, William Cooper and his two wives—Doughboy and Sall, to go with his surveying party to Rapid Bay. Aboriginal people travelled overland from Encounter Bay with Cooper to meet Light’s party. The Island women, who had 'kangaroo dogs' from the island, were able to supply Light's men with fresh meat which they cooked for them. Light reportedly had good relations with the Aboriginal people of the Rapid Bay 'band'. They carried wood for him, brought reeds for thatching and otherwise rendered Light such help as they could. The Aboriginal people slept around his hut at night. When Light in the Rapid was trying to find a good harbour, for which he had an account from the sealer John Jones, an Aboriginal woman from Kangaroo Island on board showed him the mouth of the Onkaparinga River. Light's men added to their provisions by buying potatoes from a sealing vessel that was passing through. The established network that the Islanders had with the mainland Aboriginal groups and passing merchant vessels thus 10Advertiser, 27 December 1886. Morphett (1836, p.7) states that the sealers and some Aboriginal people had shown the colonists of 1836 a reliable supply of drinking water at Pat Bungar, a small valley a few kilometres north of Cape Jervis.
11Southern Australian, 27 September 1844. Also see Nunn 1989, p.58).
12Adviser, 27 December 1886.
13Morphett 1836, p.13).
15Thomas 1925, p.47).
17Observer, 15 January 1898.
18Dutton 1960, p.172). The identity of his two wives at this time is given elsewhere (Advertiser, 27 December 1886).
19Gouger 1838, pp.46,47).
20See Jones 1835 [1921]; Dutton 1960, pp.175–180).
21Price 1924, p.56).
proved useful to the official colonists of 1836 who had arrived needing directions, fresh food, drinking water, and physical assistance.

During the establishment phase of the Colony of South Australia, the authorities took advantage of the knowledge Kangaroo Islanders had of the southern Aboriginal inhabitants. Cooper and his wives were moved to Encounter Bay in the Lower Murray to develop relations between the new colonists and the Aboriginal people. They were also engaged in the creation of a garden there. Light employed Cooper and his wives as interpreters and as 'go-betweens' for the colonists and the Aboriginal groups. In early 1837, Nat Thomas, a sealer from Kangaroo Island, helped colonists track two missing horses south from Adelaide. Thomas already knew the area through his sealing activities and was able to point out 'native wells' under the sandhills near the mouth of the Onkaparinga River. On one occasion, the party was surrounded by Aboriginal people whom Thomas recognised as Onkaparinga and Encounter Bay people. Although Thomas knew a few of their words, he kept out of sight. The woman he had on Kangaroo Island was from their community and they were reportedly not pleased at her absence. In the colonists' camp at Glenelg near Adelaide, an Aboriginal woman regularly supplied the newcomers with a type of water cress for food. The Europeans reportedly had no knowledge of where it was obtained. Some of the Aboriginal helpers later moved from Glenelg to Adelaide, where they were employed in jobs such as fetching water from the river. The Islanders and local Aboriginal people were valuable as guides and labourers for the coastal regions from Adelaide to the Lower Murray region.

At the time of colonisation, the need for interpreters at Adelaide and Encounter Bay was lessened because many of the Aboriginal people there already spoke English, having learnt it from the Islanders. The area covered by this region was considered by the official colonists to have an Aboriginal population more amenable to European settlement than both Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas. Therefore, not only did Aboriginal people assist the European colonists, but the nature of European relations with the various Aboriginal groups was one of several factors influencing the placing of the site of the capital.

The European colonists of 1836 set up a new iconography of the landscape by naming topographic features after the English aristocracy, and significant explorers and settlers. However, there are also many examples of place names that pre-date the 1836

---

123 The Aboriginal wives of the Islanders were probably some of several Tasmanian people reported to be living among settlers at Encounter Bay by the early 1840s (Penney [as 'Cuique'] in S. Aust. Mag., September 1842, vol.2, pp.18–23).
124 Light (1839, p.21) stated that the Adelaide Plains site was good for settlement as the 'natives more friendly than at Port Lincoln and Yorke Peninsula'. This was also supported by the views of the Islanders (see end note 45).
settled. For example, John Morphett's account in 1836 of the Colony of South Australia uses names gained from sealers and Aboriginal people, such as 'Pat Bungar' for a small valley just north of Cape Jervis, 'Yanky Lilly' (= Yankalilla) and 'Aldinghi Plains' (= Aldinga'). Here, the role of the sealers in naming parts of the landscape was acknowledged by Morphett. The sealers had gained these place names from their Aboriginal contacts. The place names used by Sturt also appear to have been influenced by the sealers. In Sturt's map of the Fleurieu Peninsula and the Lower Murray, there are place names, some of them Aboriginal, for localities he did not visit (Fig. 3). It has been suggested that some of these topographical features, such as Granite Island and Seal Rock, were given their names by sealers sometime before 1830. Nevertheless, as with most names derived from European and other sources, the etymological sense of the Aboriginal place names are generally not known by the broader public. Linguistic studies in many instances have established their original meanings.

In the case of the place names of Kangaroo Island, today there are a number of names in official use that derive from the French explorer Baudin, such as D'Estrees Bay and Cape du Couedic. The present use is presumably the result of the publication of Baudin's expedition reports. The American whalers have also left their mark on Kangaroo Island, as the term Pelican Lagoon given by Flinders was replaced by the name of American River, because of Pendleton's activities there as described above. There have been, and are presently, many examples of place names on the island put into use by the pre-1836 sealers, such as Hog Bay, Harvey's Return and Murrell's Landing. Interestingly, there are no Aboriginal place names on Kangaroo Island recorded from the early period of sealing and whaling, in spite of the Tasmanian and mainland-derived populations of Aboriginal people living there.

The early recognition by Europeans of the relationship that Aboriginal people had developed with Kangaroo Island is evident in their use of Aboriginal trackers. For instance, in 1836 when the colonist Joseph Finch disappeared in the Rapid Bay district, the Islander Cooper and some Aboriginal people searched for him. In the same year, the Islander Wallen and his two wives, Puss and Polecat, set out with a party on Kangaroo Island to find two missing passengers of the Africa who had attempted to cross on foot from the western side. Here the role of the Aboriginal women was described as being 'trackers'. Aboriginal trackers were routinely employed to search for lost stock in southern South Australia.

The role of tracker and Aboriginal interpreter often merged. In 1840, Aboriginal guides from the Encounter Bay area were used by colonial authorities in their expeditions to discover the whereabouts of the survivors of the Maria wreck. In the
investigation of the subsequent massacre of the *Maria* shipwreck survivors on the Coorong, three Aboriginal men—‘Encounter Bay Bob’, ‘One-arm Charley’ and ‘Peter’, were part of the investigating crew. 138 It is interesting to note that all three appear to have had experience in whaling and sealing, due to their early connections with Kangaroo Island.139 During the early days of European settlement at Encounter Bay, ‘native guides’ were routinely used by the police.140

In 1844, Inspector Alexander Tolmer was sent to Kangaroo Island to arrest escaped bushrangers who were living in the bush on the island. These outlaws were living there with the assistance of two Aboriginal women, Sal and Suke.141 Tolmer was well aware that those he was to pursue had a geographical edge over him. For this reason, Tolmer hired two other Aboriginal women on the island, Bet and Old Waub, as trackers.142 In addition, one of the men accompanying Tolmer was a policeman stationed at Willunga, who was known to have formerly served as a whaler with Captain Hart before official settlement. Tolmer considered that the knowledge of the Kangaroo Island area this man possessed would be particularly useful. Tolmer’s party successfully tracked the escapees, and he claimed that he would have failed to find them without the help of the Aboriginal women. As with the earlier search for Barker, the Islanders here received payment for the tracking services of their wives.143

Knowledge of Kangaroo Island gained by Aboriginal women’s hunting and gathering expeditions proved useful on many occasions. In November 1853, the steamer, *Osmanli*, struck a reef near Cape Linois in D’Estree Bay.144 A rescue party that included the Islander Nat Thomas and an Aboriginal woman, reached the stranded passengers by travelling overland. The location of a soak to provide drinking water was shown by the Aboriginal woman, probably the wife or daughter of Nat Thomas. In December 1855, the Islander Buik and an Aboriginal woman searched for a missing man named Pennington who had disappeared in thick scrub on Kangaroo Island near Osmanli Beach.145 Troopers from Adelaide, Coward and Dundas, were dispatched in January 1856 to help find Pennington, but even with Aboriginal guides, were unsuccessful. The Aboriginal residents of the island would have had extensive geographic knowledge of the barren south coast of the island, through the hunting and gathering expeditions of the women.

The exploitation of Kangaroo Island’s mineral resources was on occasion facilitated by the earlier Aboriginal residents. For instance, during Tolmer’s raid on the island, Old Bet (or Betsey) had told him about the abundance of pitch there.146 This led to an

---

138 There were three expeditions with which these three Aboriginal men, trained in whaling and sealing, were a part. For an account of Pullen’s expedition, see *Register*, 15 August 1840. For Penney’s expedition, see *Register*, 24 April 1841. Also see Lendon 1930, p.23). Bull (1884, pp.116–129) gives an account of O’Halloran’s expedition.
139 Encounter Bay Bob served as a guide and tracker on Sturt’s expedition from Adelaide to the North West Bend of the Murray River in 1839 (Davies, 1881, pp.121–168).
141 Bet and Wauber (= Old Waub) were possibly both Tasmanian (Clarke, 1997).
143 Nunn 1989, pp.95–97).
144 Bull 1884, pp.58,59).
145 Cockburn 1908 [1984, p.172]).
attempt by Tolmer, Nat Thomas and Mrs Seymour (daughter of Thomas and Old Bet) to
lodge a claim on Kangaroo Island for natural pitch. In 1856, Old Bet lodged a gold claim
for the Cape Willoughby Ranges with the Gold Research Committee. She stated that
after some Islanders had returned from the mainland gold fields, she had been shown
gold nuggets they had. She had exclaimed 'Me see him plenty like it that yellowfellow
tone.' She explained that when her son, Nat, was very young, she and another
Aboriginal woman had collected a number of nuggets and had beaten them out or
'made them long' as she had put it. However, Aboriginal knowledge of the island was
not always taken without question. William A. Cawthorne, the son of the first
lighthouse keeper at Cape Willoughby, claimed that Old Bet was not to be taken
seriously. He considered that island rumours of gold were based on Tolmer's
accidental discovery of it while capturing bushrangers in 1844. Cawthorne considered
that Tolmer's find was in a different area from where Betsey had lodged her claim.
Cawthorne had already lodged a claim to the Gold Research Committee for his
suggested area of the island.

Some of the Aboriginal inhabitants on Kangaroo Island were returned to their
place of origin after 1836. Although a few Tasmanian women were eventually taken
back to Tasmania, several of them chose not to return to their previous homeland.
This was perhaps because of their knowledge of events in Tasmania. For instance, by
1830 only three hundred fully descended Tasmanians of an original population of
several thousand remained. It is possible that some Tasmanians were absorbed into
the mainland Aboriginal population, while others remained on Kangaroo Island. In
1844, there were twelve Aboriginal women living on Kangaroo Island, several of whom
were originally from Tasmania. They were judged to be between forty and fifty years
of age, having been on the island upwards of seventeen years. In the 1860s, one
Aboriginal family of mainland ancestry was moved from the island to the Point McLeay
Mission in the Lower Murray. By the 1870s, it seems that most of the Aboriginal
people who had originally been taken to Kangaroo Island, had either died or were
removed. The exceptions were three Tasmanian women, all of whom outlived the so-

---

147 Register, 13 September 1856 (reprinted Observer, Supplement, 13 October 1906).
148 Register, 15 September 1856 (reprinted Observer, 20 October 1906). W.A. Cawthorne was an
earliest Adelaide painter and ethnographer (1844).
149 Thomas Willson, Observer, 7 October 1871.
151 Wood Jones (1934) claims that some Tasmanians may have drifted into mainland
populations after European colonisation. Mollison (1976, Appendix) suggests that at least
one present day Aboriginal family in the Lower Murray has Tasmanian descent. My
fieldwork has shown that for the family mentioned by Mollison, this is very likely.
Furthermore, among contemporary Aboriginal people, there is knowledge of additional
genealogical links between Ngarrindjeri and Tasmanian groups.
152 Tolmer in the Observer, 28 September 1844.
153 In 1860, Taplin records that an Aboriginal woman and her children were sent by the
Government from Kangaroo Island to the Point McLeay Mission (1859–1879, Journals, 22
December 1860). The woman's name was Nellie Raminyenmermin, the widow of John
Wilkins, who was a Russian Finnish whaler living on Kangaroo Island (Kartinyeri, 1990,
vol.1, p.13).
called ‘last of the Tasmanians’, Truganina. The last of these island women died sometime around 1888.

The early Islanders did leave descendants among later Kangaroo Island populations. With the anthropological interest in the ‘extinct races’, one woman, who had been the child of a white sealer and a Tasmanian woman, was the subject of special anatomical studies. However, the Aboriginal people on Kangaroo Island became socially cut off from other former sealing stations in the Bass Strait after official settlement. With the large influx of farmers on Kangaroo Island, its distinctive Aboriginality has largely remained in the past. In contrast, the descendants of the sealers and their Aboriginal wives in the Furneaux Group of Tasmania have formed a culturally distinctive population that persists today. Nevertheless, there are still people living on Kangaroo Island who can trace descent to a Tasmanian woman brought there sometime before 1836.

Conclusion

From the evidence put forth here, it is clear that both the early sealer/whalers and their Aboriginal contacts did have special roles in the initial formation of the Colony of South Australia. One of the main problems that official colonists faced upon their arrival in 1836 was essentially lack of geographical knowledge. Initially through the medium of the sealers, Aboriginal people helped the colonists in a variety of ways that drew upon their pre-European knowledge of the landscape. The historical reconstruction of the interaction between sealers, Aboriginal people and the official colonists, is therefore not simply of antiquarian interest, but provides deeper understanding of European and Aboriginal settlement patterns since 1800.

Published accounts of the formation of the Colony of South Australia have tended to focus on official events and people. The merchants and sealers operating in southern Australian waters during the early period are barely mentioned in most Australian history texts. The general histories of South Australia, such as that provided by Blacket, Price and Dutton, note the existence of the early sealers solely because they were the first Europeans there. British history has given prominence to explorers and founders of colonies, rather than to sealers and whalers who were not part of government-run expeditions. The treatment of the Aboriginal inhabitants has also largely been confined to contextual material, to reinforce the ‘wilderness’ quality and ‘primitiveness’ of the Australian landscape. The pre-1836 populations of both European and Aboriginal

154 Kangaroo Island resident, Thomas Willson, claimed in 1871 that there were three Tasmanian women left there, the rest having been taken back to Tasmania many years earlier by Captain Duff and others (Observer, 7 October 1871). Duff was captain of the Africaine in 1836–1837 (Dutton, 1960, pp.183,186,187,211). One of the last three Tasmanian women on the island was possibly Truganina’s sister (Clarke, 1997). Note that Truganina (= Trugananna, Truganini) was also known as Lalla Roohk.

155 Basedow 1914; Berry 1907).
157 See Nunn (1989) for a history of Kangaroo Island.
159 Tindale 1937a, p.32; Mollison 1976, Appendix; Clarke (1997) provide genealogical data of families with Tasmanian descent living on Kangaroo Island and in the Lower Murray region.
people have generally not been considered significant in the development of the Colony of South Australia.

During the exploration phase of Aboriginal and European relations in southern South Australia, there was an equal relationship between the colonists and the indigenous populations, albeit sometimes brutal. However, gradually their relations became more asymmetrical as the technology and culture gap between them grew. As land was developed for agriculture and the social structure of the official colony was established, the reliance by Europeans upon Aboriginal knowledge of the environment became less and less. In contrast to the early sealers, the official settlers of South Australia quickly become independent of the Aboriginal source of landscape knowledge. This is not to say that Europeans did not use Aboriginal labour in agriculturally-based industries, simply that the hunter-gatherer knowledge described above was no longer being utilised. Nevertheless, we can not understand European colonisation of southern South Australia without fully considering the relationship of early Europeans and the Aboriginal inhabitants.

Acknowledgments

This paper formed part of a chapter of a PhD thesis in cultural geography and social anthropology. It was read out at the Anthropological Society of South Australia in 1992. Drafts of this work were commented upon by Chris Anderson, Peter Smailes, Kingsley Garbett, and Rob Amery. Andrew Hughes photographed the display panel of Aboriginal artefacts.

Philip Clarke is Senior Curator of Aboriginal Collections and Coordinator of the Anthropology Department at the South Australian Museum. His doctoral dissertation in social anthropology and cultural geography focussed on the Aboriginal culture of the Lower Murray region of South Australia.

References


Basedow, H. 1914. Relic of the lost Tasmanian race—obituary notice of Mary Seymour. Man, pp.161,162.


Cameron, J. 1979. *Yilki—A Place by the Sea*. Yilki Uniting Church, Victor Harbor.


Scott, T. 1839. *Description of South Australia...* Duncan Campbell, Glasgow.


Deep nation: Australia's acquisition of an indigenous past

Denis Byrne

Since at least the 1970s the concept of national heritage has been an inseparable part of the practice of archaeology in Australia, and given that archaeology and cultural nationalism march hand in hand in virtually every country of the world, this is hardly surprising. Nor is it surprising that a settler colony like Australia, in order to bond itself better to the exotic terrain by sending roots down into the continent's past, would at some stage want to appropriate to itself the time-depth represented by the archaeological remains of the indigenous minority. Yet surely, on the face of it, there is something quite radical and extraordinary in the prospect of a settler culture which for so long had pronounced indigenous culture to be a savage anachronism suddenly turning to embrace the past of that culture as its own.

My contention is that Australia's adoption of Aboriginal 'heritage' was, however, a radical departure only in a limited sense. Preceding this act of appropriation and stretching back into the nation's colonial origins there can be seen to be a series of other ways in which the physical, 'archaeological' traces of the Aboriginal past had been actively colonised. This essay attempts to delineate that series of colonial 'moves'. My concern as an archaeologist working in the field known as 'Aboriginal heritage management' is to trace the lineage of my own practice and thus, optimistically, break free to some extent from its colonial complicity. As this implies, I believe that archaeology in Australia can only be post-colonial to the extent that its practitioners deconstruct its colonial underpinnings. Archaeology in Australia must decolonise itself before it can claim to be post-colonial.

In what follows I develop the notion of two diametrically opposed trends operating in southeastern Australia from 1788 onward. On the one hand Aborigines were engaged in transactional relationships with white settlers and were establishing a new cultural geography (i.e., adding to the old cultural landscape new networks of significant places). On the other hand, settler society, while spatially marginalising Aboriginal people and denying the authenticity of the emergent Aboriginal culture of the southeast, was also beginning to regard the archaeological remains of pre-contact Aboriginal culture as a benchmark of authentic Aboriginality. At the same time that various means were being used to decrease the visibility of living Aboriginal people in the landscape of the southeast various other means were being employed to enhance the visibility of the archaeological remains which, in a sense, were replacing them there.
Contact as transaction

The members of the First Fleet who arrived at Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, in 1788 had a momentary glimpse of local Aboriginal culture before it began to change. This is not to say that it was static prior to 1788, simply to note, retrospectively, that Aboriginal society was on the verge of an era of immense and in many ways catastrophic change. Chroniclers of the first years like Tench and Hunter were well aware that the Aboriginal people around Port Jackson were staggering under the immediate effect of the encounter and they hurried to describe what they could of the habits and appearance of these people, to collect their artefacts and to write down words from their language while there was still time. Whatever chaos and confusion might be seen to have entered the lives of the natives, there was, in the minds of these observers and collectors, no question as to the authenticity of the people themselves as true representatives of the strange land.

Gradually, over the space of a few decades, this perception changed. As Aborigines in the Sydney area increasingly modified their lifestyle and their material culture to meet the novel constraints and possibilities attendant upon the arrival of Europeans, the Europeans increasingly lost interest in them. The Aborigines were seen to have lost or to be fast losing that quality which for so many Europeans was the only excuse for being a native, the quality of being authentically primitive. Leaving aside for the moment the question of how Europeans defined authenticity, it is important to understand that they saw themselves as the exclusive agents of change. Lacking such agency, the natives could only ever be the passive recipients of European ways and products. And it was for this reason that with few exceptions the early observers failed to attend to the process by which Aborigines were recontextualising or Aboriginalising elements of European culture. For the reality, of course, was that there was agency on both sides.

A reading of European accounts of the early years at Port Jackson does provide glimmerings of the nature of Aboriginal agency in the contact process—the conventional use of the term 'contact', though, now seems rather too hard edged, evoking as it does an image of cultures as billiard balls and a nineteenth century vision in which 'European culture bumped into non-European culture without merging'. Nicholas Thomas's term, 'entanglement', which he uses primarily in the context of cross-cultural traffic in material culture, seems preferable. It is an entanglement which occurs in the processes of exchange, borrowing, modification, and reworking which are a typical accompaniment to the meeting of cultures. We know that, confronted with a large array of European artefacts at Port Jackson, the Aborigines' desires were focused and specific. European dresses, jackets, and trousers were worn mainly to gain useful favour with Europeans but there is a suggestion that hats and scarves were objects of direct or unmediated desire. Bread was favoured over other European foods; blankets were sought after by Aboriginal women who recontextualised them as garments and as slings for carrying babies on their backs. Prior to the Europeans' arrival the Aborigines around Port

1 Tench 1979, Hunter 1968.
2 See for example Adas 1989.
3 Leach 1989, p. 43.
Jackson were not unfamiliar with the dynamics of exchange but the circumstances of the encounter called for adaptability on both sides. If the British were willing to innovate by engaging with Aborigines in 'gifting'—Cook's voyages would have familiarised them with this practice—then the Aborigines for their part displayed flexibility by bartering their 'curiosities' and providing certain services in return for European goods.

The flow of Aboriginal products and knowledge into European hands was seen by Europeans in the contexts of curiosity and science. They did not feel their integrity as Europeans had been brought into question by this traffic, yet the equivalent flow into Aboriginal hands was seen both as a symptom of primitiveness and a cause of cultural collapse. In an ever-expanding field around Port Jackson the native inhabitants were losing their authenticity in European eyes and, as others have noted, they have been losing it ever since.

The construct of traditional culture upon which this view rests has now been exposed to critique, at least among anthropologists. Those who have studied the urban and rural Aboriginal communities of the settled southeast of Australia, hence defying the dictum that real Aboriginal culture was only to be found in the remote Centre and North, have been able to point to the emergence of dynamic and adaptive forms of Aboriginality. A more general critique of the culture concept in anthropology is exemplified by James Clifford's argument that tribal societies, rather than being fragile 'endangered authenticities' with a tendency to shatter upon contact with the West, are no less inventive than their larger scale counterparts. It is characteristic of all human cultures to be constantly negotiating change.

Clifford writes against the following characterisation or narrative of tribal peoples:

'Entering the modern world', their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly 'backward' peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.

If Aborigines did continue to invent local futures after 1788 then what, one might ask, were they? The example might be given of a distinctively Aboriginal valuation of Australian money. Or of the way roads and motor vehicles have been used in a novel way by Aborigines to maintain kinship links along 'beats' and 'runs'. A myriad of settler social and economic practices were sampled and reworked by Aborigines, but here I want to look at inventiveness specifically in terms of places and objects. It is apparent that while Aborigines were busy inventing local futures and signifying the places and things which went with them, European settlers were hard at work ignoring these in favour of the places and things the 'old' Aborigines had left behind.

7 Kaeppler 1988.
8 See for example, Beckett 1988a.
9 See for example, Beckett 1988b; Keen 1988.
10 Clifford 1988, p. 5.
11 ibid., p. 5.
The opening of a gap

The most widely accepted narrative of the Aboriginal experience in the southeast of the continent through the course of the nineteenth century presents it as an unmitigated slide into dependency. Among the recent challenges to this narrative is Goodall's presentation of the 'forgotten' history of Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry in western New South Wales. Goodall also documents the eagerness of many New South Wales Aborigines in the early and mid-nineteenth century to adopt elements of the settlers' farming economy and the efforts they made to re-acquire land and clear it for agriculture. In a counter-narrative which sits uncomfortably with the accepted vision of fringe camp lethargy and degeneracy she writes about the building of houses, the planting of gardens, and the spending of farm profits on curtains, pianos, and, particularly, horses.

We now accept that it was not an inability to cope with the new which devastated Aboriginal morale. This resulted, rather, from the experience shared by many Aboriginal people of being moved off any land where they had tried to build an adaptive lifestyle (see, for instance, Read's account of the dispersal of the Wiradjuri people in Western NSW) and of being confined to small designated reserves where they had to subsist on rations while they watched settlers take up the land they themselves had cleared. This is not to say that reserves, or the Protection period generally, represented a termination of Aboriginal ability to innovate. Rather than helplessness in the face of an irresistible settler culture we see that many Aboriginal people were still reaching for the good life (which does not have to mean the European life). In the fringe camps and on the missions and reserves cultural change was being transacted and not just imposed.

Christmas camps constitute a case in point. The celebration of Christmas was introduced to Aborigines by missionaries in the nineteenth century in the belief that by distributing gifts and special foods such as Christmas cake and pudding they might attract people to the missions, reinforce the importance of the birth of Christ, demonstrate Christian kindness, and civilise Aborigines via their participation in one of Western civilisation's great rites. By the early to mid-twentieth century Aborigines had absorbed elements of the settler Christmas into a yearly ritual of leaving the missions to camp together in the bush or on the coast. Christmas cakes were baked, cricket was played and at night there was singing and dancing to the sound of violins and gum-leaf bands. Kin groups were brought together. Though the practice has now stopped, the locations of the Christmas camps are fondly remembered by the parental and grandparental generations in Aboriginal communities. The Christmas camps are now part of an Aboriginal cultural landscape which consists, in any one area, of a constellation of places such as old missions, mission cemeteries, and the sites of old fringe camps. It is a landscape which overlays or overlaps rather than replaces the Aboriginal cultural

14 Goodall 1996.
15 Goodall 1990.
16 Read 1984, 1996.
17 For references to Christmas camps see Attwood 1989 and Thomson 1989.
landscape of pre-settler days. Some Christmas camps, for instance, are on prehistoric coastal fishing and shellfish gathering sites which are marked by shell middens. ¹⁸

The religious or sacred landscape of Aborigines was also being re-formed. As European settlement cut across the old sacred landscape, Dreaming sites marked by mountain peaks, rock outcrops, and water holes were often now on the other side of boundary fences. The raised-earth circles (bora grounds) which had been used for initiation rites were liable to be bisected by roads or crossed by telegraph lines. Sacred carved trees were cut down.

According to structural-functional anthropology's understanding of the Dreaming as a fixed 'charter' handed down to the living by ancestral beings and anchored to 'sacred sites', this scale of European intervention in the sacred landscape would surely have shattered Aboriginal spiritual life. The revision of the 'charter' model in recent years, however, underlines the agency of the living Aboriginal actor not only as receiver and transmitter but as interpreter and modifier of the Dreaming. According to Nancy Munn, writing of the Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia, what is passed on is not just the 'law' but 'a form or mode of experiencing the world in which the symbols of collectivity are constantly recharged with intimations of the self'.¹⁹ These symbols of collectivity include the landscape and ritual objects. Writing of the Pintupi, Fred Myers helps us to see that the Dreamtime as understood at any one time is not contradicted by novel events or the arrival of the totally unprecedented (e.g., white settlers).²⁰ These are not so much incorporated into the Dreaming as revealed, through visions, to be a previously unrealised dimension of it. This new understanding provides a background against which to consider evidence collected on the North Coast of New South Wales (NSW) in the middle decades of the twentieth century which reveals the existence of a greatly changed Aboriginal 'mythology' but one which was successfully assimilating elements of settler culture.²¹ Many elements of the settler landscape (a bridge, for instance, and a race-course) had been invested with specific supernatural attributes; stories circulated which associated certain places with the peripatetic activities of Birugan, a syncretic deity with some of the characteristics of Jesus. The new understanding of myth in anthropology may allow us to read such evidence not as indications of a corrupted, atrophying religious life but one which is alive, dynamic, and transactional.

A comparison might be drawn between the resignification of sacred space in post-1788 New South Wales and that resignification which was occurring in Christendom in the early first millennium AD as the sacred space of paganism, rather than being obliterated by Christian churches, shrines, and insignia, lived on inside the sacred space of Christendom.²² An equivalent process took place in Thailand as Mahayana Buddhism colonised the space of animism.²³ In Spanish America, Catholicism sought to domesticate the sacred places of the Aztec and Inca religions with curiously syncretic results. Gary Urton, for instance, addresses himself to the way the Spanish in the Andes

¹⁸ Information in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service's Aboriginal Sites Register.
²⁰ Myers 1986.
²³ Byrne 1995.
appropriated Inca sacred space to bolster colonial institutions while the Inca, not exactly at cross purposes, did something similar with the institutions and practices of the introduced religion: there are no institutions or practices untouched by history, there are no 'innocent survivors'. Urton's comment might equally well apply—he shows this to be true—to places and spaces, sacred or secular. They are rarely pure, never immune to the reworking of history.

I suggest that one of the functions of the static-fragile conception of 'tribal' society against which Clifford writes has been to facilitate the wishful vision of a precolonial order swept away. The notion of a precolonial, indigenous intelligence persisting in 'settled' eastern Australia in the form of a signified landscape 'inside' the colonial landscape is in some ways subversive; that this signification might include the borrowing and recontextualisation of elements of the coloniser's own culture threatens the perceived solidity of that culture and hence, in a sense, its right to be there. As a branch of the colonial culture's spatial knowledge, archaeology has had a role in blinding us to this sort of agency on the part of the indigenous. Through a process of monumentalisation, archaeology has helped conceptualise 'genuine' indigenous culture not so much as entirely swept away but as contained or confined in the form of archaeological sites. Colonial archaeology, in this sense, is characteristically reductive.

Aboriginal culture in the southeast was perceived by white settlers to be a faded, static memory of a once vibrant 'traditional' culture. The archaeological sites, on the other hand, retained their integrity; as the Aborigines faded (i.e., changed) the sites stood in for them. This is illustrated in the Sydney area where the horizontal sandstone exposures around the harbour and its many deeply-incised inlets bore thousands of engravings, executed by Aborigines prior to 1788, depicting human figures as well as whales, sharks, kangaroos, boomerangs. This land was parcelled out in the nineteenth century and soon houses, boat sheds, garden walls, and lighthouses were built on the sandstone, sharing space with the engravings or covering them over. By the 1830s, European residents of Sydney were commenting on the engravings and sketching them but they were mostly either uninterested or unsuccessful in eliciting information on them from local Aborigines. By the time amateur archaeologists began systematically recording the engravings in the 1880s the few surviving Aborigines of the region had long since been removed to missions. People like the surveyor W.D. Campbell discovered many of the lesser-known engravings by talking to old European landholders, some of whom recalled scraps of information passed on by departed Aborigines. By virtue of their physical ownership of the land and their long residence on it these landholders assumed a sort authority over the engravings denied to contemporary Aborigines who, living on the outskirts of the city, were rarely seen. In more ways than one, the engravings had become European property. Similarly, one of the attractions of Aboriginal stone artefacts in the eyes of the collector was, as Griffiths notes, that unlike Aboriginal-made tourist art, 'they could be 'discovered' and harvested for free, without Aboriginal mediation.'

---

24 Upton 1990, p. 15.
25 Allen 1988, p. 86.
26 Campbell 1899.
27 Griffiths 1996, p. 73. See also p. 81.
So the physical traces of the Aborigines were 'taken up' by settlers along with the land. These traces were seen as constituting a more authentic manifestation of Aboriginality than the acculturated persons of the living Aborigines themselves; in the logic of this frame of thought the settlers now possessed, in property, an authentic form of Aboriginality. More important, though, than the physical-spatial separation of Aboriginal remains from living Aborigines was the separation which was effected in certain European discourses. In addressing myself in what follows to the discourses of natural history, ethnology, and antiquarianism, in addition to that of archaeology, I am responding to what I see as the continuity between them. This continuity is not, or not strictly, chronological, but is of the nature of an alliance or formation of discourses.

Separation by discourse: natural history and ethnology

By the time Europeans were describing and settling Australia the discourse of natural history had forsaken the Renaissance tradition in which the magical and legendary attributes of a plant or animal might be included in the account given of it. This tradition had been left behind in favour of an Enlightenment classificatory approach based on observable physical attributes. Once classificatory systems such as that of Linnaeus had been established one could relatively easily incorporate into them new plant and animal types encountered either in Europe or further afield. As Mary Louise Pratt observes, circumnavigation of the globe by Europeans brought into being not just a 'planetary consciousness' but a 'European global or planetary subject'.

One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize ('naturalize') new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system.

In this way one did not discover new species, one recognised them. What Joseph Banks and Carl Solander did with the plants and animals they found on the east coast of Australia in the mid-eighteenth century was to move them over into an existing European order.

As the exploratory gaze of the eighteenth century voyager scientist moved across the Australian landscape it registered rock outcrops, trees, native huts, lagoons, and natives fishing in lagoons all as a continuum (successive elements of a panorama fused by the sweep of the eye). Seen as an extension of nature, the Aborigines were naturalised. Defined as the description of the visible, natural history paid particular attention to the appearance of the Aborigines, to their bodies and artefacts, to their materiality. 'The peoples discovered are not submitted to an analysis of their internal cohesion', Daniel Defert observes, 'they are exposed to an inventory'. Given the fleeting nature of their stay such 'analysis' would, anyway, have been difficult for the earliest European observers.

---

30 ibid., p. 31.
An inventory had the advantage of being able to be compiled even when the natives were not around. In 1623 Jan Carstenz examined the interiors of the 'wretched huts' of the Aborigines on Cape York, finding pebbles, human bones, and some resin. On the west coast of the continent in 1688 and 1699 William Dampier examined camp sites to discover what food people ate and James Cook did the same at Botany Bay in 1770. By inspecting the food near the Aborigines' fires and by observing the contents of their huts Cook determined that they were a people who did not store food but, rather, subsisted from day to day. It was fortunate that objects as well as people could serve as signs because the Aborigines could prove extremely elusive. Despite six weeks on the west coast and sixteen sorties on land by groups of his party, De Vlamingh never saw a soul. Tasman's company spent ten days on the coast of Tasmania: 'They saw no Aboriginal people, though they saw fires in the woods, heard voices and deduced correctly, from a study of the distance between scars cut in the bark of trees, that they had been used for climbing up their trunks'. Of course, on numerous other occasions Aborigines were encountered in person though it is remarkable how little the Europeans learned from them. The gaze of the explorer taking in an abandoned camp site, penetrating the interior of a vacant hut, remains a strong metaphor for the separation of people from their artefacts.

With the advent of European settlement the classificatory enterprise moved inland. Explorers, surveyors, geologists, and other scientists fanned out from the coastal settlements; trained observers, they frequently depicted Aboriginal camps, burials, and carved trees in their records and collected Aboriginal artefacts. The surveyors plotted rivers and mountains onto maps and laid down a cadastral grid over the land surface. Traces of Aborigines on the land were sometimes plotted onto maps where, fixed in the imperial space of English-style parishes and counties, they were recontextualised as items of quaint interest in an imperial inventory of resources.

The collection had a privileged place in the technology of natural history. As a pressed plant in a herbarium can be thought to definitively represent a species, so also the nature of Aborigines was approached as if it could be captured by collecting the artefacts, the bones, and even sometimes the persons of Aboriginal people. As voyager scientists were replaced by settlers and as Aborigines and their material culture were seen to change, the earlier collections began to acquire a certain cachet, representing, it was believed, the true nature of true Aborigines more accurately than did the living Aborigines and their products.

Thomas points out that in depicting the natives' artefacts as floating freely upon the page with no hint of their human associations, Banks' draughtsmen were concerned to show that their natural history was free of the licentiousness usually associated with curiosity. Here the act of detachment can be seen to stem from natural history's effort to legitimise itself as a science but the detachment, nevertheless, was in tune with the

---

32 Mulvaney 1977, p. 263.
33 Beaglehole 1955, p. 309, 312.
34 Mulvaney 1958, p. 133.
36 Thomas 1994a.
subsequent habit of treating artefacts as a form of Aboriginality free-standing and independent of Aborigines themselves.

The contention here is that the practice of natural history set the stage for the practice of heritage management by introducing the classificatory habit, with the inventory as a component device, and by encouraging the idea that objects (artefacts, sites, and the like) could be used to represent peoples and cultures. I will go on to argue that it is possible to see the same emphasis on observable physical attributes operating in racial classification.

Ethnology took up its place under the meta-discourse of natural history as a specialist field for the classification of Aborigines and their products. Nineteenth century racial classification was combined with Darwinian theory to arrive at the finding that Aborigines were not only naturally inferior to Europeans but were also serially prior to them. This established a pseudo-logic for Aboriginal mortality (as fossil survivors from another time they were fated to be supplanted) and, by denying Aborigines coevality with Europeans, it instituted the idea that Aboriginal artefacts of the present and recent past could be treated as the equivalent of those from the remote past. The principal significance of both was that they illustrated the Aborigines' otherness. One result of this was the peculiar disjunction of competing identities which saw Europeans collecting stone artefacts at a time when Aborigines were rejecting them in favour of steel hatchets and flaked glass artefacts. Europeans categorised Aborigines as users of stone artefacts while Aborigines, presumably, saw themselves as users of steel and knapped-glass. The settler's construction of Aborigines thus always backdated them.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century natural history moved on from a classification based on observable phenomena to an interest in establishing the character of natural beings on the basis of what David Spurr has called 'the internal principle of organic structure':

This principle gave rise to a system or ordering that allowed for a hierarchy of characters depending on their relative complexity of organic structure and for classification according to certain key functions: how a species reproduces or what it eats. To classify therefore meant no longer simply to arrange the visible, but to perform a circular analysis that related the visible to the invisible, its 'deeper cause,' then arose again toward the surface of bodies to identify the signs that confirmed the hidden cause.

In their dual role as both evidence and proof of the Aborigines' character and place in the hierarchy of human development, Aboriginal artefacts became increasingly important display items. With the intensification of Western industrialisation during the nineteenth century Westerners came to see inventiveness as the hallmark of their society and to see technology, more than any other measure, as the index of their civilisation's superiority. This goes a long way to account for the enthusiasm of Australian colonial governments to be represented at the great international expositions of the nineteenth century where Aboriginal artefacts would be laid out in juxtaposition to the products of

37 Fabian 1983.
38 Spurr 1993, p. 63.
Australian settler society. Perhaps what was best exposed at these venues was the extent to which capitalism had commodified humanity.\textsuperscript{40} Aboriginal artefacts became the baseline in an epic of technological progress which spoke of the immense distance Australia had travelled since 1788.

As the West discovered the world beyond its borders it began to seek its identity in relation to that world and against it; in other words, by reference to what was outside and opposite. The unilinear models of human progress already being advanced in the mid-eighteenth century allowed the non-Western world to serve as evidence of the West’s prehistory. Voyages of discovery, as Johannes Fabian shows, became ventures in time-travel and the discovery of places like Australia became exercises in archaeology.\textsuperscript{41} The native Other became a dimension of the European subject. One appreciates that the sort of alterity which posited the Aborigines as the settlers’ Other also brought the settlers into a certain intimacy with the Aborigines (the non-West, it has been argued, gave the West its identity, the concept of the West having no positivity of its own).\textsuperscript{42} White Australia became locked into maintaining its construction of the traditional-static Aborigine partly because the stability of its own identity depended upon it.

‘Character,’ understood in the sense used by Spurr, was an essence which could not be amenable to change—too much hinged on it. It was closely allied to the concept of race and because the racial type ‘Aborigine’ was, like all racial types, believed to be the embodiment of a particular physical essence, it followed that, via miscegenation, it could be found at an individual level either in a pure or diluted form. The Aboriginal type itself in this view could thus be sub-divided into ‘half-castes’, ‘quarter castes’ and even finer discriminations (e.g., ‘octaroons’). In the one-way street of racial discourse Aboriginality could be lost, but not added to.

When the concept of biological race was abandoned by anthropologists in the mid-twentieth century it was left, Gillian Cowlishaw notes, to social anthropologists rather than physical anthropologists to define who the Aborigines were.\textsuperscript{43} In the event, the former defined them by reference to the surviving elements of ‘traditional’ Aboriginal culture in the north and centre of the continent. Culture took the place of blood and the concept of the ‘pure’ or ‘full-blood’ Aborigine was replaced by that of the ‘traditional’ Aborigine.\textsuperscript{44} Since Aboriginal culture in the southeast had so obviously changed from what it was in 1788, then those in settler society who had an interest in ‘real/authentic’ Aboriginality were forced to seek that essence elsewhere. They sought it in the past and on the frontier (the frontier being as remote to most settlers as was the pre-1788 past). Meanwhile, Aboriginal culture as lived by Aborigines in the southeast continued on under the noses, as it were, of the settlers. The gap opened up between the ‘real’/remote Aborigines and Aboriginal people of the southeast is, of course, purely conceptual, but it continues to be used as a political weapon against Aborigines in places like New South Wales. One of the perils of heritage practice and its privileging of the past is that in the ‘wrong hands’ it becomes part of this general offensive.

\textsuperscript{40} Breckenridge 1989; Lucáks 1971.
\textsuperscript{41} op cit.
\textsuperscript{42} Todorov 1985; MacLean 1992-93.
\textsuperscript{43} Cowlishaw 1987.
\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Ingold 1986.
Ethnology and archaeology were practised as inseparable discourses in Australia up till the mid-twentieth century. John Mulvaney in 1958, in an almost ritualistic cleaning of the slate before 'modern' archaeology began, held the cultural evolutionism of ethnology to account for the damage it had done to Aborigines. In what follows, however, I have paired antiquarianism with archaeology, doing so in the interests of drawing out their shared propensity to produce Aboriginal remains as a particular kind of 'cultural capital' in settler and national society.

Separation by discourse: antiquarianism and archaeology

Originating in Renaissance humanism, antiquarianism was saved from being assimilated by the later discourses of art history and archaeology by the extent to which it treated the possession and display of antiquities, at both a private and state level, as an end in itself rather than a means to knowledge. Antiquarianism, however, has tended not to be allocated a separate place in the history of 'Aboriginal studies', the private collectors of Aboriginal artefacts tending to be seen as practising amateur forms of archaeology or ethnology in the 'vacuum' which existed prior to the advent in Australia of professional anthropology in the 1920s and professional archaeology in the 1960s. In choosing to give antiquarian collectors separate consideration here I am persuaded by their importance in circulating Aboriginal artefacts through settler society, broadcasting the notion of Aboriginal culture as collectable.

It followed from the perception of Aboriginal culture as 'fossilised' that little distinction was made between wooden spears and shields obtained from living Aborigines and stone implements which may have been millennia old. Both were collected, frequently by the same people. The balance between old and new depended partly on where the collector was situated: on the frontier, wooden artefacts, baskets, ritual objects, and personal ornaments were obtainable whereas in settled areas only prehistoric stone artefacts were collectable in a primary sense. Of far greater importance was the distinction alluded to earlier between those collectors driven by unadorned curiosity and those whose curiosity was legitimised as science. At Port Jackson both the convicts and the officers of the First Fleet collected avidly, though the line between collecting for profit and collecting for knowledge was somewhat blurred. The strong market for 'ethnographic' objects among private metropolitan collectors would soon find its counterpart in the Australian colonies themselves.

In most parts of Australia prehistoric Aboriginal stone artefacts could be found on the surface of the ground—eroding, for instance, from sand dunes and stream banks or

---

4 Mulvaney 1958.
4 This is a very free adaptation of Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic and cultural capital. The labour and time which go into collecting artefacts and sites is offset by the accumulation of what is a symbolic resource which can be converted into a form of prestige (in identity), improving the standing, authority, and ultimately the power of the nation state (Bourdieu 1977, p. 171-83).
4 See Pomian 1990 who links this development to the development of the secular state.
4 Thomas 1994a. See also Thomas 1991 on the tension which existed on board the Endeavour between the collecting activities of the natural scientists on the one hand and the common sailors on the other, a tension which he shows to be so revealing of the state of European knowledge on the brink of the Age of Science.
turned up by the plough. The budding anthropologist A.P. Elkin noted in the early part of the present century that Australia was a country ‘where a 1918 motor tyre may easily be punctured by a Paleolithic (sic) or Old Stone Age spear head’. This view of Aboriginal archaeological sites as two-dimensional metaphorised the ‘flat time’ in which Aborigines were believed to dwell.

The exploits of stone artefact collectors were acknowledged in *Science of Man*, a journal published by the Sydney-based Anthropological Society of Australasia (1895-1913), and later (in the 1930s and 40s) in *Mankind*, the journal of the Anthropological Society of NSW. The ASNSW and its equivalent in Victoria functioned somewhat as clubs of private artefact collectors who, in a practice which may have been borrowed from the Society of Antiquaries in London, exhibited their acquisitions for the benefit of other members at Society meetings. It would be wrong to say the collectors were uninterested in the theory or practice of ethnology and archaeology. In New South Wales in the 1930s some of them assisted Fred McCarthy in the excavation of rock shelter deposits and in Victoria they helped familiarise Mulvaney with that state’s archaeological record when he began his archaeological research there. Many collectors were keenly interested in classification and helped produce the early stone tool typologies.

Their collections, however, took first priority. They were first and foremost *personal* collections, virtual extensions, as Susan Sontag brilliantly shows, of the collector’s person. In Griffith’s sweeping history of antiquarianism in Victoria he writes of how this could extend to a nostalgic attachment by the collector to the sites from which Aboriginal stone artefacts had previously been collected. The collectors might—many indeed did—donate or bequeath their collections to public museums but it was *collections* they handed over, nurtured creations, not just raw job-lots of material. Also, following Pierre Bourdieu, the collections constituted a form of cultural capital which enhanced the social position of the collectors.

In the 1960s and 70s Australian governments passed legislation protecting Aboriginal ‘relics’, simultaneously designating professional archaeologists as those licensed to collect or excavate them. I will argue later that the state only moved to protect Aboriginal cultural remains when it was ready to graft Aboriginal culture, or a reified version of it, onto the national identity. In this view of things, archaeology thus only achieved supremacy over antiquarianism when the artefacts were ‘nationalised’. Which is to say that the artefacts, which had accumulated cultural capital for the

---

51 Mulvaney 1977.
53 Sontag 1993.
54 Griffiths 1996, p. 85.
57 Joan Evans 1956 traces institutional aspects of this separation in England; John Mulvaney 1981 refers to the situation in Victoria, and Hilary du Cros 1983 addresses the process of closure against collectors in NSW.
collectors as private citizens, now were able to accumulate a form of cultural capital for the state.

Archaeology in the last few decades has engaged selectively with living Aboriginal culture. Murray, however, observes that archaeology's particular use of ethnography has perpetuated the idea of a timeless Aboriginal culture originally promoted by cultural evolutionism. He points to 'the tendency among archaeologists (who use the ethnographic database uncritically) to create timeless ethnographic presents which are simply retrodicted into prehistory as reliable guides to the nature of prehistoric society.' The uncritical ethnoarchaeology and ethnohistory to which he refers has focussed respectively on the remote Aborigines of the Centre and North and the historical recordings of Aborigines in the South and thus it conforms to the formula that authentic Aboriginality resides only on the frontier or in the past. Correspondingly, there has until very recently been an almost studious avoidance of 'contact' archaeology. There has been little research interest by archaeologists, for instance, in the early incorporation of glass and ceramics as raw materials for artefact knapping. It is this type of interest which might open up the issue of Aboriginal agency in technology transfer or of Aboriginal agency in making over other Europeans products and practices. Archaeology has furthered the conceptual separation of pre- and post-contact Aboriginality by avoiding precisely that area where continuity would be found.

Others have written more fully on the four discourses I have singled out here. My particular concern has been with their colonial context and application. I turn now from the question of how settler society has seen Aborigines and Aboriginality to the question of how settler society has seen itself.

National identity without Aborigines

By 1880 seventy percent of the settler population was Australian-born. The six Australian colonies had attained a substantial degree of autonomy from Britain and were twenty years away from Federation and nationhood. Early settler society may have been a 'fragment' of Britain but despite the best attempts to reproduce the homeland in Australia the class structure, the economy, and the political process, to say nothing of the natural environment, had all been radically different from the outset. By the 1850s there was already a consciousness among settlers of being different to the British, a sense of distinctiveness which by the 1890s had produced a mythologised Australian 'type': sturdy, bush-wise, independent, and male, he was an amalgam of the outback pioneer and the gold digger.

There was a strident, chauvinistic note to the way Australian identity was asserted in the 1890s which had not been present earlier. Also evident was a belief in an intimate connection between the emergent 'new breed' and certain unique qualities of the land. This belief is of central importance here and it calls for some comment on the phenomenon of nationalism from which it proceeded. Emerging first in the Americas, the model for the modern nation state was exported to Europe in the nineteenth century

60 ibid., p. 12.
61 Colley and Bickford, 1996; Murray 1996.
62 Hartz 1964.
and subsequently adopted by the settler colonies. Despite possessing typically polyethnic, polyglottal communities, and despite possessing borders drawn by international peace conferences or colonial masters, nation states nevertheless and remarkably assert an abiding and almost religious connection with the national soil. As a counter to their actual heterogeneity, nation states have tended to rely heavily on the use of unifying emblems, the performance of rites of commonality, and on the invention of tradition. They have also relied on the use of alterity. In conceptualising itself, the 'imagined community', to borrow Benedict Anderson's term for the nation, simultaneously imagines its Other (the 'not we') in the person of the nations which surround it.

At the end of the nineteenth century settler Australia was almost homogeneous from an ethnic standpoint. It had a single common language and enjoyed a degree of geographic boundedness rare among nations. What it lacked was historical depth, that attribute which Eric Hobsbawm has identified as the strongest known 'proto-national cement'. What it lacked was a rationale for why this particular population should be located in this particular place. Had things been slightly different, had for instance the Dutch East India Company been less mercantile and more territorial in ambition, Australia might quite easily have been subsumed within the Dutch East Indies. But it was not merely the plain fact of the absence of historical depth which was problematic for Australia—plenty of the new European nations had no single history they could call their own. Rather, it was the question of how such depth could be finessed in a situation where the pre-1788 past was plainly Aboriginal. Efforts were being made in the 1890s to address this matter.

In the field of art, Bernard Smith has detected a shift late in that decade from a nationalism which, 'exuberant and generous,' had celebrated what seemed unique in the Australian landscape, to a nationalism which changed into an 'anti-foreign chauvinism'. Conrad Marten's watercolours were attacked by Sydney Long for not being evocative of the 'weird mystery' of the bush and the native-born Arthur Streeton became a culture-hero: 'To paint Australia you had to be Australian... Unless you were born with 'Australian' eyes you could not hope to 'see' the Australian landscape'. As to the weird mystery of the bush, it was, as Smith points out, not

...an intrinsic quality of Australian nature but a notion elaborated by Marcus Clarke. By the time Long received it the idea had become sufficiently acclimatized to appear as a quality native to the bush itself and not, as in truth it was, the distillation of a century of colonial experience of bush life.

Streeton's paintings 'vibrate in our national being' wrote J.S. MacDonald, Director of the National Gallery in Melbourne, 'For we are not only a nation, but a race, and both occupy a particular territory and spring from a specific soil.' If the project of

---

64 Hobsbawm and Ranger 1989.
65 Hobsbawm 1990, p. 73.
66 Smith 1975, p. 231.
67 ibid., p. 234.
68 ibid.
69 Quoted in Hughes 1970, p. 66.
colonisation required the presence of an Aboriginal Other for the purposes of alterity (they who were inferior and prior to us) then the project of colonial nationalism required the presence of an additional Other—in this case, they who cannot 'see'. The Other, whether of the colony or nation, has this quality of being always there at the core of the 'We'. In Homi Bhabha's words:

The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves.'

The first of a series of translations had thus begun whereby the land's strangeness became an essential quality perceptible only to the Australian-born. First they could see the strangeness of the land, later the strangeness would mystically come to reside in them as an essence. It was a process of translation by virtue of which settler Australia mythologised itself as indigenous.

New natives were emerging. What, then, of the other natives, the Aborigines? At the time Australian national identity was first being formulated, Aborigines were perceived to be a dying race whose membership or otherwise of the national community was hardly an issue. Cultural evolutionism, moreover, defined their society as a low and savage anachronism. So, while Aboriginal artefacts might usefully be juxtaposed with settler products in a narrative of technological progress, any equivalent of the 'Indianization' of eighteenth century North American settler identity would seem to have been out of the question. The ostentatious emulation of certain Indian ways which accompanied the massacre of Indian persons was enabled by the Enlightenment conception of the Indian as a type of natural man. Times and views had changed. Eighteenth century Americans and early twentieth century Australians both had come to the conviction that the frontier had produced a superior fighting man, but whereas the Americans' saw their way of fighting as coming from the Indians, the Digger at Gallipoli was seen as having been spawned by the bush and the goldfields.

Yet certain aspects of Aboriginal culture were powerfully attractive to a new nation casting around for symbols and emblems of essential Australianness and some of these aspects were admissible. Aboriginal words provided original-sounding place names and were used from the earliest days of the colony; depictions of Aborigines were introduced into the work of silversmiths and other decorative artists in the 1880s, along with native ferns, kangaroos, emus and emu eggs. Later, and at a more serious level, the sacred designs of the Aranda found their way into the work of artists like Margaret Preston and during the 1930s, 40s and 50s the concentric circle motif of the Aranda tjurunga appeared on European secular objects ranging from book covers to caravan curtains. There was a limit, however, to how far these references might be taken.

It was the importance to Australian national identity of the notion of racial purity which stood as the most significant barrier to such borrowings. The White Australia immigration policy, supported by both conservative and left governments from the 1890s right up until the 1960s, was designed to ensure that racial purity was maintained. Until the proximity of the populous Asian neighbourhood began to unnerve those

---

70 Bhabha 1990, p. 4.
Australians committed to white supremacism in the 1890s it had been 'safe' to proclaim the non-Britishness of Australia; after that time the unblemished quality of the Anglo-Saxon stock was proudly and unreservedly maintained. In White Australia the Aborigines were not counted in the national census; in a sense they were the foreigners within. When the embargo on the use of Aboriginality in the framing of national identity was finally removed in the 1960s it was not the innovative, transactional, frequently urban and ghettoized Aboriginality shared by living Aborigines which was drawn upon by white Australians but the 'traditional,' static, materialised Aboriginality with its complement of archaeological remains.

The production of a deep nation

In the decade from 1965 a series of laws was passed by the State and Federal Governments in Australia to protect Aboriginal artefacts and sites (including Aboriginal 'archaeological' sites, human skeletal remains, and places of sacred significance). The prevailing view was that the legislation was an obvious and long-overdue response by government to the rapid loss of Aboriginal archaeological remains and the obvious need to actively manage what survived.

Why were measures not taken previously? There had been pressure for protective legislation in New South Wales since 1889 when Robert Etheridge described the lack of action to stop the tide of loss as almost 'a national disgrace'. The question of protection for the rock art of the Sydney area was raised in the NSW parliament in 1905 and the Anthropological Society of NSW mounted a campaign in the 1930s for government protection of Aboriginal 'relics.' McCarthy used the offices of the Museum to petition State parliament which seemed to show some interest in 1939 but then the outbreak of war and a change of government intervened. The campaign was revitalised in 1947 yet nothing concrete was achieved in NSW until 1970 when blanket protection was afforded to Aboriginal sites by an amendment to the National Parks and Wildlife Act. What is remarkable is that when the change came, it came without fuss. There was almost no debate on the proposed legislation in the NSW parliament and no opposition to it. The pattern was similar in the other states while at the Federal level the Australian Heritage Commission Bill passed through Federal Parliament quite without controversy.

The enabling agencies set up to administer the new laws were staffed mostly by archaeologists. The turnaround described above occurred only a few years—a decade at most—after the establishment of professional archaeology in Australia and the profession has tended to see itself as playing a central role in bringing it about. The truth, I suggest, was otherwise and is dramatically apparent in the language of the parliamentary debates of the time which drew heavily upon a discourse of heritage then emerging in Australian politics. Introducing the legislation into the NSW House of Assembly in 1969 the government minister responsible warned that if 'our more valuable relic areas are not protected... we will, as a nation, be immeasurably impoverished.' In the Victorian parliament the Minister introducing the Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Bill in 1972 argued that These relics should be

---

73 Cole 1971, p. 515.
74 Etheridge 1889, p. 15.
75 Hansard (NSW) No. 81, pp. 2, 190-91.
regarded as the cultural heritage of the people of the land of their origin'.76 We can take it he meant the present citizenry. A Member of the House commended this bill, saying 'we are concerned with the history of Aborigines as part of the history of Australia'.77 The same rhetoric of national appropriation accompanied protective legislation through the parliaments of Queensland and Western Australia.78 In NSW and elsewhere in eastern Australia Aborigines had been left out of the consultative process and were given no role in the administrative machinery established for site protection (though within a few years most of the agencies had set up advisory committees with Aboriginal representation). The legislation had not aimed at preserving the ‘relics’ for Aborigines and, given that in these more densely settled areas of the continent the conceptual separation between Aboriginal sites and living Aboriginal people was complete, it appears that the legislators quite genuinely failed to see any connection between the two.79

Yet it seems equally clear that the reason the remains were to be protected was not that they were ‘archaeological’ and thus scientifically valuable. If the archaeological value of the sites appears to have been a consideration for law makers this was, I suggest, because archaeologists had worked to elide archaeology and heritage. While earlier campaigners had argued that Aboriginal sites were the scientifically valuable property of the nation, from the 1960s archaeologists argued that they were the heritage of the nation.80 The distinction is an important one and has to do with the difference between identity (one identifies with and is identified by one’s heritage) and possession (‘relics’ as property of the nation in the sense that mineral and forest resources are perceived as property).

Whether it was archaeologists or legislators who first began to think of Aboriginal sites as national heritage is not as significant here as the fact that archaeologists had begun to articulate their work as part of a national identity project, a project which, in Harry Allen’s words would aim at ‘grafting white culture directly onto an Aboriginal root’.81 In this respect the papers presented at the 1968 Conference on Prehistoric Monuments and Antiquities in Australia, held in Canberra and organised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, are interesting in that they mark perhaps the first concerted use by archaeologists of the discourse of heritage. For McCarthy,  

76 Hansard (VIC) No. 19, p. 5001. 
77 Hansard (VIC) No. 20, p. 5407. 
78 For Queensland see David Trigger 1980, for Western Australia see Elizabeth N. Hawke 1975. 
79 See Sullivan 1985: 141-42. Changes to the NSW legislation in 1974 ‘recognised that Aboriginal people in the State might have ‘traditional’ spiritual attachment to natural landscape features but still did not recognise that ‘relics’ would be of significance to them. A survey of ‘traditional’ sites which began in 1973 soon began to show that Aboriginal people in NSW considered archaeological ‘relic’ sites to be significant as well (see Creamer 1984, 1988; Kelly 1975, 1979). 
80 For the earlier view see for example the argument that they should not be ‘lost to the people of the [NSW] State’ by Robert Etheridge in Mankind 1, No. 1, 1931, p. 6; the claim that they were the ‘State collections and the people’s collections’ by F. D. McCarthy 1938, p. 122; the claim that they were ‘national relics’ made by H. J. Wright 1941, p. 7. See also Griffiths 1996, p. 145 on Charles Barrett’s argument that Aboriginal ‘relics’ should be protected as ‘national possessions’. 
81 Allen 1988, p. 83.
legislation was essential for the protection of 'our heritage of Aboriginal antiquities'; Mulvaney, similarly, urged the protection of 'this national heritage' and Edwards asked for government support 'to perpetuate this valuable, centuries-old heritage which our young nation has adopted'.

Recalling that until the 1960s Australian national identity had been constructed partly in opposition to Aborigines and the other non-white 'races' one can appreciate just how radical a change had taken place. The real break came, I suggest, with the Second World War and the struggle against fascism; after that, a national identity based upon 'racial' purity was simply no longer tenable, especially not as post-war Australia opened its doors to large scale immigration from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean and later from Asia. Government policy on Aborigines moved painfully from assimilation, to integration, to multiculturalism. The implications of what amounted to an official sanctioning not only of Aborigines as Aborigines but of Aborigines as Australians (the compact of the referendum of 1967) were profound. Unlike white Australian culture which was broadly indistinguishable from Western culture in general, Aboriginal culture was highly distinct and recognisable internationally. A reified version of Aboriginal culture had thus always been perfect as an ingredient in the formation of national identity and the White Australia barrier to its deployment was now removed. Its removal, though, signalled not an approach to the reality of Aboriginal existence but somewhat the opposite, an unrestrained embracing of Aboriginal 'heritage'. It can be seen, I believe, that this was the culmination of the process of separation referred to earlier—natural history, ethnology, antiquarianism, and archaeology all helped produce a 'detached' version of Aboriginal culture which could then be assimilated by the would-be 'deep nation'.

Not enjoying sovereign power over its citizens, the modern nation state's power rests on the consensus of the citizenry in its rule. Employing the concept of hegemony, Gramsci explained how the state uses the sphere of culture to help obtain this consensus. He showed how the sense of commonality generated in this sphere leads individuals not so much to 'identify' with the state or nation (in the way we normally understand that term) as to experience it as collective individual. Richard Handler's work on the heritage industry in Quebec is perhaps the most detailed explication we have of how objects and places can be raised from the level of being a private resource to that of being a resource of the nation state (or, in Bourdieu's terms, from being the cultural capital of the individual to being the cultural capital of the nation state). Having no objective existence of its own, these objects and places, which can be listed, curated, and displayed, lend presence to the nation.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the heritage site or place in the process of national identity formation. Places and sites are part of the national soil and terrain—even so-called built heritage has its foundations in the soil and terrain. They are grounded in the body of the nation. The concept of the national 'geo-body', as developed by Thongchai, is useful here in helping us understand the way the modern

---

83 Bhabha 1990, p. 4.
84 Handler 1988.
nation fetishizes its terrain and the borders of its terrain (its boundedness). I would suggest here that if the state in Australia favours archaeology over antiquarianism this may partly be to do with the way that archaeology respects the in-ground depositional context and integrity of Aboriginal remains; antiquarian collecting, by contrast, to the extent to which it tears artefacts out of (or off the surface of) the ground, represents a violation of the nation's geo-body.

Australia's embracing of Aboriginal heritage as part of national heritage has not, unfortunately, meant an end to treating Aboriginal culture as the Other of white Australian culture. Both Jones and Murray show how the Otherness of Aborigines was changeable, mutating between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a vision of noble savagery to one of ugly brutishness. Perhaps the current vision of Aboriginality as national heritage represents simply a further shift in alterity; perhaps the essentialism of Aboriginality-as-heritage is really not so different from the essentialism of the nineteenth century construction of Aboriginality which, among other things, served to highlight the technological advancement of settler Australia. The latter said to metropolitan Europe, 'we may be at the savage end of the earth but look how similar we are to you in our accomplishments'; the former says, 'we may appear to be the same as you (i.e., Western) but look at how uniquely of this place we are'. In each case identity is moored via alterity to a 'primitivist' construction of Aboriginality which must not be allowed to change.

'By definition', writes Ellen Badone, 'the notion of a cultural patrimony presupposes the existence of an authentic cultural baseline, situated in the past, which is being eroded by modern influences'. In the Australian context, because the 'primitivist' construction of Aboriginality is so threatened by the innovative reality of contemporary Aboriginal culture, increasing effort must be invested by the nation to produce and stabilise the Aboriginality of heritage. It is precisely here that the value to the nation of the archaeological record is established: in its concrete materiality it is a vision of Aboriginality not susceptible to change, not available to the type of erosion to which Badone refers but ideally suited to being made over as cultural capital for the building of national identity. The 'authentic cultural baseline' became the target of the nation-wide salvage project initiated and coordinated by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (established 1964) in its early years. Aboriginal 'archaeological' sites were included along with 'traditional' culture, language, and Dreaming sites as the main categories towards which the recording programme was directed. All were seen to be in danger of disappearing, but the archaeological sites, with the exception of rock art sites, were less vulnerable to attrition than was 'traditional' culture. The Institute's recording

---

65 Thongchai, 1988, analyses the way that Siam, as a bordered geo-political entity, came into being only in the last decades of the nineteenth century and how this mapped entity was projected back into the past; see also Anderson 1991, pp. 171-75, for his discussion of Thongchai.
66 Elsewhere (Byrne 1993: 173-74), though, I have argued that the modern state’s attitude to antiquarianism is one of ambivalence. There is a sense in which the private circulation and ‘performance’ of antiquities in places like Thailand may be tolerated by the state.
68 Marianna Torgovnick 1990 gives a general account of the discourse of primitivism; Nicholas Thomas 1994b, pp. 171-85, discusses its operation in the context of settler societies.
programmes, along with those of the state heritage agencies, added to the baseline the weight of tens of thousands of archaeological sites and these, arguably, helped to compensate for the loss of 'traditional' culture.

Australian archaeology has tended to see itself as innocent of power. Innocent, not in the sense of believing itself to be unempowered or unengaged politically—Mulvaney, for instance, advocates the active engagement of archaeology in the 'public arena' and his career has epitomised this—but in failing to see itself enmeshed by, acted upon, and in a way, diminished by formations which stand outside or around it. Those formations which have concerned me here have been the Australian nation state and the 'culture' of colonialism.

In writing of power as it acts upon individuals in the modern age Foucault maintained that:

They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

The element of nationalism present in Australian archaeological writing provides an illustration of this—not the more obvious nationalism of heritage, discussed above, but the concern with identity which lies submerged in much of this writing. Murray draws attention to the fact that, unlike much of the history and anthropology carried out over the last couple of decades, prehistoric archaeology has done little to debunk the idea of the timeless/traditional Aborigine—in his words, the 'essential Aborigine'. I would suggest the reason for this lies at least partly in the extent to which, during the 1960s and 70s, archaeology entangled itself in the business of heritage. The virtual merging of the discourses of archaeology and heritage which this involved locked Australian archaeology into a form of essentialism.

A post-national archaeology

The nation state perceives itself to be hyper-discrete in space but virtually unbounded in time: its 'geo-body', in other words, is projected back into 'history'. By assisting in this project of deepening, archaeology has to some extent locked itself into the largely primitivist discourse of 'Aboriginal heritage'. I mean by this that however archaeologists, individually, may think about Aboriginal cultural remains, it is now difficult to champion their conservation without engaging in a discourse shaped by national identity builders, tourism operators, Greens, and New Agers. This discourse which essentializes Aboriginal culture as environmentally-friendly, time-less, traditional, and 'threatened by modernity'.

As noted by Murray, Aborigines, for their own reasons, also 'trade in the currency of essentialism'. This is hardly surprising, considering the extraordinary valorization of the timeless-traditional conception of Aboriginal culture by settler discourses,

---

90 Mulvaney 1988, p. 216.
91 Thomas 1994b.
92 Foucault 1980, p. 98.
94 Thomas 1994b, p. 177.
95 See for example Murray 1996, p. 76.
archaeology among them. But if archaeology has helped to produce this situation it can also help to undo it.

If archaeology in Australia were to cease concerning itself with the nation’s desire for ‘depth’ it might rise, as it were, to the surface. By ‘surface’ I mean that relatively horizontal (post-1788) space or terrain across which are distributed the traces of the Aboriginal contact and post-contact experience, a terrain where duration is measured in generations (life-times) rather than millennia. An archaeology of the post-contact would counter nationalist archaeology by refusing to locate ‘real’ Aboriginality in the pre-colonial past. One would hope that, equally, it would refuse the obsession with cultural purity.

The shortcomings of the term ‘contact’ were noted earlier; in particular, the perhaps insufficient emphasis it gives to the mutual entanglement on the part of Aborigines, Europeans, Chinese and others. Ann Curthoys and Stephen Muecke have recently suggested that a post-nationalist Australia would be one where the racial purity and exclusion of others which characterised the nationalism of the first half of the present century would be replaced by, among other things, an emphasis on difference and inclusion. A post-national archaeology, I suggest, could be one which, breaking free of the essentialist heritage model, focused instead on the trafficking of objects and ideas between Aboriginal and other cultures in the period after 1788 and which turned its attention to the ‘traces’ of the cultural transactions which occurred in this period.

The ‘site’ concept, which has always done violence to Aboriginal concepts of land and country, could be abandoned in favour of an understanding of cultural landscapes as artefacts in which the same physical places are experienced and signified differently by different groups. This, indeed, would be part of a general reversal of the heritage industry’s prioritizing of materiality over meaning. The materialist orientation with its paranoia about the erosion of a ‘non-renewable resource’ (another essentialist manifestation) would be thrown off in favour of a realisation that the ‘resource’ (the reservoir of traces of Aboriginal past) is constantly being topped up. Not just in the sense of replenishment, of contemporary generations leaving their own traces behind, but also in the sense of re-newal through interpretation.

It is too late to propose an inclusion of Aborigines into the practice of heritage management: they have already been appropriating elements of it for some time and making over of heritage discourse can only de-nationalize it. No longer just assistants to white archaeologists in the production of a past which is unrecognisable to them (a past populated by stone artefacts rather than people), they appear to be using it to create local pasts—Clifford’s ‘local futures’—which might well, initially, be unrecognisable to us.

---

* Both Murray 1996 and Colley and Bickford 1996 have argued for a greater focus on the archaeology of the post-1788 period. For Murray, this would be a key component of a ‘post-Mabo’ archaeology in Australia.

* Curthoys and Muecke 1993, p. 179.

* See Ellis 1994 and Ross 1996 for a critique of the ‘site’ concept in Australian heritage practice.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian National University, Canberra, for the opportunity, during the period of my doctorate there, to think about the issues pursued in this article. In particular, I wish to thank Isabel McBryde for her encouragement. I also wish to thank reviewers of an earlier draft of this article for their comments.

Denis Byrne is a Sydney-based archaeologist, currently Coordinator of Research with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. His interests include the way that the Aboriginal experience of the post-1788 period is represented in heritage discourse and the different understanding of heritage conservation in Western and non-Western societies.

References

Adas, M. 1989, Machines as the Measure of Men, Ithaca (NY).
_______ 1988b (ed.), Past and Present, Canberra.


Kelly, R. 1975, 'From the 'Keeparra' to the 'cultural bind'—an analysis of the Aboriginal situation', *Australian Archaeological Association Newsletter* 2: 13-17.
McBryde, I. 1989, '...To establish a commerce of this sort'—cross-cultural exchange at the Port Jackson settlement', in J. Hardy and A. Frost (eds), *Studies from Terra Australis to Australia*, Occasional Paper No. 6 of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, pp. 170-82.
McLean, I. 1992-93, 'The circumference is everywhere and the centre nowhere', *Third Text*, vol. 21, pp. 5-10.


Tench, W. 1979, Sydney's First Four Years: A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and a Complete Account of the Settlement of Port Jackson 1788-1791, Sydney.


1994b, Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology. Travel and Government, Melbourne.


Torgovnick, M. 1990, Gone Primitive, Chicago.


Human agency, historical inevitability and moral culpability: Rewriting black–white history in the wake of Native Title

Shayne Breen

Whatever may be the evils of society in a state of civilization they are assuredly less in character and degree than those of savage life; and I can never regret that the fair and beautiful country of Tasmania has been entirely reclaimed from the dominion of the debased and treacherous Aborigines; though I cannot but comment that it has been done in part in sad violation of those laws established by Him who hath made of one blood all men to dwell upon the face of the earth.1

In the 1993 Native Title debate, Geoffrey Blainey sketched a version of the history of black-white contact in Australia in which he sought to cast doubt on the need for native title legislation. In a series of newspapers articles and the occasional reported speech, Blainey articulated a position on native title which argues that in the course of dispossession most Aborigines died from disease and that Aboriginal society would inevitably decline in the face of the natural planetary spread of superior western civilisation. Blainey delivered these views in support of his position that the then federal Labour government was being too generous to the country’s Aborigines in what he sees as a guilt-ridden and politically-correct attempt to make reparation for perceived past wrongs.2 In his criticism of the High Court Mabo decision, Blainey argued that the judges were told the wrong story of the past; Blainey’s story, presumably, is the right one. Here we have the self-proclaimed historiographical objectivist accusing supporters of native title of propagating a fashionable political-correctness, ignoring the political motivation which informs his own views—aptly described by Humphrey McQueen as the defence of the Australian mining industry.3

Many Australians have little awareness that historians’ interpretations of evidence are, in larger or smaller degree, influenced by personal values and interests. For many Australians, history is fact, not interpretation. So when an historian with the profile of Blainey asserts publicly that most Aborigines died from disease, and that it was inevitable they would be overrun in any case, many Australians will believe that he is stating historical fact. But as Henry Reynolds and Gillian Cowlishaw have argued,

1 Weston 1843, pp 93–4.
3 McQueen 1994, p. 55.
Blainey's position is open to debate, not only in terms of its substantive claims but also in terms of what Blainey neglects to mention. In particular, Blainey's emphasis on disease as the major cause of Aboriginal deaths, while it may be statistically correct, deflects attention from the extent of murder as a major cause of deaths. This debate between Reynolds and Cowlishaw on the one hand and Blainey on the other is but one further episode in the now long-running debate between colonial and post-colonial versions of race relations in Australia's past.

The historical debate at the national level has been replicated by historians, both amateur and professional, at the local level. The story of Aboriginal dispossession in the Deloraine district of northern Tasmania illustrates this process of selective remembering. In the 1890s Daniel Griffen, the journalist son of an Irish immigrant, recorded in passing the dispossession and what he saw as the sad fate of the Pallittorre. In 1964, J. R. Skemp, formerly a science teacher, recognised the reality of dispossession and gave it a place in his short history of the district. More recently, Simon Cubit, a leading advocate of the claims of cattle owners and horse riders wishing to practise their 'traditional' pursuits on the plateau which overlooks the Deloraine district, described the process of early British occupation of the Meander district without acknowledging either the prior occupation by the Pallittorre or their resistance to the British invasion. Cubit portrays the stock-keepers and their masters as 'bold' and 'ambitious', as heroic pioneers involved in a sequential process of occupying the wilderness and miraculously transforming it into productive grazing land. Cubit's approach, which typifies the historiography of racial contact in Australia from the 1880s until the early 1970s, amounts to a denial of the existence of the Pallittorre, and hence a distortion of historical truth. This kind of selective amnesia needs to be challenged by a more rigorous analysis of the process of colonisation.

My purpose in this paper is to challenge the historical props on which Blainey and others argue against the need for some form of reparation. I seek to show that black-white relations in Van Diemen's Land, and especially in Pallittorre country, were more complex and problematic than Blainey's over-generalised explanations recognise. I argue that Aborigines sought to resolve disputes in ways in which violent contact was limited, and that they used the threat of force as a major weapon. In contrast, the British regularly practised promiscuous massacre, a practice fuelled by the belief that in relations with Aborigines force was necessary. These arguments involve not only the question of how Aborigines died but also the thinking, both black and white, which informed the various uses of force. I argue also that notions of the British invasion and subsequent Aboriginal deaths as inevitable outcomes of broad historical forces are little more than figments of conservative historical imaginations, most notably those of John West and Geoffrey Blainey. More to the point, Blainey's arguments, and West's, are contrived to deny the proposition that historical actors choose and execute courses of action for which they must bear responsibility.

---

4 Reynolds 1993, p. 19; Cowlishaw 1993, pp. 15 and 24.
Resisting the invader

In the following analysis of Pallittorre relations with the British colonists I have used Rhys Isaac's ethnographic approach of discerning historical actors' intentions and motivations from their reported actions. Ethnographic analysis allows the historian to imaginatively enter into the circumstances and perhaps mentality of historical actors who have left no written records. The method requires that reported behaviours, which are regarded as action-statements, be understood in the context of the cultural assumptions and values the historical actors in question were likely to have applied in the reported situation. Further, situations or incidents understood in this way should be recurrent incidents which can be seen as typical or even symbolic of relations between competing cultural groups, in this case indigenous people in Tasmania and their British colonisers.6

William Knight and John Hurling lived and worked as stock-keepers on the land occupied by Thomas Cookson Simpson (Figure 2).7 John Hurling was an assigned convict and Knight was his overseer. Abandoned in this place by their master, theirs was a lonely and sometimes fearful existence. Roads and hence communications were poor, and housing very basic, little more than mud huts with bark roofs. At the time only a small number of British men lived in the district: three free colonists, all of whom were working as overseers for absentee cattle graziers; a few assigned convicts; and a small number of soldiers and police whose job it was to help protect the colonists and their cattle and sheep from bushrangers and Aborigines. No white women lived in this colonial outpost.

On the night of 22 June 1827, Knight and Hurling were sitting in their stock-hut. The hut's fireplace smoked a great deal that night, a fact which irritated Knight. Denied the small comfort of a blazing fire on a cold winter's night, Knight remarked to Hurling, perhaps sarcastically, that he wished 'the natives would come and burn down the bloody hut tomorrow morning'. About noon the following day, Saturday 23 June 1827, Knight and Hurling were working some thirty yards from their hut. They had felled a tree for firewood and were engaged in lopping its branches. Despite being only thirty yards from their hut, Knight and Hurling had taken their muskets with them, although when rain began to fall they returned the muskets to the hut. Disregarding the rain, the two men returned to their work. A creek, its banks protected by a cluster of tea tree brush, flowed past the front of their hut. Unknown to them, a group of Pallittorre were hiding in the brush. In due time, according to Hurling, 'a number of black native people rushed into the hut and took possession of it'. Armed with hatchets and protecting their heads with their arms, Knight and Hurling moved towards the hut but were met by a hail of spears. One of the spears, thrown by a tall black man, struck Knight in the left shoulder. Knight pulled the spear from his shoulder and as he did so waved his hands

7 Depositions concerning the death of William Knight, 1827, 1/316, Chief Secretary's Office, Hobart. Unless otherwise indicated the information in the following section is drawn from these depositions. Four statements were given to P.A. Mulgrave, police magistrate at Launceston, between 26–30 June 1827. The statements were given by a police constable, a soldier, an overseer of convicts and an assigned convict.
Map 1: Pallittorre country in Northern Tasmania

to Hurling. Hurling, supposing that Knight meant him to run from the attackers, ran onto the adjacent plain, which was ankle deep in water, and towards Gibson’s hut, some three miles to the south-east, in search of help. Knight slowly followed Hurling, but about 200 yards from the hut, two or three blacks knocked Knight down. In line with the practice followed by other Tasmanian Aborigines, the Pallittorre killed Knight by beating him around the head with waddies. They also used a garden hoe. The blacks then returned Knight’s body to within fifteen yards of his hut. A rope made of native grasses was used to drag the body, which had a black mark around its neck, from the plain to the hut. The rope was later found by whites at the blacks’ camp. When Knight’s body was found by Hurling and some others, it was on its back, the legs were crossed, one arm was under the head and the other under a side, and a dark coloured cotton handkerchief covered the face. Knight usually kept this handkerchief in his kangaroo skin cap, which was lying on the ground near his head with some blood in it.

While Knight was meeting his fate, about twenty blacks pursued Hurling across the plain to the edge of the forest. Just prior to entering the forest, Hurling turned and faced a black, who was armed with a spear in each hand, standing some ten to fifteen yards away. Hurling threw his hatchet through the air. The weapon hit its mark, knocking the black to the ground. Intent on fleeing his attackers, Hurling decided his chances were better without his boots, which were too big for his feet. He unlaced them and threw them off, recalling later he felt he could no longer run with them on. Ankle deep water would not have helped. By now there were about twenty blacks within thirty yards of Hurling, all armed with spears. As he ran, several spears were thrown at him, although none hit. Some three or four hundred yards into the forest, Hurling became tired and was unable to run any further. He noticed among some tall grass a huge fallen tree with a large limb coming off its side. He clambered under the tree, which was hollow, and laid down with his face to the ground and his hands under his body.

The Pallittorre surrounded the tree where Hurling was ‘hiding’. They passed backwards and forwards at both ends of the tree, as they did calling ‘Rugga, Rugga’, possibly a word for ‘go away’. They kept this up for a short time. Some thirty minutes later, Hurling’s dog came to him. Assuming that the blacks were unable to find him and fearing they may have followed his dog, Hurling immediately abandoned his hiding place. So that he might run more freely, he pulled off his trousers, which were sodden, and proceeded to run along a very rough forest road towards Gibson’s hut. At some stage either during or after the killing of Knight and the pursuit of Hurling, the Pallittorre ‘plundered’ Simpson’s stock-hut. They took with them four whips, a straw hat, a handkerchief, two forks, four spoons, one wooden bucket, a frying pan, five shirts, two pairs of trousers, a pair of boots, a waistcoat and a blue jacket; they also took a quantity of flour, thirty pounds of sugar, twelve pounds of tea and three pounds of soap. They left a bucket, a frying pan, two iron pots, a grubbing hoe and a mortising tool. Outside the hut they left forty pounds of salt. They burst open several bags containing eighteen bushels of wheat, and scattered the grain about the hut and outside the door. These actions by the Pallittorre severely disrupted Hurling’s capacity to remain at the hut and perform the colonising tasks his master had assigned to him.

---

*I was unable to find any reference to this word.*
Hurling arrived at Gibson's stock-hut about 3 o'clock. Waiting there to greet this unexpected visitor were Henry Smith, William White, Thomas Baker, field police constable Thomas Williams and two soldiers, corporal James Lingan and corporal John Shiners. Smith and White were both convicts, assigned to David Gibson, their absentee landlord, himself a former convict. Baker was their overseer. Hurling, wearing only a shirt and with his trousers in one hand, ran straight into the hut and sat down on a stool. He was out of breath, on the point of exhaustion, and, according to the occupants of Gibson's hut, pale and frightened. It was some time before he could speak. When he could, Hurling told Smith 'Oh! My mate is killed, the natives have been and killed my mate along side of me.' Almost immediately a party comprising police constable Williams, corporal Shiners, Baker, Hurling and Smith left for Simpson's hut. They found Knight's body where the Pallittorre had left it, some fifteen yards from his hut. The Pallittorre were nowhere to be seen. Williams observed both large and small barefoot foot prints, indicating both adults and children were in the Pallittorre party. Smith estimated 30 people; their footmarks 'were all over the Garden like the footmarks of so many Cattle'. The whites returned to Gibson's hut. The following day, Sunday 24 June, Shiners, Williams and Lingan, accompanied by Baker and White, set off in pursuit of the Pallittorre. About two in the afternoon Shiners noticed the smoke of a fire which he judged to be near Laycock's Falls, some five miles west of Gibson's hut. Arriving at the falls about an hour before sundown, the pursuers hid in a hollow tree some 400 yards from the blacks' camp. Two blacks, armed with spears, stood guard, suggesting an expectation of revenge.

The British response to Knight's death suggests they adapted their military practice to a form of guerrilla warfare. Between seven and eight o'clock the whites crept to within 40 yards of the blacks' camp. Six fires were burning. Three were close together, and the other three 14 to 15 yards away. About 30 blacks and a number of dogs were at the first clustering of three fires. Without calling out and under the cover of darkness, the whites, with pistols blazing, rushed the Pallittorre camp. A 'great number of black native people' ran from their camp and 'immediately disappeared amongst some scrub and ferns'. No blacks cried out. Like other Tasmanian Aborigines, the Pallittorre were quick to incorporate British hunting dogs into their hunting practices. As the Pallittorre fled in to the night at Laycock's Falls, their dogs attacked their assailants. Throughout the course of the night the whites shot upwards of 25 of these dogs. The evidence makes no mention of any intention to take prisoners. Williams, Shiners and their accomplices were intent on reprisal, not on implementing the rule of law. Both Williams and Shiners were at pains to point out they had not called out prior to their attack. This was significant because in British military tradition, surprise ambushes were considered to be dishonourable. This, however, was a silent war, unannounced in the immediacy of its execution, requiring great patience and cunning in the quest for advantage.

Next morning, no black bodies could be found, although Williams saw tracks of blood near the fires. He was quite sure at least one black had been shot. He traced the track of blood over two logs; between the logs he saw 'the prints of naked human feet, close to the track of blood'. In contrast, Shiners did 'not think that any of them had been

\[9\] See Neal 1991, pp. 17–18, 58, 78–80, for a discussion of the non-application of the rule of law to Aborigines in New South Wales prior to 1860.
wounded’ or killed. Not surprisingly, the blacks did not return to their camp. The whites remained at the camp until about ten o’clock the following morning, but to no avail. They returned to Gibson’s hut; soon after, they set out for Launceston to tell their stories to the police magistrate. Knight’s death prompted a horrible revenge. Soon afterwards, the Hobart Colonial Times reported that ‘The people over the second Western Tier have killed an immense quantity of the blacks this last week, in consequence of their having murdered Mr Simpson’s stock-keeper. They were surrounded whilst sitting round their fires, when the soldiers and others fired at them when about thirty yards distant. They report that there must be about sixty of them killed and wounded’.10

* Why was William Knight killed? There is one very specific reason for the killing. An informant called Punch told Robinson that Knight deserved to be killed because he ‘used to kill the natives for sport’.11 Using the depositions taken by Mulgrave, we can discern at least two other specific reasons for the Pallittorre attack on Knight’s hut: to ‘plunder’ the hut, taking some of the contents and destroying others; and to scare Hurling away. So the Pallittorre had very specific reasons for the ritual killing of Knight. But the location of Knight’s death in appropriate wider contexts allows a deeper understanding of the Pallittorre motivation for killing him. In particular, the broader context of the Black War in Van Diemen’s Land, and prior relations with Europeans living in Pallittorre country are appropriate contexts; and Knight’s killing also needs to be understood within the contexts of Aboriginal expectations concerning reciprocal exchange and conflict resolution.

In early 1803, the Aboriginal land then known by the European world as Van Diemen’s Land was invaded by Britain. Following a decade of living in survival mode in both the north and the south of the island, the colonisers gradually occupied the Aboriginal hunting grounds between Launceston and Hobart, as well as on the east coast of the island. Through the 1820s, colonisation intensified into river valleys adjacent to the central corridor between Launceston and Hobart, and into what was referred to by the colonists as the Westward, a series of Aboriginal hunting grounds stretching westward some thirty miles from Launceston to what became known as Deloraine. At the end of this northern corridor was Pallittorre country. (see Map 3)12 The intensification of colonisation in the 1820s occasioned a vigorous and extremely effective resistance by the island’s Aboriginal owners. The Black War was well underway by the mid-1820s but was at its fiercest in the late 1820s.13 The extent of land in Pallittorre country suitable for grazing, some 31,000 acres,14 ensured it was a target for the invaders. From about 1823 onwards, British squatters began moving cattle and stock-keepers onto Pallittorre land. Chief among these was William Field, formerly a convict,

10 Hobart Colonial Times, 6 July 1827.
11 Plomley 1966, p. 219; In 1830, information about black-white relations in the Deloraine district was given to the diarist G.A. Robinson by a stock-keeper called Punch. Punch worked on a stock-run at Avenue Plains, near Parkham, some 10 kilometres west of Deloraine township. Born in London, he was a former convict who had also been a constable. Robinson described him as very civil, and was impressed by the fact that Punch gave Truganini, who was travelling with Robinson, a new pair of shoes.
14 Cubit 1987, p. 10.
who by the mid-1820s had acquired ownership of large numbers of cattle and sheep. Field sold most of his produce to the government store in Launceston,\(^{12}\) a commercial relationship suggestive of government acceptance of this "unofficial" occupation. No record of hostility in the period from 1823 until late 1826 exists. The effective dispossession of the Pallitorre occurred in the late 1820s, during the second phase of pastoral expansion in Van Diemen's Land.

A concerted resistance occurred across the Central North during late Spring and early Summer of 1827. At least 19 separate incidents occurred in this period, including nine incidents between 10-24 November. At least eight whites were killed, in addition to spearings, other woundings and general harassments. Huts were plundered and burnt, and at least 100 sheep were killed at the Lake River.\(^{15}\) Between 2-7 December,

\[\text{Map 3: Occupation of Aboriginal Land to the late 1820s, Van Diemen's Land.}\]

\(^{15}\) Correspondence file, William Field, 71/227, Archives Office of Tasmania.

\(^{16}\) Plomley 1992, pp 44–51.
several travellers were harassed on the Launceston to Hobart Road. But when we examine relations between the Pallittorre and the stock-keepers living in their country prior to Knight's death, we gain a more substantial insight into the local context for Knight's killing and the nature of the violence which characterised the conflict. A series of incidents, involving Pallittorre attempts at negotiation, raids on stock-huts, the theft of women and children, and killings of blacks preceded Knight's death.

About six months prior to the attack, in the previous summer, 'about twenty of the native people came to the hut and remained in the neighbourhood of the hut the whole of the day'. Almost certainly the Pallittorre on this occasion sought to induce Knight to fulfil his reciprocal obligation to them.17 Knight, who had been an 'associate' of the blacks in Sydney, spoke to them in their own language and they went away. No spears were thrown, no shots were fired. Relative harmony prevailed, although the appearance of harmony probably masked developing tensions. About three months prior to his death Knight told Hurling that he had 'fallen in with some natives and fired at them, and that three spears which he had brought home with him, had been thrown at him'. Hurling's account of the information related to him by Knight suggests that Knight was the aggressor in this incident. No other information concerning this incident is available. It is very likely Knight's death was related to these earlier incidents. More generally, the theft of women and children may have persuaded the Pallittorre to take revenge on Knight. Punch told Robinson that he asked a black who could speak English why they killed Europeans. He was told 'if black man came and took away his lubras and killed his piccaninnies, would he not kill black man for it?'

The Pallittorre punishment of William Knight was also almost certainly in response to an incident just eleven days prior to their attack on Simpson's hut. On 12 June, some two hundred blacks surrounded Gibson's hut. They isolated Thomas Baker from the hut, hence he was unable to get his gun. One of the blacks threw a spear at him, which missed. The black then approached Baker, apparently without a weapon. According to Punch, Baker produced 'a long knife he had in a case by his side and ripped up his [the black's] belly and ran away'. The black died from this wound. Despite this incident, the Pallittorre remained in the district overnight, a decision, as events transpired, which proved fatal. Baker's retribution was both swift and brutal. He went immediately to Stocker's stock-hut (Map 2), where James Cubit and his 'half-caste' Aboriginal mistress lived. That night, guided by the Pallittorres' fires, Baker, Cubit and Cubit's mistress went to the blacks' camp and killed nine of them. Cubit was reputed to have killed more blacks than any other man in the colony.18

After Baker 'escaped' on the day of 12 June, the Pallittorre raided his hut. Baker did not become aware of this 'plunder' until the following day; his actions the night before were therefore in response to several other factors: the approach by the black he had killed; being surrounded by two hundred blacks (an estimate made in the fear of the moment?); an accumulation of hatred and fear of the blacks; and, as I will discuss below, a belief that violence was a necessary part of black-white contact. The Pallittorre stripped Baker's hut of all its bedding material and clothes. They took seven bushels of

---

17 See Reynolds 1982, pp. 68-70 and 72-3 for a discussion of the role of Aboriginal reciprocity in Australian race relations.
flour, which they used to make damper, all the knives, an axe, two pairs of sheep shears, a pair of scissors, a tomahawk, some gunpowder and all the tin pots. They also took away 30 or 40 kangaroo skins. Clearly, the Pallittorre wanted Baker to leave. They had not come to kill him, but to collect payments owing, to frighten him into leaving and to reduce his capacity to continue colonising their land.

Two markedly different strategies were pursued by the protagonists. The Pallittorre sought to threaten transgressors of expected reciprocal arrangements, either to procure payments due or to induce the colonists to leave, rather than engage in direct conflict; the colonists ignored reciprocal expectations and practised the massacre in response to Aboriginal threats. Baker's version of the story has himself escaping from the blacks. I contend that the Pallittorre allowed Baker to escape. Their business was not to kill him, nor did they respond impulsively to Baker's action. Whatever their feeling about Baker, the Pallittorre felt no immediate need to leave the district, nor to conceal themselves, suggesting they felt no further threat from Baker, at least not in the immediate future. This interpretation is supported by evidence prominent colonist Roderick O'Connor gave to the 1830 Aborigines' Committee. O'Connor told the committee 'the Natives are more anxious to plunder than to murder'.

The various incidents which culminated in the killing of William Knight and the subsequent massacre of up to sixty Aborigines consolidated a pattern of relations between the Pallittorre and the colonists which persisted until the mid-1830s. Following Knight's death, the Pallittorre continued to raid and sometimes burn stock-huts, spear cattle and sheep, and drive away the colonisers. Whitefoord Hills, to the west of Deloraine township, was one popular site of resistance during 1830. At least five separate incidents occurred there, including one near the Avenue in which 300 sheep were clubbed to death. The Avenue plain had been 'for countless generations the favorite hunting ground of large tribes of natives, owing to the plentifulness of game, kangaroo and wallaby abounding from the Blackamoor to the Rubicon'. These tactics were met with what only can be described as a series of mass murders. In July 1830, for example, the Pallittorre attacked some stock-keepers and successfully drove them away. Soon afterwards, the Pallittorre leader Quamby, along with several others, was killed.

At Middle Plains (Map 2), also in July 1830, 'Lyons and some others fell in with a tribe of natives and drove them into a small lagoon and shot several, and from there they drove them to the foot of Ritchie's Sugarloaf and shot all the others except an old man and a woman who begged for mercy and were suffered to go away'. Henry Hellyer, the Van Diemen's Land Company chief surveyor, told Robinson that in 1830 a stock-keeper called Paddy Heagon living at the Retreat, some two miles east of the future Deloraine township, shot nineteen blacks with a swivel gun charged with nails. O'Connor told the Aborigines Committee that 'Captain Ritchie's [stock-]men, to the westward of

---

19 Shaw (ed) 1971, p. 54.
Norfolk Plains, used to hunt them on horseback, and shoot them from their horses.\textsuperscript{25} Punch told Robinson that several natives were shot by either Murphy or Murray and two others at the Long Swamp. Punch felt that these men were excessively cruel and that 'in this case they ought to be punished'.\textsuperscript{26}

The Pallittorre continued to respond to these assaults with retribution spearings, which were not intended to kill, and with raids on stock-huts. One such attack was made on a stock-hut at Dairy Plains (Map 2) occupied by Thomas Johnson and Dolly Dalrymple. This incident has been written about several times. Dolly is usually presented as heroically resisting a vicious and cowardly assault by a large number of blacks.\textsuperscript{27} A six hour siege is reported to have occurred, and Dolly's heroism is frequently marvelled at because she was a woman and because she was a 'half-caste', the daughter of an English sailor and an Aboriginal woman whom the sailor had abducted. These racist and sexist interpretations always fail to locate the blacks' attack on Dolly's hut within the wider black-white relations in the district. On this occasion the blacks speared Dolly's daughter in the thigh, and they set fire to the hut. While there can be little doubt that the attackers were in a mean mood and that in all probability Dolly acted with great bravery, the interpretations of this incident always seek to 'heroineise' Dolly and 'cowardise' the blacks.

The Pallittorre also regularly harrassed Cubit. In September 1831 Cubit walked from his hut at Stocker's Plain (Map 2) to collect water from a nearby spring. Local legend has it that 'some score or more of spears' were thrown at him. Cubit 'beat a hasty retreat' to his hut but received eight wounds, none fatal, along the way. The blacks made a 'long and determined attack' on the hut but a stockman there 'shot several of them, and the remainder fled to the mountains'. Other Aborigines who frequented the district apparently wearied of the struggle. Sometime in 1830, in response to Arthur's offer of a free pardon to any convict who could 'conciliate' Aborigines, John Benfield approached three blacks. He offered them bread and, putting aside his gun as requested by the blacks, was led to a place beyond Dunorlan (Map 2). From here Benfield took a larger group to the local military party; Benfield subsequently received his pardon. This report suggests that these blacks sent out three of their number to meet Benfield for the purpose of making arrangements to 'come in'. Lack of food and weariness of the struggle, or perhaps an unwillingness to engage in the struggle, were reasons why many Aboriginal groups submitted to the invader. Perhaps the brutality and extent of the killings in Pallittorre country also induced these particular blacks to 'come in'.\textsuperscript{28}

**Attitudes to the use of force**

In the second half of the 1820s, both Aborigines and colonists in Van Diemen's Land adopted practices designed to induce fear and terror in the hearts and minds of their respective enemies. But, as I suggested above, the methods used by the two groups to induce fear and terror differed considerably. The Aborigines were far more imaginative in their use of force than were the British, using different methods to achieve different

\textsuperscript{25} Shaw (ed) 1971, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{26} Plomley 1966, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{27} Skemp 1964, pp. 10–11; Veale n.d., pp 83–90.
\textsuperscript{28} Griffen 1893–4, pp. 38–9.
ends; for the British, force usually meant mass killings of Aborigines. Indeed the record shows that for the British the mere fact of being black was sufficient cause to warrant the use of extreme and unlawful force against Aborigines.

Lyndall Ryan, for Van Diemen's Land specifically, and Henry Reynolds, on a wider national scale, have written comprehensive analyses of the reasons for Aboriginal resistance, citing such factors as the invasion of their land, the failure of the colonists to accept reciprocity, British killings and abductions of Aboriginal women and children, and a desire for the British to leave. Reynolds has also offered a wide-ranging account of the tactics, both traditional and new, employed by Aborigines across Australia in that resistance. Tactics such as surveillance, retribution spearings and occasional retribution killings were derived from traditional cultural practices. Innovations included the use of British food, which increased mobility and lessened the risk of capture or reprisal; the theft and in some places the use of firearms; economic warfare, such as killing stock, burning haystacks or ruining seed; and selective attacks which also lessened the risk of reprisal. The Van Diemen's Land experience, including that of the Pallittorre, largely conforms with this explanation of the reasons for resistance and the explication of the tactics used by Aborigines. But the Pallittorre experience, and that of Van Diemen's Land Aborigines generally, suggests that our understanding of the nature of black-white violence can be enhanced by further exploration of two important issues: Aboriginal attitudes to the use of force, as distinct from the tactics used; and the characterisation of Aboriginal resistance as guerrilla warfare.

The evidence for the Pallittorre suggests they never believed that violent killing, or even lesser expressions of force, were necessary or even desirable in their relations with the colonisers. As Punch told Robinson 'when he first came the natives was very peaceable, but they have been drove to commit outrages on the whites by reason of the dire atrocities first committed upon them'. The evidence prior to the Knight killing suggests they sought to negotiate a reciprocal arrangement with Knight. In their ten years of relations with the British, during which time many of their people were killed, the Pallittorre killed only two whites. On many occasions they could have killed colonists, but did not. The ambush and killing of William Knight was a premeditated retribution prompted by several factors, both local and non-local, as argued above. On most occasions, Pallittorre hostility involved theft or property damage, or attempts to induce colonists to leave, not the killing of colonists. Given that less than 2500 colonists were killed by Aborigines Australia-wide, the Pallittorre approach to the use of force seems to have been widespread across Australia. And although colonists were killed, never did Aboriginal violence in Van Diemen's Land come to resemble the often unprovoked promiscuous violence practised by the British. This was not a question of 'primitive' weaponry (captured guns were not used against the colonists), or of lacking the tactical skill—the record shows Aborigines were skilful, creative and witty in their

29 Ryan 1981, ch. 7; Reynolds 1982, pp. 103–110.
32 Reynolds 1982, p. 121.
resistance to the British. Rather, Van Diemen’s Land Aborigines chose not to commit atrocities on the scale practised by the British.

One prevailing tendency in the historiography of Tasmanian Aborigines is to assert that the Aborigines were experiencing some kind of slow strangulation of their intelligence at the time of the British invasion. Rhys Jones was the modern populariser of this social-Darwinist notion, and it has manifested itself in a number of ways both before and after Jones presented his thesis in the film The Last Tasmanian. Along with the myth that Aborigines became extinct with the death of Truganini in 1876, this strangulation myth has been and still is a major factor in the oppression of Tasmanian Aborigines. In this regard it is important to stress the tactical innovation demonstrated by Van Diemen’s Land Aborigines in their responses to the British invaders. Failure to do so not only encourages the contemporary survival of the strangulation myth, it runs the risk of depicting Aborigines in early colonial Tasmania as captives of the topography and their cultural traditions. The issue of Aboriginal adeptness at guerrilla warfare is a case in point. Certainly the topography, the process of gradual occupation by the British, and the weapons preferred by the Aborigines meant guerrilla warfare was an obvious option, but we should be wary of the proposition that guerrilla warfare was a ‘natural’ development, that Aborigines took to guerrilla warfare as a fish takes to water. Such an assertion tends to imply that the choice to use tactics which historians have conceptualised as guerrilla warfare were not conscious choices, but rather something which Aborigines did ‘naturally’. Certainly they worked to harness advantages available to them, but we need to recognise and acknowledge that creative and intelligent choices were made.

Characterisations such as Jones’ notion of strangulation may be unwittingly supported by interpretations about the nature of the Aboriginal military response to the British invasion. Reynolds suggests that many Aboriginal groups moved from ‘feud to warfare’ in their relations with the British. In general terms this model does describe a broad movement that did occur. There are three problems, however, associated with this term. One is that it can be interpreted as meaning that the Van Diemen’s Land Aborigines were slow to discard responses based on traditional practices; two, the term fails to explain why the shift occurred; and three, the term fails to recognise that some groups who met colonisers for the first time in the mid 1820s, such as the Pallittorre, moved much more quickly into the warfare mode than other groups. The most vigorous and organised resistance in Van Diemen’s Land coincided with the rush of occupation in the second half of the 1820s. Until that time, many Aboriginal groups preferred to negotiate solutions, largely on the basis of reciprocity, rather than engage in conflict. Not until the massive escalation of sheep and colonisers in the mid-1820s did warfare develop. Also, the decline in population levels induced survivors to come together, thus creating the impression of a late organisation. This impression tends to obscure the point

---

33 see Clark 1987, p. 64.
34 The Last Tasmanian: a story of genocide, 1976, (feature documentary), Sydney, Artis Film Productions Pty Ltd, producer Tom Haydon.
35 Discussions with Aboriginal colleagues and students over the past seven years have convinced me of this point.
36 Reynolds 1982, p. 103.
that although the conflict intensified in the late 1820s, reflecting an apparent transition from 'feud to warfare', the tactics used underwent refinement rather than major change during the 1820s. Aboriginal hostility, although more organised in the late 1820s, remained linked to the retribution process, to attempts to drive the colonists away, collect due payments or acquire food. The Pallittorre experience suggests it took them little time to realise they were involved in an open-ended conflict with their invaders. After they confronted Baker, for example, they remained in the immediate vicinity of his hut, leaving them easy targets for the reprisal that night. At that time, they saw that having enacted retribution, that particular matter was closed. But they learned very quickly that this was not the case. After they killed Knight, some ten days later, they travelled some five miles from the scene of the killing and posted sentries to detect evidence of pursuit.

One tactic which has not been emphasised as much as it might have been is that of the threat of force, a tactic closely related to the production of fear in the enemy. Reynolds cites one example of this tactic and Ryan in several instances refers to the Aboriginal intent to intimidate the colonists, but in my view it deserves greater emphasis. Incidence of the threat of force, a less tangible tactic than the others discussed by Reynolds, needs to be discerned from the ethnographic record. The record for Van Diemen's Land in the late 1820s shows the existence of considerable British fear. During the military operation known as the black line, in September 1830, for example, the government's decision to begin the line below Launceston provoked both fear and outrage in Launceston and surrounding districts. A colonist at George Town, some thirty miles north of Launceston, reported seeing a tribe of some 600-700 Aborigines preparing to attack Launceston. At the time there were less than 300 Aborigines still living on the entire island, although the general belief was that some 2,000 were still 'at large'. This capacity for fear reflects the colonists' sense of vulnerability, a vulnerability born of their own perception of Aborigines as treacherous savages as well as the Aboriginal capacity to induce fear. But was British fear merely an outcome of the conflict, and not an outcome deliberately pursued by the Aborigines? We need to be careful not to deny the possibility that Aborigines deliberately decided to use the threat of force and the attendant generation of fear as a powerful weapon in their war against the British, that Aborigines were creative agents in moulding the shape of the conflict, not merely ad hoc responders acting within parameters set by the topography, the British and their own cultural traditions.

Several incidents suggests that Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land used the threat of force as a major weapon in their struggle against the British. Ryan relates an incident at Eastern Marshes, near Oatlands, in October 1824, in which 150 Aborigines, accompanied by 50 dogs, divided into groups, surrounded a stock hut, threw spears and stones, and finally surrounded the hut with fires. Despite a siege lasting in excess of five hours, the two servants who occupied the hut 'escaped'. This incident represents far more than a desire to acquire provisions; occurring at the beginning of the Black War, it can be read

38 Depositions concerning the death of William Knight, 1827, Chief Secretary's Office, 1/316, Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart.
40 Launceston Advertiser, 6 July 1830.
as a symbolic incident, a display of a range of weapons in a configuration of confinement but exercised primarily as intimidation, demonstrating to the colonists at large that the threat of force and its attendant fear were to become a fact of daily life. The Pallittorre adopted similar tactics. In addition to the Baker incident, twenty or thirty Pallittorre chased John Hurling from the site of Knight's killing, throwing spears at him, all of which missed. In both cases, the Pallittorre threatened the two colonists with force; in neither case was the colonist actually assaulted. These threats of force, read as statements of intent, suggest the Pallittorre wished to convey to the colonists not merely a desire to have them leave, but to frighten them and other potential invaders, to create in the minds of colonists a permanent state of fear.42

Other tactics also were designed to induce fear. In the summer of 1827-28 the sudden appearance, after long periods of absence, and open hostility shown by the Luggermairrerperpairrer and Lairmairremener bands of the Big River tribe, the southern neighbours of the Pallittorre, caused panic among the colonists. The decision of the Lairmairremener to split up and work in two adjacent areas along the Ouse and upper Derwent Rivers gave 'the impression of combined strategy'. At other times, constant movement and sudden attacks in unexpected places made capture difficult, thereby keeping fear levels high.43 There are numerous reports of Aborigines telling raided colonists they would be back to get them. In December 1829, for example, the Lairmairremener robbed huts near New Norfolk. They speared a settler and took his two pistols; they did not kill him, but told him 'we will give it to you'.44 The taking in raids of guns and knives, although there are no reports of those weapons being used in Van Diemen's Land, would almost certainly have enhanced British fear. These tactics produced fear amongst the colonists; such tactics were shaped by the traditional movements of those bands and the local topography, but were also the results of decisions, consciously taken, to induce terror amongst the colonists. Fear was not simply the outcome of tangible tactics; it was also the outcome of an Aboriginal policy of terror. The threat of force, and the fear such threats engendered, rather than tangible violence itself, was a major, if not the major weapon used.

The savagery of the British reaction to Aboriginal hostility has several explanations. Fear, racial hatred and the Aboriginal resistance certainly contributed to that over-reaction; but given the 'peaceable' disposition of the Pallittorre and many other Aboriginal bands in Van Diemen's Land, can such factors account for the ferocious nature of British violence? At least two writers have suggested that colonial powers have seen racial others as inherently criminal and necessarily productive of social chaos. Winthrop Jordan suggests that free African Negroes in America were seen to be potentially if not actually in a state of insurrection. Barry Morris recently argued that force was seen by colonists as a necessary part of black-white contact in colonial New South Wales; this perception was prompted and legitimated by constructions of Aborigines, based on real and imagined fears, as treacherous savages always likely to undermine the colonising effort. The perception that force was necessary pointed to an inherent instability of British power in colonial situations, giving rise to a culture of

42 See Ryan 1981, p. 97, for a further example.
terror which governed colonists' relations with Aborigines in colonial New South Wales.45

Following Jordan and Morris, free or uncontained Aborigines can be characterised as potential or actual insurrectionists who had to be controlled by force. The record for Van Diemen’s Land, including both Aboriginal and British actions, supports such a characterisation. Certainly the record shows that Aborigines in Van Diemen’s Land refused to accept the theft of their lands. On the British side, perhaps the most telling evidence is the decision in the early 1830s by Arthur and Robinson to ‘round up’ West Coast Aborigines who posed no threat to British occupation.46 The record of British violence in Pallittorre country, certainly after William Knight’s death, suggests emphatically that most colonists there felt it necessary to use force against the local Aborigines; and there can be little doubt that Aboriginal violence, relatively limited though it was, consolidated such perceptions.

Several prominent colonists who assessed the conflict between black and white argued that force was necessary in dealing with Aborigines. Arguments for force often drew links with perceived Aboriginal savagery and the need for force. In an analysis of the potential value of the black line, the Launceston Advertiser owner and editorialist John Pascoe Fawkner argued that the capture of the blacks ‘cannot be achieved without bloodshed’—the ability of the blacks to disappear into the bush and avoid apprehension meant that force was necessary if they were to be contained. The only way to prevent ‘their deadly incursions’ was ‘by shooting a few of them’.47 Colonists giving evidence to the Aborigines’ Committee believed that force was necessary. Roderick O’Connor, for example, thought it ‘impossible to suppress them by open force; the Aborigines should be fought not openly but in a silent war marked by the genocidal ambush. O’Connor advocated ‘some of the worst characters would be the best to send after them’, citing a colonist called Douglas Ibbens who had killed half the eastern tribe ‘by creeping upon them and firing amongst them with his double-barrelled gun’.48 John West also felt that force was necessary to subjugate the Van Diemen’s Land ‘savages’. In 1852, West wrote that the consequences of the occupation for indigenous people are of little concern because the ‘original occupation of this country necessarily involved most of the consequences which followed’. Like the 1830 Aborigines’ Committee, West blamed the convicts for inflicting death and destruction on the Aborigines. But in West’s view the Aborigines themselves were chiefly to blame, since as savages they were unable to comprehend the laws of civilisation: ‘the barbarian that cannot comprehend laws or treaties, must be governed by bribes, or force’.49

Although historians such as A.G.L. Shaw have argued that Governor Arthur was genuinely concerned to protect the Aborigines in Van Diemen’s Land,50 the record of events does not lend substance to the proposition. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that both the British government and Arthur, along with most colonists, believed that force was necessary, certainly if the Aborigines refused to accept British

47 Launceston Advertiser, 27 September 1830.
49 West 1852, p. 96; Shaw (ed) 1971, pp. 35-41.
50 Shaw 1980, pp. 123-34.
authority. David Neal has recently shown that in New South Wales the rule of law was not applied in order to protect Aborigines, the same is the case for Van Diemen's Land. Arthur's governorship is marked by a failure to prosecute the many recorded massacres perpetrated against Aborigines by parties of colonists including police and soldiers, the revenge massacre for William Knight's death being but one example. This failure suggests Arthur believed force was necessary. Bronwyn Desailly has convincingly shown that the British government was prepared to condone the use of force to suppress Aborigines who challenged the British occupation, although it sought to conceal such condonement. It is not surprising then, that from the time Aborigines began to seriously threaten the British invasion of their hunting grounds, Arthur's policy reads as a sequence of measures involving the forceful repression of Aboriginal resistance. In the late 1820s Arthur actually adopted a formal policy of terrorising the Aborigines out of the 'settled districts', a policy which sought to move between the threat and the use of force. It makes no difference, as Shaw has argued, that Arthur may have been powerless to stop atrocities against Aborigines—the point is that his policy both facilitated and encouraged atrocities such as those committed against the Pallittorre. Reynold's most recent work suggests that Arthur himself was aware of this.

One outcome of seeking to generalise about the causes of Aboriginal deaths on an Australia-wide basis, or even a colony-by-colony basis, is that experience at the local level can be obscured. What use is a generalised view if it does not accord with the record of evidence in specific places? History is as much, if not more so, about the particular as the general. A generalised view, if it is to aspire to validity, must follow detailed investigation of local places; it must reflect regional variations and similarities, not subvert them to a general view. The dangers for the integrity of historical scholarship inherent in generalised versions of early colonial conflict are exacerbated when high-profile historians seek to popularise comfortable and sanitised general versions. Death by disease is no doubt a less culpable notion than death by violence for a clientele enamoured of a celebratory version of Australia's past.

The discussion above shows that Blainey's assertion that disease was responsible for most Aboriginal deaths simplifies and distorts the wider story of Aboriginal deaths in the wake of colonisation. While agreeing that disease and other factors, all linked to colonisation, were responsible for most Aboriginal deaths, Reynolds asserts that between 1788 and the 1930s at least 20,000 Aborigines in Australia were killed by whites or their agents, some of whom were native police. Plomley argues that in Van Diemen's Land, starvation caused by the British occupation of hunting grounds was one significant cause of Aboriginal deaths. The importance of local studies lies in recognising that different factors contributed to most deaths in different places. In many places, certainly in Tasmania, it is not possible to tell how many Aborigines were killed.

52 Desailly 1977, ch. 3.
54 Desailly 1977, ch. 3.
57 Plomley 1992, p. 15.
how many died from disease, or how many died from starvation. According to the historical record, the chief cause of Aboriginal deaths in Pallitorre country was the promiscuous massacre. Evidence that disease had lesser impact than killing in Pallitorre country was the ability of those not killed to remain healthy. As late as 1834 Robinson was told by an unnamed Aboriginal woman who only very recently had been living with the Pallitorre that there were 'plenty' of blackfellas still in the district. Reports of raids for food on colonists' properties at Chudleigh, in the west of Pallitorre country, corroborate the woman's evidence. In any case, as Reynolds has pointed out, the important point from the perspective of national debate about white Australia's obligations to Aborigines in the wake of native title is not how many died from what cause, but asserting that disease accounted for most and neglecting to emphasise the extent of killing—the course Blainey chose during the native title debate—distorts the reality of contact violence. As I am arguing, this distortion is further exaggerated by national versions of the past which do not allow for local variations.

Irresistible inevitability and human agency

In his *The Invasion of America*, Francis Jennings used the term 'the conquest myth' to characterise colonial justifications of indigenous dispossession which emphasise the inevitability of the process. According to this myth, savagery and civilisation were opposites, the natives incapable of civilisation and hence full humanity, the colonists 'ennobled in their contest with the dark powers of the wilderness'. Savages were creatures of the wilderness and would always remain so, whereas the civilised were 'required by divine sanction or the imperative of progress to conquer the wilderness and make it a garden'. Fundamentally, all prescriptions contained within the myth were in some way fated—as Jennings puts it, 'it was all inevitable'. As a means of rationalising the gruesome reality of Aboriginal dispossession, various elements of the conquest myth were re-inforced during the early decades of the British occupation of Tasmania. Aborigines were routinely perceived as objects of savagery, if not the most uncivilised savages on earth. In the early 1850s, the conquest myth was popularly articulated in Tasmania by the Launceston-based preacher, editor and historian John West.

West's views on the inevitability of conquest are important in this story. West was an immensely influential journalist and preacher in northern Tasmania during the 1840s and 1850s. His views provide verification that the conquest myth was afoot in Van Diemen's Land, and his contribution to racist ideology, at least in Tasmania, has been considerable. West found that the occupation of Aboriginal land in Van Diemen's Land was just in the following terms:

The right of wandering hordes to engross vast regions forever to retain exclusive property in the soil, and which would feed millions where hundreds are scattered—can never be maintained. The laws of increase seem to suggest the right of migration: neither nations nor individuals are bound to tarry on one spot, and die. The assumption of sovereignty over a savage people is justified by necessity—

---

59 Jennings 1975, pp. 29–31
that law, which gives to strength the control of weakness. It prevails everywhere: it may be either malignant or benevolent, but it is irresistible.65

Three closely related ideological positions inform West's justification of occupation. West argues firstly in Lockean terms64 that the 'laws of increase seem to suggest the right of migration'. Migration for West is in fact necessary, for without it both individuals and nations will perish. Secondly, the occupation is justified by the social-Darwinist law which 'gives to strength the control of weakness'. This law prevails everywhere, its moral implications being coincidental to its ubiquity. Thirdly, West wrote that it 'is not in the nature of civilisation to exalt the savage'; the relation of the savage to the white (West's word) 'can only be that of an alien, a slave'.65 Three natural laws then, those of increase, the dominance of the strong over the weak, and the incorrigibility of the racial savage, render inevitable a just and necessary occupation of Aboriginal land. These are laws which impel and dictate broad historical forces which human society is obliged to accept, indeed must accept because they are irresistible. In part, West was responding to a widely felt ambivalence in the 1830s and 1840s about British presence in the colony and the implications of that presence for the island's Aboriginal population. W.P. Weston, for example, spoke for many colonists when he wrote

Whatever may be the evils of society in a state of civilization they are assuredly less in character and degree than those of savage life; and I can never regret that the fair and beautiful country of Tasmania has been entirely reclaimed from the dominion of the debased and treacherous Aborigines; though I cannot but comment that it has been done in part in sad violation of those laws established by Him who hath made of one blood all men to dwell upon the face of the earth 66

West's justification for England's 'assumption of sovereignty' was thus one early expression of a process of denial of responsibility which is still evident at the present time.

Geoffrey Blainey informed his analysis of the implications of the Native Title Act with an ideological positioning similar to that advanced by West. Attributing a major population increase to the pre-Christian invention of agriculture, Blainey argues that for 5,000 years the strong have invaded the weak; and that the Aboriginal 'way of life was bound to be overthrown eventually because it supported so few people on so much land'. Blainey also offers a modern version of West's law concerning the incorrigibility of the savage. The Native Title bill 'is introducing a form of ownership and an attitude to the land that served the world well in the Stone Age but will be self-defeating in the 21st century'. And despite an historiography that compellingly documents the deliberate process of marginalisation, Blainey argues that the 'main reason' why Aborigines are 'less fortunate' in the fields of health, education and work opportunities is because their traditional culture, for all its merits, does not fully equip them for the modern world. The new emphasis

---

63 West 1852, pp. 92–96.
64 Yarwood and Knowling 1982, p. 95.
65 West 1852, pp. 92–96.
on Aboriginal ownership of land is reinforcing culture. In that sense, it is a backward step.\textsuperscript{57}

The inevitability argument operates on two levels, the inevitability of the occupation itself, and the inevitability of Aboriginal deaths once the occupation had occurred. The argument that historical processes inducing the inevitability of invasion might be at work is supported by some superficial evidence. Five thousand years of invasions and almost continuous war suggest an entrenched desire to dominate others. But the issue is more complex and problematic than either West or Blainey allow. Robert King has argued, for example that important strategic, trade and social factors figured prominently in a long-running debate which culminated in the occupation of Aboriginal Australia. And recently Allan Frost has argued that the British occupation of Australia was part of a British Board of Trade plan to establish a global free trade network.\textsuperscript{68} Such choices challenge the notion of human society impelled to act by instincts beyond its control. Once again Blainey's historical method reduces a set of complex processes to simplified generalisation.

West asserts that occupation 'necessarily involved most of the consequences which follow';\textsuperscript{69} not only was the invasion necessary and just, so too were the consequences which followed! Is such a view beyond dispute? If we accept the view that the bulk of colonists thought force was a necessary, it was more or less inevitable that many Aborigines would die violent deaths, although there are many examples of colonists who were able to enjoy relatively harmonious relations with Aborigines, primarily when control of land was not an issue. Ryan shows, for example, that relations between Aborigines and sealers along the north coast of Van Diemen's Land in the early years of the nineteenth century were in some respects mutually beneficial and certainly more harmonious than those with agriculturalists and graziers from about 1810 onwards.\textsuperscript{70} The apparent ability of individuals such as Punch to co-exist with the Pallittorre also shows that conflict and death were not inevitable.\textsuperscript{71} In any case, neither the argument for the inevitability of invasion, nor the belief that force was a necessity, should obscure the fact that in many cases of massacre, actions followed premeditated decisions. If we held that the belief that force was a necessity meant that mass killings of Aborigines was inevitable and hence somehow an inevitable fate, we dispense with the notion that individuals and states ought to be held accountable for their actions, irrespective of when those actions were committed. In Van Diemen's Land prevailing ideas and circumstances helped shape decisions, but individuals made decisions and committed actions. Beliefs, ideas and circumstances may prompt decisions and help explain subsequent actions, but they cannot exonerate individuals from responsibility for those actions, especially in the absence of substantive evidence of self-defence. Just as the Pallittorre were not the passive victims of their invaders, nor were the invaders the passive victims of their own beliefs, prejudices and prevailing circumstances. That the Van Diemen's Land Aborigines were systematically massacred was never inevitable; mass killing by massacre was the outcome of consciously taken decisions.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{57} Blainey, 24 July 1993. \\
\textsuperscript{58} King 1990, pp. 13–20; Frost 1992, pp. 4–11. \\
\textsuperscript{59} West 1852, p. 92. \\
\textsuperscript{60} Ryan 1981, chs. 3 & 4. \\
\textsuperscript{61} Plomley 1966, pp. 218.
\end{flushright}
When combined with representations of Aborigines as anachronistic cultural objects, the inevitability argument on both levels—invasion and deaths—is calculated to exonerate past historical actors for responsibility for the mass murder of Aborigines; it serves also to excuse contemporary Australians from the responsibility to provide Aborigines with necessary and just human rights, usually conceived as some form of land rights, and the provision of basic services such as health care and educational opportunity. The effect of the inevitability argument is to render the decision to invade and the deaths which followed of lesser significance in the destruction of Aboriginal society than the broad historical forces which impelled those lesser, contingent decisions. As did West, Blainey is seeking to swing the pendulum of public opinion away from an acceptance of pre-meditated killing as a major cause of Aboriginal deaths and towards a more comfortable view of the past—that Aborigines lacked both the biological capacity and the cultural sophistication to adapt to the inevitable arrival of a superior western civilisation. Blainey and his predecessor West give us essentially colonial versions of the past; their histories document Australian history as the story of western progress, as the story of broad historical forces to which individual agency is always susceptible; they present historical pasts in which the indigenes are required to assimilate into western culture and society, or perish. Both use their versions of the past to argue, each for his own generation, that neither compensation nor reparation to Aborigines is necessary.

Conclusion

The historical debate which accompanied the High Court’s Mabo decision and the subsequent Native Title Act 1993 is one expression of a ‘contest to control the memories that nourish national consciousness and so shape our future’. Given such lofty stakes, it is crucial that positions put by protagonists such as Blainey be challenged, certainly on historical grounds, and on moral grounds too. Both grounds involve questions pertaining to the relevance and methodology of historical scholarship in the field of race relations. In 1990 Peter Read wrote that historians have seldom addressed ‘the question of whether we, the present, have any responsibility towards rectifying the deeds of earlier generations’. The High Court ruling that ‘Australia’ is morally illegitimate to the extent that it is founded on European denial of the continent’s prior ownership by indigenous people, however, has prompted debate on the issue. While Tim Rowse has expressed the view that such matters are ‘endlessly ponderable’ positions put by Blainey and the moral philosopher Raimond Gaita suggest a polarisation exists. In many ways this debate and the 1996-97 Wik debate, in which the High Court ruled that Native Title and pastoral leases could co-exist suggest the ambivalence which characterised the views of men such as Weston is still evident in Australian society. As might be expected, the focus of these debates is whether or not land should be returned to

---

73 McQueen 1994, p. 54.
74 Read 1990, p. 298.
75 Rowse 1993, p. 229.
77 For comment on the High Court’s Wik decision, see, for example, The Australian, 21 March and 15 April 1997
Aborigines. Blainey does not address the issue of an inherited responsibility, but rather points out perceived negative outcomes (in his view) if the responsibility is accepted. Blainey argues that no further land should be given to Aborigines for a number of reasons: the average Aborigine has 12 times more land than the average non-Aborigine—an over-simplification, in my view, which distorts the reality of Aboriginal dispossession; a potential weakening of the 'sovereignty and unity of the Australian people', a claim which assumes that such sovereignty and unity actually exists; the threat to economic prosperity derived from mining, a claim for which the evidence is contradictory; that ownership of land is not vital for the survival of any Australian family, an argument which ignores the importance of land in formulations of Aboriginal identity; and the High Court's appropriation of the Parliament's right to embody contemporary moral values in law, a claim which forgets that the parliament drafted and passed the Native Title Act.78

Gaita, on the other hand, argues that reparation in the form of Native Title is necessary because nothing less than reparation will redress 'the crimes of our political ancestors' and restore to Aborigines their 'full human status', the depth of their 'moral and spiritual being', which was denied by the application of terra nullius79 and by the ubiquity of the conquest myth. If the obligation to restore full human status to Aborigines provides one basis for an argument for present responsibility, this paper suggests at least one other. Its illegality aside, one of the most morally culpable aspects of the occupation in Van Diemen's Land, and in fact all of Aboriginal Australia, was the persistent choice, when taking the land, to employ the promiscuous massacre. Many Aborigines with whom I have worked speak of the enduring cultural and personal trauma bequeathed by knowledge of those massacres.80 This trauma and the attendant moral culpability is intensified by the fact that in almost every other aspect of social life the British invaders rigorously applied the rule of law. As most historians would know, reparation for war crimes is not a novel notion. When taken together, the illegal claim to the country, the morally culpable means used to acquire and retain it, and the disastrous consequences for Aborigines, which persist to this day, provide a very solid basis for the argument that we do have an obligation to rectify past wrongs. In the long run, no amount of over-simplified and politically motivated 'history' will deny that obligation. And herein lies the importance of local studies.

Local studies enable us to engage with the particular, the actual, and the complex, to explore wider issues at close range, and perhaps understand more intimately the living actuality of the time. The argument that colonisation in Australia was an abstract force to which humans were bound to defer, or a structure imposed on local practice81 tends to deny the diversity and complexity of relations between indigenes and colonisers in local places at different 'historical moments'.82 This argument tends also to deny the level of agency open to the participants in those relations. Similarly, explaining Aboriginal deaths in terms of the abstraction 'disease' obscures the complex of ways and circumstances in which indigenous people died. To claim validity, a generalised view

---

78 Blainey, 10 November 1993.
79 Gaita, 19 November 1993.
must reflect detailed investigation of local places; it must reflect regional variations and similarities, not subvert them to convenient generalisation. Historical opinion, especially on an issue which many observers believe has deep implications for the moral character of contemporary Australian society83 should always proceed from a rigorous historical analysis of available evidence and from generalisations which take account of the diversity and complexity of local experience.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Richard Barwick for his help with preparing the maps for publication.

Shayne Breen lectures in Aboriginal Studies in Riawunna, Centre for Aboriginal Education, at the University of Tasmania. Dr Breen holds a PhD in history from the University of Tasmania, and he is descended from the Aboriginal peoples of Central Victoria.

References


The Australian, 21 March and 15 April, 1997.


Blainey, Geoffrey 1993, 'Mabo decision looked back through modern blinkers', The Age, 31 July.


Blainey, Geoffrey 1993, 'Land rights for all', The Australian, 10 November.


Cubit, Simon 1987, 'Squatters and opportunists; occupation of lands to the westward to 1830', in Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Papers & Proceedings, Hobart, vol. 34 no. 1, pp. 7-13

Depositions concerning the death of William Knight 1827, Chief Secretary's Office, 1/316, Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart.


Dove, Thomas 1842, 'Moral and social characteristics of the Aborigines of Tasmania, as gathered with intercourse with the surviving remnant of them now located on Flinder's Island', Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science, vol. 1, pp 247-8.

Field correspondence 71/227, Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart.


Hobart Colonial Times, 6 July 1827


The Last Tasmanian: a story of genocide, 1976, (feature documentary), Sydney: Artis Film Productions Pty Ltd, producer Tom Haydon

Launceston Advertiser, 27 September and 4 October 1830.

McQueen, Humphrey March 1994, 'Manning Clark revisited', in 24 Hours, Sydney, pp 54-56.


Reynolds, Henry 1993, 'Laws of the British empire recognised native title', The Age, 11 November


Shaw, A.G.L. (ed), 1971, *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of all correspondence...on the subject of the military operations...against the Aboriginal inhabitants...*, Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association.


Wangkangurru people started leaving their homeland, the Simpson Desert, gradually over the last decades of last century. In 1900-1901 there was a mass exodus and everybody left, except for one family who were ultimately persuaded to leave by their relative Imatuwa, who had returned to collect them. This migration is described in Aboriginal History 9, 1986. Wangkangurru people had maintained their traditions relatively undisturbed, but with this move they joined people who had had European contact for many years. The departure from the desert coincided with an increase of activity by European investigators. Stevens¹ describes how the ethnographers who visited the area just after the turn of the century were anxious to learn about the traditions of the new arrivals. A centre for this interest was the mission at Killalpaninna on the Cooper in Diyari country, where the Rev. Reuther had been studying the Diyari language and mythology for some time: he too now concentrated on Wangkangurru myths.

The arrival of Wangkangurru people had an enormous impact among the rest of the Aboriginal population: it made people aware of traditions and led to a kind of cultural revival throughout the Lake Eyre Basin. The presence of newcomers who were still so actively singing their own songs led to a new burst of activity in oral traditions: people made songs in their contemporary surroundings. A whole lengthy song cycle was composed in this semi-traditional environment, it was called Kudnarri 'the (Cooper) floodplain'. It was considered new and exciting and was loved as being communal to all the groups of the eastern Lake Eyre Basin. Parts were in Wangkangurru, parts in Diyari. Since it was so popular, the song-cycle was constantly being added to, incorporating new events. The earliest datable event celebrated in the series is the sinking of the bore at Mt. Gason (1903). Leslie Russell, (b.1906, dec. 1976) who with his 'brother' Jimmy was the last to be able to sing parts of this cycle had himself added to it, he for instance 'found' a verse about the lilies growing on the floodplain of the Cooper near the Kopperamanna crossing. When Norman Tindale visited the many older people who were living at Pandie on the Diamantina in 1934 the first song that Sam Dintibana, the senior Diyari rain-maker sang for him was not his favourite song from his own ancient tradition: it was a verse from the Kudnarri cycle. These much-loved songs remained in the memory of Diyari and Wangkangurru people until the 'sixties and 'seventies and parts of the cycle were recorded on various occasions during that period both by Peter

¹ Stevens 1994, p. 218.
Austin and Luise Hercus at Marree (Hercus tapes 155, 163 and 195). Peter Austin\(^2\) studied and analysed some of these verses. Other elderly people in the camp were pleased to hear the songs again, and on one occasion Mary Dixon (Diyari, b. ca 1890, dec. 1969) joined in. The first verses of the cycle refer to the travels of young men looking for girls. Throughout this sequence, when it was sung long ago, women had to call out in Diyari warli yura? 'who are you': Mary Dixon did this during a performance on Hercus tape 195 (January 1968 at Marree). In this paper we discuss just one verse from this cycle. It deals with an historical event of 1917, a sudden death at Lake Allallina.

How Ned killed a man at Lake Allallina

Blanche Ned in his earlier years

Ned Palpilinha was the last Wadigali man: his mother had come from Wadigali country, from along the Yandama Creek near the New South Wales border before he was born. Because he was brought up at Blanchewater, he became known as Blanche Ned. He spent the last years of his life, in the late twenties and thirties, with Wangkangurru people at Pandie Pandie. Tindale saw him at Pandie Pandie and recorded a Wadigali vocabulary from him. He is buried near the former Old Clifton Hills outstation, next to the Ngamini rain-maker Nipper and the Yarluyandi man Lagoon Charlie Kuranta. The memory of Blanche Ned and his 'brother' Blanche Tom lingered among Aboriginal people in the Lake Eyre Basin. The people at Pandie and Birdsville remembered Ned as a kindly old man, a 'loner' because he was the only one who could speak his language, Wadigali, which he had learnt from his mother. Further south however he was recalled by some very elderly people who had known him at least twenty years before he went to Pandie. Mary Dixon (Diyari) remembered him, as did old Alice (Kuyani). They recalled that he was also known by the name Ngapa WiRari 'Water moving about', which refers to the Blanchewater Creek. Blanche Ned, like his 'brother' Tom, was described as having been in his younger years an aggressive person who enjoyed arguments. He was dedicated to his own traditions, and this naturally made him more and more isolated. He occasionally stayed at Marree, but spent much of his early life in his adoptive country at Blanchewater and in adjacent areas of Mumpowie Station.

Ngarlantarlan—Lake Allallina

Occasionally Blanche Ned visited the camp at Ngarlantarlan just outside the precincts of Killalpaninna Mission and stayed with the mixed group of older people that remained there. Traditionally Ngarlantarlan had been a site for the Storm History, a major myth that traversed Lake Eyre: it started just to the east of Coober Pedy and ended at Mt. Gason. The myth relates how the people who travelled with the storm camped at Ngarlantarlan and liked the place. They began asking the old Man Warrpa, the Storm himself 'how much further do we have to go, can we not stay here by the lake?' The Storm said 'no' and carried them on to Poongalissie Pungalatyi and Mt Gason. Thus Ngarlantarlan was a mythological site that had significance and attracted the

\(^2\) Austin 1978, pp. 531-534.
A MAN DIED SUDDEN AT LAKE ALLALLINA

more traditional people. In the first two decades of this century this included some of the Wangkangurru people who had left the Simpson Desert in 1900, a few Wangkatyaka people from the lower Diamantina, as well as a few Diyari and some of their northern neighbours, Ngamini and Yawarawarrka. The people in the camp originally had one thing in common: they preferred not to live right at the Killalpaninna Mission, presumably because they felt freer here, they were away from supervision and nevertheless had the benefit of rations. It was at Ngarlangarlani, not at the mission, that ceremonies were held, for instance the 'Molonga' dance was performed there in 1901 (Jones and Sutton 1986:36–38). There was a core of people at Ngarlangarlani who were particularly jealous of their traditions, and quarrels could easily break out regarding traditional matters. Blanche Ned, it appears, on one of his visits from Murnpeowie was involved in a quarrel with another man at the camp, a quarrel resulting from a previous feud. This ended with Ned killing the other man.

This violent death stunned people in the camp to such a degree that an old man composed a song about it as part of the new semi-traditional song cycle called Kudnarri, largely in Diyari. The text is not clear at this point: it could have been a Yawarawarrka man named Ngati Purkula. He taught this verse to Jimmy Russell and his parallel cousin Leslie Russell. Jimmy and Leslie Russell sang parts of the cycle together (on Hercus tape 195), in January 1968 at Marree. Mary Dixon who was present also knew the verse about Ngarlangarlani, but she did not join in, neither did old Alice.

The same song was subsequently also recorded by Leslie Russell alone for Peter Austin, and Leslie explained that he was 'sister's son' to the man who was killed.2

---

2 Austin 1978, p. 533.
Figure 1  Lake Eyre–Cooper Creek, showing the location of places mentioned in the text
The song

Leslie Russell introduced the song, speaking in English and Arabana:

Sing'm along  tharli-tharli. Mathapurda-nha  pirda-kapukanh
  tongue-tongue  old man-ACC  kill-ANC

Ngarl-un-garl-un
Ngarl-un-garl-LOC

'Let's sing the verse with the words tharli-tharli. He killed that old man long ago at Ngarl-un-garl-un.'

Alice Oldfield echoed his words:

Ngarl-un-garl-un  pirda-ngura.
Ngarl-un-garl-LOC  kill-IMP

'At Ngarl-un-garl-un he got killed.'

Jimmy and Leslie Russell then sang the following verse:

Apinyera lilangda  Because of a vengeance party he died
Ngarl-un-garl-nya  At Ngarl-un-garl-un he threw (a boomerang)
Pinyunngera lilangda  Because of a vengeance party he died
Nganhunngera diyungera  It's me he threw it at!
Tharlingera tharlingda  (One speaking a strange) tongue, a tongue
Tharlingera tharlingera  
(One speaking a strange) tongue, a tongue

Pinyängera lilängera  
Because of a vengeance party he died

Nganhängera diyängera  
It's me he threw it at!

Pinyängera lilängáa  
Because of a vengeance party he died

Ngarlängera diyängera  
At Ngarlängarlani he threw (a boomerang)

Tharlingera tharlé liláli  
(Because of one speaking a strange) tongue, a tongue, he died.

L.H. What does he say there?

Alice. .... Leslie-nganha

Leslie. No, no,  mathapurda
old man  nguru ..  Ngati-purkula

Leslie. Yea, Yawarawarrka.

Alice.  Arayi,  mathapurda-ki
Yes  pirda-kapukanha, that's him we been sing'm

L.  Minha-ku?

Leslie. I don't know, I wasn't in that ha ha!

Mary.  Pirda-kapukanha  Ngarlängarlaga
Kill-ANC  Lake Allallina-LOC

Ngarlängarlani  kanti-purru...
Lake Allallina  club-having

(He) killed that man—who had a club in his hand—at Lake Allallina.

The song follows the conventions of traditional songs in that extra syllables are added to words in a parallel fashion, hence the repetition of -ngera. Words may be transformed in various ways in songs as analysed by Peter Austin, so lilangá was said to be equivalent to pali 'to die', and tharli-tharli was explained as equivalent to tharli-pirla-li 'one speaking a strange tongue (ergative case)'. Ned being of Wadikali origin certainly was 'one speaking a strange tongue'. The song says a vengeance party killed the old man, but the work of the vengeance party, both the singers and audience agreed, was carried out by one man—and the documents quoted below explain the reasons for the vengeance. The words nganhängera diyängera were not clearly explained to Luise Hercus, but they were given to Peter Austin as nganha diya 'it is me he hit'. This was no doubt intended as the surprised final thought of the victim.

The line tharlingera tharlingera in the explanation given to Peter Austin gives an even more dramatic account: the word 'tongue' was said to refer to the old man being hit on the back of the neck so that, as he died, his tongue protruded like that of a bullock. This explanation was subsequently quoted also by Tamsin Donaldson.

---

4 See Koch 1987, p.52 for further comment on metre and added syllables in this song.
5 Austin, ibid.
6 Donaldson 1979, p.78.
Jimmy Russell (standing) with Mick McLean at Dalhousie in August 1975.
(Photograph by H. Creamer.)
Explanation

Mick McLean, who had known Blanche Ned, gave some background to the song. Because he had met Blanche Ned at Marree, he thought at first that the murder had taken place there: he was not in the area at the time, but had heard a graphic description. He recounted it as follows:

1. Yata thika-rnda mathapurda-nha pirda-lhuku.
   Again return-PRES old man-ACC kill-PURP
   mathapurda Ngapa-WiRari, Pirlatapa.
   old man Ngapa-WiRari Pirlatapa

2. L.H. Minha-ku pirda-ka?
   What-DAT kill-PAST

3. M.M. Having row. Old Ned, he kill'm'
   Kira-ru punga-ru wanka-ngura, mathapurda
   Boomerang-INST humpy-ABL rise-CONT old man
   nguru-nga panti-lhiku waya-rnda, antili wanka-rda.
   other-LOC fight-PURP wish-PRES first rise-PRES

4. Mudluwrrru nyurdu mRa-ru parda-rna.
   Shield too hand-INST hold-IMP

5. Just coming out of punga. humpy
   Kalya nguyu pirda-lhuku kumpira-ma-rna.
   Time one kill-HIST dead-make-IMP

6. Just been having yarn, just put up any sort of a row.

Translation

1. M.M.: Then he, (Ned), came back again, (after he had had a row with the other man) he came back to kill that old man. He (Ned) was called Ngapa WiRari 'Water moving about', he was a Pirlatapa man.7
2. L.H.: What did he kill him for?
3. M.M.: They were having a row. The old man was just coming out of his humpy when (Ned) killed him with his boomerang. The old man (George) was wanting to have a fight with the other one (Ned) and was at that very moment just coming out.
4. He was holding a shield in his hand, (but that didn't help him).
5. He was just coming out of his humpy when (Ned) struck him and killed him with a single blow.
6. They had been having a discussion and some sort of argument.

7 Mick Mclean always thought of Ned as being Pirlatapa, because he was born at Blanchewater in Pirlatapa country.
George Aiston. Until his death in 1944 George ‘Poddy’ Aiston ran a store and museum (now deserted and reduced to rubble) at Mulka on the Birdsville track. Among the many people, both Aboriginal and white, who were indebted to him were the mail-drivers. Fred Teague of Hawker (dec. 1994) drove the Birdsville mail in the later thirties. He took this humorous snapshot of Poddy Aiston who was showing him some weaponry from the museum. (Photo made available to L. Hercus by Fred Teague in 1988.)

Historical background

During her work on the history of the Killalpaninna mission Christine Stevens discovered a set of contemporary documents about this killing. On June 29th 1917 the missionary Bogner wrote from Killalpaninna to the Police Sergeant who was stationed at Mungeranie:

Dear Sir,

A few weeks ago there was a rumour that a native died very suddenly out in the camp a few miles from here at Ngalangalannie Lake. Further information came to hand that he was killed. I do not know this blackfellow (sic). They came over from Murmepowie station with their own buggy. The man suspected to be the murderer is called ‘Ned’ and his lubra. The victim is called ‘George’. All information in this letter I got from Theo. Vogelsang...

Luckily for Ned this Police Sergeant was none other than the famous and widely esteemed George ‘Poddy’ Aiston, who was later, in 1924, to be co-author of Savage Life in Central Australia, and who had close friendship with a number of Aboriginal people.  

* Austin, Hercus and Jones 1990, p.138.
Aiston evidently wasted no time and went to Killalpaninna on July 7th 1917 to make inquiries: Christine Stevens found the report he sent to the Police Inspector's Office at Port Augusta. This report contains an account of how Mr Theo Vogelsang the 'Overseer' at Killalpaninna had heard that a man named George had died:

They told him that George had had a fit. Mr Vogelsang thought no more of it, but about 3 weeks later heard a rumour to the effect that George had been killed by a blackfellow named Ned. Ned had killed George because George had boasted that he had killed a gin and a white man near Innamincka by lightning, the gin that was killed by lightning was the mother of Ned's gin Agnes. Mr Vogelsang further stated that George was hunted out of the camp at Killalpaninna because he was always threatening to kill the blacks there by making lightning and boasting that the white man and gin.. at Innamincka were killed by lightning made by him.. The blacks drove him out of the Killalpaninna camp and he went to the shepherds camp at Ngananganinna Lake, the night before he died there was a corroboree at this camp.

Aiston's letter then reports his own inquiries:

On the 8th July I went to this camp, the first camp I came to was deserted and there was a comparatively freshly made grave about 80 yards northwest of it, a little further round the lake I found the fresh camp the blacks had made, at this camp I found Robin, in answer to my question as to how George died Robin stated that early in the morning George got up and standing up called to Ned who was camped below him on the sandhill: 'Oh Brother come and fight me, and I will kill you with lightning same as I killed the white man and the old woman at Innamincka—I will kill Agnes same as I killed her mother'. Ned called back—'Oh Brother I come to fight you now'—with that Agnes screamed and ran at George and hit him in the ribs with her digging stick and knocked him down. Ned then hit him on the head with a piece of wood he had picked up before he had left his own camp...

Ned is at present at the Kannawaukaninna Bore...

I would respectfully ask for instruction as to what I am to do in this case...

Aiston then went on to say that he himself thought that it would be in the best interests of all concerned if no action were taken.

Aiston wrote a second letter on the 18th of July to Inspector Thornton at Pt. Augusta to strengthen his previous recommendation to let the matter rest:

I have just been informed that blacks had assembled at this corroboree from Kanowna and Goyders Lagoon for the purpose of deciding what was to be done to George, who had for years terrorised the blacks right through this country... Two justices of the Peace here, Mr A.J. Scobie and Mr A.F. Scobie... are both of opinion that they could not commit on this evidence—Mr Bognor JP of Killalapaninna reckoned that if it were possible to give Ned and his gin a thrashing it would be all that they deserve...

There is no doubt that the authorities took Aiston's advice and no action appears to have been taken against Ned.

---

10 Aiston makes it clear that this idea is obviously Bogner's, not his own.
Sam Dintibana's song

When Norman Tindale visited Pandie Pandie in 1934 he worked with all the senior men. This naturally included Ned Palpilina: Tindale's notebook contains a Wadigali vocabulary from Ned which is the only reliable evidence we have from this language. Tindale did not record Ned, so we cannot hear his voice. He did however record the senior Diyari man, Sam Dintibana, and the first song that Sam sang was a verse from the much loved *Kudnarri* cycle. The words of this verse are not analysable to the present writer.\(^\text{11}\) but it is definitely not the verse about Blanche Ned.

An analysis of Sam's song shows the uniformity of the *Kudnarri* tradition over the years: the verse contains the same addition of *-ngerera* at the end of words, standard throughout the Diyari parts of the cycle.

Recordings made by Norman B. Tindale on the Diamantina in 1934, cylinder 1 record 1:

\begin{verbatim}
Balangera margarangera burangerera
Bidi:ngerera bidingerera
Margangerera burangerera
Dabuyangada baryalayala
Mawayungar Wardingerera
Dabuyingerera dabuyayala
Mawuyungera Wardingerera
Bidi:ngerera bigeraya
Margangerera burangerera
Bidi:ngerera bidingerera
Margangerera burangerera
Dabuyungar dabuyayala
Mawuyungar Wardingerera
\end{verbatim}

Musical analysis of the two songs: Sam Dintibana (1934) and Jimmy and Leslie Russell (1968)

The two songs, recorded thirty four years apart, show a number of differences musically, yet the two songs have been identified as being from the same series, the *Kudnarri*. This analysis examines the structural points of the songs, showing where they differ and where they are the same.

The notations show only the vocal part in order to illustrate the analysis more clearly. In the 1934 version, a percussion accompaniment is audible starting midway through the first line of the song. The 1968 version uses an accompaniment of sticks and a tapping against a tobacco tin right from the beginning.

\(^{11}\) The words of Central Australian songs are different from ordinary speech, grammatical endings can be omitted, initial consonants are often altered and extra syllables added, see Austin 1978, pp. 531–534. The meaning is usually esoteric and is not accessible even to native speakers without an explanation.

\(^{12}\) *Bura* means 'to tear', and *marga* means 'to crawl'.
Melodic features

The melodies of each version, lasting approximately 11 seconds, are sung three times. A full version of each melody is performed every two lines as shown on the notations; the two crotchet rests indicate the end of each full melodic exposition. A breath can be heard clearly in the 1968 version between the second and the third melodic repetitions; however, seeing as the placement and the length of the rest is the same in the 1934 version, it is most likely that breaths were taken in those places as well.
Both versions of the melody have a range of a third. The 1934 performance uses a major third the first time, but the following repetitions encompass a minor third. The 1968 version employs a minor third each time the melody is sung.

Musically, the structure of the melody consists of two melodic phrases, each of which corresponds to a line of text. The first melodic phrase vacillates between either a major or minor third, and the second phrase is sung on one note only. The 1934 version uses three adjacent notes whereas the 1968 version skips a third up and down, leaving out the tone between the interval. The 1934 version, as a rule, employs more ornamentation than the 1968 version.

In both cases, the first full melodic performance differs from the two following repetitions in the beginning melodic phrase. Due to a crack or brief interruption in the 1934 cylinder (shown by the "break" above the score), the first part of the melody is incomplete, but the remainder of the first phrase shows the melody staying on the B longer than in subsequent performances of the melody. When the word bidingera occurs, the melody repeats the A in the same way as subsequent performances of the second melodic phrase. The next two performances of the melody are then the same.

In the 1968 version, the first musical phrase uses an extra D to accommodate the word, apinjera, otherwise the repetitions of the melody are the same.

**Rhythmic features**

In most cases, when words are used ending with -ngera, a distinctive dotted or syncopated rhythmic pattern is used.

1934 version \( q \ q \ e \ q \ = \ mar-ga-ng-ra \) (staff 2)
1968 version \( q \ q \ e \ q \ = \ li-la-ng-ra \) (staff 1)

Words without the -ngera ending use a non-dotted rhythmic pattern:

1934 version \( q \ q \ e \ e \ h \ = \ da-bu-ra-ya-la \) (staff 3)
1968 version \( q \ q \ q \ q \ q \ q \ h \ = \ a-pin-ya-ra li-la-ng-na \)

One place where the word with the -ngera differs from the above analysis is in the 1968 version on the word, nganhangera. This word uses a syncopated figure which returns to the normal -ngera pattern when the following word, diyangera is sung.

\( q \ q \ q \ q \ q \ q \ q \ = \ ngan-ha:-ng-ra \)
\( q \ q \ e \ q \ = \ di-ya-ng-ra \)

The structure of the melody, the melodic range, and the distinctive dotted rhythmic pattern generated by the extra syllables in "-ngera" make the tune recognisable as the same for both versions, even though there are differences in the first melodic phrases.
Wima song
sung by Sam Dintibana in 1934
A 9568 A, 01:19(1)
Song about Blanche Ned

sung by Jimmy and Leslie Russell in 1968

A 2076B, 08:24 (Song item 8)

First melodic phrase

Voice

A-pinya-ra la nga Nga-rla nge-ra di ya nge-ra

Second melodic phrase

Pi-nya nge ra li nge-ra Nga-nha nge-ra di ya nge-ra

Tharlinge tha rlinge Tharlinge tha rlinge-ra

Pi nya nge ra li nge-ra Nga-nha nge-ra di ya nge-ra

Pi nya nge li nga Ngalin nge-ra di ya nge-ra

Tharlinge-ra tha rlinge-ra tha rle tha rle ли ли
Conclusions

The unique fact that we have both European and Aboriginal accounts of the events at Lake Ngarlangarlani gives us some insight into the way in which traditions came into being.

In the oral traditions of people in the Lake Eyre Basin a basic distinction was made between traditional songs and 'rubbish' songs. Traditional songs had their own style and technique and celebrated the History time; furthermore they showed distinctly archaic linguistic features and the interpretation was esoteric. 'Rubbish' songs dealt with personal events, seeing the first motorcar, seeing the first rabbit, an injured Aboriginal stockman lying in a ditch, managing to attract attention by waving his hat around on a long stick and being rescued, a jealous wife, a drunken skirmish and so forth. From the few songs of this kind that have survived it seems that their language was very close to the spoken language. When telling of a dramatic turn of events or when expressing strong emotions the oldest traditional people would often sing their words, their intonation would change to a chant. The sentence structure would still be like the spoken language, and the meaning perfectly clear, they would in fact be composing a 'rubbish' song. There seems however to be a third category of songs, which is somewhere between 'rubbish' and traditional. This category includes a couple of 'train' songs recorded from the Flinders as well as the song cycle under discussion, the 'songs of the Cooper' or Kudnarri cycle: in these compositions everything except the date of the subject matter is traditional. The comparison between the two performances—the one at Pandie in 1934 and the one at Marree in 1968—shows that this cycle represents a well-established tradition. The fact that there should be different explanations for some of the words in the Blanche Ned song (as recorded by Austin and Hercus respectively) shows that the event was already shrouded in myth.

Apart from the verse about Blanche Ned and one other verse of the Kudnarri cycle there do not seem to be any further songs in the whole of the Lake Eyre Basin that deal with particular historical events for which a European account is also available. This makes Jimmy and Leslie Russell's song all the more valuable.

The story of Blanche Ned was told with a certain irony: George was spoiling for a fight but was killed without being able to strike a blow. It follows the theme of 'the biter bit', so common in Aboriginal mythology. The traditions about Blanche Ned show myth in the making. The event was associated with Ngarlangarlani and was already by the 'sixties part of the 'History' of this site.

There is a closely parallel case associated with Wimparanka, Wimbra waterhole on the Gregory, on Stuart Creek Station. A duel took place there, probably a little earlier than the events at Lake Allallina, around 1910, but we have no historical record of this. Two Kuyani men, one belonging to Stuart Creek and the other to 'the Mirrabuckinna mob' from near the northern tip of Lake Torrens had an argument about traditional knowledge and they fought on the flat just south of the waterhole. Their respective supporters watched in horror as they actually killed one another. There is the same feeling of irony in this story: each wanted to kill, and so each died. A Kuyani man made

---

13 This other verse reflects the Aboriginal reaction to a station building being erected in a remote location not far from Lake Eyre. Work on this by Luise Hercus and Grace Koch has been submitted under the title 'Wire Yard' to a future publication in honour of Sally White.
A MAN DIED SUDDEN AT LAKE ALLALLINA

a song in traditional style about the event which Arabana people referred to as YuRupula pantirda ‘Two Men are fighting’. In the ‘sixties the Patterson brothers, speakers of Kuyani, could still sing this song and show the exact place where there had been many broken boomerangs lying about, evidence of the fight. If traditions had not broken down altogether, who knows whether Blanche Ned and George as well as the Two Men at Wimparanha waterhole might not have become minor Ancestors associated with a particular site?

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to Vlad Potezny for drawing the maps and to Richard Barwick for preparing the musical texts for reproduction.

Luise Hercus is Visiting Fellow in the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, ANU. She has been working on Aboriginal languages for the last 35 years, mainly in the Lake Eyre Basin.

Grace Koch has worked for over 20 years as Curator of Aboriginal Music at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and has lectured internationally on Australian Aboriginal music. She has worked as a consultant on three land claims with the Central Land Council. Her publications include the books Kaytetye Country: an Aboriginal history of the Barrow Creek area, and Dyirbal Song Poetry with R.M.W. Dixon. She has also served as Editor of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives

References


——. Field tapes nos. 155, 163 and 195


Tindale, N.B. MS, Diamantina Notebook, 1934, SA Museum

——. Wax cylinder no. 1 of Diamantina collection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABL</td>
<td>ablative case</td>
<td>ablative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>accusative case</td>
<td>accusative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>ancient past tense</td>
<td>ancient past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONT</td>
<td>continuative suffix</td>
<td>continuative suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>dative case</td>
<td>dative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPH</td>
<td>emphatic suffix</td>
<td>emphatic suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIST</td>
<td>historical past</td>
<td>historical past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMP</td>
<td>imperfective</td>
<td>imperfective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INST</td>
<td>instrumental case</td>
<td>instrumental case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>locative case</td>
<td>locative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>past tense</td>
<td>past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRES</td>
<td>present tense</td>
<td>present tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURP</td>
<td>purposive</td>
<td>purposive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
'no moral doubt...': Aboriginal evidence and the Kangaroo Creek poisoning, 1847–1849

Jane Lydon

Part I: Historical context and discussion

Introduction

Frontier violence between white invaders and Aborigines has become an established research theme, a development related to a contemporary consciousness of our brutal past. The significance of massacres of Aboriginal people is more than historical. Often suppressed, the truth and meaning of such incidents cannot always be demonstrated in conventional historiographic terms. For some, this does not matter: a 'myth' may satisfy the need to understand the past as well as 'facts'. It has been argued, however, that in documenting such cases we establish an informed basis for contemporary reconciliation. As Ann Curthoys has pointed out, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the on-going process of reconciliation is grounded in history—for Aboriginal people, 'in the fact of dispossession and the continuing importance of belonging to one's own country... For non-Aboriginal Australians, the ability to come to terms with Aboriginal claims with full political seriousness depends on a recognition of the historical basis of our very presence in the continent at all.' In this context, primary material relating to the poisoning of twenty-three Aborigines in 1848 at Kangaroo Creek in the Clarence River District assumes fresh interest. The incident configures opposing Aboriginal and European interests, but can also be seen in terms of the European struggle between nineteenth century official and humanitarian concerns for Aboriginal welfare on the one hand, and the interests of white settlers, on the other.

The following discussion briefly reviews this dialectic and the key events which shaped it, such as the 'Myall Creek massacre' of 1838, which was particularly significant in its effect on official policy and public attitudes. Specifically, the admissability of Aboriginal evidence in European courts of law became an important debate. A brief account is given of the Kangaroo Creek incident and its role in this wider context. Finally, the depositions of the European witnesses to the Kangaroo Creek events, and documents tabled with the 1849 draft of a Bill to provide for the Evidence of Aborigines in courts of justice, are presented.

1 Roberts 1995.
3 1983, p. 97; and see Read 1990.
Official policy and the NSW frontier 1838–1844

From his arrival in New South Wales as governor in February 1838, Sir George Gipps was confronted by the problem of catering both to the home office and its increasing interest in the legal status of native peoples, and to the demands of the powerful squatters' lobby. One effect of the Select Committee Report on Aborigines of 1837 was the greater concern of the Colonial Office to uphold Aboriginal rights. British policy, secured by a small number of British and colonial philanthropists, stressed that Aborigines were British subjects. There was little understanding of the practical problems of the colonial 'frontier', which were rapidly worsening at just that time. In January 1838 Glenelg informed Gipps that Protectors of Aborigines were to be appointed, and in March Gipps decided to issue a government notice, based on Glenelg's despatch of July 1837, appealing to colonists to show sympathy and kindness towards the Aborigines of NSW.

But in the meantime Gipps had to deal with a climax of frontier violence which polarised colonial opinion and aroused strong anti-protectionist feeling. Notably, the debate which surrounded the Myall Creek massacre of June 1838 articulated the range of contemporary attitudes, significantly affecting local politics and race relations for many years. This incident, where twenty-eight Aborigines were killed at Henry Dangar's Myall Creek Station in the Liverpool Plains, seemed to have reached its conclusion with the acquittal of the eleven men accused. But the efforts of John Hubert Plunkett, Attorney-General, in the face of tremendous public opposition, saw seven of them tried again, and this time hanged. Of the remaining four, one was discharged, due to it being found that there was insufficient evidence against him, while the remaining three depended on the evidence of 'Davey', a 'civilised' Aboriginal man employed on Myall Creek Station. 'Davey's' evidence was considered inadmissible, on the legal principle that he did not understand religion and the concept of 'a future state of reward and punishment', and so could not take an oath. These three were therefore also dismissed.

While the Myall Creek case was in some ways unique, both because of the willingness of Europeans to give evidence for the prosecution, and because of Plunkett's persistence, it was also shaped by the prevailing pattern of race relations. Specifically, the inadmissibility of Aboriginal evidence here as elsewhere formed a barrier to legal proceedings, and prompted Plunkett's vigorous campaign to remove it. As evident in the ensuing public debates, Myall Creek served to catalyse a range of interests, crystallising emotions concerning Aboriginal rights in general.

In the minds of the squatters, the debate on Aboriginal rights was closely associated with the issues of land tenure and control, leading to a long struggle between

---

5 H.R.A. XIX, p.48. Glenelg to Bourke 26 July 1837; see also Reece 1974, p. 140.
7 Harrison 1978.
9 Harrison 1978.
them and Gipps. They believed in the inferiority of Aborigines, and objected strongly to the official principle that Aborigines were subjects of Her Majesty, and as such had rights, as well as to the related, although unofficial argument that this implied a right to the land and therefore to compensation for its loss—both of which seemed ludicrous to those in the bush. Other moves towards Aboriginal welfare, such as the establishment of a Protectorate for Aborigines, and the philanthropic Aborigines Protection Society were also the targets of hostility. The grievance at the heart of the opposition to government policy was the perception that it favoured blacks at the expense of white settlers. Public outrage over Myall Creek persisted, as the nature of the event was forgotten, and it came to be remembered by some as white self-defence, 'seized upon by those who supported the settlers' interests as a highly convenient political weapon'. Against this view, the pro-Aboriginal feeling of humanitarians was heightened by the nature of the crime, as particularly bloody and unprovoked, and by the formation of the 'Black Association', a body of seemingly responsible men who had banded together to defend the accused. The Aboriginal reaction to the Myall Creek case was expressed in heightened resistance along the 'frontier', as white support was exploited to their advantage.

Governor Gipps was heavily criticised for the state of frontier conflict by the Sydney newspapers, and his response to the Myall Creek case, while inexplicit and so less visible to us at this distance than unofficial parties', showed a desire to keep frontier conflict out of the public eye. Nunn's clash of January on the Gwydir River earlier in 1838 was allowed to languish until it was too late to effectively prosecute, and Harrison argues that this was because, as Gipps wrote to Glenelg, it was 'deemed inexpedient to hold an investigation while the Public Mind remained in a very excited state in respect to the Blacks'. He also delayed the long-planned proclamation based on Glenelg's 1837 despatch, advocating sympathy towards the Aborigines. Despite these concessions to public opinion, Gipps did persevere in his attempts to implement official policy, for example introducing a Border Police Act in March 1839.

Further, following a suggestion from Normanby, in 1839 (partly on the prompting of the Aboriginal Protection Society), he prepared legislation securing the admissability of Aboriginal evidence in courts of law. This act was passed by the NSW parliament, accepting Aborigines as competent witnesses in criminal cases, 'notwithstanding that they have not at present any distinct idea of Religion or any fixed belief in a future state of Rewards and Punishments'. But back in England it was decided that this was 'contrary to the principles of British jurisprudence' after all, and was disallowed. In 1843 the home authorities thought again and adopted an Imperial Act (6 Vic. Ch.XXII) allowing for Aboriginal evidence. However, when in 1844 a bill to this effect was put to the N.S.W. Legislative Council, it was thrown out. This rejection maintained the situation where

11 Harrison 1978, p. 32.
12 Harrison 1978.
16 31 August, 1839 HRA XX, pp. 302-3.
18 H.R.A.XX, p. 756: Russell to Gipps, 11 August 1840, enclosure no. 1.
19 NSW V. and P. (L.C.), May and June 1844.
settlers did what they wanted, with no recourse for Aborigines to the courts. Violent black-white relations continued on the margins of white settlement.

Kangaroo Creek, 1847–48

At this point I turn from the general development of policy and opinion in NSW to the poisoning at Kangaroo Creek, briefly outlining the sequence of events. Rowley argued that the settlement of the Clarence River region by Europeans from around 1840, and the consequent conflict with the indigenous population typified the process of NSW frontier expansion. Initially peaceful relations soon became hostile, frequently as a result of mutual misunderstanding, and in the early 1840s Aborigines from the country between Dorrigo and Kangaroo Creek carried out a number of small attacks on Clarence River stations. Attacks on the whites and their stock at Kangaroo Creek occurred throughout the 1840s.

In 1843 Crown Commissioner of Lands Fry estimated the Aboriginal population of the Richmond and Clarence Rivers at over 2,000, the rich environment favouring hunter-fisher bands prior to white settlement. He observed seven 'tribes', each numbering between fifty and 150. In north-eastern NSW in the mid-nineteenth century, a diverse material repertoire included a wide range of tool forms, made from wood, plant and animal fibre, stone, shell, glass and bone. Tindale identified the Kumbainggari tribe (Gumbaynggir) people as occupying the headwaters of the Nymboida and extending north to Grafton, east to the coast and south to the present vicinity of Coffs Harbour, Urunga and Bellingen.

The Kangaroo Creek run claimed by Thomas Coutts in the Clarence River District was 53,760 acres in area—a large property, with an estimated grazing capacity of 560 cattle and 7,500 sheep. It was 'bounded on the north by Mr Forster's run; on the west by Mr Blaxland's run; on the south by Barren Mountains; on the east by the sea coast range of the Barren Mountains; and on the north-east by Mr Small's Station'. Coutts re-located to Tooloom Station in 1850, on the northern arm of the Clarence, and the Kangaroo Creek run was bought by William Layton. The incident which occurred on or about the 28th November 1847 can be reconstructed as follows, according to the evidence of Coutts' dray-driver Patrick Byrnes, shepherds Thomas Walker and John Tomkinson, and hut-keeper John Flynn. These depositions comprise a detailed, eye-witness account of events on the Kangaroo Creek run, despite various biases. (The different informants are referred to in brackets by surname.)

---

22 McBryde 1974, p. 10.
23 Tindale 1940 cited in Officer and Navin 1994
24 Gazette 3 June 1848, p. 706.
Figure 1 Location of Coutt’s Kangaroo Creek run in 1848–1849. The modern township of Nymboida is on the site of Blaxland’s 1840s station (‘Pandemonium’). Forster held the run to the north, on the Orara, called ‘Purgatory’.
At the end of November, 1847, an Aborigine named Jemmy was sent by hut-keeper Thomas Walker to get some tobacco from the Head Station, about thirteen miles away. He returned saying that Coutts had instructed him to gather all the Aborigines of the area to work at the head station (Walker). Tomkinson, another hut-keeper stationed about ten miles from the head station, reported that at the end of November about twenty Aborigines were assembled, ready to go and work for Mr Coutts, 'who would give them rum, and they would be back in two days' (Tomkinson). Tomkinson's account suggests that the relationship between Coutts and the Aborigines had been poor: 'They moreover said they considered Mr Coutts unfriendly towards them—but I told them that he was not; and then they said they would go and make friends with him'. Under cross-examination, he elaborated: 'I should say Mr Coutts was very unfriendly towards the Blacks before the time above-mentioned... They were not allowed to be about the Head Station before that—I have often heard Mr Coutts complain of the Blacks having killed his cattle, and say that they deserved shooting—Moses Jones told me Mr Coutts had lost a pistol by going out after the Blacks...Before this period none of them would go near the Head Station' (Tomkinson). Flynn referred more obliquely to such problems, stating that 'Mr Coutts complained to me some time last winter that the Blacks were very troublesome to his cattle—he said that he would give them tobacco and tomahawks and make friends with them—I told him it would be the best plan as they were always very quiet with me with the sheep' (Flynn). By contrast, Walker's evidence, which is otherwise quite damning regarding Coutts' character, suggests a more positive history. He said: 'some time ago the Blacks took 300 sheep from me but I rescued them again—It was the Bellingen Blacks who took the sheep—they had always been troublesome about the Station.—The other Blacks were very quiet—Mr Coutts had always behaved well to the Blacks' (Walker).

The group of Aborigines who went to Coutts' Head Station included identified individuals Georgy Georgy, referred to by the other Aborigines as the King or Chief, Billy Billy, Jemmy Jemmy, Garry Garry and Jerry Jerry (Tomkinson, Walker and Flynn). Tomkinson stated that 'These Blacks were in the habit of constantly coming to my hut and I know them well...' (Tomkinson)

What happened at the Head Station? Patrick Byrnes, dray-driver, told how on the 29th November (stated by other witnesses to be the 28th) he had seen twenty-three Aborigines weeding Coutts' paddock: 'They left off work at about twelve o'clock—I cannot say the precise time, as I had no watch—After the Blacks had finished weeding I saw Mr Coutts give a Black called Georgy Georgy about ten pounds of flour out of the store...I went near the store to see what was going on, as I had heard it murmured on the Farm that "the Blacks were going to have a dose"—By a dose I mean that the Blacks were to be poisoned—John Ryan told me of it—When Mr Coutts brought out the flour he had a piece of brown paper in his hand. I do not know what he did with the paper—he might have put it in his pocket for anything I know...Mr Coutts called for some soap and water and washed his hands...I saw the paper distinctly It looked as if it had contained a powder or something of the kind—My reason for supposing it, is that it looked as if it had been folded up...' (Byrnes). The Gumbaynggir left, and were not seen again.

The news of the murders seems to have spread rapidly amongst the local community—black and white. Walker recounted how, two days later, around November 30th, he had heard from a man called 'the Barber' (an otherwise unknown figure who was not called as a witness), that 'a great number of Blacks had died from eating the flour that had been given them—About two hours afterwards I met two Blacks and two gins
who told me that twenty three Blacks had “tumbled down” from eating the flour—They appeared much distressed—They were crying very much.—I understood from them that the flour had made the Blacks vomit before they died—The Blacks call Mr Coutts ‘Micato—They said it was the flour that Micato had given them, that made the Blacks tumble down…” (Walker) Tomkinson’s evidence also reveals the way the news had spread: ‘Two or three days after the Blacks left for the Head Station two or three children came to my hut and told me that the Black fellows were dead—The following day three gins came and reported the same story, saying that about twenty of them were dead from having eaten of the flour given to them by Mr Coutts.—The next day one of the Blacks named Billy Billy—the one above-mentioned as having passed in company with about twenty others for the Head Station came to my hut and told me that about twenty Blacks were dead from having eaten of the flour given to them by Mr Coutts, He said that he was very ill—he looked very ill—He said he had eaten some of the poisoned flour but had got the better of it—He complained of his throat and stomach—he pointed to some flour, and said the Blacks had been working for Mr Coutts and that he paid them with flour and tobacco’ (Tomkinson).

Byrnes went to visit the site of the deaths about three days later, as did Walker, to whom the Aborigines had described the place, but no action was taken regarding the incident for about a month, when on the 5th January 1848 the district’s Commissioner of Crown Lands, Oliver Fry, was visiting a nearby property, and a Mr Walker, (not Coutts’ hut-keeper) informed him of the rumours. Fry paid little attention, until, enquiring of an Aborigine named Sandy attached to his department whether he had heard the story, he was informed that Sandy ‘had heard it long ago—and that a number of Blacks had died in consequence of eating flour they had received from Mr Coutts’ Asking why he had not been told of it before, Sandy replied that ‘he had forgotten it’ (Fry). Clearly, in this case the Aborigines themselves saw no point in appealing to white systems of justice.

Fry told Sandy to find some of the Aborigines of the tribe affected, to show Fry where the bodies were. Sandy had not re-appeared five days later, and on Tuesday 11th January, Fry visited the ‘Lock-up’ at Grafton to make enquiries of some of Coutts’ employees who had come in, regarding the reported murders. The circumstances surrounding the witnesses’ decision to give evidence are unclear: they may as easily have been prompted by self-interest as by ethical concerns. Byrnes, for example, was already in gaol, and when he heard Fry questioning the others, ‘called out that he also knew about this murder’ (Fry). Later, overseer Bernard Malone, for the defence, claimed that he had been working with Byrnes throughout the day in question, and that it was therefore impossible for Byrnes to have witnessed the Aboriginal group (Malone). In his own very brief defence, Coutts declared simply that he knew nothing of the matter, and that ‘Byrnes would swear anything’ (Coutts). Under cross-examination, Coutts similarly attempted to undermine Walker’s credibility, suggesting that he had left the property over a dispute regarding rations. Walker had explained, ‘I gave information as soon as I could get away from Mr Coutts—He refused to let me leave and kept putting me off from day to day—At last I told him that I would stay no longer, and accordingly started for the settlement for the purpose of giving information, but Mr Coutts rode there before me, and had me arrested for absconding.’ Under cross-examination he elaborated further: ‘The evening before I left I told Mr Coutts I would not stay any longer while such poisonous murders were going on, and that no luck would attend it.—I told him his rations were bad—This was the next morning—But I told Mr Coutts I was not leaving on account of the rations, but for what I had told him the night
At this distance it is impossible to determine the interplay of interest and strategem between the participants, but the evidence against Coutts was strong enough to convince the officials involved of his guilt.  

Fry and his party, comprising the Chief Constable of Grafton, one of the Crown Lands troopers, Sandy, and Thomas Walker, set out for the site on the 12th January. They camped that night two or three miles from Coutts’ Station, and the following morning at about seven o’clock arrived at the scene. Fry’s disturbingly graphic account relates how the party inspected the site in the rain, noting scattered human remains and collecting pieces of damper, presumed to contain arsenic, for analysis. The bodies themselves were too decomposed to analyse. The party then went to Coutts’ Station, where Fry charged Coutts with the poisoning, to which Coutts declared that he ‘knew nothing at all about it’. Fry left, leaving the Chief Constable behind with Coutts pending the case being heard the following Saturday (Fry).

On the 17th January 1848, Thomas Coutts was committed for trial by Forster and Mylnes, local Justices of the Peace, on a charge of wilful murder, and was sent to Sydney for trial before the Supreme Court. Local feeling was apparently strongly against Coutts, land-owner Charles Tindal writing in a letter to his father of the ‘atrocious murder of Blacks’, and that ‘everybody hopes he will be hung’. On the 23rd February Coutts was brought before Sir Alfred Stephen, Chief Justice. He was given bail, sureties of 250 pounds each being given by Robert Campbell, Merchant of George Street and William Gaunson, Greengrocer, of George Street, Sydney. He himself put up 500 pounds, making a total of 1,000 pounds.

On the 10 May the Attorney General decided not to proceed with the case due to lack of evidence and Coutts was discharged. The administration of the case demonstrates that the concern manifested by local Europeans such as Walker and Tomkinson was echoed by official responses to the event. Crown Commissioner Oliver Fry, for example, in the letter forwarding the depositions he had gathered to Sydney, designated the incident as ‘one of the most hideous enormities that has ever taken place, in any age or Country. The atrocity to which I allude, is the murder by poisoning of not fewer (it is believed), than twenty-three Aboriginal natives...’ Attorney General Plunkett’s decision regarding the case was that ‘there is not sufficient legal evidence to sustain the prosecution although I am sorry to say that the suspicion is very strong that the prisoner is not guiltless of the dreadful deed charged against him.’ And concluded that ‘This is one of the many cases from which the defect of the present law, in excluding altogether the evidence of the Aboriginal natives, is apparent.’ Other incidents in the area around this time took a similar course,

---

27 Supreme Court N.S.W., Trials, 1848.
28 28 Jan 1848.
29 (Supreme Court) (SMH 31.1.1848. [It is not known what Coutts’ connection was either with the well-known Sydney merchant Campbell or with Gaunson, nor why they were prepared to provide bail for him, but the situation is reminiscent of the ‘Black Association’ formed by wealthy supporters of the accused in the Myall Creek case.]
30 Col. Sec. 48/7126; Nicholls’ letter, Supreme Court papers; and see Crown Sol. Judgement Books, June sessions.
31 Col. Sec. 48/1331.
32 10 May 1848, Col. Sec.48/7126.
such as that of the 31 January, 1848, when another Aborigine, also named Georgy, was shot on the property of Forster, one of Coutts’ neighbours, and in which another neighbour, Blaxland, was implicated. The Attorney General made the same decision.

Some months later, in April 1848, Fry reported the murder by Aborigines of one of Coutts’ hut-keepers, a James Lafont, and again, it was decided that there was insufficient evidence to proceed: that is, the law was applied regardless of the colour of the victim. On this occasion the Attorney General stated his position at greater length: ‘I certainly concur in the opinion of Commissioner Fry “that this lamentable recurrence must be regarded as the inevitable consequence of Mr Coutts’ own conduct” for although I did not put Mr Coutts on his trial for the charge of poisoning a tribe of Native Blacks in December last, and for which he was committed it was not from any moral doubt I entertained of the strong suspicion of his guilt of the dreadful crime, but solely because, there was not sufficient legal evidence to substantiate it in a Court of Justice as the present state of the law excludes the evidence of the Black Natives themselves. Indeed the case of Mr Coutts renders still more apparent the great deficiency of the present law in that respect, and I trust that a new legislature will now see the expediency and necessity of passing a law to remedy it, similar in principle to the Bill which was proposed... to the present legislative council, but rejected by a large majority of that body.’ In August the Governor requested that a bill allowing for Aboriginal evidence be drafted.

The 1849 Bill

The debate surrounding this Bill shows that the stakes, and the players, remained much the same, ten years later, as in the Myall Creek case; the events at Kangaroo Creek in 1847-8 can be seen within the framework of the European struggle over legal reform. In April 1849, the Attorney General sent the draft of a bill, to provide for the admission of the Evidence of Aborigines in courts of justice, to the Colonial Secretary. Attached to the draft were two enclosures: copies of correspondence regarding the Coutts poisoning and the murder of hut-keeper Lafont at Kangaroo Creek, and a report by the Commandant of the Native Police, regarding similar conflict on the Darling River in February 1849. These are transcribed below). The 1849 bill was similar to that presented in 1844. The debate surrounding its introduction is interesting because while several ‘outrages’ are alluded to, only two are discussed in detail, and together: Myall Creek, still hotly debated ten years later, and the more recent Kangaroo Creek poisoning. Both were seen to exemplify the issues to hand, and were used as part of the various arguments put for and against the bill.

Plunkett, who introduced the Bill, refers to the Kangaroo Creek poisoning as ‘a case where justice was entirely evaded because native testimony could not be admitted, to show that it was the use of the flour which had caused death. All the natives agreed to the same story, so that there could be no moral doubt, taking their tale in connection with that of the European witnesses, that the flour was given deliberately to destroy the
blacks. It was the legal evidence only that was wanting, and for want of this the parties whose guilt was well known, escaped the hand of justice. Many case too, occurred in which white people were murdered by the aborigines, and the latter escaped from justice because the testimony of their fellows could not be taken against them.\(^3^9\)

Lowe responded, opposing the Bill, as he had in 1844 'The wisest policy they could adopt, was to leave the blacks and the settlers to fight it out between themselves.' He argued that the outrages upon the blacks had sprung directly from the protectionist policies of the government: 'The white people knew that if they repelled the aggression of the blacks they would be dealt with by the law. They could not carry on open war. They dared not treat them as open enemies, so this system of poisoning was resorted to.' He predicted that the effect of this Bill would be to worsen the condition of the blacks because whites would act on the principle of 'dead men tell no tales' and would put them out of the way. Nicholls claimed that the Coutts case was 'trumped-up', Coutts having made himself obnoxious to the magistrates on account of 'certain matters relative to the females of his family'. Wentworth claimed that the origin of the Bill, at 'Exeter Hall' (that is, with the evangelical movement), was enough to condemn it—battles must be fought without the aid of the government, which should not artificially perpetuate the Aboriginal race.

The strength of Plunkett's commitment to reform, demonstrated throughout his career, became apparent during the parliamentary debate when the Myall Creek case was alluded to as 'judicial murder'.\(^4^0\) He made a long and fervent speech, recapitulating the course of events during the Myall Creek trials, and stating that 'He (the Attorney General), loud as the outcry might be against him, would be ashamed of himself as a man, and as a public officer, if he had taken a different course on this occasion.\(^4^1\) He went on to deal with the Kangaroo Creek poisoning, and the suggestion that Coutts was innocent, stating that 'the witnesses in that case concurred in a statement that was most probable. And if the committal that had been complained of was so unjust, why not prosecute for conspiracy on the part of those witnesses. But he must say that the exclusion of the evidence of the aborigines in this instance was unjust to the party accused. They were seen eating the damper and died from it, and the survivors alone could furnish the evidence how they came by it, and the circumstances under which it was given.'

The council divided and a vote of nine for the Bill and ten against was recorded. The polarised positions evident in the debate, and the Bill's narrow defeat, reflected the complexity of white attitudes of the time. The strict rules regarding evidence, modelled on British jurisprudence, were gradually relaxed during the nineteenth century\(^4^2\), but it was not until 1860 that Attorney General Hargraves accepted the evidence of an Aborigine on the grounds that 'if an aboriginal witness be competent in other respects to give evidence, his being an aboriginal is no ground to reject his testimony if given on oath'. Other cases followed, and in 1876 an 'Evidence Further Amendment Act' became law.

\(^3^9\) S.M.H 29 June 1849.
\(^4^0\) Moloney 1973 and especially pages 134-161 for a discussion of Plunkett's work with respect to Aboriginal affairs; ADB 1788-1850, p. 336.
\(^4^1\) It is important to note, however, that Plunkett's view of Aborigines was based on the same view of them as 'benighted creatures' albeit with a soul to be saved. That is, he did not regard them as equals. See Read 1990, p. 293. Moloney 1973, pp. 158-161 discusses his racist attitude towards colonial immigration.
\(^4^2\) Neil Andrews, personal communication.
although judges continued on occasions to rule Aboriginal evidence inadmissible on the grounds of their inability to take an oath.43

Conclusion

Like other massacres, the Kangaroo Creek incident represented a crisis in race relations, a catalyst for the articulation of conflict. For contemporaries it was seen to be important largely as an example of frontier violence, shaped by official policy and events such as Myall Creek. As Lowe pointed out, the use of poison was a covert, more easily concealed form of assault.44 Because it was therefore harder to uncover, presenting particular difficulties to prosecution and conviction, it threw problems with the law as it stood into sharp relief, and the Kangaroo Creek incident became a tool in the hands of legal reformers. Simultaneously, for the opposing squatters' faction it represented the dangers of Aboriginal legal rights, and the failure of white law to protect its own.

This nineteenth century denial of the Aboriginal voice also presents certain problems for the modern historian. The silence of the Gumbaynggirr persists. But the Kangaroo Creek poisoning remains as an enduring memory for many members of the local community.45 It reminds us that notions of truth and evidence are culturally informed. As Plunkett said, speaking in the 1849 parliamentary debate, 'there could be no moral doubt' of the Aboriginal version of events at Kangaroo Creek, despite its rejection by white law. Similarly, as academic historians, we must be careful not to allow our own emphasis on rigorously constructed historical arguments to exclude versions of the past which have a different epistemological basis.46 Nevertheless, as some historians have recently argued, by understanding the complexity of conflict in the past, and the way that men and women saw and made choices which violate our neat expectations, we are enabled to see more clearly the potentialities of our own time.47 Disclosing what happened to the Gumbaynggirr in 1848, and something of the contemporary European possibilities for choice, prompts reflection upon the options we have ourselves.

Acknowledgements

This paper developed from research undertaken for archaeological consultants Navin Officer, as part of the Grafton/Coffs Harbour Regional Water Supply Project. I thank Kerry Navin and Kelvin Officer for this opportunity, and am grateful for Kelvin's valuable advice during the course of the project. I also thank Isabel McBryde, Peter Read, Ann Curthoys and Ross Gibson for their encouragement and comments on drafts of the paper. Peter Tonkin very capably assisted with research. Thanks to Isabel McBryde for preparation of Figures 1 and 2.

Jane Lydon is a PhD student at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University, investigating cultural exchange in specific historical context, through a study of

44 And see Reece 1974, pp. 48–9.
45 Officer and Navin 1994.
47 Read 1992; Reynolds 1990; Dening 1995.
nineteenth century Aboriginal-European relations at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, Victoria. She is currently contracted as historical archaeologist on Norfolk Island.

References

The salient facts of this tragedy emerged from material held by the State Archives Office of NSW, and especially from the Colonial Secretary’s Correspondence. Research using this material often involves following subject index references down the years to an accumulating snowball of documents, due to the nineteenth-century administrative system of filing earlier relevant material with the most recent correspondence. This was the case with the Kangaroo Creek depositions transcribed below, which were lodged with a request to analyse the poisoned damper.

Primary


State Archives Office of New South Wales

**Colonial Secretary. Correspondence Received.**

*Index and Registers 1848.*

The following list, compiled from index and register, comprises (abbreviated) year and letter number (which is the key to its storage location in the archives), index subject entry and in brackets, a summary of contents as per register.

48/2771 Coutts Thos (1 Mar, Applying for lease of Crown Lands, to Chief Commissioner: 3/5 Neg.)

48/1331 Commr Crown Lands, Fry: TC murder of blacks (transmitting copies of proceedings relative to the murder of several Aborigines by Mr Thomas Coutts) (= with 5858)

48/5858 (from Crim.Crown Solicitor, 1 May 1848. 'Requesting authority to incur expense of analization of a piece of damper [case of TC]')(approved 5 May)

*nb this is where copies of depositions were lodged, loc:4/2800.2*

49/2290 (Fry, 31 Jan, Reporting murder of an Aboriginal native at Mr Foster’s Station. To Attorney General 10 ?. Answered 28 Feb = 48/5225

48/5225 Att.Gen. 15 April, recommendation for further investigation. See 48/5780)

48/5780 (Att.Gen. 1 May 1848 Deposition connected with death of Aborigine named 'Georgy' at Mr Foster’s Station) (M.7703)


48/5682 (Fry, 13 April, Murder of Jas.Lafont hutkeeper of Thos.Coutts. To Att.Gen. 8/9: May, 48/7126)


Colonial Secretary. Commissioners of Crown Lands (1) and (2) 1848.
(2) 4/2812 Commissioner Fry, estimate for 1849—salary of two mounted police 54 pounds 15 shillings.
Commissioner Fry, reporting that Mr Coutts is the licensed occupant of the Kangaroo Creek Station.
(48/1332: 29 Jan 1848) Stands committed for the murder of the Aborigine named Georgy-Georgy.
Commissioner Fry, report on the state of the Aborigines in the Clarence River district for 1847.
(4/6913)

Attorney General to Colonial Secretary
15 April 1848, page 100.
1 May 1848, pp 108–9.
13 June 1848, pp 129–130.
15 June 1848, pp 131–3.

Supreme Court
N.S.W. Trials 1848.
Judge's Notebooks—Manning, Criminal court, 1848–9 (City 2/5825-6, 2/5831).

Parliamentary Archives
Consolidated Index to the Votes and Proceedings and the Printed Papers from 1 August 1843—19 December 1855. Evidence of Aborigines Bill.

State Library of NSW: Newspapers
Sydney Morning Herald Jan–June 1848—article 31 Jan reporting incident and trial.
29 June 1849 reporting parliamentary debate surrounding bill to make Aboriginal evidence admissible.
Australian 2 Feb 1848
The Atlas 19 Feb 1848
Maitland Mercury 2 Feb 1848

Mitchell Library
1836 'Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)' PP, 1836, VII, No 538.
An Act to allow the Aboriginal natives of New South Wales to be received as competent Witnesses in criminal cases, 1839 [3 Vic. No.16 (NSW)]

An Act to authorise the legislatures of certain of her Majesty’s colonies to pass laws for the admission in certain cases of unsworn testimony in civil and criminal proceedings 1843 (6 and 7 Vic. Ch.XXII.Imperial Act)

Aboriginal Natives’ Evidence Bill. NSW V. and P. (L.C.), May and June 1844

Land Titles Office
Government Gazette. 2 June 1848. Claims to leases of crown land.

Clarence River Historical Society
Letter from Charles Grant Tindal to his father, 28 Jan 1848. Lib. No. E5.

Secondary

_Australian Dictionary of Biography 1788-1850_. Melbourne University Press.


Officer, K. and Navin, K. 1994 Cultural Heritage Component Coffs Harbour Water Supply Headworks Project. Stage 1.1 Report prepared for GHD.


Read, P. 1992 Unearthing the past is not enough. Island 52:49-52.


Part II: Transcripts of nineteenth-century documents relating to the Kangaroo Creek poisoning.

(A question mark (‘?’) before a word indicates that its form in the original document was unclear to me.)

*Commissioner of Crown Lands Office—Clarence River Jan 18th 1848. From Commissioner Oliver Fry, to Col. Sec.*

The copies of proceedings which I do myself the honour to transmit, will reveal to you the particulars (in so far as they can be ascertained), of one of the most hideous enormities that has ever taken place, in any age or Country. The atrocity to which I allude, is the murder by poisoning of not fewer (it is believed), than twenty-three Aboriginal natives, which, as there is every reason to conclude, was committed on or about the 28th of November last by Mr Thomas Coutts, of Kangaroo Creek, in this district.

The statements contained in the Depositions are so full both as regards the nature and extent of the offence, and the measures I considered advisable, consequent on acquiring a knowledge of it, that nothing remains for me to add, further than that every effort was made to procure such evidence as was possible under the circumstances, and that the cause of such

*Regina v. Thos Coutts (copy)*

48/1331

*For the murder of an Aboriginal Native commonly known as Georgy.*

Oliver Fry Esquire duly sworn states—I am Her Majesty's Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Clarence River District.

On Wednesday the 5th Jany Inst. I was at Mr Mylnes, where I was informed by Mr Walker that he had heard the day previously from Mr Forster of a rumour being current amongst the Blacks in his, Mr Forster's vicinity of a number of the blacks having died in consequence of eating flour which they had received from Mr Coutts.- I was not disposed to attach much credit to the report—I however determined upon enquiring into it—and on reaching home I asked a Black Boy named Sandy who is attached to my Department—if he had heard the story—He told me—he had heard it long ago—and that a number of Blacks had died in consequence of eating flour they had received from Mr Coutts—I asked him why he had not told me of it before when he told me that he had forgotten it.—I told him to go away on the following morning and find some of the Blacks belonging to Mr Coutts' Tribe who knew where the bodies of those who had died were lying and bring them to me that I might go with them and see where the bodies were.—Sandy had not returned on Monday the 10th January upon which day I was at the settlement for the purpose of holding an inquiry upon a man who had been drowned—On Tuesday the 11th Inst. I went to the Lockup at Grafton to see some men that had come in from Mr Coutts' Station, and in order to enquire into the supposed murder.—

At the Lockup I saw a man named Thomas Walker, also a man named Patrick Byrnes alias William Byrnes and a man named John Flynn, all of whom had come in from Mr Coutts Station.—Walker and Flynn informed me, that they had come in to charge Mr Coutts with having poisoned some Blacks—while they were speaking—Byrnes who was in one of the cells—called out that he also knew something about this murder.— I heard their several statements and on the day following viz on the 12th I had them taken down in writing and sworn to—Their depositions appeared to me to be sufficient to authorise the issuing of a warrant for the apprehension of Mr Coutts—I issued a warrant accordingly, and the same day I started for the place where I had heard that the bodies of the persons who had been poisoned were lying—I was accompanied by the Chief Constable of Grafton.—one of the
This 1914 cadastral map of the Kangaroo Creek /Towallum area shows Portion 7 then held by Peter Shea. This area east of the creek was the probable location of Thomas Coutt’s head station in 1848. (From an original kindly supplied by the NSW Lands Office. Reproduced with permission.)
Crown Land Troopers—Sandy the Black Boy, and the man Thos Walker, from whom I had received the information, and who had seen the bodies and knew where they were.—On the night of the 12th we camped in the bush about two or three miles from Mr Coutts Station. On the morning of the 13th at about seven o'clock I reached a Black's Camp, a place which had been described to me as the spot where the bodies were to be found.—The Camp is situated in a straight line about a mile in rear of Mr Coutts' hut.—It may be more by the usual track—Upon reaching the camp the man Walker pointed out to me a sheet of bark, under which he said one of the bodies was lying.—I ordered the party to dismount and turn the bark over—Underneath it was lying the perfect skeleton of a human being.—The camp was close alongside a creek—on looking about the camp I saw on the Bank of the Creek the skeleton of another which seemed as if it had been pulled out of the water.—There was also within a few yards of the camp a grave recently made—I had it opened and in it I found the remains of the body of a Black—part of the flesh was remaining—before further looking round I found also the skull of another human being, and the man Walker pointed out to me where others had been lying—I could see by the grass which was discoloured where they had been lying but had been removed, whether by dogs, or not I cannot say.—Before leaving for this camp Walker had told me, that there were several bodies in the water; I searched for them but could not find any part of them, but there had recently been a considerable fall of rain which I fancy may have flooded the creek and carried away the remains of the bodies—in the camp and quite close to where the bodies were lying I found a quantity of bread (damper)—Pieces of this damper were found in several parts of the camp—in four ?several places.—They were triangular pieces and looked as if they had been cut from a circular damper.—The pieces adhered to the ground.—It required some force to detach them from it—The upper surface was worn away by the weather.—They had evidently been lying there some time—I removed them—I have them now in my possession locked and sealed up—I should think there is about ten pounds weight of it.—There are several circumstances which lead me to believe that this damper is strongly impregnated with arsenic.—It smells strongly of garlic, which is one of the characteristics of arsenic.—It produced the same effect on the hands of the Chief Constable and the Trooper—at least they told me so.—It appears to me to be very much heavier than damper usually is—but this may possibly be from the moisture as it was raining at the time.—My object in going to the Camp was not only to see the bodies but to endeavour to get some of the stomachs of the dead Blacks if I could.—I however found that they were so much decomposed that it was impossible to obtain anything of the kind.—Nothing remained but the bones—some of the skin of the back and also some skin and dried flesh attached to it was found in the grave I had caused to be opened.—The Blacks had however died at no very long period back, as the smell from the bones was very strong.—As the flesh of the bodies was all destroyed I saw it was no use looking for the stomachs and therefore went to Mr Coutt's—I saw myself, the remains of four bodies, and I saw where four others had been lying.—Two had apparently been dragged in the Creek—I have had much experience with regard to the Blacks. It is my opinion that such Blacks as had wives would be buried by them—and such as had none would be left on the spot, supposing any large number to have died at once.—Upon arriving at Mr Coutts' Station I saw some children near the door, I asked them for Mr Coutts who shortly afterwards came out to me—I called him on one side and told him that he was charged with having poisoned some Blacks, and that it was necessary for him to come in to have the affair investigated.—I did not search the house, nor order the Chief Constable to do so—I left the Chief Constable behind with Mr Coutts and told him that the case would be heard on Saturday.—When I told Mr Coutts of the charge laid against him he said that he knew nothing at all about it (signed) Oliver Fry.

Patrick Byrnes, alias William Byrnes being duly sworn stated—I am a bullock driver in the employment of Mr Thomas Coutts of Kangaroo Creek.—About the 29th of November last I was at Mr Coutts Head Station.—A number of Blacks were employed weeding Mr Coutts paddock.—There were about twenty-three of them.—They left off work at about twelve
o'clock—I cannot say the precise time, as I had no watch—After the Blacks had finished weeding I saw Mr Coutts give a Black called Georgy Georgy about ten pounds of flour out of the store—I was standing about eleven yards off at the time. I cannot say if it was flour that he gave him; but I suppose it to have been flour, as it was given from the flour store and was in a bag—I went near the store to see what was going on, as I had heard it murmured on the Farm that 'the Blacks were going to have a dose'—By a dose I mean that the Blacks were to be poisoned—John Ryan told me of it—When Mr Coutts brought out the flour he had a piece of brown paper in his hand. I do not know what he did with the paper—he might have put it in his pocket for anything I know. After Mr Coutts gave the flour to a Black named Georgy Georgy—he ordered all the Blacks away, as he said some cattle were coming up which would be frightened.—The flour was apparently for the whole of the Blacks, as I did not see Mr Coutts give any more to any of the rest of the Blacks.—The Blacks went away, and Mr Coutts called for some soap and water and washed his hands.—There were some Cattle coming up to the Yrad at the time.—I saw the paper distinctly It looked as if it had contained a powder or something of the kind—My reason for supposing it, is that it looked as if it had been folded up—About three days afterwards I went to the Back Creek which is about a mile and a half from the Head Station, and I saw seven Blacks lying dead there—Amongst them was the Black named Georgy Georgy above mentioned also Garry Garry, and Jerry Jerry. These three I know to have been working in the wheat paddocks on the day that Mr Coutts gave them the flour. The bodies were near a water hole and a Black's Camp was close by—I knew Georgy Georgy well—I have known him for about two years—He was called King by the Blacks—By King I mean Chief or something of the kind—To the best of my opinion Georgy Georgy had been dead about two days—The bodies were perfect but smelt strong.—

Cross examined by Prisoner—

To the best of my opinion it was about the 29th of November that you gave the flour to the Blacks.—I did not give information before through fear—I was afraid if I gave information that you would shoot me on the road—I have been at work with a man named Barney—I was cutting timber with him for about a day and a half—I will not swear to a day when I was working with him, (signed) P.A.Wm.Burns.

Thomas Walker being duly sworn states—I am a shepherd in the service of Mr Thomas Coutts of Kangaroo Creek—In the month of November I was stationed at an Out Station about thirteen miles from Mr Coutts Head Station—About the end of that month as near as I can recollect I sent a Black called Jemmy Jemmy with a note to Mr Coutts for half a pound of tobacco—Upon his return to my hut Jemmy Jemmy told me that he was desired by Mr Coutts to collect all the Blacks to work at the Head Station.—That evening Jemmy Jemmy and Garry Garry left my hut for the purpose of going to the Head Station.—Two days afterwards I heard from a man called 'the Barber' that a great number of Blacks had died from eating the flour that had been given them—About two hours afterwards I met two Blacks and two gins who told me that twenty three Blacks had "tumbled down" from eating the flour—They appeared much distressed—They were crying very much.—I understood from them that the flour had made the Blacks vomit before they died—The Blacks call Mr Coutts Micato—They said it was the flour that Micato had given them, that made the Blacks tumble down—These Blacks described to me the place where the bodies of the dead Blacks were to be found lying, and some days afterwards I went to the place—It is situated about a mile and a half or two miles from the Head Station—Upon arriving there I found six dead bodies—Three were in the water—one was uncovered—One was under a sheet of bark, and one was under some boughs—The place where I found the bodies is usually called the Back Creek.—To the best of my belief one of the bodies lying there was Jemmy Jemmy—I conceive it was him from his unusual size—The same evening a man named Flynn my hut-keeper—showed me another body about eighty yards distant from the six bodies above-mentioned. I told Flynn that there were six more bodies close to, and asked him to come and see them—but on approaching them, the stench was so great, that he held his nose and went away—On Thursday the 13th of the present month I accompanied Mr Fry to the place in question—
showed him where the bodies had been lying—some of them had been removed—I saw a grave opened in which were some bones—Some five or six pieces of damper were lying near where the bodies had been—Mr Fry and the Chief Constable collected it, and put it into a handkerchief or something of the kind—I gave information as soon as I could get away from Mr Coutts—He refused to let me leave and kept putting me off from day to day—At last I told him that I would stay no longer, and accordingly started for the settlement for the purpose of giving information, but Mr Coutts rode there before me, and had me arrested for absconding—I have heard Mr Coutts complain of the Blacks killing his cattle—Last Winter—or about three or four months ago—Mr Coutts desired me to send the Blacks in, and he would give them tobacco and tomahawks—some time ago the Blacks took 300 sheep from me but I rescued them again—It was the Bellingen Blacks who took the sheep—they had always been troublesome about the Station.—The other Blacks were very quiet—Mr Coutts had always behaved well to the Blacks.

Cross examined by the Prisoner—
The evening before I left I told Mr Coutts I would not stay any longer while such poisonous murders were going on, and that no luck would attend it.—I told him his rations were bad—This was the next morning—But I told Mr Coutts I was not leaving on account of the rations, but for what I had told him the night before. (signed) Thomas Walker.

John Flynn being duly sworn stated—In November last I was a hut-keeper in the service of Mr Coutts—about the shearing time, or just before it, I was one day in Company with a shepherd named Thomas Walker—When near the Back Creek and about a mile and a half from Mr Coutts Head Station I showed Walker a dead Black.—He said that there were some more close to the Creek and wanted me to go and see them but the smell of the one I showed him so disgusted me that I would go no further.—Mr Coutts complained to me some time last winter that the Blacks were very troublesome to his cattle—he said that he would give them tobacco and tomahawks and make friends with them—I told him it would be the best plan as they were always very quiet with me with the sheep—(signed) John Flynn

John Tomkinson being duly sworn states—I am a shepherd in the service of Mr Thomas Coutts of Kangarro Creek—About the latter end of November last about twenty Blacks were assembled at the Station where I was placed—It is situated about ten miles as near as I can guess from the Head Station.—The Blacks told me that they were going in to work for Mr Coutts who would give them rum, and that they would be back in two days.—They moreover said they considered Mr Coutts unfriendly towards them—but I told them that he was not; and then they said they would go and make friends with him—Of the Blacks that went to the Head Station—Georgy Georgy—the King or Chief was one—Billy Billy was another and Jemmy Jemmy was also of the number besides many others which I can enumerate if necessary.—These Blacks were in the habit of constantly coming to my hut and I know them well—I have never seen any of them since the day that they left for the Head Station—except one.—Two or three days after the Blacks left for the Head Station two or three children came to my hut and told me that the Black fellows were dead—The following day three gins came and reported the same story, saying that about twenty of them were dead from having eaten of the flour given to them by Mr Coutts.—The next day one of the Blacks named Billy Billy—the one above-mentioned as having passed in company with about twenty others for the Head Station came to my hut and told me that about twenty Blacks were dead from having eaten of the flour given to them by Mr Coutts, He said that he was very ill—he looked very ill—He said he had eaten some of the poisoned flour but had got the better of it—He complained of his throat and stomach—he pointed to some flour, and said the Blacks had been working for Mr Coutts and that he paid them with flour and tobacco.

Cross examined by the Prisoner—
I should say Mr Coutts was very unfriendly towards the Blacks before the time above-mentioned—that is to say—when they were going to make friends.—They were not allowed to be about the Head Station before that—I have often heard Mr Coutts complain of the Blacks having killed his cattle, and say that they deserved shooting—Moses Jones told me Mr Coutts had lost a pistol by going out after the Blacks—Mr Bloodsworth gave me some tobacco to give to the Blacks in order to induce them to go in to the Head Station.—This was about five or six weeks before the Blacks were said to have been poisoned.—Before this period none of them would go near the Head Station—signed John Tomkinson.

For the Defence—

Bernard Malone being duly sworn states—I am Overseer to Mr Coutts of Kangaroo Creek—About the middle of November William Byrnes was at work with me—this was the last time that the Blacks were at the Head Station except two that came with the shearers—On that day he went with me to dinner—You gave us a glass of rum each—When we came home to dinner, there were no Blacks there.—I only know that the Blacks had been on the Station that day by hearsay—I did not see them—Byrnes could not have seen the Blacks without my having seen them—I was working with Byrnes after dinner til nearly dark-

Crossexamined by the Bench—

I have heard some of the men say that some of the Blacks had been poisoned— I saw the skulls of two human beings at about two miles from the Head Station, on a place called the Back Creek—I never found the Blacks troublesome except in killing cattle, and the shepherds reporting them for trying to get their sheep away from them (signed) Bernard Malone.

Moses Jones being duly sworn states—I am an Overseer—Last month of November I was in the service of Mr Thomas Coutts of Kangaroo Creek—In September last—Walker a shepherd sent in a note to say the Blacks had taken 300 of his sheep from him but that he had got the best part of them back again.—In January or Febry 1847, in the course of conversation with him he complained very much of the Blacks and the depredations that they committed.—He said that if some stuff (meaning poison) was sent out to him, he could very soon put them out of the way—that he himself would undertake to put them out of the way and asked me to speak to Mr Coutts about it.—This I refused to do but promised him (merely to pacify him) that when I went to Sydney I would get it for him.—Walker was taking Holloway pills and using his ointment at the time—He said that if Mr Coutts would furnish him with it, he could easily conceal it in the boxes.—Upon my return from Sydney in August he (Walker) asked me if I had brought him the poison—I told him that I had not.

(signed) Moses Jones

Peter Frazer duly sworn states—I am a labourer—I was last in the employment of Mr Coutts—

Memorandum

This witness having been drinking was taken out of court.

Thomas Walker being re-sworn states—I never at any time had any conversation with Moses Jones respecting poisoning the Blacks—I never commissioned him to buy or procure any poison for me—I asked him to buy Holloway's pills but he did not keep his word and get them for me.—A man named the Barber told me, that Malone had recommended Mr Coutts to poison the Blacks, and he said also that it would be a good plan, only that the innocent would suffer as well as the guilty (signed) Thos Walker

John Tomkinson re-examined- When I first went out to Mr Coutts Station—That is to say about nine months ago—I was riding out on the dray with Malone—a conversation took place about the Blacks—I cannot positively swear whether Malone said that he had struck up a
plan to poison all the Blacks or that Mr Coutts had done so.—He said however that it would have been an excellent plan only for one thing, and that was, that the innocent Blacks would suffer as well as the guilty ones. (signed) John Tomkinson

**Defence—**

Mr Coutts in his defence states that he knows nothing whatever about the matter—That he believes that Byrnes would swear anything. (signed) Thomas Coutts

The court commits Mr Coutts to take his trial at the next General Gaol Delivery in Sydney—signed William Forster JP, John Mylnes JP

Grafton Police Office
Jany 17th 1848
True copy
(signed)

49/3403
10th April 1849

*The Honble the Attorney General to the Honble the Colonial Secretary, transmitting the draft of a Bill, to provide for the admission of the Evidence of Aborigines in Courts of Justice with two enclosures*

Attorney General's Office,
7th April 1849
Sir,

1. In attention to the comments of His Excellency the Governor, conveyed to me in your letter of the 9th August last, No. 48/635. I have the honour to transmit a Draft Bill, in the same terms as one presented to the Legislative Council in the Year 1844, to provide for the admission of the Evidence of Aborigines in Courts of Justice.

2. With respect to the suggestions made by Mr Walker, and enclosed to me in your letter of the 22nd March last, No. 49/208. I think the proper time for this consideration will be in committee; but I do not consider it advisable to insert them in the draft Bill, when laid before the Council.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
J.H.Plunkett

2 49/2602 16th March 1849

*Commissariat Native Police Submitting observations respecting ill-treatment of the Aboriginal Natives?*

Darling river
15 Febry 1849
Sir,

In another letter of this date I have the honour to inform you that I had reached this place. I have to report that during my journey I have been in constant communication with the aboriginal natives and have hitherto found them very friendly.

The settlers however complain of their stealing sheep and on the Darling on the stations of Messrs Fletcher and Walker. This seems to have been carried on to a serious extent as they have lost several hundred sheep.
On the other hand the natives complain bitterly of the illtreatment they receive from the shepherds and their servants who in return for the presents of immense quantities of fish and lobsters which they receive from the blacks, abuse them, threaten to shoot them and drive them from their huts. The owners of the stock are the sufferers from this conduct which it is the interest of their servants to persevere in for the purpose of keeping up the price of labour in this part of the Colony.

I wish to call your attention to the fact that at present the Natives are liable to all the penalties of the British Law, but derive no benefit or protection whatever from it, and this arises from their evidence not being admissible.

I know that there is in this colony a strong prejudice against submitting their evidence, but I consider that the only danger to be raised is not that a Native would bear false witness, but that he might be inclined not to tell the whole truth.

I have no doubt that the opposition to a bill for the admission of the evidence of the blacks would be abandoned if it were not retrospective.

But it is in the lower courts of justice that such a bill would be of use to Natives for no man would assault and ill use a black if he knew he was liable to be fined for the offence upon the evidence of the Natives who might be present. It would be still better if there were a law for the prosecution of the Natives by which the Chief Constables could in their respective districts lodge informations against parties illusing (sic) the blacks.

I have also to observe that I think it would be more serviceable to the colonists and more merciful to the Natives if the crime of sheep or cattle stealing were not visited with the punishment inflicted by British law; but punished by imprisonment in the nearest lockup for three months with or without corporal punishment.

This would have a beneficial effect upon the tribe; but transportation or any other punishment at a distance is only revenging the offence upon the individual but has no effect upon his tribe who do not know what has become of him and forget him. It is so difficult and expensive to prosecute Natives before a Circuit Court that the settlers in their own defence have been obliged to take the law into their own hands and the consequence has been to the Natives that in many cases the crime of sheep stealing has been punished with death.

I have the honour to remain sir
Your most obedient servant
Frederick Walker J.P.
Commandant
Native Police

48/7126 17th June 1848
Attorney General
Attorney General's Office
Reporting that there is not sufficient evidence to institute prosecution in the case of the murder of Jas. Lafont.

Sir,
I beg leave to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th ultimo transmitting for my report, the accompanying letter from the Commissioner of Crown Lands at the Clarence River, reporting that on the 9th April last, a man named James Lafont, a hutkeeper in the employment of Mr Thomas Coutts of Kangaroo Point in the above district, was murdered by the Aborigines.

In reply I have the honour to report for the information of His Excellency the Governor, that I have received the proceedings of a magisterial enquiry relative to the death of Lafont, the late hutkeeper of Mr Thomas Coutts, by which it clearly appears that the unfortunate
deceased must have been murdered by the Native Blacks, but there is no Evidence to bring the offence home to any particular individual.

I entirely concur in the opinion of Mr Commissioner Fry "that this lamentable occurrence must be regarded as the inevitable consequence of Mr Coutts' own conduct" for although I did not put Mr Coutts on his trial for the charge of poisoning a Tribe of Native Blacks in December last, and for which he was committed, it was not from any moral doubt I entertained of the strong suspicion of his guilt of the dreadful crime, but solely because, there was not sufficient legal evidence to substantiate it in a Court of Justice as the present state of the law excludes the Evidence of the Black Natives themselves,—Indeed the case of Mr Coutts renders still more apparent, the great deficiency of the present law in that respect, and I trust that a New Legislature will now see the expediency and necessity of passing a law to remedy it and similar in principle to the Bill which was proposed by the government to the present Legislative Council, but rejected by a large majority of that body.

I would also beg to refer to my letter of the 1st May last, reporting, for the Governor's information, on the charge against Messrs Blaxland and Forster, relative to the death of a Native Black named "Geary"—as another instance of the deficiency in the law of Evidence. As long as such acts are committed by the White people on the Aborigines, and while the perpetrators of these go unpunished, it cannot be wondered at, that revenge should occupy the breasts of those Savages—I entirely concur in the sentiments expressed in Mr Fry's letter.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J.H.Plunkett
Attorney General

\textit{copy}

Attorney General's Office
10th May 1848

Sir,

Having reference to the Depositions in the case against the Individual named in the the margin, charged with poisoning certain of the Aboriginal Blacks on the Clarence River; I beg leave to inform you that there is not sufficient evidence to sustain the prosecution, although I am sorry to say the suspicion is very strong that the prisoner is not guiltless of the dreadful deed charged against him.

This is one of the many cases from which the defect of the present law, in excluding altogether the Evidence of the Aboriginal Natives, is apparent.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your Obedient Servant,

(sigd) J.H.Plunkett
Attorney General
48/5682 28th April 1848

Commissr Fry
Clarence River
Crown Lands Officer 13th April
Reporting Murder of Jas. Lafont, a hutkeeper in the employ of Mr. T. Coutts

Sir,

I do myself the honour to acquaint you that on Sunday the 9th inst. a man named James Lafont, a hutkeeper in the employment of Mr. Thomas Coutts of Kangaroo Creek in this District, was murdered by the Aborigines at a sheep station, distant about three miles from the residence of his employer.

From the evidence elicited on the investigation as to the cause of death it would appear, the outrage took place under the following circumstances.

Upon the day above named a shepherd who lived with the was attacked by the Blacks while out with his flock and being driven from his sheep ran to the station for protection. On reaching the hut he found the hut-keeper Lafont outside the door, quite dead. There were no Blacks about the place, nor was there anything, save the peculiarity of the wounds, to indicate by whom or what the murder had been committed.

The flock of sheep (amounting to about nine hundred) was missing for some days, and supposed to have been driven off. But as (with the exception of about eighty) it has returned to the station, it is now generally believed that it was not disturbed by the Blacks and the loss is imputed to the ravages of native dogs.

Upon the foregoing being reported to the Magistrates all the available part of the Police was ordered in pursuit of the depredators but returned in a few days without having effected anything.

In conclusion I beg to add, that it is impossible to regard the circumstance I have reported as other than the inevitable consequence of Mr. Coutts's own misconduct. To those familiar with the manners and habits of the Natives; the murder of Lafont, must seem, but the sequel to the poisoning of December last. There is no people who entertain a stronger sense of retributive justice than the Aborigines of New Holland. With them "Blood for Blood" is a necessary (and where circumstances render it possible) an inviolable maxim, according with their superstitions, and essential to their existence. It was easy to have foreseen the occurrence of a calamity such as the murder of Lafont, but the means of arresting it were not so readily perceived; as none presented itself as efficacious save the impracticable one of removing Mr. Coutts from the District.

I have the honour to be sir your most obed servt

Oliver Fry
Evidence of four New England corroboree songs indicating Aboriginal responses to European invasion

Barry McDonald

To preface this examination of Aboriginal evidence for local contact relations, I will first briefly comment upon selected aspects of the history of those relations as presented by conventional European historical sources such as pastoralists’ diaries, official reports, pioneers’ reminiscences and so on. I will then introduce descriptions of four corroboree songs (using this musical category loosely), framing them within certain historical and cultural contexts to enable a better grasp of their significance.

The idea of the incompatibility of European and Aboriginal social and intellectual systems, and the consequent inevitability of conflict, has been promoted in academic publications up to the very recent past. Again, some ‘broad brush’ historical examinations such as Tony Swain’s discussed below, run the understandable risk of glossing over significant regional differences in the course of achieving a manageable overview. Still others interpret sketchy historical evidence in a way that perhaps exaggerates the level and extent of frontier conflict. Hopefully, the following survey will sufficiently highlight both the multiplex nature of the New England frontier situation and the possible uniqueness of this region’s historical experience, to contribute useful detail to the discussion of Australian contact relations.

Apart from John Oxley’s fleeting visit to the southern edge of the Tableland in 1818, groups of Europeans did not visit New England, as far as is known, until Hamilton Collins Sempill established the Wolka sheep run in 1832. Very little evidence for the course of local black/white relations exists for the period before George Macdonald was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands for New England in 1839, although the Sydney Herald did occasionally report on conflict with Tableland Aboriginal people, beginning with the following mention in January 1836:

We hear that numerous outrages have been commenced by the aborigines in the newly-discovered country north-east of Liverpool Plains.

It is possible that conflict occurred immediately upon ‘first’ contact in 1832, which may be inferred from evidence Sempill himself gave to the New South Wales Committee on the Crown Lands Bill in 1839:

---

1 Dingle 1988, p. 57.
2 Blomfield 1988, pp. 83, 84.
3 Sydney Herald, January 28 1836, quoted in Campbell 1922, p. 245.
After a certain time, a person is as safe in the vicinity of the Aborigines as anywhere else; but on coming for the first time in contact with them, they are invariably hostile; that hostile feeling, however, wears off as soon as they become acquainted with White persons settling among them, and the power they possess. Commissioner Macdonald's first Report on the State of the Aborigines suggests that this may not have been the general rule, and it would be fair to say that, at the very least, such hostility was not at all inevitable, nor did it follow a prescribed pattern. Other reliable evidence indicates that first relations could be friendly, and numerous New England squattages such as Ollera, Clerkness, Oban, Aberfoil, Mihi, Kentucky, Ohio, Rimbanda, Loonga, Inglebah and Waterloo were known for at least accommodating customary Aboriginal usage of land. Not only this, but certain resident squatters such as the Everetts and Captain S. Darby expressed more than a passing interest in indigenous cultural matters, and displayed some understanding of local Aboriginal thought and languages. Obviously others were not so accommodating, and though the evidence relating to the period before 1839 is scant, the name of the stockman 'Terrible Billy' Stephenson has been associated with a number of pastoral stations at that time, including Saumarez, Gostwyck, Salisbury, Terrible Vale, and Niangala. This man may have held a brief to initiate aggressions that are now spoken of only in the haziest terms (e.g. on Saumarez, Gostwyck and Macdonald River stations), an insight prompted chiefly by the following statement of the Wallabadah pioneer William Telfer:

went through a dense scrub for about four miles Passing mount Terrible Enroute which was called after a stockman named Terrible Billy in the old Times who was a terror to the aboriginals in the New England districts he after Comited suicide on Glydes Corner in 1851.

Unofficial European action towards Aboriginal people in the first decade of contact seems to have followed no uniform policy, and instead depended to a great extent on the attitudes of individuals. Nor did it follow class lines as has been

---

4 Oxley considered that the Aboriginal people he met on New England had previous knowledge of Europeans (Oxley 1820, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977, p. 61).
5 N.S.W. Legislative Council 1839a, p. 223.
6 Macdonald 1842, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977, p. 104.
8 Macdonald 1842; the Everett Family Papers. I am indebted to John Ferry of the History Department at the University of New England for drawing my attention to the Everett correspondence and other sources, and for discussing with me some of the ideas presented in this article.
9 Fennell & Gray 1974, p. 84.
10 Gray 1982, p. 89.
11 Bundarra Young 1922, p. 401.
13 Milliss 1980, p. 91.
Figure 1  New England Pastoral District

NEW ENGLAND
Towns, Villages and
Pastoral Stations
postulated by I.C. Campbell, who attributes much of the hostility to the generally brutalized character of convict labour.\textsuperscript{14} The opinion of Susan Bundarra Young that:

the convicts were not the hardened ruffians and criminals that they have been represented to be\textsuperscript{15} has been echoed by Donald Jamieson and others.\textsuperscript{16} Some records portray a close relationship between assigned labouring men and local Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, evidence given to the 1839 New South Wales Legislative Council Select Committee On Police and Gaols laid the blame for bad relations in the adjacent north-west region as much on the character of station superintendents as on their stockmen.\textsuperscript{18} And in the aftermath of Myall Creek, some of the sharpest disapprobation—issuing from both contemporary newspaper editorials\textsuperscript{19} and the published accounts of informed observers such as Judge R. Therry\textsuperscript{20}—was reserved for several of the local squatters themselves.

Much also must have depended on the varying attitudes of the Aboriginal groups concerned, and even upon individuals within groups.\textsuperscript{21} While it is probably the case that an anti-settler Aboriginal 'confederation' was formed on the north-west slopes between 1836 and 1838,\textsuperscript{22} there is no evidence that Tableland Aboriginal people acted with a similar unity of purpose.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, it is possible that the European presence actually sharpened hostilities between local groups here, an idea supported both by contemporary newspaper reports and by oral historical evidence.\textsuperscript{24}

Relations between black and white also varied over time during this early period. Settlers living on Surveyor's Creek station, for example, for some years maintained good relations with local Aboriginal people. Documented familiarity includes the mutual celebration of Christmas in 1842, and the frequent employment of Aboriginal men and

\textsuperscript{14} Campbell 1971, p. 11
\textsuperscript{15} Bundarra Young 1922, p. 294.
\textsuperscript{16} Jamieson 1987, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{18} N.S.W. Legislative Council 1839b, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{19} Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser, 10 December 1838, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1974, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{20} Therry, R. 1863, Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Residence In New South Wales and Victoria, London, chapter XVI, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick, pp.120–122.
\textsuperscript{21} Jamieson 1987, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{22} Bundarra Young 1922, p. 399; Gardner 1846, n.p.; N.S.W. Legislative Council 1839b, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{23} Macdonald 1842, described the Tablelands people thus: '...from the widely scattered state of the Tribes—their distrust and fear of each other;—their constant feuds...there is but a very remote probability of effecting any radical change in their moral or social Condition as a people...' (emphasis as in original).
\textsuperscript{24} Although the specific events took place well after initial contact, various issues of the Armidale Express for June 1860 discuss troubles on the eastern border of New England, caused by Aboriginal people from the Macleay River being driven there by the N.S.W. Mounted Police. Current oral historical evidence links these troubles to stories of pitched battles between the Macleay River people and Tableland tribes (Mr. M. Kim 1996, pers. comm; Mr. B. Lockwood 1996, pers. comm; see also Scholes 1971, pp. 54, 57.)
women on the property. But in 1844, the station overseer wrote the following in his journal:

Thursday September 26th. 1844...I keep my gun & pistol loaded in the house. The Blacks attacked a neighbouring station, Rusden's, & nearly killed a shepherd, left him for dead & stole some of the sheep. the damn scoundrels, they ought to be shot. I had some of them here to-day working about the house & I heard to-night that one of the Blacks I had was one of those who attacked Rusden's, they are treacherous dogs.25

Again, white attitudes in New England probably changed markedly after the perpetrators (or their agents) of the Myall Creek massacre were hanged in 1838.26 By this action, sections at least of the colonial government had shown a clear intention to enforce the protection of Aboriginal people, a principle laid out explicitly in the initial general instructions to the Commissioner of Crown Lands for New England.27 A general caveat against large-scale aggression had thus been published abroad before fully one-third of the 45 or so stations in New England had been taken up by the end of 1839.28 An illustration of this effect of Myall Creek, inter alia, may be seen in the writings of the ever-hostile Finney Eldershaw of Marooan Station. Although the sheep runs around Ben Lomond were first taken up in about 1837,29 Eldershaw wrote that bloodshed did not occur there until 1841.30 In that year, the murder of shepherds on Marooan resulted in retaliatory action where Aboriginal people were no doubt killed, but probably not on the scale assumed by the historian Geoffrey Blomfield.31 In discussing this action and local relations generally, Eldershaw clearly indicated that he and like-minded squatters felt themselves considerably constrained by British Law in their ability to defend their investments adequately against Aboriginal depredation:

the actual position in which the Squatter of the so-called unsettled districts stands towards the aboriginal tribes...is one of undoubted hostility; in plain terms, it is a position of open warfare; and without presuming to enter into the question of right, by which the British Government...assumes the privilege of taking possession of and inhabiting the wasting territories of such savage tribes; it is surely to be inferred, that the mere assumption of this authority conveys to the subjects of that Government an indisputable right to protection...I deem it manifestly unjust that actual murder must be permitted to be perpetrated before sufficient measures are allowed to be adopted for the removal of the danger. The evident intention to ravage and destroy is the natural signal for protective action.

26 The Myall Creek massacre is not considered here as an example of New England contact relations. Although Myall Creek itself ran just outside the western border of the New England pastoral district, the massacre was almost certainly a continuing expression of the state of hostility that existed in the north-west region between whites and Bigambal, Kwiambal and Gamilaraay people (see e.g. Muswellbrook Bench Book, August 1838, evidence given before E.D.Day).
27 ‘General Instructions to the Commissioners of Crown Lands beyond the Boundaries’, New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b, pp. 578–582.
28 Campbell 1922, pp. 235–237.
29 Gardner 1854, p. 69.
30 Eldershaw 1854, pp. 62–75.
Figure 2  The languages of New England and northern New South Wales (after R.M.W. Dixon, 'Grammatical Categories in Australian Languages', A.I.A.S., Canberra redrawn by R.E. Barwick). Note: Language names in this map are spelt according to the 1972 recommendations of the A.I.A.S. Convention for the Representation of Tribal and Language Names.
But it seems not. We must wait till we are attacked, remain quiescent until the murderer stalks at our door, and his victims quiver at our feet, and then a warrant may be obtained from the nearest neighbouring justice of the peace; and armed with which precious document, we are permitted to call upon the offender to surrender himself to justice...The manifest absurdity of a warrant at all in such cases needs no comment.\(^{31}\)

The type of frontier incident at Marooan was repeated, as far as is known, perhaps six times more in New England (on Bolivia, Dundee, and Salisbury runs),\(^{32}\) before hostilities appear to have largely ceased in about 1845.\(^{33}\) For various historiographical reasons, I believe these 'skirmishes' were carried out on a smaller scale, and were of lesser consequence, than the putative pre-1839 aggressions mentioned above.\(^{34}\)

The main purpose of the foregoing sketch has been to argue the varied nature of the New England contact experience as recorded in European evidence, and to introduce the view that there was nothing inevitable about the course black/white relations would take here after 1832. That course ultimately depended on attitude, opportunity and other historical factors, rather than on any economic, or social determining forces; it can be seen to be a phenomenon that continues throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\(^{35}\) Again, evidence suggests that the New England experience was different to that of the regions to its immediate west and east, a situation which again may be reflected in the more recent history of the Tablelands. To pursue some of these ideas further, I will now describe four corroboree songs, mainly to show that Aboriginal responses themselves varied, and were the product of creative, flexible historical agents. The first is a corroboree verse, with contextual explanation, recorded by the writer in February 1996 from Mrs. Hazel Vale of Armidale. The second is an account given by Albert Norton of a skirmish, with musical denouement, that took place on southern New England. The third is a description of Aboriginal singing from the same district in 1842, while the fourth song, from Tenterfield in the region's north, may date from about 1840. The evidence of these four songs represent musical productions from the three main Tableland language groups, who spoke dialects of Gumbainggirr, Anaywan\(^{36}\) and Yugambal respectively.

---

\(^{31}\) Eldershaw 1854, pp. 102–105. Further evidence of the restraining influence of Myall Creek is contained in a report from the *Sydney Herald*, to the effect that, during 1842, warriors on the Namoi river repeatedly taunted white stockmen, telling them that 'they are afraid to shoot them as the Commissioner will hang them'. Quoted in Swain 1993, p. 140.

\(^{32}\) Irby 1908, quoted in Gilbert and Elphick 1974, p. 125; Frankland 1845, p. 150; *Sydney Herald*, 27 January 1842; 25 October 1844.

\(^{33}\) Irby 1908, quoted in Gilbert and Elphick 1974, p. 125; Frankland 1845, p. 150; *Sydney Herald*, 27 January 1842; 25 October 1844.

\(^{34}\) Both Norton and Frankland, for example, in chronicling their travels over the northern part of New England soon after its occurrence, wrote that contemporary European accounts of the alleged massacre at Bolivia were likely to be highly exaggerated.

\(^{35}\) While this is not the place to introduce further argument, I believe that, in the absence of missions and managed reserves on New England, the positive relationship between Aboriginal people and certain property owners here continued more-or-less uninterrupted from the 1840s until the Second World War.

\(^{36}\) Although the spelling recommended by Terry Crowley for this language is Nganyawana (Crowley 1976), I consider that the historical evidence that has since become available justifies the reversion to a name that the people of central New England almost certainly used themselves.
Mrs. Vale is the eldest daughter of Frank Archibald, who was born into the Baanbai language-group of central-eastern New England. During the latter part of his life, Frank's singing was recorded by several researchers, including Bill Hoddinott of the University of New England, and John Gordon, a grantee of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. A number of Frank's 'lingo' songs, all of which were learned from much older members of his family, reflect Aboriginal perceptions of European innovations such as the railway and Christian religion. Many of these he taught his own children. While attending a family gathering held in February 1996, Mrs. Vale sang one of her father's songs which had escaped previous documentation:

This is the story I was told...Our people used to live in this little valley you know, and on each side the scrub was, and they used to have the boys or girls there lookin' out for the...white fellers comin' with their guns. And if they'd see them they'd cooce out..."Ai! Yaaban! Yirrali!" That means 'white man'. And they'd look. "Yir!" they'd say, tell 'em to run. They'd start runnin' with their spears and that and plant:

Bulagiri wambil-wambil double-barrel li gu djanaa-ya
Bulagiri wambil-wambil double-barrel li gu djanaa-ya.

That means the white men comin' with their guns you know, and tellin' them, our people, to plant and get away from them. Yir, that means 'go, you wait for them'.

The song is typical of south-eastern corroboree verses, both structurally and in offering resistance to easy translation. Not only does the allusive nature of Aboriginal song-texts usually demand an intimate knowledge of background cultural material but the language of this one is only imperfectly understood. It is composed in the Baanbai dialect, and its translation has required educated assumptions to be made from knowledge of the related Gumbainggirr language. This work was kindly carried out by members of Muurbay Language Centre Sherwood, and with their help, I suggest the following rough meaning for the verse: 'Go and tell that there are two white men coming with guns, take fright and go'.

Dating the song has been equally difficult, but it is quite likely that the events described took place between the years 1839 and 1845. The most significant altercation in Baanbai territory seems to have been the 1841 'scrimmage' reported by Eldershaw, although other minor episodes did occur later on the tribe's eastern borders. Nor does the song's internal evidence offer much assistance to precise dating, as double-barrelled guns are expressly documented as accompanying the first Europeans to New England in the mid-1830s. The Aboriginal response outlined in the verse is patently one of cautious fear born of the knowledge of guns—an entirely rational appreciation of the power of European technology—and not a portrayal of some mystical awe of the invader, as Eldershaw and Sempill might have it. While the compound adjective 'wambul-wambul' would normally indicate great fear in Gumbainggirr, I do not feel the

---

28 Hoddinott 1964.
29 Gordon 1968.
30 McDonald 1996, uncatalogued field tape in the author's collection.
32 Eldershaw 1854, pp. 82–105.
34 Gardner 1846, n.p.
possibility that the song describes an ambush should be entirely ruled out, especially as Mrs. Vale's contextualization introduces the idea of hiding in wait for the white men. 'Wambul-wambul' might then bear the nuanced meaning of something like 'great caution'. Whatever the case, it appears that the song suggests rational and wary observation and appreciation of European behaviour.

While a few other Baanbai songs of Frank Archibald are known, no lingo song-texts have been found relating to the musical cultures of the other Tableland groups—the Anaywan and associated mobs, or Yuŋgambal, Gnarbal, and Maabal people. That racial conflict was documented in song elsewhere on the Tablelands, is attested by Albert Norton, a grazier who spent considerable time with Aboriginal people in the Walcha district between 1852 and 1858, and who wrote of a period of conflict which he said had well passed by the time he arrived on New England:

Some of their corroborees are both amusing and clever. On one occasion some settlers with whom I was acquainted had had rations stolen from shepherds' huts. This, of course, was attributed to the blacks, who, it was decided, must be "dispersed." Accordingly, seven or eight angry men started off with their carbines and ammunition in time to reach the blacks' camp in the early morning; one was left behind a hill in charge of the horses, while the rest moved forward to the scene of battle! They had expected to find a few blacks, but about two hundred were in the camp, and they did not immediately run for their lives. Instead of doing this, they rapidly advanced towards the aggressors, who, with nervous fingers, pulled their triggers, endangering their own lives as much as those of the enemy. The cartridges were soon exhausted, and it was the whites who ran for their lives. The blacks might have killed them if they had really wished to do so, but there were no casualties on either side. They arrived in a breathless condition at the spot where the horses had been left, and hastily rode away. "The incident then closed"....It became a favourite corroboree with the blacks, and was "staged" for the benefit of the principal white performers!4 4

The two pieces of musical evidence presented so far are qualitatively different—one is a verse of a corroboree song, the other a description of the circumstances leading to the creation and performance of a corroboree cycle. But it is also clear that they can be regarded as reducible to similar phenomena for the purposes of the present exercise. Corroborees in south-eastern Australia were often of a programmatic nature, organised into a series of discrete sections or 'acts' that were combined to portray a particular event or process.46 The Archibald song probably represents one such section, chiefly because of its typical musical structure, which in common with much Australian material, strongly implies 'cycle-building'.47 But even granting structural similarity between the two pieces, one compelling difference remains. This concerns the apparent mood of the corroborees. Both the Baanbai song and its contextualisation indicate an air of caution and hostility,48 suggesting that these people had previous experience or knowledge of armed conflict with Europeans. A genuine air of Aboriginal hostility is missing from Norton's account. This seems odd, as it is hard to imagine either that those Aboriginal people felt entirely confident in the face of concerted white action, or that they had not yet experienced

---

46 McDonald in press.
48 Steve Morelli 1995, pers. comm.
serious conflict. But Norton clearly portrays them as exhibiting little fear, and showing no desire to press home a tactical advantage, nor to exact immediate revenge.

But some revenge was achieved. As Norton intimates, the corroboree he describes was designed to lampoon the defeated whites. The performance of satirical songs has been recorded as an important feature of local Aboriginal music-making. Radcliffe-Brown noted the occurrence of inter-tribal 'singing competitions' on New England, where 'each side prepares a song and sings against the other'. It is unlikely that his informant was describing there a simple match of compositional or performance skills. F.J.E. Bootle observed, from his experience of Gamilraay society in the Moree district, that:

they also make songs up, one tribe against another; but this often leads to fighting...The tribes by making songs about one another have great fun, but they often annoy the tribesmen, when a challenge is sent to fight.

By composing their corroboree and staging it 'for the benefit of the principal white performers', Norton's Aboriginal people may well have been wielding a time-honoured weapon of derision, and would thereby have gained some satisfaction at the expense of the European transgressors. This not only suggests forceful social action under the circumstances, but also that these people were reacting to the local settlers at least as confidently as they would another Aboriginal group. The fact that Norton indicates that relations were friendly enough for the shared performance of the corroboree is also instructive, in that it comprised a type of public 'discussion' which could elsewhere have easily served as an incitement to further violence.

Contemporary observers of frontier relations typically portrayed Aboriginal people as awe-struck and tractable once they had experienced hostility from whites. Eldershaw clearly overstates the case when he characterises his vanquished opponents as

Imbued with a mysterious and superstitious fear of the stupendous power of the white man,

but it is no doubt true that New England Aboriginal resistance during the 1840s often took alternative forms to belligerent adversarial action. It is argued from the foregoing songs and other evidence, that Guris were eminently capable of employing alternative relational strategies, drawing to varying degrees on a customary repertoire that is barely visible in the historical record. That described by Norton seems to be both a creative and an eminently judicious instance of this alternative strategising, in that some Aboriginal satisfaction was gained without serious risk of an escalation of inter-group violence.

49 It is also strange that the Europeans in this case did not utilise the strategic advantage of being mounted on horseback—an advantage for which Aboriginal people freely admitted they had no answer in conflict on the north-west slopes (N.S.W. Legislative Council 1839b, p. 253). Perhaps the Walcha Europeans really wished only to frighten or disperse the blacks, and Norton's indication that this term was used entirely euphemistically may be wrong.


51 Bootle 1899, p. 5.

52 Eldershaw 1854, p. 74.

53 Miller 1985 emphasises the continuing historical importance of the concept of passive resistance in New England Aboriginal society.
Creative response can also be seen to characterise the third item that I wish to discuss. This concerns a song performed at a Christmas gathering held on Surveyor's Creek, and described by that station's superintendent:

Saturday 24th. December 1842. My birthday...after dinner my health was drunk by them all &...we had some famous songs & amused ourselves very much. A number of blacks were invited into the room...to drink my health—they sang us some of their war songs— one was a very melancholic one, something about 2 picaninies having been killed by the whites & by & by they were to jump up 2 white fellows. The grog began to take effect & some of these, viz. the blacks, were actually falling down. There were about 20 of them singing, it had a strange effect. After tea we all played billiards & amused ourselves the best way we could, the stakes for the games was a fig of tobacco each.

It is possible that it was action associated with the song that induced the singers to fall down in this instance, rather than the effect of the grog. And just as with the last example, the singing of the song to the white people may have been designed to activate some immediate and dynamic communicative power. Whatever the actual intention of the singers or the sensibilities of the audience, the song certainly had a 'strange effect' on the diarist. But what is perhaps most interesting about this item is its evidence of two novel and somewhat discrete Aboriginal cosmological attitudes regarding relations with white people. For upon contact, it was commonly held throughout the south-east that whitefellers were the manifested spirits of Aboriginal ancestors, and further, that black people would henceforth return after death as whites. These are phenomena more complex than might first appear, but which so far seem to have received scant analytical notice from scholars. Indeed, Tony Swain's historical/philosophical examination of post-contact south-east Aboriginal religious movements may well be the only framework to which evidence of the second belief can be applied at present. Swain's interpretation is, if I understand him correctly, that far from being a mystification born of ignorance, these beliefs relate to an early and short-lived bid to place whites within an Aboriginal moral universe—to make some moral sense of European invasion. But once it was perceived that whites could not be so easily located, Swain continues, then a succession of strategies was developed—first 'millennial', then eschatological, until at last the 'cult' of the bora provided the necessary required balance in a reformed Aboriginal worldview:

...there were two options explored by Aborigines of the south-east in response to the emergent unbalanced dualism created by the dislocation of the traditional locative cosmology. Both focused on the future. The 'millenial' vision of an end to Whites, while understandably having some attractions, was less prominent than

54 'War song' was a contemporary generic European term for corroboree song.
55 Surveyor's Creek 1839-1845, n.p.
56 In the sense of 'singing' the whites. This aspect of south-eastern indigenous music is discussed in McDonald in press.
57 Commissioner Macdonald himself was said to have been considered by the members of one group as the reincarnation of a certain head-man, both having shared a similar physical deformity (Macdonald, quoted in Blomfield 1988, pp. 57, 58). Other descriptions of the phenomena can be found in Backhouse 1843, p. 57, and Breton 1834, pp. 181, 199.
58 Swain 1993.
59 Swain 1993, pp. 114–158.
the cults concerned to ward off the coming eschaton...the literature will not allow us to specify exactly how these two orientations were historically and sociologically related...60

While there are historiographical impediments to accepting Swain's thesis in toto, it does offer opportunities for an increased understanding of early south-eastern Aboriginal cosmology that seem to be unavailable elsewhere in the literature. Swain (and others) adduce enough evidence from all over the region to secure the argument that belief in whites as spirits was at least a pan-south-eastern Aboriginal phenomenon. But quite soon after contact, the perception of whitefellers must have shifted to regarding them as real people, although perhaps different to Aboriginal people in more than just skin-colour. This seems to be the only logical way to read the evidence Swain provides of Aboriginal people at first attempting to drive away the white spirits by ritual means,61 and later expecting that they could be destroyed by disease or force of arms.62 The songs discussed above also show that the Baanbai and Anaywan singers were confident they were dealing there with people and not ghosts. I would argue that this third song under discussion again relates to whites as people, and the belief it expresses that contemporary Aboriginal people would 'jump up whitefellers' after death, is not only one step removed from seeing the invaders as spirits, but should be interpreted in other than the strictly millennial or eschatological ways of Swain's scheme. It was mentioned above that Swain's interpretation of Aboriginal 'millennianism' was that it expected the overthrow and eventual extinction of whites, together with their technology.63 On the other hand, his eschaton signified the end of Aboriginal existence in the world, which would thereafter be populated by white spirits.64 Swain illustrates the latter with evidence of a post-contact Yuwaaaliyaay eschatological vision, quoting from the writings of K.L. Parker:

As Swain nowhere expressly mentions the belief that Aboriginal people, after death, would 'jump up' whites, it is difficult to locate the concept within either of the cosmological schemes examined. Viewed in the light of eschatology, the Walcha Aborigines described above may have been giving despairing voice to a vision similar to the Yuwaaaliyaay one, but I believe, for a number of reasons, that this is far from a necessary reading of the evidence. First, the expression used by the Surveyor's Creek overseer, and quite possibly the singers themselves, is 'whitefellow', not 'ghost' or 'spirit', which may well bear a slightly different nuance to Parker's 'Wundah'. Second, the

60 Swain 1993, p. 143.
62 Swain 1993, pp. 134, 135.
63 Swain 1993, p. 135.
64 Swain 1993, p. 137.
corroboree song gives an impression that this reincarnation is inevitable, and not dependent on the failure to maintain certain ceremonial obligations, as in Parker's version, local initiation ceremonies were still very much current around Surveyor's Creek in 1842). Again, the 'melancholic' mood that is ascribed to the song may relate solely to the writer's perception of its melody—something that does not translate accurately across broad cultural boundaries. The fact that he did not grasp the exact meaning of its text is attested by his describing it as 'something about...'

'Jump up whitefeller' also sits uneasily with Swain's millennial perspective, chiefly because it clearly identifies the white with the black, rather than signifying any Aboriginal desire to eradicate the European presence. While one must agree with Roger Keesing that there is an obvious limit to the ability to translate another culture's cosmology in terms of our own logic, the evidence of one more New England song may take the foregoing examination a little further.

This a song from the Warren Fahey Folklore Collection, in the oral history archives of the National Library of Australia. The puzzling piece was given to Fahey by a Tenterfield correspondent, Ted Hoskin, together with the rider 'by W.J. Hoskin, Mingoola 1880', and the following footnote:

On the northern line about 490 miles from Sydney near Sunnyside, Tenterfield, is a place known as Bullock Dray, where it is said, may still be seen the remains of an old bullock dray supposed to have been abandoned by early explorers. There was neither road nor rail nor wire and people steered by the compass. The boss is supposed to have gone back for repairs to Sydney, leaving the stores and stock in charge of a few convicts and blacks.

Here is the text of the song:

Good-bye Master, givem you sack
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke,
Can't go no further, can't go back.
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke.
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke,
Can't make it new one, no got it spoke,
No got it chain—no got it yoke,
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke,
Serve it right Master, can't take a joke!
Eat plenty tucker, not work a stroke,
All a-day sit down, fill pipe and smoke,
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke.
Long way to Sydney, all a way bush,
White men muck about, can't make em push,
Bullock go bong-bong, jumbuck 'e croak,
Yarraman tumble down—wheelbarrow broke.
Plenty lot tucker—we do 'em brown
plenty more sugarbag—bush sit down.
Boss 'e go walkabout, bigfeller smoke,
Warrigal, warrigal—wheelbarrow broke!
All a-day sleep it, by-m-by tea
Look out for big fella corroboree.

Like it 'im koala, like it mopoke,
Goo-goo goburra wheelbarrow broke!
White man 'e come along, blackfella die,
Jump up whitefella too by-m-by.
No more possum, good fella bloke,
Goodbye sugarbag, wheelbarrow broke.
No more work it—good time 'e come,
Plenty more bacca, plenty more rum,
Ride about em touri—flash fella moke,
Goolwall Booligal—wheelbarrow broke.\(^7\)

The events detailed in the song and its setting may have occurred as early as 1840, and certainly accord with descriptions of the creation of that northern frontier given by Dawson, Gardner and others.\(^{46}\) For reasons set out below, the song should probably be considered a montage of contributions by several hands—Aboriginal and European—over time, which could explain both the attribution of authorship to Hoskin, and its late date. The text is unlikely to be a purely Aboriginal creation, although European activities certainly formed the basic content of some local syncretic songs, such as those composed by Mrs. Vale's great-grandfather the Baanbai King Bobby. But in length and formal structure—especially in the use of rhyming quatrains—it is quite uncharacteristic of corroboree verses. The song also bristles with examples of the ubiquitous Sydney pidgin, which should perhaps be seen more as a European patois, often used by whites to parody Aboriginal expression, than an Aboriginal linguistic phenomenon. But there are elements that do localize the song. Although certain of its lingo words may derive from local dialects, they are not much help in isolating its origin, as words such as 'booligal' and 'gooburra' occur with different meanings in many widespread languages. However, the noun 'touri' (alternatively spelt 'taurai', 'tarri' and 'thary') meaning 'country' is a local Yugambal word,\(^{47}\) and may also have been used by Anaywan speakers.\(^{48}\) Of central concern to the argument at hand is the philosophy contained in the song's last two verses, and here the 'author' is likely to be, at the very least, repeating some characteristic Aboriginal expressions of the 1840s. For these reasons I wish to regard the song as both Aboriginal and local, at least in its essence.

Again we see the 'jump up whitefeller by and by' motif, expressed in a way identical to that of the Walcha song. This time it is clearly identified as a post-contact phenomenon, and couched in what could be seen as quasi-millennial terms—that the white man has failed in his pioneering endeavour, and good times will come for blackfellows to utilise the innovations the whites have brought (e.g. horses and tobacco), in a new era of prosperity. While white economic elements will to some extent replace the traditional possum and sugarbag, certain traditional features are retained in the vision, the most important being the concept of 'touri'. This effectively prevents the 'jump up' concept being read as a simple replacement of the black by the white (either as spirit or incarnation), and keeps it firmly within a non-Christian locative cosmological tradition.

\(^{47}\) Fahey n.d.
\(^{46}\) Dawson 1930, p. 45; Gardner 1855, p. 70.
\(^{48}\) Mathews n.d. series 3/12, notebook 2, p. 53.
Further clues to the possible significance of 'jump up' are given in Swain's discussion of the bora 'cult', which he considers to have superseded and to some extent reconciled the millennial and eschatological visions. There Swain recounts the cult's spread throughout the south-eastern 'region', describes its typical physical ritual expression, and deliberates upon its possible cosmological significance. The main physical features that set the bora apart from putative earlier initiatory rituals, Swain argues, are the inclusion of a centralised earth sculpture of the 'All-Father' Baiame on the bora ground, together with symbolic representations of European goods such as domestic animals (including horses), vehicles and playing cards, and even effigies of whitefellers themselves.71

Tapping into a century-long argument concerning the indigenous south-eastern belief in a sky-god, Swain considers the bora to signify both a post-contact shift from a locative cosmology to an ubiety, and an attempt by Aboriginal thinkers to resolve the unbalanced dualism created by invasion.72 Swain's descriptions of the use of ritual objects denoting European items certainly resonate with the content of 'Wheelbarrow Broke', and the 'jump up whitefeller' theme twins with an assumed need for a cosmological shift in accommodating the white presence. Swain may well be right in denying the possibility of cargoism developing in Australia, as he says that European goods cannot be shown to have had any soteriological value for Aboriginal people. But his opinion that:

Nor...is there any evidence that Aborigines of the south-east particularly prized the prospect of enhanced access to European commodities,73

may be a little over-confident in the light of both 'Wheelbarrow Broke', and the following statement of John Breton in relation to the Aboriginal people of the Wollombi Valley:

Several creditable persons have informed me that the natives imagine they will be happier in a future state than at present, as they are to "jump up" white men, and to possess all the comforts which they see us enjoy, with plenty to eat and drink, and eternal sunshine to keep them warm! If this be true, their theological ideas must be of recent formation, or have experienced some sudden change.74

'Jump up whitefeller' indicates a strong identification of black with white, and thus accords with Swain's theory that a developing Aboriginal cosmology sought a subsumption of dual elements under the one Law. However, although I would agree with Swain that the development of local cosmological thought must have been fuelled by cosmological dislocation, I do not consider that his generalised view of the extent of such dislocation, nor of its violence, necessarily holds good for the New England experience of the 1840s. Over such an abyss of time and communication, it would seem vain to imagine one could gain an entirely accurate grasp of the 'jump up whitefeller concept' as expressed in the New England corroboree song record.

In conclusion, I argue that there may have been considerably greater variation in the style of local response to contact, both black and white, than Swain and others allow

71 Swain 1993, p. 141.
72 Swain 1993, pp. 143, 144.
73 Swain 1993, p. 143.
74 Breton 1834, p. 181.
for in their formulations. On the Aboriginal side, the range of attitudes presented in the evidence includes the entirely rational appreciation of whites as people, strategic caution, confident derision, revenge, some desire for European goods, and a sophisticated attempt to accommodate the European innovation into a long-established cosmology. Following Swain, these positions and strategies are seen to emanate from cultures well-equipped to deal with challenges, either by adapting customary action or developing novel responses. European styles on the other hand, include attitudes that are often singularly crude in their appreciation of Aboriginal rationality, some commentators believing that Aboriginal people were either impossible to understand, or had nothing to understand, being virtually cultureless. Some Europeans are seen as more willing to communicate, and to some extent share country with Aboriginal people and gain insight into local indigenous cultures. I believe this variation and complexity characterises the course of early contact relations that I surveyed at the beginning of this essay, and provides some evidence to help counter any belief in the inevitable incompatibility of European and Aboriginal systems and world-views.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to the following: John Ryan, Isabel McBryde, John Ferry, R. B. Walker, David Horton, Stephen Wild, Arnold Goode, Catherine Nano, Ray Cooper, Bruce Lockwood, Michael Kim, Steve Morelli, Emily Walker, Kenny Walker, Hazel Vale, Maisie Kelly, and the three anonymous referees who provided comments on an earlier version of this paper. Thanks also to the staffs of the following libraries: the Dixson Library at the University of New England, the Mitchell Library, the Australian National Library, the library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and the University of New England Archives. Research for part of this work was made possible by the provision of an Australian Postgraduate Award from the Commonwealth Government, administered by the University of New England, and limited project grants from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and the Oral History Section of the National Library of Australia. The map of New England pastoral stations included here was reproduced with permission from Walker, R.B. 1965, Old New England. A History of the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales 1818–1900, Sydney University Press. That of New England Aboriginal language boundaries was reproduced with permission from Crowley, Terry 1976, ‘Phonological change in New England’, in Dixon, R.M.W. (ed), Grammatical Categories in Australian Languages, A.I.A.S., Canberra.

This is a much-expanded version of an article first published in Australian Folklore, no. 11, 1996, and any common textual material is reproduced with permission. In that piece, I examined the first two songs I discuss here, without the historical contextualisation of early contact relations.

Barry McDonald is a musician with particular interest in recording folk traditions in music, song and oral history. He is currently completing doctoral research at the University of New England applying the perspective of these fields to regional history.

75 Walker 1962, p. 7.
76 Eldershaw 1854, pp. 76–107.
References


Everett Family Papers, 3052/5, University of New England Archives, Armidale.


Frankland, John 1845, Notes by Frankland of a Journey in the Bush From the Williams to the Clarence River, C441, Mitchell Library, Sydney.


Jamieson, Donald 1987, Tales At Old Inglebah, D.C. Jamieson, Tamworth.


Laves, Gerhardt 1929, unpublished field notebooks, MS 2189, A.I.A.T.S.I.S., Canberra.


McDonald, Barry 1996, 'New England corroboree songs as evidence of contact relations', Australian Folklore, no. 11.

Miller, James 1985, Koori: A Will To Win, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.


New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b, 'Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee on Police and Gaols', Votes and Proceedings, pp. 1-345.


Surveyor's Creek Station, 1839-1845, Overseer's journal. The person who gave myself and other researchers access to this privately held resource, has requested that its location and precise bibliographic identity remain unpublished.


A letter from Jack Horner

Some experiences and thoughts on continuity of cultural knowledge and language among Aboriginal people in Northern New South Wales (1930—1960s), related in a letter to Aboriginal History.

Jack Horner

It is conventional to say that the indigenous people in New South Wales bore the brunt of the British colonists' invasion in the nineteenth century. Yet, though the clans dispersed, and initiations withered and died, some of the 'classical' culture remained in rural pockets of the State. A strong reason why this was so, why conservative values continued a cultural knowledge despite the external pressure to move elsewhere, was the general communal need for security in land ownership. Throughout the years that I was Honorary Secretary of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship in Sydney (1958-1966), the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board kept up a constant insistence that boundaries of local reserves might change. Farmers nearby would be willing to buy, and the reserve residents could never be sure that some portion of their 'home' would remain as their land.

The arbitrary nature of these boundary shifts may be shown by one that produced unexpected allies for the Bundjalung people. In about 1954, an experienced primary school teacher named Rus McCrohon came to the AWB school at Cabbage Tree Island, Richmond River. He was determined to improve the children's morale and raise their interest in reading and writing. He was soon having heated rows with the conservative Manager. While searching one day among high grass for a 'lost' cricket pitch, Rus was interrupted by a jeering Manager, who said, 'Don't worry too much about the wicket. The Welfare Board will sell this half of the Island, in three months'. Enraged, McCrohon won the interest of Ballina business men to raise funds for a Society, to buy back the disputed land for people on Cabbage Tree Island. This story came to the Anglican Bishop of Grafton, K.J. Clements. He met McCrohon and then invited the founder of Tranby Aboriginal Co-operative College, socialist and priest Father Alf Clint, to discuss with McCrohon and Bob Bolt a possible way for cane cutting to finance a Co-Op. Store.

Some languages were alive in mid-nineteenth century New South Wales. I stayed at Dr Charles Duguid's home in Adelaide in 1962 for a FCAATSI conference (he was the President). He told me that in 1937 he had met in Oxford the famous Greek scholar Gilbert Murray, who related a story that in 1867 his father, the grazier-politician Sir Terence Murray, had taken with him to the Paris Exposition two Wiradjuri (or possibly Ngunnawal) station servants. Within a fortnight of their stay in Paris, the two Aborigines had picked up spoken French conversation. They had, of course,
encountered strange languages at home. As Gilbert Murray was born in Sydney in 1866, this account of vitality in local languages would have come from Sir Terence himself.

Another source for our awareness of spoken language comes from the feminist Jessie Street, who recalled that as a girl living with her Lillingston family at Yulgilbar cattle station on the Clarence in the late 1890s, she heard an Ogilvie aunt teaching English to a class of boys and girls from Baryulgil, Bundjalung people. This implies that the Bundjalung dialect was still spoken. Her grandfather Edward Ogilvie had learned their dialect and befriended them. The local people led the procession at his burial in 1896. In the early 1930s one of the Yeigir at Maclean, a woman known to whites as Rosie Combo, in old age was enlightening the social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown on the language of her people, among other things. Kinship was his special interest.

An instance of bush resourcefulness in Koori tradition appears in a book by Alex S. Gaddes, Red Cedars, Our Heritage. A 'clever man' named Dottai living with his clan at Bowraville in 1885 saved the leg of a horsebreaker (the author's father). The leg had been fractured twice when the horse crashed into a tree. This accident happened at Taylor's Arm, a branch of the Nambucca River. Dottai made a platform in a tree-fork. As a 'clever man' he would have had knowledge of painkilling herbal properties. After setting the leg in splints, he gently lifted the man onto the platform, and with rushes and grass-strings tied the limb to the angled tree branch, forming a traction. The patient was comfortable; Dottai visited him often; the Station family cared for his needs. Dottai's descendant, Tasman Dottai, in 1947 protested for civil rights with Bill Ferguson in Sydney.

In 1935 a Kamilaraay man Herbert Groves (handyman at his home reserve, Caroona near Quirindi) had joined the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board staff, at the suggestion of William Ferguson, to sample living conditions on segregated reserves. From August that year to May 1936, the APB sent Groves to Angledool to help staff tend the sick. He saw a genuine and violent stick fight between two men, each holding a shield. When describing this event for me in 1957, Groves was still shocked at the violence, though he added; 'Mrs Clarke, the Manager's wife, of Maori descent herself, quietly moved about, picking up the sticks.'

Baryulgil on the Clarence River was an isolated settlement in the 1930s. The U.A.M. missionaries based at Lismore, Mr and Mrs Tinsley, travelled by car, via Grafton, crossing the Richmond Range over dirt tracks. In April 1934, Tinsley reported to the United Aborigines Messenger that eleven huts housed 180 people, with another three houses (evidently owned by white people) beside the Clarence. 'The men who work are away most of the week'; 'they assemble at the camp Saturday and Sunday. Ration day comes once a fortnight', Tinsley wrote prior to the (1948) opening of the asbestos mine. The following year, his report (March 1, 1935) after moaning a lot about the resistance to his fundamentalist services, described his new experience of Aboriginal dance:

On the night of the 2nd instant (February 1935), I saw a corroboree for the first time.... The ones who were not taking part sat around and kept up a weird but fascinating chant in their own language. It was an impressive sight and a new experience... When the ration runs out, they can sometimes make a little by washing gold, or hunt the kangaroos upon the hills round about...
Edward Ogilvie of Yulgilbar station had bequeathed to the people some land on the property for their exclusive ownership and use; it was known as 'The Square' and as such was referred to me, after the Fellowship 1961 conference when Kooris became aware that I had some personal access to politicians in the State Parliament. I was asked to make a request of Jessie Street, whose mother had inherited Yulgilbar Station, if this land still belonged to the people at Baryulgil. In the end, I met Jessie's lawyer son, Sir Laurence Street, and we discussed 'The Square'. The whole property by then had been sold to another squatter company. While friendly in his manner, he held out little hope for taking back the land, which would have been where that 'corroboree' had been performed, on Saturday nights many times.

One reason for the conservation of knowledge and language among Bundjalung speakers was the slowness of change on the large Scots-run cattle-breeding stations, derived from the original Dyraaba Station (Cassino, Tabulam, Kyogle, Runnymede, Woorooloog) which all offered good training and constant work. James Morgan, who held the so-called 'full-blood' Aboriginal position on the Welfare Board from 1964 to 1968 came from this background. He was born in 1902, possibly grandson of 'King' Morgan. Trained as cattle-hand he told me he had 'never lost a day's work'. He and his older relative, Alex Vesper from Kyogle, during the 1920s travelled around seeking rural work when not in the cattle-yards. Fencing was a shilling a post; farmers knocked this down to a mere ninepence. 'We could not argue', said Morgan, 'for we had to have the money. No food at Stoney Gulley.' They kept up many traditional ways. They both knew all the names and legends and revered places of the area. Besides their fishing and hunting (by gun) for food, they built little gunyahs, and 'put a little fire in front of them, very cosy in winter.'

Clive Williams, son of a Casino tracker who was also from the Upper Richmond country, joined them a few years later, and found both men 'reading books from the light of the little camp fires'! In 1919, James Morgan had learnt about reading English language, by answering a Sydney newspaper advertisement for a correspondence course. Clive Williams, more than anyone else, explained vividly for me what it means when a Koori finds he or she is 'outside country'. 'You feel very much alone', he told me. 'The birds, bush, trees and rocks - they don't know you, don't recognise you.' It was evidently a bewildering experience, a sense of loss, rather like a loss of hearing. Kevin Gilbert tried to describe to me how a spirit of companionship and identity is felt 'within country', but I did not comprehend easily. A common knowledge among Kooris, even today, is the familiar 'bird who brings back bad family news.' A Tranby College student from Coffs Harbour in 1965 first revealed this traditional belief to me and it is confirmed for the far South Coast of the State by Eileen Morgan in *The Calling of the Spirits*.

The strong tradition for families to remain together, and to attend the family funerals was another accepted custom maintained from earlier times. When in August 1960, the Co-op. Store at Cabbage Tree Island officially opened, visitors came from far and wide along the North Coast to celebrate the occasion. Charles Leon (President of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, in Sydney) travelled with me on the Brisbane Express train. I awoke at two a.m. (it had stopped, to 'pick up'), to find Charles standing by the carriage door. 'It's Nambucca - my brother lives here; I thought he might be waiting for me', he explained. As for funerals, all relatives were expected; no excuses were possible. When a Leon family member died suddenly at Wollongong, the people came to the local
cem etery only to find that the funeral director at Wollongong had not sent the deceased by train; as usual, he wished to be paid fees before he acted. All the journeys were in vain. Naturally, people were very indignant!

Anthropologist, Malcolm Calley, in 1954-55 went to Bundjalung country to listen to the Pentecostal convention held that year at Muli Muli (Woodenbong) and Tabulam. This convention, operating as a baptism ceremony in defiance of authority, was run by Pastor Frank Roberts, senior. He was a fiery rebel who had pursued a long argument with the Lismore City Council over the principle that the people should own Cubawee Reserve in Lismore, or else own land for residence in the city itself. The religious convention drew people from afar, and Calley became aware, as he wrote later in his doctoral thesis (1959) that the church enabled the family groups to meet and create a powerful sign of their traditional family leadership structure as well as a mixed Pentecostal Christian hope and Gidabal expression. A cultural activity in ritual lent the pastor leadership, accepted in the wider white world.

It was recorded by Thomas Hall (Hall, 1987) that the last Bora ceremony held at Killarney (south-east of Warwick, within Gidabal land, but just over the Dividing Range in Queensland) was in 1858. James McGrath once told Roland Robinson that the 'last dance at Nambucca Heads was in 1924'; Clive Williams complained to me that when a young man, he had 'missed the last initiation ceremony by a few weeks'. These supposed events are now beyond recovery, since they were private. Could someone have misdirected Clive Williams? The dates appear quite late.

At Canberra in 1969 the FCAATSI Conference was to be opened by a Bundjalung Elder, Cecil Taylor, speaking the language. He and Dick Donnelly preserved the Gidabal culture. Prior to the Conference, I took Taylor to the old Institute of Anatomy (now the Film and Sound Archive), where a large display board could be observed through a window. It was Good Friday, and public buildings were closed. The display showed some photographs of Walbiri men dancing, very likely taken by Herbert Basedow, in the 1920s. Taylor took a long look, then suddenly dropped to sit on the verandah floor, crossed his legs, and loudly sang a song. I stood unmoving in tribute, but did not ask him what the song was, for its heartfelt passion was unmistakable, in Gidabal. Was this a lament that the dancing was over?

The Gidabal dialect was published (Geytenbeek, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1971) as a grammar, and has appeared since as a primer. Near the mouth of the Clarence river, on an island officially pronounced in error as Ulgandahi Island, the two sisters Joyce and Christine Mercy among other youngsters learnt the southern Bundjalung dialect from their older relations. Joyce Clague (born Mercy) has since told me that the island's name, spelled properly, is Ngullagandah, the nasal sound 'Ng' is pronounced, and the name means 'Shaped like an ear'. I would expect that many generations had known this dialect before that of Joyce Clague and her sister Christine Mumbler.

Alex Vesper was evidently regarded as a person holding important links with the past at Stoney Gulley in the 1930s. Stoney Gulley was located near the old Runnymede cattle station homestead, by then taken over by the NSW Aborigines Protection Board, and run as a APB Home. According to my interview in 1966 with James Morgan, Vesper had prevented the APB Inspector (Smithers) from taking away a young girl, Evelyn Webb. In the 1960s the Webb family were living in Redfern, where Evelyn attended
weekly dances run by the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship. Today, according to the newspaper *Koori Mail* (October 1996) she is an Elder in a community near Byron Bay, in Bundjalung country.

Vesper also had a responsibility at Stoney Gully for keeping the land. In 1960, during a break of the FCAATSI Conference held in January that year, at Newport, near Sydney, Vesper spoke to me. He was still angry at the way A.P. Elkin and other Welfare Board members had sent Stoney Gully people to Muli Muli, Woodenbong, and sold the land to local farmers. 'I should never have allowed them to do that', he said. 'I was responsible for that land'. The Welfare Board's arbitrary action had been taken in 1940, twenty years before.

Living at Woodenbong, Vesper evidently lost the high status that he had enjoyed at Stoney Gully. He did not belong to the original families of Muli Muli village, and was regarded there as an outsider, though he knew the myths and legends and could recite them to poet Roland Robinson.

Many of the incidents from these conversations may not be easy to present in full detail, let alone verify as truly historical. Far from being unimportant, however, I think that the oral nature of 'thrown-off' observations, though lacking the precise accuracy given by note-taking, may offer some fresh insights. For example, Clive Williams and I were discussing some recent stories of racial discrimination (this was at the entrance to the Cahill Expressway road tunnel in Sydney, near the main public gate to the Botanical Gardens, where he worked in the 1970s), when he ruefully admitted:

'O of course, I was brought up not to trust that Moree mob'.

'I was amazed by this remark. 'But Clive, ....!' I know, I know', he grinned. 'The town Moree is nowhere close to Casino. But that's the way people felt about it at the time.'

Were the 'Moree mob', as Williams described them, sufficiently far away, over the Richmond and New England Ranges, and speaking the strange Kamilaraay tongue, to be dismissed as foreigners, perhaps feared? I have no idea of the motivation for this evident tradition of distrust to understand.

For over thirty years Jack Horner has been active in organisations seeking justice for Aboriginal people, and more recently Reconciliation within Australian society. His contributions were honoured in 1997 by the Anglican Church through the Canberra-Goulburn Diocese. He is the author of the biography of William Ferguson - *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom*. For the Bicentennial volumes *Australians: A historical Library*, he co-authored the section in *Australians 1938* on 'The Day of Mourning' (26th January 1938). He is still actively researching and writing, especially on the 1967 Referendum. His involvement in this event was significant.

References
For the personalities, places and events discussed in this letter Jack Horner has drawn on his personal memories and notes of interviews with:

Herbert Groves (1958)

Charles Leon (1961)
James Morgan (1966, n-d)
Pastor Frank Roberts Snr (1960s)
Pastor Frank Roberts Jnr (1960s, 1972)
Clive Williams (Sydney 1965-71).

Further relevant material has been referred to from:
Sakuless, Peter. 1978, Jessie Street: A rewarding but unrewarded life, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia.
Ethnography—Who needs it?

Review article


I take my title to this article, which is a reconsideration of issues of interpretation theory in the form of a book review, from one of Eric Michaels' better-known titles. Speaking as someone professionally educated in literary theory and not anthropology, it nonetheless seems to me that the kind of radical shift signalled in Michaels' ideological stance announces the termination of ethnographic projects or at least their transformation into something so different as perhaps to require a new name. This is not such a large claim, given the death-notices which have been regularly issued over the past twenty five years in connection with history, teleology, authorship, origins and so on. At any rate I am encouraged to comment on developments in a discipline of which I have only amateur knowledge because of obvious parallels with my own discipline or more precisely because contemporary theory cuts across the disciplines, effacing or partly effacing old boundaries while delineating new ones, such that many of us, in supposedly diverse areas, currently find ourselves dealing with very similar questions.

What takes me to Little Eva at Moonlight Creek is an interest in both theory and Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal culture first. Little Eva is the second volume in the UQP series inaugurated by The Honey-ant Men's Love Song and Other Aboriginal Song Poems, edited by Martin Duwell and Bob Dixon. It is as powerful, diverse and beautiful a collection as the first. Most of the owners/performers of the songs are different, as are most of the recorders/translators: John Bradley, Luise Hercus, Ian Keen and the late Ray Keogh. The one Aboriginal name in the collection which will be familiar to the general reading public is that of Paddy Roe; others, including Jack Baju, Mick McLean, Peter Mondjingu and Runggurr deserve to be equally well known. Like its predecessor, this book has useful and readable introductions to the people and the material; followed by the Aboriginal-language text plus all-too-brief commentary (generally by Aborigines) plus translation. It's a compact item to be carried in your coat pocket and read in snatches when you feel like it.

Again, as with the first volume, there are four sections, this time one featuring songs from the Gulf country near Borroloola and one songs from the Kimberley, as well as two adding to the original material from the Simpson Desert and from Arnhem Land.
The Yanyuwa songs from the Gulf have something of the same liveliness, variety and immediate appeal as the Dyirbal ones which introduced the first volume. They range from cycles (eg. dealing with the 1942 crash of the American bomber *Little Eva*) to a host of occasional pieces. These last are really marvellous. They record or reenact everything from a woolly blanket catching fire overnight; to ‘Saltwater Katy’ standing in the fancy outfit given her by Europeans; to a pilot deftly manouvering a lugger onto a jetty; to harpoon ropes tangling; terns screeching when their eggs are stolen; pigeons calling ‘from island to island’; a grader levelling a road; women mooching over sexy guys. Then there’s the girl—no apologies to Freud—admiring her boyfriend’s new long harpoon ‘for the clear deep sea’ or the fellow scratching a louse—shades of John Donne’s ‘The Flea’—whose lovebite signifies the hungry affection of his absent girlfriend. Or somebody whose pants keep slipping down because he’s so skinny. Or, again and again, sensitively poetic references to animals, effects of weather, the sea—in a manner which might remind some readers of the sparest of *haiku*.

Similar local effects obtain in the cycles (a white cameraman flat on his arse; inland Aborigines in a funk over crossing saltwater crocodile waters), but there the impact is more sustained. The ‘Little Eva’ sequence, composed by Frank Karrijiji, tells the story (assuming its mode to be merely documentary, which it probably isn’t) of the air disaster, visualizing the bomber buffeted and brought down by winds, local people searching for the wreckage, wondering how pilots can bear to be all the way up there, noting that biplanes have armpits (why didn’t anybody think of that before?), exchanging signals with searching planes and so on. Even if ‘propeller’ manages consistently to be misspelt, it’s all immediately lively and—for non-Yanyuwa—a fascinating glimpse of wartime events through particular cultural eyes.

The *nurlu* songs from the Kimberley may remind people who saw the recent and quite startling Rover Thomas exhibition at the Australian National Gallery of the artist’s *krill krill* ceremony. I don’t know if this is or is not a legitimate comparison; at any rate we have in each case a song given to the singer by spirits (for example, of dead relatives), whose enactment involves the reliving of a spirit-journey. Thomas’ classificatory mother told of her journey east from Derby (where she died) to the vicinity of Turkey Creek (where she was involved in the car accident which led to her death), then north to Kununurra, from which she witnessed the destruction of Darwin by Cyclone Tracy—the same creature so overwhelmingly depicted as a monstrous, charcoal bulge in Thomas’ great 1991 canvas. In this case there were two spirit guides, each for a given phase of the journey. For this particular Italo-Australian the Dantian parallels are vivid: the traveller, successive guides (*c/f. Virgil, Beatrice*), the vast overview of topographies and of historical events—Tracy, observed from the grandstand of the Kimberley. I don’t dare even to begin speculation on the significance of Thomas’ juxtaposition of the mother’s death and Tracy. It may well be deeply unflattering to Darwin *balandas*. At any rate the *nurlu* of the Duwell/Dixon anthology seem to tackle comparable subject matter. Spirits appear, dancing, then dive under the ground to reappear on the other side; or they soar and veer like birds; or they dig open your sister’s grave, at which point she and other ghosts fly out; or they race, like athletes, towards paperbark country. Or there are comets and sickness-bearing clouds to be deflected from the community. All this usually in association with specific localities or underpinned by spirit-travels from landmark to landmark.
On a previous occasion I made some comment on the songs from south-central Australia presented by Luise Hercus in the original volume. The new ones included in this volume are remarkably good, just as striking as their predecessors. Again they range from what must be secular, 'rubbish' songs to material in an older mode: sections of a larger story dealing with Kinpili and his big penile club (something for the Lévi-Strauss databank, since everything here appears in twos: two trees, two men, two ants); and Fire History verses, narrating or acting out and recreating the transformation of Sandhill Lizard to Knob-Tailed Gecko. This last has intriguing Christian echoes of burial and resurrection, though in reverse order. The more occasional songs, if they are 'rubbish,' are very high-quality rubbish indeed. They include brilliant sketches—James Joyce would have said 'epiphanies'—capturing the soul of an event, such as the arrival of the first car in the district, the first sight of a train, the first encounter with a rabbit ('frightened of a rabbit!')—or a lullaby (grim, like most tales for children), or a spell against meat-ants.

If these, and the songs in preceding sections, are consistently tough and beautiful, Ian Keen's Yolngu selection is really ravishing, like all Arnhem Land material of this sort, from the Berndt translations onwards. One of the songs printed isn't the one mentioned in the introduction, but the reader can't complain, since it's excellent anyway. Five Yirritja and two Dhuwa pieces, the first lot funerary, the second apparently suitable for various occasions and embodying Djangawul mythology, all focus on birds: Sulphur-Crested and Red-Tailed Black cockatoos, Red-Winged Parrot, Crested Pigeon, emu, bustard. Keen's translation seems to aim most specifically at poetic pyrotechnics, and it comes off, conveying both lyrical immediacy and a sense of *illud tempus* eternity. Clearly the birds illustrate and generate parallel human activities, group-, place- and season-specific, relating to obsequies or other rites. But even without any knowledge of or capacity to guess at this level of significance, anyone can be enthralled by the natural description, particularly those all-important small touches: cockatoo crests ruffled by the breeze, 'tongue-chasing' parrot talk, long-leg emu running, halting and looking round as emus do.

To turn to matters of theory. The main difficulty—and attractive challenge—of a collection like *Little Eva at Moonlight Creek* is the mass of queries it generates and the hermeneutic implications of these. Attention here necessarily focusses as much on the explanatory notes provided as on the translated texts themselves. Indeed in this context it is probably fair to say that the distinction between 'primary' text—the song—and 'secondary' explanation tends to collapse during the reading process. At any rate I want to know why the Little Eva verses concentrate on the search and not on the discovery, making no mention of the one survivor and his ordeal—surely the dramatic climax for any European narrative of the event. Is it because other verses, not printed here, exist or have existed? Or because the Yanyuwa experienced the event in their own narratological way? Or had a particular reason for highlighting some events and not others? Am I to read significance in the fact that the narrative—or rather the ceremony of which the song is a part—hinges not on the Crusoe topos of the survivor but on the topos employed by Joyce in *Ulysses*, that of encounter, contact, exchange—in this case between Aboriginal searchers on the ground and white searchers in the air? Turning to other songs: what am I to read into that snapshot of Saltwater Katy? Admiration? Moral disapproval? Katy acted as interpreter for white skippers who repaid her with dresses. But is there a suggestion of something shameful, prompting complex feelings, perhaps negative ones?
These are simple examples. More involved ones could be elicited from the (to a far-removed, uninhibited reader) radical ambiguities in the text, or, using Iser’s terminology, the ‘gaps’ in the text, characteristic of the nurlu songs or the Two Trees sequence, all crammed with suggestiveness, but suggestive, in any given instance, of what in particular? I would prefer not to be accused of Faustian hubris, even if I am guilty of it, but it does seem to me that Little Eva would prompt as many if not more questions in other readers’ minds, and as keen a desire to know—at least some of the answers.

All the queries I have raised boil down to issues of contextualization. Or of authorial intention which is itself one way of viewing the context in which something is done, said, sung or written. What might be the singer’s attitude towards Saltwater Katy? Or the ceremonial whole of which a particular Yolngu song is a part? Of course the terminology, and the ideology, of parts and wholes, with its attendant problematic (the hermeneutic circle) can be traced back at least as far as the modern inventor of interpretation theory, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher, with authority from Augustine who in book XII of the Confessions had insisted that to know the meaning of Genesis one had to know what its author Moses had intended, formulated the hermeneutic project, one that could only be approximately realized, as: understanding the text as well as or better than its author. If in its early nineteenth-century form this formulation at least gives the impression that what is Other (the past, for example), may be recuperated with some objectivity, more recent hermeneutics such as Gadamer’s has problematized the epistemic relationship. Still, interpretation remains feasible, at least something of the truth of what is Other (and therefore requires interpretation) may be known. While this truth is mediated by the situation of the interpreter, Effective-History (Wirkungsgeschichte) ensures that the interpreter asks meaningful questions and so receives valid answers. I suppose the explanatory notes accompanying the Little Eva texts take the premises of classical hermeneutics for granted, since they function to aid understanding (Verstehen) through contextualization: ‘this is something of what x might have meant in the context in which s/he sang the song.’ Contextualizing hermeneutics is necessarily anti-formalist (it is philosophically opposed to, for example, structuralist principles), and Little Eva’s notes provide a fine example of this. ‘The Ant-Monster’ song on pp. 104–5 calls up the Dreaming event in which the ancestral meat-ant annihilated the goannas. At the same time the explanatory note points out that, according to reverse-magic logic, the verses are sung to remove ants, not goannas. Here, contextualization flatly contradicts textualization and points up the limits of any purely formal methodology.

Traditionally, hermeneutics worked to establish itself as a theorized alternative to positivist empirics. More recently it has had to position itself in relation to the radical philosophical scepticism of the post-structuralists. Radical scepticism rejects the contextualizing model, since it judges totalization, the notion of the ‘whole,’ to be inadmissible. Accordingly it insists on the heterogeneity of data, such that any ensemble, on scrutiny, immediately dissolves into further ensembles—strictly speaking, to the point of infinity. There are no texts, only intertexts, no ‘things,’ only differentials. To ‘textualize,’ i.e. to fix the heracleitian flux, something one has to do if one is to think or

---

1 Hermeneutics the Handwritten Manuscripts, H. Kimmerle ed., Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1986, p. 112.
talk about it, indicates a political move. 'Understanding' is never a neutral business. The dissolution of the 'whole' naturally implicates the idea of the 'part,' since after all 'parts' simply function as lesser totalizations. In Derrida's ontology they exist precariously as supplements, that philosophically problematical vitamin shot which adds without adding, since it adds to a deficiency. But it is all too easy to overestimate the difference between this conceptual strategy and the hermeneutic paradigm, even in its early nineteenth-century form. Schleiermacher was perfectly aware of the provisionality of interpretation, even in his more euphoric pronouncements. Who isn't? He saw the deconstructive dynamics of the hermeneutic circle, the mutual propping up of part/whole binaries. Understanding, after all, always presupposes that one has already understood. Still, epistemological euphoria sought to define the role of interpretation as one of regaining an original contextual meaning—something of this being preserved in E.D. Hirsch's argument in Validity in Interpretation. But, in general, twentieth-century hermeneutics has tended substantially to modify the Schleiermacher model, either by subjecting it to critique, as in Gadamer's work, or by reinventing itself as Reception Theory and so focussing on the response rather than production end of textualization, i.e. stressing the productive process of interpretation itself. My own feeling is that Schleiermacher anticipated this with his insistence on hermeneutics as an 'art.' But this is not the assessment of, for example, Gadamer, whose model of interpretation incorporates reader-response, though not in such a way as to 'subjectivize' the operation after, say, the manner of Derrida.

It is not difficult to apply all of the above polemics to the situation of the ethnographer, who necessarily operates not merely as passive, as it were transparent, recorder of data but as interpreter. Transposing somewhat from my discipline, I assume that, somewhere along the line of the 'as-empirical-as-possible' process of data-gathering, the traditional ethnographer (and I include practitioners of structuralism in this) asked of the text in question, whether this text happened to be a story or a song or a kinship system: what does it mean? Or at any rate: how am I to understand it? It is probably not too unfair to say that this went hand in hand with more or less total scepticism of the truth of the text in its own terms. The 'real' truth of the text had to be, say, sociological or psychological or something of the sort. At the same time the European passion for anthropology since the days of the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme implied a contradiction, a sub-text which inscribed that obscure nostalgia, the Rousseauist dream in which lost Europe finds itself once more, returns to its own source even as it enters the Heart of Darkness, the cultural Other. At the level of politics this contradiction takes the form of simultaneously undermining and seeking to protect the ethnographic object.

In contrast to all this, an ethnography informed by contemporary theory might well begin with the death-of-meaning premise, or perhaps with a less philosophically radical version of it, say the assumption that anthropology has little or no access to the empirical truth of the phenomenon, whether it be Saltwater Katy or Yolngu spirituality. Once meaning is bracketed in this way, the ethnographer is encouraged to ask: whose meaning and for what purpose? You no longer ask 'what is an Australian identity?' but, as Richard White did, 'who invented Australian identity and why?' I take it that at this point the ethnographer, instead of dismissing the truth of the textual Other, takes it seriously, not by actually believing it, but as a political act, an intervention. You relativize your own conceptual framework to the extent of allowing another framework to exist for
someone else. While you can't accept the truth of this other framework, you respect its integrity for essentially political reasons. Concomitantly you place that once disguised, displaced Rousseauist dream at centre stage. Instead of observing Otherness you shift the spotlight on yourself as object of anthropology, either by locating anthropology in Brooklyn instead of or as well as the Amazon, or by checking out the politics of ethnography itself.

I am not so sure that the new strategies are so very different from the old ones; one might unkindly suggest that they represent de-essentialized versions of these. After all, that wretched ethnographer is still too superior actually to accept Otherness in its own conceptual terms. Instead of interpreting along positivist lines s/he now interprets in terms of political strategies. And by acknowledging the originally-disguised reflexivity of the project, what is s/he doing other than practising overtly rather than covertly that original European self-centredness which characterised the supposed study of Otherness?

All of these issues are raised in the reading of Eric Michaels' Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons. The book, which makes stimulating reading for anyone interested either in Aboriginal matters or in contemporary theory, media and cultural studies, consists of ten (previously published but uncollected) essays. These deal with the—as Michaels nicely has it—Aboriginal invention of electronic mass communication, questions of ethnographic practice and ethics, Aboriginal acrylic art and, at every point, the current state of anthropology. All this drawing on Michaels' work at Yuendumu between 1982 and 1986 and elsewhere in Australia up to his AIDS-related death in 1988. Bad Aboriginal Art (mischievously ironic, like other Michaels titles, and guaranteed to catch attention) is edited, minimally it appears, by Paul Foss, who is never actually named as editor. There are four introductions, all of which are excellent, only one of which is called an introduction. While Michael Leigh and Paul Foss speak of Michaels as a friend, introducing his work in more personal terms, Marcia Langton puts it all in the perspective of Aboriginal media and media politics—and Dick Hebdige explains where, conceptually, Michaels is coming from. Langton's piece gives much information; Hebdige's serves the purpose of mediating between the local and the overseas reader. Though I have a deal of enthusiasm for the contents of this book, I nonetheless felt that Hebdige's comments—knowledgeable, sympathetically partisan, articulate, as you'd expect—are, in the end, a little too partisan. Clearly Michaels, when he did not arouse opposition, aroused immense affection and admiration. His essays are remarkably lively, witty, bitingly intelligent. But I am inclined to resist that—as always, overstated—melioristic faith in generational superiority, the sense, both in Hebdige's comments and Michaels' essays, that we are somehow, at last, conceptually 'on the right track.' I've never met an academic on the right track, myself included. And what of the Walpiri view of the subject? The other temptation worth resisting in the reading of this book is the one which might prompt one to canonize Michaels because he has died—and of AIDS (one thinks of the haloed ikon in the recent Art in the Age of AIDS exhibition). Not that the commentators succumb to this exactly: it's just that the option looms on the textual horizon.

Michaels' 'Aboriginal Content: Who's Got It? Who Needs It?' takes up the major threads of the theoretical polemic alluded to above. It does so in a refreshing and disarming, indeed compelling way. Rather than engaging in the potentially essentialist
complexities of 'what constitutes Aboriginal content on TV?' ie. 'what is "Aboriginal"?' Michaels sidesteps and counters with 'who decides on definitions of this sort?' It's a question of power: who's got it. Once we abandon the hunt for that elusive meaning of Aboriginality we are freed to analyse constructs of Aboriginality. The conclusion is that the 'professional' Aborigine, the one required by bureaucracy and mass media, is not only phony but destructive (who needs it?). But destructive of what? Here Michaels is hard put not to reintroduce his own brand of essentialism, the 'real' Aborigine obscured by the political construct. His Aboriginal identity is local, not pan-Aboriginal, in line with post-1968 ideologies of regionalism and pluralpolitics. I expect that Michaels is right in stressing that Aboriginal identities were bound to locality and therefore heterogeneous. I'm not so sure he can maintain this is still so or will continue to be so. Certainly Aboriginal people themselves argue the point. Eleanor Bourke accepts the idea of 'Aboriginality' preceding contact with Europeans; Kevin Gilbert fought for pan-Aboriginality, an identity postdating contact; Gordon Briscoe thinks there never was and never will be any common identity.

At any rate Michaels puts the case attractively as a defence of local (eg. Yuendumu) TV, the liveliest, most community-oriented, most empowering. In so doing he raises the spectre of anthropological protectionism, since he aims to preserve the Walpiri from bureaucracies and business and—worse—from themselves. After all (and at points like this the author is amusingly honest) the Walpiri embarrassingly prefer Bruce Lee to their own product. They would just love to make Kung Fu movies rather than local documentaries. Very much to his credit Michaels understands that any ideology, any methodology, generates its peculiar contradictions. In the end, he admits, the temptation to interpret Jupurrurla's TV as Brechtian represents the ethnographer's own 'quirky aesthetics' (p. 38). We are a long way from reader construction of the text here, much closer to an old-fashioned, unavoidable hermeneutic respect for the original. I must say, though, that I thought the Appendix to the article deconstructs the rest in a less than attractive way. Michaels hears that some Aborigines don't approve of his comments. His response, alas, is to lecture them in no uncertain manner, claiming all those liberal bourgeois rights to free speech and his own opinions he gladly trashes elsewhere.

The same problem crops up in 'Para-Ethnography,' a highly-critical review of Chatwin's *The Songlines* and Morgan's *My Place*. What is there to say on the subject of Chatwin's book except that it deserves all of Michaels' criticism and more? We are here in the true, original home of nauseous ethnographic mystique. As regards Sally Morgan, my reaction is much more ambivalent. Michaels attacks Morgan, not to mince words, as racist—because he thinks (and it is consistent with his anti-essentialist nominalism) that the construct 'Aboriginality' is racist. I find this doctrinaire and beside the point. Morgan's sin is that, instead of inventing her identity, she discovers it: always was, always will be—Aboriginal. Michaels', for once tired, suggestion is, amazingly, that *My Place* should have de-privileged the Aboriginal by putting it on a par with Morgan's non-Aboriginal ancestry. This so patently misses the point that it seems scarcely necessary to say so. It doesn't mean that there may not be a touch of sentimental smugness in Morgan's all-too-pat position. But there are insights which validate themselves: you just can't argue with them, except at the risk of appearing obtuse. Perhaps Morgan will find the need to problematize 'her place' at some stage. Even so, you can't problematize every
act of understanding; to do so would be to negate understanding itself, to remain precisely obtuse. Moreover the attack on Aboriginality as a racist construct has its own tendentiousness. Ultimately it allies itself with the dismissal of nationalism characteristic of contemporary theory, particularly that emanating from France. Of course anyone can point to the Nazi experiment or to ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. But nationalism has its uses in a world of dominant multinational corporations. Aboriginal people may judge that it will serve them well, even at the cost of subverting local identities. Certainly it served the Algerians against the French and the Vietnamese against the French and the Americans. Perhaps that is why contemporary French intellectuals have little time for nationalism: in its Third World form it has tended to bite the revolutionary hand that fed it—given that modern nationalism may be said to date back to 1789. So it's a noble sentiment when you have it, less noble when others use it against you. White Americans and Australians subdued indigenous peoples in the cause of nation-building. What is the morality of white academics lecturing these same peoples on the (potential? actual?) racism of their growing national consciousness?

The best side of Michaels' politicization of hermeneutics, the shift from 'what does it mean?' to a Beckettian 'who is asking this question and why?' is probably evident in those witty, incisive and enthusiastic accounts of Walpiri video and TV. Michaels draws up preliminary guidelines for ethnographic collaboration, the sine qua non ethics of photography in remote communities ('A Primer of Restrictions on Picture-Taking in Traditional Areas of Aboriginal Australia'), as well as giving an account of what actually happens: media-murder ('Hundreds Shot at Aboriginal Community: ABC Makes TV Documentary at Yuendumu'). He lovingly recreates the real thing, Jupurrurla making TV at Yuendumu, playing his reggae to the community to signal his intention to broadcast, shooting his own Bob Marley T-shirt, ducking in and out of the picture and so on. This is his idea—and who, in this context, would disagree?—of a 'cultural future' as distinct from a postmodern, Baudrillardian simulacrum. In 'Hollywood Iconography: A Walpiri Reading,' one of the best essays in the collection, he pursues the cultural politics of TV in an imperfectly literate community. Picking up the idea of parallels between oral and electronic societies, he convincingly urges the case that Aborigines had good reason to resist the imposition of literacy and that they have equally good reason to embrace the electronic media. All this with illuminating comments on the nature of writing and of Walpiri iconography as a form of writing characterized by alliance with, rather than subversion of, orality.

Michaels' essays on the emergence of acrylic art again return to the political question of production and to the Aboriginal communication systems underpinning it, rather than to questions of meaning. Interpretation is, first and foremost, a matter of who interprets. Michaels writes with immense verve and a lot of sensitivity on the role of authority in 'traditional' society. His sensible view, that script, and print in particular, removes itself from the authority of its origin and so necessitates what Foucault termed the author-function, contrasts with Foucault's own dark (and fuzzy) hints of a bourgeois conspiracy in 'What is an Author?' In 'Bad Aboriginal Art' he elaborates, again very convincingly, on the relation of 'authority' and 'authenticity.' Western Desert acrylics can't be judged on art-market criteria of authenticity, which have everything to do with authorship and nothing to do with socio-religious authority. In that sense, there are no good or bad acrylics, only good or bad, ie. authorised or unauthorised, productions. It
seems fair, though one should probably add the caveat that, according to the evidence, 'traditional' artists do admit the category of the aesthetic, even if they do not rate it as highly as does the aestheticizing bourgeois culture of modern Europeans. The irony in all of these articles, however, is Michaels' perfectly understandable enthusiasm—even as he dismisses Western notions of authenticity—for the authenticity conferred on the product by an authorised process of production, in turn linked to an authorised and authoritative interpretation. He won't interpret the text because others are better qualified to do so. But why privilege their terms of reference, rather than his, if not to accept Schleiermacher's assumption of the priority of origins? At times, talking about 'alien readings of the text,' for example (p. 116), he sounds much more like Schleiermacher than Gadamer, let alone Derrida.

Indeed the contradiction emerges in its baldest form in the essay originally included in that splendid volume, Yuendumu Doors. Quite simply, Michaels here puts his nominalist principles in abeyance, raising all over again those questions supposedly laid to rest by contemporary theory: what if 'authenticity' were a fact, if the 'truth' of the Walpiri could be communicated not via discourse but somehow directly, in a way 'less mediated than the linguistic' (p. 59)? Goodbye to all that post-Saussurean theorising, from Lévi-Strauss onwards. Hebdige draws back from it in amused alarm: it's 'Eric Michaels, closet existentialist' (xxiii). But on this issue I think heresy-spotting, however sympathetic, doesn't help much. I'm impressed rather than concerned by the fact of an apparent startling contradiction. For a start, it puts theory (which I for one find seductive) where it finally must belong, on the bookshelf. More important, it shows the ethnographer, whether positivist or postpositivist, at long last considering the possibility that Western systems of knowledge may be wrong and the Walpiri right. What's the use of anthropology if it can't at least place one in the position of being tempted on this score?

Which brings me back to the discussion of ethnography. Michaels' writing focusses his constant discourse with himself and with others on the role of anthropology. It may well be said that anthropology proper is so tied up with the imperial project that it cannot survive its demise. Still, people continue to 'do' ethnography, and in an age of (Western) doubt, when the earnest, patient dedication, and the arrogance, of the empirical researcher give way to a mannered, fidgety self-consciousness, and to a little humility, what principle can one cling to if not reflexivity? Michaels outlines his methodological assumptions in the essay 'Aboriginal Content,' where he insists he wants to understand 'our' not 'their' media revolution (p. 22). It's not a matter of what the West can tell the Walpiri about TV; it's the Walpiri who teach the West about the possibilities of the medium. The entire ethnographic enterprise turns on reader response to the text, that is, on interpretation as textual construction—with political implications.

That means that totalising perspectives which place the ethnographer in the position of privileged observer are no longer feasible. The point is underlined in Michaels' not overgenerous review of Myers' Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self. In 1995 it may well be so. If that is the case, however, it does not let Michaels off the hook. Instead of providing answers, he argues, examine the questions. I like his examination of the questions, but can't help thinking his version of the 'all Cretans are liars . . . ' teaser—all anthropologists are liars'—leaves him without a theoretical prop. If Michaels as ethnographer tells me that all ethnographers are liars, am I to believe him or not? Do the acknowledged fictions of a reflexive methodology, because they are acknowledged, have
the power to effect an impossible Aufhebung, somehow (how?) lifting the postmodern ethnographer above that sordid sphere of self-interest which s/he insists cannot be superseded?

These are the philosophical dilemmas of consistent radical scepticism. And yet, in the midst of political imbrication, understanding, that hermeneutic always-already-there, does happen. Michaels' essays themselves constantly testify to this. They are full of answers, as well as questions. The Walpiri may or may not be impressed, but Michaels' excitement bubbles over with—'that's the way it is; yes, I understand.' In Geertz's words (never mind that he is referring to informants, not anthropologists; it comes to the same thing): 'in fact, not all Cretans are liars, and it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something.' I am taking Geertz somewhat out of context, but it makes the point that even in times suspicious of totalization, when the part receives precedence over the whole without which it would be inconceivable, some act of synthesis remains necessary, indeed takes place, for example in the act of understanding something. Of course understanding is an interpretative act. But anyone who sees it simply as interpretation, ie. as a construct without real correspondence to the original, has simply failed to grasp the phenomenology of understanding, which requires just that element of the non-subjective. At this point, both in connection with Michaels and contemporary theory, I wear my heart on a Gadamerian hermeneutic sleeve.

Livio Dobrez
Australian National University

1 The Interpretation of Cultures, London, 1975, p. 20.
Australia's annexation by the British crown is generally believed to have led to no treaties between the crown and the indigenous peoples. This has made it unusual in the history of the acquisitions of colonial territory by European powers. Apart from South America, which was conquered by conquistadors, these acquisitions were legitimised as a *de jure* - lawful - cession of territory to a European state by treaty. This was the model followed in North America, Africa, Asia and New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi has sometimes been counted as the first Australian treaty. It has mainly been New Zealanders who have not been able to forget that the effect of that treaty was to make New Zealand a dependency of New South Wales. Now it appears that Waitangi was the second Australian treaty.

The focus of Reynolds' re-examination of the Tasmanian wars is the agreement made between the Aborigines and the British which brought the wars to an end. It was the central reference point of the petition to queen Victoria in 1846 by the exiled Aborigines at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. They described themselves as 'the free Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land now living upon Flinders Island' and asserted 'that we were not taken prisoners but freely gave up our country to Colonel Arthur then the Governor after defending ourselves.' They reminded the queen that they moved to Wybalenna as 'Mr Robinson made for us and with Colonel Arthur an agreement which we have not lost from our minds and we have made our part of it good.' Reynolds argues that this reference to an agreement is not an antiquarian curiosity but a justified view of the petitioners' position. He suggests that the crown, as a result of the agreement, owes a fiduciary duty to the Tasmanian people and that the Australian War Memorial, under its legislation, is required to commemorate the Tasmanian wars and the Aborigines who fought in them.

Reynolds' account challenges a number of accepted views. When the Aborigines finally went to war they waged a guerilla campaign which the British army found difficult to effectively resist. Their surrender was not a result of the hypnotic influences of George Augustus Robinson but a political decision that they could not win the war. Truggernana and other women were not 'bimbos'. They were instrumental in reaching that decision and implementing it. Under the appalling conditions of their exile on Flinders Island the Aborigines were not the passive victims of genocide but developed a number of responses which transmitted their institutions and their claims to the colony to the present generation.

---

1 See Williams 1985.
In succeeding chapters Reynolds shows how the Aborigines fought in self defence in the wars from 1824 to 1831. The lateness of the wars was produced by the small numbers of European settlers before the 1820s and the development of Aboriginal strategies to counter guns. The tactics used by the Aborigines were familiar to the British veterans of Spain who described it as ‘guerilla’ warfare. The military campaign unleashed by the Aborigines produced at least two reactions amongst the settlers, to denigrate them as savages and to respect them as tacticians who outmatched them. Reynolds demonstrates that a number of government officers and settlers came to appreciate the political aims which underlay the campaign. The Aborigines finally capitulated as result of continuing migration and ignorance that the British resources were stretched to the limit in the Black Line in 1830.

Reynolds traces the contradictory British policy on indigenous peoples in Australia and the difficulties of enforcing policy made in London on the Australian frontiers. The policy, rarely enforced, that Aborigines were the king’s subjects and within his peace came to a temporary end in the mid-1820s with instructions from London and Sydney that ‘hostile incursions for the purpose of plunder’ by indigenous peoples were to be opposed by force ‘as if they proceeded from subjects of an accredited State’. In Van Diemen’s Land the policy was followed and Aborigines engaged in attacks on the British were treated as enemies and prisoners of war and not subject to criminal prosecution. They were excluded by force from the areas settled by the British. Finally, where they remained in those areas they were subject to the proclamation of martial law which made them ‘open enemies of the King, in a state of actual warfare against him.’ The consequences of this policy in Van Diemen’s Land and growing pressure about indigenous peoples on the British government within Britain itself led to the government reinstating its former practice in the Australian colonies.

The failed Black Line cost half the colony’s annual budget. It coincided with increasing positive responses by Aboriginal groups to George Augustus Robinson’s Friendly Mission. Reynolds discusses whether Robinson’s hypnotic and persuasive charm was responsible for his success. This is the usual explanation. Reynolds argues that it ignores the political abilities of the Aborigines. Women from the Mission, including Truggernana, and from the groups contacted were instrumental in obtaining agreement to the terms offered by Robinson for the British. Reynolds explains Truggernana’s role as political rather than sexual and defends her also from accusations of treachery to her people. The Aborigines had come to accept that they could not win the war. Treaties or agreements were known to them from their own practices between peoples in conflict. The unwritten terms appear to have included that, after a temporary period away from the mainland, the Aborigines would return to their territories under the protection of the British crown. It was this which gave Robinson his influence. The Aborigines who treated with him cannot be blamed for the failure of the crown to honour its part of the agreement. That rests with Robinson and the crown. This has parallels in other jurisdictions to which Reynolds does not refer. The cardinal rule was, and is, in international law that states must keep their word. Treaties must be complied with. If the crown acted deceptively, or its agent, Robinson, exceeded his authority in

---

2 The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties codifies the customary law in Article 26: ‘Every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it and must be performed by them in good
the promises he made this has parallels in treaty making in the United States after the War of 1812 when the United States had no further need of allies against Britain. Treaties were then procured by 'threats, coercion, bribery, and outright fraud by the negotiators for the United States.'

The Aborigines' belief that the government had agreed to provide for them made them reluctant to work, at Wybalenna, as part of a program to develop 'habits of industry and moral feelings.' In breach of the agreement the cultural life of the Aborigines was also interfered with. Reynolds argues that, while the Aborigines were oppressed and the death rate appalling, they were sufficiently self-reliant to exercise some choice in their religious beliefs and practices. Christianity made little impact at first and, when it did with the young people, it also appears to have generated a strong belief in their rights as the original owners of the territory occupied by the colony. They were not compliant victims but a dynamic and resourceful people who developed and transmitted to the present what may be Australia's oldest existing political tradition.

Reynolds claims that governor Arthur's support for treaties when he returned to Britain may have influenced the Colonial Office to require a treaty for cession of sovereignty over New Zealand. It seems more likely that the British felt obliged to follow their general practice. An added reason to treat in respect of New Zealand was a result of the British government procuring a Declaration of Independence of the United Maori Tribes of New Zealand. Having recognised Maori sovereignty the British were then required to procure a cession of it in accordance with international law to more effectively justify the exclusion of other colonial powers. The consistent practice of the British crown overseas supports Reynolds' claims that what was negotiated in Van Diemen's Land was a treaty. It was a practice which clerks in the Colonial Office at neighbouring desks would have been familiar.

Reynolds refers briefly to the fiduciary relationship between the crown, or its successor as sovereign, and indigenous people in the law of the United States, Canada and New Zealand. This duty is imposed by the common law in specified situations where there is an unequal relationship between parties. Generally a fiduciary must use a position to benefit the person to whom the duty is owed and avoid any possible conflict of interest. This duty in respect of indigenous peoples is regarded as arising from the 'power' of the crown and the 'vulnerability' of the indigenous peoples' title to land. Justice Toohey, the only judge in the majority in Mabo v Queensland (No 2) to give the issue significant attention wrote:

faith.' UN Doc A/CONF. 39/27, at 289 (May 22, 1969). It is repeated in the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Operative Paragraph 34 'Indigenous peoples have the right to the observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements concluded with States or their successors, according to their original intent. Upon the request of the indigenous peoples concerned, States shall provide for the submission of disputes which cannot otherwise be settled to competent international bodies.' UN Doc E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/26 (June 8, 1993).

Wilkenson & Volkman 1975, p. 610.
Orange 1987, pp. 21-22.
The power to destroy or impair a people’s interests in this way is extraordinary and is sufficient to attract regulation by Equity to ensure that the position is not abused. The fiduciary relationship arises, therefore, out of the power of the Crown to extinguish traditional title by alienating the land or otherwise; it does not depend on the exercise of that power.

Justice Toohey also thought that the duty could also arise from crown’s subsequent creation of reserves and the appointment of trustees. The possibility of the existence of a fiduciary duty was admitted by High Court in *Northern Land Council v The Commonwealth*. It is arguable, but not generally accepted, that all seven judges supported it in *Mabo v Queensland (No 2).* Whether or not Toohey J was correct in the latter case is known only to the judges of the High Court who must inevitably decide it. The duty is particularly associated with relationships created by a treaty with indigenous peoples. In a number of New Zealand decisions the partnership between the crown and Maori created by the Treaty of Waitangi has been referred to with each partner ‘accepting a positive duty to act in good faith, fairly reasonably and honourably towards the other.’

If the fiduciary duty does exist much of its content is uncertain. In the United States, where the duty first emerged in the common law as a concept of trusteeship, the courts have rendered it, in the opinion of some, devoid of any positive or legally cognisable meaning. However considerable discretion is a feature of fiduciary law.

If the matter is ever considered by the crown as a matter of its honour or the courts deign to hear Aborigines asserting the existence, and breach of an agreement, they may seek to invoke the rule of construction applied to the terms of such agreements in the United States. They are given the meaning most sympathetic to the Indian parties which would naturally have been understood by them. The reasons for such a rule, the superior power of the crown, existed as much in Van Diemen’s Land as in North America.

**References**


---

* (1992) 175 CLR 1, Toohey J at 203.
7 (1987) 61 ALJR 616.


Neil Andrews
University of Canberra


While the name Mabo is familiar to Australians as short hand for indigenous land rights, its bearer and his role in the High Court decision are virtually a cipher. Its frequent mispronunciation ('Maybo' instead of 'Maabo') is indicative of the speed with which Edward Koiki Mabo's claim for his ancestral land on a remote Torres Strait island was obscured by the more momentous claim for Aboriginal land rights on the mainland. His death, a few months before the High Court handed down its historic decision, prevented him from enjoying whatever celebrity might have been due to him at that time, but even the official unveiling and subsequent desecration of his tombstone in a Townsville cemetery in 1995, has not left us with much idea of the man.

I think this is partly because he does not fit neatly into the indigenist stereotypes. Australians seem to have trouble imagining two indigenous groups, and Aborigines far outnumber Islanders. It is the Central Desert which has become the prototypic Aboriginal location, rather than the coral reefs and lush vegetation of Mabo's island, Mer.

But even for those who know something about the Torres Strait Islanders, there are difficulties. The man claiming customary ownership of the places where his ancestors built their grass huts and planted their gardens lived in a mainland city, spoke excellent English, and numbered academics, trade unionists and civic leaders among his friends. Such complex figures are not unusual in the history of decolonisation, but it takes time
before they can be fitted neatly into the kind of straightforward narrative from which heroes are made.

The book under review goes some way towards documenting these complexities, and is at the same time an outcome of them, arising out of a collaboration and friendship between Mabo and Noel Loos, a historian and educationist at the James Cook University of North Queensland. Loos recalls how they first met at an Inter Racial Seminar in 1967, and then on the university campus where Mabo worked as a groundsman, spending his lunchbreaks in the library reading what anthropologists had written about his people. The last time they met was just a few days before Mabo died. In 1984, when they were sitting together on the educational committee of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, in Canberra, Loos took advantage of a free evening to propose that Mabo should record an account of his life. The project remained unfinished when they went home, and other commitments prevented them from resuming. I remember Noel Loos lamenting this at Mabo’s funeral, but this book shows there was enough for someone who knew and liked the man as well as he did, and who could talk with his wife, Bonetta, and his friends, to tell his story.

In its essentials, Mabo’s career was like that of hundreds of Torres Strait Islanders of his generation. He was born in 1936, in a remote island community that, after some seventy years of colonial rule, retained a robust sense of tradition while hungering for social and material advancement. He grew up speaking Meriam and Torres Strait pidgin, but acquired a better control of standard English than most of his peers, thanks to a friendship with a white school teacher, who had a strong commitment to the Islanders and, unusually had learned both Torres Strait languages.

As often happened with teenage boys, he incurred the displeasure of the island council for ‘girl trouble’ and drinking alcohol, and was sent away to work on a pearl lugger for the year. He never really returned. Work on various boats took him to the ports of North Queensland, and in due course he absconded in search of ‘proper wages’ and the urban life, from which the government had until recently ‘protected’ its Islander wards.

Wages in the Strait were a fraction of what could be earned cane cutting or railway fettling, and many at that time regarded the mainland as place of freedom. And when the market for pearl shell collapsed in 1960, hundreds of young men followed Mabo South, where they quickly acquired a reputation as ‘good tropical workers.’ In due course they brought down wives, children, and even parents, until the majority of Torres Strait Islanders resided on the mainland. Today, Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane each have Islander communities numbering several thousand.

These mainland communities tend to be inward looking. Mabo, having had to make his way at a time when Islanders on the mainland were still few, and being more at home speaking English, did not allow his horizons to be bounded in this way. He sought out the kind of people—mostly white—who could tell him about politics, education, anthropology and indigenous rights. Through his years on the mainland, he built up an extraordinary network of activists, academics and civic leaders, among whom he moved with ease despite his lack of formal education. It was my impression that he was less at ease with the Islander community; certainly he had acquired a reputation in the islands as a trouble maker who associated with Communists and Trade Unionists, and who
questioned mission Christianity. As he says himself, and as Loos confirms, he was neither communist nor godless, but rather selected what he wanted from whoever had something to teach him.

These subversive connections seem nevertheless to have been the ground on which the Mer Council repeatedly refused him permission to visit the island, where his parents still lived. The exclusion, which he suspected emanated from the Queensland government, rankled. However, it was the discovery over lunch with Noel Loos and Henry Reynolds that the land (being a reserve) belonged not to the Meriam but to the Crown that seems to have set him on the course of a legal challenge. Discussions at a Land Rights conference in 1981 set the process in train. One presumes that those who advised Mabo in this course of action perceived the Australia-wide implications of the Meriam case, and no doubt he soon became aware of it if he had not been from the beginning; what is less clear is how far this was part of his project, rather than incidental to it. This ambiguity is not peculiar to the Meriam case, or Mabo’s role in it; it is built into the notion of indigenous rights, according to which indigenous people claim national recognition of entitlements, on grounds which are intrinsically local and particular.

In an organisation like FCAATSI, where Mabo like many others gained his political education during the 1960s, it was possible for Aborigines, Islanders and even the descendants of Pacific islanders to work together around the struggle for civil rights. The Black Community school, of which Mabo was the main mover, began with a similar agenda. But with the shift to indigenous rights, the various groups became preoccupied with their own versions of indigeneity. In particular, the issue of land not only divided Islanders from Aborigines, but set Islanders against one another.

The other island communities in the Strait held back from the Mer case, settling for a form of title that left *terra nullius* intact. The Meriam, consistent with their turbulent history, refused this option, but were divided over the case, and in particular Mabo’s own claims.

Although the High Court ended up finding in favour of ‘the Meriam people,’ the Meriam held their land as families or even as individuals. Moreover, disputes over boundaries and the rights of particular claimants to inherit were endemic, as the Murray Island court books attest. Mabo’s claims were not immune, and there were some who saw them as an act of self aggrandisement rather than as a bid for native title. Nor could they be altogether blamed for this perception, since Mabo accompanied his land claim with a bid for election to the island council and a for recognition as hereditary chief. (This is the import of the genealogy reproduced in the appendix which by implication demotes another leading family, also among the plaintiffs.)

The council had finally let Mabo return in the mid-1970s, but his attempt to live on Mer was a disappointing and distressing experience. The island had changed over the twenty years since he left, but perhaps it had never quite lived up to the picture that he had carried away with him as a youth, and embellished over the years of exile. His knowledge of the island and its culture was encyclopedic, but his rigid notion of custom left no room for process, particularly political process. The distance from the negotiations

---

1 I refer to the Deed of Grant in Trust which provided indefinite tenure, which could, however, be overturned by an order of the Governor-in-Council.
of everyday life that enabled him to communicate to non-Meriam a coherent sense of Meriam culture put him at a disadvantage when it came to local politics. The same weakness led to his 'creditability' being questioned by the Queensland judge who determined questions of fact for the High Court, and his being dropped from the list of plaintiffs during the final stages of the High Court hearings. The irony is that, without him, there would probably not have been a case at all. In the words of one of his cousins, 'He was the only bridge from our side to the wider community.' (p.185)

Noel Loos is a professional historian, and as one would expect, the book is built on a foundation of documentary research including The Papers of Edward Koiki Mabo, now held in the National Library of Australia. It is also informed by more than twenty years close acquaintance with his subject and other Islanders on the mainland, if not with conditions in the Strait. It is, in this sense, a memoir, which does not attempt to conceal affection as well as admiration for Mabo and his family, but which does not shy away from the difficult issues either.

I wish Loos had told us more about his editing of the taped interviews which form the core of this book, but, he does not seem to have been unduly directive. Mabo was an articulate man, who had spent a lot of time explaining himself and the Meriam to non-Islanders. For the most part, he gives us an unpretentious anecdotal account of a young Islander man making his way on the mainland. He describes some of the difficulties he encountered, but he does not present himself as a victim, rather explaining how he got round them. An increasing political awareness is part of the story, but little in the way of rhetoric.

Compared with the liveliness of the migration story, the account of his early life on Mer is thin. Perhaps this was because Loos knew much less about this world than he did about the mainland—though it seems that the recorder failed to function during one of these discussion. But, as Mabo himself was aware, he left the island before reaching the age at which men begin to take part in community affairs. What he remembers is what he was told, rather than what he would have experienced had he stayed. Much of his systematic understanding of the culture was acquired after he left, not just from books, but in discussion with other Townsville Meriam, who still spend hours arguing over the fine points of what they now call their 'culture'.

Loos does not conceal his grief at the death of his friend, nor his outrage at the desecration of the newly unveiled tombstone three years later, the perpetrators of which have never been found. The Federal government provided the funds for the body to be reinterred at Las, the principal site of Mabo's claim, where the shrine of the dual god Malu-Bomai had once stood. Mabo's friends and supporters (but not the whole community) marked the occasion with a reenactment of the sacred rites. It was not, as Loos was told, for the first time in eighty years—excerpts are to be seen in Cecil Holmes's 1967 film The Islanders—but this was the first time for many years that the chants had been performed for their original, funerary purpose. Loos writes:

The dance........confirmed for many at Las Mabo's position as a spiritual leader in the ancient line of ancestors, zogo le,2 of the awe inspiring agud,3 Malu-Bomai.

---

2 A sogo le was a hereditary ritual leader and custodian of sacred objects.
3 Agud was the Meriam term for a spiritual being such as Bomai, which nineteenth century missionaries appropriated for the Christian God.
Many Meriam now saw this dual deity as the forerunner of Christ. Christianity had been brought by the missionaries in 1871, but the Islanders had known God's presence 'from time immemorial.' (178)

Loos concludes:

What I am sure of is that Koiki Mabo would have wished for no other burial site than the one he now occupies at Las. His turbulent life had ended in an extraordinary triumph and he had at last returned home. (186)

Jeremy Beckett
University of Sydney


The trouble with colonialism is that it is too big, too encompassing, and too familiar to be easily seen. The discourses which might be most appropriate to give an account of it, modern historiography and anthropology for instance, were partly or wholly developed within the context of colonialism and might even be seen as components of the discursive formation which is colonialism. Will it be necessary then, to invent new scholarly discourses innocent of colonialism's taint in order to study it? Nicholas Thomas argues not. While we should not take their effectiveness for granted, it should be possible to use the 'disciplinary technologies' (p.19) which are already available to undertake a 'historicisation of colonialism' and that is what he sets out to do.

Most crucial to his project is the step of treating colonialism not as a policy or period but as a culture. One of the things which previously has kept the discourses of colonialism out of view has been their success in giving substance and visibility to their subjects rather than to themselves: the precisely drawn racial type, the immutable customary order of the colonised society—it was the very believability of such constructs, the appearance of naturalness bestowed upon them, that kept the discourses of colonialism hidden. So successful, indeed, have those discourses been in naturalising their subjects that we are in danger of ascribing to them a singleness of purpose a concertedness, which they never really possessed. Colonialism, according to Thomas, is best seen as a plurality of projects and voices which, rather than bringing themselves to bear on the colonised in a concerted manner, are often in bitter conflict: 'Colonialism is not a unitary project but a fractured one, riddled with contradictions and exhausted as much by its own internal debates as by the resistance of the colonised.' (p.51).

Colonialism's Culture comprises theoretical chapters followed by several case studies situated in the British empire (South Africa, Fiji, the Solomon Islands). In a critique of the work of Bhabha, JanMohamed, and Spivak, Thomas calls into question on three points the account these authors have given of colonial discourse. Firstly, the effort made to show that such discourse works to deny difference in the colonised may exaggerate the extent to which the colonisers actually perceived difference to exist: 'in the
experience of contact, unfamiliarity is not necessarily overwhelming' (52) 'texts and images often create differences that do not exist' (p.53). Secondly, to suggest that race origin has been fixed upon as the basis for ascribing degeneracy to subject peoples is to generalise, according to Thomas, from what has been true in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, neglecting to note that several other criteria (eg. heathenism, lack of industrial technology, dullness induced by tropical climate) were employed for the same purpose in earlier times and to an extent have continued in use. Finally, to presume that colonial discourses portray the colonised 'pejoratively' is to ignore the instances where they 'may admire or uphold them in a narrow or restrictive way' (p.54). Thomas also has a problem with the critical Fanonism' (p.9) of Bhabha and Spivak, which in elaborating the hegemonic power of the English book to deny the colonised an authentic voice, 'excludes the possibility that "natives" often had relatively autonomous representations and agendas, that might have been deaf to the enunciation's of colonialism' (p.57). The question of just how 'natives' have given voice to their experience of colonialism is outside of scope of Colonialism's Culture though one understands that Thomas sees it not as a matter of the colonised speaking back or writing back. Rather, the colonised appreciate that it is not they who are being spoken to by the discourses of colonialism, it is the colonisers speaking among themselves.

It is now seventeen years since Edward Said's Orientalism was first published. Not without reference to that book's problems (which Said himself has subsequently been among the most energetic in addressing), Thomas carefully analyses its contribution to the study of colonial representation. He writes of the manner in which the book 'completely transformed the field by drawing attention to the ways in which a whole series of European writers and scholars created a texted Orient through persistent images and metaphors, some of which were numbingly familiar' (p.22-23).

While the reinvented anthropology (which Thomas describes as supervising 'the deconstruction of the imperial museum of anthropological knowledge' (p.7) is keen to ascribe agency to colonialism's subjects, it is less ready to do the same for colonialism's individual practitioners.

One way of evaluating Colonialism's Culture is in the extent to which it succeeds in its stated aim of developing a way of writing about colonial culture' (p.31). In part it does this by moving to the site of performance, the places where Western colonialism has been enacted places where one might, as Thomas says, undertake an ethnography of colonial projects 'that presupposes the effect of larger objective ideologies, yet notes their adaptation in practice, their moments of effective implementation and confidence as well as those of failure and wishful thinking' (p.60).

Easily the quirkiest of the case studies consists of a biography of Vernon Lee Walker, a young Australian in island Melanesia in the 1880s, as revealed in a series of letters to his mother. This 'obscure and inconsequential racist' whose 'world was inhabited by failed businesses, bad debts and recalcitrant and aggressive natives' (p.160), languishes in uninspiring Noumea before working on a labour-recruiting schooner in the New Hebrides. He is mildly haunted by a sense of failure and he drifts along waiting for something good to happen until one day he is killed by natives on a remote beach where he has landed to purchase yams. Thomas comments on Walker's apparent lack of interest in scenery and landscape: 'he never takes scenery as a detached thing to be produced and
accentuated' (p.164). Nor does Walker bother to differentiate much between one group of natives and another or to speak about the resource potential of the islands he travels through.

This young man who seems to find himself in the colonial world almost by accident writes letters which signal fail to represent the mission and adventure of colonialism but which end up being curated in the Rhodes House Library, Oxford, only, in the fullness of time, to fall into the hands of Nicholas Thomas who realises the eloquence of this failure. Incomplete at one level, they are complete at another.

The case of Vernon Lee Walker establishes that colonialism could fail not only because its impositions were resisted by the colonised, or because one colonial project undermined another, but also because colonisers were often simply unable to imagine themselves, their situations and their prospects in the enabling, expansionist, supremacist fashion that colonial ideologies projected (p.167)

It appears that discourse never dies, only its practitioners do. In his final chapter Thomas points to the way in which the contemporary primitivism of Robert Lawlor's (1991) book *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreaming* and Kevin Costner's (1991) film *Dances with Wolves* represent a continuation of eighteenth and nineteenth century progressivism. It is the quality of inversion which distinguishes primitivism from the mere difference valorised by exoticism: Aboriginal society is portrayed as being not just strange and different but 'radically anti-modern', fixed in time, unable to change or to accommodate change, Aboriginality can... be cherished only in so far as it is a stable form that can be made to correspond with New Age metaphysics' (p.177).

Thomas makes the crucial point that the discourse of primitivism does not function to effect a sort of embrace in equality between disaffected whites and tribals. Lieutenant Dunbar in *Dances with Wolves*, disassociated from the flaws of modernity and white Society, as an indigenised white man, is a profoundly different figure to the acculturated Indian; while the latter can only acquire the corruption of white society and... half-caste morality, the white traveller retains the authority of presence that the passing Indian perforce lacks while substituting integrity and an identification with the land for the discredited expansionist narratives of conquest and environmental destruction (p.182). In other words, primitivism functions as a sort of salvaging of certain qualities from the ruins of tribal culture. Where it happens that this culture is indigenous to the land one has settled, then the salvaging serves to indigenise one: 'self-fashioning via the Sioux or the Aborigines does not exoticise oneself, but makes one more American or more Australian' (p.183). It is because such practices are so much a
part of national life in the Australia of the late twentieth century that we can be described as living in a colonial rather than a postcolonial condition.

Denis Byrne
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney


The Aboriginal Studies Press is to be congratulated on this magnificent publication. It is timely indeed: after nearly a century this work, which has been out of print for many years, is still constantly studied and quoted and remains a major source-book. There is an initial page containing a warning to those who might be offended by some aspects of the book, all the rest of the work is exactly as it was in the 1904 edition.

The Aboriginal Studies Press has excelled in the way it has published books dealing with important contemporary issues. This facsimile edition may seem far removed from what is contemporary, but it is not. Howitt's work deals with those parts of Australia where there have been the most dramatic losses of traditions. The fact that it has now become generally available again will help us all to a better understanding of the present through the records of the past. People concerned with many aspects of Aboriginal Studies will be grateful to the Aboriginal Studies Press.

L.A Hercus
Australian National University


Despite growing national and international recognition for contemporary Aboriginal art, there is a sense in which this response has overlooked an historical dimension that situates Aboriginal productive endeavour within a colonial context. This publication by Andrew Sayers, undertaken when he was curator of Australian drawing at the National Gallery of Australia, makes a major contribution toward redressing this omission. Sayers devotes a chapter each to three major artists from south-east Australia: William Barak, Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla. In addition, he interweaves analysis of the work of many other individuals whose artistic career was more brief, intermittent, or, in some cases has remained anonymous: artists such as Erlikilyika (Jim Kite) who accompanied the expeditions of Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen; Yertebrida Solomon, a
Ngarrinderi woman resident at Raukkan (Point McLeay) and the five Aborigines whose drawings formed the basis for *The Dawn of Art*—the first public exhibition of Aboriginal art staged in Melbourne in 1888. It is a telling comment on both historical relations between colonisers and colonised and the enduring strength of Aboriginal creativity that four of these artists were, at the time, inmates of Fannie Bay Gaol, Palmerston (Darwin) whilst the fifth, Billiamook, was employed as an interpreter by police.

Sayers persuasively argues that drawing represented a 'creative space' outside the 'traditional' framework of Aboriginal society which Aboriginal artists strategically appropriated to communicate with members of the majority culture. The drawing are also expressive of Aborigines' historically differentiated colonial experiences: whether, like Barak and McRae, they depict ceremonies and activities associated with a past hunter-gatherer lifestyle; or, like Oscar and Charlie Flannigan, they record contemporary scenes from pastoral life. Writing in a scholarly yet accessible style, Sayers combines detailed visual analysis with a wealth of historical evidence—amassed from explorer's journals, ethnography, government archives and settler records—to highlight the complex and contingent lives of those Aborigines dispossessed by the relentless process of colonisation. In a separate essay, Carol Cooper provides a valuable counterpoint to this narrative, exploring the traditional visual culture of south east Australia that provided the context for these developments. Building on her previous scholarship in this field, Cooper analyses the geometric and figurative elements present in rock art, body designs and artefacts to explore the customary law and individual and group identities they encode.

This beautifully produced publication will have lasting relevance and appeal for several reasons. First, Sayers' research undercuts the stereotypes that surround contemporary Aboriginal art to focus attention on the precursors, earlier generations of Aboriginal artists who selectively syncretised Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal visual traditions. A foreword by the Melbourne artist Lin Onus refers to a second function this book will perform, assisting many dispossessed Aboriginal people to relocate their cultural heritage. Third, by charting the changing critical response to these Aboriginal artists from widespread appreciation in the nineteenth century to their virtual exclusion in the decades to follow, Sayers calls into question our generalised understandings of the delayed response to Aboriginal art. His evidence suggests that the purist constructions for Aboriginality which relegated these drawings—together with the watercolour landscapes of the Hermannsburg School—to relative obscurity, mirrored and indeed supported policies of racial discrimination aimed at rendering Aborigines invisible. Finally, *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century* constitutes a key resource and reference. As Sayers points out, the drawings assembled for the touring exhibition associated with this publication are fragile historical items, located in relatively inaccessible, private and institutional collections, here and overseas. Given these constrictions, there is little likelihood they will ever be reassembled for another exhibition. Instead *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century* creates a significant archive combining historical commentary, biographies, a fully-documented catalogue and a wealth of detailed illustrations. A paper back edition issued in 1996, updates this exciting
and engrossing publication by including additional artists and drawings located in subsequent research.

Sylvia Kleinert
Australian National University


Fighters from the Fringe is a very welcome and timely addition to author Robert A. Hall’s earlier work _Black Diggers_ published in 1989. This new book as was his earlier work is enhanced by the authors military background which delivers both knowledge and authenticity to the subject. The book unveils another chapter of the hidden history of this country. It is well written and researched proving to be both interesting and enlightening. It is illustrated with excellent photographs.

This book is particularly significant as most people are still unaware of the role that indigenous service men and women have played in the defence of their country during the First, Second, Korean and Vietnam wars. My only criticism of Robert Hall’s book centres on the wrong assumption (p.8) that Aboriginal political groups had begun to appear in the early nineteen thirties. This statement is clearly in error as it is well documented that the first Aboriginal protest and politically organised group were the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association which was formed in Sydney and was active from 1924 to 1927, as shown by R. Broome.¹ Hall’s book displays to the reader quite clearly the horrifying levels of racism which were evident during the early days of the second world war. This was highlighted by the actions of the Army whose policy delivered in early 1940 on indigenous recruitment and enlistment stated ‘recruitment of non-Europeans was neither necessary nor desirable’. How suddenly, as the book details, these barriers were withdrawn once the Japanese began to close on Australian shores! The laws governing indigenous recruitment, although never officially appended or changed were certainly relaxed as Australia’s own predicament became more threatening. The irony of Government directions was never more evident than in one case discussed in this book: two Aboriginal men in the Northern territory were jailed in 1932 for killing a Japanese trepang lugger crewman. A decade later these same men were among many others recruited in the North for the specific task of defending our shores against the Japanese. The collection of stories and recollections from a number of people, Reg Saunders, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and others gives a first hand account of what life was like for indigenous people during the war. A number of striking similarities came to light from some of these stories. Most had stated that they had enlisted to fight for ‘their’ country, and certainly not for king, Queen or the British Empire. Also most of the accounts show that suddenly during the war the levels of racism seemed to subside. I cannot recommend this book enough: it is a very good read and highly informative.

¹ R. Broome 1985:160.

There are many Masters theses that are as important to research as PhD theses, and yet they never see the light of day. The Garland Press specialises in publishing such works. Mieke Blows’s 1981 thesis on Eaglehawk and Crow is an outstanding example of such a work. It is a pity that it has taken so long to make the study available: there have been changes in anthropological thinking in the interval. This does not impact on the present work as seriously as one might imagine: it is a quite particularly valuable contribution, because it is a little out of the present mainstream of anthropological research. It is based on comparative mythology with psychological interpretations, or as L. Hiatt puts it in a comment quoted on p.x of the Introduction ‘Blows uses Lévi-Straussian procedures to reach Róheimian conclusions’. The author has updated the work by including references to some recent works, but two major and highly relevant contributions have escaped notice:


The present work is a careful and thorough comparative study of the many versions of the myth of Eaglehawk and Crow, widespread particularly in south-eastern Australia, and of major significance in social anthropology as it reflects the matrilineal moiety system. It is a thought-provoking work, but one aspect of Aboriginal mythology that is somehow missed out in all the psychological discussion is humour, and the deep-felt traditional need for entertainment. Anyone who has ever heard a traditional person telling a story in ‘the language’, or even in English, will be aware of the fact that the narrator takes great delight in events such as a ‘bad’ character stuck on top of an ever growing tree, moreover the talking faeces that appear in some of the versions would have been a source of great hilarity. Mimicry also often plays a major part in narrative.

There are a couple of minor points where one might disagree with the writer, eg Gurnu, the language of the Bourke area is written as ‘Gungu’, and there is a need to mention (p.205) that other Australian languages too had terms that were parallel to the Western Desert concept of ‘dyugur’. These minor matters are more than compensated by
most perceptive insights into many aspects of mythology and a sensitive criticism of the theories of Tony Swain (p.67).

One of the points that is of more importance is geographical distribution. Thus for instance on p. 12 ff ‘Barkindji’ is taken to include only the Southern Paakantyi people, and there is some discussion as to whether it originally included the Wilcannia area. On p. 15 we are told about Popilta Lake, which is the location of one of the stories: ‘it could be Maraura, it could be Barkindji’. Paakantyi is the general term for all the Darling River people, who shared many traditions as they did also with the neighbouring Malyangapa, and so this point makes no difference. As with some linguistic features there are regional affiliations that cross ‘boundaries’. There is therefore no deep need to discuss whether a tradition belonged to one or other Paakantyi group or to Malyangapa-Wadikali, but the wider geographical distribution of these myths is of significance. Page 48 contains a general map which gives the distribution of the myths. It is clear from the text that the Eaglehawk and Crow myths were known to Adnyamathanha people in the Flinders Ranges and to the neighbouring Ngadyuri and Nukunu, Parnkalla and probably Wirangu people. The people of the west coast, contrary to what is said on p. 33 and p. 51 were Wirangu, and shared some traditions with Parnkalla people. In the Lake Eyre Basin adjacent to Adnyamathanha to the north there were very important Eaglehawk myths, but there was no tradition of conflict between Eaglehawk and Crow. The myths of this conflict are therefore not co-extensive with the Karraru-Mathari and Kilpara-Makwara moiety division, and this might perhaps have been discussed in more detail.

The emphasis throughout is on psychological explanation and deeper meaning. It is said for instance that the tree ‘is the pivotal symbol in the Oedipal drama’ (p.88). It is most important that Blows has made these valuable points, but one may prefer to think of a great tree rising into the sky, as in the Urumbula myth of Central Australia. The tree continues into the night sky as the Milky Way and brings with it a vision of a supernatural world, even more than a vision of human emotions.

The book represents an important contribution to the study of Australian mythology and opens up new fields for further understanding.

L.A. Hercus
Australian National University


Ruby Langford’s first book Don’t take your love to town (1988) was a delightful autobiography of a north N.S.W. Aboriginal woman whose life contrasted dramatically with that of a white upper middle class person such as me, born in the same year. Since writing this book and a second, Real Deadly (1992), one of her relatives has given her the Bundjalung (Aboriginal) name Ginibi, meaning ‘swan’ (the Australian Black Swan, of course), and she has become well known in both white and Aboriginal circles as a speaker and writer. It is pleasing to find more and more books by Aboriginal people.
available in book stores and libraries. Among such books, autobiographies probably predominate, and some telling novels and plays have also appeared, as well as much poetry.

My Bundjalung People is in another genre, one that has considerable popular appeal, that of the chatty travelogue, visiting relatives and others in search of information on people and places, with no particular highlight or crisis. Information on individuals and groups of people (in this case Aboriginal people with connection to particular places or families) emerges in snippets and vignettes throughout the book, building up a picture of the tragedies and joys of Aboriginal people of the Northern Rivers area of N.S.W. and the Gold Coast area of Queensland, who in the past spoke dialects of a language now usually referred to as Bundjalung. (Traditionally these various dialect groups had names, but there was no all-embracing name of the language, and the name Bundjalung, while generally accepted by most NSW groups, is not acknowledged as a suitable name by some of the groups, both in Queensland and in NSW.)

The book is Ruby Langford Ginibi's search for information on her family (mother, grandmother, etc.) and relatives, visiting contacts at various Aboriginal (and mostly Bundjalung) communities in the traditional Bundjalung area of the Northern Rivers of N.S.W. and in some neighbouring areas. Despite not particularly enjoying the chatty travelogue style (by any author), I know I will find it a useful reference book to people and places, many of which are known to me through my own work in the area. Although the title might suggest something more general, it deals with specific people and places, bringing them to life in clear and succinct descriptions. It is the author's search for her roots and connections, not an overview of the Bundjalung people, and is a valuable statement of Aboriginal local history and culture from the insider's viewpoint. Ginibi's connections take her to a wide range of the Bundjalung communities in northern NSW.

The book has a number of photographs of people referred to in the text, and maps of the trips Ruby made with her chauffeur, her adopted daughter Pam Johnston. Many conversations reproduced in the book were from tape-recorded interviews, and use forms of English and some Bundjalung words common among the Aboriginal people of the area.

Ginibi uses, with permission, extracts from a number of documents which came into her hands on her trips in 1990 to trace her connections. One of the highlights, to my mind, is the extensive quotation from a script 'Australian Aborigines' by a Cunningham Henderson in the mid 1800s. In his accounts, Henderson captures (amongst other things) the delightful situational humour of many of the Aborigines he knew. Ginibi and those she interacted with on her trips also exhibit humour in many situations, which lightens some of the more poignant or cruel situations she has accounts of.

I am less than happy, however, with the spelling of many of the Bundjalung words and phrases she uses in the book. There is a mixture of spellings which reflect standard spellings of Bundjalung words in accepted orthography for this language (in its various dialects), spellings adapted so that monolingual English speakers will perhaps pronounce the words correctly, and spellings that (to me) are wide of the mark in a number of ways. Although there is a useful glossary of terms (including some non-
standard English ones) at the end of the book, there is no guide to pronunciation, and
different conflicting conventions are followed in different words. One further constant
(though minor) irritant to me was the spelling aye for what many people prefer to spell
eh, the agreement seeking tag so common not only in Aboriginal English but in the
English of much of the northern half of Australia. At times the 'reading' of aye as an
affirmative like Scottish aye suits the meaning better than the (often) implied question of
eh. But I still had to work at reading the correct sound into it.

This whole issue of spelling is one that exercises my mind quite a bit, having been
involved in editing or discussing manuscripts by some relatively unschooled authors.
Quite clearly, the spelling rules some of us absorbed unconsciously (to a great degree)
and/or learnt consciously at school, and which seem so reasonably sensible to us, are not
absorbed by everybody in our society. Or is it that some deliberately rebel against the
spelling rules? Are certain non-standard spellings adopted by subgroups (such as
younger people of our children's peer group) as in-group markers? Is it a clash of these
various systems that leaves some people floundering with trying to spell, and in
particular trying to spell words from another very different language? It is clear, from a
comment on one of her pages, that Ginibi was having great difficulty in spelling at least
one Bundjalung phrase she records. Magistrates and other reasonably educated white
people from last century also showed the same mixture of being 'spot-on' with writing
some words and producing hard to interpret messes for others. Ginibi has the advantage
over those earlier recorders of having spoken the language, and in continuing to use
many of the words and phrases, sometimes 'in lingo' and sometimes in English, and
having potential access to those who have recorded the dialects with a consistent system,
though in the actual practicalities of life the potential access was never actualised due to
the accidents of time, space, money and health. Given the costs of producing a book, I
would like to see that in producing future books of this kind, the publisher and author
consult a linguist or lexicographer to produce a pronunciation guide and spellings that
follow a consistent system.

Nonetheless, on the one hand any Aboriginal readers from the Bundjalung people
and area will read the clues of context and their own language knowledge (even if
limited to the common words Ginibi uses in the book) and know what words are meant,
and how to say them, and on the other hand many (but not all) white readers will have
little interest in the exact pronunciation of the words but will pick up the flavour of
language use adequately. Both sets of readers will enjoy the book in their different ways,
and Ginibi's hopes that it will lead to better understanding will be realised.

Margaret C. Sharpe
University of New England

First published in 1981, Lyndall Ryan’s book remains the most comprehensive historical study of Aboriginal-European relations in Tasmania. The second edition provides two additional chapters to bring the political situation up to date (1995), a new introduction and an updated bibliography. Apart from these, the text of the second edition replicates that of the first. Even with the new material, the focus of the book remains squarely on the colonial period; only four of the book’s nineteen chapters deal with Tasmanian Aborigines in the twentieth century.

It is an impressive piece of empirical research. Ryan provides meticulously detailed accounts of violent conflict between Aboriginal Tasmanians and European colonists, the endeavours of George Augustus Robinson and the debacle of the subsequent incarcerations. Robinson receives a harsh press. He is depicted as almost simple-minded for his lack of both perception and moral sensibility, with no hint of the strangely troubled soul discerned by other writers. Ryan’s strength as an historian, however, lies in her ability to assemble her data into narratives that are both informative and accessible. And if the detail sometimes threatens to overwhelm, the reader has ready recourse to numerous well-designed and well-placed maps tracing the convoluted sequence of events and movements around the island.

Despite the emphasis on conflict, death and oppression, Ryan’s paramount purpose is to attest to the survival of the Tasmanian Aborigines. As she grandly puts it in the introduction to the second edition, her intention was ‘to liberate the Tasmanian Aborigines from the scientific discourse that had imprisoned them as extinct scientific curiosities’. Perhaps this is merely an inept attempt to pin a little fin de siècle textual trendiness onto what is in fact a work of old fashioned solid scholarship. But more than that, it places an impossibly heavy burden of responsibility on the historical text. Could any work of history accomplish such a liberation? Do the Tasmanian Aborigines depend on historiography for their liberation? Perhaps it would have been better to state the intentions more modestly.

Overstatement also mars the conclusion, where Ryan suggests that Tasmanian Aboriginal political activism is, and always has been, ‘ahead’ of that of the mainland. ‘It seems’, she remarks, ‘that Tasmania will remain the cradle of race relations in Australia’. Apart from the awkwardness of the ‘cradle’ metaphor, this claims too much for Tasmania. Similarly in the conclusion to the first edition (reproduced here as chapter 17), she maintains that Tasmania may be held up ‘as a mirror that reveals the real nature of those “other Australians across Bass Strait”. Such statements put Ryan in a tradition that stretches back at least as far as James Bonwick, whereby Tasmania was held up as an exemplar of colonial race relations and as a portent of what was to come on the mainland. Surely the significance of the Tasmanian study does not need to be boosted with such overstatement.

Of course, comparison between Tasmania and mainland Australia may be perfectly legitimate. The problem is that Ryan suggests some sort of primacy to the Tasmanian situation. She claims, for example (again in what was the conclusion to the earlier edition) that: ‘Tasmania was the proving ground of European technology,
warfare, culture and political economy which, emerging victorious in Tasmania, swept across the mainland as an expression of manifest destiny'. Nothing in the text validates this precedence claimed for the island. A little later she maintains that the segregated reserve system instituted in Queensland after 1897 'was expressly modelled on Robinson's spectacular, blind failures'. No reference for this assertion is provided, which is unfortunate since it accords neither with the writings of Archibald Meston and others involved in drafting the 1987 Act nor with the available secondary literature on the subject.

Only two chapters of the book are devoted to the Cape Barren Islanders, a brevity of treatment that sits oddly against Ryan's central concern with the survival of the Tasmanian Aborigines. After all, it is that group of mixed descent, once known as Cape Barren Islanders, who provide the necessary linkages between pre-colonial and post-colonial Tasmanian Aborigines. Moreover, insofar as the Cape Barren Islanders are dealt with, the significant issue of identity is skated over too lightly. It is suggested (though nowhere explicitly stated) that from the mid-nineteenth century to the early 1970s, 'Islander' was this group's normal term of self-designation. According to Ryan, they held their Aboriginal heritage, both biological and cultural, in high regard. But to what extent did they identify as Aborigines? Did they consider themselves a group distinct from both Europeans and Aborigines? Perhaps no definitive answers are possible, but if validating the survival of the Tasmanian Aborigines is the book's fundamental purpose, these issues of identity and definition deserve extended treatment. After all, the supposed extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines rested on a particular (narrowly racial) definition of the group; and more recent affirmations of survival depend on the ability of Tasmanian Aborigines (and others) to gain public credibility for their alternative definitions of Aboriginality.

Then again, perhaps academic validations of Tasmanian Aboriginal survival are now redundant. Some white Australians may continue to dispute the group's designation as 'Aboriginal', but that designation now has a far greater public credibility than it did in 1981. Perhaps the first edition of this book contributed to that process. But the strength of the book does not lie in undermining the myth of Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction; certainly not in liberating them from the 'scientific discourse' that once consigned them to extinction. Indeed, since the book completely fails to address the relevant discourses of racial science, it is difficult to see how it ever could have met that objective. Rather, the strength of the book derives from the solidity of its empirically-based reconstructions of Aboriginal-European relations, particularly in the colonial period. Although such reconstructions may have fallen from academic fashion, and although Ryan resorts sometimes to grandiose and inflated claims, the continuing value of her book resides in the empirical data it contains.

Russell McGregor
James Cook University
North Queensland

This is a confronting book. Its content 'should come as a shock' to regional readers writes David Towler of the Warrnambool Standard, the well known Western District newspaper. 'For any resident of Western Victoria its impact rests not only with the horrific brutality and extent of the killings but the familiarity of the place names and some of the alleged murderers'.

Scars in the Landscape is also a significant book in that it 'takes us forward into a new phase of frontier historiography', as Henry Reynolds states in the Foreword. The first stage was that of general accounts of the frontier which appeared in the late 1960s and 1970s. These reminded readers of the inter-racial violence which accompanied the arrival of Europeans in each area of Australia. The next, regional studies, assembled detailed information and reassessed the frontier experience providing irrefutable evidence that violence was integral to the 'settlement' process. With Clark's Scars in the Landscape we have for the first time a study simply of violence, of massacres, in one region of Australia.

The study area stretches beyond what is usually thought of as the Western District to cover almost half of Victoria: from Werribee west to the Glenelg River and from the coast north to Ouyen.

Scars in the Landscape is a 'register' of massacre sites. The format is one which makes information readily available to the general reader. The massacre entries are presented 'geographically', according to the territories of the ten language groups of western Victoria. Within each territory the entries are arranged chronologically. For each entry there is a standard list of information: place name of the massacre; location, when known; date of incident; Aborigines involved; Europeans involved; and number of reported Aboriginal deaths. Each entry is accompanied by a small map indicating the site of the massacre. The account of the massacre is given as in the primary source material with minimal editorial comment.

Clark defines 'massacre' as 'the unnecessary indiscriminate killing of a number of human beings, as in barbarous warfare or persecution, or for revenge or plunder'. 'In a wider sense', he writes, 'it is taken to refer to a general slaughter of human beings'. I find his use of the term problematic, and after defining the term he makes no attempt to justify its use for individual entries. Nor could he do so with any certainty for some of the reported incidents. There is, for example, the incident in January 1842 when the overseer, James Guthrie, returning to Eumeralla station was accosted by two Aborigines, one of whom threatened him with a leangle—a weapon used when fighting at close quarters. Considering his life in danger, Guthrie shot the Aborigine and later reported the incident. Clark reveals awareness of the predicament I think in his frequent use in the Introduction of the phrase 'massacres and killings' rather than 'massacres'. Perhaps the book should have been subtitled 'a register of massacres and killings'? As well my concern is that 'massacre' as used in the title to cover all killings may suggest,

particularly to those not aware of frontier history, that the Aborigines were passive victims. They had no chance: they were simply massacred! Yet those familiar with the history know that Aboriginal groups in areas where there were safe places to which they could retreat kept up guerrilla warfare over something like five years, and that there were places where Europeans were obliged to employ twice as many shepherds as usual, were forced to abandon outstations and finally abandon stations because of the strength of Aboriginal attacks.

How did Aborigines die on the western Victorian frontier? In ones and twos according to the information assembled in the register. And those who died were mainly men. There were large scale massacres such as the Whyte Brothers massacre of which J.G. Robertson wrote, 'Fifty one men were killed, and the bones of the men and the sheep lay mingled together bleaching in the sun at the Fighting Hills'. But the evidence shows that the typical incident was one in which one or two Aborigines were killed. Over half of the entries in the register (53 out of less than 100 entries) are of this kind.

Most massacres occurred in the territory of the Dhauwurd wurrung (Gunditjmara) and the Djab wurrung language groups. More interesting is the fact that the register exposes how few massacres were reported for some language groups providing more evidence to support the commonly held belief that many killings were not reported. Take for example the Girai wurrung and Djargurd wurrung whose territory stretched from Warrnambool east to Lake Corangamite and from the coast north to Lake Bolac, Derrinallum and Cressy. This was an area in which it was widely believed that killing Aborigines was necessary. Niel Black of Glenormiston, for example, wrote to his partner: 'A few days since I found a Grave into which about 20 must have been thrown. A Settler taking up a new country is obliged to act towards them in this manner or abandon it'. As for Aboriginal women, Black commented: 'it is no uncommon thing for these rascals to sleep all night with a Lubra and if she poxes him or in any way offends him perhaps shoot her before 12 next day'. It is also the area about which the editor of the Hampden Guardian wrote that its history would never be written for it 'would be such a long record of oppression, outrage, wrong, and cold blooded murder on the part of the "superior race" that it dare not be, and, therefore, never will be written'. He suggested by way of illustration that 'were it possible for free selectors to use the same kind of "persuasion" now, in the occupation of the land, as was used to the blacks by..."the early pioneers" there would not be many "squatters" left...in the course of two or three years'. Yet the register lists three entries only, dramatically highlighting the wide gulf between the views of those in the area and the official record.

I would have liked the sites of massacres to be more precisely indicated on a map but that I know is too much to ask.

This is a beautifully produced book. The cover design is attractive, the maps and illustrations clearly reproduced and the material well set out and easy to read. Readers I have spoken to have expressed delight with the quantity of information available, at having assembled for them many of the basic documents held in archives: information perhaps familiar to regional historians but not previously available to the general reader.

2 in Kiddle, 1962, pp. 121–122.
3 12 Sept. 1876.
In the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody National Report Overview and Recommendations*, Commissioner Elliott Johnston, QC added a section on history remarking that he did so 'not because the chapter adds to what is known but because what is known is known to historians and Aboriginal people; it is little known to non-Aboriginal people and it is a principal thesis of this report that it must become more known'. *Scars in the Landscape* is a valuable book which will make a significant contribution to greater understanding of our history for by its nature it provides the evidence of frontier violence in a manner that secondary and tertiary students and general community members interested in local history find powerful and convincing.

Jan Critchett
Deakin University


This delightful book was researched and produced with the assistance of the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Jakelin Troy is a scholar with a wide knowledge of the Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century, particularly in regard to the language and artefacts of Aboriginal-European interaction. In her 'history of king plates' she puts the brass and silver-plated breast plates bestowed on Aboriginal tribal leaders and elders firmly into the historical context of military gorgets worn by British army officers from early times until 1831 and given to American Indian leaders and warriors by both British and French colonisers from at least the mid-eighteenth century.

If this book goes into another edition it might be helpful to include one of the portraits of great American Indian leaders wearing silver gorgets, such as Osceola, the great war leader of the Seminoles, whose people resisted dispossession in the Second Seminole War (1835—42). These plates were worn with pride and, as Jakelin Troy’s narrative makes clear, the negative response to the gorgets by some Aborigines in more recent times has largely been engendered by the derision of white Australians ignorant of the tradition.

The claim by modern Aboriginal spokespersons that there never were Aboriginal ‘kings’ is correct in the political sense but not in a spiritual sense. Sacral kingship originated in the institution of the hereditary shaman who passed on certain curative skills and techniques of controlling or accessing the spiritual world to a chosen family member. All the regalia of modern royalty such as sceptre, crown, orb, originated in the paraphernalia of the shaman. The Aboriginal kadaija man with his possum skin slippers and quartz crystals was such a shaman and his position was often hereditary. Many of those who were presented with king plates were high ranking initiates in a hierarchical lodge of shamanic adepts and just as much entitled to be called ‘kings’ as the kings recognised by Republican Rome.
While Jakelin Troy recognises that most of those singled out were 'elderly and senior initiated men' or 'spiritually or intellectually superior men' (p.14) she also recognises that the brass plates were used deliberately by the pastoralists to curry favour with the local Aboriginal communities whom they were dispossessing. Quotations from Carl Lumholtz (Among Cannibals 1889) and others show how insidious the practice had become.

Not all the gorgets recognised 'kingship', some being an acknowledgment of service on a pastoral run, or as native constables or as native guides on expeditions of exploration. Gorgets in this category were in reality honours and were often received for particular services or heroic actions. The honours aspect of the gorgets is subtly confirmed by the use of heraldic blazon to describe the motifs used in decoration, language usually confined to armorial bearings and flags. Some gorgets were deliberately commissioned by missionaries to provide a measure of protection against removal or disposal by ruthless settlers or police. A final category comprised gorgets given to the 'last of the tribe'.

An important section of the book is devoted to gorget collecting, in particular the collection of Edmund Milne which forms the basis of the National Museum of Australia collection. Another important section is devoted to the manufacture and decoration of gorgets. The quality of the photographs is outstanding, most of the originals being in the collection of the National Museum or the National Library of Australia. The Appendices, an annotated catalogue of Aboriginal Gorgets in the National Museum of Australia and a list of known Aboriginal gorgets, provide the substantive text to which the history is an introduction. The provenance of each gorget is given with full documentation, including measurements and description together with a photographic illustration.

This book is well documented, superbly presented, and eminently fair. It provides a historical context for an art form and system of honour which was part of an on-going military tradition but which was exploited in the wake of pastoral settlement.

Niel Gunson
Australian National University


There can be few people possessing more than a passing interest in Aboriginal music who have not confronted the challenges inherent in an understanding of the song poetry. On a pan-Aboriginal basis, so it now appears, there are genres of song poetry whose precise meaning is hidden beneath linguistic conventions (the poems may be mnemonic devices not requiring conformity to spoken syntax) and linguistic circumstances (the poems may contain words of unknown, secret or archaic origin).
Dixon's and Koch's work on the Dyirbal, formerly living in substantial numbers on Queensland's north-western coast but now numbering only a few speakers, represents a particularly difficult type of linguistic-ethnomusicological research because of the limited and ever-diminishing human resources. Dyirbal speakers were not always able to supply English glosses for song words, and individuals sometimes showed different understandings of specific words in their songs, all sung solo.

Following a brief historical section, three quarters of the book is devoted to presentation of the five styles of songs. Each song poem is presented in standard interlinear format, followed by an expanded translation, listing of repetitions of individual lines in the recorded performance(s), and brief discussion under the headings of song word and grammar.

Dixon's summary of the songs' linguistic content and Koch's investigation of musical features are more descriptive than analytical. Dixon finds that the songs contain set numbers of syllables per line, with individual styles also limiting the number of lines per poem, then proceeds to illustrate the several configurations of word-based syllabic patterns occurring within each line. Clearly, grammatical patterning is a major constraint on the compositional process.

I do have some concerns about Koch's musical notations. There is no suggestion that overall exact pitch is significant to Dyirbal songs, so that elimination of a thicket of accidentals (sharps and flats) in the form of key signatures is both simple and practical by means of transposition. The five sharps indicated on p.333 and the seven sharps on pp.320-1 are extreme examples in point.

Koch notes 'the tonic note', usually the song's final pitch, 'is the note that determines the key of the melody' (p.xix), and this is potentially useful both as a means of both comparing individual songs and also objectively summarising an entire corpus of material. But the tonic of a Dyirbal song does not necessarily connote identically with that of Western tonality, which in performance implies a key and in written form implies a key signature. Standard convention for notating non-Western music is to include accidentals for only those pitches affected, i.e., without automatic octave duplication, and to avoid the imposition of European values such as major and minor modes, key, and so forth by placing at the left-hand end of each stave the accidentals for only such pitches. Although clearly presented, Koch's notations suffer somewhat from foreign values. For example Figures 5 and 6 on p.66 assume an A Major tonality and have key signatures sharpening all Fs, Cs and Gs even those there are no Fs, Cs of Gs in the melodies; and the E Major signature on p.206 sharpens all Fs, Cs, Gs and Ds even though no Cs, Gs or Ds appear in the melody.

Similarly the Western notion of metre as expressed in time signatures (4/4, 6/4, etc.) connotes not merely a succession of pulses but a hierarchy of beats within each musical bar, e.g., in 4/4 the first beat receives the primary accent, and the 3rd beat receives the secondary accent. Although, in her list of musical definitions (p.xviii), Koch notes that 'the [accompanying] sticks always play a steady beat, a rhythmic pulse', she assigns to the melodies by way of time signatures and bar lines the notion of metre. Subsequent research may indeed confirm that the Dyirbal do conceptualise their melodies in terms of 'bars' containing from one to six beats, but such a possibility
appears very unlikely and is moreover negated by the stated non-metric regularity of the stick accompaniment.

When read as an academic document, there is a feeling of incompletion throughout, deriving perhaps from the presentation in various arrangements of raw data as ends in themselves rather than as means to broader ends. Dixon notes (p.35), for example, that 72 per cent of words in spoken texts end in a vowel, whereas 82 per cent of vowel-final words occur in songs; what significance should the reader draw? The authors refer to individual Dyirbal as 'consultants' in recognition of their significant input, and this is doubly appropriate as the book seems designed not for reading cover to cover, but for selective consulting for meaty information on individual songs and singers.

Under the circumstances, Dixon and Koch have probably extracted all the information still recoverable, and their results will be welcome by both present-day Dyirbal and the academic community at large. This is, I believe, the first such collaborative major publication on Aboriginal songs and song poetry, and it achieves two broad successes, contextualising song as a structured medium for transmission of the uttered word, and contributing towards an understanding of how, if not why, language and melody interact.

Richard M. Moyle
University of Auckland


This is a miscellany of exploration and developmental history, local geography, Aboriginal traditions and poetry assembled by the author, who lives in the region - Cape York Peninsula. She moves in small chapters from north to south, beginning with the Torres Strait Islands and ending at Cairns. Toohey's style is friendly and accessible rather than scholarly, as this is intended in part as a book for visitors to the region, but the author very commendably footnotes her many and varied sources, which range from published histories and ethnographies to obscure articles in defunct northern newspapers. The Aboriginal and Islander content is treated with respect and it is pleasing to see the region's recorded indigenous mythology taking its place in the foreground, rather than, as so often happens, briefly preceding the settler mythologies that commonly form the focus of locally produced regional histories.

Peter Sutton
Adelaide

Here is an interesting and important collection of myths, mostly from New South Wales, with a few from other parts of Australia. My friend Janet Mathews who died in 1992 collected stories from many old Aborigines in various parts of New South Wales. Her husband was the grandson of the well-known R.H. Mathews, called in this book Milanen; Janet had access to R.H. Mathews' papers and manuscripts, and the book includes stories collected by him from all over Australia.

The title story of the collection tells how the Wangkumara sent out a pelican to fly to the Northern Territory and to return and report what he saw. On his return he saw beautiful colours (opal) on the ground and tried to break some off with his beak. This caused a spark which set fire to the grass so the people had fire to cook their food.

There are in this collection a number of stories from other areas about the origin of fire: the Wongaibon tell of the owl who captured it from two old women who were keeping it secret; the Kamilaroi story is that Crow had it but kept it to himself until Sparrowhawk stole it from him. Similarly this collection has many explanations of the origin of other phenomena.

Isobel White
Canberra


An undergraduate text on Statistics isn't the normal fare of the review section of Aboriginal History, indeed, to extend the statistical metaphor, I would hazard the guess that the chances for such texts coming for review in this Journal would be less than three in a thousand, nonetheless here we have such an improbability, so let us accept the opportunity we have been given without, I hope, embarrassing our editors.

This small and inexpensive book is specifically prepared as a supplement to a formal, introductory course on Statistics as taught by its author and would indeed serve that role in other such courses. As the author points out, it is not a teach-yourself book, nor is it, in the reviewer's opinion, a guide to statistical problems specific to History or Archaeology. What is nonetheless intriguing about the book is that the author has selected some fifteen examples from the broadly defined fields of History and Archaeology and one of these is taken from Attenbrow's taphonomic investigation into discriminating Aboriginal midden shells from naturally accumulated shells. It happens that mentioning such things as shell beds and bird mounds is quite a reliable raiser of blood pressure among many Australian Archaeologists, so the book contains a sort of bonus for us. Most of the other examples are taken from overseas Historical Demography
and Economic History, while the other archaeological cases include data sets from metallurgical investigations of artefacts and a much more interesting case considering evidence for climatic change and the collapse of an Andean civilisation. What the illustrated tests do is not so much to tell us whether our inferences are correct as to tell us whether the evidence can safely support the inferences.

I consider that Dr Hutchinson has correctly identified a problem for many Arts and Social Science students who take courses in Statistics, though he does not express it this way, in that they find it hard to identify with the usual, bland and boring examples that Mathematics and Statistics teachers think up. Bags of red and white balls, people in cars, coincidences of birthdays, or even ranking lecturers (some of which examples actually crop up here too) hold very little intellectual allure, whereas tests that cast light on interesting questions of why?, strike me as having the potential to draw us into a serious consideration of the application of Statistics.

Here it may be helpful for me to clarify my own position. I have been doing quantitative research in Archaeology for nearly forty years and have largely taught myself (with attendant pitfalls) to employ Statistics. In turn, I have recognised a need to explain quantitative methods in teaching, while honours students in Archaeology and Biological Anthropology have expressed the need for an introduction before embarking on their own research. Of course, all Universities offer service courses on statistics, which are sometimes excellent, as is that at ANU at present, and sometimes deadly. But Arts and Social Science teachers cannot demand that their students take such courses. There is abundant anecdotal evidence that students who are, as it were, injection moulded into fields such as Statistics, gain little or no benefit and may indeed become hostile. On the other hand, it seems irresponsible to direct people towards research for which they are ill-prepared.

Even people who encounter statistics in their tertiary education may fail to make any connection between the research tool placed in their hands and their everyday experience. At least, that is the reviewer’s recollection of the processes of deliberation at academic Faculty meetings. So one cannot but agree with enthusiasts like Paulos, who wish to introduce Statistics at a much earlier stage in education and make our entire society truly numerate.

But there is an ebb and flow in the dynamics of knowledge, and at present there is a strong and perhaps growing tide that is deeply hostile to the further growth of empirical knowledge and its methodology of observation, numeration and statistics. This criticism comes under the banner of Post Modernism, though it seems to retain qualities of earlier cycles such as nineteenth entury Romanticism and seventeenth century neo-Platonism. Put very briefly, the argument goes that while granting that the artificial construction of a pure observer (scientist) and an objectified observed have proved remarkably effective for Physics, having given us an intelligible universe, this approach has proved to be an unmitigated disaster, or at the very least a blind alley, when applied to the human situation.

The post-modern argument is not merely rhetorical; it is accompanied by a flood of cases in which the critics have shown that it is possible to turn upside down much of

1 Paulos 1988.
the accepted thinking based on the conventions of objective observation. Furthermore, for those of us working in Aboriginal History or counting shells and bones, like the reviewer, we cannot console ourselves with the thought that the trouble is 'out there', ravaging such over-ripe fields of learning as Literature and Sociology. No, the wolf is at our own doors, if we are to accept Keith Windschutte's doom-laden prognosis for Australian History or Julian Thomas's altogether more urbane case in The Politics of Vision and the Archaeologies of Landscape.

If I were asked to teach an Honours course again I would also continue to give an introduction to Statistics and would indeed be happy to use the Essentials of Statistical Method as my text. This is not because I reject out of hand the stimulus of Post Modernist criticism, though I find the sometimes rather righteous attempts to cleanse the subject of the erroneous thinking of previous generations as tiresome as I found the selective use of the Philosophy of Science by the missionaries of the New Archaeology, because I do not believe that the more conventional methods of Archaeology have become totally sterile.

It further seems to me that there would be some advantage from the increasingly strategic use of statistical tests in our Archaeology and that these might impart as much benefit as other more radical proposals for surgery. For instance, I am struck by the tendency for statistical tests to reveal profound differences between assemblages where I intuitively feel that they belong to similar entities. Am I using the wrong tests, or am I ascribing too much weight to the criteria, such as the typologies I employ to describe the assemblages, or am I indeed deceived by my experience and intuition? Perhaps we need a healthy dose of Post Modern criticism to jolt us out of our conventional patterns of organising the past, but in the meantime I would very much like to learn what thoughtfully applied statistical tests have to tell us about our archaeological thinking, so I welcome Version 2 (History and Archaeology) of Essentials of Statistical Methods.

References
Windschutte, K., 1994 The Killing of History: How a Discipline is being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists, Macleay Press, Sydney, p. 266.

Wilfred Shawcross
Australian National University

3 Thomas 1993.
The act of looking at a rock painting, repeated countless times in the Arnhem Land Plateau, is the resonant image of Chaloupka's *Journey in Time*. It is an act that unites the ancient unnamed artists with the explorer Leichhardt and the artist/archaeologist Chaloupka; an act that links their journeys and makes their human understandings possible. Chaloupka's approach to the archaeology of images is grounded as much in an experience of human action transformed through image as in the 'science' of art and culture. While there is concern with the very archaeological problems of chronology and interpretation, the power of the images to transform and delimit archaeological knowledge is also acknowledged.

The product of over thirty years of research and commitment, *Journey in Time* is a monumental work. Combining over 270 photographic images with a wealth of textual detail, it will remain the most comprehensive survey of the rock art of Western Arnhem Land for some time to come. The intensity of Chaloupka's engagement with this art of world significance, moves the work beyond its coffee table format into one of both academic and personal significance.

Despite 60,000 or more years of occupation, one of the characteristics of the Australian archaeological record is that the evidence of change over this vast period of human time is often limited. The question of whether this is reflects a deep continuity or a failure of archaeological technique and imagination to capture the subtlety of a complex culture history is in part answered by the sequence of Arnhem Land rock art. Following the work of Mountford (1956) and Brandl (1973) Chaloupka's examination of thousands of galleries has highlighted a cultural richness stretching back into the early Pleistocene; a richness that is invariably represented by a few stone artefacts in uniform deposits.

In keeping with the scope of its theme *Journey in Time*'s complex layout incorporates four parallel elements. The first of these is the well-written text, which, following the broad ranging introduction, is divided into four separate sections (there are no conventional chapters). *Gubolk* (the land), uses the journals of Ludwig Leichhardt to introduce the geography, fauna and flora of Western Arnhem Land. This European perception of the land is balanced by *garrewakwani* (the ancestral past), which outlines the land-forming journeys of the ancestral beings which appear in the art. From their actions the people of Arnhem Land come into being and in *bininj* (the people), the language groups, their relation to the complex kinship system and clan territories are detailed.

*Gunbim* (the rock art), follows the now familiar chronological scheme presented by Chaloupka (1984, 1985) in earlier publications. The key to this sequence is the realisation that (prehistoric) art contains a record of past environments, material culture and human actions. Although this record will be distorted, by the modes of meaning (both past and present) which are attached to the images, as historical artefacts, they were formed in the world of their creators and change through time. Even if the febrile elaboration of the Yam figures, owed little to the 'everyday' they are bound in time by different modes of
representation, ranging from the naturalism of the early animal figures through to the formalism of the later x-ray art. When these are linked to an increasingly defined sequence of regional environmental change the importance of the art as a record of the human life-world is evident.

The earliest art, which Chaloupka dates from the late Pleistocene to 8000 years, is defined by imprints of objects and paintings of large animals (including some extinct species) and human figures in a naturalistic style. These are followed by ‘the most vital and exciting paintings of the regions long rock art sequence’ (p106); the exquisitely drawn human figures of the Dynamic figure style. The Post-Dynamic phase sees a complex of related styles: post-dynamic figures, simple figures with boomerangs, Mountford figures and Yam figures. From 8000 to 1500 BP, with the rise of sea level and the creation of estuarine conditions up the river valleys, the familiar x-ray style is established. The creation of the region’s characteristic wetlands about 1500 years ago sees the introduction of further elements with the appearance of new material culture (including watercraft) and bird species like the Magpie Goose and Jabiru.

The final contact period is marked by Macassan boats, houses and scenes, European explorers on horses and buffalo shooters armed with rifles. Sorcery figures also increased as disease and social conflict took its toll along the edge of the Arnhem Land plateau. Chaloupka concludes his survey with a series of discussions on some of the major motifs and themes, other art forms and recent artists.

Within the main body of the work information sections on, for example, materials, material culture, animals depicted, and an assessment of the artists as observers of nature are inserted in the manner of many contemporary textbooks or popular introductory works. Unlike these formats they are not clearly defined and so tend to break up the flow of the writing. A further layer of information is added by the detailed captions for the illustrations containing information not necessarily repeated in the main text.

As noted above, the photographs, represent the most comprehensive collection of rock art images yet published in Australia. It is hardly necessary to emphasise the importance of illustration to a work of this nature. While the usefulness of photography to document rock art has been questioned by researchers who argue that they can lack detail (cf Garlake 1995:17) there can be no quarrel with Chaloupka’s photography or the selection. The reproductions are, however, often only of average quality and the presence of the image is often subdued when compared with the brilliant yet somewhat hyper-real reproductions in Walsh (1988), the only comparable work in Australian rock art publication. This is not a significant problem when the size and the diversity of the offering is taken into consideration along with the price of the volume.

One further feature of the illustrations worthy of note is that they are not specifically referenced to by their numbers in the main text. While it is hard not to see this as a production flaw, it allows the images a degree of independence from the text's capacity to speak for them. This, it will be suggested is not inconsistent with Chaloupka's deeper intellectual concerns and is in keeping with the overall feel of the work which is somewhat fragmented and layered in the manner of an encyclopaedia or contemporary multi-media product. The effect is not necessarily detrimental as a loss in coherence is balanced by gains in accessibility and information density.
Rock art is no longer only an archaeological artefact, its study is also concerned with the human spirit, mind and soul (p79). This statement challenges contemporary archaeology to take seriously the vision of rock art as a product of imagination. Yet in listing the fields of study - anthropology, art history, psychology and comparative religion - which would presumably be more at ease with the implications of this broadened concern, the writer diffuses the responsibility of archaeology to confront the destabilising effects of these images on its authority by confirming its place in the standard disciplinary array.

This confirmation may owe less to the current institutionalised disciplinary conventions as to the events of Chaloupka's initial encounter with the rock art of western Arnhem Land; not in the lecture hall but in the more dangerous realm of the 'field'.

Its beginning goes further back, to 1958, when, in the heartland of the region's rock art at the East Alligator River, I entered a rock shelter whose wall and ceiling were ablaze with multicoloured layers of painted images. ... In the stillness of the day I stood spellbound by their magic, captivated by the their unique form and the brilliance of their execution(p8).

If, to paraphrase Cioran (1996:43), all history is the struggle to transform gross feeling into gnosis and that there is a price to be paid, then this can only be harnessed through the finding of a way of acknowledging 'responsibility' in the face of the spellbinding mysteries of the 'cave' (see Derrida's commentary on Patocka's arguments in Derrida 1992). Archaeology is part of Chaloupka's way of responsibility. The price of gnosis lurks in the defended space which connects theory, imagination and memory to the whelming mysteries of the first encounter.

Chaloupka's unique articulation and balance of enchantment, responsibility and knowledge both realises yet also decentres and defines the limits of his treatment of the art as an object of archaeological study. The images are seen as artefacts with form, chronology and distribution—their relation to the cultures who created them is primarily illustrative. Hence, while they can inform us about chronology, environment, economy and material culture their link with social and ideological structures is to be treated with caution. For reasons already suggested, Chaloupka shows little inclination to follow his younger colleagues in questioning these latter strictures. Those looking to extend discussion about the social meaning of the 'dynamic figures' or the world-view of the 'large naturalistic phase' will be disappointed. The few suggestions which Chaloupka has raised in, for example, the interpretation of the 'Yam figures' as part of a wide spread 'Yam Civilisation' originating outside of Greater Australia have been criticised as inconsistent and simplistically material (Lewis 1988:73).

It will be a matter of opinion whether Chaloupka shows an admirable restraint in limiting interpretive 'speculation' (or 'theorising') about the socio-ideological context of the most ancient art forms, or simply offers little to complete the picture of the art as a product of a social world - a world where objects may be as 'good to think' (see Lewis 1988:73 quoting Levi-Strauss) as they are to draw or eat. It is not Chaloupka's aim to engage his critics in this work which is free of the contentiousness which tends to mar rock art study in Australia (see Tacon and Chippindale 1994:242). As noted above this is also consistent with Chaloupka's sense that the human experience that the art reflects
and evokes is not conveniently reducible to an intellectual discourse that is of greater significance than the images themselves.

The naturalism of the early phase and the glorious self affirmation of the Dynamic Figures underline the point that these images derived from cultural modes or mentalities which, although ancestral to contemporary Arnhem Land Aboriginal culture, may not be emphasised by it today. This reinforces the temporal depth of the culture and the narrative and personal complexity involved in its formation and interpretation. *Journey in Time* is an important work with a density and humanity that challenge the often shallow formulaic scientism of contemporary Australian archaeology. By presenting an archaeology that is reflective of the past, yet ethically and humanly engaged in the present, it moves the discipline to respond.

**References**


Barry Cundy
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
Information for authors

Typescripts must be double-spaced and with ample margins to allow for editorial marking. Submit two hard copies and keep one. Footnotes should be as brief as possible and numbered consecutively throughout the paper. A short form of citation should be used for footnote references (e.g. Saunders 1976:27). Do not use Harvard references. The references, on a separate page, should show the author's name and full publication details as given on the title page of the work, listed alphabetically by author and chronologically for each author. Tables and maps should be submitted in final form (except to size), on separate sheets, numbered on the back, and accompanied by a list of captions and photographic credits. Once manuscripts are accepted, authors should submit final versions on computer disks. Microsoft Word is preferred.

Authors should follow the usage of the Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra).

2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
3. Fison and Howitt 1880:96.
4. See Cox 1821.
7. Colonial Secretary—In Letters (CSIL), 30/1722.
8. L.E. Threlkeld to A. M'Leay, 15 July 1831, CSIL, re Land 120, 315527 (in 45/514)

References
Details of authors' names must be given as on the title page; do not abbreviate. Journal titles and descriptions of documents and other archival material must be given in full.


Colonial Secretary—In Letters (CSIL), 1830,1831. Archives Office of New South Wales, Sydney.

Cox, G. Journal kept by Mr George Cox on his late tour to the Northward and Eastward of Bathurst etc. 1821. MS. Mitchell Library, Sydney.


Saunders, Reg. 'Parabar the shark', Aboriginal and Islander Identity 2(10), 1976:27-8.