‘Mission Impossible’: Aboriginal survival before, during and after the Aboriginal Protection Era

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BEd(AdultEd)

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Declaration

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed……………………………………….
Acknowledgements

To my Worimi Ancestors who walked the traditional path, who cared for our land and our people, for all those who endured the many hardships throughout colonisation and those Worimi elders with us today: I acknowledge you and pay my respect. Thank you for leaving your deep footprints in history to make our journey that little bit easier.

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Abstract

The topic I chose for my thesis is something I personally felt very strongly about. I was driven to undertake this important research study for my family, local community and the wider Aboriginal community. I wanted to write a story about the history of an Aboriginal Mission of a small coastal town in New South Wales, Karuah, and to deliver an accurate historical record so that younger generations of the Worimi people can understood the changing lifestyles of their ancestors before, during and after the arrival of Europeans. The thesis discusses Aboriginal survival, living on the mission under the control of Christian missionaries and government policies of so-called protection. During and after the reign of the Aborigines Protection /Welfare Board, the mission underwent substantial transformations, which I also personally experienced as I was growing up there.

The limited historical research undertaken on missions, reserves and stations, like that at Karuah have, to a large degree, been a missing piece of Aboriginal history. Australia and its institutions systematically denounced, omitted and erased a significant period of our history that caused the shattering of our people’s cultural beliefs, families and communities. These designated tracts of government land became the catalyst for many social and economic problems that Aboriginal people experienced and are still coming to terms with today. Our people were often plagued with extreme poverty and hardship, yet little concern was raised in the wider Australian society. Australian governments believed that Aboriginal people were a dying race destined for extinction whilst under the governments’ paternal care.

This thesis was written to provide our younger generations with information of the paths our Worimi ancestors were compelled to follow and the lifestyle and freedoms that were restricted and controlled. The account I present reveals our people continually confronting bias and racial discrimination in that small town where the Karuah mission was established, and how they experienced and contested the racist attitudes of the local Karuah residents and wider Australian society. This thesis provides an Aboriginal historical perspective in displaying the mission’s transformation over the years and showing the struggle and courage of our ancestors who lived in a very different era from today. In the end it is not just a story of tragedy and destruction but one of great pride, survival, success and triumph.
Chapter One

Introduction

This is an Aboriginal story that is very important to me, my family and my people. It is similar with many Aboriginal groups and their stories in the maintenance and continuation of Aboriginal culture. The approach to this story and research, I think, is different from euro-centric beliefs of what embodies Western knowledge. There are different ways of doing something like this, that is, learning and gaining knowledge from differing perspectives. For me, knowledge is about the creation and preservation of the Aboriginal world-view, a world-view that has been maintained for upwards of 60,000 years and remains as the longest living cultural memory known to man.

There are many colonial images of the so-described noble savage who hunted and gathered to sustain his meagre existence. This was how traditional Aboriginal society’s cultural beliefs were interpreted by Western anthropology: a portrayal of our beliefs as superstition and fear that ruled the life of the prehistoric Blackman. All of this needs to be re-interpreted from an Aboriginal perspective. An Aboriginal warrior, spear in hand, standing on one leg with his foot resting on his knee gazing forlornly into the distant horizon is a common stereotypical image generally used to promote the concept of the noble savage and, perhaps, is a symbol of a dying race.

Our Dreaming and creation stories are integral to our traditional culture and our history, but there are many Aboriginal stories of cultural knowledge that are just as important. These stories are becoming more frequently written, and many more will be told about our history and survival as Aboriginal peoples under a European colonial regime. This story also reveals the power relationships that have existed between Indigenous knowledge and the institutions of the Western academies. There is today a wider acceptance of Aboriginal knowledge in Australian society, through the arts - in poetry, novels, theatre, dance, films and the work of Aboriginal artists. It is through these forms of artistic expressions that Aboriginal stories are told and enacted to illustrate aspects of our culture and knowledge. Because our methodology of presenting our knowledge is from a different paradigm that is not seeded from the Western academic tree, it tends to be disregarded and left to wither and die alone.

Klapproth points out the importance of the relationship between Aboriginal storytelling and transmitting cultural knowledge:
However, the social importance of traditional Aboriginal storytelling resides not only in the transmission of such important cultural information. The human contact and relationship between the storyteller and audience is in itself an important factor in the transmission of Knowledge.¹

The telling of our stories is immersed in culture, because it is exclusive and vibrantly alive, which equates holistically to our past, present and future. The process of telling our stories sustains us in relationships with people, the land and the total environment. Today, a number of these cultural stories are being translated into written historical records by individual Aboriginal people. This is a new process for Aboriginal people because oral storytelling has always been our way of educating, imparting knowledge and communicating with each other. Aboriginal knowledge is what we know of Australia’s first peoples. We continue to tell stories today about the survival of Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal communities, families, individuals and the changing environment.

Storytelling is at the very core of what Aboriginal culture is and includes many aspects of Aboriginal knowledge. Many stories are not set in the Dreaming, but have developed over time and accompanied us as we travel forward into a changing future, along with diverse and ever evolving Aboriginal cultures. Storytelling and stories are unique to many Indigenous cultures across the world and provide answers to many of life’s questions. More importantly, this type of discourse is about life itself and is interpersonal in nature, that is, the narrator of the story enters into a relationship with the listener and is reciprocated. Klapproth understands the importance of narratives in culture stating:

To a large extent these discourses are what the individual experiences as his or her world, and participation in these discourse practices become one of the most important means by which a person expresses his or her personal and cultural identity.²

This relationship connects people at a different level because a story is a personal gift, even if it has been told a thousand times to thousands of different people. Once the storyteller takes the time to tell the story and you listen, the relationship is engaged and it benefits everyone who is present. The changing pitch of the voice and the use of Aboriginal language and Aboriginal English portray meaning; these, along with the use of body language and gestures, assist in the transmission of Indigenous cultural knowledge. Without the use Aboriginal language or

Aboriginal English, there would be a loss in meaning and understanding of the context of the story. The cultural knowledge that languages are able to convey is lost when a language dies, and with each loss a unique worldview dies.³

Whether the content of the story or the knowledge imparted didn’t seem to benefit you particularly at the time, or you didn’t like what you were told, you will nevertheless gain and learn something from that story and also learn a little about the storyteller. As Thomas King explains in his book *The Truth About Stories, A Native Narrative*, when telling a traditional story about his culture:

*Take it. It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your children. Turn it into a play. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You have heard it now.*⁴

Storytelling is immersed in culture and has meaning for many Indigenous peoples around the world. The use of these stories is common to Indigenous human existence. Maybe they will never change the course of your life or bestow knowledge that will empower or inspire you passionately and you may not immediately see the relevance of them. Nevertheless, the reality of them is that the stories become a collage within your memory, which impacts on how you view the world. Perhaps one small story may not change the path that you travel, but it has that possibility as many of those stories relate to life journeys.

Stories and the many storytellers that you have heard can transform into a bigger picture that can be only seen by you and can help your own personal and cultural growth. This means, of course, that all those stories have brought you closer to different peoples’ perspectives on life and their experiences that have triggered thought processes and ideas to help us as Indigenous peoples arrive where we are today in the world. This is a place where we have always been positioned; a more caring people that place family, community and the environment as first key factors in the construction of humanity.

**The Journey**

This narrative has its beginnings back in 1996 when I enrolled in a Masters program at the University of Newcastle. It began as a simple story that I wanted to convey about my ancestors

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and the Worimi Nation. It was a story about their history and about living on a government reserve in the small New South Wales coastal town of Karuah. Dreaming stories are the only Aboriginal stories that most Australians have heard and want to hear. Most Western interpretations have Aboriginal cultural knowledge clouded as a primitive religion, ancient rituals, mystery and fantasy that are told to explain an ancient culture that was locked in the Stone Age development of man. Or, they are seen as just stories that are told to children as a form of amusement by old grey bearded Aboriginal storytellers sitting around a campfire. The journey of my Masters originally started at what now seems a long time ago. But what I have just been talking about affected my first attempt. I will explain it as I go along. It needs to be understood that not all stories take you directly from A to B in a straight line, and these sidetracks are common throughout all of our stories. Stories, most of the time, are more about the journey than the destination and these detours and sidetracks are integral to the structure of the story. They can provide knowledge that may assist people in different situations and are a powerful element to learning, understanding and personal growth. Knowledge comes from learning of life experiences, and wisdom is developed through these life experiences and Aboriginal culture stories are told to us in many forms.

I was quite excited about enrolling in and undertaking a Masters degree because it was something I never imagined doing - a university research thesis. My negative educational experiences at high school saw me leave at mid-year eleven and I picked up education later at TAFE and through an undergraduate degree at university. I never intended that or thought my career path would lead me to become an academic. I am still not sure if I really am one, despite having now spent over seventeen years as an academic at the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle.

For me, it was important to undertake an historical study about my ancestors, the Worimi, and the Karuah Mission where I grew up. I wanted to write a story that my children and grandchildren could read and from which they could gain some understanding of their people’s past. The study would provide information about their heritage and ancestors, the Worimi people of Karuah, giving them an understanding of what it was like for us growing up on the mission, particularly for my grandfather, my mother’s generation and my own. The title for the thesis provides the key to the study: *Mission Impossible*: Aboriginal survival before, during and after the Aboriginal Protection era. Clearly, for many Aboriginal people and communities, historically their very survival was the major life experience and involved surviving the best way they could in different situations under, at times, extreme and adverse circumstances.
At first, the direction which my research took was in the discipline of Sociology and Anthropology, but it is better defined as Aboriginal history or Aboriginal studies. I was referred to a well-established academic as a supervisor who was well known for his research with a number of Aboriginal communities. We met and he discussed what would be a practical framework for my master’s plan. I told him my ideas that I wanted to write about and his response was that I would have to write two books, one academic and the other for the Aboriginal community. This was not what I had in mind and I didn’t see the point when my most important intended audience for the research was the Indigenous community, with the academy coming second. I thought I could write the thesis to accommodate academic discipline, but I didn’t want to go straight down the line of the western academy, because I wanted to challenge some of those processes and it was important that it was my Aboriginal story.

I guess that is why I never really got started in the first place. I didn’t follow through with the writing of the thesis and withdrew. I thought it was pointless writing a thesis that the community couldn’t relate to or gain something from. The purpose of the thesis was to hopefully engage the academy by displaying a more culturally appropriate way of doing such a thing, that is, writing about aspects of our history, our community and culture from an Aboriginal perspective; presenting Indigenous knowledge that the community can understand and relate to, while giving the academy an insight into what I think represents Indigenous knowledge.

At the time my supervisor’s comments were more than a little disconcerting, and I didn’t put up much of an argument as he explained what was needed with academic rigor. In the end, he was the experienced senior academic. I think this put me off more than I realised because the examples he used and his own publications were not the way I thought and talked, therefore it was not the way I would write my story. It was frustrating that I would have to write along the academic lines that he explained and then write a separate book that would be more community friendly. When I had initially started I had been keen to carry out archival research, to write down from memory some personal conversations with elders in the Aboriginal community at Karuah and then finally begin writing the thesis. I recall presenting my first draft chapter, which was the literature review of the available material relating to the Worimi people, with a great deal of apprehension. I felt it probably wasn’t very good and the response was what I expected: it needed a fair bit of editorial work. One of the main points my supervisor made was that it had to be written in the ‘third person’ and not in the first person, as I had done. As an academic, I had to be more objective and not so subjective.

I saw this as problem because much of the thesis holds a deep personal affiliation for me and I didn’t see a problem with writing it from the inside, so to speak. I did understand what he
meant, but it didn’t connect for me. Through years of academic study, many Aboriginal researchers see themselves and are directed as outsiders like some voyeur or scientist studying their own culture from the sidelines. We are as much a part of the study as the subject for me, and the entire thesis process is holistic. As Linda Smith, a noted Maori, academic, who describes the problems Indigenous people face when writing about themselves, says:

*We begin to write about ourselves as Indigenous peoples as if we were really 'out there', the 'Other', with all the baggage that this entails.*

This meant that I was being urged to write as if I was someone removed and detached from the research area; like I was on the outside looking in, but not connected to the people, community and land. As the author of this work, it was one of the greatest obstacles that I had to face. I am a Worimi man who grew up on the mission. The place and its people are central to the story and we are all connected. This was my central purpose for attempting to write this thesis in the first place. It took me ten years to realise that I should not have withdrawn, but just written the thesis and argued my point of view. Indigenous academics have been challenging the academy in the way they present and represent the uniqueness of their own Indigenous knowledge for years now.

Initially I didn’t understand how I could write about my country, people and family without being subjective to some degree in the presentation of my writing. These facets of my research are the very essence or basic elements that contribute to making me who I am as an Aboriginal person and scholar. How can I tell this story any differently when I am Aboriginal? Do I change when I talk and write? If so, does this change my Aboriginal persona or when I need to don an academic gown to tell my story through an academic lens? If I am writing about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal history, then why do I present it in an entirely Western perspective that is somehow devoid of the culture that it represents? This is who I am. This is how I think and feel. This is how I speak, so this is how I write.

I thought that it must be written to embody Indigenous worldviews of life and the way we communicate with each other. When we talk in the community, the language we use is ours, including subtleties of humour, body language and the use of colourful adjectives. Using these, it becomes distinctive to us as people. If this is the case then this is how we should write, not as if it is barren or hollow and only carries the meaning of Western ideologies. The way I see Indigenous writing is that it should contain Indigenous knowledge and culture infused and

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vibrant with the characteristics of the writer and the aspects that underpin the values of Indigenous storytelling.

Storytelling! That’s all many people think it is, just telling a story with no real purpose other than entertainment, and not providing analytical or critical solutions to theories and philosophies. It doesn’t utilize a specific path that everyone can follow. The way in which our storytelling is engaged can provide some answers to questions by unconventional means, using clear narratives that we can grasp in a language that best suits us. Not everyone thinks the same way and the ways of understanding, doing and learning vary. The most effective methods to convey knowledge are usually in an environment where people feel comfortable and safe.

Irene Watson spoke about her struggle being an Indigenous person maintaining her identity and culture while presenting her writing in the academic world. Because of her oral culture, she speaks about the difficulty of voicing and translating it into an academic narrative:

What language should I use? An academic narrative, no. A poem or a song is better. One that is mine. And for me this has been a struggle, simply to assert who I am, to assert my voice.6

Irene’s words not only draw relevance to this story, but are at the very core of what I am writing about. For Irene, it would have been twice as hard to present her narrative in the academic arena being an Aboriginal and a woman. Just being Indigenous and working in an institution as an academic can create tremendous personal conflict and I have found myself continually questioning who and what I am doing. There are times when the lines are blurred, that is, the lines between cultural identity and a career path that can make us stray into areas that I do not want to enter.

The problem has been that, in many cases, we have not asserted our Aboriginal voices enough in our writing. Although, the numbers of Aboriginal academics have grown significantly, many have not asserted their Indigenous voices so that they are heard. That’s what we have learned over the years: in and out of the academy our voices have not been heard and translated to appropriate writing. Our voice helps bring Indigenous meaning that provides a different perspective to what has already been written and recorded in Western methodologies. This is the struggle that many Indigenous people contend with - the disregard and acceptance of our knowledge in Western societies. Wilson explains this in the academy:

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Often, the university has accepted what it can appropriate for colonial purposes (the field of anthropology alone, notorious for their indigenous data collecting, often endless examples of this) and dismissed any knowledge that challenges the status quo and Western ways of knowing.7

There are a number of issues preventing Aboriginal writers in the production and presentation of our histories in Western literature. There is our responsibility to our community with the knowledge that pertains only to the people in it. This means gaining permission from elders or the community itself to record cultural knowledge that may be seen as knowledge that should remain only within that community. There is also the fear of presenting cultural knowledge in documents that will be critically challenged by other academics and mainstream society. It will be either exploited or scrutinized and its cultural value questioned and devalued.

I did step back from this study for some time but eventually I recognized its importance and, with two new supervisors more supportive of what I was attempting to do, I took up the challenge and returned to the study.

The Last Thirty Years

Historically, our culture and knowledge has been denigrated and degraded both physically and psychologically ever since the British colony was established in Sydney in 1788. It can be argued that that same mind-set hasn’t really changed or wavered significantly in over two hundred years and today our cultural knowledge is still being questioned. Even the highest court in Australian and various forms of media and academics challenge the authenticity of the Aboriginal recording of their histories. To validate this statement you only have to look at the last two decades here in Australia. There have been three major issues: social justice, human rights and Aboriginal rights. It is not that difficult to explain how Australian society accepts or denies Aboriginal history before and after we were colonised.

Evidence is freely available to explain the lack of value that has been placed on us as Indigenous people, on our culture and our knowledge. It is easy to gauge this statement if you are able to be objective: you can see how Aboriginal Australians have not been afforded the luxury or respect, as custodians of this country, that we are justly entitled to. I, on the other hand, am subjective because this issue has brought weight to bear on my life and many other Aboriginal people. That is why I am telling this story through this thesis, to shed a few rays of

light on a small part of our history. *The Native Title Act* and The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the National Inquiry into the Forced Removal of Aboriginal Children (Stolen Generations) have had a tremendous impact on a wide range of social factors throughout every Aboriginal community, mine included.

In the case of Native Title, the highest court in Australia agreed with Eddie Mabo that his Meriam people did indeed hold Native Title rights to their Traditional lands in the Torres Strait. It set a precedent in this country and debunked the myth of Terra Nullius as ‘land belonging to no one.’ The Australian government was then required to pass legislation from that High Court decision and created the *Native Title Act*, under a lot of pressure. But our Native Title Rights didn’t end there. Claimants for Native Title are continually challenged about their cultural beliefs in a bid to neutralize all legal attempts to reclaim their Traditional lands. Evidence provided testifying to Aboriginal spiritual connections to the land, is always under attack in the courts and media. The media began creating mass hysteria through propaganda campaigns about how Aborigines could claim your backyard under Native Title in an attempt to create racial division. All endeavours to convey our cultural beliefs that we have in the land have been lost or disregarded in one form or another in Western society.

Pastoralists didn’t like the High Court ruling because they believed it threatened their pastoral leases and they lobbied the government through the media to change the *Native Title Act*. It went back to court and the Wik decision was handed down and supported. Aboriginal people were once again the losers and ‘co-existence’ was the appropriate catch cry. The government made dramatic changes to the *Native Title Act* with John Howard’s infamous Ten Point Plan. It made it more difficult for Aboriginal people to claim Traditional lands by reducing the claimant’s basic right to negotiate for land to start their claim.

Land is central to every aspect of Aboriginal culture; from the coastal areas to the deserts and plains the land is a part of us and not something that is owned to be exploited, but vibrantly alive with the essence of life itself. Western society has lost their Dreaming connection and can’t comprehend this symbiotic relationship that we have with our country, the land of our ancestors. For us as Aboriginal peoples, it cannot be separated, because we were created together in the beginning and we care for the land and it cares for us. Deborah Bird Rose gives her interpretation of understanding country in her book, *Country of the Heart*. She tries to provide an Indigenous perspective of how she sees country for anyone who does not have that connection. Rose believes that:
Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is both lived in and lived with.8

Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is one of the most damning factors that reflects institutional racism in the Australian society. We had a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) in 1987-90 because of the disproportionately high numbers of Aboriginal people that had died in police custody and prisons. The findings were so alarming that the RCIADIC identified the need for extensive procedural practices to be put into place when an Aboriginal person is placed in custody. The RCIADIC made over 330 recommendations to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal deaths. Not one police officer or prison guard was charged with killing an Aboriginal person. Nothing substantial was implemented from the recommendations that has assisted in the reduction of the numbers of Aboriginal deaths in custody. In actual fact since the RCIADIC, the death rate of Aboriginal prisoners has risen quite dramatically. So can you see the frustration that many Aboriginal people feel with the inequality within the wider Australian society? It can be construed that our history and presence doesn’t count for anything in this country. If there was any value placed on Aboriginal cultural beliefs and us as Aboriginal peoples, then a significant humanitarian approach would have been implemented to address this racial and social problem. Instead of the death rate rising and the incarceration of Aboriginal people increasing out of proportion, these should have been reduced and there would be no need to discuss them here.

This remains an important issue that isn’t about to go away in the near future, because racism is so entrenched in the institutions of Australia’s society. We only have to pick up a newspaper from the not too distant past to see the problems that Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has caused on Palm Island. The media and police only highlight the Indigenous violence and justify the government deploying more police and greater controls. The structural problems surrounding Aboriginal deaths in custody are almost lost in the media hype to construct their own reality of the situation whereby the police are the victims. This again relates to the writing of Aboriginal history, the control and manufacturing of court evidence and how media bias disempowers Aboriginal people.

My brother became one of those statistics and he wasn’t an object. He was an Aboriginal man and Aboriginal deaths in custody aren’t something that Aboriginal people watch from the nose bleed seats in grandstands. We are in it up to our necks, especially when breaches of basic human rights become so commonplace amongst our people that white Australians take for

granted. Aboriginal deaths in custody and the issues surrounding it affect all Aboriginal people and impact on our daily lives to varying degrees, directly or indirectly.

All government reporting from the RCIADIC portrays a picture of accidental deaths, self-inflicted fatalities, injuries sustained from resisting arrest and suicides. This is what the government would have us believe are some of the primary causes for most Aboriginal deaths in custody. The truth or interpretation of the truth lies within the power of Western institutions that flourish from the racial life force nurtured within the foundations of Australian society. The law enforces the ideals of the institutions they represent and they will uphold and protect their values with fervour as, after all, they are their institutions.

Finally, I will examine the Stolen Generations tragedy, which has decimated Aboriginal families, Aboriginal communities, and Aboriginal culture. In May 1995, we had a National Inquiry into the Forced Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families. Here was a sincere opportunity to address and heal a deep wound not only in the Aboriginal communities, but in the wider society as well. The findings from the Inquiry very explicitly stated that, indeed, there were large numbers of Aboriginal children removed, and they estimate it was over 59,000 Aboriginal children who were removed from their families and communities.

You only have to look at the various state governments’ Aboriginal protection policies around the country to find legislation specifically enacted to remove Aboriginal children from their families and communities. My grandmother was one of the stolen generations and I personally witnessed children being removed from the Karuah mission. Some of these Aboriginal children were taken from the mission and returned as adults, and others weren’t. Every child on the mission was taught to fear the welfare and the law; we all knew what could happen if you ran afoul of them.

The language of the *Bringing them Home Report* reflects Aboriginal testimonies and perspectives about the removal of large numbers of Aboriginal children. The government challenged the validity of the findings of the report. Here again, this clearly exposes the power relationships that have always existed when it comes to our histories and our stories and what the governments and their institutions are willing to accept. I have seen numerous case files of Aboriginal state wards and of whole families that were removed. Yet, the previous federal Liberal government and most of Australian society fail to recognize that this actually happened, and a chance to mend a rift has faded with denial and the fear of compensation dollars and cents.
I worked for over thirteen years with the Hunter Aboriginal Children’s Services, a fostering program that I played a key role in establishing in Newcastle to help prevent Aboriginal children being placed in white substitute care. In that time, I dealt with many Aboriginal parents of Aboriginal wards that were taken away as part of the Stolen Generations. I have worked closely with Link-up, an Aboriginal organization committed to help reunite Aboriginal people that were separated from their families.

Finally, the Federal Labor Government under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made an apology for all Aboriginal people affected by the stolen generation. Aboriginal people and their cultural heritage suffered traumatically, becoming casualties from imposed government assimilationist policies. It has been this paternalistic attitude that has stripped away any chance to be heard in our fight to maintain our history, cultural beliefs and rights to be recognized as the first Australians. We could argue semantics about whether whole generations were taken away, but we as Aboriginal people remember what happened. Aboriginal families and communities have lived with the fallout from the devastation of child removal. Our living memories and knowledge handed down regarding what transpired remains with us forever. We were not objects in this practice, regardless of whether it was their best intentions or something a little more sinister. These living Aboriginal memories, recorded through oral testimonies, are selective memories for Western society, according to whether it benefits their institutions or not. Butler explains the importance and use of oral histories:

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\text{Moreover, both Attwood and Broome have affirmed the importance of oral history, and discussed the way it challenged the authority of the historian as “expert”; their designation of testimony as “oral history” has worked to limit the affective power of indigenous speech by positioning it as something professional which historians “choose” to engage with at their discretion.}^9
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Aboriginal people have always utilised the power of memory in the maintenance and continuation of our culture and traditions. These memories are handed down in the different forms of stories, performance and songs from one generation to the next. Our histories do not linger in the past - they are carried with us every day, because they are living memories that we pass on to keep them alive. They are not something forgotten in history, but are something we live with every day and are a part of our present and future. The concept of time and history is much different for us; we don’t see it as a distinct linear line. It always presents a constant, and is circular where past, present and future are intertwined.

Each of the three important social issues mentioned and the manner with which they have been dealt by the Australian government and their institutions are a continual reminder that our knowledge of this land and its history is not respected or valued. Our cultural knowledge has been either exploited or held to be contemptible in this country. These issues are all linked and entwined in our history, culture and future; everything is cyclic and perpetual. Family and kinship structures have sustained Aboriginal communities; everyone is connected through close kinship ties, which maintains every facet of our live. Extended family relationships ensure that everyone is connected as close-knit communities.

Aboriginal knowledge is what we have learned over many generations and told as stories about our own histories before and after the arrivals of Europeans. They are stories that can be traced back to traditional culture, the changing environment and the arrival of the white man. It is also the living memories of our more recent ancestral families that are handed down about Australia’s colonization. Our stories told are a little and sometimes very different to those documented by early Australian historians. These historical records have either completely missed an Aboriginal presence at all or have denigrated Aboriginal people and their culture, often portrayed as Stone-Age man and a primitive race connecting the missing link in man’s evolution. This uninformed and racist-mindset became a worldview entrenched in Australia’s short history by anthropologists, and historians and eagerly supported by the media.

It could be debated that Aboriginal people are one of the most researched Indigenous races on the face of the earth. Many students of anthropology, sociology, archaeology and history have gained their notoriety as well as Doctorates and other post-graduate qualifications from studying Aboriginal people and their cultural practices. Some have risen to an almost super-star status amongst academics and the literary worlds. Academics utilizing Western research methodologies that recorded Indigenous history are seen and labelled as the leading experts on Aboriginal knowledge. They are believed to hold all the information and knowledge of our past and present, thus predetermining to some degree many aspects of our future relationships within Western society.

The story that I am going to tell in this thesis pertains to a number of interesting and significant historical perspectives of the Karuah Aboriginal Mission and its residents. It will offer some insight into the history of the Worimi Aboriginal people who have and still occupy the land surrounding Port Stephens. My intent is to provide an Aboriginal viewpoint to many historical issues of the Karuah mission that have not been investigated and discussed in more recent times. There still remains relevant and important information that has not been aired that significantly contributes to Aboriginal as well as Australian history.
There are a number of reasons why I chose this topic for my thesis but it comes down to one major point. I wanted to write a story about the history of the Aboriginal Mission at Karuah. The purpose is to enable younger generations of Worimi descendants to understand what it was like for their ancestors living on the mission whilst under the control of governments and their protectionist policies. I thought that it would be good, particularly for my children and their children, to understand the lifestyle their ancestors endured as well as other family and extended family members. Since the days of the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales, the Karuah mission has undergone a number of significant changes even from the time that I grew up there.

The history of Aboriginal missions, reserves and stations including Karuah, under the assumed sanction of the Aborigines Protection Board, has basically been a missing aspect of Aboriginal history in Australia. The government has done quite well at trivialising or sweeping away a time in our history that has devastated not just individuals and families but whole communities. For many non-Aboriginal people, missions and reserves were places that were out of sight and out of mind and that’s how the government designed them. In many cases, life on these missions was fraught with extreme poverty and hardship which raised little concern from the outside world other than missionaries and humanitarians. The desired outcome for the government and mainstream society was for Aboriginal people to eventually disappear from the face of the earth, and they were strongly committed to this immoral plan.

I hope through this thesis to convey to these younger generations an understanding of the paths our elders were forced to travel where life wasn’t as easy as they may have thought; how they had to deal with bias and racial discrimination especially in small towns where missions were established. It openly generated and fuelled racist attitudes which remained generally uncontested. I think this is what I envisaged this thesis to be about in providing information so people can comprehend the changes for the mission and appreciate the struggle of their ancestors in a period that was at times very unforgiving.

The material contained in the following chapters in this thesis will begin with presenting a background of the Worimi people before the arrival of the colonisers. The traditional land and boundaries of the Worimi clans were and are important aspects to be outlined, as well as the traditional language spoken by the Worimi people. That was all about to change with the coming of the cedar getters, and sustained contact with convicts and free settlers caused the death and devastation of the once strong traditional lifestyle. Detailed information pertaining to the traditional cultural practices is provided, as is a significant part of the history of the residents living on the mission. The protection era followed with the establishment of the Karuah
mission/reserve where the Worimi people were now under the control and protection of an evangelistic religious sect who in turn were answerable to the New South Wales Protection Board- an indirect form of control.

A number of key topics have been examined while the Worimi people were under the paternal control of the Aborigines Protection Board and the influence through evangelistic missionaries. Religion as an organisation promoted by the Aboriginal Inland Mission played a pivotal role in the development and maintenance of the mission as well as the lives of everyone living there. Politics and the ongoing struggle against the government's protection policies of oppression will be highlighted to show the strong political stance and involvement of the Worimi people. Racism and racial attitudes is central to the issues discussed and is easily identified throughout many of the following chapters. The lack of access to appropriate Western education resulted from Aboriginal children being denied attendance in the local public school. This left them languishing in the mission school with no prospect of gaining adequate schooling. The final topic I will examine is the role sport played in the lives of many of the Aboriginal residents of the mission; discussing how racism excluded many Aboriginal people from playing sport but in some cases how talented local Aboriginal sportsmen helped breakdown some racial barriers that existed.
Chapter Two

Language, Land, and Clan Boundaries

The fact that we may not speak our language fluently anymore or use them as a main means of communication is not really an issue. It is more about language being a marker of who we are in relation and connection to our land and our ancestors.10

This thesis begins as an Aboriginal story that holds great importance to me and my people. I feel the need to tell the story about my Worimi ancestors and family history at Karuah mission in New South Wales from an Aboriginal perspective and standpoint. It is my intention to analyse and evaluate various conflicting anthropological information and interpretations relating to the Worimi history, culture, land boundaries and language. Then I intend to unpack that knowledge and combine archival research with oral history memories to produce a document that can inspire future generations of Worimi people by presenting a proud past.

In this chapter, I want to discuss the Worimi land, its boundaries and culture including the language spoken by the clans of my ancestors the Worimi people. The Worimi occupied a small area on the mid north coast of New South Wales that surrounds Port Stephens just north of the regional city of Newcastle. I will present and discuss some of this historical archival literature and its relevance to the people that still live in and around the Karuah mission. Unfortunately, in recent years the importance of oral memory has not been recognized and little was recorded through Worimi elders compared to what had been successfully captured in the past. This disconnection from cultural memory has occurred as a direct result of colonization, dispossession and the objectives that missionaries and missions established to ‘civilise’ and Christianise Aborigines by severing all traditional cultural links through indoctrination.

I will use the archival information collected to illustrate how early anthropologists viewed Aboriginal people, their land and the different Aboriginal languages and dialects of the region. The importance that researchers placed on tribal or clan boundaries will be examined and the significance it held to Aboriginal clans will also be discussed. Analysing the ability of anthropologists and ethnographers to accurately record Aboriginal cultural and historical information from Aboriginal informants is an important aspect of this and the next chapter. The type of knowledge involved and the capacity of Aboriginal informants to relay traditional knowledge to anthropologists will make for an important and interesting discussion.

Since the British arrival in Port Stephens, we have been fortunate in that there remains enough recorded information to glimpse the history of the Worimi people. In recent decades there has been a strong movement and resurgence towards Aboriginal language revitalization. Work has been completed by linguists with the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative to reintroduce the Kattang language into our Kattang-speaking communities. Our culture and language has suffered under the weight of colonisation including the work of various missionaries and enforced government assimilationist policies. Enforced policies of control prevented Aboriginal people from speaking their own language and imposed the use of English. Additionally, there have been many inaccuracies and misinformation perpetrated about Aboriginal people and communities.

It is recognized that there is great difficulty in locating accurately tribal territories. Early observers were not aware of the organization of tribes into hordes, which were the landowning groups within a tribe. Consequently there was confusion and error in assigning tribal characteristics to hordes. By the time that more aware observers tried to discover the organization, it was too late, because extensive detribalization had occurred.11

Sharing Personal Family Stories

Throughout this thesis I place great importance on oral memory and family reflection and connection. As an example I want to share a story that was told to me by my maternal grandfather Joseph Ping when I was a young boy. My middle name is Joseph, and I am named after both my Grandfathers, my Dad’s father Daniel Joseph and Mum’s father as I mentioned. Yes, and as the name ‘Ping’ suggests he is of Chinese ancestry. He was first generation Aboriginal Chinese, his father, my great grandfather Young Ping arrived in the Port Stephens district in 1879, having worked his way from China via Okinawa in Japan. Young Ping’s journey will make for a good story on another day, one which I hope to research in greater detail for my grandchildren and future generations as there are many questions of how a Chinese man ended up here after living in Japan.

Like most grandparents he treated me and my siblings with love and kindness, he was a gentle softly spoken man not like Nan. She was prone to express herself somewhat differently, much louder and at times quite abruptly and very sharp in making her point. Pop (Joseph) was a quiet

hard-working man. Your typical Asian build, he was short, not very big, but well-toned and muscled with ‘six pack abs’ like an old-fashioned washboard. He would usually come over to our home on Sunday evenings and spend time with Mum and us. On Saturdays he enjoyed a beer because he worked hard all week as he had done all his life. He was a timber-getter by trade and lived much of his life in the bush cutting pit props for the mines and sleepers for the railway. He began as a timber cutter when he was a very young man. That’s all he did, work; and he was still cutting timber until his retirement at sixty seven. He died not long after that. I think the hard physical work and being in the bush kept him physically and mentally fit. He loved the bush.

I have only good memories of him but what I recall and loved about him the most was the way he would take the time to talk to us and tell me stories; stories about different things he experienced in the bush and his life experiences when he was young. I have forgotten a lot of what he told me and it was a long time ago. I was too young then, and now I am too old to remember, but there were a couple of stories that really stuck in my memory. The type of stories you never forget that seem to stay with you when everything becomes a little ‘blurry’. I was, maybe eight or nine. I am not quite sure of the age and it’s not really important, but this is the story he told me about Worimi land.

He told me about a place way up near the start of the Karuah River where the water runs fresh. He said that there is a lot of gold there, as he pointed up the Karuah River. “It’s everywhere”, he said, “the gold is so soft and pure it’s just like butter you could cut it with a knife”. You can imagine, a young boy hearing about such a treasure so close to home. Of course I thought, “Wow! We could be all rich.” Years later I found out that gold had been found around the Gloucester-Stroud area many years ago. A bit of a gold rush happened there back in the 1870s at the top of the Karuah River. I sat there in awe, wide-eyed listening intently and when he finished talking I asked simply, “Pop have you ever got some of the gold”?

The tone in his voice changed along with his face when he replied very sternly something like, “You can’t go to that place or take anything from there. There are spirits there who protect that gold and everything around it and we don’t need the gold that much. Anyway it’s not worth it”.12 As I said earlier, Pop was a softly spoken man and I hadn’t heard that tone from him before. I couldn’t and didn’t understand his response but I knew he meant what he said to me. When I grew older I dismissed it, and thought Pop had just been making it all up; there was no

12 Joseph Ping Conversation 1968
gold up the river, he was just entertaining his grandson with a good yarn about gold and a treasure.

I didn’t think about it much for many years, but as one gets older and wiser, one begins to reflect. I now think the story was much more important and was more than a treasure story about gold. He was imparting to his grandson that up the river was a very special place that was more valuable than gold. He was imparting to me about the need to take heed and respect this place. That our ancestral spirits protect and preserve it and that’s the reason to keep away from it. The funny thing is I heard that same story some years later by Uncle Manning Slater. Did it develop over the years as a Worimi urban legend or was it an important Worimi story?

Regardless of its substance, the story is very important to me because it was told to me by my grandfather. Was there any truth to what he told me? I don’t really know but it is a treasured memory and I will respect my grandfather’s words and memory. He was a Worimi man who had first-hand knowledge of the land and he knew his country better than most. I was just a kid at the time but it sure sounds like there was a little more to that story than he let on. That story personalized an area of Worimi country and gave it meaning to me. The tradition of telling stories and Aboriginal narratives is crucial to understanding certain aspect and viewpoints of Aboriginal land, culture and its people.

The loving, caring nature of my grandfather went without question and a family trait which is identified in a newspaper account of 1918 labeled ‘A faithful Husband’ describes my grandfather’s father and my great grandfather William Ping’s concern for his wife:

Every fortnight there is a man who walks to Newcastle from the Karuah River, 27 miles. He comes in to see his wife, who is seriously ill at the Newcastle Hospital. When he sees how she is, he walks back the 27 miles. The man is a half-caste, and so is his wife. His name is William Ping and he is 27 years old. His grandmother was a half-caste aborigine and his father a Japanese [Chinese not Japanese]. His grandfather who was an Englishman, was a soldier in the Crimean war. He left again on another homeward tramp last night. “There are plenty of black men with a white man’s heart,” he said.13

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13 The Mail (Adelaide SA) Saturday 14 December 1918, p 2; The Singleton Argus, Tuesday 17 December 1918 p 3; The Muswellbrook Chronicle, Saturday 21 December 1918 p 8; The Farmer and Settler Friday 3 January 1919 p 8
Traditional Culture and Language: Problems

My grandfather’s initial story does raise questions about how Aboriginal stories told to anthropologists by Aboriginal informants are received and interpreted. The problem as with all stories is that anthropological research depends on the credibility and reliability of the informant. Even with credible information it becomes open to Western interpretation as it is transcribed into English. It loses the essence of its cultural content and meaning because our histories, our Dreaming stories, are oral in nature and originated in Aboriginal language. The informant’s stories are seldom given the recognition of their value and respect as anthropologist’s interpretations are pigeonholed into the Western paradigm. Only then after it has been converted through Western interpretation and understanding, is it given value. The problem remains in their interpretations and findings relying heavily on what they believed they were told and what the informant wanted to tell them or did not tell them.14 Fatnowna and Pickett point out that:

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\text{Not only is there is a hegemony of academic knowledge and theory, and a loss of natural wisdom in everyday life and it mechanisms of consultation and transmission, but this academic hegemony is held largely by non-indigenous culture, unilaterally promoting Western systems of understanding and its own constructions of Aboriginal realties.}^{15}
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During the archival research process I was relieved to find such an abundance of recorded information about my people’s history, language and culture. I discovered anthropological, linguistic and historical sources relating to the language and group boundaries of the clans or Nurras\textsuperscript{16} of the Worimi people. The major language group is the Kattang of which the Worimi form a small part, and that covers a considerably large territory on the eastern coast of New South Wales.

The Kattang language group appears in secondary literature under a number of different spellings, for example, Kattang, Gathang, Kutthung, Ghadung. I have chosen to use Kattang for uniformity throughout the chapter and thesis. This spelling version of Kattang is more familiar to me, and is a form that I have used in the past. Like all Aboriginal language it was never recorded in written form by Aboriginal people. Traditional Aboriginal culture was an oral


\textsuperscript{15} Scott Fatnowna & Harry, Pickett. (2002). \textit{Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: Towards a philosophy of articulation}. Claremont, South Africa, New Africa Books (Pty) Ltd.p225

\textsuperscript{16} Worimi word for clan as used by Elkin
culture and as such there is no right or wrong way to spell an Aboriginal word. As long as it is spelt as it basically sounds, it is correct.

Within the Worimi territory existed, a number of patrilineal clans that were noted by many anthropologists and ethnographers including Elkin, Enright, Mathews, and Howitt. The later work of Sokoloff adds to this body of knowledge and information relating to the boundaries of the neighbouring Aboriginal clans. I will demonstrate that the available documentation is often contradictory as most historical records relate to the reliability and interpretation of the informants knowledge. I will then move beyond this important question to incorporate my own research with the Aboriginal community at Karuah, where this thesis and its research process are centred.

**Anthropologists and the Karuah Mission**

The Karuah Mission has had limited research done on its history and cultural background. As such, that makes my study an important one. Elkin and Mathews have recorded significant linguistic information in the area that reveal an understanding of the Nurras of the Worimi and surrounding clans. The findings from both Elkin and Mathews are nevertheless occasionally conflicting, whilst at other times they draw similar conclusions regarding cultural practices which I will examine in greater detail throughout this chapter.

These early researchers of the Worimi people have thankfully recorded enough elements to substantially outline their traditional lives. They have provided glimpses and images of Worimi culture that would have almost certainly been completely erased through the gradual impact of colonisation. At times, their language and interpretation of Aboriginal culture are paternalistic and condescending to the extent that they portray the imprinted stereotypes of the Rousseauian noble savage.

I wonder how many anthropologists actually were given factual core information when they recorded their much heralded research publications, especially, when they were outsiders and observers, not accepted nor part of the clan. Given that skin or acceptance doesn’t give you access to the sacred oral archives of Aboriginal traditional life. The tradition of passing on knowledge of the Dreaming would have been restricted to those who were part of the clan and only when they are eligible to receive it. McNeil explains the problem with this type of research:
The ‘outsider’ research method, also known as participant observation, provides an ideal platform for the analysis of a range of problems in this type of research. The famous anthropological Freeman-Mead debate provides a detailed case study scenario and elaborates on the ‘outsider’ question referred to at the 1988 Tokoroa hui.17

There are many examples that could be construed that early academic writers manufactured their research for sensationalism and mislead their readers and established many untruths, like cannibalism, sorcery and abhorrent sexual behavior. Irrespective of their motives, in the end the information recorded regarding Aboriginal cultural knowledge depended on the individual informant. What was his or her clan status and capacity to act as a knowledge holder? This fuelled by the researcher’s interpretation of the information received leaves questions, regarding the validity of what was recorded.

A good example of this can be found in the anthropological work of the late Margaret Mead with Native Samoans. Her research and publications saw her fame and status grow to that of a highly respected international academic authority in the late 1960’s. Her celebrated work *The Coming of Age in Samoa* was standard reading for many first year undergraduate anthropological students in North America and Australia. In her research, Mead claimed that she had found a society in which uninhibited sex was condoned and rampant, beginning at puberty. One of her young Samoan informants, who provided this information at that time, publically recanted the information she had given Mead some sixty years later as inaccurate and humorous. Leonard Sax explains that particular incident:

*Six decades later, a series of investigative reports demonstrated that Mead had gotten the story completely wrong. She had not lived with the islanders, but only interviewed a handful of them. Her primary informant, a 24-year-old woman named Fa’apua’a Fa’amu, invented an outrageous story about mixed sleep-overs and free sex among teenagers.*18

The point I am making is that information received from an Indigenous informant is neither always true nor interpreted accurately. It depends on the informants’ range of knowledge and the processes and abilities for passing on important cultural knowledge that always remains within that specific group. Cultural knowledge amongst most if not all Indigenous groups is based on a deep belief in spirituality. All spiritual and cultural knowledge pertains to the

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specific group and the country or land for which that sacredness is contained. Cultural and spiritual knowledge is only known to that group and no other; it binds certain groups together through their religious beliefs.

Unlike Western views of knowledge, some things in Traditional Aboriginal societies are just known and only known to a certain few who have earned that right. Cultural understanding is beyond verbal description. Indeed, interpreting any culture through the lens of a Western paradigm loses the very meaning of its purpose. I will touch on some of these cultural issues as I continue in an attempt to convey an Indigenous perspective.

This is what makes us unique as Indigenous peoples-interpreting and understanding the intangible and tangible world. We as a people living in Western society take for granted what is around us all the time, in what we can possess and only comprehend, what we see in the material world. If we are able to understand the holistic world we become more attuned to relationships that are integral to our daily lives. Family, a sense of community and our relationship to the environment are the fundamental moldings for the creation of humanity.19

Kattang Language, Tribal and Clan Boundaries

The Kattang Language group covered a significant area of land along the mid-eastern coast of New South Wales. The findings of researchers can vary from one to the other depending on the time period of interviews, who the Aboriginal informants were, the actual knowledge they possessed and their cultural ability to pass it on to the uninitiated. Clan boundaries today still contain degrees of uncertainty and in most cases there are no clear definitions. Only specific clan boundaries which are divided by notable natural land forms like hills, valleys, rivers and other waterways can be more easily identified.

The loss of important and relevant information could be due to the premature deaths of traditional elders, particularly pertaining to the British invasion resulting in violence and disease. Therefore the cultural knowledge of the land could not be handed down to younger generations. The cultural knowledge of country and the extremities of boundaries and cultural practice died with them. Following the initial onslaught, the eventual removal and relocation of Aboriginal people onto missions, stations and reserves brought about a huge loss of cultural

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information. This again meant vital knowledge was not passed on to the following generations. Attenbrow confirms that:

*Elders had not been able or chose not to pass on the knowledge to the younger generations before they died from introduced diseases, warfare or natural causes.*\(^{20}\)

Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Native Title claimants have raised boundary issues in the contemporary setting. In some cases, there are no clear understandings or distinctions regarding where clan boundaries had been. While the majority of clans lived in harmony and intermarried, boundaries played a lesser role in their relationships and day-to-day existence. Elkin gives a general outline of his understanding of the Kattang language group area as:

*This Language is generally known as the Kattang and so it is probable that one tribe, the Kattang, of which the Worimi, the Awabakal and also the Geawegal who inhabited the Hunter valley for fifty or sixty miles above the site of Maitland, were local subdivisions, occupied the coastal country from the Manning River south to Lake Macquarie and probably further south.*\(^{21}\)

This is where the anthropological information presented varies regarding language groups and land boundaries. Nils Holmer, a Swedish linguist, recorded a wide range of Indigenous languages across and around the world during the mid-twentieth century. He believed the land boundaries of the Kattang were as he states:

*... the Kattang country extended at one time from Telegraph Point or Port Macquarie, in the North, to the Hawksbury river in the south...*\(^{22}\)

This is a much broader area than Elkin reported. Holmer places the southern boundaries further down, below the Central Coast to the Hawkesbury River. This area of land was recorded as belonging to the Darkinjung people. They are noted as speaking a language not dissimilar to the Kattang language. All the neighbouring clans of the Kattang spoke similar versions of the language and, undoubtedly, could communicate effectively with one another. It could be surmised that the Darkinjung were another clan of the Kattang speaking group just with a

\(^{20}\) Valerie Attenbrow. (2002). *Sydney’s Aboriginal past: Investigating the archaeological and historical records.* Sydney, University New South Wales Press Ltd.p126


slightly different dialect. They traded goods and intermarried with other clans of the Kattang, which gives rise to this assumption.

Enright’s research findings and interpretations of the Kattang land boundaries again differ slightly from the findings of Elkin and Holmer. His analysis covers a large section of land that displays the enormity and spread of the Kattang language group; “Kutthung was spoken from a little South of the Macleay River to the Hunter river district.” While they all contain slight variations, their interpretations of the Kattang boundaries locate the group in roughly the same vicinity. The Muurrbay Aboriginal language and Culture Co-operative at Nambucca Heads on the North Coast of New South Wales have undertaken extensive research for Aboriginal language revitalization programs. Their research provides a comprehensive dictionary of the Kattang Language. Their understanding explains that it is impossible to provide precise knowledge of the boundaries of the Kattang Language group but it is generally believed by the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-op that:

Gathang [that is Kattang] was spoken between the Wilson River (north of Port Macquarie, including the hinterland, as far as the Falls Country) and Port Stephens in the south, and as far west as Maitland, Paterson and Gloucester. Their neighbours are Dhanggati in the north, the language from the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie (HRLM) south of Port Stephens, which is also known by the names Awabakal, Kuringgay, Wonnaruwa, and possibly Kayawaykal.

It is obvious that the Kattang language covered a great deal of the mid-north coast as well and further inland that I am lead to believe would have included the Gringai, Geawagal and Wonaruah. I have included a map on page thirty five that provides an outline of the Worimi land, clans and neighbours.

Language and Clans: The Karuah Community

The specific Aboriginal Clan of the Kattang Language group I want to discuss in detail as part of this thesis is the Worimi. The Worimi encompass my family and members of the Karuah Aboriginal community on the ‘Mish’. What is clear is that the Worimi was a major clan within the Kattang-speaking language group. The boundaries of the Worimi clans extended over a substantial area of land. Information I have received from local knowledge within the

Aboriginal community at Karuah is that our land comprises all of Port Stephens, and south to the Hunter River, and north to the Great Lakes moving inland just short of Taree on the southern side of the Manning River, then west to Gloucester and Barrington Tops. Enright’s findings, supports what I have been told about our boundaries, but as I said earlier, he takes the southern boundary much further south to the Hawkesbury:

There is clear evidence that the Worimi occupied the country bounded by the seashore from the Manning as far south as Norah Head and possibly to the Hawkesbury. On the north, the Manning for some distance bounded this territory and they occupied the country as far west as Barrington Tops…

There were four local Aboriginal clan groups, the Garuagal, Maiangal, Gamipingal and Buraigal, that occupied specific tracts of land that made up Worimi country. Enright draws the conclusion that there was a fifth, the Geawagal, which appears accurate. He deduces that the Geawagal were merely a horde, and a part of the Worimi. He further elaborates on the suffix use of the ‘gal’ or ‘kal’ used in the Kattang Language. This suffix means that each group was a division, clan or horde of the main group. Elkin confirms the use of the suffix ‘gal’ and ‘kal’ on these names and interprets their meaning as “belonging to” or “of”-so they belong to the Worimi. They are known as local descent groups. These people lived and stayed together all the time. They would hunt and gather food, sharing the same rights, obligations and duties to the Dreaming and spirit pools within their own country. A member’s descent can be traced back to every individual relationship with his or her ancestors from which, they in turn inherit the same rights and privileges as their ancestors. The Northern Territory Lands Rights Act states that:

...a local descent group of Aboriginal who: (a) have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for the site and for the land and (b) and are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over the land.

Elkin identified the four local descent groups and the areas of land that they occupied within the Worimi nation.

They were (1) the Garuagal, living along the tidal reaches of the Hunter River from its mouth to Maitland; (2) the Maiangal on the southern side of Port Stephens, bounded

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roughly by Telegerry creek, the Port and the ocean; (3) the Gamipingal on the North side of Port Stephens and the Karuah River, and east of this river to Tea Gardens; and (4) the Buraigal from Limeburners Creek up to Stroud.  

Boris Sokoloff provides further evidence linking another Nurra, the Garawerrigal, that adjoined the Gamipingal; they were most likely a part of the Worimi clans. A map uncovered in the Forster Local Council indicates that there could have been a larger number of smaller hordes or Nurras within the Worimi boundaries than originally thought. Enright confirms that these Nurras could have been sub-clans of the four major clans of the Worimi peoples:

...the Warringal, living between Telegerry and Pipeclay Creeks; the Warrimee, living between Telegerry Creek, Port Stephens, the sea shore and the Hunter river; the Garawergal, between the Myall River and the sea shore; the Yeerungal, about the Myall Lakes; the Birrimbai in the neighbourhood of Bungwall Flat; and the Birroongal, on the Myall River.

The Tobwabba clan, are recorded as occupying the northern coast line that covers much of the Wallis Lake area. I have found no evidence that includes Tobwobba with the Worimi clans. Through the memory of older members of the ‘Mish’, I place the Tobwobba clan within the Biripai group boundaries. The term ‘Nurra of the Worimi’, as described and identified by Elkin, have a masculine orientation (patriclans) but that could also mean that Elkin’s informants were male and that’s how they may have described themselves to him:

...according to Threlkeld gal is the masculine suffix. Thus the Garuagal are the men belonging to Garua, the saltwater, and the Gamipingal are the men of the spear.

Enright records the meaning of the Worimi Nurra as the; “Yeerungal ‘People of the long narrow place’ the Birroongal ‘People of the deep river’ and the Garawerringal ‘People of the sea’” The Aboriginal Karuah residents were Garawerringal or Garuagal, just a different spelling interpretation by both researchers that related to the people and the waters that

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32 Walter Enright. (1900). “Languages, etc. Aborigines of Port Stephens.” Royal Society of New South Wales.p102
sustained their lives. Each of these local descent groups or Nurras had their own system that determined which rights and responsibilities they inherited depending on whether they were patrilineal or matrilineal clans. The Worimi were believed to be patrilineal or patri-clans which meant they followed the descent of the men. Elkin further provides an explanation of male descent:

*It is generally patrilineal, patrilocal and exogamous; that is to say, the wife belongs to another group but lives in her husband’s country and the children also belong there.*

Map Great Lakes Council Pamphlet

The lifestyle of the Worimi was like most other traditional Aboriginal groups in Australia - they lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle. The cycle of life that they followed did not take them over great distances even within their own country. They never travelled out of their Nurra territories unless invited and required to attend specific ceremonies. Each of the Worimi Nurra group’s country was not a large area of land, as there was no need to travel far because their land provided them with all the required food and material needs. The environment within Worimi country was very rich in resources particularly seafood. They knew every spiritual and physical aspect of their country that was necessary for their survival and to fulfill their Dreaming

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obligations.  

James Miller, an Aboriginal academic, author and Wonaruah man explains the Aboriginal interpretation of the land:

*The land held the key to life’s secrets. Man was given the knowledge to read the land and every rock, tree and creek he found an explanation for existence. He did not own the land, the land owned him. To know the land was to know life.*

**Clans bordering the Worimi**

The Biripai or Biribai adjoining the northern borders of Worimi land also spoke the Kattang language. Sound marriage relationships were maintained over many years cementing family unions between the Biripai and Worimi into a strong alliance. My mother Colleen Perry, an elder of the Aboriginal community from the Karuah ‘Mish’, was born in Biripai country while my grandfather was cutting timber in the area. She said the Kattang language has not been used there since she was a very small child and then it was only in secret because it was forbidden by the Purfleet missionaries. She doesn’t give clear definitions of the boundaries to the north because she said that it was not necessary as the Biripai were the same mob as us.

The people known today as the Awabakal or Awabagal to the south also spoke the Kattang language. Interestingly enough their name with the suffix ‘kal’ or ‘gal’ suggests that they were indeed another horde or Nurra of perhaps a larger Aboriginal group. There are many similarities between the Awabakal and Worimi people and they had strong relationships in trade and marriage as well, much like the Biripai. The Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, a missionary who I will discuss later in Chapter Three delivered a sermon in the Awabakal language to the Worimi people at the Australian Agricultural Company Carrington settlement on Port Stephens. Records indicate that the Worimi people clearly understood Threlkeld’s sermon. Enright considered the Threlkeld visit and theorised that the Awabakal spoke the Kattang language:

*That was apparently Threlkeld’s first visit to Port Stephens, and the incident, as well as a perusal of Threlkeld’s grammar and vocabulary of the Awabakal, who inherited the country around Lake Macquarie, suggests that the Awabakal spoke Kattang.*

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35 James Miller. (1985). *Koori, a will to win: The heroic resistance, survival & triumph of black Australia.* London; Sydney, Angus & Robertson. p1
36 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry conversation 1999
There were a number of similar correlations that existed between both the Worimi and Awabakal clans, one being they shared the same sex totem. This sex totem was one clear marker that linked and connected these two groups. Both sex totems of the Worimi and Awabakal are the same: the men were the ‘Bat’ and women were the ‘Woodpecker’. “These were also the sex totems of the Awabakal”38 This raises an important question for me, were the Awabakal merely another Nurra of the Worimi? Enright certainly thought so but additionally included the Wonaruah. He believed strongly that:

...the Wanaru and Awabakal tribes were merely hordes of the Worimi who spoke dialects of the Kattang language.39

Alfred Howitt from Nottingham England, who was educated at Heidelberg in Germany and also the University College School in London, migrated to Australia and lived in the bush with his father making a modest living as a gold prospector. Howitt loved the Australian bush and the natural environment. He became an explorer, natural scientist and a pioneer in recognizing and recording Aboriginal culture.40 In working in the local area he believed that the Geawegal occupied land along both sides of the lower Patterson and surrounding country.41 Does this open the possibility that they were also another Nurra that belonged to the Worimi group? According to Howitt, the Geawagal spoke the same language as the Kattang, which gives weight to that possibility.

The territory claimed by them may be defined as being part of the valley of the Hunter River...These Aborigines spoke the language of, and intermarried with those of Maitland.42

The Gringai people, who occupied the southwest portion of Worimi territory, are another clan who are clearly identified as being part of the Worimi clan. Enright points out that the Gringai maintain ties and relationships with other Worimi Nurras and, “...intermarried with the Patterson river natives and those of Gloucester.”43 William Scott mentions the Gringai clan and their location which distinctly links them within the Worimi clans: “the Gringai tribe, a sub-

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38 Adolphus Elkin. (1931). "Notes on the social organisation of the Worimi, A Kattang-speaking people." Oceania 11,p361
Scott felt the need to record the relevant information on the Worimi clans and customs because he saw them disappearing under the might and influence of Western colonisation. In his lifetime, he witnessed the almost complete extinction of the people he had grown up with. He obviously had strong relationships with the Worimi and wanted to leave a cultural/historical record of their existence. Enright adds further to this body of knowledge with his research and with the assistance of William Manton, a Worimi descendant of the people that Scott documented. Manton provides supportive and additional information of the Kattang language spoken in and around the Gringai land.

*William Manton, of Karuah informed us that Kattang with a different twang was spoken at Dungog. Howitt and Fraser refer to people of that district as the Gringai. Manton called them Nangongan, which means back of the hill. We were also informed that Kattang was spoken at the Bowman, which lies west of Gloucester.*

The Wonaruah people to the west and the Darkinjung to the south spoke a similar dialect to the Kattang language. Why did all these neighboring groups have extensive knowledge and utilization of the Kattang language? Was it learned as part of the Aboriginal trade system over many centuries, when being bilingual meant the difference between death or quality of life and surviving in times of drought and famine? Perhaps it was connected to the exchange of languages due to the need to fulfill marriage obligations - hence intermarriages. Whatever the reasons, they all spoke a similar language. Perhaps, they were all simply members of the Kattang-speaking language group that covered a broader area than was previously thought.

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The Significance and Purpose of Aboriginal Language

Language has always been the means of communicating between individuals and groups both socially and for survival. Language is also vital for the construction, maintenance and continuation of spiritual and psychological aspects of traditional culture. Traditional Aboriginal culture is learned orally through traditional language and through observation and imitation. Without traditional language, the transmission of specific knowledge that is akin to any specific group ceases to function. We all need to be a part of and participate in groups of individuals interacting with one another. Aboriginal languages convey the meaning and understanding of developed communal religious concepts and belief systems. When languages are no longer spoken and become extinct, we lose another world view that is unique to a living breathing culture. As Enright reveals:

*The Kut’thung dialect is spoken amongst the Aborigines living along the southern bank of the Karuah River and south shore of Port Stephens. It was at one time spoken amongst the tribes lying between Port Stephens, West Maitland and Patterson but with the exception of the kutthung they are now extinct.*

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Language is the cultural conveyor belt of knowledge and this is clearly evident in groups that have had the good fortune to continue speaking their language. There are many that have had their language extinguished because of the impact of religion, ethnocentrism and a barbaric mindset that adhered to the social Darwinist theory of ‘survival of the fittest’. Language is what defines us as peoples and gives us a sense of belonging to one another and our connection to country. As Anthony Liddicoat and Angela Scarino discuss Svaberg’s (2007) definition of the importance of the culture of language:

*If language is a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation, then it is not enough for language learners just to know grammar and vocabulary. They also need to know how that language is used to create and represent meanings and how to communicate with others and to engage with the communication of others. This requires the development of awareness of the nature of language and its impact on the world.*

Language can be the immediate source of identifying most peoples’ nationalities, cultures and communities around the world. It clearly links individuals and groups of people to specific continents, countries and areas of land within them. For Indigenous peoples, language has a higher significance because without the spoken language, stories of histories are lost. It reduces the numbers of grand narratives, which are at the core of their cultural beliefs. Between Aboriginal clans, language is an immediate source of identification and a place or country of origin. It unmistakably defines who you are and where you are positioned in the Aboriginal world.

Aboriginal language relates directly to country, which can be traced back to the stories of the Dreaming. Some of these deeply important stories are told through specific forms of ceremony that include symbolic communication or sign language, which is also unique to individual language groups across the country. Howitt spoke about Aboriginal clans, which used a gesture language as part of the communication system. He was struck by the use of gestures to communicate between the different groups but believed that it was less rarely used in coastal regions. Perhaps by the time Howitt studied the coastal Aboriginal groups, the traditional way of life and gesture language no longer existed, or he had not gained the relevant trust to be informed of their gesture system.

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Gesture Symbols and nonverbal Communication

Gesture symbols have played a significant part in Aboriginal language and life. They have developed for a number of specific reasons, but particularly as a means of survival. In areas where hunting game was scarce, communicating vocally was not sensible, as frightening game meant that many people would go hungry. Non-verbal forms of communication were developed within individual Aboriginal groups, where discretion and secrecy were required.50 Aboriginal women of the clans would have used their own form of gesture and sign language because of spoken language taboos. In the contemporary setting these forms of communication continue, as Christopher Balme states:

Research carried out by ethnolinguist Adam Kendo who has studied the sign language of the women from the Walpiri tribe in central Australia shows that this form of communication is still alive and is passed on by enculturation.51

Aboriginal clans used non-verbal communication, which developed even further into more diverse forms of interpersonal communication. They would have conversed on a number of different levels to avoid uninitiated men and women of the clans understanding secret and personal conversations. There would be times when information that pertained to secret men’s business would be required to be transmitted between only men, and the same with women. Certain knowledge was not to be divulged to novices and was only available to a specific audience of initiated men. As Ellen Grote and Judith Rochecouste point out:

Aboriginal languages, and consequently AE52 are rich in manual coding sign language or gestural systems where they have been high elaborated in relation to prolonged taboos on the use of speech.53

New South Wales and particularly the coastal Kooris have a special connection and still use forms of gestures as a means of communicating. Simply making eye contact and then giving a slight nod of the head is a source of identifying that you are Koori and you recognize the person as a Koori. Again, upon eye contact a simple bending of the wrist upward, a slight raise of the hand and a small turning of the hand indicate recognition and a greeting. A two-toned short

51 Christopher Balme. (2003). Decolonizing the stage: Theatrical syncretism and post-colonial drama. New York, Oxford University Press.p223
52 Aboriginal English
whistle is used to draw one’s attention or call, to let you know that a friend or family is present. There are many other examples to mention here but they all contribute to our makeup and the identification of who we are and where we are from.

William Edwards’ work with the Pitjantjatjara people in central Australia illustrates the use of Aboriginal speech gestures that are used on a daily basis. Maintaining and understanding the same language gestures gives immediate identification to a specific group and location.\(^{54}\) It gives Aboriginal people a sense of solidarity and togetherness as it not only provides group inclusion but also excludes other groups. Having specific forms of communication forges a sense of belonging to a specific tract of land or country that is easily recognized for countless generations through Dreaming law/lore.

This Aboriginal sense of belonging is at times indescribable; it’s not something within your sight, or a thing that can be clenched in your hands or heard, but rather something that you feel and sense. The uniqueness of most Indigenous peoples is maintained through their religious beliefs and being able to interpret and comprehend the intangible world. Western society has bleached cultures to ideals of what can be possessed within our grasp that pertains to the physical and material world. But connecting with Aboriginal cosmology makes one more attuned to the importance of relationships that are integral to our daily lives. In that understanding, family and a sense of communal belonging and our relationship to the natural environment are the core ingredients that define us.\(^{55}\) Michael Hart supports this line of thought by stating:

> Similarly, Aboriginal people see the world holistically through these ties. People have relationships with the earth world, the plants, the animals, other people and the environment as well as with the spirits and ‘sky world’. The Aboriginal ‘ways of doing’ are guided by moral principles imbedded within these spiritual constructs and expressed in the individual and community actions.\(^{56}\)

As an Aboriginal person, knowing that you are connected to everything and everyone, gives you a greater sense of who you are and that you fit into a structure that is very much alive and vibrant. Your individualism isn’t static and your position in life is important, having purpose


and meaning for others. Family and kinship embodies that sense of belonging, and you are never in isolation or alone in the world; the lines of kinship join your individualism to the greater body of personal relationships and group dynamics that is essential for us as people. It gives us a stronger sense of self and self-worth in a structure that expresses unity, togetherness and group solidarity. Elkin expresses the same point to explain Aboriginal group cohesion:

*This attitude serves to strengthen unity and cohesion of each group and incidentally of the whole tribe because each group is related to and dependent on others; it is dependent on them for wives, uncles, mother-in-law and other relations, and is bound to them by reciprocal duties.*

### Communicating through Message Sticks and Smoke signals

Carved message sticks were another common form of Aboriginal communication between neighboring clans. Scott observed they were used by visiting Aboriginal groups coming into Port Stephens and represented an invitation to ceremonies and or the conveyance of important news. They also acted as passports, as messengers entered unfamiliar land, and gave them immunity from any hostile attacks for trespassing on others’ clan lands. Dale Kerwin describes message sticks notes of introduction:

*When travelling or as invitations to important ceremonies. They were marked by lines, circles and totemic figures, which represented movement and time. Walter Roth concluded that message sticks were a guarantee of good faith, and may at time act as passports over hostile country.*

Aboriginal people had the ability to communicate with each other over great distances without leaving their country, by utilising fire to create smoke signals. The method they employed for this efficient communication was relatively simple for sending greetings and summoning people or groups for ceremonial purposes. A fire was lit at a specific elevated place where it could be noticed by the intended recipients. Once the fire was established, green branches would be thrown on it, which would douse the flames and replace them with a cloud of blackish-gray smoke. Then a heavier branch would be used to cover it and be released at specific intervals so

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57 Adolphus Elkin. (1964). *The Australian Aborigines: How to understand them.* Sydney, Angus & Robinson.p113


puffs of smoke ascended into the sky in a systematic form that represented a Morse code of dot and dash fashion.\(^{60}\)

This Aboriginal code for communication was used between differing hordes and clans that spoke similar languages and probably had extensive contact with each other. It would be used only for those particular groups in the surrounding countries and was a very efficient way to send messages over long distances. The message sticks and smoke signals were crucial in maintaining long distance communication lines that aided in the development of stronger economic and social bonds in the traditional way of life.

The intermarrying between neighboring groups meant that Aboriginal clans became adept at understanding a variety of Aboriginal languages. It would have been a necessity to establish successful trade relations and to exchange Dreaming stories and cultural knowledge. Storytelling and songs were highly prized and were valuable in imparting educational and environmental knowledge. New knowledge and stories told at night around the campfires would have been welcomed, particularly by the younger ones.\(^{61}\)

Special languages for communicating would have developed over the years between different clan groups. Hybrid languages formed into pidgin or creole as they did later on between Aboriginal people and the colonists. This hybrid form of European and Aboriginal language exchange began in New South Wales in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet.\(^{62}\) The early attempts of communication derived the emergence of what was termed Aboriginal English.\(^{63}\) Marcia Langton identifies how Aboriginal English began:

> Pidgin developed as a means of communication between the colonists and the indigenous peoples, and between indigenous peoples who were concentrated in reserves or missions with others who spoke different languages. This became fixed as young people grew up hearing only pidgin. Pidgin developed into creole languages that are based on both indigenous Australian languages and English.\(^{64}\)

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The traditional Aboriginal way of learning is through an interpersonal approach. That is, listening and observing immediate family, extended family and significant elders. This mode of cultural learning in traditional society is quite effective and is common to all clans. In Aboriginal society, culture can be described as a continuum of what is depicted as the Aboriginal cycle of life and is governed by the lore of the Dreaming. In Aboriginal culture there is no beginning or end, you start to learn as a child progressing through various phases in your life, until you come full cycle and become the teacher.

Knowledge of the land and language is learned from a young age. In many groups, women are responsible for their learning until they are old enough to be influenced by men. It is an unstructured learning process but it is more personal than in a Western classroom or learning through educational books. Aboriginal language is a living part of Aboriginal culture that is indivisible from its people and the land that they occupy. The traditional social learning practices take place in real life settings, not in contrived formal artificial situations like in Western learning, and the activities are designed for the needs of real-life situations and people.

Since the arrival of Europeans to our shores, history has revealed the dramatic changes that have taken place in traditional Aboriginal society. The first Aboriginal groups to experience these changes were the eastern coastal clans of New South Wales, where the first penal colony was established. Aboriginal history in Australia was willfully whitewashed as the foundations of English settlement were laid down upon Aboriginal land. The presence and involvement of Aboriginal people were often omitted from the early developing New South Wales colony and from Australia’s history.

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that Aboriginal people, their culture or history gained a place in the history of the continent. A young generation of historians painted quite a different picture of the establishment of the country. Some, like Henry Reynolds, challenged the whitewashed history of the past and told of the Aboriginal wars and massacres that took place on the continent. This new history revealed the Aboriginal fight to retain their land and culture across the country under the constant threat of violence and death.

The aftermath of the frontier wars saw most Aboriginal people confined and forced to live on Aboriginal missions and reserves under the stringent controls of the Aborigines Protection Boards. I will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter Four. Growing up on an Aboriginal

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Reserve was totally different to the lifestyle in broader Australian society. It had its own set of rules and standards that had to be adhered and accepted by its Aboriginal residents. Traditional Aboriginal learning in the oral tradition was strictly forbidden on the reserves and missions. As a result, the traditional Kattang language was not practiced on the Aboriginal reserve (Mish) at Karuah. Consequently, only a few of the elders could speak the language and subsequently many only knew a handful of Kattang words or a pidgin language.

To reinforce what I have just said, there was one simple reason why traditional Aboriginal practices stopped on government reserves and missions. Aboriginal people were forbidden to speak their traditional language or perform ceremonies in the continuation of their spiritual beliefs. Missionaries with their religious mandates influenced and forced many Aborigines to assimilate to various versions of Christianity. The Worimi had no choice but to leave their traditional beliefs and lifestyle behind them. In this strictly controlled environment, Aboriginal people had to adapt to a new way of life just to survive. Although traditional language was not spoken fluently, some of the vocabulary lingered and developed into Creole, Pidgin English or Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English evolved and was spoken by many residents, almost becoming a second language and used secretively between residents.

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As young children on the ‘Mish’ we listened to the adults but mainly women talking at night picking up different words that pertained to language. This was our first experience of learning Aboriginal English. Most times we were allowed to listen and sometimes participated in adult conversations even though we were not encouraged to. Winter nights around the open fireplace and with no electricity brought people together. If words were spoken that we did not understand, we asked; sometimes explanations were given but also denied if adults didn’t want us to comprehend personal conversations. This is how we learned and understood aspects of Aboriginal language. Learning from family we began to speak Aboriginal English amongst ourselves and in our play.

Those nights around the fire were more than our first learning experience of the language and structure of Aboriginal English. It was also a shared bonding of family together. It became a place to practice what we knew and what we learned from our parents and others living on the mission. Learning Aboriginal English from men did not occur until I got older. My brother and I were not permitted to be around or participate in the men’s only discussions and if we were in earshot we were quickly told to go away. Many of their discussions took place while they consumed alcohol under the two ironbark trees that were known as the Iron Bark Hotel. As I
grew older I was allowed to listen sometimes to the men’s conversations but when I was old enough to drink the *Iron Bark Hotel* had just about closed down. Below is a picture taken in the 1980s of the Ironbark Hotel and the once manager’s house.

This chapter has provided a significant account of academic resources that explain the land boundaries, language and culture of the Worimi people. The point I have tried to make is that, whilst we are extremely fortunate that some anthropologists, ethnographers and historians recorded aspects of our culture and past, there are many contradictory aspects of their work. This, therefore, warns of the bias, misinformation and mistakes that litter libraries and institutions. Additionally, those recording aspects of culture were entirely reliant on the credibility of those who they were observing or recording. Regardless of the variance in their findings, the observations recorded of the Worimi boundaries whilst not conclusive provides some rough estimates of the original Worimi estate.

In traditional Aboriginal society, Aboriginal clans and their people knew the exact extent of the land borders within their own country. Trading relationships and intermarriage between neighboring clans ensured disputes over land were never a continuing problem. In examining the many records and accounts, a clear understanding is gained of the variance, distance and physical extremities over which the Kattang language was spoken by Aboriginal clans. The Worimi and neighboring clans all spoke Kattang or what they perceived as similar dialects of it. This strengthens the idea put forward that a number of the neighboring clans were indeed Nurras or sub-clans of the Worimi clan.
The use and importance of Aboriginal language in traditional cultural practices has been deliberated upon to demonstrate how it is infused within Aboriginal cultural beliefs. I have argued that the Aboriginal language uniquely interprets Aboriginal worldviews, which lose meaning in any other language. An explanation for the loss of traditional Worimi language has been provided by understanding the impact of the missionaries and religion. The development of hybrid languages such as pidgin or creole was vital initially to communicate between clans and with the colonists.

The use of significant various forms of Aboriginal non-verbal communication have been explained. These methods provided a successful way of relaying information over vast distances and also as a means of secret communication between individuals within clans groups. Aboriginal land and languages remain at the very core of Aboriginal existence and central to the traditional way of life. In the coming chapters, I will elaborate further about aspects of the traditional Worimi lifestyle.
Chapter Three

The Worimi in the footprints of our ancestors

*From Port Stephens to the Queensland border there is a stretch of coast of over 300 miles in length... Very little has been recorded as to the tribal organisation, beliefs and customs, but what there is suggests to me that they are probably differed from the inland Kamilaroi tribes much as other case tribes further south differed from those inland but not so much perhaps in their local, in their social, organisation.*

As Howitt the anthropologist suggests, very little has been recorded about most of the eastern coastal clans because traditional Aboriginal people were taken from their land in the process of invasion through colonisation and assimilation. This story tells of the Worimi Kattang-speaking people’s cultural practices that functioned unimpeded before European occupation for tens of thousands of years.

What was the traditional Aboriginal lifestyle like in the Worimi country before the Europeans arrived to establish a British colony? How did traditional Worimi people live out their lives as the oldest continuing culture known to man? This chapter will provide answers to those significant questions by presenting a clear background of the traditional lifestyle that the Worimi people lived prior to contact with Europeans. My purpose is to show many facets of the complex structure of Worimi traditional culture and religious beliefs, before being coerced and compelled to undergo dramatic social and religious transformations. These changes were instigated under the control and directions of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and the highly influential/detrimental impact of western religion.

The chapter provides some detail as to how Aboriginal people first occupied the land before being forced and herded onto the Karuah Mission that was set up by the Australian Inland Mission at the turn of and into the twentieth century. More importantly, it provides an explanation of how everything in traditional life is governed and controlled by Aboriginal religion and cosmology - termed the Dreaming. The Aboriginal Dreaming is at the very core of all Aboriginal existence and is central to their religious beliefs and practices. Throughout the chapter I will discuss facets of the Dreaming that controlled behaviours, relationships, obligations and duties to maintain the functions of traditional society. Finally, I will provide an

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examination of the fundamental need for survival through hunting and gathering, the
manufacture of weapons and tool technology.

Australia and its Aboriginal people provided Western scientists of mankind a petri dish never
before witnessed anywhere else in the world. This has resulted in Australia’s Aboriginal people
being one of the most researched peoples on the planet. These scientists have provided more
than their fair share of scholarly anthropological and sociological documentation. Scientists
have dissected and analysed what they believed to be a miraculously preserved past eon. They
believed that they were able to study available specimens of Stone Age man. The research
undertaken by these early scientists was at times crude and in most cases has proven to be
inaccurate. Very few researchers as outside observers truly understood the nature of traditional
Aboriginal societies, the social structure and their intense cultural beliefs. Nevertheless, we
were quickly categorised as a people locked in the Stone Age and subsequently viewed as a
dying race.

**Worimi Dreaming**

Every aspect of Aboriginal traditional life is made up of a series of strict religious practices.
Everyone and everything in this religious tradition is connected through what Western
anthropologists termed the Aboriginal Dreaming. The term Dreaming is not a true indication of
what the word actually encompasses within Aboriginal society and cosmology. How this word
is used suggests Aboriginal religion and their spiritual beliefs are somehow detached from
reality. Misinformed observers described the Dreaming as being akin to hallucinations, or
mental fabrications. It is dismissed as being like dreams or myths that don’t contain any
substance or importance. In total contradiction to this, the Dreaming for Aboriginal people is
based on deep and powerful religious beliefs at the core of what is deemed spirituality.

Western scientific studies appear to have been very superficial, relying on impersonal
observations and questionable informants leading to a genuine lack of understanding of the
structures of Aboriginal religion. Garland and Wheeler are a good example of this type of study
concluding that: “There is no evidence of the Worimi having any religious beliefs as such, but a
rigid code of honesty and morals was maintained and rarely violated.”67 Their opinion was
published as recently as 1982. Clearly, they had not delved into the inner sanctum of a Worimi
Aboriginal community or gained acceptance among them to produce more thorough and
tangible facts.

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Many myths were current and stories were often told of the ancestors of the race and the great achievements; but the early settlers were never looked upon as initiated men and knowledge of the beings, if any, whose histories would be told only to the initiated, was never divulged.  

Perhaps they formulated these misleading ideas through the writings of the journalist Gordon Bennett whose editing of William Scott’s memoirs in The Port Stephens Blacks stated:

If religion played no part in their daily life, and if in some things commonly they were oppressed by a dread of the unknown spirit, it may be said that many of their actions were regulated very definitely by superstition.

Bennett had already established prejudicial ideas of a people he categorised as primitive peoples. It was not surprising as he was but one of many who projected Australian Aborigines as locked into the Stone Age of man’s development. Much of this early scientific research was based on preconceived racial ideas that developed over many centuries in Europe and affirmed the missing link in man’s evolutionary scale.

Arguably more reputable researchers like Adolphus Elkin later Professor and the chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney, Walter Enright a Maitland solicitor and budding anthropologist, Robert Matthews surveyor and anthropologist and Boris Sokoloff anthropologist have provided more detailed and appreciative studies on the traditional Worimi way of life. They appeared to have established and maintained some local Aboriginal relationships (informants) over a period of time to gain more accurate information and provide a better understanding of Aboriginal religion and their lifestyle. William Scott perhaps held the best example of first-hand knowledge by witnessing the Worimi traditional life and cultural practices as he was born at Port Stephens in 1844 and was a part of the AA Company. Uninformed studies were used as a tool to denigrate Aboriginal people and their religious beliefs, and commonly also to justify Western superiority and the taking of their traditional lands.

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70 Ibid
Spiritual

Aboriginal people are unique. We all share the same spiritual essence, governed since the beginning of time and the creation of life on earth as we know it. As an Aboriginal person you cannot separate or isolate the spiritual, material and physical worlds without splintering and destroying your own identity and everything that makes you who and what you are. Holistically, traditional Aboriginal life cannot be divided or separately forced into just one of these categories. When we separate these worlds, we lose our connections to all aspect of life and our sense of belonging as told through the Dreaming. Marcia Langton recognises this disconnection and loss as when:

The cues, the repetitions, the language, the distinctly Aboriginal evocations of our experience are removed from the recitals of our people; the truth is lost to us.  

All the Dreaming stories from the many differing language groups in Australia have a direct connection through story to their creation, their interpretation of birth, life and death, which enshrine their understandings of their origins. Aboriginal lore and the law that had been handed down for millennia was set and played out in the Dreaming. All aspects of the Dreaming did not change or were not altered. It explains not only the creation of Aboriginal Australia, but also, more importantly, the rules and laws of how life must be lived under their creator. In the time of Aboriginal creation the Dreaming speaks about a featureless world and the creative Ancestors who either emerged from within the earth or descended from the sky, and then shaped the landscape and all within it.

These supernatural spirits beings created the world and every living thing that still exists today. They are eternally immortal, ever-present and always connected to Aboriginal people in everyday activities and Aboriginal people are able to communicate with them through ceremonies and rituals. Dreaming stories vary throughout the different language groups across this continent, but all have a basic concept of how their world came into being. It was a time when spirit beings roamed the earth, creating it as they walked and performing supernatural feats. For Aboriginal people, the Dreaming gave meaning to their lives - a sense purpose and a continuing connection to their land and creator in the physical world.

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Many myths were current and stories were often told of the ancestors of the race and the great achievements but the early settlers were never looked upon as initiated men and knowledge of the beings if any whose history would be told only to the initiated was never divulged.\(^{73}\)

Dreaming stories contain various accounts of Aboriginal creation. There are many language groups that contain stories of the Rainbow Serpent, Biame, Koin (Coen) or other great-spirit beings, that created Aboriginal Australia. These stories provide the basis of Aboriginal religion and the foundations of a very deep and vibrant spirituality. It is these spiritual beliefs that embody the very meaning of Aboriginal existence. This is how Aboriginal people see themselves, as being part of the land and connected to their spiritual ancestors. It is through these spiritual ancestors that they are forever connected to the land and each other and through ceremonies are able to communicate to the creator and spiritual ancestors.

Dreaming stories have controlled, maintained and preserved traditional Aboriginal culture in a continual cycle of life functioning unaffected for many thousands of years until the coming of Western man. These Aboriginal grand narratives form the basis of a remarkable belief system that produced proficient effective longevity societies.

It was spiritual in its concept. Life began the spiritual experiences of the father; existence in this world from mother by birth, the beginning of the worldly experience. At the initiation ritual is taught the secrets of life and of the dreamtime the spiritual sky world from which he came; and then death he returned to the spirit world, the abode of this totem and his ancestors, there to await rebirth.\(^{74}\)

In the Dreaming, creation beliefs fluctuate across the continent, but most lore, in the Northern regions in particular, focuses on the Rainbow Serpent as the creator. In the coastal area of New South Wales, the Kattang or Worimi speak of Baiame or Baayama as the creator and one of the great supernatural beings. He was recognised as a sky (spirit), meaning he came from the heavens to create the world. He reputedly possessed the greatest power of all the supernatural beings. Baiame could take many forms when appearing to humans but was recognisable to the Worimi because he was said to be made entirely of crystal quartz.


He was the ‘Great Shaper’ or ‘Thunder-God’. He was imagined as variously a half-human, half-crystal being or giant in human form. He was also able to appear in ordinary human size, sometimes obviously god-like because of his skin of quartz-crystal and at other times he appeared (to Shamans) in human flesh, distinguishable from a man by his glowing crystal eyes.\textsuperscript{75}

Baiame was the all father and creator of the Worimi Aboriginal world. He was revered and respected by all those under his protection. He has been identified and discussed amongst many other tribes on the east coast of New South Wales as a sky god who created every living thing and shaped nature. He walked and created the earth when only birds and animals roamed the land before he changed them into men and women. He gave them his laws and rules which would guide them through their daily lives and he told everyone to obey them before returning to the sky.\textsuperscript{76}

Coen was another spirit being that instilled fear amongst the tribes of the Worimi and the Awabakal clans. He is also described as taking on many different forms of bird, animal and human who was reported to make mysterious noises at night, moving around the bushes always in the shadows waiting to steal people. Coen is supposed to be an evil spirit that was used to terrify the uninitiated Worimi men ensuring conformity and obedience. A thunderstorm was said to be Coen who was angry with them and had come to warn and frighten them into conformity by obeying the laws of the Dreaming.

\textit{It is also one of the spirit, Coen (Koin), always lurking in the shadows of the forest waiting to catch them, to make them sick and to kill them. He was in the thunder and lightning blazoned his power and wrath across the heavens, and occasionally came to earth and killed one of their people, or scattered the largest tree in pieces across the ground.}\textsuperscript{77}

Coen was reported to reside in the thick bushes or rainforests occasionally seen in the day but mostly at night and was always present at male initiations ceremonies.\textsuperscript{78} The bullroarer or ‘Torikotti’ when twirled at the male initiation ceremony represented the voice of Coen and was an important part of that ritual. It was used to warn women of the clan to keep away from the

\textsuperscript{75} Michael O’Rourke. (1997). \textit{The Kamilaroi lands, north-central New South Wales in the early 19th century.} Victoria, Jenkin Buxton Printers Pty Ltd. p.172


area because it was men’s business and meant death for them to be anywhere near Coen. The fear of Coen ensured appropriate behaviours for potential initiates and social control for Aboriginal people to never stray far from the camp fires at night.

These supernatural beings of creation have left evidence of their extraordinary events all over the country. The verification is contained in sacred and significant sites, which were crucial to the religion practices of Aboriginal clans. The spiritual essence of the supernatural beings remains implanted in their own country, which assists in the continuation and transmission of knowledge of the Dreaming for each group. The spirits of ancestors are infused and ever present in the land, and it is through these ancestors that people are connected to the creator spirits. As Howitt recorded:

*He is evidently everlasting for he existed from the beginning of all things and he still lives.*

I have heard and read a number of stories regarding traditional Worimi elders who believed that crystal quartz stones were sacred and carried great power. These stones were said to be taken from the body of Baiame as a testimony to his existence and confirmation of their custodianship of his Worimi lands. With the establishment of the missions at Karuah and Soldiers Point in Port Stephens missionaries were reported (by former mission residents) as taking possession of these artefacts from the men to ensure Christianity prevailed and the old religion was denied. Garland and Wheeler mention a mystery bag that the Worimi men carried which contained a piece of crystal rock. William Scott, whose father was an employee of the Australian Agricultural Company in Port Stephens, recalls as a child stumbling onto and peering into one of these mystery bags. He saw a crystal rock which greatly distressed his Aboriginal servant Fanny. She made him swear to secrecy about seeing the sacred stones and urged him strongly to never mention the matter again to anyone.

Enright discusses some artefacts he received in 1935 from a Michael Griffin which he called totem stones: 

“I showed them to a Worimi Karadjji at Purfleet last year (1936), and he stated that one of them, a piece of white quartz of spherical shape 7 5/16 inches in circumference, was

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79 Ibid, p16
used by medicine men...” The mystery bags and their crystal contents were used in rites of passage and as a source of identification that was sacred to the initiated Worimi men. Uninitiated males and women were forbidden to see what was contained within them for fear of death. “Women therefore, were always in great dread of seeing one of them.” This explains Fanny’s reaction to Scott seeing the stones as a child.

It has been the often public political struggle for Aboriginal Native Title in Australia that has created some degree of public awareness of what traditional Aboriginal land means to Aboriginal people, more particularly when it comes to issues of sacred and significant sites. Under Native Title legislation proof is now required as verification that Aboriginal people still maintain a continued connection to their land. Aboriginal heritage and connection to land is revealed in their Dreaming stories and recognised as evidence, along with family genealogies, which act as title deeds to Traditional lands. Aboriginal people declare their rights to the land on the premise that their creator and spiritual ancestors that created them and their country are still there today, infused within their land.

These are places made by Supernatural Beings like the Rainbow Serpent, Ancestral Heroes such as Biroogun or Dirrangun, and the Sky Gods, Biaime, Ulitarra and others, which explain the creation of the world, emphasised a law, or marked some event. These Beings were believed to be ancestors of living people, and through the survival of this folklore, some in detail, much more in a general sense, Kooris today consider that their rights to the land are as old as the creation of land itself.

The land provided for everyday life and Aboriginal people believed that the land was also alive with the same spiritual embodiment of every other living thing. Many Aboriginal people around the continent have referred to their land as ‘Mother’ because it gave life to everyone and everything providing them with the necessities for survival. At different sacred and significant sites specific Aboriginal people performed ceremonies to please their spiritual ancestral totems. For those completing their obligations the totemic spirits would provide spiritual guidance and nourishment for them and their clan to continue their journey in the Aboriginal cycle of life.

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Totems

It was a complex system of relationship, totemic in practice, religiously adhered to by its people; an organised moral and social order handed down by the ancestors from the beginning of time that recognised a relationship of man, nature and the universe, totemism established a common bond a common existence shared by the aboriginal people, the birds and animals of the forests, and altogether, of spiritual origin.86

Totems are one of the most important and significant spiritual features of traditional Aboriginal society which impacts directly on almost every aspect of their daily life. They regulate much of the personal relationships in kinship and maintain the social structures of traditional society. Under traditional Dreaming law every totemite must fulfil a range of roles that pertain to their obligations, rights and duties. Members of the Worimi clan received a number of different totems, which was common amongst other clans. The first was the personal or conception totem. The next totem was their source of identity as a group and aligned them to specific country; this was the clan or birth totem. Sex or gender totems were synonymous with the Worimi people and more totems could be gained with higher initiations.

Totemism, then, is a key to an understanding of the aboriginal philosophy of life and the universe—a philosophy which regards man and nature as one corporate whole for social, ceremonial, and religious purposes, a philosophy which is from one aspect pre-animistic, but from another is animistic, a philosophy which is historical, being built on the heroic acts of the past which provide the sanctions for the present, a philosophy which, indeed, passes into the realm of religion and provides that faith, hope and courage in the face of his daily needs.87

Tribal or Clan Totems

Clans carried their own special totem that was specific to the whole tribe or clan group. This Tribal totem was given to every new member at birth or through marriage and, they all shared it equally. It was their source of identification and group solidarity that united groups of people firmly into their designated country. Any new born would also become a member of the groups’ totem, as well as having their own personal totem that was given when conception occurred. Depending on which area of Australia, Aboriginal women or men marrying into the clan must

also adopt the particular totem of that clan and still keep their personal totem. That is, they must either adopt the matrilineal of patrilineal line that the clan followed.

...the patrilineal principle is an expression of the belief in local spirit centres and the doctrine of pre-existence and the finding of the spirit, child whereas the matrilineal principle is physiological in character.88

The clans or Nurras of the Worimi followed this typical ideological form of lineage and were identified as basically a patriarchal clan. “The Worimi are divided into a number of patrilineal totemic clans, tambual, which are exogamous.”89 This meant that the individual must marry a member of the opposite moiety to his own. Moieties are an essential part of traditional Aboriginal societies and are best explained as the, “division of a society into two halves based on descent”.90 This process divided Aboriginal societies into halves where one complimented the other successfully providing appropriate partners for marriage.

Each nurra was subdivided into a number of smaller groups which were probably based on the extended family unit, or on most practical group size for hunting and gathering food.91

As mentioned previously, every clan of the Worimi people was a part of the Kattang language group and many of the smaller clans’ family groups were known in our language as a Nurra. Moieties within these Nurras determined appropriate marriage partners, but more specifically they were a means of preventing incestuous relationships. In some of the smaller Nurras this caused some real problems as they had limited moiety suitable marriage partners. The patriarchal and matriarchal totemic system, or moiety Nurras, were forced to marry outside to ensure marry obligations were carried out.

Within each of the Hordes were a number of patrilineal totemic clans, which had a bearing on kinship and marriage. That is, descent that can be traced through the father

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and marriage was forbidden between people of the same totemic clan, the prohibition extending to relatives who were second cousins or, more nearly related."  

Amongst the Worimi there were many of these small families or sub-clans that ensured suitable marriage partners for most concerned. In the event that the moiety system was unproductive, marriage partners were arranged or stolen from neighbouring clans of the same language groups. Elkin has provided the names of the smaller clans within the Worimi clan through one of his trusted informants, Billy Manton. These smaller totemic clans were referred to by Billy as totemic moieties of the system for determining marriage arrangements and clan taboos:

makan, lizard; wapara, male kangaroo; womboin, female kangaroo, kula, native bear; wuran, goanna; watu, possum; natun, water; makun, paddy-melon (small wallaby); palbu, kangaroo rat; baman, leech; kandiwan, flying-fox; burkan, bandicoot.  

The tribal/clan or birth totems that tie Aborigines to the land best explains why Aboriginal people generally kept within their country or tribal area. Once they left their own country they believed they would be deprived of all spiritual support and were left unprotected and, therefore, exposed to any hostile or evil spirits. There were exceptions to this rule in regards to trading, marriages and invitations to attend ritual ceremonies. Additionally, in times of drought and famine they would seek permission from neighbouring clans to hunt or gather food/water in their territory after going through certain ceremonies related to receiving permission to enter. Everything relates back to their spiritual ancestors and the Dreaming which ground their beliefs firmly into the country of their totem.

Personal Totems

Personal totems held great significance to individuals and groups in the Aboriginal world as a source of connection to the spirit world and spiritual ancestors. At sacred sites or spirit pools (water holes), spirits would enter the body of a woman as a child to begin its journey in the traditional Aboriginal cycle of life. The beliefs in the spirits beings are crucial to understanding the fundamentals for the continuation of the traditional lifestyle. Upon death the spirits would return into the spirit pools and land at the sacred sites waiting to be reborn again.

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93 Adolphus Elkin. (1931) “Notes on the social organisation of the Worimi, A Kattang-speaking people.” Oceania 11, p361
To the Aboriginal people the personal Totem is a precious possession, a reason for being, a source of identification, an ambassador in the spirit world, a passport through life.95

There are many sacred places across the continent where the creator spirit entered and emerged from the earth. The allocation of a personal totem varied from place to place. The identification to the totem was established by the location of the sacred site or spirit pool where the spirit entered the woman’s body. Conception, therefore, had a sacred meaning. These totemites incurred duties for caring for their totem and area of land around their spirit pool. They would perform ceremonies at those sites of their personal totem.96

The totemic relationship invariably requires that people take responsibilities for their relationship with another species, and learn that their own well-being is inextricably linked with the well-being of their totemic species. Where the totemic relationship also involves land, people are further implicated in a set of responsibilities toward that land, and their well-being is linked to the well-being of that land.97

These totemites had special obligations towards their totemic species and they could not kill or eat their totemic animal because they shared common descent, being of the one family sharing the same flesh.98 They were responsible for performing certain ceremonies for the well-being and continued existence of their totemic spirit. All those who shared the same personal totem formed a close-knit group and held a strong connection with one another. They were responsible to each other and for looking after that sacred place and their totemic species. Through the laws of the Dreaming they had to fulfil their ritual obligations and duties to their totem and spiritual ancestors.

The ritual is not an attempt to control nature magically, but is a method of expressing man's need and his desire for the maintenance of the normal in nature, and a way of cooperating with nature at just those seasons with a particular species should increase. It is not an attempt to bring about the regular an extraordinary but rather to maintain the regular. It is a system of cooperation with nature which is both economic and

psychological in purpose; it expresses economic facts and needs, and also gives confidence in the process of nature and hope for the future.99

The spirit world in the Dreaming was the abode of their ancestors and was interrelated with totemism which was seen as a substantial mechanism for their holistic existence in traditional society. The importance of the personal totem could not be understated in Aboriginal society because it was a religious belief that connected them to the spiritual world of the Dreaming.

Now, this is as it should be, for the totem is “himself,” being both within and without him; the totem-species symbolises and is the sacramental form of, his own self or soul, likewise he is the sacrament of the “soul” the species; thus personal totemism is akin to the social totemism.100

The animal or totemic species were one and the same, sharing the same life force and spiritual essence. The totemic species closely linked them to nature and acted as their guide in the spirit world. The relationship between the individual and their totem provided a spiritual connection to their ancestors in the Dreaming. These personal totems would come to them and appear physically in daily life or at other times in psychic visions. They would warn them of impending dangers, were a source of healing sickness and provided a variety of much needed information. Elkin explains this:

The Aborigines, with their totemistic view of nature and men according to which man and natural species and phenomena share a common life and a mutually dependent, sees nothing incongruent in receiving information concerning each other through the totem either in its substance or in a vision.101

Enright and Elkin believed that the Karadji, the medicine man (or more commonly known as a clever man) was a highly knowledgeable man. He would have gone through the full process of initiation - a process of receiving secret spiritual knowledge of the Dreaming. They described the Karadji as having a personal totem and another separate totem altogether. These totems were always associated with the sacred site like a waterhole called a ‘Nambi’. The Karadji would

enter the waterhole and speak to the spirit, where he would seek guidance and answers to life questions after making requests.102

Sex Totems

In the Worimi clans sex or gender totems were evident and also a common feature of many of the neighbouring clans. “The men's totem or Kimbai, that is, mate was kulangulan, the bat in the women's totem or rjarin, elder sister was Dilmin, the woodpecker. These were also the sex totems of the Awabakal.”103 The Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, the early local missionary, provides some information from the Awabakal people’s Dreaming stories about how both males and females transformed after death: “…that the bat was a man transformed after death and the woodpecker, a woman who had met with a like fate.”104 Why did the Awabakal people share the same sex totems? Again this goes to the question and the strong possibility that the Awabakal may have been just another clan of the Worimi?

Men of the Worimi clans took great pleasure in playfully tormenting the female totem at times, by throwing stones at the diminutive bird. Sometimes they caught it and even killed it. Arguments, fights and corporal punishments followed from these male antics and, at the time, their misdemeanours created great tension between the women and men. Richardson describes these types of totems as tribal totems using the appropriate Worimi word ‘Gimbi’.105 Elkin also suggests that these sex totems that he describes as ‘Kimbai’ meaning (a mate) each representing both genders of the Worimi Clans.106

Marriage, Kinship and Relationships

Marriage in any society is a celebrated family and communal event. In traditional Aboriginal society marriages were always arranged. Marriage was a necessary function that had to be performed under Dreaming laws. Every adult had to be married - there was no such thing as a

single adult life in traditional Aboriginal society. Marriage was foretold in the Dreaming and therefore was an important means for social control, to maintain kinship relations and the status quo. I discussed many aspects of marriage earlier while explaining the importance and roles totems played in traditional Aboriginal society. Totems are intrinsically linked to marriage and great emphasis was placed on selecting the appropriate marriage partner from the relevant members within the moiety system.

The Worimi and other Kattang-speaking clans were able to communicate with most other neighbouring clans throughout the east coast of Australia. Many of these forged relationships aided in the survival and maintenance of strict religious controls by fulfilling marriage requirements that were set down by the Dreaming. Marriage in Traditional Aboriginal society was a well-defined structural mechanism that controlled all kinship, family relationships and all forms of social interactions. For boys, the first initiation into manhood provided possible candidates that were promised in marriage. The rigidity of the Aboriginal social organisation restricted the choices of these arranged marriages. Any type of incest was not tolerated in any form.

It was the elders in traditional society and, in particular the women, who maintained the knowledge of family structures within clans to ensure that appropriate marriages took place. In many cases Aboriginal people were required to intermarry with neighbouring clans, which created stronger bonds and relationships that in turn benefited both groups. Totems provided more than a spiritual connection to the land and the Dreaming; it was a method of family identification to carry out arranged marriages. Sokoloff points out the importance of totems:

Not only does it regulate marriages and kinship, but it is the Aborigines link with their natural and spiritual environment, which is expressed through their ritual and ceremony while preserved in their mythology.

The Worimi moiety totem system is highly complex: it was divided many times into two and four in what was termed sections. In many cases, it was broken down further into sub-sections. In some of the larger clans these sub-sections were divided into significant number which required extensive knowledge of all family groups within clans. “Section totemism is a method of dividing the members of a tribe into four groups, each of which is symbolised by, or

associated with one or a number of natural species.\textsuperscript{109} These four section totems meant that two of these totems or moieties belonged to one family as did the other two, so they only had two choices for suitable marriage partners.

Sub-sections were used in many of the larger clans which were divided into eight groups allowing for these family moiety groups four choices into which they could marry. The larger the clans the more sub-sections of moiety totems were available. Some sub-sections were divided even further to sixteen and maybe, in rare cases, even more. \textit{``Sub section totemism, which is also indirect matrilineal in descent is primarily a principle of dividing man and natural species, at least those of social and economic importance into a groups.''}\textsuperscript{110}

When discussing the class system of the sub-clans of the Worimi people Howitt did not obtain sufficient information from his informant to draw clear conclusions as to how it actually functioned. Without adequate data, he thought that the moiety marriage class system may have broken down entirely with the European intrusion and colonisation. The only relevant information he discovered was they were classed as patriarchal. He identified a number of moiety totems pertaining to the clans.

\textit{There were also totems in these tribes, for instance, Black-snake, Black-crow, Eagle-hawk, and Stingray.}\textsuperscript{111}

Bernard McKiernan points out in his study of Aborigines in the lower Hunter River: \textit{``Marriage was not permitted among the local groups. Wives were obtained from the tribe at Port Stephens and the Patterson River, either by elopement or capture.''}\textsuperscript{112} Gordon Bennett also recorded that capture and sometimes elopement took place amongst the Kattang-speaking clans. The capture of women was not an unusual occurrence amongst the Worimi clans. As a boy and young man I listened to stories around campfires from a few of the older men on the ‘Mish’, who have now long since departed. They boasted how, in the old days, their Worimi ancestors would raid and steal women from the Wonarua tribe. They jokingly made remarks that the women were the only good thing to come out of Wonarua country. These stories were usually told after a few beers and a flagon of wine under the shady leaves of the so called Ironbark Hotel, on the Karuah

\textsuperscript{112} Bernard McKiernan. (1911). "Some notes on the Aborigines of the lower Hunter River, New South Wales." \textit{Anthropos} 6: 887
River at night. They demonstrate, however, that cultural memory and verbal knowledge continued to be transmitted.

Marriage between families assured that people were placed in a number of social relationships that impacted on every individual, requiring them to fulfil their obligatory rights and duties. The process of marriage placed everyone and every family in specific kinship relationships with one another, which fused together the rigid foundation of traditional Aboriginal society. It was the kinship structures that forged, disciplined and maintained social control over everyone through the laws of the Dreaming. One of the more well documented kinship behaviours throughout Australia was the avoidance relationships between the groom and his mother-in-law.

*The universal rule which forbade men to hold any communication with his wife's mother was very strict in these tribes. He might not look at her, not even in her direction. If his shadow happened to fall on her, he would have to leave his wife, who would return to her parents.*\(^{113}\)

Through traditional marriage rules, under no circumstances were men allowed to speak to their mothers-in-laws. The only available avenue to communicate between them was by utilising a third-party and relaying messages through that third party. There was no compromise to this rule and the sanction for breaching it inferred the severest of punishments, death. After European settlement, this punishment became much more lenient, opting for temporary banishment from the camp.\(^{114}\) Elkin agrees that this avoidance behaviour was evident, but adds to the body of knowledge about kinship behaviour and avoidance relationships by believing that the groom also maintained:

“…a reserved attitude towards his wife's mothers brother and his wife's father.”\(^{115}\)

Avoidance relationships were crucial in maintaining traditional Aboriginal family structures. In the case of the mother-in-law, it was pretty well straightforward. The mother-in-law would be of the same class or social classification as his wife, but she was forbidden to communicate with the son-in-law and had to keep out of his way. Even the slightest familiarity between them would be seen as indecent, which was not the way of the Dreaming, possibly angering the

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creator. It would have been quite common for the mother-in-law and the son-in-law to have been around the same age. They may have grown up and spent time together as children forming early friendships.

It is easy to understand that total avoidance in their kinship structure would be necessary to negate any possible future inappropriate emotional, sexual and physical relationships of any kind. The kinship structures were the mechanism used to enforce the Dreaming laws and control all social interactions in the Aboriginal world. Kinship was the train tracks of traditional Aboriginal society and kept everything together travelling on a particular course. The many facets of kinship were responsible for the formal and efficient relationships needed to sustain a continued balance in the Aboriginal universe.

The Sacred, Ceremonies and Initiations

Every aspect of traditional Aboriginal society, including the Worimi people, was implicitly bound together by their strong spirituality and religious beliefs. Their rituals and ceremonies were a continual spiritual reminder of their physical obligations to not only their spiritual ancestors in the Dreaming but also their natural environment in the traditional way of life. Their spiritual beliefs made sense of the physical world and gave meaning to life, which forged a complex union to help create a moral balance for everyone and everything.

The emotional nature of the ceremonies not only served to bind individuals to their community and Nurra but also to bind members of the group to each other. Through the roles and complexities of ceremonies, the individual developed a sense of personal and social identity. Aboriginal people, their religion and cultural practices were based on profound core values in spirituality, creating group cohesion and unity. Their obligations to all spiritual beings was a source of social control and social order, because they feared the anger inferred from those spirit beings, especially if they did not respond to their responsibilities and carry out their duties.

In traditional Aboriginal society childhood was not merely a time for play, but was about learning skills for survival for when one became an active member of the clan. This early instruction was initially administered under the guidance of women who taught the children how to procure a variety of food sources. Whilst in the care of their mothers and other female kin, children continually gained knowledge and an understanding of their land and country. As

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they grew older, gender separation became a more obvious feature of their activity. When boys were deemed old enough, they spent time with the men of their family who began to groom them for their first initiation into manhood.

Recently I have learnt that when the candidate for initiation was taken to each of the carved trees around the sacred ring he was told the story about the carvings thereon. The aborigines have a legend that it was the catfish who founded the Keepara ceremony, and pointed out as proof that the catfish built a ring of stones as a nest, and the male guarded it.\(^\text{117}\)

The story of the catfish in the Keepara ceremony is reflective of the nature and lifestyle of the Worimi people of Port Stephens. Once a boy had reached the desirable age around puberty it became the men’s responsibility to educate, protect and care for them. When it came to some religious practices, men and women had their own secret business. As told through the Dreaming lore, the ceremonies of initiation signified the growth and development of individuals within the Nurra groups.

Similar initiation ceremonies took place in the country of the Gringai which was another clan of the Worimi around the Dungog area. Juvenile males between the ages of 12 and 18, who were thoroughly disciplined and properly trained, were considered eligible to enter manhood. Howitt’s informant describes this ceremony and initiate as the ‘Bumbat’.\(^\text{118}\) The Gringai people believed in the creator Baiame and the stories that maintained their spirituality and connections to their land. This first male ceremony of initiation made them fully members of the clan and forever fused them to the land that was identified as their country.

They were convinced that this spirit settled them into their country, apportioned their hunting grounds gave them their laws and instituted the ceremony of ‘bumbat’ or ‘bora’.\(^\text{119}\)

The bumbat or bora ceremony identified by Bennett was the first initiation ceremony of the Gringai people. It was the first step and integral to the transmission of traditional knowledge and continuation of traditional culture. Messengers were dispatched to all the Worimi Nurras because it was such an important major social event. The ritual brought together many clans.

\(^\text{118}\) Alfred Howitt. (1996). *Native tribes of south-eastern Australia.* Aboriginal Studies Press.p574
The visual evidence of the novice’s initiation into manhood was the crude extraction of the front tooth. This was performed in the ceremony where the upper front tooth was either bitten out or an elder knocked it out with a stick prepared for the special occasion. Reg Ford noted that the ceremony was used widely by the Worimi:

For the Warimai (Worimi) people the initiation ceremony was similar for all its numerous ngura (hordes and clans), and the people of the adjoining groups, including the Garuagal of the lower reaches of the river (William) and the Geringai of the upper section of this river, to its source.

Matthews believed that the last recorded Worimi Keepara ceremony was held on the Manning River, which took place in the winter of 1889 on part of the Australian Agricultural Company’s land grant in the County of Gloucester, New South Wales. These ceremonies were traditionally carried out with discretion and only clan members were invited. So I am confident that similar ceremonies continued in secrecy and, therefore, were not recorded by outsiders. The Manning River ceremony and camp site chosen was a place where there was good hunting and fresh water. He describes it as a short distance from the right bank of Stony Creek, a small stream which flows easterly to the Manning River. This Keepara ground was about three-quarters of a mile up Stony Creek from the crossing place over the creek on what is now the public road from Timonee to Georgetown.

I meet with a degree of scepticism a lot of the recorded information provided by many of the Western anthropologists that I have used in this chapter. Particularly, I have some reservations about male initiations and the secret business of men. It is for this reason that I have withheld some information. Nevertheless, the information does provide enough accurate facts on the Keepara ceremonies. As recorded, the Keepara ceremony was a rite of passage for every older boy to enter into initiated manhood and be promised a wife as foretold in Aboriginal Dreaming lore. There was general knowledge pertaining to aspects of the Keepara ceremony available to both genders, but other certain stages and their rituals were only known to the initiated men who had previously gone through this ceremony. Bennett recorded Scott’s observations to the secrecy of Worimi ceremonies:

The statements as to the Gringai and other tribes of the Hunter River are evidently from native informants who told all that it was lawful to tell to an uninitiated person. What Mr

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Scott says is from observation of occurrences, part of ceremonies which were of such a character that a black fellow would not reveal them to an outsider.\textsuperscript{123}

This first initiation was seen as the death of the boy and birth of the man. The initiate was given knowledge of his obligations, rights and duties as a man. Very little secret and sacred knowledge was passed on to the novice in this stage of the ceremony as is evident because women were included in parts of this preliminary ceremony. In other parts of the Keepara ceremony, women were excluded where Coen was supposed to be present amidst the sound of Bull-roarers (Coen’s voice) which was said to impress the boys with supernatural terror. It was fear that ruled traditional society, the fear of angering the great spirits as well as severe physical punishments inflicted by breaking sacred law. Matthews states the importance and secrecy of initiations;

\textit{The boys and cautioned by the old men but if ever they tell the women or are initiated that they have seen this instrument the penalty will be death.}\textsuperscript{124}

Further initiations were a testament to specific individuals who had progressed and continued to fulfil the many different roles they played as an active member in traditional society. The reward was greater status amongst peers by way of receiving further initiations and thereby being granted more secret knowledge of the Dreaming by elders. This knowledge was only known to the Aboriginal men of high degree who had progressed through the full stages of initiation. Divulging or overhearing this secret men’s business by anyone outside of the initiates imposed the severest of punishments, death. Elkin explains;

\textit{The word secret is used advisedly. Understanding of life and man is reserved for the initiated, for those who have successfully passed through various degrees. There are several of these, each of which is marked by his own ritual, nay, and portion of esoteric knowledge.}\textsuperscript{125}

Many of the early researchers cast aspersions on the validity of the information they gathered about men’s secret business and ceremonies from their informants. "As everything relating to

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\textsuperscript{123} Alfred Howitt. (1996). \textit{Native tribes of south-eastern Australia}. Canberra. Aboriginal Studies Press. p\textsuperscript{577}

\textsuperscript{124} Robert Matthews. (1869). “The Keeparra ceremony of initiation.” \textit{Royal Anthropological Institute} 26.p\textsuperscript{333}

\textsuperscript{125} Adolphus Elkin. (1977). \textit{Aboriginal men of high degree: Initiation and sorcery in the world's oldest tradition}. Rochester, Vermont, Inner Traditions.p\textsuperscript{4}
These ceremonies is very secret this is only hearsay.”126 This anthropological research was gathered from un-initiated Aboriginal informants and non-Indigenous witnesses after the destruction of traditional Aboriginal cultural lifestyle and when Aboriginal people were suffering through the initial stages of segregation and being moved on to missions and reserves. McKiernan supports this notion:

These ceremonies have been described by Dr. HOWITT. Other writers have given very detailed and ‘spicy’ particulars of them, but these accounts were collected after the organisation of the tribes had completely broken down through intercourse with whites, and then only from the degraded remnants of the race.127

In any case, sources for the Worimi ceremonial rituals and for those of other eastern Australian groups raise doubts as to the reliability of the informants and their capacity to attain detailed knowledge. There may well have been factual information, but initiated men would have been reluctant to pass on sacred knowledge to the uninitiated or the outsider. This spiritual knowledge came from the Dreaming via the creator and their spiritual ancestors. This knowledge was only known to them and they feared the anger and retribution that came from exposing it to the uninitiated. Howitt understood the consequences for exposing secret knowledge:

Offences against individuals or blabbing about sacred rites of a tribe at all breaches of custom were visited with some punishments.128

Other Aboriginal clans along the east coast of Australia have recorded similar initiation ceremonies to that of the Keepara ceremony. On the plateau of the largest hill at North Arm Cove there are stone circles that were used to initiate young boys into manhood. There are a number of these Keepara stone circles still intact about a metre high and a couple of metres across. Fortunately, the Keepara stone circle has been preserved due to its isolation, but a few of these sites have been destroyed through vandalism and theft. The small community around North Arm Cove continues to grow today, spreading ever closer to this important Worimi historical site.

The carved trees that once decorated this sacred site and provided taboo warnings to the women and the uninitiated are no longer standing. No doubt, they have become trophies and conversational pieces for those who thought they were entitled to steal a little piece of traditional Aboriginal culture. The preservation of the site is crucial to relating aspects of the Worimi Dreaming, to the physical landscape and their religious practices. Without these physical sites, Dreaming stories contain very little substance or validity and are just stories that were told in traditional Aboriginal culture.

Walter John Enright, the son of an Irish immigrant and a practising solicitor in Maitland, was absorbed in the study of geology and the environment. In his youth, Enright was associated with some local Aborigines which generated the beginnings of a genuine curiosity in their traditional culture. Much later, he would be stimulated and drawn to the anthropological work of Robert Mathews and Adolphus Elkin and their subsequent publications on Aboriginal culture. Enright would carve his own niche in the anthropological world with many published contributions to well-recognised journals like *Mankind* and *Oceania*.

He placed great confidence in his informants believing the information they provided on the Keepara ceremony was indeed factual. His relationship with his informant/s was quite strong and respect between them must have grown over the period of time he spent with them. In a moment of truth, he displays some moral compass of caution when publishing this information in public journals. It is obvious that Enright’s experiences with his informants instilled the importance and sacredness of their religious beliefs and he didn't want to betray their trust. Nevertheless, he published quite large details on the Keepara ceremony.

*To describe the Keepara in a public journal would be a breach of confidence in the aborigines who have trusted me, and hurtful to their feelings. I think my description of the Keepara, is complete and in years to come may be published without hurting anybody’s feelings.*

Enright provides a very brief and superficial record from his observations that the Worimi performed a rainmaking ceremony. It is a ceremony that has never been mentioned by any of the Elders that lived on the ‘Mish’. He describes the process as being very strange. Only the inlanders could perform the ceremony successfully. He stated that women and children, regardless of their totem clan, could also perform this ceremony. They would travel down the

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Karuah River in their bark canoes to the shores of Port Stephens. The ritual appeared seemingly meaningless to him as participants merely dug a hole in the sand and pulled up grass.  

Sorcery, black magic and mysticism have been commonly dramatised discussion points for many anthropologists when they have dissected, discredited and pulled apart any semblance of what could be labelled as primitive Aboriginal religion. As Bennett recorded: “Naturally in a race where religion has no place in the social condition superstition and fantastic beliefs in the existence of evil spirit prevails to a great extent.” As in most major religions, superstition and fear are common factors in ensuring morality, conformity and social control in all societies.

Elkin explains:

Sorcery, or black magic, provides explanation of illnesses, pains, and deaths, the causes of which are not known or obvious. The explanation is personal or spiritistic. Someone or some spiritual powers performed black magic because ill-disposed to the victim, because the latter broke some taboo.

In many of these cases that were seen as pertaining to or caused by magic, they could be treated by a medicine man with special training in sorcery and seemingly held magical powers. Medicine men, clever man or Karadji, were very powerful men who are well respected and feared because it was believed they attained so much power from gaining spiritual knowledge. These medicine men could reportedly perform a number of supernatural feats such as telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, teleportation and various psychic abilities. They had the power through their knowledge of sorcery to cause sickness and death, but also the ability to cure the victims of evil magic. Bennett also identifies the power of medicine men in the Worimi:

They also believed that the Koradji were possessed of wonderful supernatural powers and besides bringing disaster to others could effect cures of all manner of ills among their own tribes. It may be taken generally that sickness of all kinds was believed to be caused by the incantations and magic of the Koradjis or medicine-men of hostile tribes.
Hunting and Gathering

Port Stephens provided an abundance of natural food sources or ‘bush tucker’ for the Worimi people. Kangaroos, wallabies, marsupials, emus, possum, reptiles, whale and various other small creatures were plentiful. They were spoiled by the delicacies of the sea that provided such a valuable part of their diet which was embedded in the Worimi lore and lifestyle. In traditional Aboriginal society gender roles varied greatly during the day and they separated to perform their specific duties, that is, men hunted for the larger game while the women gathered food. Bennet discussed the importance and skills of the Worimi people possessed in fishing:

*The business of fishing was perhaps the most important of all to the natives. In the piscatorial art there were highly proficient, using both lines and spears.*

The men with the four pronged fishing spears harvested large numbers of mullet and salmon from the schools during their seasonal migrations while the women contributed to the fishing haul, utilising their mastery of the fishing line and hook. The men of the Worimi clans would also hunt the larger land game like kangaroo and emu, but this could take days. Women’s contribution to the provision of food was substantial. In fact, on a daily basis, they supplied more food than the men. They were responsible for gathering enough food to cater for their immediate families while the men were away. The prized larger prey from the men’s hunt was shared amongst the wider extended families.

Aboriginal women on the east coast of Australia were renowned for their uncanny fishing skills. They made net bags (dilly bags) from string fashioned from the bark of trees to carry many of their tools of trade like hooks made from shells, lines, shellfish, seafood and all other daily necessities. The art of making and using fishing lines was a skill perfected by women of the Worimi along with many other clans on the New South Wales east coast. At an early age girls learned from the older women how to hone this skill perfectly for the benefit of their families.

They were required through Dreaming law to go through a ceremony that eternally connected them to the sea and fish they prized and desired. A ligature was tied to the first joint of the little finger very tightly and left for some time until it actually died and fell off or it was severed by one of the women elders. Depending on the clan area the small piece of amputated finger was taken out into the ocean, harbour or river and thrown in. The belief was that fish or fishes would

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eat that small finger and forever be attracted to the hand from whence it came. This ensured that all Worimi women after depositing their sacrificial personal lure in the waters would always be successful fishing in the future and provide food for their families. Sands also recorded this east coast cultural female custom.

*The first two joints of the little finger of the left hand of the women among some tribes are removed in youth. This ceremony of amputation is called Malgun.*

It was then an increase ceremony to ensure a future ‘harvest’ of fish. Mud crabs and lobster were very highly prized delicacies that the women also provided and to obtain both was no easy feat. My mother was one that continued that tradition. I experienced first-hand her skill in catching mud crabs. She had a real natural talent for acquiring mud crabs from their muddy burrows in the sides of small creeks. She seemed to be able to do this with consummate ease, which I can assure you, is not as easy as it seems and she said:

*I used to always take my kids crabbing. I had a knack. I used to be able to know how to put my hand down and grabbed the crab from behind.*

Bennett describes William Scott’s recollections of the Worimi women diving for lobsters in the ocean off Port Stephens Heads as a mighty task performed without any diving equipment. They would dive freely and were able to hold their breath deep down amongst the rocks in the ocean, while the men guarded them by throwing stones in the water to ward off any sharks that may have been in the vicinity. Val Merrick, a Worimi woman, believes that our aunty Ellen Dates, while not personally mentioned in the book, was one of the women that William Scott witnessed diving for lobsters, as mentioned by Bennet in his book *The Port Stephens Blacks*.

The tasks and skills that the Worimi and other New South Wales Aboriginal east coast women displayed in their role of gathering food (fishing) set them slightly apart from other traditional Aboriginal female gatherers in Australia. When it came to fishing, at times, both genders harvested fish from the rivers and sea, but the women were the true masters of the fishing lines. They also gathered various roots, fruits, yams, berries as well as shellfish from the water’s edge.

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There is no doubt as to the large contributions women made in procuring a variety of food sources for their families. They maintained a healthy balanced diet and ensured that everyone had enough to eat. Still, they only took as much food as was needed from their environment to feed their families and continue their journey in the lifecycle.\textsuperscript{142}

Certain highly skilled older women undertook the tedious task of making fishing lines and string for dilly bags from the bark of young Kurrajong trees. It was a long drawn out process which resulted in the fashioning of extraordinarily strong fishing lines that landed the heaviest of edible fish possible, even including sharks. Fishhooks were made from bone, but mostly from a number of different sea shells where a hole was made in the centre and filed with shale or quartzite into a crescent shape until it formed a lethal hook.\textsuperscript{143} Camp sites have been discovered at Birubi Point containing fish hooks and other Worimi artefacts that have been carbon-dated to be at least one thousand years old, well before the intrusion of Europeans.\textsuperscript{144} Sokoloff also recorded the skills of the Worimi woman:

\textit{The fishing line, called "yirrawarn", was strong enough to catch large fish. The problem was in the fish-hooks. These fishhooks, called “birrooyee” or “pirrewuy”, were made from oyster or pearl shell: rock oyster (Crassostrea commercialis) and probably the turban shell (Ninella torquata), the large earshell (Notohaliotis ruber), the mud oyster (Ostrea sinuata) and perhaps the pipi (Plebidonax deltoides).}\textsuperscript{145}

The Worimi men were accomplished hunters and used a number of hunting weapons similar to other clans around Australia including: spears and a woomera, clubs and throwing sticks, boomerangs and stone axes.\textsuperscript{146} These weapons were shaped and moulded by skilled craftsmen from natural materials and technology that was available to them. There were two types of boomerangs that they used made of myrtle wood. One had a slight curve that was used for hunting smaller game and the other had sharper curves that would return to the thrower.

The spear truly represented the traditional Aboriginal man. The Worimi men carried several types of spears with them. Larger game hunting and fighting spears had a single sharpened point

\textsuperscript{142} John McLachlan. (Unknown). \textit{Living conditions of the Worimi Aboriginal people of Port Stephens before and after the appearance of Europeans}. p4
made of bone, whereas the fishing spear was fashioned with four wooden prongs. The construction of the spears using simple yet clever technology made them proficient craftsmen. Soaking the shaft in water for extended periods, then using fire to straighten and harden spear points took much patience and skill. The ingenuity of the woomera made hunting more successful as the spear was projected with much greater thrust, distance and accuracy. The woomera was about three feet long, fire hardened and tapered at one end with a notch inserted into a groove made at the end of the spear. 147 Bennett describes how the Worimi fishing spear was constructed:

The fish spear was made in three distinct parts. The main shaft was the dried Stem of the giant lily (pooloongearn), and into this was fitted a second portion, a part of the dried flower stem of the grass tree (pummirri). The head was of four prongs made of ironbark and hardened by fire... When the prongs were properly fashioned and barbed, the head would be fitted to the shaft with fibre cord and gum from the grass tree.148

All of the traditional food sources or ‘bush tucker’ from the land and sea offered a rich and balanced diet for the Worimi people that adequately sustained them for thousands of years. The traditional lifestyle of hunting and gathering provided health and good levels of fitness as they travelled throughout their country fulfilling their Dreaming obligation in the cycle of life.

Since the Worimi lived in favourable environment with abundant food sources, as with other tribes along the coast of N.S.W., their population density was high for a hunter-gatherer society.149

In this chapter I have addressed several key issues that have provided insights into the complicated traditional lifestyle of the Worimi people. I have presented certain factors as to how the traditional Worimi people existed in a world contained within the rigidity of the Dreaming laws and kinship structures. These structures forged traditional Aboriginal society in a series of networks that stemmed from their devotion and deep seated beliefs in spirituality. This chapter offers an explanation as to how everyone honoured their spiritual ancestors by living under the laws that were handed down from creation in the Dreaming.

It was a complex life interwoven throughout a variety of marriage, kinship and totemic relationships which were interpersonal, dictating social interactions and avoidance behaviours. I have furnished a clear picture on the importance of marriage and kinship, which implicitly bound Worimi society together with the underlying concept of reciprocity through obligations, rights and duties they were required to perform in everyday activities. I have also explained how the Worimi through hunting and gathering, assisted by skilled technology in weapon, and tool production, provided a rich lifestyle for the people. Particularly illuminating is the unique role Worimi women played as gatherers harvesting the bounty of the sea.
Chapter Four

**European contact and the coming of the cedar-getters**

There is no completely definitive evidence, but it has been estimated that the Aboriginal population was in excess of 300,000 when the First Fleet arrived here in 1788. Those numbers of Aboriginal people declined significantly as the colonial settlements eventually spread throughout the eastern coastal area of Australia. The psychological and spiritual damage from being driven from their country broke down Aboriginal traditional belief systems and their continuous lifecycle of seasons. A significant number of Aborigines died from the introduced diseases that the white man brought into the country. Perhaps many more Aborigines were killed from conflict with the convict and free settlers in frontier wars under the might of what was Western civilisation.  

* A combination of disease, loss of land and outright murder reduced the Aboriginal population by an estimated 90% during the 19th century and early 20th century. A wave of massacres and resistance followed the frontier.  

In this chapter I will discuss the early European contact period between the Worimi people and Westerners in the Port Stephens area. Examining the frontier conflict that arose from the presence of convict timber-getters and shepherds, it is clear that their treatment of Aboriginal people initiated murders, massacres and indiscriminate killings. The history and role the Australian Agriculture Company (AAC) played in the lives of the Worimi people that began with the work of its first Chief Agent Robert Dawson will be examined in more detail. More importantly, how the Worimi people helped develop the ACC settlement at Carrington and the million acres granted to the company will be fully considered.  

I will explain the violent attitudes and treatment of Aboriginal people that began with the Bidagal man Pemulwuy in the first settlement in Sydney under Governor Arthur Phillip. This brutal violence continued with the convict and free settlers as the colony expanded and Aboriginal lands, people and their way of life were slowly crushed by colonial progress. This happened because the colonial administrators sanctioned the killing of Aborigines in the frontier conflicts, which only encouraged unnecessary violence on the frontier. An explanation will be given as to how this left the Worimi people decimated to a large degree and with no options.

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They barely survived on the fringes of the expanding white settlements. It will then be discussed how the British government and the Christian fundamentalist missionaries opted for a policy of the protection of its Aboriginal people which aided, it can be argued, in quickening Australia’s colonisation.

**Initial Contact**

The literary work of more recent historians has shed more light onto the cloudy past of Australia’s colonial history. These academics have dispelled the previous glossy fairy-tale and mythology of a peacefully settled country based on the notion of progress. Australia was colonised in real terms, however, under British military force. No quarter was given to Aboriginal combatants civilians or soldiers as the colonial administration continually devoured their new-found territory. Despite the fact that Governor Phillip was instructed to establish peaceful relations with Aboriginal people, he took control and established the penal colony of New South Wales in 1788 with a degree of force. The colonial government of the time was tainted with the blood of Indigenous peoples as brute force stamped out any resistance to their expanding empire. Lerone Bennett Jr gives his interpretation of the process of colonialism:

> ...colonialism is that relationship of domination and violence established by Europeans as a result of the slave trade and military conquest and extended by a process of mystification, administration and coercion. Stated in a somewhat different way, colonialism is a relationship of exploitation, based on inequality and contempt and perpetuated by force and cultural regression.152

This was the process that was used to develop the newly English found continent of Australia. Contempt and mistreatment of Aboriginal people from the first initial and sustained European contact provided clear markers of European colonialism. Dispossession, by forcefully taking traditional Aboriginal land with military force, is the ignored legacy of Australian history. Murders and massacres were just as common occurrences as colonists spread further from the original Sydney settlement. Aboriginal people would lose their cultural practices and eventually were forced to accept physical control and incarceration under colonial rule.

Phillip’s explicit directive for peaceful and friendly relations with the natives wasn’t successful with resistance and conflict happening within a very short time of the British arrival. Despite the

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early attempts by Phillip to fulfil his instructions, Aboriginals were dispossessed of their land and acts of inhumanity were perpetrated against them by convicts.

In the first colonial town, Sydney, war was declared by Pemulwuy a warrior of the local Bidagal tribe. It culminated when he speared and killed Phillip’s gamekeeper, McEntire, in revenge for raping Aboriginal women. An enraged Phillip ordered that the head of Pemulwuy be obtained, but this proved unsuccessful at the time. The ensuing warfare lasted twelve years until Pemulwuy was eventually captured and killed in 1802.\(^{153}\)

Pemulwuy was the first of a number of Aboriginal warriors to die defending his people’s rights to their land. As the colonists moved further afield to the south, west and north of the original settlement to claim Aboriginal land, they left a trail of devastation and destruction that fuelled hatred between Whites and Blacks. Aboriginals mounted their own campaigns of guerrilla warfare resistance, often with some success despite being up against superior firepower and greater military numbers. Treaties were never offered by the colonial governments to acquire Aboriginal lands. Armed with the notion of Terra Nullius and greater military force they eventually overcame the defenders. The military was the only western tool needed to colonise a so-called primitive people.\(^{154}\)

From the initial contact in Sydney, although minor skirmishes occurred, there is evidence that most Aboriginal people avoided the newly-formed colony, which seemed to preserve the status quo of the separation of two cultures. There were some Blacks who accommodated and utilised certain aspects of white culture and technology in their own culture while maintaining some traditions and social relations. Not all Aboriginal people were involved in frontier conflict as some believed there were benefits in what the white man had to offer,\(^{155}\) like the intelligent Eora man Bennelong, who was captured by Phillip and learnt much about Western culture. Bennelong became the mediator for interactions between colonists and Aboriginal clans around Port Jackson.\(^{156}\) From the very outset, Aboriginal people avoided the invaders, as David Collins states:

> It was natural to suppose that the curiosity of these people would be attracted by observing that, instead of quitting, their visitors were occupied in works that indicated an


intention of remaining in their country; but during the first six weeks, only two came near them.\textsuperscript{157}

The reported relationships between Blacks and the early colonists varied considerably according to early historians, but what is clearly undeniable is that Aboriginal land was taken and that Aboriginal people resisted to their own detriment. There were many horrors that Aboriginal people experienced and endured as part of the process of Australia’s colonisation. Murders, massacres, torture, rape and slavery were all too common features of the colonial landscape. These incidents of frontier violence went unregarded. They were seen at the time as a necessary tool to colonise the land and its people as soon as possible.

As already related in the Introduction, recent historians and journalists such as Henry Reynolds and John Pilger have attempted to tell the truth about Aboriginal history and how Australia’s wild frontier days extracted a heavy toll on Aboriginal people. In his early book,\textit{History of Australia} published in 1883, George Rusden exposes the attitudes of the settlers and the pioneering heroes who believed they were acting within the constraints of colonial rule: "The slaughter of... every black found by the avenging band became common practice under the assumed sanction of government."\textsuperscript{158} There were many incidents like these where the Australian colonial government condoned terrible acts of inhumanity by the convicts and free settlers upon the Aboriginal population.

This not only happened in Australia but around the world, particularly in British colonies. Later humanitarians and devout Christians took action to save the unfortunate heathen who were regarded as creatures of the Lord. At this time English Christian fundamentalists and humanitarians were concerned with the spread of slavery and consequent treatment or neglect of Indigenous peoples throughout the British Empire. In Australia, there were serious concerns raised by some about the inhumane treatment of Aboriginal people. There were two particular strong voices in Reverend George Robinson and Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, both of whom emigrated to Australia.

In the First Fleet, the primary cargo was not free settlers but convicts sentenced for breaking English laws.\textsuperscript{159} It was intended that an open-air prison or penal colony [from a British point of view] would be set up in a remote part of the world. Britain used transported convicts on long or

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Rusden}G W Rusden. (1883) \textit{History of Australia.} London, Chapman and Hall limited.p130
\bibitem{Attenbrow} Val Attenbrow. (2010). \textit{Sydney's Aboriginal past: Investigating the archaeological and historical records.} Sydney, University of Newcastle Press Ltd.
\end{thebibliography}
life sentences to help settle Australia. They forced them to carry out their colonial superintendent’s orders, which began with Governor Phillip’s authority, whenever required. In return, they received reduced sentences, tickets-of-leave and eventually freedom and tracts of land as grants to start their own farms in this new colony. This gave convicts a vested interest in removing Aboriginal people from the land as the colony forged further away from Sydney harbour.

Opening up Port Stephens

Captain David Collins and Charles Grimes Deputy Surveyor-General sailed on the schooner Francis north of Port Jackson and anchored off Port Stephens. Grimes spent a week there in February 1795 briefly surveying the interior of the port. His report states that another inspection should be carried out to provide greater detail, which they carried out a month later in March. During that survey they met a group of Aborigines who welcomed them to their shore and invited them to watch the Worimi perform a dance (Corroboree). Afterwards, one of the natives drew Grimes into the woods where he then poised and threatened to throw a spear at him. Fortunately for Grimes, a young convict sailor Wilson prevented the imminent assault by shooting the would-be assailant twice with a double-barrelled shotgun.

Collins recorded in his diary that the natives were very unfriendly. The incident obviously distressed Grimes considerably. Grimes described the Worimi natives as a stouter and taller race with a different language to those of the Port Jackson Blacks near the Sydney Cove colony. Their huts and boats were larger in size than the gunyahs and canoes of the Sydney natives. Nevertheless, the so-called primitive weapons of warfare were still the same. Collins reported that the Grimes party were not the first and only Europeans to set foot in the Port Stephens area. There were four runaway convicts from Sydney that were believed to be in the very same area: John Tarwood, George Lee, George Cannoway and John Watson.

During the night of 26 September, 1790, five convicts who had been sentenced by English law for the term of their natural life successfully escaped from Rose Hill (Sydney) in a small flimsy punt. Four of them managed to sail the small unstable craft out of Sydney Harbour, vanishing

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silently into the night. Another, Joseph Sutton, was found hiding on board the anchored ship the *Neptune* in the harbour and was punished severely upon his discovery. A boat was sent to search for the remaining four missing convicts but they could not be found. It was assumed that they had perished in the ocean in the small rickety sail boat.\(^{163}\) Those four men managed to sail into Port Stephens and eluded authorities for five years. They were all accepted into the Worimi clan, even taking wives and having children and living as part of the clan. These seem to have been the first mixed-race unions in the region.

In 1795, Captain Broughton of the *Providence*, while surveying Port Stephens, came across the four convicts who by then were more than willing to give themselves up. Broughton reported that they showed deep sorrow in leaving their Aboriginal wives and children and the Worimi tribe who had taken them in as their own. The men were handed over to the authorities in Port Jackson, but were soon liberated and given their freedom. The knowledge they gained of the Worimi (Kattang) language and their land while living amongst the Worimi would become a valuable resource to the colonial administrators. The Worimi language they acquired differed greatly from the local languages spoken around Sydney. They found themselves employed as interpreters and informants.\(^ {164}\) No doubt they were willing to help their captors after having been granted their freedom.

Collins recorded another incident in 1796 describing Aboriginal people as less troublesome when a group of convict fishermen became shipwrecked around Port Stephens after a savage storm. The Worimi and or the Awabakal people (which were probably the same clan) escorted the three fishermen most of the way back to the Hawkesbury River. Along the way back they noticed the rich exposed coal seams that were in abundance around the Newcastle area. News of the fishermen’s coal discovery spread like wildfire throughout the Sydney settlement inspiring settlers to explore the scene of the newly discovered El Dorado.\(^ {165}\)

Kristyn Harman in her book *Aboriginal Convicts: Australian, Khoisan, and Maori Exiles* discussed another incident that involved violent encounters with fishermen and Aborigines of the Port Stephens area in the same year of 1796. The fishermen were accused of molesting the Worimi people and the Aborigines wanted to exact some vengeance through reciprocity. There were a number of violent exchanges which left a deep feeling of bitterness and forged genuine


mistrust between the two groups. From then it became common practice by convicts around the Port Stephens area to shoot the natives whenever they approached. They stole their women at every opportunity to ‘sate’ their own sexual desires.166

Here there are a couple of conflicting stories about the interaction between the Worimi and the intrusive whites. The escaped convicts were taken in by the Worimi tribe and were accepted as members living amongst them, taking wives under kinship rules and regulations. The shipwrecked fishermen were shown kindness and were assisted by the Worimi by escorting and travelling with them a great distance to ensure their safe return to their Sydney settlement. Yet, Charles Grimes was supposedly threatened and saved from being speared after an altercation with one of the Worimi people. The only reasonable answer to this contrast in Worimi behaviour seems to me to be the Aboriginal belief and custom of reciprocity. Grimes must have displayed some type of inappropriate conduct towards the Worimi to get such a threatening response. Huntington confirms the friendly nature of the Worimi:

> It is the opinion of many who have lived among the native and supported by many well established facts that the native are not the cruel and cold-blooded savages which many writers have painted them. Their treatment of Tarwood and his companion as well as the fishermen prove conclusively that their kindness and hospitality is scarcely equalled by any other uncivilised people.”167

James Cook was credited as the first European to discover Port Stephens, naming it after a secretary to the Admiralty, Phillip Stephens, in 1770.168 As I mentioned, Grimes and Broughton surveyed the harbour in 1795 and two years later Lieutenant Shortland arrived there while searching for Cumberland. Governor Macquarie, who visited the Port in 1811-12, named Nelson Bay after his brig, the *Lady Nelson*. During John Oxley’s expeditions, he eventually found his way to Port Stephens in 1818. Broughton’s description of the land surrounding the harbour of Port Stephens was unappealing to anyone wanting to settle in the area.169 The

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Worimi had little contact with whites during the early colonial period and there was little immediate threat from the distant colonial Sydney settlement.

That was all about to change with the coming of the White cedar-getters in 1816 and their white convict servants to the Myall and Manning areas. Many Aboriginal clans were dispersed in their wake which, of course, had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal traditional way of life.\textsuperscript{170} Aboriginal people had really no option but to retaliate and they attacked the foreign intruders who were destroying the landscape, their culture and their lives. A little earlier in 1814, along the Patterson River in the lower Hunter Valley, hostilities between cedar-getters and Aborigines were quite violent and confrontations were frequently recorded.

**Newcastle as a Secondary Penal Settlement**

On 25 July, 1811, Lieutenant Scottowe was placed in command of the small penal settlement at Newcastle. The Newcastle settlement was established for hardened repeat offenders in the Sydney settlement. The overcrowding populations in the Parramatta gaols and the closure of the Norfolk Island penal settlement meant that, in 1814, the Newcastle settlement became the infamous secondary Australian punishment settlement. They were put to hard labour working in the coal mines, salt pans, lime kilns and cedar cutting gangs.\textsuperscript{171}

\textit{For offences deemed serious or repeated offences convict men and women were transported, by both magistrates and criminal courts, to terms at the prison settlements of Newcastle, later Port Macquarie and still later Moreton Bay. Penal settlements moved further up the coast because settlement outgrew their penal functions.}\textsuperscript{172}

In November, 1814, Lieutenant Menzies reported to Governor King his intentions to suspend the operation of private cedar-getters on the Patterson River because of an attack from the natives. Menzies spoke of the need to arm the cedar parties, a practice that continued and was evident in 1819 when Lieutenant-Colonel Morisset gave evidence before the Bigge Inquiry. Morisset informed the Inquiry that the woodcutters were accompanied by guards to prevent


\textsuperscript{171} Noel Davies. (1996). \textit{Convict Nobbys: The story of the convict construction of Macquarie pier and the reconstruction of Nobby's island}. Broadmeadow, NSW, Newey & Beath Pty. Ltd.p18

convicts from escaping and to protect them from the Aborigines.\textsuperscript{173} New South Wales was becoming a dangerous and expensive place to colonise, but also an opportunity for much wealth and prosperity.

_These people were the first who came in contact with the natives, they contrived to conciliate them whilst they could make them useful as guides, of procuring them kangaroo and other game; but they were sure to give the natives some cause for offence ere long either shooting, striking them, or taking their gins, and the consequences were that what would naturally have been expected._\textsuperscript{174}

John Thomas Bigge was appointed by the colonial office to carry out an investigation into the state and conditions of the New South Wales convict colony. The secretary of the state, Lord Bathurst, had concerns that the primary function of Australia’s settlement as a penal colony no longer took priority. The official policy was that the future development and growth of New South Wales as a colony was to remain always the secondary goal. Bigge was to report on the overall management and administration by Governor Lachlan Macquarie because of the escalating financial burden it was becoming and to make recommendations for any future development.\textsuperscript{175}

The reports that Bigge published in 1822 and 1823 would bring the Worimi people into sustained contact with Whites and forever change their way of life. From two independent meetings held in London to discuss Bigge’s reports, the first led to the establishment of the Australian Agricultural Company (AAC), the second the Van Diemens Land Company.\textsuperscript{176} The AAC was granted a million acres of land that included Worimi country extending northwards from the shores of Port Stephens. In 1824, the company was floated in London and eventually made its base of operations in Port Stephens at Carrington with the same charter as the East Indian Company.\textsuperscript{177} The newly formed company saw its role as changing the Australian landscape:

\textsuperscript{175} Frank G Clarke. (2003). _Australia in a nutshell: A narrative history._ Dural, Rosenberg Publishing,p76
\textsuperscript{176} Damaris Bairstow. (2003). _A million pounds, A million acres: The pioneer settlement of the Australian Agricultural Company._ Cremorne, Damaris Bairstow,p4
\textsuperscript{177} Damaris Bairstow. (2003). _A million pounds, A million acres: The pioneer settlement of the Australian Agricultural Company._ Cremorne, Damaris Bairstow. p5
...its stated object was ‘Cultivating Waste Lands in New South Wales, The A.A.
Company’s prime purpose was the production of fine wool and as an adjunct, ‘cultivating
the Vine, Olive, flax, and other productions now imported from the shores of the
Mediterranean.’

Those waste lands to be cultivated, as Bairstow called it, was the country that belonged to
Aboriginal people and, for the first time, the Worimi were exposed to sustained contact and
conflict with Whites. The AAC operated fairly independently of the government and was seen
as a private company like the original companies that were formed to colonise America and
India. Up until 1838, the government assigned convict labour to private employers like the AAC
to assist in the process of colonisation, but from 1840 to 1842 free immigrants were sent to
replace all AAC convict workers because the transportation of convicts to the eastern seaboard
ceased in 1840. Garland and Wheeler saw the impact that the AAC would play in the lives of
the Worimi:

*If the arrival of the cedar-getters was the turning point in the lives of the aborigines
because it exposed them to the worst features of the white man’s attitude towards them,
then the arrival of the A A Co. was the turning point because it introduced them to the
possibilities of taking part in the white man’s way of life.*

One of the main preoccupations of the Newcastle convicts was to escape the open-air prison and
the military administrators employed Aboriginal trackers to hunt them down. Trackers were
used to locate them and allow the military officers to bring them back. They were excellent
trackers, described as having superior eyesight and the ability to track great distances; as
trackers they were extremely accurate. They did this for very little reward beyond rations and
were very active in recapturing the prisoners diligently and without fear. This role certainly
didn’t endear Aboriginal people to the majority of the colonial population who were convicts.
The Aboriginal trackers would fuel an already, growing convict hatred towards all Aboriginal
people they encountered in their daily lives.

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origins.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.p27
181 Robert Hughes. (2003). *The fatal shore: a history of the transportation of convicts to Australia 1787-
1868.* London, Vintage. p436
Robert Dawson and the Australian Agricultural Company

Robert Dawson accepted the appointment of chief agent of the Australian Agricultural Company in December 1824. On 24 June, 1825, Dawson boarded the York at Cowes seaport in England and set sail with staff, stock and supplies to cultivate the AAC lands. After taking a couple of weeks off in Rio de Janeiro, they eventually dropped anchor in Sydney Harbour on 23 November, 1825. Dawson left Sydney on 1 January, 1826, with the AAC committee secretary Harrington, the company surveyor, Armstrong, and Henry Dangar, government assistant surveyor, to survey the proposed AAC land grant around Port Stephens.

The next two years were occupied with exploration and the establishment of the Company Settlement at Carrabean (later Carrington) on the northern shore of Port Stephens, No 1 Farm (near Carrington), No 2 Farm (Stroud), and a chain of sheep stations north towards the out station at Gloucester.


Dawson’s party was guided by a young local Aboriginal man from Karuah by the English-given name of Ben, who provided knowledge of the local land and fresh water sources in exchange for tobacco, clothing and a tomahawk. They came upon and were later assisted by another

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183 Dawson (1830) p7  
Karuah Aborigine, Tony, as they travelled further up the Karuah River. Dawson recognised the value of the Aboriginal people to his work with the AAC. Their contributions helped with its success. He found them to be friendly hard workers as long as they were treated with respect. Dawson also knew many of the convict timber-getters that the AAC assigned instigated much of the conflict with the Aborigines.186

*I cannot omit to state how much assistance I have derived from the Natives who are very friendly and were anxious to make themselves agreeable to us. Without them our own people could not have had Huts on their arrival. Their assistance was also most acceptable and valuable in landing and stowing the stores; cutting down and carrying Poles (?) and other burthens procuring Bark removing obstructions of wood and stones and many other things we could not have got done without them. Provided they are not ill treated by the Convicts I have no fear of their enmity and I shall do everything in my power to protect them and secure the friendly intercourse which at present subsists between us."187

Conflict was unavoidable despite the best efforts of Dawson. The cruel ruthless treatment of Aboriginal people by convicts would ultimately mean the law would have to intervene at some time. Convict labourers were employed as cedar-getters and, as they travelled further away from civilisation and became isolated, they were moving further away from the constraints of colonial law. Many people in Australia are aware of the Myall Creek Massacre and the unprecedented court case that convicted and hanged Whites for killings Blacks in 1838. Fewer would know that there was an earlier court case in which four convict men were charged, convicted and sentenced to death for killing Tommy, an Aboriginal boy, near Port Stephens.

John Ridgway, Samuel Chip, Edward Colthurst and another man who had escaped, Thomas Stanly, were indicted, found guilty and sentenced to death for the murder of Tommy. The incident took place at the Myall River, near Port Stephens, on the 8th of May, 1826.188 These cedar-getters lured the eight year old away with them in a boat to a lonely part of the river where they strangled him and dumped his body in the river.189 Upon their return, Pennington, the gang superintendent who had befriended Tommy, noticed that the boy was absent. He

186 Robert Dawson. (1826). Report from Mr Robert Dawson to the Governor and deputy Governor of the Australian Agricultural Company. Sydney, the Australian Agricultural Company
overheard Stanly saying to the other culprits not to say a word about it. He knew immediately that something untoward had befallen his young friend.\textsuperscript{190}

These convicts were not assigned to the AAC and the murder was quite distant from the Carrington settlement, but Dawson took it upon himself to find and apprehend the men who perpetrated the crime. The trial of these men was carried out in Sydney, but received only modest publicity. There was a postponement in carrying out their executions. A date then was set for their hanging at Carrington so that the local blacks could witness the White man’s justice before their very eyes. There were violent retaliations by the Myall River Blacks by way of the spearing of AAC employees even as the hanging scaffold was being built. Dawson became concerned about the effect the hangings would have on the many convicts in the AAC settlement and he had it postponed again. The three men’s death sentences were eventually reduced to life imprisonment.\textsuperscript{191} It would appear that the life of an Aboriginal boy was still not equal to that of a White man in western law.

Another fatal incident happened around the same time and involved the convict constable Byron who was employed by the AAC. Byron shot and killed Tony, a Carrington Aborigine, and as this incident was much closer to home, Dawson acted immediately. He issued an arrest warrant and had Byron handcuffed and paraded in front of the local Blacks the next day. It was a token gesture on his part to show his Blacks that he was there to protect them, also to avert any Aboriginal retaliation from the fatal event. The shooting was deemed accidental and Byron was quickly and quietly removed from Carrington and returned to Sydney for his own safety.\textsuperscript{192}

Dawson reflected on the significant role Aboriginal people played in the day-to-day labour maintenance of the settlement at Carrington. This realisation became more evident when the whole tribe left the settlement and headed into the bush to perform the funeral ceremony for the departed Tony. The settlement had become quite dependent on the Blacks for supplying them with many basic necessities while Dawson tried to carry out the AAC corporate plan. It was in Dawson’s and the settlement residents’ best interest to maintain good relations with the Port Stephens Blacks. As Dawson states:

\textsuperscript{190}(2011, Tuesday, 30 August, 2011 ). "Decisions of the superior courts of New South Wales, 1788-1899." R v, Chip, Colthurst, Stanly and Ridgway [1826] NSWSupC 62

\textsuperscript{191} Damaris Bairstow. (2003). \textit{A million pounds, A million acres: The pioneer settlement of the Australian Agricultural Company}. Cremorne, Damaris Bairstow. p86

\textsuperscript{192} Damaris Bairstow. (1993). “With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampignal on the Australian Agricultural Company's estate at Port Stephens.” \textit{Aboriginal History} 17(1-2): 9
Their services had almost become necessary to the families in carrying water collecting and chopping firewood, and supplying them with fish, which they did in abundance.\textsuperscript{193}

Aboriginal women assisted White women in the domestic duties and also spent many hours removing seeds from the sheep’s wool of the AAC’s prized produce. Aboriginal men worked together with Whites in almost all that was needed to develop the land of the Australian Agricultural Company. They became quite adept as sawyers, sharing opposite ends of the large hand saws with their white counterparts and working in unison. The Worimi men were described by Dawson as expert oarsmen and seamen as well as being excellent guides and messengers. The payment of flour and tobacco was all Dawson needed to employ his Aboriginal labour force. He placed great trust in the Port Stephens Blacks and was not afraid to be alone with them in any situation.\textsuperscript{194} Greg Blyton confirms the addictive currency of tobacco that Dawson supplied to his workers:

\ldots it appeared Dawson was such a prolific supplier of tobacco to Aboriginal People that his reputation precedes him during his travels... Aboriginal People at Port Stephens through word of mouth had not only become acquainted with the virtues and generosity of Dawson as a provider of tobacco, but also had developed a propensity toward tobacco.\textsuperscript{195}

The addictive properties of tobacco became a very useful tool to get Aboriginal people to work for the AAC. Once Aboriginal people were hooked on the fragrant weed they would be easily persuaded to comply with the supplier. William Scott recalls how Aboriginal men and women became veritable nuisances in their bid to obtain a small supply of tobacco for their enjoyment. They waved their empty pipe at his father longing and pleading to have it filled by him.\textsuperscript{196} James Macarthur and Colonel Henry Dumaesq visited Port Stephens in April 1827 to assess the progress of Dawson’s work in developing the land grant of the AAC. After eighteen months of his arrival they were impressed with his good management and were told the richness of the land could support a thousand settlers. In May that year, Henry Dangar visited the settlement and was amazed by Dawson’s overall management and how he developed the settlement and

\textsuperscript{193} Robert Dawson. (1830). \textit{The present state of Australia}. London, Smith, Elder and Co.p100

\textsuperscript{194} Damaris Bairstow. (1993). “With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampignal on the Australian Agricultural Company’s Estate at Port Stephens.” \textit{Aboriginal History} 17(1-2): 10


AAC land in such a short space of time. That first assessment would be proven wrong regardless of his initial success as the land proved unsuitable for sheep and the crops failed.\textsuperscript{197}

They were equally impressed with the employment of the six hundred Worimi people at the settlement who provided so much labour for so little cost. Dawson only paid his Aboriginal people for what he believed was an equivalent in labour, which would appear to be a very meagre payment. Both men and women were employed by Dawson, which led to the initial success of the settlement at Carrington. They believed his influence over the Aborigines was so great that he brought harmony to the hostile tribes around the Port.\textsuperscript{198} Macquarie later recounted Dawson’s expenditure for Aboriginal labour in his report to the committee management:

\begin{quote}
\textit{With respect to the issues to Natives, I am of opinion that much expense is thus needlessly incurred, for the purpose either of indulging a whimsical vanity on the part of Mr Dawson, or of keeping up a delusion in the eyes of the British Public. I would by all means recommend the treatment of the Natives with kindness and with generosity, but there are bounds which cannot be overstepped without evil consequences, and I consider that at Port Stephens these bounds have been far exceeded, both in the presents which have been made to them, and in the disgusting familiarity in which they are countenanced and encouraged.}\textsuperscript{199}
\end{quote}

Macquarie obviously did not trust the Aboriginal people of the AAC settlement nor the relationships that existed with the Whites and particularly with Dawson. This was in contrast to the paternal attitude towards Aboriginal people that is evident in Dawson’s writings. He claimed he developed thorough and close working relationship with them. He saw the Worimi people as a harmless primitive race, naïve and ignorant to the civilised ways of Western society. In his opinion they were childlike and pawns to be used while they helped to develop a capitalist empire in England’s new colony. He saw his role as their protector against the evils of the convict gangs and the White population who enflamed an already wild frontier.

\begin{quote}
They have usually been treated in distant parts of the Colony as if they had been dogs, and shot by convict servants, at a distance from society, for most trifling causes. There has, perhaps, have been more of this done near this settlement and on the banks of the
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
two rivers which empty themselves into this harbour, than in any other part of the Colony, and it has arisen from the speculators in timber who formerly obtained licences from the Governor to cut Cedar and Blue Gum for exportation upon land not located.\textsuperscript{200}

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When the convict timber-getters invaded the traditional lands of Aboriginal people when harvesting cedar and gum forests, they either directly or indirectly broke traditional Aboriginal laws. Dawson had close encounters with the Worimi people in the early contact period, but he experienced skirmishes much further from the Carrington settlement. One such event occurred around the Stroud area. When Dawson passed Davis Hill, he was approached by a group of Aborigines. They grabbed their spears and pointed them threateningly at him. His guides quickly reacted by talking to the would-be assailants. As a result, they threw down their spears and disappeared in the dense woods.\textsuperscript{201}

Another episode also occurred: on his way to Stroud. Dawson encountered a hostile tribe of Aborigines who speared one of his men in the face. They took the injured man to Port Macquarie where he was attended by a doctor at the hospital and recovered quickly from his injury. So concerned was he about the ferocity of that tribe, that Dawson applied to the commandant for protection and assistance to return home to Port Stephens.\textsuperscript{202} The fact of the matter was that violence between Blacks and Whites was becoming a concern. As convict-settlers ventured further inland Aboriginal people fought for their traditional lands and their lives.

As part of the process of Australia’s colonisation, there were many horrors that Aboriginal people experienced and endured. Particularly in the early part of the nineteenth century, massacres and murders, slavery and acts of cruelty were normal everyday events. These incidents of frontier violence, most of which went unchallenged, were seen at the time as a standard measure of what was necessary to quickly colonise a land and its people.

There were many cases of murder, massacres and indiscriminate killings that were seemingly condoned by the Australian colonial administration, as Henry Reynolds and John Pilger have pointed out in recent years. There were countless acts of inhumanity and cruelty inflicted by the

\textsuperscript{200} Robert Dawson. (1830). \textit{The present state of Australia}. London, Smith, Elder and Co.p58
\textsuperscript{201} Robert Dawson. (1826). \textit{Journal of a journey performed in the bath in search of the Australian Agricultural Company’s grant near Port Stephens}. Australian Agricultural Company
convict settlers upon an undeserving Aboriginal population. All of which sent alarm bells ringing within the ears of Christian fundamentalists and humanitarians. The London Missionary Society employed Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, who is credited with establishing the first mission in Australia at Lake Macquarie on the southern extremities of Newcastle late in 1825.

Lancelot Threlkeld and the Lake Macquarie Mission

Keith Clouton believes that Threlkeld established the first mission in Australia at Bahtabah (Belmont) on Lake Macquarie. The mission moved to Punte (Toronto) in 1831. By 1837, Threlkeld realised that the Awabakal Aborigines were a dying race. The Lake Macquarie mission provided some help and protection for fifteen years, but Threkeld’s work was cancelled out by the moral code of the colony, especially that of the convicts and the racist attitudes of the free settlers towards the Aboriginal tribal land, their freedom and often their lives.

Threlkeld recorded the Awabakal language with the help of Biraban (puntamai) who spoke 15 fluent languages before learning English. Other missionaries later took similar interests in Aboriginal culture, perhaps in their academic pursuits. Men like the Reverend Adolphus Peter Elkin recorded language and wrote books and many articles on traditional Aboriginal society in New South Wales. Many of the early missionaries learned the local Aboriginal language to communicate with Aboriginal people to assist in the conversion process to Christianity and assimilation.

Threlkeld’s early work on the mission ultimately failed because there weren’t enough local Blacks to congregate on the mission. He nevertheless recorded the colonial treatment and decimation of the Aboriginal population around Lake Macquarie. The slaughter of Aboriginal people, as well as sickness and disease, was well documented, perhaps in an attempt to explain the missionary’s failure. Like Dawson he appeared to have the same paternalistic attitudes towards Aboriginal people. There was little he could do but watch as the Awabakal people disappeared under the force of Western civilisation. The mission officially closed in 1841.

Threlkeld recorded the demise of the Awabakal population stating:

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The thousands of Aborigines, if ever they did exist in these parts, decreased to hundreds, the hundreds have lessened to tens, and the tens will dwindle to units before a very few years will have passed away.

Threlkeld created some ground-breaking work by recording and publishing works in the Awabakal language with the help of his Aboriginal informant Birabahn. Threlkeld learned several local Aboriginal dialects which was a necessary tool to civilise and Christianise Aboriginal people. In July 1833, Threlkeld visited Carrington to deliver a sermon in the Kattang (Worimi) language to fifty Worimi people. While they understood him as he spoke their language, it failed because most of the Aboriginal people found little solace in Christianity; but settlers voiced their contempt for the heathens that rejected their religion. Threlkeld was well aware of the vicious extent of the open contempt that the settlers expressed towards Aboriginal people outside the AAC settlement and the failed Lake Macquarie mission. Threlkeld passionately claimed:

The ripping open the bellies of the Blacks alive; - the roasting them in that state in triangularly made log fires… together with many other atrocious acts of cruelty, which are but the sports of monsters...

The Departure of Dawson and sequent events with the A.A. Company

Robert Dawson’s reign as the Chief Agent for the Australian Agricultural Company was short: only three years later he was dismissed in April 1828. There were a number of accusations and allegations of mismanagement pitted against him by James Macarthur, a senior member of the local committee of the Australian Agricultural Company. The sheep weren’t thriving and producing wool in the wet coastal climate and the land wasn’t as fertile as first thought. When the newly formed company started losing its investments someone had to be made accountable. There were also allegations that Dawson was privately speculating company land for his own family in the Manning Valley, all of which led to his demise.
He returned to England in late 1828 to clear his name and press for justice. He published a rebuttal of the accusations against him but wasn’t granted a full hearing and was officially dismissed from the company in January 1829. Dawson also published his book in 1830; “The present state of Australia; a Description of the country, its Advantages and Prospects with reference to Emigrant: and a particular account of its aboriginal inhabitants”. He would return to Australia in 1839 where he was previously granted land in New South Wales by the AAC. Dawson was reappointed to the position of magistrate in the Hunter area where he remained until 1862 and then returned to England.210

After Dawson was dismissed, the AAC exploited more Aboriginal land to further develop their sheep industry. There were reports of Aborigines being troublesome to their shepherds. Unarmed and isolated they felt vulnerable to attacks from the Aborigines, but there weren’t any serious incidents reported. A year later a convict shepherd was killed and Carl Rantzsch, a free shepherd, was speared. One of the Aborigines was shot in retaliation, and Ebsworth, a clerk and one time temporary chief agent of the A A Company, hoped it would act as a warning to all Aborigines. Relations between Whites and Blacks became frayed and volatile. Aborigines lost more of their lands without any reciprocity or compensation from the company.211

All retaliation attacks by the AAC were supposedly to frighten off Aborigines from their grant in a bid to make those isolated shepherds feel safer. There was a brutal massacre by convict settlers that wiped out a whole tribe in the Gloucester district in 1835. The massacre took place on Robert Ramsay McKenzie’s property on the western bank of the Barrington River a couple of miles from Rawdon Vale. Five convict shepherds were murdered and the settlers sent a clear message of vengeance to the Aborigines. There were other similar incidents that occurred on AAC land and many more isolated settlers abandoned their localities in fear of their lives.212

Sir Edward Parry, Dawson’s successor, cunningly used the company’s own Aboriginal trackers to hunt down, shoot and kill the guilty Aboriginal parties for killing shepherds. The official policy of the AAC was still one of so-called appeasement and Aborigines killing Aborigines raised very few eyebrows anywhere. Legally, it didn’t impact on the AAC or any of the

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211 Damaris Bairstow. (1993). “With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampignal on the Australian Agricultural company's estate at Port Stephens.” Aboriginal History 17(1-2):13
company officers in charge of the Aboriginal trackers. It stopped further Aboriginal retaliations against the settlers and the AAC was absolved from any perceived wrong doings.  

On the settlement, there were growing concerns regarding several cases of intercourse between convicts and the Aboriginal women. Many convicts contracted a venereal disease that spread quickly amongst them, which restricted them from performing work duties and hindered the AAC’s progress. Restrictions were put in place to ban convicts visiting the Aboriginal camp and having any sexual relations with the Aboriginal women. Sexually transmitted diseases, along with other introduced Western diseases, killed many of the Worimi people, as they had no cure.

John Macarthur and James Edward Ebsworth, the AAC accountant, both acted in the position of Chief Agent position when James Macarthur returned to England to meet the committee regarding Dawson’s dismissal. Ebsworth was only twenty-three when he was given charge of the million acres and he had his fair share of problems, being constantly undermined by the more senior staff. It was a great relief when he heard that Sir Edward Parry was the newly appointed person in charge, but that only took effect upon his arrival in December 1829. The committee restructured the company to take full power of attorney away from the local directors and give it to the new Commissioner position that Parry now held.

James Macarthur and Parry’s attitude towards the Worimi people differed greatly from the very paternal view of Robert Dawson. Macarthur in particular seemed to hold strong contempt for Dawson’s sentiment and treatment of the Worimi people living on the Carrington settlement. Bairstow confirms Macarthur’s attitude: “To the Australian-born James Macarthur, the Aborigine was neither childlike nor innocent but an affront to the sensibilities of civilised men.” Parry earned a reputation for his inhumane treatment of Aborigines, as told by

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213 Damaris Bairstow. (1993). “With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampignal on the Australian Agricultural Company's estate at Port Stephens.” Aboriginal History 17(1-2): 13
218 Damaris Bairstow. (1993). “With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampignal on the Australian Agricultural Company's estate at Port Stephens.” Aboriginal History 17(1-2): 11
Aboriginal Les Ridgeway; he gave convicts guns to shoot Aborigines if they didn’t obey him and they took their women off them. Once again, Damaris Bairstow points out in her article:

*But the best will in the world did not save the Aborigines. Their land had been usurped, their society shattered. The tragedy is reflected in the words used in Company correspondence. The ‘pleasure’ Dawson gained from the society of the aborigines had changed under Parry to a policy of non-molestation.*

Aborigines further north around the Myall Lakes had already been decimated before the AAC withdrew from the Lakes in 1832 as free settlers began to arrive. They lost their traditional lands that contained their sacred sites and hunting grounds and a country they called home. Their traditional food sources began to disappear. Under the guns of convict settlers, timber-getters and the introduction of cattle, many died. Suffering from starvation, they began to kill the livestock to eat and the settlers retaliated, which fuelled increased hostilities as Aborigines resisted being driven off their country. Lorna Lippmann writes about the constant threat that Aborigines faced:

*Aborigines who continued to challenge the invasion of their lands were driven by force of arms by either troops or white settlers. Assimilation or annihilation was the order of the day.*

The introduction of sheep and cattle devastated the Worimi lands by destroying the natural habitat and the delicate balance of the natural food chain. Some Aboriginal people risked their own lives when they wandered into White camps seeking assistance and basic handouts just to survive. The more exposure Aboriginal had to Western society the more they were exposed to violence and Western diseases. William Scott, who was born in Carrington in 1844, recorded in his youth that measles decimated the Worimi clan whose numbers had already been significantly reduced.

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220 Damaris Bairstow. (1993). "With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampigmal on the Australian Agricultural Company's estate at Port Stephens." *Aboriginal History* 17(1-2): 15
223 John McLachlan. (Unknown). Living conditions of the Worimi Aboriginal people of Port Stephens before and after the appearance of Europeans.
In correspondence to his wife, Parry’s description of the Worimi people on the AAC settlement delineates a harmless and quiet people who were very different to those around Sydney. In the same breath, he also described them as a race of hideous people who didn’t wear any clothing except for some women who threw a blanket over their shoulders if they had one. Parry was a very religious man and organised regular church services on Sunday utilising the carpenter’s shop as a place of worship. In the absence of a minister he conducted the Church of England service. The clerk, Ebsworth, was quick to praise Parry’s ability to deliver Bible readings with reverence and feeling.225

It would seem that the men only held the position of Commissioner of the Australian Agricultural Company for short periods of time. Parry was replaced by the seasoned military man Colonel Henry Dumaresq in 1833. Henry died five years later at the age of forty-five in 1838 from previous war injuries he had sustained. Around the end of Dumaresq’s time as commissioner Governor Richard Bourke raised concerns about the treatment of Aborigines on the AAC land. Bourke’s last order was a gazetted notice that he was going to prosecute any person who forcibly detained Aboriginal women. His replacement, Governor Gipps, republished the notice and was forced to intervene because of the conditions that existed for Aborigines on the AAC land grant.226

The Significance of the Myall Creek Massacre Case

Much of the same was occurring on the New South Wales frontier: fundamentalists, English Christian evangelical and humanitarian parliamentarians lobbied the government to protect Aboriginal people from slavery and frontier violence in Australia that had spiralled into an uncontrolled epidemic. This would culminate in the colonial administrators setting a legal precedent for the killing of Aboriginal people in Australia. The court recorded a very powerful statement from the magistrate in the famous Myall Creek court case that occurred in June, 1838, and resulted in the hanging of the criminals involved in the Myall Creek Massacre. Bruce Elder cites the magistrate in the case:

> It is clear that the most grievous offence has been committed; that the lives of nearly thirty of our fellow creatures have been sacrificed, and in order to fulfil my duty I must

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tell you that the life of a black is as precious and valuable in the eyes of the law, as that of the highest noble in the land.227

Despite these strong words by the magistrate in that landmark court case, murders and massacres continued more secretly throughout the Australian colonies. The only thing that changed was that settlers were more careful in disposing of Aboriginal bodies, and they no longer publicly bragged about their murderous deeds. Parsons explains how this type of behaviour continued and how it was the worst indictment against White Australia - the killing of natives by police. He also discusses what happened in the Western Australian Kimberleys as late as 1926 when at least twenty natives were shot and their bodies burnt. Another incident was the Central Australian shooting of 1928 when at least thirty-one were murdered according to official accounts.228

It is clear the continuation of the massacres and murders of Aboriginal people some ninety years later cannot be warranted by any reasoning. The mindset of the convict Australian settlement appears to not have diminished, particularly those living off the land in the pastoral industry. The following generations must have retained a deep hatred for the Aboriginal who once owned the land and fought to keep it. In the eyes of such racist people, the Aborigines were seen as vermin that needed to be exterminated, along with the kangaroos, emus and rabbits.

We have not only taken possession of the lands of the Aboriginal tribes of this colony, and driven them from their territories, but we have also kept up unrelenting hostility towards them, as if they were not worthy of being classed with human beings, but simply regarded as inferior to some of the lower animals of creation.229

The number of Aborigines employed by the AAC was mentioned and the conditions they were living under can be found in the Reports from the Committee on Police and Gaols 1839 and the Committee of Immigration in 1841. The Worimi people gradually migrated to the larger White settlements for sheer survival, leaving their shattered traditional lands and lifestyle behind them. Some tribal ceremonies continued, but their significance to the tribe and individuals faded along with their traditional names, language and cultural heritage. Perhaps the final insult was that their women were taken by force, stolen by the convict settlers and others and, thus, Aboriginal

men were prevented from continuing the life they once knew and forcing them towards the White settlements.230

Phillip Parker King: The Worimi and the A.A. Company

Phillip Parker King, son of Governor Gidley King, was appointed as the next Commissioner of the Australian Agricultural Company. He was employed during the transitional period of the convict labourers/farming-based economy to the free settler society where workers were actually paid. During the ten years he occupied that position, the free worker transition became a tumultuous and costly time for the AAC.231 Still, they had the Worimi people who remained in their service, accepting the meagre rations supplied and their physical protection from frontier violence. King formulated a couple of reasons why the AAC Worimi Aborigines conducted themselves passively, which made them different from other Aboriginal groups of the colony:

* One principle reason for this is the absence of public housing, around which, wherever they are, the natives congregate, and by the prostitution of their wives, find ready means to purchase drink: another is, there being no individual in the immediate neighbourhood of the company’s establishment to interfere with the protection and kindness shown to the natives by the Company’s servants.232

King obviously had little respect for the Worimi people who occupied positions of employment with the AAC; they were merely lowly tools to be used to further his standing to achieve the goals of the Company. The Worimi were employed in a variety of positions: as domestic servants, guides, messengers, stockmen, shepherds, boatsmen, sailors, constables and labourers. King did not understand why they left their employment positions and the settlement to enter the bush for periods of time and then return as if nothing had happened. He had no idea of the need for the Worimi to carry out their cultural practices that they still performed. His opinion of the Blacks employed by the AAC was quite unfavourable. He saw most of them as useless, volatile and unreliable as labourers when required to work.233

232 Phillip King. (1841) Accounts and papers: Twenty Volumes. 6, p103
233 Phillip King. (1841) Accounts and papers: Twenty Volumes. 6 p103-104
By the 1850s, the Worimi lands had been completely taken over by the AAC using frontier violence, brute force and coercion. The AAC corporate plan to develop its pastoral industry on the million acres was well on its way. Most of the Worimi people who weren't compliant and employed in the AAC business enterprise found themselves living in makeshift camps on the fringes of White settlements. The small number of Worimi who remained in the bush clinging to their traditional beliefs did so at their own peril. They were exposed to constant settler violence. Many others who attached themselves to the AAC did so for their own protection.234

The population of the Worimi clans had declined dramatically since the arrival of the Australian Agricultural Company which had taken control of their traditional lands and their lives. At the height of Dawson’s regime as chief agent, six hundred Aborigines were employed by the AAC. William Scott, born in 1844, played with the Aboriginal children at Carrington as a boy and, at that time, they were already on the decline. In 1873, Scott left the area and, by then, only fifty Worimi people remained.235 Some of the reasons for their depopulation were identified by Bennet in the *Home Companion and Band of Hope Journal* in 1859:

> With regard to the A A Company having reduced the native race in that quarter, I fearlessly maintain that many of the 500 servants of the company did so by an unprincipled destruction of the Matrix of future generations. This base illicit traffic was carried on with impunity by many of the officers and men of the company, as well as the surveyors of the government, who positively robbed the native camp of the flower of its hopes – the daughters of the tribe.236

The AAC settlement at Port Stephens underwent some dramatic changes in the second half of the nineteenth century that would impact greatly on the Worimi people. The failing sheep operations were transferred to another of the company’s estates, ‘Warrah’, near Willow Tree on the Peel River, while the northern part of their Port Stephens estate was developed for cattle. Land around Stroud was sold and leased for farming, and timber-getting continued to remain productive throughout the area. The AAC pastoral interest moved further north-west and the Carrington settlement no longer remained the hub of the AAC operations.237 It would be the

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emergence of a newly formed Aborigines Protection Board that assumed the control of all Aboriginal people living on the fringes of the colony in New South Wales in 1883.

The numbers of Aboriginal people had been reduced significantly and any employment with the AAC at Carrington had all but ceased. The settlement Aborigines were now paid via rations and handouts for any work that was available for them. They supplemented their diet with bush foods. In the absence of the AAC they were now required to travel to Stroud to receive government blankets or even as far as Forster in 1874. The Police Magistrate at Bulahdelah, Phillip Snape, requested that he distribute the blankets for the Myall and Port Stephens Blacks from Bulahdelah. Two years later Snape requested blankets and warm clothes for the one hundred aging Blacks who were living, as he describes, in deplorable conditions.238 Because of the age of these people, child births had dramatically decreased.

The closure of the AAC at Carrington left the shrinking population of the Worimi people with little means of survival. They became outcasts on the fringes of a settlement that had slowly evaporated over the passing years. Going back to their traditional lifestyle was no longer an option as their land had been taken over by the influx of free settlers. This was exacerbated by the fact that they no longer had the AAC to protect them from settler violence if they trespassed on the land that was once their own. Life was about to change again for the all Worimi people because of the colonial violence and ill-treatment that had all but annihilated the once thriving Aboriginal population.

The recommendations echoing from the meeting of the British House of Commons Select Committee 1837 were in favour of the notion of Aboriginal protection, a people that were now under British and Australian care. They developed ideals for Aboriginal people under the guise of protection with the aim of Christianising and civilising the noble savage. Assimilation would become the platform by which Aboriginal protectors and supervisors were directed while they maintained their physical welfare. The vehicle for this project of human social engineering would be implemented by way of Western education and finding them gainful employment. The reality was that the protectors were agents of the colonial state and served the specific interests of working towards a speedy and peaceful settlement of Australia.239

Given the historical evidence of this government protection, it can be construed that Aboriginal people jumped from the frying pan into the fire. This segregation for protection did provide

some relief from conflict and violence from the settlers, but it came at a huge cost of their freedom and civil liberties. Under the assumed government protection, Aboriginal reserves were set aside where Aboriginal people were incarcerated, fully contained and totally controlled under the supervision of a representative of the colonial and later state administration. Within seventy years of contact with Europeans, the Worimi clans had been demolished, their land had been taken and they had been incarcerated or were living as social outcasts. Rowley saw the injustice of incarceration of Aboriginal people on government reserves:

*An almost unique feature was the long established administrative habit of confining Aborigines in managed institutions, not because having committed offences or being mentally deficient, but because they belong to a particular racial minority. To match such a tradition of management, one may look to the institutions used to confine enemy aliens in wartime. The progress of Aboriginal from tribesman to inmate has been a special feature of colonial administration and of white settlement in Australia.*

Eventually, a number of Worimi people were forced, coerced or found their way to the land of the present Karuah reserve. There is a newspaper article that places Aboriginal people living there around 1883. I have been told that the government gazetted the Karuah reserve in 1898, but the only government documentation I have found is a *Grant of Land 11 May 1923* that dates back to section 235A of the *Crown Lands Consolidation Act 1913*. Regardless of the date, Aboriginal people were occupying that land well before either date. Walter J Enright had already commenced visiting the Aboriginal people at the Karuah reserve in 1896 where he began his anthropological studies of the Worimi tribe.

*Mr C J Muston, of Port Stephens waited upon the board to urge the removal of the aborigines from Nelson's Bay to Karuah. The board decided that if the aborigines could be induced to settle at Karuah, they would be encouraged to do so by the board and supplied with the necessary appliances to fence and cultivate their reserve.*

The Aborigines Protection Board supplied rations and blankets to the Worimi people through their police agent stationed at Tea Gardens. Many of the coastal Blacks were furnished with fishing boats and tools to build accommodation and grow crops to scratch out a means of

survival and become self-sufficient. \textsuperscript{243} The Worimi people were fortunate in the fact that they did not rely solely on government rations; the sea and some bush foods were still available to them. The government reserve land set aside at Karuah was now the only place that many generations would call home while under the watchful eye of the board’s representatives.

\begin{quote}
At a spot on the Karuah River, near Sawyer's Point, about 18 miles from Port Stephens Heads, there is a reserve of 40 acres which has been set apart for the use of the blacks. There are three or four aborigines resident on the land, but the natives of the district frequently go there during the year. Some of the elderly men and women are supplied with rations by the Government, the goods being issued by the contractor under the supervision of the police officer in charge at the Tea Gardens. \textsuperscript{244}
\end{quote}

For the Worimi people at Karuah those watchful eyes would come in the form of the evangelist missionaries. They were charged with the protection of the Worimi from the evils of White abuse and treatment from any treatable illness. These Christian fundamentalists were like many other missionaries- they were tools that came from the recommendations of the British Select Committee. Under the tutorage of the missionaries it was believed that Aboriginal people could be educated, Christianised and made to attain basic standards of Western civilisation. Through faith and hard work the goal of the missionaries was to make Europeans out of the Aborigines. \textsuperscript{245}

In this chapter I have presented information regarding the first White contact that the Worimi people encountered with the early colonists. How relationships between settlers and Aboriginal people were strained, even with the first settlement at Sydney among members of the Eora people, like Pemulwuy, and Governor Arthur Phillip. There has been conflicting and contradictory evidence provided of the relationship between the convict settlers and Worimi people. How the convict cedar-getters were the first Whites to have any sustained contact with the Worimi Aboriginals leading to incidents of violence and conflict that would escalate over the years.

A historical framework has been provided with the study of the English people’s first discovery of Port Stephens and how they explored its waterways for Western settlement. The


initial physical contact with the Worimi was discussed, showing that it resulted in armed violence and an immediate distrust for the local Aborigines. The paternal and racist attitudes of the colonial administrators have been explored that demonstrated how the destruction of traditional Aboriginal society and their growing Aboriginal death toll were ensured. This was regardless of the fact that local Worimi Aborigines were used as guides and interpreters by the English as they explored the Worimi lands that they would soon usurp and control.

The role the Australian Agricultural Company and Robert Dawson played in maintaining friendly relations with the Worimi people has been discussed in detail. In particular, how the Worimi were employed and provided much of the labour force to develop the company’s business enterprise from the Carrington settlement has been fully explored. The attitudes and treatment of the Aborigines by the Company’s convict employees set the scene for the volatile relationship that existed between them. The reasons for the dwindling numbers of the Worimi clans that led to their ultimate protection by the British government have been addressed. This now leads onto the next chapter concerning how the onset of missionaries and the influence of religion were imparted on the Karuah Mission.
Chapter Five

“I’ll do it all for Jesus”: A Religious experience on the ‘Mish’

This chapter will examine my families’ personal experiences of living on the Karuah Mission in the days of missionary control. This personal reflection and narrative approach will be interspersed with a combination of oral memories and archival sources in relation to the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM). The AIM is remembered by the Karuah community both fondly and with contempt. An examination of those contradictions lies at the heart of understanding those years on the ‘Mish’. I will explore just how significant were the roles that missionaries and religion played in shaping Aboriginal people’s lives and cultural identity after they took control of our ‘Mish’. This will entail details of how the AIM was founded and its early growth and development in the Hunter Valley and at Karuah. As the founding missionary leader of the AIM, Retta Dixon Long become a powerful religious icon in Australia and her role forms an essential component of understanding this time period.

Some of my earliest recollections of missionaries relate directly to my childhood memories of Sunday school and church on the Karuah ‘Mish’. It is also synonymous with words and music from the hymn, ‘I’ll do it all for Jesus’. That song is the background music for the documentary video: ‘A Lousy Little Sixpence’ narrated by Margaret Tucker, author, activist and stolen generation Aboriginal woman. It is a resource that I have used many times in Aboriginal Studies tutorials at the Wollotuka Institute of Aboriginal Studies, University of Newcastle. The documentary delivers to students a good understanding of the involvement and impact missionaries had on the lives of Aboriginal people.

That song will be forever etched in my memory because of the countless times I sang it on Sundays in the church. There were many positive memories of the missionaries and my involvement with Sunday School Program. The missionaries from the Tahlee Bible College were the second wave of religious influence that we were exposed to on the ‘Mish’. Our evangelical past and subsequent reason for the Karuah reserve being labelled the ‘Mish’ is entrenched in the historical roots of our ancestors. Missionaries were always kind or nice to us, but looking back there was also a distance between us which is difficult to explain. History has shown that missionaries of a professed Christian religion played a major role in the process of the assimilation of so many Aboriginal children. It also became a part of what has been termed the ‘Stolen Generations’ operating before and throughout the Aboriginal Protection Era of the early to mid-twentieth century.
I was only young child then during the mid-1960s. We didn’t have electricity in those days and kerosene lanterns decorated and dully illuminated the church during the Sunday night services. I recall when the missionaries finally had the church wired for electricity and on winter Sundays, although the sun was just setting, it was already nearly dark when they arrived. They would hurriedly begin unloading and connecting a number of car batteries to the wiring which looked-like jumper cables. When it was connected the church lit up like a biblical beacon drawing in the residents as the radiated light flooded from its windows and open double doors across the rapidly darkening reserve.

Life for Aboriginal people living on the ‘Mish’ was simple yet complicated at the same time. It was an enforced and controlled lifestyle on forty acres of reserve land under paternal government care. It came at great sacrifice of so many basic human rights that went unheeded. The efforts to attain our humanity in a Western lifestyle came at a high cost of everything we believed in our cultural beliefs. This was compounded by the double edge sword, metaphorically speaking, that the missionaries wielded. Cathleen Inkpin in her recent Honours thesis makes clear statements about the impact of religion on Aboriginal people:

> Christianity has been a transformative tool for the oppressed throughout history, but also a tool wielded by the oppressor. In missionary activities, as well as in society more broadly, Christians of all different denominations have contributed to the disadvantages suffered by the first Australians.²⁴⁶

For all of us on the ‘Mish’, the Church was a major social event on a Sunday evening and everyone got dressed up to attend its services. Aunty Iris Russell recalls how important and popular church was on the ‘Mish’ in her day, and, like many, those memories became an important part of her life both physically and spiritually. “Oh yes. Church used to be full. Even young people on those days.”²⁴⁷ They would fill the church every Sunday night: young children with their parents, perched, fidgeting tired and bored on the hard wooden benches in each pew.

The missionaries preached with a passion. They always emphasised that a better life awaited us if we accepted the Lord into our lives. I didn’t understand what they meant at the time, and I thought my life was pretty good at my young age. After the service it became a real social function with large pots of tea and home-made cakes baked by many of the ‘Mish’ women. They were good cooks and the cakes were always a nice motivation to attend the church.

²⁴⁷ Iris Russell & Colleen Perry conversation 1999
services. That’s what almost everyone did on Sunday nights when I was young, although a lot of young men and a few fathers were always missing, including my own.

Not everyone embraced the missionary’s beliefs and work ethic that were forced onto Aboriginal people. Many could see the paternal hypocrisy they preached and the little value they placed on Aboriginal cultural beliefs. This was compounded by the intrusive and far-reaching control given to them by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board over every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people living on the ‘Mish’. Mum, although not a devout Christian, attended church regularly, maybe for the social contact - but she understood the problems associated with the intensity of the missionaries’ work. She made comments like:

...they had the church, and they used to have morning prayers, prayer meeting, they used to have church every Sunday, Sunday school every Sunday morning. It was too much religion pushed there, that’s all it was.248

Aunty Louisa Ridgeway, who was born in 1889 at Carrington near Tahlee and who was affectionately referred to by Aunty Iris Russell as ‘Aunty Louie’, recalls the missionaries with genuine fondness and respect stating; “they were very good to us and kind used to have a lovely afternoon on the choosy at the mission with prayer meetings, sing a song and afternoon teas they were the good old days when I don't forget to still say my prayers each night.”249

Arthur Collins was a long associate of the AIM: he became the son-in-law of Retta and Leonard Long (the AIM leaders) after marrying their daughter Grace. He was the first person to be put in charge of the AIM Training College at Pindimar, although he had never received any formal Bible training except for some evening classes at the Sydney Missionary and Bible College.250

He commented on the extensive and intense religion practiced on the Karuah Mission. He spoke about Joanie Ridgeway who was responsible for leading most of the morning prayer meetings in the Mission Church.

Karuah had a record that I think very few other mission stations anywhere in Australia could equal, for over thirty years they had an unbroken record of a prayer meeting every morning err, in the summer months it generally began at 6 o’clock in the morning, the winter months it may have been half-past six, but it went sometimes for an hour-and-a-half to two hours.251

248 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry conversation 1999
Such was the passion and devotion for prayer that many of our people displayed, in delivering these marathon prayers sessions on behalf of the mission and missionaries that entwined their daily lives. Personally, that definitely resonates, an overkill of time, to remain in prayer for such extensive sessions. Perhaps our people were trying to fill an empty void inside them and needed something or someone to believe in. The capacity to maintain cultural contact was under serious threat as, “You know the Europeans forbid Aboriginal people to practice their own culture. So most of the people here became very religious.”

252 Collins jokingly remarked about the length and extremity of the prayer meetings:

*I was interested to hear one of our missionary’s say that often she’d slip out for breakfast in the middle of the prayer meeting and come back and the people would be still praying. They had at that time a very real spirit of prayer.*

Church attendance was one thing that created solidarity; a place where most Aboriginals came together for a single purpose and mingled together with smiles on their faces. Sunday school was another thing; it was mandatory for every Aboriginal child on the ‘Mish’ and you received stern punishments if you ever played hooky. That one hymn, *I’ll do it all for Jesus*, along with a few others, was sung by everyone at Sunday school and sometimes Sunday night at church as well. As a young child, I would sit in Sunday school and sing the words to the song loudly and proudly, ‘I’ll do it all for Jesus … He’s done so much for me’.

At that time in our lives we rarely had sustained contact or interaction with any White adults who showed any interest in us at all, other than our teachers at the Karuah Public School, which was minimal at best unless you did something wrong. These missionary people displayed, at times, a more individual caring attitude towards all of the Aboriginal children that attended Sunday school. There weren’t that many of us children there at the time and they had their own motives and it was obviously in their best interests to treat us well. Still, it was nice to feel some kindness, to be wanted or appreciated by white people instead of being sneered at or ignored by the locals from down at the point, as usual. So it’s easy to see how Aboriginal people were seduced by the missionaries that took control of missions and reserves around this country.

When I was about eleven or twelve, I actually assisted in teaching the younger children on the mission at Sunday school. A few of the older children, who at times included my sister Denise

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and myself, were taken by the missionaries to the boys and girls institutions in Newcastle on a few occasions at night to sing hymns. At the end of our hymns we received applause from the audience and reaped much praise from the missionaries who took us there. We were also rewarded with dinner, food and soft drinks after our ‘gala’ performances and it became a real treat.

What they were attempting to do then, which I didn’t realise until much later, was to actually groom us to become missionaries like themselves. Young Aboriginal people who were confident and could sing with a decent voice were placed in high regard by missionaries as they could sing their hymns. I started to realise that the words to these hymns didn’t quite ring true. I began to question many things about myself and my involvement with these missionaries. I couldn’t see what Jesus had done for me or anyone else living on the mission. It seemed like it was a one-way relationship, with Aboriginal people doing all the giving and getting very little or nothing in return other than some kindness. I was starting to become aware and realised just how differently we were treated outside the ‘Mish’ and the disadvantages we all experienced. Unfortunately, Jesus wasn’t doing anything to change that disadvantage, so as a young teenager I stopped doing it all for Jesus!

In reality, missionary work in Australia contributed greatly to the decline and destruction of traditional Aboriginal culture and the destruction of Aboriginal families. Christianity, even with the best intentions to save the souls of Aboriginal people, actually destroyed what semblance of Aboriginal identity had survived what could be termed the wild colonial frontier days in New South Wales. The irony was that, in some cases missionaries did help save Aboriginal lives, but eventually they destroyed the lives of individuals, families and communities. There was no room for the existence of Aboriginal religion within the realms of Christianity - only one religion could survive, which was also the way in which colonisation and Western society always prevailed. Just as Jupp states:

> From first contact most missionaries from all denominations all over Australia made active efforts to alter, suppress or destroy Aboriginal religious practices and belief. In this they had varying success.²⁵⁴

The missionaries would play such a significant and important role at the micro level in the lives of Aboriginal people on and around the Karuah ‘Mish’.

I find it interesting how my ancestors came to occupy the land surrounding the Karuah mission in those early days and there are a couple of differing versions of how it actually came about. Aboriginal reserve land was usually set aside on poor quality land that was in out of the way places on the fringes of small country townships. In New South Wales, when quality land had been government gazetted as Aboriginal reserves, in many instances the government took it back and resettled Aboriginal people in less desirable locations. That didn’t happen at Karuah but it did at Soldiers Point when the Aboriginal residents were later forced to give up their traditional lands and relocate to the Karuah ‘Mish’. This compacting of Aboriginal people together in more tightly congested reserves accelerated during the opening three decades of the twentieth century.

The 40 acres of land designated as the Karuah reserve is on prime real estate, although a salt water marsh and a dam clearly separates it from the town. It is located about half a mile from the town itself. The land must have been just far enough away not to interest anyone to acquire it. There was an attempt to remove the Karuah residents during the 1920s, but media support rallied behind the Aboriginal residents. Additionally, this time period witnessed the rise of the first united all Aboriginal Political organisation that fought strongly against the revocations of the Aboriginal reserves. I will discuss the onset of political activity in greater detail during the next chapter.

There are stories that have been handed down for generations that the land was originally given to Aboriginal people. Aunty Iris remembers a story her Aunty Louisa (Louie) Ridgeway told her when she was young, about a Mr White from Tahlee. He was returning home from Soldiers Point in choppy seas and his boat capsized and two Black ‘fellas’ swam out and saved him from drowning. In a generous gesture for saving his life, he gave them the mission land; apparently he was a wealthy man and owned land all around Port Stephens. My mother also confirmed this story but wasn’t sure of the name of the person who gave them the land. However, there has never been any archival documentation or any written proof uncovered that the land was given to Aboriginal people.

Due to the lack of evidence this story has now become Aboriginal folklore or an urban legend. There doesn’t seem to be a time frame in which this event happened. I am not sure in that era of the legalities that Aboriginal people would have been able and entitled to have freehold title to any land under state legislation or under the ever growing powers of the Aborigines Protection Board. The Board was the government instrument to maintain control over all aspects of

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256 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry (1999) Conversation
Aboriginal life from inception. It was a power they would not be willing to relinquish for almost a century until a referendum and changes to government legislation.

A letter was sent to the Protection Board in 1883 by Mr C. J. Mustons suggesting that the Nelson Bay Aboriginal clan be moved to Karuah, and the Board set about trying to bribe and coerce them to move with the necessary equipment to fence and cultivate the Karuah land. Inspector Lynch visited the small Aboriginal Nelson Bay camp near the lighthouse and interrogated the residents about moving to the Karuah reserve. They declined, but said they were willing to move not far away to the area, later known as Soldiers Point, if the Board supplied them with the same resources to cultivate the land. Surprisingly, the Board agreed to the people’s request to stay in the immediate area and not force them to Karuah. However, the First World War would halt any independent endeavours for the Nelsons Bay clan and they were eventually moved to Karuah when the land became a naval base.

*King and Queen with Mr Ridgeway, are at present busy in moving their residence from Soldiers Point to the reserve, owing to the Federal Government having resumed the whole of Soldiers Point for a new Naval Base.*

Foundations and early growth of the AIM

On the 1st August 1905 Retta (Dixon) describes the never-to-be-Forgotten meeting that was held at the residence of Mr Cochrane (local C.P.S) at 7.30pm. The constitution for the new formed Evangelist organisation was laid on the table. It had been signed by Retta Dixon, Mabel Timbury, H Selwood Austin, Mary Austin, Bartrop, A Millard, E M Aitkin, P.O. Davis, A T Cochrane, I Worgran, G Coughlan and W Long.

The formation of the Aborigines Inland Mission witnessed the Aboriginal people’s first exposure to Christianity and the beginning of religious control over them on the Karuah ‘Mish’. It all started from a single meeting at Singleton in the Hunter Valley on the fateful night when their constitution was tabled as a small group of obsessed religious pioneers signed on the dotted line. From there, it blossomed into a strong religious icon and, after five years, the

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260 Retta Long. (1936). *In the way of his steps*. Sydney, Aborigines Inland Mission Australia, p11
261 Retta Long. (1936). *In the way of his steps*. Sydney, Aborigines Inland Mission Australia, p11
AIM organisation realised it needed to be strategically positioned in Sydney where it could gain more political power, funding and influence.

In 1910, the headquarters of the Aborigines Inland Mission was transferred from the small town of Singleton in the Hunter valley to the big smoke of Sydney. Retta Long would become one of the most powerful and influential Christian women in the first half of the twentieth Century, an achievement that not many women obtained in that era. She was a devout Christian who would devote her entire life as a missionary carrying out the religious work that she believed she was destined to do. It all started when she was a young woman after being heavily influenced by the holy crusades of Methodist minister W. G. Taylor.

Retta Dixon was the eldest of three children and the only daughter of Matthew and Matilda (Brown) Dixon. She was born on April 5, 1878, in Sydney. Her father, Matthew, was a carpenter and joiner. He was also an Irish Baptist who built two rooms as an evangelist church for Aborigines at La Peruse. At the age of thirteen Retta, became a member of the Petersham Baptist Church. Initially, she was drawn to missionary work being carried out in India, but was turned down by the church in her attempts to go there. She fulfilled her dream by becoming a missionary in 1879 and joined the NSW Aborigines Committee. That evangelist missionary committee was under the control of the United Aborigines Mission (UAM). Through the Christian Endeavour Society, Retta Dixon started working with Aboriginal people at La Perouse Aboriginal Reserve in Sydney.

The Christian Endeavour Society was established in Portland, Maine, in 1881 by Dr. Francis Clark who had the desire to recruit and prepare young people or youth at an early age for religious servitude. It was a means to provide Bible training for young people to become ministers and missionaries. The society was an interdenominational across all evangelical denominations and quickly spread throughout the world. The society had as one of its key constitutional rules that all members participated regularly in prayer meetings, which shed some light on why later there were marathon prayer meetings on the Karuah ‘Mish’.

Retta Dixon, with a number of other committee members, became disenchanted with the UAM organisation and resigned from the committee, thereby creating a large division in the UAM.

262 Retta Long. (1936). In the way of his steps. Sydney, Aborigines Inland Mission Australia, p11
Nevertheless Retta was truly committed to her missionary aspirations and saw the need to carry out work where it was needed most, and for her that was in rural NSW. In 1905, she moved to Singleton, located in the Hunter Valley, and with the help of fellow UAM defectors and local Christians in Singleton formed the Aborigines Inland Mission. It was clearly a breakaway from the United Aborigines Mission.

In 1907, the AIM established an Aboriginal mission and only weeks later they opened a residential home for Aboriginal children. The Singleton Children’s Home was a refuge and a place of shelter for destitute and orphaned Aboriginal children. It was first managed by Retta and her husband Reverend Leonard Long until George and Jennie Smith were appointed as managers in April 1910. Eventually control of the children’s home was taken over by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. This meant that the Smiths were forced to resign from AIM in their employment under the board as Matron and Manager of the Singleton Children’s Home. After the early success of the AIM, the home was eventually closed by the board in 1923.

The marriage of Retta Dixon to Rev. Leonard W. Long on 11 January, 1906, was, on paper, a match truly made in heaven, or was it a union forged in servitude to their religious beliefs and their one true God? Probably both as their strong personal and dedicated partnership as co-directors developed the Aborigines Inland Mission into a powerful Christian movement throughout New South Wales, later spreading into Queensland and other Australian States. They had met and worked together as counsellors on the La Peruse Mission Council where Retta began her work as an evangelist missionary. They were married by Dr Porter who had also baptised Retta Dixon as a baby. The wedding took place in the midst of the newly formed first council of the AIM and, as she described them, her dear local Aborigines. Their marriage lasted twenty three years until Leonard’s death in December 1928. He was considerably older than Retta.

In September, 1907, Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM) began publishing “Our Aim,” a monthly Christian evangelist newspaper that was more like a newsletter. It was a small means of

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270 Retta Long. (1936). In the way of his steps. Sydney, Aborigines Inland Mission Australia.
spreading the word of their religion and informing people how they were saving not only the souls, but also the lives of many Aboriginal people throughout south eastern New South Wales. They expanded their work further to more remote western locations of the state and eventually into Queensland. *Our Aim* recorded snippets of information (small reports) about every local evangelist mission that they set up or were associated with throughout Australia.

The newspaper reported on brief items that included specific details of the missionaries and the extensive work and travel that the Native Helpers were doing for AIM. Once again the AIM converted Aboriginal people to their faith they used the more devout and enthusiastic believers to become their agents and workers as pseudo missionaries. The Native Helpers were trained with basic religious instruction to carry out the missionary work throughout Aboriginal communities in Australia. These Native Helpers executed most of the duties of missionaries, but were not recognised or credited as Aboriginal missionaries just their helpers.

*Our Aim* provided small stories on any social, sporting and religious events that were happening for Aboriginal people living on and around their missions. It was definitely a means to generate donations and raise some funds through its sales and was a great public relations exercise. It was distributed for this purpose to various Protestant churches in the suburbs of Sydney and elsewhere in New South Wales. It was used to inform mainstream society of the good Christian work they had been doing and was perhaps a media source that needed to compete with the UAM newspaper *The NSW Aborigines Advocate*.

The UAM *Advocate* was launched with much fanfare in July 1901 with the subtitle, ‘*A monthly record of Missionary Work amongst Aborigines*’.271 The rival AIM *Our Aims* subtitle was ‘*A Monthly Record of the Aborigines Inland Mission*.’ The Longs obviously didn’t need to reinvent the wheel, they simply used the *Advocate* as a prototype to produce and disseminate their information. The *Advocate* had been successfully operating for a few years and the contents of both newspapers were very similar with Retta adding her own writing style to it. Every Aboriginal family on the Karuah Mission received a regular issue of *Our Aim*.

The material published included a variety of topical information about their strand of evangelical work, marriages, death and any other social event that was happening under their watch. It reported on all progress that was taking place in their missions under their control. The Aboriginal schools would always get a mention if teacher (in most cases they were missionaries

with little educational training) positions changed or when highlighting the Aboriginal children’s success. The Native Training College that was established later and its Aboriginal students were always discussed in reverent terms and with pride.

There were always glowing or optimistic reports of Aboriginal people who had embraced Christianity and the great work they were doing on and off the Karuah ‘Mish’. At the same time as the birth of the Our Aim newspaper, the first Annual Convention and Missionary Conference was held in Singleton.\textsuperscript{272} These conventions grew into quite significant events and became a source for financial and political assistance in maintaining and developing the AIM’s long-term goals. Retta Dixon Long was the primary person involved and she passionately maintained Our Aim with the literacy skills she had obtained from her private school education. She edited and wrote many of the articles contained in it.

\textit{The A.I.M. publishes two monthly magazines-"Our Aim,"2/- per annum, giving reports of the work, is always alive with fresh news. "The Australian Evangel," containing Gospel messages and other features, with contributions from the Aborigines themselves, is circulated amongst the coloured people on our stations and elsewhere.}\textsuperscript{273}

The AIM’s work was primarily focused on spreading the word of the Lord through the church, and the Karuah Mission Church took pride and place alongside the Singleton Church. Long describes the people living on the Karuah ‘Mish’ as somehow having been sheltered from the worst forms of evil of the western world and therefore having not sinned greatly.\textsuperscript{274} Like most missionaries, Retta Dixon Long really had a narrow paternal view of Aboriginal people. She saw Aboriginal people as being almost childlike in nature and without their own cultural beliefs and mettle. They were, therefore, ready to be moulded and forged into a tool that would serve the Lord’s purposes as dictated by the AIM. She saw them as somehow shielded from the racial hatred and often volatile darker side of Western society. On the ‘Mish’, they were under God’s protection from the wider racism ever-present about them, but only while ever they accepted the word of the Lord under the AIM umbrella.\textsuperscript{275}

\textit{Our second church formed at Karuah, Port Stephens also caused us to glorify God. Composed of men and women who had not tasted so deeply of sin, being sheltered from}

\textsuperscript{272} Retta Long. (1936) \textit{In the way of his steps}. Sydney, Aborigines Inland Mission Australia.
\textsuperscript{273} Retta Long (1935). \textit{Providential channels}. Sydney, Aborigine Inland Mission. p.95
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid
\textsuperscript{275} Retta Long (1935). \textit{Providential channels}. Sydney, Aborigine Inland Mission. p.95
its worst forms, it struck its roots deeply and bore much fruit and became a compliment of its sister church at Singleton.²⁷⁶

One of the clear success markers of the work of the AIM was, as Retta boasted, the number of Aboriginal conversions to their religion that had been achieved within nine months. There were four Aboriginal converts from the Karuah ‘Mish’ who had come forward to offer themselves and their services to the AIM version of the Christian faith. Three of these men were single and were chosen to go out as mission workers (Native Helpers) and help build a mission house at St Clair reserve at Singleton.²⁷⁷ There was an exceptional young man, a boy really, among those three named, Alec Russell, who I will discuss in more detail a little further on. In the first year they converted seventy-six Aboriginal people from around the Singleton, St. Clair and Karuah missions, adding believers to their growing congregation as the AIM progressed.²⁷⁸

Long, described many of the local Hunter Valley Aboriginal people as being despised by mainstream society. Even as believers they were somehow divorced from humanity in general. She described them as branded, as being plucked from the burning fires, drunkards, profligate, degraded, beggars and never worthy of civilisation. Others she categorised as habitual criminals that changed their ways for the Lord, but all were labelled as social outcasts.²⁷⁹ It seemed the worse the so-called character of these Aboriginal people the better. It was the AIM who miraculously saved them from a life of nothing but pure evil. The power of their religion to convert them was almost a divine intervention, which turned these poor wretched creatures into worthy human beings who could love and be loved after they accepted the gift of god.

One of Retta Long’s Native Helpers who had been recruited very early from the Karuah mission was a boy, Alec Russell.²⁸⁰ From the amount of praise Retta published about Alec, he was obviously the pin-up Aboriginal boy for the AIM. He became a testament to their work, showing what could be achieved with diligence and hard work in the service of the Lord. Retta Long reported that Alec was only fifteen when he was converted as a ‘native helper’ and he would continue in that role for another nine years.²⁸¹ Long describes the value and impact that Alec made in that role after training under Mr Harrington.

²⁷⁶ Retta, Long. (1936). In the way of his steps. Sydney, Aborigines Inland Mission Australia. p.15
²⁷⁸ Ibid
²⁸⁰ Different reference sources have differing spelling applications for his name Alex, Alec and Alick for the purposes of this thesis I will use the spelling Alec
Alec indeed left his mark on all the work he did as a Native Helper over a long association with the AIM movement. He helped spread the evangelists’ message to his people near and far. Not only did Alec help recruit more local Aboriginal people but he travelled throughout New South Wales, even interstate, conscripting many more new Aboriginal believers. It was quite an astute plan by Retta and the AIM to recruit and use Aboriginal people to carry out the AIM’s purpose. It would have been much easier and less intrusive for other Aboriginal people to relate to Alec and identify with these reformed evangelical native helpers. Alec was everything that the missionaries had hoped for. He became the religious tool that forged the aims and objectives of the AIM movement.

Bertie Marr was another Native Helper who scaled the heights of evangelistic glory and who worked closely with Alec as they travelled carrying out the AIM work. Alec and Bertie were the AIM’s rising stars. Whilst still on trial and learning, they even took some of the Karuah Missionary services while Mrs Ayers, the current missionary, was ill with influenza. The amount of work and miles travelled either walking or riding a bike as the AIM Native Helpers showed their commitment and faith in this new religion and their missionary benefactors. Alec worked and paid his own way some of the times to carry out and fulfil the AIM missionary work.

It was the beginning of a long and industrious religious career for the young Native Helpers, Alec Russell and Bertie Marr, a continuing pilgrimage to carry on the missionary’s work. Alec’s deeds and journeys were well documented in Our Aim. In 1908 on the Walcha reserve, Alec conducted services gaining the Aboriginal residents trust and winning the souls of two lads from the Macleay River. For this and other out-reach trips Alec hired a bicycle, paying for it out of his own money and peddling for hundreds of miles to conduct meetings to convert Aboriginal people. The numbers of Aboriginal converts were rising steadily as Alec and the message of the

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282 Retta Long. (1936). In the way of his steps. Sydney, Lawson: Mission Publications.p17
AIM spread further afield. This plan of utilising Aboriginal Helpers approach proved a very successful ploy by the AIM to get to Aboriginal people from the inside, so to speak.

Alec Russell would spend some time preaching at an Aboriginal station that was under the direct control of the Aborigines Protection Board at Brungle, just a few miles out of Gundagai. Alec and Bertie first visited Gundagai in March 1909 and Alec tells of how they walked for one hundred and ten miles over two or three days. They preached to Aboriginal people all along the way. He regularly visited and stayed at Brungle. Sometimes Bertie Marr accompanied him or he just travelled alone. He was called into the reserve at Yass to deliver sermons and convert sinners. It seemed Alec was always working on the road. These long trips proved very tiring, which resulted in him taking a regular break from work at home at Karuah for a month’s holiday and recuperative rest.

Alex Russell Snr was one who came to know the Lord and had a real missionary burden for his people, and he went from Karuah as one of the very first missionaries of the AIM to go down onto the Victorian border and it was there that he met his wife and they were married and in later years he came back and they settled at Karuah, but he never lost his love for the Lord.

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Back in 1907 the local Aboriginal residents played a major role in the construction of the Karuah mission house. As the foundations were laid for the mission house so too were the seeds of a strong evangelistic Christian faith planted deeply into the heart of the mission and its people. There were many changes on the ‘Mish’ during the AIM’s religious reign in what appears to be an uneven symbiotic relationship that would endure unimpeded for over half a century.

Power and control over all Aboriginal people on the ‘Mish’ now seemed to rest with the missionaries, although the Aborigines Protection Board had assumed legal control over all Aboriginal people. There was no doubt about who held the reins at the Karuah ‘Mish’ as Colleen Perry stated that, basically, Karuah was run by the AIM.289 The mission house and later the church were situated in the very centre of the land allocated as the mission or reserve. It represented the source and power of Western society’s religion that emanated towards the makeshift tin shacks of a more fragile and discarded race of people.


The Aborigines Protection Board Report for the year 1910 discussed with and reported to the council of the Australian Aborigines Missions regarding the conditions that their missionaries were living under on the various designated Aboriginal reserves. They recognised the good work that was being done by the missionaries, but felt that they would be held responsible for anything that happened of an untoward nature on the reserve. This was especially the case for female missionaries who were not permitted by the Board to reside on any Aboriginal reserve on their own.291

In March 1911 *Our Aim* reported that Leonard Long and a Mr Burgess visited Karuah on their way to Queensland. On Saturday afternoon they held a meeting to discuss the plans for building a church on the reserve. The construction of the church had been planned for some time and its construction was nearing realisation. The meeting was to deliberate on the size of the church, the cost of materials for its construction and what everyone was willing or prepared to do to see it finally built. They had hoped to construct the very best church that they could afford with finances and resources available to them. The church was to be a gift or monument to the Aboriginal people who were now worthy of God because he had done so much for them.292

Photograph courtesy of the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council

It was the Aboriginal residents who again built the Karuah church and, by the look of the early photographs, they did quite a polished and professional job. None of the Aboriginal men had any formal training in carpentry or building although some had worked in the timber industry. Like most of the tin shacks that were homes to Aboriginal people, building every one of them

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was a communal project and the more skilled builders took the lead role in their construction. When the mission residents built the missionary’s house, they also put whatever small amount of money they earned and possessed into purchasing building materials for its construction. That same process continued for the construction of the mission church with Alec seen as the leader by working to provide funds to purchase the timber to build the church.

*Directly after Mr Long left Karuah, the young lads went into the bush and cut the blocks for the foundation of their new church and drew them to the ground. A few days later these same young workers, with Alick Russell, went off to the millet patch near Raymond Terrace to earn money millet cutting to help purchase timber for the church. They are now waiting for some of the men to be free to go to the Branch to choose the timber and building operations will begin.*

The AIM had now firmly established a symbolic power base for its operations at Singleton in the Hunter Valley and at Karuah in Port Stephens. They had taken religious control of both missions and cemented their position with the construction of a church and permanent residential accommodation for their missionaries. It was only the beginning of their rule and with each passing year more and more Aboriginal people were converted to Christianity throughout New South Wales and further interstate. Retta Dixon Long ensured the intensity of

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293 Retta Long. (1911) “April report.” *Our Aim.* Sydney
the AIM work gained momentum like a tropical estuary tide enveloping the exposed mangrove flats quickly and without any hindrance.

There had been a real competition between the two mission organisations to establish their permanent presence with their churches in Aboriginal communities. The UAM and AIM were vying for religious control over Aboriginal communities and people by converting them and building churches on their reserves as quickly as possible.\(^{294}\) However, the AIM was relentless in its bid to gain religious control over Aboriginal communities and was getting the upper hand with every passing year. Retta recorded the AIM success:

\[\text{In 1918, 1,400 Aborigines had been brought under the ministry of our Missionaries, several hundred more having been \textit{“touched.”} By 1920, 3,000 were included in our scope. The increase continued until in 1925, 6,000 outposts in N.S.W. and Queensland.}\(^{295}\]

In the same year of 1918, Retta Dixon Long writes about a great loss to the Karuah mission with the departure of one their fine missionaries, Miss Mabel Stewart. Retta said that Stewart was happy at the Mission station at Karuah, but was needed to go to Queensland to recommence missionary work in the northern state. Stewart was to commence her duties in a newly established AIM centre at Gayndah about 70 miles north west of Maryborough. She was to start work immediately as her new congregation were needy and awaiting her arrival.\(^{296}\)

Retta Dixon Long successfully developed the AIM organisation into a flourishing evangelical entity converting and expanding her religious foothold in many Aboriginal communities. The AIM position was gaining ascendency in the missionary race with the UAM understandably creating some ill feelings in this competition for the souls of Aboriginal people. The UAM were not going to lie down without a fight and it appears there was no turning the other cheek. Retta Dixon Long describes 1920 as “\textit{a year of severe trial chiefly through a campaign of slander by our adversary the devil}”, and she wasn’t talking about Satan. So intense was the UAM slanderous campaign that she thought that she had lost all support for the work they had been doing.\(^{297}\)

The pressure she and the AIM experienced from the now strained relationship between the two missionary organisations was clearly a bitter one. Djenidi explains that in the same year of

\(^{295}\) Retta Long. (1936) \textit{In the way of his steps}. Sydney, Lawson: Mission Publications,p21
\(^{296}\) Retta Long. (1936) \textit{In the way of his steps}. Sydney, Lawson: Mission Publications , p25,26
\(^{297}\) Retta Long. (1936) \textit{In the way of his steps}. Sydney, Lawson: Mission Publications , p22
1920, three of the AIM’s recruits, Mary Belshaw, Rod Schenk and Harry Preston, resigned from the AIM to join the UAM. It would appear that the slanderous attacks on Retta and the AIM by the UAM were so intense that it rattled the AIM’s cage and resulted in a few defections from her organisation. The relationship between Retta and UAM would not improve over the years.

In December 1924 *Our Aim* reported how the Karuah mission was favoured with a visit from an old friend, Mr Moloney, a newspaper editor from Newcastle who brought with him, as they describe, a full blood Aboriginal from South Australia by the name of David Unaipon. They filled the church with parishioners and after some singing listened with great interest and intent to the address given by Moloney and Unaipon. This was indeed a significant historical event for the mission residents as Unaipon was not only a fine preacher, but also a well-educated Aboriginal writer and inventor. His famous name lives on today, immortalised on the fifty dollar note, and will continue to be remembered throughout the annals of Aboriginal and Australian history.

Just a little more than a year later, about the middle of 1925, the AIM lost one of its earliest friends, Rev. T. R. Peirce, who had supported the missionary’s work and contributed greatly to their progress. Peirce was remembered by Retta with reverence, reporting: “He was the pastor of the West Maitland Congregational Church, when the A.I.M. was founded in the neighbouring town of Singleton. He had our monthly reports printed in “The Mercury” of which paper he afterwards became editor, and paid for many reprints as we required. He encouraged us as the work grew to publish “Our Aim,” and it was he who suggested its name.”

Aunty Iris Russell was born and lived on the Karuah mission. She vividly recalls the times as a young girl staying for lengths of time at Soldiers Point and Pindimar visiting her family. Her grandfather William Manton (always known as ‘Pardy’) would take her there by river, and he used to drive a boat for Mr White from Tahlee. He wouldn’t hesitate to bring a boatload of residents from the ‘Mish’ to Soldiers Point for AIM open air services. Back in the days when Aunty Iris was a young girl, boats were their major form of transportation to go anywhere around Port Stephens or on the upper Karuah River. She mentioned that:

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We used to go by boat from Karuah, and because there was like nobody at Karuah had cars then only one that was like there was the taxi fella who use to hire his car out.\textsuperscript{302}

Aunty Iris and mum both spoke about how there was a food and produce boat that travelled up from Tea Gardens twice a week on Mondays and Fridays. They did this for many years until Owen Johnson opened up a small shop down at the point. Bread was the major item that all people bought from the food boat. There wasn’t a bakery in Karuah at the time so everyone tried to ensure that they had enough bread to last at least from Monday to Friday. The food boat was called the \textit{Ullumbah}.\textsuperscript{303} Viola Brown, who was born at Pindimar and raised in Soldiers Point, also confirms that boating was the major form of transportation that was available to them. She stated that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Everywhere we went here, we went by boat. There was no other way. If we went over to the bay – we went in a boat.}\textsuperscript{304}
\end{quote}

The open air services were held on the beach at Soldiers Point because there was no church available for their congregation. They were great social gatherings with all the local Aboriginal people who lived there attending every service that the missionaries offered. There were only a few non-Aboriginal residents that lived nearby and they also turned out to hear what the missionaries had to say. Whenever any missionaries were visiting from Newcastle or surrounding district they were ferried by Pardy Manton from the ‘Mish’ to Soldiers Point to attend the AIM open-air services.\textsuperscript{305} Pardy would also taxi Aboriginal families between the two recognised missions or anywhere else in the Port when required.

\begin{quote}
\textit{For quite a number of years he was the skipper of a luxury schooner that was anchored in the Karuah River, just down a little bit from the reserve. I think the name of the man who owned it and was reputed to be a millionaire at that time was a Mr Longworth, but ahh, Pardy Manton was a real trusted servant who kept that boat immaculate. It was spotlessly clean all the way through, and ahh, as it sailed around Port Stephens up and down the place ahh, Pardi Manton was the man who skippered it and did a tremendous job.}\textsuperscript{306}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{302} Iris Russell & Colleen Perry. (1999). Conversation
\textsuperscript{304} Kathleen Schillings. (2004). \textit{Aboriginal womens heritage: Port Stephens}. Hurstville, Department of Environment and Conversation (NSW)
\textsuperscript{305} Tim Hill. (2005). \textit{Oral history interviews with Iris Russell}. Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies.
\textsuperscript{306} Arthur Collins. (Unknown). History - Karuah mission.
Wherever the missionaries went to deliver sermons in Port Stephens it was usually Pardy who took them there as the skipper of the boat. They didn’t just hold open-air services for visiting missionaries and the Aboriginal congregations, but for anyone with religious affiliations. These open air services were also held every Sunday at Sawyers Point with converted white people also attending. A room was made available off one of the local stores for white weekly meetings. Other open air services were held in Tea Gardens, up The Branch, Nelsons Bay and Limeburner’s Creek for anyone interested. Pardy Manton took the missionaries and residents all around Port Stephen for picnics and special occasions at Easter and Christmas.

I have discussed some of the skills in particular boat building and sailing that Pardy Manton possessed earlier and there is no doubt he was a very gifted and talented man. He was an extremely religious man who is described by Collins as a man who walked the closest to God. Apparently he couldn’t read or write, but was very close to the Lord, so much so that Collins believed that his face just shone. He was described as an elderly man who would spend some quiet time in the bush alone with God in prayer. Pardy Manton maintained his religious beliefs throughout his life and was always available to help the missionaries where needed and without question.

1928 saw the beginning of a number of very prosperous years for the AIM movement. In the following five years there were over two thousand six hundred Aboriginal people converted. Eight Native churches were established and fifteen Native Christian Conventions were held with one thousand Aboriginal believers gathering at the fifth convention. Twenty eight missionaries were accepted, including Retta’s son Arnold and daughter Grace, and thirty Native Helpers joined the AIM quest to pioneer and establish a stronger religious foothold throughout Australia. This growth unquestionably was due to the leadership of the Longs. The AIM movement, despite the occasional setback, had gained momentum and strength as every year passed. Retta’s religious vision was becoming a reality, but was tempered in 1928 by the death of her much beloved partner and husband.

A Native Training College

From 1930 Retta held a series of conventions which she believed would benefit and deepen the spiritual lives of her native Christians. She was relentless in her efforts as a missionary and at

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these same conventions she continually promoted the idea to establish a Native Training College. Her persistence resulted in a fund being opened up and negotiations commenced to locate suitable premises for the college in 1937. Land was acquired at Pindimar and was so deemed the appropriate location for the college, but it was not until 1938 that the first two students entered the Native Training College in Port Stephens.311 As previously mentioned, Arthur Collins, Retta’s son-in-law, was appointed to run the newly formed Native College.

Retta Dixon long noted that one of the most significant achievements of the AIM was the eventual appearance of the Native Ministry in 1924. Twelve Aboriginal men and women, young and old, had shown aptitude for spiritual leadership amongst their people, yet the AIM was unable to provide them with any formal religious training.312 The formation of the Native Ministry became a real priority for Retta as she saw the importance of developing Aboriginal leadership in her conversion of more Aboriginal people to the evangelical faith. So the AIM Native Training College at Pindimar was established. Unfortunately it appears the Second World War put a hold on any hopes for the future success of the AIM Native Training College at Pindimar, which was forced to close.

_We are expecting, God willing, to re-open our College for students in February of next year and may find it necessary on account of the changes made by the war to move it for the time being. We are hoping if it is moved to be able to still have it in the same district._313

The College never reopened at Pindimar or in the same district as they had hoped. It was later relocated to Dalwood, near Branxton, and in 1945, after the Second World War, moved to 'Minimbah' House in Singleton.314 The Native College, which was crucial in Retta’s long term plans for the AIM movement, had stalled. In her mind, as more students graduated from the College, it would mean more Aboriginal evangelical conversions throughout Aboriginal communities in Australia.

Throughout the 1930s, the open-air rallies, conventions and services that were held pushed for donations that supported the AIM’s idea for better Aboriginal leadership through training in the

AIM Native Ministry. This was a contradiction in itself, as the Native Training College provided theology and Bible literacy only. Arthur Collins, its first head, hadn’t attained any formal qualifications in the ministry. So this also poses questions as to the quality of the formal training and leadership Aboriginal people received under Collins’ administration and tutelage at the Native College. This would appear to be a replica of the type of sub-standard education that Aboriginal people were exposed to in the Aboriginal Mission Schools.

Collins reflected on the early establishment of the college. He went to Pindimar just prior to his marriage to Grace to clear the ground around some of the houses that had been given to the AIM to use as they saw fit. The college was envisioned as a provider of skills and training that would enable Aboriginal graduates to return to their communities as pastors and, more importantly, gain knowledge to become community leaders. When Arthur and Grace were married in 1938 they went immediately to Pindimar and began working in the Native Training College with the first two students, Bob Blair from Cherburg, Queensland and Ralph Naden, who came from Gilgandra in NSW.

Robert Blair, of Cherbourg, our first arrival in the morning, after travelling Over 800 miles, last had the desire of his heart fulfilled, for in 1934 he wrote asking me to remind Mrs. Long about the Training College, as he wanted her to know that there were several on Cherbourg who were looking forward to entering it.

These first students would become examples of what could be achieved for Aboriginal people in the AIM Native Training College at Pindimar. Ralph Naden came from Bulgandramine in New South Wales. He was a young man with strong Christian beliefs and was full of desire to serve the Lord and his people. Ralph Naden, the son of another AIM convert Pastor William Bee Naden, became the very first New South Wales student enrolled at the Aborigines Inland Mission Training College at Pindimar. Ralph was described thus:

although not a Minister of religion, Ralph is a teacher of good, a gatherer of people and a story-teller who can relate to those he sees as most in need: young people, predominately aboriginal, who need focus in their lives.

319 Ibid
This was how Retta Dixon Long and the AIM became so successful in converting Aboriginal people to her religion. Through utilising the Native Helpers, she gained access to more Aboriginal people. She employed Aboriginal people who were good communicators, people who were respected, with the key ingredient being talent as effective storytellers with the ability to draw other Aboriginal people in. Both of these Aboriginal men, Bob Blair and Ralph Naden, were motivated leaders who had already created a history of their own being the first students and graduates from their respective states.

**Religion and Politics**

Retta’s belief that Aboriginal people should take responsibility for their own training was quite evident when she created a new organisation after acquiring the land for the Native Training College at Pindimar. The organisation was named the Australian Aborigines Missionary Movement (AAMM) and it appointed Sidney William Ridgeway and his wife Corra as its central officers as secretary and treasurer.\(^{320}\) It was Sid who came up with the organisation’s name of AAMM. Sid was an AIM convert and a deeply religious man, but this was tempered by the fact that he was highly politicised. Earlier in 1925, Sidney had become the foundation executive member of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, founded by Fred Maynard.\(^{321}\) I will discuss this organisation in greater detail in chapter Seven.

Sid Ridgeway was an intelligent man who was a strong advocate for both his people at Karuah and the wider Aboriginal community. Over many years, he would fight the NSW Aborigines Protection Board over civil rights issues that brought him into direct conflict with the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. Collins believed that the AAMM was an Aboriginal autonomous organisation set up by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people with funds coming directly to Sidney and Corra to manage for the future training of an Aboriginal evangelist movement. This must have been an unholy alliance (excuse the pun) as Sid Ridgeway and the AAPA were at completely opposite ends of the political spectrum to the AIM in the mid-1920s. The AIM sided with the NSW Aborigines Protection Board in confronting the rising tide of

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Aboriginal resentment against the Board. This would cause a deep rift between Aboriginal people, communities and the AIM. It would seem that the supposed Aboriginal autonomy of the AAMM was a product of this forged relationship between Aboriginal people and the AIM which complemented both in achieving their ultimate long-term goals.322

Initially, the AAMM proved to be successful. Only a year after its formation, it had established fourteen branches and had raised over thirteen hundred pounds. Unfortunately, the radical ideas of Aboriginal people who were receiving funds and in charge was cut short. Sid Ridgeway had no friends within the inner sanctum of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board in his role with the radical AAPA. It is likely that the Board brought pressure to bear on the AIM to take back the control and power over the AAMM.

The glimmer of any hope for Aboriginal organisational autonomy and control over financial matters to empower the Aboriginal evangelists and their communities faded as quickly as it came. In 1941, all co-ordination of the AAMM organisational activities now rested with the AIM Native Training College at Pindimar.323 It appears to me that, although Retta Dixon Long handled all the initial work in establishing the AAMM organisational structure, it was Sid Ridgeway that first flagged the idea to the AIM. He worked behind the scenes to see its initial fruition and would only have succeeded through his strong community connections across the state.

Sid Ridgeway was the son of William and Charlotte Ridgeway, also known and given the title by the missionaries as the King and Queen of the Worimi people. Sid was a talented man, an avid and very fine cricketer who was also a skilled tradesman who built boats and carved furniture for his people and the missionaries. Aunty Iris proudly describes some of the furniture he carved out of oak, in particular a chair he made for one of the missionaries with ‘mother’ carved into it. He also carved his name into the history of Karuah and the ‘Mish’ as a key player in the early Aboriginal political struggle. Aunty Iris said that he left Karuah and moved to East Bankstown, now Greenacres, in Sydney.324 He initially lived in Chulora and worked in the railway yards. Radi confirms that he did become a reader at the Church of Christ in Bankstown, and was a top class cricketer who played for North Bankstown Cricket Club. Sidney lived his

life out in Bankstown and passed away at the age of sixty four in 1959 from cerebral thrombosis.  

**Give us our Bread our Daily Bread**

Rations and the supply of food were the responsibility of the APB and, depending on the area and the persons managing the reserves, the amount of food that was rationed out varied. Fortunately, the Karuah ‘Mish’ was able to supplement some of their food from fishing or other seafood and small amounts of bush tucker, although other reserves weren’t so lucky. Reserves and rations were a temporary measure to smooth the pillow of the race of people doomed for total extinction. *The Newcastle Morning Herald* reported on the June 2, 1890, on how well the APB expended the sum of 11, 300 pounds:

> The money has been well laid out, and we believe that in disbursing the food and rations an honest attempt has been made to benefit the poor black fellow as much as possible and to preserve him from the weaknesses which are leading to the destruction of his race. Disease and destitution appear to cling to the people wherever they go and the day is not very far distant when there will be no work for the Board to do.  

In 1893, the APB reported that there were only three or four Aboriginal people living permanently on the Karuah reserve which had been set aside for them. There were a number of Aboriginal people who frequented the land during the year. The government was also negotiating with the other Aboriginal settlement at Soldiers Point to move to the Karuah reserve to amalgamate them. The Aborigines Protection Board was responsible for supplying rations to Aboriginal residents at Karuah. Senior Constable Stone acted as their government agent carrying out directives from the Aborigines Protection Board in relation to the supervision of the local Aboriginal residents.  

*Some of the elderly men and women are supplied with rations by the government, goods being issued by contractor under the supervision of the police officer in charge at Tea Gardens.*

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That same year, the Nelsons Bay Aboriginal residents received a fishing boat that had been authorised by the APB some time ago. It was fitted with sails and oars and all the necessary gear required to catch fish around Port Stephens. The boat was to help sustain their livelihood as fishermen to help provide food for their community, further reducing the financial responsibilities of the board. The board had also given instructions at Newcastle to provide tools to the Aboriginal Karuah reserve. Those tools would become invaluable to the Aboriginal residents from Karuah, and they naturally grasped the skills needed to use them effectively to make life a little easier on the ‘Mish’.

_The Aborigines Protection Board authorised Inspector Lynch to purchase an adequate supply of tools to enable the blacks to build huts and improve the land on their reserve at Port Stephens._

Rations and paternalism were marked characteristics of government controlled reserves and Karuah was no different to anywhere else, but they were lucky enough to be able to supplement their needs with food from the sea. Aunty Louisa remembers what they were given to them in her era by the missionaries: “They gave us rations, sometimes goods, sometimes just a bit of tea and sugar, and people from town and the government gave us clothes.” Most of the Aboriginal men from the ‘Mish’ gained some form of employment when it was available. There were always menial labouring jobs in the oyster industry and some, like my grandfather, cut timber railway sleepers or pit props for the mines. Fishing was always the way for the Worimi people and they were fortunate enough to be able to continue that tradition.

Colleen Perry remembers how rations were delivered to residents on the Karuah ‘Mish’. However, she couldn’t exactly recall for how long they used to come to the mission or how often the mission received rations. Whether, it was once a week or once a fortnight she also wasn’t quite sure. But she recalled the supplier’s name - it was Markey who used to come from Raymond Terrace in his little ute, and they had margarine in a big box as well as sugar, flour and salt in large bags. They would weigh the limited produce with scales while they were there.

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Mission residents would walk up to the ute and they weighed it out right there and then and handed them their rations.332

The tightening control over Aboriginal missions and reserves accelerated during the 1930s when more and more people were dumped together and some missions and reserves closed. Every Aboriginal person on a reserve throughout New South Wales was under the control of the Protection Board and was supposed to receive government rations. The first time that Margaret Tucker and her family received rations was when they moved to Brungle and received a government cottage. For the Brungle Aboriginal community, the amount of rations received depended primarily on family numbers. “...Government rations, the amount was determined by the size of the family.”333 Throughout Margaret’s life as a domestic servant, food was withheld as a form of punishment and to maintain control over her while in servitude with the board.

Shirley Smith (Mum Shirl), my aunty, was another in her biography who mentions the rations that her family received on Cowra (Erambie) mission in the south west of New South Wales. They were given rations of flour, sugar, tea, bully beef and sometimes jam or syrup, and the meat was often bad by the time they got it. Mum Shirl, as did all Aboriginal people, knew the control and power the APB had over Aboriginal people. She remembered all too clearly the power the mission managers held on Erambie mission down to the most basic of all human needs, food.334

*The white managers and manager’s assistants turned out to be not people who helped us, but people who controlled us, they tried to run our lives right down to the littlest item, like what food we put on our table.*335

Food wasn’t the only rationed commodity that was needed for the physical maintenance of Aboriginal people under government legislation. Blankets were a major item distributed to Aboriginal people from the Protection Board, but more to keep an account of the Aboriginal numbers residing on reserves. Clothing for Aboriginal people wasn’t high on the government’s budgeted agenda, but the missionaries managed to acquire clothing through their Christian networks. AIM succeeded in supplying some quality clothing to the mission children when and if it became available to them as donations. The Port Stephens examiner reported the missionaries’ work:

On the reserve are 40 boys and girls of varying ages; and in the parcel of clothing were two garments for each child. The Missionaries stated that it was the best parcel of clothing they had seen anywhere in connection to missionary.336

The Last Amen for the AIM

Retta and the AIM organisation held the Karuah mission reins for many decades and achieved some success, particularly in the first three decades. She illustrates the sum of those accomplishments boastfully in her book In the Ways of his Steps, but those decades would become the pinnacle of what she and the AIM would achieve. It was from the middle of the twentieth century that the role of the missionaries and their work in New South Wales came into question. Retta recorded that:

We closed our thirty years activities with 11,000 Aborigines under our spiritual care, in 35 centres and outposts. 106 agents were at work, 50 being missionaries giving their whole lives to the work, 20 associate workers contributing splendid service in the time at their disposal, and 36 native workers...337

In the mid-1950s, the subject of the validity of missionary work in New South Wales really put an end to their domineering roles on missions. Even the UAM newsletter raised their concerns, while the Dawn magazine suggested: “…the work done by UAM and AIM was no longer relevant to New South Wales Aboriginal people.”338 This marked the end of days of dominance that the AIM missionary maintained over the Karuah ‘Mish’. It would result in the departure of the AIM from the ‘Mish’, and the Aborigines Protection Board and its successor, the Aborigines Welfare Board, appointing their own full time managers.

There have been a number of important historical issues discussed throughout this chapter, including the attempts to impose indoctrinating religious control over Aboriginal people living on the Karuah ‘Mish’. It explains the closely monitored one-sided relationship which did provide some humanitarian relief for Aboriginal people on and around the ‘Mish’. But, importantly, it highlights the far-reaching control and paternalism of the AIM workers over Aboriginal people through evangelical Christianity. The AIM did succeed in gaining access to and recruiting Aboriginal people and communities by utilising local Aboriginal people as their Native Helpers.

337 Retta Long. (1936). In the way of his steps. Sydney, Lawson: Mission Publications. p 51
The AIM would not align itself with the genuine needs of Aboriginal people in fighting for land rights, protecting their children, demanding citizenship and protecting a distinct Aboriginal cultural identity. Nor would it acknowledge that Aboriginal people needed to control their own destiny and take charge and self-determine Aboriginal affairs. The AIM rarely challenged the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board for their callous treatment of all Aboriginal people. These issues would become the platform for the first Aboriginal political movement in the 1920s and would prove to have far-reaching effects across the eastern seaboard. Sadly, the AIM sided with the board in seeking concessions from the government in funds and greater control at the expense of Aboriginal political demands and the genuine needs of the Aboriginal community. I will examine the rise of the AAPA and Karuah’s prominent role in that political era, and the fight of local ‘Mish’ residents for Aboriginal rights across the twentieth century.
I recall one of many conversations with my mother, Mrs Colleen Perry, around our open fireplace in a small dirt floor corrugated iron shack on the Karuah Mission. It was our home and I was young, probably no more than nine or ten years old. There wasn’t much to do at night without electricity and, no television set. So we all would sit around the fire at night, especially in the winter with the kerosene lamp turned down low and the flickering flames casting obscure shadows on the walls as we talked. We spoke about anything and everything; other parents and adults if visiting told us their stories about when they were young, especially when we started complaining about current problems from our viewpoint, having only had a short existence living on this planet.

We were whinging about a number of things, as children do, including the local Karuah School. It was then that we were abruptly cut off and told by mum just how lucky we were to go to the Karuah Public School. She told us about her childhood experiences in elementary schooling at the Aboriginal mission school and how Aboriginal children were excluded and not allowed to attend the local public school outside the mission. Mum reminisced that when she was around twelve years old there was nothing more they could teach her because that was the highest attainable standard of education they provided at Mission or Aboriginal schools missions, reserves and stations in New South Wales. There wasn’t any high school or further education for Aboriginal kids after that. She remained at the mission school until she was about fifteen, mainly for company with the other kids.  

You see, Mum was a very strong advocate for Western education and continually reminded us of the importance of gaining a formal school education and taking advantage of the opportunities that she and her generation never had. Like most who attended mission schools you were either self-educated by reading whatever was available or you went without and mum was one that liked to read. That was the required standard of education that all Aboriginal children experienced in the Aboriginal Schools system in New South Wales at that time. She knew the power that education held for those who wanted to grasp its potential and understood that it was the means of both survival and achievement in her changing environment. I will reveal more of her discussion and insight later in this chapter.

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339 Colleen Perry Conversation 1969
This chapter will examine the historical struggle Aboriginal people endured so that their children could gain access to Western education. Lack of exposure to formal education through racial barriers and psychological and physical exclusion from the public school system remained an ongoing concern at Karuah and indeed state-wide during the course of the 20th century. Although there were dramatic and traumatic changes faced by these children, traditional Aboriginal educational methods have always been constant and available to them. Throughout this chapter I will use a combination of archival and library research, personal reflections, oral testimonies and conversations to reveal a complex, sad and sometimes uplifting historical period in Australia.

Education is one of the principal means by which knowledge and culture are transmitted from one generation to the next. All forms of education, both formal and informal, contain many common factors in all nationalities, societies and cultures across the globe. Education in its simplest form equates to the knowledge for survival in your world, along with reinforcing what each particular society holds most sacred and valuable. As G K Chesterton the famous English author and philosopher argued: “Education is simply the soul of society as it passes from one generation to another.”

Globally, education becomes a useful mode and means of maintaining social order for everyone to live and abide under with its own set of laws and codes of morality and conduct as a community.

This, in its purest form, was the basis of traditional Aboriginal societies and a culture imperative which always transmitted knowledge about every piece of their cultural history, religion and, more importantly, all aspects of their land and their spirituality and physical ownership of it. This form of education was a communal model developed to ensure economic and social survival. It took a number of forms with children learning from observation and imitation, whilst adult knowledge contained spiritual and ritual ceremony. As the child grew, education became increasingly more interpersonal and focussed on individual learning. Unlike Western educational institutions Aboriginal knowledge was never written or catalogued in libraries; knowledge was stored in the living memory of specific individuals our elders. These elders were educators responsible for the transmission of knowledge to the following generations.

The renowned American philosopher and academic Allan Bloom expressed the power of education in any developing society; “Education is the movement from darkness to light.”

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341 Alan Bloom retrieved 13 March 2012 from http://www.quotes.net/quote/1301
These words mirror the intentions of the New South Wales Government’s legislation in relation to a compulsory primary school education for all children as society advanced toward the 20th century. Ironically, this law didn’t provide much movement towards the light for Aboriginal children. It only forced them into the shadowy recesses of the mission or reserve manager’s control on the centralised Protection Board’s paternal segregated shelters.

The amount of research carried out or undertaken on the history of Aboriginal education, particularly New South Wales missions or reserves is to some degree limited. Apart from the publications of James J. Fletcher and a few Aboriginal autobiographies, historical data can be found still uncovered in New South Wales Government and missionary records. Other sources of information are occasionally located in the local newspapers. The remainder of the sources are the memories of Aboriginal ex-students and teachers who attended such schools. Fortunately for this particular study, there has been enough information recorded to provide a reasonable understanding of the provision of the education of Aboriginal children living at Karuah.

The New South Wales Public Instruction Act of 1880 applied compulsory schooling to all children aged six to fourteen who lived in a two mile radius of a public school. Race relations between Aboriginal people and parents at Karuah soon became a disturbing ongoing issue which all stemmed from the compulsory requirements of the Public Instruction Act 1880 and the fact that Aboriginal children were attending the school. In 1883, George Reid, the Minister of Public Instruction declared:

*No child whatever its creed or colour or circumstance ought to be excluded from a public school. But cases might arise, especially amongst the Aboriginal tribes, where admission of a child or children may be prejudicial to the whole school.*

The first exposure and experience Aboriginal children had to Western education, was at the Native Institution/School at Parramatta as an experiment in assimilation from 1815 to 1820. The architect of the experiment was missionary William Shelley who believed, with education, Aboriginal children could be trained to become servants and good British subjects. The institute ultimately failed because Aboriginal parents objected to their children being coerced away from their care. However, the Aboriginal children that attended the

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Native Institute clearly expressed a level of intelligence that was above average, which Parsons reported.\textsuperscript{343}

\textit{Indeed, Dr Piddington, Lecturer in anthropology in Aberdeen University, and Director of the bureau of Colonial Development, states that; “results on about 25 full-blooded Aboriginal children show an average of Intelligence Quotient of 104, that is, four points about the white average.”}\textsuperscript{344}

The first school established at Karuah was on the north east side of the Karuah River in Aliceton opening on 29 May 1884 with twenty three students. There were fifteen children living on the mill (north) side of the river and nine on the opposite (southern) side in Karuah. The government paid for a grant to lease land from the sawmill owners for a school. The Sawmill was owned by Bate and Muston of Sydney, which employed about a dozen men. It was the only source of employment, apart from a newly developing oyster industry. This was on the opposite side of the river to where most of the permanent residents lived at the time. The owners of the Sawmill applied for the school at Aliceton as a means of servicing their employees’ educational needs for their children.\textsuperscript{345}

Established by the Public Instruction Act in New South Wales in 1880 the Department of Public Instruction’s policies for the establishment of new primary schools in local communities needed an average student attendance of twenty pupils, not just an enrolment number of at least twenty pupils, to establish and fund a fully-fledged public school. Failing that, it was possible for the department to establish a provisional school if the average attendance was between twelve and nineteen. Another type of school utilised by the department was a half-time school, which was a school and teacher that were shared half the time between two different communities/towns. (Karuah would frequently make use of such a school in its earlier days, but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the choice for Karuah was largely between a public school and a provisional school.)\textsuperscript{346}

Jane Hackett was employed as a teacher by the Department of Public Instruction in 1884 to begin teaching at the Aliceton (Karuah) School when it was established. She was untrained as a teacher and taught at the school for the first seven or eight years. By the end of 1884, Miss

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{343} Dale Kerwin & Harry Van Issum (2013). Pedagogies to enhance learning for indigenous students: evidence-based practice. Robyn Jorgensen, Peter Sullivan (Ed.) An Aboriginal Perspective-Policy and Practice. Springer.p4
\item\textsuperscript{344} Geoffrey Parsons. (1946). \textit{Black chattel: The story of the Australian Aborigines.} London, The National Council for Civil Liberties
\item\textsuperscript{345} John Grogan ‘Karuah 1884-1984’ unpublished typescript
\item\textsuperscript{346} John Grogan “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished Typescript
\end{footnotes}
Hackett had twenty three pupils on the roll and an average attendance of fifteen. The Karuah School went through a number of changes because of the fluctuating numbers of pupils attending the school. It went from being a provisional to a public school during the years 1886-1889, then reverted briefly to a half-time school with Swan Bay from 1889-1890, a half-time school with Limeburners Creek between 1890 and 1891 and then it was temporarily closed in October 1891. The numbers of pupils had dropped suddenly with the departure of families from the locality.

It reopened as a provincial school a month later under the supervision of Amelia Sladen who was twenty three years of age and had between three and four years teaching experience in other small schools. She stayed a year and was replaced by Annie McClellan who found Karuah a trying place to work in. Amelia wrote a letter to the Department of Public Instruction early in 1894 on the damaging effects of race relations between white parents and Aboriginal people. It had become such a concern affecting the school and especially her mental state that she almost had a nervous breakdown. Amelia writes:

*The population at that place (Karuah) while very small is composed of three distinct elements, about one half were white children, the remainder being composed partly of Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal children. The jealousy between the parents of the scholars as to the conditions upon which the children are to be taught or allowed to associate with each other had led to complaints and counter-complaints of the nature that have utterly broken down my nervous system, and I feel assure that at Aliceton [as Karuah was known at the time] I can do justice neither to the department or myself.*

The population base in the township of Karuah had shifted location over the years. At first, the majority of residents lived on the northern side of the river known as Aliceton, because of the availability of employment in the local sawmill industry. The southern river side or what became the town of Karuah underwent a significant population growth. Now there weren’t just whites sharing the Karuah community but Aboriginal and Indian people as well. Like many other small Australian towns, this changing diversity in mixed population triggered more openly racial attitudes, prejudice and biased actions from its residents.

The Public Instruction Act of 1880 was a law that enforced the enrolment and attendance of all children, which technically included Aboriginal children, in the public school system. That is, it

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347 *Port Stephens Pictorial* 26/8/1970
348 *Port Stephens Pictorial* 26/8/1970
349 John Grogan, “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished typescript
made schooling compulsory between the ages of six and fourteen. This form of legislation, in one sense, contravened the legislation set out in the Commonwealth 1901 Australian constitution which excluded Aboriginal people from citizenship status. Aboriginal people were directed by the Protection Board set up in each state, in varying forms, but basically they had no other option but to enrol their children in the New South Wales Public School system in the early twentieth century and that’s exactly what they did in Karuah.

The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board kept detailed records of the number of Aboriginal people under their paternal care and Aboriginal children were frequently considered a political and financial burden. The board was concerned about the growing number of half-caste Aboriginal children on reserves, which was well documented as putting more and more pressure on the board financially. In the Protection Board’s report (1883-1884) there were 9,031 half caste children compared to 6,612 full blood children and of that number 146 Aboriginal children were receiving public or other school instruction. The compulsory clause had not been strictly applied to Aboriginal reserve children.

In the Protection Board’s report 1885-1886, the number of Aboriginal children receiving public school or other instruction had risen to 526. Board records of this period note that there were 20 Aboriginal people in the Port Stephens area and 9 of those were children. The board believed that school provided Aboriginal children with training to take up their lowly economic positions at the bottom tier of the industrialised classes of the Australian society. They were adamant that schooling assisted the children in generating increased energy by building character and encouraging industry to assist in cultivating and shaping the land as labourers.

The New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, by then generally known as the New South Wales Department of Education, had its own new policy from 1916 in relation to the designated education of Aboriginal children, in consultation with the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. The Department and Board concluded that, if there were sufficient numbers of Aboriginal children, they would set up a separate Aboriginal school on the reserve, station or mission that would be made available to instruct them. If the required student numbers were down, they enabled those Aboriginal children to attend the New South Wales public school system, as long as they met the requirements of the ‘Clean, Clad and Courteous Policy’ of 1884.

350 Aborigines Board for Protection Report for 1883-4, V.II
351 Aborigines Board for Protection Report for 1885-6, V.2
For the Department of Education the establishment of segregated Aboriginal schools was an attractive solution as they did not have to purchase the land on which the school building was to be erected, as this was already in the hands of the board. In addition, white parental complaints could be prevented with the removal of Aboriginal children from public schools and by placing them into the alternative schools on the reserves.

The ‘Clean, Clad and Courteous Policy’ (as J. J. Fletcher dubbed it) was brought about by racist white parents who lobbied the Department of Public Instruction to permanently remove Aboriginal children from the public school system. The policy decreed that they (Aboriginal children) were to be clean, nicely dressed and to behave in a manner that was acceptable in Western society. Not only was this clearly an example of institutional racism but was further compounded by the fact that, under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act of 1909, Aboriginal people were victims of enforced poverty on the missions and reserves. They were without the same financial opportunities that were available to other Australians and were mainly reliant on the welfare mentality of missionaries and the generosity of the Aborigines Protection Board. Under protection legislation, it intended to prevent Aboriginal people moving from place to place seeking employment.

One early teacher, Miss McLennan, appeared from the evidence in correspondence to the Department of Instruction, to have treated Aboriginal children fairly and defended their place and presence at the public school. This was despite extreme pressure exerted by several white parents to have Aboriginal children removed from the school. Racism and exclusion in the form of parental and community members objections to Aboriginal children attending the Karuah Public School were commonplace. It was also happening everywhere else in New South Wales and remained an ongoing issue for a great period of the twentieth century. The correspondence containing complaints to the department flowed steadily in. Eventually, the anger and opposition of the white parents resulted in them withdrawing their own children from the school as a form of protest and demonstration.352

Wesley Hartcher was Karuah’s longest serving teacher. He recalled the issue erupting over an impetigo breakout in the school. The symptoms of the disease first appeared on an Aboriginal student living near the reserve. Hartcher was clearly aware that impetigo was not the real issue that sparked parental unrest - it already existed concerning the attendance of any Aboriginal children at the Karuah School. The continual, objections, and agitation from parents are identified in the school inspectors’ reports. The impetigo outbreak was merely an excuse:

352 John Grogan “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished typescript
There is an Aborigines’ Mission Station about 3/4 mile away from the above school. A Missionary is in charge of the station and works it in conjunction with another Mission lower down the Karuah River. The [white] parents at Karuah naturally objected to the children living in the camp attending the public school. The lady in charge could well instruct these children about 6 to 10. I strongly recommend that any aborigines’ children living on the mission station at Karuah not be allowed to attend the local public school, and the Teacher be so informed. When seeing about school matters a few years ago, the parents at Karuah urged the exclusion of aborigines’ children from the local public school.\footnote{John Grogan “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished typescript}

The Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM) was prepared to assist where possible in providing religious instruction and education to the Aboriginal children at Karuah. The AIM involvement began in 1905, as outlined in the previous chapter. It was reported in the AIM August report that Miss Ayres from Queensland was welcomed by the missionaries at the Karuah mission as a Christian worker and new helper for the children. She was praised for the work she undertook in the newly formed ‘day school’ for the Aboriginal children:

*With her assistance new work has been undertaken. A day school for the children has been opened and tuition given on alternate days to the half-time Public school across the river.*\footnote{AIM August Report Karuah 1906}

I think it is interesting that Aboriginal children were given instruction on alternate days on the Karuah mission by Miss Ayres, who did not receive any remuneration for instructing them. Was the timetabling of those alternate days solely for religious instruction or structured educational purposes to alleviate some of the racial tensions that had been brewing in the public school over the years? If it was about easing those racial relations, then it wasn’t very productive. I believe she was mainly providing religious instruction. However, it did assist Miss Ayers in later gaining employment as a school teacher on the Karuah mission.

Aboriginal children from Karuah were being determinedly pushed out of the public school by white parental influence with the support of the Department of Public Instruction and the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. It culminated in the total exclusion of Aboriginal children in 1908 from Karuah Public School. Due to the relatively small number of Aboriginal children - it was claimed that there were six or seven identified - that was not enough to warrant a separate Aboriginal school defined as a Provisional School. Therefore, they were excluded.
from the only school close enough for them to attend, the Karuah Public School, and this effectively denied them any hope of receiving a basic Western education. The compulsory clause of 1880 was denied by public authorities. The Aboriginal kids were forced to accept whatever informal education that was available to them at the hands of the lady missionaries from the AIM. The ‘Clean, Clad and Courteous’ policy of 1884 utilised by the racist white parents of the Karuah district proved to be a most effective mechanism in excluding Aboriginal children from attaining a very basic Western primary school education.355

This discriminatory policy didn’t even go far enough for the more fervent racist parents living in Karuah or anywhere else in New South Wales, because Aboriginal parents responded to the requirements set out in this policy. They made sure that their children were clean, dressed tidily and, most of the time, well-behaved. White parents again lobbied the department, which saw the establishment of a much stronger deterrent - the Exclusion on Demand Policy of 1902. This racist yet legal policy allowed for the exclusion of any Aboriginal child if a white parent objected to an Aboriginal child's attending school without a valid reason at any public school in NSW.

The best example to demonstrate the racist views of the parents and department towards Aboriginal children in Karuah can be seen through the determination of Dan Ridgeway who attempted to enrol his children at the Karuah School in 1914. Fletcher clearly outlines the incident in his book, Clean Clad and Courteous. Mr Ridgeway, an Aboriginal father, approached Constable Deane, the local police officer, and asked whether there was any legal reason why his children could not be admitted into the Karuah Public School. Constable Deane knew the children and family well and considered them to be always clean, tidy and well-mannered and advised Ridgeway he could see no rationale to prevent their enrolment. The school teacher at the time, Mr Hartcher, also agreed with Constable Deane’s assessment of Dan’s children and saw no objections to their enrolment. Subsequently, six Aboriginal children were enrolled in the Karuah Public School on Monday 25 November, 1914.356 It was a short-lived victory for Dan and his children as they did not find the local Karuah community very accepting.

Only two days later, eighteen of the forty two white children were kept home by their parents as a protest against the presence of these Aboriginal children infiltrating the school. The following day this number had grown to thirty two, and parents accelerated their disapproval in the form

355 John Grogan “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished typescript
of a signed petition. Thirteen of the twenty two families involved with the school signed a petition to exclude the Aboriginal children. The actions of the parents took Hartcher and the department by surprise and they had no other recourse but to permanently exclude all of the Aboriginal children.\textsuperscript{357} This became a common theme throughout New South Wales. The wholesale exclusion of Aboriginal children from the public school system took place across the state in the early years of the twentieth century and later.

Mainstream society had labelled all Aboriginal children as a threat to the health, morality and civil codes of the newly formed Federated Australia that is now the Commonwealth of Australia. Segregated Aboriginal schools on missions became the government’s response to parental protests and community outcry. They wanted to prevent these less than desirable Aboriginal children infiltrating and mixing with their children as part of the public school system. Dr William Jonas a Worimi man and former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Rights Commissioner identified this departmental practice:

\begin{quote}
Within schools segregation was practised. In 1937 a minute book from the New South Wales Minister of Education to his Department stated:
Where a number of Aboriginal children were attending the school they should be segregated from the ordinary school pupils and provided for in a school set apart for the purpose preferably at an Aboriginal settlement.\textsuperscript{358}
\end{quote}

In his unpublished typescript held by the Mitchell Library, Leonard Fox identified another similar incident in Collarenebri in the south west of New South Wales in the 1940s. Leonard relays the story told by Marie Reay in the \textit{Aborigines Protector} in May 1947 about the time when Aboriginal children enrolled in the local public school. Parents staged a mass strike, withdrawing their children from the school until the Aboriginal children were removed. Twenty eight Aboriginal children were segregated into the Town Hall where missionaries taught a curriculum consisting almost entirely of the Christian religious ideology, as it was impossible to get any qualified teacher for them.\textsuperscript{359}

Like many other parts of New South Wales, white parents in the township of Karuah had instigated and severed any future exposure to mainstream education in the Karuah Public School for Aboriginal children. This extended to all Aboriginal children living in and around the

\textsuperscript{357} John Grogan “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished typescript
\textsuperscript{359} Leonard Fox, (1960). “Aborigines in New South Wales.” unpublished typescript
Karuah mission. In the long-term, it meant that the responsibility to educate Aboriginal children now fell within the jurisdiction of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. They did this in collaboration with the Department of Instruction and sometimes with missionary bodies, as was the case in the Karuah district. It was supposedly the mandate of the Aborigines Protection Board under its legislation to protect and educate Aboriginal children under their paternal care. This proved to be false hope. The Protection Board became and was known as the Persecution Board by Aboriginal communities across the state.

The responsibility to find and provide an elementary education for these children now fell to the evangelistic missionary with the AIM, Mrs Retta Dixon Long who was clearly in control of the mission as she controlled its theological approach. She was, to some extent, an agent for her Aboriginal parishioners, although all legal powers over Aboriginal people resided with the Aborigines Protection Board. Long negotiated with the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board for any financial assistance that was needed to provide support and care for the mission residents and to develop the mission.

She became the advocate who dealt directly with them in addressing issues affecting the Aboriginal people on her missions that were expanding across the state and, later, into other parts of the country. The Protection Board had the power to exclude the missionaries from the reserve if they so desired once the land was legally gazetted under the control of the Board. Missionaries were a cheaper substitute than employing a manager to take over the management of missions, at least for the periods when the board was poorly funded. There were, however, a lot of missionaries who did not fully agree with Department and Protection Board policies that controlled and dehumanised Aboriginal people. They objected to the token support and treatment that they afforded to Aboriginal people under their stringent and neglectful supervision.

A more humanitarian approach to Aboriginal people living on reserves or missions wasn't always what the Protection Board was willing to provide. They were a centralised, bureaucratic organisation that rarely understood the significant problems that Aboriginal communities on reserves faced. The denial of educational rights for the children would play a significant part in the establishment of an Aboriginal School, which I will discuss a little later.

Mrs Retta Dixon Long appears to have proven herself very proficient in her duties as a missionary by providing care and support for her Aboriginal congregations. Her ability and proficiency in writing letters to the Department of Public Instruction and the Aborigines Protection Board proved to be quite a bonus for the Aboriginal communities under the banner of
the AIM. She took an avid interest in the problem presented by the exclusion of Aboriginal children from the public school at Karuah. Her correspondence assisted in attaining some positive responses which, in turn, assisted in addressing the educational void affecting the small number of Aboriginal children of Karuah.

Long was a skilled writer and she set about lobbying for funds to create an Aboriginal school and to provide a teacher to deliver religious instruction to parishioners within the mission, both adults and children. The first response to her correspondence was from the Department of Public Instruction. It referred to her earlier correspondence requesting a subsidy to employ a school teacher. The initial response was positive and indicated that it might be granted. But her letter was forwarded to the Aborigines Protection Board for their consideration first.\footnote{Peter Board, Department of Public Instruction Letter to Mrs Long dated: 20th February 1908}

It took another two months before a decision was made by the Board. The subsequent correspondence to Mrs Long dated 26 March, 1908, reads as follows: “I am desired to inform you that there are not sufficient children to establish a school, but my Board are prepared to allow Miss Ayres, the missionary a sum of 26 pounds per annum for the instruction of these children”.\footnote{Office of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines Letter to Mrs Long dated 26th February 1908} It was a Catch 22. This was also a double-edged sword, as being under the control of the AIM would place the community and all the children under the very tight and strict religious indoctrination of the evangelical Christian variety.

In the time that followed, the board obviously pondered the notion and value of supporting an Aboriginal School as a prerequisite for a provisional school at Karuah. While not initially granting its establishment, they at least agreed to employ a teacher. Retta Dixon Long realised that the only educational option available for these Aboriginal children was the creation of an Aboriginal School. Although she was not successful on this occasion, the issue would rise again and meet with a lot more success. Long had set the political wheels in motion and planted the seed for future negotiations to achieve her goals.

Mrs Long had won the first round of negotiations for Aboriginal children with the acquisition of temporary or provisional funding for a teacher in the person of Mrs Ayers. Unfortunately, most teachers recruited for Aboriginal Schools prior to 1948 were nearly all temporary appointments and uncertified with little teaching experience. In most instances across the state, it was the responsibility of the mission and reserve manager to employ teachers and it was left to their discretion, which meant very few trained teachers were appointed at Aboriginal schools anywhere in New South Wales. It would take another seven years before the approval of an Aboriginal school for the Karuah mission would be fully achieved.
The earlier incident concerning Dan Ridgeway and his attempt to enrol his children in the Karuah Public School had forced the Aborigines Protection Board to reassess the possibility of a separate Aboriginal School. Not only did it highlight the segregation and racist views of the Karuah community, but also the civil rights being challenged by Aboriginal people who were seeking equity and a basic right to education for their children. Retta Dixon Long was quick to inform the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board about the incident and received a reply dated 1 December, 1914.

...the matter of applying for the admission of the Aboriginal Children had already been reported to them by the police and the matter had been forwarded to the Department of Public Instruction to provide them with advice on what to do.  

Since the exclusion of the Aboriginal children from the Karuah Public School back in 1908, Long tried to fulfil her missionary obligations by providing whatever limited educational resources to the Aboriginal children on the mission that she could. Over that period of time, the numbers of Aboriginal children of school age grew to the required figure that warranted an application to establish an Aboriginal School as a Provisional School. With the return of AIM missionary, Miss Stewart, to Karuah she was able to deliver limited education to a small number of Aboriginal children. As Retta points out:

Every day she teaches five little ones for three hours and enjoys imparting to them the instruction they so eagerly receive.

The AIM continued its correspondence as it campaigned and lobbied on behalf of the Karuah Aboriginal community. There were numerous official letters Retta Long sent which forced both the department and the board to liaise between each other to address the missionaries’ concerns. This resulted in correspondence from the Department of Public Instruction to the Aborigines Protection Board on 22 January, 1915, requesting an arrangement for payment for a suitable teacher if they were willing to provide the available shed attached to the mission house to use as a classroom. In the letter, the department stated:

I beg to inform you that being no school building available, sixteen (16) Aboriginal children of school age at Karuah and Soldiers Point are being deprived of a school education, the white people are objecting to the Aborigines attending the same school as

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362 Office of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines Letter to Mrs Long dated 1 December 1914
their children. It is understood however, that your mission has already has a building on the reserve at Karuah, that would be suitable for school purposes...

My mother, Colleen Perry, when talking to Aunty Iris years ago when they were looking through old photos, revealed that there was an old shed attached to the mission house, and many years before it had been used as a school house. The original mission school house was a tool shed or farm shed. That’s what they used for a school, and I can remember the building when I was young as we lived almost next to it in our shack. Having the necessary number of school aged Aboriginal children, it brought about a much more positive attitude and response from the relevant bureaucracies than before. Further, with the support of a continual stream of harassment letters from the AIM, a positive response to the application to build an Aboriginal school was received. The department letter explains:

...the construction of an Aboriginal school on the Mission would be more favourable if Aboriginal people built it and that funds would be provided in a joint effort between Department of Public Instruction and Aborigines Protection Board for a teacher when it was completed.

The Karuah Aboriginal children would be finally afforded a proper school room on the proviso that the Aboriginal residents built it themselves. It would seem that any gains in Western education meant that Aboriginal people had to work and pay for it in some form. Luckily, there were a number of Aboriginal men with skills in carpentry who were able to apply their talents towards its construction. In particular, Uncle Pardy Ridgeway and John Ridgeway were extremely skilled and talented in woodcraft. They were master boat builders and made furniture, all without any formal training.

Retta reported in Our Aim of the approval and work undertaken to establish the mission school they had been working so hard towards. But it would take almost another year before the Aboriginal school house would be constructed on the ‘Mish’. Leonard Long reported that: “All the people are well: The babies are growing fat and strong, and the older children and their parents are looking forward to their new school, which we pray will soon become an accomplished fact.”

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364 Department Public Instruction to New South Aborigines Protection Board  22 January 1915
365 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry Conversation  1999
366 Office for the Protection of Aborigines to Mrs Long dated 13 March 1915
The construction of the Aboriginal Mission School was reported in the February edition of *Our Aim* as their prayers having been answered. The author proudly states that, after praying and working, it was now an accomplished fact, further describing the school building as nice, high and airy as it was set in the middle of the reserve. It was built by five Aboriginal men and completed in a fortnight, working 11-12 hours a day get it finished so the children could resume their school work.\(^{368}\) So, after a lengthy battle, the AIM was able to establish funds for a teacher to provide instruction to Aboriginal children at the ‘Mish’. Grogan mentions Long’s tenacity for success:

> Mrs Long's badgering of the authorities on their behalf resulted in the appointment of an untrained teacher to a segregated provisional school.\(^{369}\)

Photograph The Karuah Mission School 1916-154 courtesy of the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council

Fletcher (1989) makes the point that Aboriginal children were the sole targets of discrimination and exclusion from the Karuah Public School system, in comparison with other coloured children from other cultures. He describes a particular case in 1919 involving Indian children by

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\(^{369}\) John Grogan “Karuah 1884-1984” unpublished typescript
the name of Buckshi Ram. Although these children had an Aboriginal mother they were in the custody of their Indian father and were allowed to live in the Karuah town community. A parent complained about the girls’ heads being lousy with head lice and argued that they should be removed from school. The inspector removed the children while the infection was being treated, but had no problem readmitting them back into the school once the problem had been addressed.370

In this case it merely involved meeting the infectious diseases requirements of public education. The children were removed, but only until the infection was cured. But, in the case of Aboriginal children with infections, the rule was used to remove them on a permanent basis. So it appears that Hindu children had the same rights as other white children when it came to parental concern about the school’s stance regarding health and hygiene. Unfortunately, Aboriginal children living on the ‘Mish’ weren’t afforded the same courtesy and concern, leading to a reasonable assumption that they were seen as inferior and not worthy to be Australian. Total exclusion and segregation from any interaction with the Karuah school children or mainstream society seemed to allow white parents to sleep better at night.

The Aboriginal school became a showpiece for the evangelistic missionaries and a testament of the Christian work that they were committed to and believed in. This was evident and almost immortalised with regular postings about the Karuah mission in their own magazine Our Aim and The Australian Evangel. The local newspapers, including the Maitland Advertiser, Port Stephens Pictorial (Examiner) and the Raymond Terrace Examiner also covered any newsworthy issues concerning the Karuah mission activity and its Aboriginal school.

The Examiner reported on the appointment of Miss H. Ferguson who replaced Miss Hagan as the Aboriginal school teacher on the mission. Miss Ferguson had previously taught at Nambucca Heads for three years and was credited with doing a good job educating Aboriginal children on the north coast. She was described as a returned Methodist Missionary from New Guinea. She had also worked for some years on Western Australian goldfields - thus working in a number of organisations and locales in a manner described as benefitting humanity.371

Another well documented event was the excursion when Miss H. Ferguson took the Aboriginal children from the Karuah Aboriginal School to Maitland accompanied by Queen Charlotte Ridgeway who a reporter mistakenly described as the last surviving member of the Aborigines.

370 James Fletcher. (1889). Clean clad and courteous: A history of Aboriginal education. Sydney, Southwood. p113
371 Raymond Terrace Examiner 15/8/1919
from Port Stephens. This was a common error of recorders of the time, in this case, the reporter did not even contemplate or note Queen Charlotte’s son, Sid Ridgeway, and many other descendants. The Aboriginal deputation was in Maitland as part of the welcoming ceremony for the Prince of Wales’ visit and was presented to the Prince by the Mayor of Maitland. The Prince shook all their hands and graciously responded to the words of welcome from Miss Ferguson.\footnote{Raymond Terrace Examiner 30/7/1920} The issues of how and why Aboriginal people were given royal assent and the tagged comments as being the last surviving members of a tribe I intend to discuss later in more detail.

On another occasion, the State Governor, accompanied by Dame Margaret Davidson, visited Port Stephens and the Karuah mission school in 1921. They were greeted with all the official pomp and pageantry by the Aboriginal School children, Aboriginal residents, the teacher Miss Ferguson and the AIM missionaries. There were presentations of boomerangs and flowers made to the dignitaries. The official party chatted with the community for some time and stated that they enjoyed the time they spent at Karuah.\footnote{Raymond Terrace Examiner 9/12/1921}

The \textit{Raymond Terrace Examiner} reported in 1922 that Miss Ferguson, who had been in charge of the Aboriginal school for the past three years, had recently been appointed the Matron of the Reserve. The reporter expressed how she had done so much for the advancement and benefit of the dark races over the years as a Methodist missionary and praised both her pioneering work in places like New Guinea and her 2 year leadership of the school in Nambucca Heads. Evidently, she had been hospitalised for months with a knee injury before her transfer to Karuah.\footnote{Raymond terrace Examiner 9/6/1922}

In 1932, \textit{The Australian Evangel} loved to report the benefits of the influence of Christianity on Aboriginal children. There was one story about Aboriginal children who made donations of pennies for boys and girls in hospitals for Christmas. They were boasting that they sent five shillings to one hospital and another five shillings to the childrens hospital and were saving for the next visit of “The Memorial Van” with the boomerang on it.\footnote{The Australian Evangel 1/10/1932}
The Memorial Van was the evangelistic showpiece that travelled around country New South Wales and Queensland as a means of spreading the Christian faith and religion to smaller country towns, stations and Aboriginal camps. Leonard Long covered many miles to give lantern services in many of these more isolated areas informing people of the Christian work they had been doing for Aboriginal people. In so doing he recruited more Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to the service of the Lord and established a stronger interstate religious dynasty.

Aboriginal people and their children on missions mostly lived in extreme poverty. They had no legal rights under intrusive protective legislation that took away any human rights and, in most cases, their dignity. Aboriginal children were constantly exposed to overt racism whenever they came into contact with mainstream society. Because missionaries showed some kindness to Aboriginal children, they repaid it with a small amount of money they really couldn’t afford, giving what they had to an affluent society that forced them out of the mainstream public school system into segregated Aboriginal schools. The standard of education that they had received ensured their low positions in the chronic cycle of poverty.

The establishment of an Aboriginal School at Karuah was warmly welcomed by the parents of Aboriginal children. It didn’t, however, provide a straight-forward solution to Aboriginal

education. The success of the school depended on the relationship between teachers, students and parents. As is the case everywhere, some teachers’ attitudes towards Aboriginal students were better than others. It was never about the quality of education students received because the Aboriginal curriculum was never meant to contain anything of value, only the basics to survive as farm/station hands and domestic servants.

All teachers have a profound influence on the lives of the children they teach, and this is particularly the case with Aboriginal children. It may be their first exposure to situations where they are totally under white control, unaided or unsupported by parents or extended family and kin. In this environment, they can be quite vulnerable and intimidated and even reduced to questioning their self-worth as individuals. This would be particularly the case if their teacher isn’t knowledgeable and understanding of their cultural background and the issues of life on Aboriginal missions.

These negative experiences can be exacerbated tenfold for these children if their teacher harbours any racist beliefs or attitudes. The school experience can all too quickly disintegrate into being the last place an Aboriginal child or children wants to be. Many rebel with the limited options of fight or flight, rejecting any form of education being offered in the classroom. The evidence pertaining to the Karuah Aboriginal School suggests that, in the main, the teachers seemed to provide a reasonably good environment for the Aboriginal children to learn during the day. Aunty Iris Russell recalls one particular teacher, Miss Stewart, as being a good teacher who came from the Blue Mountains area, but, unfortunately, Miss Stewart had to give up teaching when she contracted an illness. She was a diabetic. Miss Stewart had to give it up because she started to lose her fingers - she lost two or three fingers.377 The next replacement came and she was described by Aunty Iris as a Pommy lady called Miss Herbert. Aunty Iris had fond memories of her school years on the ‘Mish’ and in her later teenage years assisted in teaching the younger children.378

Aunty Iris spoke about working with the mission manager and his wife, Mr and Mrs Wilcox, as part of her role assisting younger children in the classroom, stating that: “he was a good teacher, to the kids, but, I left school then.”379 Mum affirms Aunty Iris’ statement that Wilcox was a decent mission manager and teacher. The next manager was Mr Nossiter. Mum said he wasn’t too bad, but she didn’t like his successor Mr Crossing. Wilcox and most managers didn’t live on the ‘Mish’, opting to live in the Karuah community at the end of Mustons Road where a

377 Iris Russell & Colleen Conversation 1999
378 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry Conversation 1999
379 ibid
house was provided by the Protection Board for the mission manager’s family. They recalled how “He used to ride his bike across to the mission.”

Aunty Iris spoke highly of Mr Wilcox and was impressed with his background, of how he had “...something to do with the Navy, at Yarralumla House at Sydney and ahh, then that era, he got transferred then, he went into teaching and that’s when he came to Karuah, but he got on really well with the students.” Aunty Iris and mum spoke about how the girls would go to the Wilcox house one afternoon a week. They had to go over to his wife’s place and they’d sit on the veranda and she’d give them sewing lessons one afternoon a week. They said that even the boys had sewing lessons at a different time and couldn’t see the sense of them learning to sew, but they had too. Sewing was part of the primary curriculum for many years, especially for girls. In the context, it was also training for domestic service.

Nevertheless, there were complaints made about the teachers’ treatment of Aboriginal children at the mission school. Most of them were not dealt with internally but others found their way to the department. There was one incident that ruffled a few feathers that came in the form of complaints from two parents regarding the teacher Mrs Elsie Herbert. The two complaints were in the form of correspondence sent to the Department of Instruction and were made by Mrs Annie Manton and Aunty Elizabeth Ping. The letters concerned the physical abuse meted out to their children by Mrs Herbert.

These are extracts from the letters of complaint made by Mrs Annie Manton and Aunty Elizabeth Ping that were forwarded to Miss Herbert from Chief Inspector B. Harkness. Mrs Manton states:

> I have four children in family three go to the mission school. I don’t live on the mission is it a fair go that these children the boy age 9, girls 6 & 4 years get punched shut fist and nocked about by the teacher who was sent here for health sake. Nerves is her trouble the children are very compeling of being sore about the body are we to send our children to school if the teacher is still nocking them about.

A similar letter was posted by Aunty Elizabeth Ping:

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380 ibid
381 ibid
382 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry Conversation 1999
383 Letter Chief School Inspector B. C. Harkness, dated 3 march 1938
I have three children at school age. Two are being continually punched on the back once clouted with a hard covered book. The school Mistress, Miss Herberts we believe has been put here for health saks (bad nerves). Can you please tell me sir are we forced to send our children. I quite understand that our children wants education and education is not brutality. The first week of school this year the school mistress marked bruised and blistered the left hand of my child.  

Elsie Herbert responded to the complaints with correspondence to the Chief Inspector of schools, Mr Harkness, of the Department of Education. In the letters she defends her actions by claiming that Mrs Ping was the cause of all the problems by making false statements about her, and she only punished Zoe (4 slaps with the cane) as a last resort because she was disobedient. Herbert was able to provide previous filed Unsatisfactory School Attendance reports stating that:

Mother hostile through falsehoods taken home. Child refuses to do what I tell it.

I guess you can read whatever you want into the last comment made by Elsie Herbert, but the teacher/student relationship, for whatever reason, dissipated, especially in terms of respect. It would appear that Elsie taught Aboriginal children with a firm hand and a length of cane when needed. It became the last place that Zoe wanted to be and her absence was duly noted by Elsie. There was a preliminary investigation by the Protection Board in the school which, typically, resulted in the disregarding the complaints of the parents, Mrs Ping and Mrs Manton.

Interviews with some of the older children seemed to support Miss Herbert’s views that the punishment of Zoe was not as severe as stated in the complaints. However, one is left to ponder under what conditions the older children’s responses were procured. This evidence seems to have led to the official opinion that the parents of the children, more specifically Mrs Manton, had maintained a previous grudge against Mrs Herbert. This apparently supported the evidence of Miss Herbert, as she had complained to the police about the non-attendance of Mrs Manton’s children at the Karuah Aboriginal School. There were problems with the Aboriginal school, but on the whole most children, according to Aunty Iris, were reasonably contented with most of the teachers.

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384 Letter Chief School Inspector B. C. Harkness, dated 3 march 1938
385 Form 2. Unsatisfactory School Attendance: Public Instruction (Amendment) Act 1916 Section 19 not dated
The Karuah Aboriginal School was probably no different to many other Aboriginal mission, reserve and station schools in New South Wales. The simple difference was that it was a small mission which, in turn, provided for only a small number of Aboriginal children in attendance. This would have made it a more relaxed and easily managed school. John Ramsland in his book, *Rainbow Beach Man*, points out Les Ridgeway’s differing view of Karuah and Purfleet Aboriginal schools both of which he successfully attended as a student. He describes Karuah School as having a warm, pleasant and positive environment but lacking in teacher qualifications, in contrast to the military style school of Purfleet.\(^{386}\)

In another published article, Ramsland mentions how, in the early days, the Purfleet Aboriginal School was reasonably well organised by a succession of able teachers provided by the Department of Public Instruction. It was further supplemented by devout missionaries teaching Sunday school through their evangelical programs for the children. So the Aboriginal children at Purfleet mission, a little earlier than the Aboriginal children at Karuah, were given a very basic elementary education heavily indoctrinated with missionary Christian ideologies.\(^{387}\)

In her book *Through My Eyes*, Ella Simon wrote about her life, particularly on the Purfleet Mission at Taree, and provides some interesting information about her education at the mission school there. She makes what seems to be a couple of curious comments about her time spent as a student at the Purfleet Aboriginal School stating that, “Education was a luxury.”\(^{388}\) Why was it a luxury? It’s an intriguing statement from a woman who embraced Christianity and, through her work with the church, actually assisted in assimilating Aboriginal children. She doesn’t say it is a fundamental right that all children are entitled to an education or that it could be used as a process to assimilate Aboriginal people in the long term.

What was she really saying? Perhaps she meant it was a means of merely occupying Aboriginal children during the day while only teaching them the fundamentals or elements of a Western education. Prior to its establishment there would have been limited exposure to any aspect of education outside of their homes. Maybe she meant it in the sense of the previously denied access to the teaching of the basics of reading and writing. The Aboriginal Schools Curriculum of 1916 only required that children in Aboriginal schools be taught to the level of the end of third class. They were also taught by untrained teachers who probably didn’t have the ability, even if they did receive instruction, to deliver an acceptable standard of elementary school education.

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388 Ella Simon *Through my eyes*: Blackburn, Vic.: Collins Dove, 1987 p.66
Comments made by Charles ‘Chicka’ Dixon, one of our great Aboriginal leaders and political activists, were directed towards the poor level of schooling given to Aboriginal children. He fought for civil and political rights for Aboriginal people when we weren’t afforded those rights under oppressive government policies and laws. In Fletcher (1989), he ironically explains the value of his mission education that he acquired at Wallaga Lake: “When I left the mission I couldn’t write my name. I can see the value of education fully. I had to go to gaol to get it.”

He later spoke about the three so-called universities where he acquired his education: Long Bay Gaol, Grafton Gaol and Goulburn Gaol. He received and saw nothing of value from his exposure to education provided during his childhood at his mission school.

The reality was that, from 1916, they were taught a rudimentary Aboriginal school syllabus that would prepare them to become the underclass and a labour pool of servants to an ethnocentric emerging Australian society. So, for Aboriginal students, their employment future had already been planned. This is mentioned in the report on the syllabus of Aboriginal schools:

*Experience teaches very conclusively that the boys become farm labourers and the girls domestic servants. Our aim therefore has been to make school life as practical as possible and to fit both boys and girls to fill positions referred to with some degree of credit.*

In her honours thesis, Heather Goodall (1982) critically evaluates this same ideology expressed by the president of the State Childrens Relief Department, Mr A. W. Green, in regard to Aboriginal children: “The very large proportion of boys become employees of agriculturists, while the girls become domestic servants.” Goodall realistically claims that the Aborigines Protection Board persisted with the scheme because it provided a mechanism, not for training Aborigines but for removing them from their communities. The board began apprenticing young Aboriginal adolescents even before it had any legislative power to do so.

Eventually, the Protection Board was granted greater legislative power which it utilised fully by amending the 1909 Protection Act to enforce what they termed as the apprenticeship system. Aboriginal schools and the curriculum became the board’s vehicle for carrying out training for the future of the Aboriginal labouring underclass. This form of Aboriginal employment would

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391 Heather Goodall, *A history of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales, 1909-1939* BA (hons)1982 University of Sydney. p72
economically benefit the newly developing Australian economy while maintaining Aboriginal people in subservient positions. As Ramsland states:

*Clearly, the occupational destiny of and lowly status for each child in an Aboriginal School were stamped out for them in the Syllabus. They were to come under the apprenticeship amendments of the 1909 Act*.

Beverly (nee Simms) Manton attended the Aboriginal school on the Karuah mission and has fond memories of the school house that was situated on the hilltop overlooking the river. She said it was a two classroom school with a shed out the back where the boys learned woodwork and made things for the mission houses and the girls, of course, learnt to sew. The playground had some fixed equipment made by the men on the mission. Beverly’s memories of the school were very positive and she describes it as quite beautiful with the small number of Aboriginal children in attendance having river views.

Aunty Iris Russell recalls her time spent at the Karuah Aboriginal mission as a student: “I stayed at school til I was 18, to help the schoolteacher out because I was taking so many of her classes off her hands. Like the younger ones.” She reinforces how a restricted curriculum was taught in the mission schools and the idea that perhaps it was a means of occupying the children during the day. Fortunately, she did not enter the Aborigines Protection Board’s desired role as a domestic servant as had other Aboriginal children at that time and earlier.

Ella Simon makes another very valid comment in her book to support this mode of education that they all received on mission schools: “Whether you had an education or not, you still lived the same; you still just got like everyone else.” This is a really important statement because it reinforces the fact that it would not have mattered if any Aboriginal kids had attended a high school and gained their Higher School Certificate: they were forever consigned to the fact that they were either domestic servants or labourers. Clearly, a better education would not have empowered and changed the lives of Aboriginal people living on missions as it was meant to do. Only breaking away from missions or reserves offered better opportunities, even though many racist attitudes had to be overcome. Still, Aboriginal people broke away from their missions and the power that the Protections Boards had to maintain control over their lives. Sydney and other capital cities provided opportunities for employment and, in some cases, careers were made.

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392 John Ramsland (2009) Conference paper ANME Historical Perspectives on Education
394 Iris Russell & Colleen (1999) Conversation
Men like Doug Nichols, Harold Blair and Reginald Saunders paved the way for others to follow, leaving their deep footprints in a concrete jungle that was never meant for them.\textsuperscript{396} There would have been no local businesses willing to offer any form of employment to an educated or uneducated Aboriginal person unless it was menial labouring work. The racial attitudes of the time would not have allowed it, and the Karuah mainstream community is an appropriate and good example of this. It is clearly reflected in the lengths that white citizens went to exclude all Aboriginal children from their school. The same people weren’t prepared to employ and accept any Aboriginal people in a position that had standing in their community.

As I commented earlier, the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and its amended Act foretold the future employment of Aboriginal people as the under-class to be domestic servants and farm or station hands. So, the emphasis on further education beyond the elementary level carried no weight or value; it didn’t matter as you lived the same life as everyone else on a mission. There were only very limited opportunities in mainstream employment as labourers. Aboriginal people had their employment prospects predetermined under protective legislation, racist attitudes, mainstream attitudes and sub-standard education. Any ability to change their lives did not exist.

In the late 1930s, an ‘Equal with white’ education policy was developed for mission schools. It was revised and published in 1940. The Board was considering the notion of merging Aboriginal children into the public school system. It was put on the table, but having decades of segregation behind them, they realised that it was going to be a long term process. Instead, the curriculum was upgraded to a six year course of study, but only to a fourth grade standard. The Welfare Board which replaced the Protection Board hoped that this limited education would help absorb Aboriginal children of admixture blood more easily into society.\textsuperscript{397}

The Board’s Annual Report 1937 revealed its commitment to this approach whereby it stated that established special schools on reserves and Aboriginal stations were being staffed with trained teachers appointed by the Department of Education, whose work was subject to regular examinations by District School Inspectors and copies of reports furnished to the board. It can be stated that the question of raising the standard of instruction in these schools by improving the syllabus was now the subject of consideration by the Department.\textsuperscript{398}

\textsuperscript{397}James Fletcher. (1889). \textit{Clean clad and courteous: A history of Aboriginal education}. Sydney, Southwood.
\textsuperscript{398} (1938). Annual Report of the Board of Protection of Aborigines year ended 30 June 1937
Other statements at the 1937 Commonwealth Native Affairs conference were made to express the extent that the government was willing to go to achieve these goals. At that conference A. O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, stated:

*Are we going to have a population of one million blacks in the Commonwealth or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were ever any Aborigines in Australia?*³⁹⁹

This was a very strong and committed statement by the government as an attempt to wipe away every aspect of Aboriginal identity and their cultural existence. Appropriate Western education would become a crucial component in this master plan to whitewash Australia’s Indigenous population, contrary to many white parents’ vigorous protests. The 1937 conference clearly articulated the government’s intention for Aboriginal Australia at a federal level and Sir Ronald Wilson quoted these same words sixty years later in an Australian conference 1997:

*This conference believes that the destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end. Nobody who knows about these groups could deny that their members are socially and culturally deprived. We must improve their lot so that they can take their place economically and socially in the general community. Once this is done, the breakup of such groups will be rapid.*⁴⁰⁰

During the 1940s, Aboriginal children in New South Wales mission schools finally received an upgrade in the syllabus and were to be taught by a qualified trained teacher.⁴⁰¹ The mission school system had provided an apartheid model that instituted long term segregation of Aboriginal children from mainstream society - one that pleased many Australian parents, especially in country towns. Fortunately, over time, the government’s policy of assimilation began to weaken the power to exclude Aboriginal children from public schools. This was further assisted by dwindling Board and department finances to maintain Aboriginal schools. This meant that more Aboriginal children were forced into the mainstream school systems. Again, this strained the racial relations between white parents and Aboriginal people.

Grogan explains that, during the 1940s, the Aboriginal school thrived at Karuah with a healthy enrolment and numbers above twenty and no indication from the department of it closing. In 1948, the Ridgeway family returned to Karuah and their son attended Waratah Public School; he did quite well coming third in his class, 3A. Their accommodation was midway between the mission school and the Karuah Public school and they tried to enrol him in the Karuah Public School.402

Being Aboriginal, they approached the teacher of the Aboriginal school, Albert Crossing, for enrolment and upon assessment found the boy’s education well above the standard of his school. Albert directed the Ridgeways to enrol their son in the Karuah Public School, which they did, and the school accepted him without hesitation. It didn’t take long for the Parents and Citizens Association to lodge a complaint with the Minister of Education.403 Old habits had not waned over the years. The letter stated:

The opinions of the parents and citizens of Karuah are that he should attend the Aboriginal school, as it is less than one mile from the public school, and much closer to where he lives than the public school; in the home that he lives is an Aboriginal of Aboriginal Blood and she attends school on the mission.404

The inspector of schools investigated the complaint and found that the Ridgeways resided in a house between the schools. He found no evidence of the stated Aboriginal girl living in the house and found the boy to be clean and bright. Unquestionably, the Parents and Citizens Associations concerns were that this boy’s attendance would open the door for all Aboriginal children to attend their public school. This incident created confusion as, since the establishment of the government assimilation policy, very few Aboriginal children had been excluded from schools and, under the Aborigines Protection Boards Exemption Certificates, more Aboriginal parents were entitled to enrol their children in public schools.405

In 1943, an amendment to the NSW Aborigines Protection Act introduced a provision which enabled an Aborigine, whom it believed had achieved the desired behavioural pattern, to apply to be exempted from the provisions of the Act and Regulations, (exemption certificate) and be given the status of a normal citizen, thus, on paper allowing them the same rights and privileges as other Australians. Lippmann discusses the use of these exemption certificates, or passports as they were known:

Under the proclamation, Aborigines were banished from towns, villages or farms and passports issued only to those who agreed to conduct themselves in a peaceful, inoffensive and honest manner.406

The Aborigines Protection Board called them passports and, in a sense, that was what they were - passports to another world not contained on a mission or reserve. Aboriginal people had another word for them, Dog Tags or Dog Licences. For most Aboriginal people confined to the reserves, accepting the so- called passport meant you were a good and well trained dog. They were seen as loyal and obedient to the government that controlled your life as your white master’s trained pet. As time passed, the passports or exemption certificates gave way to more immersion and a welfare approach to assimilation which included moving all Aboriginal children into the public school system and out of Aboriginal schools.

Beverly Manton recalls this time period when she and all the Aboriginal children were allowed to merge with the Karuah Public School. As she puts it, “The government decided that the Aboriginal children should attend the Karuah Public School in town, much to the protesting of the white parents”.407 The Karuah parents’ protest gained momentum against any merger of Aboriginal children into their public school. The emotional fallout from this new government venture spilled into the Karuah mainstream community and further fuelled racial tensions and relations between Blacks and Whites.

The intense levels of racist rage from the white community in Karuah are clearly visible in a letter of protest to the Department of Education that can be found in Fletcher (1989). The author is convinced that many people in the town are of the same opinion as her description of Aboriginal people and their children. The author of the letter states:

They have little if any moral. They use lurid, disgusting language-children included. They have dirty heads-even when they are in their teens. They do not help themselves or try to do anything in life. The children are not easily taught and thus would tend to hinder the progress of the white children.408

Many of those Karuah residents carried the same sickening racist attitudes, but on this occasion, the government’s assimilation policy took precedent over the racist attitudes of the white Karuah community. Beverly Manton explains how Aboriginal people felt after being allowed to attend the Karuah Public School: “Aboriginal children were subjected to much hatred and were left with a feeling of being unwanted and unwelcomed in this town.”

That feeling was an integral part of the Karuah community structure and was always present in the psyche of every Aboriginal child that attended the school. I have often wondered if it has ever waned or just crouches tensely under a thin veil of political correctness waiting to emerge given the opportunity.

Aunty Iris also recalls the closure of the mission school. She talked about how the government assimilation process moved the school down to the ‘Point’. The ‘Point’ was the name Karuah was known and referred to by mission residents. She had long since left the mission school and did not have the opportunity to attend the public school at Karuah.

In 1955, the merging of Aboriginal schools into public schools had been set in motion, along with the Department of Education’s new policy in relation to Aboriginal education. This supported the government’s plans for assimilation with a view to merging all Aboriginal children into the public school system. The department provided the following reasoning to mainstream society for its new policy:

It is the policy of this department to encourage the assimilation of Aboriginal children as members of the Australian community by permitting their attendance at public schools. Nevertheless, if a principal of the school is of the opinion that there are circumstances in the home conditions of the Aborigine children whose enrolment is sought which justify refusal of deferment of enrolment or if he is aware that substantial opposition to such enrolment exists in the local community, he should inform the district inspector of schools and await the Departmental decision on the matter.

The merging of Aboriginal children into the public school system didn’t happen overnight and many parents maintained their objections to the whole process. This was more apparent especially where there were comparatively larger numbers of Aboriginal children residing. Karuah being a smaller community meant that Aboriginal students proportionally made up a healthy percentage of the student population. Across the state, conflict was inevitable and problems between Whites and Blacks continued as more Aboriginal children entered mainstream classrooms.

I recall one particular incident when I was in First Class and my brother Ricky had just started Kindergarten. Being a small school, we shared the same classroom, which was then termed Infants. We had received a new Infants teacher and the two classes were sitting on the mat, legs crossed, in front of the teacher while she was reading a story to us. I was sitting next to Ricky whose nickname was Jap and if you saw him you would know why, when Ricky turned to me and said he needed to go to the toilet. So I told him to put his hand up and tell the teacher. It took a while before she acknowledged him. Now Ricky was hard to understand at the best of times and I had to tell her what he wanted. She told me that he would have to wait until recess before he could go to the toilet and of course Ricky couldn’t wait and wet himself there on the mat. I was told to take him home to get him changed, which I did.
When I told mum what had happened, let me just say she wasn’t very happy at all. She grasped our hands and quickly marched us back down to the school. I think my feet only touched the ground a few times! She stormed into our teacher’s classroom grabbing our teacher by the hair of her head and dragged her out of the classroom onto the veranda. Now, Mum was only a skinny small woman and our teacher was quite tall, a good six or seven inches taller than Mum. With our new teacher hunched over, mum pointed at Ricky’s wet pants and she launched into a very loud verbal attack at her. Mum shouted words to the effect that if she ever humiliated either of her sons in front of the other kids like that again she would make her wish she hadn’t.

By this time the whole school had witnessed what had transpired. Student faces blocked out the classroom windows with their teachers beside them, one being the principal who was now trying to calm Mum down. I recall just standing there looking at the old wooden floor feeling really embarrassed. I had never seen Mum like this and it wouldn’t be the last time. When Mum calmed down and released the mass of hair follicles that was made up in a bun at the back of the teacher’s head, she explained to the principal about the incident. There were apologises made to her and reassurances that it wouldn’t happen again. She told the principal if it ever did she would report it to the department and have them deal with it. Needless to say we never had any other problems with that teacher again and I am sure she understood the meaning of what humiliation felt like.

Other than that incident, most of my memories as a student attending the Karuah Public School were good and most teachers treated us quite fairly most of the time. Like all teachers who came and went at the school some were better than others. Very few were memorable. There was one teacher who stayed most of his career at Karuah and I hold a great deal of respect for him as a good teacher and human being. John Grogan was an asset to the Karuah Public School and I have never heard a bad thing said about him from any Aboriginal children that he taught. John accepted the task of writing the centennial history of the Karuah Public school in 1984 and that unpublished typescript has become a valuable resource for this chapter.

The Aboriginal children got along with most of the other children in the playground because life is simple when you’re that young. All you want to do is play and have fun. However, conflict was always inevitable because racial attitudes emerged from parental influences. The thing about racism is that it’s something you are not born with and it is not part of nature. It’s something learned and taught to you by racists, and there are many willing teachers available. Fortunately, there was a large presence of Aboriginal children at the school and the older children looked after or protected the younger ones.
I recall a time when a friend I grew up with, Ricky Manton, and I made friends with one of the children in the school when we were just out of or still in infants. This new friend asked us to come around to his house after school and play. From memory, I think he had some toy he wanted to show off. When we arrived at the house, his mother was in the front yard gardening and she wasn’t impressed when we entered the yard. She told her son very sternly to go inside the house and told us very abruptly to go home and not to ever come around there ever again.

I didn’t think much of it then; we just thought that she was a mean person because she wasn’t very nice to us. All of our young lives we lived on the mission and the only times we went to the Karuah township we were accompanied by a parent or an older relative. I told my mother about what happened and she was quite annoyed at us and not the boys’ mother. She sat me down and spoke to me in a stern toned voice and explained that white people from the Point didn’t like black people - it’s the way it’s always been. I was told never to go to anyone’s home after school and play only with kids from the mission.

I didn’t quite understand what she told me at the time, but did as I was told and the older I got the more I realised we weren’t treated the same. Little incidents that seemed like nothing before started to make sense in terms of the relationship between Whites and Blacks in Karuah. I attended the school ten years after the official merger with the Aboriginal school and the same racial attitudes of parents remained. I believe the civil rights movement in the sixties impacted greatly on the overt racial behaviour of most people in Australian society. It didn’t mean that racist beliefs had faded into oblivion, only there were social and political correctness. There were now consequences for displaying open racism and people were more cautious in their behaviour, employing a subtle and covert approach to fulfil their desires for racism.

The number of Aboriginal people and their children on the ‘Mish’ had steadily grown over the years, which raised the Aboriginal attendance figures for the Karuah Public School. It was and is still a small coastal country town so Aboriginal children contributed a healthy percentage of the student population. I am not sure if that was a contributing factor or not, but in 1999 we had the first Aboriginal Karuah School captains, Alyssa Feeney and Mathew Gallagher. Regardless of the reasons for their being elected, it took forty four years for that milestone to be achieved and Alyssa went on to complete her High School Certificate and a Bachelor degree at the University of Newcastle.

High school became another very important issue for all Aboriginal children living on missions which, in turn, impacted on the number of Kooris who attained tertiary qualifications. The racial issues and subsequent denial of access to the public school system, Karuah in particular, that I
have presented, hopefully provides a portal to understanding the severed relationship between Aboriginal people and Western education. There have been generations of Koori children in segregated Aboriginal schools that did nothing to change life on the mission.

Even after merging into the public school system, bias, prejudice and racist attitudes from students and teachers were ever-present. White parents and the mainstream community continued their campaign to lobby for the exclusion of Aboriginal children from the school. All of which stripped away any motivation or desire to remain in this hostile institution, and soured any form of Western education for them in the future. You can count on one hand the number of Aboriginal children that graduated with a Higher School Certificate from the Karuah mission. I was not one of them and how I ended up here at the University of Newcastle as a lecturer is another long story.

The Aboriginals’ fight for their rightful place in the classroom has been a long protracted battle. Many factors contributed to changing government policy, but unquestionably it was the courage and determination of Aboriginal people at the grassroots community level that prevailed. I mentioned the late great “Chicka” Dixon earlier and other Aboriginal political activists have played the historical key role of forcing the country to examine its past. The Karuah community has played a crucial part in the national political struggle and, as shown in this chapter, one of the major platforms over the past century has been the demand for Aboriginal kids to gain equal access in education. I will examine Karuah and its significance in the political struggle for the right of Aboriginal people in the next chapter.

This chapter demonstrates and highlights that more research can be done by historians into the existence of a large number of Aboriginal schools that existed in New South Wales in the first half of the twentieth century. Further research will interpret the Aboriginal experience and existence during that significant period. It was a sub-system of schools and schooling on the majority of reserves, missions and stations in New South Wales.
Chapter Seven

Aboriginal Political Insight: Taking back our rights

_It has to be understood by observers of Aboriginal politics in Australia that all governments’ primary objectives on the surface is to deal with the bricks and mortar issues while beneath the covers social engineering is going on._

These are the words of Michael Anderson, a high profile Aboriginal political black power activist of the 1960s and 1970s. He is one of those proud Aboriginal warriors who founded the Aboriginal Tent Embassy that historic day in Canberra in 1972, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter. His comments were contained in a written submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Professor James Anaya. Anaya maintains the brief on human rights and freedoms of Indigenous peoples around the world. He met with Anderson in 2009. Anderson’s words underpin the long and arduous political struggle that Aboriginal people have had and continue to fight. The same issues, from the legacy of colonisation - the lack of human rights and Indigenous rights as the first peoples of Australia.

There have been numerous political problems that Aboriginal people have had to endure since the colonisation of Australia. One that remains at the heart of everything relates to the core of Aboriginal peoples’ existence, that of land rights. Dispossession and theft of traditional country have left Aboriginal people void of their spiritual and economic status, which is still being measured and assessed today by every Aboriginal community. An explanation will be provided as to how and why the land was taken from Aboriginal people and, just as importantly, a discussion of the issue Michael Anderson refers to in his United Nations submission on government social engineering will take place. Anderson talks about our never-ending fight against prescribed government assimilation under relentless government racist policies to eradicate a distinct and unique Aboriginal identity.

This chapter will examine and provide information on the political history and struggle of the Worimi people for their land and human rights and the connection to the Karuah Mission. I will discuss the establishment of the early Aboriginal political organisations, including the first all-Aboriginal united political organisation to form in Australia, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), which included a number of prominent Worimi activists.  

intend to show that this and other Aboriginal political organisations along the east coast of Australia were established to combat the sinister policies and powers of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. Further, I will proceed to describe how these legislative government powers were unleashed on an unsuspecting Aboriginal population. There were government policies that were intended for the total cultural extinction of the Aboriginal people including cultural genocide.

The *New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act of 1909* would become the catalyst for the social and economic problems that Aboriginal people experienced and are still working through today. The examination of this legislation will be undertaken, as well as the White Australia Policy, which echoes the racial mindset of the Australian government and its developing post-colonial society. I will provide details of other significant Aboriginal political milestones in Australia that have impacted on the Worimi population. Major political issues like the Federal 1967 referendum that changed the platform for Aboriginal rights across the board. An analysis of Aboriginal Land Rights is detailed and crucial to the Aboriginal political movement and a means to understanding Aboriginal cultural significance.

It could be argued that the Aboriginal political struggle began not long after Arthur Phillip’s long boats were beached on the shores of Botany Bay at La Perouse on 18 January, 1788. Later, the First Fleet moved into Sydney Harbour and the Union Jack was raised in Sydney Cove on 26 January. 1788. By this time, the whole fleet was anchored in Sydney Cove and the British government had, in effect, confiscated Aboriginal lands in favour of a convict settlement or an open-air prison. Before the First Fleet had sailed, Arthur Phillip had been declared Governor of New South Wales extending from Cape York in the north to the southern extremity of the mainland. Thus, the British government had already declared a huge amount of territory theirs to possess.

Once the new British colony established itself on Australian soil, it was inevitable that Aboriginal people would be dispossessed of their traditional lands. Progressively, as the colony expanded, Aboriginal people were mistreated and forced to relinquish their relationship to country. Retaliation and open conflict was unavoidable. Violence and conflict was a marked feature of the Australian political landscape and would continue so for the next two hundred years in one form or another. The legal and racial justification for this abhorrent behaviour towards Aboriginal people came under Europe’s *International Law of Nations* and, in particular, *Terra Nullius*, meaning land belonging to no one.
On the whole, acceptance of terra nullius profoundly affected the white approach to indigenous issues: "Aborigines, as it were, did not exist before the invasion and those who survived were owed no rights except those of legal children who would ultimately inherit no more than the rights of other Australians." 413

It was James Cook and Joseph Banks who recommended the settlement of Australia when Cook was credited for its initial discovery, although history has proved otherwise. While his ship was being repaired, Cook and Banks observed Australia’s Indigenous inhabitants and their reports to England indicated that the land would eventually be deemed Terra Nullius. Aboriginal people had obviously occupied the land, living the traditional lifecycle for many thousands of years. Cooks and Banks accurately observed the hunter-gathering lifestyle but, at times, romanticised it with images of Rousseau’s stereotype of the noble savage, which clearly placed them at the bottom rung on the evolutionary scale.414

It was from their reports that the scene was set for how the colonial administration would colonise Australia and its Indigenous population. This impacted greatly on the treatment of Aboriginal people once the English claimed their traditional lands, because they had not attained the type of living standards of so-called civilised man. James Cook did not represent the norm for a British naval officer of the time. He did not come from wealth, standing or a privileged background. He was from a poor family, which gave him a greater sense of the inequality on every street corner of London at the time. He saw raw sewerage and, therefore disease, dumped and running freely on the streets of London.415 He was therefore able to see a stark difference in living conditions:

They live in a tranquillity which is not disturbed by the inequality of Condition. The Earth and Sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for Life. They covet not Magnificent Houses, Household stuff, etc, they live in a Warm and Fine Climate; and enjoy a very Wholesome Air. 416

King George had issued strict instructions to Governor Phillip before he sailed to the newly found continent - he was to: “by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with

them and to punish those who wantonly destroy them”. Phillip, of course, did initially adhere to this order but it was quickly broken and the impact of disease and violence was catastrophic. Delano identifies the outcomes of colonisation for its Indigenous population:

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

The colonisation of Australia denied Aboriginal people any form of political status; they were seen as just primitive and savage. They weren’t even considered worthy of human status. The ensuing treatment of Aboriginal people by settlers and colonial governments could only be described as horrific debauchery. Not only did Aboriginal people lack political rights, but basic human rights also were not afforded them. The Aboriginal death toll rose significantly as convict and free settlers spread further inland and along the coastline, and many died defending their rights to their land. Large-scale massacres and murders were a common feature of colonisation, seemingly caused by little provocation and justification other than their total eradication from the newly acquired lands.

Competition and greed saw new worlds colonised quickly and brutally before rival European countries could stake their claims to lands. After the frontier days in New South Wales it would be missionaries who were charged with the care and protection of Aboriginal people. They were to protect and educate the Aborigines on newly formed missions and reserves that emerged under the reign of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and its earlier forms. Delano discusses how colonisation treated the Indigenous inhabitants:

_Australia was settled not too long after Europe had experienced an Industrial Revolution, and when the Europeans ‘discovered’ new lands in the period of industrial expansion, their views about the superior importance of their own interests, supported by pure greed and the view that in Christianity they were bringing that supreme gift to the heathens which would restore the balance, commonly led to their ignoring the prior claims of the ‘natives’- whom they often dehumanised, first in the use or perversion of laws to deprive them of their lives and property, and later in law itself._

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418 Amaso Delano 1817, p448 found in Damaris, Bairstow. (1993). "With the best will in the world: Some records of early white contact with the Gampignal on the Australian Agricultural Company's estate at Port Stephens." _Aboriginal History_ 17(1). p5
In the later part of the 19th century, dramatic changes were about to take place for Aborigines on the eastern coastal region of New South Wales. Earlier, English fundamentalists from the anti-slavery society, after successfully abolishing slavery, turned their attention to the treatment and conditions of Indigenous peoples within the powerful British Empire. During the 1830s and 1840s these reformist groups held considerable political power in English Parliament, which filtered down to the colonial administrators, much to the dismay of many. The consequences of Australia’s violent invasion were reflected in a number of reports received in London concerning the Tasmanian massacres and many others, which fuelled the Christian fundamentalists’ convictions. Also, an alternative economic process needed to be explored other than the expensive Aboriginal warring that was hindering the whole process of colonisation.420

The fundamentalists and missionaries successfully lobbied the British government to address the indiscriminate slaughter of the Australian Aborigines and to recognise they were entitled to hold some land in Australia. It resulted in the House of Commons appointing a Select Committee in 1836/7 to inquire into and address the needs of Australian Aboriginal people. The committee spoke about a plain and sacred right for Aborigines to acquire their own piece of land. Most of the land reserved for Aborigines, was allocated for church missions and hunting reserves on poor or distant land that bore little or no interest for the agricultural and pastoral advancement of the settlers.421

By the 1880's there were a number of government ordered reserves in New South Wales, and those Aborigines who had been rounded up were now prisoners of the state, the remainder of the Aboriginal population being left to live wretchedly outside country township or on pastoral properties.422

The early church missions and hunting reserves were seen as viable solutions to the growing Aboriginal ‘problem’. The government allocated tracts of land where Aborigines could live out their lives out of sight and out of mind. Many of these early reserves produced sustainable farming economic activities that supported many dislocated Aboriginal families. There was minimal control on these reserves and Aboriginal people were free to pursue agricultural interests for their families and communities. It is important to understand that the land for independent Aboriginal farms was largely gained as a result of the Aboriginal people

themselves writing petitions and seeking help to regain land within their own country. From the 1880s through to 1920 Aboriginal people had regained some 26,000 acres of prime coastal land in New South Wales.

These independent farms were not like the tightly controlled reserves of the 1930s onwards. There were only one or two Aboriginal families holding between forty to, in some cases, 500 acres of land which they cleared and cropped, and on which they built homesteads and held livestock. These farms were noted for their incredible success and some 85% of Aboriginal people in New South Wales during this time period were independently running their own affairs by combining traditional hunter gathering activities with European farming methods. It was the board that, under pressure from the expanding settlement, crushed and destroyed this unique period of Aboriginal success.

Unfortunately, many of these small Aboriginal farming communities were revoked in the not too distant future. Aboriginal reserve lands were heavily reduced by the Protection Board to boost their finances and appease white farmers. However, those successes like the famous Cumeragunja were eventually wiped out as successful farming initiatives were taken away and most of the more tightly controlled missions or reserves ensured a life of restricted movement, incarceration, control and chronic poverty and illness. Aboriginal people were forced into a state of welfare dependency by their so-called protectors. Aboriginal people became political refugees in their own country, social outcasts and an abominable blight on the emerging Australian nation. Bennett points out the lack of political status and the subsequent treatment of Aborigines.

For many decades, the political influence of Aborigines was non-existent, primarily because they were usually denied the basic concession of equality with whites: they rarely were given full protection before the law, they suffered the indignities associated with forced movement around the country, they lacked the right to vote, and efforts to complain of their treatment often gave rise to white chastisement of ‘cheeky’ Aborigines.

From the 1890's, most colonies, soon to be states in Australia, had formalized control of Aboriginal people, by means of individual Aboriginal legislation or Protection Statutes. Earlier

in 1883 there were already in existence government-appointed Aboriginal protectors and governing boards responsible for the supposed protection and welfare of the Aboriginal race. These guardian protectors were more concerned with the Christianising of the noble savage and saving their heathen souls.

If there were no religious groups in charge then a representative of the law, a local policeman, was responsible for the handing out of blankets, providing rations and enforcing local government regulations to control the natives.426 Lobbying from Christian fundamentalists to protect Aboriginal people was reasonably successful, but it also meant the end of traditional cultural practices. Aboriginal Protective Legislation was developed, which stemmed from the House of Commons Select Committee in 1837 and recommended that:

To determine under what special regulations they should be placed... such short and simple rules as may form a temporary and provisional code for the regulation of the Aborigines, until advancing knowledge and civilisation shall have superseded the necessity for any such special laws.427

The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board was set up in 1883 and its infamous Act in 1909, which accelerated the ripping away of the regained Aboriginal lands and the taking of children from their parents. Aboriginal people viewed the board with contempt and openly resented their brutal treatment that resulted from government protection policies. From the very outset of the late 1880s, Aboriginal people like Matthew Kropinyeri were questioning their treatment and openly challenging the government on many of the issues relating to all policies and legislation-affecting Aborigines.428 Goodall identifies earlier Aboriginal challenges for land:

It is from the early 1860s that we find sustained evidence of Aboriginal action in NSW too over land.429

Prior to the 1930s, Aboriginal people remained independent of Board control. Under the 1909 New South Wales Protection legislation, managers or superintendents had enormous power and control over mission residents. Tighter controls of management were not in place until the

1930s. Many managers carried out their roles and responsibilities with overt cruelty and to the letter of the law. The position of manager didn’t require any specific set of skills. You only needed to have previously held some kind of position as a public servant (e.g. soldier, policeman, sanitation worker, minor clerk etc.). Regardless of who became the manager, there were no specific requirements for the position and, generally, racism and bias against Aboriginal people was quite common amongst the general Australian population. Fox writes about the managers’ power:

...we had fifteen managers of various types. We have had those who preferred to come with us with their bible and those that favoured the bullets and batons...there was unrest...The Aborigines knew too that not far away was something people called democracy. Were they enjoying this on the station, with all its rules and regulations, perhaps under a manager who could not control his temper or one who became vindictive at the least provocation.430

Protection Acts made all Aborigines ‘Wards of the State’, which meant that all legal parental responsibility or guardianship now rested with the state (government), in this case the New South Wales Government. All Aborigines now required managers and/or superintendents, which is the same as under any prison system. Aboriginal people had no civil rights and were totally controlled and exploited by their superintendents. Rowley discusses some of these managers’ “welfare and discipline... obey all lawful order”, and Aboriginal people knew the extent of discipline that managers could inflict for minor breaches of mission rules. The withholding of rations was a common occurrence requiring little provocation, such as not conforming to the wishes of the manager, or if he didn’t particularly like you.431

Habits of orderliness or cleanliness had to be maintained in what were most often tin shacks with dirt floors and hessian bags sewn together for doors. Dancing or other native practices all required written permission and all missionaries denied these traditional practices for being against conversion to Christianity. No Aborigine could leave the reserve without permission. Aboriginal people were really incarcerated and confined to these small areas of reserved land under the control of the manager. Every Aboriginal on a reserve could be ordered to work for thirty-two hours weekly, without remuneration, on the development or maintenance of the reserve. 432

There were numerous functions which were carried out by the Protection Board for Aborigines, some notable under section 7 of the Act:

(a) to, with the consent of the Minister, apportion, distribute, and apply as may seem most fitting, any moneys voted by Parliament, and any other funds in its possession or control, for the relief of Aborigines;
(b) to distribute blankets, clothing, and relief to Aborigines at the discretion of the board;
(c) to provide for the custody, maintenance, and education of the children of Aborigines;
(d) to manage and regulate the use of the reserves;
(e) to exercise a general supervision and care over all matters affecting the interests and welfare of Aborigines, and to protect them against injustice, imposition, and fraud.433

Under the Protection Act, all and any individual decisions made regarding Aboriginal lives were negated and transferred to appointed government managers or missionaries. The mission prisons that Aborigines were confined to had no release dates. They were indeed truly at the mercy of the ‘Governors pleasure’. The following generations of Aborigines had become a totally dependent group, institutionally regulated by their so-called protectors. They had no power and only the bare necessities of life were granted to them; they were exposed to long-term instituted hegemonic control. Their freedom of movement was restricted only to the confined areas of the reserves/mission stations’ boundaries. They were, however, required at times for their cheap labour to service local business and farming needs. Basically, most Aboriginal people became slaves as a work force to their white oppressors. Lippmann explains Aborigines as a defeated race as:

Those many Aborigines who were institutionalized in this fashion employed the time honoured resistance techniques of a circumscribed people to preserve their dignity and identity. ‘Circumscribed is a preferable description to ‘defeated’: though they could be said to be defeated in a military sense, in spirit they have never been. They became masters and mistresses of passive resistance, and have remained so.434

In reality, Aboriginal people were expected to die out and disappear on these government created reserves and missions. They were put there as a means of segregation and to provide a place where they would fade away peacefully under the paternal eye of government control and

protection. The early Protection Board reports all indicated that Aboriginal people were a dying race and the local *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners Advocate* (NMH&MA) printed those sentiments from the Aborigines Protection Board reports.

In 1890, the NMH&MA colourfully reported on the sharp decline of the Aboriginal population and that we were: “Following in the footsteps of ‘the noble red man,’ the Tasmanian Aboriginal, and other races which have been civilised off the face of the earth.” Most of the board’s reports before the turn of the twentieth century grasped the notion that Aboriginal genocide was clearly at hand with the board’s census figures for Aboriginal people confirming that they were significantly on the decline:

> The report of the Aborigines Protection Board annually tells a sad story of the decadence of a race doomed to speedy extinction.  

The NMH&MA used those figures to dramatically illustrate the Aboriginal situation and the justification for finances expenditure for the benevolent work the Aborigines Protection Board was doing to ease a primitive race suffering in their hours of want, printing:

> Soon the race must be as extinct as the dodo; and it is therefore satisfactory to find that no one grudges the small expenditure which annual voted for the purpose of making easy their path to the grave.  

In Lorna Lippmann’s book, *Generations of Resistance: The Aboriginal Struggle for Justice*, she clearly understands the ramifications and long term purpose of government reserves and missions:

> Church missions and hunting reserves were suggested ‘to smooth the pillow’ of what appeared to be a dying race.  

**Survival and the Karuah Mission**

From day one Aboriginal people have been highly underestimated. We are great survivors with some of our people living in the harshest and driest habitable areas on the planet. Yet, we

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remain the oldest continuing culture in the world. We didn’t die out, as the Protection Board statistics indicated, we actually thrived. Life on the ‘Mish’ at Karuah continued under the control of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board whilst it was managed by the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM). The Aboriginal population flourished, as did the Karuah ‘Mish’, continually growing in number over the years. It was further aided by the forced relocation and inclusion of our Aboriginal cousins at the settlement of Soldiers Point.

Nevertheless, survival was always the issue for Aboriginal people living on government controlled Aboriginal reserves. Food and access to it is that most basic of all human needs. The cost to maintain the Aboriginal reserve was a growing concern, contrary to the board’s first assessment that reserves were hospices where Aboriginal people would terminate. We didn’t, and the Aboriginal population flourished, but with a growing number of what government officials termed half-caste or mixed-race Aborigines (children), because of unscrupulous white contact. The Aborigines Protection Board annual reports in 1910 and 1911 reported accounts of what they saw as ‘depravity’ and ‘vice’ in Aboriginal stations and Aboriginal camps, yet contradictions in the same reports describe them as ‘happy’, ‘contented’ and ‘moral’ communities. Striking contrasts existed in the same reports and there were no doubt as to where the so-called depravity and vice stemmed from, with the rising number of half-caste children.439

The Newcastle Morning Herald reported on this phenomenon:

*The case of the half-castes is equally interesting. They are increasing at a rate of about 1000 per annum... At all events, they are said to be superior in intellect to the full-blooded aborigine, which may be due in part, to the effect of partial civilisation and education.*440

This prompted the board to take immediate action against the ever expanding non-“full-bloods” or the half-castes living on their reserves and receiving rations and the board’s assistance. The initial board policy of Aboriginal segregation started to give way to the possibility of non-full-blood dispersal from reserves. It was quickly seized as a viable means to alleviate government reserve expenditure by removing half-caste Aborigines from reserves to find menial labouring jobs. For the half-caste Aboriginal children, the board devised a more sinister slavery scheme that would train the boys to become station hands and the girls to become domestic servants. The board colourfully termed this disgusting ruse as ‘apprenticeship systems’ and ‘indentured labour.’ In 1915, the board was granted more extensive powers over Aboriginal children

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through an amendment to the 1909 New South Wales Protection Act. There were some dissenters to the board’s proposal of this inhumane policy, but it prevailed:

...one Member of Parliament spoke out against it. He denounced the suggested scheme as slavery. There would be mean officials, he predicted, cringing, crawling, merciless, grasping, cruel officials, not humanitarian but who just obeyed the letter of the law, in league with the local squatters who just wanted cheap labour. Girls who were taken would be exposed to more vice than if they had stayed in the camps. Improve the children if you can, he said, but you will not improve a child by taking it away from its parents. The separation of a swallow from its parents was cruelty. Yet the Amendment was carried by 28 votes to three. From 1915 to 1937 any station manager or policeman could take Aboriginal children from their parent if he thought this was for their moral and spiritual welfare.

Robert Donaldson, a former member of parliament, pushed hard for the amendment to ease the government’s financial responsibilities on reserves while merging the young half-castes into the white community. Donaldson would assume a sinister identity with Aboriginal communities through his obsession with separating Aboriginal children from their families. He was known as ‘the kids collector’. Aboriginal children were used as slave labour and were taken away from their families and communities without any real justification. They could be removed and placed into white institutions where they could be assimilated and groomed as servants for white masters. Once removed, many of these children never saw their communities or families again. Official secrecy surrounded their removal but the board’s intent was clear:

The Board recognise that the only chance these children have is to be taken away from their present environment and properly trained by earnest workers before being apprenticed out, and after once having left the Aborigines’ reserves they should never be allowed to return to them permanently.

Bomaderry Infant’s Home was established in August, 1908, by the United Aborigines Mission Society, initially having seven so-called neglected Aboriginal children being placed there. Over

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the following thirty years, the number of Aboriginal children inmates grew steadily, requiring more staffing and eventually funding from the Aborigines Protection Board and, later, the Aborigines Welfare Board.\footnote{John Ramsland. (2004). "Bringing up Harry Penrith: Injustice and becoming Burnum Burnum: The formative years of a child of the Stolen Generations." \textit{Education Research and Perspectives} 31(2):96} It usually housed children up to the age of ten and then sent them to other institutions like those at Cootamundra and Kinchella. Aboriginal training homes had already been developed by the first amendment to the Protection Act in 1911. The old hospital at Cootamundra was originally purchased as an Aboriginal girls’ home to accommodate orphans and again so-called neglected children, but was used to institutionalise Aboriginal girls for a life of domestic servitude.\footnote{(1911). Aborigines: Annual report of the board for the protection of, for the year ended 1910. Office of Board for Protection of Aborigines. Sydney, Government Printer. p4} Haebich and Mellor reveal that:

\begin{quote}
The girls were trained as domestic servants there, and sent out to work for middle-class white families, on the farms and in the towns and city areas. Some received reasonable treatment from their employers, while others suffered physical, mental, and at times, sexual abuse.\footnote{Anna Haebich & Doreen Mellor (2002). \textit{Many voices: Reflections on experiences of indigenous child separation.} Canberra, National Library of Australia. p177}
\end{quote}

Kinchella Boys Home, on the other hand, trained young Aboriginal boys in basic skills to become labouring farm or station hands.\footnote{Peter Read. (1981). \textit{The removal of Aboriginal children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969.} A. Affairs. Surrey Hills, Sydney, Department of Aboriginal Affairs. p8} In these government homes, Aboriginal children were exposed to psychological, physical and sexual abuse from people who were supposedly there to protect them.\footnote{(1997). “Bringing them home. National inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.” Human Rights & Equal Opportunity. Commission. Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.} At Kinchella, evidence was given by inmates regarding the cruel and inhumane punishments handed out by an alcohol fuelled teacher and superintendent Mr McQuiggin to inmates (boys) no older than thirteen: \begin{itemize}
  \item being tied to a fence and beaten by a rope;
  \item being beaten by a piece of rubber hose;
  \item being beaten by a stockwhip;
  \item being put on bread and water.
\end{itemize}\footnote{(1936). Police inquiry into the conduct of Mr. McQuiggin, teacher and superintendent. Education, Department of Education. p 2} Concerns of sexual abuse were raised by many of the inmates who attended the Kinchella School. The Board, however, reported the supposed success of their child institutions:

\begin{quote}
Many hundreds of children have been dealt with in this and have afterwards settled down and established homes of their own, quite independently of the Board. At Cootamundra
\end{quote}
the girls are, of course, given domestic training, while at Kinchella the boys are fitted for situations on farms and stations.\textsuperscript{451}

They separated the fairer-skinned Aboriginal children from their parental influence to be brainwashed and conditioned to become subservient tools for the ruling class. They became servants and had no alternative but to conform to this new environment, still deprived of any form of human rights. The colour of their skin determined a future devoid of the love of family and protection from the new world that generated a deep hatred for their very existence. Milne identifies that the:

\textit{Protection and later Welfare Board officials concentrated on fairer skinned children so that by the 1950's the Board instructed the welfare officers to hand over Aboriginal children 'of lighter caste' to the Child Welfare Department if they need to be committed.}\textsuperscript{452}

Assimilation was used to extinguish and destroy Aboriginal people and their cultural heritage; it was unmistakably a form of social engineering through government legislation. The removal of Aboriginal children from reserves and missions became the final insult, although Aboriginal people had been protesting for years about the theft of land as well as living conditions on missions. Without their children there was no foreseeable Aboriginal future and it became time to challenge the reign of white government tyranny. Small local Aboriginal Advancement organisations began to emerge throughout New South Wales and Victoria in the 1920s. The first all-Aboriginal political organisation, to form in this country was the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) that formed in Sydney in 1924 and that had a number of prominent Worimi men and women at the highest levels of its leadership.

Fred Maynard, whose family had originally come from Port Stephens, was the President, whilst his close friend and ally Sid Ridgeway was the Secretary. Sid Ridgeway was from the Karuah Mission and his wife, Corra, was Maynard’s cousin. The fledgling organisation received heavy Aboriginal support across the state. Fred Maynard and Sid Ridgeway were well aware of the long-term struggles of William and John Ridgeway who had both been politically active for

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years, particularly in their fight for land rights around the Port Stephens area. The AAPA challenged the oppressive powers of the Aborigines Protection Board and exposed its’ sickening policies in the press. For the first time, the board was left severely embarrassed and forced to take action against the Aboriginal membership of the AAPA. The AAPA held street rallies, conferences, meetings and established an effective state wide Aboriginal community network of information. Within a short space of time, the AAPA had established thirteen branches across the state with a membership of over six hundred people. They lobbied by writing letters to politicians and even to King George V of England, but were under constant attack from the Board through the NSW Police. Maynard writes about the Aboriginal media success:

...the support of JJ Moloney and coverage in his newspaper the ‘Voice of the North: and public exposure and embarrassment suffered by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board in major newspapers over its practice of removing Aboriginal children from families. The seeds that had been sown and developed over years of hardship by Aboriginal people were now ready to flower.

Fred Maynard found support in the AAPA from a sympathetic white woman, Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton. Her connection to Aboriginal people began as a white missionary and social worker. Her political awakening was triggered through her connection to Aboriginal activists and a growing awareness of the abuse Aboriginal children suffered under the Board’s apprenticeship system and the many dislocated Aboriginal families. Her work with Aboriginal people and the AAPA placed her in direct conflict with both the government and her church. She witnessed first-hand the cold-blooded damage that the Board’s apprenticeship system was doing to Aboriginal families and their communities. The removal of Aboriginal children from parental influence, never to be seen again, horrified her and gnawed at her long-held conception of Christian faith.

The AAPA’s initial mandate, clearly, was to stop the Board from taking Aboriginal children away under their apprenticeship scheme and to demand Aboriginal rights to their land. Maynard and Hatton attacked the Board for the frequent sexual abuse suffered by young girls now under the Board’s care. In the first six months of the AAPA’s intensive campaign across the state, it

became clear that Aboriginal land rights issues were an urgent concern. These two key issues, children and land, formed the central focus of the AAPA’s fight, for without land and family, life itself for Aboriginal people was not worth living.457

After the 1909 Aborigines Protection Act was enacted, the New South Wales government revoked many of the Aboriginal community farming leases and appointed white overseers to manage their reserves. As white settlement expanded along the east of Australia so did the demand for land and any viable government reserve farming land occupied by Aboriginal people gave way to their demands. The government also required land for the soldier resettlement scheme from the First World War.458 This affected all Aboriginal people, including the Worimi people of Port Stephens. They were once again dispossessed and placed on smaller confined area of land on the ‘Mish’. Retta Long reported that:

King and Queen, [William and Charlotte Ridgeway] with Mr Jim Ridgeway, are at present busy moving their residences from Soldiers Pt. to the reserve, owing to the Federal government having resumed the whole of Soldiers Point for the new naval base.459

At the inaugural AAPA conference held on 25 April, 1925, at St. David’s Church and Hall in Surry Hills, over two hundred Aboriginal people attended supporting the objectives of the newly formed political voice of Aboriginal people. Fred Maynard spoke passionately about how Aboriginal people had advanced in all areas of society and had the right to determine their own destiny by controlling their own affairs. Hatton, one of the conference convenors, spoke enthusiastically to the audience regarding the need for an Aboriginal ‘Wake-Up Movement’ to challenge the government on issues of Aboriginal oppression. Needless, to say the conference was successful: the sheer numbers in attendance obviously mirrored Aboriginal concerns over their lack of rights under the state government’s Protection Board.460

The AAPA’s second conference was strategically held in Kempsey north of Sydney on the mid north coast with its large Aboriginal population. Local newspapers recorded in excess of seven hundred Aboriginal attendees from across the state at the three day conference. The AAPA

gained strong support because of both the amount of local Aboriginal land and the numbers of Aboriginal children taken without hesitation by the Board. The most significant aspect of the conference came at the end of Maynard’s address to the packed house. He put forward a resolution demanding the full rights of citizenship that all Australians enjoyed. At the conclusion of the conference, the AAPA platform and political stance had achieved several hundred Aboriginal signatures on a petition that resulted in the resolution being sent to state and federal parliament. The federal government’s response was dismissive and the Prime Minister informed the Aborigines that they were not entitled to vote and that it could be an issue for discussion in the future.461

The third AAPA conference was convened in Grafton, also on the far north coast of New South Wales and, again, a large Aboriginal gathering was present to support the AAPA. Newspaper editor J. J. Moloney, who already had an association with Aboriginal people from the Karuah ‘Mish’, attended the AAPA conference. He had previously reported on the famous Aboriginal evangelist David Uniapon’s visit to the Karuah mission. Moloney continued to cover and support the AAAPA political platform in his newspaper, The Voice of the North. Resolutions were passed on the issues of Aboriginal land, family, freedom from molestation by board officers, self-determination and the call for the current Aborigines Protection Board to be scrapped and replaced by an all-aboriginal Board in control of Aboriginal affairs.462

Another petition was formulated from the conference resolutions and it was signed and sent to parliament. The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board dismissed any notion of Aborigines gaining control over their own affairs, stating it was ‘impractical’. The premier, Jack Lang, responded negatively to the AAPA petition by dismissing it. The AAPA were left with a bitter taste in their mouths. An enraged and disillusioned Maynard quickly retorted to the Premier’s letter, enthusiastically relaying the disgust and contempt he and the AAPA held for the dismissive attitude of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. Still, it did not sway the New South Wales Government in any way. Its advocacy of the rights of Aboriginal people fell on deaf ears.463

The Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM) movement initially assisted Aboriginal people and communities where possible in their struggle against oppression. They did, however, know their limitations, particularly if they wanted to retain religious control of Aboriginal people on government reserves. The AIM sided with the Board in its attacks against the AAPA membership. This AIM political move was clearly planned to maintain control over Aboriginal lives and souls at the expense of Aboriginal people rightly having direction and a say in their own affairs. Fred Maynard and Sid Ridgeway were constantly looking for political allies to combat the board’s oppressive powers. They knew all too well about the weight and potential power the church could wield in Western society. In 1927, the AAPA bombarded the press and government with many letters of protest and held meetings with heads of churches and missionary organisations. The AAPA attempted to use every political avenue available to them. The church had extensive networks on and off the missions.\(^{464}\) In 1929, the AAPA met with the bishop in Sydney:

*The report described a meeting at the Chapter House of St. Andrews Cathedral, Sydney between the Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney, Revd D'Arcy Irvine and the chairman of the Australian Board of Missions the most Reverend J.S. Needham and seven Aborigines of the AAPA. The report said that the 'natives' sought the opportunity of stating their claims for racial equality with whites and other concessions.*\(^{465}\)

Unfortunately, the church loyalties ultimately lay with the Board and their own religious directives. Despite the negativity of the church, it was another important step in the long Aboriginal political journey and struggle that would eventually bring about changes in the future. The Board and the AAPA’s dislike for each other intensified as the AAPA continually discredited the Board for its lack of humane care for the apprenticed Aboriginal children. An incident in 1927 involved a fourteen year old apprenticed Aboriginal girl who was raped where the Board had placed her for employment and became pregnant; she was removed only to be returned to the same employer after the birth of the child, which infuriated Maynard.\(^{466}\)

Maynard led a scathing attack on the Board, which resulted in the board mounting its own vicious campaign against Maynard, trying earnestly to discredit both Maynard’s and the

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AAPA’s reputations. The Board’s chairman was, in fact, the NSW Commissioner of Police. As such, the police’s intimidation of the AAPA leadership was intense. Later, threats were made against Maynard’s children and his opportunities for working on the docks in Sydney evaporated overnight. The onset of the Great Depression, as well as police intimidation, forced the AAPA into decline and, in some sense, into hiding as an underground movement. Uncle Reuben Kelly, a Dungutti elder, later recalled that the last time he saw Fred Maynard speak was in the grounds of the University of Sydney in the mid-1930s. The AAPA trod a path that other Aboriginal activists in the future would adopt and follow and use to eventually find freedom from the board’s oppression in the 1960s and 1970s. Goodall confirms that:

The AAPA disappeared from white public view after 1927 and did not have the opportunity to confront the anthropologists as it had the missionaries. This confrontation was to come in the following decade.

The AAPA were hounded out of existence by the NSW Police. Maynard would have a so-called ‘accident’ where his injuries were so severe he was in and out of hospital for twelve months. One leg was broken in six places and, he suffered from diabetes, gangrene set in and his leg was removed. Interestingly, before his accident Maynard and another high profile AAPA office bearer, Johnny Donovan, had their names put forward to speak at the 1937 NSW Commission on Aboriginal Affairs. Neither Maynard nor Donovan or, for that matter, any of the old AAPA membership were allowed to speak.

Clearly, Worimi people have played a significant role in Aboriginal Australia’s political history, especially through the initial hard work of the AAPA. The Ridgeways fought for their rights for years, particularly in the battle to give Aboriginal children the right to an education that was discussed in Chapter 5. The Aboriginal fight for their rights continued in the following decades and would impact on residents on the Karuah ‘Mish.’ Land rights have always been the focal point of the political struggle for Aboriginal people. Despite the efforts of Aboriginal groups like the AAPA, any form of land Rights legislation would be a long time coming, but Aboriginal people never abandoned the land rights fight, which is echoed in the words of the political activist, William Cooper:

How much compensation have we had? How much of our land has been paid for? Not one iota! Again we state that we are the original owners of the country. In spite of force, prestige, or anything else you like, morally the land is ours. We have been ejected and despoiled of our god-given right and our inheritance has been forcibly taken from us.”

The Political Football Is Kicked Again

The immortalised words of William Cooper in his petition to parliament are a constant reminder to all Australians of the political aspirations for land rights of all Aboriginal people. Cooper had picked up the ball where the AAPA dropped it. Not only did he pick it up, but he hit it straight into the government court with force and determination. Lippmann documents: “As far back as 1930 a Victorian Aborigine, William Cooper, collected signatures for a petition to the King to have an Aboriginal representative in the lower House of Federal Parliament.”

Upon his arrival in Melbourne, Cooper formed the well documented Australian Aborigines League in 1936. He was the great-uncle of and a significant influence on the Aboriginal sportsman and political activist, Doug Nicholls.

Earlier, Cooper and his brother John Atkinson had been instrumental in the Cumeragunja Aboriginal community’s demands for their land in the latter part of the 19th century. He wanted direct representation in parliament to convey the demands he outlined in his letters and petitions on behalf of Aboriginal people. He made powerful statements in his correspondence to the government, such as: ‘...this small portion of the vast territory which is ours by Divine Right’. Cooper was a very religious man who maintained his political campaign for his people, but nothing would sway the parliament and grant him an audience with it. That goal would come much later in his political career.

In 1937, the state and commonwealth administrative members of Aboriginal Affairs held a conference at Canberra. It was the first government conference to discuss the future of Aboriginal Affairs in Australia. The principal resolution from that conference witnessed the implementation of the assimilation policy to authorise the removal of as many Aboriginal children as possible from their families. It would result in thousands of Aboriginal children being removed nation-wide, which continued well into the 1960s. The targets were half-caste

Aboriginal children; such was governmental fear of the growing numbers of these Aboriginal children living on reserves and missions.\textsuperscript{474} This was reflected in the resolution that was passed at the Canberra Conference:

\textit{That this conference believes that the destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin, but not the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to this end.}\textsuperscript{475}

With a myriad of strong politically motivated allies that included the legendary New South Wales activists Jack Patten and William Ferguson from the Aborigines Progressive Association, Cooper organised a cornerstone event in Australia’s Aboriginal political history. The Day of Mourning conference and protest would forever change the political landscape for all Aboriginal people in Australia. Strategically, the conference was held on the 26 January, 1938, when white Australia was celebrating one hundred and fifty years of white occupation and settlement.\textsuperscript{476} National media was on hand to report on Australia’s one hundred and fifty year celebration.

Some of the press noted the Aboriginal protest with photographs and reports of the conference that claimed full citizenship rights and opposed the callous treatment by government policies. The media attention catapulted Aboriginal civil rights issues back into the gaze of the wider public spotlight. It forced the government to at least talk with the protestors, and a deputation of twenty Aboriginal men and women that included Cooper, Ferguson, Patten and Pearl Gibbs met with Prime Minister Joseph Lyons. Patten spoke to Lyons about their Ten Point Plan, which involved a long-range policy for Aborigines. The policy thoroughly addressed Aboriginal people’s national political and economic aspirations.\textsuperscript{477}

The Australian government would again ignore the calls to address Aboriginal rights and it would be another thirty years before citizenship would be granted. But the tide was beginning to turn. Aboriginal people had realised the power of the media and became very skilled at mobilising empathic support through the press. Certainly in the wake of World War II, serious global discussions took place in regards to developing basic standards of human rights, because

\textsuperscript{474} Quentin Beresford & Paul Omaji. (1998). \textit{Our state of mind: racial planning and the stolen generations}. Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press.p29
\textsuperscript{475} (1937). Resolution at the Aboriginal Welfare Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, Canberra.p21
\textsuperscript{477} Jack Patten. (1938). “Our ten points.” \textit{The Australian Abo Call: Voice of the Aborigines}. Sydney, Jack Patten. 1:1
of the atrocities that took place during the war years. Australia played a key role in negotiating for the United Nations Charter in 1945, and they were one of the eight nations responsible for drafting the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Yet Australia’s Aboriginal population at home were denied those same rights that the nation was involved in drafting.\footnote{478}

The sounds of bombs and gunfire in the Second World War had helped temporarily silence the political voices of Aboriginal people and their small advancement organisations. Despite this fact, they continued their quest towards a concept of self-determination, land rights and freedom from oppressive government policies. The Pilbara strike in Western Australia in 1946 over wages lasted three years and became the longest strike action in Australia’s industrial history. It gained momentum and support from different sectors of mainstream Australia when the three strike leaders were arrested and gaoled. This sent ripples around the world alerting the World Federation of Trade Unions and the United Nations, thus embarrassing the Australia government and its signed treaty commitments.\footnote{479} Gary Foley discusses the importance of that strike:

\textit{The 1946 Pilbara strike can also be regarded as a part of the inspiration underpinning the better known Gurindji walk-off at Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory some 20 years later in 1966. If the Gurindji strike is to be considered as the birth of the modern Land Rights movement, then the Pilbara strike should be regarded as an equally significant prelude to Wave Hill.}\footnote{480}

The famous strike and walk-off of Wave Hill Station by the Gurindji people led by the immortalised elder, Vincent Lingiari, set the wheels in motion for the first Land Rights Legislation in Australia. The Aboriginal stockmen on Lord Vestys Station in the Northern Territory began a strike over inadequate wages and living conditions, but more importantly also asking for rights to their land. The Gurindji elders sent a petition to the Governor General claiming their traditional lands. This followed on from the Pilbara strike and the Yirrkala bark petition of 1963. During the strike, the government finally recognised that Aboriginal Land Rights had to be seriously considered.\footnote{481} The Gurindji people wrote:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The 1946 Pilbara strike can also be regarded as a part of the inspiration underpinning the better known Gurindji walk-off at Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory some 20 years later in 1966. If the Gurindji strike is to be considered as the birth of the modern Land Rights movement, then the Pilbara strike should be regarded as an equally significant prelude to Wave Hill.}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
We the leaders of the Gurindji people, write to you about our earnest desire to regain tenure to our tribal lands in Wave-Hill-Limunya area of the Northern Territory, of which we were dispossessed in time past, and for which we received no recompense... In August last year, we walked away from the Wave Hill cattle Station. It was said we did this because of wages were very poor (only six dollars per week), living conditions only fit for dogs, and rations consisting mainly of salted beef and bread. True enough. But we walked away for other reasons as well. To protect our women and our tribe, to try and stand on our own feet. We will never go back there.482

The Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (AAF) was founded in 1956 after discussions with two determined women, Pearl Gibbs and Faith Bandler. These great activists realised that they would need to collaborate and employ support from white Australians to counter the Aborigines Welfare Board483 policies of assimilation. The ‘White Australia Policy’ had further legitimatised the Welfare Board’s approach to remove half-caste Aboriginal children.484 This racist early twentieth century policy coincided with the Federation of the former Australian colonies in 1901 into the nation state. Within ten years, it widened its scope to include all cultures that did not resemble the Australian way of life, or more importantly, that were not white.485

Given the above, there is little wonder that Aboriginal people would be treated so badly and that later governments would attempt to exterminate the Aboriginal race through policies and practices that contained no semblance of morality. When Australia’s founding commonwealth fathers began constructing the constitution, the concept of a white Australia was evidently a key issue in their discussions.486 The Commonwealth White Australian Policy reflected their entrenched racial fears and xenophobia by excluding non-white people into Australia. Historical evidence supports how this remained official government policy from 1901 to the late 1950s with residual components of the policy lingering into the early 1970s.487

483 The Aborigines Protection Board was transformed into The Aborigines Welfare in 1943. The name change but it remained the same organization.
A Time for Change in a new political era

The NSW government formally adopted a policy of assimilation in 1951. This policy required Aborigines to 'live as white Australians do', revealing a continued commitment to cultural homogeneity underpinning the 'white Australia policy'. It was not until 1973 that the NSW government finally repealed all elements of the 1909 Aborigines Protection Act and following the Whitlam Labor Government, adopted a policy of self-determination.488

It was a constant struggle to keep Aboriginal children with their families against government department authorities and their cruel legislative powers. It was a fight for survival because the process of assimilation was destroying and stealing our cultural identity, especially from the younger generations. The cost and toll of fighting against insurmountable odds, for the rights of Aboriginal people, weighed heavy on Aboriginal political organisations and their members. At the disbandment of the AAF in 1969, Charles Leon, president of the organisation, commented that:

What the fellowship did in ten years was fantastic; people were hearing for the first time that Aboriginal people were subject to discrimination under separate government laws.489

The greatest accomplishment by Gibbs, Bandler and the famous non-Aboriginal feminist Jesse Street under the AAF was the formulation and distribution of the petition to amend the Australian Federal Constitution that lead to the 1967 federal referendum.490 Gibbs and Bandler would see the fruits of their labour when the Australian constitution was amended while working under the banner of another great Aboriginal political organisation, the Federal Council for the Advance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). The organisation formed in February, 1958, in Adelaide. It was largely made up of Aborigines, white socialists and Christian reformers. Their main focus was a national non-discriminatory policy of self-determination for Aboriginal people, which meant citizenship was firmly placed on the table.491

James Anaya, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recognised that:

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During the 1960s, armed with a new generation of men and women educated in the ways of society that had approached upon them, indigenous people began drawing increased attention to demands for their continued survival as distinct communities with historical based culture, political institutions, and entitlements to land.\textsuperscript{492}

This became the era for the most dramatic political changes in the Aboriginal struggle. The world was experiencing revolutionary social upheaval sparked by a civil rights movement in the United States of America involving African-Americans in the southern states of America. Charles Perkins, an Aboriginal student/activist influenced by the American Civil Rights movement led by Dr Martin Luther King, conducted the Australian Freedom Rides. Supported by thirty white university students, he took a bus trip across north-western New South Wales. Like for the Freedom Rides in America, its purpose was to expose the inherent racism, third world living conditions and poverty Aboriginal people experienced across the state. The Freedom Rides gained national and international media coverage as they protested in New South Wales country towns, which fuelled the public awareness of urban Australians and the international communities.

This event embarrassed Australia and its domestic commitment to the United Nations’ international treaty agreements. No longer could Australia hide and deny its neglect and mistreatment of their Aboriginal population as it had so easily done in the past. Over a century of fighting for Aboriginal rights and recognition of our humanity finally came into realisation with the successful campaign to amend the Australian Constitution. Aboriginal people were decisively classified as citizens in their own country, by being counted in the census. It appears the constitutional change resulted from a number of significant factors: the relentless and tireless work of Aboriginal political organisations and their workers, non-Aboriginal support groups, and national and international pressure highlighted by extensive media coverage of the Aboriginals’ plight.\textsuperscript{493}

The 1967 referendum was seen by many as the most significant political event in Aboriginal history, including the staggering numbers of organisations and people that supported and coordination that brought about its success. The world was shrinking; through international travel, technology and media exposure. Australia was no longer invisible from the international community. It was now much harder to hide the black skeletons in the closet.


The Changing of the Guards: The Formation of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy

The establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy stands as one of the most important political achievements in our history. The Tent Embassy, a highly symbolic public assertion and statement of Aboriginal rights, was erected on the lawns of the (old) Parliament House by a group of Sydney based Koori activists on so-called Australia Day, 26 January, 1972. Opposition leader Gough Whitlam, as a part of the Australian Labor Party’s successful election platform, promised to support Aboriginal land rights for Aboriginal people. On 26 January, 1972, a small group of Koori protestors set up camp on the lawns of Old Parliament House. They were initially prompted to act because of the comments of conservative Prime Minister William McMahon’s 1972 Australia Day speech. His speech squashed any hopes Aboriginal people had for genuine land rights.\(^{494}\)

Obviously, there would be no support for Aboriginal advancement under the Australian coalition government. McMahon’s Australian Day statement drew a quick and lethal Aboriginal response that would ignite an Aboriginal political uprising and rattle the very foundations of Parliament House in Canberra. Aboriginal activists had already planned a course of action well in advance of McMahon’s speech. The Liberal government previously indicated they would not support Aboriginal Land Rights if re-elected. The night before McMahon’s speech, a small group of Aboriginal protesters drove to Canberra and, the next day, set up the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.\(^{495}\) Robinson records that:

*The car that left Sydney on the night of 26 January was driven by the Tribune's photographer, Noel Hazzard. Bertie Williams was dragged from his bed to join Billy Craigie, Tony Coorey and Michael Anderson in their hurried journey to Canberra.*\(^{496}\)

Australia woke to the news that Aboriginal protesters had established an Aboriginal Embassy on the lawns of what is now Old Parliament House. The protest group acquired a beach umbrella to sit under and materials for placards. So it began! Battlelines were drawn as four lone Aboriginal warriors, contemplated political war. It would not finish with just those four Kooris: the numbers of protestor swelled over the months that followed. A tent replaced the beach

umbrella and the Aboriginal Embassy became the Aboriginal Tent Embassy as it is known today. Parliament amended a law prohibiting trespassing (camping) on government land. The next day, on 21 July, 1972, the Tent Embassy was torn down by police in a violent encounter with 70 protesters who were standing their ground. Eight protesters were arrested.

The Tent Embassy was re-established two days later, but this time with more than two hundred Aboriginal and white protesters marching on Parliament House. Once again, the next day, the Tent Embassy was torn down in a more brutal and well-documented conflict with police. Eighteen protestors were arrested. Many were injured under excessive force from police. As you could imagine, this generated a lot of national and international media attention. The negative media coverage of McMahon’s heavy handling of the Tent Embassy swayed mainstream Australia to become a little more open-minded towards the Aboriginal struggle for Land Rights. McMahon’s arrogance and strong-arm tactics would be the final nail in his political coffin. Voters responded vehemently. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) won the election later that year.

All politicians and political parties have difficulties when it comes to keeping their election promises, but Gough Whitlam did honour his word to support Aboriginal Land Rights. However, he didn’t rush into the process and appointed Justice Edward Woodward in 1973 to hold a commission of inquiry into land rights. This led to the 1976 Aborigines Land Rights Act (NT), but it only applied in the Northern Territory. It was not until 1983 that Aboriginal people would be granted state Land Rights legislation in New South Wales. This long awaited piece of legislation, although not the Land Rights that Aboriginal people had been demanding, finally recognised the dislocation and dispossession of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Its structure was a genuine process for a degree of compensation for the loss of land and an instrument to provide some Aboriginal communities with a viable economic base.

* * * * *

The early 1970s was an exciting time for us as Aboriginal people. I can recall my mother dragging us off to Aboriginal protest marches and meetings. I come from a very political family. My father was the brother of Shirley (Mum Shirl) Smith and the uncle of Paul Coe, all key

players in the Tent Embassy and Aboriginal political black movement in Sydney. Although I was never included in their conversations when they were together, I overheard their plans for militant action by the black power movement in Redfern. My father and Aunty Shirley were close, but they had very different views on how to handle Aboriginal political matters. Militant action appealed to Dad because he had a very simple remedy to almost everything, which was a strong hands-on approach.

The Land Rights issue is at the core of our existence and this new state legislation assisted in the adoption of an Aboriginal Land Councils to carry out its functions. This was comprised of a three-tier structure, meaning that grassroots people could have a self-determining voice about land rights in their own communities. My mother, Colleen Perry, applied to establish the Local Aboriginal Land Council on the ‘Mish’ and was successful. The ‘Mish’ and its residents, for the first time, were masters of their own destiny. They were now in control of the ‘Mish’ and its future at Karuah. The Land Council established the Kamarah Aboriginal Housing Co-op to address the need for adequate housing and infrastructure for the needs of the local residents. Dr Jonas understood by recognising the value and success of Aboriginal land councils to Aboriginal people:

> What we can say, however, is that the combined historical and social processes of two hundred years have resulted in Aboriginal underdevelopment. At the broadest level we can say that this means that Aborigines have been made worse off in terms of life sustenance systems, in freedom, and in self esteem. These can be seen as collective names for those needs which Aborigines have articulated right throughout New South Wales. Clearly, organisations which are meeting some of the needs in an on-going way must be regarded as successful organisations.502

The ground-breaking political work that had been started out so long ago by Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association had come to fruition. A local Worimi Aboriginal woman, Bev Manton, from the Karuah ‘Mish’, was employed as the CEO of the Karuah Local Aboriginal Land Council for a number of years as she had gained experience on another land council. She later launched a political campaign and was elected as a Regional Councillor. Eventually, she was voted into the position as chairperson, and head of the New South Wales State Aboriginal Land Council, the largest Aboriginal political organisation in

New South Wales. Bev remained in the position as chairperson for two terms: four years at the helm of our peak political organisation.503

The vibrant Aboriginal political movement was the inevitable outcome of the invasion, occupation and dispossession of Aboriginal people from their traditional land. Aboriginal people survived atrocities, murder, massacres and poisonings, which were clear attempts to exterminate the Aboriginal race. Aboriginal people were forced onto government reserves and had no control over any aspect of their lives. Generations were shaped by welfare dependency within the self-professed good will of governments and Christian religious groups. Government policies of assimilation were further attempts to breed out the purported Aboriginal problem. Charles (Chicka) Dixon, a great Aboriginal activist was inspired by Jack Patten and the Aborigines Progressive Association, very clearly summed up Aboriginal sentiments of the political movement in the 1960s:

*You know, you said earlier about anger. You kick a dog three times, it bites you the fourth. It’s gonna bite. You know, people, Aboriginal people, in the 1960s started to say, ‘We’ve had enough, that’s it.’* 504

Throughout this chapter, I have provided an outline of the Aboriginal political movement that started firstly with the AAPA under Worimi leadership from Port Stephens from the early part of the twentieth century. I have shown that Aboriginal political organisations fought for their rights to land and to protect their children and their cultural identity. I have included a number of significant political milestones, although not directly involving the Worimi people, but still having a major impact on their political consciousness and the future development of the ‘Mish’ at Karuah.

This chapter has provided an overview of some of the most important issues around Aboriginal land rights. In the conclusion, it has shown how a Worimi woman would eventually reach the pinnacle of our largest Aboriginal political institution in New South Wales. I have examined the early work of political activists like William Cooper and Jack Patten who took up the political struggle for rights and citizenship, the impact of the 1967 referendum under the tireless work of FCAATSI and the impressive collection of Aboriginal activists that included Pearl Gibbs, Doug Nicholls and great Australian friend, Faith Bandler. I have provided a clear understanding of the establishment of the Tent Embassy, the violence that individual political protesters endured and how the Embassy’s endeavours laid the foundations for Aboriginal land rights legislation.

I have presented information on the role that the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board played in the control and removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Evidence has been presented to support the assertion that government assimilation policies were, by design, clear attempts at cultural genocide and legitimised social engineering designed to breed out the Aboriginal race and break up family solidarity. I have explored the White Australia Policy after Australian Federation, which also influenced departmental approaches to the removal of Aboriginal children and their cultural identity. The rights and benefits we enjoy today as Aboriginal people are a direct result of a strong dedicated grassroots Aboriginal political movement. Some of those brave Aboriginal protesters risked life and limb for rights to land and freedom from government oppression and their memory and struggle continue on today.
Chapter Eight

Koori perspectives of Rugby League and other sports: Achievement, Identity and Struggle on the mission and in the mainstream

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the influence that sport had on the lives of all the people of the community living on the Karuah mission or ‘The Mish’, as it is known by the locals. I will explore how sport has taken Aboriginal people from a small obscure mission or reserve hidden away beside the Karuah River on Sawyers Point to the more elite sporting arenas of the industrial city of Newcastle and the metropolis of Sydney. My purpose is to show how sporting achievements have given Indigenous Australians a much wider acceptance in mainstream society, where, normally, racial class and social barriers separated colour.

There are a number of questions that need answering to understand how Aboriginal people from the Karuah mission became involved in competition sport. Was Karuah notably different to other missions or was it the same? What did people do to make their lives more meaningful while under strict government control on the mission? What interests did people become involved in that brought them and mainstream society together on or outside the mission? More specifically, did participation in competitive sports outside the mission impact on the lives of the athletes and people from the mission? When did sport become a level playing field for Aboriginal people? These and others questions pertinent to the people of the Karuah Mission will be explored and examined. Throughout this chapter, I will use the word Koori, as it represents for me the most appropriate word for Indigenous or Aboriginal Australians.

What is it about sport that Australia and other countries around the world embrace so passionately? Why do we as a country pride ourselves on our sporting heroes here and in the international arena? Does sport for us as Indigenous people mean something more than just a game, and does the social implication of what it offers go much further than it does for other sports participants? Sporting arenas are supposed to be the ultimate level playing fields, unlike in mainstream society itself, which tends to hold a negative view towards Aboriginal people. Here in the sports arena there can be no Black and White, no race and no religion, only two warriors or two teams that battle by the same rules to become the victor. Whether it is an adversary or teammate, people see a player’s skills, abilities, desire, courage and passion beyond the colour of their skin. Before and after the contest, racism perhaps, is still an
underlying issue, but when a game or match begins there should only be players. The veil of racism is somewhat lifted when the sporting event is taking place and the excitement and adrenalin are flowing, both for spectators, supporters and players.

Traditional Aboriginal Sports

Were there any sports played here by Koori people prior to Europeans arriving on the shores of Australia? Come on! Sport wasn’t invented and played solely by Western societies: it is an integral component in every society and culture on the planet. Ken Edwards did some extensive research collating the ‘Yulunga’ (Play) Traditional games played by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders throughout Australia before colonisation. It’s only natural for children to occupy themselves in free play and from that play there would have developed games and individual competition amongst themselves. Further, friendly organised competition would have evolved and become a social event spreading further to other groups and clans. So we as Indigenous Australians have been involved in sport for a very long time and it was a very important aspect of our cultural makeup.

Every aspect of traditional Koori society was about learning to survive to fulfil roles, obligations, rights and duties. In particular, boys as part of their training to survive to become initiated men would have to learn to throw small spears and boomerangs at targets. I think that friendly rivalry between young boys trying to prove their worth for manhood must have been common throughout Aboriginal Australia. William Smith, in his book *Myths of the Australian Aboriginals*, demonstrates that he is convinced that Aboriginal sports existed:

> Wrestling and foot-racing between two or more persons were common sports to be witnessed everyday among the aborigines, especially among the boys and young men. Another form of sport was throwing the spear and boomerang.\(^{505}\)

I am sure that the young men full of testosterone would have indulged in forms of combat like wrestling to prove their manhood. Spear and boomerang throwing were about learning and training to become a man and practising the skills needed to provide food for the clan and immediate family. Smith goes on to say that there were other games that the young men played which utilised the same skills as hunting to capture and kill prey for their clan. Interestingly Smith talks about a popular ball game that was called *Pulyugge* by the Karatinyeri men of South Australia, which involved throwing a ball back and forth between two groups. Smith believes

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that when neighbouring clans got together there were competitive sports played. I think that the nature of Aboriginal people and their communities has always been such that humour and the enjoyment of life are central to the people in it and forms of fun and sport are common, particularly with the young.

Out of Bounds

Historically, racist government policies have hindered any Aboriginal advancement. It has only been a little more than forty years since Aboriginal people have been granted citizenship in our own country and granted Human Rights that other Australians have always enjoyed. We as Aboriginal people were never afforded or given the same status and treatment of even the convicts who first invaded and occupied our lands. No rights, whether Indigenous or human, were permitted and our ancestors were not treated humanely. Aboriginal people were catalogued by the colonisers as being part of the native fauna and flora, alongside all the other unique wildlife of Australia. The 1901 Australian Constitution clearly discriminated against Aboriginal people as humans and we were categorised and placed under the New South Wales Fauna and Flora Act. This meant that we were considered as only animals or plants. Before the 1967 referendum, section 51 of the Australian constitution was as follows:

*The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:- The people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.*

The clause removed was, “other than the aboriginal race in any State”. In addition, section 127 was entirely removed. This read: “*In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.*”

The movement to include all Aborigines as Australian citizens emerged against a background of civil rights activism in many parts of the Western world. More particularly it began with the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s. Australia was under mounting international political pressure to honour their International Human Rights obligations here domestically.

In that short time we have seen Indigenous people scale the heights of sporting glory and received the accolades that they have earned in their sporting careers. The first Australian

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507 Ibid
cricket team to tour England in 1868 was made up entirely of Aboriginal players. Prior to the referendum in 1967, many of us were legally confined to missions and reserves under the legal government control with an appointed white protector or religious sect. Segregation and total control over the day to day lives of all Indigenous people were implemented by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board ratified by the 1909 New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act, as well as similar early 20th century acts in other states. There were no sporting fields and few sporting opportunities available for Aboriginal people on government controlled reserves in New South Wales. Any possibility of competing in competition sports was out there in mainstream society and it was up to the Protection Board as to whether or not you were able to play.

I have explained in the previous chapter on politics exactly what missions were like for Koori people. The Protection Board provided some basic shelter, including huts and housing and a fence to keep Kooris within the borders of the reserves and others out. Aunty Iris and Mum spoke about the mission gate and said that they as children would stand on the gate and swing on it during the day when it was open. After 6 pm, the mission manager would lock it and that’s the way it stayed until morning. Mission societies only provided churches and accommodation for the missionary residents. No thought at all was given to the possibility of providing properly constructed sporting fields or sporting ovals within the reserve or on the mission themselves.

The atmosphere was like a German prison-of-war camp in the Second World War. Casual sport without any facilities to speak of was played by the young in any vacant open space within the reserve that wasn’t taken up by housing. If the river was beside the reserve then the children swam and fished in the river that for centuries had been the life blood of the Worimi clans.

Aborigines Pick Up the Ball

Although Kooris were restricted to the missions by the Protection Board, some were allowed to participate in local mainstream sport. When an opportunity was offered it was accepted eagerly by Kooris to escape the effects of the protection policies and the mission. When local sporting opportunities came up, in many cases, the Protection Board permitted Koori participation because they saw it as a means of assimilating them to the ways of an emerging Australian society. Small towns like Karuah were always short on numbers for team sports so Kooris from the mission were recruited when needed. The problem was that when they competed in sport their athletic talents overshadowed many of the other players and they became regulars and star players standing out amongst the others.
What is it about sport that inspires the spectators and participants? Perhaps it’s the developed camaraderie of a team sport that sees cohesion, teamwork, helping and encouraging a fallen mate, community, state and country’s victory. Whatever its nature, sport has become imbedded in the social, economic and political structures of Australia, and indeed the world. It can symbolise a number of principles admired by many societies: work hard, pick yourself up when you’re down, don’t give in, fight against the odds and you can succeed and win.

When Australia wins any sporting event we all go up and cheer as one nation, no matter what the sport is, and we take some ownership of it; this is a unifying factor in Australian culture. As Cathy Freeman crossed the finish line and won the gold medal in the Sydney 2000 Olympics we all went up as one nation, proudly supporting her victory. The media quickly seized the opportunity and I read and heard their words like “Our Cathy” in the media. In the 1994 Commonwealth games when Cathy won the gold medal and took the Aboriginal flag with the Australian flag on a victory lap, the more conservative newspaper headlines and many Australians around the country weren’t so supportive of her.

Arthur Tunstall, former leader of the Australian Commonwealth Games Association, berated Cathy publicly in the media, saying: “She should have carried the Australian flag first up. And we should not have seen the Aboriginal flag at all...”508 Regarding her open display of pride in her culture and people, Arthur’s comments generated friction and racist attitudes emerged within the media and mainstream society. Fortunately, not everyone agreed with Arthur’s comments: even the then prime minister saw the value and symbolism in what she did. Cathy was always in the spotlight after that incident and was a lot more tactful in displaying both flags when she won.509

Lionel Rose was the first Aboriginal to become a world boxing champion and he did this at the age of 19. Lionel won the World Bantamweight Championship in 1968 against a seasoned Japanese legend, the champion Masahiko "Fighting" Harada. Rose was a great man who carried himself well and won against the odds, but, at times, the media wasn’t very kind to him, particularly after he lost the title. Lionel had an outstanding amateur boxing career, winning the Australian amateur flyweight title at age 15, yet missing out on selection for the 1964 Olympics. He lost his world bantamweight title to Ruben Olivares in a fifth-round knockout. Much of the media described Lionel as an Australian when he won and when he lost he was an Aboriginal. Everyone loves a winner, but, in Australia, it is preferably white winners and the media is quick

to put the boot in when a Koori loses or doesn’t perform well. Lionel was described by everyone who knew him as a gentleman.

Then there’s Anthony “The Man” Mundine, an Indigenous Australian world champion in boxing. Every time I went to a pub or club to watch him fight almost everyone would cheer for his opponent, even if that opponent wasn’t from Australia. There were many who would say they don’t like him because he is too arrogant and full of himself. That well may have been the case, but I have my doubts as I have never seen so many people dislike an Australian world champion. People can’t see that he was trying to replicate the career of his outspoken hero Muhammad Ali, nor do they know or care about the charity work he does with Kooris across many communities. Because of his religious beliefs, Anthony was asked by the media to comment on the Muslim terrorists’ attacks. It was unnecessary and unwarranted - no other sporting personality in the western world has ever been questioned about that!

History has shown us that the media has never been kind to Kooris and are eager to attack us at any opportunity that arises. The construction and destruction of Koori people and culture in the media has been a powerful tool to keep Kooris on the outer graces of society. The media is responsible for inciting and maintaining racist attitudes by demonising any Koori that challenges or expresses the inequities that are evident in society. Maybe it’s ok to be an Aboriginal world champion in sport, as long as you remain subservient, conformist and don’t question racial issues in sport and, heaven forbid, promote your Indigenous views and culture. The reason Anthony gave up rugby league and took up boxing was because he believed there was bias in representative player selections, particularly in New South Wales, and I would have to agree with him.

Dave Sands (Dave Ritchie) was born at the Burnt Bridge Aboriginal Settlement near West Kempsey, but in Stockton, where he lived, and in the boxing fraternity he was a living legend having won a host of Australian boxing titles and a British title in his short-lived career. There are a number of local memorials erected in his name and even one in Sydney. In 1998, Dave was inducted into the International Hall of Fame in America and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Hall of Fame. He was the local hero who was loved and respected by all who knew him. He was described as a shy quiet man who was always courteous; a family man whose family and kinship ties came first. Ramsland and Mooney in their paper “Dave Sands as Local Hero and International Boxing Champion” (2008) quote the words of boxing historian and radio commentator Ray Mitchell upon the death of Dave:
World boxing has lost a great fighter; Australian boxing has lost its mainstay; society has lost a gentleman\(^{510}\)

Great world champions, like tennis player Evonne Goolagong-Cawley, and boxers Lionel Rose and Dave Sands, were described by the media as ladies and gentlemen. These champions were more accepted by mainstream society because of a further suppressed version of Aboriginality than their sporting achievements. Sure it was their talent that got them noticed, but it was their demureness that made them more acceptable and attractive to Australians. In his book *Good Sports: Australian sport and the myth of the fair go*, Peter Kell provides an explanation for their media attractiveness:

They were seen as polite, well presented, passive, compliant, grateful and completely satisfied... They were seen to be different to other Aboriginal people and not subject to behaviour of that categorised the rest of their brethren. In short they were not “militant”, “dissatisfied”, or “Upptit blacks” they were not “bloody whingeing”. The media loved them because their heartwarming stories painted a picture mainstream society wanted to see, a “rags to riches” story that everyone wanted to hear.\(^{511}\)

Evonne’s rise to the top of the tennis world happened at a time when the push for Aboriginal rights and Land Rights were placed firmly on the national agenda. The 1967 referendum had just been passed and many Aboriginal social issues relating to that decision emerged with some negativity in the media and mainstream society. Evonne had her fair share of critics and knockers with their derogatory remarks, but she held her head high and remained a real champion on the tennis court winning seven Grand Slam finals and coming runner up in eleven.\(^{512}\) Rex Bellamy of *The Times* describes her in Kell’s “Good Sports” (2000) as: “beautifully gifted, with grace of balanced movement, instinctive tactical brain, flexible repertoire of strokes and an equable temperament.”\(^{513}\) She was a graceful woman on and off the court with a pleasant manner and attitude that attracted praise from reporters wherever she competed.

For many past Koori sports people, it was a battle just to be permitted to play because of racist attitudes and the powers of government protection policies. There were a number of Kooris who competed at elite levels. Many didn’t identify themselves as Aboriginal to avoid the far-

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reaching constraints of the Aborigines Protection Acts and the racial barriers that have been ever present in Australian society. For Kooris to compete at any level of sport there were sacrifices they had to make that mainstream athletes didn’t have to. The cost of sporting glory could mean loss of Aboriginality, denial of culture and acceptance of a new way of life that has destroyed Indigenous cultures around the world.

**Taking a Step Back: Black Colonial Cricket**

Cricket was and is the preferred and only real summer sport to be embraced nationally in Australia, having been seen more as an English gentleman’s sport. It doesn’t offer the same physical demands as rugby league and it appears to have lost its appeal to Kooris. This is also because of a complete lack of support and encouragement from Cricket Australia towards Kooris taking part in it in the modern era; but Koori people have been playing cricket since the early to mid-1800s. Why did Kooris take up any sporting opportunity that was available to them in those early years? Was it the settlers’ idea to mock the noble savage by dressing him in cricket whites to play the gentleman’s game? Did they play to be accepted or was it a chance to prove that they were just a good if not better than the White man? Was it a chance to beat him at his own game or escape the atrocities against his people, that were delivered by the missions/reserves and their missionaries and their managers? Missionaries also felt sport was another means of Christianising and civilising Aborigines. Whatever the reason, Indigenous Australians have contributed greatly to the national and international sporting profile of Australia and will continue to do so.

It appears to me that Koori cricketers of that period were displayed and used as a form of amusement. The noble savage dressed in the cricketer’s whites playing the gentleman’s game while also, perhaps, seen as being almost like trained monkeys in a circus or carnival sideshow. This is reflected in the comments of Colin and Paul Tatz in their book, *Black Diamonds*, about a Koori cricketer Shiney, or Shinal, who played cricket in Hobart town in 1835. On his death, he was beheaded and the specimen was sent by the resident doctor to an Irish museum for preservation.\(^{514}\) It is a timely reminder that when it came to Kooris there was no team camaraderie, no respect or even decency displayed towards Shiney’s humanity. It has been this type of attitude and evolved mindset that has retarded the relationship between Kooris, the Australian government and mainstream society, which still lingers today.

In the 1860s, Koori teams were consistently involved in playing cricket and, even earlier in the 1850s, there is evidence of individuals playing, probably to help field a full side. In Victoria, there were matches played between different Aboriginal missions and settlements. In New South Wales, it is recorded that individual Kooris played and broke records, amazing spectators. Kooris like Johnny Taylor and his father and many others played with successful teams around southern New South Wales and the Victorian border. Johnny is reputed as having scored 35 runs off 4 hits, including 10 runs off one hit, and is reported as having hit a ball 165 metres on the fly. What a powerful and talented batsman he must have been! It was the beginning of Koori players entering into mainstream cricket in the state of New South Wales.\textsuperscript{515}

I don’t think a lot of Australians would know that the first Australian cricket team to tour England 1868 was an all Aboriginal team. The motivation for sending this team is debatable, but exploitation appears to be at the bottom of it all. However, the players returned to the full extent of the governments’ protection policies at the end of the tour. This was with the exception of one of those players, John Mullagh, who left his mark on the tour of England and when he played cricket in Australia. Johnny Mullagh achieved much more than fame and glory as an all-round cricketer. He won the respect of cricketers, spectators and the media through displaying his sporting talent, determination and mettle in a time of open racism in Australia and, indeed, around many parts of the Western world.

As suggested by Harcourt, the English tour was treated by serious cricketing students of the game a ‘curiosity little better than a vaudeville turn’.\textsuperscript{516} And that’s what it became, a sideshow to entertain the English and a moneymaking venture. Tom Willis managed and coached the team when they played a game on Boxing Day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). They were persuaded to play interstate matches starting in Sydney, New South Wales, and then on to Brisbane in Queensland to raise money for the tour of England. Unfortunately, they were left stranded in Sydney when entrepreneur Captain Gurnett embezzled the funds they raised and they had to return to Victoria. Upon their return, they acquired a new financial sponsor to play cricket matches and Charles Lawrence, a former Surrey professional cricketer, took over as coach and manager.\textsuperscript{517} He later became a cricket coach in the seaside suburb of Manly.

The English tour, under Lawrence’s leadership, began with great success for the Koori players who were watched by 7,000 at Surrey, and, as Hardcourt explains, the

*Team impressed the critics who employed superlatives to describe the scene: ...A new epoch in the history of cricket*, Reynold’s News; *...decidedly the event of the century trumpeted the Sheffield Telegraph.*

The Koori team was welcomed with open arms by the English spectators and press. Throughout the tour, John Mullagh was a standout performer, scoring most of the team’s runs and taking most of their wickets, with Johnny Cuzens a close second. It was these two players who carried the team and were probably the only first class cricketers in the Koori side. The English teams they played on tour were not up to the standards of national teams but were sound county sides; still, Mullagh and Cuzens were head and shoulders above the rest. The other players were outstanding athletes and entertained the crowd with the amazing feats in fielding.

There were some criticisms of the tour and the Koori team, but, on the whole, it was a positive venture for the Koori players and everyone involved. Some racist comments were printed in local papers, as well as criticism of the quality of the teams that the Koori side played. Towards the end of the tour, crowds slowly faded away and, financially, it failed; the black carnival sideshow was losing its appeal to the English. Nevertheless, players like Mullagh and Cuzens shone like beacons, continuing to reap the praises of media and spectators alike. Throughout the tour, descriptions of the team and individual players reflect a positive portrayal of their behaviour and demeanour on and off the cricket field. They played cricket with the etiquette of

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English gentlemen and competed in the athletic and novelty events with humour and goodwill towards fellow competitors. 519

The whole team played and performed their way into the hearts of the English spectators that came to see them as the fascinating natives of Australia. It was more than a game of cricket that they watched - at stumps the Koori team performed athletics and novelty events for money and put on a sideshow to entertain and amaze the crowd. Acts of Boomerang and spear throwing, every performance displayed their tribal skills. One spectacle that was a particular favourite was Dick-a-dick dodging cricket balls at 15 to 20 metres armed only with a very narrow wooden shield and wooden club. Cricket balls were thrown simultaneously by three men and high balls were blocked with the thin shield while lower ones were hit away with his club. This skill was appreciated immensely with loud roars and applause from the crowd in disbelief as he deflected the rain of balls at his body.520

The sideshow antics enthralled the crowd and became an important feature of the tour, perhaps even more exciting than the cricket matches themselves. The Koori players were outstanding athletes and this is how they received money on tour, by winning the sporting events. Johnny Cuzen usually won the 100 yards sprint, John Mullagh was a standout for the high jump as was Dick-a-Dick in the 150 yards hurdles. Mullagh starred against Bootle scoring 51 and 78 runs then taking 12 wickets and a stumping. After the match he was presented with 50 shillings for his excellent play.521 In presenting the purse, the club president claimed that:

_He did not think there was a better player in England than Mullagh, especially, that until about three years ago he had not handled a bat, and knew nothing of the game..._522

John Mullagh is recorded by Tatz as quietly confronting the racial attitudes of the times, which reflected the man who was proud and dignified with the ability to challenge racism through his cricketing fame. Back in Australia, John once slept in the open because a racist Victorian inn keeper only offered accommodation next to the stables as being good enough for a “nigger”. Directly or indirectly, through John Mullagh’s sporting ability, people began to see a sportsman and not just a black man. In turn, Johnny started the process of breaking down those racial barriers that were established when the English long boats were beached at Botany Bay. A

520 Ibid
memorial with his cricketing averages was erected on his local Harrow ground, which was later renamed Mullagh Oval. It is that love of sport and exceptional sporting ability that helps create heroes that cut across all boundaries, including race.523

‘Big Bill’s’ Home Ground Advantage: the Making of a Legend

Historically, local cricket and rugby league at Karuah and in the Port Stephens area were generally a means of bringing towns, friends and family together. They became society calendar events that the Raymond Terrace Examiner (RTE) reported on as local news and as regular sporting events. Social cricket was a marked feature of Limeburners Creek in the 1920s and revived again in the 1930s due to the efforts of the Hall family. Teams that participated came from the local areas of Wallarobba, Clarence Town, Allworth, Booral, Swan Bay and two teams from Karuah. Yes, one of the Karuah teams was an all-Aboriginal side from the Karuah mission with the names Manton, Ridgeway and Russell heading the team.

Stories of almost superhuman sporting feats have been reported by players, spectators and media over the years concerning William (Bill) Ridgeway or ‘Big Bill’ as he was affectionately referred to by the media. He was better known to his family and close friends by the nickname “Digler”. No one seems to know where that name came from and how he acquired it. I was just a young boy when Bill died, but can recall people on the mission referring to him by the name ‘Digler’. Outside of the mission it was usually Bill or ‘Big Bill’.

‘Big Bill’ was well over six foot and a big man in excess of sixteen stone of pure muscle, sinew and bone who made the cricket ball almost vanish into the broad ‘mitt’ that was his hand. I have heard many legendary stories about Bill’s sporting prowess from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in and around the Karuah district. Bill was well known as a local rugby league and cricketing legend who was a giant of a man, and I am not merely talking about his stature. He was a man who was respected as a gifted athlete and gentlemen and that’s how he was described by people who knew him - the players, spectators and media. Throughout his sporting career, the media decorated Bill with many flattering superlatives from his sporting achievements that made him into a local living legend.

In one game he was credited with hitting a six out of the oval, clear over an adjoining house and yard onto the race track behind the house.524 You might think that people have exaggerated this

extraordinary feat, a hit of around one hundred and fifty metres on the fly. Stories were told and handed down at Karuah about how he once hit a six back over the bowler’s head, clearing the oval and huge gum trees and then fading out of sight, something like a Tiger Woods’ golf drive. They had to stop play for a half hour while they tried to find the ball, with both teams looking for it. They couldn’t find it in the far clearing and the only conclusion was that it ended up in the adjoining dam almost 200 metres from the initial hit. It wasn’t the first time that he had done this. These amazing sporting stories of Bill’s super human feats continued to grow into sporting folklore spreading further afield as he competed in any arena.

In a local unidentified newspaper article, Bill is cited as being a man who walked out to bat with one pad on his leg and bare feet to face the bowler’s pace attack. He didn’t usually stay long at the crease, but that didn’t mean he didn’t score runs - it just meant he scored runs quickly. When playing with Duckenfield against Paterson, he hit ninety runs in eighteen minutes and was only at the wicket for only five overs. What a brilliant innings and what a spectators’ delight to witness such a display of power hitting! He was an all-round cricketer and also a devastating fast bowler who collected five wickets for forty three runs in the same game. In the newspaper, he was described as: “brilliant field and great throw”; “put up some sensational performances this season”; “Billy is the most popular with players and spectators”. Bill was the ultimate all-rounder with bat or ball in hand or anywhere in the field and praises were sung by local cricketing enthusiasts who witnessed his talent.

Comments were made such as, ‘The most popular with players and spectators’. There were many interesting statements like this made by the media. The era we are talking about was the late 1930s. There would have been a lot of overtly racist attitudes with the racism that was embedded in the foundation of Australian society. Bill’s sporting prowess enabled him to breakdown those racial barriers and people watched a gifted sportsman who challenged the boundaries of what champions achieve on the playing field. I am sure they saw a Blackman, but came to admire what he could produce in a single game, even if it was only until the last ball was bowled.

Bill went on to play district cricket with the Waratah-Mayfield Cricket Club where he established himself as a regular long-term first grade cricketer. His right arm fast bowling struck fear into the hearts of opposition batsmen and won the hearts of the spectators. He is recorded by the Newcastle Morning Herald as playing first grade cricket in 1921 and making the big hits.

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524 Limeburners Creek Progress Association. (1988). From Twelve Mile to Crystal Creek. Limeburners Creek, N.S.W, Limeburners Creek Progress Association
525 Unidentified Newspaper
Ridgeway made a tremendous hit off Scott for a six. Bill consistently scored runs throughout his career, but he never went on to score centuries. He still made the big hits and adding to the team’s batting tally. Ridgeway hit with good effect, and scored 26 before being bowled by O’brien. People watched and waited for him to produce something that they could talk about around the dinner table or over a beer at the pub.

Bill continued to hold his first grade position into the 1930s and developed his skills more as a genuine right-arm fast bowler with Waratah. His ability to reduce opposition runs and take wickets became a feature with the club and the newspaper persistently recorded his sporting talents: Taylor quickly gave way to Ridgeway, who immediately met with success by clean bowling Chapman the same bowler then Simms before he had scored,... Even when Bill was absent from the team he still managed to get mentioned in the Newcastle Morning Herald. Not having his valued bowling contributions must have been the reason why Waratah didn’t win their games:

Waratah had a stiff task, and was handicapped by the absence of its pace bowler Ridgeway. Perhaps Ridgeway might not have taken a wicket, but his bowling would have lent variety.

‘Big Bill’ played first grade Newcastle district cricket with Waratah and also with his beloved local Karuah teams. The Raymond Terrace Examiner eagerly reported on Bill’s sporting success. Bill loved playing cricket at the place where he started, Karuah, and with his People against the teams and friends that created his sporting legend. The all-Aboriginal Karuah mission team led by Bill played in the Robins Cup at Maitland Park on an Easter Monday and the Port Stephens Examiner reported colourfully that:

Bill landed a couple of sixers one invading the bowling green and hurried the bowlers to shelter. But as soon as the danger had passed they gather around the hole made on their beloved green and gazed mournfully at the indentation. Some nearly wept: others drowned their sorrows in the old fashioned way.

They didn’t win the game, but what great stories would have been told in that club for years to come about the fear and damage ‘Big Bill’ inflicted on their bowling greens from the adjoining cricket field.

After Bill’s first grade cricketing career ended, he returned to Karuah and continued to play with his own mob at Karuah. I think that this is where he got the most pleasure out of the game. Against Limeburners Creek, an engagement which sounded more like a social game than competition, Bill still scored runs and took wickets. The *Port Stephens Examiner* reported on the game: “E Manton and A Munro were the most successful bowlers for Limeburners W Ridgeway and J Callaghan for Karuah. The match caused considerable amusement. Some of the mission boys play with Limeburners and some with Karuah. Big Bill and his party playing for Karuah on Saturday had the biggest end of the stick sub-sequently had the laugh.”  

Bill scored 57 runs not out in that game and was always the celebrity with reporters eager to write about his sporting exploits.

Bill’s cricketing abilities had seen him attain the heights of first grade district cricket with Waratah, a first class district club in the industrialised suburbs of Newcastle in an era when Aboriginal men weren’t a feature of the gentlemen’s game. Had he not been Koori I wonder would he have donned the baggy green cap or become another iconic representative player. I guess we will never know for sure, but there was another Aboriginal cricketer, Eddie Gilbert, who played state cricket for Queensland at the same time. During his amazing career, Eddie experienced extensive racism and prejudice that hindered his first grade career. At the time, he was regarded as the fastest bowler in Australia and is credited with bowling Donald Bradman out for a duck. Racists were continually trying to push him out of the game and any chance of Australian selection with umpires labelling him a ‘chucker’, allegations of him being a leper and even teammates trying to run him out when he was batting, not to mention other biased behaviour towards him.

Eddie reflected later in a moment of truth: “It’s all right to be a hero on the field, but a black man can be lonely when he is not accepted after the game.” Had Eddie been Caucasian he would have stood among the cricketing legends like the ‘Don’. What he did achieve in his career helped pave the way for other Kooris who aspired to become representative cricketers. The same was the case with Bill: he wore the whites for Waratah with pride and honour, gaining

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him the respect from everyone associated with him and the game, and making him the
champion of the media and cricket supporters. As a local hero and legend from Karuah, there is
no one who has been his equal. The stories of his powerful hitting and skill as a cricketer were
recorded and told by local witnesses such that they have become part of Australian sporting
folklore. Indeed, every now and again the stories appear out of the mists of history, sometimes
in the local press.

If ever there were true gentlemen who played the game of cricket ‘Big Bill’ would have stood
amongst them. Perhaps he even towered above them, not only in stature, but in strength of
character. With a modest personality that belied his huge size, he remained humble to all who
knew him and wherever he played. Bill’s sporting glories and stories have faded along with the
years and the people who witnessed them, but hopefully they will not be entirely forgotten. Had
‘Big Bill’ been Caucasian, much of his cricketing deeds would have been recorded with vigour
and pride by sporting historians. There will always be champions in any game, but real sporting
heroes only come maybe once in a lifetime. They should be recognised and remembered
through time as immortals, regardless of their cultural background or heritage.

Change of Seasons: Rugby League and the Smell of Liniment

In New South Wales, rugby league epitomised working class men’s sport and, for many, it
became the family weekend outing with large numbers attending games throughout the second
half of the twentieth century. Aboriginal men were suited to the dynamics of the game of rugby
league. It has always been a physical and demanding sport and, with the natural athleticism that
we possess, it was quickly embraced. Those Koori men who were permitted to play the game
did so with great enthusiasm and vigour. Aboriginal men were allowed to become warriors once
again for at least eighty minutes on the playing field on winter weekends. Many did not reach
the heights of first grade and test selections, but they contributed to every aspect of the game
and with a specific cultural input that began with the early touring Australian teams of rugby
league and rugby union. The Aboriginal War Cry was a feature in these Australian sporting
teams.
Kangaroos War Cry:-

Photograph Sean Fagan of RL1908.com

_Wallee Mullara Choomooroo Tingal_  
_Nah! Nah! Nah! Nah!_  
_Cannai, Barrang, Warrang, Warrang._  
_Yallah, Yallah, Yallah, Yallah._  
_Ah! Jaleeba, Booga, Booorooloong._  
_Yarnah mee, mee, mee._  
_Meeyarra, Meeyarra, Jeeleebo, Cahwoon._  
_Cooeewah, Cooeewah, Wahn, Wooh._  
_We are a race of fighters, descended from the War Gods -_  
_Beware! Beware! Beware! Beware!_  
_Where we fight there will be bloodshed -_  
_Go! Go! Go! Go!_  
_We are powerful, but merciful; are you friends?_  
_Good! Good!_  
_The Kangaroo is dangerous when at bay._  
_Come on, Come on, to Death._

Kooris might have been omitted from the beginning of the rugby league competition and test selection for games in Australia, but have contributed to each test match in England and France when the Kangaroos have toured. Like the Maoris that lent their Haka to the All Blacks, the Australian team borrowed an Aboriginal war cry from a Queensland Murri Clan. The Australian Test Team performed the war cry when they docked in Great Britain on their tour in 1908-9. It is believed that it was given to Queensland test player Jack Fihelly when he met Archie Meston.

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who managed an Aboriginal troupe that was performing in Sydney when the test team was
departing for England. The war cry was said to belong to the warriors of Stradbroke Island in
Queensland referred to by Archie as the fiercest tribe in Australia. Even some of the immortals
of rugby league participated in the rituals prior to test match kick-offs.\

Reports from the media in Britain varied about this war cry - some were positive, some were not
- but it became very popular with the English spectators and a drawcard for every game they
played. At the same time, the Australian Rugby Union team was also touring and had also
adopted and performed the Aboriginal war cry. Similar to the New Zealand teams’ ‘Ka Mate
Haka’, the war cry was documented by reporters as being more of a yell of defiance and less
tuneful than the ‘Haka’. The war cry became a feature of the Australian touring rugby league
teams over a long period of time and was last performed in December, 1967. Perhaps political
correctness due to the 1967 Referendum was a timely reminder of the misuse and abuse of
Koori people and their culture.

Karuah is only a small coastal and river town on Port Stephens in total population, meaning
there really weren’t enough the locals to form their own full football team, so they had to draw
on the Kooris from the Aboriginal Mission. Most of the young men played with the Karuah
rugby league team and were known to the locals. They either worked for them labouring on
their oyster leases in commercial fishing or as labouring wood-getters felling trees for local
timber mills. This was the only employment outside of the ‘Mish’ that was available for the
men. Rugby league was an important Karuah social event and without my ancestors playing
there would probably not have been a Karuah football team that could be locally fielded.

Some of the identified Koori men that lived on the ‘Mish’ and played for Karuah over the years
were Arnold Dates, B. Dates, Sid Ridgeway, William (‘Big Bill’) Ridgeway, Hugh Ridgeway,
Darby Ridgeway, Arthur Ridgeway, George Ridgeway, Tim Manton, Peter Manton, Steven
Manton, Jackie Manton, K Manton, Alex Russell, Laurie Russell, G. Russell, Wally Russell,
Jack Feeney, Les Maher, Harry Clarke, Mervyn Ping, Eric Simms, Danny Manton, Dale
Greentree, Tim Greentree, Joey Irvine, Steve Robinson, Paul Roberts, Rick Perry and myself. I
hope I haven’t omitted any of the mission boys who wore the red and white and apologise to
any I missed. Within this group were men who mostly married on the mission producing
another generation of rugby league players.

N.S.W, Sean Fagan.p 389
‘Big Bill’ Ridgeway was one of these Karuah Koori men who embraced the game of rugby league and, over the long term, was a true warrior every time he laced up his football boots and competed on the playing arena. Bill didn’t just leave his sporting talents and extraordinary athletic deeds on the cricket pitch in the summer. He brought those same sporting abilities and displayed them on the football field. His football career began with Karuah and he went to Newcastle to play first grade with Waratah-Mayfield Rugby League Football Club. The Waratah locals must have loved watching Big Bill representing Waratah first grade in both cricket and Rugby League, an all-round athlete.

The legend that started at Karuah grew even further afield spreading to Newcastle as again the media adopted ‘Big Bill’ and colourfully documented his sporting career. Bill Ridgeway played rugby league for various local teams over a particularly long stretch of time – at the very least for over 30 years with Karuah. He won his first premiership with Karuah in 1926 and his last with them in 1942. His long term first grade position with Waratah gained him praise and admiration by Newcastle rugby league fans. At that time the Newcastle Rugby League competition was on a par with Sydney. English touring teams always had an uphill battle against the Newcastle representative sides. Back in those days, the Australian rugby league selectors drew on players from the Newcastle competition to represent the Australian team.

Wherever he went, Bill was a crowd and media favourite. He became larger than life and the earliest available record of him playing rugby league with Karuah was in the Raymond Terrace Examiner: ‘...W Ridgeway fielding the ball well and passed to A Ridgeway who got across.’ 536 Bill and Arthur made a formidable combination in the Karuah backline which resulted in both of them scoring many tries by carving up the opposition defences. They were both offered and took up positions in the Waratah first grade backline and continued their attacking raids in that competition. Waratah, an industrial suburb, was more representative of the working class players and gave Kooris more opportunities than other clubs, Bill’s athleticism and skill as a league player was well documented by the (RTE) and his name regularly appeared with almost admiration.

_W Ridgeway Karuah’s fullback who played an excellent game landed a field goal making the score 11 to 12._ 537

Karuah won the competition in 1926 and there were ten Koori players in the winning side; Uncle Mervyn Ping, ‘Big Bill’ Ridgeway, Arthur Ridgeway, Hugh Ridgeway, Darby Ridgeway, Darby Ridgeway, Darby Ridgeway,

537 (1928). Raymond Terrace Examiner. Raymond Terrace.
Sid Ridgeway, G. Ridgeway, Les Maher, Steven Manton and G. Clarke. The majority of the team were Koori who came from the ‘Mish’ and an almost all Ridgeway team! The winning players were presented with their premier medals at a presentation dance at Karuah. Most of the Koori players weren’t present and their medals were awarded to them later.538 Bill won another premiership with Karuah in 1942 with most of the mission boys making up the team and playing alongside him.

It’s not hard to pick ‘Big Bill’: he was the tallest man in every photograph taken of him. Bill, along with other Kooris from the ‘Mish’, also played grade with Raymond Terrace and became a feature in the Raymond Terrace Examiner. A clear indication of his popularity with supporters was the advertising of the return of Bill to their team as a draw card for their games. “The team that beats them will know they are playing. Bill Ridgeway will be playing with the Terrace next Sunday and should improve the team.”539 Tim Manton must have been a good player as his name was regularly documented in the newspaper playing with Karuah and Raymond Terrace, along with number of other Kooris from the ‘Mish’. Tim Manton played a wonderful good game at halfback, W Ridgeway was a success at fullback.’540

The Raymond Terrace Examiner continually reported on Bill’s speed and the power he displayed every weekend in the local rugby league. The combination of his physical stature and athleticism for such a big man won him praise as a sporting rarity, but the description most used by all who met him was ‘gentleman’ and this gained him respect and approval throughout his sporting life. I remember ‘Big Bill’ as a child when he was quite an old man living on the ‘Mish’. He was respected by everyone on that mission. I wish I could have seen him play and witness some of his sporting abilities. The stories I have been told about ‘Big Bill’ over the years by relatives on the ‘Mish’ and Karuah locals who glowingly expressed these things with admiration and a reverence appropriate to the man that he was.

It was inevitable that such talent should not go unrewarded and Bill was asked to play first grade for Waratah-Mayfield. They were still giving him write-ups in the Raymond Terrace Examiner when he was playing for Waratah-Mayfield; he was the real local hero and they claimed him as their own: ‘W Ridgeway scored two tries for Waratah on Monday night.’541 In a game against Easts, Bill injured his knee and was limping badly, but still managed to make an impact on the game and was recorded in the Newcastle Morning Herald thus: ‘but still he put in a few nice runs down the sideline down the wing. The best movement of the game was when

541 (1933). Raymond Terrace Examiner. Raymond Terrace.
Ridgeway fielded a punt from Montgomery on his 25 line. He dashed to the Easts’ 25 line, with the rain pouring down at the moment supported by Oliver, Bailey and Edwards’. Even injuries didn’t stop Bill from performing on the football field, which only added to the legend that he had become. Comments like this continued with every game he played: ‘Ridgeway by Herculean efforts made ground with players hanging on to him.’

The media portrayed Bill as a titan amongst players, somehow touched by the sporting gods to carry out supernatural feats on the football arena. ‘...Ridgeway, who raced from half way to score in the corner, carrying his tackler, Dawson over with him.’ Bill scored three tries in that game and had a blinder receiving the reporter’s accolades throughout his column. ‘Ridgeway again showed his ability when received from V. Dobson, and evade several tacklers to score in the corner.’ There were very few Waratah games in which Bill didn’t gain mention regarding how his skills contributed towards the team’s performance. His attacking flair was regularly described by sports reporters with eager excitement and was always prominent in local newspapers.

It would appear there was nothing he couldn’t do. He was a colossus with the agility of a man half his size. Spectators anxiously waited for him to receive the ball to produce his own brand of magic. ‘The ball travelled to Ridgeway, who leapt in the air, gathered the ball in well, and dived over’. Hands the size of baseball gloves smothering the ball as it submerged into his grasp, accelerating across the grass in full flight with his other hand in the faces and chests of the opposition. ‘Then Ridgeway took a hand and raced down the wing, fending off player after player...’ What a sight to behold on winter Sunday afternoons - this giant of a man with speed, strength and all the attributes of an athlete exciting the spectators. It is not difficult to draw comparisons between ‘Big Bill’ and the current super star Greg Inglis in fending off tackles with disdain.

The game against Newcastle Central brought his name praise and further acclamations of his supernatural attacking abilities when he was credited by the Newcastle Morning Herald with scoring one of the best tries ever scored at Waratah Oval.

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545 Ibid
Bill Ridgeway, Waratah’s winger, brought the spectators to their feet with one of the most brilliant tries ever scored on Waratah Oval. Receiving the ball from Davis on the half way line, he brushed off Hindle, evaded Liddiard’s tackle, beautifully fended off Prigg, and when the crowd expected to see Bell grass him, it was amazed to see Bell smothered with a palm, and Ridgeway go over the line to score. Central supporters were the first to acknowledge the merit of his effort.\textsuperscript{548}

No doubt a great try and something extraordinary having the opposition supporters acknowledging his ability to score great tries is a testament to the respect that he was given on the football field.

In the semi-final against Kurri Kurri, Bill’s performance was outstanding and the newspaper reported; “Ridgeway’s display must be classed as his best.”\textsuperscript{549} Bill wasn’t just an attacking back, he was an all-rounder and I am sure many opposition wingers cringed when they faced him with ball in hand, one on one trying to pull him to the ground: “Price was moving nicely for Wests but Ridgeway brought him down with a perfect tackle.”\textsuperscript{550} A lot of the old people who saw ‘Big Bill’ play believed that he was one of the best players to wear the maroon and gold jumper for Waratah. But that’s getting harder to confirm as there aren’t many people of his era alive today to tell of his football ability. All that remains at the Waratah Leagues Club is a picture of him in the runners-up team of 1934. All records of Bill and any other player were lost in the 1955 flood waters - only newspaper articles in the library remain.

The Newcastle Morning Herald continued to record Bill’s outstanding football career in their weekly sporting section, colourfully describing his sporting flair in game after game. From the stories I have heard over the years and what I have found out through archival resources, Bill could have played first grade in Sydney. At the time there was little difference in the standard of play between the two competitions - Sydney and Newcastle. The only question I would ask as a rugby league fan is: Why didn’t Bill achieve representative honours in the game? If any rugby league fan read those newspaper articles about him they would also wonder why he didn’t receive a green and gold jumper. As an Aboriginal man, the question is answered for me: it was in an era when Aboriginal people weren’t really given consideration to represent Australia in most sports.

\textsuperscript{548} (1932). Newcastle Morning Herald. Newcastle.
\textsuperscript{549} (1934). Newcastle Morning Herald. Newcastle.
\textsuperscript{550} (1933). Newcastle Morning Herald. Newcastle.
It was a time before we were citizens, before we had rights and, I guess, we were fortunate to play any sport outside of the mission. Bill was a proud larger than life Blackman with clear roots to the Karuah Mission; there was no mistaking that. Had he been born in today’s sporting culture I have no doubts he would have worn the Green and Gold with pride for Australia. Perhaps even becoming a household name like Sonny Bill Williams, along the way making himself quite a bit of money from the game that he loved to play. He was remembered by his people, the spectators, players and anyone associated with the Newcastle rugby league of his time.

Bill returned to Karuah to play out his football career with his home team and other Koori players from the ‘Mish’, most of whom, were his family. He won a premiership with Karuah in
1942. The last relevant newspaper article recorded him playing with Karuah in 1946 and he was still a crowd and media favourite as the *Newcastle Morning Herald* reports: “Bill Ridgeway was down for a while, and the crowd cheered him as he rose.”

I think Bill would have been a champion in any sport he played. If it required a bat or ball he would have excelled. I have known a couple of Koori men who were like this, possessing great hand eye co-ordination that allows them to rise above other players. They seem to do it with the least amount of effort and at times appear to get bored with the game they are playing.

What set Bill apart from other extraordinary athletes is something I can’t quite explain: there was something about him, his personality or his physical presence. I don’t really know for sure, but people seemed to be drawn to him. Maybe it was just hero worship, like being in the presence of a celebrity, star or someone important. Whatever it was, people spoke about Bill and his sporting achievements with awe and admiration. That’s how Bill must have been throughout his long rugby league and cricket career, like some kind of human magnet who just drew people to him. People who knew him have said he was always humble and the consummate gentleman, whose quiet demure complemented his sporting ability which people came to admire and respect.

Spectators in a Small Crowd

It was a well un-kept secret amongst Kooris that one of their most elite and iconic rugby league players, Clive Churchill, also known as ‘the little master’, was indeed Koori. Clive grew up in the Newcastle multicultural inner suburb of Merewether and attended the Marist Brothers School in Hamilton. His former teacher at Marist Brothers, Brother David Hayes, remembered his Aboriginal mother whom he met on various official occasions at the school. Mrs Churchill regularly attended inter-school games and provided oranges pieces for the team at half-time. She was born in a small settlement near Bathurst where she met her husband who later fought with the AIF on Gallipoli. He was an expert rifle shot.  

John Ramsland recalls the conversation with Brother David Hayes who still lives at the school. Brother Hayes was the schoolboy coach and was definite that Mrs Churchill, Clive’s mother, was an Aborigine from the central-west of New South Wales. He knew her well. This was confirmed when Ross Taylor, a Cook’s Hill Surf Club stalwart, told John Ramsland that, when he drove Clive Churchill in his open car in a Newcastle sporting pageant. Clive told Ross that he was of Aboriginal descent (as was Ross). Churchill’s family have always denied their Aboriginality. This would make a great Koori story that I sincerely hope is told by someone to ensure it becomes part of Australia’s recorded history.

Legendary South Sydney player, Eric Simms, was among just a few Kooris who donned the Australian green and gold. But it was Lionel Morgan from Brewarrina who represented Australia in 1959, which was before my time. I didn’t know that he was the first recognised Koori to play rugby league for Australia. George Green was credited with the distinction of becoming the first now recognised Koori to play with Eastern Suburbs (Sydney) in 1908. Lin and Dick Johnson were the first blackfellas to play for New South Wales in the 1940s. Lin Johnson kicked the winning goal for Canterbury in their win over St. George in the 1942 grand-final. There were several others who were not identified as Koori because of earlier racist attitudes.

Many Aboriginal people from around NSW left the missions and reserves to escape the powers of the Protection Board and took up residence in Sydney, especially around Redfern and Green

552 John Ramsland Conversation 2012
553 John Ramsland Conversation 2012
Valley in the west of Sydney. Sydney was a growing multicultural capital city and it was easier for Kooris to blend into the large ethnic cauldron. The access to genuine employment and, to a large degree, the opportunity for acceptance or to be just left alone by the wider society and the Protection Board were very attractive incentives to move to the big smoke. South Sydney was one of the first Sydney clubs to have Koori players in their first grade side. Kevin Longbottom and many young men from La Peruse played juniors and first grade for the club.

When I was a young child growing up on the mission, practically everyone supported South Sydney, because of our local hero, my first cousin Eric Simms, who played full-back for them. Eric learned and developed his goal kicking ability as a student at Raymond Terrace High School. He played local junior rugby league in La Perouse and when he moved back there with his family. He played in the victorious South Sydney President’s Cup team that won in 1965 and was quickly elevated to grade football and then first grade where he broke records over the next ten years.\footnote{Ian Heads. (1985). \textit{The history of Souths, 1908-1985}. Crows Nest NSW, Hoffman-Smith Enterprises.}

I would argue that Eric Simms probably had the greatest impact on Rugby League of any player in its history. As the \textit{National Indigenous Times} reported, “it was Eric Simms who changed the course of football history”.\footnote{(2005). \textit{National Indigenous Times}. Bangor NSW.} Was Eric the greatest league player of all time? No, but he was a truly gifted kicker of the ball unlike anyone else during his playing career. Eric played 206 first grade games with South Sydney at fullback, scored a total 1,843 points and, in 1969, broke the record for most points scored in a season, 265, and also scored 50 points in 4 world cup matches, a record which still stands to this day. He was selected for and played in eight world cup matches for Australia, but was never chosen in a normal test match against England or New Zealand.\footnote{Allan Whitaker \& Glen Hudson. (2007). \textit{The encyclopedia of rugby league players} Wetherill Park, NSW, Gary Allen.}

Eric had the ability to score field goals at will and at that time field goals were worth two points. He was a superb positional player. He forced the rugby league administration to rethink and change the rules by reducing the value of the field goal to only one point. Heads and Middleton explains why the rule changed: “In one match, against Penrith, Simms kicked five successive field goals, at two points a goal. In a move reminiscent of the rule change in the 1930s to thwart billiards wizard Walter Lindrum, the NSWRL voted to reduce the value of field goals to one point.”\footnote{Ian Head \& David Middleton (2008). \textit{A centenary of rugby league 1908-2008: The definitive story of the game in Australia}. Sydney, Pan Macmillan,p267} He broke the record for most points in a season in 1969 and left his mark on the
game and entered the annals of rugby league history. No other player in the history of rugby league has had a greater impact on the game than Eric Simms.\textsuperscript{560}

I can clearly recall when Eric visited the Karuah mission to see his mother and family: we were kicking the football around on the ‘Mish’ and Eric came out and played kicks with us. It wasn’t long before half the mission came out - some women were watching and other adults joined in. Dad kicked the ball back and forwards with Eric for a long time barefooted and it was a wonder how he could walk the next day because his right foot was so swollen from kicking the ball. All of us kids would run around and pick up any loose kicks or dropped catches and hand the ball back to them to kick it again. I don’t remember Eric returning to the mission after that day and I only saw him years later at his home in Sydney.

Not many rugby league fans under the age of fifty would remember or know of Eric Simms. Mention the mighty winning Rabbitohs teams from the 1960s and people will pull out names like Coach Clive Churchill, John Sattler, Bobby McCarthy and Ron Coote, but they are unlikely to recall the name Eric Simms. It was refreshing to find this article on Eric recently in the \textit{Daily Telegraph} by Paul Kent who states: “Simms still has the rare distinction of being one of the few men whose influence was such it singlehandedly changed the game.”\textsuperscript{561} It’s nice to know that a true Koori rugby league legend is not forgotten, but still remembered and respected for his contributions to the game.

As Kooris migrated to Sydney, the Koori population boomed there and they wanted their own rugby league clubs that were exclusively for Kooris, teams like the Redfern All Blacks, Zetland and Koori United. These clubs were formed because of the discrimination and denial of access Koori players had to endure from mainstream clubs just to play rugby league in Sydney. Many talented players weren’t even picked to play or were graded and some just warmed the bench waiting until a player got injured and there were no white replacements available. The only opportunity that many of these Koori men would have had just to play rugby league was to form their own teams with which to enter the competitions.


Redfern All Blacks in 1945 courtesy Uncle Joe Goolagong

Right to left: Dick Lord (Ballboy), Lal Hinton (Captain), Merv (’Boomenulla’) Williams, Vesty Garret, Ray (’Sugar’) Williams, Jack McClaren, Jackie Simms, Issac (’Ike’) Bates, Cec Stewart, Alan Duren, Babs Vincent, Laurie (’Divebomber’) Perry, Colin Saunders, Eric (’Nugget’) Mumbler.

The skill and athleticism of many of these players became part of Koori folklore; players like my dad, Laurie ‘Divebomber’ Perry, a Wiradjuri man from Erambie mission in Cowra who lived in and around the Redfern area. That’s my father in the picture above, the third player from the left who played for the mighty Redfern All Blacks. Laurie acquired the nickname the ‘Dive Bomber’, the reason for which isn’t hard to work out when you look at his tackle in the picture below. His high flying tackling style won the acclaim and admiration of teammates, opposition players, spectators and the media. The length and height of those leaps covered huge distances. Unfortunately, that tackling style also cost him three or four collarbone breaks. The height and angle at which he made these diving tackles didn’t leave much room for error and he paid for a few that went astray.

There were also the Longbottom boys of La Perouse who would get numerous write ups and photographs in mainstream newspapers and magazines. Local magazines like the Pix published the athleticism that they displayed on the football field.
The same happened throughout rural areas in New South Wales: wherever there were large numbers of Kooris on reserves they formed their own rugby league teams.

The Moree (Boomerangs), Armidale (Narwon) and Purfleet mission were missions that formed their own rugby league teams to avoid being unfairly omitted from team selections due to bias and racism. South Taree or ‘Purfleet Mission’ and Forster or ‘Cabaritta Mission’ had strong connections to the Karuah Mission through many blood kinship ties. Bert Marr Junior was a well-known first grade winger in Taree who played first grade for twenty one years and was known locally as the fast ‘Brown Bomber’. He scored an abundance of tries over the course of his first grade career, becoming a hero among his people at Purfleet. Balmain club tried to

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562 In the last part of his playing career Clive Churchill was Captain-Coach of the Moree team in 1961, Clive Churchill, They called me the Little Master Percival Publishing Sydney, 1962, p190-191
sign him, but he wasn’t interested in Sydney and was happy living where he had family connections and was working as a ganger on the railway.\footnote{John Ramsland (2001). Custodians of the soil: a history of aboriginal-European relationships in the Manning Valley of New South Wales. Taree, NSW: Greater Taree City Council}

Football is in my blood. My grandfather Joseph Ping (Pop) played for the Purfleet Mission Football team while he cut timber in the area. That’s him, fifth from the right in the above picture. He was a part of the 1938 Purfleet Football Team, who was the Taree Premiers in the Wollamba League. I never knew Pop played league with Purfleet or any other team until after his death when I was eleven. He spoke to me about lots of things, but never about him playing “footy”. There would have been some great stories of sporting glory, overcoming huge odds in a difficult era and combating racism, not only to win but just to compete. Courage, determination and drive are attributes of all great athletes and successful sporting teams and these Koori teams, the players and supporters, would have had inspiring tales to tell us all.

\begin{quote}
A handsome line up of the Purfleet Football team. From left are Joe Simon, Les Marr, Tommy Ridgeway, Doug Slater, Jimmy Simon, Maher, Percy Simon, Nip Simon, Joe Ping, -, Claude Leon, - Simon, Henry Cunningham.

Photo courtesy of M Maher
\end{quote}
Racing Racism in Sport

Racism can be found in the foundations of Australian society. Its roots and feelers have spread like weeds to every community and can easily be recognised in each aspect of social life. It has become an institutional problem within the history of colonisation and for a supposedly expanding multicultural society. Kell supports this racial notion stating: ‘This racism remains in the social, political and administrative systems of Australian society, albeit now at a residual level. At an individual level, however, Indigenous people are still subject to vilification and there remains a deep hatred against them which is not directed with such vitriol in any other group in our society.’

So, why would sport be different to any other aspect of Australian society?

John Coomber reports in the Daily Telegraph with the headline ‘Racism common in Australian sport’ referring to the Race Discrimination Commissioner Tom Calma report titled, ‘What’s the Score A survey of cultural diversity and racism in Australian sport’ that Aboriginal and other ethnic groups are under-represented in Australian sport, and suggests they are turned off organised sport because they fear racial vilification. In the article he says: ‘It is clear that incidents of racial abuse and vilification are prevalent across all major sporting codes, involving professional sportspeople, amateurs, coaches and spectators.’ He further states that:

The fear of racism in Australian sport is also a major barrier to participation for indigenous people and those from various ethnic and cultural groups.

Perhaps the most notable racist incident in the modern era that has been displayed by the media across Australia was Nicky Winmarr and the racist taunts delivered by the spectators in an Australian Rules game. The image of Nicky lifting up his jersey and defiantly pointing to his black skin and the crowd was such a powerful image. It remains imprinted on my mind, the history of that game and hopefully in the hearts and minds of every Australian. Still, racist incidents and vilification are continually reported and dealt with by the league which leaves questions regarding the very racist foundations of Australian society.

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566 Ibid
567 Ibid
Racism came to the fore in the Australian Football League (AFL) in the early 1990s because there were so many Aboriginal players in the first grade teams and the league with such a large fan base and extensive media coverage. Indigenous players were reporting and complaining to referees about racial sledging and, at the end of June, 1995 the AFL introduced a new rule which specifically prohibited any form of racial sledging on the basis of a person’s race, religion, colour or national or ethnic origin. The new rule was directed at players, but also club officials and all coaching staff. The rule was titled the ‘Racial and Vilification Code’ but was known as the racial abuse rule or code. The rule came under much criticism in 1997 by Indigenous players because of the continued verbal abuse they experienced on the football field.  

Most of these cases were mediated and apologies were given and accepted, but one case involving David Cockatoo-Collins and Todd Curley went to the tribunal and received huge media attention in Melbourne. Collins claimed that Curley called him a ‘black c...’, but Curley denied it and said he called him a ‘weak c...’. With the support of his team mates, Curley’s version was accepted and he was cleared of the allegation. Collins would not have taken this allegation that far if it had not been true. He stood his ground on a racial issue that cuts at the 

very core of Aboriginal and Australian relations in sport and wider society. It is something that we have all had to deal with on our own, because racism is what we’ve all experienced on a daily basis. When given an opportunity and avenue to challenge racism, Collins voiced his complaints, but it was to no avail. Complaints continued from Koori players, which lead to the removal of the mediation process and the introduction of fines and penalties for any guilty player.569

I had never really been an AFL supporter until the Sydney Swans came to Sydney and made the Grand Final in 1996. However, I had watched a number of games prior to seeing the Swans, which involved Essendon’s Aboriginal player, Michael Long. I respected him not only for his ability to kick and mark the ball with precision and athletic skill, but because he was a true advocate against racism in football. Like all Koori sportspeople, Michael has dealt with racism on the playing field and has made a number of valuable comments in the Melbourne media to highlight the racism that he and other Koori players have experienced. Gardiner starts his chapter with Michael’s comment from the Sun-Herald: “Racism isn’t something you’re born with, it’s something your taught” 570 This is a real problem that we as Australians have inherited and nurtured for over two hundred years here in this country. There are still many teachers willing to pass on racist beliefs who are more than able to teach it and keep it alive.

Racism in rugby league started to be addressed later in the 1990s, although Koori players have been complaining for years about the racism at all levels of the game. In his book, Arko my game, Ken Arthurson mentions the racial sledging incident involving Chris Caruana and the then young rising star Aboriginal player, Owen Craigie. Owen complained, bringing racial sledging into question, and it was finally dealt with by the Australian Rugby League in 1997.571 The ARL did crack down on racial sledging from that day on, but prior to that it was common practice by players to defame any men of colour. You would have players and officials argue that all forms of sledging including racial were part of the game and people shouldn’t be too offended.

Ken Arthurson states he has heard remarks about Aboriginals over the years that he believed could come into the category of racism and I would have no doubt that most would have been. The racist remarks in that era would have been seen as acceptable, funny and would not have even raised so much as an eyebrow. He mentions one comment in particular which was offered

more in jest than seriously: ‘If you have four darkies in your team you can win the comp... If you’ve got five or more you’ve got trouble.’ He says that this is an unacceptable theory which has been proven wrong over the years. I wonder when he thought this was wrong: before, after or then? Did he assess the theory over the years? Did he say anything to correct that club official or just smile or laugh to condone his comment? It doesn’t sound like he corrected him and even silence is condoning what was said to him.

Like any Koori Rugby League player or sportsperson, I have endured racial sledging and taunts during most of my playing career. When I played in the under tens, I now remember, to my amazement, that it was the parents on the sidelines who gave most of the racist remarks, with venom and enthusiasm. I could hear my mother arguing with those people about the racist remarks that they made so openly. Surprising what you can hear or what you would rather not hear from the grandstands and sidelines while playing on the field. When there are breaks in general play like scrums or when tries are scored and you are standing out wide in the backline you can hear the racial taunts very clearly. These racial public attacks on Koori children cut at the very core and fibres of our children’s cultural identity, self-esteem and self-worth.

Players making racist comments were sometimes much easier to deal with, as long as you didn’t get sent off for taking physical retaliation in tackles. Racism had always been a part of the game for me until about the mid-1980s when a referee by the name of Tommy Gustard penalised a player who gave me a racist mouthful. I couldn’t believe it. I was playing first grade with Waratah and he called the captain and the abusive player over and told them he wouldn’t tolerate that kind of behaviour while he was refereeing the game and if it happened again, the offending player would be sent off for an early shower. Tommy earned my respect that day and the sledging became a lot more subtle from other players in the games that Tommy refereed.

I have heard my own team mates using racial sledging on the field against other Koori players we were opposing. It’s weird you know, you play team sports for the camaraderie and you make friends that can last a lifetime from those seasons and years you play together. But have a few beers with these same men after doing battle on the football field and they would come out with such racist remarks, which had me shaking my head in wonderment. These team mates are racist and I am not sure if some of them even realised they are racists. When I would say something to curb their comments, their usual response was because ‘I wasn’t like that’. They had their preconceived ideas of what constituted a Koori, which justified their comments and...

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behaviour. These young men were the experts on Kooris and because I didn’t fit their stereotype of what they believed Kooris were like, therefore, I shouldn’t be offended.

I think that, over the past two hundred years of Australia’s colonisation, racism has become so entrenched in Australian society that there is a significant percentage of the population that doesn’t even realise that they actually are racist. They are either ignorant or in denial to such an extent that its exposure is evident in every facet of Western society. In this country, racism is alive and vibrant, infused into the psyche of anyone willing to feed it. Racism and racial sledging has been and is endemic in Australian sporting teams, whether local, state, national or international. Australia has left its racist remarks on many black sportspersons and sporting teams here and around the world.

My Game: My Bragging Rights

We lived with my grandmother and grandfather for a short time when Mum moved back to the ‘Mish’ from Sydney when I was about three. Nan and Pop were given the ex-manager’s house to live in and it was the only house on the mission at that time with electricity. Nan had bought a brand new black and white television and we would all huddle around it to watch our cousin, Eric Simms, play for our beloved South Sydney Rabbitohs. It was really fun and a big event when looking back at it now. Her house was packed for the televising of the South Sydney game and when there was a movie on Sunday night. People were everywhere: adults sitting on the chairs, kids sitting on the floor, others standing in doorways and outside looking through windows. This situation brought people together in a community spirit of togetherness.

For us and many other families living on the mission, rugby league, particularly South Sydney, became a ritual that we as devotees followed religiously. So, of course, league became encoded into my DNA, flowing more and more in my blood and into my cells. The first time I played league for the primary school was with Karuah Public School and they were big events for us and our parents; being a small school we barely scraped to field a full side. There were local derbies where we played against Tea Gardens, Stroud and Bulahdelah Public Schools, and, sometimes, Raymond Terrace. We played barefooted - that was the decision of the school - and many of us Kooris wouldn’t have been able to play any other way because we couldn’t afford football boots. I remember the first time we played Raymond Terrace and John Grogan, our teacher and coach, argued with their coach to get his kids to take off their boots or there would be no game. They did and I think they still flogged us as they were a large school with plenty of players.
We had one player who was an outstanding athlete and brilliant footballer, Ricky Manton, who stood out from all the players on the field. Ricky was like a brother to me as we grew up on the ‘Mish’ and went to school together. He later moved to Oyster Cove near Tanilbah Bay on the opposite side of Port Stephens. He represented Raymond Terrace High School and the zone for rugby league, cricket and athletics and was one of those kids that had all the blue ribbons on sport carnival days. If you put a bat or ball in his hands, he could do something special with them, but he didn’t really seemed passionate about sport. It was as if he could take it or leave it, like it was not that big of a deal, which annoyed a lot of us who had to try harder, just to be average.

We played rugby league at Raymond Terrace High School and so did Peter Sterling. I wasn’t that good, Peter was a solid player, but Ricky was the star of the team. I ran into Peter a few years later and he asked me what happened to Ricky, because he expected to see him in Sydney playing first grade. I don’t know if I was biased or just young, but Ricky was one of the best footballers that I have ever seen play the game. He had a punishing defence, could step off both feet, good turn of pace, and had a great kicking game in general play and kicked goals. He usually won the man of the match award for best and fairest, and earned them all with his athletic talent.

I don’t really remember the Kooris from the mission playing rugby league with the local Karuah second division “footy” team. Danny Manton ‘Flathead’ played and I think Tommy Riley, who came and lived with us, played a few games for Karuah. I didn’t go to many games, although I am sure there must have been some Kooris who played at the time. I wasn’t keen on supporting the locals because Karuah was a racist little town and local Kooris were definitely treated differently by some of the locals. At the age of seventeen, I was working in Newcastle and would come home on weekends. On Saturday, I would go to the Karuah hotel with dad where we would drink, bet on the horses and play darts. A guy by the name of George Ray, or “Stingray” as he was known, was the SP bookie at the pub and was on the committee for the Karuah Rugby League Football Club. He would ask me to play with Karuah every Saturday he saw me and I eventually agreed to play for them. George looked after me for playing with the team and would sometimes slip me money for a few drinks with the boys after the game.

I started out my senior playing career with Karuah at halfback, moved to five eight and where I eventually settled in the centres. I wasn’t gifted with great speed and wasn’t really that quick off the mark, but I had a good step and palm. Playing with Karuah was always a social event for the local players and although we wanted to win, we made sure that didn’t get in the way of a good time before and after the match. There wasn’t much to do in Karuah - a small town with a pub
and a club - so football was something to do to pass the time and a social event. We had many good years with Karuah, although we never won a premiership. Some of the antics that we got up to off the field need to be told in another forum. A small core of us, both Black and White, developed strong friendship bonds over the time we played together.

There was Danny Manton, AKA ‘Flathead’, an interesting nickname that I never got around to asking about. He was a bit older than ‘Sparrow’ and I. He had been playing for Karuah for a number of years prior. Danny was a good footballer who could have easily played first grade rugby league with any club in Newcastle. He wasn’t gifted with great speed, but was a damaging and solid all-around player. We formed a very strong centre partnership over the years and made a formidable and sometimes lethal combination to the opposition teams. Paul ‘Sparrow’ Roberts was a cousin from Sydney and, like many other relatives, ended up living with us on the ‘Mish’. He was the same age as me and we shared a bedroom growing up. ‘Sparrow’ played on the wing, usually outside me. He had tremendous acceleration. I have never played in a team with anyone as fast over twenty five to thirty metres. Perhaps Ewen McGrady may have come close to him. But his off the mark speed was electric and netted him many tries over the seasons he played with Karuah.

Ewan McGrady’s early playing days make an interesting story - especially, how he got his start and played first grade with Waratah. It was when I was coaching the Waratah reserve grade and it was at a trial game against Cessnock. Ewan came over and introduced himself to me. I had never seen or met him before and he asked if I could get him a run with Waratah. I walked over to the third grade coach and told him my cousin had just turned up, he was a good player (I had no idea how good he was) and wanted to try out. He started Ewan at half back and after twenty minutes he had scored four tries and was making the opposition defence looking pathetic. Our first grade coach replaced him just before half time and gave him a start in first grade in the halfback position.

Ewan came from a large family on a small reserve, Goodooga, near the Queensland border. A very quiet softly spoken shy man who didn’t drink or smoke - he just let his sporting talent do the talking. He played first grade for the season and made the Newcastle representative team against England. He went on to win the Rothmans Medal and the Rugby League Week’s player of the year with Canterbury in 1991. He is probably still playing today, running around in some second division team. I watched him play and spoke to him in the 2008 New South Wales Aboriginal Knockout held in Kingscliff. Ewan was an amazing player who stood out wherever he played. I need to get back to Karuah where it all started. Many Koori contemporary players came from country towns where they were noticed or moved to the city to try their luck.
There was Steven John Robinson, or ‘Robbo’ as he was known, who was the complete athlete - light and fast on his feet. ‘Robbo’ was a product of the stolen generations and was my sister Denise’s partner living on the mission. I remember asking him when he first moved to the mission if he played football and if he would like to play with ‘Sparrow’ and me with the Karuah side. He said he had played a few games before and would have run with us, just for something to do. ‘Robbo’ played his first game that weekend and scored four tries, all of which demonstrated speed, body swerves, side stepping and strength. Now you had to be there to believe the sheer brilliance that this man displayed. In one try he beat seven defenders to score under the posts. Not only did he leave the opposition in awe, but his team mates as well. He was only five foot eight or nine inches tall and not stocky, just lean muscle and fit.

Karuah didn’t have a backline: we had a ‘Blackline’ and that’s what we called ourselves and were known as by team mates. ‘Flathead’ inside centre, me outside centre, ‘Robbo’ at fullback and ‘Sparrow’ on the wing completed the line. That combination won Karuah more than its fair share of games and had we a stronger complete pack of forwards, premierships would have been ours for the taking. Playing with the Karuah football team did change some dynamics with players and supporters from the town. Some people made an effort to say hello and accept us in the team and town, but there was still tension between many others. It did on the whole, if you pardon the pun, shift the goal posts a little in our favour for once and I have to admit it was a good feeling, even if it was just a token gesture from most.

After a couple of seasons with Karuah, ‘Robbo’ was offered a contract with the Waratah/Mayfield Rugby League Club, a first division club in the strong Newcastle competition. Joey Irving and I were graded and played with Waratah the following year, but there weren’t any large offers of money or contracts thrown at us. It didn’t take long for ‘Robbo’ to leave his mark on the Waratah club and Newcastle competition. In one year, 1985, he scored 27 first grade tries and we made the semis, and at the end of that season he received a contract with the North Sydney Bears. For years, the coaching staff and team management would talk about the one hundred and seventy five metre try he scored against Lakes in the semi-finals. That’s right, he did. I am not pulling your leg. Maybe it wasn’t exactly 175 metres, but it wasn’t too far off it.

This is how ‘Robbo’ scored that spectacular try: ‘Robbo’ was on the wing and caught a high bomb in his in-goal area almost on top of the right hand corner post and exploded across his in-goal surface, almost at his opposite left hand corner post. His speed was uncanny, leaving four or five defenders in his wake displaying strength evasive skills that left everyone watching in
total disbelief at how he even got out of his own in-goal area. He then sprinted down the sideline at incredible speed pushing off cover defenders as he crossed the try line at their corner post and eased off to stroll under the posts to score under the black dot. Over a long distance, ‘Robbo’ was the fastest footballer that I have ever played with - he seemed to glide over the grass and had a couple of gears to use when needed.

‘Robbo’ was offered a job, a contract and played on the wing with North Sydney Bears the following year and must have been the oldest player that debuted for North Sydney. He played a few seasons in first grade on the wing and got his picture and write up published in the Rugby League Week magazine as a ‘Game Breaker’. ‘Robbo’ was displaced by a talented winger by the name of Les Kiss and he left the club that year and played second division football around Sydney and Newcastle. I played rugby league with ‘Robbo’ at Karuah and Waratah. We played many games together, but ‘Robbo’ died alone in a one bedroom flat in Sydney. He lay there for over a week and no one missed him and he is buried at Karuah. This is a good example of what happens to Kooris when you are no longer the great sportsman, together with racism and the legacy of the stolen generation.

I was amazed the first time I walked into the Waratah Leagues Club; it was after I played the second game of the season in first grade game - it was almost surreal. I walked to the bar to get a beer and the barman knew my name. I looked back surprised that he knew my name and I think that night almost everyone knew my name as well. People were patting me on the back saying hello and what a great game I played and I don’t think I bought another drink that night. I have had people buy me drinks after games with Karuah, but they were people and friends that I knew. It’s hard to describe that feeling of not just acceptance, but being valued by people you don’t even know. It was a real first for me and something that I will always remember.

I met a life member, player and club stalwart by the name of Brian McDermott. ‘Macca’, at the Waratah Rugby League Club talked about a Koori Waratah rugby league player who was his idol by the name of Ronnie Monro. ‘Macca’ is a Waratah man through and through with the maroon and gold flowing through his veins and he told me how he would watch Ronnie play first grade when he was just a junior with the club. He told me Ronnie was a Waratah legend and talked about some of the amazing feats he performed on the playing field. How Ronnie could have played in Sydney, but chose to stay in Newcastle. Waratah looked after him: bought him a house, got him a job paid him good money; they looked after him well. I am told that a

573 Brian McDermott (1983) Conversation
Aub Rowlins played first grade for Waratah and was a selector who recorded the player stats in all grades on every game that we played. He was a nice guy who was always good for a yarn and talked to me a lot about Koori footballers who had played for Waratah. When he spoke about Ronnie, it was always in the highest terms. Everyone would describe Ronnie as a champion athlete and always a gentleman. One story that Aub told me was about the grand final against Cessnock when it poured rain the day before the final and the league called the game off. The weather was beautiful the next day and the game was reinstated. Unfortunately, Ronnie thought there was no chance of playing and had been partying all night and was still pretty drunk the next day when Aub called in to pick him up for the game. When they got him into the dressing rooms, Aub had to help dress him and had to lace up Ronnie’s football boots because he was still intoxicated.

Ronnie ran out and played. I don’t know why they let him, but he must have sobered up on the field after a while. Waratah won the grand final and Ronnie scored three tries and had a great game in defence as well. I think Aub said he picked up the Man of the Match award. Such was Ronnie’s athleticism and sporting ability in any condition in any game, he was the man. Ronnie could have played first grade in Sydney had he wanted to, but was content to play for Waratah where they looked after him.

Aub said he was an athlete and could do anything and it was obvious by the way he spoke about Ronnie that he sincerely respected him. I was talking to Aub and his wife Helen one day and they told me about the time they spotted Ronnie at the Newcastle Show. He was entering ‘Sharman’s Boxing Tent’. It was in the rugby league off season. I will explain to those who have not heard of ‘Sharman’s Tent’. Jimmy Sharman established a troupe of boxers in 1915 that travelled and followed agricultural shows around the Riverina area and then spread further throughout New South Wales and Victoria. Show patrons would pay ‘two bob’ to enter his tent and watch patrons take on his boxing champions for cash prizes if they could beat them. Many Koori’s took on Jimmy’s troupe boxers for the prize money; some were Koori and others joined the show after beating his champion.

In Victoria before the AFL was truly a professional sport, Koori players had to earn a living outside the football field. Dave Nadel writes in his article ‘Aborigine and Australian football’

Aubrey Rolands (1985) Conversation
that: “Before the 1980s many Aborigines could not afford to play VFL football. Doug Nicholls, after he had already established himself as a footballer, began fighting with Jimmy Sharman’s boxing Troupe because clubs did not pay the players during the off season”\textsuperscript{575} These Koori footballers needed to survive and Jimmy’s tent was a way of making some money in the off season. There wasn’t much work for Koori men and this was big money if you were good enough or had the courage to have a go. People had to provide for their families the best way they could and it was an honest way to make money.

Anyway, back to the story: Aub and Helen entered the tent, although Helen was reluctant to go in as she didn’t like violence, but they did just in time to see Ronnie accept the challenge to take on the man whom the ringmaster bragged couldn’t be knocked out. The prize of fifty pounds was available for anyone who could knock him out. This champion fighter was only short, but built like the proverbial brick outhouse. Anyway to cut a long story short, to the amazement of the ringmaster and the patrons of ‘Sharman’s Tent’ Ronnie Monroe knocked him out cold. The ringmaster, stunned, was reluctant to pay Ronnie the fifty pounds for the deed and argued with him for some time as that was good money in those days, but eventually paid him for his skill.\textsuperscript{576} What a talented athlete Ronnie must have been. I bet he could have been a champion in any sport he played. Some people are just like that.

I played with Waratah for about ten years accumulating 107 grade games, most of which was in reserve grade. Some might say that I was a good footballer and, on my day, I could do some damage to the opposition, but at times I lacked fitness and concentration. I never did any training in the off season and it took me half the season to get a good level of fitness. By that time, the first grade team was well established and the coach didn’t make too many changes unless there were injuries or they were losing games. In my first season with Waratah, I got sent off in only my fourth game in first grade and never really recovered from it - there were personal issues that I was dealing with at the time. I stayed with the club and played in and out of first grade making a lot of good friends along the way. There were a number of Kooris who played for Waratah over the years so I had a few brothers to joke and laugh with over a few beers after games.

Over the years, I found that I could read the game pretty well and talked to players continually, directing play and trying to motivate them during the game and at half time. In 1987, Waratah offered me the position of reserve grade captain coach. I continued in that position for three

\textsuperscript{576} Aubrey Rolands (1985) Conversation
years, but, unfortunately did not win any premierships. It was a great honour to be coaching grade and I learnt a lot about players, coaching, myself and the game. My claim to fame was that I became the first identified Aboriginal to coach senior rugby league in NSW under the Australian Rugby League. I wasn’t sure about taking the coaching position at first, being just a Koori guy from a small reserve taking on the huge responsibility of coaching a team of White men. The short version is that I did take it with pride and enthusiasm and thought I was very fortunate to be offered the position at that time and, for me, it was quite an achievement.

Throughout my football days, I played in the New South Wales Aboriginal Knockout with the Newcastle All Blacks on the long weekend in October, playing in three grand finals and losing them all. I was nearing the end of my football career and rang an old mate of mine, Rick Griffiths, who entered a local team, the Mindaribba Warriors, in the knockout for whom, I had played in the last couple of years. I asked him whether he was interested in entering the Newcastle All Blacks (NAB) team in the Newcastle second division rugby league competition to help prepare for the Long Weekend October Aboriginal Knockout. I said to him that if he put in a team that I would come and play in it. Rick did register the team and in, 1991, I played for the NAB team against my old hometown team, Karuah, where I started out so many years ago.

The team was successful, being the undefeated Minor and Major Premiers in the Keith Manning Cup, although we had to struggle throughout the season after almost being beaten in the first game against Swansea. In that game we took the field with only eleven players and held our own as best we could with the score Swansea 24 - NAB 4 at oranges. A number of players got the date wrong and committee members contacted them and picked them up. For the second half we went in with a full team and the game was drawn 28 all. We never looked like losing another game for the rest of the season. We fielded a strong side every week drawing on talented Koori players from all around Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and even Karuah. One particular player living on the ‘Mish’ at the time was Eddie Tighe, originally from Moree. He was a punishing defender who had a great tackling technique. He certainly left his mark on many players who wished they had never run in his direction.

Boat Building/Racing

About twelve years ago Mum and I visited Aunty Iris Russell, who wasn’t well, at her home at Soldiers Point, which is in Port Stephens. Aunty Iris was a beautiful old woman who was seven years older than mum and had lived on the Karuah mission most of her young life. She was Mum’s cousin and over a couple of cups of coffee they talked about the old times on the Karuah mission. They spoke about lots of things that I thought sounded very interesting and I listened
intently about what the men did for work and pleasure. Aunty Iris spoke about Uncle John Ridgeway and Uncle Pardi Ridgeway who were both talented woodworkers. She said Uncle John was a true craftsman who made cabbage palm chairs. He would row the boat over to the island to get the palms and he’d bring them home and make the chairs. He even made a lounge suite, a lounge and two small seats. I am not sure how comfortable they were, but as you can see by the photograph below they look like they were well made.

(Photograph: John Ridgeway with two of his Cabbage Palm chairs) The two chairs pictured are housed in the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.

Uncle Pardi made boomerangs and paddles. He would go out into the bush and cut a gum tree down, cut most of it off and carry it home on his shoulder. Pardi had a big shed with a big long bench in it and he used to make paddles and even made wooden sandals for people. Aunty Iris spoke about how Pardi, John, King (Billy) William Ridgeway helped her father, Jim Ridgeway, build boats for fishing and also sailboats for racing. I thought it was pretty cool that they were
skilled enough to build boats from scratch. Aunty Iris said some of the Maher boys carved boomerangs, and nulla nulla’s in particular Uncle Howard (Bossy) Marr. 577

These men had established themselves as talented woodworkers, but Jimmy was a skilful boat builder. They also raced his boats that they helped build. One article in the Port Stephens Examiner on 8 January, 1915, describes his obvious talents:

*Mr. Jim Ridgeway of Soldiers Point, scored a brilliant success at Mungo brush regatta this year with his locally-built boats. Four boats built by him- Raven (Dan Ridgeway), Vixen (Geo. Johnson), Dove (King W. Ridgeway), and Mona (McGurk) took part in various sailboat races, and there appears to have no chance for any other boat.* 578

Aunty Iris recalled with pride how King Billie and Uncle Sid, Uncle Jim and Pardi had built boats. They used to take the ‘Dove’ to Mungo every year and they’d win every sailing event. The late Kevin Ridgeway, Sid’s son who lived on the Central Coast, has kept the cup that they won all those years ago. They cut the cedar themselves, took the timber to the local mill and had them cut into planks and then built the boats from scratch. She remembered how everyone from the mission rowed boats down to Soldiers Point when the regatta was held there. 579

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577 Iris Russell & Colleen conversation 1999
579 Iris Russell & Colleen Perry conversation 1999
The following year, the three Ridgeway men entered the annual Easter Saturday local Handicap Sailboat Regatta race and manned their own boats. Jimmy in his boat the ‘Raven’ with a 3 minute handicap the roughie of the field, John in the ‘Wonga’ a good distance behind him with a 30 second handicap, but Hugh was the gun: he was off scratch with his boat the ‘Dove’.\footnote{580}{Raymond Terrace Examiner. Raymond Terrace.} “...the ‘Wonga’ finished the nine mile course at 4. 1 ¼, with the ‘Vision’ 2 ½ mins behind and the Dove 15 seconds later. 30 per cent of the proceeds was devoted to the War Service Fund...”\footnote{581}{Raymond Terrace Examiner. Raymond Terrace.} Not only did they build their own boats and compete in the mainstream boating regatta, but they also contributed to the war efforts of Australia, helping raise money for the cause.
Full-Time Siren

Perhaps the one important difference of the Karuah mission compared to other Aboriginal missions was the size and number of Kooris living on it. The ‘Mish’ was quite small compared to most missions, especially being located on the mid-east coast in a small town along the Pacific Highway. With the population of Karuah so small, the only way the town could fulfil their sporting events was to draw on the Koori men from the ‘Mish’ to field their teams. The Protection Board was more than happy to allow the Kooris to play to assist the town of Karuah in their social development and, later on, to help assimilate Kooris into Western society. I believe if Karuah’s male population was larger many Kooris, if not all, would not have played competition sport at all. I would hate to think that sporting spectators and reporters would have missed witnessing the sporting prowess of ‘Big Bill’ and others that have excelled in sport from the ‘Mish’.

Prior to the 1967 Australian referendum, Kooris had been denied the most basic of all human rights, their humanity. Having Kooris competing and excelling in sport had changed the sporting and Australian landscape forever. Although shunned and isolated from mainstream society, Kooris began appearing in local, regional and interstate cricket and football teams, as well as individual sports. Whether it was from the lack of local players or the recognition of their athleticism, Kooris found their way into the playing arena and succeeded. Sport has been the great leveller for Kooris and seen the bonds of team camaraderie blur the lines of Black and White to shade it to grey while the games lasted. Through the efforts of our early sporting ancestors, the relationship between Kooris and mainstream society has grown stronger, drawing both worlds a little closer and causing them to become more accepting of one another.

For Kooris it was a chance to escape the mission and the Protection Board and see what was going on in the Western world. It changed the lives of many Kooris from the ‘Mish’, providing positive physical and mental stimulus to our self-esteem. For once, we were seen not only as human but worthy of recognition and praise, something that had not been evident before in Australia. This has led to the building of a broader relationship that didn’t previously exist between Kooris from the ‘Mish’ and the Karuah locals. Through sport, we have contributed to the community. This semi-acceptance from the locals has broken down a number of the barriers that had kept so many Kooris from being seen and heard in Karuah. It is due to the efforts of our Ancestors who competed in mainstream sport, like ‘Big Bill’ making his mark in the game and reserving a place in our sporting history.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion

When I started to write this thesis, my primary purpose was to provide an historical account of the Worimi people living at the Karuah Mission in Port Stephens, New South Wales, for their benefit and use. Today the ‘Mish’ still stands strong with a growing Aboriginal population. Many are the descendants of the traditional Worimi clans who still proudly call it their home. There hasn’t been any substantial or recent research carried out that specifically covers the historical lifespan of the forty acres of the Karuah government reserve land in detail. More importantly, there is little recorded history of the Aboriginal residents of the ‘Mish’ and their contribution to Aboriginal and Australian society, particularly on the east coast of the New South Wales.

The objective of the thesis was to provide an important specific addition to the present body of knowledge of local and regional Aboriginal history. The chapters I have delivered provide a broad overview of the history of an Aboriginal mission and some new historical information that has not been revealed before. I have also synthesised existing primary and secondary historical material into a new form.

The thesis intends to become an historical reminder that my Worimi ancestors left footprints in their land that have never faded or washed away after the English long boat keels breached the shorelines of Port Stephens. Those Worimi footprints can be still seen as clear historical markers in a variety of circumstances and highlight our participation and involvement in the development of contemporary Australian society and culture. The Worimi people are great survivors, as has been documented, despite mounds of recorded episodes of historical violence, racial discrimination and oppressive prejudice. They have endured racist and assimilationist government policies directed towards them that were designed to achieve total control and the breeding out and erasure of their cultural beliefs. The thesis provides a snapshot of their legacy and hopefully provides our future generations with inspiration, hope and courage.

I believe that the research carried out on the Worimi people offers a glimpse of the evolution and changing lifestyle of the residents on and around the Aboriginal Mission at Karuah. This thesis covers a small surface area of a number of important historical and anthropological aspects of Aboriginal history. Further research would enhance the current body of Aboriginal knowledge and narratives of our people that have gone relatively unnoticed in Australian history.
The thesis examines the Worimi land, its boundaries and the Kattang language of the Worimi and other surrounding Aboriginal Clans. I have attempted to show how early anthropologists observed Aboriginal land tenure. In this, I have discussed the importance they placed on tribal boundaries and the Aboriginal people that occupied the land within them. From the research collated I have detailed a number of discrepancies in the actual Aboriginal clan boundaries, as well as to what extent geographically the Kattang language was spoken. Aboriginal land and its boundaries were well known amongst all members of those clans and it rarely became an issue. There was much interplay across boundaries that was not recognised or noticed by earlier anthropological studies.

This is an important research issue, not so much as to where the actual land and language boundaries were, but more to how the researchers acquired their information and how they interpreted their findings. The critical point that I have made in this chapter was the method of recording Aboriginal history and cultural knowledge. Most researchers, including anthropologists and historians, are outsiders who don’t live within the culture or are not accepted as part of the clan or tribe. They become solely reliant on a clan informant’s cultural knowledge of the subject matter and capacity or permission to pass it on to an outsider. Finally, the researcher’s interpretation of what they were told is then filtered through a Western lens and can become problematic through that distortion. As Lee explains:

*Research that has been rooted in western positivistic beliefs has caused tremendous harm to Indigenous people precisely because of the lens of western worldviews from which Indigenous people are examined, explained and devalued in the name of research.*

The Kattang language speaking group covered a significant area on the mid-eastern coast of New South Wales in which the Worimi was a central clan. Kattang or variations of different dialects of it was spoken by many of the bordering clans. These clans intermarried and traded with one another, forming close relationships. This raises questions of the possibility that a number of neighbouring clans were indeed members of the Worimi people and the Kattang language speaking group. Previously, these clans were believed to be and therefore were recognised as independent clans in their own right by some Western observers.

The name of each Worimi Nurra (Clan) gave meaning to the people and a sense of belonging that personalised the particular tracts of land they inhabited. Those Nurra names became a

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source of identity and group solidarity within the greater body of the Worimi tribe (language group). The Kattang language was not only a marker that grouped clans together, but was a means by which others were excluded. The use of symbol and nonverbal communication was discussed as a vital tool for communication between and within neighbouring clans. Gestures and non-verbal communication were important media to ensure language and cultural taboos were not broken, but observed. I have explained how this form of communication is still used today amongst Aboriginal people.

I have explored the traditional lifestyle of the Worimi people before the arrival of the British settlers. An outline of the complexities of the traditional way of life that the Worimi people enjoyed and that sustained them for thousands of years has been presented. A distinct understanding of Aboriginal religion/cosmology has been discussed which is interpreted through what anthropologists come to term popularly as the Aboriginal Dreaming. The Dreaming sets out to provide an explanation of how Aboriginal people were intimately connected to the land, their spiritual ancestors and to each other. The Dreaming regulated every aspect of traditional Aboriginal society enforced through the uncompromising structures of the Aboriginal kinship system and Lore. They lived in a process of reciprocity and interpersonal commitments, encompassing the important kinship principles of obligations, rights and duties that maintained the Worimi people and their society.

The Worimi people’s deep-seated beliefs in spirituality were reflected in the importance they placed on their creator and ancestor spirits. Their creators, including Biame and others like Coen, give a clear window into a religious viewpoint that hadn’t wavered until Western civilisation used Christianity to purge traditional Aboriginal beliefs. Worimi ceremonies were historically identified, such as the well documented Keepara ceremony that was recorded by the likes of Mathews, Enright and Elkin. These men presented the proud rite of passage into the traditional male journey that transformed boys into men. The importance of rituals, initiations and ceremonies were clearly a vital component in the religious practices of the Worimi.

Information on the sacred crystal quartz stones provided the physical evidence that Biame looked over, cared for and entrusted the Worimi with the custodianship of the traditional lands they occupied. It was through ceremonies the Worimi were able to enter and connect with their Ancestral spirits in the Dreaming. The use and significance of the number of Worimi totems affecting Worimi individuals and Nurras presents an awareness of how traditional Aboriginal society was strictly controlled and maintained. Through an explanation of the multifaceted Worimi totemic system which placed everyone within an intricate web of social and obligatory kinship relationships, we gain a detailed insight into traditional Worimi society.
Totems were utilised to provide a resource that determined appropriate marriage partners in the traditional lifecycle. The importance of Aboriginal marriage provides one of the key elements to understanding the rigidity and complexities of the Worimi kinship system. Marriage predetermined all future behaviours and relationships between individuals and clans and was a pivotal component in the maintenance of the Worimi kinship structures. These marriages and connections included avoidance relationships that were common in traditional Aboriginal society. This was the case particularly with the relationship that existed between the groom and his mother-in-law: they were forbidden to have any form of personal communication between them as it was a taboo.

The Worimi traditional lifestyle, as it was within most Aboriginal clans in Australia, separated into gender specific divisions of labour and daily chores. As an example, the Worimi women provided much of the daily food requirements for their families in their role as gatherers, which included skills as exceptional fisher women. These women were exclusive to coastal clans with the skills that they possessed in providing seafood as proficient divers in the coastal rivers and ocean. The women made their own fishing lines and fishhooks which provided a substantial contribution to the Clan’s seafood diet.

Evidence that the Worimi males were also renowned as talented manufacturers of tools and weapons has been outlined. They were particularly skilled spear makers and used a variety of spears, which included a three-pronged spear for fishing. The simple yet clever fire technology used to manufacture efficient and lethal spears was testament to their traditional skills and knowledge for survival. They were very competent hunters of larger game which was in abundance over the Worimi lands before the advent of White men. Such hunters shared their bounties with the wider extended families.

The significance of initiations ceremonies discussed provided a time of celebration and the coming together of many of the Worimi clans. The Keepara ceremony, the first initiation for young males into manhood, was such an important clan event. The story of the sacred totem of the protective male catfish provides substance and meaning to the Keepara ceremony that had been practiced by the Kattang speaking language group. Mysticism that surrounded the Keepara and other Worimi initiation ceremonies were revered and feared, because through these ceremonies people were connected to the creator and ancestral spirits in the Dreaming.
People may enter the spirit world through the process of the Dreaming and conversely, spirits may be induced to enter the physical world during the performance of the ceremonies they have instituted.\textsuperscript{583}

The traditional lifecycle of the Worimi people provided a very healthy and balanced way of life. Their traditional diet and healthy semi-nomadic lifestyle promoted a strong stout race of people prior to the arrival of the British. That event would have a catastrophic impact upon Aboriginal Australia. Conflict began and continued from the initial point of English exploration of Port Stephens. Despite initial recordings by the English revealing that the Worimi people occupied and lived on the lands around the shores of Port Stephens, conflict was quick in coming. The very first encounter and meeting with the Worimi by an English exploration party resulted in the reporting of a violent incident that led to the shooting of a Worimi man.

An examination and analysis of the available resources has demonstrated that sustained contact with the English dramatically changed the delicate balance of the traditional lifestyle and the lives of all the Worimi people. The colonisation of New South Wales left all Aboriginal people exposed to convict and settler violence that began with the first settlement in Sydney. For the Worimi, I have provided evidence that they experienced the same if not more convict brutality with the coming of the convict cedar-getters onto their traditional lands. Conflict between the cedar-getters and the Worimi was commonplace as Aboriginal people were treated like pests and vermin who stood in the way of the expanding English penal colony and its broader manifestation of free settlement.

I have discussed the significant role the Australian Agricultural Company (AAC) and its initial Carrington settlement and headquarters played in restructuring the lives of the Worimi people. The influence of Robert Dawson, the first appointed chief agent of the Carrington headquarters, which was part of the million acres of land granted to the company by the British government under Terra Nullius, has been well documented. He and the chief company agent successors recorded aspects of the dramatic changes to Worimi cultural traditions. Evidence provided reveals that Dawson and the AAC Carrington settlement provided some protection for the Worimi against the ever present dangers of convict violence that, on many occasions, seemed to be beyond the reach of colonial law.

Dawson’s paternal attitude towards the local Aboriginal population reveals that he believed that he had become their protector and saviour from the evils of the convict workers. He employed a

large number of the Worimi people who laboured under his protection and guidance as he established and developed the Carrington settlement. That relationship benefited both parties and the Worimi remained at the settlement until their pastoral operations failed and were transferred to other parts of the colony. After this time, the large Worimi population in and around the Carrington settlement seem to have almost disappeared without a trace. I have provided evidence that convict murders, rapes, massacres, indiscriminate killings and western diseases took a heavy toll on the Worimi people. The progressive loss of their traditional lands meant they were unable to continue their religious practices, which left a psychological and spiritual void that could not be filled. Aboriginal women were taken by convicts to serve their sexual desires, which, in turn, broke down the Aboriginal family matrix. This resulted in the extinguishing of any traditional or cultural future for the Worimi. Even under the protection of the Carrington settlement, the once six hundred plus Worimi workers had been progressively reduced to a mere fraction of that, which stood at about fifty Worimi workers were just prior to its closure.

I have highlighted the recommendations by the British House of Commons Select Committee concerning the future treatment of Aborigines within their respective imperial and empire dominions. This would again change the lives of the Worimi and all Aborigines as it led to the setting up of government policies of Aboriginal protection and control. The establishment of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board in 1883 would have far-reaching ramifications. The Protection Board initially set up local police as its agents to enforce the functions of the board. These police officers were given the responsibility of carrying out the policies of protection by providing rations and blankets where possible or practicable to the existing surviving local Aboriginal people. The Worimi were now social outcasts living on the fringes of white settlements in the bush and, later, on the reserve at Karuah under the intrusive policies of government protection.

The move onto the mission has been thoroughly examined through the impact of Protestant Christian missionaries and the role they played in the lives of the Worimi people living on the Karuah ‘Mish’. The evangelist missionaries and their religious beliefs became a powerful influence on the Aboriginal residents living on and around the Aboriginal reserve. At Karuah, a newly formed break away evangelistic religious group, the Aborigines Inland Mission, was a locally based organisation led by Retta and Leonard Long who were entrusted by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board to care for the local Aboriginal groups. That religious authority was charged with converting and taking total control over the lives of all the local Worimi residents. The board’s mandate and instructions to protect and educate Aborigines
suited the missionaries’ own religious agenda to civilise and Christianise those residents under their paternalistic care.

A large percentage of the local Aboriginal residents embraced this new evangelic Christian religion which was delivered with some degree of empathy and kindness. A few locally trained and enthusiastic Worimi converts were accepted and given the title of ‘Native Helpers’. They were never fully trained missionaries, but eventually embarked on missionary work within Aboriginal communities throughout New South Wales. Alec Russell and, later, Bert Marr were two of these exceptional dedicated ‘Native Helpers’ who travelled to many Aboriginal communities converting more Kooris than the missionaries themselves could ever have achieved.

I have discussed the strong leadership of Retta Long and how the AIM grew into an influential religious organisation. How the AIM from its humble beginnings at Singleton and Karuah quickly progressed into a national missionary group is delineated. This was expedited because of the rivalry created between Retta’s former missionary organisation, the United Inland Mission, and her new AIM in the competition for Aboriginal converts to Christianity.

One of the clear markers of the missionary’s success was easily recognised by the construction of a church on an Aboriginal mission and the degree to which it was attended. Thus, the AIM claimed their pseudo title deeds to the Karuah mission and its people with the construction of the first and only evangelistic church on the land of the Karuah ‘Mish’. It was the local Worimi men who worked to pay for most of the building materials and actually built the Karuah Mission church on their own. The church would become an authoritative religious icon and testament to the seemingly hard and persistent work of the AIM’s Aboriginal devotees.

The missionaries had provided open-air religious services before the construction of the Karuah church. They delivered these open-air services on the mission, in the local township of Sawyers Point and at the other Worimi Aboriginal camps at Nelsons Bay. The most viable mode of transportation to get around Port Stephens was by water and boat. Pardi Manton, a well-known Aboriginal leader and a man with an intimate knowledge of the Port Stephens’ waterways was entrusted with a vessel to transport the missionaries. He also taxied Aboriginal people between the two Aboriginal settlements across Port Stephens.
I have provided an in-depth examination of the Western educational experiences of the Aboriginal people living on the Karuah ‘Mish’. These experiences began initially through the Australian Agricultural Company and, then, in the mainstream public school system as part of government legislation. But educational opportunities would change dramatically in a relative short period of time. Racial hatred from local white parents and wider societal influences would force Aboriginal children out of the public school system. The state government responded by building and creating a segregated substandard Aboriginal school system on missions and reserves.

Up until the 1950s it was common throughout Australia for aboriginal children to be excluded from state schools. Moves to formally exclude children surfaced in New South Wales in the 1880s and became formalised as government policy by 1902. In that year, State Minister John Perry, ordered teachers in all 2,800 government schools to exclude Aboriginal children immediately when white parents objected.

A historical outline of the Karuah Public School has provided some details of Aboriginal student participation and exclusion in relation to this school. The Karuah Public School went through a number of changes operating in different modes and locations in the early years of its inception. Archival records highlight the lengths white parents and local community members went to in order to eject Aboriginal students from the presence of their children’s classrooms. Aboriginal parents fought tenaciously to oppose these barriers and enrol their children into the school, without any major success in negating the policy. When the Aboriginal children were excluded from the Karuah School, the missionaries provided what meagre untrained schooling they could, as well as deep religious indoctrination and instruction.

The long and arduous struggle by the AIM and Aboriginal residents to establish the much needed small Karuah Aboriginal Mission School building has been discussed. Information regarding the different teachers, lack of adequate education provision and other problems experienced in the Aboriginal school has been reported. Complaints by correspondence to the Department of Education were raised by Aboriginal parents regarding allegations of harsh treatment (corporal punishment) of their children by teachers at the mission school. Records of the event leading up to the mission schools’ eventual closure have been examined alongside the

584 See for another in-depth study, Esther Kilkelly. (1966). Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow - : race relations in New South Wales, with special reference to a coastal Aboriginal community. (Unpublished master’s thesis), Auckland University, New Zealand
changing government policy of assimilation. All Aboriginal children were eventually allowed to merge back into the local public school system in the small seaside town of Karuah.

Racial hatred was again reignited as white parents continued to lobby the school’s principal and the Department of Education to remove Aboriginal children. This time it was a lot harder to expel Aboriginal children from the school than it was before. The New South Wales Government’s policy of assimilation would not falter and Aboriginal students would remain to receive primary school education with other white children.

I have provided an overview of early Aboriginal political activism across the twentieth century and the connection it had with the Karuah community. The establishment of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and the control it exerted over the lives of Aboriginal people would result in a rising Aboriginal political backlash. Aboriginal people under the board would become, in effect, political refugees and prisoners of war segregated and incarcerated under their assimilationist policies.

Evidence of the early Protection Board records reveal that they believed Aboriginal people were slowly but surely dying out and there would be no Aboriginal problems in the foreseeable future. The creation of government legislation, including the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act 1909, gave the board greater legal control over the lives of all Aboriginal people across the state. Under this Act, Aboriginal people had no form of civil or political rights. Later, an amendment to the Act provided the legal capacity for the board to remove large numbers of Aboriginal children from their parental and community’s influence. This racist, misused and intrusive legislation would become, alongside Aboriginal demands for land, the catalyst that fuelled the rise of the Aboriginal political movement during the 1920s.

Aboriginal people were supposed to be protected just like the fauna and flora of this big land; but it wasn’t protection we got, it was exploitation and that is what we still receive today. The Act covered every person of Aboriginal descent and was in force, in various forms until 1969.586

I have discussed in detail the formation of the first recognised all–Aboriginal political group, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) that fought against the oppressive government policies. Led by Worimi descendants, Fred Maynard and Sid Ridgeway, they fought gallantly, holding conferences and large street rallies and meetings to

challenge the Aborigines Protection Board’s policies. Despite the short lifespan of the AAPA, they broke new ground and created political pathways where no other Aboriginal political organisation had walked before.

A number of other important early Aboriginal political campaigners and their organisations that followed the AAPA have also been discussed in detail. Political warriors like William Cooper and Jack Patten were instrumental in changing the Australian political landscape and their uncompromising stance would also impact on the Worimi community. These strong Koori activists, with the help of supporters, lobbied the Australian and state governments to consider the notion of Aboriginal citizenship and equality for all Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal Australian Fellowship and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been examined as key players in the civil rights movement. The long political fight succeeded with the 1967 referendum, which, in effect, granted Aboriginal people citizenship and, therefore, recognition as human beings with the same rights as other Australians.

I have discussed how the Gurindji people’s protest for better working conditions and their claim for land rights kick-started the Aboriginal Land Rights Movement. The political fight culminated when those dedicated, strong and persistent Aboriginal protesters established the famous Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of old Parliament House in Canberra in 1972. The symbolic success of that protest and violent battle bore fruit years later, with the establishment of the 1983 New South Wales Land Rights Act. This gave all Aboriginal people hope to establish an economic base for the future with, at one time, a representative from the Karuah ‘Mish’ elected as leader to the peak political organisation the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council.

My analysis of sport delivers some insight into the way in which relationships between Aboriginal and mainstream Australians changed when Aboriginal people entered the sporting arenas. It shows how racism is still imbedded in the Australian sporting culture, which historically denied Aborigines from competing in most of the team and individual competitions. The Aboriginal Protection Board influenced Aboriginal participation in sporting events and it had the power to deny or allow Aborigines to compete in local competitions. When Aborigines became involved in mainstream sport, it was never a level playing field as they contended with racial vilification. Some exceptional Aboriginal sportspersons were able to overcome the imbalance, but with great difficulty.
I have discussed a number of racial issues that affected all Aboriginal competitors playing locally and nationally in Australia. When Aborigines represented Australia and won they were heralded by the media as Australians, but if they lost they were referred to as Aboriginal. Winning determined your nationality and your acceptance within Australian mainstream society. Even today, those same racist attitudes can be still found throughout Australian media outlets.

Racial abuse and racial vilification remain in the structure of elite and local sport codes around Australia. Players, spectator fans, sporting administrators and officials have been responsible for directing varying degrees of racial vilification at Aboriginal sportspeople. I have presented examples of racial vilification, as well as the changes to rules and regulations across both major football codes in Australian. The AFL and the NRL are still experiencing incidents of racial vilification within their codes. The same racial problems which were seemingly addressed legally not that long ago, still continue to plague these football codes. All of these public events affect the emotions and aspirations of the Karuah Aboriginal community who keenly follow the sports media, especially on television.

*Racial abuse between players on the field any attracted real attention following the first ever formal complaint, lodged by Essendon’s Michael Long in 1995, and even this only became public following Long’s dissatisfaction at the outcome of the hastily organised mediation.*\(^{587}\)

An examination of Aboriginal cricket players during the mid-nineteenth century Aboriginal cricket tour of England has been presented. This tour displayed the talents of two particularly exceptional Aboriginal cricketers, John Cuzen and John Mullagh. Racism kept many talented Aboriginal cricketers from achieving their ultimate goal of representing their country. This includes the local gifted sportsman, ‘Big Bill’ Ridgeway. I have explored ‘Big Bill’s’ sporting experiences playing first grade cricket and rugby league in the Newcastle district competitions. ‘Big Bill’s’ sporting prowess gained him the respect of players, fans and local media in both summer and winter sporting codes in which he participated and outshined. His contribution to sport and larger-than-life personality changed how many local sports enthusiasts viewed and accepted Aboriginal people into their teams.

These Aboriginal sports champions and those not so successful athletes helped break down and break through some of the racial and social barriers that have always been there and have prevented Aboriginal people participating in sport. Many Aboriginal sportspeople lied

about their heritage or did not refer to it just so they could participate in the game that they could conquer and enjoy playing. Racism in all Australian sports culled many talented Aboriginal players from the games in which they excelled, but others who persevered forever changed the racial barriers in Australian sport.

From my research and the subsequent writing of this thesis, I have highlighted a number of important historical factors concerning and affecting the Worimi, as well as other Aboriginal groups of this nation. Things have changed today for the better, but we still have a long way to go before justice and equality are everyday norms for all people living in this country. A study of the mission at Karuah clearly reveals the courage, persistence and tenacity of Aboriginal people in attempting to survive and maintain their cultural connection to country. Aboriginal people, including the Worimi, have left an indelible imprint on the history of Australia and the people living in it, which opens, possibilities for better Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships for the future.
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