

**Living with the *Munpitch*: The history of  
Mitchell River Mission, 1905 - 1967**

**Thesis submitted by  
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in November 1999**

**For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
the School of Humanities at  
James Cook University**

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for another degree or diploma at any other university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given.

Philip Freier

30 November 1999

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the interaction between missionaries and Aborigines in a remote North Queensland mission conducted by the Church of England (Anglican) denomination. In particular it explores the relationship of the pre-mission Aboriginal contact history of this area with Aboriginal perspectives of whites. It looks at the ambiguities implicit in missionary policy and how this influenced the development of relationships on the Mitchell River Mission. In Queensland, church missions were used by the state government as a cheap way of carrying out its policies for Aborigines. Even though missionaries acted with apparently complete authority on the Mission there was a complex interplay of politics involving Aborigines, missionaries, higher church officials, the national mission agency of the Church of England, and the state government. The outcome of this was a consistent trend towards pauperisation of Aborigines and their remaining in a situation of entrenched disadvantage. A dialectical analysis of the history of race relations, through discussion of the *Munpitch* concept of the *Kokobera* people, provides a theoretical basis to the study.

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## **Abbreviations**

ABM	Australian Board of Missions
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ANA	Australian National Airways
ANU	Australian National University
AR	Annual Report
DAIA	Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement (also Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs)
DFSAIA	Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs
DNA	Department of Native Affairs
JCU	James Cook University
JOL	John Oxley Library
LRM	Lockhart River Mission
ML	Mitchell Library
MRM	Mitchell River Mission
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
USAAF	United States of America Air Force
QPP	Queensland Parliamentary Papers
QSA	Queensland State Archives

# **Chapter One**

## **In search of Mitchell River Mission: an opening reflection**

At the beginning of 1977, as a newly married, second-year teacher I moved to Kowanyama for the commencement of the school year. Four of us, including my wife Joy, were given the task of establishing secondary school classes to cater for the graduates of the Kowanyama State School. At that time Kowanyama was unequivocally under the administrative control of the Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement (DAIA). Even though we were teachers with the Education Department, Joy and I lived in DAIA accommodation, a small apartment on the end of the barn-like “Domestic Science Training Centre” that Joy, a home economics teacher, had the task of setting up. I taught in a building on the edge of the school grounds that was known as the “Old Feeding Centre”, where apparently children had been brought for supplementary meals some time previously, “... when the government took over the Mission”. The “Feeding Centre” was one of the few places that looked old, as, with only a few exceptions most of the other buildings at Kowanyama were newly built. There were few pointers in the built environment to any life before the period of government administration that had commenced only ten years before. Whatever Mitchell River Mission had been, it was certain that it would take some searching to find out.

There was certainly very little written about the history of this place. The only book that seemed much known, and then mostly in church circles, was John Bayton’s history of the Diocese of Carpentaria, *Cross over Carpentaria*, published in 1965. Bayton devoted part of a chapter, eight pages in all, to the foundation of the Mission and made passing reference to it in other parts of the book. Apart from Bayton’s book, further searching revealed a few first person accounts of travellers and those of the pioneer missionaries, Gilbert White and Ernest Gribble, that seemed to make up the rest of the published works of significance to Mitchell River Mission.

It soon became apparent that there was much more to this place than metal-clad

buildings and government administration. We became involved in the life of the church, a relatively unusual thing for the “white staff” of the time to do. Here we met people like Maudie Koolatah and May Smiler and learned that they had been housekeepers for the mission superintendent, and people like Alma Luke and Judy Brumby who had been teachers in the mission school. Many other people left me impressed with the richness of their experience. Their stories depicted a life in which Aborigines were far more central to the ordinary life and management of community affairs than was apparent under DAIA administration. We witnessed very few Aborigines in any positions of responsibility, mostly their only possibility for employment was on the “trainee wages” offered by the DAIA or in the few jobs available to men as stock workers on nearby cattle stations. Work for women on cattle stations had evaporated with the introduction of award wages; the situation was only marginally better for men. Recollections of the past evoked the “mission time”, when most people lived in palm-leaf houses in the three villages that the missionaries named, without imagination, “Number One”, “Number Two” and “Number Three”. The only trace of these was in the location of those mango trees that had survived Cyclone Dora in 1964 and now grew in odd places, like the middle of roads, in the new town. People spoke with affection about this “mission time” but also spoke in a matter-of-fact way about its privations and punishments. It was a world that seemed qualitatively different from the one in which I lived even though there was much that was also consonant with the present. I had, without knowing it, ventured into the world of oral history and begun to recognise that this would be a significant part of any research that attempted to deal with the history of Mitchell River Mission.

Seeing little apparent link between education and adult life, school children lost patience with the education system as they grew up. Formal classroom methods of teaching to fourteen year olds had limited benefit so my teaching strategy was to take the students out from their “Feeding Centre” classroom as much as possible, often for weekend camps with parents and other community elders. Yarning around the camp fire in the evening provided a further dimension of a rich life and heritage that was seldom as confidently expressed back in the Kowanyama township, certainly not in the presence of

“white staff”. This sort of participation in the life of Aboriginal people on their own country made the gap between this life and the world controlled by the “Department”, “the Manager” and the “white staff” seem very large indeed. It was then that the *Kokobera* term *Munpitch* (or its cognates *Agnar* and *Wangar* in *Kunjen* and *Kokominjen* languages respectively) kept coming up as the usual way to speak about whites in general. I was conscious that people would use these terms when speaking to each other in language in my presence, and were as often speaking about me. As far as the received wisdom of the “white staff” was concerned, Kowanyama Aborigines were understood to retain only minimal culture and have little history as whites understood it. From my reading I learned that the ancestors of Kowanyama Aborigines had an extensive contact history with whites, at least back to the seventeenth century, and were amongst the groups who might have been expected to have dealt with the events of that history in some significant way. To deal with the history of Mitchell River Mission without in some way recognising this significance seemed to me to be flawed from the outset. The outcome of these observations is contained in Chapter Three, “Strange Encounters with the *Munpitch*” and is present as a recurring theme throughout other parts of this thesis.

During our first few months in Kowanyama we went out with Aboriginal neighbours “hunting” in the swamps on a trailer hauled by a frequently-bogged tractor and on the tray-back of the church truck that just as often bogged or broke down. When I was able to bring a four wheel drive vehicle into Kowanyama at the beginning of the dry season in 1977, there were further opportunities of travelling out of Kowanyama on day trips to hunt, fish or search for turtles in the swamps. Joy’s teacher aide, Susan Brumby, and her family were frequent partners in these excursions. I wrote down some of the language, mostly *Kokobera*, that was spoken and was generally keen to learn about history and culture. There was eagerness to speak about “story places” and many of the cultural nuances were as plain to see in the bush as they were hidden in the school and in the generally administratively-controlled environment of Kowanyama. At this time anthropologist, John Taylor, and linguists, Barry Alpher and Bruce Sommer, were involved in follow-up research from their earlier work and Paul Black was undertaking

initial field research of the *Kokobera* language. Anthropologist John Beaton was working on cultural anthropology research. Even the famous Cornell anthropologist, Lauriston Sharp, visited during this period, some forty years after his first work in the area. Barry Alpher and Paul Black responded to the interest in their work by conducting classes in writing the languages spoken at Kowanyama.

Chapter Two, “The life that was”, sets out to give a broad impression of pre-mission life. So much of my understanding of the historical events connected with the Mission has been informed and enriched by an understanding of Aboriginal culture at Kowanyama. A reader unfamiliar with the local cultural norms will be helped by dealing with this subject first and then referring back to it, as needs be, when other more specific issues arise in the subsequent text. Chapter Four, “The search for a Mission”, gives a background to the missionaries who established Mitchell River Mission and demonstrates the complex motivations behind their quest.

The building where we lived was close to some big mango trees that served as a meeting place for the community when there was any matter of importance to discuss. When the crowd gathered in the afternoon, I would go across to sit and hear the discussion. Men like Harris Gregory, Colin Lawrence, Peter Michael, Clem Bernard, Nelson Brumby, Kenny Jimmy, Isaac Zingle or Thomas Bruce would be the animators of discussion with their not inconsiderable skills of oratory on a range of concerns of community interest. Others, men and women, joined in to sway the consensus as they saw fit. Even though there was a formally constituted “Community Council” which met with the DAIA manager to make official decisions, it was here, under the mango trees, that community politics were worked out.

Speaking to people about these meetings convinced me that they were not just a recent phenomenon. Indeed, as a mechanism of communication and decision making, community meetings were on the wane and had effectively been abandoned in the interval between when I left Kowanyama in 1978 and when I returned in 1983. By this time the “pub” had become the universal meeting place. In only five years, the sober and considered discussion I had witnessed in the community meetings had been subsumed by



an impatience that regarded this sort of meeting as an intrusion into the afternoon's drinking time. Back in 1977 community hopes rested upon the completion of a new beer canteen. There was an intense outpouring of pride when this was opened on 5 August 1977 by Eric Deeral, the Aboriginal member of the state parliament for the seat of Cook, and named the "Magnificent Hotel", after Magnificent Creek, one of the major anabranches of the Mitchell River. This event was celebrated as a "coming of age", when the shackles of control over the use of alcohol were loosened, that at last Aboriginal people in Kowanyama were not being treated as children. The passing of ten years had not erased the distaste for regulation and managed austerity that had characterised the mission years. Even the way beer was served at the new "Magnificent Hotel", five cans of beer sold on three nights of the week and then only from 5.00 pm to 7.00 pm, evoked former mission practice with its rationing and scarcity. The song especially composed in *Kokobera* for the Magnificent Hotel opening directly alluded to the queuing which resulted from the serving practices:

*Magnificent Hotel, standing open with honey,*

*Standing on heaps of feathers;*

*We stand here in long lines,*

*We drink honey out of baler shells.*

Three chronologically divided chapters explore the experience of "protection", the tangle of policy and practice in place for over half a century: Chapter Five, "The promise of protection, 1905-1924", Chapter Six, "The practice of protection, 1924-1960", and Chapter Ten, "The demise of missionary control, 1957-1977".

By 1983, and the subsequent years when I was recording oral history, the growing chaos of a community increasingly feeling the effects of alcohol was never far from interviewees' minds. Returning to Kowanyama had made me painfully aware of the death of some of my mentors from only five years before and the impact of alcohol on the life of the whole community. The community meetings had gone and the incidence of violence to self and significant others had increased. I was determined to be more

systematic than I had been in the period 1977, 1978 and commenced interviewing Kowanyama people as well as any former missionaries that I could contact. These were mostly carried out as tape recorded interviews. I consciously sought to interview people from the broadest cross-section of community membership starting with the oldest people first. The willingness of some very old and frail people to participate was immensely encouraging. I well remember interviewing Geoffrey Philip on 21 December 1987 as he recounted the story of his part in a police patrol north of the Mitchell River in 1935. Frail as he was, he explained with meticulous detail events that had occurred over fifty years before, and this only eight days before his death.

Present suffering is likely to make the past seem to be a “golden age”, and recollections about the past are more likely to emphasise the ways that the past differs from the present. The contemporary social background needs to be taken into account in the evaluation of what the Mission was actually like. Additionally, on many points, both Aborigines and missionaries were plainly ignorant of much of the detail that can now be reconstructed from documentary sources. For these reasons this thesis is not an “oral history”, even though such accounts are an important source throughout. Chapter Six, “The practice of protection, 1924-1960: building a missionary pastoral empire”, is a case in point. For this chapter I have examined a range of documentary sources that disclose information about opinions, agendas and facts that were all held as close secrets at the time of the events. Church and missionary dignitaries as well as government officials did not disclose their plans to any significant extent to each other nor even to lower ranking members of their own constituency and generally not to Aborigines. I have attempted to capture something of the dynamic nature of these power relations throughout the thesis, for this thesis is in part an historical exploration of the social relationships on the Mission and the extent to which these relationships match with what Aborigines and missionaries thought was happening. It also looks at other changes at Kowanyama over time.

The approach I have taken has meant that important world events such as the two World Wars and the Depression are only presented as echoes in the lives of the people at Mitchell River Mission. There is much that is interesting about these events, particularly

the presence of RAAF Radar Station No.320 at Belburra from 9 June 1943 until 5 September 1944, and the forced landing of the USAAF B-17 aircraft 41-2417 north of Kowanyama in July 1942, even though they have not been examined in any detail here. Equally, I have not attempted a detailed analysis of The Australian Board of Mission's (ABM) role in missions to Aborigines or a revision of the history of the Diocese of Carpentaria, both of which are important projects in themselves.

In the seven years (1977, 1978 and 1983-88) I lived at Kowanyama I encountered an Aboriginal domain that was distinct from the formality that characterised many of the interactions Aborigines had with non-Aborigines. David Trigger describes this same social, spatial and relationship dynamic from another Gulf community. A significant thing that the return to Kowanyama taught me, of which I had been unaware before in any explicit way, was that I was regarded as a member of the family of Daniel Barnabas, even though he had died during my absence. His close family members spoke to me as if I was his son, and others established a relational connection through this kinship. If it concerned Kowanyama Aborigines to think about it, I was regarded as *Kokobera*. My sons were openly spoken of as "*Kokobera* boys". This was a domain which Aborigines valued as properly theirs and so were involved in a continual process of establishing and maintaining boundaries to either include or exclude whites. In 1977, I was asked by Susan Brumby to take her father, Daniel Barnabas, out to Sandy Hole, about fifteen kilometres from Kowanyama. When we arrived at this spot, a small dam near the edge of a large swamp, I was surprised to see about thirty Aboriginal people standing in a group. As soon as Joy and I got out of the vehicle there was an animated argument in *Kokobera* language between Daniel and Doris Gilbert, one of the group already there as we arrived. It is was clearly over concerns about our presence. When this was settled and it was agreed we could be there, I was told that we were going to "meet" this country, which we proceeded to do by some guns being fired and everyone shouting as we advanced as a group towards the water of the dam. This, it was explained, was the country that belonged to Sarah's husband, Anthony Mark. Upon his death the locality that we stood on had been closed against any visits until the time had come to "meet that place", effectively

confronting the spirit of that man with our noisy entrance and claiming the land back to be used by the living. After these formalities were concluded and the whole group had begun fishing and hunting turtles, Doris came up to me and explained that she had no personal grievance towards our presence but needed to speak up in the way that she had out of respect for the deceased, a close kinsman. The window into the world of the *Kokobera* had been opened a little wider for me to see into.

Researchers in this situation are certain to encounter the social and personal reality of these things and may even be accepted within the Aboriginal domain and so need to deal with their own conception of where they stand and what that means for their research. The biographical approach I have taken to introducing this inquiry is an attempt to locate myself in this question. Without doubt there is a great need for Aborigines at Kowanyama to “tell their own story” to the world outside of their family and community. Written versions of this story have begun to be set down through initiatives of the Kowanyama State School, the Kowanyama Community Council and Nungalinga College amongst others. This research does not however do this. Instead it tells the story of missionaries, Aborigines and their interactions, and their changing understanding of each other. Chapter Seven, “Living with the *Munpitch*: Aborigines and missionary control” and Chapter Eight, “Making good Blackfellows: Living like the *Munpitch*” explore this experience.

Even though I had no part of the life of Mitchell River Mission, the relationship I had with Kowanyama, its successor community, was bound to affect the way I went about research. I had worked amongst its people as a school teacher and then as an Anglican priest. John Harris has shown that personal and family involvement, even in the events that have comprised history, need not detract from the value of historical writing. Like Harris, I am a co-religionist with the missionaries in the histories we have written. I was carrying out this research as the priest of the Church of the Ascension, a post-mission “provisional parish” of the Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria. Like two of my recent predecessors as priest-in-charge, Noel Gill and Philip Robinson, I had initially been known to Kowanyama Aborigines as a lay person and then returned to Kowanyama to

work as an ordained minister after receiving theological training. To that extent, I was an heir in office to the people intimately connected with the evangelism of the Kowanyama people, matters that are discussed in Chapter Nine, "Pathangany made us all: religion and traditional belief". In writing as I have I was conscious of what Gilbert White, one of the founders of the Mission, said when he looked into the future on 16 August 1898:

The benevolent reader of the year AD 2000 is requested to give to those who wrote here 100 years ago ... that tribute of a kindly thought which is due to their common share in this our not too easily understood life.

The task for a co-religionist of the missionaries in writing about the history of Mitchell River Mission is no less perplexing. There are many circumstances where I have described the actions of individual missionaries as arbitrary and inconsistent with their own espoused principles. In other situations the development of missionary policy appeared guided, over the long term, more by pragmatism and the values of the broader society of the time. Often the principles they espoused were beyond their achieving. The missionaries also acted with courage and heroism and undoubtedly endured hardship in the course of their missionary service. With meagre resources they provided medical care, education and the knowledge of Christian faith that many Aborigines have taken as their own. Some individuals amongst the missionaries were much loved and respected. The presence of some others was more endured than enjoyed.

There are many individuals in the history of the Mission who would each, individually, be worthy subjects for a biographer. If I have said too little to satisfy a reader's interest about some of these people, it is because of the limitations imposed by a project of this kind.

Mitchell River Mission could have been the centre for a rich variety of academic study had the career of Lauriston Sharp taken a different turn. His doctoral research amongst the *Yir Yoront* in the 1930s was one of the extensive field research projects inspired by the development of "modern" anthropology. His subsequent career was almost exclusively concerned with Thai research (in what was then called Siam) and his classic paper from 1952, "Steel axes for stone age Australians", represented an exceptional foray back into the field of his earlier Australian research. Still, his doctoral

dissertation, published articles of the time and, more especially, his unpublished field notes provide a valuable starting point in understanding the social dynamics on the Mission as well as between the bush-living *Yir Yoront* and the Mission. Only two of Sharp's graduate students at Cornell researched topics at Kowanyama: Donald Crim on changes to kin-term usage, and Barry Alpher on the *Yir Yoront* language in the 1960s.

Next to Sharp, John Taylor's doctoral research at Edward River stands as the anthropological work most immediately relevant to this investigation. The people who were gathered to form Edward River Mission (now called Pormpuraaw) had earlier been numbered amongst those the Mitchell River missionaries labelled "bush natives" and "wild blacks". The life and customs that these missionaries had encountered only tangentially, and often as a disruptive influence on missionary order, is analysed in Taylor's work. He describes cultural practices and social patterns that were shared between the *Thaayorre* people of his study and the *Kokobera*, *Kokominjen* and *Kunjen* people of Mitchell River Mission. Texts from linguists Barry Alpher, Bruce Sommer and Paul Black have also proved helpful in penetrating beyond the problems of second-language communication. Veronica Strang's recent work provides a very helpful picture of the integration of life and land for contemporary Aborigines at Kowanyama and particularly focuses on the experiences of some of the *Kunjen* groups.

Even though summary versions of the founding missionaries' diaries were available in newspaper form soon after the missionary expeditions between 1902 and 1905, they were slower to appear in book form. Gilbert White rendered a thorough version of his diary entries in his 1919, *Thirty Years in Tropical Australia*; Ernest Gribble dealt with his version of these events in the 1930, *Forty years with the Aborigines*, and the 1933, *A Despised Race*. In each case the diaries and narratives contribute to a genre of publication that can be described as "missionary adventures". These highlight, after the pattern of St Paul's missionary journeys, the hardships and struggles of the missionary, and were essentially Christian propaganda sponsored by the Australian Board of Missions to explain and win support for missionary work. None the less they provide valuable material for this thesis since they are consciously first-person

accounts by significant participants in the earliest period of mission history.

Gribble's second book, *The Problem of the Australian Aboriginal*, published in 1932, brought together his knowledge of customs and practices of the diverse people he had worked with at Yarrabah, Mitchell River and Forrest River with the intention of representing Aboriginal people as intelligent, sensitive and creative in contradiction to the stereotypes of the time. He ventured into an evaluation of government and missionary policy and offered a brief but comprehensive history of Christian missions amongst the Aborigines. As much as Gribble's book recognised the need for the systematic study of Christian missions, the application of such scholarship (unavailable to Gribble) did not emerge until many years after Gribble's pioneering literary efforts. Swain and Rose's, *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, published in 1988, represented the breadth of scholarship in what was by then the growing field of mission history. The book opens with the Elegy of Jack Bruno, a Kowanyama man, which powerfully demonstrates the preference of Aborigines at Kowanyama to understand the world in spiritual, rational and reflective terms. In contrast to this, Keith Cole's summary of Anglican missions gives only five lines to Mitchell River Mission and wrongly identifies the year of its foundation. The present work is written between these two poles. It builds on the insights of mission Aborigines as subjects in their own history and provides a level of detailed analysis of the history of Mitchell River Mission that has not previously been attempted. Of the growing number of studies of Aboriginal mission history I have only dealt with those that seemed most relevant to my research.

Two years later John Harris published his magisterial, *One Blood*, the most comprehensive historical survey of Christian missions undertaken in Australia. Although Mitchell River Mission is only dealt with in passing brevity, *One Blood* has marked itself as an indispensable pillar of the literature of Australian Christian missions. Harris' structure of his inquiry in *One Blood* has proven particularly helpful in organising the material presented here. In its own way this thesis complements his more detailed study of the Northern Territory Anglican missions.

A central argument of this thesis is that the encounter with whites was understood

by Aborigines in spiritual terms and that this understanding changed over time. The Aborigines of Mitchell River responded to whites as *Munpitch*, spiritual beings. It is not necessary to venture beyond the Asian and Pacific neighborhood of Australia to identify examples of similar responses to white contact. Wiener, Aguilar and Sahlin from the contexts of Bali, the Philippines and Hawaii respectively each account for a primarily spiritual response to the directly material intrusion of whites. Whether in Australia or in this wider Asian and Pacific region, the identification of whites as somehow “returned spirits” of the deceased is indeed remarkable. It also underscores the difficulty indigenous people had, across this wide variety of social contexts and geographic locations, locating whites in their own social and moral world. Additionally it suggests a lost kinship which these same people are open to re-establish with whites. The Aborigines of Mitchell River Mission demonstrated this throughout the life of the Mission and particularly in the broadening of their own spiritual traditions to include whites in the same ontological order that the behaviour of whites so often seemed to distance themselves from.

Within the Australian context, the work of David Thompson on Lockhart River is particularly pertinent in identifying the way in which Anglican Christian practice has been incorporated into a traditional Aboriginal world view. The discussion of “lost opportunities”, detailed in Chapter Nine, explores early attempts at this incorporation from Kowanyama. Again, from the experience of Lockhart River Mission, Noel Loos has demonstrated what a rich vein of history and human aspiration was to be discovered in the study of the Christian Co-operative Movement, one of the last attempts at innovation during the period of church hegemony on the Cape York Peninsula, Anglican missions. The present inquiry builds on this analysis in Chapter Six, from the perspective of the Mitchell River encounter with this attempted innovation, but places it in a much longer time perspective than has been possible in the original work from Lockhart River.

A major theme of this thesis is the mismatch between Aboriginal aspiration and what actually occurred under missionary control. The landmark work of Djiniyini Gondarra, the 1986 *Let my people go*, plainly states the case for Christianity lived as a dynamic belief by Aborigines, not just as an aspect of European cultural dominance and



Aboriginal dependency. This was something dear to the heart of the Reverend Nancy Dick, the first Aboriginal woman ever ordained as a deacon in the Anglican Church. Her summary of the history of Kowanyama was brief but conveyed powerfully the lived experience of a woman who became a highly respected Christian leader:

When the missionaries arrived and lived on the mission they began to build houses, a church and dormitories. It was a hard time for the Aboriginals. The missionaries started teaching the Aboriginal to read and write when the school and church came up and were built, the missionaries began to put the children in school and dormitories. But it was a very strict [time] and hard to earn money for their families. Then the Aboriginal people became Christians and their Christianity grew more and more. The gospel and the good news were in the hearts of the Christian, or people, they began to know God and believed in Jesus Christ. So Jesus is like the plant and the Aboriginal like the soil.

What follows here is an explication of this history. It attempts to deal with the range of issues Nancy Dick raised: the impact of the transition to residence on a mission station, the experience of missionary dominance and the missionaries' attempts at social engineering, the contrived austerity of the missionary regime, and the journey made by Aborigines to become Christians. As far as Kowanyama is concerned, this is the first academic study of its mission history and, as such, presents new insights into the broader field of mission history research by exploring linkages with the extensive pre-mission period.

This work presents a north Australian window on the history of European-Aboriginal relations in Australia and further challenges these views which seek to represent these relations as evolving from Sydney Cove in 1788. Where it has failed, the responsibility is mine alone.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Life That Was**

Prior to the establishment of the Mitchell River Mission, Ernest Gribble told potential inmates that the mission would be concerned to make them “good blackfellows”. It was not, he asserted, about making them like white men, they could still expect to walk freely over their country, to hunt and carry out ceremony. In making this statement Gribble, on one hand, seems to appreciate the significance of land, ceremony and means of production to the Aborigines of the Mitchell, but on the other hand, and despite his many years of work with Aborigines, seemed still not to appreciate the impact of his proposed mission upon these domains. The strategies employed by the mission in producing “good blackfellows” would impinge upon every element of traditional Aboriginal life. During the mission period from 1905 to 1967 the Aborigines of the Mitchell experienced confinement to the mission boundaries, the curtailment of many elements of ceremonial life and faced adaptation to a radically altered means of production, leaving Gribble’s words as an idealistic dream or from an Aboriginal perspective a mocking taunt.

Even though the people of the Mitchell were exposed to the mission influences to make them “good blackfellows” well ahead of any systematic appreciation of their traditional life, they were also the subjects of such a study in the 1930s by Cornell anthropologist, R. Lauriston Sharp. Sharp used his research to produce a paper which has become something of a classic in the anthropological literature, “Steel axes for stone age Australians”. If Gribble was overly optimistic about the possibility of the mission enterprise co-existing with the traditional, Sharp took a tone of deep pessimism seeing the introduction of the steel axe and other missionary influences as the cause of “... a mental and moral void which foreshadowed the collapse and destruction of all Yir Yoront culture, if not, indeed, the extinction of the biological group itself”. The simple

moral good that Gribble proposed would follow the establishment of the Mission would often struggle to be seen in the many dimensions of the culture clash that became the story of the Mission.

An account of the history of Mitchell River mission solely in terms of the documents and perspectives of its European missionaries would be incomplete without some description of the Aboriginal people and society who came to be associated with the mission. An attempt to open up the Aboriginal perspective calls for as thorough account as is possible, even though the result may seem summary to the anthropologist and shallow to the Mitchell River people themselves. What follows is a summary of some features of the customary life of the Aborigines who came to be connected with the Mitchell River Mission (see Map 1). These people will be described in terms of their physical environment, the human ecology of their area and their cultural milieu. This will provide a background to the more specific discussions of these matters in later chapters when they are necessary for elucidating an understanding of historical events within the life of the mission.

The *Yir Yoront*, with whom Sharp lived in 1933 and 1934 were a group who numbered about 150 and lived around the mouth of the Mitchell River. Most of their number came eventually to be permanent residents at Mitchell River Mission where they were known as the *Kokominjen*. They were culturally similar to the other groups involved with the mission and Sharp's work provides an important resource in understanding the culture of the Aboriginal people who inhabited the mission from its foundation at Trubanaman in 1905 to its transfer into government control at Kowanyama in 1967.

John Taylor has completed a modern ethnographic study of the people at Edward River just to the north of Kowanyama. Begun as an offshoot of Mitchell River Mission in 1939, Edward River Mission became the home for some of the *Yir Yoront* and practically all of the *Kuuk Thaayore* and *Wik Nganchera*. Taylor's work related the pattern of pre-settlement life to the

ethnographic present of Edward River in the period between 1968 and 1970. My own insights into life at Kowanyama come from living there during 1976 and 1977 and then from December 1983 to June 1988. Between Sharp's work in the 1930s, Taylor's in the 1960s and my own observations more recently, there is a basis for reconstructing both pre-settlement patterns of culture and describing cultural patterns concerned with life on the settlement.

The *Kokobera* people figure at the centre of many perspectives of Mitchell River Mission; it was on their land that the Mission was founded in 1905. The *Kokobera* man *Thur palngkal kalawiny* is credited by his descendents as the first Aborigine to befriend the missionaries. The *Kokobera* were in the middle of some of the most hectic challenges to mission authority even though they were stronger allies to the missionary cause than the missionaries were able to acknowledge. What follows is an account of what anthropologists call the "ethnographic past": a composite account of traditional life according to the *Kokobera*. It is in many respects a fiction, constructed from the balance of probabilities, as people in contemporary times remember the social circumstances of their past. For that reason I have chosen not to cite the names of those who contributed to my reconstruction since they are many and any one person alone may not be the sole source of elements of the picture created. Where similar circumstances amongst other Aboriginal groups in north Queensland have been described by scholars, I have cited these to attest to the wider occurrence of the phenomena described from the *Kokobera* perspective. Sharp's unpublished fieldnotes are mostly concerned with the *Yir Yoront*, but also contain a few quite specific references to the *Kokobera*.

The *Kokobera* were southern neighbours of the *Yir Yoront* inhabiting the area around Topsy Creek, the creek most immediately to the south of the Mitchell River delta. Trubanaman, the first site for Mitchell River Mission, was squarely within the land of the *Kokobera*. Missionary effort was directed towards the *Kokobera* people during the early years of the mission. The

*Kokobera* hold that they are the group most centrally connected with the mission, by reason of the Trubanaman site and also because of the role of key *Kokobera* people within the life of the mission. Even the relocation of the mission to Kowanyama, on the northern fringe of *Kokobera* land, did not diminish this claim.

The abundance of tribal names quickly becomes confusing and when there is no need to specifically identify an actual language I will follow the vernacular practice of people in Kowanyama and refer to three so called “tribes” connected with the mission (see figures 2 and 3). These three “tribes” are *Kokobera*, *Kokominjen* and *Kunjen*. Each “tribe” comprises a number of different language units, and functions to include even Aborigines from outside these units into the structure of the settlement as a whole. From the perspective of the *Kokobera* their neighbours to the north were speakers of *Kokowap* and *Kokominjen*, to the east *Kokomarntingen* and to the south *Kokoppereng* and *Kokonharr*. The *Kokomarntingen* or *Uw Oygangand*, as they know their own language, refer to the *Kokobera* as *Uw Almbadnhm*. This process could be repeated in turn for each of the different language groups who have found themselves in association with Mitchell River Mission, and explains the variety of names used to identify the languages of Aborigines related to the mission in some surveys of Aboriginal languages.

Even though the people who came to be associated with Mitchell River Mission spoke a variety of different languages they became accustomed to a division of the whole settlement community into the three “tribes” mentioned. These basic divisions of identity for different family and clan groups are related to the three distinct villages at the Kowanyama site of Mitchell River Mission prior to the Mission being rebuilt after Cyclone Dora in 1964. These villages were themselves a formalisation of the earlier practice of people on visits to the mission making their camps on its outskirts at places closest to their home country. As the camps became villages, and bush people were induced to

reside at the mission, it was natural for them to live in closest proximity to people from their own country or those whose country was in the same direction as theirs. Within the mission, people came to identify themselves as *Kokominjen* or “Bottom end”, *Kokobera* and *Kunjen* or “Top end”, “Bottom” and “top” were the respective salt and fresh water reaches of the Mitchell River (see Map 3 following p.24).

The *Kokominjena* people comprised those from the saltwater reaches of the Mitchell River delta and included, along with *Yir Yoront* speakers, those speaking the related *Yir Thangedl* language as well as speakers of the *Kinkopel* dialect. The *Kunjen* people were made up from groups occupying the Mitchell River and its tributaries upstream from the limit of saltwater, as well as other inland groups. The *Kunjen* people included speakers of *Uw Oygangand* and *Uw Olkol* as well as other *Uw* dialects.

Even though modern Aborigines at Kowanyama usually identify themselves with one of the three “tribes” relatively few modern people are fluent speakers of the language which forms the basis of their “tribal” identity. In contrast, the people of traditional times were characteristically fluent in many languages, even going beyond those of their immediate neighbours. An individual in traditional life would live in an extended family group. A man in this arrangement might have married a woman from a clan which spoke a different language, giving the likelihood of a mixture of vocabulary at least within the people of one camp.

Mitchell River Mission was established on the western coast of Cape York Peninsula which is itself a triangular-shaped isthmus projecting northwards at approximately 17ES latitude from the main land mass of Australia towards New Guinea and separated from that island by the waters of Torres Strait. The location of the southern boundary of the Peninsula has received different treatment by authors approaching the subject from a variety of disciplines. An early geographical study by Whitehouse accepted 17ES as

did Anning's more recent paper from the perspective of agriculture. Whereas Valentin accepted the Peninsula to extend to the Norman River on the west coast at 17E30'S, Pedley and Isbell's botanical study of the Peninsula in 1970 took the southern boundary at 16ES. Stanton's 1976 proposal for national parks on the Peninsula accepted the 16ES boundary; his definition was followed by Covacevich and Ingram and the other contributors to the 1979 "Contemporary Cape York Peninsula" symposium in Brisbane. When "the Peninsula" is referred to here it can be taken to mean the land north of 17E30'S as the focus of this study is upon both the west coast and the Mitchell River.

The Great Dividing Range forms a watershed between the rivers of the narrow coastal lands of the east and those that flow across the broad plains of the west. The Gulf of Carpentaria to the west of the Peninsula is a uniformly shallow expanse of sea which experiences large tidal fluctuations. The Mitchell River system is the largest water catchment and drainage system in the Peninsula draining a considerable area of the southern Peninsula into the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The Peninsula area is characterised by a monsoonal climate, and is dependent upon rain-bearing winds from the north-west which blow in the period November to March. For much of the year the river level is low, sometimes becoming a string of waterholes as the prevailing south-easterly winds blow dry across the land. River flooding occurs when the monsoon winds bring heavy wet season rains across the catchment area of the Mitchell River and its tributaries. The wet season proper is preceded by a period of seasonal change when tropical thunderstorms occur and bring drought-breaking rains to the landscape. Kowanyama's average annual rainfall of 1226 mm falls mostly between November and April, with the months between December and March having the greatest rainfall.

The Mitchell River flows in a general west, north-westerly direction from

its source in the hinterland to the north of Cairns. Along this course it is joined by the main tributaries of the Palmer, Lynd and Alice rivers with the Coleman River forming a confluence with the Mitchell delta at 15E20'S as it meets the Gulf of Carpentaria. The entire river system is fed by streams that rise as far as 375 kilometres apart from each other. In times of maximum river flow, streams like Magnificent Creek, Topsy Creek and Nassau River are fed from the floodwater in the main Mitchell. The river basin provided a natural unit for the cultural area of the Mitchell River people who were drawn to the river margins as the dry season advanced. In a similar way the coastal area was another natural unit of cultural definition, not least because the coastal people were specialists in exploiting the estuarine and littoral habitats for food. Since the Mitchell River Mission was close to both these river and coastal areas, it was, in a sense, at a place where the natural interests of both the coastal and the river people coincided.

The coastal area experiences the effects of tropical cyclones during the wet season which, combined with the effects of the large silt load carried down the river in flood, provide the means for quite dramatic morphological changes to estuaries from year to year. Fast growing stands of *Casuarina* stabilise the sand mass of the frontal dunes almost to the high water mark whilst various species of mangroves grow in the waters protected by sand spits. This plant growth on the dunes as well as the mechanical action of tides and silt deposition make for an advancing coastline. Series of parallel dunes can be observed extending kilometres inland and are relics of former coastal environments. This coastal environment of sand ridge and salt marsh has minimal freshwater available in the dry season so that animals need to rely on freshwater further inland or on soaks in the ridges themselves. Human habitation of these immediately coastal environments was made possible through digging shallow wells.

Freshwater lagoons are important aquatic environments throughout the



western Peninsula with large swamps being prominent along the rivers and nearer the coast. Some lagoons are formed by what are in effect anabranches of the river in flood and depend upon the flooding of the rivers for replenishment. Many of the swamps are filled to a depth of over a metre in the wet season by local runoff of rain and are quickly covered by a luxuriant growth of swamp grasses. As the dry season advances, the swamps dry and grazing by both native marsupials and introduced cattle becomes intensive on the swamp grasses. The swamps contract to either an entirely bare plain or, in the case of some of the larger ones, a small area of water in the centre. With the advent of grazing cattle and the large populations of feral pigs the dry beds of the swamps are inevitably pockmarked by the hoof prints of these animals as they walk in the drying mud.

Human and animal life is profoundly affected by the seasonal variation of surface water. Wallabies are the dominant native marsupial life of the area with kangaroos being present in small numbers and isolated populations. The wallabies breed quickly with the onset of favourable conditions in the wet season and attain great numbers. Migratory birds, particularly the magpie goose, descend upon the swamps to nest in large numbers, constructing floating nests of bent swamp grass and reeds. Long-necked turtles spend the dry season aestivating in the dried mud of the swamps emerging only when the monsoon rain fills them. The existence of freshwater lagoons and billabongs provides the habitat for large reptiles including both estuarine and freshwater crocodiles, turtles, water goannas and snakes including the file snake which is distinctive to the Mitchell River system. Sharks, sawfish and stingrays all venture into the freshwater reaches of the larger streams and can be found, particularly in the Mitchell, above the limit of salt water during the dry season. Crustaceans and molluscs are also common in these freshwater environments.

Plant communities vary with habitat and considerable diversity exists,

ranging from the salt pans of the coast to the gallery forests lining the freshwater streams. Open savannah woodlands cover much of the land. The distinctive and large-growing cabbage tree palm (*Corypha elata*) grows both near swamps and on the creek margins. The gallery forests of the larger streams comprised *Melaleuca* and *Eugenia* species as well as the Leichhardt Pine. Most of the creek and river margins in their saltwater reaches are covered with dense populations of a variety of mangrove species with hibiscus trees and gutta percha growing just out of reach of the salt water.

The coastal land to the south of the Mitchell River delta provided for all of the food, water and shelter requirements of those who lived there. The availability of food plants and animals varied seasonally along with the supply of water. Some food items like fruits, goose eggs and fish were for short seasonal periods in absolute abundance, during which time they came to occupy a predominant role in the diet. The changes in the availability of food sources and seasonal variations were responsible for a pattern of movement over the hunting ranges of the clans, with the dry season rendering some areas inhospitable. People mostly spent their year in family groups, which Taylor calls "hearth groups", or associations of these depending on the capacity of the land to support their hunting and food gathering at any particular time. Even though fish were a normal part of the diet of hearth groups and obtained in the normal rounds of daily life there would be other times when the co-operative efforts of several groups would be needed to poison a waterhole and gather the stunned fish that floated to the surface. An event like this involved ritual songs and actions which legitimated the fish poisoning activity and defined another level of social organisation.

The relationship of the land, its plants and animals to its Aboriginal inhabitants was more than just one of food, water, climate and geography. The land, plants and animals along with all other natural phenomena were intimately related to human society by a manner of perception quite different

from that which followed from the European dichotomy between the human and the natural.

The notion of the “Dreaming” has become accepted as a general term for the Aboriginal perception of time, causation and the place of humans in the world of nature. Stanner was the first to popularise this concept as a way of describing the unique belief system which undergirded the culture of the Australian Aborigines in general. He asserted that the Dreaming was a cosmogony (explanation for the way things have come to be) and a cosmology (description of the extent of reality) which formed an integrated philosophy in Aboriginal traditional life. He considered that the Dreaming had been constructed out of the realities of social organisation through a process of abstraction. In other societal contexts with different starting points this same process, Stanner considered, had produced “religion” and “science” as known by Europeans. Sharp concluded, many years earlier, that “the mythology undoubtedly serves the aboriginal [sic] as our history and natural science serve us in offering to our curiosity a plausible explanation of the origins of cultural and natural phenomena”. The deeds of the ancestors who formed natural species and phenomena provided the basis for Aboriginal beliefs about the land and their relationship with it.

The prevailing lack of large scale topographical relief in the coastal and estuarine regions near the lower Mitchell has meant that distinctive parts of the small scale topography as well as trees have taken on additional importance as cultural markers. When this is combined with the dynamic pattern of stream and coastal change it is easy to see that a feature like a large tree by a riverbank that seems so permanent to one generation may be removed by natural processes in the next. Yet the concept of Dreaming as evidenced in this area transcended these events to witness to the activity of the ancestors in the contemporary world of any generation. Questions, were they to be asked, about the manner that a site, such as a tree, became endowed with qualities

which marked it apart from other trees would all be referred to the axiom of ancestral activity.

The cyclical notion of the generations summed up all known kin into a pattern of no more than five generations; two each for the ascending and descending generations in addition to that of the individual. With the increase of years and the attainment of old age, consanguineous ascending kin became fewer and eventually entirely absent. The kinship system worked in such a way that younger people from the descending generations were available in appropriate classificatory relationships to fill the gaps in kinship roles left by the demise of actual consanguineous kin. In this way a person always maintained their place within the wider pattern of ascending and descending generations irrespective of their age. Outside these contemporary generations the period of ancestral action was located and experienced in the present through myth, song and ritual as well as the day to day activities of life. The ancestors had acted in an era that was just outside, but continuous with, the historic, even though they were not counted in a genealogical sense as forebears.

The conceptualisations of the present were related to the Dreaming or the period of the ancestors in such a way as to influence the historical perception of events, at least compared to the way those same events are perceived in the European tradition. Thus an elderly *Kunjen* woman, whom I had known well at Kowanyama since my first association there in 1977, was quite emphatic in 1988 that I had both known her husband (who had died in 1968) and had been living at Kowanyama during Cyclone Dora (this cyclone had occurred in 1964). Whilst this could be explained by confusion of identity or lapse of memory it seemed to be an example of a retrospective account of history where the past was conceived to reflect social realities of the present. This suggests that the use of oral history and oral tradition in reaching an understanding about the past needs to be done within a context of

corroborating documentation and awareness of present social reality.

From Stanner's perspective the whole of Aboriginal traditional reality was rooted in the societal and particularly in the fundamental division of human society into male and female. This then extends to the whole non-human world. Evidenced through totemism and in moiety divisions in some groups, or extended to sub-section and section divisions in others, this principle returned to the human world to emphasise the relatedness of all people and of these people to the world they inhabited. This emphasis on relatedness posed a difficulty in the encounter with Europeans and their culture which focussed on the radical otherness of the creator to the created and of humanity to its environment.

The Dreaming was a reality then which both encompassed the physical environment and rendered it as an extension of the world of experience and relationship. From birth to death the individual in Aboriginal society received the constant affirmation that the significance of the human person was a primarily social reality. In the same way the era and action of the ancestors was an immanent rather than transcendent reality. Among the *Kokobera* the first signs of pregnancy were noted and associated with activity near a place where, it was believed, the *pakaler* or spirit of the infant would have entered the mother's body. This place where the *pakaler* originated would remain associated with the individual throughout their life and be the place to which the *munpitch* or ghost of the physical body was told to return to after death. This place, now referred to in Aboriginal English as the "home" of the individual, located them within a social world that was itself intimately related to the locale in which the individual and their kin lived. Taylor considered this process of "spirit conception" to be the "basic ideology underlying the formation of clans".

The domains of the clan lands contained within them various sites of significance either specially identified with the activities of the ancestors or

generally so as an increase site for some animal, plant or natural phenomenon associated with clan totems (*pinganem*). The increase sites would receive attention in the course of the year and in the case of ones that were depressions in the ground would have the dust from the site thrown in the cardinal directions with the instruction for the object of increase at that site to abound in those directions. Increase sites that were in some other form might be activated by being struck or disturbed in some other way.

Other places were carefully managed not so much for the good they were able to dispense to the four points of the compass but because inappropriate activity in their proximity would see havoc unleashed in all directions. The “cough story” at Sandy Hole is an example where disturbance of the site preceded and was considered to be able to bring about a universal outbreak of debilitating sickness. This site is associated with a long saga which at one point has one of the ancestors encountering a man who uses nasal mucous instead of bark to cover the meat in his ground oven. There is no memory amongst contemporary *Kokobera* of sites of this nature being used in the way Taylor described for Edward River where potentially harmful sites were activated by their custodians, “when they were at odds with the rest of the community and could blame no particular person for their predicament”.

Clan ownership of land was a central principle of social organisation and provided the means through which access to resources were regulated. There were different degrees to which people could have rights over land and its resources. The primary right to land an individual could have was to the clan land from which their spirit was considered to have originated. This was usually within the clan lands of an individual’s father but did not necessarily need to be so. Control over access and resource use were possessed by individuals “stewards” (after Taylor), or simply as “bosses” as they are referred to in Aboriginal English.

Lesser rights over land were accorded the kin of the person who held

primary rights depending on the nature of the relationship, which in turn corresponded to reduced access to the land's resources. An individual would thus have tracts to which primary rights could be exerted as well as others in which secondary rights could be claimed as through spouse or mother. When this situation is translated into the context of the hearth group it is evident that an individual could benefit from lands which were connected with others in the group even if, as an individual, they had no basis for rights to that land. People travelling across another's clan estate could receive temporary rights to hunt and gather food for the period of time agreed to by the steward of that area.

Related together by participation in the totemic mythology of the land, hearth groups were allied into clans whose members shared an identity based on the stories of the ancestor figures who brought the land into being. Several clans might share a common language whilst still having affiliative relationships with clans whose language was different and thereby form a larger ritual-ceremonial group. Thus among the *Kokobera* speaking people the *Papekepenpéw* were the people (*pa*) whose main camp (*pekew*) was the place named *penpéw* who shared the totems (*pinganem*) of black snake, green frog and whistle duck. One of the sites of significance on the clan lands of the *Papekepenpéw* was the increase site for the black snake, one of the totems of this clan. Along with other clans (eg. *Manirr* and *Karméw Wanthél*) having different *pinganem* the *Papekepenpéw* make up the people who identify in the modern day as *Kokobera* and whose male ancestors, from whom that identity has been received, predominantly spoke the *Kokobera* language or related dialects. Taylor identifies the groupings of this kind in ascending order of complexity: hearthgroup, band, clan, ritual-ceremonial group.

While an individual could acquire personal names throughout life it was usual for them to have a name which linked them as a person to the *pinganem* (totem) of their clan. This was the primary symbol of their association with the

clan lands or “ritual estates”. Thus in the *Karméw Wanthél* clan which has shark as a *pinganem*, three male siblings received personal names derived from this *pinganem*. The names of the brothers *Pongkomkutjaremping* (when the mince from the shark becomes hard), *Mokolmampekalawing* (shark fin breaking through the water) and *Kopongkomperanger* (shark with white liver), derived largely from the food use of the shark (*koypongom*).

As well as personal names derived in this way an individual might have a nickname that came from some childhood trait or personal characteristic. The name, *Manganbilay* for one man meant literally “What’s that thing?”, a commonly asked question by an inquisitive child, and seems to have been an example of a nickname becoming the better remembered name for this person who died in 1950. An individual could also be known by the name of their country as was the case for Charlie Goatboy (died 1959) who was known as *Pathakongendu* (*path* is the generic prefix indicating a place name) after the lagoon at Sandy Hole. Personal names were often given from an older person to a younger and in this way and in the other ways discussed here an individual could acquire several names in the course of their lifetime.

At birth the names of same generation kin as the new born were spoken. This recitation of names was understood to aid the elimination of the placenta. The person named by the midwife when the placenta was expended was then in a special relationship with the new born, its *unchel*. This adoptive relationship, called *pangunchel yipel* widened the circle of relationship and responsibility towards the new born and saw the member of the kinship group who was so named taking special responsibilities towards the provision of food for the child as the child became older. Initially the *unchel* was in a taboo relationship to the new born and their parents. At about two years of age when the baby was weaned, a ceremony took place where the child met the *unchel* and was placed in front of this person’s feet, from which action the name for this particular relationship originates. A gift to the baby confirmed the



relationship which saw the *unchel* (male or female) stand in solidarity with the adoptee against an assailant in a fight and the latter eventually assume the role of son or daughter in the mourning rituals upon the death of the *unchel*. This custom, which was probably unknown and inconsequential to the missionaries, lost ground with the introduction of white nurses as midwives in the 1940s and was wholly eradicated when mothers from Kowanyama were taken to Cairns for their confinement in the 1960s.

A custom which received active opposition from the missionaries was that of promised marriage. In its basic form a female baby would be “promised” to an adult man of suitable marriage relationship in a ceremony that established patterns of avoidance between the promised husband and the kin of the promised wife. These avoidance patterns were most pronounced towards the mother of the promised wife. This avoidance was a mark of respect and deference to those people who had given a man his wife and acknowledged the life long debt he bore towards these people. Settlement life brought a higher level of anxiety in observing avoidance relationships on account of the specialisation of jobs that took place and the closer proximity in which people continually found themselves with others they were obliged to avoid. Despite these difficulties it is not at all uncommon for people in present day Kowanyama to make decisions about where they look while walking down the street, where they sit in a waiting room for a medical clinic or how seating is arranged in a vehicle in the light of these avoidance responsibilities.

As childhood developed into an age where children had increased independence they would participate in the activities of their family group acquiring the practical and economic skills which would become the means of their future survival. As these things took place in the usual course of the days and seasons, children would be exposed to a constant and unfolding picture of the extent of the social network they had been born into and its extension to the non-human world through totemism and the actions of the ancestors.

The attainment of adulthood would be marked by an increasing contribution to the economy of the family through hunting and food gathering. Girls would commence the move to the camp and country of their promised husband perhaps becoming established as the junior of one or more elder wives. Both boys and girls had their adulthood affirmed by the cultural and ritual life of the clans as they met for ceremony, the boys participating in men's initiation rites and the girls joining in the women's roles for these and other ceremonies as they progressed to adulthood. By the end of the mission period customary activity of the large scale, socially organised kind had found its main expression within the rituals of mourning.

Ritual knowledge was defined along sex and age lines with penalties of either direct retribution or sickness being invoked for disregard of these boundaries. This applied equally to women and men who were generally aware of the domains of knowledge that were dangerous to each gender respectively. If aspects of the mens' initiation rituals were taboo areas for women, the areas of menstruation and childbirth were equally so for men. Both men and women had accompanying powers and efficacies which this division of knowledge conferred upon them in the functioning of society.

The customary response to death and its expression in mourning customs has many elements which have been practised in an unbroken continuity up to the present day and are a significant part of modern Aboriginal identity at Kowanyama. This is despite the discouragement missionaries gave to the practice of traditional mortuary customs. The death of a clan member would cause a grief stricken response amongst kin. Anguished cries and wailing, self mutilation by cuts to the body or blows to the face would engulf those who came together to share their time of sorrow. Whilst this description suggests a scene of chaos, underlying patterns of kinship were reinforced during these events. The basic division in responsibilities at these times was made between the kin of the deceased and those of the widow or widower.

Mourning strings were worn by people who had agreed to undertake certain responsibilities associated with the mourning ritual and to uphold dietary and social restrictions which accompanied these. A female widow among the *Kokobera* would wear the long diagonal pair of strings, *mankokormurr*, the *therkongórr* around the upper arm and the *manngurchm* a string worn around the neck with five tails that hung down the back. A man who was widowed would wear the *manngurchm* only. Uncles and brothers of the deceased would wear the *therkoriy*, a long string wound several times around the upper arm. Gifts of yam or sugarbag would be given by the wearers of the *manngurchm* to the kin of the deceased and to the grandsons (actual or classificatory) who had been responsible for the preparation of the corpse.

Evisceration and skinning of the corpse were traditional practices across a large area of the western Peninsula before the corpse was suspended on a sapling platform or in a tree fork to allow for further dessication before being wrapped into a ti tree bark coffin. The remains in this state were then able to be transported to the various camp sites over the period of up to two years before the bones were buried. Fluids from the body were captured at the early stages of the dessication process and were themselves dessicated and preserved. These mortuary customs have not been practised by the *Kokobera* or their neighbours in Kowanyama in recent times. Despite the abandonment of traditional mortuary practice the allocation of duties to kin in carrying out contemporary responsibilities are continuous with these traditional ways. Responsibilities for washing and dressing the body after death, for binding up the corpse in a palm leaf coffin and for interring the coffin at the burial are all determined along traditional lines.

Extended periods of seclusion for the principal widow and closure of the hunting tracts and conception site of the deceased coincided with an exhortation to the spirit of the deceased to depart from the world of the living and go to its final abode. This seclusion was usually long and arduous in

earlier times but had been reduced to a matter of weeks or months in the 1970s and shortened further to even a matter of days by the 1980s. The prohibition on mentioning the name of the deceased has continued into modern times as a strict observance. The introduction of the Torres Strait custom of “tombstone opening” (a Christian liturgy associated with unveiling the grave and headstone) has become adapted to the cultural dimensions of Kowanyama and is usually the event which allows the name of the deceased to re-enter the public domain. A close kin member of the deceased, usually a brother, reads the inscription on the headstone and in speaking the name of the deceased signals the end of months or years of mourning.

The traditional mourning customs of widow seclusion, name prohibition, land closure and the destruction of the dwelling and possessions of the deceased might seem at one level to be intent on obliterating all memory of the person who had died. This was, however, far from the case. The deceased were remembered and their memory honoured by the observance of these practices which were based on the belief that the ghost of the deceased, the *munpitch*, would be attracted back to the circumstances that were familiar from life unless stringent attempts were made to conceal the familiar nature of these places, things and people. By self denial the living assisted the departed spirit to move on to its spiritual home.

Death brought with it too an opportunity for wider social interactions to be brought to a sharper focus. This occurred through the belief that death was due, by and large, to the malevolence of others whatever might be the agency, natural or otherwise, from which it had resulted. Irrespective whether a person had died from a snake bite, crocodile attack, spear wound or sickness, a primary cause in terms of malice was sought for the death of all except the very young or very old. This was discovered through a sort of clairvoyance or divination carried out by a member of the mourning family at a vigil near the remains of the deceased.

The *pamarthakwin*, a close kin relation of the deceased, was the person who maintained this vigil to discover the identity of the *payokatjítj*, the supposed prime agency behind the death, who would be considered the “murderer”. This *payokatjítj*, when revealed to the mourning kin, would be considered responsible for the death and held accountable for these supposed actions. Retribution might be exacted through a spear fight at some later time or sorcery alone might be applied to bring the “murderer” to account. The way in which the *pamarthakwin* approached the mourning kin would be interpreted as a signal about the identity of the *payokatjítj*. If the *pamarthakwin* burst into a mourning wail at some distance from the mourners, it would be taken that the *payokatjítj* was from a far distant clan but if the *pamarthakwin* waited until he joined the group to wail it was taken that someone who was closely related to the deceased was responsible for their death, even perhaps someone there amongst the assembled mourners. This could result in accusations made there and then and general recrimination for unresolved ill feeling vented, even if the person so accused was later exonerated. This process provided “evidence” from which real or imagined grievances could be pursued and was responsible for much of the inter-tribal conflict when people took up residence on the mission.

This practice of ritual inquest after a death with its consequent apportioning of blame was along with grievances over marriages a common source of conflict between clan groups. Large conflicts would see the allies of the clans concerned brought together for a full scale “tribal” fight and would be one of the occasions when the alliances of clans would represent a larger nation. Even though such conflict was engaged in with great commitment, people were generally aware of the scale of outcomes which would settle matters and allow the grievance to rest. This highly ritualised conflict might cause injury or death but would only proceed so far as to satisfy the restoration of harmony. It was a form of conflict resolution. Even enemies were in

relationship and excessive violence in conflict beyond that approved by the social norms would be long remembered and accrue a debt that would invite retribution. An important principle of justice operating in these circumstances considered the accused and the accuser on equal terms if a trial-at-arms was initiated and considered justice to have been done when the extent of injury was balanced on both sides.

The cohesion between different clan groups was enacted by ritual which at one level was primarily male in orientation but involved the whole clan by necessity. Ceremony cycles, called *penp* in *Kokobera*, related the clan totems together usually in a narrative song cycle which described the movement and creative actions of an ancestor figure. A clan might have particular responsibility for a song cycle yet participate in others. In this way the *Papekepenpéw* clan whose main camp was to the north of Topsy Creek had primary responsibility for the *Penp warengvméIngen*. This clan with the totems of green frog, black snake and whistle duck would in this way call together distant clans at a pre-arranged time for this *penp* or men's initiation. The *Woi ngalt* of the *Yir Yoront* identified the two ancestral brothers, whose actions were relived in the *woi*, as *Kunjen* from the east and had them participating in an initiation ceremony with the neighboring tribes of the *Yir Yoront*, including the *Thaayore*, *Munkan* and *Kokobera*.

These song cycle and initiation rituals were of varying degrees of secretness and sacredness. Elements of some are performed publicly in modern times without any contention, others raise some concerns about the propriety of their public display, whilst others are never performed on account of the risk that such public display would cause. *WarengvméIngen* is thus the song cycle which evokes, for the clans concerned, the sacredness of the ancestor's action in creation and the sacred context of male initiation rites. Elements of the cycle are considered benign and even beneficial in ordinary life. I was told by one man that he sang the frilled lizard song of

*WarengvméIngen* to calm his grandchildren when they were upset. In contrast the poison snake song was considered far too dangerous to bring into the public domain. The gradual exposure of *WarengvméIngen* to a public audience was brought into question on account of the death in the space of a few years of three principal men of the *Papekepenpéw* clan in the late 1970s. Their death shortly after elements of this *penp* had been performed publicly raised fears amongst the *Kokobera* that the decision to play *WarengvméIngen* publicly was misjudged and that the death of the three brothers was a consequence of evoking the sacredness of *WarengvméIngen*.

The *penp* regarded with the greatest gravity in modern times for its secret-sacredness and disastrous consequences for those who transgress this character is one known as *Yiral*. This *penp* is also known in Aboriginal English as *bora*, a term used widely in eastern Australia to describe men's initiation ceremonies in general but used in Kowanyama to designate *Yiral* exclusively. Whereas the other *penp* caused restrictions on access to certain areas for a finite period, *Yiral* had the characteristic of leaving the main camp of seclusion permanently *menainy* or "poison". Sickness and death were expected to befall any of the non-initiated who even walked over these places. In 1934, the year after the last performance of *Yiral*, Sharp was told of three men, Barnaby, Bert and Walter whose deaths were attributed to the metaphysical dangers considered to be contingent with *Yiral*. This is in distinction to the dangers associated with transgressing the prohibitions of ritual taboo associated with a *penp* which could result in death by ambush. In the 1980s infringements of places made *menainy* by *Yiral* still occasioned urgent visits to the few initiated men left alive at that time to have underarm smell from the initiated "greased" on the transgressor as the only efficacious way to evade the destructive consequences of the transgression.

Through *Yiral* the *Kokobera* had strong links with the coastal people south to Normanton, with *Kokobera* people travelling to the ceremony when it

was held in the *Kurtjar* lands farther to the south. Clans and the ceremonies relating clans to each other were more significant realities on these occasions than a common language for the people of this lower Mitchell region. It was not at all unusual for clans and individuals who were custodians of ceremonial knowledge to preside over ceremonies and song cycles in a language other than that commonly used by their clan. Song cycles could be sung at their various stages in different languages, even in words that were unknown except for their context within the song cycle. Despite a diversity of languages amongst relatively small tribal groups these different entities were drawn together into a cognate universe by the common subscription to ceremony and marriage relationships. Some myths occurred at repeated intervals along the western Peninsula coast. This feature of mythic repetition meant that even distant tribes could find common identity with people many kilometres from their own clan lands if they had occasion to meet. In modern times these opportunities have become much greater so that myths and totems provide a means, along with family friendships from earlier generations, through which distant Aborigines are fitted into the social life of Kowanyama.

Any one of the song cycles and the actions of the ancestors they described did not exhaust the meaning of the country over which these songs traversed, nor did they lay claim upon those who were their custodians to hold to an exclusive view of the cosmos where all layers of myth were integrated without remainder.

Prior to their confinement on reserves, the Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula had opportunities for wider contact with people outside their immediate environment. McCarthy's summary of trade relationships within Australia located the people of the lower Mitchell country on the baler shell trade route between Princess Charlotte Bay and Lake Eyre and identified them as suppliers of baler shell as well as shark's tooth knives and sting ray barbs. Sharp identified these items as the means of exchange for stone axes from the



central and southern Peninsula for the *Yir Yoront*. "The stone they used comes from known quarries four hundred miles to the south. It reached the Yir Yoront through long lines of male trading partners". At the time of his observation of the *Yir Yoront* in the 1930s he considered that they had little direct influence from contact with whites. Yet, even among these people, "Toward the end of the nineteenth century metal tools and other European artifacts began to filter into the Yir Yoront territory". These trading relationships provided the opportunity for the movement of ideas as well as materials across a large area of Aboriginal Australia.

Opportunities arose, particularly for men, to traverse large distances as either couriers announcing the time of ceremonial matters or as participants in ceremonies held at a distance from their own land. The availability of tobacco at places where whites lived saw family groups traversing the country between Normanton and the Mitchell River Mission to obtain this valued item. If the world of the *Kokobera* and other peoples in comparable situations was basically the locale where they hunted and searched for food, it was surrounded by the areas and people that were related to it by myth and ceremony and then further surrounded by those places where trade items came from and were bartered into. Whilst being totally legitimated within their locales they were not insular from a wider world which it seems they were keen to integrate into their own perception of the cosmos.

It is easy to see that Gribble had picked up key issues for Aboriginal people when he stressed that the mission would not impede the Aborigines' freedom to hunt, traverse their land and carry out their ceremonial responsibilities. It is a measure of his understanding of Aboriginal traditional culture and values that he should have chosen to exclude these core matters from the concerns of his *Kokobera* audience in his attempt to induce them to participate in his proposal of a church mission.

It will be shown how much of the energy of the missionaries was

expended in attempting to change behaviours which were rooted in the traditional culture and thoroughly legitimate within that context. The missionaries were generally ignorant of the cultural realities of the people whom they had come to evangelise and that cultural change became both a means of and an end to Christian evangelisation. The next chapter asserts that the *Kokobera* and their neighbours had already come to conclusions about whites from their long contact history which would mean that they had developed a far more sophisticated anticipation of the future than had Gribble and those missionaries who would follow him.

## Chapter Three

### Strange Encounters with the Munpitch

The *Kokobera* used the word *munpitch* as their name for whites, as the *Kokominjen* used *wangar* and the *Kunjen*, *agnar*. The use of these terms has carried on into the present at Kowanyama, even with a diminishing use of *Kokobera* and the other languages, as the common Aboriginal English terms for whites. Wider exposure to general North Queensland Aboriginal usage has seen the term *mikloo* applied to whites by some *Kokobera*, but both in the recounting of contact stories about Europeans in *Kokobera* language and in contemporary Aboriginal English conversation the use of *munpitch* for whites is widespread.<sup>1</sup> This contrasts to the more formal term “Europeans” or even “white Europeans” which sometimes occurs in polite forms of reference to whites in their presence.

In addition to being the name given to whites, the *munpitch* constituted a class of supernatural beings for the *Kokobera*. The earliest citation for *munpitch* being used in this sense was in the *Queenslander* newspaper, 17 August 1901, in a discussion of the “Aboriginal death-bone” amongst the *Gooninni* (*Kokobera*) tribe by the correspondent, “Bullea”. The “death-bone” was considered, according to “Bullea”, to have belonged to, “a ‘debil debil’ or bad spirit whose name is ‘Mumbitch’”.<sup>2</sup> The *munpitch* was a ghost of a dead person, distinct from the *pakaler* or life spirit of the dead, more like the ghostly component of the physical remains.<sup>3</sup> A “new ghost”, *munpitch kutam* was the being with whom the mourning taboos were concerned. It was this being which might be attracted to the places and people familiar to the dead in their lifetime, with the risk of harming the living if it hankered after its former life and did not become at rest in its new state amongst the dead. Whereas the *pakaler* travelled west and ceased to play a

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<sup>1</sup> *Mikloo* as a name for whites appears in the *North Queensland Register*, supplement for 16 January 1905 (no page number), in a story about Aborigines at Ravenswood, “The old gin was the last of the old brigade of blacks; she was born at Mt Wyatt long time before “Mikolo” (white man) come up”.

<sup>2</sup> *Queenslander*, 17 August 1901, p.328.

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Sharp, Fieldnotes: entry 34-VIII-140-3: Manuscript 685: AIATSIS The *Kokobera* man, Sergeant (Ida Martin’s father) was Sharp’s 1934 informant on this matter.

role amongst the living after death,<sup>4</sup> the *munpitch* was able to communicate with the living, either through dreams or through an encounter in physical form. The *munpitch* of a dead person was believed to occur in the form of a large flying fox, *min mal*, at the deceased's conception site where the brothers of the deceased would go to struggle in an ordeal with the *min mal* to wrest from it the identity of the sorcerer to whom they would attribute the death of their sibling.<sup>5</sup> Communication of this kind with the *munpitch* tended to be limited to the period following death, during the period in which the bereaved kin observed the mourning customs. The *munpitch* of a recently dead member of the clan would, after a few years and the appropriate ritual, generally come to constitute an undefined part of the spirit and ghostly world.<sup>6</sup>

Some *munpitch* would however come to be associated with particular places in the clan locale, but would generally be considered far more prevalent outside of it, perhaps reflecting the heightened anxiety experienced as distance from the clan lands increased. The *munpitch koyawtroym* seems to be of the former type, a dwarf being that stood ready with spear and woomera to spear fish on the creek bank. An example of the more harmful type was the hairy *munpitch trarrarpvrrarp* that roamed across dry land. The distant *munpitch* were believed to travel across great distances of land in pursuit of the living amongst whom they would work their mischief. Children were actively taught to fear the *munpitch* and not to cry or make noise in the camp at night lest this should arouse the attention of a *munpitch* to come and steal them away to its home amongst different tribes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, entry 35-I-11, informant: Aiden. John Taylor, Of Acts and Axes, PhD thesis, JCU, Townsville, 1984, p.237.

<sup>6</sup>Lauriston Sharp, "Ritual life and economics of the Yir-Yoront of Cape York Peninsula", *Oceania*, vol.5, no.1, 1934, p.34. "Eventually the individuality of the "ghost" is lost, and it joins the numerous categories of generalized ghosts, the evil and indestructible anthropomorphs with which so much of the life of the society is miserably hagridden. Seeking to abduct children or even adults, and to kill people for pure malice or for their vital parts, these ghosts constitute a fearful menace during the night or in lonely places; only the intervention of his ancestors and a constant watchfulness can save anyone who forsakes the protecting fold of society".

<sup>7</sup>Sharp, Fieldnotes, entry 33 11/5, informant: Hector.

The ghostly *munpitch* of the *Kokobera* are cognate with the *wangar* of the *Kokominjen* and the *agnar* of the *Kunjen*. The small stature and wire-like frame of the *munpitch* belied their strength which verged on the super-human as did their actions.<sup>8</sup> If *munpitch* were wholly terrifying to children their power was accessible to those initiated in these matters. The content of the men's initiation were things "belong *munpitch*" and the *munpitch* in this way were the mediators of the secret knowledge about the ancestors and the way human affairs were properly ordered.<sup>9</sup> On an individual level they could be the teachers of new songs or dances to people who observed them singing and dancing.<sup>10</sup> They could through a closer encounter be induced to part with their secrets or "tricks" perhaps as a result of a long ordeal of wrestling or fighting with them.<sup>11</sup> They were considered to be allies to the sorcerer's malevolence in at least one type of sorcery in which they played an instrumental role.<sup>12</sup> Knowledge of this sort conferred important social significance upon its possessor and was part of the qualification to be considered a clever "bush doctor" or *chellikee*. A *Kokobera* man customarily carried a fighting spear and woomera when in the bush as much to anticipate an encounter with a *munpitch* as for conflict with another *pakaper*, another Aboriginal.<sup>13</sup> In other parts of the Peninsula this belief was responsible for the development of elaborate mechanisms for protection in this way.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, entry 33 10/1, informant Tablubl.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, entry 35-1-81-8, informants: Puntonoli and Mark. (The former person's name is usually written as Bondonolly).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, entry 33 10/12-2, informants: Ariaurmart and Hector. Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.238.

<sup>11</sup>Patrick Eric, tape-recorded interview, Kowanyama, 10 April 1987. Patrick Eric told of a personal encounter he claimed to have had with a *munpitch*, which he referred to as a "top-end dibil". This took the form of a fight which saw the dibil killed with a tomahawk and a big fire burnt over the top of the dibil. The elements of the story are very similar to one recorded by Sharp in 1933. (*Ibid.*, entry 33 10/1 Informant: Tablubl.) Sharp's informant told him of a fight with a *wangar* in which the *wangar* which picked him up, banged him against a log, hit him all over so that he bled from the mouth. Finally Tablubl killed the *wangar* with a blow on the head with a tomahawk and then piled wood over the *wangar*'s body and burned it all up. Tablubl considered that the *wangar*, "might come back". Sharp understood that the *wangar* as described to be, "very strong, physically, especially for his small size. He is very tall, but thin as a creeper". [Here Sharp indicated a diameter of 2.5 centimetres.]

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, entry 34-VI-1 7/28, informant: Timp Wardlon.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.478.

<sup>14</sup>Sydney Pern, "Weapons of Primitive Man", *Walkabout*, vol.7 no.11, 1941, p.33. Pern comments, "I have in my possession two painted shield-like implements with cockatoos' feathers stuck in all round (sic) them, which came from Cape York, and which were used by the natives for protection against "debil debils" when necessity compelled them to go into the bush at night".

The identification of whites with a supernatural being of the traditional cosmos evidently related to the widespread belief, throughout the Peninsula, that the ghosts of the dead were white in appearance. This belief stemmed from the appearance of the corpse during the traditional funeral rites.<sup>15</sup> These rites included the skinning of the corpse, a process that disclosed the white cuticle on the corpse and the underside of the skin which, aligned with the perception of the *munpitch* as “skin”, invited the attribution of a white appearance to the ghosts of the dead. The link with the white skinned appearance of Europeans was only a small step to make in identifying them as *munpitch*. Consequently, the Aboriginal response to whites was essentially spiritual, enabling them to understand this new phenomenon in a way that fitted into their world view.

The exceedingly long contact period of the *Kokobera* and their west coast allies, stretching back to the seventeenth century, suggests that the traditional category of *munpitch* may have been informed by the intermittent contact with whites as much as it was an application of a traditional category to a new phenomenon, the whites themselves. For reasons which may have to do with the bias of historians there has been no attempt to consider, in a systematic way, the contact history of a local area in the part of Australia which has the longest documented history of contact between Europeans and Aboriginals. The comparative isolation of western Cape York Peninsula from the centres of British settlement in Australia has no doubt contributed to this omission.

Attwood has stressed the process of becoming which has shaped the acceptance of a new self identity summed up in the word “Aborigine” by Aborigines in which they have both acted and been acted upon by the process of colonisation.<sup>16</sup> Along with most other commentators, he counts 1788 as the disjunction between a pre-European

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<sup>15</sup>Walter Roth, “Burial ceremonies, and disposal of the dead”, *Australian Museum Records*, vol.6, no.5, 1907, pp.365-403 (North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No.9). Roth describes this process from the Bloomfield River on the eastern Peninsula in this way, “They next start removing the whole of the outer skin, commencing operations by pressing with the ball of the thumb and so peeling off the cuticle with its colouring matter and leaving behind a comparatively pale surface”. (p.386)

<sup>16</sup>Bain Attwood, *The making of the Aborigines*, Sydney, 1989, p.150.

existence and the period of life for Aborigines under European dominance.<sup>17</sup> This date is only strictly correct for the peoples around the first European settlement near Sydney, more an exception than a rule for the rest of Aboriginal Australia. In western Cape York Peninsula we have an opportunity to consider the fact of a much longer contact period and one which was, at least until the 1870s, within the period of Aboriginal hegemony. This does not deny the incredible intensification of white influence that has taken place on the Peninsula this century nor the fact of the white hegemony since the 1870s but does attempt to explore the historical realities peculiar to the western Peninsula.

It is not difficult to accept the likelihood that contact with Europeans over this protracted period left vivid impressions upon the *Kokobera* and the other coastal people who experienced contact with Europeans prior to 1788. It is equally valid to consider this experience informed their world view as much as it was mediated by that world view. Not only by direct contact with whites was this process likely but also through the reflection and abstraction that went with communicating that experience to non-experiencing clan groups and to non-experiencing generations.

Whilst the archaeology of the concept *munpitch* is possible in only a limited sense, it may prove helpful to apply this concept as a hermeneutical device to the period of intensive contact under mission domination. The ambiguous nature of the concept, informed if not constructed entirely over the period before contact with missionaries, may be useful in explaining the process of being and becoming for the *Kokobera* in their life as Christians in the past ninety years. Despite the missionaries' assertions that they were not about to make the Aborigines of the mission like whites, all of the evidence which will be discussed in later chapters points to the high priority this transformation occupied on the missionaries' agenda. It is this dimension of the mission's history which will be explored by applying what I assert was an historically

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p.xi. "The aboriginal peoples obviously once had a reality independent of European intruders, and after 1788 they reacted to the European invasion as historical agents. Out of the exchange or dialectic between the dominant and the dominated there came a transformed consciousness for the indigenes, one shaped both by European culture and by their own - and so their part in *becoming* Aborigines was both determined and determining".

based hypothesis of Aboriginal-European relations that is summed up in the *munpitch* concept.

What follows traces the experience of pre-settlement contact between the Aborigines of the *Kokobera* area of interest and Europeans. It attempts to provide some of the historical background, in a general sense, to the *munpitch* concept proposed, in which qualitative distinctions were not drawn, initially at least, between *munpitch* of the physical, European variety and *munpitch* of the *Kokobera* metaphysical kind. No direct correspondence is asserted between any particular event in itself and any possible mythological eventuality; rather the correspondence is more in terms of the qualities or principles which are common between these events and the *munpitch* concept in general. In other words it is not argued that specific attributes of the concept can be linked to discrete historical events. These particular events were themselves part of a larger event, the event of culture contact, which spanned many generations, involving some generations and individuals more intensely than others, but all part of the experience of pre-settlement life of the *Kokobera* and their neighbours for nearly three hundred years. It is this larger event that these details serve to illuminate. In the same way the settlement phase of contact can be understood as yet another phase of this one diachronic occurrence. It is asserted that the *munpitch* concept served as an horizon, at least in the minds of the *Kokobera*, towards which white missionary activity was leading them. By the time of the mission it was a concept, replete with meaning constructed from historical circumstances, through which the nature of the European drive for economic expansion and subsequent social construction of the human person was disclosed.

Whilst it is not easy to define the geographical limits of the pre-settlement world of interest of the *Kokobera*, the coastal areas to the north and south of Topsy Creek and the valley of the Mitchell River and its tributaries have already been suggested as the area the *Kokobera* would have had some first hand, but more likely second hand, knowledge. Ceremonial contact northwards to at least the Kendall River and southwards



to the Gilbert River seems likely.<sup>18</sup> Sommer's observation that the *Kokobera* have names for places well into *Kunjen* country,<sup>19</sup> as well as Roth's assertion that the *Kokominni* of the Palmer were in contact with the *Kokobera*,<sup>20</sup> support the likelihood that they were aware of the areas of the Upper Mitchell and its tributaries at least.

The passage of the Dutch explorer Jan Carstenz along the western coast of Cape York Peninsula in 1623 provided the first recorded encounter between Europeans and Aborigines in the Mitchell River area. The western Peninsula coast had been the site of the first recorded European landing on the Australian continent when the *Duyfken* under the command of Willem Janszoon reached the north-western coast in March 1606. Janszoon travelled as far south as Cape Keerweer, just to the north of the area identified here as of concern to the *Kokobera*. Carstenz, like Janszoon before him, initiated conflict with the Aborigines he encountered along the Peninsula coast and suffered the loss of crewmen killed in the process.

This Dutch expeditions from Batavia were primarily economic in purpose in accordance with the policy of the Dutch East India Company.<sup>21</sup> The Dutch had first reached the East Indies in 1596, and by 1602 were eager to expand their influence and trade. The 1623 expedition of Carstenz in the *Pera* and Van Coolsteerdt in the *Arnhem* was intended to identify if Australia had the capacity to become a source of precious metals and spices.<sup>22</sup> Having sailed from Ambon in the Molluccas in January, the party had been carried by the monsoon winds bringing them past the coast of western New Guinea to reach the western Peninsula coast in April, by which time the winds had swung around to the south west. This seasonal wind pattern was most convenient for

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<sup>18</sup>Sharp, Fieldnotes, entry 33-4 9/13, informant: Pam Kun Par.

<sup>19</sup>Bruce Sommer, Linguistic evidence for recent migration by the Oykangand, typescript of a paper read to the Linguistic Society of Australia, 1972.

<sup>20</sup>Walter Roth, "Social and individual nomenclature", *Australian Museum Records*, vol.8, no.5, 1910, p.95 (North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No.18).

<sup>21</sup>Batavia was the name given to the former Portuguese stronghold of Jacatra by Coen after the successful Dutch seige in 1619.

<sup>22</sup>Van Coolsteerdt had been appointed skipper of the *Arnhem* upon the death of Melisz on the New Guinean coast on 12 February 1623.

Dutch exploration of the northern Australian coastline and generally ensured a safe return to Java.

Carstenz had, even before he reached the coast of Cape York Peninsula, a clearly conceived idea of how he would behave in any encounter with the Aborigines of the western Peninsula. He would:  
endeavour to come to parley with the inhabitants and generally inspect the state of affairs there; in leaving we shall, if at all practicable, seize one or two blacks to take along with us....<sup>23</sup>

Land was first sighted on 12 April 1623 and after four days' sailing to the south an unsuccessful attempt was made to put two pinnaces ashore to enable exploration to begin.<sup>24</sup> A man sent to swim to shore with gifts for the Aborigines had received no response from the people who had been observed hiding amongst the vegetation. A successful landing on 17 April was made with Carstenz himself accompanying the two pinnaces, but no contact was made nor evidence of humans seen. The next day in the area of the Mitchell River mouth<sup>25</sup> the two pinnaces had encountered a large group of Aborigines who displayed no fear of the Dutch or apprehension about the muskets carried by the sailors. The encounter was at very close quarters since Carstenz observed that the Aborigines "were so bold as to touch the muskets of our men and to try to take the same off their shoulders".<sup>26</sup>

The apparent innocence of the interaction seemed to provide an opportunity for the earlier decision to abduct an informant to be put into action. Gifts of iron and beads were displayed by the Dutch and captured the attention of the Aborigines to the extent that one of their number was able to be seized by the sailors and carried off to the pinnace.

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<sup>23</sup>J.E. Heeres, *The part borne by the Dutch in the discovery of Australia 1606-1765*, London, 1899, p.23.

<sup>24</sup>J.C.H. Gill, *The missing coast*, Brisbane, 1988, p.238. Gill describes a pinnace as a "tender to a large ship for the purpose of communicating with the shore". In its Dutch form it was either a vessel rowed by eight oars or with a schooner rig to give wind assistance to the oarsmen. The shore party of two pinnaces could have comprised, in the case in question, up to twenty men.

<sup>25</sup>The position for 18 April is inferred from bearings for 16 April and 21 April and the sailing descriptions between these dates, and the comment for 3 May that the place named *Waterplaets* on the return journey was near the site touched on 16 April.

<sup>26</sup>Heeres, *op.cit.*, p.36.

The capture of the Aboriginal man and his subsequent removal westwards to the sea contradicted all that had gone before in the encounter. His abduction can scarcely be considered to have happened quietly since he was seized “by a string which he wore round his neck” and then forcibly manhandled into the waiting pinnace.<sup>27</sup> Nor could the abduction be counted as being speedily executed since the pinnace was a substantial rowboat that would require some effort to push it off the shore, if it had been beached, or for the abductee to be carried a considerable distance if the pinnace had been left floating in the shallow water offshore. In either case ample time would be available for spears to be dispatched at either of the boats and their crew. Carstenz does not specify the details of the retreat to the *Pera* nor make any comment about the use of muskets or of any conflict with the Aborigines, but the Dutch would have had the numbers and power of arms to make good their retreat had resistance been offered on this occasion. The events may simply have come as too great an intrusion to anything the affected Aborigines could have anticipated. Certainly the time between the gift giving and the abduction was too short to reconcile the contradictory behaviour of the Dutch towards them.

If the events of 18 April had passed without an organised Aboriginal response, a further encounter on the next day showed every indication of careful planning on their part. Two pinnaces went ashore on 19 April in search of firewood and encountered “upwards of 200” Aborigines who “tried every means to surprise and overcome” the shore party.<sup>28</sup> The muskets, which had been seen as only an item of interest and curiosity the previous day, were now revealed for their destructive purpose. Overwhelmed by the force of numbers the Dutch fired two shots, hitting one Aborigine whom they saw fall to the ground.

The *Pera* reached the southern extent of its journey on 24 April when it was decided to turn back and retrace the coast northwards. This decision was reached due to the fear of getting into a “vast bay” in which unfavourable winds would perhaps prevent

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p.37.

a return to Java. The decision to turn back also seems to have impressed upon Carstenz the need to make certain that adequate informants were provided for his masters in the East India Company.

... it was further proposed by me and ultimately approved by the council, to give 10 pieces of eight to the boatmen for every black they shall get hold of on shore, and carry off to the yachts, to the end that the men may use greater care and diligence in the matter.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after this the *Arnhem*, which had become increasingly unseaworthy, parted company with the *Pera* and made its own way back to Java without any further contact with the Peninsula coast. Carstenz seized this move as an opportunity to pursue his sailing instructions with increased vigour. He had, in any case, considered the *Arnhem* and the sailing difficulties it had experienced an obstruction in his efforts to that point and had blamed his frustration on Van Coolsteerdt and his crew whom he considered had shown a “small liking and desire... towards the voyage”.<sup>30</sup>

Since the water supplies of the *Pera* were by now depleted various attempts were made to obtain water from wells dug on shore, including a lengthy inland expedition to the south of the Mitchell River delta; but little was seen of Aborigines. The *Pera* remained at anchor for three days to enable the water extracted from three pits dug for the purpose to be loaded on board. Of the inland expedition Carstenz had made along with ten musketeers he commented,

we advanced a long way into the wood without seeing any human beings; the land here is low-lying and without hills as before,... it is very dry and barren.<sup>31</sup>

By this time of year coastal people would have dispersed from their wet season camps on the coast to exploit the food resources of inland tracts. Certainly Carstenz’s comments suggest that the dry season was well advanced in that particular year. The legacy of his activities south of the Mitchell River may have been just as problematic to the Aborigines as the events that had preceded to the north. Wells had been dug, tracks left behind across a large area as well as the material items related to the Dutch landings

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p.39.

perhaps left discarded on the coast. The tracks of the Dutch would have appeared vastly alien to a people accustomed to recognise even individuals by the distinctive imprint of their foot. Even the shape and depth of the wells that were dug with the tools carried by the Dutch would have been outside the experience of Aborigines who came upon them. Anthropologist, Donald Crim, reported that Dutch wells were in use by Mitchell River Aborigines until recent times.<sup>32</sup>

Carstenz made for shore himself on 5 May north of the Mitchell River, probably in the region of the Kendall and Holroyd rivers, where again his party was the object of Aboriginal retaliation. The initial attacks by the Aborigines were repulsed, at which point the Dutch placed trinkets of iron and beads near the items discarded by the Aborigines in their retreat. Carstenz seems genuinely surprised that the retreating Aborigines regrouped to sustain their hostility. Strangely enough he had expected that the presence of the trinkets would lull them into the sort of trusting acquiescence of earlier events when the first abduction was carried out. Despite the so called “gifts” of beads and iron, Carstenz observed that they were “quite indifferent to these things, and repeatedly held up their shields with great boldness and threw them at the muskets”.<sup>33</sup>

A massed confrontation of the Dutch by over a hundred Aborigines a little further to the north gave an opportunity for an Aboriginal man to be captured and taken back to the *Pera*, where he joined the other man taken from the shore on 18 April. Despite the different parts of the coast they were abducted from, there was a greater likelihood of their being able to communicate with each other than with their Dutch captors and perhaps provided some sort of reassurance as they sailed westward to whatever fate eventually awaited them.<sup>34</sup> The apparently organised Aboriginal response suggests that there had been an awareness of the movement of the Dutch along the coast

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<sup>32</sup>Donald E. Crim, Changes in kin-term usages in the Aboriginal community at Mitchell River Mission, northern Queensland, unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1973, p.19.

<sup>33</sup>Heeres, *op.cit.*, p.40.

<sup>34</sup>John Mulvaney, “Aboriginal Australians abroad 1606-1875”, *Aboriginal History*, vol.12, no.1, 1988, pp.42, 43. John Mulvaney, *Encounters in place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606-1985*, St Lucia, Queensland, 1989, p.13.

and the opportunity of communicating their hostile intentions amongst the coastal tribes.<sup>35</sup>

The assessment that the activities of the Dutch in Australia were tinged by “insatiable covetousness”<sup>36</sup> is corroborated by the expedition of Carstenz in which every opportunity to extract information about resources was taken. In all, the expedition sustained the loss of nine men who died in conflicts at shore. Carstenz had conceded in his report that the loss of life was “partly owing to our own negligence”, yet the goal of economic exploitation was at cross purposes to the possibility of peaceful encounter with native peoples. The expeditioners left unimpressed by the economic potential assessed by their visit, considering that they had found nothing but “wild coasts, barren land and extremely cruel, savage and barbarous natives”.<sup>37</sup> The assessment made by the Aboriginal peoples of the expeditioners was one that did not share the outright condemnation and rejection reached by Carstenz despite the calamitous interruption this experience had caused to the coastal people. Whereas Carstenz had counted the whole experience to add nothing of value to Dutch purposes, it is easy to imagine that the Aborigines concerned counted some aspects of the encounter to have been at least impressive and even valuable. Certainly the ability of the Dutch to cause death and induce fear must have been impressive. The material items left by the Dutch were undoubtedly useful. Iron artifacts obtained from these visiting Europeans were incorporated into local use.<sup>38</sup> In 1845 Leichhardt had found a hafted iron weapon in the possession of an Aborigine near the Gilbert River.<sup>39</sup> On this basis the *mumpitch* may have been remembered in a way which recalled the contradictory aspects of the experience and integrated these contradictions into a single conception within the traditional worldview.

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<sup>35</sup>N.A. Loos, “Aboriginal-Dutch Relations in North Queensland, 1606-1756”, *Queensland Heritage*, vol.3, no.1, November 1974, p.3.

<sup>36</sup>C.M.H. Clark, *A history of Australia*, vol.1, Melbourne, 1979, p.23.

<sup>37</sup>Heeres, *op.cit.*, p.22.

<sup>38</sup>Carstenz had found iron in a bag of a captured Aboriginal in 1623 the origin of which he attributed to Jansz in 1606.

<sup>39</sup>Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal of an overland expedition in Australia*, London, 1847, [facsimile edition, Macarthur Press, Sydney], p.328.

Detailed attention has been given to the coastal exploits of Carstenz and the *Pera* because they provide well documented evidence of events that clearly involved an organised response from Aborigines near the Mitchell River. It is impossible to imagine that events of this kind could have intruded into the world of the ancestors of the *Kokobera* and their neighbours without causing some kind of lasting impression. There were the first hand experiences of the hundreds of Aborigines who massed to meet the Dutch landings. They were confronted with the experience of seeing whites come ashore from the west, a direction in which, as far as they knew, no humans lived. The vessels that accompanied the Dutch were of a size and design outside any known from the central western coast. Around the Mitchell River, floating logs were the only form of transport on the water and these used only for crossing the creeks and estuaries. There were the items of iron and the trinkets of beads that had been given as gifts or left in places where they would later be collected. The men abducted from the coast had been seen being carried off to the pinnaces which in turn carried them to the *Pera*. The tracks, wells and any other physical evidence of the Dutch landings remained to be accounted for where they had not previously existed. Lastly there were the white skinned beings with muskets which could roar and kill from a distance who were the common thread in all these events of April and May 1623.

It is proposed that this initial experience of contact with whites for the ancestors of the *Kokobera* made a lasting impression and it is likely that, in some way, this gave content and form to the *munpitch* classification in which whites were included. If accounts and reflections on Janz's encounters of 1606 had been communicated to the *Kokobera* lands, there may have been a more developed concept already in place than is supposed here. In any case the appearance of Carstenz was the first documented contact squarely within the sphere of *Kokobera* interest. Others would follow and pose the same sort of questions to the *Kokobera* world view as those identified in respect of this first experience and which, it is assumed, were resolved within that worldview in terms of the notion of the *munpitch*.

Tasman's voyage of 1644, of which minimal documentary evidence remains, may have given an opportunity for a new generation to be exposed to the *munpitch* from the sea. Tasman's chart of this voyage, which comprises the sole record of the time he spent aboard the *Heemskerck* in the Gulf, indicates many anchorages along the western coast of the Peninsula and, testifies to the considerable attention he gave to the rivers flowing into the Gulf, which he named.<sup>40</sup> The voyage of the *Rijder* and *Buis* under the command of Gonzal and Van Asschens in 1756 to the northern coast of the western Peninsula may have added further to the heresay accounts of encounters with whites as they filtered south to the *Kokobera* land. Certainly it had all of the elements already described for Carstenz and the *Pera* including death and abduction for it to receive wide reaching attention.<sup>41</sup>

A ship's signal cannon of unspecified origin was removed from the South Mitchell to the Queensland Museum in 1919.<sup>42</sup> Sharp found, in 1934, that his informants remembered it as a stone and considered it to have been there from their father's and grandfather's time. The *Kokominjen* thought it to have been put there by the spirit familiars, *pam ning*, from the west, the place of the dead. The cannon was the focus for a ceremony involving dancing, the display of the "stone" and making sure it was turned over from time to time.<sup>43</sup> This association of an artifact of maritime origin with the west country, the place of the dead and its incorporation into customary practice adds weight to the hypothesis that there was more than an accidental connection made between the whites encountered as *munpitch* in the pre-settlement period and the *munpitch* of the

<sup>40</sup>Abel Janszoon *Tasman's Journal*, facsimile, facsimile, Los Angeles, 1965.

<sup>41</sup>Gill, *op.cit.*, p.60. Eight men from the *Buis* who had been sent to explore the shallows near Cape Keerweer drifted east away from the *Buis* towards the coast and were not seen again despite the attempts made by Van Asschens to alert them to the presence of the *Buis*. The impact of their presence on the coast is of course unknown.

<sup>42</sup>Simpson to Curator, Brisbane Museum, 24 September 1918, 18:354, Inwards Correspondence, Queensland Museum Library. Thomas Simpson, the manager of *Lochnagar* station indicated that the cannon was found "on the Gulf coast between the Mitchell River and Topsy's Creek, about twelve miles from Trubanaman Mission station". (Topsy's Creek is the Trubanaman Creek of the early mission records). The cannon is 0.665 metres in length with a bore of approximately 60 mm, it weighs 37.8 kilograms. I am grateful to Dan Robinson of the Queensland Museum for this information and for his opinion that the cannon is basically European in design and from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The cannon had been on display at the Queensland Museum for many years mounted in the manner of a deck gun of much heavier calibre.

<sup>43</sup>Sharp, Fieldnotes, entry 34-I-23 5/1, informant: Chapman and entry 34-I-23, informant Mailman.



traditional cosmology. The incorporation of the cannon into ceremonial behaviour is consistent with the sort of ambiguity being proposed, where the *munpitch* were associated with death, but also with knowledge and ceremony. However inoffensive a signal cannon might have been, it was ironic that the descendants of generations who had experienced the destructive power of European firearms should have maintained an association in this way.

The association between European maritime activity and death was observed by McConnel in 1927 amongst the people to the south of Aurukun. These people had minimal contact with the mission station to their north and maintained an essentially traditional lifestyle. They had integrated an entirely modern coastal phenomenon into their world view along lines consistent with those discussed for the *Kokobera* to their south,

Here the natives pursued their customary life oblivious of an outside world. John Burke's steamer, on its monthly voyage down to Normanton, was regarded as a corpse in the course of cremation - inspiring, appropriately enough, a funeral dirge.<sup>44</sup>

Leichhardt had assumed that "Malays" were in contact with the western Peninsula coast.<sup>45</sup> He most likely concluded this on the basis of the contact Flinders had made in 1802 with a large Macassan fleet near the Arnhem Land coast on the opposite side of the Gulf from the Peninsula.<sup>46</sup> The possibility must exist that boats from fleets like the one Flinders described could have reached the Peninsula coast of the Gulf accidentally, but in the absence of evidence, it remains an unsubstantiated likelihood for the purposes of this argument.<sup>47</sup>

Both Flinders in 1802 and Stokes 1841<sup>48</sup> missed opportunities for landfall on the central Peninsula coast. They did however find greater caution and reticence amongst

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<sup>44</sup>Ursula McConnel, "Native arts and industries on the Archer, Kendall and Holroyd rivers, Cape York Peninsula, north Queensland", *South Australian Museum. Records*, vol.XI, no.1, 1953, p.2.

<sup>45</sup>Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal*, p.328.

<sup>46</sup>Matthew Flinders, *A voyage to Terra Australis*, vol.2, London, 1814, [facsimile edition, Public Library of South Australia], p.230.

<sup>47</sup>Clem Lack, "The history and potential future of Cape York Peninsula", *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, vol.6, no.4, 1961-62, p.956.

<sup>48</sup>Flinders knew this by the Dutch name of Coen River, the name now given to one of the Archer River's tributaries.

the people of the northern coast whenever they made contact. This was despite Flinders having the Aboriginal, Bongaree, on board whom he sent ashore as an envoy.

On the north side was a party of natives, and Bongaree went on shore to them, naked and unarmed; but although provided with spears, they retreated from him, and all our endeavours to bring about an interview were unsuccessful.<sup>49</sup>

The Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula had in their early encounters with the Dutch and English not simply experienced white skinned people for the first time but had come into contact with a different economic order capable of threatening their future and survival. The aggressive policies of the Dutch in particular disclosed a new reality which Aborigines would, upon the advent of pastoralism, come to experience on a daily basis. They were occupiers of territories which had undergone a radical revision of value due to the expansion of the European economic system. Human life itself had become subject to the economic imperatives that brought successively the Dutch and English to the Australian shore. The Aborigines had been exposed to the mix of gift giving and mayhem which often went together in the one experience of European contact. This perhaps could have informed the dialectic of risk and reward disclosed in the *munpitch* concept.

Even if the experiences of *munpitch* from the sea had disappeared without trace and not in any way become mythologised as I am suggesting, there were a series of nineteenth century events concerning *munpitch* from the land which can be adduced to serve the same point. With the establishment of European settlement in Australia in 1788 opportunities developed for extensive exploration of the Australian continent. Free settlement was declared at Moreton Bay in 1842 with exploration and pastoral settlement moving west and north at a fast rate.

Leichhardt had travelled from the Darling Downs to the Mitchell River by an inland route to the west of the Great Dividing Range in 1844/45 before striking south and west around the Gulf to Port Essington. The success of Leichhardt's expedition brought an eager interest in the prospect of settling the north, yet the availability of

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<sup>49</sup>Flinders, *op.cit.*, p.126.

pastoral lands further south was more than adequate for the immediate demands of the small population in the colony.<sup>50</sup>

Leichhardt's expedition had commenced on 1 October 1844 from *Jimbour* station on the Darling Downs and set out through the recently settled pastoral areas into the areas into which no European explorer had travelled. Leichhardt's contact with the Aborigines of the Mitchell River basin during June 1845 was the first sustained contact they had experienced with whites travelling across their land. Leichhardt and Gilbert maintained diaries of the journey and other members of the party had the opportunity of recording their version of events at the completion of the expedition. The spearing of Gilbert provided a focus for the collection of the minutae surrounding his death as well as for subsequent imaginative scholarly discussion about the antecedents of that incident. Even though there is little evidence of any effective communication or understanding between Leichhardt's party and the Mitchell River Aborigines, this interaction is worth examining in detail to further explicate the *munpitch* concept.

Anxious for his own safety and conscious of the responsibility he had undertaken through his leadership of the expedition, Leichhardt identified Aborigines as a likely threat to the successful completion of his journey to Port Essington. In this light he had expressed his philosophy towards Aborigines succinctly in a letter published in the Sydney press the morning after his expedition left for Moreton Bay.

I shall avoid every intercourse with black fellows, and instead of inviting them to come near me I shall endeavour to increase their natural fear of every thing unknown to them by legitimate means.<sup>51</sup>

Whether as a direct consequence of this policy or as a result of the earlier experiences already discussed, on each occasion when Aborigines were encountered the usual result was alarm and flight on their part. Inspection of the vacant campsites of the fleeing Aborigines provided a source of food for Leichhardt's party as they helped themselves to the Aborigines' efforts of food gathering for the day. On occasions

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<sup>50</sup>G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, Brisbane, 1963, p.12.

<sup>51</sup>E.M. Webster, *Whirlwinds in the Plain: Ludwig Leichhardt - friends, foes and history*, Melbourne, 1980, p.35.

Leichhardt noted in his journal that he left in the camp some item of exchange for the food taken.<sup>52</sup> There is no evidence to indicate that Leichhardt's intentions in this were understood by the Aborigines and nothing resembling appreciation for his "gifts" or "payments" was rendered to the explorer and his party. Apart from the loss of food that these actions represented, they also constituted a serious breach of traditional propriety which dictated that the utmost care had to be taken not to interfere with another's camp. Failure to observe this was an almost certain sign of ill intention and most likely interpreted as a precursor to sorcery being applied against the camp owners.<sup>53</sup> Whilst attention has been focused on the actions of the whites in Leichhardt's party, it is likely that the Aborigines who accompanied them were also of concern to the Mitchell River people. Since all manner of ill intentions and evil powers were attributed to Aborigines outside known associations, it may have been readily concluded that Leichhardt's Aboriginal assistants were entering the Mitchell River country for no good purpose.<sup>54</sup> In any case the interference with Aboriginal camps would have been likely to cause more than passing concern.

The guns his party used to hunt game and zoological specimens alarmed the Aborigines, a fact which was used to frighten them away when they were heard at night near the camp.<sup>55</sup> Gilbert, the naturalist with the expedition, was fatally speared in an attack on the camp in the evening of 28 June 1845. It had seemed on the previous day that the Aborigines had been intent on driving off the bullocks in a concerted plan to spear them. On this occasion Charley, one of the Aborigines with the expedition, discharged his rifle and succeeded in frightening off the group waiting in ambush. The night of Gilbert's death saw Leichhardt and the group taking to their places for the

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<sup>52</sup>Leichhardt, *op.cit.*, pp.279, 298.

<sup>53</sup>Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.243. Referring to sorcery beliefs at Edward River, Taylor observed that all adults, "felt themselves to be at risk from the threat of sorcerers and their supernatural powers. As a consequence, people were careful not to leave any of their personal effects lying carelessly about for fear they might be used by others to work harm against them.... Every morning someone would scan the immediate environs of a camping place looking for strange footprints that might indicate that a sorcerer had been near during the night".

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p.480. "Edward River men greatly feared the secret arts of Aboriginal strangers".

<sup>55</sup>Leichhardt, *op.cit.*, p.299.

night's rest and then, after Leichhardt had dozed off, an attack with spears upon the tents of the camp took place.

They had doubtless watched our movements during the afternoon, and marked the position of the different tents; and, as soon as it was dark, sneaked upon us, and threw a shower of spears at the tents of Calvert, Roper, and Gilbert, and a few at that of Phillips, and also one or two towards the fire.<sup>56</sup>

The attack and the reply of rifle fire was over quickly but had left Gilbert dead, Roper and Calvert speared and beaten, and one of the Aboriginal attackers fatally wounded. Only four years earlier, at the bottom of the Gulf, Stokes had considered the answer to the dilemma of the Aboriginal and their ways was to:

penetrate into the woods and the wilds where they are to be found;... mingle with them in the exercise of their domestic avocations;... see them as they are, in all their excusable degradation;... observe them... unawares, and see how they conduct themselves under the ordinary influences that beset them.<sup>57</sup>

This apparently simple formula for ethnographic study was not easy to realise in practice, especially for explorers of Leichhardt's ilk who, fearing starvation on long journeys into the unknown, set off in a manner that made them resemble a droving party on account of the numerous stock they took as provisions. The opportunity for stealthy observation was entirely the other way around as Leichhardt had noticed and gave excellent opportunities for Aborigines to form opinions about the explorers as they made slow progress, encumbered as they were with stock and pack animals and all of the uncertainties that went with travel over unknown country.

The attack upon Leichhardt's party which resulted in Gilbert's death has been explained variously as resulting from grievances about sexual assaults occasioned by members of the explorer's party upon Aboriginal women<sup>58</sup> to the more obvious one of resentment arising out of the regular interference to Aboriginal camps discussed earlier<sup>59</sup> and the possibility that the spearing was a retaliation for violation of a sacred site.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.308-09.

<sup>57</sup>J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, vol.1, London, 1846, p.310.

<sup>58</sup>Alec H. Chisholm, *Strange New World*, 2nd edition, Sydney, 1955, pp.207-08.

<sup>59</sup>B.J. Dalton, "The Death of John Gilbert", *Lectures in North Queensland History*, No.5, Townsville, 1996, p.30.

<sup>60</sup>Colin Roderick, "New Light on Leichhardt", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol.72 (Part 3), December 1986, p.182. Roderick's argument and rejection of the other possibilities relies upon conclusions drawn about tribal distribution from Tindale's map which for the area in question can only be

Roderick's rejection of the other possibilities in favour of the latter relies far too heavily on Tindale's map of tribal boundaries which can only be considered notional at this level of detail.<sup>61</sup> He reaches conclusions about the location of different tribal groups and the relationships between them far too readily given that events which occurred in 1845 are being considered.<sup>62</sup> His singling out of the *Kokobera* as "belligerent" and "bellicose" surely reads too much into the events.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear in Leichhardt's case, as with former encounters, that the Aboriginal response to Europeans and their technology was a mixture of wonder and fear. Certainly it must have been a matter of great amazement that Leichhardt would have set a blazing fire to burn over the grave of his companion Gilbert.<sup>64</sup> Destruction of the body in this way was quite contrary to the elaborate Aboriginal mortuary customs already discussed. Action of this kind is frequently associated with the attempt to destroy a *munpitch* after it had succumbed to a physical struggle with a *pakaper* or Aboriginal. Curiously, the same stories of these encounters with the metaphysical *munpitch* usually witness to the indestructibility of the *munpitch* even after being vanquished in a fight and exposed to the blazing heat of the fire.<sup>65</sup>

Even the inoffensive cattle and horses which accompanied the explorers were outside the categories previously experienced by Aborigines whose only referent for a large, four footed, placental mammal was a dingo. Leichhardt was quick to exploit this association as he travelled near the Norman River on his way south from the site of Gilbert's death towards Port Essington.

The natives considered our animals to be large dogs, and had frequently asked whether they would bite (which I affirmed of course), so that they themselves

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regarded as notional. On the same basis Roderick's persistent identification of Gilbert's killers as "Kokopera tribesmen" and his conclusions about the enmity existing between them and the "Kundjan people" amongst whom the possibly misunderstood campsite barter/pilfering occurred may well be misplaced given the inland location of the site on the Nassau where Gilbert died.

<sup>61</sup>Norman B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, Berkeley, California, 1974, Australia N.E. Sheet of Tribal Boundaries map.

<sup>62</sup>Colin Roderick, *Leichhardt the dauntless explorer*, Sydney, 1988, p.328.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.322-23.

<sup>64</sup>Leichhardt, *op.cit.*, p.311.

<sup>65</sup>See note 11 earlier in this chapter.

furnished us with a protection which otherwise I should not have thought of inventing.<sup>66</sup>

Amongst the legends of the people of Cape York Peninsula are stories of metaphysical dogs, immense in size and under the control of people capable of using them for their malevolent purposes.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the people who first encountered Leichhardt and his animals understood him and his companions to be the legendary individuals of supernatural power who held these great beasts under their control and were thus predictably at enmity with ordinary humans. It may otherwise be that the legendary accounts arose as consequences of these first encounters as a terrified people strove to relate their new experiences within the parameters of their own universe.

Leichhardt described how a terror-struck man found refuge in a tree after he had been detected near the fire at night at a camp south of the Staaten River. Even when the extent of his fear had become obvious, Leichhardt took his leisure in moving some eight yards back from the tree to allow his escape “which we had not done before, because I feared he might imagine we were afraid of his incantations, for he sang most lamentable corrobories, and cried like a child; frequently exclaiming, ‘Mareka! Mareka!!’”.<sup>68</sup> The fact that the individuals, animals and purposes of Leichhardt’s party were outside the familiar categories of known experience to the Aborigines of the Mitchell River area is axiomatic yet little seems to have happened from Leichhardt’s side to anticipate or comprehend this obstacle. Even when the confidence of Aboriginal groups had been established by the giving of presents the curiosity value of the explorers was undiminished, “It was singular that the natives were always most struck with our hats”.<sup>69</sup> Encounters with the *munpitch* of Leichhardt’s expedition had elicited both fear and wonder among the Mitchell River Aborigines.

Edmund Kennedy crossed the headwaters of the Mitchell near the junction with the Walsh River on his north-eastern Australia expedition of 1848. With food almost

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<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p.340.

<sup>67</sup>Percy Trezise, *Last Days of a Wilderness*, Sydney, 1973, pp.157-59.

<sup>68</sup>Leichhardt, *op.cit.*, p.323.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p.336.

gone and facing a collapse of discipline of the party, Kennedy compounded his problems by following the Mitchell in the mistaken belief that it flowed into Princess Charlotte Bay on the east coast where the relief ship was waiting to meet the party with fresh provisions.<sup>70</sup> Following Leichhardt's actions in similar circumstances, Kennedy took advantage of opportunities to take food from the Aborigines' camps, abandoned at the sight of the explorers. Again, in the manner of Leichhardt, Kennedy left some item of supposed barter value in place of the food. Whether from resentment towards this intrusion or for other reasons, Kennedy was confronted across the gully from his camp on the Mitchell on 15 September 1848 by Aborigines who hurled spears and pressed on with their attack until shots were fired. Further shots were fired when it was feared that a group of Kennedy's men who had gone fishing were in danger. The conflict ceased until the next day when a larger and evidently more hostile group of Aborigines appeared who had five shots discharged at them in the ensuing melee.<sup>71</sup> The events of 1845 and 1848 confirmed the ability of Mitchell River Aborigines to organise a powerful resistance to white intruders on their country along the lines displayed in the seventeenth century encounters with the Dutch on the western coast. The communication involved in mounting this resistance, achieved by Aboriginal warriors in numbers larger than the hearth group, suggests that knowledge of the *munpitch* and opinions about their nature were spread widely beyond the sites where resistance was pursued.

The ill fated expedition across Australia by Burke and Wills in 1860-61 reached the Gulf near the Bynoe River on 11 February 1861.<sup>72</sup> The enthusiasm with which rescue missions were launched injected new resources into exploration of the Gulf and Peninsula with Landsborough confirming the existence of promising pasture for cattle. *Floraville* on the Albert River was taken up by J.G. Macdonald of *Carpentaria Downs*

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<sup>70</sup>Edgar Beale, *Kennedy of Cape York*, Adelaide, 1970, p.194.

<sup>71</sup>Beale, *ibid.*, and William Carron, *Narrative of an expedition undertaken under the direction of the late Mr Assistant Surveyor E.B. Kennedy*, Sydney, 1849, p.50.

<sup>72</sup>Robert Logan Jack, *Northmost Australia*, vol.1, London, 1921, p.275.



in 1864, thus moving the frontier of pastoral expansion into the Gulf country.<sup>73</sup>

Pastoralism had pushed the frontier northwards in advance of settlement up the east coast which had, by the time *Floraville* had been established, only reached as far as the newly founded settlement of Cardwell.

The overland droving expedition of the Jardine brothers in 1864 from *Carpentaria Downs* to Somerset on the northern extremity of Cape York Peninsula was in part a response to this expansionist mood. Along with this confidence there was an atmosphere of increasing white distrust of Aborigines. The reprisal raids by Aborigines on the Central Queensland cattle stations of *Hornet Bank* in 1857 and *Cullen-la-Ringo* in 1861 had confirmed in the minds of many whites their fears of Aboriginal resistance. On a wider scale the supremacy of British interests had been challenged in India with the mutiny and massacre in July 1857.<sup>74</sup> The deaths of women and children in these events and in the Central Queensland pastoral region at the hands of native peoples came as a real threat to the ideology of a secure and ordered colonial society where “hearth and home” could be preserved inviolate.

When Byerley’s earlier newspaper editions of the Jardine diaries were published in book form in 1867, it seemed natural for him to speak of “the incessant and determined, although unprovoked, hostility of the natives”.<sup>75</sup> He equally, without reserve, praised the Jardine brothers for meting out “the treatment they deserved” to Aborigines “amongst whom, probably, were the slayers of Kennedy and Gilbert”.<sup>76</sup> In Byerley’s mind, at least, violence carried out against Aborigines was educative and in no way led this editor to show any discomfort in exonerating the brothers from responsibility for the trail of conflict and death they left as they travelled north. “If the

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<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.282, 283.

<sup>74</sup>For a fuller discussion on the impact of the Indian and Central Queensland massacres on the Colonial psyche see Judith Wright, *The Cry for the Dead*, Melbourne, 1981, p.89.

<sup>75</sup>Frederick J. Byerley, *Narrative of the Overland Expedition of the Messrs Jardine, from Rockhampton to Cape York, Northern Queensland*, Brisbane, 1867, p.vi.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

lessons were severe, they were in every case of the natives' own seeking, and were administered in fair and open combat".<sup>77</sup>

The feeling of providential safety which had earlier been considered worthy of record by Stokes was also attributed by Byerley to the Jardine expedition, perhaps as a legitimization of the methods they employed.<sup>78</sup> Byerley comments about "fair and open combat" which had meant, on at least one occasion, the indiscriminate firing upon unarmed Aborigines bunched up against a flooded creek. This "combat" was such that "few of the white party were without having narrow escapes to record; but a providential good fortune seemed to attend them, for every member got through the journey without accident".<sup>79</sup>

The "providential good fortune" which seemed to attend the Jardines was not unrelated to the efficiency of the contemporary rifle which was, in their hands, a weapon of highly destructive capacity. In the earlier encounters with Europeans, the Aborigines had been able to employ their spears and woomeras with relatively equal effect to the muzzle loading, smooth barrelled muskets of the whites. Only ten years prior to the Jardine expedition the weapons employed against the miners at the Eureka stockade had been smoothbore, muzzle loaders.<sup>80</sup> The armaments carried by the whites in the Jardine party were at the forefront of technological innovation at a time when, ... most of the frontier conflict of the 1860s depended on the use of smooth bore cavalry carbines, usually Enfield style, and muzzle loading shotguns, muzzle loading pistols and the occasional revolver.<sup>81</sup>

Whilst the four Aborigines were armed with double barreled police carbines, the six whites in the party had Calisher and Terry breech loading rifles and Tranter's revolvers.<sup>82</sup> The Calisher and Terry rifles could be reloaded much faster than earlier

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<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>Stokes, *Discoveries*, vol.2, p.283.

<sup>79</sup>Byerley, *op.cit.*, p.vi.

<sup>80</sup>Ian D. Skennerton, *200 years of Australian military rifles and bayonets*, Margate, Queensland, 1988, p.8.

<sup>81</sup>Clive Moore, "Blackgin's Leap: A window into Aboriginal-European relations in the Pioneer Valley, Queensland in the 1860s", *Aboriginal History*, vol.14, no.1, 1990, p.70.

<sup>82</sup>Byerley, *op.cit.*, p.7.

muzzle loading rifles and were thus better suited to rapid fire.<sup>83</sup> English manufacturer William Tranter had produced a number of five shot percussion revolvers in the 1850s and 1860s in both .38 and .45 calibres.<sup>84</sup> Such a revolver was a powerful weapon in the hands of a horseman since it gave him an opportunity to fire repeatedly at close range upon any Aborigine he chose to pursue. These armaments were to be employed to their full destructive potential in an area quite close to the *Kokobera*.

What the Aboriginal members of the expedition lacked in sophistication of arms, they made up for in experience in using their double barrelled carbines.<sup>85</sup> These weapons were still capable of killing a person at a range of thirty to forty metres.<sup>86</sup> The four Aborigines who accompanied the Jardines were seasoned troopers of the Native Police force who, hailing from the Wide Bay and Rockhampton districts, had seen service during the 1850s on the Central Queensland pastoral frontier.<sup>87</sup>

The Jardine expedition was different from the European activity in the Peninsula which had preceded it and was in many respects representative of that which was to follow. The Jardines came not as explorers with a casual commitment to passing through the country but as owners of herds for whom the land represented a base in the emerging colonial economy. The presence of the Government Surveyor, Archibald Richardson, seemed of small importance to the Jardines who considered him a poor surveyor and not their equal in locating the position of the party with respect to known features and rivers. The brothers had no pretensions to anything other than the commercial nature of their activity. They were not eccentrics or professional adventurers but young bushmen - Frank Jardine was 22 and Alexander (Alick) Jardine 20 years old at the time of the expedition. With attitudes to Aborigines hardened by their experience in Central Queensland and equipped with weapons of high destructive

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<sup>83</sup>Skenneron, *op.cit.*, p.24.

<sup>84</sup>Edgar F. Penzig, *In defence of lives and property: The weapons used in Australia in the wild colonial days*, Sydney, 1981, pp.26-8, 45, 71, 83.

<sup>85</sup>Skenneron, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>86</sup>Moore, *op.cit.*, p.70.

<sup>87</sup>The names of three of the Aborigines with the Jardine party: Peter, Sambo and Barney are listed amongst Aborigines who served with the Native Police in the period 1852-57. Contained in L.E. Skinner, *Police on the Pastoral Frontier*, Brisbane, 1975, pp.386-95.

capacity, they met any opposition, real or anticipated, with a ferocity formerly unknown in the Peninsula.

The journey from Carpentaria Downs had been marked by the Jardines' suspicion of the Aborigines. A conflict with Aborigines on the Staaten River had been only a preliminary event for a further conflict closer to the Mitchell River on 16 December 1864 when eight or nine Aborigines were killed or wounded. On that occasion the Jardines were reported to have only the regret that their whole party was not present so as to "make the lesson a more severe one".<sup>88</sup> On Sunday, 18 December, the brothers along with the Aborigine, Eulah, made up the advance party who were attempting to find and clear a crossing over one of the Mitchell tributaries when they came upon a group of Aborigines fishing.<sup>89</sup> This fishing party was perhaps forewarned of the likely response of the Jardines from news reaching them of the conflict on 16 December. They were in any case prepared for conflict since they retreated to the far bank of the river before returning across the river with "large bundles of spears and some nullahs".<sup>90</sup> The ensuing conflict, dignified by Byerley as "The Battle of the Mitchell" saw the Jardine party slaughter a large number of Aborigines against the flooded waters of the river.

After the initial spears were thrown the Jardines and Eulah made a charge on horseback into the group of Aborigines and discharged rifle shots at them. The sound of the rifles brought the seven others of the Jardine party down to the river bank at which time the conflict became a general melee. The Aborigines were observed as standing up courageously to the horsemen and then, to the relief of the Jardines, fell into disarray as their supply of spears became exhausted and allowed themselves to be pushed into a bunch against the water. At this point any sense of restraint seemed to disappear from the actions of the expeditioners as "ten carbines poured volley after volley into them

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<sup>88</sup>Byerley, *op.cit.*, p.34.

<sup>89</sup>This tributary described by Byerley as an anabranch of the Mitchell is considered by Logan Jack to be the Alice River at a point close to where it joins the Mitchell. *Ibid.*, p.35 and Jack, *op.cit.*, p.308.

<sup>90</sup>Byerley, *op.cit.*, p.36.

from all directions, killing and wounding with every shot with very little return”.<sup>91</sup> The Jardines estimated that about thirty Aborigines had been killed before they had held their hand to allow the few survivors to escape. They concluded that the death toll may have been higher than the bodies counted as fifty-nine rounds were discharged at close range.

On 21 December at their camp, as they continued their way west-north-west along the Mitchell, the Aborigines with the party observed local Aborigines stalking the camp from behind leaf bough screens. Dressed only in shirts and belts which comprised the “camp costume” of the expeditioners, the brothers, Scrutton and the four Aborigines pursued on horseback those who had been attempting to stalk the camp. They took delight in running the Aborigines they had pursued to exhaustion without firing a shot and returned to camp “laughing heartily at their ‘blank run’”.<sup>92</sup>

Sharp was certain that the “Battle of the Mitchell River” involved the ancestors of the *Yir Yoront* with whom he carried out his anthropological investigations in the 1930s.<sup>93</sup> He was equally certain that no record could be found of it in the memories of the *Yir Yoront* with whom he lived in the 1930s. Sharp had pursued this point in detail.

During the anthropological investigation some seventy years later, lasting almost three years, there was not one reference to this shocking contact with Europeans, nor anything that could be interpreted as a reference to it, in all the material of hundreds of free association interviews, in hundreds of dreams and myths, in genealogies, and eventually in hundreds of answers to direct and indirect questioning on just this particular matter.<sup>94</sup>

Sharp was most likely wrong on the first point. The “Battle of the Mitchell River” had taken place on the Alice River about 50 kilometres from Sharp’s camp between the Mitchell and Coleman rivers and in an area that is more likely to have been a *Kunjen* rather than *Kokominjen* area. This site was shown on Logan Jack’s map which was available to Sharp. The Jardine’s travels after the “Battle of the Mitchell River” certainly took them squarely through the country of most immediate concern to Sharp’s

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<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>93</sup>Lauriston Sharp, “Steel axes for stone age Australians” in Edward E. Spicer (ed.), *Human problems in technological change*, New York, 1952, p.70.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

informants, and the “blank run” episode took place in this area, possibly involving the ancestors of Sharp’s *Yir Yoront*.<sup>95</sup>

If judgement about Sharp’s first assertion is suspended for the time being, his second point is worthy of consideration as it bears upon the argument being developed here. Sharp considered that the first contact with whites that the *Yir Yoront* remembered could be put at around 1900. This would place the origin of the memory well within the personal experience or heresay understanding of adults living at the time of Sharp’s enquiry. Jan Vansina provides a helpful insight into this concern.

Beyond a certain time depth, which differs for each type of social structure... chronology can no longer be kept. Accounts fuse and are thrown back into the period of origin - typically under a culture hero - or are forgotten. The shortest such time depth I know of is that of the Aka of Lobaye (Central African Republic), where it does not exceed one generation of adults. Historical consciousness works on only two registers: time of origin and recent times.<sup>96</sup>

Whereas Sharp had argued for the second of these options, that the accounts were forgotten, I am arguing that the former possibility has occurred and historical events have become absorbed into beliefs to do with the time of origin.<sup>97</sup> Sharp did not consider the possibility that an association existed between the many *wangar* (*munpitch*) stories told to him by his *Yir Yoront* informants, which he recorded in his field notes, and the historical events for which he so assiduously searched. An almost identical argument could be advanced for the *wangar* concept amongst the *Kokominjen* to that proposed here for the notion of *munpitch* amongst the *Kokobera* since both groups were neighbours who maintained contact for ritual and ceremonial events.

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<sup>95</sup>Sharp, Fieldnotes, entry 34-I-23-2 5/1. Sharp had been told by Joseph Chapman in 1934 that an old man, Womera who was alive at that time and another old man who had died in 1929, remembered seeing Jardine when they were boys.

<sup>96</sup>Jan Vansina, *Oral tradition as history*, London, 1985, p.24.

<sup>97</sup>Lauriston Sharp, “The social organization of the Yir-Yoront tribe. Cape York Peninsula”, *Oceania*, vol.4, no.4, 1934, p.410. Even though, in 1934, Sharp had recognised the distinctive time orientation of the *Yir Yoront* he did not appear to see its bearing on his concerns in 1952. “The past begins with the mythical times of the ancestors, but these are spoken of as though they were recently dead; the application of the same term to events of the mythical period as to events of two or three years past lends additional reality to this important epoch. In some instances there is a confusion in which ancestral time appears to be considered coeval with the present. In relation to concrete genealogies, time loses all meaning for the adult if pushed back more than three generations.

If there had been no former experience of white contact, Sharp's understanding would be equally as likely as that which I propose. When these events are discussed, as they have been here, it becomes plain that forgetfulness in a way which contradicts the very character of the events themselves needed to be the outcome for each event prior to the one of concern for Sharp for his assertion to be favoured. The examination of the past suggests instead that there was the likelihood of an existing matrix of perception into which the "Battle of the Mitchell" could be integrated in such a way that no memory of the "recent time" sort remained after seventy years.

The 1870s marked the period when whites ceased to be itinerant within the area of interest to the *Kokobera* and became permanent realities. Along the coast to the north from Moreton Bay, settlements arose as ports or commercial centres for the growing pastoral activity as new areas were settled with sheep and cattle. The township of Bowen had been proclaimed by Dalrymple in 1861,<sup>98</sup> Cardwell had been established in 1864<sup>99</sup> and Townsville was gazetted as a port of entry in 1865.<sup>100</sup> Mining brought a new impetus to European settlement in the 1870s, starting with the Charters Towers goldfield in 1872 and the Palmer River field in 1873 with Cooktown being established in the same year to serve as a port for the latter. Prior to expansion of the frontier due to mining, Burketown, established in 1865,<sup>101</sup> had been the only port north of Cardwell except for Somerset and later Thursday Island at Cape York. Improved communications had been established soon after the founding of the northern settlements. A telegraph line was extended from Townsville to Kimberley at the mouth of the Norman River in 1872 only three years after Townsville itself had been connected by telegraph with Brisbane. Confidence in the security of white hegemony in the north even led to a plan to make Kimberley the point for the landfall of the undersea cable connecting Australia with Europe.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Bolton, *op.cit.*, p.21.

<sup>99</sup>Ross Fitzgerald, *From the dreaming to 1915, A history of Queensland*, St Lucia, Queensland, 1982, p.281.

<sup>100</sup>Bolton, *op.cit.*, p.31.

<sup>101</sup>Fitzgerald, *op.cit.*, p.137.

<sup>102</sup>Edward Palmer, *Early days in North Queensland*, Sydney, 1903, p.7.

Pastoralism was the basis for the permanent presence of whites in the area to the south of the *Kokobera* lands. At its establishment the legislature of Queensland was dominated by the pastoral interests who were keen to expedite the opening up of previously unsettled land for pastoral purposes. The *Pastoral Leases Act* of 1869 further liberalised the already generous provisions of the *Act* of 1860 towards gaining leasehold land. Lease periods were extended from fourteen years to twenty-one years, and a half concession offered for the first five years' rent. This gave a further incentive for prospective or established graziers to select new land even if it was in the drier and more marginal areas.<sup>103</sup>

The expansion of the pastoral frontier into the Peninsula depended upon an accessible market for cattle. Such a market was provided by the rapid population growth which accompanied the exploitation of the Palmer River goldfield, the second source of a permanent white presence, this time to the east of the *Kokobera* area of interest. Hann's "flattering prospects" of gold on the Palmer, that he had observed in 1872,<sup>104</sup> were proven by Mulligan in 1873 to indicate the existence of payable gold. By the time Mulligan left the Palmer at the end of August 1873, 102 ounces of gold had been extracted from the alluvial deposits. Mulligan returned to the Palmer in September 1873 with 100 men to commence a furious rush for gold over the next few years.<sup>105</sup>

The Aborigines of the Palmer had experienced only minimal contact with whites before Mulligan's explorations there in 1873. Hann had been there the previous year and Kennedy in 1848. They were unprepared for the catastrophic impact so many prospectors were to have on life as they knew it. Chinese and European miners comprised the thousands involved in this brief but furious period of mining activity and the resulting impact on the Aborigines of the Palmer and neighboring areas.<sup>106</sup> In the early years of the Palmer about six or seven thousand Europeans and about two

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<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.18-9.

<sup>104</sup>Jack, *op.cit.*, p.387.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, p.417.

<sup>106</sup>Noreen Kirkham, *The Palmer Gold Field 1873-1883*, unpublished BA(Hons) thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville, 1984, pp.244-312.



thousand Chinese were engaged in following the newly prospected alluvial fields.<sup>107</sup> By 1877 the number of Chinese alone had peaked at 17,000, a number which roughly equalled the entire European population of North Queensland at the 1876 census.<sup>108</sup>

The demand for gold led to a push northwards and the establishment of Hodgkinson field in 1875, Coen in 1876, Wenlock in 1892 and Hamilton (south of Coen) in 1899. By the turn of the century the experience of the previous 25 years had left some Aboriginal populations reduced to a dispirited remnant in the mining areas.<sup>109</sup> This period had also seen energetic resistance shown by Aborigines to the prospectors<sup>110</sup> and packers<sup>111</sup> who had pushed into their land.

The influx of miners to the Palmer along with the depleted state of northern herds pushed cattle prices to a premium, the main factor which encouraged the western spread of pastoralism down the Mitchell.<sup>112</sup> A.C. Grant was quick to capitalise on this premium when he established *Wrotham Park* on the Mitchell in 1873 having first brought three hundred fat bullocks from *Havilah* for sale on the Palmer field.<sup>113</sup> Cattle

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<sup>107</sup>Bolton, *op.cit.*, p.55.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>109</sup>In a telegram from Thornborough the plight of the Walsh River Aborigines was succinctly put to the Colonial Treasurer... "Will government advise giving blankets to Blacks this year two hundred fifty (250) them on Walsh always asking for blankets it is very cold". Telegram Byrnes Bros. to Hon. Colonial Treasurer, Brisbane. QSA Col/A360: 83/2210.

<sup>110</sup>Whilst earlier accounts may be exaggerated as Fitzgerald [Fitzgerald, *op.cit.*, p.224.] suggests, the Palmer and other gold rushes evidenced much conflict. Cilento and Lack (R. Cilento and C. Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics*, Brisbane, 1959, p.203] observed: "The war waged, also, between whites and blacks was pitiless: the blacks killed every man they trapped; miners and packers shot every black on sight". Reynolds gives a background picture which suggests that the conditions for a violent white response were present throughout colonial society, [H. Reynolds, "The unrecorded battlefields of Queensland", *Race Relations in North Queensland*, Townsville, 1978, p.34.] "Colonial Queensland bristled with guns. This fact more than any other illustrated the ubiquity of fear. On the frontier men were armed, often with both rifle and revolver, while travelling, while working, and loaded guns were kept ready in the home. At times of greatest insecurity guns were put down carefully close at hand when retiring, were grasped at the slightest noise, and then taken up again when venturing out in the morning. This was so with squatters, miners and selectors in all parts of the Colony".

<sup>111</sup>Reynolds, *op.cit.*, p.26.

<sup>112</sup>Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.137, and Dawn May, "The North Queensland beef cattle industry", *Lectures in North Queensland History*, no.4, 1984, p.126. "With rapidly increasing herds cattlemen responded... with a mass convergence on the Palmer as soon as it was possible to travel. The demand for cattle continued there with good bullocks bringing £15 - £17 a head in 1875. The Palmer was supplied by stations from all parts of North Queensland, even as far west as Lawn Hill near the Northern Territory border. It remained the principal market for North Queensland throughout the 1870s until, with population declining, prices fell to an unacceptably low level".

<sup>113</sup>Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.139.

were held on the Mitchell by Patrick Callaghan along with partners F. Leslie, J. Edwards and J. Duff in an enterprise which involved trade in both cattle and gold.<sup>114</sup> Edward Palmer in conjunction with John Stevenson and Walter Reid stocked *Gamboola* in 1879 with cattle from *Ravenswood* and *Mt. McConnel*.<sup>115</sup>

It was not simply the presence of whites carrying out their routine activities which represented an intrusion into the area of interest to the *Kokobera*. Wherever the whites went they demanded that their fears about the presence of Aborigines be met by the provision of police “protection”. Invariably this “protection” involved the police at least demonstrating the capacity to meet even the most unfounded fears expressed by the Colonial population. For instance Aborigines who had simply entered Bowen unclothed in 1869 were apprehended for “breaches of public decency and morality and other outrages”.<sup>116</sup> By the time the pastoral frontier had pushed westwards down the Mitchell to *Dunbar* in 1882, the *Kokobera* lands were soon to be included in the call for such “protection”.

As early as 1874 the Police Magistrate at Normanton identified the abduction and detention of Aboriginal women and children to be the cause of Aboriginal unrest in the town. In the Magistrate’s opinion the Normanton police detachment, established in 1868,<sup>117</sup> had displayed no interest in responding to the prior conditions that prompted Aboriginal outrage to this injustice.<sup>118</sup> The Normanton detachment was, it seems, keener to demonstrate its effectiveness by harsh treatment of the Aborigines. Behaviour of this sort had become sufficiently notorious for an official enquiry to be held in 1887 into the deaths of six Aborigines at Kimberley near the mouth of the Norman River.<sup>119</sup> The

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<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Telegram from Henry Bramston, Clerk of Petty Sessions Bowen to Colonial Secretary, 7 May 1869, QSA Col/A122: 69/1662.

<sup>117</sup>Letter from Sub-Inspector in Charge of Police at Burketown to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 16 September 1868. QSA Col/A114: 68/3843.

<sup>118</sup>Alfred Henry to Colonial Secretary by telegraph, 29 September 1874, QSA Col/A203: 74/2913

<sup>119</sup>Kimberley later came to be known by the name, Karumba.

investigation exonerated the white officers, Poingdestre and Lorigan and instead attributed blame to the Aboriginal troopers under their command.<sup>120</sup>

Aboriginal oral traditions suggest that there may have been more involved in incidents like these than simply passing the blame down the chain of command, although that cannot be dismissed either. It seems that Aboriginal trackers or police, freed from the moral constraints of their own society, visited a degree of violence against bush Aborigines that ranked with the worst imaginable. If murder and abduction were not horrible enough the violation of a murdered woman seemed an outrage beyond belief,

One tracker now, young fellow, they been shoot this young girl, he been shoot him, be be look, "Oh, this young girl they shoot'em."... You know what him been do? Him been start mucking around with that young girl! Dead Body! Muck Around!<sup>121</sup>

Regardless of the factual basis, this tradition associated with the Native Police held as late as 1987.

Even though the Normanton detachment had been active in the lower western Peninsula for seventeen years, the pastoralists of *Highbury*, *Dunbar*, *Mentana*, *Evergreen*, *Retreat*, *Vanrook*, *Strathmore*, *Torwood*, and *Eureka* stations considered, in 1885, that they were "wholly unprotected by a Native Police Force".<sup>122</sup> They had petitioned the government for a Native Police presence to be established in the area since they counted the presence of Aborigines to be a threat to stock and to personal safety. Government response to these requests was both sympathetic and prompt with a detachment of four troopers and one white officer being sent to establish a presence at *Highbury* shortly afterwards.<sup>123</sup>

The *Kokobera* may have avoided the "dispersals" of the Native Police but the likelihood of their being victims of the Normanton detachment on its northern forays or the *Highbury* detachment as it patrolled to the west is difficult to rule out. The earlier

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<sup>120</sup>Deposition by Constable Lorigan, Norman River 7 November 1887, QSA Col/A531: 105/88.

<sup>121</sup>Lofty Yam, tape-recorded interview, 12 November 1987, Kowanyama.

<sup>122</sup>Petition to the Hon. Samuel Griffiths from Graziers and residents of the Cook and Burke districts: 2 May 1885: 3021: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence: QSA.

<sup>123</sup>Seymour to Colonial Secretary: 24 June 1885: 4592: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence: QSA.

presence of Native Police in the pastoral lands of the southern Peninsula had been devastating. A massacre site discovered about “the heads of the Gilbert” in 1879 showed all the signs of a “dispersal” by the Native Police. Thirty-five skeletons, including those of children, displayed bullet and hatchet wounds, suggesting the slaughter of an entire camp.<sup>124</sup> The fact that the government had established the detachment requested by the petitioners at *Highbury* rather than at Burns Crossing on the Staaten River, as they had suggested, may have been a decision which worked to the advantage of the *Kokobera*. The Staaten River site was only 125 kilometres from Trubanaman on *Kokobera* land whereas *Highbury* was 200 kilometres distant. This difference could have been a crucial factor in the survival of the *Kokobera* throughout the period of growing pastoralist control.

The *Kokobera* were caught in a pincer like development, between the eastern spread of cattle stations on the Mitchell River and the northern advance of the pastoral area at the bottom of the Gulf. Whilst the fate of the *Kokobera* in the face of these developments was of no concern to the government, the commercial opportunities that might flow from improved communication between the two areas was of interest. Accordingly, Bartley Fahey, the Sub-Collector of Customs at Normanton, was sent to explore the Mitchell River so that a path of communication might be established between Normanton and the Palmer goldfield.<sup>125</sup> The pincer was closing and would bring permanent white presence from the margins of the *Kokobera* world into its heartland.

The *Kunjen* neighbours of the *Kokobera* found that their lands had been overtaken by pastoralism with the establishment of *Dunbar* in 1882. By the beginning of 1883, occupation licenses issued for *Dunbar* covered a total of 3,556 square kilometres on seventeen leases.<sup>126</sup> *Koolatah* between the Mitchell and Alice rivers,<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>*Croydon Mining News*, 27 August 1904.

<sup>125</sup>Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.152.

<sup>126</sup>Dunbar run file, QSA LAN/AF Dunbar, Cook. Dunbar’s first appearance in Pugh’s Almanac is in the 1884 edition which lists its owners as T., E.A., H.B., & F.R. Hungerford & J.H. Geddes.

<sup>127</sup>Jack, *op.cit.*, p.647.

again on *Kunjen* land, was taken up by McEacharn and Bell in 1886 only to be later abandoned, for a period, on account of Aboriginal resistance.<sup>128</sup>

Only a few years later the *Kokobera* land itself was the object of designs for pastoral expansion. Donald McIntyre of *Dalgonally* was also owner of the Normanton Meatworks and was enthusiastic to obtain all of the leasehold land between the Van Dieman (Smithburne) and Mitchell rivers which comprised a parcel of 12,800 square kilometres that had been opened to Occupation License on 24 March 1893. Unwilling to pay the rent initially asked for, McIntyre remained still unconvinced and unmoved when it was halved on 1 August of the same year.<sup>129</sup>

The establishment of *Rutland Plains* was ratified by the approval of an occupation license for which application had been made on 9 February 1900.<sup>130</sup> The *Kokobera* now faced the pastoral occupation of their lands, a permanent white presence and the opportunity of observing the *munpitch* at closer quarters. In modern Aboriginal accounts from Kowanyama to the pastoralists at *Rutland Plains* are attributed all manner of outrages against Aborigines, both on *Rutland* and at a considerable distance from it. Frank Bowman, the *Rutland* pastoralist killed by a mission Aborigine in 1910, has lent his name to “Bowman time”, the phrase used in these accounts to identify the period of pastoralist hegemony over the *Kokobera* during which many of their number were killed.

This period saw some of the *Kokobera* make the quick transition from life in the bush to becoming “station blacks”, Aborigines who were “let in” and considered useful in the pastoral enterprise. Young *Kokobera* men rode with the pastoralists, mustered stock and at times participated in the massacre of their own countrymen. In these situations they had some opportunities to assist their close kin to escape.<sup>131</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup>E.R. Gribble, *Forty years with the Aborigines*, Sydney, 1930, p.144.

<sup>129</sup>Correspondence on Gulf pastoral leases. QSA LAN S173 particularly items 93.11342, 93.23906, 03.39024 and 04.00660.

<sup>130</sup>Register of applications made for licenses to occupy under Part V of “The Land Act, 1897”, in the Land Agents district centred on Normanton, vol.1, 1900-5. O.L. 204 Rutland Plains No.5. QSA. Lack, *op.cit.*, p.967, considered that *Rutland Plains* had been first stocked in 1903 with cattle brought up by Donald McIntyre from *Dalgonally*.

<sup>131</sup>Arthur Major, tape recorded interview, Kowanyama, 30 July 1987. (Throughout this thesis quotations from Aboriginal people are denoted in italics.)

slaughter of Aborigines had become routine to the extent that Bowman's stockman, McIntyre, had taken to cutting off a finger from each Aborigine he killed as evidence of his deeds, a gruesome tally mark to demonstrate his effectiveness in dealing with "the blacks".<sup>132</sup>

Pastoralism had, in Roth's opinion, severely curtailed the freedom with which Aboriginal groups could move over their traditional lands, such movement having become subject to the pleasure and approval of the pastoralists.<sup>133</sup> Before they had been "let in", Aborigines whose land had become subject to the claims of the pastoralists were expected to keep clear of the pastoralists, their stock and anything else which might be considered of strategic value to the enterprise.<sup>134</sup> In this way camping near a waterhole might be construed as "frightening the cattle" and burning grass on traditional tracts counted as depriving the cattle of feed. In either case the pastoralists usually saw instances of this kind as reason enough to further exclude Aborigines from any land where pastoral interests were being established. In each case the frontier pastoralists were well prepared to take matters into their own hands, shooting and poisoning Aborigines whose presence was unwelcomed.<sup>135</sup>

The presence of Europeans along the gulf coast and south-western areas of the Peninsula was met with Aboriginal resistance. When J.T. Embley surveyed the Mitchell River in 1886-7 he counted "skirmishes with the blacks" to have been the cause of delays in the completion of his work.<sup>136</sup> The death of Ferguson, an elderly white stockman, in March 1894 followed his spearing on *Mentana* station by the Aboriginal, Cumjam.<sup>137</sup> Only a few months before Ferguson's death one party of survivors of the steamship, *Kanahooka*, after its capsizing off the Mitchell River in January 1894, were able to make their way through the *Kokobera* country through to safety at *Mentana*

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<sup>132</sup>Lofty Yam, tape recorded interview, Kowanyama, 12 November 1987.

<sup>133</sup>Walter Roth, "Social and individual nomenclature", *Australian Museum Records*, vol.8, no.5, 1910, p.95. (North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin no.18).

<sup>134</sup>Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, Canberra, 1982, p.33.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>136</sup>Jack, *op.cit.*, p.635.

<sup>137</sup>The *Queenslander*, 5 May 1894, p.821. A photograph of Cumjam, neck-chained to a tree after his capture, is contained in G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, Brisbane, 1963, facing p.193.

station.<sup>138</sup> This was despite popular fears that they would be exposed to the “hostility of the blacks”.<sup>139</sup>

Captain Swires received three spear wounds on the Nassau River in 1901 after he had unloaded stores for Underwood’s station.<sup>140</sup> Swires recovered from his wounds as did William Wambie, the South Sea Islander owner of *Gum Holes*,<sup>141</sup> who sustained five wounds whilst travelling in the Nassau country from *Dunbar* to Normanton to obtain supplies during a wet season.<sup>142</sup> The presence of a large oar with a bamboo cross arm erected over a shell covered mound left little doubt, in the mind of the master of the *Melbidir*, that a white man lay buried as he stood on the north bank of the Mitchell River during a survey in 1903.<sup>143</sup>

These experiences no doubt proved to the *Kokobera* that the *munpitch* as individuals were as likely to be killed by a well aimed spear as they were from his bullets. At a more general level though, the dominance of the *munpitch* and the way they needed to be taken into account in the ordinary events of life in the bush was increasingly felt.<sup>144</sup> As well the *munpitch* were the source of tobacco and other commodities which had come to be highly valued by the *Kokobera* and their neighbours. On account of this, there were strong motivations to accommodate the *munpitch* so that these new and valued items might be obtained.

It is difficult to appreciate the impact that tobacco alone had on the Aborigines of the Mitchell River area. Sharp found that the appearance of any tobacco amongst the bush dwelling *Yir Yoront* was met with such a craving that it led to, “extremes of

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<sup>138</sup>As reports reached Brisbane the saga unfolded in the pages of the *Brisbane Courier*, 30 January 1894, p.3; 3 February 1894, p.5; 5 February 1894, p.4.

<sup>139</sup>Arthur Ward, *The Miracle of Mapoon or From Native camp to Christian village*, London, 1908, p.150.

<sup>140</sup>*Croydon Mining News*, 24 May 1901.

<sup>141</sup>W.E. Roth: “Progress Report” to Under Secretary, Lands Department: 1 August 1903: Public Lands file 23839: Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, miscellaneous batch covers received, A/44681: QSA. “With the consent of Inspector Galbraith, I granted similar permission to ‘Wambi’ of Gum-hole Station, Staaten River, a Kanaka (naturalised British subject) to marry ab. ‘Mary’: there have been upwards of 20 years’ co-habitation, and two children whom the father is very anxious to legitimate”.

<sup>142</sup>Lack, *op.cit.*, p.969.

<sup>143</sup>“Report of the Melbidir’s Master on Mitchell River”: Harbours and Rivers file 1065 of 9 September 1903, contained in Mitchell River contained in Mitchell River Box, DFSAIA.

<sup>144</sup>Jessie Burrie, tape-recorded interview, 20 March 1988, Kowanyama.

eccentric behaviour”.<sup>145</sup> By the time Sharp observed the *Yir Yoront*, prostitution had become a regular means for both a woman and her husband to obtain tobacco.<sup>146</sup> Jerry Mission recalled how his father had walked great distances across the Peninsula as far as *Drumduff*, travelling from one station to another in the hope of obtaining tobacco.<sup>147</sup> He had also obtained leaf tobacco from the *Lama Lama* people of the central and eastern Peninsula in whose country it grew wild.<sup>148</sup> Poor health and exposure to the diseases of the towns seemed evident amongst people whom Gribble observed at Trubanaman in 1905, a direct result, he considered, of their regular movement between the reserve and the towns of Croydon and Normanton in pursuit of tobacco.<sup>149</sup>

Opium too had become a significant trade item between whites and Aborigines, to the extent that it figured in the title of Queensland’s 1897 *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. This legislation aimed to relieve the pressures on Aboriginal survival by a policy of state intervention in questions of Aboriginal welfare. Even with this protective legislation a traveller in the Peninsula found that opium was freely available to Aborigines as late as 1913.<sup>150</sup>

On the documentary evidence alone it can be seen that opportunities for contact with whites had been frequent during the fifty years before Anglican missionaries turned their attention to the *Kokobera*. These nineteenth century experiences were of a kind with those that went back as far as the early seventeenth century and confirmed within the minds of the *Kokobera* that the *munpitch* were ambiguous beings. Despite their capacity to bring havoc into the order of Aboriginal society they were a force to be

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<sup>145</sup>Lauriston Sharp, “The social organization of the Yir-Yoront tribe. Cape York Peninsula”, *Oceania*, vol.4, no.4, 1934, p.408.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, p.429.

<sup>147</sup>Jerry Mission, tape-recorded interview, Kowanyama, 15 November 1987.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.* and George Murray, interview, 1 February 1988, Kowanyama. George Murray had seen *Kuuk Thaayore* people travelling through *Koolatah* station on their way to the Palmer in search of the wild-growing leaf tobacco. He described the method of smoking this tobacco; two people would use each end of a single piece of bamboo, alternatively blowing so the other could inhale.

<sup>149</sup>*North Queensland Register*, 2 January 1905, p.45.

<sup>150</sup>P. McD. Smith, *The Strenuous Saint*, Adelaide, 1947, p.11, reported that Wilkinson on his trip in 1913 from Coen south to Normanton via Mitchell River Mission had difficulties with his Aboriginal assistants due to opium. “From some unknown source, probably from Chinamen employed on stations or from travelling on the road, his black boys were obtaining opium, and from the start he had trouble with them because of their indulgence”.



reckoned with, even to be used for benefit and knowledge, as they were brought into the order of the Aboriginal cosmos.

Decisions made by Aborigines to come into voluntary, peaceful contact with whites were decisions made after careful judgement of the risks and rewards that could be expected from close contact with such ambiguous and powerful entities. It will be shown later that the missionaries were inclined to consider themselves a type apart from the *munpitch* who had been their predecessors in contact with the *Kokobera*. The missionaries were also inclined to a “recent time” understanding of the extent of white influence on their Aboriginal charges and considered, as will be discussed next, that they had found in the *Kokobera* and the other people of the reserve innocents in the matter of white contact.

The contact between Aborigines of the lower Mitchell River area and *munpitch* had been long if intermittent. The period of most intensive contact was still to come in the form of a Christian mission where Aborigines would systematically share many experiences in a white dominated environment. Mining and pastoralism had established a white presence in the Peninsula which inevitably applied pressure on the *Kokobera* in quite fundamental concerns for survival. A developing relationship was in the process of forming out of the chaos that so often followed the initial frontier encounter. Yet the *Kokobera* and their neighbours were not unprepared for this. Their experience to that point had given them a category, probably refined over several centuries, to deal with the tide of change that was sweeping ever faster upon them.

The *munpitch* were apparently weak and frail yet had great strength: even fires burnt over their dead bodies did not prevent their reappearance, they were capable of great harm yet were also teachers and innovators of new and clever “tricks”. As a working hypothesis to account for the behaviour of whites, this category had summed up much of the paradox of the Aboriginal experience of whites. It remained for it to be tested in the closer experiences of living under white domination.

## Chapter Four

### The Search for a Mission

On Saturday, 3 June 1905, only two days after Ernest Gribble's announcement that the mission would be concerned to make his Aboriginal listeners, "good blackfellows", his fellow missionaries erected a tent fly to serve as a church.

Here we held Evensong, and were all very glad to be able to worship again in a building, however humble.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the missionaries had just come from a long and arduous journey on horseback they had brought with them a heavy baggage of expectation for themselves and their new venture. It would not be long before these expectations were loaded upon the Aborigines who had greeted the missionaries with apparent equanimity. From this tentative start the intense longing for the familiar which the missionaries experienced would gradually but decisively work its way to be yet another influence from European society upon the Aborigines of the lower Mitchell. In attempting to understand the motivations and ideologies of the missionaries it is useful to examine the steps that had led up to Gribble's "good blackfellow" speech.

Apart from the year long efforts of Kennett and Jagg at Somerset in 1867 there had been virtually no Anglican interest in far north Queensland during most of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> It was left to the Reverend John Brown Gribble to identify the coastal area to the south of Cape Grafton near Cairns as a place where his frustrated designs for the Aboriginal people could be worked out. John Gribble had developed a passionate concern for the Aborigines after being exposed to the worst excesses of violence against Aborigines that had gone with the expansion of colonial society. His efforts at defending the causes of Aborigines in north Western Australia had met with a hostile response from pastoralists and had left him unsupported by church officials.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert White, *Thirty Years in Tropical Australia*, Sydney, 1919, p.125.

<sup>2</sup>John Bayton, "The Mission to the Aborigines at Somerset", *Year Book of Proceedings* (of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland), vol.7, no.3, 1964-65, pp.622-33.

<sup>3</sup>J.B. Gribble, *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land (Blacks and Whites in North-West Australia)*, Perth, 1905 and republished Nedlands, 1987.

John Gribble had little personal impact on the Bellenden Ker Mission he founded, which would come to be known as Yarrabah. It was left to his son, Ernest Gribble, to shape the future of the Mission. As the son of a clergyman with an enthusiasm for the preservation of the Aborigines, Ernest Gribble had been exposed to his father's commitment from an early age. At the age of ten he had accompanied the elder Gribble and Daniel Matthews of Maloga in 1878 to the site which would become Warangesda Mission on the Murrumbidgee.<sup>4</sup> By 1885, along with his brother Arthur, he had been left in charge of his father's mission on the Gascoyne River in Western Australia while John Gribble travelled to Perth to attend to the removal of the rest of the family to the Gascoyne.<sup>5</sup> Even though Ernest Gribble had shown a leaning to the ordained ministry of the Church of England, the poverty of the family circumstances which followed John Gribble's missionary vocation led the son to scorn the thought of following in his father's missionary footsteps. The news that John Gribble was establishing a mission station in north Queensland brought no enthusiasm from the son, "He had urged me to join him, but my reply was emphatic, that I would never go as a missionary among the blacks".<sup>6</sup> Ernest Gribble's hopes of constructing a financially secure future were dealt a severe blow with the pastoral collapse of the late 1880s when his work as a drover left him again frustrated and poor. Penury rather than prosperity would be the condition from which he was to enter his life in the Church. Encouraged into church work as a catechist at Tumbarumba by Dr Thomas, the Bishop of Goulburn, Ernest Gribble had commenced a path which would lead to where he least expected to be found, as a missionary to the Aborigines.

John Gribble's declining health prompted the son to venture north out of compassion and to agree to "temporarily" caretake operations until the father was well enough to return. The elder Gribble showed no signs of such improvement and died a year after he had landed at Yarrabah. By the end of 1892, Ernest Gribble was in charge

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<sup>4</sup>E.R. Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, Sydney, 1930, pp.7, 8.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.53.

at Yarrabah and present to receive a party of about eighty Aborigines, the first to come voluntarily to the mission site in the six months of the missionaries' presence. His response to the arrival of the Aborigines was both religious and pragmatic. Whether they knew it or not this first party of Aboriginal visitors was taken to be a nucleus from which a residential mission would grow. Accordingly the Aborigines were quickly cooked a meal of boiled rice and were present as prayers were raised in their midst to ask God's blessing upon the work of the mission. Gribble's reflections on this meal give more than a hint of his understanding of the role of the missionary as an advocate of cultural change:

That feast was most amusing. I made the blacks sit in a circle, and gave into the hands of each a supply of food. I began with the old women, but as I proceeded, one old fellow came and expostulated with me and gave me to understand that the men ought to be served first. I went my own way, much to his disgust.<sup>7</sup>

Gribble "went his own way" to set about establishing the mission infrastructure he had been familiar with in Maloga, Warangesda and the Gascoyne. Not hesitating to take a stockwhip to Aborigines he considered troublesome, Gribble established his influence in matters of communal life on the mission.<sup>8</sup> Employing the same determination and practical abilities which had characterised his life as a station hand and drover, Gribble experienced a degree of success, at least in missionary terms, denied to many of his missionary predecessors with the Aborigines. John Gribble's choice of a remote site seemed vindicated by the perceived success of the Yarrabah Mission, a success which came to be acclaimed by the same Church which had most reluctantly witnessed his first missionary efforts in 1892.

By the time that the Archdeacon of Townsville, Gilbert White, came to be installed as the first bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Carpentaria in 1900, Ernest Gribble was considered without peer among north Queensland Anglicans for his work amongst the Aborigines. Gribble was the obvious person for the neophyte bishop to turn to in his attempts to initiate missionary work in his new diocese. Compared with

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.70, 71.

Gribble, a familiar hand in the bush, White seemed to bear the heavy imprint of his English clerical ancestors as he ministered in the sparsely settled regions of Australia where he was to carry out his life's work.<sup>9</sup> By 1900, Gilbert White had fifteen years of experience in north Queensland having worked in the Herbert River district, Charters Towers, Herberton, Ravenswood and Townsville. His four years in Herberton on the Atherton Tableland from 1887 to 1891 were spent mainly in contact with the European and Chinese settlers,<sup>10</sup> and his travels at night in the district left him in fear of the Aborigines whom he "supposed to be dangerous".<sup>11</sup>

White's perceptions of Aborigines had been influenced by the frontier environment in which he lived. He had been part of a welfare visit to the Palm Islands in 1898 and took part in the distribution of blankets to the Aborigines of the area. A letter to his English cousin gave him the opportunity of describing this encounter in detail:

One of the blacks had been working for Mr Hughes<sup>12</sup> & we brought him back to see his friends. He was the proud possessor of a pair of boots & he affected to be unable to walk without them. He brought some bread & fruit as a present to his mother a hideous old wrinkled hag and two bags of damaged currants that he had bought cheap. We found them all emptied out in a heap on the sand as is the provident way of the blacks. They eat all they get straight off as fast as they can. We slept on board and next morning we had a bathe and after breakfast took ashore the blankets. I had brought some trade tobacco and the blacks were all drawn up & received their Government blanket and then I gave them tobacco and Mr Hughes pipes. All men, women and children smoke all they can get. There were not 40 of them all told and only three piccaninnies. They seemed to be quite happy & contented.<sup>13</sup>

The Aborigines encountered by White at the Palm Islands were portrayed ironically and with a contrast between the stereotypes of "children of nature" and "degraded humanity". White describes the Aborigine in Hughes' employ as westernised

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<sup>9</sup>White's biographer commented, "Whether he ever succeeded in becoming what is called 'a good bushman' is doubtful", J.W.C. Wand, *White of Carpentaria*, London, 1949, p.19.

<sup>10</sup>White had a high respect for the Chinese, "I had a real respect for the patient and good-natured Chinaman" [White, *Thirty Years*, p.13], to an extent that it led him to write to his friend and later bishop Christopher Barlow "in terms of severe criticism" over remarks Barlow had made derogatory to the Chinese (Wand, *op.cit.*, p.23).

<sup>11</sup>White, *Thirty Years*, p.22.

<sup>12</sup>The head of the Customs Office in Townsville and White's Church Warden. (Abbreviations which follow are White's.)

<sup>13</sup>White to Agnes Martelle, 5 May 1898, Gilbert White Papers, Australia Board of Missions, Sydney (hereafter ABM).

to the extent that walking without boots was uncomfortable but stamped by nature as a member of a supposedly inferior race as the son of “a hideous old wrinkled hag”. White’s tone is interpretive as well as descriptive and postulates the habits of western life adopted by Aborigines as a veneer which only went to further satirise their “degraded” state.

His interest in recording that “only three piccaninnies” were to be found in the group of forty confirmed the prevailing belief that Aborigines were a “dying race”.<sup>14</sup> This combination of beliefs, popularly held by most whites, contributed to the reasons for seeking a remote site for Christian missionary work. In such a place the missionaries hoped that Aborigines could be insulated from adopting a useless veneer of westernisation and instead adopt the positive influence of Christian morality and culture. The “child of nature” stereotype suggested that such Aborigines when protected and insulated from a superficial civilisation would have the opportunity of rising by degrees through succeeding generations from their supposed state of natural simplicity. Reversing the apparent trends of decline in the numbers of the Aboriginal population was considered highly desirable both from a humanitarian perspective and in accordance with the strategy that the most productive mission work was to be carried out amongst the children and youth. Evidence that missions were arresting the decline of Aboriginal populations gave mission enterprises a victory over the “doomed race” theory which served them well in their self justification and in their propaganda. Gribble took great satisfaction that at Yarrabah the number of births rose over a ten year period to far exceed the number of deaths on the mission.<sup>15</sup>

The ensemble of attitudes that undergirded the Christian missionaries’ approach to the Aborigines were a mixture of negative perceptions of the Aborigines and positive hopes of what they could become as Christians, even if their Christian status might only bring them to be the equals of the lowliest whites. Gribble’s authority among northern

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<sup>14</sup>Remote Aborigines who had experienced some contact with whites often concealed children and teenagers from their visitors for fear of their being taken away, a reality which often helped to confirm to whites their pre-existing belief of the diminishing fecundity of the Aboriginal population.

<sup>15</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.119.

Anglicans was built upon his success in making this scheme work. When it came to initiating a pioneering work in Carpentaria, White had a ready and familiar associate in Gribble who, having overcome his initial reluctance to adopting the life of a missionary, was eager to expand the work of the Church of England amongst Aborigines in the north.

The diocese for which Gilbert White assumed responsibility in 1900 was outstanding more in its potential than in the reality of its church life. With the demise of the gold mining industry the economy of the region was in decline, as was the European and Chinese population. The geographical boundaries of the diocese included established Lutheran, Presbyterian and London Missionary Society establishments with the latter group administering the Torres Strait Islands on the virtual doorstep of the new diocesan headquarters. A scattered handful of priests ministered across the vast expanse of Cape York Peninsula, the Gulf country and the whole of the Northern Territory. The seaport town of Thursday Island continued as a centre of some prosperity due mainly to pearling, despite the disastrous loss of over 300 lives and 100 boats at Bathurst Bay in the cyclone of 1899.<sup>16</sup> In addition to Thursday Island's strategic position for travel along the northern coastline, it possessed the advantage to liturgically minded Anglicans of a fine Church which would become the cathedral for the new diocese and the seat of its bishop. The Quetta Memorial Church had been consecrated in 1893 by Bishop Barlow of North Queensland to commemorate the 134 people who drowned in February 1890 when the R.M.S. *Quetta* struck an uncharted rock. The fortuitous presence of the missionary priest Albert MacLaren on Thursday Island at the time of the tragedy gave the impetus for a strong Anglican input into the plans for a memorial to the disaster.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>John C.H. Foley, *Timeless Isle, An illustrated history of Thursday Island*, Thursday Island, 1982, p.52.

<sup>17</sup>MacLaren was in Thursday Island awaiting passage to New Guinea where he was subsequently to become the co-founder of the Anglican mission in New Guinea in 1891. The Government Resident on Thursday Island, The Hon. John Douglas, was a staunch Presbyterian and presented a claim as part of the consecration service for the Memorial Church to be available to protestant ministers of other denominations to conduct services of worship. The Anglican dominance caused some bitterness amongst the adherents of other denominations in the ensuing years. [John C.H. Foley, *The Quetta*, Brisbane, 1990, chapter 12.]

Responsibility for the formation of a separate diocese for the north of Australia lay with Christopher George Barlow, the bishop of North Queensland. Irish born and Welsh educated, Barlow, one year the junior of White, was elected bishop of North Queensland diocese at the age of thirty-one years.<sup>18</sup> Even though his lack of an Oxford degree had been a controversial aspect at his election, Barlow set about the responsibility of shaping the future of the Church of England in the north with energy and enthusiasm not always noticed in his better credentialed contemporaries. He believed that any effective presence of the Church of England in the far north required a diocesan structure established for that purpose. In preparation for the eventual establishment of a new diocese, Barlow had gained acceptance at his diocese's 1898 Synod for the division of North Queensland into two archdeaconries, the northern beyond Ingham and the 19th parallel and the southern to encompass the remainder. Barlow had earlier conferred the ecclesiastical honours of Archdeacon of North Queensland and Cathedral Canon upon White on 4 January 1893 in the newly consecrated St James' Cathedral in Townsville, honours which confirmed White's position as one of the leading clergymen of the diocese.<sup>19</sup> Upon the creation of the two archdeaconries in 1898 responsibility for the northern archdeaconry was given to the Reverend Francis D. Pritt who had established a ministry amongst Melanesians in the Herbert River district.

The Anglican pattern of establishing a new diocese required a sum to be raised as an endowment for the sustenance of the new bishop but the financial difficulties of the early 1890s caused Barlow's plans to lapse until the end of that decade. Prompted by the knowledge that the Bishop of Brisbane was planning to visit England in 1899 to raise funds for the erection of a new Cathedral in that city, Barlow quickly arranged to travel to England in December 1898 and devoted himself to his fund raising task on behalf of the new diocese from a small office in Westminster. By 31 May 1899 the Endowment Fund had reached £8,198. Barlow arrived back in Townsville in January

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<sup>18</sup>E.C. Rowland, *The Tropics for Christ*, Townsville, 1960, p.32. Rowland's chapter on Barlow is captioned "The organiser bishop".

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.36.



1900 able to report that the full £10,000 aimed for had been achieved. Without delay a canon was drafted and brought to the Synod of North Queensland on August 1900 to authorise the establishment of the new diocese and was duly passed and assented to.<sup>20</sup> The diocese was deemed to come into existence “upon the due appointment and installation of the first Bishop” whose nomination lay with the Archbishop of Sydney.<sup>21</sup> The announcement of Gilbert White’s appointment as the first bishop was made on the same day the canon was passed, successfully completing Barlow’s plan to raise a see endowment, organise the passing of the foundation canon and to ensure the appointment of his friend and colleague as the first incumbent.<sup>22</sup> The announcement itself came as a relief to White who had commented in June that even though “the fact of my election is generally known... I am unable to say a word, or write the necessary letters”.<sup>23</sup>

Depressed economic circumstances were soon to erode the value of the see endowment and even raise the question, upon Barlow’s resignation from North Queensland in 1902, whether North Queensland itself was viable as a diocese and whether it was responsible to ratify the election of its new bishop.<sup>24</sup> For North Queensland, income from investments of the same order as the Carpentaria endowment had dropped from £650 in 1894 to £172 in 1903.<sup>25</sup> The Diocese of Carpentaria had come into existence at a bad time to provide the financial resources that would be needed to fulfil Anglican aspirations in the north. At the hand over of Carpentaria’s administration in April 1915 from White to the incoming bishop, Henry Newton, the bishop’s income from investments of £12,500 came to only £390.<sup>26</sup>

White was aware of the challenge that lay ahead and had admitted in a letter to Barlow, when the matter of the bishopric had been raised, that the work would have “many attractions and the difficulties are of a kind to which for the most part I am

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p.40, and Bayton, *Cross over Carpentaria*, Brisbane, 1965, p.71, who gives a more summary account of these events.

<sup>21</sup>“The Diocese of Carpentaria Canon of 1900” in Bayton, *ibid.*, pp.72-4.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p.75, and Wand, *White*, p.27.

<sup>23</sup>White to Martelle, 26 June 1900, Gilbert White Papers, 1/1, ABM.

<sup>24</sup>Ross Fitzgerald, *From the Dreaming to 1915: A History of Queensland*, St Lucia, 1982, p.151.

<sup>25</sup>Rowland, *op.cit.*, p.43.

<sup>26</sup>White, “Notes on Diocese of Carpentaria”, OM.AV/113/1, JOL.

accustomed”.<sup>27</sup> When the first phase of establishing a new northern diocese had been completed the emphasis then shifted to the foundation of a new Aboriginal mission station in the Peninsula. Christian missionary presence had been established in the Peninsula by the Lutherans at Hope Valley in 1886<sup>28</sup> and by the Moravians on behalf of the Presbyterian Church at Mapoon in 1891.<sup>29</sup> White drew the inevitable comparison between the energies of the German Church and the inactivity of the English Church in an address at St Paul’s Cathedral Melbourne in September 1901. To this large congregation of sympathetic Anglicans he related the challenge of Mr Foxton, the Home Secretary of Queensland, for the Church of England to “imitate the example of the Germans”.<sup>30</sup> The Mitchell River area to which the Anglicans looked as a place to establish a presence in the Peninsula had been offered to the Catholics as a mission site several decades earlier but the offer had not been taken up.<sup>31</sup> This left a substantial Aboriginal population outside the influence of any other mission in conditions of isolation which seemed the ideal situation in which to establish missionary activity.

White had travelled to Yarrabah in March 1902 to prepare with Gribble the plans for the first journey by missionaries to the Mitchell River. If verification was needed of the progress of the work at Yarrabah it was to be found by White in the 22 Aboriginal candidates presented to him at Yarrabah for Confirmation at the mission.<sup>32</sup> The first decade of Yarrabah’s operation as a mission had seen the apparent success of the missionary program with such a large number of Aborigines affirming the beliefs of the Church of England and taking their place through the rite of Confirmation as full adult members of the Church.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Wand, *White*, p.27.

<sup>28</sup>F.O. Thiele, *One hundred years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland*, Brisbane, 1938 and facsimile edition, Adelaide, 1985, p.115.

<sup>29</sup>R. Brandon, *The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland*, Brisbane, 1949, p.83.

<sup>30</sup>Newspaper Clipping, “The Race Problem: A Bishop on Northern Australia”, 16 September 1901, Melbourne. Gilbert White Papers, 10/1, ABM.

<sup>31</sup>Michael A. Endicott, *The Augustinians in Far North Queensland*, Brookvale, N.S.W., 1988, p.183.

<sup>32</sup>White, Bishop’s Diary, 12 March 1902, OM.AV/114/1, JOL.

<sup>33</sup>It was not only the adoption of Christian faith which might be considered noteworthy but also the mastery of the Catechism, “An instruction to be learned of every person, before he be brought to be confirmed by the bishop”. The Catechism was quite apart from its religious content a considerable exercise in the use and comprehension of English language.

White was in a good position to evaluate for himself the worth of the missionary strategies applied at Yarrabah and to measure the changes the mission had brought since his first visit to the site in J.B. Gribble's foundation months of 1892.<sup>34</sup> The careful planning that would take place in preparation for a new mission station on the Mitchell River was designed to transplant the experience and success of Yarrabah to the opposite side of Cape York Peninsula. Reflecting on his experiences many years later White was to make this link explicit:

The starting of an Aboriginal Mission on the Gulf of Carpentaria had been in my mind ever since my consecration. It seemed to me that Yarrabah had no influence northwards and that all the natives in Cape York Peninsula were without help from the Church, (*sic*) I regarded the Mission as an extension of Yarrabah, as a work of the Board of Missions which the Diocese of Carpentaria was bound to attempt on behalf of the whole Church.<sup>35</sup>

The claim that the missionary venture was undertaken on behalf of the "whole Church" was an important factor in the proposal's ability to achieve government support as was White's personal involvement and commitment to the venture. Gilbert White had aligned himself to the proposal for a Gulf mission as its sponsor and patron in his capacity as a bishop of the Church of England which gave the project a status not always found in missionary enterprise. Whereas Yarrabah had been founded entirely upon the initiative and personal sponsorship of J.B. Gribble with the barest minimum of consultation with the bishop and diocese of North Queensland, the new venture was to be backed by the authority of the Bishop of Carpentaria. There is no doubt that the substance behind this official Church patronage of the Gulf mission was rather less than it appeared, yet the appearance was sufficient for the Queensland Government to make available significant resources to assist the missionary efforts.

The missionaries may have preferred to see themselves as agents of the wider Church yet their efforts were also expended in the extension of government policy. At a time when the secular basis of Australian society was being enshrined in the

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<sup>34</sup>E.R. Gribble, *A Despised Race*, Sydney, 1933, p.42.

<sup>35</sup>White, "Report to A.B.M.: The beginnings of the Mitchell River and Torres Straits Missions by Gilbert White, Bishop at the time of Carpentaria", 6 October 1928, MSS 4503 Add on 1822, Guide 1(4), Box G 10 - 17/1, ML.

Australian Constitution, Gilbert White and the Queensland Government were partners in a venture which would see each party largely satisfied that their own purposes were being well served by the involvement of the other. The fact that the early mission efforts in the Gulf and Peninsula were all under the control of German missionaries may have been a strong motive for the more chauvinistic members of the Queensland establishment to manifest a greater commitment to this new mission venture of the English Church than might otherwise be expected.

The common missionary practice of arriving in an area with little knowledge of its people or conditions presented obvious risks of failure. Even though this method had been employed successfully at Yarrabah, it was not to be the method for the new Gulf mission; instead, a laborious process of exploration over several years would precede the actual presence of missionaries. Even though the Anglicans were late on the scene in the Gulf, the establishment of the new diocese carried with it a certain caution lest hasty moves to found an Aboriginal mission meet with failure and discredit the whole program to assert an effective Anglican presence in the far north.

The plan for the first journey of the Anglican missionaries to Mitchell River called for the overland party headed by Gribble to meet on the west coast with White and the Northern Protector of Aborigines, Dr Walter Roth. White and Roth were to travel south by the government vessel *Melbidir* from Thursday Island. The expedition was of a semi-official nature developing as it had from discussions between White and Home Secretary Foxton on 10 October 1901 on the subject of establishing a Church of England mission on the west coast. Foxton was pleased with the move and took the trouble to inform the Governor, Lord Lamington, about the likely developments in June 1901.<sup>36</sup> At his meeting with White, Foxton had undertaken to provide annual support for the secular side of the proposed mission to the extent of £100 for a male teacher or the lesser £80 in the case of a female teacher and from £100 to £150 for the “support of the blacks in and about the neighbourhood of the Mission”.<sup>37</sup> Foxton had also signalled his

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<sup>36</sup>White to Foxton, 10 October 1901, 01:16265, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

concurrence with the plan White had already made with Roth to use the government vessel for an exploratory trip down the coast from Thursday Island in 1902. White had written to Foxton on the same day as their discussion carefully reiterating the undertakings Foxton had made. White was eager to have the terms of Foxton's offer, generous for this era, confirmed in writing and concluded his account of the discussions by saying, "I should be much obliged if you would kindly let me know whether I have stated correctly your views on the subject".<sup>38</sup> If the offer made by Foxton had seemed too good to be true, White could only have been reassured had he seen the affirming marginal note the Home Secretary had written on his correspondence expressing his pleasure that "His Lordship is about to take this step" and that "all the assistance that is possible on the part of the Gov[ernmen]t" would be afforded to the aspiring missionary and his project.<sup>39</sup>

The provision of police protection was another form of government co-operation with the missionary explorers. On the eve of his departure from Thursday Island in May 1902, Roth wired the Home Department in Brisbane to arrange for rifles to be provided for his use by the Thursday Island police,<sup>40</sup> a request that subsequently provided two rifles and one carbine for protection against whatever unspecified threat presented itself in the Peninsula.<sup>41</sup>

The overland component of the exploratory party was primarily a police patrol to which Gribble was attached. Sub-Inspector Roland Garroway had been authorised on 5 May by W.E. Parry-Okeden, the Commissioner of Police, to take with him on the Mitchell River patrol one of his own Laura Native Police along with the Palmer Native Police detachment under the command of Acting-Sergeant Whelan.<sup>42</sup> Gribble described in some detail his part in this police patrol to the Mitchell in accounts contained in his

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Home Department (telegram), 1 May 1902, 02:0672, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>41</sup>Marrett to Parry-Okeden, (telegram), 3 May 1902, 02:06764, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>42</sup>Parry-Okeden to Marrett, (telegram), 5 May 1902, previous 02:6868, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

*Forty Years with the Aborigines* published in 1930 and in *A Despised Race* published in 1933 as well as in a newspaper article in 1911.<sup>43</sup> The second of his books seems the less reliable of the two for matters of fact about the expedition with Gribble even giving 1903 rather than 1902 as the year of his first trip to the Mitchell.<sup>44</sup> Gribble's recollection in his 1933 book that he was "requested by the Home Secretary of Queensland" to make the trip to the Mitchell River mouth,<sup>45</sup> seems to be an inaccurate construction when contrasted to his 1902 telegram to the Home Secretary; "Archbishop [of] Sydney, Bishop [of] Carpentaria, anxious I assist choosing site Mitchell River. Latter suggests accompanying patrol, need your approval".<sup>46</sup> Whatever had been the informal discussions between Gribble and White in the past, the formal initiative of establishing the mission was Gilbert White's. White had laid the foundations for sympathetic government co-operation by his consultations with Foxton and Roth.

### **Gribble's 1902 expedition with Garraway's police patrol**

Having made his passage to Cooktown from Cairns, Gribble travelled to Laura by train where he stayed for two days with Garraway as the party prepared horses and gear for the trip. Gribble hired two horses and was loaned another by the Station Master. The party, which set out from Laura on Whitsunday 1902 consisted of Gribble, Garraway and three Aboriginal troopers with twelve horses between them. From Laura they travelled west and after three day's riding reached the Frome Native Police camp on the Palmer River. A further two days were spent at Frome readying the party for their journey westward. At Frome the presence of two male Aboriginal children and a

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<sup>43</sup>The accounts are included in Gribble, *Forty Years*, pp.124-34 and *A Despised Race*, pp.53-8. A newspaper version from 1911 is included in a clippings book in MSS 4503 Add on 1822 Box G 15 - 20/9, ML.

<sup>44</sup>Gribble, *A Despised Race*, p.53.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>Gribble to Home Secretary, (telegram), 6 May 1902, previous 02:6934, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA. Gribble appears to accurately convey these events in *Forty Years* in which he states, "I had been asked by the Bishop of Carpentaria to obtain the permission of the Home Secretary, the Hon. J.G. Foxton, to join the patrol in order to inspect the country about the mouth of the Mitchell River with a view to the establishment of an aboriginal Mission there". Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.124.

male prisoner from the lower Mitchell gave Gribble an anticipation of the people of the west he hoped to encounter and in due course impart to them the “miracle” of Yarrabah transplanted in their own soil.<sup>47</sup> Acting-Sergeant Whelan and three of the Palmer troopers joined the Laura party to make a group of nine comprised of the missionary, two officers and six troopers.<sup>48</sup>

Gribble’s own familiarity with the brutality of race relationships on the pastoral frontier may have led him to find the presence of two children, obviously abducted and then retained in police custody many miles from their tribal people, an unexceptional fact of frontier life. Certainly the presence of a male prisoner apprehended for cattle spearing should have reminded him of the function of the police party he was about to travel with. The very fact that Garroway had brought three troopers from Laura rather than the one he had been authorised to take, indicated a desire to present a strong force in the relatively “wild” country to the west.<sup>49</sup> The presence of the missionary might have been thought to present some inhibition to the enthusiasm of the patrol to engage in open conflict on the Mitchell. Certainly, the party was large enough to be split in two if need arose, thus giving Garroway the opportunity of maintaining an eirenic tone in Gribble’s presence and dealing in any way he chose with whatever eventualities might arise during the long journey. The conduct of the Native Police suggests that circumstances could easily arise where an independent witness to the methods employed in “dispersing” Aborigines would be most unwelcome. In any event the two officers and six troopers represented a highly armed force capable of visiting great destruction on any Aboriginal group upon which its firepower might be focused. No one seemed to think this a strange way to found a Christian mission.

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<sup>47</sup>Gribble, Yarrabah Diary for 1902, 20 May 1902, General Correspondence, Australian Board of Missions, folio 10/7, box G3, MSS 4503 (Add on 1822), ML. Gribble noted the compliment of Frome station, “two white constables and 8 native police and several women and children. Saw 2 young Mitchell River blacks who spoke no English, and like to get these to Yarrabah”.

<sup>48</sup>Gribble, *A Despised Race*, p.53.

<sup>49</sup>Garraway to Parry-Okeden, 30 November 1903, 03:23833, Frome Station, A/41596, QSA. Garraway considered the patrols from Frome, “most necessary”.

The Aboriginals on the journey west from Frome were wary of the patrol and were only known to be there by the smoke from their fires. Camps were hurriedly deserted in the path of the patrol with camp fires left still burning. Whelan's earlier abduction of the two boys, Dinaroo and Rio, whom Gribble had seen at Frome as well as the arrest of the Aboriginal prisoner from *Dunbar* had undoubtedly confirmed any misgivings the Mitchell Aborigines had about the police. The aggressive tactics of the police became evident to Gribble when, upon reaching the Mitchell, the first Aboriginal was encountered since leaving Frome. Immediately upon sighting him running hard on a plain, Whelan and a trooper rode after him and stopped his flight. Three other Aboriginals emerged from a place of concealment when their companion was halted but no conflict ensued. Garroway evidently wished to elicit information about the patrol's distance from the coast, which, with a specified date already arranged for the meeting with White and Roth, became an increasingly important detail. With no details about the proximity of the Gulf forthcoming from this encounter, the party was no more certain of the distance still left to be travelled.

Grass fires which had been started by the Aborigines made travel difficult for Garroway's detachment and signalled a move from a passive to more active Aboriginal resistance to the police incursion. As soon as a tidal creek was reached and the anticipation of encountering the coast quickened, the discovery of a deserted Aboriginal camp led to the troopers being sent to search for its inhabitants who were found in a creek hiding from the police with only their heads above water. The fearful Aborigines were coaxed out of the creek and showed the party a crossing for the horses. Once across the creek a suitable lagoon was located for the evening camp and the Aboriginal women were set to work gathering firewood before the whole party of Aborigines were sent away at sundown.

At this camp Gribble attempted to make friends with the Aborigines. He shared no common language with them and the presence of the police contingent raised their anxiety to an extent that communication advanced little beyond the people's interest in Gribble's watch chain to which a gold cross was attached. Gribble struggled to assure



himself that he, at least through bearing this talisman, would be seen for himself and not as a policeman. There was however no evidence that his desire to be seen as a missionary made any impression on his reluctant hosts. On his own admission the Aborigines, “seemed to know who the police were, but were evidently puzzled as to my connection with the police”.<sup>50</sup>

If Gribble’s friendly overtures did little to allay the Aborigines’ concerns that the police presence on their land presented a dangerous risk, actions later that evening could only confirm those fears. An evident threat of attack upon the camp was detected by a trooper out in the moonlight to shoot ducks. He rushed back to the camp, ordered all lights to be extinguished and reported that “the blacks were creeping all round the camp”.<sup>51</sup> This report caused general alarm and fear of imminent attack. Garraway had intended to wait and, if spears were thrown, to reply with rifle fire. Gribble persuaded Garraway, since they were easy targets in the moonlight, to pre-empt any Aboriginal aggression and fire his revolver into the water. The shot sent the Aborigines fleeing in panic. Attacks on police patrols in the lower Mitchell had been sufficiently frequent and successful for the presence of any Aborigines near a police camp at night to be considered a threat.<sup>52</sup> The members of the party were tense and apprehensive for the next four days until they reached the coast. They were, by that time, five days late for the rendezvous with White and Roth. Upon reaching the coast they caught a glimpse of the sails of the *Melbidir* disappearing to the south as she travelled to Normanton.

On the coast and on the way back to Frome the Aborigines preferred to avoid Garraway’s patrol so that only occasional encounters happened. Gribble found that, in addition to the two boys, a woman had been previously abducted, further explaining to him the reasons for the Aboriginal resistance he had experienced near the Gulf. The whole trip had given only three occasions of direct contact with Aborigines, the first when Whelan and a trooper ran down the lone man on the Mitchell, the second when

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<sup>50</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.130.

<sup>51</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.131.

<sup>52</sup>Poingdestre to Lamond, 20 July 1896, 96:1164, and Lamond to Commissioner of Police, 30 July 1896, 96:09080, Highbury Station, A/41590, QSA.

the troopers had been sent to search for the inhabitants of the abandoned camp site and the third when the contingent surprised an old woman and her two daughters collecting food in a swamp on the return journey. No voluntary contact had been initiated by Aborigines in the course of over 600 kilometres of horseback travel across the Peninsula. Moreover, the reactions of the Aborigines indicated they viewed the intrusions with suspicion or hostility, responses which future missionaries could expect, even if they were concealed after missionary authority was established.

As far as Gribble's contact with Aborigines was concerned the long trip had been a spectacular failure, due to the police nature of the expedition and the strenuous and successful attempts of Aborigines to avoid contact. What Gribble had acquired in the course of the journey was a detailed knowledge of the locality and the familiarity of conditions of travel that would be useful for any future missionary expedition to the Gulf.

An oral tradition from Kowanyama, makes no distinction between "Mr Gribble" and the "policemen" in a description of a police intervention on the Mitchell.<sup>53</sup> In this account three men were taken from an Aboriginal group that had run away from the presence of the whites after an incident in the country around *Shalfo* station, close to the junction of the Alice and Mitchell rivers. It emphasised the alarm that Aboriginal people had of the whites and their common strategy of running away and hiding. Diving in the water and hiding under logs were amongst the means of concealment described as a response to the encroachment of whites. Even if the old people stayed in the camp the young girls would be forced to hide, so likely was the possibility of their abduction. For Aborigines outside of the influence of cattle stations or for ones who had not yet been "let in" to the proximity of the stations, life in the bush had taken on an extra dimension of peril with the advent of even the most infrequent white contact.

Even if the Aborigines Gribble encountered had no idea of his relationship to the police patrol, Gribble's self perception was both clear and affirmed by an experience on the return journey. The patrol made a camp for lunch near a lagoon and found several

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<sup>53</sup>Jessie Burrie, tape-recorded interview, Kowanyama, Queensland, 20 March 1988.

“beautifully made netted dilly bags, full of lily roots”, which had evidently been abandoned by their alarmed owners as the patrol approached.<sup>54</sup> Gribble decided to take two of these dilly bags and left two sticks of tobacco tied to a remaining one as a “payment”. This brought forth considerable hilarity from the Aboriginal troopers who found Gribble’s scruples in the matter most amusing.<sup>55</sup> Yet Gribble with this almost innate response of conscience was acting in the same way as Leichhardt and Kennedy, who had each applied this principle of barter at abandoned camp sites without considering how inadequately it countered the gravity of offence their intrusion had caused.

Gribble’s Yarrabah had acted as receiving station for Peninsula Aborigines sentenced for exile on account of cattle spearing or other acts of resistance. Yarrabah along with Mapoon had been proclaimed a reformatory under the *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865* which had meant that they were also receiving stations for Aboriginal children under the age of fifteen years detained in custody under that Act at the discretion of a Justice.<sup>56</sup> Gribble was proud of the changes that took place when people were brought to Yarrabah and wrote a number of short biographies about his success stories. An account concerning a woman named Topsy indicated that abductions of the kind Gribble had learned of in 1902 had occurred in the Mitchell River area from as early as the 1880s. Topsy had been captured as a child on the Mitchell River “not far from the coast of the Gulf” and had, after experiencing both good and bad fortune, been brought to Yarrabah at the age of seventeen years.<sup>57</sup> By the time that Topsy died several years before 1905 she had been at Yarrabah long enough to attend school, marry and give birth to three daughters. The people whom Gribble contacted in such circumstances at Yarrabah were often survivors of a massacre and had commonly passed through the

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<sup>54</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.133.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p.134. Ever the pragmatist, Gribble noted on this subject, “apart from the moral question, I had to bear in mind that I was to return the following year to make friends with these blacks and help establish the Mission among them”.

<sup>56</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Lands Department, 1 December 1903, 03:33606, Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, Miscellaneous batch covers received, A/44681, QSA.

<sup>57</sup>Newspaper clipping, paragraph headed “Topsy” from unidentified newspaper, 1911. In a collection of clippings in MSS 4503 Add on 1822 Box G15 - 20/9, ML.

custody of numerous whites before they reached Yarrabah. Of the two boys at Frome, one, Dinaroo, was taken by Gribble back to Yarrabah. Gribble was prevented from taking Dinaroo's companion, Rio, on account of his already having been given by the police to someone else.<sup>58</sup> Dinaroo's journey with Gribble to Yarrabah would take him further away from his own country both in distance and in experience of life. In addition to the humanitarian reasons for this action Gribble perceived an advantage in having the boy accompany him on a subsequent journey west, when it might be hoped that contact of a kind more profitable to the missionary cause might be made with Dinaroo's people.

### **White's 1902 expedition with Roth on the *Melbidir***

The sight of the *Melbidir* sailing south towards Normanton gave the ground party only the barest hint of the frustration that their late arrival had caused White and Roth who had confidently expected to make the rendezvous with Garroway's patrol. White had been actually scanning the coast as the *Melbidir* sailed south from Trubanaman Creek but had failed to see Gribble as he rode and waved frantically to the point of the estuary.<sup>59</sup> Although for White the attempted meeting with Gribble's party was a frustrating failure, the voyage down the coast in May 1902 had given White a clear impression of the task ahead of him as he encountered contrasting aspects of the impact of Europeans on the Aborigines of the Peninsula.

Roth's visit to Mapoon provided an opportunity for the *Melbidir* to be careened and the ensuing work provided a five day period where White could observe at first hand a Mission which, like Yarrabah, had passed through the foundation years of its first decade. Just as Yarrabah and its reputation seemed to depend on Gribble, the achievements of the Mapoon Mission seemed to be the result of the determination and dedication of one man, its superintendent, Nicholas Hey. White considered the work of

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<sup>58</sup>Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, Canberra, 1982, p.44 and Ross Fitzgerald, *op.cit.*, St Lucia, Queensland, 1982, p.215. The Native Police commonly distributed orphaned or captured Aboriginal children to settlers wanting cheap, servile labour.

<sup>59</sup>White to Home Secretary, 19 June 1902, 02:10299, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA. White made this comment about the departure from the Mitchell River area, "We appear to have passed close to them at 10 am on June 1st but though we were watching through glasses at that time we saw no signal smoke or other sign".

Hey and his mission helpers as “simply marvellous” in respect of “material adaptations and influence on the natives”.<sup>60</sup> Mapoon seemed to epitomise the success of the industrial mission model employed at Mapoon, Yarrabah and other Aboriginal missions and intended for Mitchell River. White observed one hundred and fifty Aborigines living permanently at Mapoon in what he perceived as a pattern of order, harmony and industry. Twenty married couples dwelt in their own houses that had each been the reward for six months’ labour by the husband prior to the marriage. A dormitory cared for children and a cash income to the mission was provided for by appropriating the earnings of the young men who had been *bêche-de-mer* fishing. The common fund, the Aborigines’ apparent satisfaction with westernised labour practices and the Christianising of the Peninsula Aborigines seemed to represent all that a mission could hope to achieve in the short space of ten years.

From White’s perspective the Mapoon experience was a wholly beneficial example of European contact with Aborigines. In another experience soon after, he saw a much less attractive dimension of frontier race relations where the effect of white male domination in frontier contact justified the Aboriginal usage of “the whiteman” as a generic term for Europeans. Two days after leaving Mapoon, White and Roth reached Moreton Telegraph Station which was at that time a lonely white outpost in the northern Peninsula. From Moreton, White accompanied Roth to investigate the deaths of several Aborigines at the hands of the Native Police.<sup>61</sup> White’s reluctance to publicly criticise the police, who were his allies in the missionary explorations, was shown by the torturous circumlocution he used in describing the allegations,

... that a certain white man, who had been sent on certain business connected with the natives, had allowed the armed natives by whom he was accompanied to attack and kill members of a certain tribe without warning or provocation, when he might have accomplished his mission without bloodshed or trouble, and that he had returned and reported that he had never seen the natives at all.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>White, *Thirty Years*, p.105.

<sup>61</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Lands Department, 1 January 1904, 04:00311, Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, miscellaneous batch covers received, A/44681, QSA. Three police trackers, Joe, Jimmy and Pumpkin, were held responsible for the murders and deported to Fraser Island. Joe escaped from Fraser Island on 9 November 1902 and made his way back to the Peninsula by July 1903. Roth considered this quite an achievement since Joe spoke no English and had been taken by sea to Fraser Island.

<sup>62</sup>White, *op.cit.*, p.109.

Despite his reluctance to be publicly critical of the police he was determined to prompt Roth to pursue an official inquiry.<sup>63</sup> The evidence was too compelling to ignore: Under one of the skulls was a little lump of lead of the exact weight of the bullets which had been supplied, as we knew, to the assailants, a large and unusual size. We could find no cartridge-cases - they had evidently been carefully picked up - but we had sufficient evidence to induce the Commissioner of Police to make the journey up from Brisbane to investigate for himself, and such justice as was possible was eventually done.<sup>64</sup>

Since the purpose of the combined expeditions was to identify an appropriate location for a reserve upon which a mission could be founded and to establish a relationship with the local Aborigines, the failure to meet on the coast as arranged presented a new problem in making a coherent approach to the Home Secretary. Difficulties with communication ensured that there was confusion about the particular area of land which the government should be requested to gazette as a reserve for Aborigines. White wasted little time upon reaching Normanton in formulating a formal response to the Home Secretary. White's perceptions of the Mitchell River area were cursory; his farthest excursion was "about half a mile inland but the country was scrubby and difficult to traverse".<sup>65</sup> His impression of the land near the Mitchell River was generally poor and, although conceding that the ground party could have found better country inland, thought it an unlikely occurrence and was responsive to advice from Police Inspector Galbraith that the land between the Staaten and Nassau Rivers would provide a more suitable area for the reserve.<sup>66</sup>

The specific area was unimportant to White; what was of more concern was that the mission reserve be capable of supplying "plenty of water and native food for the people".<sup>67</sup> These characteristics were a necessary precondition to the success of the mission which was to proceed on "industrial lines" since it was recognised that native

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<sup>63</sup>White to Roth, 1 August 1902, 02:534, Home Secretary's Inwards Correspondence, HOM A41, QSA. "I feel that the matter is too grave a one to be lost sight of", White observed.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>White to Home Secretary, 7 June 1902, 02:9740, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>66</sup>Galbraith to White, 7 June 1902, appended to 02:9740, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>67</sup>White to Home Secretary, 7 June 1902, *ibid.*

food would form an important supplement to the projected garden produce. The very presence of the mission would, White anticipated, lead to a big demand upon its resources of food and water since “once started the neighboring [sic] blacks will probably be sent and possibly practically restricted to it”. The advantages of Galbraith’s suggestion commended themselves; a native population of about five hundred, permanent water, a suitable passage for shipping, and plentiful food resources.

### **The culmination of the 1902 expeditions: the declaration of a reserve for Aborigines at Mitchell River**

When Gribble’s recommendation that a suitable reserve could be located near the Mitchell reached White in Croydon on 19 June 1902, he had no hesitation in wiring and writing to the Home Secretary on the same day requesting that the application of 7 June incorporating Galbraith’s advice be held until Gribble’s full report was available in writing.<sup>68</sup> By 2 July 1902, White was in a position to make a lengthy report to the Home Secretary and make reference to Gribble’s recommendations. Considering that there had been only three occasions when Gribble had made direct contact with Aborigines his extrapolation from the second encounter seems rather extraordinary. In describing the Mitchell mouth in his plan for the reserve, Gribble commented,

... you will thus take in the Island[s] formed by the mouths of the Mitchell which are *teeming* with blacks. We struck a large camp on one occasion which had just been deserted a few hours... Garraway and I counted 65 lighted fires.<sup>69</sup>

Gribble praised the Mitchell River country as well watered and grassed. It “teems with food” he said, and gave evidence of the good condition of the Aborigines. Wallaby, kangaroo, turkey, geese, ducks, ibis and native companions were “in thousands, while the lagoons abound in other food”. Gribble had not only formed an enthusiastic impression of the general environment but had located a potential mission site only three miles from the coast where there would “be ample water and ground for

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<sup>68</sup>White to Home Secretary, 7 June 1902, 02:10299 and previous 02:9740, Director’s Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>69</sup>White to Home Secretary, 2 July 1902, 02:11071, Director’s Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA. The emphasis here is White’s and may reflect emphasis in Gribble’s report.

gardens”. On Gribble’s account the area that White had perused from the coast and counted as “very poor” and without evidence of any significant Aboriginal population was revealed to be a veritable Garden of Eden simply awaiting the enlightening power of the missionary presence. Gribble continued in praise of his favoured mission site:

Here the Mission will be away from white neighbours now or in the future for the Islands or Delta will never be used by whites and the blacks are practically untouched by whites at present. Rice and vegetables could be grown.<sup>70</sup>

In his enthusiasm to confirm that he had found a suitable site for a mission, Gribble had read into what he had seen all the attributes considered necessary for such a site.

The position outlined by Gribble was one that Sub-Inspector Galbraith of the Normanton police was prepared to confirm and to venture his estimate that an Aboriginal population in excess of 2,000 existed in the area between the Nassau and the Mitchell. This estimate placed Gribble’s proposed reserve area as four times more populous than the one he himself had advocated to the south, between the Nassau and Staaten rivers. Galbraith’s only proviso was that the mission station itself should be much further inland than the site indicated by Gribble on account of the likelihood of flooding, a concern that had occurred to White as well. Galbraith was prepared to concede the whole of the country from the Staaten north to the Mitchell as a reserve, an area that even White thought a little too ambitious.<sup>71</sup>

Recognising the pragmatic value of having all available information at hand, White had taken the opportunity of investigating the land tenure on and around the proposed mission reserve. To his surprise he found that the local land agent reported the maps showing leases were wildly inaccurate with some land shown on the maps as fronting the Nassau being in fact much further to the north and closer instead to the Mitchell. He was left with the uncertainty of the potential for conflict that might exist over grazing interests and the proclamation of the reserve. It would be “very disastrous [sic] for the mission to begin with disputes with the neighbouring cattle owners”, White asserted. He feared that any delay in proclaiming the reserve could result in “serious

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<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*



trouble with the blacks as they are very numerous and wild, and if all their hunting and feeding grounds are occupied by cattle they will be driven by hunger to reprisals”.<sup>72</sup> In this one letter to the Home Secretary, White had moved away from his starting point of reporting the confident enthusiasm of Gribble to the more sobering reality that, despite his fervent hopes for an isolated place free from the effects of whites, the people of the Mitchell River were acquainted with the whiteman and threatened with his destructive impact on their society.

White had approached the whole issue of existing white control of the lower Mitchell with far more realism than Gribble had shown. Recognising that any opposition from local landholders would be destructive to the success of the mission, he had taken the trouble to consult with Bowman of *Rutland Plains*. Bowman already exercised influence northwards to the Mitchell and the site proposed by Gribble at Trubanaman was relatively close to the *Rutland Plains* homestead. Bowman told White that a very large reserve was necessary and considered a reserve “10 miles square” as “utterly inadequate”.<sup>73</sup> He obviously saw the advantage of a reserve large enough to contain the district’s Aborigines since there were many in the vicinity of his station who were not yet “let in”. A reserve would provide a humane solution to the pastoralist’s “Aboriginal problems”.

By 22 August 1902 the Lands Department agreed to reserve the land requested by the Bishop except for that held under lease or licence.<sup>74</sup> White had been concerned to have the reserve land gazetted before he finalised plans to apply Church resources to the project and showed frustration at the slow passage of the gazettal through the government bureaucracy.<sup>75</sup> The *Government Gazette* of 10 January 1903 contained the advice White had hoped for, of the gazettal of a “Reserve for Aborigines, Mitchell

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<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>White to Home Secretary, 5 July 1902, 02:11073, Director’s Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>74</sup>Scott to Home Secretary, 22 August 1902, 02:13251, Director’s Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>75</sup>White to Home Secretary, 4 December 1902, 02:18888, Director’s Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

River, about 700 square miles in the County of Dunbar”. In practical terms this merely gave the approval for the next stage of planning to proceed on the part of the missionaries and was a step further towards their realising the government support Foxton had spoken of with White.

Despite earlier advice that White was to be included as a trustee of the new reserve, his name was omitted and the names of Foxton, Parry-Okeden and Roth gazetted as trustees.<sup>76</sup> This reflected a more cautious embrace of the missionary cause than Roth had been working towards and a determination to maintain total government control over the statutory basis of the reserve. Even to that point considerable government resources had been expended with no return. White’s obsession with detail and formal approval contrasted ironically to the way in which the pastoral frontier had spread to the Mitchell. It also meant that the Aborigines of the lower Mitchell, whom he desired to help, had their exposure to the excesses of frontier violence prolonged.

The decision to exempt land already leased for pastoral use from the reserve raised new difficulties for White who considered that the presence of lease O.L. 232 on the reserve would “largely destroy its usefulness as the object of the Reserve is to isolate the aboriginals”.<sup>77</sup> White received surprising support for his apprehensions about the utility of a reserve which totally enclosed an existing grazing lease from the press in Brisbane. It was pointed out that the income the Government derived from the occupation license he most objected to was only £18 a year. The *Brisbane Courier* was prepared to go further and do away with *Rutland Plains* as well in its call for all occupation licenses on the reserve to be cancelled, citing that this would only represent a loss of £98 10s in revenue to the government coffers. “If that is done”, the *Courier* declared, “it will not only increase the area declared sacred to the blacks, but will render the task of preserving them from undesirable contact with whites an easier one, and do appreciable ill to no one”.<sup>78</sup> White could not have agreed more. Some important strands

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<sup>76</sup>*Government Gazette*, 14 February 1903.

<sup>77</sup>White to Home Secretary, 12 February 1903, 03:02314, Director’s Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>78</sup>*Brisbane Courier*, 7 March 1903.

of public opinion apparently accepted that the doomed race theory could be proved invalid if Aborigines were segregated and entrusted to missionaries.

The land which posed most problems for White in his scheme to isolate the Aborigines from the influence of non-missionary whites was in reality marginal to the concerns of the established pastoralists. Arthur Underwood's *Bosworth*, with an area of 186 square kilometres, had been applied for on 26 November 1900.<sup>79</sup> Underwood, a successful cattleman of *Midlothian* near Normanton, had a small herd in this remote country between Magnificent Creek and the Mitchell. Cattle had been depastured there in the drought which had afflicted the Peninsula cattle country at the turn of the century, more as an emergency measure than a serious attempt to settle the Mitchell country. When it came time to abandon *Bosworth* in 1903, only one hundred "stragglers" were found on the entire run.<sup>80</sup> An adjacent block held by Bowman was equally peripheral to the enterprise at *Rutland Plains* and could be readily conceded to the reserve as an act of goodwill that would help, in no small way, to secure continuity of tenure to the main *Rutland* blocks by moving the reserve's southern boundary from a line made by the Nassau and Scrutton rivers to *Rutland's* northern boundary.<sup>81</sup>

The laborious way in which White had negotiated for the gazettal of the reserve and the importance he had placed on the resumption of the runs within its boundaries witnessed to White's methodical character. He seems to have been absolutely convinced of the importance of ensuring every possible avenue of negotiation had been completed with Government and the local pastoralists as the first priority in establishing a mission. That he could feel confident of the value of these outcomes without any significant contact with local Aborigines or negotiation with them about a missionary incursion on

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<sup>79</sup>Entry for O.L. 232 in Register of applications made for licenses to occupy land under Part V of the Land Act 1897, in the Land Agent's district centred on Normanton. QSA.

<sup>80</sup>*Croydon Mining News*, 14 November 1903.

<sup>81</sup>Phillips to Under Secretary for Public Lands, 28 June 1893, 93:11342; Government Gazette, 1 July 1893, 93:23906; McIntyre to Lands Office, 12 July 1902, 02:20687; Lands Department Inwards Correspondence, LAN S173, QSA. Donald McIntyre's ambitious plan to obtain all of the vacant coastal land between Normanton and the Mitchell had been proposed at various times between 1893 and 1902 yet seems to have been of no serious issue when the reserve was being discussed and its boundary decided. McIntyre, of *Dalgonally* station, had hoped to obtain a vast tract of land, at a cheaper rent than the government was prepared to allow, to provide cattle for his Meatworks in Normanton.

to their land demonstrates his perception of Aborigines as objects, not even subjects, in the missionary enterprise.

### **White's 1903 expedition with Galbraith's police patrol**

When it came time for White to make his second visit to the Mitchell River in July 1903, he was in a much better position to know exactly what shape the reserve would finally take. White's 1903 visit provided him with opportunities to mix with Aborigines in a way that had not been possible in 1902. He now accepted Roth's opinion that it was necessary to carry arms;<sup>82</sup> he conceded, "to be unarmed was simply to invite attack".<sup>83</sup> He was now even keen to reassure his cousin in England that he and his party "were of course well armed".<sup>84</sup> His "adventures on the Mitchell" in 1903 gave him an exposure, in a way that had not been possible the previous year, to the Aborigines amongst whom he sought to establish a mission. This experience led him to describe the Mitchell River Aborigines as, "quite wild, wear no clothing whatever and speak no English". From dealing with Aborigines as abstract entities in his negotiations of the previous year, he had shifted in his opinions to share the conventional wisdom of Europeans on the frontier whose contact with Aborigines was prejudiced by suspicion, contempt and fear.

His pragmatism and acceptance of conventional attitudes left him without any concern that travelling in the company of the police would influence relationships with the Aborigines of the Mitchell, who in the previous year strenuously avoided Gribble on that basis. Even though he had questioned the *de facto* mastery of the pastoralists over Aborigines, he did not question the *de jure* rule of the police and the government protectors. At times the latter could be held no less responsible for the plight of Aborigines than the former. White was not keen to pursue any links between the law and its agents and the suffering of the Aborigines, which, as a missionary, he was keen

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<sup>82</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Home Department, (telegram), 1 May 1902, 02:06763, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>83</sup>White, *Thirty Years*, p.111.

<sup>84</sup>White to Martelle, 26 July 1903, Gilbert White Papers, ABM.

to ameliorate. Against the existing state of affairs he was eager to obtain a transfer to the mission of control in whichever way it was exercised, but principally with the endorsement of government authority. In this way White was a good student of the philosophy of the 1897 *Aborigines' Act* and a willing participant in its embracement of a European solution to the Aboriginal "problem".

Even though Gribble had presented his report from the 1902 exploration as if there was nothing further to decide, White was eager to inspect the reserve in 1903 and to select a site so that a mission station could be established after the wet season of 1904.<sup>85</sup> He had sought formal approval for an expedition to include Roth as well as Galbraith, both of whom were willing to go overland with White from Normanton. He indicated his willingness to bear any expenses "of myself or my party", yet there is no suggestion that this was ever required. Despite the Police Commissioner's concern about the trouble and expense which his department was incurring,<sup>86</sup> the Queensland Government offered its full support. Roth had no hesitation in purchasing nine kilograms of trade tobacco to distribute as largesse on the 1903 expedition to the newly proclaimed reserve.<sup>87</sup>

White left Normanton on 11 July 1903 in a buggy driven by Galbraith and travelled the 260 kilometres to *Rutland Plains* in four days. The local knowledge the Normanton police had acquired through their patrols to the north was a valuable asset. White used the services of one of the trackers as a translator with the Aborigines he met on the Gilbert and Staaten rivers. These first encounters with bush Aborigines on the road north gave an opportunity for White to tell them, through the interpreter, that a reserve had been proclaimed and that a mission would soon be established. To give them a hint of what this meant he doled out gifts of tobacco and handkerchiefs.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Lands Department, (telegram), 03:17242, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>86</sup>Parry-Okeden to Chief Clerk, 9 July 1903, 03:08933, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>87</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Lands Department, 1 August 1903, 03:23839, Chief Protector, A/44681, QSA.

<sup>88</sup>White to Minister for Lands, 31 July 1903, 03:24141, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

Roth who had left Normanton on 8 July 1903 with Frank Bowman arrived at *Rutland Plains* a day before Galbraith and White. His impressions of the Bowmans and the conduct of their affairs with Aborigines at *Rutland* were wholly negative, “I have never regretted anything so much in my life as the fact of my being the guest and accepting the hospitality of these Bowmans”.<sup>89</sup> With this intensity of feeling it must have been a relief for him when White and Galbraith arrived on 16 July. In any case little time was spent at *Rutland*. As soon as all had arrived, the expedition was formed to explore the reserve and immediately departed from *Rutland*. Roth and White were accompanied on their inspection of the reserve by Constable Smith, an Aborigine named Grady and Alick Macdonald, a local European stockman.<sup>90</sup>

The first encounter with Aborigines on the reserve appeared likely to be a repeat of the unsatisfactory encounters Gribble had described the previous year. Some five or six miles north of Magnificent Creek the party came upon a group of women gathering lily roots and seed pods. Their initial response was one of alarm and if it had not been for Macdonald’s reassurances they were certain to have fled before the strangers. Macdonald had lived in the lower Mitchell country for about twenty years according to White and had gained the confidence and trust of the Aborigines.<sup>91</sup> White was prepared to concede that the success the party enjoyed and the friendly relationships they had with the Aborigines on the reserve was due to the good offices of Macdonald. The new found confidence in Macdonald may have been tested when, a few kilometres further past the women, a group of about twenty-five *Kokobera* men armed with spears

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<sup>89</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Lands Department, 1 August 1903, 03:23839, Chief Protector, A/144681, QSA.

<sup>90</sup>Grady is mentioned by name in White’s report to the Minister for Public Lands as “black boy Grady”, but is not mentioned in any way amongst those enumerated by White in the letter to Agnes Martelle.

<sup>91</sup>Macdonald was, in fact, a remarkable survivor of the pastoral frontier, whose association with the mission would not be restricted to his part in White’s explorations. He had discovered the injured Ferguson in March 1894, after his spearing on *Mentana* and attempted to assist him before his death. (*Queenslander*, 5 May 1894, p.821) Macdonald was in charge of *Lochnagar* at the time of its ransacking and burning in May 1896, surviving the Aboriginal attack but losing his “clothes, cooking utensils, a rifle, gun and ammunition, [as well as] £4 in money”, on that occasion. (Hutson to Commissioner of Police, 24 June 1896, 96:07188, Highbury Station, A/41590, QSA.) By 1921 he had taken up residence at Mitchell River Mission and was placed in charge of the dairy cows and the poultry. (Diary entry for 18 July 1921, Mitchell River Mission diaries, 1905-37, vol.9.)

confronted the party by drawing up in a rank across their path.<sup>92</sup> When their concerns were allayed the men fell in with the party as they moved on a little further to Bosworth Creek where gifts were dispensed and White explained through the interpreter the purpose of his visit as he had done at the Gilbert and the Staaten on the way north.

When peace had been made at the camp on the Bosworth, the explorations continued past the deserted *Bosworth* station then northwards before making a course to the west and to the coast. The anticipated rendezvous between the ground party and the *Melbidir* took place off Topsy or Trubanaman Creek on 21 July. White embarked for the sea voyage to Burketown and the remainder of the ground party were left to return overland to Normanton. White's departure brought another occasion to dispense gifts to the Aborigines who had come to see the strangers, a presentation which he thought was received to the "great satisfaction" of the Aborigines.<sup>93</sup>

Before sailing for Burketown the master of the *Melbidir* took the opportunity of making soundings of the main Mitchell mouth which had received only a cursory inspection on the way down from Thursday Island. White took this chance and travelled up the river in a dinghy with two of the crew to explore the shallow reaches of the Mitchell and the land around it. He had earlier observed the Aboriginal custom in this part of the Peninsula of crossing rivers with the aid of a floating log and came upon a site on the Mitchell where about a dozen of these logs remained. He decided to take one as a specimen for Roth and left beads and tobacco in the place of the log.<sup>94</sup> It would not have occurred to White to contemplate the futility of this exchange; beads and tobacco, however desired as a trade item, were a poor substitute for those who of necessity crossed these crocodile filled rivers in their pursuit of the food resources of this delta area.

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<sup>92</sup>White refers to them as *Gwinni* which reads as a version of *Gunani*, a cognate of *Kokobera*. William J. Oates and Lynette F. Oates, *A revised linguistic survey of Australia*, Canberra, 1970, pp.192-94 and Norman B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (Berkeley, 1974), p.177.

<sup>93</sup>White to Minister for Lands, 31 July 1903, 03:24141, Director's Inwards Correspondence relating to Mitchell River, DFSAIA.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

At the conclusion of the trip White expressed his profound gratitude for the kindness he had received from all concerned and his great pleasure with the reserve which he counted “in every way suitable to its purpose”. The ground inspection had vindicated, in White’s mind, the campaign for the incorporation of the Occupation Licences 350 and 232 into the reserve proper. Without the termination of these leases he was now sure that the reserve would have been almost useless since it was here that the best sites of permanent water were to be found, along with the timber and game that went with them. The remaining pressing concern which had become evident on the ground was for fencing to keep neighbouring cattle out of the reserve, not to exclude cattle for their own sake but to deprive the outsiders of any opportunity or excuse to enter the Aboriginal reserve. Even this itself was a strategy to deny any opportunity for “the most fruitful source of all trouble”, which White counted to come from these same outsiders, “interfering with the native women”.<sup>95</sup>

Roth compiled a report, on the eve of his departure from Queensland in 1906, in which he detailed abuses to Aborigines in the vicinity of the Mitchell River Reserve. This report depended heavily on the experiences he had whilst in White’s company in 1903 at which time he indicated his intention of making a formal documentation of the abuses. Roth’s delay in carrying out his intention indicates the strength of the pastoralist’s position and the difficulty that would be encountered in implementing any agenda for reform since government policy to that point had been mainly concerned to appease the pastoralists. White would have been aware of the details of Roth’s concern on these earlier visits either from personal experience or from Roth himself. This leaves little room for doubt that White’s concern for fencing the reserve was in fact a plan to keep out the neighbours rather than just their cattle, and was based on firm evidence.<sup>96</sup> If White was cautious not to appear critical of the police he was equally concerned not to appear openly critical of the pastoralists, even though their approach to Aborigines was plain. It was White’s belief that the Aboriginal interest was best served by all

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<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup>QSA. HOM/J22: 1907/291.



endeavours to establish the reserve and secure upon it a missionary presence and, if possible, to cultivate the co-operation of those pastoral interests who were in fact the greatest threat to the Aborigines under their influence.

The missionary bishop, in his desire to find a place of isolation where Aborigines might be easily segregated from the influence of whites, had to face the fact that the reserve had been for a long period under the destructive influence of the pastoralists. It was not a place of pristine simplicity in the matter of race relations. As much as White wanted to believe in the propriety of white society, he was confronted by the reality of the excesses of the pastoralists and the police. This put a person like White, as it would the missionaries who would follow him, in a difficult position. Whilst desiring to serve the Aboriginal interest he could not conceive of the Church being in conflict with the established interests of his own society, especially as that same church was so obviously dependent on the goodwill of churchmen who shared all the prejudices against Aborigines that were acted out in the violence of the frontier. If the Aborigines had established that the *munpitch* were ambiguous beings, the Christian *munpitch* were marked with the same ambiguity.

### **Gribble's 1904 "Yarrabah" expedition**

The journeys of missionary exploration in 1902 and 1903 had relied heavily on government patronage; the third journey in 1904 carried out by Gribble was to represent the first major investment of Church resources in the mission project. Compared with Gribble's 1902 police patrol, the 1904 expedition was well equipped, with four months' supply of rations and thirty horses. Gribble headed a party composed mostly of Yarrabah workers in addition to the Reverend Francis Palgrave. Two other white missionaries, Wriede and Richardson, along with the Aborigines James and Angelina Noble, Ernest, Bendigo, Grady and Dinaroo made up the missionary group with the two clergymen. With the closure of the Anglican work at Fraser Island, Gribble was free to deploy his own energies and the mission resources towards the establishment of a mission on the Mitchell. The Fraser Island people themselves, upon their transfer to

Yarrabah, were set to work in preparation for the expedition to the Mitchell.<sup>97</sup> Bendigo was one of Gribble's "success stories".<sup>98</sup> He had been arrested for cattle spearing on *Dunbar* and deported to Fraser Island as a criminal in 1901, and had, along with Grady, become a catechumen under Gribble's tutelage and risen to a position of trust.<sup>99</sup>

Dinaroo, the child whom the police at Frome had given to Gribble in 1902 to raise at Yarrabah, was at last to return to the country from which he had been abducted two years before. Grady had accompanied White and Roth in their exploration of the reserve in 1903 and, along with Bendigo, had originated from the lower Mitchell area. James and Angelina Noble as well as Ernest Bungee<sup>100</sup> were mission Aborigines from Yarrabah who had positions of trust in the operations there. The Yarrabah Mission had developed under Gribble into a family concern not least because it offered a place of sustenance for Gribble's mother and sisters after his father's death which had left the family in straightened circumstances. Consequently Gribble's brother in law, Wriede, was present for this expedition along with the young Yarrabah missionary, A. Richardson.<sup>101</sup>

The size of the party and the effort required to make comfortable progress with freshly broken horses added to the discomfort of the early part of the journey which was over the roughest country. Some supplies were lost at this stage when packs were thrown by the horses and the riders were thrown more than once from their frisky mounts. Palgrave, who had only recently arrived from Canada, was an inexperienced horseman who suffered more often than the others from being unceremoniously thrown from his saddle on the early part of the trip. Before accompanying Gribble on the journey the Reverend Francis Milnes Temple Palgrave M.A. had been a missionary to the Stikine River Indians in British Columbia for five years.<sup>102</sup> He had most immediately

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<sup>97</sup>Gribble, *A Despised Race*, p.59.

<sup>98</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.146.

<sup>99</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Home Department, 1 April 1901, 01:06183, Chief Protector of Aborigines, miscellaneous batch covers received, A/4681, QSA.

<sup>100</sup>Bungee is Gribble's spelling, the alternative Bounghi is given in G.Higgins, *James Noble of Yarrabah*, Lawson, 1981, p.17.

<sup>101</sup>Gribble cites his brother in law as H. Wriede in *Forty Years* and as G. Wriede in *A Despised Race*.

<sup>102</sup>Crockford's Clerical Directory for 1931.

been a curate in an English parish for three years and had come to Australia to explore the possibility of his being called to missionary work amongst the Aborigines in far north Queensland.<sup>103</sup>

Angelina Noble who had become such a leading figure amongst the women at Yarrabah made an early impression as to her usefulness by taking charge of the preparation of breakfast while the men fetched the horses and packed the load.<sup>104</sup> No stranger to the bush Angelina had been brought to Yarrabah as the drover's "boy", Tommy. Abducted at an early age from the Winton district, she had been in the possession of a horse dealer who travelled North Queensland with Angelina under the guise of his "boy", Tommy, in which guise she had been fitted out with the accoutrements of the stockman as well as having her hair closely cropped to conceal her feminine identity.<sup>105</sup> This deception was not uncommon and practised as a means of concubinage by more than a few of the travelling men of the north, drovers and horse dealers.

The expedition was overtly religious in its character, with a psalm and prayers said corporately before the commencement of the day's journey and with Evensong to conclude the day after the evening meal. This was a stark contrast to the earlier trip Gribble had made over the same country with the police when their norms and mores had set the tone of the journey. Upon calling at a cattle station for a supply of salt beef, Gribble had the opportunity of baptising two small children who otherwise might have gone many years without the ministry of a priest. There was no difference to Gribble between the orientation of prayer in the daily routine and the purpose of the expedition. Once on the Mitchell and amongst the people of the reserve, Gribble was pleased at the interest the tribal Aborigines showed in the morning and evening prayers of the missionary party. He reflected, "our prayers went up daily on their behalf, that in God's

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<sup>103</sup>White, Bishop's Diary, OM.AV/114/1, JOL. A general entry for 1904 comments, "Rev F.M.T. Palgrave M.A. arrived July 26 with a view to offering for aboriginal work. Received general license. Left for Yarrabah on Aug 2nd 1904".

<sup>104</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.137.

<sup>105</sup>Higgins, *op.cit.*, p.16.

own time their eyes might be opened and they might be brought to know and worship God and His Son”.<sup>106</sup>

It was only when the party had travelled some distance to the west of *Gamboola* that they came upon the “wild blacks’ country”.<sup>107</sup> The term “wild blacks” would come in time to be incorporated into the scheme of classification of Aborigines at Mitchell River Mission and was itself a necessary part of the mission ideology which Gribble practised and was intent on spreading. It contained an implied contrast to the pious, mission Aborigines the missionaries found useful. In his account of an encounter with a bush Aborigine who turned out to be the man he had met as a prisoner at Frome in 1902, Gribble recalled the reaction of Dinaroo who had been with him at Yarrabah since that 1902 encounter. When the former prisoner came into the camp with Gribble, Dinaroo was quoted as exclaiming, “Dadda been come with wild blackfellow”. This comment exposed the alienation of the child from his own countrymen and his identification with the missionary as “Dadda”, outcomes of the Europeanising influence of Yarrabah which seemed to have the wry approval of Gribble.

The meeting with the former prisoner who had originally been captured at *Dunbar* was also a reunion for Bendigo who knew him as a kinsman, Bendigo having been removed from *Dunbar* himself two years before.<sup>108</sup> The earlier meeting with Gribble, the presence of Bendigo and the general Aboriginal presence in the missionary party raised such confidence in Bendigo’s countryman that he led the missionaries some considerable distance to a large camp of his people. By reference to other locations that Gribble describes, it is likely that this camp, which he estimated contained about one hundred and fifty people, could have been in the heavily wooded country in the area known as “Too True” where several coastal streams rise in the flood season from the

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<sup>106</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.146.

<sup>107</sup>This is the phrase used in *Forty Years* (1930), by the time *A Despised Race* was published (1933), the account of the same events substituted the phrase “black man’s land”.

<sup>108</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Lands Department, 9 April 1901, 01:06183, Chief Protector, A/44681, QSA. “Removed” here has a technical as well as spatial sense. Under the Act the Protector of Aborigines could exact a legally binding order of removal upon any Aborigine for misdemeanor or misconduct.

Mitchell waters.<sup>109</sup> A large number camped in such an area would also suggest that this was a retreat from the pastoral influence over the open country away from the river. The thick timber and many watercourses provided an adequate barrier against horsemen coming unexpectedly upon the main camp while the river was the mainstay for food at that time of year.

The missionaries were well received at the Aboriginal camp and were entertained with a corroboree until late in the evening. Even though Gribble's party had been invited to this camp, Gribble took it as a propitious sign when as the evening drew to a close a message was received from the Aborigines requesting from Gribble where he would prefer them to camp the night. Gribble valued this deference and thought it "good indeed of these wild people to seek to please us", especially since, as he realised, it was the missionaries who were the intruders. He used the opportunity to point out a place only a hundred yards away from where the dancing and corroboree had taken place as suitable for his hosts to bed down for the night.<sup>110</sup> The apparent acceptance of missionary dominance was agreeable to the scheme of mission control Gribble had in mind for the Mitchell River people.

The presence of Angelina Noble had opened up for the missionaries a whole new domain of interaction and confidence with the women and children. Whilst bush Aborigines had seen Aboriginal men as native police, stockmen or general retainers to whites, it is most unlikely that they would have encountered an Aboriginal woman travelling freely with her husband in a party of whites. The main experience of Aboriginal women with whites was that of rape or abduction into concubinage, with those Aboriginal women on the station precincts mostly detained against their will. Coming as she had through these experiences herself, Angelina would have been well

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<sup>109</sup>Gribble describes the meeting place between Bendigo and his kinsman as north of *Dunbar*, "Bendigo, one of our boys who had originally been taken by the police from a cattle station not far south of where we then were, recognized the man as a fellow tribesman" (*Despised Race*, p.62) and describes a journey from there which took less than two days to reach the old *Bosworth* station (*Forty Years*, pp.143, 144).

<sup>110</sup>By way of contrast the account contained in *A Despised Race* has Gribble initiating the dismissal of the Aborigines, "At last, as we were all very tired, I told Bendigo to tell his countrymen to go away as we wanted sleep. At this much talk ensued around Bendigo. I asked him what the trouble was, and he informed me that his countrymen wanted to know where they could camp. This amused me, so I told them to go a little way up the creek" (p.63).

placed to understand the apprehensions of the Aboriginal women and their fears for the safety of their own children in the presence of whites.

Gribble was surprised as the Aborigines withdrew after the corroboree to hear a voice from amongst the group call out to the missionaries, "Good night; be good".<sup>111</sup> Angelina was able to explain that a woman who had formerly been abducted from the bush and taken to the station had escaped from the whites and returned to her own people. Her child, of European paternity, named Warrie, was much loved by his tribal relations. Soon after Gribble's party left the reserve a party of whites led by the *Dunbar* stockman Dick Day again abducted Warrie and his mother, Lily, along with two other women Maggie and Possum and took them to *Dunbar*.<sup>112</sup> By the time of Gribble's next visit in May 1905, he found Lily at *Dunbar* and with another child of European paternity aged four months in her arms.<sup>113</sup> White, male dominance had exerted pressure on the whole Aboriginal society and had exposed it and its members to a force that seemed to offer only possession or destruction as means of relating to Aborigines.

The very confidence which the presence of missionaries on the reserve induced may have made the Aborigines less cautious for a while afterwards and made events such as these abductions the more easily carried out. There is little doubt that Gribble's party would have gone to considerable lengths to explain the concept of a reserve to the Aborigines they encountered, much in the way that White had done in the previous year. There is also every reason to believe that the possibility of living in safety free from the depredations of the pastoralists, under the apparently benevolent patronage of the missionaries, was enthusiastically taken up by the Aborigines themselves who had first hand experience of the pressure that white pastoral occupation had placed them under. Protector Old of Normanton had written in January 1904 of the change in attitudes that had arisen amongst the Normanton Aborigines after a Normanton Aboriginal named

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<sup>111</sup>Gribble, *A Despised Race*, p.63.

<sup>112</sup>The death of Richard Day in Normanton on 23 June 1905 was reported in the *North Queensland Register*, 26 June 1905 as follows; "Richard Day, for twelve years head stockman at Dunbar Station, died this morning. He left a will in favour of the local [Normanton] hospital, which is still without a doctor".

<sup>113</sup>QSA Home Secretary, HOM/J22, 1907:291.

Charley had accompanied a group of “half-caste” children upon their removal to Mapoon. On his return to Normanton, Charley was full of praise for the conditions under which the children were kept, his favourable impression spreading amongst the people of the Normanton area to an extent that many of their fears were allayed. Old considered that many of the fears had been fostered by whites in their efforts to keep control over the Aboriginal population.<sup>114</sup>

Old was positive too that the mission station would extend the government’s protection net to the Mitchell. He hoped that the presence of a mission station would deter the sort of abuse that occurred to Warrie, Lily, Maggie and Possum late in 1904. Old described the pattern by now familiar to the Mitchell River people, “some white men, with black boys under them... rounding up small mobs of wild natives, and despoiling their women”. In Old’s assessment the practice of rape was so common and Aboriginal women so resigned to their fate that, “if a white man meets a wild gin the first thing she will do is to throw herself on her back”.<sup>115</sup>

The main base on the reserve for the missionaries was at a lagoon called Yeremundo where they stayed for several weeks and where two significant events to the missionaries occurred. The first was the baptism of Bendigo and Grady in the Yeremundo lagoon. At a point where the lagoon formed a narrow body of water the reserve Aborigines, numbering about two hundred, and the two catechumens lined up to be faced on the other side by the seven Christians comprising four whites and three Aborigines. As Palgrave and Gribble entered the water Bendigo and Grady did likewise from the opposite bank and, upon meeting in the middle, were baptised in the name of the triune God, with Bendigo emerging with the Christian name Peter and Grady with the name John.

The second event of significance was the construction of a log hut, built with walls of saplings and thatched with grass. The construction of a hut was meant as a sign of the missionaries’ intention to return permanently. This intention was explained and

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<sup>114</sup>04:226, Chief Protector, A/44680, QSA.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

the time of twelve months, twelve moons, was communicated to the local *Kokobera* people amongst whom the efforts of the next year would focus. The camp at Yeremundo seems to have maintained the interest of the Aborigines for the period of the missionaries' residence there. Dancing and singing ensued each night and many people presented themselves to have their ulcers and sore attended to; even a broken leg was amongst the medical conditions treated at Yeremundo.<sup>116</sup>

When it came time to leave Yeremundo on account of the proximity of the wet season Gribble took the opportunity of exploring the south of the reserve which he had visited in 1902. It was there, he understood from local Aborigines, a better place for a mission site could be found. The journey to Trubanaman took two days, as much due to the huge crowd of Aborigines who accompanied the missionaries as to the distance involved. Gribble estimated that the number accompanying the party to Trubanaman reached as high as six hundred, a testimony to the confident relationship that had been so quickly established.<sup>117</sup> Such a large number of people could be accounted for by the coincidence of Gribble's visit with the gathering of people for ceremony. Gribble had earlier received information from the station Aborigines at *Rutland Plains* that Aborigines from the south were intent upon killing him and his party.<sup>118</sup> This threat would be consistent with the likelihood of partial information about the presence of whites on the reserve reaching the southern people who, if aware that large numbers of Aborigines would be present on the reserve for ceremony would have the confidence of overwhelming numbers to make good any threat to intruders. Certainly the *Yiral* initiation ceremonies drew people from well to the south of the reserve and had important sacred sites in close proximity to the Yeremundo camp. Gribble recorded a song which was sung continuously by his hosts who did not know its meaning since it had been received from Aborigines far to the north, which possibly suggests some ceremonial element to the words since ceremonies often ranged across many language

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<sup>116</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.146.

<sup>117</sup>Gribble, *A Despised Race*, p.64.

<sup>118</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.145.



groups and had constituent parts that would need to be rehearsed and sung in a foreign language by the custodians of the ceremony.<sup>119</sup>

In this pre-wet-season period, which the *Kuuk Thaayorre* people a little to the north of the Mitchell refer to as *Raak Paapath* or “sun-hot time”, the food resources in coastal areas as well as available water were much depleted.<sup>120</sup> This led the coastal people to move further inland and to share with inland peoples proper the exploitation of food resources in the swamps and rivers. The fish poisoning rituals took place at this time and provided both cultural interaction between clans and rich food supplies. The opportunity of gathering for ceremony depended on the food supply to sustain large numbers, circumstances which for the *Kuuk Thaayorre* occurred most reliably in the latter period of the wet season. To the south of the Mitchell, in the period before the onset of the wet season, Gribble described abundant sources of native food all of which were well utilised by the crowds accompanying him from Yeremundo to Trubanaman. In all likelihood those crowds continued together after Gribble’s departure for ceremonies such as *Yiral* until the rains signalled for each clan to return to their wet season refuge. So late had Gribble left his departure from the Mitchell that his party encountered thunder storms on the journey east which heralded the onset of the wet season.

Upon reaching Trubanaman, Gribble confirmed the opinion he had made in 1902 that it would provide a suitable site for the mission station. Gilbert White had expressed some doubts about this site on account of its exposure to flooding and perhaps because of its close proximity to the boundaries of the nearby *Rutland Plains* and *Lochnagar* runs. Gribble had gone to the reserve in 1904 with the knowledge that White suggested old *Bosworth* station as the site for the mission. He had only given this the most cursory of inspections before passing on to Yeremundo where the main camp

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<sup>119</sup>Ernest Gribble, *The Problem of the Australian Aboriginal*, Sydney, 1932, p.52, cites the song as “Dinna wopah me yetta morrie burra dabonah aye aye mi mi”. White, *Thirty Years*, pp.134, 135, gives these words from 1905 which he said were “the words of a favourite corroboree song, sung over and over again about two hundred times: Denna Wapomi Yetta Molliburra Dabonai nai ai mai mai. I cannot discover that they have any meaning”.

<sup>120</sup>John Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, PhD thesis, James Cook University, 1984, p.68.

was made. For Gribble and for the Aborigines of the reserve the close proximity of the *Rutland Plains* homestead to *Bosworth* made it too open to the entry of unwanted whites and had supply routes too dependent on the patronage of the neighbouring pastoralists. In comparison Trubanaman had relatively easy access to the Gulf and supply by boat and was over twenty-five kilometres distant from the *Rutland* homestead. The presence of the southern Aborigines, probably *Kokoberen* or even *Kurtjar* from the Smithburne River, who had swelled the numbers on the reserve may also have convinced Gribble that a mission site on the southern coastal edge of the reserve would allow the future mission to exercise an influence southwards as well as northwards to the Mitchell and its delta islands. A large latin cross carved on an ironwood tree confirmed Gribble's choice of Trubanaman as the site for permanent missionary activity the following year. After two days there, the missionary party turned their horses east for the journey back to Yarrabah.

### **Gribble and White's founding expedition of 1905**

When it came time to prepare for the expedition to found the mission station at Mitchell River, a great deal more was known about what to expect than had been the case on any of the four preceding journeys. The reserve had been proclaimed and its borders and difficulties with problematic pastoral leases had been resolved. The site had been identified by Gribble, was readily accessible by sea and appeared to have all the desired attributes. The lack of any apparent opposition by Aborigines to the missionary incursion on to their land suggested that good prospects lay ahead for the missionary scheme of exercising influence in both directions along the coast.

Even the overland route was familiar to an extent that Gribble could find alternatives to the most difficult sections encountered on earlier trips. White who had started from Port Douglas met with Gribble at Northedge Railway Station on 10 May 1905 to form an expeditionary party of nine people and thirty-one horses. An arrangement had been made to meet Inspector Galbraith at Yeremundo on 25 May but,

as in 1902, the journey to the west coast took longer than planned and Yeremundo was not reached until 30 May by which time Galbraith had gone.

The Yarrabah contingent comprised Gribble, John Grady, James Noble, Peter Bendigo, Ernest Bungee and the three permanent European staff of the new mission: Millar, Williams and Field. John Grady was making his third visit to the Mitchell in connection with the founding of the mission along with James Noble, Ernest Bungee and Peter Bendigo who had each been on one of the previous expeditions.

Before leaving the established cattle runs on the upper Mitchell, Gribble had sent Bendigo and Grady to make enquiries amongst station Aborigines as to the situation amongst the people whose country they were soon to enter. Their efforts were cut short by Scotty, one of two white stockmen on the property who ordered them off at the point of a revolver. Both Bendigo and Grady were justifiably frightened by this treatment and to investigate these actions White and Gribble themselves rode to the station the following day to confront Scotty and his mate. The interchange ended with a warning to the missionaries that if they were to proceed down river they would soon be “as full of spears as a pin-cushion is of pins”.<sup>121</sup>

Despite Scotty’s warning the rest of the journey continued without the dire events he had forecast and upon their arrival at Yeremundo the missionaries were encouraged to find the hut from the previous year in good order and the grass kept short around it. Gribble, Grady and White went to declare their presence on the reserve. Upon their return to Yeremundo they were greeted by the Koko Widdee group White had met in 1903.<sup>122</sup> This group of fifty men and youths contained some old women and young children but was noticeable by the absence of young women. White concluded that this was due to the young women being taken to the stations, which, on the evidence he had previously collected, was likely. White observed ironically, “With the whites one sees

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<sup>121</sup>Gribble, *A Despised Race*, pp.68, 69.

<sup>122</sup>The name “Koko Widdee” is used as cited by White yet seems anomalous to modern Aborigines. The name appears constructed from the *Kokobera* words for “speech” and “nothing” and suggests that White or one of his station informants confused a response from these *Kokobera* speakers indicating that they couldn’t understand English, perhaps by using a phrase like “Koko wutiy nam”, with a name for a language which for the *Kokobera* would consistently start with Koko or “speech”.

almost always young aboriginal women, hardly any old. Here is one cause of the disappearance of the race”.<sup>123</sup>

On the reserve John Grady was the principal interpreter since Peter Bendigo was apparently unfamiliar with the *Kokobera* and *Yir Thangedl* languages of the reserve people. There is a suggestion that James Noble had some knowledge of the general linguistic pattern of the Mitchell River area through his association with other Yarrabah Aborigines originally from the Mitchell. His knowledge appears to have been of a very general nature though, perhaps serving more to establish his credentials for trust amongst these people than to further clear communication.<sup>124</sup> On 1 June, the camp at Yanda Swamp provided a further opportunity for Gribble to be convinced that his approach was on the right track when about sixty Aboriginal men and their associated women and children arrived at the camp during the day. As the missionaries sat down to commence their service of Evensong, the old “King” of these people, as White termed him, walked over and seated himself at the side of the missionaries facing his own people. With his confidence boosted by this apparent interest Gribble delivered his “good blackfellow” speech as he set out the missionaries’ agenda.<sup>125</sup>

Gribble’s points were plain. He expressed the thanks of the Bishop for the way in which the hut at Yeremundo had been kept in good order, and reminded the Aborigines that the missionaries had kept their word by returning as they had promised. He expressed pleasure that there had been no cattle spearing since the last visit and was no doubt inwardly pleased that there had been no reprisal raids and killing by whites in that period as well. After these affirmations Gribble declared the agenda for the future, “We are here to teach you about God the Father, Who made you and the grass and the trees and the women too. We do not want to make you like white men, but good

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<sup>123</sup>White, *Thirty Years*, p.123.

<sup>124</sup>R. Hinxman, The Reverend and Mrs James Noble, pioneer missionaries in Northern Australia, typescript, no date. Hinxman indicates that Claude Connolly, who had come to Yarrabah before James Noble and been an associate of both Noble and Gribble from their days of droving in the Scone region of New South Wales, was the source of Nobles’ understanding of the language and also the means of his acceptance into the kinship system of the Mitchell region.

<sup>125</sup>White, *op.cit.*, p.124.

blackfellow; still walk about, still catch possum and wallaby, still make good corroboree, but not kill cattle, not steal, not fight other blackfellow, not hit wife on head with waddy, and wife too she not talk-talk to husband”.<sup>126</sup>

With this declaration of the theological and social agendas of the mission, it remained to explain the significance of the reserve boundaries and the paternalist contract that they would be secure within the reserve boundaries “while they behaved well”. This code, which much appealed to White, may have had some appeal to the Aboriginal audience who were certainly unused to whites displaying any concern for them.

Trubanaman was reached the next day and, by 3 June, “permanent” tents had been erected on what was planned to become the mission enclosure. A large tent fly was erected in the middle of this area to serve as a church and, with these flimsy structures, the site for the mission was claimed at Trubanaman. An arrangement had been made for the cutter *Minnie* to bring supplies to the mission on 8 June, an arrangement which seemed most necessary to White on 5 June when he commented, “I hope that the stores will arrive punctually, as we are very near the end of our provisions”.<sup>127</sup>

The *Minnie* did not arrive as planned and an anxious watch was maintained day and night on the beach at South Mitchell from 7 June until 4 July when the *Melbidir* appeared off the shore. White and Gribble were anxious about the shortage of supplies and took turns, with the other missionaries, at keeping the watch, usually in pairs. Not only did the failure of the *Minnie's* arrival cause a shortage of food, it limited the extent to which the industrial approach of the mission could be initiated.

By 6 June the missionaries had purchased, by exchange for hooks, lines, tobacco and pipes and other trade items, considerable numbers of native artifacts. Gribble found that reserve people regularly travelled to Normanton and Croydon in search of tobacco, and concluded that some control over their supply, and guarantee of their availability,

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<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.* White has evidently tried to render this account in a form of Aboriginal English perhaps of the form used by Gribble in addressing Grady the interpreter. “Blackfellow” is apparently used as a collective noun.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p.126.

would make the isolation of the Aborigines on the reserve easier to enforce. This isolation also was desirable for reasons of health, particularly since venereal disease occurred in much higher incidence amongst the reserve women who habitually visited the towns. Of the twelve women Gribble met who regularly travelled south, eight were in what he described as a “pitiful condition from disease”.<sup>128</sup> The dispensary which Gribble and Williams operated at Trubanaman was well patronised, with up to twenty people a day receiving treatment of some form or other, indicating either the attraction of such a novelty or the actual high occurrence of health problems which were amenable to European medicine.

The failure of the *Minnie* to arrive had put the missionaries in a desperate situation and, on three occasions, they had to send to *Rutland Plains* for flour. The year before Gribble had established that Mrs Bowman had friends in common with him and that she had known his father.<sup>129</sup> It was certainly time for this familiarity to be drawn upon to meet the missionaries’ need.

It was not only the lack of food that disturbed the idyll of the Trubanaman camp. Conflict between Aborigines, which Gribble had warned against, broke out on Trinity Sunday, 18 June, just as the missionaries were finishing breakfast after their celebration of Holy Communion. A man of very tall stature, *Minpulmanth* of the southern *Kokobera*, whom the missionaries called “Urdell the giant” and a *Koko Widdee* man were about to start a conflict over hunting rights which would have soon embroiled the camp in a tribal fight.<sup>130</sup> Only the presence of the missionaries prevented the conflict developing. Indeed it was only the missionary presence which prevented the conflict being resolved. The assertion of rights to land for hunting was a central tenet to the clan based Aboriginal society on the Mitchell, something of which the missionaries seemed unaware. Large gatherings of different clans would inevitably mean that old conflicts

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<sup>128</sup>*North Queensland Register*, 2 January 1905, p.45.

<sup>129</sup>Gribble, *Forty Years*, p.144.

<sup>130</sup>Jerry Mission, informal interview, 13 March 1990, Brisbane. Jerry, a seventy year old *Yir Yoront* man thought *Minpulmanth* was of the fish hawk dreaming. Jerry recalled that he was known by the nickname “bigfoot” or *thameltharpel* in Kokobera.

would need to be brought out into the open to be resolved before mutually accepting relationships could be re-established. The presence of missionaries added a new and complicating dimension to this process.

Only a few days later White was encouraged by the unexpected friendliness of *Kokominjen* visitors who approached his camp when on watch duty with Grady at South Mitchell. He had formed an impression that these people of the Mitchell delta were particularly fierce and unfamiliar with whites and this was the first occasion he had of meeting eighteen of their number first hand.<sup>131</sup> This experience gave him great satisfaction and he was only too willing to attribute this supposed change amongst the *Kokominjen* to the establishment of the mission only three weeks earlier. "It is pleasing to think that the Mission has already rendered it possible for a single white man to camp in safety among these wild people".<sup>132</sup>

It is not surprising that White felt satisfaction at the ease with which he could travel about in the reserve and amongst its people. Negotiations to secure the reserve had always assumed the missionary cause was the moral conscience of the society at large. With these negotiations complete, it seemed that White was, in one respect, simply coming to possess lands to which he was the moral if not rightful heir. There seems to have been little conception on the part of the missionaries or government that the Aborigines of the land would desire to exert any proprietary rights over what was now the reserve. White authorities dealt with them more like tenants on some feudal estate, roughly treated in the past by uncaring Europeans, but now in their response to the missionaries, demonstrating gratitude in receiving a new and benevolent master.

Gradually the missionaries imposed their authority over the Aborigines whose land they had appropriated. In what White referred to as "our first act of discipline", the child Mengadolin was formally discharged from his place in the mission for an act of petty theft.<sup>133</sup> His position of privilege as one of the four schoolboys undertaking

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<sup>131</sup>White to Martelle, 24 June 1905, Gilbert White Papers, ABM. Here White refers to these *Kokominjen* visitors collectively as "the very primitive savage".

<sup>132</sup>White, *Thirty Years*, p.135.

<sup>133</sup>White, *Thirty Years*, p.135.

alphabet lessons with Williams was contingent upon the missionaries' interpretation of "good behaviour". Coming from a culture where plenitude existed for sharing, Mengadolin was being taught the rule of private ownership, much loved by the Europeans, as much as he was their alphabet.

Gribble had no hesitation in asserting his authority over the Aborigines when the problem arose as to how to unload the stores from the supply boat upon its eventual arrival. He "pressed all the blacks, about two hundred, into our service", White observed. The stores and building supplies were carried back to Trubanaman upon the heads of the Aborigines.<sup>134</sup> If Millar, Williams and Field had any reason to doubt the strategies at Yarrabah, they had before them an object lesson of the Gribble style, with its combination of pragmatism and muscular Christianity. Upon Gribble's departure with James Noble and Ernest Bungee, it would be left to them and the two Aboriginal Christians, Bendigo and Grady, to work out their way of translating the Yarrabah principles to the mission at Trubanaman. The establishment of missionary hegemony had begun.

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<sup>134</sup>Newspaper clipping in MSS 4503, Add on 1822, Box G15 - 20/9, ML.



## Chapter Five

### The Promise of Protection, 1905 to 1924

Gribble, in his Yanda Swamp speech of 1 June 1905, set down the missionary agenda in such a way that Bishop Gilbert White was, “lost in admiration of the skill of the address”.

Thursday, June 1. After breakfast talked through Grady to a number of natives, and tried to explain the pictures on a Church almanack [sic]. All seemed very pleased to see Mr. Gribble back. Started about 10.30, and at 1.30 reached Yanda Swamp, where we camped. About forty natives accompanied us, and many more arrived in the course of the day. After tea we went to the camp for Evensong. It was quite dark, but as there was no wind we carried a couple of candles, which dimly outlined about sixty blacks [sic] seated in a half-circle, with the women and children behind.

We sat down in front with Grady as interpreter, while the old king gravely walked over and seated himself at our side. We sang “O God our help in ages past”, the blacks preserving complete silence until the conclusion of our short service, the meaning of which was first explained. Then Mr. Gribble, through Grady, gave a most practical address, easy to understand and interpret, something in this style:

“First the Bishop says thank you that you looked after the house and kept it in good order. The Missionaries have kept their word. They said they would be back in six moons, and they are here. We very glad to hear you have not speared any cattle since our last visit. (Grins of conscious virtue on the part of the audience.) We are here to teach you about God the Father, Who made you and the grass and the trees and the women too. We do not want to make you like white men, but good blackfellows; still walk about, still catch possum and wallaby, still make good corroboree, but not kill cattle, not steal, not fight other blackfellow, not swear, not hit wife on head with waddy (symptoms of disapproval at this prohibition among the audience), and wife too, she not talk-talk to husband. (Sudden revival of approval in the front rows, and an emphatic click of approval.)” The boundaries of the reserve were explained, and they were warned not to trespass, and to bring their sick to the mission station, and were promised protection while they behaved well. All seemed very simple, but I was lost in admiration of the skill of the address, which very few men could have given. John Grady was in his element, translating with eloquent gesticulations.<sup>1</sup>

Gribble himself did not include this speech in his published account of the Mitchell River expedition. Its significance lies with the eager endorsement it received

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert White, *Mitchell River Aboriginal Mission*, Thursday Island, 1905, pp.5, 6. Another version appears in *Round About the Torres Straits*, London, 1917, p.23, which makes less conscious effort to render the address in an Aboriginal English style. It is substantially the same as the 1905 version but with the addition of the words, “We teach children read and write in school”. An almost identical version of the 1905 text appears in, *Thirty Years in Tropical Australia*, London, 1919, p.124.

from White, the bishop in charge of the mission operations for its first ten years. Gribble, according to White, spoke with such anticipation of Aboriginal compliance with mission authority that he could list traditional activities of hunting, ceremony and economy as amongst those things that Aborigines would be *permitted* to do. Matters that were at the core of Aboriginal life were being considered, and would be treated, as if they were within the realm of missionary control in this new mission life.<sup>2</sup> This view was in accordance with the powers implicit in the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897* through which the behaviour of reserve Aborigines was subject to regulation in most aspects of life. More importantly, it was clearly embedded in the minds of white missionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century, including those who would work at the Mitchell River.

The missionaries' hymn, which heralded the inauguration of this new social order, was both an appeal for divine protection and an affirmation of their belief that Aboriginal life must yield to "civilisation". Perhaps the line of the hymn which spoke of flying "forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day", served as an anthem of their perceived task as agents of this cultural change. These Anglican missionaries, unlike the Lutherans at Hope Valley and Bloomfield, showed no inclination to learn the language of the people they had come to live amongst.<sup>3</sup> If Aboriginal languages were thought of as part of a redundant culture, the effort required to learn them could easily be dismissed as unnecessary. This approach would leave missionised Aborigines, years later, incredulous that they and their forebears could have ever have been asked to commit themselves to such a sacrifice. To the claims by missionaries that Aborigines should "forget your old things", a recent response of one woman was to "... *feel guilty and say 'how can we forget?'*"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Wiffie Currington, *Memoirs*, typescript, 1984, p.37. Describing his period as Superintendent in the 1940s and 1950s he commented, "Each Saturday morning was always a holiday and I would have the parents take their children out and go hunting".

<sup>3</sup>Noel Loos, *Aboriginal European Relations in North Queensland, 1861-1897*, PhD thesis, James Cook University, Townsville, vol.2, p.571.

<sup>4</sup>Alma Wason, taped interview, Kowanyama, 10 March 1988.

In contrast to this missionary agenda, the *munpitch* ideology of the *Kokobera* at least provided them with a way of sharing the same world with the whites but making a distinction between the essential nature of themselves as *pakaper*,<sup>5</sup> the real people, and the whites as *munpitch*. It would allow them to identify cosmologically with whites but maintain an ontological distinction from them. The missionaries belonged to the same world but were different beings, and as such Aboriginal identity would be in Aboriginal control not white control.

It seems remarkable that Gribble could, in good faith, hold that the Aboriginal interests, which he clearly recognised, in land, customary activity and traditional economy might be expected to co-exist with the new order that the mission was inaugurating. His sincerity is not the issue here and his comments are less remarkable when the actual background of Yarrabah is placed behind his words. Gribble's Yarrabah had quickly become the place to which many Aboriginal people from across North Queensland had been relocated, theoretically on the decision of a government protector but practically through Gribble's energetic recruitment.<sup>6</sup> In his mind, the mission on the Mitchell was thus an extension of the work at Yarrabah, an attempt to jump across the frontier and exercise a Christian influence on and humanitarian concern for Aborigines before the social disintegration of frontier life produced the kind of dispossession that Gribble saw amongst Yarrabah's intake of inmates.<sup>7</sup> It was an attempt to "isolate [the

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<sup>5</sup>*Pakaper* literally means "real people" in Kokobera language, the term that the Kokobera applied to themselves and other Aborigines but not to whites.

<sup>6</sup>Gribble made wide use of this fact in advertising Yarrabah's success. His newspaper accounts (no date, but probably written around 1908) of Topsy, the abductee from the Mitchell; May, an abductee brought up in the house of the man who had slaughtered her family; Dick Darkness, an abductee from North Queensland who was taken by a travelling circus to Melbourne and abandoned; and Moreton, the blind former black trooper were part of communicating this picture of Yarrabah as a place of refuge for the cast off and neglected Aborigines of the north. (ABM collection, Mitchell Library, MSS 4503 Add on 1822, Box G15 - 20/9) In 1910 H.G. Iver summarised the situation in a report to ABM, "Some of the Blacks remain on the Station of their own free will, but many of the people have been sent by the police or on the order of the Home Secretary". ("Extracts from Rev. H.G. Iver's Report on Yarrabah Mission", in circular from ABM Aborigines' Committee, 26 November 1910, Chairman of ABM Correspondence, 1891-1913, "ABM and Aborigines", Box 1, Folio 1, ABM Sydney.)

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert White, "Report to the A.B.M.", typescript, 6 October 1928, ABM collection, Mitchell Library MSS 4503, Add on 1822, Guide 1(4). He was quite clear that Mitchell River was part of the wider Church's initiative rather than just a local venture, "I regarded the Mission as an extension of Yarrabah". The Australian Board of Missions concurred, "When we have allowed to Yarrabah the widest sphere of influence, there still remain in the North of Queensland alone some 13,000 natives who cannot possible be reached by it. These are found in the greatest numbers in the well-watered and low-lying plains on the

Aborigines] completely” from white contact “which, even when well meant, is sometimes harmful, and which is more often deliberately selfish than purposely helpful”.<sup>8</sup> These missionary founders unquestioningly considered their own efforts as “purposely helpful” rather than merely “well meant”.

We have already discussed how White seemed to conceive of Aborigines simultaneously as “children of nature” and “degraded humanity”.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps his admiration of the Yanda Swamp speech was due to the way in which Gribble touched upon both concepts and offered hope to the missionary bishop that his mission subjects could become “good blackfellows”. As such they would be enlightened “children of nature”, preserved from whatever degradation the missionary found objectionable. Certainly he extracted the maximum propaganda value from this perspective when he was reviewing the first five years of the Mission for his church support base:

Five years ago everything was as primitive as it could be.... The natives were all primitive savages, very few of them understanding even a few words of English.... The natives were shy and suspicious, given to constant fighting among themselves and to killing the cattle on the neighbouring run, ill treating their wives, dirty, unwashed, and diseased, and full of all kinds of superstitions....<sup>10</sup>

As Gribble’s words at Yanda Swamp had captivated the missionary bishop, so White’s publication of them in his 1919 book, *Thirty Years in Tropical Australia* came at a time when the pioneering missionary efforts initiated at Trubanaman were being recapitulated at the Kowanyama mission site. They were words to reassure the Mission’s supporters that missionary benevolence would destroy nothing good and eradicate only those things that were bad, or bad at least as it was seen through the eyes of white Christians.

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other or Western side of the Peninsula, between the two great rivers, the Mitchell and the Gilbert. Here the natives are still largely untouched by the evils of semi-civilization”. Quoted from *Missionary Notes*, March 1903, in “History of Mitchell River Mission” (typescript, no date). Australian Board of Missions, Needham Library, Box 2D, item entitled “Australian Aborigines - Frank Stevens”.

<sup>8</sup>Gilbert White, 20 January 1905, “Mitchell River Mission” (printed appeal for funds from church supporters), Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, A/58855, Health and Home Affairs Department Batch Files 1936 - 1939, QSA.

<sup>9</sup>Chapter 4, p.101.

<sup>10</sup>Gilbert White, “Trubanaman Mission Station, Mitchell River after five years”, *ABM. Review*, 15 July 1910, pp.85, 86.

It is hard to imagine that the Aborigines who heard the Yanda Swamp speech could do so without this being mediated by the *Munpitch* concept. Here, after all, were *munpitch* who had aligned themselves with the supernatural sphere, promising new knowledge about the maker of all things. They had performed their Evensong ritual in the presence of these *pakaper*, even welcoming the senior *pakaper* man to be seated at their side. The words of the *munpitch* were interpreted by the Aboriginal missionary John Grady.<sup>11</sup> This need to communicate through an intermediary, only emphasised that these *munpitch* were one step further away from the ordinary sphere of *pakaper* life than was this Aboriginal missionary speaking directly to them.

The missionary *munpitch*, so recently arrived and so quick to display their Evensong ceremony, were so confident in their power that they gave new law to the *pakaper*. The *pakaper* were told not to kill cattle, not to steal, not to fight, not to swear and not to trespass; they were offered healing for their sickness and protection from the depredations of other *munpitch*. There seems little doubt that the missionaries were firmly placing themselves within the Aboriginal conceptualisation of *Munpitch*, as much by their words as by their white skin. This conceptualisation recognised that there was a beneficial and knowledge imparting reality to the *munpitch*, and that this was inevitably entwined with the arbitrary, destructive and fearful aspects of this reality. In terms of race relations, the *pakaper* had a sophisticated and historically informed concept that they could apply to their interactions with the missionaries. The mission would be the place where these relations would be further developed and tested. As noted previously, the term *munpitch*, is still used today to refer to Whites.

Gribble named the primary goal of the Mission, “We are here to teach you about God the Father, Who made you and the grass and the trees and the women too”. This

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<sup>11</sup>Grady was under permit and agreement to White in 1903, having been the interpreter for Roth and White’s visit to the reserve area in 1903. (Roth to Under Secretary for Lands, 11 August 1903, A/58783, QSA.) He had been with White to Thursday Island and with Gribble to Yarrabah for training. Presumably he met and married his wife Rhoda at Yarrabah. (Gilbert White, 20 January 1905, “Mitchell River Mission” A/58855, QSA.) Rhoda came from Yarrabah with Chase when he arrived at Trubanaman to take up the superintendentship in October 1905. (Chase to Roth, “Report, Trubanaman Mission 1905”, no date, 06:1000, A/58783, QSA.) Grady died on 10 March 1910 at Trubanaman, “The first pioneer of this Mission to cross the River”. (*ABM. Review*, 20 May 1910, p.48, and Henry Matthews, diary entry for 10 March 1910.)

was to be done within the parameter of Aboriginal identity, “We do not want to make you like white men, but good blackfellow; still walk about, still catch possum and wallaby, still make good corroboree”. Gribble’s secondary goal, “[to make you] good blackfellow” was elaborated in his subsequent statement that the missionaries would seek to regulate inter-group and inter-personal conflict, “not fight other blackfellow” and regulate male/female relationships, “not hit wife on head with waddy, and wife too she not talk-talk to husband”. Any benefit was to be conditional upon the *pakaper* confining themselves to the limits of the reserve and upon their continuing to “behave well”. Irrespective of Gribble’s intentions the *Kokobera* who met the aspiring missionaries must have been concerned about the missionary’s presence but they would have begun weighing up the advantages this brought compared with the concomitant risks.

Protection against pastoralist threat is spoken about in the recollections of modern day Aborigines as a lasting missionary legacy. Modern oral accounts contain frequent reference to the havoc and destruction visited upon the *Kokobera* and their allies by pastoralists, and identify the establishment of the mission as the means by which this period of frontier life was brought to an end.<sup>12</sup> This happened through the development of what White termed the closed boundary policy of the mission. Alongside this development was a related but different emphasis of protection - the protection policies that were used to limit the freedoms and opportunities of Aborigines.

The missionaries were forging their plans for the Mission at a time when the government legislation that provided for areas to be declared as Aboriginal Reserves was still quite new. The *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* had been part of a widespread legislative response throughout the late Colonial and early Federation period to enact laws leading to the segregation of Aborigines from Whites.<sup>13</sup> The Queensland Government had developed an intentional policy of using

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<sup>12</sup>Walter Greenwool, taped interview, Kowanyama, 23 November 1987. “This mission saved people from getting killed out in the bush from old Bowman... The mission was put up just to save the people”.

<sup>13</sup>*Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from Their Families*, Sydney, 1997, pp.71-2.

church missions which had seen official responses to missionaries change from resentment to approval. From 1885 the Queensland Government had subsidised the operation of missions and had envisaged, in the 1897 Act, that missions would be one of the cornerstones of its Aboriginal policy.<sup>14</sup> Gilbert White had frankly acknowledged and endorsed this approach, even though he recognised that it provided the government with a low cost means of exercising influence amongst Aborigines.<sup>15</sup> He accepted the prevailing belief, clearly enmeshed in government policy, that Aborigines, by virtue of their race, were wards of the state, and thus merely worthy objects of Christian charity.

The Mitchell River area was the sort of locality where the sanctuary and refuge measures of the Act were intended to apply for the benefit of Aboriginal population. At Mitchell River the case for protection from the depredations of pastoralists was not difficult to make. Despite the agitation for police protection during the twenty years prior to the establishment of the Mission, the pastoralists had failed to convince government officials that they were meek victims of Aboriginal aggression.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Gilbert White considered that the Mitchell River Aborigines, before their contact with the missionaries, had regarded Whites as only “apt to flog or shoot them on the very slightest provocation, and often on none at all”.<sup>17</sup>

Walter Roth, the first Northern Protector of Aborigines, emphasised this in his 1906 report when Mitchell River Mission was being established. He stressed the difficulty of,

... successfully fighting people who have powerful interests behind them. For instance, Van Rook, Dunbar, and Stirling Stations are, I understand, under the joint managership of Hutson acting for the Bank of New South Wales.<sup>18</sup>

The district contained white men who had earlier faced the court on the charge of murdering Aboriginal people.<sup>19</sup> Thomas McLean,<sup>20</sup> the head stockman at *Vanrook*, in

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<sup>14</sup>Noel Loos, *Aboriginal European Relations*, p.530ff.

<sup>15</sup>Gilbert White, *Across Australia*, Thursday Island, 1901, p.32.

<sup>16</sup>William Hutson to Commissioner of Police, 24 June 1896, 96:07188, Highbury Station, A/41590, QSA.

<sup>17</sup>Gilbert White, *Answer! Australia*, Sydney, 1927, p.21.

<sup>18</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Home Secretary's Office, 11 May 1906, 06:907, Chief Protector of Aborigines Correspondence, OF 31, DFSAIA.

<sup>19</sup>Old to Roth, 11 November 1905, 05:412, Chief Protector of Aborigines Correspondence, OF 31, DFSAIA.

1905 had been declared not guilty by the jury in 1894 when he had been charged with killing an Aboriginal man at *Delta* and then burning his remains. Murtagh Sullivan, also associated with *Vanrook*, had been acquitted of killing an Aboriginal man at *Dunbar* in 1895. Sympathetic juries made the task of prosecution almost impossible.<sup>21</sup> Roth was also not confident that the police were to be relied upon when it came to investigating matters of abuse against Aborigines. He even considered Inspector Lamond, the senior officer in the district, unreliable when it came to discharging his duties for the benefit of Aborigines. Roth considered Lamond unsuitable for an inspection tour of *Lochnagar*, *Rutland Plains*, *Stirling*, *Van Rook*, and *Dunbar*, a “piece of work” which would in Roth’s opinion involve “peremptory and drastic action”.<sup>22</sup> By this he presumably meant arrest and court proceedings against pastoralists. Roth was acquainted with these places and circumstances personally, but had either been unwilling or unable to take action himself without the support of the local protector.

The Bowmans of *Rutland Plains* had made a very bad impression on Roth in his brief visit there in July 1903.

I have never regretted anything so much in my life as the fact of my being the guest and accepting the hospitality of these Bowmans. I am preparing a report concerning some aboriginal matters connected with their station.<sup>23</sup>

The humane treatment of mission Aboriginal, Bendigo,<sup>24</sup> by the owners of *Lochnagar* was in such a contrast to what might have been expected that it led the

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<sup>20</sup>McLean had come to the Mission on 10 June 1907 to take Sloper back to the station but was refused. (Mission Diary, 10 June 1907)

<sup>21</sup>Court procedure usually rendered Aboriginal evidence inadmissible. The Aboriginal witnesses in the Normanton murder trials of Jenkins and Seery in 1909 were withdrawn at the judge’s direction when their capacity to “understand the difference between the truth and a lie” was successfully challenged by the defence. The case against them, of murdering Daylight an Aborigine, was dismissed. *North Queensland Register*, 27 September 1909.

<sup>22</sup>Roth to Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, 11 May 1906, 06:907, Chief Protector of Aborigines Correspondence, OF 31, DFSAIA. By June of the same year Roth went further, opposing Lamond’s appointment as Normanton Protector, claiming Lamond’s “utter uselessness” would result in the Aborigines of the north being “shot down mercilessly”. (Roth to Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, 8 June 1906, 06:7233, Home Secretary’s Correspondence, 1907/291, HOM/J22, QSA.) By 1907 Old had been transferred and Lamond confirmed in his position at Normanton. (Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office to Chief Protector of Aborigines, 4 February 1907, 07:667, Home Secretary’s Correspondence, 1907/291, HOM/J22, QSA.)

<sup>23</sup>Dr Roth’s Progress Report: July 1903, QSA, A144681 03-23839. Roth detailed his concerns in a confidential memo to the Under Secretary for Lands, producing corroborated evidence of the Bowmans being involved in abduction of an Aboriginal woman at gunpoint as well as theft of Roth’s trade tobacco when he stayed at *Rutland Plains*. Roth to Under Secretary for Lands, 11 August 1903, A/58783, QSA.



missionary Williams to write to Roth in a very relieved tone, "I am sending this via Lochnagar. They are greatly concerned to know how I am getting on without meat, and have sent a verbal message by Bendigo that I am to send for anything I want. It is very good indeed of them I think, not only this, they took Bendigo in and gave him a jolly good feed. Thank goodness there are some decent people living in the wilds".<sup>25</sup> There were clearly not many if the relationship with Aborigines is used as the measuring stick.

Even though the case was evident enough that Aborigines were being killed at the hands of the pastoralists, it was not one that the missionaries cared to press in public. Realistically, they knew that continued government support would be jeopardised by any active declamation of the pastoralists' conduct.<sup>26</sup> It may be that they were also mindful of the treatment meted out to J.B. Gribble when he had raised such matters in Western Australia in 1896. This had led to the Queensland Government withdrawing their earlier offer of support for Yarrabah when the Colonial Secretary was informed of his activism in Western Australia.<sup>27</sup> They would certainly have been aware of the ethos of the local settlers and may even have been fearful for their own safety.<sup>28</sup>

It was simple enough to promise protection for Aborigines at the Mission but much more difficult to extend this mantle of protection across the whole range of territory that was of interest to the *Kokobera* and to the other Aborigines who had aligned themselves with the Mission. Indeed, quite apart from this difficulty, the very presence of the Mission made it easy for the pastoralists to revenge for old grievances

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<sup>24</sup>Bendigo was an Aboriginal assistant of the Mission who had responsibilities of overseeing work gangs in the early years at Trubanaman. Bendigo had been a member of the overland party which had travelled from Yarrabah and Port Douglas that had included three other Aborigines James Noble, Grady and Ernest as well as Gribble, White, Millar, Field and Williams.

<sup>25</sup>Letter to Roth, October 20th 1905, QSA, HOM/J22 1907/291.

<sup>26</sup>Noel Loos, *Aboriginal European Relations*, vol.2, pp.527, 538. Loos points out that reports of J.B. Gribble's pro-Aboriginal stance, in attempting to expose atrocities in Western Australia, resulted in the Queensland colonial secretary, Horace Tozer, reneging on his 1891 offer of Government financial assistance for the foundation and maintenance of Yarrabah.

<sup>27</sup>Su-Jane Hunt, "The Gribble Affair: A Study in Colonial Politics", Essay included in republished edition of J.B. Gribble, *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land*, Perth, 1987, pp.62-72.

<sup>28</sup>Walter Roth to Under Secretary for Lands, 11 August 1903, A/58783, QSA. Roth was discouraged from confronting the Bowmans of *Rutland Plains* by Inspector Galbraith since, "it only meant more unpleasantness, and that I would of course have to put up my fists with no useful purpose. I took his advice and said nothing". Frontier lawlessness had won the day over these two influential government officers.

against Aborigines who had come to live there. One example of this caused considerable dismay in 1909 as superintendent Henry Matthews lamented,

The peaceful routine of our work was interrupted by a visit from a policeman accompanied by Messrs Simpson and Watham. The constable arrested Cookie for supposed cattle-spearing, which occurred nearly three years ago. Cookie bolted with the handcuffs on, sprang into the lagoon, swam across and got clean away. Chase was made, but they failed to catch him. Several of the new Koko Mindjuno boys [sic] took fright and went away. With the exception of two, all returned tonight. This occurrence has caused a sensation not altogether pleasant.<sup>29</sup>

From early in the Mission's life, runaways from all the neighbouring cattle stations had shown up, seeking refuge at Trubanaman. In August of 1906 four runaways, one from *Rutland Plains* and three from *Waterloo*, presented themselves at the Mission: "Boy named Bony came to Mission Station at 8.00 a.m. having run away from Rutland Plains"<sup>30</sup> and "a boy named Splinter, whom Grady claims a brother, and two others, called at mission this morning, and asked to be taken on. They admitted having run away from a station owned by Wright of Waterloo".<sup>31</sup> The *Kokobera* and their neighbours now had two very distinct *Munpitch* cultures to relate to, and, not surprisingly were confronted with complex challenges as Splinter's relationship with the Mission demonstrated. The *Kokobera* were instantly ready to test the protective capability of these different *Munpitch*, a flattering response since they were obviously in great need of such a refuge.

Familiarity with station life was a mixed blessing for the likes of Splinter whose acquaintance with station whites had left him with an ample vocabulary of the English words the missionaries would rather not have heard. Superintendent Henry Matthews counted this as sufficient reason to refuse Splinter refuge, and important enough to record it officially in the mission diary: "Judging by Splinter's language, he would not be a fit inmate. For that and other reasons declined taking him on".<sup>32</sup> Matthews was also

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<sup>29</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 December 1909, (throughout the thesis entries from the Mitchell River Mission diary will be cited in this way. The diaries are found from OM.AV/13/1-16 under their JOL reference numbers at the Anglican Records and Archives Centre, 373 Ann Street, Brisbane).

<sup>30</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 19 August 1906.

<sup>31</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 28 August 1906.

<sup>32</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 28 August 1906.

showing the *Kokobera* that mission benevolence was arbitrary and dispensed according to factors quite apart from simple humanitarian need, after all. In denying refuge he was committing Splinter to the tender mercies of the pastoralists from whom he had fled.

Questions about the boundary of the Mission had been of concern even before the proclamation of the Reserve and had remained contentious, especially with Bowman of *Rutland Plains*. Bowman was undoubtedly aware of a campaign in the *Brisbane Courier* to revoke the lease of *Rutland Plains* entirely and include it as part of the mission reserve.<sup>33</sup> Even without revocation of the leases for the whole of his actual holding, Bowman was facing the loss of good pasture north to the Mitchell over which his cattle could roam when pasture became scarce. Whilst this land was outside his lease, it was an important resource especially in times of drought, as useful to him as areas properly within his holding. *Rutland* cattle were scattered over the mission reserve and provided potential flashpoints between the mission and their owner.

Williams had needed to have his enthusiasm checked by mission superintendent, E Selwyn Chase, after he had instructed the Aboriginal “King” to drive Bowman’s cattle away from Yeremundo.<sup>34</sup> Chase was keen to discharge his duty of protection and no doubt recognised the danger in which Williams’ instructions would place mission Aborigines. He countermanded William’s order and told the “King” to “leave that to me”.<sup>35</sup> Such official reluctance to forge an alliance between missionaries and Aborigines and to assert effective control over the reserve left the initiative with the pastoralist. In Bowman, the superintendent was confronted by another White who had been “in place” longer than himself, and against whose interests he was unwilling to act directly. Even so, issues about the boundary would remain central to the development of the protection policies of the Mission.

On 24 July 1906, only two months after Williams’ attempt to assert missionary control over the reserve was stifled, Bowman visited the Mission with questions of the

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<sup>33</sup>*Brisbane Courier*, 7 March 1903.

<sup>34</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 12 May 1906.

<sup>35</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 13 May 1906.

reserve boundary foremost in his mind. Chase had evidently acted according to the mind of Gilbert White, his superior, who underlined the importance of relations with *Rutland* in his August report, “All the members of the staff have been working hard and a good impression seems to have been made on wild natives and on neighbouring station owners”.<sup>36</sup>

One of the problems was that, with no proper maps of the area, the reserve boundary was capable of highly subjective interpretation.<sup>37</sup> The government was slow to act in providing a clear description of the boundary which would eliminate this sort of confusion, only sending McGowan, the Government Surveyor, to survey the reserve in October 1906, a full four years after the proclamation of the reserve.<sup>38</sup> However, even with this ground for confusion clarified, the actual fact of pastoralist intrusion on to the reserve was unchanged.

Missionary indecision about how pastoralist attacks and abductions could be prevented on the reserve did not seem to diminish the mission’s attraction as a refuge for Aborigines as they had nowhere else to turn to. Given the risk entailed in a journey of more than fifty kilometres, the arrival of a small boy at Trubanaman in 1906 from *Waterloo* suggests widespread confidence in the mission as the bush-living *Kokobera* and *Koko Nar* people had undoubtedly assisted the child in his journey.<sup>39</sup>

If confidence amongst Aborigines had grown, the practice of receiving runaways from stations reached a point where the pastoralists considered their interests sufficiently threatened for them to confront the situation head on. Three runaways from *Vanrook* presented themselves on 7 July 1907, to “claim the protection of the Mission”.<sup>40</sup> They reported that the manager of *Vanrook* had beaten a fourth Aboriginal

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<sup>36</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 7 August 1906.

<sup>37</sup>White had stressed this Roth in April 1906, “The matter of the survey of the southern border is very pressing. The stations wish to push it North up close to the Mission, and as long as it is undecided we cannot tell the natives when they are off their own land, and it is a cause of trouble. I am told that one man destroyed all the weapons of a party of natives on what we believe to be the Reserve”. White to Roth, 16 April 1906, 06:791, Northern Protector of Aborigines Office, miscellaneous subject batches, 1898 - 14 September 1920, A/58909, QSA.

<sup>38</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 2 October 1906.

<sup>39</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 17 November 1906.

<sup>40</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 7 July 1907.

who had then headed for Normanton. This sort of beating was unexceptional, the sort of penalty meted out by the pastoralists for even the most trivial of transgressions.<sup>41</sup> Desertion to the Mission was more serious, and could be expected to attract more severe punishment, since it threatened the pastoralists with the loss of valuable labour and publicly discredited them by exposing their abuse of Aboriginal workers.

Six days later a contingent headed by Campbell of *Vanrook* and including Bowman of *Rutland Plains* as well as Simpson<sup>42</sup> of *Dunbar* arrived at the Mission in search of the runaways. Campbell had gathered his neighbours from the south of the Mission to present a show of pastoralist solidarity against the impact the mission was making on their work force. The presence of Bowman, a Justice of the Peace, conferred a quasi-legal authority upon the group, a legitimisation of the law enforcing character of this posse.<sup>43</sup> It was an effective demonstration of the economic and political power of the pastoralists to the missionaries and to the Aboriginal workers. The confrontation was precisely about the issue that had concerned Roth, the eagerness of the pastoralists to use Aboriginal labour outside of the provisions of the 1897 *Act*. Missionary presence in the area was ineffective in either controlling the pastoralists or in regulating labour relations.

Even though Millar,<sup>44</sup> and subsequently Chase<sup>45</sup> and Matthews,<sup>46</sup> had been gazetted as Superintendents under the *Act*, they had not been appointed Protectors with formal authority to authorise and regulate European use of Aboriginal labour. Roth had apparently considered this but did not proceed with the matter.<sup>47</sup> The missionaries,

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<sup>41</sup>Mission diary entries for 21 July 1916 (Lane), 23 May 1925 (Chapman), 8 July 1927 (Done), 26 April 1931 (Chapman), 7 November 1932 (Chapman), 1 August 1936 (McLeod).

<sup>42</sup>*North Queensland Register*, 9 October 1905. "Thomas Simpson has been appointed manager of Dunbar Station, vice Mr Tonner, deceased". (Tonner had only been manager at *Dunbar* for two years at the time of his death, his appointment having been announced in the *Croydon Mining News*, 13 August 1903.)

<sup>43</sup>Roth to Under Secretary for Lands, 11 August 1903, A/58783, QSA.

<sup>44</sup>Andrew Millar, appointed in Government Gazette, 5 August 1905, p.294.

<sup>45</sup>Edward Selwyn Chase, appointed in Government Gazette, 28 October 1905, p.4.

<sup>46</sup>Henry Matthews, appointed in Government Gazette, 18 August 1906, p.215.

<sup>47</sup>It seems likely, though, that there had been consideration of this happening. Certainly this was the assumption in Chase's letter to Roth (Chase to Roth, 3 November 1905, 05:1559, Chief Protector of Aborigines' Correspondence, DFSAIA, OF 31.) At that time Sergeant James Old of the Normanton Police held the position of Protector. Despite Roth's reservations about other police, he held Old in high regard, considering him to be the right man to undertake the "piece of work" amongst the cattle stations

however, had authority to investigate complaints of offences against the provisions of the *Act* and, with Matthews' appointment as a Justice of the Peace in 1907, the capacity to lay charges against offenders.<sup>48</sup> Matthews was given an additional quasi-formal role in 1907 when Chief Protector Richard Howard suggested that he be issued with a book of labour agreements as a convenience for the pastoralists in the vicinity of the Mission, acting as an unofficial deputy to Inspector James Lamond, the protector in Normanton.<sup>49</sup> The strict provisions of the Act were left untested, perhaps through unfamiliarity with the law or sheer unwillingness to implement them. Consequently, the missionaries' effectiveness in the face of pastoralist abuse seemed to be wholly contingent on the respect shown to them by their pastoralist neighbours. They depended on the co-operation of the pastoralists in offering refuge to Aboriginal people.

When it came to the point of conflict, the missionaries were not accorded the gentlemanly respect they freely conceded to others, as was demonstrated by the actions of the contingent of southern pastoralists. They were humiliated by an exhibition of pastoral dominance which mocked White's glossing over of the earlier troubles with *Rutland*. With no resistance offered to the pastoralists, two of the *Vanrook* runaways were escorted from the Mission, "Sloper went away with Mr Simpson and Brassy with Mr Campbell".<sup>50</sup> The third, Charley, managed to escape again, only to be apprehended the next day when Campbell returned, this time with Newsome as his ally.

The ineffectiveness of the formal apparatus of protection meant that abuses against Aboriginal labour continued to bring a steady stream of runaways and complainants to the Mission. Each succeeding decade witnessed many such incidents,

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towards the Mitchell (Roth to Under Secretary, Home Secretary's Office, 11 May 1906, 06:907, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 31, DFSAIA.) He was undoubtedly unwilling to lose Old, a trusted ally within the police, and perhaps unsure about giving the missionaries too much authority outside their Mission.

<sup>48</sup>Under Secretary to Henry Matthews, 30 January 1907, (Margery Webb's papers) and Gilbert White, diary entry for 9 March 1907.

<sup>49</sup>Howard to Lamond, 3 September 1907, 07:2142, Chief Protector of Aboriginals correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>50</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 July 1907. Sloper had been "admitted" to the Mission on 29 May 1907, and had been sought on two occasions by pastoralists, by Grant on 7 June 1907 and by McLean on 10 June 1907. On each occasion they had been refused. His attempts to move out from their influence may have been the catalyst for the show of force on 13 July 1907.

as well as the arrogant flouting of the law by certain pastoralists. Campbell, by this time manager of *Rutland Plains*, was part of a “night raid” on the Mission’s Angeram outstation in 1916 to apprehend Luke and Lawrence after they had run away from *Rutland*.<sup>51</sup> By 1925 there was at least a police investigation after Carlton Curr of *Inkerman* shot Ben, a mission Aborigine, who had been attempting to take Elsie from the *Inkerman* homestead.<sup>52</sup> The threat of violence that Aborigines were subjected to was brought home to the missionaries in 1927 when Dudley, the *Rutland* cook, armed with an automatic pistol, invaded the mission and held up Done, the chaplain, in his attempt to seize Bullie and take her with him to the station.<sup>53</sup> Curr was accused of attacking Norman with hobble chains and a revolver in 1931.<sup>54</sup> Campbell’s head stockman, Royes, wounded Toby with a rifle shot after a quarrel at the *Rutland* camp in November 1932.<sup>55</sup> Campbell was again involved in an assault in August 1936, this time whilst mustering on *Koolatah*. It was further alleged he threatened to use his revolver.<sup>56</sup> There is no evidence of the effective application of legal sanction against men like Campbell and Curr who were habitual offenders against Aboriginal workers. They were imposing white authority outside the provisions of the law because they realised there was little, if any, likelihood of prosecution or of even a police inquiry.

The ineffectiveness of the law in restraining abuse against Aborigines on the stations does not seem to have spurred the mission to more vigorous representation of these needs, rather it seems to have been the incentive to focus more closely on the things they could hope to control. In the initial years this came down to some restraint of *Rutland Plains* activity on the reserve. Even here the judgements of the missionaries

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<sup>51</sup>Frere Lane, diary entry for 21 July 1916. This incident left Lane, the acting superintendent, feeling guilty that he had been taken in by Campbell and, “made me resolve to write him on the matter warning against a recurrence of such tactics”.

<sup>52</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 23 May 1925.

<sup>53</sup>John Done, diary entry for 8 July 1927. Constable Schultz from Normanton arrived at the Mission to investigate the incident on 16 August 1927. Strangely, Done did not seek to have Dudley prosecuted, telling Schultz that the Mission would be satisfied, “...provided he was warned to keep off [the] mission”.

<sup>54</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 26 April 1931.

<sup>55</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 November 1932.

<sup>56</sup>Alec McLeod, diary entry for 1 August 1936. A closing of ranks by the whites who witnessed the event, Hughes and Barr, contradicted the account given to McLeod by Willie Koolatah. They maintained that Campbell did not have his revolver.

indicate a reluctance to believe that fellow whites could be capable of conduct they themselves thought unacceptable.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, acting superintendent J. De La Perrelle, on the testimony of the probable offenders, doubted the complaints of Aboriginal men when sexual liaisons between white stockmen and Aboriginal women were suggested:

Visit from Mr A. McIntyre of Rutland Plains, Mr McIntyre (Lochnagar) and a Mr O'Shanassy asking permission to muster cattle on reserve. Boys complained of some women being enticed to their camp (musterers). Went early this morning. Two women were there but the white men knew nothing of their presence. Sent them back. Boys "walkabout" today.<sup>58</sup>

The racial ideology of the missionaries led them to strive for a common cause with the white pastoralists even when this interest was unreciprocated or even held in contempt. Thomas Williams, while acting as superintendent, responded to the serious and substantiated allegation that Grady's wife, Rhoda, had been taken from him by a white man at *Rutland* by the only effective means he could, repatriating her to the Mission; his influence outside this was negligible.<sup>59</sup> There is no indication that he contemplated bringing charges of kidnapping, rape or even transgressing the stipulations of section 14 of the 1897 Act against the harbouring of Aboriginal women by whites.

Two *Kokobera* men, Grouchy and Craigie, had been nominated for removal for spearing cattle on *Rutland Plains* in October 1908.<sup>60</sup> Grouchy's removal order to Barambah was executed in January 1910, but Craigie remained at large until April 1910 when he came to the Mission. Matthews, aware that Craigie was under sentence of removal, noted in the mission diary that Craigie would be kept at the Mission until the

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<sup>57</sup>Bruce A. Sommer. "The Bowman Incident", in Hercus and Sutton, *This is what happened*, Canberra, 1986, pp.241-63. Sommer concludes, "Bowman in fact emerges as avaricious and arrogant, perhaps even cruel in his treatment of Aboriginal men and women. McIntyre appears as a careless braggart and unconvicted murderer, certainly cruel even if Bowman wasn't" (p.253).

<sup>58</sup>J.P.R. De La Perrelle, diary entry for 22 October 1907.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas Williams, diary entry for 26 February 1908. "Went to Rutland Plains to see into Grady's complaint. Found that Rhoda was living an immoral life, also that Stockman of Lochnagar was implicated... brought them home again also a little boy about 7 years old called Johnny".

<sup>60</sup>Normanton Protector to Howard, 12 October 1908, 08:2622, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.



arrival of the police.<sup>61</sup> Gilbert White took Craigie to Thursday Island when he returned from his June visit to Trubanaman and handed him over the police for imprisonment.<sup>62</sup> White considered the sentence of removal to Barambah excessive and wrote to Chief Protector Richard Howard recommending that his punishment be limited to imprisonment on Thursday Island.<sup>63</sup> William Lee Bryce, the protector on Thursday Island, supported White's plea for clemency but both were over-ridden by the Police Commissioner who considered Craigie a "bad character" who deserved banishment.<sup>64</sup> With Craigie's removal order standing, White made an attempt on 12 August 1910 to stall his deportation until Howard's arrival on Thursday Island so that he could personally review Craigie's case.<sup>65</sup> White's intervention, from the time he decided to take Craigie north to Thursday Island in June and for the two months of his imprisonment was of no assistance to Craigie in either reducing his sentence or in stalling his deportation. By 12 September 1910, Craigie had died in Barambah from pneumonia.<sup>66</sup>

This sort of attempt to intervene in the execution of pastoralist retribution, even though it was totally ineffective, confirmed the pastoralist view that the missionaries were not allies. Missionary interest in the Craigie removal can only have strengthened Bowman's resolve to deal with actual or potential cattle spearing by his own methods of running Aborigines off his run and shooting any who resisted. It was these methods that led to Frank McArthur Bowman's spearing on 28 August 1910. This spearing and

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<sup>61</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 19 April 1910.

<sup>62</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 4 June 1910, and White to Howard, 29 June 1910, 10:1087, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

<sup>63</sup>White to Howard, 1 July 1910, 10:1095, and Commissioner of Police to Howard, 2 July 1910, 10:1098, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

<sup>64</sup>Lee Bryce to Howard, 12 October 1908, 08:2992, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

<sup>65</sup>Lee Bryce to Howard, 12 August 1910, 10:1348, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

<sup>66</sup>Superintendent, Barambah to Howard, 12 September 1910, previous 10:1511, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

subsequent death motivated the mission to be more inward looking and to attempt to forge an identity distinct from the world around it.

Pastoralism in the southern Peninsula was reaching the stage where Aborigines had begun to be “let in” to the cattle stations and were an important, if unappreciated, part of the station labour force. This stage overlapped with the pastoralists’ initial approach of only seeking to ensure that Aborigines were “kept out” of their runs, kept out by squatter vigilantes or the native Police or a combination of both.<sup>67</sup> Frank Bowman, at the time of his death, was engaged in running *Kokobera* people off his pastoral lease, even though Aborigines were an important part of the *Rutland Plains* labour force.

This pastoralist approach to Aborigines was entirely pragmatic and showed all of the contradictions that such pragmatism fostered. Even though some Aborigines had been admitted to the rank of trusted worker, their bush relations might as easily be shot down in their presence.<sup>68</sup> The attitudes towards Aborigines from the “keeping out” time were not forgotten and were manifested in the harsh treatment of station Aborigines. By this time the emphasis had swung over to the use of law as a means of retaining valuable Aboriginal labour and as a means of removing any Aborigines who were considered disruptive to station life.<sup>69</sup> The missionary pioneers of Mitchell River Mission did not count on how they would be caught in the middle of this process and how they would, quite soon, be exploited as a means of achieving the alienation of the land from its Aboriginal inhabitants.

Bowman died subsequently from this wound on 2 September 1910, his Aboriginal assailant, having already been shot dead by either Bowman or his associate

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<sup>67</sup>Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, Canberra, 1982, pp.28-61.

<sup>68</sup>Arthur Major, recorded interview at Kowanyama, 30 July 1987. Major, a *Kokobera* man who had been “let in” to *Rutland Plains*, recognised his brother, Sergeant, in a group of bush-living *Kokobera* confronted by Bowman and Major. Anticipating that his brother would be shot and killed with the others, Major warned him to drop into the grass and crawl away to make an escape.

<sup>69</sup>Whelan to Garroway, 3 November 1900, 00:19037, Northern Protector of Aborigines Office, miscellaneous subject batches, 1898 - 14 September 1920, A/58909, QSA. Robertson of *Dunbar* was pressing for all the bush Aborigines to be shot by the police as well as for the removal of Bendigo and Monday from the district. The police declined to meet his first request but arranged for Bendigo’s removal to Fraser Island.

McIntyre.<sup>70</sup> Bowman's death focused the missionaries' concern more on the success of their "civilising" efforts than it did on the repeated and excessive provocation that led to the spearing.<sup>71</sup> The missionary cause was thrown open to public debate, "Mission Black or Myall?" demanded a headline in the *Brisbane Courier* as it sought to identify whether the Mission was implicated in Bowman's death. The public, from whom both Government and missionary support was ultimately derived, were told that the dying Frank Bowman was full of recrimination and blame about the contribution of the mission to his fatal wounds. The *Courier* sensationalised the story with the dying Bowman's response to the news that Matthews was there to visit him, "No; I don't want to see him, as I consider him the cause of this. You might bring him in to see the wound".<sup>72</sup>

Less than a month after Bowman's death, his widow had written to the Chief Protector, with a more detailed complaint:

... if you could spare a day or so I should very much like to see you with reference to the blacks killing cattle on Rutland Plains & trust you will see the necessity to investigate the matter thoroughly. I can produce sufficient evidence to prove to you that the matter requires immediate action. I shall probably be leaving the district soon [and] shall not perhaps have another such opportunity of proving these cases to you.<sup>73</sup>

Mrs Bowman mounted a vigorous correspondence to Howard, demanding the removal of Splinter, Lochnagar Major, Kangaroo, Malcolm and Waterloo Tommy, the relocation of the Mission to the north and its replacement by a police station.<sup>74</sup> All these demands sought to tar the Mission with criminality and to exonerate Bowman of any

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<sup>70</sup>For discussion on the circumstances of the incident see Bruce Sommer, "The Bowman incident", pp.241-63.

<sup>71</sup>Bowman to Howard, 20 August 1910, 10:01789, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 118, DFSAIA. Up until only a few days before his death Bowman was depicting that there was an Aboriginal "problem" which required the intervention of government authorities, seeking an interview with chief protector Howard when he was next at Mitchell River, "...as I would like to have a talk re the blacks in this vicinity".

<sup>72</sup>*Brisbane Courier*, 30 September 1910, p.5.

<sup>73</sup>Bowman to Chief Protector, 20 September 1910. 10:02141, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>74</sup>Bowman to Howard, 16 November 1910, 10:1986, and Atthow and McGregor to Howard, 22 October 1919, 10:1825, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

wrongdoing. Howard, whilst unwilling to censure the missionaries, was most willing to sacrifice the five Aborigines, whom he considered to be “implicated in the affair”.<sup>75</sup>

Even though the missionaries’ role had become a matter of public debate, the central issue of pastoralist provocation and missionary inaction was never canvassed. Pastoralist activity generally, and Bowman’s *Rutland Plains* in particular, had intruded into the life of the *Kokobera* for over twenty years. Within this context it was hardly surprising that one of the *Kokobera* retaliated, especially when the missionary presence had been unable to stop the harassment of bush *Kokobera* on their own land.

The missionaries maintained their timid stance, sensitive to the charge that they had not curbed cattle spearing and were not the “civilising” force that they claimed to be, this, at the same time as their own missionary journal was lamenting the church’s silence about abuse against Aborigines: “The ordinary man blames the Church and the Clergy for timidity and cowardice more frequently and severely than most of us realise”.<sup>76</sup> The missionaries’ own documentary records provide ample evidence for a vigorous response, but it was not forthcoming. They seemed instead to have been shamed into silence by the suggestion that they were complicit in the death of a fellow European. Certainly Matthews was traumatised by the whole event, to the extent that he would not speak of it afterwards. This was understandable as he had to be smuggled out of *Rutland Plains* by the police after the inquest as Mrs Bowman was waiting for him with a pistol.<sup>77</sup> He had, at least, written to Howard in protest against the removals.<sup>78</sup> Matthews’ reticence was not, however, just the avoidance of a painful experience by a man who had come close to the death of two others, it was a reluctance throughout his leadership of the missionary enterprise to directly confront the labour abuses on the

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<sup>75</sup>Howard (in Cairns) to Brisbane Office, 8 November 1910, 10:1923, Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

<sup>76</sup>*ABM Review*, 15 February 1911, p.217. The solution proposed was still guarded, “We should be far more respected if we spoke out *sometimes* and showed our independence of popular favour” (my emphasis).

<sup>77</sup>Reminiscences of Barbara Lane, typescript, no date, p.12. Barbara Lane (née Matthews) was Henry Matthews’ sister and the companion of Mrs Bowman after Frank Bowman was speared. She later married the mission chaplain, the Rev’d Frere Lane.

<sup>78</sup>Matthews to Howard, 23 November 1910, 10:2212, Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

stations. Similarly, Gilbert White had avoided naming of the police in his 1918 account of a massacre that took place a full sixteen years before.<sup>79</sup> It is clear that this reticence was the normal missionary response to white atrocities. The reactions of J.B. Gribble and Ernest Gribble were exceptions that confirmed the rule.<sup>80</sup> The missionaries' racial and cultural loyalty took precedence over their concern for justice for the Aboriginal people they had assumed responsibility for. Gilbert White and the missionaries under his control had adopted the stance that had so grieved J.B. Gribble who had been told by Barlow, the bishop of North Queensland, that he would rather see Gribble's plans at Yarrabah fail than allow Gribble to expose white abuses in the North.<sup>81</sup> The question before the public, "Mission Black or Myall?", demanded an answer from the missionaries in practical terms beyond that of the relieved Matthews to the Coroner: that Bowman's killer "was not a mission boy, but was a Myall".<sup>82</sup>

More than this the pastoralists had found the Achilles heel of their missionary irritants, the propensity of the missionaries to both feel and act as if they were responsible for the behaviour of the Aborigines in the district. With little likelihood of even repeat offences against Aborigines being punished so long as they took place on the station, the pastoralists were free to deal with Aboriginal labour as they best saw fit. The Mission had proved that it would not be a critic in any way that mattered and could be depended on to give up any of its Aboriginal "inmates" when the pastoralists or police demanded this. It was only a small step, which the Mission was quite prepared to

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<sup>79</sup>White, *Thirty years*, p.109. Instead of saying that the white officer had been complicit in the massacre, White skirts around the issue in these words; "The charge was that a certain white man, who had been sent on certain business connected with the natives, had allowed the armed natives by whom he was accompanied to attack and kill the members of a certain tribe without warning or provocation, when he might have accomplished his mission without bloodshed or trouble, and that he had returned and reported that he had never seen the natives at all". Perhaps he was fearful of the laws of libel if his text identified the officer to whom he allude but who had not been charged with any crime.

<sup>80</sup>John Harris, *One Blood: two hundred years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity*, Sutherland, 1990. John Gribble openly confronted Carnarvon pastoralists who pursued refuge-seeking Aborigines to his mission and further enraged pastoralist hatred by exposing the near slavery of Aboriginal labour conditions (pp.416-29). Ernest Gribble exposed the 1922 and 1926 police massacre of Aborigines on the Marndoc reserve in Western Australia, his activism substantially responsible for the 1927 Woods Royal Commission into the massacre (pp.513-17).

<sup>81</sup>J.B. Gribble journal entry for 3 June 1892, quoted in Loos, *Aboriginal European Relations*, vol.2, p.538. "Why are the Bishops so afraid of vindicating the cause of this long suffering race?" he asked.

<sup>82</sup>*Brisbane Courier*, 30 September 1910, p.5.

take, for it to become a means of recruitment of station labour and a place for station Aborigines to spend their wet season lay off. For pastoralists this resulted in a double benefit, they could save the resources involved in maintaining a permanent Aboriginal workforce and be relieved of the risks that came with their earlier attempts exclude bush Aborigines from their runs.

Following Bowman's death in September 1910, there seems to have been a concerted campaign by pastoralists to purge the area of any Aborigines they considered troublesome. Barney, Snowball and Pigeon were added to the group of Splinter, Lochnagar Major, Kangaroo, Malcolm and Waterloo Tommy who had earlier been sentenced for removal by Howard. The Mission provided, once again, an easy target in which to locate individuals with whom there was a score to be settled:

[17 December 1910] "Police Constables Bourke and Goodrich arrive 3 pm and arrested Splinter and Barney and took them away. The boys were nominated for removal, by station people".<sup>83</sup>

[18 December 1910] "Police arrived 11 am looking for a camp man who is wanted".<sup>84</sup>

[20 June 1911] "Police arrived at noon with Waterloo Tommy in custody. Constable Burke also arrested three Nassau Blacks, Snowball, Pigeon and Malcolm. They are to be removed from the district".<sup>85</sup>

The removal of the Mitchell River men to the government reserve at Barambah was a very severe penalty, and as had been the case for Craigie, certainly one that hastened their deaths. Kangaroo died of influenza in the epidemic of 1919<sup>86</sup> and Lochnagar Major of tuberculosis in 1922.<sup>87</sup> Splinter's wife Millie and child had travelled on the *Empire* from Thursday Island with Miss Matthews under order of removal to join him at Barambah in October 1911,<sup>88</sup> their child dying shortly afterwards in December

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<sup>83</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 17 December 1910.

<sup>84</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 18 December 1910.

<sup>85</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 20 June 1911.

<sup>86</sup>Superintendent, Barambah to Bleakley, 5 August 1919, 19:2781, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, January 1919 to December 1919, A/59002, QSA.

<sup>87</sup>Superintendent, Barambah to Bleakley, 16 October 1922, 22:5607, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, January 1922 to December 1922, A/59005, QSA.

<sup>88</sup>Lee Bryce to Howard, 31 October 1911, 11:2111, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, 4 October 1911 to 1 July 1913, A/58996, QSA.

1911.<sup>89</sup> In this microcosm we can see the human tragedy of the policy of protection and the inability or unwillingness of the mission to intervene to actually protect the Aborigines from such life threatening dislocation. The *Kokobera* could only have concluded that there was a close working relationship between the church and state, between the missionaries and the pastoralists with the police as their agents. The mission *Munpitch* and the *Munpitch* who were outside the Mission were obviously different but had more in common than either had with the *Pakaper*, the real people of the Mitchell River.

More than this it was a further humiliation for the Mission, emphasising the limitations of its influence in matters of importance. It showed pastoralist contempt for the assertion that the Mission was exerting a civilising and improving influence on its charges. It was, as a brief review of Splinter's career shows, a betrayal of those Aborigines who had been willing to submit their lives to missionary influence.

Splinter, declined refuge in August 1906, had succeeded in becoming part of the Mission on 19 September 1907, but had failed to keep out of danger, and was shot and wounded, but not fatally, in December 1907.<sup>90</sup> Matthews was aware that Splinter had been reported to the police "for bad behaviour" but had accepted him with reform in mind.<sup>91</sup> Splinter's period at the Mission is neither notorious nor atypical. He is only recorded for two misdemeanours, damaging a pannikin in February 1908<sup>92</sup> and being part of a group of four who had killed and eaten a mission goat on 8 July 1910.<sup>93</sup> Splinter was well integrated into the Mission by the time of his removal, having a wife and child and being part of the church community. There seemed to be every reason for

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<sup>89</sup>Superintendent, Barambah, to Howard, 27 December 1911, 11:2503, Chief Protector of Aborigines Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, 4 October 1911 to 1 July 1913, A/58996, QSA.

<sup>90</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 3 December 1907.

<sup>91</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 19 September 1907.

<sup>92</sup>Thomas Williams, diary entry for 10 February 1908.

<sup>93</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 8 July 1910. "Heard last night that four boys had killed a goat, and eaten it, this week. Called upon the boys - Splinter, Bunburradubera, George and Nassau to stand up in church, and confess. Gave address and urged honesty and truthfulness. The boys did not attempt to deny their wrongdoing".

the missionaries to be satisfied with the reforming influence the Mission was having on Splinter. Barbara Matthews went further, calling him a “favourite” of the missionaries:

While we were away at Mapoon the police came and took two of our boys, Splinter and his brother Barney, away. They both said they had not speared cattle, but some of the station owners had accused them of it. It was a great upset for our people, for they were both favourites.<sup>94</sup>

By invoking old grievances against him the pastoralists had swept aside both the missionary agenda and Splinter’s efforts to be shaped by its influence. By 1912 Splinter had been recruited into the police force as a tracker and was stationed at Warra in southern Queensland until 1914.<sup>95</sup> He was now remote from mission influence and any saving grace they offered on behalf of their Saviour.

When added to the spate of removals from the district in 1908, these arrests confirmed that the pastoralists were acknowledging that the rule of law was now the preferred means to deal with the Aborigines remaining on their runs whom they considered troublesome.<sup>96</sup> Pastoralists had realised that the *Act*, especially when interpreted in their favour by the police, could be a useful weapon in their hands as they continued to push for the control, restriction and removal of Aborigines from their runs.<sup>97</sup> Police Commissioner Parry-Okeden had circulated to his Inspectors the requirement that “except for breaches of law” the only authority by which police could detain or remove Aborigines was by an order of the Minister.<sup>98</sup> This attempt to enforce the actual provisions of the 1897 Act, six years after its passing into law, sought to regulate police practice and prevent unfair and arbitrary collusion between the police and the station interests to the disadvantage of Aborigines. In effect it revealed what had been common practice prior to his circular.

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<sup>94</sup>Barbara Matthews, *Heralds of the King*, 1 May 1911, vol.1, no.9.

<sup>95</sup>Photo PM 1140, Queensland Police Museum.

<sup>96</sup>“Aboriginal movements compiled from various records”, typescript, 3 September 1992, DFSAIA. Three removals are listed from *Rutland Plains*, two from Staaten River, and two from *Vanrook*. In each case removals were to Barambah settlement.

<sup>97</sup>Robertson of *Dunbar* had been quite explicit about his intentions to Acting Sergeant Whelan in October 1900, saying that he would “allow no blacks on the run and that the trackers should shoot them, that was what they were kept for”. Whelan to Garroway, 3 November 1900, 00:19037, Northern Protector of Aborigines Office, miscellaneous subject batches, 1898 - 14 September 1920, A/58909, QSA.

<sup>98</sup>Parry-Okeden to Inspector... (circular memorandum), 1 June 1903, QSA, Chief Protector of Aborigines, A/44680.



Frank Bowman's death on 2 September 1910 caused the loose and unsystematic protection policies of the Mission to become much firmer. If the first five years of the Mission's operations had appeared to be unsympathetic to the pastoralists by providing a place of refuge to Aborigines from the stations, Bishop White's offer to "use every endeavour to prevent any natives living on the Reserve from crossing to the south of the fence" signalled a new phase of the development of the policy of protection.<sup>99</sup> In one of the rare allusions to Bowman's spearing in church circles, the ABM children's magazine reported: "Since it happened Mr Matthews won't let the Mission boys go beyond the Mission reserve for fear they would get into trouble with the other blacks".<sup>100</sup> This heralded the concurrence of the Church of England with the process of alienation of Aborigines from their traditional land outside the reserve boundaries and began a new phase of this process whereby the Mission would be an active rather than merely passive agent.

Gilbert White's visit to the Mission for two weeks during the dry season of 1911 was important in developing this mission policy. After White and Archer Bowman agreed to the erection of a fence on 9 August 1911, the practicalities of this undertaking were foremost amongst the Bishop's concerns. Scarce resources were to be used to provide materials and employ Mr Watham as a fencer. White could see that increased self sufficiency in food was necessary if the Mission were to develop a closed boundary policy as this would preclude the use of traditional hunting ranges to the south of the Mission. With this in mind he authorised the purchase of the first stock horse for the Mission, for Mr Woodd [sic] to assist the working of the mission cattle herd he proposed to establish.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>White to Bowman, 10 August 1911, copy transcribed as diary entry for 10 August 1911.

<sup>100</sup>*Heralds of the King*, 1 November 1910, vol.1, no.3.

<sup>101</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 19 August 1911. White gives every indication of planning to stay longer than the fortnight but seems left with no alternative but to return to Thursday Island when his sister, who had become "alarmed" at the length of his absence, unexpectedly arrived with Murray, the Governor of Papua aboard his vessel the *Merrie England*.

White's new policy also enunciated more clearly the strictly religious basis of authority on the Mission.<sup>102</sup> Either through ignorance of the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* or through contempt for it, he arrogated to himself as Bishop powers that properly belonged to the Superintendent by virtue of his appointment by the government under the Act: "No visitor... should be allowed to reside on the Mission for more than a month without special permission from the Bishop".<sup>103</sup> This was reflected too in his desire to promote more rigorous religious observance amongst the missionaries than had previously existed. The spiritual life of the missionaries was to be fortified by a Quiet Day each month which would include the monastic offices of Prime, Terce, Sext and None in addition to the ordinary service of the day. Thus decreed the Bishop of the Church of England.

The Mission was to become, under White's plan, more tightly controlled with outside influences kept to a minimum. The blurred lines between "mission inmate", the term used for the next fifty years, and the fringe dwelling and free ranging "camp blacks" were to be made sharper by both symbolic and spatial means. Village life presented itself as the means through which this would be achieved. Different villages were created to accommodate Aborigines during the different stages of progress to "civilisation". A schema was in place that envisaged the transition from bush or camp life through an intensive period of missionary control over single adults and then to a more independent existence as married couples on one of the mission outstations. This grand scheme sought to dovetail this "civilising" progress with the different functions of the mission's internal life. Angeram had been established as an outstation of Trubanaman for married people and White was keen that a further settlement be formed on the coast at Koongalara for the families of the mission's boat crew.<sup>104</sup> This pattern of

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<sup>102</sup>Noel Loos, *Aboriginal European Relations*, vol.2, p.572. "The aim of the Christian missions in North Queensland was to create a theocracy".

<sup>103</sup>Diary entry for 12 August 1911.

<sup>104</sup>Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 1 January 1913, p.176. "It was generally agreed [by the mission staff] that the ideal at which we should aim is the condition of things which is being realised at Yarrabah and Mapoon, the native outstations being independent and self-supporting, and the Head Station being the training place for the young, the home of the sick and the centre of the spiritual life of the Mission".

satellite villages echoed developments at Yarrabah.<sup>105</sup> It also had its own distinctive local influences, recognising the different tribal affiliations of the people who had come to live at the Mission. The scheme, as it developed at Mitchell River, provided an opportunity for married couples to live with groups of tribal kin away from the mission station at Trubanaman, with the *Kokobera* at Daphne and the *Kunjen* at Angeram. It provided an opportunity of escaping missionary dominance since the white missionaries continued to reside at Trubanaman, having entrusted one of their South Sea Islander assistants to each village. With Trubanaman situated squarely on *Kokobera* land and having a majority of *Kokobera* residents, other tribal groups were in a weaker position, both psychologically, as they were distant from their own land, and in terms of power relations. The Angeram community provided the *Kunjen* with the opportunity of escaping both missionary and *Kokobera* dominance.<sup>106</sup>

White's offer to fence the boundary was timely from a pastoralist perspective, coming as it did when the pastoralists were attempting to divide up their holdings into paddocks of a more manageable size.<sup>107</sup> When C.M. Curr took control of *Rutland Plains* in 1912 and put 1,000 head of *Abingdon Downs* heifers on its pastures, the *North Queensland Register* observed, "There is a good deal of fencing to be erected shortly on Macaroni, Lochnagar, and Rutland Plains. Before very long the whole of the country from the Norman River to the Mitchell will be all fenced".<sup>108</sup> Looked at from afar, fencing marked the advancement of progress and civilisation. The humanitarian and evangelical interests of the missionaries conveniently dovetailed with the interest of the

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<sup>105</sup>Noel Loos, *Aboriginal European Relations*, vol.2, p.573.

<sup>106</sup>Maudie Koolatah, taped interview, Kowanyama, 27 March 1988.

<sup>107</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 10 August 1911. White wrote to Bowman, "we are willing to erect at our own cost a fence from the Saltwater on Cabbage Tree Creek to the nearest point on your boundary. We will pay half the cost of the erection of a barbed two wire fence from this point along the boundary in a N.E. direction as far as Trubanaman Creek and I hope as far as Magnificent Creek: ...without consulting the Board of Missions I will be responsible for at least four miles on the understanding that the total cost of the fence does not exceed 14 pounds a mile. We have no intention at present of putting cattle on the portion of the Reserve S.W. of Cabbage Tree Creek and would not object to the presence of your cattle there provided that it is recognised that it is part of the Reserve and that we have no right to object to the presence of natives there. We would use every endeavour to prevent any natives living on the Reserve from crossing to the south of the fence".

<sup>108</sup>*North Queensland Register*, 5 August 1912.

pastoralists to exercise exclusive control over their leases, something that White had been quite explicit about in his report to Chief Protector Richard Howard.<sup>109</sup> He was willing to regard all the areas outside of the reserve as “off their own land”, as far as the Aborigines were concerned, irrespective of their cultural affiliation with the land beyond the reserve boundaries and any relatives still living there.<sup>110</sup>

The closed boundary policy that White was wanting the Mission to implement was to be made apparent to the “wild natives”, the bush *Kokobera*, *Kunjen* and *Kokominjen*, who were accustomed to visit the Mission in the course of their hunting rounds. It also provided another opportunity of extending mission authority. White laid down the law in minute detail:

I notice that some of the wild natives still come into the mission compound without any clothes. Think the time has come where this should be strictly prohibited. A certain number of loin cloths or handkerchiefs might be entrusted to one of the resident men & all who desired to enter told to go to him to borrow them before entering. They might be thrown after use into a weak solution of disinfectant... in the sun.<sup>111</sup>

These bush-living people were asked to conform to missionary proprieties of dress, but only when on the mission compound and then only to an extent that served to mark them out as different from all of the others, white and black on the Mission. They were not even given the opportunity of retaining these crude garments to use as they saw fit. Clothing was significant in marking boundaries between people in terms of their degree of integration into the Mission. In this way it had a strong symbolic character.

Implicit in any attempt to maintain a closed boundary was the need for increased self sufficiency. The Mission’s earliest intentions were to produce food to supplement the supplies purchased with the government and church grants but the mission economy

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<sup>109</sup>Gilbert White, cited in *Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines of the Year 1911*, p.33. “Mr A. Bowman, at my request, came over to see me about a fence between his run and the Mission. This is most urgently needed in the interests both of the Mission and the run. Our cattle are increasing, and some fencing is absolutely necessary”.

<sup>110</sup>White to Roth, 16 April 1906, 06:791, Northern Protector of Aborigines Office, miscellaneous subject batches, 1898 - 14 September 1920, A/58909, QSA.

<sup>111</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 27 October 1912. Twenty years later Aborigines had reversed this symbolism, this time using nakedness as a symbolic marker of their freedom once they had left the confines of the mission compound “...the children... as soon as they got out of the compound... would park their clothes in a tree fork and pick them up on their return”. Alfred G. Reynolds, *Variations in a Varied Life*, typescript, no date, p.126.

remained heavily dependent upon these supplies, transported in to Trubanaman by boat from Thursday Island. The wet season of late 1909 and the early months of 1910 had exposed the fragility of the Mission economy, with food supplies at the Mission becoming exhausted. The whole of the Mission was then dependent upon what bush food that could be found. The missionaries now relied upon Aboriginal food gathering skills.<sup>112</sup> Even the cherished mission routine had to be abandoned in the face of the crisis: “people remain on mission but hunt for food every day”.<sup>113</sup> This crisis had developed when relatively few people were actually dependent upon the mission: 15 married couples, 28 single men, 2 single women, 23 school children and infants as well as the 7 staff. Unless this sort of crisis could be averted in future, the mission population would be tempted to disperse in times of scarcity, a possibility at odds with the “civilising” ambitions of the Mission.

The imposition of severe economies alone, without increasing the financial base, was not sufficient to protect the Mission from such seasonal disbandment.<sup>114</sup> White applied every possible pressure on the superintendent, keeping a “close hand” on him lest he should incur unauthorised expenditure on food. White wanted the whole mission to operate on a budget of £800 per annum.<sup>115</sup>

Indeed the task of the missionary Bishop was as much one of convincing his supporters to provide the financial means for the success of his venture as it was one of converting the *Kokobera* and their allies to Christianity.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 21 September 1909. “Still waiting for the boat. We are living on what the blacks bring or what we can shoot”.

<sup>113</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 19 January 1910.

<sup>114</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 7 June 1910.

<sup>115</sup>Gilbert White, “Report to the A.B.M.”, typescript, 6 October 1928, ABM collection, Mitchell Library MSS 4503, Add on 1822, Guide 1(4). This included a grant of £300 from the Queensland Government.

<sup>116</sup>William St Clair Donaldson (Archbishop of Brisbane), diary entry for 7 August 1906. Church authorities at a distance could easily patronise the venture with generous words knowing that the problem of raising funds did not rest on their shoulders, “I have little fear as to the support from the outside. That will increase quite as fast as it can be used, though the supply of men will of course be an anxiety, when so many special qualifications are needed. I am very thankful to have been able to see the work, and I trust that what I have seen may make me a more useful friend than I would otherwise have been. The possibilities of development in the work seem boundless. It is full of hope”. Moral support would often be the extent of encouragement from the Church at large.

Pressure on the food resource, which was the basis of much Aboriginal interest in the Mission, also meant that there was a greater likelihood of Aborigines' taking cattle for food. Matthews was aware that, in 1907, "camp blacks" had speared cattle on *Rutland Plains* but, apart from reiterating the missionary rhetoric, he had no effective means of dealing with this source of conflict with his pastoralist neighbour.<sup>117</sup>

As on most missions throughout Australia, the Mitchell River missionaries had early turned to farming to meet the increasing demand for food. However, a number of agricultural experiments returned little for the effort expended. The missionaries had no way to store any agricultural surplus and often had to compete with bush-living Aborigines to be first to harvest the crops of corn or cassava.<sup>118</sup> Despite the extraordinary efforts put into establishing its location, the site that Gribble had chosen had many limitations; it was evidently unsuitable for any sustained agriculture, was too close to *Rutland Plains* and was not close to the boat landing. The new closed boundary policy exposed these limitations and led to new activity aimed at bolstering the level of food production on the reserve. The Mission had fostered outstations for married people along Yarrabah lines at Angeram, Daphne and Koongalara, but these small settlements did little to increase the production of food. Daphne and Angeram were within close proximity of Trubanaman and suffered the same limitations of soil and water as the head station; Koongalara was right on the coast, practically built on beach sand and reliant on soakage wells for water. The possibility of establishing another outstation as an agricultural centre was appealing if a suitable site could be found that offered good soil, reliable water and was above the flood mark. Such a site was found at Kowanyama and subsequent developments eventually led to the relocation of the entire Mission there, even though the initial aspirations for this place were more modest.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Diary entry for 7, 8 February 1907. Matthews noted that he went over to the camp and "explained that blacks had no right to spear cattle on either side of boundary".

<sup>118</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 23 May 1908. Also, the itinerant chaplain William Wilkinson thought there was "not much advance in cultivation" when he visited Trubanaman in May 1913 (Journal, OM.AV/138/1, QSA).

<sup>119</sup>The settlement on Magnificent Creek is first known as Ardumunda or Kardmunda (diary entries from 9 July 1917 to 26 July 1918), then as Mangont or Mungont (diary entries from 2 September 1918 to 11 October 1918) before finally being known as Kowanyama (diary entries from 19 November 1918 onwards). The first pair of names is an English rendering of the *Kokobera* name for the white apple trees

The Kowanyama site was first explored by Henry Matthews and Frank Simpson (of *Lochnagar*<sup>120</sup>) between 8 and 10 June 1917.<sup>121</sup> Chapman and four mission Aborigines visited there on 15 June 1917, with Matthews and a work party commencing the initial clearing of land a fortnight later.<sup>122</sup> These preliminary efforts met with Bishop Henry Newton's approval when he inspected Kowanyama in September. The major task of establishment was left to Chapman upon his return from furlough the following month.<sup>123</sup> Since Matthews was on furlough himself for a whole year commencing September 1917, the initiative rested completely in Chapman's hands until the end of 1918. Chapman's year in charge reflected two priorities, establishing the theocratic centre of the settlement and food production, as Chapman noted in the mission diary:

At present one section of the people with myself are hard at work building a church, the others with Jack Giebo are planting the crops... I have impressed upon the people that GOD'S House must be completed before any other buildings are commenced, as it is the centre of all our work. [Chapman's emphasis]<sup>124</sup>

The new project presented the Mission with an opportunity to reinvent itself and learn from the mistakes at Trubanaman, to strengthen the approaches found valuable at

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that grow in this area, the second pair a rendering of the *Kokobera* place name, *Taarch-Manengk*, with Kowanyama being a rendering of the *Yir-Yoront*, *kawn yamar*, meaning "many waters" Kowanyama is not a traditional Aboriginal place name but was the name given by Matthews to the site. (See Barry Alpher, *Yir Yoront Lexicon*, Berlin, 1991, p.3, and Henry Newton, *ABM Review*, 15 June 1919, p.44.)

<sup>120</sup>*Lochnagar*, which was ultimately to be absorbed into *Rutland Plains* appears to be the station which had the closest affinity with the Mission at the time of the closed boundary policy. Perhaps this was structural. It was a small station and relatively disadvantaged in dealing with larger neighbours, or simply an outcome of the positive interpersonal relations between Matthews at Trubanaman and Frank Simpson at *Lochnagar*. Of the surrounding pastoralists, Simpson was the one who appeared to be a "friend" of the Mission, evidenced here in his participation with Matthews in identifying Kowanyama as the site for an agricultural settlement. *Lochnagar* was provisioned from the Trubanaman Mission landing, with Simpson using his motor vehicle to assist in the transportation of mission stores. This practice continued even after the landing had been relocated to the South Mitchell, nearer Kowanyama. The arrival of Frank Simpson's wife at *Lochnagar* in 1915 undoubtedly helped forge a bond with Matthews who had married Nellie Phillips at Trubanaman in October of the same year. (Henry Newton, Bishop's diary, 27 October 1915. For Mrs Simpson see, Clem Lack, "The history and potential future of Cape York Peninsula", *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, vol.6, no.4, p.967.)

<sup>121</sup>Henry Matthews to Agnes Matthews, no date (probably 9 June 1917), Margery Webb collection. "First impression that this is *the* place par excellence, for agricultural purposes. I feel that I was led here in the first instance. Simpson and I simply rode straight out here. If we had followed Major's lead, he would have not come here, knowing that the scrub was so thick. So through our blundering, if you can call it so, we struck what will I hope revolutionise the mission prospects.

<sup>122</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 15 June 1917 and Bert Cole, diary entry for 29 June 1917.

<sup>123</sup>Henry Newton, diary entry for 5 September 1917.

<sup>124</sup>Joseph Chapman, *ABM Review*, 1 July 1918, p.58.

Trubanaman and to develop new ones in the light of twelve year's experience. Chapman was like his pioneering predecessors, Gribble and White, in seeing untold opportunity and advantage as a new missionary venture lay before him. In the middle of 1918 his optimism was unbounded. He had spent the wet season at Kowanyama out of contact with his colleagues at Trubanaman during the biggest floods that even the oldest Aborigines could remember, yet the new site had proved to be high and dry, unthreatened by inundation.

For less than two years between September 1918 and May 1920, Trubanaman would be maintained, in a diminished role, as a school settlement. The nineteen kilometres of road separating it from Kowanyama represented, in the missionary understanding of things, an insulation from the "contamination" of the children with Aboriginal ways. Once the principle of this enforced separation had been established, and such a large distance proved to be unworkable, the children were relocated from Trubanaman, firstly to Kowanyama itself and then, two kilometres further west, to Belburra on 8 November 1921. In this way the time-honoured Australian mission strategy of the separation of Aboriginal children from their cultural roots was achieved on the Mitchell River Mission.

It was not just the site with its "pretty situation" and "the purest water" which offered so much promise, the bush Aborigines nearby seemed friendly and interested. Chapman had started to study their *Kokominjen* language and considered it "more expressive" than the *Kokobera* he had encountered at Trubanaman. Seeing these traditional Aborigines fired Chapman's missionary optimism as he projected his hopes for the future onto them. He counted these new people to be "physically superior" and to "possess an intelligence which is lacking in many of the others". Chapman did not consider, in his comparison between these *Kokominjen* and the people at Trubanaman, that the Aborigines at Trubanaman had become sophisticated in the ways of the Mission and had become less malleable than he wanted them to be. Nor did he imagine that the *Kokominjen* had sufficient familiarity with the Mission that they perceived that there were advantages for them in his missionary initiative and were keen to encourage a



mission station closer to their territory for the sake of gaining greater access to these advantages. Chapman, looking entirely from the missionary perspective, believed that these people were willing to part with their children and entrust them to the missionaries, evidence indeed that they were indeed the sort of people who could be expected to co-operate with the missionary program.<sup>125</sup>

This willingness was most propitious for the missionaries since they now considered that their efforts would prove more productive by exercising a stricter control over the children and isolating them from the cultural and social influences of their families.

Since opening the new industrial centre at Mangont [Kowanyama], all of the older people have been sent there, leaving only the children and one or two married couples here [at Trubanaman]. It is very important to separate the children from the old people, and under the present conditions it is possible to do this and I am confident the results will be very far reaching.<sup>126</sup>

By the time Belburra was established, the missionary policy towards children was entirely rigid, with all school aged children living and studying under close missionary supervision. Boys were to remain until the age of fifteen years, girls until they married. All this was to place the children “under more definite Christian influence, and less under the influence of the superstition of the older people”.<sup>127</sup> Recognising that this practice would seem drastic to church supporters, who would have resisted such separation had it been proposed for their families, Henry Newton conceded coldly:

It is not intended to cut the children off from all association with the older people. Sundays spent at Kowanyama for service, and other holidays will give opportunity for the children to see their parents and others.<sup>128</sup>

This comment is an important measure of racial attitudes. Aboriginal culture was so despised and Aborigines seen so less than human, that the Bishop believed that this limited contact of parents with their children would be regarded as satisfactory.

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<sup>125</sup>Joseph Chapman, *ABM Review*, 1 July 1918, p.58.

<sup>126</sup>Diary entry for 2 September 1918.

<sup>127</sup>Henry Newton, “Mitchell River, Annual Report for 1921”, *ABM Review*, 7 October 1922, p.120.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*

Theocracy and agriculture found their combined expression during Bishop Henry Newton's visit in May 1921:

At 5pm a procession was formed at the church and proceeded round the crops. Three stations were made, litanies of intercession and thanksgiving were sung by the Bishop as well as suitable hymns and psalms. Although the ceremony was quite unrehearsed, everything passed off very smoothly and is a striking lesson to our people.<sup>129</sup>

This "striking lesson" can only have confirmed the missionaries' sense of purpose since it took place between the March food crisis and July's bumper peanut harvest. The peanut crop was a lone success amongst a variety of agricultural experiments to build an economic base for the Mission. Sawmilling along with cotton, rice and tobacco growing were all failed schemes that were attempted with financial success in mind. The success with the peanut harvest would not be repeated, but with success so hard won it is not surprising that it was savoured and taken as a harbinger of good fortune for the future. With the entire peanut crop selling for £100, the austerities of March were miraculously put in the past. The bountiful harvest was paralleled on the spiritual plane by the Whitsunday baptism of five Aborigines amongst the thirty-four confirmation candidates. Such evidence of spiritual affiliation with the missionaries was highly prized. Newton thought that "the results of the work of many years have been evidenced during 1921 more than at any other time".<sup>130</sup>

Matthews' desire for the Aborigines to have "greater opportunities for usefulness",<sup>131</sup> was enforced by more restrictive mission discipline. The coming and going of Aborigines as it suited at Trubanaman, which had irritated the missionaries, was stopped. Aborigines now needed to prove that they were "in earnest" if they wished to be re-admitted to the mission after leaving. Hunting activities had to be confined to the appointed day. Each mission "inmate" was expected to be home at the mission station by nightfall.<sup>132</sup> Matthews even intruded upon the domestic arrangements of the married couples. He arranged for them to pool their food and eat from a common

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<sup>129</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 11 May 1921.

<sup>130</sup>Henry Newton, "Mitchell River, Annual Report for 1921", *ABM Review*, 7 October 1922, p.120.

<sup>131</sup>Henry Matthews, *ABM Review*, 7 March 1919, p.190.

<sup>132</sup>Henry Newton, "Mitchell River, Annual Report for 1921", *ABM Review*, 7 October 1922, p.120.

kitchen so that they would have three meals a day, rather than allowing them to continue having just the one large daily meal they preferred.<sup>133</sup> “Good blackfellows” now had to eat the *mumpitch* way.

The missionaries had ridiculed the attempts of bush Aborigines to “sell” children to the Mission.

The visiting tribes of a few weeks ago left us with five young boys; they were very anxious to sell them to us, but it had to be explained that we couldn’t buy humans as we bought cows, but if they wished to leave them they could do so. They all gabbled at once, but the outcome of the conference was that they were to be left. Evidently they have confidence in the institution.<sup>134</sup>

Chapman, however, was the ultimate pragmatist, not concerned with such sophisticated niceties; material inducements were very much part of his strategy to recruit children. Even if the missionaries did not count this as “buying” children, the dispensing of missionary largesse to bush Aborigines when they co-operated by “sending” their children to the Mission, made this distinction far too subtle. One man remembered his father being given tea, sugar, flour, fish hooks and line when he agreed, after initial reluctance, to Chapman’s suggestion that his son should be taken to Belburra.<sup>135</sup>

The missionaries’ eagerness to bring children under their closer influence could be used in other ways to the advantage of Aborigines. Lucy, from *Waterloo* station, brought her two children to the Mission in 1918 to prevent her “halfcaste” daughter being taken away to be raised in Brisbane by the daughter’s white aunts.<sup>136</sup> Such trust in the Mission was at least reciprocated. Chapman opposed, on humanitarian grounds, the removal of the daughter, as an adult, to Mapoon when a round up of “halfcastes” from the Gulf missions was proposed.<sup>137</sup> Even though the mission had failed to be an entirely safe refuge in its early years it was still attractive to Aborigines faced with indifference or hostility on the stations.

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<sup>133</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 15 February 1922.

<sup>134</sup>Bert Cole, *ABM Review*, 1 October 1918, p.106.

<sup>135</sup>Norman Junior, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 April 1988.

<sup>136</sup>May Smiler, taped interview, Kowanyama, 1 August 1987.

<sup>137</sup>Maudie Koolatah, taped interview, Kowanyama, 27 March 1988. One woman from Aurukun was relocated to Mapoon.

Whereas the initial efforts of food production had concentrated on gardening, the missionaries soon recognised the need to establish a mission cattle herd. The Mission was, after all, situated on a large tract of good cattle country. With cattle on the neighbouring stations numbered in the thousands it was inevitable that they would encroach upon the mission reserve if nothing was done.<sup>138</sup> The cattle herd, initially numbering only 26, was commenced in 1908.<sup>139</sup> In the early stages two principles motivated the missionary interest in becoming pastoralists themselves: “use it or lose it” and “self sufficiency”. White was conscious of the need to use the 600 square mile reserve, and warned, “if we do not utilise this land towards making the Mission self-supporting, we may lose it altogether, with great loss to the natives”.<sup>140</sup> White believed that a herd of 500 cattle would be sufficient to make the Mission self-supporting, a herd number reached after only nine years.

Almost twenty years of participation in the Mission by the *Kokobera* and their neighbours had seen many changes. They had laboured hard, with missionary urging, to build a settlement on their own land at Trubanaman only to see that abandoned, on the decision of the missionaries, and their pioneering labours repeated at Kowanyama on the northern fringe of their estate. They had witnessed the efforts of the missionary *Munpitch* to distinguish themselves from the pastoralist *Munpitch* they had first encountered. They learned that these *Munpitch* shared more in common with each other than they did with the *Pakaper* upon whose land they chose to live. They saw that,

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<sup>138</sup>*Pugh's Almanac*, 1905.

Station	Ownership	Horses	Cattle
<i>Dunbar</i>	Bank of NSW	178	17,469
<i>Rutland Plains</i>	Bowman Bros.	97	3,800
<i>Lochnagar</i>	D. McIntyre	45	800

Cattle raising practices at *Rutland Plains*, *Dunbar* and *Lochnagar* were such that cattle ranged freely over much of the country and, apart from those constrained by smaller paddocks, were for most practical purposes in a feral state. Mustering and branding on the border country between runs was necessarily a co-operative venture. The ownership of the many unbranded cattle was settled by mutual agreement in joint musters in such areas.

<sup>139</sup>Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 15 August 1910, p.107.

<sup>140</sup>Gilbert White, *Missionary Notes*, 26 July 1909, p.66.

despite the differences between missionaries and pastoralists, the missionaries were recruited as agents for the pastoralists to assist them in the organisation and supply of *Pakaper* labour.

Pastoralism was a driving force in shaping the first twenty years of the Mission, either through reaction to its influences or in co-operation with them. The effect of Bowman's death on the development of missionary policy set the pattern for conditions which centralised Aboriginal labour on the Mission and relieved the pastoralists from their earlier, costly efforts to deal with a resident Aboriginal population on the stations. The acceptance that Mitchell River Mission had become integrated into the pastoral economy of the region came in 1916, only six years after Bowman's death, when a total of one hundred head of cattle were donated to the Mission from various stations in the district. A lot had changed in the nine years since the pastoralists of these stations, the Mission's new-found benefactors, had ridden into the Mission in a show of force to reclaim Sloper, Brassy and Charley for service at *Vanrook*. As much as the missionaries of 1905 had supposed that they would be the shaping and guiding influence as they contemplated the future, the earlier advent of pastoralism to the Mitchell made a far greater claim on that future than they recognised or wanted to acknowledge.

Gilbert White's "self sufficiency" target of 500 head was quickly exceeded; by 1923 the herd numbered 1,200, but there was little to suggest that the Mission was any closer to "self sufficiency". Aborigines and missionaries still laboured in conditions which showed no evidence of benefit from the increased value of the cattle herd. Gilbert White could not have foreseen how dominant the production and working of cattle would be in the life of the Mission and how much it would affect most areas of life for the Aborigines and missionaries who made up this mission community.



## **Chapter Six**

# **The Practice of Protection, 1924-1960: Building a Missionary Pastoral Empire**

By the time Henry Matthews concluded his superintendentship in 1924 the “protection” of Aborigines associated with the Mission was no longer primarily about refuge, but had taken on the meaning that Brock considered typical of the wider Australian context:

[“Protecting” Aborigines took on] new connotations of isolation, discrimination, institutionalisation and invisibility. “Protecting” Aborigines meant removing them from the sight and awareness of the general Australian population, restraining them within carefully defined lands, maintaining them as unproductive, dependent communities which could act as labour pools in times of labour shortage, singling out Aborigines as different from the rest of the population.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike many other missions, Mitchell River Mission could scarcely be considered unproductive since, as will be shown, the cattle enterprise succeeded to the extent that it financed the whole of the Diocese of Carpentaria. Despite this, the appearance of poverty and the image of Aborigines as dependent and unproductive was cultivated by field missionaries, their missionary organisation and the church at large. The missionary hierarchy was convinced that such an image, which complemented racial stereotypes of Aborigines, was central to the success of their efforts to gain financial support from the general public.<sup>2</sup> At the same time as this was being fostered, an extremely valuable asset was being developed in the shape of the mission cattle herd. Cattle have been central to the history of reserve Aborigines over the last century. It was on account of cattle that they had first experienced the depredations of the pastoralists; the decision to form a mission herd assumed a willing Aboriginal workforce; and reserve Aborigines were in high demand as workers on the cattle stations away from the Mission as well. Even

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<sup>1</sup>Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos; A history of Aboriginal institutionalisation and survival*, Cambridge, 1993, p.2.

<sup>2</sup>Newton to Montgomery, 1 January 1917, folios 220, 221, OM.AV/61/2, JOL. “We have hopes the cattle will produce an income. We have sold some but the proceeds must go to stocking up and other improvements and we have to be careful the opponent of Missions does not have an excuse of attacking the Mission as a money making concern!”

though work on the cattle stations offered a temporary break from the life and routine of the Mission, it did not offer independence from missionary control as the role of the Mission as a broker of Aboriginal labour increased with greater Aboriginal participation in the station labour force. On both the Mission itself, and through their involvement with the station labour trade, the missionaries were constructing a pastoral empire which only seemed to emphasise the image of dependence of Aborigines on whites.

There was little to suggest in 1908, when the cattle herd was established, that a herd of 26 cattle would grow, over time, into an asset worth over £200,000 in 1960.<sup>3</sup> Any debate about the direction which the cattle operation might take was settled in 1917, a year in which mission cattle were sold for £405,<sup>4</sup> with Matthews' business sense prevailing over Bishop Henry Newton's humanitarian desire to allow greater Aboriginal benefit from the cattle:<sup>5</sup>

I have advised Mr Matthews to kill more beasts for the station[&s] use. He is loth to do so as cattle are a good price, but personally I believe that the gain in letting the people see that they get direct return and benefit from their work with the cattle more than compensates for any pecuniary loss - also the Aborigine is a meat eater and gets tired of a bread or rice or vegetable diet.<sup>6</sup>

The use of the cattle herd as a food source was grudging in the period between 1918 and 1920, when Trubanaman and Kowanyama were both operating, with a beast being killed on alternate weeks at each place. By the 1950s with a resident population at Kowanyama of around 700 people, a beast was killed on alternate days. Certainly, mission consumption of beef did little to limit the growth of the herd. Herd numbers continued to increase well beyond the demise of mission administration in 1967:<sup>7</sup>

Year	Number of Cattle	Developments
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<sup>3</sup>Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 15 August 1910, p.107. This value is extrapolated from the value of the Native Affairs Department herd of 5,964 which was considered to be worth £140,273. (Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1959.)

<sup>4</sup>Newton to Jones, 30 June 1917, folio 178, OM.AV/61/2, JOL.

<sup>5</sup>Newton's humanitarianism is based on a recognition that an impoverished diet could lead to neither vigour nor commitment towards the missionary program. Writing to Chapman he observed, "It is good to hear that you can get them to take an interest in farming and if only they get some results into their stomachs they will realize the good of working". Newton to Chapman, 17 April 1917, folio 82, OM.AV/61/2, JOL.

<sup>6</sup>Gilbert White, "Mitchell River Mission" (no date, follows letter of 4 January 1917), folio 248, OM.AV/61/2, JOL.

<sup>7</sup>Compiled from Annual Reports.



1908	26	Establishment of herd
1910	45	
1912	180	Cattle fund contributes £36 to Mission budget in 1913
1917	500	100 head donated to Mission by neighbouring cattle stations
1923	1,200	
1928	2,421	Second set of cattle yards built at "Red Lily" in 1931
1934	4,381	Alec MacLeod becomes cattle manager in 1932
1940	5,101	450 head given to establish Lockhart River Mission herd
1959	8,000	Co-operative cattle scheme proposed
1977	16,759	(Ten years after Government takeover of Mission)

Apart from the steady, if meagre, supply of beef that was dispensed as part of rations on the Mission and the growing need for work amongst the cattle, there was little other evidence of prosperity commensurate with the growth of the cattle herd. The Bishop of Carpentaria and the Chief Protector acted as co-trustees of the mission reserve,<sup>8</sup> an arrangement that continued until the regazettal of the reserve in 1958 when the Director of Native Affairs was proclaimed sole trustee.<sup>9</sup> When a question of agistment of *Rutland Plains* cattle on the reserve arose in 1923, Chief Protector Bleakley considered that trusteeship conferred the power to enter into such financial arrangements and to decide how these funds were disposed of.<sup>10</sup> With the operational responsibility of the reserve falling to the Bishop and his missionaries, and with the church being the larger financial stakeholder until the 1950s, the Church through the bishop had a control over the

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<sup>8</sup>Even though both Bishop and Chief Protector were trustees ex-officio they held personal appointments. When the government was seeking to extinguish the Weipa reserve to facilitate bauxite mining in 1957 it first had to secure the resignation of Bleakley, the former Chief Protector who had concluded his duties in 1941, from his trusteeship of the reserve. (Acting Director of Native Affairs to Under Secretary, Dep't of Health and Home Affairs, 31 January 1957, Administration Kowanyama Reserve (Boundaries etc), 17A-3, DFSAIA, Interim Transfer R254, QSA).

<sup>9</sup>Queensland Government Gazette, 5 July 1958, pp.1788-89.

<sup>10</sup>Bleakley to Matthews, 5 September 1923, 23:4904, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

improvements on the reserve, including the cattle, that was for most practical purposes the same as ownership.<sup>11</sup>

Like their Lutheran contemporaries at Koonibba in South Australia, it soon became clear that when the Diocese of Carpentaria used the language of self sufficiency for mission Aborigines it was not Aboriginal self sufficiency that was their concern but the solvency of diocesan operations.<sup>12</sup> A mission superintendent, whilst exercising authority in the daily operations of the mission and empowered to do so under the Act, carried out these duties modified by the theocratic character of the mission structure. Superintendents acted to implement the decisions of the Bishop and Diocesan Council in matters to do with the cattle.<sup>13</sup>

The policy on the management of the cattle and the application of cattle profits was clearly stated by Bishop Henry Newton to Jones, the ABM chairman, in 1917.

... for some time all the money from the sale of cattle should be used to develop the Reserve in any way that will increase the herd and make the herd more productive - buying stock, fencing etc. But we reserved the right to make a special grant for the upkeep [of the Mission] if we thought it necessary at any time.<sup>14</sup>

To Matthews, Newton was giving even clearer signals that he should not look at the cattle as a source of operational funds, “We do not say we will not use the money for general upkeep of the station but we do not want to encourage a hope of that, at least for some time”.<sup>15</sup> Newton and his successors in office seemed to have no trouble in resisting the temptation of encouraging the hope that people at Kowanyama might see some direct benefits from the cattle that were run on their traditional lands. Even in the general operations of the Mission, there was early evidence of a trend towards the

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<sup>11</sup>O’Leary to Matthews, 17 October 1961, Administration Kowanyama Reserve (Boundaries etc), 17A-3, DFSAIA, Interim Transfer R254, QSA. “The Church is protected for any investment made on these Reserves and has the full authority and administration of them under the ‘Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Acts’”.

<sup>12</sup>Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos*, p.90.

<sup>13</sup>The first management committee to run the cattle concern at Mitchell River was formed in 1917 and consisted of Bishop Henry Newton, Tom May and Francis Slade, the dean of the Cathedral on Thursday Island. (Newton to Jones, 30 June 1917, folio 171, OM.AV/61/2, JOL) A separate cattle account was opened with the management committee as signatories. (Newton to Matthews, 30 June 1917, folio 181, OM.AV/61/2, JOL)

<sup>14</sup>Newton to Jones, 30 June 1917, folio 171, OM.AV/61/2, JOL.

<sup>15</sup>Newton to Matthews, 30 June 1917, folio 182, Bishop’s outward correspondence, OM.AV/61/2, JOL.

pauperisation of Mitchell River so that other aspects of the operations of the Diocese could be funded. Newton's successor, Stephen Davies, found that he was able to operate Mitchell River in financial surplus during 1924 and successfully sought approval from the Diocese's primary church funding body, the Australian Board of Missions (ABM), to apply the surplus of £150 to the Torres Straits Mission.<sup>16</sup> In 1921 ABM, in an attempt to keep some control over the operation of the Mission, claimed ownership of the cattle when it ruled "that all capital and plant for industrial purposes is the property of the Board".<sup>17</sup> By a decision of the Board in 1932 this rule was overturned and ABM released the Diocese of Carpentaria from the obligation to consult with the Board in how it arranged its internal finances, a decision which opened the way for the Mitchell River cattle to be administered as a purely diocesan concern.<sup>18</sup> By 1937, the transfer of 250 head of cattle to Lockhart River Mission showed that the cattle herd was treated as a solely diocesan asset, to be used for the general purposes of the Diocese rather than for the exclusive or even particular benefit of the Mitchell River cattle operations or the Mitchell River people themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The establishment of missions at Lockhart River in 1924 and Edward River in 1939 was undoubtedly important in hastening Diocesan control of the Mitchell River cattle as it added extra burdens of cost to the diocesan budget. Edward River Mission was an extension of the influence of the Mission to the north of the Mitchell River. Joseph Chapman's interest in the Edward River area went back as early as 1923 when he planted bananas and cassava there, an interest wholly supported by Matthews who was keen to purchase a small boat to assist Chapman moving between Kowanyama and

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<sup>16</sup>"Organisation Committee Report, August 1924 Meeting", 20-21 August 1924, ABM Board Minutes, vol.2, M4, Box 3, ABM Sydney.

<sup>17</sup>"Mitchell River Cattle", internal memorandum, no date but probably 1956, 5/6, ABM Chairman's correspondence, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 9, ML MSS 4503, Add On 1822.

<sup>18</sup>"Report of the Australian Board of Missions to General Synod, October 1932", ABM Board Minutes, vol.5, Box 6, series M4, 29-30 June 1932. ABM Sydney. The only proviso was that, "due regard [be shown] to the particular purposes for which such [cattle and] other possessions were acquired".

<sup>19</sup>*ABM Review*, 1 November 1937, p.184.

Edward River.<sup>20</sup> Chapman's agitation to establish a mission station at Edward River in 1928 was part of his strategy to block attempts to have the delta and northern coastal areas of the reserve thrown open to pastoral selection.<sup>21</sup> Walter Daniels spent part of 1932 on the coast near the Coleman River in an attempt to pioneer a mission station but this work lapsed until Chapman himself moved to Edward River, a little further north, in 1939.<sup>22</sup> This provided a new focus for the bush-living people from the north of the reserve and left Kowanyama to the earlier-settled *Kokobera*, *Kunjen* and *Kokominjen* who had already formed themselves into three villages close by the mission station. With the *Kokominjen* and *Thaayore* bush dwellers settled at Edward River, new arrivals to the Mission after 1939 were generally people displaced from fringe camps on cattle stations, more familiar with living under white control than the northern tribes, and amenable to employment in cattle work.

Even though support for Edward River was a logical extension of the missionary work at Kowanyama, the Diocese stretched the principle of spreading the Mitchell River funds much further. Superintendent Currington experienced occasions when general Mitchell River funds, not cattle funds, were applied to the other Aboriginal missions or more generally in the diocese. Timber ordered against the Mission account for work at Kowanyama was used instead to repair the Vicarage on Thursday Island; goods for Lockhart River were charged to the Mitchell River operational account. Currington felt personally affronted by this sort of dealing but was told by Bishop Hudson, "You've got to look after your brothers".<sup>23</sup> This seemed to imply that the needs of the people at Kowanyama were being met, which was far from the case.

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<sup>20</sup>Matthews to Chief Protector, 10 August 1923, 23:04904, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA. The boat, a motor launch, was eventually purchased the following year. (Stephen Davies, entry for 3 March 1924, Bishop's diary, OM.AV/114/1, JOL)

<sup>21</sup>Chapman to Chief Protector, 22 October 1928, 28:05357, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>22</sup>Chapman had spent long periods at Edward River during 1937. (*ABM Review*, 1 September 1937, p.154.) He moved to Lockhart River Mission to relieve for a period during 1938, (*ABM Review*, 1 November 1938, pp.203 & 205) before returning to the west coast.

<sup>23</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987.

Such “looking after” the work of the diocese from the Mitchell River cattle account was used in the post-war period to mask the insolvency of the Diocese. Funds for specific purposes deposited by individual church communities within the Diocese, had not been separately invested, and were used to bolster the Church’s operational funds, resulting in these deposits becoming, in effect, only book entries. The Mitchell River cattle income was the Diocese’s only means of cash to reinstate these unrepresented “trusts”. Additionally, the Mitchell River cattle financed the unprofitable cattle operations at Lockhart and Edward to the extent of £10,000, an extraordinarily generous contribution. Hudson reluctantly detailed this sorry position in a confidential statement to his church and government funding agencies in 1958 in a desperate bid to extract increased financial support from them.<sup>24</sup> This revelation, he acknowledged, stood to discredit the reputations of “diocesan officials, past and present”, and threatened the Diocese’s credit with business houses if it became generally known. More than this, it revealed that missionary paternalism had exploited the Mitchell River reserve and its people and that its administration had fallen far short of normal fiduciary standards.

After such raids on the Mitchell River funds there was nothing left to purchase basic items like wire, fence posts and replacement stock necessary to maintain the cattle operation at profitable levels. Nothing worthwhile for the people of Mitchell River, apart from the growth of the herd itself, had been achieved by direct diocesan management. In addition to the other missions, the Government was the principal beneficiary in this sleight-of-hand style of book-keeping. “Helping your brothers” had left all of the Carpentaria missions impoverished and made much less demand on the government purse than departmentally operated settlements. The Queensland Government was the ultimate beneficiary, its state wards at Kowanyama the ultimate losers.

In addition to the operational grant for each mission, capital grants to improve various aspects of the economic and social life of the missions were made available

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<sup>24</sup>John Hudson, “Statement re cattle at Mitchell River”, 5 March 1958. (Included in 1958/1959 financial assistance papers), OF 40, DFSAIA.

from the government coffers. The government provided a capital grant of £500 for the construction of the school at Belburra in 1929.<sup>25</sup> These funds were from the Aboriginal Protection Property Account, a government fund accumulated from deceased estates and unclaimed wages of Aborigines.<sup>26</sup> The term of Wiffie Currington's superintendentship coincided with Con O'Leary's term as Chief Protector and subsequently as Director of Native Affairs. Currington discovered that capital funds were largely held in O'Leary's gift. He recalled making strenuous representations to O'Leary for grant funding to purchase bulls only to have details of the sale of 800 head of Mitchell River cattle quoted back to him as reason for the Mission to buy them itself.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the apparent prosperity of the Mitchell River cattle operation further disadvantaged Mitchell River from gaining access to available grant funds, meagre as they were.

The government grant remained static and unreviewed for long periods at a time, suggesting a lack of active management of this funding source on the part of the Diocese. Incompetent central administration had relieved pressure on government funds during the 1950s which was a time of expanding government expenditure on Aboriginal affairs generally, and a period when government was showing an increased willingness to intervene on missions to raise living standards. Towards the end of this period, Yarrabah's grant was five times greater than that for Mitchell River even though both places had a similar number of residents.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Mitchell River Mission Operational Funding<sup>29</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>ABM Grant</b>	<b>Government Grant</b>
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<sup>25</sup>McFarlane to Bleakley, 18 July 1929, 29:04344, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>26</sup>Bleakley to Under Secretary, Home Department, 14 February 1928, 28:01233, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>27</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987. Currington's plea for "50 good Shorthorn and Devon Cross bulls to improve the herd", was made in his 1950 and 1951 annual reports. (AR, 1950, QPP, p.1095 and AR, 1951, QPP, p.1119)

<sup>28</sup>O'Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, Director of Native Affairs Corres., 8 March 1960, 60:1985, OF69, DFSAIA.

<sup>29</sup>Compiled from annual financial assistance papers, OF 40, DFSAIA.

1925 to 1934	£1,040	£600
1935 to 1950	£1,040	£900
1951, 1952	£1,040	£3,000
1953 to 1955	£1,040	£4,500
1956	£850	£6,300
1957	£850	£7,150
1958	£850	£10,900
1959	£850	£11,100

The negotiations between the Diocese and the government over the foundation of a mission on the East coast of the Peninsula required a significant investment from the Diocese which was represented by the 450 cattle from Mitchell River taken to Lockhart River in 1937 and 1939.<sup>30</sup> A further 300 breeders were transferred in 1950, making a total of 750 head given away over 13 years.<sup>31</sup> In 1939, the same year as 200 head were transferred to Lockhart River, the Aboriginal garden workers at Mitchell River were being labelled, without any intended irony, as “indigent”.<sup>32</sup> Mitchell River Aborigines were being portrayed as dependent and unproductive at the same time as a considerable resource was being siphoned off the reserve.

There was a uniqueness about the cattle operation at Mitchell River, certainly unique when compared with the other diocesan ventures and with the other missions and reserves in Queensland. It was one of the few enterprises that fulfilled the missionary hope of building an economic base for an “industrial mission”, an enterprise that would keep Aborigines busy and instil industrious habits as well as generate a financial surplus. This achievement came through the persistent application of a policy of herd building that commenced in the fourth year of the Mission’s existence. Both Aborigines and missionaries acted to achieve these things with considerable diligence

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<sup>30</sup>Stephen Davies, *ABM Review*, 1 November 1937, pp.184, 185. Davies, speaking of the 250 head of Mitchell River cattle taken to Lockhart River in 1937 commented, “By this gift the Church has now fulfilled the last of the conditions which the Queensland Government insisted upon when they asked us to undertake missionary work on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula”.

<sup>31</sup>Annual Report, 25 September 1951, Director of Native Affairs, QPP, p.1119.

<sup>32</sup>Alec MacLeod, *ABM Review*, 1 June 1940, p.88.

and care. Even though the financial management of the Diocese was often chaotic, there was no sense of the diocese making decisions which would threaten the income producing capacity of Mitchell River, even though they were hesitant in making investment decisions which would have enhanced this capacity. By the end of the 1950s it was an extremely valuable diocesan asset, treated as an adjunct to, but different from, the Mission. This was shown in the privileged position of the cattle management over other mission workers. In 1960, when missionary wages were £350 per annum, Jack Trewick, the cattle manager, was being paid £900 and George Wheeler, the head stockman, £600.<sup>33</sup> The cattle operation was the only area of mission life where industry standard wages would be paid and then only to those in charge, not to the Aboriginal stockmen who were still working for rations. Missionary records focus on the appointment of cattle managers as key initiatives in pushing the development of the cattle operation forward but neglect to identify the significant role of local Aborigines in building up the pastoral industry on the Mission.

There were often large gaps in between the appointment of outside cattle managers when the cattle operation was in the hands of the *Kunjen* man, Gregory Leonard.<sup>34</sup> Gregory was born at Trubanaman and grew up at *Koolatah* station.<sup>35</sup> He had learned stock work at *Koolatah* but preferred to live at the Mission on the conditions of a mission worker, apparently preferring the life of, as Rowse terms it, an “insider” on the Mission, a trusted missionary lieutenant, to the more marginal role offered on the station.<sup>36</sup> On the Mission he was in charge of droving trips to bring horses to Mitchell River from *Valley of Lagoons* and *Merluna*, and, as well, ran the stock camp when there was no white cattle manager. With Alec MacLeod’s appointment to this position in

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<sup>33</sup>Diocese of Carpentaria, *Wages and Salaries*, p.27. OM.AV/121/1. George Wheeler was employed on the award rate of £600 per annum.

<sup>34</sup>Gregory was obviously sought after by the stations as he had built up a bank account of £84.8.4 in 1931. (Protector, Somerset District to Chief Protector, 22 August 1932, 32:06606, OF 46, DFSAIA.)

<sup>35</sup>Gregory, the son of Annie and Leonard Arfangatun is the ninth person baptised at Trubanaman. (Entry in Baptism Register for 5 June 1910, OM.AV/10/1, JOL)

<sup>36</sup>Tim Rowse, “‘Were you ever savages?’ Aboriginal insiders and pastoralists’ patronage”, *Oceania*, vol.58, no.1, December 1987, pp.81-99. Rowse applies a typology of “Colonist”, “Aboriginal Insider” and “Aboriginal Outsider” to relations in the Kimberley pastoral district of Western Australia.



1931, Gregory worked as his head stockman and when MacLeod became mission superintendent in 1938, Gregory's influential role as MacLeod's trusted "offsider" increased.<sup>37</sup>

The cattle operation exposed Kowanyama people to Aboriginal leadership in areas of the Mission's life that was otherwise the exclusive preserve of whites. In addition to Gregory Leonard, Mapoon Aborigines particularly were employed in management roles in the cattle work: Willie Hudson in the late 1930s, Arthur Callope in the 1950s and George Wheeler from 1957 occupied positions otherwise filled by whites. At least in George Wheeler's case, an exempted Aborigine from 1957, he was paid at the award rate that whites would expect to receive.<sup>38</sup>

The white men who worked the mission cattle were not missionaries, they were employed specifically for their cattle experience, living a life that was often away from Kowanyama, on the stock camps or droving bullocks. These head stockmen were usually known to mission Aborigines through their work on cattle stations in the region. Unlike the missionaries proper, who invariably came from places vastly distant from the Peninsula, the Mission's white stockmen and cattle managers were more likely to be part of the human community of the Peninsula. Where the missionaries showed remarkable continence, some of the stockmen had been involved in sexual relationships with Aboriginal women. Bob Barr and Henry Butler were the fathers of Aboriginal children, and Arthur White became married to Barr's Aboriginal daughter, Cora.<sup>39</sup> As Trigger discovered at Doomadgee, behaviours that indicated a previous closeness to the Aboriginal domain were likely to result in whites being accepted as less of an intrusion into the Aboriginal domain on the Mission.<sup>40</sup> While the cattle operations were distinctive

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<sup>37</sup>Maudie Koolatah, taped interview, Kowanyama, 27 March 1988.

<sup>38</sup>George and Mildred Wheeler were exempted from being protected persons in 1957 before they arrived at Kowanyama (Register of Exemptions, 1942-1967, A/58979, QSA.)

<sup>39</sup>Sam Zingle, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 March 1988.

<sup>40</sup>David Trigger, *Whitefella comin'*, Cambridge, 1992, p.92. Even though Aboriginal and white domains were clearly marked on the stations, Lindsay Aidan and Aurukun stockman, Silas Wolmby, were in the habit of camping with Arthur White on the stock camp at *Dunbar* station so that they could sleep more soundly than was possible if they camped with the older Aboriginal men who tended to stay up late into the night talking (Lindsay Aidan, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 March 1988.)

as a diocesan controlled economic unit as far as the Diocese was concerned, they were distinctive for mission Aborigines as an area that was more clearly part of the Aboriginal domain than other areas of mission activity.

Aborigines were encouraged to believe that the cattle corporately “belonged” to the community. This sense became particularly obvious in the concern Aborigines showed for the ownership of the cattle at the time of the hand over to government administration in 1967.<sup>41</sup> Kenny Jimmy said that people believed that the Bishop “*should have stuck to all those cattle*”, (ie. not handed them over to government control).<sup>42</sup> Jerry Mission recalled missionary Joseph Chapman being lenient towards him in the 1930s, when he and some other young men killed a bullock to eat, on the basis that the cattle belonged to Aborigines as it was the efforts of Aboriginal labour that had been responsible for building up the herd.<sup>43</sup> The fact of mission cattle being slaughtered to supply beef from very early in the mission’s life was a compelling reinforcement to this belief, especially as the meat had been distributed as part of the mission rations.<sup>44</sup> It is likely that missionaries used the language of corporate ownership even when they knew that the relationship between cattle profits and any benefit to Kowanyama residents was, at best, indirect, and often meagre.

However, the management structure of the cattle operations involved some Kowanyama men living at mustering camps on the reserve for periods of time and gave them access to better rations than if they had stayed at Kowanyama itself. Access to beef, which was more liberally supplied to mustering camp workers, was shared with family members back at Kowanyama as the opportunity arose. Work in the mustering camp also provided an opportunity to hunt and fish at places normally inaccessible to Kowanyama “inmates”. Cattle work offered a place for the distinctive bush skills and

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<sup>41</sup>Sam Zingle, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 March 1988.

<sup>42</sup>Kenny Jimmy, taped interview, Kowanyama, 4 May 1988.

<sup>43</sup>Jerry Mission, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 November 1987. Chapman, as an agriculturalist, may have had little personal commitment to the prosperity of the beef industry on the Mission especially since the cattle became very destructive towards any attempts at gardening as their numbers grew.

<sup>44</sup>Bishop Henry Newton believed that, “an extra beef ration will give the natives on the Mission more interest in the herd and make them more contented”. Meeting of 22-23 June 1921, ABM Board Minutes vol.1, M4, Box 3, ABM Sydney.

even ritual knowledge of the land to be used to advantage. James Gibo recalled that when he was head stockman at *Rutland Plains* he would call out in language to the “old people”, the spirits of the traditional owners of that land, “*to let all the cattle out of the scrub*”, an effective enlistment of tradition in the furthering of the cattle work.<sup>45</sup> Mustering provided a mission sanctioned reason to travel to traditional tracts of land and for young men to learn from their elders the stories of the land and the brutal contact history of their forebears, an opportunity that was not present without missionary surveillance back at Kowanyama. James Gibo was able to take me to a place on *Rutland Plains* where, many years before, he had been shown human bones in the sand and was told the accounts of Bowman’s atrocities by older Aborigines.

For the majority of people who lived at Kowanyama the presence of so many cattle, along with improvements like fences and yards, had the effect of imposing further restriction on access across the reserve land. Grass burning, a traditional event, needed to be curbed so as not to destroy fodder. Cattle contaminated the waterholes and general access was only allowed when it did not interfere with mustering. Even gardening activities on the Mission had to withstand the grazing assault of so many cattle.<sup>46</sup> An unforeseen consequence of the increase in the size of the cattle herd was to increase the pressures which confined most Aboriginal activity to the actual mission station.

For most people, though, the greatest opportunity offered by pastoralism was for experience outside the Mission, with the opportunity of working for wages rather than mission conditions of rations and a token wage.<sup>47</sup> Aborigines had been an integral, if undervalued, part of the pastoral workforce from before the Mission’s foundation.<sup>48</sup> The earliest use of the Mission as a sanctuary was by station Aborigines seeking to get away from pastoralist control. The Mission’s success in providing pastoral workers with

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<sup>45</sup>James Gibo, taped interview, Kowanyama, 17 July 1987.

<sup>46</sup>AR, 1948, QPP, p.893. “I am afraid that this year we may not be so successful with our sweet potatoes as the cattle found a weak place in the fence and got in one night and caused a considerable lot of damage”.

<sup>47</sup>Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry*, Cambridge, 1994, pp.136-46.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p.79

protection had its corollary in the preference for station work increasingly shown by some missionised Aborigines.<sup>49</sup>

This arrangement of moving between the Mission and stations suited the expectations and circumstance of some Aborigines, especially those whose traditional land was distant from the mission reserve. The missionaries sought to discourage this movement when it was unregulated and for the convenience of the Aborigines concerned, but willingly sanctioned it when it took place within mission controlled structures and subject to employment agreements. Thus, Chapman had no hesitation in sending Leonard Arfangatun and his family packing when they had come to the Mission after leaving *Shalfo*, part of their traditional *Kunjen* country. He objected to their “making a convenience of the mission”.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, unsanctioned departures from the Mission were certain to arouse missionary disapproval of the kind shown by Chapman when Ethel, May, Amy, Roland and Bullie went to *Rutland Plains* without his permission in 1936.<sup>51</sup>

Work off the mission acted as a kind of “safety valve” that helped to perpetuate missionary order by removing Aborigines from potential conflict situations for the greater part of the year.<sup>52</sup> This seems to have been the situation for men like Bob Dunbar who came to the Mission as adults with a familiarity of station work. By the 1950s when Kowanyama was a major supplier of station labour, a new generation of mission-born Aborigines called Kowanyama home even if their traditional country was not part of the reserve. For these Mitchell River people, brought up with the expectation that they might some day work on the stations, the Mission was a place to return to and find

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<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p.144, “Thomas Bruce, who was born at Mitchell River mission in 1927 and went to work on *Van Rook* station at about the age of fifteen, had no desire to go back to the mission for holidays. He worked at the station for six years, mostly offside for the horsebreaker. Early in 1947 he decided that he wanted a change and went to Normanton where the local protector signed him up for work on nearby *Magowra* station”.

<sup>50</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 15 November 1919, “Leonard and family put in an appearance having absconded from *Shalfo*. He wanted to be taken on. I advised him to return to *Shalfo* and not make a convenience of the mission”.

<sup>51</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 31 October 1936.

<sup>52</sup>Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Sydney, 1989, p.80. Attwood contrasts “communitas” off the mission to order and rigidity within it.

some respite from their demanding work on the station. During the 1950s, at the peak of demand for pastoral workers of both sexes, the mission population swelled by 50% over the wet season when station workers returned for a “spell”. The extent of this influx guaranteed that there was only a token attempt to incorporate such a large number into the mission workforce. Even though the mission routine was often rigid and uncompromising, it probably appeared comparatively lax over these wet season layoffs since it struggled to cope with the large seasonal increase in population.

Even though male station workers were in no confusion as to who was boss on the stock camps, the nature of their work, if not living conditions, was more broadly egalitarian between black and white than was the women’s work on the station homesteads. Here, Aboriginal women had very clear insights into a rigid hierarchy, particularly as it was manifested in the division of the domestic space on the big stations. On *Abingdon Downs* in the 1950s for example, three separate eating areas existed: for the Aboriginal stockmen and their wives, for the white stockmen in the kitchen, and for the manager and his family. Doris Gilbert recalled that each of the white dining areas were served by five Aboriginal women.<sup>53</sup> Compared with the Mission, even with its spatial and social distinctions between the Aboriginal villages and the missionary area, this sense of social distinction on the stations represented an intrusion into the domestic domain that made it seem all the more powerful. On the nearer stations to the Mission, distinctions were brutal. Lindsay Aidan worked at *Dunbar* and *Koolatah* and experienced how Aborigines were served a standard diet of corned beef and damper on the woodheap.<sup>54</sup>

A woman who left to work at *Taldora* station at the age of 14 years, thought life on the station, in terms of its demands, was like living in the mission dormitory. On *Taldora* she had to rise at 4.00 am to start her work and was not finished until 8.00 pm. Even with this, there was a sense of freedom that had not been experienced on the mission; the opportunity of finding romance and the challenge of learning to cook, set

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<sup>53</sup>Doris Gilbert, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 March 1988.

<sup>54</sup>Lindsay Aidan, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 March 1988. He described this as the situation at *Dunbar*, *Rutland*, *Inkerman* and *Koolatah*.

table, make beds and clean the homestead.<sup>55</sup> Even for older people who had grown up on the Mission, station work was usually their first experience of living away from the Mission.

At *Rutland Plains*, *Dunbar* and *Koolatah* it was likely that other Aboriginal workers were kin or known from the Mission.<sup>56</sup> On the more distant stations, Kowanyama people were often confronted with a situation where there were no familiar faces and were dislocated from important family events. Arthur Major, who started his station career as a teenager in the 1930s, spent ten years at *Esmeralda* in the Croydon district. This separation from Kowanyama meant that he was away on both occasions when his parents died.<sup>57</sup> For others, away for a long time, their kin had often given them up as dead. Norman Junior was held up in Winton for two years on account of wartime travel restrictions when he was returning north after taking a mob of *Esmeralda* cattle to Blackall. Upon his return home after the war he was surprised to learn that his parents thought that he had died.<sup>58</sup>

Norman Junior's experience as the Aboriginal "boy" on Billy Corrigan's droving plant demonstrates the unequal power relationships that continued outside the Mission and the social isolation that resulted from working amongst whites. First recruited to *Macaroni* station by Billy Wilson, Norman Junior joined Corrigan and was the only Aboriginal in what was otherwise a family concern: Corrigan's wife, son and daughter made up the rest of the workforce. Deprived of any experience of equality with the Corrigans, he had also been discouraged from developing any solidarity with Aborigines along the droving track. At Boulia, Corrigan told Norman that the local Aborigines were cannibals who would "take their same colour away and eat him", and offered to protect Norman from this alleged danger by allowing him to camp with the

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<sup>55</sup>Maudie Fraser, taped interview, Kowanyama, 8 April 1988.

<sup>56</sup>Susan Brumby, taped interview, Kowanyama, 11 April 1988. After her marriage in 1955, Susan and her husband George went to work on *Koolatah* station and subsequently to *Rutland Plains*. On Rutland she stayed at Lochnagar outstation with her husband's brother Frank and his wife Maisie, another relative, Mission Dick, was the "home boy" on the outstation.

<sup>57</sup>Arthur Major, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 March 1988.

<sup>58</sup>Norman Junior, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 April 1988.

family instead of in his usual place, alone and, at a distance from them. Being young, isolated, and suddenly fearful, he was glad to accept Corrigan's offer. This same apprehension was encouraged when an all-Aboriginal droving plant was encountered along the stock route. Norman described his reaction to seeing these Aboriginal drovers as again one of fear that they might take him away with them, a fear undoubtedly cultivated by Corrigan to reinforce his place as the "boy" on the droving plant lest this example of Aboriginal leadership and autonomy stir up similar aspirations in Norman.

More positive experiences of meeting with other Aborigines happened at Winton, during his long wait for the War to end before he could return to Kowanyama. Here he felt happy to talk with them on Friday nights when they came in to see films at the picture theatre. He had become aware too, of the "invisibility" of Aboriginal people in a place like Winton, where they were apparent in the town only at times sanctioned by whites. Norman's experience broadened his horizons even though it had dislocated him from his Kowanyama community and frustrated important possibilities of developing broader relationships with other Aborigines. His experience was one of far warmer community on the Mission than he had found as a drover, and saw him develop a career as a mission "insider" in preference to continuing with station work.<sup>59</sup>

For others, life on the station exposed them to brutality and abuse that they had not experienced on the Mission. Lindsay Aidan had seen an Aborigine bashed on the head with a shovel, and his brother bore a scar on his arm from being flogged with a stockwhip by the head stockman on *Miranda Downs*. Drunken whites were in the habit of wanting to pick fights with Aborigines, something that was humiliating and mocked their inferior social position on the stations. Aborigines knew that they would be the ones who would be punished if they defended themselves. The inequality of power relations was a constant fact of life for station Aborigines and intruded into all areas of their life. Women were exposed to the risk of sexual harassment, forced sexual activity and even rape. Their husbands were forced to accept the humiliation of the situation for

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<sup>59</sup>Norman Junior, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 April 1988. His career on the Mission included work around the Superintendent's house, and then, later, at the end of the mission period, as a policeman and Justice of the Peace in the government time.

fear of confronting the force of white solidarity that usually formed if any charge of misconduct was made against a fellow white.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the injustices of life on the station, increasing numbers of Kowanyama Aborigines after the War went as drovers, stockmen or domestics to the stations. This high demand for Aboriginal labour is demonstrated in Wiffie Currington's comments in his Annual Report:

[1946] Demand extra good for stock work. No complaints from any of the stations where boys [sic] employed.

[1948] Demand for stock boys [sic] extra good, and all boys [sic] that are suitable are out on employment.

[1951] During the last twelve months, the demand for native labour for the cattle stations has been far in excess of the amount [sic] of boys [sic] we have been able to send out.

[1955] Usual demand for native stockmen is being met as far as possible.

[1958] All able bodied men not required for Mission maintenance have no difficulty in obtaining employment on cattle stations, and we are not able to supply all the labour that is needed.<sup>61</sup>

In the dry season of 1958 there were only six able bodied men left on the Mission, an arrangement that was typical of this post-war period of high demand for station labour.<sup>62</sup> In 1940, when 120 agreements for Aboriginal labour were issued from Mitchell River, extra planes were needed to take the workers to the stations, a problem solved in future years by Australian National Airways taking over the run and using much larger DC-3 aircraft.<sup>63</sup> Considering that 1937 was the first time people at Kowanyama had seen an aircraft, their use of and familiarity with air travel was a direct

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<sup>60</sup>Lindsay Aidan, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 March 1988 and Kenny Jimmy, taped interview, Kowanyama, 4 May 1988.

<sup>61</sup>AR, DNA (for the years cited), QPP.

<sup>62</sup>Clarke to Coaldrake, 25 January 1959, ABM Chairman's correspondence: personal file, N. Clarke. ABM, Sydney.

<sup>63</sup>ABM Review, 1 August 1941, p.115. The ANA route travelled from Cairns to *Abingdon Downs*, Normanton, *Vanrook* and then Kowanyama. (Doug Sutherland, *The life and times of Douglas Milton Sutherland*, typescript, no date, p.28.)



result of their value as station labour and at odds with their experience of technology on the Mission which was otherwise unsophisticated.<sup>64</sup>

At the same time as the Diocese was given a free reign in the administration of the Mitchell River Cattle operations by ABM, the government was claiming back its role as the financial guardian of Aborigines. Up until 1931 savings accounts held on behalf of some mission Aborigines were maintained by the Diocese; others had been kept by the Chief Protector's office from the start. The accounts handed over to the Chief Protector demonstrated that work on the stations had the potential to raise Aborigines, at least on paper, far beyond the indigence in which they were so often depicted.<sup>65</sup>

Oscar	£67.17.9
Willie Koolatah	£76.6.4
Gregory	£84.8.4
Leonard	£94.17.11
Toby	£152.0.1
Henry	£200.3.4

These were substantial savings representing many years' work,<sup>66</sup> large amounts by missionary standards. When Alec MacLeod was appointed mission cattle manager in 1931, his gross

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<sup>64</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 1 October 1937, AB/1, QSA, "[Captain Howard, the pilot ] arrived at 11.30 am and flew over the buildings several times. The people were very excited, some were afraid and hid themselves. It was the first plane the natives had seen, and the first to fly over the Mission". The Mission had its landing ground approved for use by single engine aircraft six weeks later. (Alec MacLeod, diary entry for 1 October 1937, AB/1, QSA.)

<sup>65</sup>Stephen Davies, entry in Bishop's Day Book for 9 July 1931. OM.AV/126/1, JOL. and Protector, Somerset District to Chief Protector, 22 August 1932, 32:06606, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>66</sup>See Dawn May, *Aboriginal labour*, p.111.

salary was £125 a year.<sup>67</sup>

Authorisation to draw against individual accounts was given by the local protector, usually the police officer or court official in the towns or the superintendent on the missions. Kenny Jimmy found that the only time he actually handled his own money, even though he was earning £5 a week droving, was when he went into Normanton for the races and was given a small cash amount by the Clerk of Petty Sessions.<sup>68</sup> The stations, like the Mission, operated on a rations system with food and clothes being given in lieu of wages, with cash considered only “pocket money” for special events. By 1967, the time of the government takeover of the Mission, some mission Aborigines

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<sup>67</sup>Stephen Davies, Bishop’s Day Book entry for 20 April 1931, OM.AV/126/1, JOL.

<sup>68</sup>Kenny Jimmy, taped interview, Kowanyama, 4 May 1988. Kenny said he was earning “five bob a week” which seems erroneous given the rates of pay set down in 1952, his apparent confusion only emphasising his point that he didn’t have the opportunity to manage his earnings. (AR 1952, DNA, QPP, vol.2, p.966.)

had several thousand dollars  
in their accounts.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to hefty savings balances, the experience of working on the stations had opened up a wider window on the world than was possible for those who only knew the Mission. Air, rail and motor travel were commonplace means of travelling to the stations at a time when the work and transport on the Mission was mostly unmechanised. Some stations had exposed mission Aborigines to better accommodation, the convenience of reticulated water and the health benefits of properly organised sanitation at a time when the Mission lagged far behind even small country communities in these things. Aborigines on the stations participated in a world where their labour had value and where stations competed for their services. Hector Highbury spoke of the confidence this gave the people in their own abilities: “*We used to get a lot of jobs, anywhere*”.<sup>70</sup> They saw whites carrying out similar labours exercising real choices in how they lived their life and spent their money, choices that they were not open to them on either station or mission.

Compared with even the smallest country town, the mission “store”, commenced in 1922, offered virtually no choice beyond those items deemed appropriate by the missionaries for subsistence.<sup>71</sup> Flour, rice, tea, sugar and tobacco were the staples of the store and often, towards the end of the “wet”, would be in a poor condition, mouldy or weevilly. The initial idea was to give greater and more economical access to a basic range of consumer items for those who had accrued savings balances but these aspirations were not met to any appreciable extent. For nearly forty years it remained a voucher-operated arrangement in parallel with the doling out of mission rations. Beyond the very modest expenditure possible through the mission store, Wiffie Currington had a policy of not allowing people to draw more than £50 at a time and then only for

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<sup>69</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987.

<sup>70</sup>Hector Highbury, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 November 1987.

<sup>71</sup>Matthews to Bleakley, 27 October 1921, 21:6141 and Bleakley to Matthews, 9 December 1921, 21:6141. Chief Protector of Aborigines Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

approved expenditure, like Christmas shopping.<sup>72</sup> This was an application of the time honoured “protection” policy and had the effect of masking the difference between the affluence, on paper, of people with large savings balances and the poverty of those who had stayed on the Mission with very little opportunity of earning cash or accruing a savings balance.<sup>73</sup> Even though Currington had raised the “wages” for working on the Mission from one shilling to five shillings per week, this was of no consequence compared with wages of eight pounds per week that were being earned on the stations.<sup>74</sup> When all were brought to the same subsistence level of life on mission rations, the monetary disparities were glossed over.

This protection policy had the effect of allowing very little personal material progress on the Mission throughout the period of post-war high employment. It was a policy that allowed little latitude, as assistant superintendent Norman Clarke discovered after he had purchased a set of kitchen chairs for Smiler Mission and transported them back to the Mission without first gaining Currington’s approval.<sup>75</sup> Even though Smiler, a mission “insider”, had built up ample funds through selling crocodile skins, he was discouraged, as a “protected” Aborigine, from utilising his money for the material improvement of his home and family. Additionally, Currington may have interpreted Clarke’s actions as an attempt to cut between him and an Aboriginal confidante by appearing to challenge the superintendent’s central role in dispensing favour and approving purchases.

Kowanyama Aborigines showed almost no interest, however, in seeking to be exempted from the provisions of the Act. Younger Aborigines heard their elders express

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<sup>72</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987.

<sup>73</sup>The “Memorandum with regard to the hiring of female Aboriginal or Half-Caste servants”, summarised this aspect of the policy of protection well, “Servants may draw on their bank account at any time on application to the Protector or Officer in Charge of Police, who will see, if necessary, that the money is judiciously expended for clothing and other requirements”. (no date, but referred to in correspondence from 1919; Chief Protector to Matthews, 29 September 1919, 19:3478, Chief Protector of Aborigines Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.)

<sup>74</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 September 1984. The store continued to operate on a ration and credit deduction system until the early 1960s when cash transactions were introduced. (Philip Robinson, taped interview, Nambour, 18 August 1987.)

<sup>75</sup>Norman Clarke, taped interview, Mareeba, 25 September 1992.

a mixture of disapproval and amazement towards Aborigines who became exempted when they encountered exempted Aborigines on the stations or along the droving camps: “*Doesn’t he feel shame, one blackfellow amongst the white man?*”<sup>76</sup> The prospect of living with whites and having no contact with family or community was largely inconceivable to Kowanyama people. “*We never worry about it*”, was one man’s response to the possibility of becoming exempted.<sup>77</sup>

The Mission had become well integrated into the pastoral economy which it served. In addition to supplying labour from Kowanyama, the mission acted as an agent for the Presbyterian mission at Aurukun, all at no cost to the stations. The Mission was an active participant in enforcing labour agreements. Chaplain Doug Sutherland described the summary treatment Geoffrey Philip received when he walked off *Donors Hill* station and made his way, in excess of 400 kilometres, back to Kowanyama, only to be immediately sent back.<sup>78</sup> The Normanton protector’s comments on this incident reflect a grudging admiration of Geoffrey’s endurance. Despite his admiration, the use of force in upholding the labour agreement was harsh and unbending:

Phillip Geoffrey [sic] shot through from Donor’s Hills about one month ago and walked back to the Mitchell River Mission - about 280 miles - carrying a swag - not a bad effort. He was returned on the plane last week and has gone out to his employment today. He was put in the cell for a few days[,] until he went out[,] to quieten him down.<sup>79</sup>

This eagerness, on the part of the Mission, to be a party to enforcing labour agreements concealed an ongoing struggle for authority between the mission superintendent and the protector in Normanton. This relationship went back to 1907 when Chief Protector Richard Howard suggested that Matthews be allowed to act as a deputy to Inspector James Lamond, the protector in Normanton.<sup>80</sup> Howard’s decision to involve the missionary in this way was explained in terms of better conveniencing the

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<sup>76</sup>Lindsay Aidan, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 March 1988.

<sup>77</sup>Lindsay Aidan, taped interview, Kowanyama, 15 March 1988.

<sup>78</sup>Doug Sutherland, *The life and times of Douglas Milton Sutherland*, typescript, no date, p.30.

<sup>79</sup>File note, “Extract from Report from the Protector of Aborigines, Normanton, dated 31st March, 1953”, 31 March 1953, Administration - Kowanyama Employment, Aborigines, 17A-13, DFSAIA, Interim Transfer R254, QSA.

<sup>80</sup>Howard to Lamond, 3 September 1907, 07:2142, Chief Protector of Aborigines correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

neighbouring pastoralists, since the Act prescribed a Justice of the Peace as witness to the agreement. Undoubtedly this provision of the Act was unworkable in the remote pastoral regions where hundreds of kilometres and seasonal flooding separated the already reluctant pastoralists from their nearest centre of government administration.

In 1942 the Normanton protector instructed that Bullie, Nipper and Barbara be sent to Normanton from *Rutland Plains* for re-employment in the Normanton protectorate only to have the then mission superintendent, MacLeod, intervene to have them returned to Kowanyama.<sup>81</sup> Bullie was once again in the centre of the struggle for authority between Kowanyama and Normanton in 1953 when the Normanton protector requested she be sent to a station. Currington's reply was direct: "[She] is approximately 60 years of age and has a credit balance of over £600 and as she herself wished to remain on the Mission, I would think that she was entitled to".<sup>82</sup> Currington asserted that it was his role to place Aboriginal workers and to manage their work schedules, a role equally claimed by the Normanton protector in satisfying the labour hungry stations. O'Leary backed Currington's claims, effectively, if not legally, granting him an exclusive sphere of influence. O'Leary thought Currington's declaration, that he intended to "hold all labour wherever possible for use on the surrounding stations, before allowing any labour to go to other Protectorates", "fair and reasonable".<sup>83</sup> Missionary paternalism, even though capable of being rigid in enforcing agreements, still offered more consideration for Aborigines and their individual circumstances than did a distant protector inclined to treat them as mere labour commodities.

In addition to its role as a "safety valve", work on the stations did little to disturb the equilibrium on the Mission. Practices on both stations and mission supported the pauperisation that had become as integral a part of the mission ideology as paternalism. As long as the Mission controlled the place that Kowanyama people considered

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<sup>81</sup>Protector of Aborigines, Normanton to O'Leary, 24 June 1942, Administration - Kowanyama Employment, Aborigines, 17A-13, DFSAIA, Interim Transfer R254, QSA.

<sup>82</sup>O'Leary to Protector of Aborigines, Normanton, 30 January 1953, 6E/21, Administration - Kowanyama Employment, Aborigines 17A-13, DFSAIA, Interim Transfer R254, QSA.

<sup>83</sup>O'Leary to Protector of Aborigines, Normanton, 30 January 1953, 6E/21, Administration - Kowanyama Employment, Aborigines 17A-13, DFSAIA, Interim Transfer R254, QSA.

“home”, Aborigines were willing to make the transformations between station and mission and all that this required of them. Even though Aboriginal labour was productive it was treated as unproductive. When Aborigines had become rich they were treated as if they were poor. All the while the Kowanyama people were being told that the mission cattle herd was theirs, its profits were being raked off into the unaccountable morass of diocesan finance already described. The self critical survey of missions by Robertson, the ABM chairman, in 1952 identified the limited aspirations for native people which he saw being characteristic of ABM’s work not only in Australia but also in New Guinea and Melanesia.

... we have simply provided... food and clothing - we have attended to his educational and physical needs, but we are still looking upon him as a “hewer of wood and drawer of water”. In these days of national consciousness we must do more.<sup>84</sup>

Robertson sought a solution in the formation of co-operatives.<sup>85</sup> This still echoed the “self sufficiency” rhetoric of Matthews, decades earlier, when the cattle enterprise was commenced. Robertson was impatient that the achievement of economic power was a long way off:

We may be forced to help them [Aborigines] for a generation but they are capable, in time, of being able to stand among us as a respected people, instead of mere satellites that we are forced to feed and clothe.<sup>86</sup>

Targets for self sufficiency and economic viability were continually revised. Gilbert White considered that 500 head of cattle would be sufficient to ensure self sufficiency,<sup>87</sup> Robertson placed self sufficiency a generation in the future even though, at the time of his comments, White’s numerical target had been achieved tenfold. By 1958 there was very little in the way of general material progress to show at Kowanyama for over fifty years of missionary control. When Norman Clarke went there as assistant superintendent he found the place almost exclusively concerned with cattle

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<sup>84</sup>“Chairman’s Report”, 12-13 November 1952, ABM Board Minutes, vol.J, box 11, Series M4, ABM Sydney.

<sup>85</sup>Noel Loos and Robyn Keast, “The Radical Promise: the Aboriginal Cooperative Movement”, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.25, no.99, October 1992, pp.286-301.

<sup>86</sup>“Chairman’s Report”, 20-22 November 1956, ABM Board Minutes, vol.K, box 12, Series M4, ABM Sydney.

<sup>87</sup>Gilbert White, *Missionary Notes*, 26 July 1909, p.66.

and supplying labour to the stations. Clarke's description of the village life at

Kowanyama in 1958 shows the extent of material deprivation;

The people live in small poorly ventilated cabbage tree huts, mostly with dirt floors, very few of them are in line so that no streets can be made, they are set in a sea of long grass and rubbish so that it is hard to tell that there is a village at all... Most of the houses have no furniture and the people just sit on the ground to eat and prepare meals... the dormitory and school children, though they sit at a table, only eat with a spoon or their fingers... There is electricity and water laid on, but only for the whites, there is one tap to a village as far as water is concerned and as the villages are fairly scattered many of the women have to carry water a long way. The store is a ramshackle old affair and no attempt has been made to make it look like a shop. There are public lavatories scattered throughout the villages and men are employed to empty them; they slack on the job if they get a chance but you can hardly blame them as they have to carry the pans on a yoke over their shoulders, two at a time anything up to nearly half a mile... there is no arrangement for disposal of rubbish and tins etc are just thrown into the grass.<sup>88</sup>

Even this poor arrangement was an improvement on the situation in 1954 when there were only toilets for the staff and two Aboriginal families. The communal toilets, criticised by Clarke, were part of a hookworm eradication program commenced only four years earlier.<sup>89</sup> The condition of the school building was so bad that a government inspector feared that it could collapse and cause loss of life.<sup>90</sup> The years between the end of Matthew's superintendentship in 1924 and the end of Currington's in 1960 witnessed minimal material change in Kowanyama compared with the extent of change in the wider community or even on the other Aboriginal communities.<sup>91</sup>

The ABM's post-war slogan for its new Aboriginal policy, "The Aborigines Call for Our Best", suggested far more than was achieved, at least as far as Mitchell River Mission was concerned.<sup>92</sup> The policy, envisaged the development of "community, health, education and recreation services commensurate with the responsibility we owe to our original Australians". From the apparently low base of missionary operations

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<sup>88</sup> Clarke to McFarlane, 13 July 1958, ABM Chairman's correspondence: series 5, box 2, folder 9.

<sup>89</sup> Doug Sutherland, The life and times of Douglas Milton Sutherland, typescript, no date, p.41.

<sup>90</sup> O'Shea to Director General Health and Medical Services, 3 December 1958, Chief Protector of Aborigines Correspondence, OF 40, DFSAIA.

<sup>91</sup> Annual Report, Director of Native Affairs, Queensland Parliamentary Papers, 1960-1961, p.1167. O'Leary reported that progress in housing on Church Missions was "not comparative [sic] with that applicable on Government Settlements", a comment that applied to Kowanyama in most other areas as well.

<sup>92</sup> *ABM Review*, 1 September 1947, p.131.



towards the end of the Second World War, when Currington continued alone, without any other white assistants, the appointment of additional missionary staff was the main initiative during the post-war period.

Whereas the pre-war Missionary propaganda dealt with the material concerns of the Mission, especially towards the various schemes to build an economic base, post-war writing emphasised the personality and struggles of individual missionaries. This change of focus to the missionary rather than the Mission may reflect a recognition that an economic base had been established in the cattle, but more likely reflects the organisational needs of ABM in its attempts to meet its personnel requirements in the post-war period. The re-building of the New Guinea mission, new missionary opportunities in Japan and a new spirit of missionary co-operation in the areas of concern to ABM displaced Mitchell River from its pre-war prominence in the pages of the *ABM Review*. When interest in Aboriginal missions experienced a resurgence in the 1950s, it was in the shape of the wildly enthusiastic propaganda for the co-operative experiment at Lockhart River.<sup>93</sup> Even when Lockhart River was being advanced as the model of the way forward for Aboriginal missions, there was no recognition of the extent of resources that had been applied from the Mitchell River cattle funds to prop up the Lockhart finances.<sup>94</sup>

Incredibly, ABM had been kept in the dark about the internal financial arrangements of the Diocese until Robertson, encouraged by the Board's finance committee, decided to ask the obvious question, "[What was] the income received from the cattle industry on the Mitchell River Mission?"<sup>95</sup> Hudson's answer must have shocked ABM's Sydney administrators. For the six years from 1950 to 1956, cattle sales had amounted to £46,299.<sup>96</sup> Even though this period's figures opened with

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<sup>93</sup>*ABM Review*, 1 October 1955, pp.150-53.

<sup>94</sup>John Hudson, "Statement re cattle at Mitchell River", 5 March 1958. (Included in 1958/1959 financial assistance papers), OF 40, DFSAIA. Hudson admits to £10,000 being applied to the cattle operations alone between Lockhart and Edward River missions.

<sup>95</sup>Robertson to Hudson, 18 September 1956. ABM Chairman's correspondence, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 9, ML MSS 4503, Add On 1822.

<sup>96</sup>Hudson to Robertson, 13 October 1956. ABM Chairman's correspondence, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 9, ML MSS 4503, Add On 1822.

accumulated deficits, the Diocese was able to operate four of its missions in surplus to their budgets in some of the years during this period. This meant that savings had been made on staff wages and other operational items and that the missions concerned were run at a lower level of services than even their meagre budgets suggested. By a combination of operational stringency and application of cattle funds all deficits were absorbed by 1956.<sup>97</sup> When the net subsidy for each of the diocesan missionary operations was calculated, the return of funds to Kowanyama was worse than even Currington had supposed:

Diocesan Administration	£5,225
Torres Straits Mission	£16,559
St Paul's Mission, Torres Straits	£2,038
Lockhart River Mission	£7,071
Edward River Mission	£2,062
Mitchell River Mission	£4,908

Considering that annual wages, even for well paid whites, were under £1,000 at the end of this period,<sup>98</sup> the amounts represented here were significant, their total, equivalent to over a million dollars at present day values. Even the amount for Lockhart River, the most subsidised of the Aboriginal missions, seemed insignificant beside the combined subsidy to the two missions in the Torres Straits and to the diocesan administration on Thursday Island.

Richard MacFarlane, the Registrar (chief administrative executive) of the Diocese, wrote a scathing attack on Currington to Frank Coaldrake, the ABM Chairman, in July 1958 after he had resigned his appointment on Thursday Island:

I am certain that Mitchell River has not progressed one "iota" since the end of the War and further that it will never progress as long as the present Superintendent remains. The man is not a churchman in the proper sense of the word. He has no administrative ability. He has no foresight, no leadership, and

<sup>97</sup>This surplus was effectively a profit from the combined incomes of ABM grant, government grant and store trading.

<sup>98</sup>Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour*, p.121. The highest level of the station hands award, a head stockman, earned £819 per annum in 1957.

no sense of co-operation.... I have no axe to grind with Currington, but I think that in fairness to the natives, to the ABM, the Government, and the Church in Australia this man should be asked to leave. Mitchell River will never progress while he is there.<sup>99</sup>

Even though MacFarlane had not visited Kowanyama, he had formed strong opinions that the blame for Mitchell River's predicament lay entirely with Currington. He had not considered that there might be a deeper seated issue about the way that the Diocese, under his administration, distributed the wealth that was primarily derived from Mitchell River itself, with Currington as its loyal agent and chief supporter.

Through the alienation of the Mitchell River cattle money from the people and the "protection" of their personal savings, they were cast as irretrievable dependants upon government and church "benevolence" and charity, apparently dependent upon handouts for any improvement to their circumstances. "The Aborigines at Mitchell River do not benefit from the wealth they produce", was ABM chairman Frank Coaldrake's accurate assessment of the situation in 1959.<sup>100</sup> It had taken forty years for the Anglican missionary hierarchy to acknowledge this patently obvious situation.

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<sup>99</sup>Macfarlane to Coaldrake, 27 July 1958, ABM Chairman's correspondence: Series 5, box 2, folder 9.

<sup>100</sup>Frank Coaldrake, "Chairman's Report", 28-30 April 1959, ABM Board Minutes, vol.L, box 13, Series M4, ABM Sydney.

## Chapter Seven

### Living with the Munpitch: Aborigines and Missionary Control

Gilbert White's account of events for 18 June 1905 gives some clues to the missionary approach to the evangelisation of the people on the mission reserve:

Had our Trinity Sunday celebration at 7.30 am, with fresh lilies from the lagoon on our little altar. Just as we were finishing breakfast a fearful din broke out in the camp, and James Noble ran over followed by the rest of us. We were just in time to prevent a fight which was beginning between two tribes over rights of hunting. The protagonists were Urdell the giant and a Koko Widdee man. Both were furiously angry, and we had to stay some time for the tumult to subside. I took Morning Prayer and Mr. Gribble Evening [Prayer].<sup>1</sup>

Gilbert White's group of Anglican missionaries ordered their life by the calendar, sacramental actions and devotions of the Christian faith. The "fearful din" from the Aboriginal camp was no doubt seen as a significant intrusion into this missionary world since it had taken place on Sunday, the holiest day of the Christian week, and coming as it did straight after the celebration of the Holy Communion, the sacramental centre of Anglican life. As an intrusion into the new Christian order that the missionaries were bringing to the reserve, the noise of conflict was representative of the supposed "heathen" character of the Aborigines which White and Gribble and their associates had felt called to change by the principles of their Christian faith and their English culture. Just as they had decorated their altar with the native waterlily flowers, they sought to bring the *Kokobera* to the faith of the Christian church as they understood it. The repression of this first sign of conflict amongst their Aboriginal hosts figured significantly in the strategies they believed would further this aim.

The missionaries seemed, in fact, to be intent on creating a more "Christian" society than the one they had come from. In the face of frontier violence, Aboriginal dispossession and the limitations of their own effectiveness in countering these realities,

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert White, *Thirty Years in Tropical Australia*, London, 1919, p.134.

they sought a utopian ideal that combined the familiar and the fantastic.<sup>2</sup> Their utopianism sought to merge the familiar elements of English village life with an other-worldly expectation of “good blackfellows” living a life free from conflict, sexual intrigue and other realities of adult life. They hoped to create a village where Aborigines would live under missionary domination. These Aborigines, it was assumed, would be a childlike people happily content with their lot in this missionary scheme. In this way, the missionaries hoped, Aborigines would be led from their “heathen” state to a higher stage of “civilisation”. Bishop John Hudson was clear about this principle in his letter to new missionary Beth Mussett in 1953:

We are to do whatever we can and whatever we see to be necessary and helpful to the furthering of the missionary object [sic], which is to educate the people to become Christian citizens.<sup>3</sup>

The first sign that the missionaries were serious about the agenda for change that they had announced at Yanda Swamp on 1 June 1905 came with the day’s events for 18 June described by Gilbert White. On this day the missionaries made a conscious decision to cross the spatial barrier between their missionary camp and the Aboriginal camp and then to intervene to re-order certain unexceptional aspects of Aboriginal life. The missionaries were in no danger from these events and fear seemed to play no part in their intervention. On hearing the noise of the trouble in the Aboriginal camp they ran towards it and, guessing that a fight was about to develop, intervened to stop it. Satisfied that they were “just in time to prevent a fight which was beginning between the two tribes” they sought to establish the cause of the trouble. They understood the issue to have been, “over rights of hunting”.<sup>4</sup> The focus was an issue between two Aborigines and, even after the missionaries had intervened, the conflict did not widen to threaten or injure any of the missionary party. It was obvious from these actions that the missionaries would not be detached observers, patiently building an understanding of

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<sup>2</sup>See Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England*, London, 1979, for a discussion of utopian aspirations for community in England.

<sup>3</sup>Hudson to Mussett, 17 February 1953. [Correspondence in the possession of the recipient, Mrs Beth Pidsley (nee Mussett), Townsville.]

<sup>4</sup>Gilbert White, *Thirty Years*, p.134.

*Kokobera* customs and practices, but interventionists who took seriously their own charter that “good blackfellows” did not fight with each other. Unlike other *Munpitch* the *Kokobera* had encountered, pastoralists and police, these *Munpitch* were more interested in intervening in their affairs than they were in shooting or abducting them.

For much of the year the *Kokobera* and other groups with lands on the reserve were dispersed in hearth group camps with little need or occasion for contact between them. When there were opportunities for larger gatherings, usually for ceremony or co-operative exploitation of a food source, private grievances would often lead to the conflict sequence reaching a public phase.<sup>5</sup> Accusation, challenge and threat might all be part of the grievance being brought to a dramatic focus perhaps culminating in a fight or trial at arms.<sup>6</sup> By the time this phase in the conflict was reached emotions were highly charged and other people, in addition to the original parties, were likely to have taken sides according to kinship for the looming fight or joined a third group comprising people with conflicting kin loyalties that made it difficult to take the side of either one of the disputants.<sup>7</sup> Even here emotion and indignation were held in some restraint by the traditional kinship patterns and an awareness of what really was at stake and what would defuse the tension and resolve the grievance.<sup>8</sup> This very vocal, public and potentially violent phase of the conflict process would only proceed as far as was needed to satisfy the restoration of harmony. Even enemies were in relationship and excessive violence in conflict beyond that approved by the social norms would be long

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<sup>5</sup>Marc Ross, *The culture of conflict*, New Haven, 1993, p.17. It is helpful to understand conflict as “a process, involving the disputants’ sequences of responses to each other”, and for the *Kokobera* this sequence could involve both public and private elements. Privately, a person might simply harbour a grievance or resort to sorcery if the grievance was thought best dealt with in this way. For some transgressions of ritual and ceremonial prohibitions, ambush and attack may have been the means of dealing with the grievance outside of the public domain. Many times a public response would be the initial or consequent development.

<sup>6</sup>John Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, unpublished PhD thesis, JCU, Townsville, 1984, p.286, identifies six stages in public disputes: declaration, rejoinder, argument, insult and physical combat, separation, and reconciliation.

<sup>7</sup>Taylor, *ibid.*, p.287, describes in greater detail the function of these three groups.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Schelling, *The strategy of conflict*, Cambridge, 1980, pp.4, 5. Schelling recognises that mutually common interest is also involved in the relationship of antagonists. Winning does not usually have a strictly competitive meaning, “... it is not winning relative to one’s adversary. It means gaining relative to one’s own value system; and this may be done by bargaining, by mutual accommodation, and by the avoidance of mutually damaging behaviour”.

remembered and accrue a debt that would invite retribution. It was an approach to conflict that allowed a “clearing of the air” and a return to the important matters for which people had come together in the first place, an effective and pragmatic approach to relations between groups of people who only met together infrequently. Conflict has been described as one of the most fundamental realities of human society:

Conflict is a ubiquitous feature of behaviour within and between human groups. Problems of theft, murder, unpaid debts, sexual assault, jealousy and anger are human universals in that there are virtually no communities where they are unknown.<sup>9</sup>

Conflict was a normal feature of life for the *Kokobera* and was managed so as to restore harmony when this had been fractured.

In this context, the gathering of the *Kokobera* in the first few weeks of June 1905, due to the presence of the missionaries, was no different from the countless other occasions of tribal gathering that had preceded it. Not unexpectedly, the traditional conflict resolution process was at work in the camp that had formed itself around the missionaries at Trubanaman, when the violent confrontation erupted on 18 June 1905. This dispute, involving two principal antagonists, had spilled over into the wider public domain with its concomitant level of noise and involvement from all present. A situation like this, except for the presence of the missionaries, would have been unremarkable for all involved and led, in due course, to a restored harmony with perhaps some bruises or wounds as the cost of the resolution.

The sources of conflict amongst the *Kokobera* and their neighbours and the means of conflict resolution were matters that the missionaries did not understand. In considering the dynamics of the conflict of 18 June 1905 it is inconceivable to think that the Aborigines involved would have understood the intervention of the missionaries as anything other than an arbitrary siding with one party, most likely understood as a defence of one party from the other. Intervention in such a dispute, that entailed all the traditional perspectives associated with conflict resolution, without having an understanding of these things would, in any circumstance, set some very unpredictable

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<sup>9</sup>Marc Ross, *The culture of conflict*, p.2.

outcomes in place. Since the actual public event of the fight was part of a much bigger grievance resolution pattern, the termination of this important phase prematurely could scarcely be thought to resolve the grievance. Instead, it remained unresolved.

There is no evidence that any of these considerations informed the missionary intervention; rather this was the intervention of superiors into the affairs of inferiors, a crude display of the dominance the missionaries assumed would be their right to enforce over the inhabitants of the reserve. It was the sort of intervention a teacher might make in a school yard scuffle, the assumption that a sudden imposition of peace would in its turn lead to forgetfulness that there ever had been a grievance. Anthropologist A.P. Elkin spelled out in very clear terms to Robertson of ABM what was needed if missionaries were to make proper sense of Aboriginal conflict:

I don't know Mr Chapman personally. He was helpful to my research worker, but unless he really has got a mastery of the language and of the social organization and ritual life he is not likely to be in a position really to understand the movements making for trouble and tribal clashes. In the long run for the natives it is a dual life, and the missionary sees only one side of it. That is a simple fact.<sup>10</sup>

Anthropologist John Taylor's research at Edward River answered the question, as far as Joseph Chapman was concerned, that Elkin had left open: "the missionaries as a whole had little real understanding of why Aborigines disputed".<sup>11</sup>

The missionaries seemed unable to resist becoming involved in situations of conflict between Aborigines. Missionary contempt for Aboriginal society had convinced them that Aborigines were incapable of resolving conflict without missionary intervention. Indeed this had become Joseph Chapman's primary missionary aim after the establishment of Edward River Mission in 1939:

When Mr Chapman founded the Mission, he believed that he was only called to bring peace to the tribes... [he] did nothing to teach the Christian faith,... Chappie deliberately made Sunday a hunting day and most of the people left the mission on hunting expeditions, and on the other days of the week Chappie made things as difficult for [Cyril Brown, the chaplain] to have much contact with the children and adults.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Elkin to Robertson, 29 March 1950, Edward River Mission 1954-1966, Box 12, Filing Cabinet 1, ABM Sydney.

<sup>11</sup>John Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, p.508.

<sup>12</sup>Doug Sutherland, "The life and times of Douglas Milton Sutherland", typescript, no date, p.67.



This seems an incredible reversal from Chapman's boldly evangelistic assertion in 1918 that the church building at Kowanyama was, "the centre of all our work".<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the period between 1918 and 1939 was one of unparalleled conflict at Kowanyama and both Chapman's new approach and the foundation of Edward River Mission itself can be seen as reactions to this tumultuous period. In fact, episodes of conflict between Aborigines, styled as "tribal fighting" by the missionaries, was the clearest test to identify where Aborigines stood with respect to the missionaries and with respect to the disputants in such conflicts.

The practice of direct missionary intervention, of a kind with the events of 19 June 1905, was favoured by missionaries throughout the history of the Mission. Chapman is remembered striding between the contending sides, disarming fighters, breaking their spears and generally, by these means, attempting to assert missionary dominance even during a spear fight. James Housden, the chaplain between 1930 and 1932, made one attempt to intervene in this way but was so terrified by the experience he said, "I didn't try it a second time".<sup>14</sup> MacLeod caught in a similar situation sent Gregory, his *Kunjen* assistant, to fetch his revolver so that he could discharge it into the air to demonstrate that he was serious about bringing the fighting to an end and using violent means if he needed to.<sup>15</sup> Currington on the other hand, considered that it enhanced his authority to be seen to be confident to get in amongst the fighters unarmed and break their spears. He maintained that Aborigines said, "*This man's not worried, he doesn't carry a revolver*".<sup>16</sup> Currington had determined that the constant fighting he had witnessed at Kowanyama towards the end of MacLeod's time as superintendent could not be permitted to continue when he took over this responsibility in 1941. He instituted a regime where any sound of fighting after the ringing of the mission bell at 9.00 pm resulted in the closure of the store, a strategy he claimed was so effective in curtailing

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<sup>13</sup>Joseph Chapman, *ABM Review*, 1 July 1918, p.58.

<sup>14</sup>James Housden, taped interview, Caloundra, 18 August 1987.

<sup>15</sup>Maudie Koolatah, taped interview, Kowanyama, 27 March 1988.

<sup>16</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987.

fighting that he had no need for a jail. His entry in the mission diary in 5 May 1948 suggests that the use of imprisonment had, by then, lapsed for a considerable period:

At night 7 girls, some having been punished by teacher, ran away. Robert and Mark sent after them. In case it had to be used I inspected cell. Found it occupied by Barr's chickens, some mash, and the corner looked and smelled like a urinal. Cleared my own storeroom of everything in case a cell were needed.<sup>17</sup>

Whether it was James Noble in 1905 or Robert and Mark in 1948, the missionaries' own records show how heavily they relied on Aborigines to act as their deputies in enforcing missionary order. Even though the missionaries at Mitchell River resorted to the administration of corporal punishment themselves, it was a relatively unimportant strategy in enforcing the missionary order compared with the sort of influence they were able to achieve through fear of exile and through Aboriginal intermediaries. They were keen to maintain "distance" between their own power and any personal challenges to it. Certainly they were quick to punish any challenge by imprisonment, either in a cell or by leg-chaining to a post, and by banishment from the Mission, but were reluctant to do anything likely to invite a direct response against them. Chapman took Seymour, the chaplain, to task after he had "thrashed" some of the young Aboriginal women in 1936, insisting that he "lead the people not drive them".<sup>18</sup>

This meant of course that the Aborigines who carried out the missionaries' bidding needed to negotiate their way through the difficult relationship situations that arose within the Aboriginal community as a result. In an analysis of the dynamics of race relations on the pastoral frontier Rowse demonstrated that the colonists in the Western Australian Kimberley region divided Aborigines into "insiders" and "outsiders", a division that was maintained for a long period in that area. The "insiders", played a crucial role in mediating the world of the colonists to "outsiders":

The most trusted lieutenants among the station community more than accommodated to pastoralism: they helped define the pastoral order, negotiating its boundaries with an unruly world outside. They were a new breed, moulded

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<sup>17</sup>Wiffie Currington, diary entry for 5 May 1948.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 29 January 1936.

as factotums from a young age, skilled in their knowledge of country, cattle, horses, Aborigines, and their masters' wishes.<sup>19</sup>

The missionary agenda for the people of the Mitchell River contained an incipient social structure with clear distinctions between the inside and the outside of the Mission. Rewards would be dispensed and punishments imposed relative to the standing of any individual across this divide. James Noble's decision to lead the missionaries to the fight on 18 June 1905 was thus the sort of "insider" behaviour typical of someone like Noble who occupied the role of trusted lieutenant to Gribble. James Noble's eagerness to lead the missionaries to the fight between the *Kokobera* and *Kunjen* men was undoubtedly conditioned by his experience of Yarrabah and his familiarity with Gribble's suppression of any fighting that took place there as well as his expectation that the missionaries wanted the same principles employed at Mitchell River.<sup>20</sup>

Aboriginal intermediaries played an important role in the foundation of the Mission, John Grady in interpretation, and James Noble as the first of the missionary party on the scene in this conflict. Even though the missionaries used these insiders to simplify their relations with Aborigines in general, the arrangement was usually far from simple from the Aboriginal perspective. If the missionaries correctly understood the issue between the *Kokobera* man Urdell and his *Kunjen* adversary on 18 June 1905, it is likely that Urdell, confident in the security of being on his own land had aired a grievance of some kind against a member of the river tribe. From the *Kokobera* perspective, the missionaries had travelled from the East through *Kunjen* country with eastern Aborigines including Bendigo, an *Uw In gan* speaking *Kunjen* man. The further fact of their intervention in a challenge by a *Kokobera* man against a *Kunjen* man would have appeared as favouritism of the tribe whose members were most associated with these *Munpitch*. The potential to manipulate the *Munpitch* to a particular advantage in

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<sup>19</sup>Tim Rowse, "'Were you ever savages?' Aboriginal insiders and pastoralists' patronage". *Oceania*, vol.58, no.1, December 1987, p.83.

<sup>20</sup>Ernest Gribble, *A Despised Race*, Sydney, 1933, p.42. Gribble describes the 1894 intervention of a Yarrabah missionary, Sister Menia, in a "tribal fight" by standing in between the contending parties.

traditional conflicts was no doubt evident as was the influence that Aboriginal intermediaries could have over the *Munpitch* in their role as cultural interpreters. Even if the missionary *Munpitch* didn't know it, they were soon to be adopted as the *Kokobera*'s own.

The early years at Trubanaman saw the missionaries working most closely with a group of adult Aboriginal men whom they consistently describe as "boys". This missionary depiction of these Aboriginal men totally obscured the Aboriginal self understanding of their significance. Bondonally of the *Kokobera*, *Manirr* clan is generally portrayed by Aborigines as the Aboriginal patron of the missionaries, the traditional custodian of the land at Trubanaman who allowed the missionaries to settle on his land and under whose patronage they dwelt in safety.

[Bondonally said] "Don't be frightened of whites, they are just like you and me, we want to be friends",... the missionaries gave them tobacco and tea and sugar in those early days.<sup>21</sup>

The missionaries were not merely tolerated intruders but represented a valued resource that the *Kokobera* were keen to cultivate and if possible monopolise. They knew that this would not be an easy task, knowing as they did, through lengthy experience, how arbitrary and suddenly dangerous the *Munpitch* could be. Men like Bondonally were bush-living *Kokobera*, whom Bowman had not "let in" to Rutland Plains;, some had wives and children living in the bush at the time they had taken up residence on the Mission, others were unmarried. Unfamiliar as they were with the ways of the missionaries, they needed, initially at least, close supervision and instruction to carry out the tasks set for them by the missionaries. They were considered by the missionaries to be the nucleus of a workforce to construct mission dwellings, cultivate mission gardens and be the subjects of missionary evangelisation. In addition to their relegation to the missionary category of sub-adult autonomy as "boys", they were further considered to be "inmates", client members of the missionary institution with all of the loss of freedom that the term suggested.

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<sup>21</sup>Sam Zingle, taped interview, Kowanyama, 13 March 1988.

They were “insiders” of a lesser category than the “Captains” who operated more closely to the missionaries with somewhat greater autonomy, even if this was only because the missionaries were more confident in the Captains’ adhering to missionary rules. The primary routine focus of the Captains’ work was the organisation of the other men for the many tasks around the Mission. In this way Grady was put in charge of the men engaged to carry supplies up to Trubanaman from the boat landing,<sup>22</sup> and was sent on errands to *Rutland Plains*.<sup>23</sup>

Experienced and reliable “insider” Aborigines were of as great value to missionaries as they were to pastoralists. Gribble had no desire to part with James Noble or Ernest Bounghi who had accompanied him from Yarrabah. Instead, the foundation missionaries at Mitchell River had to make do with the relatively inexperienced Peter Bendigo and John Grady as their insiders. Both men had been baptised by Gribble in Yeremundo lagoon on the 1904 expedition to the reserve. Gribble’s description of this event emphasised the liminal role of these first baptisms for the Mission which was to be established the following year:

For the next few weeks we had natives in large numbers with us as we prospected about the reserve looking for a suitable site for the new mission. The natives piloted us to a lagoon called “Yeremundo”. Here we made a camp for the time that we remained on the reserve. One day in the presence of about two hundred natives, Bendigo and Grady were baptized in the lagoon. They had been prepared at Yarrabah for Holy Baptism. On the opposite side of the lagoon to our camp the natives with the two candidates for baptism stood with their spears. Palgrave and I entered the water and the boys met us in the middle and were made members of the Church. It was a most impressive scene, that gathering of wild natives in the bush. That was the first baptism on the Mitchell River. There have been very many since, and no doubt some of those ignorant natives who witnessed that scene have been admitted to Christ’s Body, the Church since. Grady was given the name of John and Bendigo that of Peter.<sup>24</sup>

Grady, a *Kokobera* man,<sup>25</sup> was employed under a labour agreement by White in 1903 and acted as the interpreter for Roth and White’s visit to the reserve area in that year.<sup>26</sup> He had been with White to Thursday Island and with Gribble to Yarrabah for

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<sup>22</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 24 April 1906.

<sup>23</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 30 April 1906.

<sup>24</sup>Edward Gribble, *A Despised Race*, pp.63, 64.

<sup>25</sup>John Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, p.326.

<sup>26</sup>Roth to Under Secretary for Lands, 11 August 1903, A/58783, QSA.

training in missionary work generally but more specifically in preparation for his baptism. At Yarrabah he met and married his wife Rhoda.<sup>27</sup> By accompanying the party to establish the Mission in 1905 he was separated from Rhoda for five months until she accompanied Chase from Yarrabah when he arrived at Trubanaman to take up the superintendentship in October 1905.<sup>28</sup> John Grady's missionary life at Mitchell River was relatively brief; he died on 10 March 1910 at Trubanaman, with Matthews paying tribute to his role in the foundation of the Mission, describing him as: "The first pioneer of this Mission to cross the River".<sup>29</sup>

Either inexperience at playing the role of an "insider" or a simple unwillingness to be moulded as one, showed when Bendigo struck Thomas Williams during an altercation over Bendigo's non-attendance at a church service.<sup>30</sup> Even though Superintendent Chase had used physical violence himself against an Aboriginal man only two days before, Bendigo's act was condemned and punished.<sup>31</sup> With missionary dominance at stake, a secure building was hastily completed so that Bendigo could be locked up as punishment for striking Williams.<sup>32</sup> Gilbert White considered this to be a "serious case of insubordination" and congratulated Chase for the way he had dealt with Bendigo.<sup>33</sup>

Bendigo, exiled in 1901 to Fraser Island for cattle spearing on *Dunbar*,<sup>34</sup> came under Gribble's influence when the Fraser Island people were relocated to Yarrabah and was an obvious choice for Gribble to take with him on his exploratory expedition to the Mitchell. He was in the awkward role from his personal point of view, but a vital one as it concerned the missionaries, of intermediary between white and black.

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<sup>27</sup>Gilbert White, 20 January 1905, "Mitchell River Mission", A/58855, QSA.

<sup>28</sup>Chase to Roth, "Report, Trubanaman Mission 1905", no date, 06:1000, A/58783, QSA.

<sup>29</sup>*ABM Review*, 20 May 1910, p.48, and Henry Matthews, diary entry for 10 March 1910.

<sup>30</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 7 March 1906.

<sup>31</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 5 March 1906. Chase administered one stroke of the cane as punishment to Barry after he struck another man on the back with a stick, noting formally in the mission diary, "this is my first act of corporal punishment".

<sup>32</sup>E. Selwyn Chase, diary entry for 8 March 1906.

<sup>33</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 12 April 1906.

<sup>34</sup>Rivers to Roth, 17 February 1901, 01:02989, COL/483, QSA.

Unlike the “insider” Aborigines who served the Duracks in the Kimberley, Bendigo and Grady had only been under white influence for a few years and had not resigned their independence to the extent required by the whites. They demonstrated that their commitment to solidarity with Aborigines was more important than protecting the missionary interest when it came to a conflict between these interests. When Thomas Williams economised on flour by making the damper for the mission Aborigines from equal measures of flour and crushed, home-grown corn Grady took exception and protested that the damper was inferior and would make everyone ill.<sup>35</sup> This was not the sort of response expected from an “insider” like Grady and was met by Williams’ threatening to send everyone bush to search for their food if they objected to his economies. Not surprisingly, this tactic isolated Grady and silenced his objection. Any “insider” privileges came at the cost of acceptance and perpetuation of missionary domination.

It is evident that the Trubanaman missionaries were searching for Aborigines to occupy this “insider” role and were willing to use a combination of reward and punishment to achieve it. Bendigo’s incarceration was the punitive side of this attempt to better prepare him for this function. Six months later, when Gilbert White ordered that Bendigo’s house be enlarged by the addition of an extra room, he was wanting to reward Bendigo for his co-operation since his punishment and demonstrate missionary willingness to invest scarce resources to form and mark Bendigo as an “insider”.<sup>36</sup> With no knowledge of Aboriginal language, Matthews was heavily dependent on Bendigo and others to carry out the daily work of the Mission. When he was investigating a disturbance in 1907, Matthews “made all boys fall into line and questioned all closely, through Bendigo”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Thomas Williams, diary entry for 27 March 1908.

<sup>36</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 7 August 1906 and White to Roth, 16 April 1906, 06:791, Chief Protector’s Correspondence, A/58855, QSA. “[Bendigo] was suffering from “swelled head” and the disgrace seems to have had an excellent effect as his conduct since has been very good”.

<sup>37</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 4 November 1907.

The eagerness of the missionaries to establish a cadre of “insiders” led them to make decisions which must have been received unfavourably by the *Kokobera* men who had decided to live on the Mission. Amongst these decisions, the rapid elevation of Pindi to an “insider” role stands out as one that was as ill judged as it was eagerly welcomed by the missionaries. Pindi had been admitted to the Mission on 21 October 1906 by Henry Matthews and was soon being praised for his efforts: “Pindi splendid worker, gives entire satisfaction”.<sup>38</sup> Pindi spoke “good English” and had been a trooper in the Native Police detachment on the Palmer under Whelan’s command.<sup>39</sup> He was one of the troopers in Constable Murray’s patrol which came under attack near *Dunbar* on 11 July 1896, and had received a bad spear wound in this skirmish.<sup>40</sup> There is no question that he seemed a good recruit from the missionary perspective; he spoke English well, had been trained to meet white expectations in the police and filled a gap in the leadership of the Mission which had been sorely felt. From the perspective of other Aborigines, however, the presence of a former police trooper in such a position of missionary confidence can only have caused uneasy feelings given that he was implicated in some of the most violent massacres in the pre-mission period of the area.<sup>41</sup>

His presence may have prompted Bob Dunbar, a *Kunjen* “insider” from the area patrolled by Whelan’s detachment, to leave the Mission for work at *Rutland Plains*.<sup>42</sup> Like Pindi, Bob Dunbar had quickly become a mainstay of the mission workforce, a “captain” amongst the Aboriginal men during the Mission’s inaugural year.<sup>43</sup> Two years after leaving for *Rutland Plains* he was back at the Mission, this time as an absconder from the station, when Bowman wanted him to drive cattle to Cairns.<sup>44</sup> By 1910 he was being prepared as a candidate for baptism.<sup>45</sup> Back working at *Rutland Plains* later in

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<sup>38</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 17 January 1907.

<sup>39</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 21 October 1906.

<sup>40</sup>Poingdestre to Lamond, 20 July 1896, 96:09080, Highbury Station, A/41590, QSA.

<sup>41</sup>Lofty Yam, taped interview, Kowanyama, 12 November 1987, counted Pindi amongst the perpetrators of the Mulong Lagoon outrage.

<sup>42</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 17 November 1906.

<sup>43</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 29 May 1906.

<sup>44</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 2 December 1908.

<sup>45</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 18 April 1910.



1910, he had been accused of theft by McIntyre, prompting Matthews, without further enquiry, to become involved in the accusation.<sup>46</sup> With his abilities as a cattleman in demand, he left Matthews frustrated when he refused to go with Watham on a mustering trip to the Batavia River on 20 April 1912, a labour arrangement that Matthews had expected him to comply with. Reacting to this refusal, Matthews “installed” him and his wife Lucy at the Mission’s Angeram outstation, a concession which allowed him some hope of a life less controlled by missionaries and pastoralists.<sup>47</sup> By 1925 he was again in an “insider” role as a member of the party accompanying Constable Brown to arrest the fugitive, Simon.<sup>48</sup>

Fortunately for the missionaries a ready pool of Christian South Sea Islanders was available from whom they were able to recruit black “insiders”. At the same time as Bendigo was being disciplined, Islander Bob Ling was being praised by Gilbert White for his work at Trubanaman: “Bob Ling has been of the greatest use in building gardens, managing the whaleboat and other work”.<sup>49</sup> A year later the praise was undiminished, “Bob Ling has been working very hard and well”.<sup>50</sup> Bob Ling was succeeded in 1909 by Jack Giebo and Tom Solomon, South Sea Islanders who were formally admitted to the office of “Lay helper” for the Mission.<sup>51</sup> Johnnie Savo, while not part of the admission service, was present at Trubanaman at least from the middle of 1910.<sup>52</sup> These three men provided almost a generation of missionary “insider” leadership until their deaths, within a few years of each other, in the early 1920s.<sup>53</sup> Jack Giebo, particularly, had been associated with missionary Florence Buchanan on Thursday Island after concluding work as an indentured labourer in the Queensland labour trade.<sup>54</sup> Chaplain Frere Lane

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<sup>46</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 1 July 1910.

<sup>47</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 25 April 1912.

<sup>48</sup>Raymond George, taped interview, Kowanyama, 17 March 1988.

<sup>49</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 12 April 1906.

<sup>50</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 9 March 1907.

<sup>51</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 1 June 1909.

<sup>52</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 7 June 1910. “John Savo’s salary will be paid for three months by the diocese of Carpentaria. At the end of that time the Superintendent must report on his conduct and advise whether it is desirable to put him on the staff”.

<sup>53</sup>The three died within a few years of each other, Tom Solomon in 1921, Jack Giebo in 1922, and Johnnie Savo in 1925.

<sup>54</sup>Frere Lane, *ABM Review*, 1 March 1915, p.222.

portrayed Jack Giebo in terms that disclose as much about Lane's perceptions as they do about Giebo and the role of an Islander "insider":

Jack is a *Christian* - not nominally but truly. He is neat in his dress and in his work. He is faithful to his superiors; and firm, but just and forbearing with his "men", as he calls the twelve married men whom he supervises at Angeram. He is not continually reporting minor difficulties and temporary misunderstandings with his "men", except perhaps in a casual way or in order to make sure that his words or methods meet with approval. He is prompt at advising headquarters or asking for help if the circumstances seem to demand it. He is not afraid to send a brief dispatch to the Superintendent, even after bedtime, saying, "Please I want you to come up quick", and Jack is at his gate to meet you with a cheerful "Good-night Mr ... I very sorry to send to you about this trouble, but", etc., etc. [emphasis is Lane's]<sup>55</sup>

Missionary perceptions were often plainly racist and certainly paternalistic, and applied to the Islander missionaries as they were to Aborigines, even if to a different extent. Lane seemed to find Jack Giebo's reference to the Aboriginal men as "men" rather than "boys" quaint, a departure from the usual missionary practice which perhaps reinforced the white missionaries' perceptions that Aborigines and Islanders were united by their black skin as acknowledged inferiors of whites. Matthews was keen to disarm the Islanders of their firearms, particularly after Johnnie Savo accidentally wounded a mission inmate whilst cleaning his revolver, even though Matthews conceded the benefit of their hunting game for the missionaries' table inclined him to allow them to keep their shotguns.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike the white missionaries, the Islander men became married to Aboriginal women and lived in a far closer relationship with Aborigines than the white missionaries. Jack Giebo supervised the *Kunjen* village at Angeram and Tom Solomon the *Kokobera* village at Daphne.<sup>57</sup> They were expected to be black exemplars of Christian life and conduct by the white missionaries. On this account Matthews was perturbed to find that Tom Solomon was the "culprit" in Bobena's pregnancy and insisted on an immediate marriage:

I am much disappointed at Tom's conduct, for I had hoped that his engagement and marriage would have been an example to our people.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Frere Lane, *ABM Review*, 1 March 1915, pp.222, 223.

<sup>56</sup>Matthews to Howard, 7 July 1911, 11:01490, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>57</sup>*ABM Review*, 12 June 1916, p.56, and 1 March 1917, p.232.

<sup>58</sup>Matthews to Howard, 7 July 1911, 11:01490, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

The Islander “helpers” were caught between missionary expectation and missionary racism, a situation that exposed them to risks that the white missionaries seldom met. Eight years after their marriage, Bobena attempted to poison Tom with strychnine mixed in a bottle of jam.<sup>59</sup>

Efforts of Islanders to align themselves with the privileged status of missionaries were often frustrated. Wiffie Currington recalled Sailor Gabey, the Torres Strait Islander chaplain at the Mission from 1938 until 1943, becoming agitated on account of not receiving the sort of preferential treatment whites expected to receive at the mission Butcher Shop: “*These blackfellows have got to wait, I’ve got to get my meat first.*”<sup>60</sup>

The missionary classification of the Aborigines of the reserve made a clear distinction between “inmates” and “camp blacks”. In fact, Gilbert White wanted this distinction marked by a physical barrier:

The station should be fenced in outside all present buildings and no native not a member of the Mission allowed in without the Supt’s permission. A small building be erected outside the fence for the transaction of business with wild and camp natives, and a stock of sulas and dresses kept for outside natives who wish to visit the station compound where no unclothed natives are to be allowed.<sup>61</sup>

His emphasis on clothing was, in addition to his obvious preference for conformity with his sense of modesty, another way of marking the boundary to the “camp” and “wild” Aborigines. In any case it does not seem to have been enthusiastically applied, probably on account of its impracticability, since six years later he was similarly insisting that nakedness be “strictly prohibited” on the mission compound.<sup>62</sup>

There were however distinctions that Matthews observed the mission “inmates” applying amongst themselves:

There seems to be a split between boys who have come to Mission from stations and boys from camps. Major who came from a station, overheard some remarks passed by old camp boys, left Mission this morning. Mr Lane and I

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<sup>59</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 11 August 1919.

<sup>60</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987.

<sup>61</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 7 August 1906.

<sup>62</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 27 October 1912.

went over to camp as soon as possible, but he had gone hunting. Major nor Bomaninglaun did not return to camp [sic]. Boys say that they have gone with some tribe to the Magnificent.<sup>63</sup>

Amongst the “camp blacks” the missionaries recognised certain men as “Kings” and used them as their agents when dealing with these people. The preference that the kings enjoyed in the dispensing of tobacco and other items came at the cost of acting as the missionaries’ agents amongst the “camp blacks” whom the missionaries recognised were largely outside close mission control: Matthews marked the time for silence by a bell and instructed the King that he was to ensure that there was no noise in the camp after 10.00 pm;<sup>64</sup> when some small boys ran away from the Mission after being punished by Matthews, the King was told to bring them back and, when he did, was instructed by Matthews to cane the boys;<sup>65</sup> after Kilpatrick was speared, the King was told to bring a man in from the bush when Constable Haylem arrived at the Mission to investigate the death.<sup>66</sup> In 1913 there were at least four Kings recognised by the missionaries: Sandbeach King, Long King, King Tommy and King Billy.<sup>67</sup> In 1907 following the death of King Weebaragwarra and in 1916 after another King’s death, successors were ceremonially recognised by Matthews and presented with a white pith helmet as the badge of office.<sup>68</sup>

Compared with Gribble’s recognition of Menmuny as King of Yarrabah and the significant role Menmuny played in the life of the mission station,<sup>69</sup> the missionaries at Trubanaman had managed only a trivialised version of the Yarrabah model. If the issue mattered sufficiently, the missionaries were as likely to dispense with their intermediaries and press the point themselves. On one such occasion, Done ordered the

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<sup>63</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 14 July 1906.

<sup>64</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 1 March 1907.

<sup>65</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 17 June 1907.

<sup>66</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 1 March 1907.

<sup>67</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 8 June 1913.

<sup>68</sup>J. Perelle, diary entry for 13 November 1907 and Henry Matthews, diary entry for 7 November 1916.

<sup>69</sup>Ernest Gribble, *Forty years with the Aborigines*, Sydney, 1930, p.77. “It was a treat to see [Menmuny] take his proper seat in Church at the daily services, resplendent in his uniform, or as with great dignity he took his place as President of the Yarrabah court”.

“camp blacks” to bring in forty loads of wood as punishment for harvesting potatoes from the mission garden without first gaining missionary permission.<sup>70</sup>

Further away from mission control than “camp blacks”, were “myall” or “wild” natives, distant tribes who visited the Mission. The missionaries were often pleased to see them go as their presence was destabilising to the mission organisation. These “wild blacks” were a source of concern for mission “inmates” as well. Most people fled the mission for the safety of their own country when a rumour of impending invasion from the *Kokominjen* reached Kowanyama in 1921.<sup>71</sup> Chapman considered a 1926 visit to have been generally bad for mission discipline:

Visiting camp people speared a number of cattle and made themselves a nuisance generally. They lent their women to the mission boys and some have contracted venereal.<sup>72</sup>

The other side to this missionary concern for threatened order was the reciprocal relationships of trade and mutual benefit that existed between mission Aborigines and bush-living Aborigines. Mick Edwards, who later became a member of the Edward River Mission at Pormpuraaw, was part of *Thaayore* groups from the northern part of the reserve who were labelled as “wild blacks” by the missionaries when they visited Kowanyama in the 1920s and 1930s. He recalled that there was a vigorous trading of tobacco by the mission Aborigines for the spears, woomeras and yam sticks made by the *Thaayore*, with both parties eager and impatient to obtain either tobacco or weapons. The *Thaayore* were told by mission Aborigines: “*Next week when you make a spear again, come again*”.<sup>73</sup> The vigorous missionary opposition to fighting at Kowanyama had included surveillance of any sign of manufacture of weapons as well as destruction of any that existed.<sup>74</sup> In effect, this created a market for weapons which otherwise could have been readily produced at Kowanyama; the missionary opposition to fighting had

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<sup>70</sup>John Done, diary entry for 5 July 1927.

<sup>71</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 24 January 1921, “Twenty two mission inmates ‘went bush’ last night, in fear of invasion by Koko Mingens. Tommy & Lawrence asked permission to go tonight, but were persuaded to remain, as their fears are quite groundless”.

<sup>72</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 9 October 1926.

<sup>73</sup>Mick Edwards, taped interview, Kowanyama, 29 May 1988.

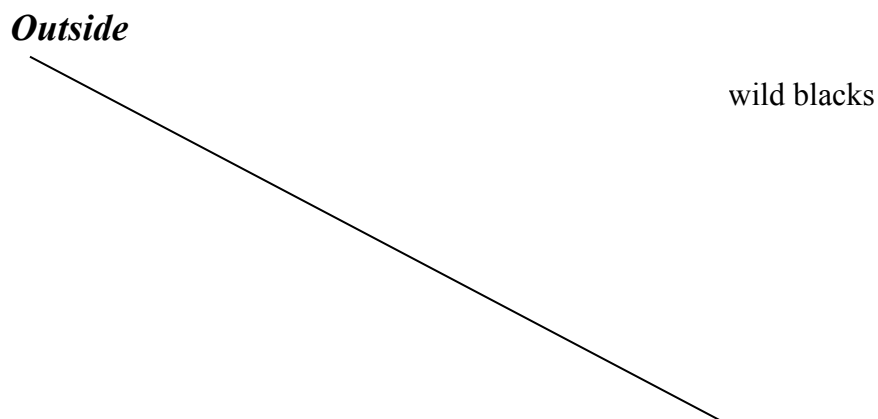
<sup>74</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 28 December 1935. On one day alone, Chapman collected 45 spears, 52 fighting sticks and six shields.

**Inside**

not      dulled      mission      Aborigines' desire to  
 invoke fighting in      their conflicts. Beef, from cattle  
 speared in the      bush, was also sought by mission

Aborigines who acted to conceal the fact of the spearing from Campbell of *Rutland Plains*. Chapman invoked both the threat of removal to Palm Island and the possibility of Campbell using his revolver against the *Thaayore* as persuasive arguments against cattle spearing. According to Mick Edwards, this simply limited cattle spearing to the wet season when they were isolated from access by both pastoralists and missionaries. Beyond the trading relationships they had established with kin at the Mission, the *Thaayore* were guided in understanding the protocol involved in dealing with missionaries by mission Aboriginal, Wallaby.

In a diagrammatic form the missionary world consisted then of:



Movement across this inside/outside division occurred both ways and marked important transitions. Transitions in both directions were ones that missionaries sought to control.

In this way the missionaries spoke of people being “admitted” to the Mission and at other times declined to “take on” individuals if they did not meet mission criteria. In the aftermath of the attempted poisoning of Tommy Koolatah, Billy Flour and Bob Patterson by *Shalfo* owner, Billy Yetfoy,<sup>75</sup> Yetfoy’s head stockman, Leonard, walked off *Shalfo* with his family to Kowanyama and found that Chapman was unmoved by their situation:

Leonard and family put in an appearance having absconded from Shalfo. He wanted to be taken on. I advised him to return to Shalfo and not make a convenience of the Mission.<sup>76</sup>

At the beginning of the turbulent decade of the 1920s, Chapman had no hesitation in consigning Morgan to the “outside” after he had fought with his younger brother, Gilbert. The same punishment was dispensed to a married couple when they quarrelled: Sent Morgan bush this morning. I will have nothing more to do with him, he is nothing more than an agitator of the worst type, continually stirring up strife among[st] the other boys and trying to embroil the missionaries. Sargeant and Yalkie sent off. I will not allow them to again commence quarrelling and fighting as they have done in the past.<sup>77</sup>

The “outside” had an almost legendary status for the missionaries: it was the region of the social realm beyond their control where heathen behaviours were thought to rule. Currington was circumspect about a man and a woman who had arrived from the “outside” in 1950 considering them, on that account, to be necessarily lawless:

A boy named Friday with woman named Judy arrived here 4 pm on foot for Chillago. This boy, I understand is not a Mission boy, though has visited here before, and is noted for running away and clearing off with women.<sup>78</sup>

The missionaries acted as if Aborigines crossing over from “outside” to “inside” were in need of having a new identity constructed according to missionary values. Individuals were renamed if this better suited missionary convenience:

Admitted two little boys tonight. One claims the name of Tommy and we named the other Willie as his native name is too long and difficult to pronounce[:] Ongremariwil.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Doris Lawrence, taped interview, Kowanyama, 24 November 1987.

<sup>76</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 15 November 1919.

<sup>77</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 24 March 1920.

<sup>78</sup>Wiffie Currington, diary entry for 12 December 1950.

<sup>79</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 1 July 1907.

On coming into the Mission from the station in the 1930s, Lindus, the daughter of Native and Annie was renamed Alma.<sup>80</sup> The assumption that certain Aborigines needed a new mission identity was not restricted to children; Bishop Stephen Davies insisted that Goggle-Eye be renamed Jack Coghlin before he officiated at Goggle-Eye's marriage to Nellie on 1 September 1947.<sup>81</sup>

With the passing of time, especially after the foundation of a permanent mission station at Edward River in 1939, there were few who could be said to be "wild blacks". Increasingly the "camp blacks" were integrated into the continuum of mission Aboriginal life in the three villages of the Mission. Edward River Mission provided a sufficient contrast to Mitchell River for it to be representative of the "wild" dimension of the "outside" but for most purposes the earlier missionary classifications had collapsed into various degrees of "insideness" of the mission inmates. The missionaries had not abandoned their dualistic conceptualisations, far from it. Instead they were developing a more sophisticated picture which, when projected onto the mission Aborigines, seemed to expose an inner world of dualistic struggle between atavistic and missionary forces.

The first signs of this change from the outside world of social patterns and behaviour to the personal world of the individual character occurred in Bishop Newton's episcopate when excommunication was first introduced to degrade uncompliant Aborigines from their status as Christians back to the non-status of "heathen". His letter instructing chaplain Bert Cole to excommunicate Bernard in 1917

located Bernard's behaviour and punishment in an eternal context of good and evil:

Matthews has written to tell me that Bernard has been guilty of adultery and I am sending you a form of excommunication to be read out in Church during the Holy Communion - after the Creed. If Bernard is on the Station he should be present. It would be well for him to stand up before you and after the excommunication has been read he should go out.... It is a good thing to use this excommunication as an opportunity to make the people realise the heinousness of Sin, and the need for care to keep away from sin lest God shut them out from heaven.... Of course if Matthews thinks well to inflict some other [additional] punishment he must use his own discretion as superintendent.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Alma Wason, taped interview, Kowanyama, 10 March 1988.

<sup>81</sup> Wiffie Currington, *Memoirs*, typescript, 1984, p.55.

<sup>82</sup> Newton to Cole, 27 April 1917, folio 76, OM.AV/61/2, JOL.



Newton's belief that God would "shut the sinner out from heaven", mirrored missionary practice of shutting transgressors out from earthly food as well as the sacrament of the Eucharist. Chapman did not mince matters when he applied the standard mixture of ecclesiastical and earthly deprivations to four men in 1916:

[They have] been deprived of their position in the Church with its attendant privileges [sic] and required to sit among the "hearers" until they are ready to publicly declare their repentance or until further notice.<sup>83</sup>

At least Bernard's status as a baptised Christian saved him from the fate of exile to which Bunberraduberra had been condemned only five years before when he had been charged with misconduct.

The mission-bush boundary was an area within the social relations of the Mission that was skilfully exploited by both missionaries and Aborigines. Despite all the peculiarities of missionary behaviour, the Mission was a popular place for Aborigines, providing as it did food, tobacco and a focus for social relationships. Often the threat of collapsing the mission-bush boundary and withholding these valued dimensions of mission life was sufficient for the missionaries to manipulate Aboriginal behaviour. Chapman applied the very simple logic of dispersing the mission population to the bush and depriving the whole mission community of tobacco and rations in his attempt to constrain an outbreak of fighting in 1922 and 1923 that brought the Mission to a standstill. Chapman's reasoning was simple: "they can remain out [in the bush] until they are prepared to keep the mission rules".<sup>84</sup> The manifestation of fighting behaviour, considered by the missionaries to be one of the main symptoms of the wild tribal life, was met in the Chapman approach, by confrontation with the less convenient dimensions of that life that Aborigines had escaped by living at the Mission. Chapman was evidently confident that the mission population would want to return to the mission, finding the task of securing their own food too onerous, and having, in general, become sufficiently dependent on the mission to make any long term survival in the bush

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<sup>83</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 August 1916.

<sup>84</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 2 October 1922.

unlikely. Even in this extreme situation some of the Aborigines were exempted from these harsh measures, Chapman decided to keep “a few to do the work, five girls [*sic*] and eight boys [*sic*]” for the four days it took for the deprivation to have its intended, if only temporary, effect.<sup>85</sup> He used the same strategy in 1935, “closing the store against the people”.<sup>86</sup>

Only certain persons drawing rations. Have stopped all work and have made the people hunt for a living.<sup>87</sup>

Chapman had passed on advice about the value of “closing the store” to Currington, advice that Currington was most willing to follow to ensure Aboriginal compliance with mission rules. Currington found that merely depriving mission Aborigines of their tobacco ration was usually sufficient to ensure that public opinion would turn against whoever may have been the focus of missionary censure. This was as close as the missionaries came to developing a justice system that involved peer judgement. The only other hint of this was in 1927 when Chapman wrote of “the people” deciding what punishment was to be given to Colin; in his case it was two week’s imprisonment, a significant penalty but not a signal of departure from the unilateral rule of the superintendent.<sup>88</sup> Mission administration was not favourably disposed to implementation of the Aboriginal court provisions of the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Acts, 1939 to 1946*. Jack Trewick’s 1965 defence of the central role of the superintendent in matters of law and order in his comments on the draft of the *Aborigines’ and Torres Strait Islanders’ Affairs Act of 1965* showed how conservative and autocratic mission administration had become.<sup>89</sup> Mission concepts of justice were so tied to punishment that David Goslett, the mission manager in 1966, considered that the operation of an Aboriginal Court would be meaningless in

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<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 14 March 1935.

<sup>87</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 15 March 1935.

<sup>88</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 31 December 1927.

<sup>89</sup>Trewick to Deputy Director DAIA, Thursday Island, 26 February 1965, Mitchell River Regulations, By-laws and Jail rules, 17A-20, Interim transfer R254, QSA.

Kowanyama since it did not possess a jail.<sup>90</sup> The formation of an Aboriginal court only occurred after the demise of mission administration. Kowanyama was gazetted as a place for holding the Magistrate's Court as late as 1974, a full seven years after the change to government administration.<sup>91</sup>

Currington was careful to insulate his "insiders" from the deprivations caused by "closing the store", as their support was crucial. He was realistic enough to always be aware of the relative weakness of his position in the long periods when he was the only white missionary, noting that there was "only one Whiteman [but] plenty of blackfellows".<sup>92</sup> Currington, in fact, asserted that the strategy of "closing the store" was so effective that he had little need for a prison during the period of his superintendentship at Kowanyama in the 1940s and 1950s, although he was presumably glad one existed when he was struck by 19 year old Daniel Charlie in 1948:

The Superintendent was assaulted by Daniel Charlie and Daniel Charlie was put in jail by a number of mission boys.<sup>93</sup>

The missionaries were keen to take every opportunity of reinforcing compliant behaviour and encouraging Aborigines to believe that their future was best served by submission. Sergeant Meekin's visit to Kowanyama in May 1924 resulted in the collection and burning of a large number of fighting spears, something that Matthews hoped would prove "that the police are friends to law abiding boys".<sup>94</sup> Such actions seemed more likely to demonstrate that the missionaries had the coercive power of the police behind them and would not hesitate to use it for removal if they chose, scarcely a message of reassurance to any Aborigines.

Transitions across the inside/outside division become less to do with living in the Mission or apart from it and more related to the standing of Aborigines with the missionaries and Aboriginal access to missionary resources. It came to have a largely

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<sup>90</sup>Matthews to Killoran, 7 September 1966, Mitchell River Police Force, 17A-21, Interim transfer R254, QSA.

<sup>91</sup>May to Killoran, 4 July 1974, Kowanyama Magistrate's Court, 17A.113, Interim transfer R254, QSA.

<sup>92</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, Normanton, 7 July 1987.

<sup>93</sup>Wiffie Currington, diary entry for 24 December 1948.

<sup>94</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 May 1924.

moral sense, a dimension that will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Even when there was no “wildness” set apart from the Mission, missionaries seem to perceive their role as changing the imputed “wildness” within their Aboriginal inmates.

Even though the inside and outside model of the Mission fits the social relations of the Mission well, it struggles to deal with the ultimate sanction applied against Aborigines: removal from the reserve. In a sense removal was such an engulfment by the “inside” world of the whites that it consigned Aborigines to a place where they were dead as far as social relations were concerned. Removal was a frequent occurrence at both pastoralist and missionary instigation. The first case of removal from the Mission was connected with the death of Kilpatrick, a mission Aboriginal in June 1907. Even though the two accused men, Bumblefoot and Manogoly, were acquitted on the charge of murder before the court in Normanton, they were none the less removed to Barambah where they met their deaths, Bumblefoot in 1910 and Manogoly in 1914.<sup>95</sup> Pastoralists initiated removals of Grouchy and Craigie in 1908,<sup>96</sup> Cookie in 1909,<sup>97</sup> Splinter, Lochnagar Major, Kangaroo, Malcolm, Waterloo Tommy and Barney in 1910,<sup>98</sup> as well as Snowball and Pigeon in 1911.<sup>99</sup> The removal of at least thirteen men, some with the wives and children accompanying them to their exile, may have made removal seem a routine method of punishment when it was first used as a means of control by the missionaries in 1912.

Following the death of his wife Lucy on 13 June 1912,<sup>100</sup> Bunberraduberra became involved in an affair with a married woman which resulted in his exclusion

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<sup>95</sup>Superintendent, Barambah to Howard, 26 June 1914, 14:1763, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1913 to December 1914, A/58997, QSA.

<sup>96</sup>Normanton Protector to Howard, 30 October 1908, 08:2892, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA.

<sup>97</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 December 1909.

<sup>98</sup>Normanton Protector to Howard, 8 November 1910, 10:1921, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, July 1907 to October 1911, A/58995, QSA and Henry Matthews, diary entry for 17 December 1910. See also S. L'Oste-Brown and L. Godwin, *“Living under the Act”: Taroom Aboriginal Reserve, 1911-1927*, Brisbane, 1995, p.81, for photograph of Waterloo Tommy at Taroom.

<sup>99</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 20 June 1911. See also S. L'Oste-Brown and L. Godwin, *“Living under the Act”*, for description of conditions at Taroom reserve, pp.102-10 for copy of Taroom death register. Both men died at Taroom, Pigeon on 2 May 1914 and Snowball on 7 June 1919.

<sup>100</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 June 1912.

from the Mission to the “camp” on 21 July 1912,<sup>101</sup> an arrangement which gave greater opportunity for the extra-marital relationship to be developed outside missionary control.<sup>102</sup> Since exile to the “camp” had proved to be an ineffective means of ensuring his conformity to mission standards of behaviour he was brought back into the Mission to appear before Chief Protector Howard on Howard’s September visit to Trubanaman.<sup>103</sup> By the end of October, with Bunberraduberra still determined to take the married woman as his new wife, Matthews sought the ultimate sanction from Howard, removal.

I regret to have to report that the boy whom I had up before you on your recent visit to this mission has again misconducted himself with a married girl. It is apparently useless talking to him and for the sake of providing a sharp lesson to the others, I would respectfully ask that you have him removed from the mission. His name is Bunberraduberra.<sup>104</sup>

Bunberraduberra’s exile to the government settlement at Taroom was undoubtedly a “sharp lesson” that the missionaries, like the pastoralists, were willing to use to invoke the removal powers of the Act to enforce their code of conduct.

Matthews was again willing to invoke removal in 1915, this time against Stingaree and Baluto after they had speared and seriously injured two mission women, Julia and Maria, during a fight.<sup>105</sup> The slow progress in processing Matthews’ request gave him time to reconsider this drastic action and, by October 1916, satisfied with the reformed behaviour of the two and the recovery of their victims, successfully recommended that the orders for their removal be quashed.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 21 July 1912. “Sent Bunberraduberra [sic] from Mission for misconduct with May, some time this morning”.

<sup>102</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 28 July 1912. “Some trouble between May and Luke. May ran away, and Luke followed and found her talking to Bunberraduberra [sic]”.

<sup>103</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 25 August 1912, “Boys brought Bunberraduberra in tonight”, and diary entry for 1 September 1912, “Held meeting of boys at 9.30 at which C.P.A. [Howard] spoke on misconduct”.

<sup>104</sup>Matthews to Howard, 25 October 1912, 12:02301, Chief Protector of Aboriginals inwards correspondence, OF 46.

<sup>105</sup>Matthews to Howard, 22 May 1915, 15:2375, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, January 1915 to December 1915, A/58998, QSA; and Henry Matthews, diary entries for 19 February 1915 and 21 February 1915.

<sup>106</sup>Protector, Normanton to Howard, 9 October 1916, 16:3302, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, January 1916 to December 1916, A/58999, QSA.

The frequency of removal seems to have brought it some degree of Aboriginal acceptance as the appropriate punishment for serious offences especially since applying traditional punishment was so vigorously opposed by the missionaries. The *Kokobera* man Simon fatally speared a woman on the Mission in 1917 and along with his wife Biddy was ordered for removal to Yarrabah.<sup>107</sup> Matthews, ever sensitive to the charge that the Mission was failing in its “civilising” vocation, was keen to impress on Chief Protector Bleakley that Simon had done this outside the immediate precincts of the Mission. Moreover, his recommendation that Simon be sentenced for removal emphasised the spearing as a breach of mission order rather than as an act of homicide:

I also beg to report that a mission woman was speared by a mission man, though both were out “walkabout” at the time. I have reported the matter to the police at Normanton, and recommend the removal of the offender, as the spearing is rather in defiance of my efforts to put down this sort of thing.<sup>108</sup>

This spearing was a shocking act to other Aborigines, especially on account of the brazen way that Simon had come back into the camp with an amount of human tissue from the dead woman, his *pachel* (lover), still hooked on his spear.<sup>109</sup> Even his grandson, an eyewitness to his arrest in 1925 considered Simon, “*A mad old fellow*”.<sup>110</sup> After the spearing Simon had stayed in the bush away from the police.<sup>111</sup> Constable Rutledge was so confident of arresting Simon on his way back to Normanton in April 1918 that he commandeered the mission buggy and took Biddy with him, causing, as it eventuated, needless anguish to her kin on the Mission.<sup>112</sup> Even though acting superintendent Bert Cole was fully supportive of the removal, “[it] may be the means of acting as a deterrent to crime”, Simon eluded arrest and Rutledge returned Biddy to the Mission six days later, along with Rio and Paul who were assisting him in the search for Simon.<sup>113</sup> The next month Constable Malcolm arrived at the Mission by boat, collected

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<sup>107</sup>Commissioner of Police to Howard, 28 December 1917, 18:0025, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, January 1918 to December 1918, A/59001, QSA.

<sup>108</sup>Matthews to Bleakley, 31 July 1917, 17:02952, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>109</sup>Raymond George, taped interview, Kowanyama, 17 March 1988.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup>Commissioner of Police to Howard, 2 July 1918, 18:2308, Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Inwards Correspondence, January 1918 to December 1918, A/59001, QSA.

<sup>112</sup>Bert Cole, diary entry for 22 April 1918.

<sup>113</sup>Bert Cole, diary entries for 22 April 1918 and 28 April 1918.

Paul and Rio and made his way to the Nassau River in a further attempt to arrest Simon.<sup>114</sup>

Simon had a fierce reputation as a warrior, and as the traditional landowner of the area closely associated with Kowanyama was vigorous in fighting the *Kunjen* men who were associated with the Mission. After his brother-in-law, Rio had fatally speared the *Kunjen* man, Roger, on 10 October 1923,<sup>115</sup> Simon fatally speared another *Kunjen* man, Mick, in the payback fight three months later.<sup>116</sup> The means of Simon's and Rio's arrests after their escape from Palm Island in 1924 is a good example of the extent to which Aboriginal co-operation was able to be enlisted by white authorities on the Mission even when it was known that Simon was to face the harsh punishment of removal from the reserve.<sup>117</sup> The fugitive status of Simon and Rio had been publicly declared on 20 April 1925:

J.W. Chapman read and explained Government document pardoning some escapees from Palm Island. Simon and Rio not pardoned and advised to surrender selves to police, all men in locality were present.<sup>118</sup>

In May 1925 Constable Brown, accompanied by Gilbert, a senior figure in Simon's clan, and mission "insider" Bob Dunbar went to find him at his camp on the Magnificent.<sup>119</sup> They were apprehensive since Simon was in the company of other kin including his nephew George, but as they approached, Simon left the camp and moved alone to Duckhole, deeper in his country. Brown persuaded George to assist him in capturing Simon and from that point George took over the operation and ensured that there was no bloodshed involved in the arrest. George convinced Brown to remain hidden while he went to lure Simon out from the bush. Using the bluff that Chapman had sent a gift of a pipe and tobacco and the promise that Chapman had blankets for him back at the Mission, George persuaded Simon, who had become lame, and needed a

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<sup>114</sup>Bert Cole, diary entry for 31 May 1918.

<sup>115</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 10 October 1923.

<sup>116</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 20 January 1924 and Doris Lawrence, "Horses in the Sand", *Kowanyama News*, vol.2, no.4, September 1986, p.12.

<sup>117</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 18 December 1924. "Rio and Simon returned this evening having escaped from Palm Island".

<sup>118</sup>Stephen Davies, diary entry for 20 April 1925.

<sup>119</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entries for 17,18 and 20 May 1925.

walking stick, to allow him to bundle up his spears and woomera so that he might more easily carry them for him back to the camp. George and Simon approached the place where Brown, Gilbert and Bob Dunbar were waiting. Simon, deprived of his spears by George's earlier ruse, was unable to put up a fight, and crippled by his lameness unable to flee, and was duly apprehended. After being roughly handled and handcuffed, Simon was tied up for the night before being taken back to the Mission.<sup>120</sup> The day after Simon was brought back to Kowanyama, Chapman spoke with the people of the *Kokobera* village and persuaded them to capture Rio and hand him over to Brown. This was done, again without any struggle, and both Rio and Simon were taken from the Mission on 21 May 1925, firstly to Normanton and then to Palm Island where they both died.<sup>121</sup> The same sort of co-operation between mission Aborigines and police was responsible for bringing Left Hand Jack and Martin to be arrested by Constable Brown in June 1926, Brumby having been captured by Brown himself beforehand.<sup>122</sup>

Peter Bendigo, the only member of the founding missionary party still at the Mission by the 1920s, was increasingly marginalised from the insider role he had been groomed for in the early years of the Mission. Embroiled in a fight with Albert, Simon and Jumbo in 1916 and with his relationship with his wife Lizzie increasingly troubled,<sup>123</sup> Bendigo was back in his own country in April 1918 and considered by Bert Cole to be involved with the "troublesome" Alice River people.<sup>124</sup> He was on his country when Constable Brown brought Rio and Simon as prisoners through *Dunbar* station in 1925.<sup>125</sup> Bendigo had taken responsibility for Mick's body when it had been brought back from Kowanyama to *Dunbar*, something which may have linked him to the death in Brown's mind and resulted in his being taken with the other two prisoners

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<sup>120</sup>Raymond George, taped interview, Kowanyama, 16 December 1987. Raymond George (born 1916), a young boy at the time of Simon's arrest, was part of Simon's kin group camp on the Magnificent, an eye witness to the arrest.

<sup>121</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 21 May 1925.

<sup>122</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 27 June 1926.

<sup>123</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entries for 25 July 1916 and 13 August 1916.

<sup>124</sup>Bert Cole, diary entry for 8 April 1918.

<sup>125</sup>Doris Lawrence, taped interview, Kowanyama, 24 November 1987.



to Palm Island.<sup>126</sup> He escaped from Palm Island by swimming with a floating log to the mainland and made his way back to the Peninsula. In August 1920 he was living in the bush on *Koolatah* station with Tommy Koolatah and Peter Koolatah.<sup>127</sup> A fugitive in 1927, he was the subject of a widespread but unsuccessful search by Constable Schultz and was only arrested when he returned to the Mission on 20 April 1928.<sup>128</sup> Leo, the Aboriginal police “trooper” from Normanton, took Bendigo from the Mission for arrest at *Dunbar* and return to Palm Island.<sup>129</sup> The next year, having escaped for the second time, he was arrested along with Billy Mango, this time by Constable Wilson, and returned to exile.<sup>130</sup> Ernest Gribble who had met up with Bendigo on Palm Island acknowledged with some sympathy that he had escaped from Palm Island three times, the last in 1931.<sup>131</sup> Gribble was, in fact, far more sympathetic to Bendigo than the Kowanyama missionaries were, and fondly remembered him from 1904 and 1905:

This week on my return from Townsville, I learned that he again escaped, with four others, to the mainland. Poor Chap! - I think none the less of him for this; he is now an old man, and the call of country and children is strong, even in a blackfellow. I do hope that he will be allowed to end his days in his own land, for he has but a few years remaining to him now.<sup>132</sup>

The “call of country and children” was indeed strong, even if patronisingly acknowledged by a whitefellow.

Henry Matthews was separated from his wife and daughter for long period in 1918, 1919 and 1920 as it was considered safer for his wife to be in Townsville during her pregnancy. During these periods he had written sensitive and loving letters to her expressing his grief in being apart from his family.<sup>133</sup> Sadly and ironically he seems not to have shared Gribble’s sensitivity to the pain of Aboriginal people removed from their home and kin, nor when recommending them for removal considered that they might

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<sup>126</sup>The death of Roger and Mick, typescript, no date, (in possession of author).

<sup>127</sup>Ernest Gribble, *ABM Review*, 15 May 1931, p.29, and John Done, diary entry for 6 August 1926.

<sup>128</sup>John Done, diary entry for 25 August 1927 and Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 20 April 1928.

<sup>129</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 24 April 1928.

<sup>130</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 May 1929.

<sup>131</sup>Ernest Gribble, *ABM Review*, 15 May 1931, p.29.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup>Matthews to Matthews, 14 December 1919. Letter in possession of Mrs Margery Webb, Brisbane.

experience grief comparable to his own. Bendigo's experiences were no doubt fresh in Gribble's mind when he launched a stinging attack on removal in a letter to mission chaplain, James Housden on 28 May 1931. Housden had written to Gribble commending Bruce and Hector to his pastoral care on Palm Island, in a tone which treated the removals as just another part of the mission routine:

Bruce is a married man aged about 26 and Hector is single aged about 19. Their offence was continual stirring up of fights among the people, but both boys have good qualities. Both are baptised and were regular attenders at church. Bruce's wife and family are at present remaining on the Mission.<sup>134</sup>

Gribble launched a strongly principled response and claimed that, by initiating removal, the missions had failed abjectly. Gribble had travelled back to Palm Island on the launch with Bruce and Hector and was touched that his name meant something to them when he introduced himself: "... their faces lit up with pleasure, and they told me that they were little boys of the bush when I visited their country years ago, and that the black people there still remembered me".<sup>135</sup> He perhaps remembered as well the undertaking that he had made at Yanda Swamp and felt guilty and angry that his missionary successors at the Mission had apparently embraced removal with such ease:

[Removal] is not Christian and the Missions by seeking the aid of the Government to deal with their naughty folk are proclaiming that they are failing. There was a time when this was not done by any Christian Mission. I was at Yarrabah 18 years and during that time not a solitary native was exiled out of over five hundred. God knows that we had many very naughty folk but it was for such that we were there even as Christ came to call sinners and not the righteous. No doubt a Mission station can be made a "moral" and well conducted place by the elimination of the sinner. But then it ceases to be in the strictest sense of the word "Christian".<sup>136</sup>

If Christian principle bore no weight in the matter of removal, the sheer inability of Palm Island to cope with the numbers of exiles sent there resulted in it being "closed against further removals of adult males", temporarily, in January 1935.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Housden to Gribble, 24 April 1931. ABM, ML MSS 4503 Add On 1822, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

<sup>135</sup>Ernest Gribble, *ABM Review*, 15 May 1931, p.29.

<sup>136</sup>Gribble to Housden, 28 May 1931. ABM, ML MSS 4503 Add On 1822, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

<sup>137</sup>Deputy Chief Protector to Protector, Gordonvale 15 January 1935, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 156, DFSAIA.

In what became the decisive move in clearing the country to the south and west of the Mission of its bush-living Aborigines, Sergeant Roles, the Normanton Protector, made a patrol between Normanton and the Mitchell River in the dry season of 1935.<sup>138</sup> Roles identified 44 men, women and children still living in the bush or otherwise outside white control: 16 on the Staaten River, 5 on the Mitchell River at Koolatah Crossing, and 13 on the Smithburne and Gilbert Rivers. Of these people, some were moved without much protest to the Mission or other reserves, and others like Charlie T and Bessie Wombie became fugitives in an effort to evade exile to Palm Island.

The heightened police activity in pursuit of the fugitives gave opportunities for others to be arrested to the North of the Mission. Between the inclination of the police to make arrests to justify their long and costly patrols and the general level of chaos at the Mission caused by the interest of the northern tribes, there was a new wave of arrests, removals, escapes and recaptures involving “camp black” and bush-living *Kokominjen* and *Thaayore* people. Chapman, by this time established at Pormpuraaw, clearly considered some of the removals to be a farce; certainly Palm Island was not the effective prison that Taroom and Barambah had been. Chapman recommended that Palm Island escapees Bruce, Bruno and Fitztom be allowed to stay at Edward River Mission with him, citing the success he had experienced with other escapees, Willie Duck and Black Dog, as precedents.<sup>139</sup> With Chapman’s opinions differing markedly from those held by MacLeod, the authorities were disinclined to give Chapman the full sway he wanted. Bishop Stephen Davies was drawn into their difference by Chief Protector O’Leary who wanted both superintendents to hold “a uniform policy”.<sup>140</sup> MacLeod’s advice prevailed, and the families of Bruce and Samtom were ordered for removal to Palm Island in August 1941.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Roles to Bleakley, 20 July 1935, Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 156, DFSAIA.

<sup>139</sup>Chapman to Protector, Thursday Island, 9 May 1941. Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

<sup>140</sup>O’Leary to Protector, Thursday Island, 23 June 1941. Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 156, DFSAIA.

<sup>141</sup>O’Leary, “Order for Removal”, no.49, 29 August 1941. Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

Geoffrey Philip, a *Kokominjen* man, served as a tracker with Constables Klupfel and Sammon of the Normanton patrol between 15 June 1941 and 3 August 1941.<sup>142</sup> This patrol arrested Charlie T, Billy Flower, Jack Bruno, Samtom, Tommy Fitztom and Bruce, consigning them to Palm Island, where they arrived on 9 September 1941.<sup>143</sup> On Geoffrey's own account this patrol was decisive in settling the bush dwellers at Edward River Mission. Geoffrey operated quite independently of the white police for much of this time, accompanied only by Rolly, the Normanton tracker, as his "horsetailer". Armed with double-barrelled police carbines and revolvers, and equipped with a set of chains and handcuffs, the khaki-suited pair were a highly mobile and visible presence as they traversed the country from the Coleman River into *Strathgordon* station. Geoffrey's message to the *Kokominjen* and *Thaayore* people he encountered was simple: "*The government has claimed this country*", and "*I just want to put you back in the Mission*".<sup>144</sup> Producing his revolver or "bulldog" as he called it, if there was any sign of a fight, he told the bush dwellers, "*Bye and bye I'll send you lot all to Palm Island*", if they did not co-operate. There was no disputing the reality of this threat.

The 1941 patrol was a well organised and costly exercise, a determined attempt to implement government policy to clear the Peninsula of its bush dwellers. The cost of fares and rations alone for the police party and their prisoners was over £110.<sup>145</sup> Considering that this figure did not include wages and the cost of maintaining horses, the patrol represented a significant investment of government resources at a time when the annual government subsidy for the Mission was only £900. With this sort of investment at stake, Sammon's accusation that Chapman acted to frustrate the capture of the *Kokominjen* escapees was very serious, especially as O'Leary had given written

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<sup>142</sup>O'Leary to Protector, Thursday Island, 3 October 1941; and Honan to O'Leary, 20 September 1941, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

<sup>143</sup>Acting Superintendent, Palm Island Settlement to O'Leary, 10 September 1941, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

<sup>144</sup>Geoffrey Philip, taped interview, Kowanyama, 21 December 1987.

<sup>145</sup>Various documents contained in Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

instruction to both Chapman and MacLeod to “render all possible assistance” to the police.<sup>146</sup>

Chapman’s urgent request for the apprehension and removal of Ned on 13 June 1941 resulted in a patrol by Constable McNaught of Coen as soon as the dry season permitted travel in 1942. Ned proved very elusive and McNaught had to go to great lengths of endurance and cunning to effect his capture.<sup>147</sup> Even though Chapman plainly stated that he was fearful for his own safety while Ned was at large, branding him “treacherous” and “murdering”, McNaught recommended that Ned’s removal order not be executed and that Ned be left in his own country to act as a “friend to the police”. Ned found unlikely patrons in the Coen police. Sergeant Cooper considered that Ned had been “more sinned against than sinning”, in a direct refutation of Chapman’s advice.<sup>148</sup> With such influence invoked in Ned’s defence, Chapman concurred with the plan to reduce the sentence of removal to three months’ detention at Coen and then release to his own country.<sup>149</sup>

With only a few exceptions, the turbulent and tragic period of removal was concluded by the end of the Second World War. Several factors, including Chapman’s founding of Edward River Mission in 1939, were involved in bringing this period to an end. The increased demand for labour from the beginning of the 1940s and the presence of Currington, a vigorous supporter of labour recruitment on the Mission, as superintendent from 1944 meant that there was little incentive to remove people and thus diminish the mission workforce. With so many people dispersed amongst the stations for a large part of the year tensions were eased, even though they increased again during the wet season lay off.

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<sup>146</sup>Honan to Police Commissioner, 6 September 1941; and O’Leary to Chapman, 20 May 1941, Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

<sup>147</sup>McNaught to O’Leary, 9 May 1942, Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA. McNaught’s graphic account of Ned’s arrest details tactics that include chaining up Ned’s two wives, depriving Ned of sleep, and a variety of subterfuges as he was relentlessly pursued by McNaught.

<sup>148</sup>Cooper to O’Leary, 8 May 1942, Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

<sup>149</sup>Burmester to O’Leary, 19 May 1942, Chief Protector’s Correspondence, OF 155, DFSAIA.

Steps had been set in place for greater involvement of Aborigines in maintaining the patterns of missionary order. The events surrounding the deaths of Roger and Mick, and the removals of Simon and Rio, marked the beginning of a more systematic approach to involve Aboriginal members of the mission in the concerns of order that were so important to the missionaries. The camp leaders were set the task of bringing in any weapons and Chapman made his own inspections of the camp, confiscating the weapons he found.<sup>150</sup> Three *Kokobera* men, Jolly, Silas and King, were appointed as “policemen” and were given uniforms in 1924 to enhance their role in keeping order on the Mission.<sup>151</sup> This formalisation of a police role built on the informal arrangements Matthews had set in place in 1919 to enforce missionary restrictions on movements within the village. Two “policemen” were elected by the mission Aborigines for a week at a time to “prevent indiscriminate visiting from hut to hut”.<sup>152</sup> *Kokominjen* Geoffrey Philip was performing police tracker duties for Constable Ivey of Normanton in 1934 and, along with Hector and Bruce, was commended by Chapman for his part in settling the unrest surrounding Black Dog in 1935.<sup>153</sup> He played a significant role in the 1941 patrol of Klupfel and Sammon and was sent by Currington to bring George Brumby into the mission jail in 1950 after he was accused of intransigence by cattle manager Henry Butler.<sup>154</sup> Geoffrey’s long police association on and off the Mission was probably influential in marking police work out as the domain of the *Kokominjen*. At the beginning of the period of government administration when an auxiliary Aboriginal police force was formed, the members were universally *Kokominjen*.<sup>155</sup>

There was no doubt, however, that missionary discipline was arbitrary, depending on many factors that went beyond the bald facts of the “offence”. Sometimes the injuries sustained in traditional fighting seemed to satisfy the missionary desire to punish infractions of order. Stingaree, who had been saved from exile in 1916 by

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<sup>150</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 11 October 1924.

<sup>151</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 12 December 1924.

<sup>152</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 6 February 1919.

<sup>153</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entries for 12 November 1934 and 28 December 1935.

<sup>154</sup>Wiffie Currington, diary entry for 18 November 1950.

<sup>155</sup>Norman Junior, transcript of interview, Kowanyama, 6 November 1987.

Matthew's change of heart, was not disciplined when he speared Jolly in a fight over Jolly's wife in 1919 in which he sustained a spear wound himself,<sup>156</sup> nor when he was wounded in an "all in" fight near the Mission in 1921.<sup>157</sup> Whereas the missionaries usually intervened to prevent conflicts between Aborigines being resolved by physical violence, Done not only encouraged violence but backed it up by his presence and other more usual missionary punishments:

Horace and Daniel played up with Monica. I allowed Ben [Monica's husband] to thrash both in my presence and am cutting Horace's tobacco down and giving both work before breakfast.<sup>158</sup>

The most extreme punishment at Trubanaman, short of removal, for both men and women when they had become rebellious or had transgressed mission rules, was imprisonment. The relocation of the Mission to Kowanyama meant that there were no secure buildings, initially at least, since the whole mission station was constructed with palm-leaf walls and roofs. This created a problem for the missionaries who had come to depend on secure restraint as an important strategy in maintaining mission order. Matthews wrote enthusiastically to Howard in 1912 seeking permission to obtain several pairs of handcuffs "for the overcoming of the more turbulent spirits". He considered that "they have a wonderfully quietening effect".<sup>159</sup> He had a pair of handcuffs that were brought in by "camp people" on 23 May 1910, probably the pair that Cookie, still manacled, escaped with five months earlier.<sup>160</sup> Use of these may well have convinced him of the desirability of obtaining further pairs and using them with the Chief Protector's permission.

It was not a big step for Matthews to see the advantage of developing a new punishment to meet the new situation at Kowanyama, chaining. Chaining was simply,

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<sup>156</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 18 October 1919. "Quarrel in the camp this morning between Jolly and Stingaree, both boys received spear wounds. Stingaree interfered with Jolly's wife". (See also Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, p.291, "The Edward River notion of fair play stressed that those who initiated trials-at-arms should come away bearing equal injuries irrespective of the nature of the wrong action that triggered the combat in the first place".)

<sup>157</sup>Edwin Tonkin, diary entry for 13 September 1921.

<sup>158</sup>John Done, diary entry for 12 July 1927.

<sup>159</sup>Matthews to Howard, 16 August 1912, 12:01826, Chief Protector's Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>160</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entries for 13 December 1909 and 23 May 1910.

as its name suggests, the securing of a prisoner to a tree or post with a chain. For a brief period it was used for a variety of infringements of mission order that otherwise would have been considered deserving of an equal period of incarceration in the mission jail: Tommy Horseboy was put in the “leg irons” for three days after a confrontation with Chapman in 1919;<sup>161</sup> Luke was chained up for a night for his part in an extra-marital affair by Matthews in the same year;<sup>162</sup> Baluto was “chained up” in 1920 because Matthews considered him “not responsible for his actions”.<sup>163</sup> “Chaining up” had the dimension of public spectacle to it, the missionary equivalent of the European humiliation of being placed in a pillory or stocks. From the missionary perspective it was a simple and effective method of restraint, much simpler than constructing an escape-proof jail, with the added deterrent advantage of public visibility. Sergeant was chained for two days for striking his wife Yalkabilay in 1920 by Matthews who formally recorded the public nature of his punishment in the mission diary: “Released Sergeant this morning before all the people”.<sup>164</sup> Chaining was undoubtedly a powerful sanction for missionaries to use against Aborigines, especially in a situation like the Mission where the sight of Aboriginal prisoners chained to a tree in preparation for being marched away to exile by the police had impressed itself on the minds of all who had seen it. Used by missionaries as a punishment, it would have been evocative of these events, a punishment only one degree removed from the sentence of removal.<sup>165</sup> The practice of chaining and handcuffing was so central to the Aboriginal understanding of police that these practices provided the basis for the language names for police themselves. The *Kokobera* term for police, *Markoteng*, literally meant “hands tied

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<sup>161</sup>Agnes Matthews diary entry for 3 September 1919.

<sup>162</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 26 July 1919.

<sup>163</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 9 January 1921. Baluto’s days of missionary intervention came to end in September 1923 when he was killed by a salt-water crocodile at South Mitchell. (Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 24 September 1923.)

<sup>164</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 5 February 1921.

<sup>165</sup>*Brisbane Truth*, 5 December 1909. The outraged reaction of the Brisbane press to the whipping and neck chaining of a young woman inmate at Mapoon in 1909 showed how seriously these sorts of punishments were regarded off the Mission.



together”, and the *Kokominjen* term *Yorpany*, “sleeping hands”, terms evocative of handcuffing and chaining.

Undoubtedly the spectre of coercive missionary authority hung over many of the interactions between missionaries and Aborigines, even those that the missionaries did not imagine were coloured by the coercion described here. The missionary assumption that Aborigines had practically no sense of history blinded them to the cumulative reality of race relations that was represented in the Aboriginal conceptualisation of them as *Munpitch*. Even though the foregoing account of living under missionary domination suggests an atmosphere of rigorous oppression if not terror, Aborigines living with the *Munpitch* found ways of using *munpitch* power to advantage.

The attempt to assert *Kokobera* hegemony was one of the themes of Aboriginal response on the Mission. Undoubtedly the mission population was tribally heterogeneous from the start: Trubanaman was on *Kokobera* land but in close proximity to *Kokominjen* and *Kunjen* tracts; *Kunjen* men, like Bendigo and Bob Dunbar, played leading roles in the early period of the Mission. Anthropologist, John Taylor analysed the tribal affiliation of people baptised at Trubanaman and found that 58% were *Kokobera*, 24% *Kokominjen*, and 11% *Kunjen*, with a further 7% ascribed to some other tribal affiliation.<sup>166</sup> The *Kokobera* were clearly dominant at Trubanaman, the Mission was on their country and they comprised the majority of mission converts. The move to Kowanyama, on the northern fringe of the *Kokobera* lands seems not to have changed their assertion of dominance amongst the Aboriginal groups, but the relocation meant that their assertion was challenged to a greater extent than at Trubanaman. The early 1920s witnessed violent conflict between the *Kokobera* and the *Kunjen* people. The deaths by spearing of Roger in 1923 and Mick in 1924 from the *Kunjen* side and the exile of Rio and Simon in 1925 from the *Kokobera* was a dramatic conclusion to this intense phase of conflict. By the next year the focus of struggle for the *Kokobera* had started to shift from the *Kunjen* to the *Kokominjen* and their northern neighbours:

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<sup>166</sup>John Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, p.327.

Silas [*Kokobera* leader] brought story of big mob of Kendall River [probably *Thaayore* but Kendall River was more properly *Wik Nganchera*] men coming to join with camp people [*Kokominjen*] to fight number 2 [*Kokobera* village].<sup>167</sup>

The imperative to maintain mission order favoured the *Kokobera* who were more aware of the limits to missionary tolerance than were the less missionised later arrivals. Skilful exploitation of missionary power was in the background of the removal of the two *Kokominjen* brothers, Bruce and Hector, to Palm Island in 1931. In 1936 the *Kokobera* were confident enough in their position of dominance to demand that they be given absolute preference for employment on the Mission's cattle enterprise.<sup>168</sup> Even though missionary solidarity and assumptions of white superiority made them blind to it, it was evident that Aborigines saw where missionary partiality lay and then sought to exploit it:

[I, Chapman] enquired into last night's brawl, found that a lot of talk had taken place concerning both MacLeod and myself, working one off against the other. MacLeod inclined to blame Hector but [I] find Allan is perhaps the most talkative having a lot to say about MacLeod intending to shoot some others which rather annoyed them, hence a lot of back talk.<sup>169</sup>

From the missionary point of view it was disturbing, but hardly surprising, that MacLeod was being claimed for the *Kokobera* side and Chapman for the *Kokominjen*. Even though they did not want to be perceived as partial, the missionaries had given clear indications where they stood. As early as 1918 Chapman made a very favourable comparison of the *Kokominjen* with the *Kokobera*, and additionally had shown interest in the *Kokominjen* language.<sup>170</sup> His missionary outreach was always to the North, towards the territory of the *Kokominjen*, *Thaayore* and *Mungkan*. MacLeod, on the other hand, attended the *Kokobera*, *yiral* ceremony, something that aligned him squarely with the *Kokobera* as far as they were concerned.<sup>171</sup> It was also rumoured that he was also the target of Hector and Bruce's intentions to spear him in 1931, something that

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<sup>167</sup>John Done, diary entry for 29 August 1926.

<sup>168</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 March 1936. "There was also a lot said about employment on the mission cattle business. The Koko Beras claim that they alone should be employed, hence feeling among the Koko Mingens".

<sup>169</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 March 1936.

<sup>170</sup>Joseph Chapman, *ABM Review*, 1 July 1918, p.58.

<sup>171</sup>Raymond George, taped interview, Kowanyama, 16 December 1987.

missionary Mary Earl had taken seriously even if Chapman had dismissed it.<sup>172</sup> Even Chapman's comment that MacLeod found fault in Hector of the *Kokominjen*, while he blamed Allan Gilbert of the *Kokobera*, suggests that the Aboriginal perception of the situation accurately stated realities that the principle of missionary solidarity would not allow Chapman to admit. This was a very difficult situation from the missionary perspective, and was only resolved by the departure of both missionaries from the scene: Chapman moved to live permanently at Pormpuraaw in 1939 and MacLeod died in 1944.<sup>173</sup>

Even if the *Kokobera* had overstated MacLeod's intentions when they had threatened their opponents with shooting, there was no mistaking the preference shown in the appointment of mission insiders. A new cohort of *Kunjen* insiders emerged in Currington's period as superintendent as did the cohort of *Kokominjen* police at the beginning of the government era. Even though they were *Munpitch*, the missionaries shared the same world as the *Pakaper*, the real people of the land. Having imposed themselves into the world of *pakaper* social relations, the missionary *Munpitch* were themselves drawn into that world to a greater extent than they ever imagined.

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<sup>172</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 30 July 1931.

<sup>173</sup>Stephen Davies, day book entry for 13 May 1944. OM.AV/126/1, JOL. "A.J. MacLeod died aged 46. W. Currington to carry on as Acting Superintendent".



## Chapter Eight

### “Making good Blackfellows”: living like the *Munpitch*

Even though Ernest Gribble’s founding principles declared that the Mission would make Aborigines “good Blackfellows” and not force them to become like Whites, the Mission, in fact, acted entirely contrary to his assertions. From beginning to end it was concerned to form Aborigines in the likeness of the missionary *Munpitch* who had come to live at Trubanaman and Kowanyama. The social mores that the missionary *Munpitch* sought to impress upon Aborigines were usually far stricter than those of the white society from which they had come. Even after the Mission was transferred to government administration in 1967, Australian Board of Missions (ABM) Chairman, Frank Coaldrake, still considered socialisation to be a distinctive calling of the Anglican Church:

The Department is certainly making towns rapidly and magnificently but it is not far advanced in the making of townspeople. The chaplains are to be expected to play a big part in this. Before the transfer, the Department helped us to make towns, now we must help the Department make townspeople.<sup>1</sup>

Aborigines who grew up in the mission era show a mixture of stark realism and nostalgia as they look back at their experiences, particularly at the formative role played by the church mission. Maudie Frazer, at the time chair of the Kowanyama Community Council, contrasted the mission times to contemporary circumstances when she was interviewed in 1985 for the Cook Shire Council’s, “Oral History of Cape York”:

The church was very good, they brought a very strict life into our community, but it was a happy time. We couldn’t do the things that now the young people are doing. We were so happy, it was a beautiful life we had you know. This time I see young people I feel sad for the young people. All they think about when they turn eighteen is to drink, not thinking much about what future they are going to have in front of them.<sup>2</sup>

For Aborigines of Frazer’s generation, such a reflection on the past is also a commentary on the tension of their present day experiences. Rapid change in the post-

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Coaldrake, Chairman’s Report, 29-30 October 1968, ABM Board Minutes, vol.P, box 17, Series M4, ABM Sydney.

<sup>2</sup>Duncan Jackson, “Oral History of Cape York”, vol.3, 1985, C-128, R-110, p.1. Cook Shire Council, Cooktown.

missionary era left many Aborigines with the same feeling of powerlessness over their destiny that they experienced in the face of missionary domination. This generation and the two that had preceded it had been part of a social engineering process that cut to the core of the society they had known from their ancestors. This was a process to produce “good Blackfellows” through whatever means were deemed necessary.

The missionaries systematically aimed at creating the western work ethic and getting the Aborigines to become conscious of the western concept of time throughout the day. They did this by instituting regular programs devoted to work, study, and prayer; each period marked by the ringing of the mission bell. Even the time for the night’s rest fell under the same control. It was an evolving process that developed strategies which were each built on the founding principle of a new moral order. The missionary appropriation of control over marriage and child rearing needs close scrutiny to understand how these essential social functions became incorporated into this process of social engineering.

There was no mistaking the reason for the “very strict life”, Frazer spoke about. The moral order the missionaries sought to impose was pre-occupied with issues of sexuality and gender relations, an order that superintendent Henry Matthews was certain mission Aborigines were intent on subverting:

The moral condition of the blacks [sic] is not improving under our teaching. They - both sexes, are intent on sexual intercourse and are abusing the freedom which they enjoy under the protection of the mission, to satisfy their unclean desires. Such action, they know will bring severe punishment in camp life.<sup>3</sup>

Even though Matthews’ certainty was infused with the well established belief in the destructive influence of the “vices of civilisation”,<sup>4</sup> he accurately recognised that the Mission had contributed to the very circumstances where Aborigines acted, to some degree, outside the restraint of tradition. Indeed, the Mission was responsible for altering social and power relationships, and had created a new social situation in which traditional censures against the sexual behaviour of which he disapproved were no

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<sup>3</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 2 March 1921.

<sup>4</sup>Russell McGregor, *Imagined destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the doomed race theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne, 1997. pp.53, 54.

longer effective in the same way. This was hardly surprising since the missionaries were active in changing many dimensions of the social reality of the *Kokobera* and their neighbours. The missionaries intervened extensively in the relationships between men and women. They sought to arbitrate the claims of competing suitors and dissuade preferences for new spouses in place of the ones already sanctioned by the Mission.<sup>5</sup> Matthews often did this in a public context, presumably to seek Aboriginal input about the application of traditional Aboriginal marriage laws, or as a means to coach the wider mission community in the principles of the new Christian code, or a combination of both.<sup>6</sup>

The founding years of the Mission were entirely masculine in their focus. An all male staff and a majority of male “inmates” ensured this was so. A full four years after the foundation of the Mission, Gilbert White lamented that opportunities had been lost due to the absence of women missionaries: “Progress has been of course hindered by inadequate means and inadequate staff especially by the absence of women workers”.<sup>7</sup> Later in the same year, White was able to add Barbara Matthews and Martha Pick to the staff.<sup>8</sup> White, a single man himself, seems to have been most cautious in the appointment of women missionaries, and considered it impossible for a single woman to serve on the Mission without a female companion.<sup>9</sup> The choice of Matthew’s sister, Barbara, was a similarly cautious decision to protect the missionaries, all of whom were unmarried, from suggestions of immorality or impropriety.

Martha Pick took over the school teaching and Barbara Matthews the needlework and music areas, which had been undeveloped in the male dominated population. Without female missionaries, the Church had been unable to effect the socialisation of the Aboriginal women along the gender specific lines that radiated from their own cultural perspective. On 2 June 1909, a few months before the women’s

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<sup>5</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entries for 14 May 1914 and 22 January 1917. Henry Matthews, diary entry for 22 January 1917.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entries for 13 October 1909 and 14 May 1914.

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 1 June 1909.

<sup>8</sup>Gilbert White, Bishop’s Day Book entry for 15 September 1909. OM.AV/126/1, JOL.

<sup>9</sup>Barbara Lane, *Reminiscences*, typescript, no date, pp.3, 4.

arrival, the Mission's "inmate" Aboriginal population comprised 40 males and 15 females.<sup>10</sup> White was happy enough with their contribution on his next visit:

I am much pleased with the progress of the Mission since my last visit and am particularly impressed with the good work done by the lady workers. They have greatly improved the whole work of the Mission.<sup>11</sup>

Even neighbouring pastoralists shared White's enthusiasm for the impact that the women missionaries were having. Thomas Watham of *Rutland Plains* visited the Mission in August 1909 and considered that the presence of the women missionaries had produced visible results: "since the ladies have been here the young girls are especially clean and well mannered. Improvements have advanced greatly in the last two years".<sup>12</sup> Watham would not have been blind to the advantage of having a group of women, trained at mission expense, on his doorstep from whom he could recruit domestic workers.

Even though Gilbert White had taken a cautious approach, the presence of the Barbara Matthews and Martha Pick soon led to missionary romance. The first intimation that the missionary *Munpitch* shared a world of relationships even remotely like the Aboriginal world was the romance and subsequent marriage of Henry Matthews and Martha Pick on 14 September 1910 at Trubanaman, the day before the inquest into Frank Bowman's death began.<sup>13</sup> Their marriage was not a long one on account of Martha's illness in 1913 and subsequent death.<sup>14</sup> Barbara Matthews became engaged to the new chaplain, Frere Lane, in July 1913, and was married at Trubanaman on 15 July 1914.<sup>15</sup> The arrival of a son to the Lanes in August 1915 meant that mission Aborigines saw, for the first time, a white infant.<sup>16</sup> Until then, the only *Munpitch* they had known were adults, and mostly males at that. Henry Matthews remarried on 27 October 1915, again to a fellow missionary, Agnes (Nellie) Phillips, who had been a missionary at

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<sup>10</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 2 June 1909.

<sup>11</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 9 June 1910.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Watham, entry in Visitor's Book, 5 August 1911, OM/AV/8/1, JOL.

<sup>13</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 14 September 1910.

<sup>14</sup>Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 1 November 1913, p.142.

<sup>15</sup>Barbara Lane, *Reminiscences*, typescript, no date, p.16.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p.18.



Trubanaman from earlier in that year.<sup>17</sup> The presence of married missionaries offered a better guarantee that sexual transgression might be avoided. It also exposed the Aboriginal women to a degree of missionary socialisation that was not possible under a wholly-male regime.<sup>18</sup>

The sudden embracement of marriage by the missionaries anticipated a change in the evangelisation strategy towards Aborigines. During the first five years of the Mission, adult Aboriginal men were encouraged to join the Mission as “inmates”, and some of these allowed to bring their wives and families from the bush to live at the mission station. Others, who had not previously married, were the subject of missionary concern that wives be obtained for them from amongst the bush-dwellers.<sup>19</sup> White’s census of the mission population on 7 June 1910, shows single men vastly outnumbering single women.<sup>20</sup>

Young children	6
Schoolchildren	17
Young men	28
Young women	2
Married men	15
Married women	15
Staff	7

This sort of gender balance was not typical of the experience in other North Queensland missions. Wilhelm Poland the Lutheran missionary at Elim and Hope Valley on the eastern coast of the Peninsula recalled the complete failure of his mission

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<sup>17</sup>Henry Newton, Bishop’s diary entry for 27 October 1915 and Jones to Pick, 25 February 1915 (correspondence in the possession of Mrs Margery Webb, Brisbane).

<sup>18</sup>Sara Sohmer, review of Patricia Grimshaw, ‘Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Hawaii’. in *The Journal of Religious History*, vol.16, no.4, December 1991, pp.503-04.

<sup>19</sup>Mary Quinan, *ABM Review*, 1 December 1917, p.172.

<sup>20</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 7 June 1910.

to entice any young men to stay, to the extent that “... our resident population, for years on end, consisted almost exclusively of the girls who had been entrusted to our care”.<sup>21</sup>

Gilbert White devised a short form of service to recognise and bless marriages “made according to native custom”, and used it for seven couples on 1 June 1909.<sup>22</sup> White’s approach was radical by the standards of his contemporaries on other missions, since it blurred the otherwise clear distinction between Christian and traditional marriage. Francis Gsell, the Roman Catholic missionary to the Tiwi people of the Northern Territory, demonstrated the typically hostile approach of Christian missionaries to traditional marriage practices when he thundered: “She had been baptized, and she belonged to Christ. She should not remain in the hands of pagans”, after discovering that a young girl had been taken from her parents to the camp of her tribal husband in accordance with traditional marriage laws.<sup>23</sup> White had to face the patently obvious fact that the adult couples who had become adherents of the Mission were in stable marriage relationships. The laws of the Church only permitted Christian marriage between individuals where at least one of the parties was already baptised. White did not have the luxury of being able to wait for this stage of evangelisation to be reached; his plans required Aboriginal exemplars of missionary sanctioned social relationships right away. His radical scheme produced church-sanctioned marriages only four years after the Mission’s foundation.

Even though Gilbert White’s initiative had the potential to minimise missionary interference in marriage matters, a far more disruptive approach was soon to prevail. Where the traditional marriage system of the *Kokobera* and their neighbours was an essential part of their land-based social identity,<sup>24</sup> the patterns of marriage that were to

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<sup>21</sup>Wilhelm Poland, *Loose Leaves: reminiscences of a pioneer North Queensland Missionary*, Adelaide, 1988, p.29.

<sup>22</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 1 June 1909.

<sup>23</sup>Francis Gsell, *The bishop with 150 wives: fifty years as a missionary*, 1955, London, p.88.

<sup>24</sup>John Taylor, *Of Acts and Axes*, PhD thesis, JCU, Townsville, p.177. Taylor found a strong preference for seeking marriage partners from neighboring rather than distant clans. “This preference operated independently of the marriage rule and came into effect when there was a choice between marrying a ‘wronghead’ partner close at hand or marrying a ‘straight’ partner from some distance away”.

develop under missionary guidance increasingly spoke of the “mission inmate” identity that allowed only a glancing recognition of the link to the land.

From 1911, the focus on married couples became the principal strategy of missionary effort. If White had been concerned about the identification and sanctioning of social exemplars, Henry Matthews seemed far more concerned about controlling the inner motivations of the Aborigines under his influence. Where White had recognised a sympathy between traditional and Christian marriage, Matthews had seen unruly passions which needed the firm hand and guiding eye of the missionaries for them to be kept in check. Christian marriage, of the kind that the missionaries now modelled, was Matthews’ remedy to the “problem” of the sexuality of the Mission’s “inmates”:

Our greatest task is to teach these people to exercise control over the sexual impulses, and desires. As it is I am afraid our difficulties have been increased, and we feel the necessity for increased watchfulness.<sup>25</sup>

The founding of Angeram outstation, only two kilometres upstream from Trubanaman, was the main initiative of this new approach.<sup>26</sup> Here, the pattern of married life, modelled by the missionaries at Trubanaman, was lived out with a higher degree of autonomy than had otherwise been experienced on the Mission proper, with the duty of “watchfulness” falling to the South Sea Islander assistant, Jack Geibo. The opportunity of living at Angeram, and the comparative independence this offered, was a powerful motivation for the Aboriginal men concerned, whom Matthews described as working “far harder than they had ever worked, even under supervision, at headquarters”.<sup>27</sup> White was immensely satisfied with these developments, especially that regular work was becoming “the habit, the instinct of the place”.<sup>28</sup> White’s aspirations for Aborigines were undoubtedly limited and envisaged the most adept Aborigines to be capable of filling only the lowest ranks of white society. Despite this, it is not hard to imagine the ideal of industry and family life at Angeram as the background of what he probably considered to be generous praise of Aborigines in 1927:

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<sup>25</sup>Henry Matthews to Howard, 1 July 1911, 11:01490, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>26</sup>Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 1 November 1911, p.132.

<sup>27</sup>Cited by Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 1 November 1911, p.132.

<sup>28</sup>Gilbert White, *ABM Review*, 1 November 1911, p.132.

In regard to their human qualities of affection, kindness, unselfishness, love of parents and children, gratitude and willingness to learn, many of them will compare not altogether unfavourably with an English agricultural labourer.<sup>29</sup>

Even though Gilbert White was capable of embracing radical means to further his plans for the Mission, he seems to have been unable to transcend the English class structure which he took as the accepted and even preferable way of ordering human affairs.<sup>30</sup>

The seven Christian marriages that took place in 1912 represented missionary success in finding wives for the cohort of single men who had been with the Mission from the early days. The men, ranging in age from twenty to twenty-five years, were wed to women ranging from sixteen years of age to twenty years. The average age of the women was seventeen and a half, and the men, on average, were five years older. Of the fourteen weddings solemnised in 1913, only four fitted this pattern. The other ten couples were considerably older. Their church marriages represented a development of the mission practice of sanctioning existing marriage relationships. Instead of White's "blessing" ritual which gave Christian recognition to marriages "made according to native custom", the parties to the 1913 weddings were married in a fully canonical rite which did not distinguish between the two classes of couples.<sup>31</sup>

The emphasis on marriage for mission Aborigines, both young and old, was reflected in the extent to which the missionaries were prepared to go to punish any deviation within these marital relationships. The first act of missionary-initiated removal of an Aboriginal from the Mitchell River reserve was as punishment for Bunberraduberra's affair with a married woman after the death of his wife, Lucy, on 13 June 1912.<sup>32</sup> Even though the missionaries had resented frequent pastoralist-initiated removals for alleged cattle spearing, Bunberraduberra's removal to Taroom government settlement emphasised the lengths to which the mission administration was prepared to go in punishing any challenge to the core missionary policy on marriage. Matthews was

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<sup>29</sup>Gilbert White, *Answer! Australia*, 1927, p.18.

<sup>30</sup>J.W.C. Wand, *White of Carpentaria*, London, no date, pp.7-15, and more generally, Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1978, p.51.

<sup>31</sup>Marriage Register, Mitchell River Mission, OM/AV/11/1, JOL.

<sup>32</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 June 1912.

determined to get the most out this situation. He hoped that Bunberraduberra's sentence would be a "sharp lesson to the others" not to transgress the sanctity of Christian marriage.<sup>33</sup> The missionaries could not, of course, punish every transgression of marital fidelity with removal to a distant settlement, but censures by temporary exclusion from the Mission or from the Christian fellowship continued to be commonplace.<sup>34</sup> One charge of "immorality" in 1925, resulted in the man receiving a "whipping" and the woman being banned from her work as a teacher at Belburra.<sup>35</sup> The missionaries were mentally trapped between the reality of sexual mores in the contemporary English and Australian societies of their day and their overwhelming desire to create what they saw as a more moral society on the Mission. This dissonance meant that mission Aborigines were subjected to an arbitrary application of harsh censures which were often as unjust as they were hastily administered.

The missionaries had placed themselves at the centre of marriage concerns, not only as exemplars of Christian marriage, but as arbitrators of the norms to be followed. From this position they soon found areas of incongruence between missionary and traditional marriage practices and sought to resolve these in favour of the Christian patterns. Their involvement in these marriage arrangements, without an exploration of the wider context, ranged from action which merely exposed the question in hand, to community opinion, to direct intervention. Matthews was undoubtedly skilful in negotiating outcomes which seemed to him to offer the best fit of Christian marriage principles around the traditional marriage patterns of mission "inmates". In 1914, after Jack and Willie had agreed between themselves that Willie should relinquish Jessie in favour of Jack, Matthews used a public meeting to censure the breach of the missionary marriage law that Jack and Willie's agreement anticipated:

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<sup>33</sup>Matthews to Howard, 25 October 1912, 12:02301, Chief Protector of Aborigines inwards Correspondence, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>34</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 16 October 1919, (Chapman would not allow Joe back onto the mission after he had allegedly committed adultery) and Newton to Cole, 27 April 1917, folio 76, OM.AV/61/2, JOL, (for Bernard's excommunication after a charge of adultery).

<sup>35</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 7 February 1924.

Held general meeting of married men to discuss Jack's claim to Jessie and Willie's acquiescence to same. As Jessie was legally married to Willie, Jack relinquished all claims.<sup>36</sup>

This was only an episode in a longer story of missionary involvement that commenced in September 1909 when Jessie joined the Mission:

Miss Robson accompanied girls to St Peter's Paddock and prevented a quarrel between Lucy and Jessie. These two belonged to one man. Since admission three weeks ago, Jessie has been accepted as the wife. It appears that Lucy has prior right and gave vent to her jealousy today. Upon discussion, it was decided that preference be given to Lucy and she accordingly took her place, Jessie coming into the girls' quarters.<sup>37</sup>

The missionaries were genuinely puzzled that there could be such a vigorous flare up of conflict between Lucy and Jessie, mislabelling it as "jealousy". They then observed Jessie, "soon after her arrival, instructing her rival's eldest daughter in some new dances".<sup>38</sup> They did not understand that Lucy's child related to both of her father's wives as mother, and that the conflicts between the two women did not cut across the relationship between Jessie and Lucy's daughter.<sup>39</sup> The two were, in Aboriginal kinship terms, "mother" of the girl. Nor did they consider that what they opposed in 1914, the dissolution of Jessie's marriage, was the same thing, in Aboriginal eyes, as they had forcibly compelled when Jessie was consigned to the "girl's quarters" in favour of Lucy in 1909. The approach of these *Munpitch* to marriage must have seemed very strange indeed to the *Pakaper*. They neither acted consistently, nor demonstrated much understanding of the fundamentals of marriage and kinship as these were understood by Aborigines.

Matthews again used direct intervention and community censure to deal with another triangular relationship, this time involving Piper, Mary and Paul in the latter half of 1916. Piper and Mary had eloped to *Lochnagar* on 19 September 1916. Matthews travelled to *Lochnagar* to bring them both back to Trubanaman on 9 October and followed this by calling public meetings on 22 and 28 January 1917. The second meeting finished with Mary agreeing to marry Paul, a marriage which duly took place

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<sup>36</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 14 May 1914.

<sup>37</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 13 October 1909.

<sup>38</sup>*Missionary Notes*, 22 March 1910, p.42.

<sup>39</sup>John Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.132.

on 25 July 1917. At the first public meeting Matthews was successful in gaining the agreement of the mission community that Aboriginal marriage laws prevailed against

Mary's desire to marry Piper:

Held meeting this evening to discuss matters re Paul and Mary. Latter will not have Paul and wants Piper. Meeting unanimous that she can't have Piper.<sup>40</sup>

Even though elements of Aboriginal marriage law were selectively affirmed by the missionaries, some of the most obvious *Pakaper* principles of marriage were not recognised by these *Munpitch*. The principle of a man marrying his deceased brother's widow was of this order.<sup>41</sup> This was what Aborigines expected of Susie after Donald Bondonally, her husband, died in 1924. At that time two of Donald's brothers, Bert and Zingle, were unmarried and preferred, according to Aboriginal law, as husbands for Susie who was expected to marry one of her brothers-in-law. Chaplain John Done's entry in the mission diary, in August 1926, told the story succinctly:

Jimmy and others trying to force Susie to marry Bert or Zingle. [I] told Susie [that] church would not allow her to marry her husband's brother. She says she does not want either.<sup>42</sup>

Done correctly stated the marriage laws of the Anglican Church. "Brother's wife" was listed in the *Book of Common Prayer* as one of the thirty categories of relationship where marriage was prohibited. What was conventional and decent in the *Pakaper* way of marriage was outlawed, according to the *Munpitch* law. Missionaries were unconcerned about classificatory relationships and looked only at biological descent and affiliation. They saw the social world of Aborigines through very different eyes from the Aborigines themselves. While the missionaries had no difficulty endorsing the marriage of a widow to her husband's classificatory brother they saw a complete obstacle in such a union with the husband's consanguinal brother, whereas in Aboriginal terms the two men stood in an identical relationship with the dead husband. In a situation virtually identical, from the *Pakaper* perspective, to the Susie Donald case, Matthews found no problem with the proposals to deal with Lena Geibo's

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<sup>40</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 22 January 1917.

<sup>41</sup>Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.129. "When a man died, it was usually expected that one or other of his brothers would marry the deceased's widow/s and assume responsibility for the rearing of his children".

<sup>42</sup>John Done, diary entry for 4 August 1926.

widowhood in the traditional way. The classificatory relationship of brother between Jack Geibo and Bob Dunbar did not figure in his reckoning: “A deputation of Lena’s brothers approached me with the view to further her marriage with Bob Dunbar. All parties agreeable”.<sup>43</sup>

Aborigines recognised that missionary power could be employed to achieve outcomes in marriage matters where both systems were in agreement. Chapman was obviously used in this way when there was a breach of Aboriginal marriage practice:

The boys brought in for an interview a man from the camp who is guilty of incest having taken his daughter to wife. Have decided to take the girl away from him. She wishes to marry a man in the Kunjen village.<sup>44</sup>

Here, the woman in question was most likely to have been in a classificatory relationship of daughter to the man. This was as much an incestuous relationship, according to Aboriginal marriage law, as it would be if she were the man’s daughter by biological descent. Such relationships are described as “wrong-head” in Aboriginal English in contrast to the preferred “straight-head” marriages between cross-cousins.<sup>45</sup>

Missionary intervention in consensual sexual relations was often direct and apparently initiated without any enquiry into traditional views on the matter or regard for what they might have been:

May reported that Luke had lent her to Joe for immoral purposes last night. Joe admitted misdemeanor. Gave he [sic] and Luke thrashing, and stopped tobacco. They have also to sit alone in church till such time as they express penitence.<sup>46</sup>

Anthropologist Lauriston Sharp observed that such “trading” of women was practised amongst the *Kokominjen* people with whom he lived in the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> In a 1916 discipline case, very similar to the *ménage à trois* involving May, Luke and Joe, Bishop Henry Newton observed: “this seems to be a custom” and reported that the woman

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<sup>43</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 10 December 1923.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 5 January 1929.

<sup>45</sup>Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.112. “A man contracted a ‘straight’ marriage when he married a MBD [mother’s brother’s daughter] or someone classified with her; a woman contracted a ‘straight’ marriage when she married FZS [father’s sister’s son] or someone classified with him”.

<sup>46</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 30 December 1912.

<sup>47</sup>Lauriston Sharp, “Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians”, in Edward Spicer (ed), *Human Problems in Technological Change*, New York, 1952, p.72. See also A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Sydney, 1938, pp.120-12, for an exploration of the practice of “lending” wives and its social functions.



involved “had not objected”.<sup>48</sup> Anthropologist John Taylor was more specific about the traditional basis for an incident of the kind that involved May, Luke and Joe:

A certain degree of variety in sexual partners within the marriage bond was permitted, or at least condoned, in both husband and wife. Thus a man might allow his wife to have a dalliance with a sojourning “younger brother” of the husband, if she was so minded.<sup>49</sup>

What was different was May’s use of missionary power to confront the male control over her sexuality that was supported by traditional cultural norms. Even though she had complied with these expectations, she was willing to bring the practice to missionary attention, knowing that punishment for her husband and his brother would result. The missionary opposition to men “giving” their wife to another, must have seemed inconsistent to Aborigines or, if not inconsistent, at least confusing. In another context, missionary opposition to polygamy, the missionaries encouraged the permanent “gift” of a woman to another man if the donor already had more than one wife.<sup>50</sup> Nancy Dick recalled that both Chapman and Currington were adamant about this, ordering that men with more than one wife be brought to their office where they were told: “You can’t have two wives, ... you must marry one, keep one. ... That’s not right”.<sup>51</sup>

Missionaries at Mitchell River, in common with their contemporaries on other Aboriginal missions, sought to eliminate the practice of older men marrying young women and replace it with same-age marriages.<sup>52</sup> Joseph Chapman, according to Sharp’s field-notes, was clear about this when Sharp interviewed him on the subject in 1933:

Old men used to grab off young girls in marriage. Virtual monopoly. Young men allowed access to older women. Mission girls put stop to this (with support of Mission vs practice); they insisted on marrying young men.<sup>53</sup>

The very fact that May told the missionary about Luke’s arrangement with Joe supports Chapman’s contention that some women actively used the Mission and its missionaries

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<sup>48</sup>Henry Newton, [diary entry for Bishop’s visit, 6-13 September 1916].

<sup>49</sup>John Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.145.

<sup>50</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 22 December 1914. “Admitted little boy today, also a woman who has been given to Jack by a man who has two wives”.

<sup>51</sup>Nancy Dick, taped interview, Kowanyama, 29 May 1988.

<sup>52</sup>Barbara Henson, *A Straight-out Man*, Melbourne, 1992, p.138.

<sup>53</sup>Lauriston Sharp, Field Notes 33, II/3, informant: Chapman. AIATSIS Canberra, Ms 685.

to change elements of their own culture that they had come to find uncongenial. This was not surprising. The introduction of a sedentary life based around the Mission had drastically changed some very basic elements of traditional life which upheld the tradition. The changes due to the mission economy, with its changed land use and social patterns, shifted the balance of gender relations in favour of the sort of initiative women were apparently showing. The traditional marriage arrangements meant that, in a marriage, a woman was isolated from her own kin and surrounded by husband's kin.

John Taylor makes this important point very clearly:

During their married lives, a mother and her daughter were less likely to be in contact than a mother and her sons. Sons tended to marry women of their mother's clan and this ensured that they would often be in the same bands exploiting the same tracts. A daughter, on the other hand, typically married a man from a clan different from that of her parents and there could be little overlap in the range of tracts that mother and daughter exploited in the course of the seasonal round.<sup>54</sup>

Life on the Mission dramatically shifted this balance and meant that a mother and her daughter could continue a very close association, especially if their husbands were away working on the cattle stations. This change alone, from living a traditional life in the bush to that of a village dweller, offered the potential for an unprecedented realignment of gender and kin relations. A woman, rather than being isolated without close kin, was now potentially in the closer presence of her own family and kin. Undoubtedly this gave her greater confidence were she to be in a disagreement with her husband and his kin. It also gave her greater potential independence. When the influence of missionary power was added to this situation, the dynamics of change became enormous. Lauriston Sharp's famous essay, "Steel Axes for Stone-age Australians", forcefully developed this point as he focussed on the steel axe as a metaphor of the social impact of missionary-introduced change:

By winning the favor of the mission staff, a woman might be given a steel axe. This was clearly intended to be hers. The situation was quite different from that involved in borrowing an axe from a male relative, with the result that a woman called such an axe "my" steel axe, a possessive form she never used for a stone axe. ... furthermore, young men or even boys might also obtain steel axes directly from the mission. A result was that older men no longer had a complete monopoly of all the axes in the bush community. Indeed, an old man might

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<sup>54</sup>John Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.163.

have only a stone axe, while his wives and sons had steel axes which they considered their own and which he might even desire to borrow. All this led to a revolutionary confusion of sex, age, and kinship roles, with a major gain in independence and loss of subordination on the part of those able now to acquire steel axes when they had been unable to possess stone axes before.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, missionaries tended to view changes of this order as a desirable outcome of their action, even if many of the specific dimensions were unintended. They saw themselves as the means of liberating Aborigines from a tyranny of tradition that was usually more imagined than understood. There seems to have been a particular satisfaction, on the part of missionaries, when their actions were received with equanimity. They delighted in anything capable of being interpreted as gratitude. The Lutheran missionary, Albrecht, directly confronted the traditional marriage laws in Central Australia and understood that he had the support and even appreciation of the women when he did so. After one such confrontation: "... he particularly noticed that a large group of women came to say goodbye. It must have been the first time, he thought, that anybody had spoken up for them".<sup>56</sup> Bishop Henry Newton was clear in his understanding that "Christianity has raised the status of woman", and sought to represent this in the social relations on the Mission, in 1916, by making the men wait in Church so that the women might leave first.<sup>57</sup>

It did not take long for the news about what was going on at the Mission to reach bush-dwelling Aborigines and for them to experience the all-embracing implications of the missionaries' desire to make "good blackfellows". Mary Quinan, a missionary from Trubanaman, found that the *Kokominjen* prevented her having any access to the young women, when she visited their camp on Magnificent Creek in 1917:

The tribes will not allow us to see their girls, they dread our drawing them into the Mission, as girls are very scarce amongst these tribes, and they want to keep them for the bush - that is what we hear on every side. It is quite a pity. On the Mission we have a larger number of boys who ought to have their own homes, but there are no girls for them. [Quinan's emphasis]<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Sharp, *Steel Axes*, pp.83, 84.

<sup>56</sup>Barbara Henson, *op.cit.*, p.139.

<sup>57</sup>Henry Newton, diary entry for Bishop's visit, 6-13 September 1916.

<sup>58</sup>Mary Quinan, *ABM Review*, 1 December 1917, p.172.

Quinan understood that the Mission was effectively in competition with the bush dwellers for the women whose presence would enhance either Mission or bush communities and whose absence would ensure decline of one or the other.

Mary Quinan's presence in the bush camp was evidence of the missionary strategy of using the women missionaries to recruit Aboriginal women to the Mission. It was also part of a strategy to attract support for the Mission from Church members. Quinan's short article, "Suffer the little children", in the *ABM Review*, painted a picture of a pathetic Aboriginal mother in such a bush camp for whom the Mission was hope and salvation:

Poor black mother - she loves her piccaninny, but does not know how to ease her pain. She has learnt one English word, "Mis-si-on", and she knows that it means "help", and her heart keeps saying "Mis-si-on, Mis-si-on", all the time. At last she rises, lifts her child gently on to her shoulders and tramps through miles and miles of bush until she reaches the Mission Station, where she lays her in the arms of a missionary, who knows that the loving Lord Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me".<sup>59</sup>

Quinan was confident that the Mission would prevail in this competition, even if it was to be through dire necessity rather than the free choice of the women concerned.

The relocation of the Mission's head station from Trubanaman to Kowanyama in 1918 offered the missionaries an opportunity to re-invent the Mission and further insulate it from uncontrolled contact with the district's pastoralists. Such a goal required a new level of effort to construct the buildings and cultivate the gardens that were needed at the new site. To accomplish this the single men, under the combined leadership of Joseph Chapman and Jack Geibo, were set to these tasks. The pattern of semi-autonomous villages for married people that had been centred on Trubanaman did not survive the transfer of the mission site to Kowanyama. It had always been inefficient to operate the different settlements around Trubanaman even though it had proven to be an arrangement that better suited the married couples who had taken up life in this way. The new site at Kowanyama gave a chance for the missionaries to seek efficiencies in the operation of the Mission and tighter control over the lives of its

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<sup>59</sup>Mary Quinan, *ABM Review*, 1 January 1918, p.186.

“inmates”. Even the domestic arrangements of the married people were brought under the sort of institutional control that had been reserved for single people at Trubanaman: Arranged with married people to have a common kitchen, so that they will have three regular meals a day, instead of eating their whole issue at one meal.<sup>60</sup>

The apparent confidence that the missionaries, and Matthews in particular, displayed in ordering the affairs of the Aboriginal “inmates” concealed tensions which had arisen on account of the intervention of the missionaries in most areas of life on the Mission. Even though Matthews had become skilled in exploiting the Aboriginal law when it suited him and opposing its implementation when it didn’t, the consequences of this approach to the marriage of Maudie erupted into violent conflict that left two men dead and two more deported to Palm Island.

Maudie’s matrimonial future had been the subject of missionary intervention in 1917 when Matthews organised a public meeting at the time of Bishop Henry Newton’s visit:

A meeting was held, Bishop presiding to discuss marriage of Maudie to Johnathan. Decided that the engagement between Maudie and Paddy is over. Maudie at present does not want to marry Johnathan. Decided to let the matter rest for six months. Johnathan, in the meantime to be admitted as a mission inmate.<sup>61</sup>

Working back from the later records of the missionaries, Maudie’s age at the time of this meeting was about 14 years. The next mention of Maudie’s matrimonial future occurred in 1920 when Maudie, along with Pansie, approached Matthews and indicated a desire to be married. Matthews simply noted his concurrence: “arrangements for this will be made later”.<sup>62</sup> Roger, Maudie’s intended, had been working at *Koolatah* in 1919, earning £7, a not inconsiderable amount, for his efforts over the dry season.<sup>63</sup> He had been accompanied at *Koolatah* by Paddy, Maudie’s suitor in 1917. The two men were most likely classificatory, if not consanguinal, brothers. Both men were back at the Mission for the wet season, from November 1919.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 15 January 1922.

<sup>61</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 5 September 1917.

<sup>62</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 15 February 1920.

<sup>63</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 1 October 1919.

<sup>64</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 17 November 1919.

As soon as the marriage plans for Maudie and Roger received Matthews' consent, Roger commenced the construction of a palm leaf house in June 1920 in preparation for the marriage ceremony which duly followed in the next month: "Roger was baptised this morning and married to Maudie this afternoon... Roger and Maudie take up their married life tonight in their fine new house".<sup>65</sup> At the time of their marriage Roger was aged 30 years and Maudie 17 years.<sup>66</sup> What seemed a model arrangement in the missionary scheme of marriage started to lose its exemplary character when Matthews discovered that Maudie had been involved in an extra-marital affair in October 1920, only three months after the wedding.<sup>67</sup> Roger, shamed by the events, left the Mission, but was back at work at Kowanyama within a fortnight.<sup>68</sup> The restoration of marital harmony continued through 1921, the year in which both Roger and Maudie were confirmed in the Church of England.<sup>69</sup> During this time Maudie was employed to work at the Matthews' home, a task that became increasingly important during Mrs Matthews illness in January 1922.<sup>70</sup>

Despite their apparent integration into the missionary scheme of things, tensions were brewing between Roger and Maudie on account of Maudie's work in the Matthews' house.<sup>71</sup> Roger became jealous of his wife and resented her working in such close proximity to the *Munpitch* and became physically abusive. Roger's beating of Maudie was met with opposition from her family. It did not take long for the whole mission community to become aligned on either the side of Roger and his *Kunjen* kin or Maudie and her *Kokobera* kin. This spiralling tension led to a fight on 10 October 1923

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<sup>65</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 11 July 1920.

<sup>66</sup>Marriage register entry for 11 July 1920.

<sup>67</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 11 October 1920.

<sup>68</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entries for 12 October 1920 and 21 October 1920.

<sup>69</sup>Confirmation Register, entries for 15 May 1921.

<sup>70</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 11 January 1922. "Mrs Matthews still in bed. Maudie made bread and cooked an excellent dinner".

<sup>71</sup>May Smiler, interview, Kowanyama, 1 August 1987.

when Roger was speared by Maudie's uncle, Rio.<sup>72</sup> Roger died the next day from his injuries.<sup>73</sup>

Matthews had Roger's house pulled down on 5 December 1923 in a concession to the funeral customs which, in the life in the bush, called for the camp of a deceased person to be abandoned.<sup>74</sup> In this case the custom had been adapted to mission life by removing the house from the people's presence. Traditional responses to Roger's death were not restricted to the Mission. His *Kunjen* kin who lived on the *Dunbar* reaches of the Mitchell River travelled down to the Mission during January 1924 to avenge Roger's death and challenged Rio and the *Kokobera*. In a fight on 20 January, Rio and one of the *Kunjen* avengers, Mickey, received spear wounds.<sup>75</sup> In such a "trial-at-arms", this outcome would usually have been sufficient to settle matters, the avengers usually expecting to suffer some injury. Consequently the *Kunjen* did not seek Rio's death.<sup>76</sup> This was not the end of the matter, however, as Mickey died of his wounds two weeks later.<sup>77</sup>

The whole affair had cost the *Kunjen* dearly, two of their number had been killed and *Kokobera* hegemony on the Mission had been strengthened. Even so, tensions had not been reduced, fighting continued and another man, probably *Kokobera*, was wounded a week after Mickey's death.<sup>78</sup> If the fortune of battle had gone against the *Kunjen*, the law of the *Munpitch* fell heavily on the *Kokobera*. Rio and his brother in law Simon, who had speared Mickey, were charged under Queensland law and removed to Palm Island, the government settlement north-east of Townsville that was used as a penal station more than other government reserves.<sup>79</sup> Maudie herself died at the age of twenty-seven years on 27 May 1928. In less than five years the small mission

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<sup>72</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 10 October 1923.

<sup>73</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 11 October 1923.

<sup>74</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 5 December 1923.

<sup>75</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 20 January 1924.

<sup>76</sup>John Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp.277-80.

<sup>77</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 2 February 1924.

<sup>78</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 11 February 1924.

<sup>79</sup>Bill Rosser, *This is Palm Island*, Canberra, 1978, p.2.

community had suffered, through death or banishment, the loss of the five adults most centrally involved in these events.

This long episode of missionary intrusion into the marriage concerns of mission Aborigines had exacted a terrible cost. The episode had also taken its toll on the missionary scheme to rebuild the Mission at Kowanyama along more efficient lines. Initially, at least, they had constructed a single village. These new living arrangements may have been responsible for the heightened tensions that erupted in the inter-tribal fighting described. By 1926 separate “villages” for each main tribal group had arisen within earshot of each other, more at the initiative of the Aborigines than the missionaries for whom even this arrangement of closely clustered tribal groups around the mission station was burdensome when it came to the missionaries exercising “supervision”.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the personal cost to Aborigines, the missionaries continually put forward new exemplars of Christian marriage from amongst the younger people on the Mission. Earlier in the year that Maudie died, a feast and holiday from the mission routine was observed to celebrate the marriage of Alban and Leah: “A general holiday, the wedding day of Alban and Leah. Much dancing and merry making among the people”.<sup>81</sup> Despite disruptions to the missionary order through domestic quarrels in the early period of their marriage, Alban and Leah continued as exemplars of the missionary pattern of marriage. Leah worked as mission school teacher for thirty-five years and is credited by Aborigines and missionaries alike as a harmoniser of Aboriginal and missionary beliefs.<sup>82</sup> The missionaries needed such exemplars and harmonisers and were prepared to display unusual tolerance to produce them. They were the “good blackfellows” that the missionary order demanded.

To the missionaries’ credit, they were consistent in resisting the pressure of government and higher church officials when it came to requests for the Mission to

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<sup>80</sup>J.C. Pond, *ABM Review*, 12 April 1926, p.6.

<sup>81</sup>[Joseph Chapman], diary entry for 29 February 1928.

<sup>82</sup>Coralie and Leslie Rees, *Coasts of Cape York*, Sydney, 1960, p.216.



provide women as wives to men in distant places. Chief Protector, John Bleakley was a willing servant of the interests of Shadforth, the owner of *Abingdon Downs*, when he wrote to the Mission in 1913 seeking wives for Shadforth's Aboriginal workers.<sup>83</sup> Given that this was a period when the Mission was struggling to find wives for its single men, pragmatism was as influential as principle in declining Bleakley's request.<sup>84</sup> A similar move by Bleakley to recruit Mitchell River women as wives for Mapoon men in 1936 was successfully opposed by Chapman, despite Bishop Stephen Davies' enthusiasm and support.<sup>85</sup> This was a significant victory for Chapman. Mapoon was the designated mission for "half-castes" on Cape York Peninsula and other missions had been compliant with Bleakley's request.<sup>86</sup> Even though Davies had arranged for five Lockhart River, "half caste" women to be "transferred" to Mapoon, Chapman's lack of co-operation prevailed. May Smiler, one of the young "half caste" Mitchell River women who had been targeted for "transfer", gratefully remembered the tone of Chapman's response: "Oh, leave them with their families, they're happy here".<sup>87</sup>

Bleakley, the dominant figure in Aboriginal affairs in Queensland in the period before the Second World War, was in no doubt that "caste", the degree of biological descent from European and Aboriginal ancestors, was a proper basis for formulating public policy towards Aborigines.<sup>88</sup> His attempt to intervene in the lives of people like May Smiler was consistent with his view that the so-called "half-castes" should marry within their caste or marry "full blood" Aborigines rather than become absorbed into white society:

It is kinder in my mind to encourage them to breed back to pure blood type than to create artificial conditions to force them into a society where their outcast condition is bound to prove a barrier to their happiness.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Lane to Deputy Chief Protector, 13 August 1913, OF 46, DFSAIA.

<sup>84</sup>See Mary Quinan, *ABM Review*, 1 December 1917, p.172.

<sup>85</sup>File memorandum, 8 May 1936, 36:1888, "Missions, Mapoon, Transfers marriageable girls, LRM". OF 83, DFSAIA.

<sup>86</sup>J. Roberts, M. Parsons and B. Russell, *The Mapoon Story according to the Invaders*, Fitzroy, 1975, p.22 and pp.50-2.

<sup>87</sup>May Smiler, interview, Bundaberg, 1 September 1996.

<sup>88</sup>Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White dominance, 1788-1994*, 1994, St Leonards, 1994, p.160. Bleakley's status as a leading administrator of Aborigines ensured that his ideas were influential in the development of policies across northern Australia.

<sup>89</sup>Bleakley, Circular Memorandum, 10 October 1934, 34:4772, OF 83, DFSAIA.

Faced with the choice of control by the eugenic policies of Bleakley and the government administration or the sometimes sentimental paternalism of missionaries like Chapman, it is not hard to understand that the latter is remembered with affection and appreciation at Kowanyama. May Smiler, (then May Wright) a survivor of the 1936 attempt to transfer “half-castes” to Mapoon had already survived an encounter with Bleakley’s policies in 1932. Bleakley had granted administrative approval for Ernest De Satge,<sup>90</sup> a mixed-race Aboriginal from the Urandangie district to marry her.<sup>91</sup> From Bleakley’s perspective, this was an ideal marriage, both parties were the children of men from respected pastoralist families; in addition De Satge had the financial means to support himself and his bride.

For Chapman, the matter was entirely different. His suspicion that De Satge had fathered a child to another mission woman left him in grave doubt as to the moral suitability of the man for one of his charges. When De Satge arrived at the Mission expecting to marry May, he was confronted by a missionary regime that considered May ought to be able to make a free choice in the matter and Chapman’s opinion that he was not a fit character to marry one of the Mission’s women. Chapman was in no mood to entertain him at the Mission or attempt to sway May’s decision when she equivocated about the marriage: “As May could not make up her mind to marry De Satge I told him he could not [sic] longer remain in the reserve”.<sup>92</sup> Contrary to the accepted wisdom of government policy and the declared intentions of a figure as influential as Bleakley, Chapman had ensured that the missionary commitment to freely-given consent in marriage prevailed. An arranged marriage by Bleakley was as inimical to that principle as was marriage arranged in accordance with tribal custom against the free will of the woman involved. Missionaries believed they knew best.

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<sup>90</sup>For background to Ernest De Satge see Bill Rosser, *Dreamtime Nightmares*, Canberra, 1985, pp.7-10 and for a biography of his niece, Ruby De Satge, pp.11-64.

<sup>91</sup>Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, Register of Marriages 1908-1936, A/58981, QSA.

<sup>92</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 September 1932.

The increased mobility of Aborigines after the Second World War made some of the assumptions of the Bleakley era untenable but the disruption of Aboriginal society in northern Queensland still meant that not all men were able to find suitable marriage partners in their own towns or communities. The fact of missionary control over women of a marriageable age was not lost on the men who looked to the Mission as the source of a potential bride. Even though he probably would not have seen his action in these terms, Chaplain Eric Wingfield used this control as a means of coercion in missionary proselytism. He wasted no time in inducting two “half caste” Normanton men into the religious regime of the Mission when they arrived by air in September 1949: “Interviewed wife-seeker and his friend and arranged to give them daily instruction in preparation for baptism”.<sup>93</sup> The freely made choice of women to marry had effectively been elevated to a higher order than the sort of conscientious decision that might ordinarily be expected of one seeking baptism in the Christian church. Mitchell River’s particular expression of missionary paternalism had consistently seen that its women were not a population resource to be shared lightly or even shared at all. The advantages of missionary success in the earlier competition between the Mission and the bush dwelling Aborigines was not going to be squandered on suitors from other places without their worthiness, according to missionary perceptions, first being established. A willingness to submit to baptism would not harm the suitor’s cause.

There is little doubt that the missionaries acted on the principle that the sexuality of the mission inmates needed to be controlled and only expressed within the context of mission-sanctioned marriages. The implications of this policy were far reaching and intruded into the family life of mission Aborigines at many levels. The regulation of marriage and consensual sexual relations represented, though, only one dimension of the program to “make good Blackfellows”. Equally far-reaching intrusion came in the form of the Mission’s appropriation of the nurture and socialisation of Aboriginal children.

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<sup>93</sup>Eric Wingfield, diary entry for 16 September 1949.

Along with the desire to control marriages, the desire to influence children through education, moral teaching and socialisation was foremost in the intentions of the missionaries from the Mission's foundation. The extent of this intention's translation into practice was, however, contingent upon access to Aboriginal children. The effectiveness of the practice, in the missionary mind at least, was dependent upon the exclusion of other influences, especially traditional ones. The mission subscribed to what it called a "rising generation" theory of progress:

The remoulding of character is gradual not magical. ... The "rising generation" are worthy of all the love and training one can bestow.<sup>94</sup>

The "love and training" to which superintendent, Bert Cole, referred, more often expressed itself in paternalism and rigid discipline than in warm familial relationships, even though both qualities are represented in the recollections of former mission Aborigines.<sup>95</sup>

Superintendent Henry Matthews looked to the establishment of Kowanyama in 1918 to provide him with the conditions whereby the children could come more completely under missionary control and influence. In effect he described the determined attack on Aboriginal culture this mission, and most others, pursued:

Since opening the new industrial centre at Mangont [Kowanyama], all of the older people have been sent there, leaving only the children and one or two married couples here [at Trubanaman]. It is very important to separate the children from the old people, and under the present conditions it is possible to do this and I am confident the results will be very far reaching.<sup>96</sup>

The missionaries had grown more confident in appropriating a parental role towards mission children. Gilbert White had raised the priority of schooling in 1913 after seeing that it had suffered neglect: "The future of the mission and the people depends largely on the school work and I trust that work will be at once recommenced and kept going steadily".<sup>97</sup> Chaplain Frere Lane had taken this instruction to heart when he prevented parents Piper and Kitty from taking their seven year old elder daughter

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<sup>94</sup>Bert Cole, visitors book, May-July 1911, OM.AV/8/1, JOL.

<sup>95</sup>Elsie Roughsey, *Tales of the Old and the New*, Melbourne, 1984, p.23. (For a Mornington Island perspective on this dual character.)

<sup>96</sup>Diary entry for 2 September 1918.

<sup>97</sup>Gilbert White, diary entry for 14 July 1913.

with them when they left the Mission in 1916: “Piper ... took Kitty and Gracie and wanted to take Chrissie - but I said, ‘No, leave her here at school’, then Kitty tried and I said the same to her. So they departed.”<sup>98</sup> Lane’s action represented a terrible intrusion into the life of Piper and Kitty’s family but was sanctioned by law in the principal Act under which the lives of Aborigines were controlled, *The Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897*. Vast discretion lay with the officials of the institutions recognised under the Act which envisaged “providing for the care, custody, and education of the children of aboriginals [sic]”,<sup>99</sup> as within the scope of government regulation.

By 1919 missionary opposition to parental responsibility had grown, as had their confidence in ordering mission Aborigines to do what they wanted:

During evening girl taken away from Mission by parents. Wallaby sets out to bring back children taken away.<sup>100</sup>

Even if the missionaries had started out with an educational purpose in 1913, their strategies had become focussed on the social dimensions surrounding the children’s lives and, by 1921, seemed particularly concerned to exercise control over female sexuality: “Put door on school and barred windows so that the building will serve as school and dormitory for girls”.<sup>101</sup>

Mission policy was becoming overwhelmed by the preoccupation to “make good blackfellows” through the regulation of Aboriginal sexuality and the destruction of Aboriginal culture. Chapman, so disgusted by the behaviour of some of the single men under his control, even ordered that Church worship be abandoned in 1922 as a response to immorality:

Seven boys ... guilty of adultery with a camp girl ... Owing to the low standard of morality among the people have decided not to have the regular church services but to have intercessions instead.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Frere Lane, diary entry for 12 August 1916.

<sup>99</sup>*The Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897*, sec.31, para.6.

<sup>100</sup>Bert Cole, diary entries for 15 and 16 January 1919.

<sup>101</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 8 April 1921.

<sup>102</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 19 September 1922.

Chapman, no admirer of the *Kokobera*, condemned them in 1925 as the embodiment of all that the Mission needed to change:

A good deal of immorality has taken place among these people. Some of the men have been in the habit of selling their wives to station men both black and white.<sup>103</sup>

Chrissie, the subject of Frere Lane's tussle with Piper and Kitty, was again at the centre of a decisive point in the development of mission policy, this time, aged fifteen, in 1924:

Miss Smith reports misconduct of Chrissie - this after two warnings. The girl left her room, passed Miss Smith's bed, and into the boys' dormitory and got into Bruno's net and awakened him. Have decided to remove all boys of the age of puberty from the school.<sup>104</sup>

It was inescapable that missionary policy had contributed, in large measure, to the crisis in control that confronted the missionaries. Their response was to tighten their control over single women and girls, and, in an effort to ensure maximum physical separation of males and females, to allow the single men and boys to live a more normal life with their families in the village. Chrissie, at least from the age of seven, had been under the control of the missionary regime and subject to all of the influences the missionaries cared to apply. It had been the missionaries' choice, not hers or her family's, to deprive her of a normal socialisation. Now, as a fifteen year old, she was being depicted as a brazen temptress from whose predations the pubescent males needed protection. Her situation, from the missionary perspective, was only redeemable by stricter control until she could enter a mission-sanctioned marriage. This duly followed in 1925, before she had reached the age of sixteen.<sup>105</sup>

Chapman moved the boys from Belburra to Kowanyama in 1928, but had no success in curbing the trysts that were, by this time, commonplace.<sup>106</sup> By 1929 Lawton, the Chaplain, complained to Chapman that twelve dormitory "girls" had been found to

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<sup>103</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 16 January 1925.

<sup>104</sup>Henry Matthews, diary entry for 25 May 1924.

<sup>105</sup>Copy of Mitchell River Marriage Register, OM AV/11/1, JOL.

<sup>106</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 30 October 1928, "Eleven school boys have taken up their abode at Kowanyama for a time. Miss Smith finds the strain too much".

have been in regular contact with their lovers.<sup>107</sup> Belburra, the school and dormitory settlement, was itself abandoned at the beginning of the wet season in December 1930 in favour of combining all of the Mission's operations on the Kowanyama site.<sup>108</sup> The retrenchment of the women missionaries in November 1931<sup>109</sup> only compounded the problems for implementing the dormitory regime which had become a farce by 1933:

Last night three girls left the dormitory by lifting two flooring boards with a stick. [9 June 1933]

Found that certain girls had removed the nails from flooring in the dormitory. [28 June 1933, Eight girls listed]

Closed store against people until enquiry was made into yesterday's happenings. The girls concerned were also locked up. "Bush School" finished this morning. [29 June 1933]<sup>110</sup>

Even though Chapman struggled to reassert his control and used his favoured "last resort" punishment of "closing the store against the people", the Mission had to face the facts that things could not continue as they had before the retrenchment of the women missionaries. Something had to yield in what was becoming an increasingly futile struggle. Soon after the events of 1933, Chapman decided to face the inevitable. All children were allowed to resume life with their families. At least, for a time, the relentless drive of the missionaries to change Aboriginal cultural values in this way slowed down. Such a slowing may simply have been the only sensible alternative on account of the impasse that had been reached in Chapman's attempts to operate the dormitory without women missionaries. Alternatively, the problems with the dormitory in the early 1930s may have provided Chapman with the ammunition he needed to deviate from diocesan policy, in much the same way as he had found a way around Bleakley's policy on "half-caste" marriages. This was certainly the clear inference to be drawn from the views he represented, much later in life, when he was interviewed on the subject by the anthropologist, Donald Crim:

Chapman has maintained that he was opposed to the enforced confinement of the adolescent girls from the outset, and that it was only the commitment of

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<sup>107</sup>Joseph Chapman, 25 January 1929, "Mr Lawton reported trouble at Belburra. The girls have been leaving the dormitory at night and meeting the single boys".

<sup>108</sup>Alick MacLeod, diary entry for 1 December 1930.

<sup>109</sup>Joseph Chapman, 27 November 1931, "Owing to reduced grant, Miss Earl and Mrs Stephens have been recalled".

<sup>110</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entries for 9, 28 and 29 June 1933.

higher church officials to the program that compelled him to implement it for so many years.<sup>111</sup>

There is no doubt that when Chapman had a free hand to found and run the Edward River Mission he did not institute dormitories, but his assertions to Crim, more than twenty years after the events described here, are difficult to reconcile with his decision to reinstate the dormitory regime in 1936 after it had lapsed for three years. His comments at that time were stark, in their presumption of missionary superiority, as he rejected something that was normal in most human societies, children living with their parents, as a “failed experiment”:

Brought in all the village boys and girls of school age to live as dormitory children, the village experiment not being a success. There are now 69 dormitory inmates.<sup>112</sup>

Whatever may have been Chapman’s private reservations about dormitories his re-assertion of the dormitory policy in 1936 set the pattern, described by Ruth Wall in 1949, that would endure for the rest of the mission period:

Thirty-five girls live in the dormitory. The boys come here for meals, but sleep at home. After the children begin school they come to the dormitory, and their parents have no more responsibility for them. In the school there are sixty-three pupils at present.<sup>113</sup>

A clear implication of missionary rhetoric was that the Aboriginal parents had little interest in exercising parental responsibility. The facts were quite the opposite and left the Aboriginal teaching assistants at the school and dormitory bearing the brunt of parental frustration:

If that little girl or boy goes back and carries on, tells them [parents] that so and so woman was growling at me in the school or if they hit them, [the children] go back and tell them and the parents go straight away to see that teacher.<sup>114</sup>

Most conflict of this kind seems to have been mediated through the Aborigines who worked closely with the missionaries. The Aboriginal intermediaries were skilful in dealing with many of these issues, and often succeeded in shielding the missionaries

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<sup>111</sup>Donald Crim, *Changes in kin-term usage in the Aboriginal community at Mitchell River Mission, Northern Queensland*, PhD thesis, 1973, Cornell University, p.24.

<sup>112</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 7 July 1936.

<sup>113</sup>Ruth Wall, *ABM Review*, 1 December 1949, p.180.

<sup>114</sup>Nancy Dick, taped interview, 29 May 1988, Kowanyama.



from the rising tide of anger, but often at great personal cost to the intermediary. These policies that pushed parents to the margins in their own children's upbringing resulted in such a level of frustration and resentment that direct confrontation with the missionaries could not be avoided. Parents, horrified with the privations their children were suffering in the dormitory, made a deputation to superintendent Wiffie Currington about threats by the dormitory matron, Minnie Butcher,<sup>115</sup> to reduce the already meagre food ration as a punishment against the children under her control.<sup>116</sup>

Parents were further outraged when Butcher implemented a policy of fitting out the dormitory girls in "rompers", suits of clothes that provided very little covering of the upper body. These Aboriginal parents, with nearly fifty years of mission-taught modesty as their pattern, precipitated a crisis that needed diocesan intervention when Butcher insisted that all the "girls", right up to those in their mid-teens, wear this same outfit. A show of armed force by the fathers of the dormitory girls sufficiently alarmed Currington that he petitioned Bishop John Hudson to dismiss Butcher. Faced with such an impasse, Hudson reversed his previous support for Butcher's approach and agreed to her dismissal.<sup>117</sup> The delegation had intended to throw spears over Butcher's house and told Currington they wanted to drag Butcher from her house and fit her out in a pair of the controversial "rompers".<sup>118</sup> Personal morality and bodily modesty, the "stock in trade" of the missionary, were appropriated in the Aboriginal struggle against missionary domination.

The description of the development of missionary policy needs to be tested against the lived experience of women who entered the dormitory as children and emerged as brides, to gauge their perspectives of this intrusion into the family relationships of Aborigines in the name of "making good Blackfellows". Alma Native

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<sup>115</sup>Minnie Butcher was dormitory matron from 1952.

<sup>116</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, 15 September 1984, Kowanyama.

<sup>117</sup>Hudson considered the practice of Aurukun Mission, where women wore no clothing above the waist, superior to the practices on the Anglican missions: "I wish they dressed like that at our missions, it's more sensible, much more hygienic, much more wholesome". Coralie and Leslie Rees, *Coasts of Cape York*, Sydney, 1960, p.173.

<sup>118</sup>Wiffie Currington, taped interview, 15 September 1984, Kowanyama.

was one such woman who spent most of her childhood in the dormitory and graduated from it to become a teacher to another generation of its “inmates”. Her reflections on this time are helpful in understanding the powerful role this experience has played in the lives of many of the older adults at Kowanyama today. Alma, the daughter of Native and Lucy, was brought into the mission, as a six year old, from *Rutland Plains* in 1937, just after Chapman reinstituted the dormitory system.<sup>119</sup> Even though she was known on the station as Lindus, she was renamed Alma by the missionaries and placed into the girl’s dormitory. Speaking *Munkan*, the tongue of her maternal grandmother, she was confronted with an alien linguistic environment whose harshness was only broken by the comforting words of some older kin. The acquisition of her parents’ *Kunjen* language only came later when she was allowed out hunting with them on Sundays. Alma’s experience reveals the array of controls and punishments that were so common in the dormitory that she accepted them as “normal”. Salt was forced on the tongues of girls who used English obscenities in a refinement of the 1920s regime when this was used to curb the use of Aboriginal language.<sup>120</sup> Other punishments were just as degrading. The shaving of a girl’s head and forced wearing of a dress made from rough hessian bag were standard punishments for anything counting as significant breaches of dormitory regulation.<sup>121</sup> The harsh control that adults had experienced at the hands of both pastoralists and missionaries was applied to a new generation through the dormitory system. From a very early age women were the focus of unequal attention from the social engineers in a way that their male siblings were often able to avoid.

After the War, Alma Native along with eight other dormitory girls, decided that they would “go bush” to escape the dormitory life. The attractions of hunting took the nine girls to Fishhole and then back to Belburra. Martin, Billy and Mark were sent to look for the runaways who were brought back to the dormitory. The nine girls were given a “hiding”, had their hair cropped to the skin, fitted up with a bag dress and put in

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<sup>119</sup>Alma Wason, taped interview, Kowanyama, 10 March 1988.

<sup>120</sup>May Smiler, interview, Bundaberg, 1 September 1996.

<sup>121</sup>Joseph Chapman, diary entry for 25 February 1933, Two girls charged with “misconduct” were “put into bag dresses” by Chapman.

the cells for a night. The hair cutting and wearing a bag dress for a week were counted as the hardest punishments to endure as they brought shame and public disgrace. “So the others can know that person is a disobedient person. ... Anybody used to make trouble in the dormitory - go straight back to the bag dress”.

Nancy Dick remembered that girls lived in fear of being caught with boys and were told while being punished, “If you make trouble again, you’ll wear the bag dress all your life”.<sup>122</sup> It was not only the missionary punishment that they faced, as often as not they were also confronted by their parents who, summoned by the dormitory matron, were shamed and angered by the reports of a daughter’s behaviour. These parents, deprived of their usual role, were easily drafted as enforcers of the missionary regime. Many of them had lived through this experience themselves and had accepted the missionary mores as their own. Their own adult lives were shaped by the constraints of mission discipline and routine; they were no strangers to missionary interference in areas that they might properly consider their own concern. These parents were in the difficult situation of wanting to have a role in their daughters’ upbringing but were generally only welcome to become formally involved when there was trouble and they were needed to force home the fact there was no escape from mission discipline.

Compared to the physical and psychological constraint to which girls were subjected, their male peers enjoyed relative freedom. This arrangement seemed plainly unfair to the girls themselves, especially as they perceived the males to be the initiators of the trysts which led to the unequal punishment of the female partner.<sup>123</sup> A marriage sanctioned by the missionaries was the only way out of the confinement of the dormitory, as Alma recalled being told: “You girls must [be] married before you leave the dormitory”.<sup>124</sup> Mission policy seemed intent on socialising women into a perception of themselves as flawed seductresses even when their own actions were beyond any reproach. When the pregnancy of a dormitory girl was discovered in 1950, all the

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<sup>122</sup>Nancy Dick, taped interview, Kowanyama, 29 May 1988.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>Alma Wason, interview, Kowanyama, 10 March 1988.

dormitory girls shared the punishment of absolute imprisonment for three weeks.<sup>125</sup> The dormitory had become a microcosm of the Mission with its general punishment of “closing the store against the people” finding its dormitory parallel in all the dormitory “inmates” sharing the punishment and shame of any individual lapse. Such collective punishment was intended to involve the whole group so as to there would be no recurrence of the transgression. It was also a powerfully coercive invitation to internalise the values and mores of the missionaries and thus avoid future punishment. Despite her experience of the harsh dormitory environment, Alma went on to be an Assistant Teacher in the mission school proving the effectiveness of the dormitory system in socialising this young woman into a role that was important for the perpetuation of the missionary scheme of things.

During the post-war years when the labour of adults from the Mission was in high demand by the district’s cattle stations, the dormitory girls were deployed for essential labour around the Mission. Herbert Norton, chaplain in 1948, criticised the way that the girls were being used as a labour pool for the arduous task of maintaining the aircraft landing ground. Norton made a direct challenge to the authority of superintendent Currington when he recorded his criticisms in the mission diary, where Currington was sure to read them, whilst Currington was away from the Mission:

Are these unmarried young women being taught native or British handicrafts? I have seen little of their handiwork except in keeping the ‘drome free of grass etc.<sup>126</sup>

Upon Currington’s return nine days later, Norton’s challenge was emphatically answered in what otherwise seems like a routine comment in the same diary: “Dormitory girls working on drome and doing a good job”.<sup>127</sup> The level of control that the Mission exercised over its young girls and unmarried women had become so embedded in the ethos of the Mission that the criticisms of a newcomer like Norton

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<sup>125</sup>Diary entry for 21 January 1950.

<sup>126</sup>Herbert Norton, diary entry for 13 May 1948.

<sup>127</sup>Wiffie Currington, diary entry for 22 May 1948.

could be easily dismissed as the misguided idealism of a neophyte. A frank and public evaluation of the sort of policies in place at Mitchell River Mission had to wait until 1997 when the report of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* was published.<sup>128</sup> Even though the children of Mitchell River Mission remained physically within their community they experienced the full brunt of the policies of separation that the Inquiry examined. Henry Matthews' prediction in 1918 that the policies of separation would be "very far reaching" was accurate but for diametrically opposed reasons from those that guided Matthews' thinking at the time.

By the time the dormitory system at Mitchell River Mission was abandoned in the late 1950s, several generations had been socialised apart from their families. Different strands of the missionary strategy were woven together in the strange mixture of pragmatism and principle which had come to characterise the mission administration. Despite the principled assertion that women should be free to choose who they married, missionary control over marriage had been strengthened after Chapman's reassertion of the pivotal role of the dormitory in 1936. Over the next twenty years, marriage, and at an early age, was the only way out of the dormitory for most women. If the social conditions that the missionaries had constructed were used innovatively by women up to the 1920s to reshape gender power relations, it came at a high price in loss of individual liberty and family relations once the missionaries decided to make girls and young women the focus of their specific attention in this experiment of control and re-socialisation.

In light of this it is instructive to re-visit Maudie Frazer's comment that opened this discussion since it sets the events analysed here into both a retrospective context and a juxtaposition with the present day:

The church was very good, they brought a very strict life into our community, but it was a happy time. We couldn't do the things that now the young people are doing. We were so happy, it was a beautiful life we had you know. This time I see young people I feel sad for the young people. All they think about

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<sup>128</sup>*Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Sydney, 1997.

when they turn eighteen is to drink, not thinking much about what future they are going to have in front of them.<sup>129</sup>

Her comments are not unusual, and show that the modern world is no less demanding in its way than was the mission regime. Nor would it be extraordinary to hear community elders at Kowanyama advocate the re-institution of the dormitory system as they contemplate the issues that face their community more than ninety years after their ancestors were first gathered together to learn to be made into “good Blackfellows”.<sup>130</sup> Over thirty years of life as a former mission has left the people of Kowanyama with fonder memories for much of what happened under the aegis of the Mission than an analysis of the Mission’s life might otherwise suggest. If “goodness” can be measured by generosity and forgiveness towards the excesses of the Mission, then the people of Kowanyama are “good” indeed.

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<sup>129</sup>Duncan Jackson, “Oral History of Cape York”, vol.3, 1985, C-128, R-110, p.1. Cook Shire Council, Cooktown.

<sup>130</sup>For public reporting of the situation in contemporary Kowanyama see Tony Koch, “The moment the laughter died”, *Courier Mail*, 31 October 1998, pp.1, 6. Koch reported that Police Department statistics indicated that a woman in Kowanyama was 25 times more likely to be raped than in the rest of Queensland.

## Chapter Nine

### Pathangany made us all: religion and traditional belief

The missionaries at Mitchell River Mission did little to study or even define the religious domain of the *Kokobera* and their neighbours. Instead of a positive study of the kind undertaken by Ernest Worms, a Catholic missionary in the Kimberleys, the Mitchell River missionaries operated within a more limited scope. Theirs was a *via negativa* which drew a large boundary around the beliefs and behaviours which seemed to them inimical to the Christian religion, what they considered to be “superstition”. Nor did the missionaries seem to be guided by theories and principles of mission that went beyond attempts at “civilising” Aborigines on the way to their becoming “Christian citizens”. Although they were regular correspondents to the journal of the Australian Board of Missions, there is little evidence that their missionary practice, their “civilising” task, was influenced by the new ideas about mission work published alongside their own letters and articles. The *ABM Review* presented significant challenges to conventional missionary thinking: reporting on the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in its August edition of 1910, featuring an interview with David Unaipon in 1912, and advocating the missionary church should be made of “black nets and black floats” ie. thoroughly indigenous, in 1919. Furthermore the pioneering work of Roland Allen (*Missionary Methods, St Paul's or Ours*, first published 1912) which rejected the central role of foreign missionaries was summarised in an article in 1922.

We have seen ample evidence of the dual, *Munpitch* character of the missionaries, something that Kenelm Burridge labels, in more general terms, “Christian contrariness”. Burridge’s study of the cross-cultural transmission of Christianity across many time periods and different cultural contexts led him to

conclude that there is an inherent tension within the Christian message itself which explains the “contrariness” of the missionary in the interaction with different cultures. He identifies two qualities, “Affirmative” and “Devotional”, to describe the complementary but dialectical relationship between the human and spiritual dimensions of Christian faith.

There is a sense, easily recognised in the words of the founding missionaries themselves, that evangelisation proceeded from a fundamental affirmation of the good that was in Aboriginal society. Ernest Gribble’s affirmations that hunting, ceremony, and traditional access to land would continue under the missionary regime were instances of the “Affirmative” quality of the cross-cultural communication of Christianity. Gribble’s Yanda Swamp speech also emphasised the claim of the transcendent God who called for a moral response by all who encountered the Christian message. This is Burridge’s “Devotional” relation of the dialectic. If Burridge is correct in his analysis, both relations will be evident even at times when one emphasis seems to predominate over the apparent weakness of the other. Nor would it be surprising that the inherent dialectical relationship of Christianity within a culture would be seen and experienced differently by missionary and native Christian, and that this perspective could change and even become reversed over time.

In this light, to the missionary, culture can be understood as that part of the human experience that is either affirmed by Christianity or needs to be surrendered in response to its claims. The tendency for the “Affirmative” to be overcome by the “Devotional” is evident in the approach of the Mitchell River missionaries characterised in this 1914 survey of missions:

[At Mitchell River Mission] the great majority of the natives are quite wild and have never come in contact with whites, but many of them have already abandoned their nomadic life, and adopted one of steady work consecrated by Christian worship.

There is little question that the missionaries were keen to understand their own efforts as a positive contribution to the welfare of the Aborigines they



influenced. The material improvements in housing, health care, education and food production, as limited and slow in coming as they were, had their spiritual parallel in the adoption of Christian worship and doctrine. In this way they did not consider that their work was in conflict with essential Aboriginal identity. The changes they advocated were conceived by them, and represented to Aborigines, as welcome affirmations of the good in pre-Christian Aboriginal society. To the missionaries the “superstition” and “vice” they saw in Aboriginal society was falling under the steamroller of Christian doctrine and morality, leaving Aboriginal society both more truly “good” and, despite its losses, “complete” after this encounter. Henry Matthews described revolutionary changes that had been introduced by the Mission to the way Aborigines lived but still portrayed the influence of Christianity as essentially “Affirmative”:

The once wild, nomad hearts are learning the meaning of self-discipline. Beautiful fruits, too, are taking the place of the old heathen vices. Lust is giving way to love. Women are no longer chattels but the helpmates and companions of the men. Yet the natives are not being made into white men. Christianization, not Europeanization, is the missionaries’ aim. They still hunt ... still dance ... but heathen rites have yielded place at the great moments of their lives to Christian sacraments. Things morally wrong are, of course, forbidden.

Despite the missionaries’ protests, the establishment of the Mission represented a major assault on the integrity of the land based society of the *Kokobera*, *Kokominjen* and *Kunjen*. The constraining of these “nomad hearts” to the settled life was far more significant than these missionaries imagined. Even at times when Christian piety and the social order it demanded cut at the heart of cultural practice, the missionaries looked for the signs that they were part of an “Affirmative” mission. The fact that Aborigines still hunted traditional foods and danced “cultural” dances continued to be reassuring signs to the missionaries that Aboriginal culture and identity had not been damaged by their teaching and missionary order. Despite these protests, the missionaries were generally unable to cross the cultural divide that straddled the gap between Christianity and what they considered “superstition”.

The “Devotional” emphasis of the Christian gospel was translated by the missionaries into an ordering of life on the Mission which reflected the strict Christian morality they considered inseparable from this gospel. Importantly, this was not the only influence at work. Anthropologist Veronica Strang recorded accounts in the 1990s at Kowanyama that demonstrated the action of Burridge’s “Affirmative” principle of Christianity within Aboriginal culture and identity. Strang identified monotheistic, eschatological and biblical dimensions in the telling of traditional creation and “Dreamtime” stories. Even accounting for the fact that one of her principal informants of these things was Alma Wason, a significant church leader of whom more will be said later, Strang’s perceptions are in accord with a broad range of oral accounts I was able to collect some five years before Strang but many years after the formal conclusion of the mission era. Looking at the origins of their social and cultural identity, some Kowanyama Aborigines at least, see Christian meaning and symbolism as an entirely integrated part of what it means for them to be who they are. It is difficult to say when or how this sense first occurred, indeed this is one horizon of the present discussion.

If the missionaries were reluctant to admit the traditional world of the creator figures of the Aboriginal cosmos into dialogue with their understanding of Christian beliefs, it seems to have happened, and at a significant level, for Aborigines. Nor should this be surprising. Even though Aborigines were sometimes depicted as mere recipients of formal catechetical instruction by the missionaries, this was obviously a very distorted conception of the reality. The appropriation of the Kokobera creation figure Pathangany as the name for God the Father, and Samuel Zingle’s confident assertion that titles this chapter, “Pathangany made us all”, stands in stark contrast to the missionary fear of “superstition”.

Donald Shearman, ABM Chairman in 1972, in a tone of official despair at the end of the mission period, declared the Mission to have been an

ineffective means of evangelisation: "... there are only a few who have any real commitment to Jesus Christ and of these some appear to have retained some of their old beliefs." Shearman went further and claimed that, "the Gospel Story has been syncretised with one of the popular myths". Shearman considered that nearly seventy years of missionary work had still not communicated the Christian Gospel to the Aborigines at Mitchell River, and implied that the methods used had been so "Affirmative" of Aboriginal culture and identity that there was little evidence of "Devotional" Christianity. His response was to advocate a new emphasis on bible translation and evangelisation in the vernacular. This, despite the decline in functional use of vernacular languages after such a long period of emphasising English language.

The "syncretism" that Shearman declared triumphant, related to the Pathangany creator brothers, whose creative travels were the subject of the *Kokobera*, Warengvmélngnen song cycle. Samuel Zingle recounted part of this story in 1988:

*When those two fellows travelled around ...  
those two Pathangany boys,  
they came from a long way, and kept travelling around.  
They created the world.  
They put one tree there ... and sang paten, sang paten all around here,  
and came to a different place,  
then they followed the sea and reckoned it was all water.  
The big fellow said to the young brother, "We've got to block this sea and make  
land",  
they built up islands first.  
That young fellow sang paten ... that big fellow sang too.  
They made this Australian land,  
so they put their hands together while they kept singing that paten ...  
they reckon that their arms stretched and stretched,  
the young fellow from this bottom side and the big brother from the top side,  
their arms were stretched and they felt their hands meeting together ...  
and that big brother said, "That's you my little brother?"  
"Yes that's me."  
So they heaped that dirt, put it up high so we'll have this place dry, Australia.  
They blocked the sea then, singing that paten.  
That big brother came back and met his brother ...  
and now the sea won't come up.*

The authenticity of the story as told was undoubtedly self-evident to the teller, but its telling to a Munpitch researcher seemed to necessitate an

explanation, through analogy, of its authority. Maureen Zingle put her husband's story in the same category as the type of knowledge that *Munpitch* seemed to accept without question: *"This story is the same way, in Kokobera, as white people make the history book."* For Samuel Zingle the authority of the story seemed affirmed by similarities with stories in the Bible: *"Its half like [in the Bible] when God made everything. ... When Moses made the water part, its nearly the same story as those two fellows you see. .. They [the two brothers] hit the water with a yvngar string. Its half in the Bible too. [When the Bible is read in Church] I think back to what my grandfather and aunty used to tell."* Veronica Strang recorded a *Kunjen*, two brothers story, in which the brothers and their stopping of a flood were linked, in like manner, with Noah. What Shearman considered an unfortunate example of incomplete evangelisation was recounted by Aborigines without any embarrassment as to its orthodoxy. Peter Michael thought that the two brothers were *"God the Father and God the Son"* and was in no doubt that the creative works of the brothers was universal: *"They put all different languages, tribes, ... right through, around this world, they gave White man English in Europe, all kinds: Chinaman, Japanese, Italian, American."*

John and Gillian Kaines, missionaries at Kowanyama in the early 1960s, recognised the paradox of their situation as it related to culture. By their time at the Mission: "You never heard anything about culture", nor was there a need to learn any of the Aboriginal languages as it was "easy to communicate in English". They had a clear understanding that the missionary's task was one of converting Aborigines to a "European way of thinking" but considered that the changes advocated were "only superficially accepted". Despite their self-confessed ignorance of cultural matters, they freely speculated about the linkages between the cultural practices they observed and paganism, even considering that the wailing and mourning rituals at the time of death were somehow tied up in some sort of "fertility rites". Consequently, even at the end

of the Mission period, culture, if it was to enter the missionary domain at all, was perceived as a dark threat and a symbol of the persistence of the “once wild, nomad hearts” that had not fully succumbed to missionary civilising.

A mere five years after the mission was transferred to government control, Shearman’s successor as ABM Chairman, John Munro, lamented lost missionary opportunities amongst Aborigines. Munro represented a new era of ABM administration, one which offered a promise of at last being able to engage theologically in the questions of mission rather than merely remaining bogged down in the practical side of running missions:

I, personally, think it sad indeed that a people whose indigenous cultic practices contained so much which would have adapted easily to a healthy sacramentalism, eg. the Churinga, the topography’s identification with the dream-time, the totemistic elements in the social order, etc., should for the most part have come to know the cultic side of Christianity in only one of many ways. But all that is a story of lost chances.

The lost chances appear in some unexpected places in the life of the Mission. Adrian Matthews, the son of superintendent Henry Matthews, recalled an event from early in the 1920s:

I do recall one day as a child on the Mission, one of our men brought Mother a pigeon he had caught and killed. Mother was in the process of cooking it. During that, one of Pop’s men was ill - “the bone had been pointed at him”, so Pop got a small bone from the pot and put it in his mouth. It was dark by then so with a hurricane lamp [he] went with his man to the victim’s hut - on [the] dirt floor he knelt down and asked the sick man where the bone had entered. He was really quite sick. Pop was shown the spot so then he put his mouth open on the spot and began to suck very purposefully, after a little while he sat back on his heels, [and] slowly drew out the small bone from the pigeon. He held it up clearly so the sick man could see it. The patient was well and recovered the next day.

Such entry into the conceptual world of the sick Aboriginal man demonstrated Matthews’ compassion and desire to do whatever he could to make a difference to the illness that had been ascribed to the effects of sorcery. There is no evidence to suggest that Matthews believed an actual bone had been supernaturally propelled into the sick man’s body nor that he had anything other than the clear intention of deceiving the man into a belief that he had removed a bone that had been in his body, yet, from the

perspective of the Aboriginal witnesses to this “healing”, he could only have been construed as subscribing to their beliefs in this regard. Undoubtedly such *Munpitch* were perceived as complex beings, disclosing a “supernatural” power when it suited them or protesting that this was all “superstition” when it didn’t.

Complex too, was the missionary approach to church membership and maintaining that membership in good standing. Christian initiation through baptism was a primary aim of the missionaries. The pattern had been set with the baptism of the Aboriginal mission helpers, Peter Bendigo and John Grady, in 1904. Ernest Gribble’s account of this event emphasised the liminal symbolism of baptism and is worth repeating here:

One day in the presence of about two hundred natives, Bendigo and Grady were baptised in the lagoon [Yeremundo]. They had been prepared at Yarrabah for Holy Baptism. On the opposite side of the lagoon to our camp the natives with the two candidates for baptism stood with their spears. Palgrave and I entered the water and the boys met us in the middle and were made members of the Church.

The first baptism at Trubanaman took place in April 1906 and involved the young, mixed-race boy, Warrie, whom Gribble had taken from *Dunbar* station. A second baptism in June of the same year took place for Jessie, the daughter of John and Rhoda Grady. The biggest focus was, however, on the baptism of adults who had been encouraged to become mission “inmates”. By the time of Bishop Henry Newton’s first visit to Trubanaman in October 1915, there was a large number of people who had undergone a lengthy period of instruction for baptism. Even though they had been under instruction for two years, Newton was not optimistic that they had grasped much of the “intellectual” side of Christianity and counted “moral fitness” to be the real test of readiness for baptism. Archbishop Donaldson, the senior bishop in Queensland, visited the Mission in 1906 and 1917 and disclosed, after his second visit, his limited expectations for the Mission’s “inmates”: “The child races, even our aboriginals [sic], will respond - *are responding* - whenever we have the patience and perseverance to wait for them”. Chaplain Bert Cole

elaborated on the supposed deficits in baptismal candidates in the same year as Donaldson's second visit:

At the afternoon service I baptized 9 women and 11 men. They were all anxious for baptism and [were] inmates of the mission and had received a good amount of instruction. We cannot expect much from any of them as far as mental capacity goes and although they may fail miserably in head knowledge still their request for baptism and their general good behaviour and obedience to mission discipline encourage the idea that they are worthy of the sacrament.

The assessment that Aborigines were inherently unable to grasp Christianity at an intellectual level carried with it a correspondingly elevated expectation that "good behaviour and obedience to mission discipline" were the only true indicators of Christian conversion. "Worthiness" and "moral fitness", hallmarks of "Devotional" Christianity, were difficult states for Aborigines to reach as the criteria measuring supposed progress were highly subjective and dependent on the perceptions of the individual missionaries. Such "worthiness" was quickly stripped away if there was any transgression of the missionary moral code. Even though baptism into the Christian faith and inclusion in the liturgical life of the Mission were fundamental objectives, the episcopate of Bishop Henry Newton from 1915 to 1922 witnessed the frequent use of ecclesiastical sanctions as a response to infringements of the missionary moral order. Even if the missionary assessment of intellectual capacity and general expectation were set at an insultingly low level, the standard of morality and adherence to church discipline was so high that it would have astonished most ordinary Anglicans in Australia or England.

The *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England, which provided the canonical basis for ecclesiastical sanction, instructed the priest to challenge the notorious behaviour of any member of their flock and to "repel" from the Holy Communion any who maintained "malice and hatred". Rarely applied against white Anglicans, Newton exemplified the approach to making the missions the place for Christianity to be lived out in its strictest form, by using excommunication, the withdrawal of the communicant status of a Church

member, as a common punishment applied to Aborigines and Islanders in his diocese. Newton explained his reasons when Bernard was excommunicated for the period between 27 April 1917 and Christmas Day 1917: "It is a good thing to use this excommunication as an opportunity to make the people realize the heinousness of Sin, and the need for care to keep away from sin lest God shut them out of heaven". The notice of Bernard's excommunication still reads as a stark condemnation:

Because Bernard of Trubanaman has been guilty of adultery and has sinned against God and brought disgrace upon the church, I Henry, Bishop of Carpentaria, forbid the said Bernard coming to the Holy Communion until Christmas Day 1917. If he is really sorry and wants to come back then he may come. And I tell all the Christians at Trubanaman to pray for Bernard that he may be really sorry for his sin and to ask God to make them brave and strong to keep away from sin themselves.

This notice is to be read out in Church and if Bernard is present he must at once go out of Church.

One woman was excommunicated and four men "degraded to the heathen's seat in church", a lesser canonical sentence, for lapses in their conduct two months after Bernard's excommunication had been declared. Adherence to the missionary order was usually the accepted meaning of "worthiness" and consequently a "worthy heathen" was sometimes more to be preferred than an "unworthy Christian". Chapman's words concerning the death and burial of Gilbert express genuine admiration and affection for the old man who, though unbaptised and occupying the "heathen's seat" at Church, had been a pillar of the missionary social order:

Burial of Gilbert snr at 10 am. Camp people came to the service, the church being crowded, many having to remain outside. The deceased was one of the oldest natives of this part and remembered the first coming of the white man. He had always been a loyal friend to the mission. He never learned to speak English and was a most regular attendant at the Church services.

Much depended on the judgement of the missionary. Chapman was, at the time of Gilbert's death, effectively the chaplain as well as the superintendent, since Henry Matthews had left in the previous month and the replacement chaplain was still a few months off arriving. Each chaplain seems



to have made his own interpretation of the canons of the Church and the rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Chapman was willing to exercise a latitude at the time of Gilbert's death that Chaplain Herbert Norton twenty years later rejected. Norton noted the death of Long King, a leading man of the *Kokominjen*, in the mission diary and was at pains to keep the funeral of this old "heathen" out of the Church:

Notice brought that Long King had died, not in No 2 village, but in the weekend river bank camp. Funeral at 3.45 pm NOT from the Church.  
[Norton's emphasis]

Important life events became times when the baptismal status of a person determined their inclusion or exclusion in the rites of passage of the missionary order. Two weddings took place at the Mission on 17 January 1949 under very different conditions:

Banjo and Biddy Jenny were married at 10 am by the Superintendent in the Superintendent's office as Banjo was not baptized ... at 3.30 Roy and Alma Native were married by Rev Norton. Native dancing during the evening.

There is no doubt that this was no mere local arrangement. Bishop Stephen Davies supported this approach and had sought authority from the Queensland Government, in 1947, for superintendent Currington to become a marriage celebrant so that marriages between non-Christians could be performed on the Mission but not as religious solemnisations. In 1914 Henry Matthews boasted that, "... heathen rites have yielded place at the great moments of their lives to Christian sacraments." More than thirty years later these same sacraments were still not universally accessible even though they had come to be so central to the social relationships and ordering of life on the Mission.

Baptism, in the early years of the Mission, and Confirmation, once infant baptism was established as the norm, were the means of distinguishing the fully missionised Aborigines from those who were simply adherents of the Mission. As a result, a tentative hierarchy of progression into the lower ranks of

the missionaries' Christian experience developed. Matthews had seven men, Tommy, Lawrence, Amos, Alban, Clive, Zingle and Barney, fitted out with surplices, to signify their status as choir members, when they sang at worship services in 1920. Don, Pindi, Bernard and Tommy Horseboy gave addresses at church services in the same year in what seems to have been a concerted drive by Matthews to promote a male leadership in the Christian worship on the Mission. Like most Anglicans at this time he does not seem to have conceived that church leadership might be exercised by women. Admittedly the cohort of young men to whom he looked for leadership had dominated the early years of the Mission. They were the group under the closest missionary tutelage and, by the 1920s, had lived much of their adult life as Christians. Matthews was also bound by the apparently unchanging tradition of the Church that only men could become ordained ministers or even have a leading role in worship. He was not to know that the events of the Second World War, which were to claim his own life would also see the ordination of a Chinese woman, Florence Tim Oi Li, as a deacon in Hong Kong in 1941 and as a priest in Zhaoqing in 1944, the first time a woman had been ordained in any part of the Anglican Church.

By 1923, Matthews' emphasis was on applying the literacy skills of his emerging leaders to their participation in worship, something that he was obviously keen on recognising as a breakthrough: "Alban read the lesson at Matins, the first Aboriginal to do so in the history of this mission." This was followed the next day by even more involvement: "Aidan read the service to 3rd collect at Matins and Evensong and Alban read second lesson at Evensong." The brothers Aidan and Alban were following in the steps of their mother Rebecca who led prayers in the Church in 1922 during a period when Chapman was too ill to take any part and Matthews was away from the Mission. The fact that a woman had already accomplished, a year earlier, precisely what Matthews considered to have been an historic achievement did

not figure in Matthews' understanding of mission history. Ironically, Zingle, Barney, and Clive, three of the foundation members of the choir, were excommunicated in 1929, demonstrating the difficulty Aborigines experienced remaining in favour with the missionaries.

The possibility of Mitchell River Mission having ordained ministers from amongst its own members received a boost when two Papuan deacons, Aidan Uwedo and Stephen Maiorot, accompanied ABM Chairman John Needham on a visit to the Mission in 1925. William McFarlane, the Priest-Director of the Torres Strait Mission and a member of Needham's party, stated the obvious fact that what had indeed been normative for the Christian Church throughout the centuries, an indigenous ministry, was within the grasp of the mission: "... is it not what one should expect and look for?" Even the photograph recording the visit of the two Papuans contained the implicit answer to McFarlane's question. Leah Bondonolly, by this time a well established mission teacher, was photographed with the deacons. She was well qualified in terms of literacy, Christian knowledge and motivation to provide the sort of recognised Christian leadership that McFarlane knew was needed. Gender and race posed a double impediment in the missionary mind for the opportunity to be developed to the extent possible. It would take more than sixty years for the Church to ordain an Aboriginal member of the Kowanyama community, when in 1987 a *Kunjen* woman, Nancy Dick, became a deacon. Even so, Leah was remembered as a formative influence by her students and younger family members and as the only Aboriginal who led prayers in the mission school. Winifred Coglein explained that when children looked at the night sky and asked, "*Has that star got [a] boss?*", Leah would answer "*Yeah, higher than you and me. Big boss.*" Her answers, in simple terms like this, impressed a Christian piety on several generations of enquirers.

The emphasis of any particular chaplain or superintendent was undoubtedly significant in whether the plans of an earlier administration would

be developed or frustrated. Chaplains were inevitably located somewhere in the spectrum of what Anglicans call “churchmanship”. At the extremes of this spectrum were practices and sentiments that identify the Anglican Church as either entirely a product of the Reformation or as essentially continuous with Catholicism. Bishop Henry Newton was unequivocally of the Catholic party, but the first consciously catholic chaplain was James Housden, who was appointed as Chaplain in 1930. Until Housden’s time the service of Matins (or Morning Prayer) was the standard worship on the Mission. By its nature it was somewhat more inclusive than the Holy Communion service which Housden raised to central prominence in the life of the Mission. Authorised lay people were capable of leading the service of Matins whereas only a priest or bishop could preside at the Holy Communion. Only baptised and confirmed Christians could partake of the consecrated communion elements whilst the more general prayers and proclamation of Matins permitted greater inclusion.

This change of liturgical emphasis alone meant the frustration of the leadership plans that Matthews had set in place in the 1920s. The trend towards the Catholic end of the churchmanship spectrum would mark the remainder of the life of the Mission. Under Housden’s guidance Alban and Aidan were prepared as altar servers. In ten years these brothers had gone from being leaders of worship in their own right, during Matthews’ time, to the decidedly junior role of altar server to Housden, a role otherwise filled in white congregations by youths aged twelve or thirteen. Matthews’ experiment in constructing a credible scale of progression from baptism to the adult leadership of the Christian community had come to an abrupt halt. The first generation of missionised Aborigines were left only with the consolation that they were part of a “child race” and worthy only of the missionaries’ patience and forbearance. Fortunately for them the increasing demands of labour from the cattle industry would mean that their lives would not hinge solely on the Mission even if the missionary hegemony there remained unchanged.

Perhaps this failure to take the aspirations of Aboriginal Christians seriously was linked to an increase in missionary scrutiny of customary initiation ceremonies during the 1930s. The focus of this concern, and a source of vigorous participation by Aborigines, was the *Yiral* ceremony of the *Kokobera*, held every two or three years. *Yiral* or “Bora”, as it is still more commonly called, remains shrouded in secrecy for modern Aborigines at Kowanyama. Modern people know that sites associated with the Bora are permanently off-limits to the uninitiated. Perhaps the uniqueness of *Yiral* in comparison with the other initiation ceremonies, at least for the purpose of this discussion, was its association with the southern area towards Normanton. The south was the direction of the greatest disruptions to Aboriginal society through pastoral and mining expansion and, as Tony Swain has described, was where a widespread movement of “Bora” ceremonies developed in response to colonisation.

Swain proposes that these “Bora” ceremonies aimed at restructuring the relationship between whites and Aborigines “to produce a Lawful [sic], balanced and equal dualism which could thus, in the face of time, endure.” Swain describes a culturally dynamic situation in which the ceremonial life of Aborigines was in contemporary dialogue with their social circumstances. Anthropologist, Veronica Strang, identified this trend in contemporary Aboriginal culture at Kowanyama:

Aboriginal cosmology is adaptive. While beliefs and values may shift more slowly than events and external circumstances, they are constantly being redefined and reconstructed to deal with changes in the social and physical environment.

Of the social circumstances of Mitchell River Aborigines in the 1930s, colonisation and its effects were at the forefront of concern. If it is accepted that whites had been conceived of in the dualistic category of *Munpitch*, the implications for the Mission that *Yiral* was concerned with things “belong *Munpitch*” is most significant. Scholarly accounts of *Yiral* are limited to the field notes anthropologist Lauriston Sharp made during the early 1930s. A small

number of initiates who participated, in 1934, in the final *Yiral* were alive at the time of my fieldwork but stood one or two generations removed from the long deceased custodians of the *Yiral* songs and ritual whom Sharp interviewed. The single public acknowledgement of *Yiral* in modern Kowanyama is the recognition of *pathemenainy* or “poison places” which are believed to cause injury and possibly death to people who trespass upon them.

Swain uses *Baiami*, the culture figure of the *Kamilaroi* people of New South Wales, to illustrate his perspective that the “bora” ceremonies were the means of integrating the dual realities of White colonisation and the Aboriginal Law:

*Bora* designs thus brought what I have categorised as the origin of unLawfulness, immorality and “evil” in Aboriginal thought [whatever it was] within the confines of a new, broader Law. *Baiami* had introduced both Aboriginal and White culture and hence both were by definition Lawful. The aim of these ceremonies was not to naively return to a pristine pre-colonial life by destroying Whites, but to maintain Aboriginal identity within the cosmos by demarcating its place within post-colonial society. In brief, it aimed to define invasion as a morally controllable act.

If, in fact, *Yiral* was a means of relating the presence and behaviour of the *Munpitch* to the moral world of Aboriginal Law, it would be a tragic irony that the profound significance this had for the theological dimension of the missionary purpose passed entirely unappreciated by the missionaries. Even though the *Munpitch* were ontologically different from the *Pakaper*, the Bora, thus understood, located and legitimated them cosmologically and affirmed that the future of the *Pakaper* was inevitably intertwined with the *Munpitch*, however different they were and however at odds their mutual interests might seem. It raises the very real possibility that the Aboriginal “inmates” of the Mission were more prepared to face the radical implications of equality contained in the Christian gospel than were their missionaries.

Chapman was set in his opposition to the Bora in 1925: “People have a desire to attend bush school which is unchristian. [I] had to deal severely with them. Michael rather rebellious.” There is little doubt that Chapman was so

embroiled in the inter-tribal rivalries, that his judgement was greatly influenced by his affinity with the *Kokominjen* and other northern groups. While critical of the *Kokobera* and *Yiral*, he personally attended the 1929 ceremonies of the *Kokominjen*, and received lavish praise in the pages of the *ABM Review* for the confidence to which this testified:

The Superintendent has been able to get into very intimate touch with the visiting natives [from north of the Mitchell and Edward Rivers] in their initiation ceremonies, which they have been carrying on during their stay. He was able to see the whole thing from the beginning, and was granted privileges rarely accorded a white man; it is a very serious thing from the native standpoint for these ceremonies to be revealed to the women and others, however, and consequently their confidence had to be honoured. But the knowledge gained should prove of very great value in connection with the spiritual work of the mission, and in approaching the people at the right angle. There is scope for great development of the work here, if the Australian Church would only rise to the wonderful possibilities and provide the necessary means.

This personal involvement softened his usual approach to the priority of work and mission routine. He even allowed a half day holiday so that the mission Aborigines could attend the closing of this ceremony. One of Chapman's fellow missionaries, Dundas Simpson, attended the 1929 *Yiral*, and was regarded by Aborigines as a *pathervketang*, an initiated man. Maudie Koolatah remembered Aborigines commenting: "*Oh, here's that Bora man coming*", as they saw Simpson coming towards them. But such approaches "at the right angle" were only fleeting and inconsistent.

Harry Rowan, on a brief visit from his post at Lockhart River Mission in 1931, weighed into the Mitchell River Bora controversy at a crucial time:

A deputation of big men of the Bora came and said they wished to kill all the old fashion of Native rights and get British law in all forms. This I think will be a very good thing and bring a lot more peace and goodwill on the place if they are helped in their resolution.

Rowan was undoubtedly keen to help stiffen this resolve and had five of the senior men of the Bora make their mark alongside their name in the Mission diary as evidence of their agreement with the proposition that: "We the undersigned have given up our old Bora of our own free will". Harry Rowan, as founding missionary at Lockhart River Mission, took an approach to Christian

evangelisation at Lockhart River that has been characterised by David Thompson as a “replacement method” whereby the new beliefs took the place of the old ways. In the Mitchell River Mission context, “British law” was Rowan’s replacement answer to “all the old fashion of Native rights”, a long way from the “right angle” advocated in the *ABM Review* article.

In contrast to Dundas Simpson’s individual response in 1929, the Mission as an institution seems to have been on an inexorable path that meant opposition to *Yiral* and inevitably, its destruction. Harry Rowan had only briefly been part of the Mitchell River scene but had managed to come away with an outcome that he was very pleased about. Further crucial decisions followed only three days after Rowan had ensured that Mark, Willie, Silas, Luke and Mark scratched their mark of assent in the Mission diary. Alec MacLeod weighed into the issue by reprimanding a fellow missionary, the dormitory matron, Miss Single, for insinuating herself into the *Yiral* ceremonies: “Matron ordered to go and change into female dress as she attended native dance dressed up as a Man.”

Since the hidden parts of the *Yiral* ceremonies were only open to men, Single’s decision to dress as a man was probably the only way for her to witness these events. Doubtless, through her daily contact with the dormitory children, she would have been aware of the taboos against a woman attending. What is puzzling is why MacLeod would take such an exception to Single’s behaviour, especially if he shared Rowan’s belief that “British law in all forms” was now to prevail. It is of course difficult to know whether MacLeod was simply concerned with her action as a breach of missionary propriety or as a breach of the sanctity of the ceremony itself. MacLeod’s concern for the latter may well have been well informed since he is remembered to have gone to the *Yiral* camp and to have taken photographs contrary to the wishes of the old men who were the ceremony’s custodians, thus arousing their antagonism. He may have been acutely aware of the offence that the discovery of Single’s



presence would have provoked and been far less confident than Rowan about the commitment of the *Yiral* leaders to voluntarily abandon their “Native rights”, especially recourse to violence as a punishment for the transgression of customary prohibitions. It was MacLeod who would have to live with the consequences of the whole affair not Rowan. As it was, the 1931 *Yiral* was not to be the last of these ceremonies in contradiction of what Rowan had confidently expected.

The Bora ceremony of 1934, thirty years after the foundation of the Mission, first came to Chapman’s attention in February when the leading Aboriginal men met to make plans. By July *Yiral* was underway and Chapman could only record the plaintive observation, “people all occupied with Bora ceremony”. Chapman had the last word when he prevented the people from going “walkabout” at the conclusion of the Bora “as the beans had to be harvested”. At one level the missionaries opposed the Bora because it competed for the time and interest of the mission community with the routines of food production as well as the general work regime that had been developed to make the mission an “industrious” place. At another level it represented a belief system that was a competitor with the church worship that could only be fully entered by baptism.

Chapman lumped together *Yiral*, sorcery and spear fighting as part of the “wave of evil” he denounced in 1936. He had every reason to expect that a *Yiral* ceremony would be staged that year as two years had passed since *Yiral*’s last took place in 1934. Much of what proceeded that year is consistent with the Mission’s attempts to frustrate these plans. Chapman made a lengthy accusation of the *Kokobera*, linking alleged murders with leaders of the *Yiral*:

Had another meeting of Koko Beras in reference to certain murders which had been committed by them some years ago and which had been concealed. [It] Proceed[s] that they had murdered Daisy’s father and that Dr Dick had murdered Bernard’s mother. Those murders were committed over Trubanaman way and by boys who were mission inmates but they had never been reported to the mission authorities. In 1918 the same people headed by Tommy Horseboy went to the Nassau to murder Charlie Nassau, having cleared out from Kowanyama.

Circumstances prevented them from committing the murder. The known murders by these people over a period of years being Kilpatrick, "Daisy's father", Bernard's mother, Stingaree, Brother of Possum, Rodger, Mickie and a sister of Parrot. The murders were confined to a section of the tribe of whom Bondanolly, Dr Dick, Sambo, Tommy Horseboy, Luke, Bernard, Sergeant [and], Major being among the prominent ones now living who had a hand in many troubles. These same people although pretending to be loyal to the mission have caused a lot of trouble being particularly hostile towards myself and hence on more than one occasion acted with violence towards me. They are especially hostile towards the Koko Mingens. Their allies are certain Kunjuns.

Many of these allegations were plainly preposterous, several of the deaths Chapman listed were the result of spear fights that had embroiled the whole community. It was taking it to extremes to characterise them as premeditated murder as the previous lengthy discussions of Roger and Mick's deaths illustrate. He disclosed a significant part of his own agenda when he charged the *Kokobera* elders of feigned loyalty to the Mission and personal antagonism and violence towards himself. Chapman had thrown the whole of the Mission's coercive influence into his struggle with the *Kokobera*. Undoubtedly the occurrence of *Yiral* provided an opportunity for animosity between its Aboriginal participants to be resolved by open conflict. Indeed the settling of grudges was a necessary preliminary to the intensely interdependent participation in a ceremony of this scale. Chapman appears to have been so personally involved in the old scores he recounted, that his judgement erred in slating home every manner of fault to the *Kokobera*. Chapman was persistent. On the next day he had linked the accusations with the closely held secrets of the Bora:

Had another interview with the Koko Beras this morning in reference to Alice's disappearance and upon certain bora ceremonies. They are a most untruthful crowd.

Despite his slander of the *Kokobera*, he was evidently successful in finding out more details of *Yiral* since he noted the day after: "Bernard trying to find out who told me about bora business." Such intense scrutiny and personal opposition from Chapman was sufficient for the ceremony planned for 1936 to be abandoned. What Rowan had claimed to have negotiated in 1931, the

abandonment of *Yiral*, was finally achieved by Chapman in 1936, leaving the initiates of 1934 as the last to experience it. The “Devotional” dialectic of Christianity had prevailed. Whether this was through the appeal of Rowan to the “higher” and transcendent order of “British law” or through Chapman’s appeal to morality is less important than the fact that the steamroller of missionary Christianity rolled inevitably onwards. Another “right angle” had been destroyed.

Even while the missionaries were engaged in a determined struggle with the leaders of the Bora ceremonies, it suited their propaganda purposes to treat the issue in a most “Affirmative” way in the missionary press. The *ABM Review* report on Mitchell River in its December 1933 edition reasserted Ernest Gribble’s 1905 proposition that making “good blackfellows” was the real task of the Mission. The assertion that the “Bora” was taking place under “mission approbation” is hard to reconcile with the attitudes and behaviours of the missionaries examined so far:

Tribal ceremonies have been in full swing, two “Boras” being joined in by the tribes. These ceremonies mean a great deal in the life of the native, and help him maintain a definite interest in the tribe as well as dignifying his own position. It is not always realised that it is not the aim of the missionary to make the native into a white man, but to make him a good blackfellow, and this is one of the reasons why the “Bora” goes on under mission approbation.

If Tony Swain is right about the intention of the “Bora” ceremonies to restructure the relationship between whites and Aborigines and if this principle can be applied to *Yiral*, it seems that a significant opportunity of cross-cultural encounter at a theological level was lost in the 1930s. The *WarengvméIngen* song cycle provides a link between what modern Aborigines at Kowanyama believe and what their ancestors may have been attempting to do through *Yiral* until this door was closed in 1936. Modern informants identify the *Pathangany* brothers of *WarengvméIngen* with the God of Christianity. The *WarengvméIngen* song cycle has an internal reference to the brothers hearing the *Kokobera* singing *Yiral* in the south and then deciding against going

towards that direction. Might this not be understood as a metaphor of the experience of the 1930s, when *Yiral*, an integrating ritual locating the *Munpitch* within the moral order of the *Pakaper*, was exposed to the God of the Christians but rejected? Its passing into history may have been the most significant but least understood “lost opportunity” of engagement between the religious worlds of Aborigine and missionary. Certainly other initiation ceremonies fell under the same steamroller of missionary Christianity, leaving the Mission apparently “cultureless” on this criterion by the 1950s. The fact that the *pathemenainy* or “poison places” associated with *Yiral* remain respected even after the passing of more than sixty years says something very different about the cultural resilience of the *Kokobera* and other modern residents of Kowanyama.

The appointment of Sailor Gabey, a priest from the Torres Strait Island of Mer, as the chaplain at Mitchell River in 1938 presented a fresh opportunity for the moral world of Aboriginal Law to meet the world of Christian faith. His appointment represented a significant change from the ten *Munpitch* priests who had preceded him. Gabey, ordained a deacon in 1924 and a priest in 1931, had already experienced the work of a chaplain on the east-coast Aboriginal mission, Lockhart River, from 1931 to 1933. Gabey was a first generation Christian among the *Miriam* people who had been evangelised in 1871, and himself only the third Torres Strait Islander to be ordained to the diaconate and the priesthood in the Anglican Church.

From the perspective of a present dominated by rapid cultural change, Sailor Gabey’s period as chaplain was remembered as a golden age by Sam Zingle, even though coercion was evidently a major factor in ensuring successful church attendance:

*All go to church morning and afternoon, blind chelarliy and wangana, never stay away ... the school kid never used to miss out, used to go every time, if we do miss out we get a hiding when we go back to school. We used to have Father Sailor Gabey ... and those were good days I reckon.*

Despite serving as chaplain to the Mission for five years until his death in office, Gabey suffered from being perceived by the diocesan authorities as a temporary incumbent of the chaplain's position. The year of his appointment saw the intertwining of patronising praise and racism in this review of Gabey's ministry:

The Rev. Sailor Gabey, one of our native priests, is still carrying on the spiritual work of the Mitchell pending the appointment of a new permanent chaplain, and by all reports is acquitting himself very creditably in a difficult post. ... By all indications a steady advance is being made in every department of the activities of the mission, excepting, of course, the chaplain-teacher's work, which it would be foolish to assume could be done as well by a native priest as by a well-educated and devoted white priest such as we pray earnestly will soon come forward. And what a happy post it might be for a priest fired with the love of souls and a devotion to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. The present juncture offers an extraordinarily favourable opportunity for a priest, who by his fitness for such a service would have good hopes of success, to come forward and dedicate to this splendid mission at least a decade of the best years of his ministerial life.

Diocesan authorities apparently had no conscience in sacrificing Gabey's reputation in their unashamed appeal to vanity in the effort to recruit a "white priest" to Mitchell River. There was, in any case, with the intervention of World War Two, no prospect of recruiting a "white priest" to the Mission. Gabey died in 1943 with a period of five year's service as chaplain of the mission, the longest period of tenure in this role throughout the whole of the mission period. Life on the Mission itself offered no respite for him from the attitudes of white missionary superiority, leaving Gabey with a daily struggle against the routines of mission life which served to institutionalise his subordinate status.

Even though he never seems to have been accepted as an equal by his white, missionary co-workers, Gabey was having an impact on the Mission beyond that of his predecessors. Gabey's time as chaplain is remembered as a vigorous period of innovation in church worship, with the introduction of Aboriginal language in hymns. He had grown up singing hymns in his *Miriam* language, and appreciated better than the white missionaries the value of the vernacular in Christian worship. Undoubtedly Gabey was seen as culturally

affirmative in sponsoring the composition, amongst others, of the hymn, *Pathangany Papingyirr*, (*Pathangany* is our Father) to the tune of the Torres Strait Islander hymn, *Napusari*. This open identification in church worship of a central cultural symbol of the *Kokobera* with the God and Father of Jesus Christ represented a major shift from the era which had preceded it. More than twenty years before, Joseph Chapman was aware of beliefs which formed the basis of this association, but seemed only to see these things through the lens of missionary superiority, focused by an almost complete ignorance of the people he lived amongst for so long:

[Aborigines at the Mission] have no religious beliefs, as far as I can understand, but they believe in a being called “fard-tung-gi-an”, who they say made everything, and lives beyond the sky in a place called “Cunee-lee”, which means “the place on top”, Their ideas are rather vague as to where the departed go, but they believe the good ones go to a place of plenty, while the evil ones are punished by having bad food to eat.

As well as his influence in embracing the vernacular in mission worship, Gabey was remembered for advocating better training opportunities for the people of the Mission to equip them for leadership, along missionary lines, in their own community. It was, however, in his entry into the world of traditional healing, that Gabey encountered hostility from Aboriginal traditional healers. Henry Matthews’ excursion into this area, when he pretended to remove a sorcery bone from a sick man, seems to have been an isolated instance; but for Gabey, more familiar with these things from his own culture, this was a central part of his role as a priest. Even though this might have appeared unorthodox or exotic to white missionaries, the integration of traditional healing and Christianity is well attested elsewhere as anthropologist, Janice Read, has shown in Arnhem Land. Superintendent Wiffie Currington, who had grown up on Thursday Island, and more able to understand these things, recalled Sailor Gabey offering to heal him when he was suffering from kidney stones by “sucking” the stones out from his body. Moreover Gabey asked Currington not to speak about the offer to the bishop as “he wouldn’t understand”. Gabey seems to have been unsure of the acceptance of his

Islander, Christian beliefs and tentative about what might happen were the bishop to discover him practising them. He undoubtedly knew very well the tightrope that native Christians walked under the piercing gaze of missionary scrutiny.

Sailor Gabey's death became understood in a way which invites further consideration. It is a commentary about the meeting of the moral world of Aboriginal Law and the missionary order. His adopted nephew, James Gibo, who spent the last hours of Gabey's life in prayer with him, was sure that his uncle's death was caused through the sorcery of one of Gabey's adversaries, Old Dinghy. In this light Gibo sadly concluded, "*that evil thing was more stronger than God's help*". Others reported that Gabey's death was a result of infringing the sanctity of a place associated with the *Kokominjen Welthn* initiation ceremony when he was digging for worms to use as fishing bait. On this explanation, even though Gabey owned to his infringement, none of the traditional custodians of *Welthn* came forward to apply the efficacious antidote to the harmful effects of transgression, their own underarm smell. In this and many other ways, Gabey is represented as an abandoned man, cut off from the help of his Christian God and estranged from the ministrations of those Aborigines who were believed to have the power to help him and misunderstood and unappreciated by the *Munpitch* missionaries.

Aborigines were vigorous in their efforts to incorporate the realities of a world in which whites had such a prominent place with the moral order of the Aboriginal law and the natural world around them. Norman Junior was certain that a very distinct blue star he had seen on a droving trip was the harbinger of the death of King George of England. Kenny Jimmy recounted a story that explained the death of Cecil Davidson, the head stockman on *Lawn Hill* station, that is significant in that it describes the conflict of the Christian moral world of the Mission and the secular world of whites outside it. Davidson had demanded that the Aboriginal stockmen under his control muster on Good

Friday. These men, mostly from Doomadgee Mission, but including Kenny Jimmy from Mitchell River, were uneasy about this and objected, *"That's in our religion, we've got to stay home"*. Kenny Jimmy continued his account of the day:

*Well he's head stockman, we couldn't put up [an] argument with him, I tried to but ... We went out to muster on Good Friday. We had a big lot of cattle too, bringing them in, doing camp drafting. Now it's the last bullock, what happened to that same head stockmen - good cattle camp, no hole, nothing. The last beast. He's trying to take him out, [a] big old bally stag. The horse tumbled with him, rolled. He broke his neck. He died right on the spot, because he never believed in Good Friday.*

The moral world of the Mission had triumphed over the secular world of the station whites, and, what is more, had been carried to that place of testing in the hearts and minds of mission Aborigines. Confronted with a competing world of at least three sets of cultural values, Kenny Jimmy and his Doomadgee companions had seen that a challenge to the sacredness of the day of Jesus' crucifixion was answered in the most direct and final way possible. In rejecting the urgent requests of those who knew better, Davidson had even isolated himself from the moral world of the cattle camp whose work was otherwise successfully completed. This was not a sentence of judgement on pastoralism as much as it was the condemnation of choosing to leave Aborigines and whites sharing the same world but without a common morality.

The conflict between the moral worlds of the missionary and other *Munpitch* was long established and fostered to an extent by the missionaries themselves, eager as they were to depict themselves as the particular benefactors of Aborigines. Even the disastrous events that surrounded the death of Frank Bowman could be understood as a contest between a pastoralist *Munpitch* and the moral and temporal order of the missionaries, occurring as they did when the mission population was at prayer in church on Sunday. This mismatch of moral worlds was so deeply embedded in the psyche of mission Aborigines that it emerged as a fresh question at each instance of turmoil or rapid change. At the hand-over to government



administration in 1967, one of the obvious changes to Aborigines, even if it was not considered important to others, was the change of the cattle brand from MOR to MR and the government broad arrow. Sam Zingle wondered to himself the significance of this arrow which had replaced the circle on the MOR mission brand. He reflected in 1988 that he believed at the time that its three lines must represent the displacing of unity with the Church by the three pillars of the new administration: "State, community, *Labor [sic] government*".

The post-war period also opened a revisionist debate amongst the missionaries themselves as they searched for their location in the competing moral worlds before them. Chaplain Eric Wingfield (1949 - 1953) was in the habit of wearing a "sulu", a rectangle of calico cloth tied at the waist in the fashion of the Torres Strait Islanders and the mission school boys, and often appeared shirtless in public. When some visitors alerted Archdeacon Robertson, the ABM chairman, to Wingfield's appearance, he wrote to him and to Bishop John Hudson in complaint. Wingfield's response to the charge opened up a critique of missionary methods to which the Church at large had no coherent answer:

I suppose it becomes a clergyman to be more conservative in attire than others, but I am a missionary as well, and I must think first of what effect my actions will have on the Aborigines of this mission. I am concerned about the whole of their outlook and their social life and habits as well as their eternal salvation, and one of the things I wish to combat is the superstition that there is something sacrosanct about European customs, as distinct from Christian morality. Again and again I have heard the complaint, most recently from Sister Chapman, that these people are absurdly and even unhygienically over-dressed. They cling, not to the customs of their fathers, but to those of a past generation of missionaries.

The question for the Mission during the entire post-war period was the one that Wingfield neatly summarised in his 1953 resignation letter to the Bishop: "Two possible destinies lie before these people - to be absorbed into white society and become the most abased class in it, or to preserve their own separate society, with such modifications as will enable it to survive alongside and in competition with the other." By this time, however, the Mission, Diocese

and ABM were so heavily dependent on Mitchell River as a cattle enterprise, and committed to an effective policy of pauperising its people, that this important question was left unanswered.

One outcome of leaving this question unresolved was the missionaries' difficulty in seeing the Christian identity of Aborigines apart from their "inmate" status. Much of the criticism of those who wanted an approach which took seriously the social and theological claims of equality and Christian dignity for mission Aborigines was aimed at the administration of Superintendent Wiffie Currington. Following World War Two there was a new concern for colonised people of the third world and, to a lesser extent, fourth world people, the indigenous minorities now referred to as first nations. Currington was the recipient of this burgeoning awareness. Wingfield claimed that, "the natives can scarcely stir an inch without his sanction", and considered that all of the "pastoral opportunities" for ministry fell to Currington and left him, as Chaplain, "a mere liturgical functionary". The difficulty for a critic like Wingfield was that he had much more in common with his predecessors than he thought. Like those who had gone before him Wingfield believed that mission Aborigines were in the grip of "superstition". All that had changed from one era to another was that the "superstition" was by then believed to surround outmoded missionary customs rather than traditional Aboriginal practices. Richard MacFarlane, the Diocesan Registrar, added his own weight to the criticism of Currington in his letter to ABM Chairman, Frank Coaldrake, in 1958:

(previously referred to in Chapter Six)

I am certain that Mitchell River has not progressed one "iota" since the end of the War and further that it will never progress as long as the present Superintendent remains. The man is not a churchman in the proper sense of the word. He has no administrative ability. He has no foresight, no leadership, and no sense of co-operation. ...

But missionary and diocesan authorities did not intervene and left Currington to make his own decision to retire. When it came to spending the lengthy periods of time which would leave a lasting legacy, men like

Currington and Chapman had an unequivocal commitment to long service that was not equalled by those who proposed a different approach.

The vast emphasis on cattle work during this time meant that the men from the Mission were away from home for much of the year leaving the church congregations back on the Mission filled predominately by women. Even the school boys, taking their cue from the adult men, left church attendance to the school girls. By the 1940s serious attrition, through death, of Matthews' first cohort of young men was being felt, Aidan died in 1937, Bernard followed in 1944, Zingle in 1945 and Pindi in 1948. Between the weakening of this generation and the demands of the cattle work, much of the early initiative amongst men had been lost. Perhaps the absence of male interest in church attendance on the Mission permitted the missionaries, for whom patriarchy was mostly an unquestioned assumption, to not even bother to structure the mission church community along regular Anglican lines. None of the structures which embedded the power of the laity, typical throughout the rest of the Anglican Church, were transplanted to the Mission. As late as 1971, several years after the transfer to government administration, Chaplain Noel Gill explained that the two Church Wardens, Kenny Jimmy and Norman Junior, were appointed to mere honorary positions without any canonical authority.

The only attempt to train anyone from Mitchell River Mission for the ordained ministry of the church was made in 1967, the year the Queensland Government took the administration of the Mission over from the Church. Thomas Bruce, at this time aged forty years, spent ten months at St Paul's College, Moa Island until the college itself was closed down. His theological studies were then abandoned. This brief blossoming of a ministry vocation in a man who had been chosen to ride buckjump horses before the Queen, had come on the back of his disappointment with his experiences after election as Council Chairman in the fledgling community democracy the church fast-tracked before the government takeover. This was not a time when supportive

structures could be put in place by a church in retreat from its missions. Even the coastal link plied by the mission boat had been broken, leaving Thomas and his wife very isolated on the Torres Strait Island. It seemed a desperate last gamble to salvage some sense of achievement in the face of abject failure to nurture a local leadership of the Christian Church.

This background made the ordination of Nancy Dick as a deacon in the Anglican Church at Kowanyama on 29 November 1987 even more remarkable in the life of the people of this, by then, former mission. It also provided a window into the way in which these people had blended Christian faith with their traditional worldview. Kowanyama people were conscious that this ordination was groundbreaking; it was the first time in their eighty year history as Christians that one of their number had become an ordained minister in the Anglican Church and the first occasion when an Aboriginal woman was so ordained in Australia.

Nancy Dick's own journey to ordination started with her response to a call for commitment issued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander church members from the Weipa South Aboriginal Community when they paid a visit to Kowanyama in 1983. She completed a Women's Studies course at Nungalinga College, Darwin, followed by a Nungalinga Certificate of Theology. These periods of study in Darwin exposed her to the Aboriginal Christian revival in Arnhem Land and gave her the opportunity to visit the Galiwin'ku community on Elcho Island where the revival had started. An essay she wrote in the course of these studies entitled "Mission and culture contact and change", is a poignant expression of her own perception of where she stood as a product of missionary formation:

*In the early days Aboriginal people didn't know about white Europeans. The Aboriginals were scared and feared the white people because they saw that their skins were different. The Aboriginal people had a strong tradition and culture. It's very hard for white and black. The Aboriginals find it hard living by the European's way.*

*When they lived by traditional ways the people had free lives. So the Aboriginals are like the plant, a pot of seed [sic]. During those times people lived in the community for years until the missionaries came.*

*Missionaries came and taught the Aboriginals how to work, build, farming, carpentry and some many more things. The early missionaries brought the gospel message of good news to the people because they didn't know about God. But they knew that there was a true God but yet they didn't quite really understand.*

*All of those Aboriginal people didn't speak English, they only speak languages because there wasn't any school. Also there weren't any religious [practices] at all in the past days. When the missionaries arrived and lived on the mission they began to build houses, a church and dormitories. It was a hard time for the Aboriginals.*

*The missionaries started teaching the Aboriginal to read and write when the school and church came up and were built, the missionaries began to put the children in school and dormitories. But it was a very strict [time] and hard to earn money for their families. Then the Aboriginal people became Christians and their Christianity grew more and more. The gospel and the good news were in the hearts of the Christian, or people, they began to know God and believed in Jesus Christ.*

*So Jesus is like the plant and the Aboriginal like the soil. We as an Aboriginal Christian could plant Jesus word in the lives of Aboriginal soil or heart or lives.*

The period between Nancy Dick's renewed Christian commitment in 1983 and her ordination in 1987 saw a vigorous debate in the Anglican Church over the issue of the ordination of women. Church members at Kowanyama were conscious of the need to change the church laws in the Diocese of Carpentaria if Nancy Dick, the most promising candidate for ordination raised from their community, were to be ordained. Alma Luke, Kowanyama's synod representative, gave influential speeches to the 1985 and 1986 synods of the diocese in favour of the ordination of women as deacons. The synod of August 1986 decided to permit women to be ordained as deacon, even though strong reservations on cultural grounds were expressed by leading Torres Strait Islanders. This set the stage for Nancy Dick's ordination the following year.

At an even more significant level, as far as relationships between people at Kowanyama were concerned, traditional leaders decided to release Nancy Dick from customary restrictions which would limit her free contact with some kin with whom she was in an avoidance relationship. This happened in a ceremonial introduction to kin with whom she could not have contact on account of a recent death and with her "poison cousins", men with whom she

had been in an avoidance relationship throughout her life. Even the future possibility of her needing to take on mourning responsibilities was considered: “*The people told me there’s no need for me to join now, just leave it*”. All of this was intended to “*make it easy*” for her to go about her ministry work which she believed would be assisted by a group of ordained people representing the tribal affiliations of Kowanyama people.

These initiatives were not a rejection of culture but a straight forward recognition of the freedom that would be needed for an Aboriginal person to minister in Kowanyama. Nancy was brought as a candidate to the ordination ceremony by her tribal grandmother, Doris Lawrence. At the presentation to the bishop, before her vesting in the white deacon’s robe, she wore a *tabela*, or women’s dilly bag on her head and carried a *kachal* or yam stick in her hand. Nancy Dick’s ordination and ministry offered the people of Kowanyama an opportunity to work through the meaning of Christianity in its “Affirmative” and “Devotional” directions from the new perspective that one of their own in the symbolically important ordained ministry offered. Sadly, this opportunity was cut short with Nancy Dick’s death, at the age of 51 years, on 30 September 1990, whilst she was attending a church conference in Papua New Guinea.

Religion had been at the centre of the Mission’s reason for existence but, apart from its formal adherence, was often relegated to the periphery of mission life. Certainly an engagement of minds and hearts at the level of religion itself, whatever this might have meant individually for those involved, does not seem to have characterised the relationship between missionaries and Aborigines. Racial and cultural stereotypes so powerfully informed the thinking of missionaries that they had great difficulty in valuing the religious experience of Aborigines. Even the attempts to integrate the missionary *Munpitch* into the moral world of Aboriginal life were not welcomed by them, rather they were counted as more evidence of intransigent “superstition”.

Undoubtedly there were those amongst both Aborigines and missionaries who fervently believed in Christianity and recognised both a common faith and common humanity in each other. Equally there were others for whom belief was less significant than the formal role of religion and its cultural structures in the life of the Mission. The succession of white, male chaplains as the custodians of official Christianity on the mission did little to engage, at a theological level, the traditional belief system of Aborigines themselves. Even the presence of a Torres Strait Islander in this role seemed to conclude with ambiguity.

The evidence from the brief period when Nancy Dick filled a central leadership role, as the missionaries had defined it, points to a vigour in the response of Aborigines to Christianity that the missionaries did not, or perhaps would not, see. Even if what happened in the 1980s was an entirely new phenomenon there was a process of integration of Christian and Aboriginal identity that led to that point. Alma Wason and those who have followed Nancy Dick as church leaders at Kowanyama recognise something that is both authentic and familiar in the Christian gospel which does not compromise their Aboriginal identity. Despite their experiences of rapid social change, and memories of the worst side of mission institutionalisation, there are those who would agree with Reggie Victor: *"[The] Church is the main mother to this place here, Kowanyama."* Others remember a Christian heritage that was passed to them by Aboriginal elders in words such as these that Nancy Dick recalled, and have resolved to be part of this same process themselves:

*God been make this world, God created you and me too, God been make us. He been make everything and he big boss belong to us. "You see all these things?" old people used to say, "that all belongs to him. You and me wouldn't be in this world today, or in this place only from him, and that's why we want to bring you children up too, to come and listen [to the] good news, to come on Sunday for school, to come for prayer, sing Sunday School songs or Christian songs." That's what older people used to talk to us.*

What others had seen as "syncretism" or a "thin veneer" might be better

understood as a necessary part of the process of encounter between two belief systems. Freed from the coercion of the mission era there is hope that “lost opportunities” will not be the final condition of this encounter.



## **Chapter Ten**

### **The Demise of Missionary Control: 1957 -1977**

In the fifty years between 1910 and 1960, Mitchell River Mission was under the leadership of four men who had each served as deputy to his predecessor before appointment to the office of Superintendent. Henry Matthews, Joseph Chapman, Alick MacLeod and Wiffie Currington were the “practical men” that Gilbert White had prescribed for the Mission, untrained in administration or missiology but capable of turning their hands to the diverse tasks that were involved in running a mission station. “The man with twenty jobs”, was the way the Australian Board of Missions (ABM) journal, the *ABM Review*, depicted Currington in 1953. They were the men who had built the pastoral empire upon which diocesan prosperity was founded, and asked little from the Diocese for themselves or their people in return. Their administration ran the Mission along the conservative and paternalistic lines that had first been forged at the beginning of the century. The mission that they had shaped, and as they knew it, was to be shaken by decisions made within the Church and within Government.

At the same time as the church supporters of ABM were told that Mitchell River Mission was “a station of which the Church of England may well be proud”, an increasing scrutiny of Anglican missions in North Queensland during the 1950s demonstrated that an entirely different situation existed. The 1950s were a decade of turmoil for the Anglican missionary hierarchy as it coped with the direct challenge of the Queensland Government to its administration at Yarrabah and as it forged ahead with its own policy initiatives, primarily at Lockhart River Mission. The ripples of change from these two east-coast missions slowly but inevitably made their way west to Kowanyama. In this process, missionary perceptions of Mitchell River changed from those of pride in 1953 to shame and disgrace in 1958.

Yarrabah provided an example of the sort of public condemnation the Church was likely to face over its management of the Aboriginal missions. In 1951, Native Affairs Director, Con O'Leary, considered that at Yarrabah: "the Church's responsibility for the future of the people whom it claims as its wards and whom it contends it caters for, falls far short of the requirements which any human being could expect". What O'Leary called for was "a vigorous policy of administration, control and development" to be instituted by the Church. This sort of criticism cut deeply into the collective psyche of a Church which had prided itself that its missions were of humanitarian benefit to the Aborigines gathered into its care. The resources needed to reverse the situation at Yarrabah were vastly beyond anything that could be found from Anglican sources and the situation lurched from one crisis to another until the Government took over full responsibility on 1 July 1960.

Even though the vigorous response O'Leary demanded at Yarrabah would not be forthcoming, ABM was formulating the first change to practical missionary policy in North Queensland since the foundation of the missions themselves. In 1952 ABM adopted the co-operative model as the policy initiative to best combine economic development with Christian principles. The balance between the two was a sensitive one for missionaries, who had often seen the poverty of the missionary vocation as a mark of the truly Christian nature of their calling. They were more than willing to see their self-chosen circumstances of poverty prescribed for the Aborigines in their charge. Bishop Ian Shevill, the diocesan bishop for Yarrabah, had seen the broader context of the government intervention at the Mission as a race "between secular materialism and the Church of God". The lack of material advantages suffered by those who lived on the missions was an obvious blight on the Church; there were any number of missionaries and churchmen who would concede this in the attempt to raise more funds, but they were also, according to the religious mind, a witness to the supremacy of spiritual values over the material and the

Church of God over the faithless.

ABM's decision to settle on the "co-operative way" as the means of addressing the challenge of the Aboriginal missions was a fortuitous concurrence of circumstance rather than the result of a high degree of planning. Alf Clint, the driving force in the ABM initiative, had been forced by ill-health to leave the New Guinea Mission, where he had spent four years organising co-operative activity in association with James Benson. A Christian Socialist by conviction and practice, Clint was radical in his aspirations, and believed that co-operatives were the means to a new ordering of society along Christian lines. Clint's High Church Anglicanism, emphasising the sovereignty of God, searched for a pattern of social organisation which would reflect this sovereignty in the whole of human life. Clint found his answer in the Co-operative Movement. The life that Clint advocated was one that required an individual response of commitment. "The Anglican Church is producing Mass priests and Mass people. The individual witness is going", he lamented to ABM Chairman, Archdeacon Robertson.

On appointment as the Director of Co-operatives for ABM in 1952, Clint visited Aboriginal groups in northern New South Wales as well as in Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait. Undoubtedly an idealist and utopian, Clint found enthusiasm for his program amongst the white missionaries and Aborigines at Lockhart River, settling upon Lockhart as the place that the co-operative venture amongst Aborigines would be tested, based on the pearlshell and trochus industry. Even though the great experiment at Lockhart failed because of the introduction of plastics as a cheap substitute for shell products, Clint's legacy endured in a number of smaller and less publicised projects. The Numbahging Society on the Richmond River, the Yarrabah bakery and, most significantly, the educational establishment, Tranby College in Sydney, stood amongst the Christian co-operative movement's successes.

Much depended on Alf Clint personally and his capacity to surround

himself with loyal followers who shared his idealism. No stranger to making enemies of those who found his ideas impracticable, Clint seriously underestimated the extent to which he was dependent on powerful and entrenched interests for his experiment to proceed. He seems to have believed that the co-operatives would sweep all opposition before them, reflecting as he thought, the Divine way for human social organisation:

The Co-operative way as God's way is taking root at last... As our people understand and practice the Co-operative technique so they will understand the New Approach to Missions - a way of peace and goodwill amongst all peoples.

In a few years Clint had gone from being considered by his detractors a harmless irrelevance in 1956, to being banned from entering any Aboriginal or Islander Mission in the dioceses of North Queensland and Carpentaria in 1962. Along with the decline in Clint's personal credibility amongst Church officials, came the apparent failure of ABM's last initiative to revitalise its mission to the Aborigines. The co-operative experiment had implications for Mitchell River which went beyond Clint's attempts to establish a co-operative there.

After his initial visit with Archdeacon Robertson in 1953, Alf Clint planned to move on co-operative organisation at Mitchell River. He considered that agriculture as well as Aboriginal arts and crafts could be developed alongside the existing cattle operations. He met Department of Native Affairs Director, Con O'Leary on this trip, and formed the impression that O'Leary was "keen and ready to help", and discovered that he concurred with his own opinion that the agricultural side of Mitchell River should be developed. His observation that O'Leary 'knows our missions and our people' and was "fond of the Bishop", gave him initial grounds for optimism, but should have hinted at the possibility of an alliance between the two, this would become an obstacle to his plans at Mitchell River. O'Leary recognised from as early as 1956 that Clint was not going to be given the free hand that he had sought to organise the Carpentaria missions along co-operative lines:

It is a noteworthy fact that amongst the Church of England Missions in Queensland, Mitchell River stands out as an industrial unit with its cattle raising operations. Mr Clint is not devoting his energies to that Mission and the Bishop of Carpentaria informed the writer that he would not allow him to do so.

Any private reservations about the co-operative scheme or the presence of opposition was not reflected in the public stance of ABM. Archdeacon Robertson identified Mitchell River as the next mission to receive the reforming benefits of the “co-operative way” in January 1954:

The natives are a happy people, and with the help of the white missionaries will, we hope, in the near future, by the help of co-operative enterprise, learn to become valuable citizens and church people.

Robertson so readily assumed that Aborigines at Mitchell River were in a state of perpetual tutelage that he did not consider that they might have attained both of his goals already. Nor did he specify what extra demonstration of citizenship or Christianity the people of Kowanyama needed to show. After all, their sacrificial labours on mission rations produced financial wealth for the Diocese and they were pillars of the northern cattle industry. Events had gained such a momentum, however, that ABM was convinced it had discovered the key to the future, as far as Aboriginal missions were concerned. Missionary propaganda about the co-operative at Lockhart River struggled for new superlatives to describe the success of this pilot experiment in “the co-operative way”. What had counted as “great advances” in October 1955 were described as “miracles” by July 1956. The drive with which ABM was pushing its co-operative policy was itself a departure from the previously distant and formal relationship with the missions. It was not until 1956 that ABM formally requested the diocese to give an account of its cattle operations at Mitchell River and then only as a result of pressure from the Board’s Finance Committee.

Even though Clint had been denied the opportunity to include Mitchell River in his plans he had by no means lost interest in it. His letter to ABM Chairman Frank Coaldrake from Thursday Island in September 1958 painted

a tragic situation at Mitchell River:

Fr. Sutherland of Mitchell is here, been in hospital. He tells me he has a church going staff, for the first time (except his superintendent) but an independent person told me, "that if he was an Anglican he would be filled with fear about Mitchell". I asked Sutherland & he agreed: a flare up on the part of the people could come anytime: one thing that saves it is that most of the men are away. Sutherland says, people - children *die* for lack of food: only one answer to the whole question is for ABM to take charge of Mission Dioceses - with ABM Bishops - such as CMS in Africa. The present set up is not good enough. No policy.

Clint had little patience for the people with the effective power on the Mission, the Bishop and Superintendent, especially since they were at best, lukewarm, about his plans. The deprived circumstances, treated as normal by old hands, were undoubtedly shocking to new and idealistic missionaries. Indeed, it was to this idealism that Clint appealed in his attempt to overthrow the old missionary order. Since the election of the Bishop of Carpentaria rested solely with the Anglican bishops of Queensland, his solution, direct control from ABM, was by no means possible to guarantee.

Chaplain Doug Sutherland acted at Mitchell River on behalf of Clint and the Co-operative movement. In February of 1958 he had been active in arranging for Christopher Geoffrey to undertake studies at the newly formed Tranby Co-operative Training Centre in Sydney. Even in this matter he anticipated opposition from Currington: "I am pretty certain that Wiffie will not want the boy [*sic*] to go South, but the Bishop is aware of that and will no doubt deal with the matter himself". Despite the Bishop's assumed support for this co-operative initiative it was Hudson whom Sutherland identified as the real impediment to the inauguration of co-operative work at Mitchell River.

I am glad to say that the Bishop at last seems to agree that we should try to establish sufficient industry to give employment to our people here on the Mission, but at the moment I cannot see any chance of him agreeing to the establishment of a Co-op here. I am afraid the Diocese needs all the money it can lay its hands upon. However I am sure the day will come when there will be a Christian Community here running its own affairs. But God knows when.

The dream that Sutherland was grasping for envisaged the end of Aboriginal work on the cattle stations and its replacement by work wholly on

the Mission. This was a dream that did not intersect with the realities of the dominant capitalist economy any better than the missionary order it stood to replace.

With the defeat of the Labor government at the 1957 State elections, the socialist credentials and Trade Union links which had served Clint well to that point suddenly became grounds for suspicion. Elected with the slogan, “a new deal for the Far North”, the Country Party/Liberal Party government moved quickly to exploit the bauxite resources in the north-west of Cape York Peninsula. It had become increasingly clear that government interest in the missions, and reserves upon which they were situated, went beyond the relatively benign desire to prompt a revitalisation of Church administration. John Warby, the superintendent at Lockhart throughout the co-operative period, wrote to Coaldrake in December 1957 declaring, “the rape of the Reserves is on”. It had become clear that the Mapoon reserve was about to be revoked to allow bauxite mining.

Initially, at least, the interest that the Anglican sponsored co-operatives had shown in mining was valued as a “bargaining medium” in the likely negotiations between government and the mining companies. At the same time the future was made clear, “the mineral resources of the Islands and the Peninsula must be developed by big capital companies”; there would be no room for small Aboriginal controlled enterprises. Under pressure as he was from this change, which had radically challenged the assumption of stability in which incremental change could be fostered on the mission reserves, Clint was also perplexed at the actions of Bishop Hudson as they affected the future of the mission stores. “What a man!”, Clint despaired to Coaldrake, as he related Hudson’s plan to hand over the mission stores to the Island Industries Board - the government authority which controlled trade in Torres Straits. The takeover of the Lockhart store by the co-operative had been an important part of the whole plan for that place and Clint despaired that he might be denied

the same opportunity at the other missions.

The bubble of enthusiasm over the co-operative project at Lockhart burst in 1958 with an investigation of co-operative finances by Diocesan Secretary, Joe Imms. In so doing, an “unserviceable debt” had been disclosed, major questions about financial accountability had been raised, and the frustrated expectations of the people aired. The Lockhart co-operative was scarcely in a different financial position to the Diocese itself during periods in the 1940s and 1950s, but was expected to conform to a standard that the Diocese had often excused itself from meeting. By October 1959, Clint’s hopes for Lockhart rested with demonstrating that the whole exercise had been conducted in an accountable way: “The matter of Lockhart River returns and audit is, I believe, most important and urgent. A failure here, we leave ourselves wide open”. With Lockhart River, the show piece of the co-operative thrust left in disarray, even Clint’s supporters realised that they were left with a hollow shell. Cyril Brown, the priest at Moa Island and secretary of the Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society, pointed out the impossibility of the situation, “It is hard to rouse enthusiasm in a cause whose sole visible sign of vitality is a Notice Board locating the registered office!”

At the time when the downturn of the co-operative movement’s efforts at Lockhart gave greatest reason for depression, Clint was given the opportunity to commence co-operative organising at Mitchell River in 1959. It may have been that Clint’s detractors considered the memory of the Lockhart debacle would be a suitably sobering curb to Clint’s enthusiasm or that the diocesan authorities assessed that the Mitchell River situation had reached such an impasse that any initiative was worth an attempt. A meeting called in the schoolroom at Mitchell River on 16 November 1959, formally established the *Mitchell River Aboriginal Co-operative Society Limited*. Clint chaired the meeting which established the Society along his standard lines before proceeding to the election of seven directors. He specifically urged the



meeting not to elect any people as director who would be likely to go away droving or who would want to work away on the stations. The need was for people who could devote their efforts wholeheartedly to the business of the Co-operative.

Of the three men elected, one, Smiler Mission, was a policeman and foreman of the mission work gang, the other two were the brothers Kenny and Brodie Jimmy who had come to Kowanyama as youths from the Nassau River. Brodie's wife Valerie, the sisters Judy Brumby and Alma Luke, along with mission teacher, Leah Minyalk, made up the four women. In terms of tribal affiliation, Smiler, Judy and Alma were *Kunjen*, Brodie, Kenny and Leah, *Kokobera*, with Valerie the sole *Kokominjen* member. Even when marriage and ascending kin affiliations were taken into account, the *Kokominjen* people were under represented.

The directors chosen were all literate and considered able to "speak up" for the rights of the people and were, in a sense, representative of the generation of mission educated Aborigines whose expectations had not been met by the mission. Their choice by the people of Kowanyama demonstrated that they well understood the sort of people the missionary administration, and whites in general, would want to deal with. They had chosen a group which was, though, unrepresentative of the traditional authority structure. The co-operative scheme was as unconcerned for this dimension of Aboriginal identity and community relations as the order it sought to replace.

At the conclusion of the meeting 48 people had signed on as members of the Co-operative. A meeting of the Board of the Co-operative, comprising Clint as Supervisor and the elected Directors, followed immediately after the General Meeting to elect a Chairman. Upon calling for nominations for Chairman, Smiler Mission was nominated and, "immediately asked to be relieved as Director, as he wanted to go on a droving trip". This should have raised a doubt in Clint's mind as to the effectiveness of his fast flowing meeting

procedure in communicating the dimensions of what he was proposing, considering he had made this point, as he thought, plainly in the General Meeting. At least with the election of Thomas Bruce, in place of Smiler, the *Kokominjen* representation appeared more balanced.

By the next day any misgivings Clint carried from the previous night's board meeting would have been dispelled with the knowledge that 105 people had joined the Co-operative as members, including the European missionary teacher, Sylvia Card. Wiffie Currington had been appointed Deputy Supervisor to Clint thus ensuring his participation in the venture. Clint's perseverance had prevailed at least in establishing the Mitchell River Co-operative on paper.

The fragile state of diocesan finances precluded any new investment to make the Mitchell River Co-operative a reality; in fact the opposite was the case. The Mitchell River Cattle Account had realised £17, 323 from the sale of bullocks for the year ending 30 June 1959 and of this £12,738 was declared as profit, a particularly high return made possible only through the low wages paid and the minimal re-investment into the enterprise. The single largest item of expenditure from these proceeds was £3,000 to purchase a boat for Lockhart River. Lockhart was also to receive a staff house and ablution blocks for seven of the village houses at a similar total cost. From these items alone, Lockhart stood to receive nearly half of the profits from the Mitchell River cattle, all because the experiment at Lockhart had become debt ridden and an increased burden on the corporate finances of the diocese of which the Cattle Account was the significant creditor.

With the passing of a year, which saw the retirement of both Hudson and Currington, there had been no action to suggest that the Mitchell River Co-operative existed in any other way than on paper and in the paid up subscriptions of its Aboriginal members. The situation had become so glaring that Dennis Hooper-Colsey, the Acting Superintendent after Currington, forbade the distribution of the *Co-operative Newsletter*, since it contained an

article about the Mitchell River Co-operative and the assurance that, "Mitchell will start business later this year. Good luck to them!" Hooper-Colsey was fearful that an unrealistic expectation was the sole result of founding the Mitchell River Co-operative. Failure would have direct consequences for field missionaries who had "to make excuses or take evasive action when schemes fail to materialize". He reflected a new understanding that the mission

Aborigines were active not passive participants in their own destiny:

... we do feel that our people are impatient for results rather than mere words and that any plans concerning the future of the mission should be discussed at all levels and in the greatest detail BEFORE the people are told about it. We do a great dis-service both to ourselves and to our people when promises are made - even obliquely - that are by no means certain of being kept.

Apart from the obvious difference of approach that resulted from Alf Clint's personality and conviction, a fundamental difference in philosophy is revealed in Hooper-Colsey's comments. Most missionaries of this era had, in common with their predecessors, practised a benevolent paternalism that seemed to them to be the proper expression of their Christian and missionary principles. Clint's challenge to this perception was in the extent of his democratic ideal, which led him to place far more trust in the capacity of the Aboriginal population of the missions to find a solution to their problems than did the principles of missionary paternalism which saw the same people as mere beneficiaries of the missionary program. At its most radical face, Clint's program called for Aboriginal control of the means of production and distribution on the reserve communities. Con O'Leary's critique of the Clint schema makes the basis for conservative opposition to the co-operative movement very clear:

In every move for the advancement of a backward race, a close examination of the psychology of that race is imperative. There is too great an inclination amongst a section of the Australian public to imagine that the wave of a magic wand will alter the aboriginal from his present status to an advanced member of an intelligent community. Our civilisation, which has taken thousands of years to attain, cannot be reached by the aboriginal in one generation.

The very notion that Aborigines could be appointed as directors of co-operatives and educated to carry out such an important function was entirely alien to this thinking, “just wasting time”, according to O’Leary. Yet for Clint empowerment of the Aborigines to control and develop their own communities was the very basis of the reforms he saw to be so desperately needed on the Anglican missions.

Even though Clint took his inspiration from the New Testament and traditions of the Church, his teachings seemed novel and threatening to his Anglican contemporaries. For the missionaries and Church dignitaries who had largely accepted the wider society’s view about Aborigines and their supposed backwardness, Clint’s optimism was offensive. A thorough going application of the radical egalitarianism of the co-operative movement would have been controversial enough in white Australian society of the 1950s; when it addressed the situation of Aborigines on a rigidly structured mission station, it was bound to encounter resistance. More than this, it challenged in a practical way how things were done and who exercised power. In the context of small, isolated missions, concerns about threats to mission order were the point of greater threat than any of Clint’s more philosophical opinions. From racism to male dominance, Clint’s critique cut a swathe through the status quo of the missions. He proudly announced that the Mitchell River Co-operative had been formed with women as directors.

Women were elected with men as Directors. This is a good move. If you have a look at the rules that are drawn up for co-operative societies you will see that women have the same rights as men. (Open membership regardless of colour, race, creed or sex!)

By 1960 the real situation at Lockhart had become generally known to people in diocesan and missionary circles. With Lockhart’s star rapidly setting, it had changed from being a ‘show piece’ of modern missionary philosophy to an example of what should not happen on a mission. As the gap between reality and rhetoric widened, Clint’s role and especially his penchant for promotion came under closer scrutiny. Currington’s successor, Dennis

Hooper-Colsey, was cautious about the impact of Clint's propaganda at Mitchell River, and highlighted his anxiety of being tainted with the smell of failure that was by 1960 associated with the co-operative movement:

The position at Lockhart is not one that any Superintendent would willingly see duplicated on another mission - in spite of the laudatory Press and Radio notices that appear from time to time.

Interestingly enough, this same capacity for publicity and promotion had been noticed by Con O'Leary in 1956 and fed his suspicions of Clint's motives:

From what can be observed to date from the co-operative at Lockhart River Mission and the ones which Rev. Clint intends to establish at the Edward River Mission and at St. Paul's Mission, no particular benefit over and above that now prevailing will go to the aboriginal. They will, however, be a medium of advertising for the Church and particularly for Mr. Clint, the organiser of them.

Even though Clint was at his most effective as a popularist organiser he was equally confident in his persuasive powers to get powerful Church and political leaders to see things his way. The Mitchell River Co-operative foundered on Clint's confidence of his talent in the latter sphere of activism. When the popularist phase had passed after the 16 November 1959 meeting at Mitchell River, the harder task of securing control of the cattle enterprise at Mitchell River began. Clint planned to achieve this control through the Mitchell River Co-operative acquiring the legal ownership of both the Mitchell River cattle and the lease of the reserve land. This was put to Dr Noble, the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, at a meeting on 20 November 1959. As simple as this solution seemed it was fraught with legal difficulties. Firstly, the reserves were legally under state control, the Church bodies simply administered the reserves as missions on behalf of the Crown. Secondly, the state authorities shared none of Clint's optimism about the desirability of Aboriginal control over affairs on the reserves. They were by then committed to seeing the missions and reserve communities as only temporary homes for Aboriginal people before their absorption into the general community. In a letter of 18 February 1960, Clint's greatest ally, John Warby, gave Coaldrake the sad

prognosis that there was little chance that these conditions would be agreed to.

Coaldrake was to find the impossibility of the situation in a meeting with O'Leary on 6 April 1960. Faced with the opinion of the Crown Solicitor that the proposal was inconsistent with both law and government policy, Coaldrake had no choice but to admit to O'Leary that ABM had not thought to consider the legalities of the proposal. Clint had once again cast his supporters adrift in deep water by letting his enthusiasm get the better of his judgement. He had not calculated on the resistance of the Queensland Government nor the fact that they held the legal authority for Aboriginal affairs in the State. Coaldrake's only consolation after the meeting with O'Leary was that an altered proposal would be considered if it was "more in keeping with the requirements of the Law and the Department's policy of protection of its wards". By 19 May 1961, Coaldrake was prepared to concede defeat and withdraw the proposal which he now considered was "evidently impracticable under present Government policy in Queensland".

Between these setbacks and Hooper-Colsey's insistence that it was "most un-Christian, unfair and, in the long run, unco-operative to promise... any change until we are absolutely sure it can be implemented and implemented successfully", there was little to be done except allow the Mitchell River Co-operative to slide into obscurity. To use Loos' words, the principles of 'concern and contempt' had prevailed over the 'radical promise' of the co-operative movement. ABM had not only failed in a major attempt to implement policy but had shown that when it came to a clash with government policies the Church was an ineffective advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people.

The loss of the oldest and best known of the North Queensland missions, Yarrabah, from church control on 1 July 1960, was a blow to Anglican confidence. ABM's attempt to turn this defeat into a victory was marked by the launching of a campaign for workers amongst the Aborigines

on 8 July 1960, National Aborigines' Day. Despite the desire to prove that ABM still mattered in the field of Aboriginal missions it had to declare the appeal a failure: "interest in serving the Aborigines was lacking".

The appointment of Seering John Matthews as Bishop of Carpentaria in place of Hudson came at a crucial time for the missionary program of the diocese. Matthews, while still Dean of Rockhampton, had been involved with Coaldrake in the investigation of staffing on Mitchell River in September 1959. A missionary in India from 1933, he had lived through the turmoil leading up to Indian independence, and was considered more aware than most of the issues involved in unravelling colonial dominance. Matthews was Dean of Rockhampton before Hudson appointed him, in 1960, to what would be a brief period of office as Priest Director of the Torres Strait Mission. It was from this post that he was appointed bishop of the diocese by the bishops of the province of Queensland, receiving the support of Archbishop Halse of Brisbane, Bishop McCall of Rockhampton and Bishop Strong of Papua New Guinea, with only Bishop Shevill of North Queensland opposing his appointment. If Hudson had been seen as obscurantist there was every hope that Matthews would be more able to work in with ABM, perhaps more like the sort of bishop Clint had called for in 1958, an "ABM man", who would implement ABM policy. He at least had a blueprint for the Diocese, sanctioned by Coaldrake, in the form of the report from the 1959 visitation.

The 1959 report envisaged that "the mission as a financial entity will cease to exist". In its place Aboriginal co-operatives would be the economic heart of a "Parish Township with the usual pattern of working life, civic life and parish life". By the time Matthews was in place as the fifth Bishop of Carpentaria, the door was already firmly closed, by O'Leary and the Government, against the development of the Mitchell River Co-operative. A key strategy in the report was an increase in the number of missionaries and a drastic improvement in missionary conditions. These missionaries were to be

exemplars of the new township life envisaged to replace the Mission.

The reality was, however, that by the time of Matthews' episcopate ABM had itself become increasingly irrelevant to the future of the Aboriginal mission communities. There was no prospect that it could bankroll the extensive development projects required on the missions and no likelihood of Clint's hopes for the missions to become co-operative communities eventuating. The government takeover of Yarrabah signalled a fundamental change of the role that government was willing to take on the church-controlled reserves. It was calculated to change forever the "virtually autonomous powers" that were exercised by the Church with respect to its missions. The three Aboriginal missions were the main bargaining point in the Diocesan Registrar's July 1961 submission to O'Leary that the Diocese needed a total budget of over £120,000, if it was to run the Aboriginal missions at a standard comparable to the government settlements. The contribution of the Church was the smallest of the three funding sources available: even the receipts from Aged Pensions and Child Endowment, which the Church claimed on behalf of Aborigines, were greater than the Church amount. The government was still getting good value from the diocese. Even if the Aboriginal missions were assumed to consume two thirds of the diocesan budget, almost 1,200 Aboriginal people had been maintained across the three communities at a cost to state coffers of only £24 per person for the whole of the 1961/62 financial year; each at about the cost of a week's wages for a white member of the public. On the case presented to him, O'Leary did not hesitate in doubling the State Government share of annual funding for the Diocese to £75,000.

The Yarrabah takeover had been negotiated to preserve as much dignity for the Anglican Church as was possible given its long standing failure to deal with the situation. The Anglican Church had secured the undertaking that it alone would be responsible for the spiritual needs of the Yarrabah people. Even the religious activity of government staff employed at Yarrabah



was to be, “under the direction of the Chaplain”, whose stipend would be met by the government. With plans advanced to build a new church it was hoped that the public would perceive the changes as a new development in missionary strategy rather than for what it was, an Anglican withdrawal.

Stung by the loss of Yarrabah, the Anglican missionary initiative on the Peninsula developed a fresh urgency. Matthews travelled to England in 1961 in an attempt to recruit people to fill the missionary places that remained vacant after ABM’s failed National Aborigines’ Day campaign in 1960. Some of these, according to Matthew’s deputy, Archdeacon Lupton, came with expectations that the big improvement in missionary conditions, foreshadowed in the 1959 report, had actually taken place. They were devastated to find that accommodation was still primitive and that there were few resources to equip them for their work. Missionaries faced the people’s disappointment that their expectations, which had been raised by Clint’s scheme, would not be fulfilled, and the difficulty of coping with the new focus on material progress generally. Missionary burnout and high turnover, the two reasons for the 1959 visitation by Matthews and Coaldrake, were set to be just as bad under the new regime that was meant to address them.

Despite Matthew’s success in extracting more funds from both ABM and the Queensland Government, the finances available for the ambitious goals towards material progress were still far short of what was required. The search for the finances needed to build a new missionary order led Matthews to make a submission to the United Kingdom National Committee of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. The project was linked to the plan to remove the Lockhart River inmates to Mitchell River and Edward River and proposed to develop the agricultural and pastoral sides of both missions. Using the time-honoured language of dependency, it envisaged “the full use of the large areas of land available for the benefit of the Aborigines and to enable them to become self-supporting, useful members of the Australian community”. On

account of the submission's international dimension it was brought to the attention of the Federal Government's Department of External Affairs, the Prime Minister's Department and then to Premier Frank Nicklin. All agreed that the submission, if successful, would be an embarrassment to Australia on the international stage. Killoran recognised that access to funding of this type could mean the indefinite continuation of Church administration, a possibility he vigorously opposed. By the end of 1963 this project was totally buried, and with it any hope of reviving the missionary order.

Field missionaries throughout the 1960s hoped that they would be able to continue in their work at Kowanyama, that it would remain a Church mission, and that increased government support would be available to assist their efforts. In hindsight it is easy to see how unrealistic these expectations were, yet the expectation amongst the field missionaries at Mitchell River in the 1960s was that the future might be expected to be marked by both increased government funding and sustained Church control. They considered that only Lockhart River was likely to be transferred from church to government control. They carried out their missionary work largely unaware of the scope of the change implicit in Pat Killoran's comment, in opposition to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign submission: "It would not be prudent for the Department to support a policy which commits the inmates of Mitchell River to mission administration indefinitely".

Every question about the future of the Mission was radically thrown open on 3 February 1964 when both Mitchell River and Edward River were struck by Cyclone Dora. Cyclones were, of course, regular occurrences on the western Peninsula coast. Mitchell River Mission and Edward River Mission had both coped with severe blows in the past. Earlier cyclones had produced damage on a wide scale. Referring to the one that struck Edward River on 20 January 1951, Chapman commented:

All buildings except my house either blown down or badly damaged. The people homeless, gardens destroyed".

Currington listed the “considerable damage” from the same cyclone at Mitchell River where most buildings were damaged to some extent, all wiring and aerials torn down and a dozen village houses “completely wrecked”. Outside interest was predictably absent on that and many other occasions. Comparison of the extent of cyclone damage over the full period of the Mission’s life is difficult, but it was no surprise that every opportunity was made to exploit the extent of damage from the 1964 Cyclone Dora for fund raising purposes.

The destruction caused by Cyclone Dora provided an apparently heaven-sent opportunity to lever more financial support from the government coffers. Matthews’ immediate response to the cyclone, described as “the worst ever for the northern missions”, was to travel to Brisbane for urgent talks with both Church and government leaders. The most dramatic damage was to four aluminium sheeted, prefabricated dwellings, part of Matthew’s bid to improve staff conditions, that simply disintegrated in the wind and left sheets of aluminium caught high up in the trees. Michael Langley described the demise of his impossibly hot quarters as “an act of God”. Langley went further and described that they had been: “... extremely hot, cramped, glaring and jail-like in appearance!” If this irreverence seemed unbecoming of one who had lived through the “worst ever” disaster to strike the Mission, Langley was keen to correct the impression Matthews had fostered: “I feel there has been a tendency for the press and other agencies to exaggerate the damage and its effects”.

The aftermath of Cyclone Dora witnessed an unprecedented public response to the suffering of the people of Mitchell River. Church members responded generously to an appeal for funds and clothing to replace personal items lost in the cyclone. Trade Unions and other public organisations wrote, urging the government to quick relief action. The government response was prompt, compared with anything the Church could have hoped to achieve from

its own resources, and generous, considering the minimal resources that had been applied to Mitchell River hitherto. By April the Cabinet had approved the rebuilding of Mitchell and Edward River missions. O'Leary's deputy, Pat Killoran, who had succeeded his former mentor as Director of Native Affairs, showed all the bureaucratic precision in his negotiation of the rebuilding project which had characterised O'Leary's earlier dealings with ABM's co-operative experiment. Aware that the Yarrabah transfer had involved a cash settlement in favour of the Diocese in consideration of the material improvements already established by the Church, Killoran was careful to establish at the outset that the government investment in the rebuilding of Mitchell River was on the condition "that equity in the buildings remains with the State".

With such a large stake in the rebuilding program, the government was determined to ensure that there would be no unforeseen difficulties if Mitchell River followed Yarrabah into its exclusive control. The 1965 *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act* gave the Minister for Education a statutory power to take control of any mission schools in which the government had ever expended state funds. Even though such a provision for forced government takeover of a church school would have been controversial if applied to the wider community it seemed entirely uncontroversial where the scholars were Aborigines. The Anglican Church, at least, was keen to divest itself of its missionary apparatus. Early in 1966, Matthews made representations to Education Minister, Jack Pizzey, whose portfolio included Aboriginal matters, for the State Government to assume control of its three Aboriginal missions. Cabinet approval, in principle, followed on 17 May 1966 and empowered Killoran to undertake the necessary negotiations. The actual takeover occurred a year later on 1 May 1967.

The negotiations that followed Cyclone Dora were far removed from the field missionaries and the Aboriginal people on the Mission. "So much

seemed to be done at an administrative level”, recalled Michael Martin, chaplain at Kowanyama and then Pormpuraaw during this period. It was not that Aborigines lacked interest in their future and in improving their material circumstances, far from it. The layers of missionary and government paternalism were so thick as to be almost impenetrable when it came to considering the voice of the people these decisions most immediately concerned. An Aboriginal ‘council’, formed in 1962 at Matthews’ request, was intended to be a ‘training’ opportunity in representative government, since it was generally expected that Aborigines would soon receive the vote. Interest vastly exceeded expectations; thirty-six people nominated for the seven elected positions. Even though the missionary-intended functions of the council were peace-keeping and personal counselling, the council, with Thomas Bruce as chair, quickly seized the opportunity of discussing administrative and policy issues. After only four months, the superintendent called fresh elections in the hope of getting a more compliant council. Four of the original seven were re-elected and a new chairman appointed. The council successfully agitated for higher wages on the Mission and decided the priority in which new Aboriginal houses would be allocated. Men’s and women’s community meetings were the place where matters of corporate morality, like gambling and sorcery, were discussed and provided a further forum for dissatisfaction to be aired.

The housing arrangements established after Cyclone Dora represented the most profound visible change from the palm-leaf houses of the three villages that were the standard under mission administration. In place of the palm-leaf houses, metal-clad prefabricated dwellings were constructed. Those built between 1965 and 1969 were constructed on a concrete slab, the ones after 1969 on a raised, wooden floor. Instead of the traditional pattern of three distinct villages, with houses situated at the discretion of their owners, the new town plan prescribed surveyed allotments on defined roads. Since the houses

were allocated on a basis of housing need as they became available, the new township was tribally heterogeneous bearing no resemblance to the tribally based distinctions of the mission villages. Frank Coaldrake visited Mitchell River and the other former missions in 1968 and commented ironically:

The Department is certainly making towns rapidly and magnificently but it is not far advanced in the making of townspeople. The chaplains are to be expected to play a big part in this. Before the transfer, the Department helped us to make towns, now we must help the Department make townspeople.

By 1972, a full eight years after Cyclone 'Dora', the rebuilding program still had not made the progress promised:

... there are still a number of families residing in sub standard tin humpies with dirt floors without adequate sanitation or electricity, while much of the unrest and fighting can be attributed to the fact that many of the new homes are grossly overcrowded and some have over twenty residents.

Even though the missionaries, at all levels, found it easier to make decisions on behalf of Aborigines rather than in consultation with them, the Kowanyama people were becoming increasingly aware of the arbitrary way they were being treated. The standard of educational facilities and school equipment particularly, was such a case that resulted in a protest from the men's meeting. At a time when slates had become obsolete in most Queensland schools, the Mission children had theirs locked away so they wouldn't be damaged and were made to write on pieces of fibro. Archdeacon Arthur Lupton, recruited by Matthews to oversee the Aboriginal missions, came up against the agitation of the Mission Council for higher wages. Lupton was impressed by the people who confronted him. "They were completely loyal [to the Mission] since they could have been out on the cattle stations earning higher wages', but had nothing to offer them except the information that he was only earning £7 a week himself.

The 1967 takeover signalled a new era for the Church and the people at Kowanyama. The transfer of the Mitchell River cattle to the government represented a big loss of income to the Diocese, leaving it incapable of even

funding the whole of the chaplain's stipend on the three former Aboriginal missions. The Government provided housing and a \$2,500 annual subsidy for five years to ensure the continuation of a role for the Church. Continuing beyond the five year period, the subsidy was increased to \$3,750 in 1975, before the arrangement was terminated by the Government in 1978. Despite cutting off the subsidy, the Government still offered that it would give preference to the Anglican Church on the former mission communities, an effective guarantee that the power of the Department would be used to frustrate any attempt of rival sects to establish themselves. Even though ABM's involvement at Kowanyama was greatly diminished, it still struggled to fill the only 'missionary' position left, that of the chaplain. The Church struggled to discover its place in the new arrangement. A meeting of the chaplains in 1972 told a similar, discouraging story to the Bishop:

The picture at Edward River, Mitchell River and Lockhart River is of communities ruined by 'grog' and gambling, with frequent occasions of violence.

Certainly, the Aboriginal court was busy with these issues, a survey of court records for the second half of 1969 revealed that gambling and alcohol related offences were by far the most frequent cases:

Breach of discipline	26	
Drunk and disorderly		27
Alcohol on the reserve	3	
Alcohol to minors	4	
Act of violence	8	
Obscene language	7	
Obstructing police	5	
Carrying weapons with intent	5	
Resisting arrest	1	
Breaking away from custody		5
Damage to Government property	2	
Starting bush fires	1	
Gambling	69	
Breaking, entering and stealing	1	

In the same year only two cases, one of rape and the other of assault, were dealt with, on account of their seriousness, apart from the Aboriginal

court. By 1973, the appointment of a sergeant of the Queensland Police Force, Laurie Witham, to Kowanyama, strengthened the cause of the Aboriginal police, which by now had ten members.

Life under the government was little less regulated than it had been under the mission. The government manager acted with the same sort of overarching authority that people had become used to from the mission superintendent. Shane O'Connor, the manager in 1969, had no hesitation in declaring the bullock paddock "out of bounds", as he considered it to be at risk of fire from Aborigines. He declared his intention of widening the access ban on hunting if the circumstances warranted it: "further restrictions may have to be introduced within the next few months". Moreover, the same pattern of mission 'insider' leadership was soon discovered to be vital for government operations, even if Manager Ted Butler did not have a high estimation of the general labour force:

Sufficient labour is available to meet our needs, but employees generally appear to lack a pride in their activities. Mitchell River is fortunate, however, in having approximately 7 or 8 men who are capable of accepting responsibility for [as] gangers, and these men are invaluable to our work programmes.

Attempts were made by Michael Martin and David Thomson, the priests at Edward River and Lockhart River respectively, to develop a linguistic and cultural dimension to their work, but these efforts did not survive beyond the end of their tenure. ABM Chairman, John Munro, commented in 1974 after 70 years of Anglican involvement: "Some basic work remains to be done in the Diocese of Carpentaria if communication in depth is to be established by means of vernacular languages". Bruce and Elaine Sommer were sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics to carry out preliminary language study and Bible translation work at Kowanyama but discovered that this was not viable. As much as Bishop Eric Hawkey recognised that there was need for "a very serious re-appraisal of our missionary methods as far as Aboriginal work is concerned", the 1970s continued to be a difficult decade for the church that



had “lost its mission”.

Kenny Jimmy, the inaugural Chairman of the Council elected after the government takeover, discovered that the Government Manager was keen for the Council to do things the way he wanted and to decide matters according to his instructions, “*You were flat out getting anything done*”. The community quickly came to rest its expectations on the Chairman, in its eagerness to get improvements in housing, wages and rights. The Government inaugurated an Aboriginal Advisory Council on a statewide basis in 1971 with reserve council chairmen, including Kenny Jimmy, as its members. This experience was frustrating, “*You couldn’t get a win*”. The power relations at this level of government administration were as plain as they were back at Kowanyama. “*We had the right to ask them [the Minister and the Director], but they had the right to make the decisions*”.

Any hope that the government era would lift wages at Kowanyama to award level was destroyed by the Government’s assimilationist policies which required work on the community to be regarded as ‘training’, and that wages be kept lower than award levels as an incentive for people to leave the community to better their conditions. People at Kowanyama had been thrown on to a crazy roundabout where so much seemed to change whilst their relative disadvantage remained unaltered. The introduction of award wages for work on the cattle stations in 1968, as well as the trend towards greater mechanisation and fencing of paddocks, led to a collapse in the demand for Kowanyama labour. By the 1970s only a few people left Kowanyama to work on the stations, and then, only to those stations that were close by and still worked on open range principles. Clint’s dream for the whole of the population of Kowanyama to be involved in co-operative work on the reserve was replaced by a nightmare of unemployment, trainee jobs and deeply entrenched disadvantage.

New health and social problems developed on account of the number,

design and layout of the new houses, as anthropologist, John Taylor, showed. The improvement to education was slow, Kowanyama had to wait until 1971 for the appointment of the inaugural group of six teachers from the Education Department. The Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs had its own problems in recruiting staff to fill the increased number of positions. In December 1971, the positions of Community Overseer, Industrial Overseer, Female Liaison Officer and Nursing Sister remained vacant despite widespread advertising of the vacancies. The vastly increased government spending at Kowanyama had not paralleled any increase in Aboriginal participation. A growing population of whites filled the new positions created for teachers, nurses, office workers, tradespersons and police. The number of whites at work in Kowanyama increased from 38 in April 1971 to 50 by October 1972. In fact, the increased emphasis on qualifications had relegated many Aboriginal people from positions of responsibility to those of assistant or trainee.

The mere presence of so many *Munpitch* emphasised white hegemony and called for a stricter concealment of the matters considered to belong to the exclusively *Pakaper* domain. Donald Crim, an anthropologist at Kowanyama between October 1961 and November 1962, explained this in terms of a two class system of missionaries and Aborigines. The white spatial domain was the scene for 'onstage' behaviours by Aborigines where they sought to accommodate what they did and how they appeared to the expectations of whites. In the Aboriginal villages and during the night the 'backstage' behaviours that were otherwise moderated or suspended were enacted. Crim observed:

Fighting, drinking, gambling, erotic behaviour and the use of obscene language were reserved exclusively for backstage, and their onstage occurrence was regarded by most [Aborigines] as a serious violation of the norms, requiring the intervention of a village councillor or a policeman in order to avoid official action by the superintendent.

The increased presence of *Munpitch* in Kowanyama, especially from

the 1970s, the township plan and the general lack of privacy only added to the difficulty for Aborigines attempting to conform to the norms described in Crim's analysis. I recall an older Aboriginal woman, upon hearing the rumour of a likely Federal Government takeover of the Queensland reserves in 1978, being delighted and expressing the hope that "*All the Munpitch will go away, and leave this place to the Aborigines*". The pressure involved in being "made into townspeople" was telling for many Aborigines.

The conferring of the federal franchise in [1965] and the state franchise in [1967] along with citizenship rights at the referendum in 1967 did not alter the realities of "living under the Act" on a Queensland reserve. Questions about rights and community politics generally were often linked to questions about the availability of alcohol. Wider exposure to the world of the cattle stations had shown that this was a key indicator of whether a person was a 'protected' Aboriginal or considered to be on the same status as everyone else. Not surprisingly, Kowanyama Aborigines who chose to drink expected, as citizens and townspeople, that they should have the same rights of access to alcohol as any other person. This was especially so since the 1965 *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act* had removed the blanket prohibition on Aborigines having alcohol, even though it retained full authority to control reserves. Others, seeing the destructive effects of alcohol abuse, advocated that it be strictly limited or even prohibited. The mission administration held to a policy of prohibition, which was usually complied with or discreetly ignored for most of the year. The wet season, when station workers were back on the Mission for their 'spell', was the main time when alcohol was considered to be a problem and when alcohol related brawls took place. This policy was initially maintained by the government administration, with the luggage of Aboriginal passengers from Cairns searched for alcohol, which was then confiscated as a matter of routine:

During the last weekend some 15 bottles of alcohol amounting to over 5 gallons were confiscated from incoming plane passengers, main carriers being the four women who were returning from Cairns with new babies.

Kowanyama wasted no time in testing public opinion about the specific provision for the lawful sale of beer on reserves contained in the 1971 *Aborigines Act*. A plebiscite amongst community residents in May 1971 decided, by the overwhelming majority of 140 to 18, to agree that the community council should proceed with the establishment of a beer canteen. Sales were strictly limited for a period of an hour on three week nights and drinkers only permitted to purchase two cans of beer each night. Importation of alcohol into the community by individual Aborigines continued to be prohibited. Whites were exempt from this ban and by 1977 even formed their own informal drinking place, the 'Troppo Bar', under the house of a white carpenter.

The opening of an improved beer canteen in 1977, named the 'Magnificent Hotel', was a time of general communal festivity and celebration. Formal invitations were sent for staff and neighbouring community leaders to attend the opening performed by Eric Deeral, the Aboriginal member for Cook electorate in the State Parliament at the time. Even a *Kokobera* 'pub opening' song was written by Isaac Zingle for the occasion. The words, in translation, show the desirability of beer; honey is used as its metaphor, and the regulation involved in its consumption; the drinkers queue in separate lines of men and women:

Magnificent Hotel, standing open with honey,  
Standing on the heaps of feathers;  
We stand here in long lines,  
We drink honey out of baler shells.

Imposed moderation in alcohol consumption was generally agreed to by Aborigines on the principle that they were 'trainees' in the matter of drinking. Even though some were seasoned drinkers from their life on the stations, others had no familiarity with alcohol. Chairman Kenny Jimmy, who received the nickname, '*Four Can*', after he resisted council moves to increase the ration beyond four cans of beer each session, was concerned about the

impact of alcohol consumption on children and felt that a ration would minimise its destructive influence. A delegation of thirty women to the Council in January 1978 agreed that the onus of moderation should fall more heavily on women, twenty-nine of their number considering that women should be prohibited from drinking entirely, and all agreeing that, if not, the women's ration should be reduced from five to four cans of beer per session.

The twenty years between the heyday of the co-operative experiment and the 1970s had witnessed many changes at Kowanyama. By the end of this period there was a mere handful of buildings left from the mission era and only the mango trees left to mark the site of the former mission villages. Disappointed expectations throughout the 1960s and 1970s contrasted with the remembrance of the mission era as a time of simplicity, sobriety and order. Acquisition of the material benefits of the *Munpitch* had brought whites in greater number to Kowanyama and with them greater pressure on the *Pakaper* way of life. New concerns with alcohol, itself imbued with a character of attraction and risk, thoroughly consonant with the *Munpitch* quality, occupied the centre stage of community politics and social relationships. The dual character of the *Munpitch* was affirmed, not diminished, by the supplanting of the missionary *Munpitch* by their government cognates.



## Chapter Eleven

### The Horizons of History

Whatever might be said about the sixty-two year history of Mitchell River Mission, it would be inadequate without stressing the role played by Aborigines in shaping that history. Even if they were sometimes represented as the mere objects of missionary endeavour, they acted from the fact of their humanity to shape the life of the Mission. The Mission, as such, had no traditional precedent in the life of the *Kokobera*, *Kokominjen* and *Kunjen* people who comprised its membership. None the less, their labours and land were central to its existence. More than that, there were many Aboriginal people who adopted aspects of the values of the missionaries and conveyed them to successive generations of mission inhabitants. The history that has been described in the foregoing chapters would have been impossible without this sort of active, historical engagement.

This has not been the story of slaves, even if the Aboriginal “inmates” of the Mission were sometimes treated like this. It is instead the story of people living in a close relationship with their traditional land and with a clear consciousness of continuity with their ancestors. It has also been the story of people whose contact with whites preceded the foundation of the Mission.

It is remarkable that the response of the *Kokobera*, *Kokominjen* and *Kunjen* peoples to white contact also maintained a continuity over several centuries. Remarkable too that this response was primarily spiritual at first, in terms consonant with the world view of these people. By identifying them as *Munpitch*, Aborigines had found a way of integrating whites into their physical world whilst leaving unsolved the problem of how these same *Munpitch* fitted into the Aboriginal (*Pakaper*) social and moral world. It seems strange at first glance to think that identifying anyone or anything in a ‘spiritual’ category could be at all effective in establishing the reality of this presence in the ‘physical’ world. Whilst the contrasts between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘physical’ are not necessarily made in the same way in the Aboriginal scheme of things

as in the modern, scientific schema there was a fundamental problem that the presence of whites posed. Tony Swain described the problem:

In the traditions of the first Australians there exists a prevailing insistence that every self has its Abiding place. One of the greatest dilemmas for such an understanding is the encounter with peoples whose place is unknown and perhaps unknowable.<sup>1</sup>

The *Munpitch* category explained the location of whites as a real fact of the world but also accounted for their radical dislocation from the moral and social world of the Aborigines.

These intruders were ascribed a place in the world which made some sense of their power, threat, useful artifacts and so on, but were denied a place as ‘real people’ in the same way that this applied to the self understanding of Aborigines (*Pakaper* can be broken into two elements, *pa* = people, *kaper* = real). Even where a much longer shared history existed between Cape York Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders there is evidence, again according to Swain, that Islanders were understood to be, “... cosmologically the ‘same’ as Aborigines, yet ontologically ‘other’”.<sup>2</sup> How much more appropriate then, to deal with whites in a similar manner?

The history of Mitchell River Mission is a story with many dimensions. The material has not suggested the operation of any single principle to the exclusion of all else. Rather, multiple factors were in operation in this history that seem, on the face of it, unrelated. It has been a story of ambiguity and paradox that has proven more amenable to a dialectical analysis than to a linear form of logic. By using the same method that was applied to the archaeology and modern reception of the *Munpitch* concept in Chapter 3, dialectical pairs emerge which frame what otherwise seem to be unrelated events. The *Munpitch* concept points to the different horizons towards which the history of the Mission developed.

From the first meeting before the time of the missionaries right through to the present day, Aborigines it seems, have jointly denoted whites and a particular category

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<sup>1</sup>Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being*. Cambridge, 1993, p.85.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.84.



of spiritual beings in the Aboriginal cosmos as *Munpitch*. It has been argued here that the things attributed to the *Munpitch* as spiritual entities can be read as a representation of the encounter between the unfamiliar worlds of whites and Aborigines. Thus when *Munpitch*, as spiritual entities, are described in the dialectical relationship of “opportunity/danger” along with “knowledge from the ancestors/transformation to a new state” these relationships are also suggested as horizons of the encounter with *Munpitch*, as whites. This historically informed understanding laid the basis for an ambiguous relationship between Aborigines and missionaries as the relationship developed during the period of intensive coexistence on the Mission. Such an encounter with the *Munpitch* exposed the *Pakaper* to a world which had been enlarged and opened to new possibilities of enrichment as well as to new risks. This encounter would involve dual outcomes in a complex combination rather than a simple choice of one or the other.

The ancestors of the people who came to make up the Mitchell River Mission had the opportunity of developing their understanding of whites from as early as the beginning of the Seventeenth Century. These encounters are recorded in all of the conventional, factual sources used by historians; journals, diaries, letters and maps and have been treated with varying degrees of recognition by historians. Right up until the development of the “frontier” histories of Australian race relations in the 1980s,<sup>3</sup> the Aboriginal people of northern Australia were usually depicted as the last to experience white contact rather than amongst the first. The history of race relations is still too readily conceptualised as one that radiated from the British penal colony in New South Wales. Indeed, for Urry, a history of Aborigines can only begin, “with the establishment of white settlement in Australia”.<sup>4</sup> However the historical process is understood, this thesis asserts that the people of the Mitchell River region were far more central to the history of these encounters than has otherwise been understood, because the history of Australia has been written from the southern cities and largely seen the Aborigines as

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<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, Townsville, 1981, and Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, Canberra, 1982.

<sup>4</sup>J. Urry, “Beyond the Frontier: European Influence, Aborigines and the Concept of Traditional Culture”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, no.5, 1979, p.2.

peripheral to this story even when the historians have included the Aborigines in their analysis.

The history of the *Munpitch* concept has its origin in the intrusion of whites into the world of the ancestors of the people of the Mitchell River Mission. Even if, at the beginning, white mariners, explorers, pastoralists and missionaries were intruders and initiators of new experiences and social relationships, there is no evidence that an inevitable *Munpitch*/initiator and *Pakaper*/responder equivalence characterised the life of the Mission. Indeed, in some important respects, inversions of this stereotype developed. *Pakaper* initiative in recognising the economic value of labour, for example, defined the missionaries as conservative and reactionary as they sought to preserve the coherence of their socially-constructed pauperism of mission Aborigines.

Equally, the post-mission Christian spirituality of Kowanyama people shows clear signs of innovation in terms of the integration of the stories from their ancestors with the narratives of biblical Christianity. This representation of Jesus, John the Baptist and other biblical figures in the “story” of the land of the *Pakaper* may well be far more than a post-mission development.<sup>5</sup> As early as 1916, Joseph Chapman reported the *Kokobera* belief about the *Pathangany* creator figure in terms which suggested a much earlier *Kokobera* innovation in response to the Christian proclamation of the missionaries.<sup>6</sup> It awaits a much more comprehensive oral history approach, than has been attempted in this thesis, to construct a narrative from “inside” the experience of Kowanyama Aborigines before questions of this sort can be fully answered. What has been attempted here can only offer glimpses of this experience as it has been elucidated from oral sources and inferred from the usual documentary sources available to the historian.

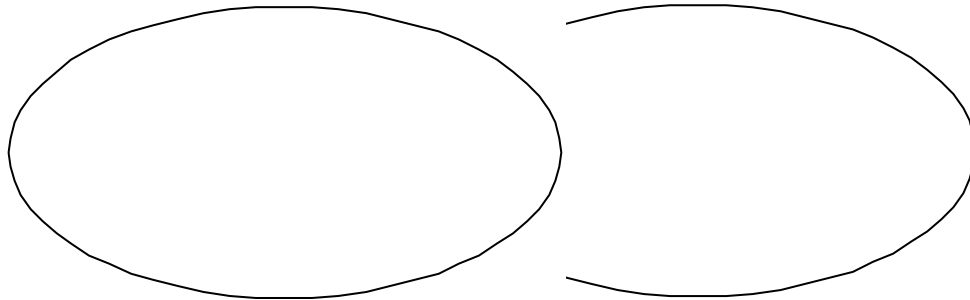
What can be said, though, is that the response of Aborigines to whites of various motivations and vocations was at first primarily spiritual. Of all of these people,

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<sup>5</sup>See the previously cited example of the biblical story of the flood (Genesis 6 - 8) and its incorporation into the *Kunjen*, *Antujil* story cited by Veronica Strang. (Veronica Strang, *Uncommon Ground*, Oxford, 1997, pp.262-3.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Chapman, *ABM Review*, 1 April 1916, p.14.

whether mariners, explorers, pastoralists or government officials it was only the missionaries who saw this spiritual dimension as the reason for their presence amongst the *Kokobera* and their neighbours at all. There is no reason to doubt that the concern shown by the founders of Mitchell River Mission was informed by their Christian



humanitarianism on one hand and their desire to evangelise Aborigines with the Christian gospel on the other. The *Munpitch* identity seems to have been located by Aborigines in the region where the world in its physical reality (cosmology) is made meaningful in terms of an understanding of being (ontology). Whilst recognising the risk of oversimplification, this location may be helpful to depict diagrammatically in the intersection of the cosmological and ontological orders:

*Cosmological*

*Ontological*

¶ *Munpitch* -

World

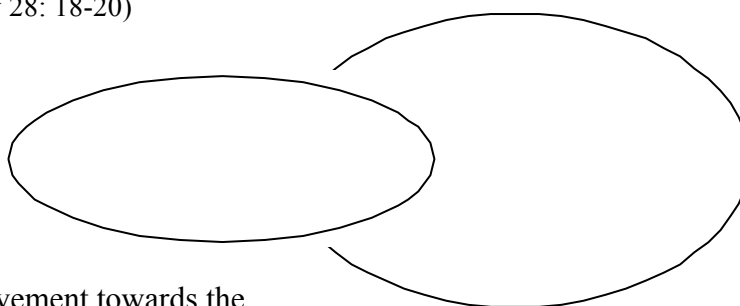
Being

It is axiomatic to assume that the missionaries desired to enter the Aboriginal ontological realm to communicate their understanding of meaning according to their Christian confession. This is implicit in the mandate Jesus Christ had given to the apostles and which the missionaries at Mitchell River understood themselves to have received:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have

commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.  
(Matthew 28: 18-20)

To this extent,  
the ideology of  
mission



demanded a movement towards the

ontological from whatever starting point the missionary might be able to find. This may be developed diagrammatically by representing this emphasis and intention in figures of unequal area:

*Cosmological*

*Ontological*

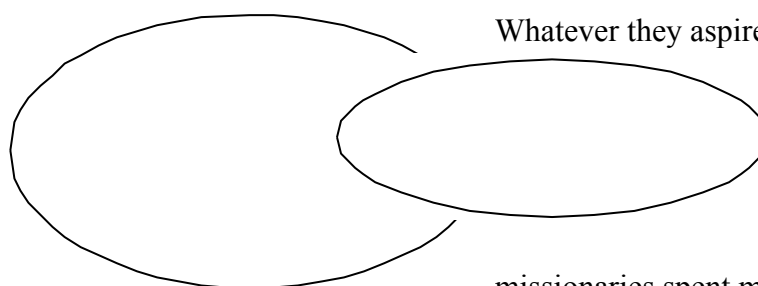


*Munpitch* -

World

Being

It is ironic that the practice of mission demonstrated the reverse of this ideology.



Whatever they aspired to do and

however they  
understood

their task, the

missionaries spent most of their

efforts operating in the cosmological world of the *Pakaper* and gave confusing signals in return to the opportunities of engagement in the ontological domain, the realm where identity and meaning were constructed:

*Cosmological*

*Ontological*



*Munpitch* -

The period of missionary control at Mitchell River did not witness the full resolution of the dialectical entities into a new state of affairs. A number of initiatives suggest, though, movement towards a possible resolution of the dialectical forces that frame the horizons of the history of the Mission. The indigenisation of the Christian message and its apparent incorporation into the stories of origin of the *Pakaper*, discussed in detail in Chapter 9, is a case in point. Another can be found in the proposals for a Christian Co-operative movement, a missionary initiative, dealt with in Chapter 10, that promised a new relationship between the labours of the *Pakaper* and the economic results that followed from it. Both hint at the sort of resolution that might be anticipated by applying dialectical reasoning but neither synthesised the pairs of forces that have been discussed, in relation to the *Munpitch* concept, at least not up until the missionary hegemony was replaced by government control in 1967.

Such a resolution of these forces, at least during the period 1905 to 1967, seems to have been prevented as a direct consequence of the strategy adopted on the Mission. The “civilizing” approach to mission that the missionaries adopted, so soon after the foundation of the Mission, increasingly threw them into labours for which they were poorly equipped. If Christian humanitarianism and evangelism were the founding principles of the Mission, “missionary order” rapidly became a driving force in the representation of Christianity to mission Aborigines. There were many steps involved in this development, which ranged from missionary intervention in the conflicts between Aborigines, to the development of institutional forms like dormitories, through to the comprehensive pauperisation of Aborigines even when their labours produced comparative wealth. The most significant must surely have occurred in 1912 when the missionaries crossed the line from being the defenders of Aborigines threatened by pastoralists and police with “removal” (banishment, often for life, to a far distant place) to employing this same censure in defending “missionary order”.

A brief analysis of “removal” as part of the missionary strategy allows an insight into the complex interplay of the worlds of the *Munpitch* and the *Pakaper* and throws light on a fundamental problem for the missionary enterprise. It is reasonable to infer, from the decision to banish mission Aborigines from their land and kin, that the missionaries valued their missionary order more highly than the humanitarian and evangelical values that underpinned the foundation of the Mission. The humanitarian value was clearly compromised since it was manifestly distressing for the individuals subject to this punishment to be deprived of their relationship to land and kin. The facts were also clear that the forced relocation of Aborigines from the tropics to southern climates invariably exposed them to the real risk of death through infection or through the debilitation brought on by abject despair. The evangelical value was similarly compromised. The places of exile were usually government settlements that were largely outside of the evangelising influence of the Christian church, not mission stations.

What might be seen though of this same decision from the perspective of the *Pakaper*? Certainly there is every suggestion here of continuity with those aspects of earlier, frontier experience which emphasised the danger of close association with the unpredictable *Munpitch*. The more the world of the *Pakaper* was shared with these *Munpitch* the more their lawlessness (in terms of the Aboriginal Law) seemed demonstrated. “Removal” is a particularly powerful example of this since it attacked two key elements of this Law; that the *Pakaper* are who they are through an essential relationship to their land, and that they are in an essential relationship to one another. The missionaries, by resorting to “removal” as a punishment for the breach of missionary order, thus showed themselves to be “lawless” (according to the Aboriginal Law) and without the values that would include them in the ontological world of the *Pakaper*.

There is no evidence that an analysis of this kind was ever suggested to the missionaries or emerged from their reflection on their circumstances. There were, though, dissenting voices that “missionary order” made it difficult to hear. It speaks

powerfully of the humanitarian vision of Ernest Gribble, the co-founder of the Mission, that he opposed the practice of “removal” but at the same time ministered as the chaplain at Palm Island, the notorious government settlement that was the destination for many of the “removed” Aborigines from the north. Gribble denounced the Mitchell River Mission’s use of “removal” as “unchristian” and maintained the principled stance that he had declared at the very foundation of the Mission.<sup>7</sup> His words are worth quoting again to underscore this point:

[Removal] is not Christian and the Missions by seeking the aid of the Government to deal with their naughty folk are proclaiming that they are failing. There was a time when this was not done by any Christian Mission. I was at Yarrabah 18 years and during that time not a solitary native was exiled out of over five hundred. God knows that we had many very naughty folk but it was for such that we were there even as Christ came to call sinners and not the righteous. No doubt a Mission station can be made a “moral” and well conducted place by the elimination of the sinner. But then it ceases to be in the strictest sense of the word “Christian”.<sup>8</sup>

To the extent that their evangelical goal required an engagement and even penetration of the ontological world of the *Pakaper*, decisions of this kind took them further away from achieving that aim. From his different point of view, Ernest Gribble was arguing a similar point to that already developed from the *Pakaper* perspective, that “removal” transgressed moral order and so further distanced those who implemented it from those who were subjected to it.

The earlier discussion, in Chapter 9, of the *Pakaper*’s possible attempts to open their ontological world to the *Munpitch* through the ceremonial life of the *Yiral* bora provides a further example of the chance of ontological engagement being overwhelmed by “missionary order”. It is, of course on the edges of this interaction that some of the most interesting insights are to be found. The simple fact that “missionary order” prevailed in this and other interactions does not do justice to the initiative and humanity of the *Pakaper* who had their own historical influence and subjective aspiration throughout these circumstances. A further exploration along these lines, using more

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<sup>7</sup>See also, Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts*, St Leonards, Australia, 1998, pp.178-200, for an account of Ernest Gribble’s application of principle to events in north-western Australia.

<sup>8</sup>Gribble to Housden, 28 May 1931. ABM, ML MSS 4503 Add On 1822, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

anthropological and linguistic resources than has been possible here, may well prove productive as a field of future research.

The *Munpitch* category and a response to whites that is informed through it endures amongst the *Pakaper* to this day. As a working hypothesis of living with the *Munpitch*, it has provided the *Pakaper* with scope to embrace values and commodities from the *Munpitch* world whilst remaining apart from absolute identity with that world. A long journey has been travelled in the 94 years since the Mission was founded. Aborigines at Kowanyama are still open to the possibility that *Munpitch* will enter their moral and social world even if the evidence of many centuries should disincline them to this view. They otherwise maintain traditions that are continuous with, if not always identical to, the practices of their ancestors. Remarkably, some of the most forceful advocates of this dual perspective do so from the standpoint of Christian faith. That this faith has found an enduring place in the lives of some *Pakaper* and an awareness in all seems in little doubt in this excerpt from a prayer that Alma Wason offered at a home fellowship meeting in 1987:

*We are here to share the good news that you have given us to share. May your blessings will [sic] be upon each one of us that we may be ready to serve you and see the way to you and to follow your ways all the days of our lives.*<sup>9</sup>

The horizons of history are still open to the *Pakaper* as they seek to find the opportunities which have accompanied their encounters with the *Munpitch*, even if the costs along the way have been very high indeed.

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<sup>9</sup>Fellowship meeting, tape recording, Kowanyama, 1 August 1987.



# **Appendix One**

## **The Bishops of the Diocese of Carpentaria**

Gilbert White	1900 - 1915
Henry Newton	1915 - 1922
Stephen H. Davies	1922 - 1949
W. John Hudson	1950 - 1960
S. John Matthews	1960 - 1968
Eric Hawkey	1968 - 1974
Hamish T. U. Jamieson	1974 - 1983
Anthony F. B. Hall-Matthews	1984 - 1996

(The Diocese of Carpentaria was absorbed into the Diocese of North Queensland in 1996)

## Appendix Two

### Chaplains of Mitchell River Mission

A. E. Smith	1 December 1906 - March 1907
H. Frere T. Lane	4 August 1912 - 14 September 1916
Henry Matthews	1919 - July 1924
C. W. Light	18 September 1922 (Temporary appointment)
Frank Pond	November 1924 - March 1925
John J. E. Done	28 May 1926 - 17 December 1927
E. Lawton	28 November 1927 - 30 June 1930
James A. G. Housden	1930 -1932
R. H. Lowe	3 November 1934 - 30 October 1935
Philip Seymour	26 November 1936 - 31 May 1938
Sailor Gabey	6 May 1938 - 29 August 1943
Arthur C. Flint	1946 - March 1947
Herbert A. J. R. Norton	1948 -1950
Eric J. Wingfield	13 May 1949 -1953
Douglas M. Sutherland	1954 - 1960
Michael W. Martin	1960 -1966

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*Annual Reports, Director of Native Affairs, 1939-1965*

*Annual Reports, Director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs, 1966-1974*

*Annual Reports, Director of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement, 1976-1983*

*Queensland Statutes*, in particular:

*Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897*

*Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1901*

*Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts  
Amendment Act of 1927*

*Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the sale of Opium Act Amendment  
Act of 1928*

*Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts  
Amendment Act of 1934*

*Aborigines Preservation and Protection Act of 1939*

*Aborigines Preservation and Protection Act Amendment 1946*

*Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Act 1965*

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Throughout the text there are references to DFSAIA, OF (Old File) numbers. These were researched in 1992 when they were held as departmental files by the DFSAIA as the successor department to the various creating protectorates and departments concerned with the administration of Aboriginal affairs in Queensland. These records were later transferred into the custody of the QSA and were re-ordered and given QSA control numbers that bear

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Home Secretary's Correspondence, HOM/A41, HOM/J22

Lands Department Correspondence, LAN S173

Northern Protector of Aborigines, 1900-1904, A/44680 - 1

Police Commissioner's Correspondence, A/41590, A/41596

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(abbreviated DFSAIA)

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Series M4;    Volume 1, Box 3  
                  Volume 2, Box 3  
                  Volume 5, Box 6  
                  Volume J, Box 11  
                  Volume K, Box 12  
                  Volume L, Box 13  
                  Volume P, Box 17  
                  Volume R, Box 19  
                  Volume S, Box 20

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Series 9, Box 3, Folder 14  
Series 11, Box 3, Folder 16  
Series 12, Box 4, Folder 18  
Series 14, Box 5, Folder 20  
Series 14, Box 5, Folder 21  
Series 16, Box 4, Folder 24  
Series 16, Box 16, Folder 9  
Series 17, Box 5, Folder 25  
Series 22, Box 6, Folder 31

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"Notes on Diocese of Carpentaria", OM.AV/113/1

Bishop's Diary, OM.AV/114/1

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White, Gilbert, miscellanea, G10-17/1  
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