‘We want to do what they did’: History at St Clair

Rosa Nolan
9/10/2012

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a BA (hons.) University of Sydney Department of History.
‘The history in places, especially in places of cross-cultural encounters, will take as much imagination as science to see. Blood and ashes are blown away with the dust. Shouts and songs die in the wind. Pain and happiness are as evanescent as memory. To catch lost passions in places history will have to be a little more artful than being a “non-fiction”. It will have to have, among other graces, a trust in and a sense of the continuities of living through different times, despite all the transformations and translations that masquerade as discontinuity.’


The Front Cover image is of Luke Hickey, Arthur Fletcher, NSW Minister for Environment and Heritage Robyn Parker, Laurie Perry, Maxine Conaty, Tracy Skene and John Lester at the opening of the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation’s Biobanking project at Valley Arms, holding their possum skin cloak. It was taken from the biobanking webpage of the WNAC’s website.
Abstract

In 1999 the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation acquired the site of the former St Clair Mission where their forebears lived. They will recreate to turn it into a cultural centre that will sustain and strengthen their community and they are pursuing reclamation and recreation of language, material culture, art, family and public history projects. They do so in the context of Native Title legislation and debates about Aboriginality and identity shape their relationship to their past. The historiographical significance of their relationship to the past is that it challenges the modes of engaging with history that have justified and structured colonial history making.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘This is what we call home’: the history of St Clair</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Good on Alex Morrison’: the Morrison Collection and what it means today</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What next for ‘the lost tribe’? Reclamation and Recreation</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘It’s not lost, it’s not lost’: the historiographical meaning of St Clair</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I am very glad to have written a thesis about healing. Working on this thesis has been immensely significant to me and I am proud to have produced something relevant to our times, to the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation and their community. First of all to Laurie Perry, James Wilson Miller, Tracy Skene, Arthur Fletcher, John Lester and Maxine Conaty for their words and time, thank you. My gratitude also goes to Peter Read, who has supervised this work, for his encouragement and faith in me. To my father, Anthony Nolan, for invaluable conversation and strength thank you. My thanks also go to my mother, Joanne Ferguson, my little brother, Rory Nolan and to Nicholas Mueller.
Maps

Map of the Hunter Valley Kooris

Approximate location of St Clair. The smaller of the two dots is St Clair, on Glennies Creek which runs south from Lake St Clair towards the number 15 highway.
List of illustrations

Blackscamp Travelling Stock Route sign, adjacent to St Clair. Photograph by Rosa Nolan. 12

Mount Yengo from the east. Photographed by Rosa Nolan. 26

Engravings at the Northern Map Site, Mount Yengo Aboriginal Place, Finchley’s Trig. Taken by Rosa Nolan. 26

The Baiame cave painting. Taken by Rosa Nolan. 27

The view north up the valley from the Baiame cave painting. Photographed by Rosa Nolan. 27

Photographs of the National Parks and Wildlife interpretation sign in the Gloucester Tops Campsite. On the reverse is the story of the Mount MacKenzie Massacre. Taken by Rosa Nolan. 28

Shield E077644, made at St Clair; http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/E077644-club 45

Club E077649, made at St Clair; http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/E077649-club 45

Spear E078215; http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/E078215-Spear 45

The Budget Arch; http://australianmuseum.net.au/The-Morrison-Collection 46

Alexander Morrison; http://australianmuseum.net.au/Alexander-Morrison 46

Glennies Creek, looking west. Photograph by Rosa Nolan. 564

Picnic spot. Photograph by Rosa Nolan. 64

Looking south. Photograph by Rosa Nolan. 65

Looking southeast. Photograph by Rosa Nolan. 65
Introduction: ‘Blackscamp’ Travelling Stock Route

If you didn’t know the history of St Clair you wouldn’t know it from any other group of paddocks. Nestled in a ninety degree bend in Glennies Creek the property is about 33 acres and receives the first water released from the St Clair dam. The creek flows south from Mount Royal fed by sphagnum moss soaks and lagoons in Barrington Tops. The fishing is by all reports excellent, and you might be lucky enough to spot a platypus in the many nooks carved into the bank. The country here, behind Singleton, is hill country between the rich plains on the banks of the Hunter River, and the mountainous Falls Country to the northeast. Today, the St Clair district is good money land; amongst the hills are several large, old homesteads built with wide verandas and corrugated iron roofs.

At St Clair there are two stands of trees with tap roots that are deep enough to pull water into the clay topsoil, making the grass around them greener than on the rest of the property. The Mission church used to stand under one. Thermo-physical testing has shown where the foundations lie but they’re invisible under the grass. Between the two stands were the houses for the Koori families and, after 1916, the manager’s house. The trees, from their size, are at least a hundred years old, making them the only part of the landscape that hasn’t changed since 1923 when the Station closed. Behind the trees, on the east creek bank, was the vegetable garden, and in a few years it will be made productive again. The only clue to St Clair’s past is the name of the adjacent Travelling Stock Route: ‘Blackscamp.’

This thesis began as an investigation of St Clair, the reserve and the mission there between 1890 and 1923 and the people who now own it: the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation. My curiosity was piqued by the fact that they plan to recreate the Mission, not memorialise it. They also
plan a good deal more for it, and this has led me to investigate their other historical projects. The three questions that run throughout this thesis are: How do they see their history? What cultural reclamation and heritage projects are they pursuing and why? What do these indicate about their relationship to their history?

Naturally this thesis was made possible and shaped by the Wonnarua. My main correspondents and interviewees have been Laurie Perry, CEO of the WNAC, and James Wilson Miller, Wonnarua historian and author of *Koori: A Will to Win*. I was also able to speak to Arthur Fletcher, Maxine Conaty, John Lester and Tracy Skene, members of the WNAC Board. I regret that further interviews were impossible in the time available. This has resulted in a gender imbalance in the interviewees and I have potentially missed a women’s perspective on St Clair.

The history with which I begin is structured around sites of Wonnarua and settler contact in the Hunter Valley that are today being recognised as of heritage value. Mount Yengo, the Baiame cave, St Clair and Mount MacKenzie are becoming symbols of the broad themes of Hunter history – the Koori deep past, pastoralism, agriculture, frontier conflicts and massacres - and of national history.

Chapter two is an investigation of the meaning of the Morrison Collection which is the strongest physical link to the Wonnarua’s past; it teases out the various meanings that the Collection held for the Wonnarua who made it and for Alexander Morrison who owned it. Object histories have the potential to tell stories not contained in the documentary record and the Morrison Collection speaks against the representation of missions as places of segregation and poverty. This is crucially important to the history of St Clair that the WNAC tell today. The differences between how Morrison and the Wonnarua related to the objects has informed how different audiences – Wonnarua and wider Australia – do so today. The WNAC’s relationship with the Collection I contrast with a different project about material culture: one of reclamation rather than preservation.
Recreation and reclamation are the threads of chapter three where I describe the many heritage, education and health projects of the WNAC. My analysis focuses on the themes of the historical narrative the WNAC construct, and how it informs their identity, their community and their relationship to their past.

Chapter four builds on chapter three by placing the WNAC’s reclamation projects in the context of Native Title, debates about ‘authentic’ Aboriginality and Australian historiography. I compare the WNAC’s solutions to problems of identity and community post genocide to those of other groups in the southeast of Australia. Refocusing on St Clair I argue that the WNAC are challenging the very terms on which communities relate to the past by refusing not only the dominant colonial narrative but the dominant means of constructing it: memorialisation.

Following Bernard Smith’s 1980 Boyer Lectures and his injunction that Australians need to reconcile ourselves and our values to our continent, our place, historians have turned their attention to the history and meaning in places.¹ Over the intervening thirty years it has become apparent that this was in response to the needs of non-Aboriginal people to come to terms with our history. From the point of view of a non-Aboriginal Australian reconciliation consists of discovering the truth of what our mob did and then owning it. In contrast what the Wonnarua emphasise in their heritage and history is healing. Our historical moment is of healing and healing is the subject of this thesis.

‘This is what we call home’: the history of St Clair

Beginning at the beginning

James Wilson Miller is a Wonnarua and Gringai man and an historian whose work has been fundamentally important to his family and community. His book *Koori: A Will to Win*, tells the history of the Hunter Valley from a Koori perspective, reading against the grain of settler evidence to establish a firm, ‘unbroken link’ through colonialism to traditional times.\(^2\) He begins with the land itself:

> The Valley was always there. It was there in the Dreaming, though the mountains, trees, animals and people were not yet formed. The river as we know it was yet to be born.

> Everything was sleeping.\(^3\)

According to Miller’s narrative the Valley was made by Baiame, the ‘creator figure in aboriginal mythology.’\(^4\) He is ‘a deity figure known up and down the coast’, shared by many Kooris in the southeast, who came down from the sky to shape the world.\(^5\) He travelled through what is now Mount Yengo National Park, and the Wollemi ranges making the rivers, ridges, plains and mountains. When he was finished he stood on Mount Yengo in Wollombi National Park to leap back into the sky, flattening the top of it.

\(^2\) James Wilson Miller, Interview with Rosa Nolan, 23 August 2012.


\(^4\) James Wilson Miller requested that I note that this creator figure is called Baiame in the south east by many nations, but that the Wonnarua name for him is Goign or Goin.

The Mount Yengo area was a gathering place for the southeast, for Darkinjung, Wonnarua, Awabakal, Worimi, Birpai and potentially Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi. It has perhaps thousands of rock engravings and paintings including hand stencils, axe grooves, images of Baiame, animals, people and Baiame’s tracks. ‘Wollombi’, the name of the nearest town means ‘meeting place’ or ‘meeting of the waters.’ Given that the engraved rock platforms were ‘refreshed’ by each generation Garry Jones and the Binghai Wollombi team suggests that they may be 20 000 years old. At the northern edge of Yengo near Milbrodale is a huge, five meter wide painting of Baiame facing north up into the Hunter Valley. His big eyes and long arms resemble those of an adult reaching to embrace a small child and etched very faintly on his arms are hatches that Miller interprets as the feathers of the Wonnarua totem: the wedge tailed eagle. Laurie Perry, another Wonnarua Gringai man, narrates the landscape from the sandstone outcrop under which Baiame is painted:

_to the West is Wiradjuri, to the north is Kamilaroi, to the east is Worimi country,

_Darkinjung is to the south, and down the coast to Newcastle is Awabakal country._

**Settlement: 80 000 wool-improved sheep**

It was at Milbrodale that British colonists first arrived overland into the Upper Hunter Valley. John Howe and Benjamin Singleton arrived in March 1820 travelling from Windsor and the Hawkesbury River. Their Darug guide was reportedly nervous, having brought them through the Yengo area, east around the mountain. This was with good reason: he was executed for

---

9 Miller, Interview, 23 August 2012.
disrespecting Wonnarua law. Governor Macquarie thought that a route from Sydney to the Hunter River would be profitable and in 1825 work began on the Great North Road the remains of which now pass almost directly above Baiame.

Taking in the same magnificent view as Baiame we can wonder what Howe and Singleton saw but know it was not the nations Perry describes. It is far more likely that they saw profit and splendour on the rich plains of the Hunter as they descended from the ridgeline. Both of them received grants of several hundred acres for their travails to which Singleton town still bears testimony.

Howe and Singleton were part of the young colony’s expansion inland from Sydney in search of profitable land. The Hunter Valley seemed a pastoral arcadia of thinly wooded alluvial flats, long grass and abundant game. Singleton wrote to Governor Macquarie:

This land is very fine forest ground, thinly timbered, I think not exceeding from 4 to 6 trees to an acre... the flooded land continues from about ¾ to 1 ½ miles back from the river on each side and great parts of it equal meadow land in England.

Peter Cunningham, close by on the Goulbourn River in 1826, was more exuberant:

In all these luxuriant plains there is scarcely a superfluous tree to be seen... [The land is] only requiring the instrumentality of the plough to produce an abundant crop.

The Hunter landscape seemed miraculous; it appeared to be natural parkland. The ‘European vision’ that conditioned Singleton and Howe’s experience of land revered parkland as the pinnacle of

11 Ibid.  
15 Ibid.
land management, practiced by the wealthy and enclosed from the poor. The Hunter Valley was wondrous to their eyes because it was naturally occurring, uncultivated, unclaimed parkland. It was a vision of pastoral plenty: the plains near Singleton were populated with both grey and red kangaroos, emus, and ‘wild turkeys... which afford an excellent and most delicate repast.’ The rivers and lagoons were ‘swarming’ with ‘the most delicious fish’ including perch, eels, jew fish, and mullet.

It was quickly settled; land grants of 100 acres were made to John Singleton in 1835 and a further 200 acres in 1836. Henry Dangar who surveyed most of the Hunter Valley between 1822 and 1826 wrote of the speed with which settlers were flooding the Valley:

*In 1822 it...possessed little more than it aboriginal inhabitants, in 1826-27, more than half a million acres were appropriated and in a forward state to improvement... Here in 1827 were upwards of 25,000 head of horned cattle, and 80,000 fine and improved-wool sheep.*

**Two societies**

It is very difficult to know what effect this had on the Wonnarua. There is a dearth of recorded evidence and what does survive are settler accounts. What can be said, and what deserves emphasis in history, is that the Wonnarua maintained their law and authority in the Valley. In abstract terms the contact and conflict seen here is that between two world views, two systems of law and knowledge. Many of the incidents of frontier violence are comprehensible as conflicts over

---

right and respectful behaviour. Miller has rewritten the 1826 uprising in the Upper Hunter to demonstrate that it was not a guerrilla war but instead was the careful execution of Koori laws. He notes that Wiradjuri and Wonnarua elders conferred in 1825 and later in the year Kooris began calling at homesteads looking for specific individuals. They sought a Scotsman called Grieg and killed a parson and a stockman in his employ. Grieg was known to shoot at Kooris fishing on or crossing his land near Denman.\textsuperscript{20}

That there were two systems of law operating can be seen in another incident in May 1835 when Charlie, a Gringai man, executed Alfred Simmons, a white man. Simmons had taken a sacred stone, the \textit{Murrumai}, the excrement of Baiame, and had shown it to a Gringai woman which was a capital offence. Charlie was found guilty of murder and hanged in Dungog from a white eucalypt that is still in the public school grounds today. His testimony of why he acted as he did was recorded by Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld but the settlers understood his behaviour in fundamentally different terms; the investigating police magistrate believed that his purpose was to kill as many whites as he could.\textsuperscript{21} Threlkeld, while a Missionary at Lake Macquarie wrote in 1826:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The blood of the Blacks begins to flow, we are in a state of warfare up the country here – two stockmen have been speared in retaliation for the 4 natives who were deliberately shot without any trial or form whatever. Martial Law is the cry of the settlers.} \textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Threlkeld’s words indicate a belief, held by the government and settlers, that the land they were on was indubitably owned by Britons. The words ‘a state of warfare’ not only refer to bloodshed and the anxiety of the situation but also to the settler perception that they had a legally

\textsuperscript{20} Miller, \textit{Koori}, pp. 34, 36.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. p. 52.
and morally valid claim to the land. On May 5th 1826 Governor Darling received instructions from the Colonial Office about the state of relations with Kooris. When the Kooris were ‘making hostile incursions for the purpose of Plunder’ the settlers were to ‘repel such Aggressions in the same manner, as if they had proceeded from subjects of any accredited state.’

A similar belief was expressed by landholders in the Hunter region who wrote to the Governor in 1825 seeking the protection of troops to prevent ‘revenge and depredation of these infuriated and savage people’. Darling replied to the settlers that ‘vigorous measures amongst yourselves would more effectually establish your ascendancy than the utmost power of the Military.’ There was no border drawn on the map and yet Kooris were understood as inhabiting and invading British territory. They were treated as an alien, enemy force rather than as natives of the land; the land was perceived by British as British territory.

‘Cruelty’ and ‘Dissipation’

It was settlers and employees of the Australian Agricultural Company (AAC) who carried out a massacre on Mount MacKenzie. It is a sheer granite cliff facing west accessible through subalpine swamps to the east, standing eighty kilometres north-east of St Clair. In 1835 five convict shepherds working for Robert Ramsey MacKenzie were speared after reportedly leaving ‘sweet damper’ in huts on a cattle station at Belbora. Two groups of Kooris were then tracked by settlers from Allyn River,

24 Ibid. p. 20.
and settlers and ‘time-expired soldiers’ employed by the AAC from Port Stephens. Douglas Rye who published the only account of the massacre wrote:

Silently and surely the white men laid their plans and long ere the dawn of the day the “sleeping camp” was encircled from cliff edge to cliff edge. Maddened with fear under the gunfire which followed they broke hither and thither in vain attempts to escape with their lives. Ultimately they turned to the cliff edge and sprang into space, and so perished.  

Geoffrey Blomfield, who brought the incident to the attention of historians believed it unlikely that the Worimi Kooris leapt and more probable that they were shot and then thrown from the cliff. The lone reputed survivor – ‘Brocken Back Tommy’ – probably jumped into the branches of trees below.

Ten years later the NSW Legislature commissioned a Select Committee of Inquiry into the conditions of Kooris in the colony. The replies from clergymen were published in 1846 and that of the Reverend Joseph Cooper of Wollombi Bridge and Jerry’s Plains was grim. He wrote that to the best of his limited knowledge the number of Kooris had diminished considerably but that this was due to ‘debauchery and dissipation’ rather than ‘cruelty’ of the settlers. He noted that a few young men worked as stock men, that there was an abundance of food, and that they seemed ‘inoffensive’. Nonetheless he predicted their extinction because he considered them unable to ‘assimilate with Europeans’.

---

26 Rye, “Massacre of Aborigines.”
There was a larger number of Kooris camped at Paterson, and Reverend William Ross estimated that they were about one hundred and fifty, mostly adults. He also thought that within the last seven years about fifty Kooris from the area had died mainly from drunkenness and venereal disease contracted from colonists. He noted that their former means of subsistence had diminished and that settlers were willing to pay them in rations for work but that ‘their condition is very wretched’. Ross, too thought that Kooris were ‘hastening out of the land of the living’ and that the government had a duty to form an establishment where the ‘youthful wanderers of the forest might be gathered, and taught the principles of religion, and brought up in the habits of industry.’ However, of adults and ‘full bloods’ he despaired; to ‘bring them within even the most extreme limit of civilization would... be impossible.’  

A more sorrowful account of the rapidly diminishing population was given by Edward Ogilvie, a squatter who grew up in the Upper Hunter and returned there in 1854. A friend of his, Coolan, a Paninpikilal man, told him how the ‘once numerous tribes of the Camilarrai’ had ‘all sank, dropped off, died’. Coolan listed the Tooloompikal, the Gundical, the Marowancal and the Paninpikilal as deceased groups.

**Adaptation and integration: the mundane frontier**

Not all the evidence suggests a narrative of decline and violence, indeed much of the history of the Hunter Valley is of accommodation, mundane relationships and minor conflicts. The ‘frontier’ is now understood as a large grey area both on the map and in our history and as much more

---

29 Reply from Reverend William Ross, Minister of the Church of Scotland, Paterson, 5th May 1846 in “Aborigines. Replies to a Circular Letter, addressed to the Clergy of all Denominations, By Order of the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines,” (October 31, 1846).
30 Also written Kamilaroi or Gamilaraay.
intimate and fractured than the allusion to a military campaign would suggest.\textsuperscript{32} Some of the best evidence for this is that Kooris were rapidly employed in the colonial economy as itinerant workers, maids, shearers, trackers and game keepers.\textsuperscript{33} They occupied a unique position in the economy as local labourers who could provide their own housing and food with traditional methods even in periods of unemployment.\textsuperscript{34} Miller writes of their agency in adapting themselves ‘to the reality of White occupation incorporating into their daily lives those aspects of white society which best suited their culture’.\textsuperscript{35} The adoption of European work was sometimes accompanied by the adoption of European ways of life: the Koori farmers of the far north coast furnished ‘their houses with curtains, pianos and other...symbols of European culture.’ Yet land reservations and occasional employment enabled Kooris to maintain aspects traditional living like ‘modified initiation ceremonies.’\textsuperscript{36}

George Thornton’s first priority when he was designated the Protector of the Aborigines in 1883 was a survey of the ‘fast decaying race’ and the results were very different from thirty years previously.\textsuperscript{37} The survey indicated that there were twenty-eight people living near Singleton and that amongst them there was ‘no fixed employment, except the half caste man, who is a stockrider’. The police magistrate recommended provision of blankets, government clothing and ‘occasional’ rations as they ‘do not appear to misappropriate them... as a rule they are moderately temperate in this district.’\textsuperscript{38} The situation across the state varied widely and included districts where Kooris were seen to be nearly extinct and others where they were part of the rural working class. The response from the town of Forbes, three hundred kilometres west of Sydney, described the Kooris as: ‘1 police tracker, 6 domestic servants, 3 woodcutters, 9 station hands, 3 killing kangaroos, 1 blind, 5

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{32} Deborah Bird Rose and Richard Davis, eds., \textit{Dislocating the Frontier: essaying the mystique of the Outback}, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2005).
\bibitem{35} Miller, \textit{Koori}, p. 73.
\bibitem{36} Goodall, “Land in our own country”, p. 192.
\end{thebibliography}
shepherding, 1 labourer, 10 wildlife, 23 children’. 39 At Louth in the far northwest of NSW, the Kooris were listed as ‘in their native state in the bush’ whereas at Rockley there was one ‘full blood’ woman married to an English miner who was ‘the last of the tribe in this district; is a skilful nurse, a Wesleyan, and a regular attendant at chapel.’ 40 Other responses included ‘Aborigines very fond of dirt; Idle and thriftless’ from the Police Magistrate at Euabalong in central NSW. 41

The other major rural employment for Kooris was agriculture on land reservations. In 1883 the Aborigines Protect Board (APB) had plans for twenty-five land reservations across the colony totalling 3500 acres. 42 The majority of such Crown alienations were for cultivation and most came about through a process of Koori agitation or direct occupation. Heather Goodall described the high number of these claims as a ‘land movement across the Southeast of NSW’ that was in step with the beginning yeoman farms. 43 Ann Curthoys noted that most Crown alienations for Kooris made before 1883 were simply ‘processed as they came in’, not as a deliberate policy. 44 The nature of the claims that Kooris made were different from other selectors: they used the language of selection thereby positioning themselves as Aboriginal yeoman farmers. However they also claimed a unique right to the land on the basis of prior ownership. They made claims for land within their country and it was not unusual to seek sites that were already significant like St Clair. 45

Fifty-eight acres

41 Ibid. p.15.
44 Curthoys, “Good Christians and Useful Workers,” p.36.
45 Goodall, “Land in our own country,” pp. 172-173.
The APB annual reports indicate that in 1890-91 two reserves were created at Singleton. The one at Glennies Creek (St Clair) was fifty-eight acres of which twenty-two acres were already fenced and twelve were already cleared, suitable for cultivation. There were three families living there growing maize, tobacco and potatoes and permanent houses were being built with galvanised iron for roofing to be provided by the APB. They were also given fabric, clothing, blankets, tents, gunpowder, shot, gun caps, a boiler, soap, clothes lines, fishing tackle, a plough and harness, a spade, a hoe, fencing, a tomahawk and two axes. The second reservation was at Gowrie, now Redbourneberry Hill on the banks of the Hunter and was owned by Reverend Doctor James Smith White. The Kooris living there were provided with farming implements in 1885 before St Clair was reserved and with shot powder in 1887. Throughout this decade the APB included in its annual budget forty pounds for medical attention for Kooris in Singleton, paid to the government medical officer.

One St Clair family in the 1890’s was that of Tom and Nellie Phillips who received financial support, rations and seed there until 1906. Phillips was the uncle to Jack Miller, James Wilson Miller’s father. Henry, George and Mary Perry, forebears of Victor and Laurie Perry of the WNAC today were part of the St Clair Mission community in the early twentieth century. The Murphy family lived at St Clair working the land; Albert Murphy was granted a piece of land in 1899 at St Clair. The Robertson and Saunders families were also listed at St Clair in the 1890’s. In 1894 the Board reported that there were twenty acres under crop at St Clair and that the population had grown to seventy six in Singleton, about half of whom were children.

---

49 Miller, Koori, p. 248.
51 Ibid pp. 76, 78.
Singleton appears to have had a strong Christian community which turned its attention to the souls of local Kooris. Throughout the three decades of the St Clair reserve ministers from each of Singleton’s three churches preached there at least once a month, and in 1903 Retta Dixon visited for the opening of the church at St Clair.\(^{53}\) Dixon had been evangelising at La Perouse and on the coast south of Sydney, travelling by foot and receiving no income. She founded the Australian Inland Mission at St Clair in 1905 and all the AIM’s missionaries were expected to earn a living with the community they joined.\(^{54}\) The Singleton community took its lead from Rev. Dr White who was the Aborigines Protection Board’s ‘greatest antagonist in the early years.’\(^{55}\) White was horrified by the state and treatment of Kooris in the colony, taking his lead from the Christian humanitarians of fifty years earlier.\(^{56}\) He wrote to the Singleton Argus ‘They have been the victims of our greed, our lust, our violence, our unspeakable meanness.’\(^{57}\) White lectured in the Mechanic’s Institute and published booklets on ‘The Rights of Man’ and ‘War, Should a Christian Nation Engage in it?’ and his daughters helped established the Women’s Missionary Association with Dixon.\(^{58}\) Dixon also opened the Singleton Girl’s Home for orphaned children in 1905.\(^{59}\)

The AIM missionaries who worked at St Clair were respected by the Wonnarua and still are today. The history of missions is problematic because evangelising included ‘civilising’ Kooris, teaching them British gender norms and work ‘ethics’.\(^{60}\) The AIM was very different from other missions having a democratic internal structure, a ‘non-conformist’ faith and ‘a strong work ethic’.\(^{61}\) Miller draws a firm distinction between the AIM and other missions: ‘A lot of religions ruled with a strong hand. The AIM lived with their people, they ate with their people, they died with their

\(^{53}\) Miller, *Koori*, p.120.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid p.116.  
\(^{55}\) Ibid p.103.  
\(^{56}\) Ibid p.104.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid p.120.  
\(^{58}\) Reverend Dr James Smith White, “Collection including sermons, lectures, talks etc.” From 8 September 1865 – 11 May 1900, Mitchell Library; Miller, *Koori*, p.122.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid. p.124.  
\(^{60}\) Tony Swain and Deborah bird Rose, eds., *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: ethnographic and historic studies*. (South Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religion, 1988).  
people."^{62} He remembers stories about Miss Bagnall and Miss Timbrey that told of the ameliorative effect their work had in the community, lessening the suffering caused by colonisation; ‘they took us under their wing.’^{63}

The 1909 amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act signalled the end of the St Clair Mission. The Act brought more people under the APB’s scope, increased control of Kooris by strictly controlling access to reserves and allowed for the apprenticeship of children without their parents’ consent.^{64} Following 1916 when Mr T. H. Austin was appointed manager of St Clair, now renamed Mount Olive, much of the community left. Many appear to have moved to Redbourneberry Hill in Singleton or to the Walhollow Station/Caroona Mission near Quirindi after St Clair was closed in 1923 and leased to local farmers.^{65}

---

^{62} Miller, Interview, 23 August 2012.
^{63} Miller, Interview 23 August 2012.
^{65} Blyton, Heitmeyer & Maynard, Wannin Thanbarran. p.65; Miller, Koori. p.143.
Mount Yengo.

Engravings at the Northern Map Site, Mount Yengo Aboriginal Place, Finchley’s Trig.
The Baiame cave painting.

The view north up the valley from the Baiame cave painting.
Photograph of the National Parks and Wildlife interpretation sign in the Gloucester Tops Campsite. On the reverse is the story of the Mount MacKenzie Massacre.
‘Good on Alex Morrison’: the Morrison Collection and what it means today

Very little remains of the Wonnarua’s past; in terms of physical, tangible evidence of St Clair and the Wonnarua community at the turn of the century, there is not much. If objects and places serve as emotional ‘touchstones’ we would expect the Morrison Collection (MC) to be especially valuable to the WNAC. As a rare collection of wooden artefacts from south-east Australia, held by the Australian Museum, it is valuable in its own right. As the only hard evidence of St Clair’s past we expect that it would be central to the WNAC’s historical projects. Yet the WNAC have a complex relationship to their history that values artefacts in term of the benefit they can bring to the community today rather than for their own sake.

The relationship of the WNAC to the MC is emblematic of a contested moment in the uses of history. On the one hand the MC is “official history”, housed in a museum and available online as a major collection of Aboriginal artefacts. On the other the MC does not excite the WNAC as a reminder or remnant of their past. The crux of this difference lies in the way the MC stands as a symbol of what was lost in dispossession at the same time as the WNAC see the collection for its potential as a focus for employment and community building. The WNAC have eyes for the present and future rather than the past.

‘Mind-blowingly Aboriginal’

By contrast with the static artefacts of the MC the Wonnarua have reinvigorated possum skin cloak making. The attention, enthusiasm and hope that this project has inspired are much more

67 Objects can be used to tell the history that is not documented: Neil MacGregor. A History of the World in 100 Objects. (London: Penguin Group, 2010), p. xvi.
important to the community than the MC. In 2011 Banmirra Arts ran a workshop to make the first possum skin cloak in Singleton in one hundred and forty years.\(^{68}\) The community ‘put our own map and stories of this area inside’ on the skin side, and they now hope to make one for each ‘for each family, one for ceremony and one for death, funerals, and children’s cloaks.’\(^{69}\) For the women who ran the workshop the practice was deeply connected to traditional times, and was spiritual as well as practical:

\[
\text{Our story began long ago. The Old People sent this story to us... Their message, our story, is to return the cloaks to our People, to reclaim, regenerate, revitalise and remember. To remember what those cloaks meant to us and tell the stories of our People and Country.}\(^{70}\)
\]

The senior cloak makers describe the cloaks as ‘one of the most sacred objects’ for south eastern Kooris and as ‘vessels for the body and spirit’ that ‘connect people with country and community.’\(^{71}\) Bringing together the WNAC community has been the great success of the project. The feedback from the workshop was dominated by expressions of belonging and feelings of connectedness. Throughout the responses connection was variably ascribed to ‘my people’, ‘Elders’, ‘history’, ‘culture’ and ‘country.’ One respondent said that he felt:

\[
\text{more complete. One phase of who I am as an Aboriginal man [is] complete. [It is] hard to say in English – mind-blowingly Aboriginal. Empowered. More stronger. More confident.}\(^{72}\)
\]


\(^{69}\) Perry. Interview. 13 July 2012.


\(^{71}\) Sneddon, “Possum Making Cloak in Singleton”

\(^{72}\) Stories, “Possum skin cloak workshop”
The cloaks inspired far more enthusiasm and connection than the Morrison Collection which has facilitated only little community gathering or living relationships. The cloaks, by contrast, are to be a living practice of culture that directly benefits the community in profound, very personal ways. The WNAC are more focused on revitalising their community than pursuing the physical remnants of the past like the Morrison Collection.

**The Collection’s other history**

However, the MC is worthy of historical investigation because it sheds light on the process of dispossession and the sorts of ambiguities that characterised the actors and agents of colonialism. The MC presents strong evidence of the integration of the St Clair Mission into the local economy; it shows that the Wonnarua were combining their traditional craftsmanship with settler tools to produce objects on order for Morrison. Alexander Morrison was a part of the Empire-wide network of trade in Aboriginal artefacts examined by Tom Griffiths and the MC shows that the Wonnarua were producing ‘artefacts’ for this growing market in ‘curios’. In light of Griffith’s inquiry into the antiquarian consciousness and its relationship to colonialism Alexander Morrison becomes something of an historical curiosity himself. He was a friend to the Wonnarua and yet he was embedded in and reproducing the historical consciousness that sanctioned their dispossession.

This chapter examines the meaning of the Morrison Collection. I will explore its diverse meanings for the community who made them and the man who collected them in order to draw out the different stories that the objects hold for the WNAC today, and the intended audience for a museum collection which is the wider Australian public. This broader audience for the MC has inherited ideas of progress, history and Aboriginality from the Victorian collectors. The WNAC, on the other hand, have inherited the dispossession of their forebears and cultural and community problems from a century of assimilation. The objects for them are most promising when they offer

---

chances for education, training and connection to their ancestors, rather than speaking to the
discourse that dispossessed them.

The Collection Itself

Consisting of one hundred and twenty four wooden artefacts the MC was assembled by
Alexander Morrison of Singleton between 1890 and 1905. Most of the objects appear to come from
the south east of Australia, although a few are from as far afield as south east Queensland and the
Northern Territory. Some of the most valuable items are two wooden canoes made in different
styles, a series of hobnailed clubs, decorated shields and two spears. Finding the provenance of the
objects is very difficult because Morrison kept no records and sixty-eight objects have disappeared
since Richard Mulvaney examined it in 1983. These include a bull-roarer, a collection of postcards, a
string bag and a whip handle.  

‘The dark entrepreneurs’: Made at St Clair

Mulvaney concluded that at four of the objects were undoubtedly made at St Clair: two parry
shields and two clubs. All were considered by Mulvaney to be too small to be of use, were made of
a pale wood and were light to hold. One of the shields (E077644) was still rough to the touch on
the handle when I visited the MC in May 2012. Mulvaney described the four parrying shields
provenanced to the Hunter Valley as ‘distinct in their lack of apparent function’ and the two from St

76 Shields: E077644 and E078183; clubs: E077649 and E077650.
Clair as ‘very small’. Likewise the two clubs do not ‘give the appearance of being... threatening weapon[s].’ The second club (E077650) has a smooth bulb on the end that is common to other clubs in the MC from the Hunter Region. Given the ‘great range’ that wood provides for ‘individual self expression’ it is possible that the bulb head was a feature either of an individual craftsman, or of the St Clair community.

What are we to make of these objects that were too small to be of use? Mulvaney argues that the St Clair community probably produced these four objects specifically for sale to Morrison. He points to the cottage industry that developed at other reserves at the end of the nineteenth century as circumstantial evidence for entrepreneurial undertakings at St Clair. At Coranderrk in the 1870’s Koori women made baskets expressly to sell to settlers and deliberately varied the design by including handles. Likewise at Fraser Island Mission the manager planned a thorough cottage industry including boomerangs, shields, spears and nullahs.

By the turn of the century St Clair was a hub of economic activity for the Wonnarua. Not only was it a highly successful agricultural venture but it appears that the community there were using their farming implements to produce artefacts for sale to Morrison. Evidence that supports this impression is that Morrison employed Kooris from St Clair in his printing press, and his father Daniel Morrison helped them to organise a corroboree performance in 1888. While none of the objects made at St Clair can be readily identified as having been made with glass or metal there are some from the Hunter Valley that can be. Mulvaney recorded four hobnailed clubs from the Hunter Valley that have since disappeared from the MC but that reflect the use of farm tools. Another club has a beautiful ‘post contact leaf/branch incised design’ and reflects the inclusion of European

---

78 Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation, p.32. It appears that the 2 hunter valley shields have disappeared including the one with a ‘post-contact branch/leaf incised design on all sides.’
79 Ibid. p. 33.
80 Ibid. pp. 32, 45.
81 Ibid. p. 15.
82 Ibid. p. 41.
83 Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation, p.5; “A Grand Corroboree”, Singleton Argus, Wednesday 29 February 1888.
84
designs in Koori material culture. The archaeological literature from the Hunter Valley suggests that the Wonnarua relied mainly on wood as a material, using stone only to shape objects. It is highly likely that the nails, hatchets, knives and glass at St Clair would also have been put to this use. This is strong evidence of the integration of the St Clair community into the local economy as workers and craftsmen, and it contradicts the later history of reserves, including St Clair, as places of control and assimilation.

Four further objects, two spears and two canoes, all provenanced to the Hunter Valley indicate the continuation of traditional lifestyles. The two canoes are highly prized by the Australian Museum as rare examples of ‘high craftsmanship’ from the south east. Both were unsuitable for coastal waters and thus were probably used on rivers in the Upper Hunter away from Newcastle. The first spear (E078215) has two heads, one currently attached to the body with sticky tape and the other showing black resin on its base suggesting that at some time it was attached in a traditional method. The second spear (E078213) is only a shaft but has twine on both its head and base. Mulvaney didn’t mention this when he catalogued the spears so it is unlikely that the twine came from the farm and more likely that it has been added, like the sticky tape, since 1910. The resin and the plain hardwood heads suggest that the spears were used for hunting or war rather than fishing, the head made of iron bark or eucalypt and the body made from a grass tree. It is unlikely that the spears were made specifically for Morrison as he collected mainly clubs and boomerangs; the spears are more likely to be evidence of traditional hunting methods or systems of law.

---

85 Ibid. p. 32. The club is part of a pair, the shield of which Mulvaney described as having a ‘post contact leaf/branch incised design’ but which isn’t currently in the Collection.
86 Ibid. pp. 38, 44.
88 “Morrison Collection Canoes”
89 Traditional method was twine and resin. “Morrison Collection Spear.” Accessed online at <http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/E078215-Spear> on 1 October 2012.
90 Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation, p.31.
91 Ibid. p. 25.
92 Spears made up 3% of the Collection that the Australian Museum acquired, and 8% of the items on the Budget Arch. See Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation, pp. 42-43.
'Money with which they bought opium': objects from around the colony

Morrison was part of the Empire-wide network of Victorian collectors and amateur scientists that Tom Griffiths examined in *Hunters and Collectors*.\(^93\) It was this opportunity that the St Clair Kooris were responding to and able to participate in. Morrison was part of an extensive network of collectors and interested peers who sent him material, and sometimes commissioned it. In 1905 he received a couple of objects, along with a note which read:

\[\text{I got the best I could but they are not very good. The blacks now are very lazy and I had great work to get even those I sent. The only inducement was the money with which they bought opium.}\] \(^94\)

As a travelling journalist Morrison had numerous opportunities to collect artefacts from around the colony. He was typical of Victorian collectors in that his collection was neither systematic nor representative. Instead it was an amalgamation of ‘Tasmanian convict relics, obsolete uniforms, antique guns, stamps, books and postcards’.\(^95\) The ‘miscellaneity’ of his collection was of no concern to Morrison, for whom the whole world in all its detail was the object of study; his was a ‘programme whose aim was nothing less than universality.’\(^96\)

Morrison’s antiquarian context explains a mystery about the MC: all the objects are men’s objects. The one artefact that can be reliably thought to be a woman’s, an unrecorded dilly bag, has been lost.\(^97\) Over eighty percent of the MC is boomerangs and clubs, objects that represent a

\(^93\) Griffiths. *Hunters and Collectors*.
\(^94\) Unfortunately we don’t know from where or by whom the objects were sent. Mulvaney, *From Curio to Curation*, p. 15.
\(^95\) Ibid. p. 5.
\(^97\) Also missing are 37 postcards, 1 whip handle and 1 bullroarer. Mulvaney, *From Curio to Curation*, p.29. On the dearth of historical and ethnographic information recorded about women, and the bias of these fields see Diane Bell. *Daughters of the Dreaming* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1984).
primitive masculine stereotype of Kooris. In concentrating on hunting implements Morrison was not alone; Mulvaney wrote that as ‘mementos of the wild colony’ and as ‘trophies, men’s weapons exude a more savage taste.’ Collectors were highly selective about the objects they purchased and pursued. Griffiths notes the attention given to hunting implements and especially the boomerang as a unique artefact. He claims that they both reflected and reaffirmed the view that Kooris society was centred on ‘subsistence hunting an activity that was seen as desperate and dependent.’

‘The ethic of conquest’: underpinning colonialism

Griffiths’ examination of the historical consciousness of the Victorian antiquarians is pertinent to interpreting the MC. The ‘antiquarian imagination’ encompassed history as well as the biological and geological past. Each small item in a Singleton drawing room would ultimately help to explain and prove nothing less than the ‘western vision of natural and cultural development.’ That vision ordered the world and all its inhabitants; according to the discourses of biological evolution and social progress Australian Aborigines were at the bottom of the ladder. They were the ‘the scale by which the European world could measure its progress.’ Thus the racial hierarchy was framed as natural and predetermined, the result of the progress of evolution and history. Griffiths identified this historical differentiation of races as the belief that essentially sanctioned colonial power relations: the ‘ethic of conquest.’

Collecting, as a practise required the observer to single out and examine the artefact, to objectify it. Morrison’s true objects, however, weren’t made of wood; they were the people living at St Clair and they were part of a much larger puzzle. Griffiths’ description is suitable: Morrison was ‘caught in an abstract international intrigue about people no one knew.’

---

99 Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation, pp. 40-42.
100 Griffiths, Hunters and Collectors, p. 12.
101 Ibid. pp. 1, 22.
102 Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation. 4; see Griffiths, Hunters and Collectors, p. 10.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid. p. 54.
comparing notes with other collectors were a means of ‘mediating his own society’ and understanding history and the world around him. But including Koori people in the array of objects under observation relies on, and reasserts, their status as objects and thereby their fundamental otherness. Griffiths writes that ‘collecting often was an act of distancing.’ This is the ‘ethic of conquest’ in action that positions Koori people as subject to the gaze and knowledge of British colonisers.

Arches: Acts of Empire in Miniature

Morrison’s immersion in the British imperial consciousness was amply displayed when he constructed an arch to welcome the Governor of NSW to Singleton in 1904. On the 27th of April Sir Harry Rawson came ‘up country to get some colonial experience’. He stayed at Baroona, the ‘palatial residence of Mr A. A. Dangar,’ visited the hospital and nunnery, addressed 750 school children and praised the ‘magnificently fertile’ Hunter Valley. From the corner of George and Hunter Streets the Decorations Committee had placed masts decorated in Rawson’s colours bearing flags, shields and ‘aboriginal trophies’ from ‘various portions of the Empire.’ The first arch at Elizabeth and George Street was made from bales of hay, had “Welcome” painted on it and was covered in a ‘swag of greenery.’ At John Street, opposite Morrison’s shops, the citizens had erected ‘The Aboriginal Native Arch’ with Morrison’s ‘collection of Aboriginal trophies.’ Morrison’s Budget newspaper printed the following description:

The whole of the framework was filled in with the green foliage of the gum tree and festoons of wild clematis; both sides of the front of the arch were decorated with aboriginal implements of war artistically arranged, and about half way up seats were made for aboriginal men to occupy. In the centre on the top of the platform a gunyah

105 Ibid. p. 52.
106 Ibid. p. 54.
was built on the pattern formerly used by the blacks in the early days... [and] was occupied by the gins and piccaninnies... two warriors stood... and brandished their weapons as the procession approached. Simultaneously the gins began their native songs.  

It was startling to realise that the Kooris from St Clair were included on the arch as part of the display. In the photograph are three men, dressed in work gear and hats, apparently looking fearsome and three women, in bonnets and dark dresses, inside the gunyahs. Positioned alongside the artefacts they had made and sold to Morrison they were framed by them as objects themselves; as human curios.

Arches were a means for settler communities living at the periphery of the British Empire to identify with and mirror the International Exhibitions in London, Sydney and Melbourne. There were two other known Aboriginal Arches, one in Armidale in 1893 and the other in Brisbane for the 1901 tour of the Duke and Duchess of York. Other ‘multicultural’ arches in the federation celebrations included German, French and several Chinese arches. Often made by a community, arches were an expression of local identity and represented a town’s unique contribution to the Empire. Standing on them was not unusual. Firemen in Adelaide, ‘pioneers’ in Hobart, Chinese in Ballarat and miners in Sydney all stood on or with their arches.

In 1893 in Armidale some Aborigines stood below the arch wearing blankets representing their ‘savage’ state and some stood atop it dressed as settlers. The Brisbane Aboriginal Arch was an

---

108 Ibid.
110 The inclusion of Aboriginal people in ethnographic displays at Exhibitions was not uncommon. See Peter H Hoffenberg. An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 222-229.
112 Ibid. pp. 8, 10.
enormous affair involving women, children in gunyahs with skins and dillybags and sixty men, from across the continent, in traditional costume and carrying weapons.\textsuperscript{113} The arches were a means of reproducing and reaffirming both the loyalty of the citizens and the hierarchies of race that ordered their worldview. Native plants were often included in native arches as an expression of local variety. The Brisbane arch, which from the photograph looks to be three stories high, was covered in grass trees, stag horns, bird’s nest ferns, and strings of shells.\textsuperscript{114} The plants reproduced the orderly accumulation of knowledge and when displayed alongside Kooris represented Aboriginal people as close to nature, or akin to fauna.

Sir Harry Rawson was unambiguous as to the centrality of the Empire to Singleton and the importance of rural towns like Singleton to the Empire. He declared NSW the ‘finest country in the world’ wanting only ‘population and capital to be able to hold its own with any single country in the world.’ When Mayor Bennet said that Singleton had sent more men than any other town its size to the Boer War Rawson replied that ‘although this is a distant portion of the Empire...in the loyalty of its inhabitants it is second to no part.’ He told the school children that they were descendents of ‘ancestors who fought for their home and the constitution of England... They should all feel that they were one part of this big Empire and whose traditions they...were...upholding.’\textsuperscript{115} The Native Arch served two purposes: it showed that Singleton was a successful, loyal member of the Empire and by using the artefacts of the local indigenous population it affirmed their Australian identity.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Alexander Morrison: an historical curiosity}

A paradox appears in the history of the Native Arch: how did Morrison reconcile the ‘ethic of conquest’ that structured his worldview with everyday relationships with the St Clair Kooris?

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. p.97.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. pp.95,96.
\textsuperscript{115} Morrison, “The Native Arch”.
Catherine Foggo, who spoke to Mulvaney, described him as ‘friendly’ to the Kooris and from his correspondence we know that he ‘actively encouraged and supported the Mission.’

He employed Kooris in his printing press where he produced the Singleton Budget and District Advertiser from 1894 to 1955 and he knew how to throw a boomerang.

He was part of two well established middle class families who dominated John Street shopfronts as builders, engineers and storekeepers and in his garden he kept a ‘small zoo’ and an ‘open air theatre’ called the ‘Lyric Wintergarden’.

He wasn’t ever elected to office, but he was a public man: from about 1910 he was the district coroner, a post he held for thirty years. His grandmother, Jane Glass, gave him the money to open the newspaper and when she died in 1899 her estate was valued at over a million pounds.

He considered his family to be part of the history of the area and included them alongside Benjamin Singleton and John Howe in the Budget Special Edition. In this he described Jane’s husband Alexander as ‘killed’ on his Patrick’s Plains station in 1862. He was embedded in discourses of Empire and racial hierarchy that justified the dispossession and oppression of people he knew. How did he engage in economic transactions with people whom he and his society considered to be a dying race, belonging to the past?

‘There is a moral in this story’: Charles White and Alexander Morrison

Something of an answer is to be found in a remarkable extended serial that Morrison published in 1904. Written by Charles White, titled ‘The Story of the Blacks: The Aborigines of Australia’ the style is a lather of Victorian outrage about the fast disappearing opportunity to study ‘the blacks’ in ‘their native state’ it was underpinned by the belief that:

117 Mulvaney, From Curio to Curation, p. 5.
118 Ibid. p.4; Morrison, “The Native Arch”.
119 Ibid. p.8.
The black race will in a short time be but a memory, for the final issue in the unequal struggle between the white man and his coloured brother is not far off, and the last chapter in the history of the Aborigines is even now being written.  

White sought to describe the Aboriginal society in the ‘primitive’ state, as anthropological specimens. His attachment was not to the Kooris themselves but to the knowledge that he felt should be available to him, should be preserved, of their ‘natural state.’ He felt ‘a feeling of profound regret that the opportunity for compiling an exhaustive, succinct and reliable account of the original inhabitants of these lands would be allowed to pass away.’ He wrote ‘to-day the position stands thus: The aborigines as a race have been practically civilised off the face of the earth.’ He expected the Kooris to disappear through assimilation, or what James Wilson Miller calls ‘deculturisation’. 

White was willing, however, to question the veracity of simple ideas about aboriginal society on the grounds that groups differed widely. He repeatedly argued that while the stereotype might be true for some groups across the continent, he personally had not experienced evidence of it. Of the claim that Kooris were ‘the lowest sample of the human race’ he said ‘while not questioning the correctness of the statements made... I am not disposed to accept all that has been said on the point without question.’

As to frontier violence White was surprisingly even-handed, detailing accounts of ‘wholesale slaughter by the Police’ as well as ‘atrocious massacres by the aborigines.’ He called the Myall Creek Massacre ‘one of the most horrible deeds of blood that has ever been recorded.’

---

123 Ibid.
regarded mixing ‘strychnine or arsenic with the damper’ as common in recently settled areas and called it ‘the poison of the invading army of white men.’\textsuperscript{128}

Nonetheless White depicted aboriginal violence in more gruesome terms than settler violence and attributed it to Koori’s depraved and duplicitous character, describing it in more sensational terms than those of European violence. White included in his account the killing of Grieg’s convict servant on the Hunter River in 1826:

\begin{quote}
A tall, lame, villainous looking member of the tribe named Nullan-nullan (or the heathen) crept behind him and dealt his a crushing blow on his head with his club; plastering the walls and floor of the hut with his brains.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

White’s moral outrage was heightened for violence that led to the disappearance of whole aboriginal groups: ‘cases in which no plea of right or propriety could be urged as justification... the wilful poisoning of whole camps.’ He described the Black Line as a ‘War of Extermination in Van Diemen’s Land’.\textsuperscript{130} His Victorian curiosity led him to value their society and thereby to not only lament but condemn its passing:

\begin{quote}
The poison of contact with the European race had done its work more quickly in Tasmania than in the Australian colonies – that was all. There is a moral in this story of the Black War in Tasmania for any of my readers who chose to search for it.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

His concern for aboriginal people sprang from his desire to know, observe and catalogue their society and his history both debunks and reproduces stereotypes of the day. His object was not aboriginal people themselves, but their society which he sought to preserve in a ‘simple narrative of facts’ from their previous ‘savage state’ to their ‘condition of semi-civilisation’.\textsuperscript{132} Yet there is a moral

\begin{footnotes}
\item[129] Ibid.
\item[132] Charles White, “The Story of the Blacks”, \textit{The Budget and Singleton Advertiser}, 15 April 1904.
\end{footnotes}
tone in White’s work that argues for a more complex understanding of Aboriginal society, and better treatment of them within settler society. While White’s regrets were a common refrain at the time the fact remains that Morrison’s serialisation suggests that he was sympathetic to White’s views.

_The Colonial History_

While there cannot be a single meaning to the MC: for the Wonnarua Morrison’s hobby was a means to income, a friendship and an economic partnership but for Morrison it was a project of ordering the world and understanding his place in the Empire. Morrison appears to have been one who had whispering in his heart, who was disquieted by a simple narrative of Koori disappearance. The intersection between moral engagement, everyday relationships and antiquarianism is not the history that the WNAC hear or tell about the MC.

_‘Good on Alex Morrison, he done well’: the collection and the community_

When the WNAC visited the MC in November 2009 CEO Laurie Perry said that ‘seeing the objects today gave me a great sense of ownership. The MC, to me, is a very important collection to our people.’ Of particular importance was the fact that Cath Miller was able to attend:

_One good thing to come out of this is that my aunty Cath, whose family are on that Mission as well, visited the place a couple of times when she was young and for her to be here with me at the moment is quite exciting._

Reconnecting with their past and their heritage is the major project of the WNAC, yet the MC is not receiving the attention that could be expected given its status as hard evidence of life at St Clair. The WNAC do hope to house the MC ‘in the homeland’, possibly at St Clair, and they do expect to train

---

133 Henry Reynolds, _The Whispering in our Hearts_, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998)
135 Perry, “Wonnarua people visit the Collection.”
Koori curators to manage it. Online access is important because the WNAC want ‘all our members and wider public to see [it].’ This will in part lead to a more reconciled public; Perry hopes that it will ‘create a greater understanding, not just for our people, but for the wider community.’

Laurie Perry had a high opinion of Morrison, saying that he ‘must have been a fascinating man’ and ‘he’s done well.’ For Perry Morrison was not a Victorian antiquarian who aided his community in justifying Koori dispossession. Instead he was a good man whose work brought about the preservation of Wonnarua artefacts. Perry didn’t know what to make of the arch but did register his surprise: it ‘took me years to see the Aboriginal people’ in the photo ‘which sort of surprised me because I was looking at an arch.’ Morrison’s ambiguous role in negotiating the antiquarian consciousness and the ethics of colonialism is much more relevant to non-Aboriginal people than to the WNAC and is the history that I found fascinating about MC. The Morrison Collection speaks two different histories to two different audiences. Chapters three and four will explore the way that the WNAC are more interested in how the past can serve as a focal point for strengthening community than in the artefacts themselves.

---

137 Perry, “Wonnarua people visit the Collection.”
138 Ibid.
139 Perry, Laurie. Interview with Rosa Nolan, 13 July 2012 in Singleton.
Shield E077644

Club E077649

Spear E078215
The Budget Arch printed by the *Budget and Singleton Advertiser Press* as a memento of Rawson’s visit.

Alexander Morrison
What next for ‘the lost tribe’?
Reclamation and Recreation

At interview Laurie Perry described the Wonnarua in a joking manner that captured something essential; he said: ‘We’re like the lost tribe.’ There is a deep irony in the statement and he said it with a smile. It could not be said if it were in fact true that the Wonnarua had been lost utterly. Such a statement can only be made by someone who is secure in the fact that Wonnarua identity will never be lost. It highlights the fact that underpins all of the WNAC’s projects: they were the subject of an attempted cultural genocide, and they survived. Colonial Australia posed a total threat to their society and they lived to tell the tale.

The subject of this chapter is the history of the Wonnarua as they tell it. I will sketch the themes of the account that the WNAC give of their families, lands and culture since the closure of St Clair station in 1923. These themes are integral to the WNAC community and identity today. The second half of the chapter will explore what the WNAC are doing about their history because they see it as in need of redress. The key activities focus on reclaiming and recreating their culture and heritage. Like many Koori organisations in the south east of Australia they have effectively become their own anthropologists and historians and are engaging with it in new and distinct ways. This alerts us to the true object of recreation and reclamation: their community. This all important purpose sanctions historical infidelity in the recreation projects but according to the WNAC is in keeping with the spirit of their ancestors.

‘A travesty of unjustified cultural genocide’

The WNAC’s Reclamation Committee is unambiguous that the historical policies they have experienced constitute an attempted cultural genocide. The loss of land and associated loss of culture they describe in the following terms:

To direct bloodline descendents of Wonnarua people, this represents a travesty of unjustified cultural genocide, paralleling that of many other Indigenous Nations in south eastern Australia today.

The keystone of this claim is that the genocide failed, and the evidence for it is in the living breathing Wonnarua people today. There were, according to James Wilson Miller, ‘attempts at cultural genocide for all groups in Australia’ which ‘failed and the reason it failed is because I’m sitting in front of you.’ The message of survival, and the survivor identity, is a conscious choice. Miller explained that to ‘say that they’ve taken all of our culture away, which a lot of people have said, they’ve taken away our language, they’ve taken away our song, they’ve taken away our rights’ is to say that ‘our tribe wasn’t strong enough in the first place.’ The idea of weakness, he felt, is historically inaccurate: ‘we fought to have those things.’ If the genocide had succeeded then the Wonnarua would have been ‘deculturised’ or ‘totally assimilated.’ It would have meant ‘taking the culture out of [the] group and replacing it with another.’ Instead the story they have is ‘a story of survival.’ And the evidence for it isn’t in the archives, it’s in the living people: ‘To say that there’ll never be any more Wonnarua people I can’t say that, we’re going to live forever.’

In this story of survival the past and the present combine to become something that is more meaningful than a footnoted history; the living community is writing its own history and is shaping it

---

141 In the field of genocide studies there is considerable debate as to whether it was a successful or failed genocide but for the purpose of this thesis it is a moot point. It is a matter of respect to agree with genocide survivors that the genocide failed. For more see Colin Martin Tatz. Genocide in Australia. (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1999) & Colin Martin Tatz. With Intent to Destroy: reflecting on Genocide. (London: Verso, 2003) especially chapter four.


to their needs. They don’t want a story of assimilation and loss through lack of agency or strength and they point to their very existence as sufficient evidence that such history is wrong. So instead they turn colonialist history on its head and tell a story of Koori triumph, agency and strength. This story is true history compared to the one that perpetuates the idea of Koori disappearance from Australia. More importantly it’s a better story for this community.

Nonetheless the attempted cultural genocide has had serious consequences for the community leaving them with questions rather than answers about their history and culture. For Koori, Miller ‘pieced together’ a history of traditional Wonnarua life from a number of sources. This was necessary because ‘no written evidence or oral tradition of Wonnarua legends exists today’ and there is ‘no oral tradition of pre-European culture existing among today’s descendants of the Wonnarua.’ He described ‘in general terms the close relationships between the spirits, the land, humans and the animals’ and drew on moiety kinship systems and legends which are ‘basic to Koori philosophy right across Australia.’ Borrowing from others and using what is known to re-establish a tradition is characteristic of WNAC projects and is a means of addressing the gaps in their knowledge.

Likewise there is a great deal about their recent history that the Wonnarua don’t know. About the mission and the manager Perry said ‘we honestly don’t know how people were treated there... They wouldn’t have been treated too good, we don’t have the stories.’ In light of this Koori is invaluable. Perry explained that ‘the only stories I know is what Jimmy Miller has actually told us about.’ When writing the book Miller took oral histories with his grandmother Jean Miller and simultaneously searched the court, newspaper and AIM records for the family members she named. Miller is also the last person to grow up on Redbourneberry Hill in Singleton, where his family had been living on and off since St Clair closed. His memories, the book and the DVD he produced are all fundamentally important records of Wonnarua past, repositories of information concerning their

---

family. His work is a model for the WNAC’s language and genealogy projects: extracting facts, dates, names from the archives to invigorate the heritage of the existing community.

Despite these issues there is a sense that the fundamental meaning of the WNAC’s history is intact and known; the theme or the significance of their history is that they are survivors. Perry described a direct relationship between the essence of Wonnarua history and his identity:

_We understand that there was a struggle and that struggle was hard but they survived...

and we’re descendents of these people and we’re here to tell the story, we’re survivors

and we haven’t lost our language, our culture or who we are._146

This strengthens their resolve to recover what is missing and to bring culture into their lives again. Perry is of the belief that the fact that Wonnarua culture and heritage could be retrieved from the archives and brought back to life meant that it was not lost: ‘From the nation’s point of view it’s about getting back our information and teaching it, it’s not lost, it’s not lost, it’s there, it’s now to be found and actually teach our mob.’147 The WNAC established the Reclamation Committee in 2009, the purpose of which is to gather what information is available, store it and turn it into educational resources for themselves, and then for the wider community. They are doing this because ‘connection with culture and heritage is fundamental to individual and community identity, wellbeing and resilience.’ It is pride and a secure sense of self that they intend to pass to their children by ‘celebrating Wonnarua’s unique identity’ and ‘fostering the development of the next generation of Wonnarua Aboriginal leaders in culture and heritage.’148

_‘Everything. It was all stolen. Not just the children. Everything was stolen.’_

---

146 Perry. Interview. 13 July 2012.
147 Perry. Interview. 13 July 2012.
The stolen generations loom large in the WNAC’s history as the key mechanism by which culture was taken. Perry says that the policies of child removal caused the need now to learn about their past:

_The problem with us is we’re part of the stolen generation, our family, they were taken away, we’re trying to get everything back, it’s difficult to try to bring back things. Like when you take a family album and you look at it, and after all these years you find out oh that’s your cousin... so the stolen generations got a lot to answer for... That’s why we got to gather all the information, and that’s why we got to get it all together so we can pass it on, not many of our mob know._ 149

Knowing culture and knowing family is the same thing, they are learned together. The object of the stolen generations was simultaneously the bodies of the children and their identity; by preventing family relationships the APB was also able to prevent the children from identifying with their heritage. 150 Koori children, their minds and selves were seen as the vehicles for changing Koori society. Miller writes that for his aunt Jean Miller, who was removed while still an infant and ‘knew no family life’, ‘the scars were much deeper.’ 151 Identity, like culture, is in your bones, and the psychological and cultural devastation of Wonnarua people are two strands of the same thread. Miller makes the point that the experience of child removal is intrinsic to being Aboriginal in modern Australia: ‘It is widely regarded from the Aboriginal perspective that not one family escaped from the trauma of having a child torn from their parents.’ 152 Seven of James Miller’s nine aunts and uncles

---

149 Perry. Interview. 13 July 2012.
150 Peter Read. _A Rape of the Soul So Profound: the return of the stolen generations_. (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), p. 49.
151 Miller, Koori, p. 165. Nancy de Vries’ autobiographical account is a good example: Nancy de Vries, Gaynor Macdonald, Jane Mears, and Anna Nettheim. _Ten Hours in a Lifetime: Nancy De Vries’ Journey Home_. Werrington: University of Western Sydney, 2005; See also Coral Edwards and Peter Read, eds. _The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken from their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggle to Find Their Natural Parents_. (Sydney: Double Bay Publishing, 1989).
were removed from his grandmother and Miller describes himself as a ‘passed around generation.’

It is the Stolen Generations that bring the emotional and psychological effects of history most clearly into the present, and that structure how the Wonnarua historically explain their current situation.

Having been the subject of broad public regret and apology the Stolen Generations act as a metaphor to describe the injustice and outrage felt about other policies of assimilation.

Responsibility for the removal of children has been formally accepted by the Australian nation. However the WNAC insist that Australia take responsibility for other policies as well. The argument that the WNAC have been subjects of a failed cultural genocide likewise accuses the Australian public, and makes them responsible for the consequences of it. The question of who carried out the genocide against them is answered in tandem with questions about responsibility for other past policies, especially of child removal.

Agency and responsibility are the key points in the WNAC’s history of injustice and underpins how they view their culture and heritage today: it wasn’t lost, it was taken. The most important aspect of this is that it ascribes agency and responsibility to non-Aboriginal society. Tracie Howie, chairperson of the Guringai Link Aboriginal Corporation describes how the culture too was stolen:

_Stolen Generations... goes deeper than just being the removal of a person, of a body. It was the removal of our culture, the removal of our song, the removal of our dance, our language. Everything. It was all stolen. Not just the children. Everything was stolen._

---

**Finding family and teaching children**

---

153 See the family history in the endnotes to this chapter; Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.

The stolen generations set the priorities of the WNAC. Given that separating families and teaching children non-Aboriginal culture and values was crucial to cultural genocide it is unsurprising that redress focuses on finding family and teaching children. The very first step in coming back together was finding family members so in 2011 the WNAC commissioned Kath Schilling to trace their family tree beginning with a woman called Sarah Waters.\footnote{155} Sarah was born in the mid-nineteenth century on the Allyn River, and the Wonnarua identify their Gringai heritage as stemming from her. From her ten children with a Koori man Harry Waters, there are now nearly a thousand descendents who are eligible for WNAC membership. She died, reportedly at 106 years, in Sydney and is buried in the Eastern Suburbs.\footnote{156} She is the lynch pin of Wonnarua genealogy in whom traditional life and modern history meet. 

Perry explained that tracing the family had been facilitated by Native Title opportunities. The WNAC was established in 1984 ‘when the native title act came out’ and the ‘people involved are through [our] Aboriginal ancestor Sarah Madoo.’ He said that ‘some of the people we didn’t even know... our cousins who we’ve never met’ but that ‘from that time on we know who are descendents of Sarah Madoo.’\footnote{157} Perry suggested that getting in touch with sixth and seventh cousins was something a lot of white people didn’t understand, but that it was ‘what we got to do to come back together as a tribal group.’\footnote{158} The WNAC now hold ‘family reunions’ to which maybe three hundred people come despite the difficulty of coordinating such a conference. James Miller expects to one day use them to teach culture and history.\footnote{159} 

Much of what the WNAC do they do for their children. When I asked Perry about his children he told me ‘my daughters have got Wonnarua tattooed on their backs. There’s a lot of our younger...
His pleasure about this stemmed from the fact that their identity as Wonnarua women was secure and that they were proud of it. His goal is:

...they’ll feel proud and be who they are and at least they’ll know... I’m Wonnarua, this is my mob, this is my country, these are my boundaries, this is my language, these are my stories, these are our sites.\(^\text{161}\)

Miller wrote that his book was motivated by the realisation that he ‘would be providing my son and two daughters with a rich and permanent written heritage of which they can be justly proud.’\(^\text{162}\) Insurance against further loss of culture and the means of strengthening culture in the community is focused on the next generation. Perry said: ‘We’re in the process now of teaching all our kids, developing our stories, our history...we’re recording a lot of the information so we can pass that down.’\(^\text{163}\) Even if the children aren’t especially interested in learning about history at the moment Perry hopes that the more permanent records will be available to them because ‘when they’re older they’re going to think “I wish...”’.\(^\text{164}\) A point of concern was that ‘all the knowledge holders... [are] getting old now’ for which the solution was ‘we’ll start teaching it... so we can pass it on.’\(^\text{165}\)

‘I don’t give a damn how many linguists there are.’\(^\text{166}\)

Language is one of the more difficult items of culture to recreate because it is normally learned by children in the family home. This doesn’t dim Perry’s hopes however: ‘it was disappearing but it doesn’t take much to get it back if you get the right people.’\(^\text{167}\) The WNAC published a ‘Salvage
Grammar and Word List’ of the Hunter River Lake Macquarie Language (HRLM) in 2006. The Awabakal/Gringai language has been under pressure throughout colonial history and was described as ‘extinct’ as early as 1850. The man who did so, Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld had been the student of Biraban, an Awabakal man, in the 1830’s. Threlkeld was mistaken, however, as HRLM was maintained and spoken at St Clair into the twentieth century. Miller insists that it was spoken privately but not in front of white people. He also suggests that Harry and Sarah Waters used English to communicate because they didn’t speak a common Koori tongue, and thus they raised their children speaking Koori English. The living practice of Wonnarua, Anuin and English that was heard in the Waters household was very different to the Threlkeld’s published morphologies and it is these that have informed the Salvage Grammar.

The WNAC described the Gringai/Awabakal as ‘our birthright, our cultural right, our right to identity and our human right.’ The language ‘artefact’ from the archives is now required to meet the needs of the community and enable them to strengthen their identity and culture. But in many respects the ‘Salvage Grammar’ is insufficient to the task. Morphologies are formal documents, structured by a particular epistemology and written by tertiary educated linguists for an audience capable of dealing with the jargon. This is an unavoidable fact of the evidence available to the WNAC but it means that the linguists’ work is not ‘the be all and end all’ to the WNAC’s plans for their language.

---


169 Lissarrague, Salvage Grammar, p. 7.


171 Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.


174 Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
In terms of a re-establishing a living cultural practice there is more potential for a language reclamation project that caters to the ability and desires of the community. Rather than struggling with ‘what has been written on our language’ to ‘try to pronounce some of the words’ Miller insists that the community should shape the language they intend to speak. He said that ‘there are parts of that book that we can use’ but that the language should be brought ‘around to the way we pronounce things...we know enough.’ The fact that a linguist would be unable to speak Wonnarua, despite detailing its grammar and dictionary, is crucial to Miller’s position. Given that information like intonation is not included in the salvage grammar, and given that that linguists are continually revising exact pronunciations, Miller argues for community control in deciding how they will speak the language of their forebears. The salvage grammar, while useful, is not ‘Wonnarua the way we would like to see Wonnarua.’ This position acknowledges that some information about the HRLM language has been lost but suggests that community ownership of the practice is more important than an impossible to achieve historical authenticity because it will better serve the present needs and hopes of the community.

The hopes that Perry described were big hopes. The WNAC are firmly committed to learning to speak HRLM and then ‘at some stage we can actually teach our language to our mob’ but this is not the first step. Instead Perry wants to recreate naming ceremonies where babies and adults can take a Wonnarua name by ‘matching up the words to the person.’ He also hopes to develop a welcome to country in Wonnarua and to give Wonnarua names to sites along the new Hunter Expressway. Both of these projects will be undertaken before a living practice of HRLM exists within the community and will be undertaken before they’ve developed educational resources.

---

175 Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
176 Perry. Interview 13 July 2012.
177 Perry. Interview. 27 July 2012.
Healing the old wounds

One of the key means by which the WNAC intend to strengthen their community is by providing the funds to address problems. On their website they emphasise their health and education programs before anything else; a pop-up on the home page reads ‘Are you making use of the WNAC health and education funds?’ The aims of the Nation are to nurture ‘the history and culture of the Wonnarua Nation’ and to ‘improve the health and education of members.’ They have four agreements with four different mining companies around the Hunter Valley to provide compensatory funds for community projects, training, employment, or support for small businesses. The Centennial Coal Health Agreement for example works as a ‘little medicare’ whereby members may claim back medical costs. The education fund works the same way to cover institutional fees, sporting equipment, tutoring and HECS assistance. While the WNAC is not a Local Aboriginal Land Council they do regard themselves as ‘a Native Title organisation’ set up ‘to deliver Native Title outcomes...to administer the Native Title money.’

Perry feels that his focus, his job is to support the community and that central to that is ensuring the economic sustainability of the WNAC. He explained that the WNAC’s Valley Arm property adjacent to Mount Yengo National Park was being used to replace, or ‘offset’ the biodiversity loss caused by the new railroad from Branxton. His idea was that:

---

We’ll create employment and an Aboriginal green team will manage their projects forever and we’ll get paid to do it and we also get the opportunity to sell our biobank credits to other developers so that the money keeps coming in.\textsuperscript{183}

In fact each the WNAC’s projects are, at heart, focused on strengthening and benefiting the community; they all aim to ensure their continuity as a community and a family and to make them proud of their heritage and identity.\textsuperscript{184} This type of engagement with the past is remedial; the WNAC community’s needs have arisen from the Wonnarua’s history of oppression. Each of their programs from genealogy to education and language are attempts to rebuild the ties that have come undone through generations of assimilation policy.

‘We want to do what they did’: the future of St Clair

St Clair has a long way to go; as I write it is still only a couple of paddocks with a great view of Mount Royal and an excellent fishing spot. In the next two years the WNAC hope to build a hall for meetings and workshops and a community garden in the eastern paddock by the river.\textsuperscript{185} They also plan to build a church on the buried foundations of the AIM church that remain under a stand of trees and a corroboree ground nearby. Each of these projects is a combination of re-creation and necessity. What is being built, and how it is being built is determined as much by the community needs as by the demands of historical recreation.

\textsuperscript{183} Perry. Interview 13 July 2012.

The church is ‘the main thing’ that the WNAC want to build to mark St Clair as the site of a former mission.\textsuperscript{186} Yet it’s a church with a twist: it’s not going to be consecrated. It’s going to be used to say ‘this is the church they went to, not as a church.’ The foundations will be used to build a church shaped building to house historical and cultural ‘interpretation: photos and maps and other research material.’\textsuperscript{187} The rebuilt church will be partly about demonstrating the history and partly about narrating it making it less than an exact replica and thereby of more use to the community.

There is another catch however, that undermines the possibility of the authenticity of the church. The WNAC have no idea what it looked like. Thus the foundations are a crucial component of the project; they will lend the church sufficient historical authenticity that it will have the ‘veneer of the past’ and feel valid as a heritage site.\textsuperscript{188}

What will not be built is as significant as what will: the house that the manager, T H Austin lived in will not be rebuilt and nor will the tin huts that the Kooris occupied. Perry acknowledged that the hut was not a priority for the Wonnarua but the reason for this was not historical prejudice. Instead it appears to be a combination of a lack of a contemporary use for the building and a dearth of knowledge about it.\textsuperscript{189} The determining factor in choosing between the church and the manager’s hut to house historical interpretation was that the foundations to the church remained. The foundations will lend the new building more authenticity and more meaning than the manager’s hut would have.

In light of this it is curious that the WNAC have chosen to build something that probably never existed at St Clair: a corroboree ground. There was a corroboree held, probably including St Clair residents, off Kent Street in Singleton in September 1902 for which a settler audience gathered.\textsuperscript{190} More spectacularly, in February 1888, a ‘Grand Corroboree’ performance was held in

\textsuperscript{186} Perry. Interview 13 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{187} Perry. Interview 13 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{188} Graeme Davison, The Use and Abuse of Australian History (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p. 111.
\textsuperscript{189} Perry. Interview. 27 July 2012
\textsuperscript{190} Miller, Koori, p.109.
the garden belonging to Daniel Morrison, Alexander Morrison’s father. It was billed as being ‘all of
the olden time’ and the men involved were described as ‘entrepreneurial.’\textsuperscript{191} We know that St Clair
was a campsite before settlement and it is possible that it was used as a gathering and ceremony
place but all the reported corroborees were held in or near to Singleton proper.\textsuperscript{192}

The WNAC foresee a teaching use for a corroboree ground. Miller envisions ‘an area of St
Clair set aside, not for initiation so to speak but to show people what it would’ve been like for boys to
go through this.’ Likewise he hopes to have a women’s area ‘to show girls what it would’ve been like
and a place for women to teach.’\textsuperscript{193} Perry does not expect to conduct ceremonies in the future
except Welcome to Country and naming ceremonies.\textsuperscript{194} A point of comparison is the Wollombi
Corroboree put on by the Wollombi Valley Arts Centre, a tradition that has been reinvigorated since
1990.\textsuperscript{195} The Arts Council describes the Corroboree as a ‘vital link in keeping traditional culture alive’
as well as ‘an opportunity to share Aboriginal culture with indigenous and non-indigenous people.’\textsuperscript{196}
For both organisations having a corroboree ground where they can bring the community together is
more important than absolute historical accuracy about where it is.

The community garden that the WNAC were planning has morphed into something else also.
Now, it is expected to be a viable agricultural venture, a means of making the site ‘self supporting.’
Perry insisted of St Clair: ‘it’s got to make money.’\textsuperscript{197} The WNAC hired a consultant to check to
commercial viability of irrigated farming, horticulture, floriculture, native tree propagation and cattle

\textsuperscript{191} “A Grand Corroboree”, Singleton Argus, Wednesday 29 February 1888. Accessed online at
\textless http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/7855658\textgreater on 1 October 2012
\textsuperscript{192} “A Blacks Corroboree.” Singleton Argus, Saturday 6 September, 1891. Accessed online at <
\textsuperscript{193} Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
\textsuperscript{194} Perry. Interview 13 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{195} Wollombi Valley Arts Council. “Wollombi Corroboree.” Accessed online at
\textless http://wollombi.org/corroboree.html\textgreater on 1 October 2012.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} Perry. Interview. 27 July 2012
They intend to replicate the use of the paddock where Tom Phillips, James Miller’s great uncle, grew over four thousand cabbages but it must also meet the ongoing costs of the site.\(^{199}\)

**To what end?**

St Clair is a big, long term project and the WNAC is firmly committed to it. Why? For what purpose have they poured their time and energy into these 33 acres? When I asked two answers were given: to strengthen the community, and to redress the erasure of Wonnarua history. I will address the second of these in greater depth in chapter four but for the time being will emphasise that the WNAC insist, time and again, that St Clair and all their reclamation projects are about healing their community.

**‘The New Minimbah’**

The WNAC has many audiences in mind for the St Clair project: schoolchildren, mining employees, tourists, the broad Australian public engaged in debates about Koori history, and themselves. It is this group that both Perry and Miller are resolute they want to teach; the primary goal of St Clair is to redress the lack of cultural and historical knowledge within the community. Miller hopes to travel there after he retires saying, ‘I’m good at teaching other people, but I’d like to teach our people. I’d like to run classes there, culture classes.’ He hopes that the elders too will go to St Clair; we can ‘use it for our elders to go and talk, remember that a lot of our elders don’t know much about their own people.’ All of this teaching would be a way of securing the Wonnarua future:

---


\(^{199}\) Miller, *Koori*, p.126; Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012; Perry. Interview. 27 July 2012.
‘I wouldn’t want to see it used for anything else but the teaching of Wonnarua culture heritage and the teaching of Wonnarua future.’ As for most WNAC projects this is the ultimate goal: if there is ‘something that can speak to the future of our people St Clair would be a place that could do it.’ Miller has thought of a name for it: ‘Minimbah in Wonnarua is “place of learning”... I’d like to see St Clair utilised as a place of learning so we can rename it “The New Minimbah”... “The New Place of Learning.”’

Perry likewise felt that first and foremost St Clair was for the Wonnarua people; that the purpose of the site is to ‘teach people about it, especially our mob.’ The lessons are to be a combination of knowledge about traditional culture, family history and general Koori history. John Lester agreed with Perry: ‘we want to go back and make it an active centre for Wonnarua nation people... [to] pass on culture to our own mob, use it as a meeting place and also moving to the future.’ The point is to create the ‘capacity for us to meet and share culture.’

Reclamation or recreation?

The WNAC’s emphasis on the present needs of the community alerts us to the true object of recreation at St Clair; it is the community that is being reconstructed, not the buildings or the site. The prioritising of the community fundamentally shapes each of the heritage projects at St Clair and directs them away from absolute historical accuracy. Moreover it sanctions any apparent historical infidelity. When I asked what St Clair should be Miller said it would be inadequate ‘if it’s just going to be there to say this is where the church used to be... this is what it looked like.’ The immense significance of this site is not its place in the national debate but the potential it has to strengthen the Wonnarua.

---

200 Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
201 Laurie Perry, Interview with Rosa Nolan, 28 July 2012.
202 Arthur C Fletcher, Interview with Rosa Nola, 28 July 2012.
203 Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
Reclamation and recreation are both modes of engaging with the past. They are similar to heritage in that they change people, they are evocative and they inform identity and communities.²⁰⁴ They are fundamentally different from heritage, however, because they seek to redress the wrongs of the past and its effects in the present rather than to preserve the past for its own sake. The WNAC view their history as that of survivors, structured by the removal of children and the breaking down of families. The WNAC are bringing back together the ‘lost tribe’ and building relationships that should never have broken. There is, however, precious little difference between reclamation and recreation. Reclamation suggests that what is being practised and reinvigorated was never lost, that it is available for the Wonnarua to stand up and voice ownership of it, to simply claim it back. Recreation acknowledges that some things are gone; some items of culture or knowledge have been fatally lost. The WNAC use reclamation for culture and heritage projects, and recreation to describe their plans for St Clair, and in respect I will do the same because the difference between the two modes of engaging with past is highly politicised in contemporary Australia. It is this I will examine in chapter four.

Glennies Creek looking west and the adjacent picnic spot.
Looking south and southeast from the northwest corner of the property.
The future of St Clair is about healing the WNAC community of the historical injuries done to it. Indeed all their projects are about this. Those injuries include health problems, want of income, education difficulties or need for financial assistance. They do not, however, see themselves as a community of victims passively being lifted up by the benevolent state. Instead they are survivors, hard workers, resilient, proud Kooris. They are taking their history in hand and redressing it.

This final chapter will explore the historiographical context in which the WNAC are pursuing reclamation and recreation of culture and heritage. Their projects, especially St Clair, have been formulated and shaped in response to the silence of Australian history about Aboriginal people, and against the misrepresentation of Kooris in mainstream media. The need for public recognition of both their history as they tell it, and their identity, has turned their attention to the wider Australian public rather than confining their projects to their community alone. They have also been significantly directed by the opportunities offered following the Native Title Acts, and by the debates about ‘authenticity’ and cultural continuity that these have sparked. I will examine the way that these debates construct history and culture and compare them to the historical consciousness that Alexander Morrison demonstrated and Tom Griffiths examined. I will argue that to make recognition of Koori identity contingent upon performances of a timeless authenticity is to perpetuate the historical consciousness of Victorian antiquarianism and colonialism.

‘The old people are still there.’
Before examining the historiographical meaning of the St Clair project I want to set the tone with a reminder that what I discuss is the feelings, identity, spirituality and hopes of real people. St Clair is immensely significant to the WNAC community and they emphasise time and time again that it is their home. Despite the fact that ‘we’re all over the place now,’ Perry was unequivocal that ‘this is what we call home.’\textsuperscript{205} Maxine Conaty told me that despite having lived in Sydney all her life, having ‘never lived on the land’ her father ‘always pushed us to go back home, go back home and feel the country.’ She regretted not having done that ‘while he was still living’ but her involvement in the WNAC and the St Clair project was a way of reconnecting and making up for that. She explained that her cousins ‘who hadn’t been on the land’ still felt ‘the calmness of being there’ when they visited.\textsuperscript{206} The past lives at St Clair: ‘the old people are there still…there’s a cemetery… [and] they make you welcome.’ Arthur Fletcher, who voiced these thoughts, said that the ‘feeling that our people lived and died at that special place’ allowed him to connect with both his past and his living community.\textsuperscript{207} These feelings were sometimes beyond expression: Perry said ‘there’s just something about it’ and Fletcher insisted that he ‘cannot emphasise how important it is to me.’\textsuperscript{208} Visiting the site, simply looking at the southern flank of Mount Royal elicits feelings of connectedness and belonging.\textsuperscript{209}

The evocative power of St Clair - what makes it ‘highly spiritually significant’ - arises from the history of Wonnarua people there, and the diaspora that followed its closure in 1923.\textsuperscript{210} The Miller family moved between Sydney and Singleton, as did the Perry family, but of the remaining thousand WNAC members, most didn’t stay in the area. Perry explained that he is the only board member from Singleton, and he and Miller were the only people who grew up there.\textsuperscript{211} St Clair takes on a

\textsuperscript{205} Laurie Perry, Interview with Rosa Nolan, 27 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{206} Maxine Conaty, Interview with Rosa Nolan, 28 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{207} Arthur C Fletcher, Interview with Rosa Nolan, 28 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{208} Perry. Interview. 28 July 2012; Fletcher. Interview. 28 July 2012.
\textsuperscript{209} For more on the construction of ‘home’ in empty places see Peter Read, \textit{Returning to Nothing: the meaning of lost places} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
\textsuperscript{210} Fletcher. Interview 28 July 2012.
special meaning in the Wonnarua historical landscape as a site that has been important to the community throughout colonisation. This was partly expressed by the belief that the Hunter Valley and St Clair are ‘home’ and is also expressed in Miller’s belief that ‘if we were to have a Native Title claim St Clair would be the only place in NSW where we could win it.’ The long, well documented history of Wonnarua Kooris at St Clair, tilling the soil and putting their labour into it to make it productive convinces Miller that, according to the logic of the philosopher Locke, the Wonnarua can own St Clair outright. A Native Title claim on St Clair isn’t planned but the possibility of it, and the fact that St Clair is thought to be the only place where it might work, is significant. The Wonnarua hold that they have a strong connection to St Clair that has been maintained through two hundred years of settlement: ‘we’ve survived everything that they threw at us.’ They view this connection as a continuation of the relationship their forebears had with the site. Likewise they view the return to St Clair and the teaching of Wonnarua culture there as in keeping with that tradition. St Clair is an historical site that proves the existence and the strength of the Wonnarua people at the turn of the Century, and now it can be a site of return and re-invigoration.

A second audience

St Clair will be used to teach the history of the Wonnarua people, and thereby their identity and strength, to the broader public. The many audiences that the WNAC expect to address at St Clair can be broadly categorised as ‘us’ meaning the Wonnarua community, and ‘everybody else’. While the majority of their projects focus on the first, both Miller and Perry emphasised the need to extend their activities into the public debates about Koori history. This decision arises from the

212 Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
214 Miller. Interview. 28 August 2012.
community’s need for public recognition as a minority community with special significance in multicultural Australia.

In chapter three I noted the direct relationship, for Perry, between telling the history of his people and his identity. Self narration is how we bring ourselves into being, and Perry hopes that St Clair will be a platform from which the Wonnarua can tell their story.  

*We want people to take away from St Clair a sense of knowledge. This is what happened, this isn’t made up, it’s true. [That] people understand about the original people from the area: they survived. [We want to] get people and kids to understand that there was a struggle and that struggle was hard but they survived, they cooked and they ate and that and they still survived a terrible experience even after European settlement. And we’re descendents of these people and we’re here to tell the story, we’re survivors, and we haven’t lost our language, our culture, or who we are, and to teach people about who we are.*

For Perry telling the story of his ancestors is the means of historically explaining his existence, his condition, his identity, his feelings and person. The resilience of his ancestors has been handed down to him and teaching the public about his ancestors is simultaneously teaching them about himself. The bedrock of this history is continuity; the Wonnarua in the past had the same characteristics and skills that the Wonnarua have now. According to David Lowenthal the emphasis on continuity rather than change is typical of heritage projects but it stands in contrast to the history proposed by colonial Australia in which there is a radical break between Kooris in the past and Kooris in the future. I will return to this problem later.

---


Autonomy over self narration is a crucial aspect of self identity, without it a community or person is held hostage to the identities and stereotypes imposed by others. The second crucial aspect of identity formation is recognition from others, acknowledgement of the identity one claims. The German philosopher Axel Honneth argues that respect is a primary condition for positive social interactions and the withholding of respect or recognition is a means of establishing both everyday and structural power relations.\textsuperscript{219} The silence that has dominated much Australian history writing is a means of denying the existence and resilience of Kooris in the past, and also the identity of Kooris in the present. Deborah Bird Rose calls this the ‘doubled violence’ of Australian history.\textsuperscript{220}

The history that the WNAC tell and the identity they claim is formulated in opposition to specific misrepresentations of Koori people in history. Miller is very proud of what his forebears did:

\begin{quote}
\textit{We were self-sufficient; we were not relying on the government, on the Board. We even gave to the First World War effort. We were a surviving community, fully functional. We had law and order, we had ethics and morals and we had a little bit of language too...}

\textit{They did have a strong work ethic, they knew the new way of working the land, and...}

\textit{[We] were not bludgers like people thought we were.}\textsuperscript{221}
\end{quote}

This history is self consciously written to correct the historical record. All of the elements that Miller lists are part of the future of St Clair: self-sufficiency and generating income, giving back to the local community, functioning well as a healthy community, and maintaining traditional culture. This is the spirit of the past that St Clair will replicate and celebrate: strong, adaptive, culturally autonomous and hard working. It is a story of survival, not victimisation and it is a story of strength, not oppression.


The decision to rebuild St Clair was in part taken to redress the obliteration of Aboriginal people from Australian history, the denial of the true history. For the WNAC their family history is immediately relevant to the national history. St Clair is:

\textit{part of our history... part of our family used to live there, stories there should not be forgotten, should be told to other people, what really happened. Australia hasn’t got a very good record of that.}\textsuperscript{222}

The demand for recognition of the true history speaks to a deep seated community need for recognition of ‘true identity’. The decision to correct local versions of the past by re-building St Clair and making it a cultural centre is in response to the community’s need for public acknowledgment of their identity and their history. Thus there are in fact no contradictions between the use of St Clair to strengthen the community through money making and cultural reclamation, and its use to tell Wonnarua history. The WNAC are using their very existence as people to refute the perceived mainstream version of history and they’re using their history to refute the absence of Koori people in the local public domain. According to Chris Healy the boycotts of the Bicentennial Celebrations by Aboriginal people were a ‘strategy of refusal’; at St Clair the WNAC are using a strategy of existence to dissent and contest the misrepresentation of their history and selves.\textsuperscript{223} St Clair is irrefutable evidence of these and can amplify their voice.

\textit{Speaking up}

What Perry glosses as a ‘bad record’ – what the WNAC wish to dissent from - is the tendency in history to remove Aboriginal people and to impose an exclusively European/settler narrative. For much of its history Australia has maintained a ‘hegemonic silence’ that denies the history, and the

\textsuperscript{222} Perry. Interview. 27 July 2012.
existence of Kooris. W. E. H. Stanner in 1968 called the ‘white Australian habit of denying the violence of the frontier “the Great Australian Silence”,’ an “absence of declamation.” Tom Griffiths extended the metaphor from frontier violence to the lives and stories of Aboriginal people and suggested that the other side of the coin was ‘white noise’. Following Griffiths, historians have argued that the obscuring and silencing of Aboriginal people in history involves both a diligent practice of silence as well as an ‘obscurring and overlaying din of history-making.’ The first is a matter of not speaking, not telling the history of a place, of not visiting an ancient site, of not advertising a place. The second process is about filling in the silence with alternative, usually British or settler stories. Bernard Smith argued that in this broad historical trend it is too easy to suggest that settlers bear responsibility for what was a ‘conditioned’ process and ‘frequently unconscious, or only half-conscious... part of a genuine attempt by white Australians to foster emotional possession of the land.’ Instead he argues that settlers made use of the cultural terms available to them and that responsibility for the outcome is cross generational.

Public history – memorialisation, tourism, museums, place names and public holidays – has been especially complicit in this trend. Tony Birch notes the ‘almost total absence of an Indigenous past within the public history-making project of Western Victoria’ and his derision can be extended to the Hunter Valley; Perry observed that there are ‘no Aboriginal place names in the Hunter.’ Place names as Paul Carter argues, name histories and structure the historical landscape; the absence of Koori place names in the Hunter parallels their absence from the public

---

224 Rose, Reports from a Wild Country, p.4.
226 Ibid. p.4.
227 Ibid.
228 Quote taken from Griffiths, Hunters and Collectors, p.4.
imagination. Birch examines the most absurd example of historical din in Victorian—Stieglitz, an official ‘Ghost Town’—where the empty paddocks and broken fences have been ‘rescued from mortality’ proper, and preserved in a state of decay. Rather than including Aboriginal narratives or interpretation of the site the only acknowledgement of Kooris in Stieglitz is included in the museum, framed as that which occurred before Stieglitz existed. He argues that historical sites should be open to multiple narratives such that none is excluded or made invisible, especially when historicising a site relies so much on imagining buildings and streets that are now absent.

The songline

By far the largest project seeking to redress the absence of Wonnarua people from the landscape is the Hunter Expressway from Branxton to Kurri Kurri. The Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has agreed to a number of compensatory mechanisms, or ‘offsets’ for cultural heritage destruction along the proposed route. These include Aboriginal ‘themes’ in the design and naming of bridges, rest areas, interchanges and ‘other features’ as well as contributions to community projects that ‘seek to preserve and protect cultural heritage’. The RTA has been in consultation with seven different Aboriginal stakeholder groups along the length of the planned expressway; this pleased Perry who said ‘everybody’s involved in this one.’ The prospect of naming and interpreting rest areas and bridges Perry found especially exciting, describing it as ‘a songline coming into Wonnarua country.’ Perry explained his hopes:

---


In the Hunter, there’s no Aboriginal place names...There are towns with Aboriginal names, but... no one seems to know about them. There’s not the connection there. So this gives us an opportunity to deliver that connection and our own songline; recreate that [as] soon as you jump on that highway. People will read the signs of the bridges and read at the rest areas what’s actually happening and where you can go to learn more about it so you’ll be able to teach people on the highway... [and then] we’re actually telling the story.\(^{235}\)

As with their reclamation projects the WNAC are willing to analogue a traditional Koori concept – the songline – into a modern representation of their community. When Perry called the expressway a songline he didn’t mean that his ancestors had travelled the route but that it will serve to draw to the attention of thousands of people. Again, the WNAC prioritise their community need for public recognition and recognition of their unique relationship to the Hunter Valley over the exact replication of traditional culture. Likewise at St Clair the WNAC are going to revive their association with the land rather than hold what remains of the past intact. The dynamism of reclamation is contentious in the context of the Native Title legislation and public debates that has raised debate about authenticity and identity.

Reclamation: valid and invalid

The WNAC are not the only Koori group involved in cultural reclamation. In the south east, where in the words of Guringai Link’s Tracie Howie, ‘we were hardest hit’, the appreciation for what

\(^{235}\) Perry. Interview. 27 July 2012.
has been lost and what can be reclaimed is strong. Questions about the best way to achieve this have been complicated by the still recent Native Title legislation.

The Native Title Act 1993 and the Native Title Amendment Act 1998 (the Act), have been the major structural change for Koori heritage and history projects in the last two decades; they have spurred debate about relationships with land and culture. The Act has proved highly problematic because it defines culture as the combination of discrete laws and beliefs with contextual, unconscious patterns of behaviour. The legislation proposes a difference between ‘laws, beliefs and practices that are “integral to a distinctive culture”’ and ‘the minutiae of everyday existence’ like hand gestures, dinner manners and gender norms. This is a false distinction, however, because the habitus or everyday culture sets the context according to which discrete laws and practices were and are interpreted. One example is that the Wonnarua changed their practice of care for the country in the late nineteenth century as itinerant workers and sedentary farmers at St Clair. James Weiner rightly argues that culture is very simply that which is being both consciously practised and unconsciously maintained by the community; ‘any given generation knows exactly what it knows at any given time’ and despite historical change that constitutes ‘a full repertoire’ of culture. ‘If Indigenous knowledge of country became mediated through... residence on a mission or reserve... it is Indigenous knowledge of country nevertheless.’ The Act only concerns ownership of land, and determines that ownership follows from the maintenance of ‘traditional’ laws. Traditional ownership can cease while ‘distinctly Aboriginal modes of being-in-the-world’ continue.


240 Ibid. p. 4.

241 Ibid. p. 3.
Despite its limited scope the Native Title legislation has directed the public’s attention to what constitutes a ‘real’ or authentic connection to land and hence to what is a real Aboriginal culture and identity. Justice Howard Olney refused the Yorta Yorta claim to their traditional lands in Victoria in 1998 because their connection to it had been too disrupted by colonialism. He argued that reclamation of culture, of both habitus and laws did not entitle them:

Notwithstanding the genuine efforts of members of the claimant group to revive the lost culture of their ancestors, native title rights and interests once lost are not capable of revival.²⁴²

For the public, if not the courts, the question becomes how do we ‘discern a real indigenous subject from a “more or less” diluted subject?’²⁴³ Elizabeth Povinelli argues that this is a form of ‘multicultural domination’ that inspires ‘subaltern and minority subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity’ in return for ‘reparative legislation’ and the ‘good feelings of the nation.’ Kooris have a special place in this national dynamic: ‘in the case of indigenous Australians, a domesticated non-conflictual “traditional” form of sociality and (inter)subjectivity.’²⁴⁴ In keeping with Justice Olney’s decision that traditional ownership had ceased for the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal comes to mean ‘pre-invasion’ or ‘traditional.’ ‘Authentic’ relationships to land are those where community, identity, law and history is inscribed into the landscape.²⁴⁵ This leaves no space for contemporary Koori identities, especially those of diaspora communities, to be authentic. Reclamation is by default not valid as an expression of Aboriginal identity; only if culture has remained unchanged throughout colonisation is the Australian public willing to recognise it. Povinelli


²⁴³ Povinelli, The Cunning of Recognition, pp. 4, 18.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 6.

emphasises the absurdity of the situation that leads Kooris to think ‘that the failure of the claim was the result of their failure to have and hold onto their “traditional culture” after 120 years of often brutal colonization.’

The problem for Kooris is this: how much Aboriginality should they perform in any given situation, and how much of what they perform should be ‘traditional’? If the requirement is that they have a ‘real’ identity, and if ‘real’ in fact means ‘traditional’ then liberal multicultural Australia retains the prerogative to refuse recognition of Aboriginality to most Kooris in the south east. The question becomes what is ‘traditional’? Taking our cue from the Native Title legislation we might wonder if the answer is: being significantly unchanged since before British invasion. Such a definition requires that authentic Aboriginality only be conferred upon those who behave as ‘an ancient race living in a modern nation’. Reclamation of traditional culture, even if it were absolutely historically accurate, is insufficient, less perfect, less true, or less ‘real’ than an imaginary Koori culture that has survived untouched.

What the WNAC are doing, which is not historically accurate, would be completely invalid.

Reproducing the Antiquarian imagination

The belief that Aboriginality can only be authentic if it is unchanged since invasion is a contemporary twist on an old colonialist assertion. It reproduces the belief that Aboriginal people

---

246 Povinelli, The Cunning of Recognition, p. 8.
248 Justice Howard Olney used the word ‘real’ to mean valid traditions and laws: ‘The tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgment of their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs; ‘One of the difficulties encountered in interpreting the records, particularly those of Maloga, is that many of the descriptions of the places of origin of the people named and of their “tribal” affiliation are either ambiguous or lack any real meaning.’ “Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v Victoria & Ors [1998] FCA 1606” Accessed online at <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/cth/FCA/1998/1606.html> on 1 October 2012. pp.129, 65. http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/cth/FCA/1998/1606.html
are essentially of the past, the belief that Charles White and Alexander Morrison of the Budget
Newspaper reproduced and sometimes challenged. This representation of Aboriginal people
justified their dispossession and sanctioned discrimination against them and it relies on a
fundamental misunderstanding of history.

Paul Fox wrote that ‘in the colonial narrative, time begins with European arrival and
occupation.’249 The colonial narrative presupposes an absolute, unqualified division between the day
before the Sydney settlement and the day immediately after, between the twenty-fifth and twenty-
sixth of January 1788. It is an absurd assertion. The suggestion that an iron veil can be drawn
between two days, bracketing all of Aboriginal Australia can only be an historical fallacy because
history is continuity and change. Rodney Harrison argues that archaeology and history need to turn
their attention to narratives that focus on the continuity of traditional Koori society throughout
colonisation and on the adaptation and dynamism of culture as Kooris experience settler society.
The ‘silence’ about Kooris in modern history has brought about the ‘replacement of “real” Aboriginal
people with material traces of their existence... [from] the deep past.’250 This is in keeping with the
antiquarian consciousness Charles White expounded and with the belief that Kooris belonged to, and
would recede into the distance with, the past.

Rose argues that the bracketing of indigenous society is a characteristic of western concepts
of history. The teleology of western time is our inheritance from Christianity which stretches reality
‘between two key moments of ontological significance’ – the life and return of Christ – and values
our current epoch only in so far as it marks our movement toward the latter.251 The secular version
of this is that modernity is carrying us forward with scientific, technological, political and lifestyle
improvements. The past in this account is only that from which we have emerged and that was both

249 Paul Fox and Jennifer Phipps, *Sweet damper and gossip: colonial sightings from the Goulburn and North-
250 Rodney Harrison, “Shared histories and the archaeology of the pastoral industry in Australia,” in *After
Captain Cook: the archaeology of the recent Indigenous past in Australia*, Rodney Harrison and Christine
different to, and worse than, the present; it is ‘always already about to be superseded.’ Implicit in this is the belief that we are categorically differentiated from the past and that this division between the past and the present frees us from responsibility for the past, or from responsibility for those characterised as being of the past. The failure to properly see and relate to the indigenous other is the fundamental structure of colonialism; ‘New World settler societies loosen moral accountability from the powerful constraints of place and time.’

In chapter two I discussed how the antiquarian imagination understood the otherness of Kooris to be a consequence of their backwards position in history. Consigning Aboriginal people to a static pre-history was the basic mode of objectifying and ‘othering’ Kooris. Differentiating “others” according to historical hierarchies underpinned colonialism; it was the ‘ethic’ of colonialism. To reproduce that same historical consciousness is to perpetuate the injustices of colonialism. Denying Aboriginal people their right to a modern identity and refusing to let them set the terms of recognition is to continue conquest.

Memorials or something else?

Memorialisation has been a key mechanism by which settler narratives were inscribed on the landscape, drowning out Aboriginal narratives. Following Smith and Carter’s examinations of colonial landscape making it is clear that memorials are part of colonisation because they take control of the narrative of the land. This is profoundly unjust when ‘as settler-descended peoples we inhabit a country for which other people already have stories.’ They establish a very particular relationship

252 Ibid. p.5.
253 Ibid. p.18.
254 Ibid. p.5.
256 Ibid. p.10.
257 Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific: in the wake of the Cook voyages*, (Hong Kong: Melbourne University Press, 1992); Paul Carter, *the Road to Botany Bay*.
between the viewer and the past whereby the past is held still, preserved and regarded, remembered and examined. They present us with a dead history: rather than ‘incorporat[ing] the legacy of the past into our own creative acts, we concentrate instead on saving its remaining vestiges.’ Memorials perpetuate the idea of an unbridgeable distance between now and then and they perpetuate a single narrative at a site rather than many. The structure of colonial history that Rose described is reproduced in the relationship to the past that one experiences at memorials or at other Aboriginal heritage sites characterised as ‘relics’ from the deep past. A solution appears to be reinscribing the landscape with Aboriginal histories at places like Baiame, Yengo and Mount MacKenzie.*

Memorials are however insufficient to the task of changing our relationship to history because they are a practice of public history making that is inherited from and therefore bound up in the ethics of colonialism. St Clair, as a cultural centre, will not only challenge the absence of the Wonnarua in landscape and public history, but will challenge the terms of the engagement with past. Jane Lydon has argued for a memorial at the site of the Blacktown Institution where ‘monuments and sites have the potential to bear witness, their “weight” and solidity reminding us insistently of the past but also speaking of resistance and survival.’ Lydon noted that a community centre at Blacktown rather than a memorial would shift its value from purely historical to acknowledgement for the present community; it would ‘build on its symbolic and archaeological significance in creating an opportunity for the indigenous community to be heard’ and become ‘a space...for Aboriginal stories to be told, for Aboriginal people to demonstrate that they experienced such processes as

---

260 Memorials hold memories, preventing the natural decay of social memory. See Adrian Forty and Susan Kuchler, eds., The Art of Forgetting (Oxford: Berg, 1999).
* See endnotes.
assimilation yet lived to tell the tale. Cultural centres are more likely to perpetuate community activity at a site than the past. Moving beyond the colonial narrative in public history requires a new relationship to heritage sites that undermines or replaces the historical consciousness that justified colonialism. As a practice of heritage building such a centre posits the continuing association with the land as more important than the preservation of a particular narrative.

In light of these two false distinctions – between types of culture and in Australian history – we can see that St Clair is about creation as much as re-creation, about claiming as much as re-claiming. Given that what is rebuilt is modified by what the community wants and needs it is clear that the WNAC aren’t attempting to bring to life the past exactly as it was. Is it enough that the WNAC are more interested in reviving their community or should they be following the letter of historical evidence more closely?

On the ground in the south east

This question has caused considerable conflict within other communities in the southeast of Australia. Kristina Everett describes how the assertion of identity takes different forms for different Darug communities in Sydney’s Western suburbs as cultural revival for one and native title claims for the other. The conflict centres on whether or not religion and culture can be re-made from the stories, memories, and imaginings of a people in the wake of Native Title and be viewed as legitimate. One group, the Darug Tribal Elder’s Corporation argue that revival is only valid if it closely follows the ‘academic research on language, archaeological sites and historical documents.’

---

264 Ibid.
precludes performances, singing, dancing and art making if what is being made is ‘unrecognisable from the early records of colonists.’ A second organisation, the Darug Custodians Corporation have been performing scarred tree funeral ceremonies for elders who pass away and the Elder’s Corporation take particular issue with this. Not only have the Custodians reinterpreted the practice to include the carving of a tortoise – their ‘family totem’ - they are narrating the ceremony in light of their spiritual connection with Baiame, the ‘All father’ of the southeast. Baiame, over centuries of missionary work in the southeast and Catholicism in the west of Sydney, has become a father figure very similar to God. Everett acknowledges that ‘dislocation’ from heritage and culture is inevitable in heavily colonised areas but that the ‘authenticity problem’, is ‘less of an analytical problem than a political one.’ She concludes that the most important aspect of reclamation is ‘the cultural and political power of these stories to articulate this particular... group’s identity.’

The legal representative of all Darug descendents and other Kooris living in Western Sydney is the Deerubbin LALC. They take a very particular position about traditional land ownership in their area: they ‘do not lay claim to traditional ownership’ but ‘support genuine assertions and respectful recognition of traditional ownership.’ This is because they are ‘sceptical’ that any of their constituents can ‘credibly lay claim’ to title because ‘European colonisation... occurred early... and had a devastating impact on Aboriginal people of the area.’ Nonetheless they both preserve and

268 Ibid.
269 Ibid. p.78.
270 Ibid. p.79.
271 Ibid. p.79.
272 Ibid. p.79.
support Koori culture and heritage, and are awaiting the transfer of fifteen thousand hectares of land won through a Native Title claim.\textsuperscript{273}

The authenticity problem is a deeply personal problem for some people; Chris Tobin, a Darug Aboriginal man, says that his family ‘grew up as white fellas’ and that they were ‘Aboriginal but we just didn’t know it.’ What was missing from his childhood were ‘the cultural values that Aboriginal people are exposed to normally.’ The heritage he can lay claim to is uncertain; it is contested both within and beyond his community. The question of how much culture and what sort – \textit{habitus} or knowledge – is brought into play. He bases his identity on having ‘lived the life’ and ‘stepping up to the responsibilities.’ The most important aspect of reclamation for Tobin has been the ‘belonging in the ancestors’ country, in the country [I] was born into... somewhere to drop roots... the Aboriginal connection is probably the strongest deepest one that I’ve ever encountered.’\textsuperscript{274}

Like Tobin James Miller argues that Aboriginality is a fluid thing. He described the same scenario as Tobin did, in which someone doubts another’s identity:

They’ve all come out of the woodwork now haven’t they? Ever since money came into defining just what is an Aboriginal?... And it would be an insult for me to sit down and say ‘excuse me are you an Aboriginal?’ Some people you can look at them and you can feel that they are Aboriginal, you can feel it. Some you can just say “well I can’t see you as being an Aboriginal person.”\textsuperscript{275}

Aboriginal culture is a lived and living tradition. Modern forms of oppression, most famously the Stolen Generations, are seen as Aboriginal experiences, intrinsic to the contemporary community


\textsuperscript{275} Miller. Interview. 23 August 2012.
and identity. If heritage is simply whatever awareness of our own past we carry with us then diaspora, assimilation and reclamation are authentic Aboriginal experiences.

**Back at St Clair**

It is within this context that the WNAC insists that their culture has not been lost, that they retain enough cultural knowledge, be it law or *habitus*, to be sure of their identity. The fact that they have made use of Native Title legislation and money to bring their family and mob back together and to make them stronger is not problematic for them. Nor do they insist that the culture they revive must be a replica of what was practised before 1821 or identical to the documentary records. They take the same approach to St Clair. It’s not the buildings that are important, not the historical fact but the feeling of connection to the place and the continuity of that connection from the past into the future. Between the lines we can read that the true object of revival for the WNAC is their community, their identity, and their wellbeing. St Clair is therefore more a reclaimed site, than a recreated one. This fact sanctions the transformation of their heritage, day in day out, as they see fit. It makes their project valid and authentic because it is in keeping with the resilience and adaptability, hard work and strength of their forebears. Happily this is the story of survival that St Clair bears witness to and as it is reclaimed by the community it can empower them.

What the WNAC are doing at St Clair directly challenges the misrepresentation of Koori people in Australian public history: primarily the erasure of Koori people from the Hunter Valley public history. Thus what they plan for St Clair is designed in opposition to the place names, memorials and history texts that perpetuate the myth that they are not today a strong, culturally

---


Wonarua community. Their relationship to history is one of challenge; they point to their very existence - reclaimed rather than ‘authentic’ - as sufficient evidence of the inaccuracy of colonial histories. They are inscribing their narratives onto the landscape with Expressway, the project at Valley Arms, Baiame’s cave and most of all St Clair. St Clair, furthermore, challenges the historical terms on which Australian engages with its heritage and past. It challenges the historical consciousness that produces the ‘othering’ essential to colonialism by making the site a cultural centre rather than a memorial. Instead of a site that will perpetuate memory St Clair will be a site that strengthens and nourishes the very community that colonial history would have erased.
The sites that remain: my travels around the Hunter Valley

The four key sites that this history has described are very different from one another and represent different aspects, or emphases in history. Accordingly the ways in which they have been interpreted, memorialised, preserved and opened to the public are varied. The story of Mount MacKenzie was almost lost entirely and the descendents of those involved have participated in a very quiet reconciliation. In contrast Yengo National Park has been turned into the largest Aboriginal Place in New South Wales, covered in rock paintings and signposts. Almost nothing has been done at the Baiame painting which remains on private property but open to tour buses and motor cycle enthusiasts. Locals appear to know many more of the painting sites in Yengo and around Baiame but getting there requires a four wheel drive. Later this year the NSW Heritage Office intends to inspect the site for its heritage value, beginning the process of official management. These are very different sites, serving very different purposes for the communities involved.

Mount MacKenzie

The history of Mount Mackenzie is only known to the wider Australian community because in 1965 Douglas Rye published the oral testimony of Isaac Moore in the Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate that was republished in Geoffrey Blomfield’s collection of oral histories from the Falls Country. The Manning is fed by the Gloucester River and the site of the MacKenzie massacre is between Gringai and Biripi country.

Mount MacKenzie was gazetted as an Aboriginal Place in 2002, as part of the Barrington Tops National Park and World Heritage Site. A decade ago there was a reconciliation between the descendents of both parties including the Gringai and the Wonnarua people. They have asked that visitors avoid the mountain but there is significant interpretation at the Gloucester River Camp Site. That interpretation explains the decline of the Koori population as caused by ‘introduced disease and genocide by the early European settlers.’ The community described ‘the recognition of the site and historical events’ as ‘extremely important to descendents.’
What is surprising about Mount MacKenzie is how quiet it is, how softly spoken. The history was not well known, other than by long term local residents, and has not been studied in great depth for a lack of documentary evidence. The reconciliation has been private and the site has not been opened up as a place for national or community reconciliation. This is in marked contrast to the Myall Creek massacre which was, even in 1838, a matter of national public interest. While it has been a very much a personal affair for those involved to come together and reconcile the heritage that they bear it has also become a site of national reconciliation for wrongs done to Aboriginal communities beyond just one massacre.

Yengo

The Mount Yengo Aboriginal Place and surrounding Wollemi National Park is widely thought to be ‘to the sandstone country what Uluru is to central Australia.’ The rock engravings and paintings there according to Garry Jones are ‘arguably one of the largest collections of rock art to be found anywhere on Earth’. Of the 2500 hectares that is thought to have rock paintings, and the 1700 hectares gazetted as an Aboriginal Place only 50 have been systematically surveyed. It is the largest of the recently created Aboriginal Places and features prominent cultural sites like Finchley’s Trig. In heritage terms it is ‘one of the best kept secrets’ of the east coast and for the Darkinjung and others it is invaluable for reconnecting people with and maintaining culture. The Ngurra Bu conduct cultural awareness, education, dances and corroborees there, and the WNAC run a biobanking project in their adjacent property Valley Arms.

In the tourism literature about Yengo the emphasis is on the deep history it represents. The academic literature about it focuses on preservation and protection from both the elements and tourists. Gionnni Di Gravio has called for better research and documentation in light of its cultural and historical significance. Hopefully such research would shed light on what Mount Yengo doesn’t speak to: colonial and modern history of the area. The tendency to emphasise the deep history and the current state of affairs at Mount Yengo precludes discussion of its relevance to Koori communities throughout the last two centuries.

Baiame

The cave painting of Baiame or Goign immensely old and valuable to both the Koori community and the broader population on the east coast but it has not garnered the attention one would expect. As part of the Wollemi area it could be up to 40 000 years old, and is in astonishing condition, having never been vandalised.
Nor has it been heritage listed or heavily promoted. The Jones family who own the site have allowed some interpretation and grant access to visitors for a donation. This year the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage has begun the process to list the site. It has the potential, like Yengo, to be a major tourist attraction and a significant site on the east coast, but this is as yet unrealised. It is fundamentally important to the Wonnarua and other communities as both evidence of their history and a means of narrating the Valley. Perry uses Baiame, and other sites like Lizard’s Rock, Burning Mountain and Mount MacKenzie to structure the history of the Wonnarua that he tells.
Primary Sources

Interviews


Perry, Laurie. Interview with Rosa Nolan, 13 July 2012 in Singleton.

Perry, Laurie. Interview with Rosa Nolan, 27 July 2012 at St Clair.

WNAC Board members: Arthur C Fletcher, Maxine Conaty, Laurie Perry, John Lester and Tracy Skene. Interview with Rosa Nolan, 28 July 2012, in Singleton.

Documents relating to the WNAC


Documents relating to other Aboriginal organisations

“Blue Mountains National Park Euroka Campground Webpage” Accessed online at

Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council, “Strategic Plan” Accessed online at


Howie, Tracy. “Growing Recognition of our Guringai Heritage.” Aboriginal History of Sydney

Howie, Tracy. “It’s not easy claiming Native Title” Aboriginal History of Sydney Website. Accessed

“Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v Victoria & Ors [1998] FCA 1606” Accessed

“Native Title Act 1993” Accessed online at

“Native Title Amendment Act 1998” Accessed online at


Tobin, Chris. “My Daruk Identity.” Aboriginal history of Sydney Website. Accessed online at

Wollombi Valley Arts Council. “Wollombi Corroboree.” Accessed online at
<http://wollombi.org/corroboree.html> on 1 October 2012.
**Historical Government Documents**


**Historical Newspapers and Others**


Threlkeld, Reverend Lancelot Edward. “Journal December 1828-February 1846.” Accessed online at the University of Newcastle Website <http://uoncc.wordpress.com/2008/02/20/lost-threlkeld-manuscript-online/> on 1 October 2012.


Secondary Sources

Australian Museum Website, Morrison Collection. Accessed online at
<http://australianmuseum.net.au/The-Morrison-Collection>,
<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Morrison-Collection-Canoes>,
<http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/E078183-ShieldE078183>,


