Valley—was undertaken by William Birrell as a PhD thesis at the University of Newcastle, and completed in 1970. The main body of this work appeared as a book in 1987, *The Manning Valley: Landscape and Settlement 1824–1900*, published by Jacaranda Press.

Greater Taree City Council's commissioned history of the region, *The Struggle against Isolation: A History of the Manning Valley* by John Ramsland, was also published in 1987. More local history is written than any other single historical genre, and the sheer number of publications written by local people about their localities, schools, churches, farming communities, industries, personalities and so on within the Manning Valley, as well as growing community interest in the conservation of the environment and cultural heritage, should ensure that the flow of local histories will increase.[21]

THE BIRIPI—A HISTORY SINCE 1827

The story of Australia since 1788 has been a story of black and white, two civilisations interacting in a great human drama, and yet until recently the Aborigines found no place in our history. Over the last thirty years our knowledge of both pre-European and post-European Aboriginal experience has been transformed.[22]

There are different interpretations of the origins of human settlement in Australia. Some Aborigines declare their ancestors were here from the beginning; rejecting the view that they came from Asia to the northern parts of the continent about 50,000 years ago as white history. This collision of judgments, observes Ken Inglis, presents a conflict for scholars who are committed to respecting Aboriginal perceptions of the world but also believe that the methods and findings of science comprise a universally valid system of inquiry—not simply a means to set two mythologies against each other.[23] Aborigines have a different conception of knowledge to white historians. Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that Aboriginal clans occupied the coastal plain of New South Wales 30,000 years ago (though direct evidence has been destroyed). This narrow stretch of land lying between the Great Dividing Range and the sea presented them with a physical landscape very different to the one encountered today. Aborigines continued to arrive until about 10,000 years ago, when the climate warmed, the ice caps receded and the sea level rose, isolating Australia.[24] Along the north coast of New South Wales, rising sea levels at the end of the last glacial period gradually submerged these early Aboriginal campsites. The climate and sea levels stabilised about 6,500 years ago.The diverse natural environments along the coastal plain of northern New South Wales—rainforests, river floodplains, heath lands, sandy plains, dunes, swamps, estuaries and tidal reaches of the foreshores—provided local Aboriginal tribes with abundant food sources, such as plants, birds, mammals, fish, shellfish and crustaceans. The wide range of foods available on the seashore and coastal plains were capable of supporting a higher population density—1.5 per square kilometre—than more arid lands west of the Dividing Range.[25]

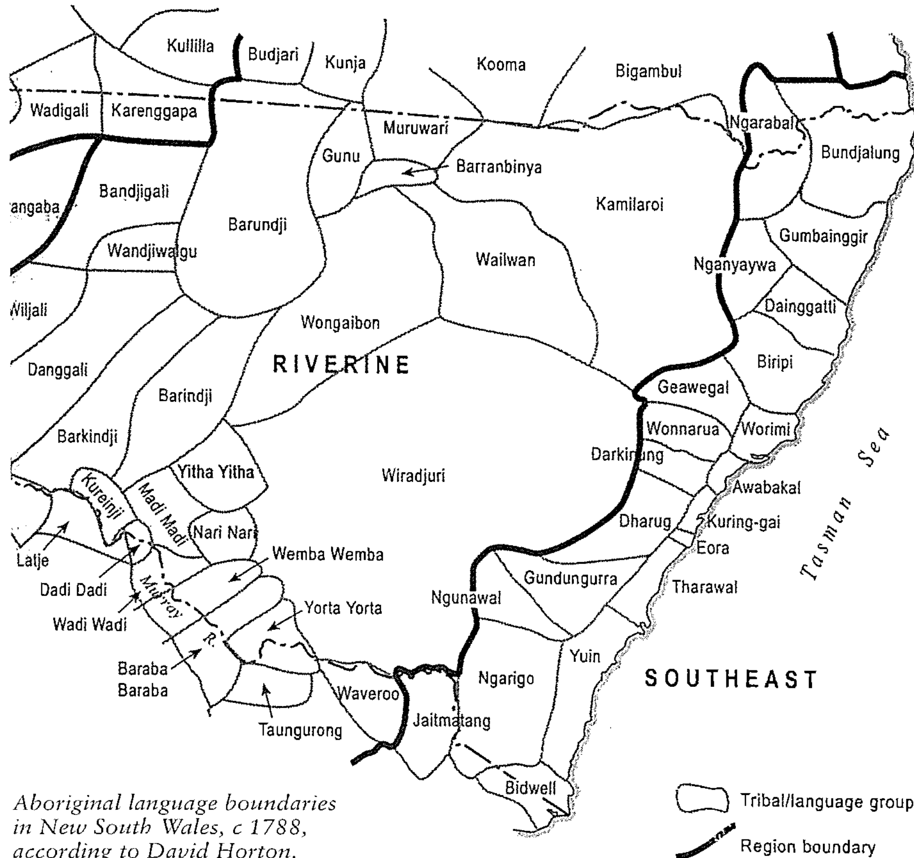
21 V. Peel and D. Zion, "The Local History Industry", pp208–14 in J. Rickard and P. Spearritt (eds), *Packaging the Past? Public Histories*, Australian Historical Studies, 1991.

22 Richard Broome, "The Politics and Ethics of Writing Indigenous Histories", *Melbourne Historical Journal*, vol 33 (2005), p6. The journal *Aboriginal History* was initiated at ANU in 1977, supporting scholarship in the field.

23 Ken Inglis, *Observing Australia 1959 to 1999*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p154.

24 J.P. White and R. Lampert, "How many people?", D.J. Mulvaney and J.P. White (eds), *Australians to 1788*, pp115–17.

25 Gretchen Poiner, "Coastal Aborigines of New South Wales", pp14–24 in *The Aborigines of New South Wales*, reprint from *Parks and Wildlife*, vol 2, no 5.



Aboriginal language boundaries in New South Wales, c 1788, according to David Horton.

Norman Tindale (1900–1993) sought to establish that Aboriginal groups related territorially to particular regions, and he first published his tribal map of Australia in 1940. The concept of tribal boundaries he introduced demonstrated that Aboriginals were linked by culture, kinship and language, and bound to the land geographically and ecologically. Tindale, an anthropologist, identified 586 Aboriginal cultural linguistic groups in Australia and modified tribal boundaries after a further thirty years of field work, which was then published as *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, in 1974.[26] Critics of Tindale's work argue its ambitiously broad categorisation does not fit the complexity of Aboriginal social and territorial relationships. Two other scholars in the late twentieth century also set out to map indigenous people for the whole of Australia—Steve Davis (1992) and David Horton (2000).[27] Horton, for example, enlarges Tindale's tribal boundaries of the Biripi to the north and south, and places the Biripi further inland. All these attempts at mapping Aboriginal Australia have been contentious; Elspeth Young has observed that "the definition of Aboriginal territoriality according to non-Aboriginal concepts of boundaries (precise lines on the ground) is fraught with danger. It is generally not appropriate for Aboriginal people".[28]

26 N.B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits and Proper Names*, Canberra, 1974.

27 Kevin Blackburn, "Mapping Aboriginal nations: the 'nation' concept of late nineteenth century anthropologists in Australia", *Aboriginal History*, vol 26 (2002), pp131–58.

28 Peter Sutton (ed), Country: Aboriginal Boundaries and Land Ownership in Australia, monograph no 3, *Aboriginal History*, Canberra, 1995, p134.

British colonisation of Australia was posited in early narratives as a process of settlement, the term "settlement" connoting a peaceful occupation, expansion and development that occurred in an effectively empty land. More recent scholars, however, have rendered colonisation as an act of invasion, a conquest that dispossessed indigenous populations, a more ancient culture, from their lands and resources and created an entangled history of indigenous and settler peoples in Australia.

The British drew a distinction between conquered and settled colonies. Australia was treated as a settled colony, one in which the territory acquired by the Crown was regarded as unoccupied, that is "terra nullius", without any settled inhabitants.[29] As Aboriginals "neither cultivated or occupied the land in the sense of individual possession" under British law, they had no proprietary interest in their land. The central tenets of colonialism were invasion and dispossession, and where settler societies were colonised by the British, "wholesale displacement, reduction in numbers and forced assimilation of native peoples" occurred.[30]

Colonialism was uncompromising and intransigent, a practice of "take all and give nothing". Among the baggage the British brought to the colonies was a social system that embraced accumulation of capital, the exploitation of wage labour, acquisitive individualism, hierarchy and inequality. The discipline of wage labour was not a part of Aboriginal culture when vast areas were opened up for sheep in Australia. The land was cleared of a nomadic people who maintained a balance between their populations and available resources. Their way of life was an impediment to the development of pastoralism.

There was, however, another view of this rapid "takeover" of Aboriginal lands. The older tradition of evangelical Christianity, which crusaded against the slave trade and convict transportation, was at the forefront of a series of investigations into colonial practices and policies. These investigations produced policies which brought the colonial authorities into direct confrontation with pastoral interests, compelling the imperial government to weigh humanitarian concerns against economic interests.[31]

The House of Lords established a select committee in 1837 to enquire into the impact of colonisation in Australia, South Africa and North America. The report found it had brought disastrous consequences for their indigenous peoples, and urged the British government to assume moral responsibility for their physical and spiritual well-being. Their conclusion was based on the belief that indigenous inhabitants of every country possessed an "incontrovertible right" to the soil. But the Christian humanitarian crusaders did not challenge colonisation itself, only its methods.[32]

The appointment of missionaries during the 1830s and 1840s helped curtail frontier violence. The reaction of Governor Gipps to brutal offensives in northern New South Wales in 1838 belonged to the evangelical Christian tradition. The vast majority of the European population, including radical dissenters, regarded

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29 M. Borch, "Rethinking the Origins of Terra Nullius", *Australian Historical Studies,* no 117, 2001, pp222–29.

30 Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1997, p403.

31 David Roberts, "The Denial of Aboriginal Rights", p28 in M. Crotty and D. Roberts (eds), *The Great Mistakes of Australian History*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006.

32 British House of Commons, Sessional Papers, Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) with minutes of evidence, vol 11, 1837, no 425, 212pp.

Aboriginals as backward and benighted people who embraced neither cultivation nor Christianity.[33] Two attempts made through private church ventures in New South Wales, to set up missions to "civilise" Aboriginals at Lake Macquarie (1825–1841) and Wellington (1831–1842), had closed by the early 1840s.

Aboriginal societies in 1788 had a complex land tenure system in which responsibilities for tracts of land rested in knowledge of the songs, myths, dances and ceremonies associated with particular places. Language was commonly mapped onto the territory so that in being affiliated to a language through both parents, a person was also related to the land through conception places, birthplaces, initiation places or naming places, or through personal or collective totemic associations. Aboriginals could distinguish what part of the country another came from by listening to their dialect.[34] Maps of language and tribal distributions along the north coast indicate the tribal and linguistic boundaries of the Bundjalung, Gumbainggir, Kamilaroi, Dhan-Gadi, Biripi, and Worimi. The lands of the Dhan-Gadi stretched from Point Lookout down to the headwaters of the Macleay River, and inland to the Dividing Range and Walcha. South of Dhan-Gadi territory the traditional tribal boundaries of the Biripi, on Tindale's map, extended from the Hastings River, westward to Rollands Plains and Yarrowitch and southwards to the Manning and Wallamba rivers, covering 7,300 square kilometres.[35] As previously indicated David Horton's map of Aboriginal Australia greatly enlarged the territory of the Biripi, stretching from the Great Divide to the coast, and from near Kempsey in the north to Forster in the south. Apart from these tribal boundaries, the Biripi, like other coastal groups, used both the mountains and the sea, and probably moved seasonally between them to some degree.

In 1983 economic historian Noel Butlin constructed demographic and ecological models in an endeavour to provide an estimate of how many Aboriginal people there were at the time of settlement. This hypothetical work suggests an indigenous Australian population of 750,000 in 1788, of which about 250,000 lived in New South Wales and Victoria—as many as A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Australia's first Professor of Anthropology, suggested for the whole continent in 1930. By extrapolating from the Butlin model the Aboriginal population of New South Wales and Victoria had declined to 75,000 by 1840.

Butlin postulates a New South Wales north coast Aboriginal population of between 20,000 to 25,000 at first contact, and between 6,000 and 7,500 by 1840. He considered smallpox to be the major cause of Aboriginal depopulation; it was the most lethal of acute infectious diseases, but there were other introduced diseases, and their adverse impact on indigenous people should not be underestimated. This speculative work suggests levels of devastation on an unprecedented scale.[36]

Diseases endemic in Europe (smallpox, typhoid, gonorrhoea, syphilis, tuberculosis, diptheria, whooping cough, influenza, pneumonia, measles), when introduced to Australia by Europeans, had a catastrophic impact as no natural immunity existed in Aboriginal people to these diseases; they were the major causes

33 Op cit, note 31, pp28–29.

34 N.B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits and Proper Names*, Canberra, 1974.

35 N.B. Tindale's catalogue lists alternative names of the Biripi as Birpai, Birripai, Birripi, Brippai, Bripi, Birrapee, Biripi and Waw-wyper. See p192 in David Horton (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Press, Canberra, 1994.

36 N.G. Butlin, *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of South Eastern Australia, 1788–1850*, Sydney, 1983, pp147–53.

of morbidity and death, and, in the absence of medical care, malnutrition and secondary infection further contributed to mortality rates.

About half the indigenous Sydney population, between 500 and 1,000 people, died from the 1789 smallpox epidemic. By 1827, Aboriginals living within the Cumberland Plain, deprived of their lands, had become largely dependent on Europeans.[37] In that year "Humanitas" wrote that he considered the tragic population decrease around Sydney was due to the Aboriginals being deprived of their natural sources of sustenance and driven from their most productive land, and to contamination by European vices and disease.[38] Remnant Sydney tribes subsisted by fishing, performing odd jobs and helping at harvest time.

Very few of the Wonnarua, original inhabitants of the Hunter, had survived by 1835 when T.L. Mitchell noted Aboriginals had almost disappeared from the region. In the mid-1830s the New England Tablelands, occupied by the Anewan, had become a new frontier for settlers, and north-west to the Liverpool Plains the Kamilaroi were violently dispossessed. Reverend L.E. Threlkeld commented in his 1837 report on the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Mission that only three members remained from a tribe which four years earlier numbered 164.[39] Venereal disease was spread to the indigenous population by convict workers from the A.A. Company consorting with Aboriginal women. Activity which, according to John Macarthur, had "put a stop to the increase in the black population" in 1828, when smallpox was reported in the Upper Hunter.[40]

The A.A. Company was dependent upon Aboriginal assistance; they supplied their fish catch to Europeans, provided firewood, and were constantly used as messengers between villages. "The Black population about the Gloucester and Barrington are a very superior race of people to those, even about Port Stephens, as to their personal appearance", Sir William Parry, a commissioner in charge of enterprises of the A.A. Company from 1829 to 1834, recorded in his journal. The Port Stephens clan feared the northern tribe (Biripi) and took the opportunity to use A.A. Company intervention to settle old scores.[41] Aboriginal peoples frequently helped travelling Europeans in the bush, made them guests in camps, and taught them to make canoes, fish and select edible plants. Alexander Harris recalled a time when he was lost, hungry and exhausted, that Aboriginals fed him baked fish and water sweetened with honey, and covered him with two large possum cloaks for warmth at night.[42]

Further north, between Dungog and the Manning River, smallpox claimed the lives of an unknown but certainly immense number of Aboriginals in the period between 1829 and 1831. Among unvaccinated populations, the fatality rate from smallpox reached as high as twenty five to thirty per cent in some groups. A disproportionately large percentage of women and children died, producing an unbalanced age and gender structure. The denser and more sedentary Aboriginal

37 D.W.A. Baker, *The Civilised Surveyor: Thomas Mitchell and the Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp17–18.

38 *The Australian*, 12 September 1827.

39 R.H.W. Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists: Aborigines and Colonial Society in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1974, pp17–19.

40 Damaris Bairstow, *A Million Pounds, A Million Acres: The Pioneer Settlement of the Australian Agricultural Company*, self-published, 2003, p91.

41 Ibid p288, p291.

42 A. Harris, *Settlers and Convicts: Or Recollections of Sixteen Years Labour in the Australian Backwoods*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1953, p173. First edition, 1847.

populations on the north coast camping near coastal river systems were especially vulnerable to the spread of infectious diseases. The research of Butlin and Judy Campbell suggests local Aboriginal populations suffered heavy loss of life from both the 1789 and 1829/31 smallpox epidemics, as well as other viral attacks that raged in between.[43] Some idea of the magnitude of the numerical decline of Aboriginal tribes between the Hunter and Manning can be found in the reports of police magistrates William Gray of Port Macquarie, Brown of Dungog and medical practitioner McKinlay in 1835. In the Port Macquarie police district, which embraced the Manning, Gray reported the Aboriginal population had more than halved between 1835 and 1845 due principally to "a species of consumption which carries them off very quickly". In the Dungog district depopulation of local tribes was also occurring. It was reported "variolous disease" had spread through camps on stations, and on the edge of towns, killing half the Aboriginals in 1835, and during the next few years it was claimed a further thirty five to forty per cent of the population, particularly women and children, died from epidemics.[44] There are some contemporary European estimates of the size of local Aboriginal populations on the north coast in the early post contact period, and they seem to lend validity to Butlin's tentative figures. The overwhelming impression of early European accounts was that the north coast was well-populated. William Gray considered 750 lived in the Port Macquarie police district in 1835, and Clement Hodgkinson thought there were about 640 to 800 Aboriginals on the Macleay about 1841. It was claimed 600 Aborigines lived in the New England region at first contact. John Guilding observed as many as 300 Aborigines in 1828 near the mouth of the Manning while a recent estimate by Birrell of 800 to 1,000 Biripi at first contact seems probable when prognostications about the size of neighbouring coastal tribes are considered. European expansion in the Manning was at the cost of Biripi dispossession. A little further north, Townsend estimates that the Ngaku on the Nambucca had declined from 900 in 1788 to 160 by 1845.[45] John Allan believed the Biripi population was more concentrated downriver, due to the greater food supply near the sea, compared to the inland economy. The number of Kamilaroi of the north-west slopes and plains declined from 10,000 in 1826 to 1,000 in 1856, a loss of ninety per cent of the population, and they had become, in William Ridley's opinion, wholly dependent on European handouts.[46] T.L. Mitchell believed profound ecological changes brought by herds of cattle, and exclusion of the Kamilaroi from the best river sites, were themselves "sufficient to produce the extirpation of the native race". As the number of sheep and cattle increased in 1848, Mitchell noted the Aboriginal population declined rapidly.[47]

43 Judy Campbell, "Smallpox in Aboriginal Australia 1829–31", *Historical Studies*, no 81 (1983), pp555–56; Judy Campbell, "Smallpox in Aboriginal Australia, the early 1830s", *Historical Studies*, no 84 (1985), pp336–58; N.G. Butlin, *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of South Eastern Australia, 1788–1850*, Sydney, 1983, pp147–53; N.G. Butlin, "Macassans and Aboriginal Smallpox: the 1789 and 1829 Epidemics", *Historical Studies*, no 84 (1985), pp315–35.

44 Select Committee on the Aborigines 1845, NSWLC, 2, 969; letters from Dr E.M. McKinlay J.P. (Dungog).

45 Norma Townsend, *Valley of the Crooked River: European Settlement on the Nambucca*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1993, p8.

46 Minutes of evidence before Select Committee on the Aborigines 1845, NSWLC, 2, 943; W.K. Birrell, *The Manning Valley: Landcape and Settlement 1824–1900*, Jacaranda Press, Melbourne, 1987, p31; Colonial Secretary Index Letters, Guilding to Dawson, 28/7847 4/1994; R.B. Walker, *Old New England*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1966, p2; Clement Hodgkinson, *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*, T. & W. Boone, London, 1845, p222.

47 Michael O'Rourke, *The Kamilaroi Lands: North-central New South Wales in the early 19th century*, self-published, Canberra, 1997, p204, p207.

As the first settlers penetrated the New South Wales north coast river basins in the late 1820s, they were witnessing tribes that had experienced dramatic depopulation which must have had a catastrophic effect on tribal activities, spiritual life and culture. For thousands of years their traditional hunting and foraging on the warm coastal valleys was based on a wide range of foods available from woodlands, rainforests, rivers and estuaries as well as the sea. The once 800 to 1,000 strong Biripi in 1788, who had developed a unique way of life in the Manning Valley for perhaps 6,000 to 9,000 years, were unable to survive white encroachments and disease, and under Butlin's model their numbers had fallen to between only 240 to 300 by 1840, making European occupation of their lands easier.[48]

As areas on the north coast from 15,000 to 6,000 years ago now lie beneath the sea, together with an absence of extensive excavation work, it is not possible to determine how long the Biripi occupied the Manning River basin and its valleys. Most archaeological evidence discovered on the north coast is, in Aboriginal terms, relatively recent. The oldest archaeological evidence of occupation, flake tools, discovered by Isobel McBryde at Seelands, the wooded valley of the Clarence River, dates from 6,500 years ago.[49]

Recently archaeologists, working with local Aboriginal people, discovered and recorded archaeological sites of pre-contact people within the Manning region—scarred and carved trees, rock engravings, quarries, middens, burial sites and bora and ceremonial sites. The majority of sites consist of flaked stone artefacts and shell middens.[50]

After the settlers seized the best land, there was a short period of peaceful co-existence between the newcomers and the indigenous population. William Wynter enjoyed an amicable relationship with the Biripi, his young son William accompanied them on hunting expeditions, and later became fluent in the Biripi tongue. Cedar cutters arrived on the Manning in 1834 but little is known of their relations with the Biripi other than they did not compete with Aboriginal land use, and quickly moved on.

The Biripi did not take flight when the battle for the Manning began, but engaged in social relations with the intruders through reciprocal trade and sexual relations with whites, although often not acknowledged. Feuds and vendettas often arose after local clans, deprived of their usual food by spreading flocks and herds, responded by killing and eating cattle and sheep; reprisals from settlers were swift. Early relations between settlers and Aboriginals were, for the most part, exploitative and brutal. Feuds also arose over continuing sexual relations with Aboriginal women. Thomas Mitchell thought much Aboriginal warfare resulted from a desire to capture women; as Aboriginals had virtually no property, all that one tribe could take from another was their women.[51]

The abundance of food resources along the north coast enabled "each tribe to subsist on a small tract of land",[52] Hodgkinson wrote, those living inland roaming

48 An estuarine site at Bobadeen in the Hunter River valley is 8,000 years old. Sylvia Hallam, "Changing Landscapes and Societies: 15,000 to 6,000 years ago", p59 in D.J. Mulvaney and J.P. White (eds), *Australians to 1788*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1988.

49 I. McBryde, *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England*, Sydney, 1974, p229.

50 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, *Mapping attachment, A spatial approach to Aboriginal post-contact heritage*, Department of Environment and Conservation, 2004, pp4–6.

51 D.W.A. Baker, *The Civilised Surveyor: Thomas Mitchell and the Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p36.

52 Clement Hodgkinson, *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*, London, 1845, p220.

over a much larger territory. Henderson estimated the extent of Aboriginal territory; "each tribe", he noted, "has a beat of not more than twenty miles in diameter from which they never move, unless on certain occasions, when they visit the territory of a neighbouring tribe for the purpose of a fight or a ceremony".[53]

The clan, the basic unit of Aboriginal life on the Manning, early settlers observed, ranged from a small number of people to groups of up to forty or fifty people centred around married and related individuals. Dispersed throughout the valley, each clan or family group had a recognised territory. The Wallaby clan from along the Lansdowne River camped at Durambah and in the mountain caves of Cross mountain; their burial ground was along Koola Creek.[54] On the Upper Manning, Allan identified different clans at Dingo Creek, Larry's Flat, No 1 Station and Gangat, each with their own totem, and noted the Aboriginal population "down the river" was more numerous than in the Upper Manning. The Crab clan occupied land near Purfleet. Ella Simon's great grandmother was a member of the Opossum clan and her husband was from the Dingo clan.[55] Perhaps in 1788 there were as many as twenty or twenty five small clans in the Manning.[56] Relationships between the Manning clans, whether friendly or hostile, depended on alliances which shifted; neighbours supplied wives, and sometimes conflict arose over the failure to deliver or by deaths attributed to sorcery.

John Oxley observed the Biripi in the escarpment and foothill country, and recent survey work indicates trade routes between the tableland and coastal tribes. The extent of Aboriginal use of fire as a land management device, and its impact on the environment is contested. Benson and Redpath argue convincingly that Aborigines would have applied a mosaic burning pattern to some types of vegetation in the pre-European landscape including grasslands and woodlands, and they also explain Aboriginal use of fire for other purposes such as a weapon or defence against early settlers. Nevertheless, shrubby forest and woodlands, heaths, inland Acacia, chenopod shrublands, alpine woodlands and herbfields are unlikely to have been burnt frequently. They also maintain that in shrubby forests, including heath, many species of plants will become extinct if they are burnt every few years. This type of vegetation includes coastal sands and escarpment and tableland granites and sandstones.[57] The Biripi generally slept in the open but if camp was set up, gunyahs were erected by placing sheets of stringybark over a sapling supported by two forked sticks. Biripi men wore a sort of sash around their loins made of threads of possum fur, and a tassel of native cat strips, and often a fine string net on their forehead. Women's clothing generally consisted of a possum skin cloak fastened neatly across the chest by a currapah, a pademelon leg bone.[58] Young children were carried in a knitted bag, slung over the women's backs. Women's hair was typically a mop, but Ella Simon distinguished hill country women, with their long black hair, from the short, ropey hair of their coastal counterparts.[59]

53 John Henderson, *Excursions and Adventures in New South Wales*, vol 2, W. Schoberl, London, 1851, p108.

54 W.F. Connors, *Pioneering Days around Taree*, self-published, 1985, p91.

55 Ella Simon, *Through My Eyes*, Rigby, 1978, p22, p124.

56 John Allan, "The Early Days of the Manning", p31 in F.A. Fitzpatrick, *Peeps into the Past*, Cumberland Argus, 1914.

57 J.S. Benson and P.A. Redpath, "The nature of pre-European native vegetation in south-eastern Australia", *Cunninghamia*, vol 5, no 2 (1997), pp285–328; a critique of D.G. Ryan, J.R. Ryan and B.J. Starr, *The Australian landscape – observations of explorers and early settlers*, Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Committee, Wagga Wagga, 1995.

58 John Allan, op cit, note 56, p32, p42, p54. The government issue blanket later replaced the possum skin cloak.

59 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p23.

Possum or wallaby skin rugs, and cloaks, and carved trees were commonplace art forms across the Manning for millennia pre-European contact, but only three of these rugs and cloaks have survived in Australia.[60] A possum skin rug was made from as many as eighty pelts sewed together with sinews and bone awls. Across temperate Australia stitched cloaks of kangaroo or possum skins—usually worn with the fur against the skin, but reversed in wet weather—were fastened by pins made by trimming the solid upper end of the fibula to a tapering point. The rapid disappearance of the cloak from the colonial landscape suggests the profound effect that dispossession by white society was having on Aboriginal Australia as native game on which indigenous populations were dependant were being replaced by flocks of sheep and herds of cattle.

The phenomenon of Aboriginal depopulation was explained by N.G. Butlin in terms of three major "disturbances": imported diseases, the "withdrawal" of resources, and killing. Research by historian Richard Broome indicates that deaths of Europeans and Aborigines from frontier conflicts claimed nothing like the total number of Aborigines who succumbed to European introduced diseases. About 20,000 Aborigines died in frontier conflicts, according to Henry Reynolds, and about 3,000 Europeans. These figures, Reynolds reflected several years later, were little better than an informed guess.[61]

Resistance to European settlement hardened attitudes and relations towards Aboriginals. According to anthropologist Barry Morris, the northern neighbours of the Biripi, the Dhan-Gadi of the Macleay River, pursued a constant and systematic plan of cattle spearing, inflicting heavy losses on stock populations. The response from the Macleay pastoralists was to call for protection from the Native Police Force, formed to come to the aid of squatters on the limits of the frontier. Resistance by the Dhan-Gadi came to an end between the years 1856 and 1858, when the Native Police were stationed at Nulla Nulla Creek. By 1858 the population of the Dhan-Gadi was reduced to about one-sixth of its former size.[62]

Feuds between settlers and the Aboriginal population occasionally broke out into more generalised conflicts. On A.A. Company land at Belbora in 1833 damper laced with arsenic was given to a group of Biripi by stockmen allegedly besieged in a hut. Hearsay evidence of Aboriginal poisonings in the 1830s was widespread. Quantities of arsenic or mercuric compounds used for treating sheep diseases were readily obtainable, and easy to mix in dampers or cakes.[63] The naming of Belbora, an Aboriginal word for a place of evil, alludes to this atrocity.

At Mt McKenzie, near Rawdon Vale, on the Barrington River in 1835, Aboriginals speared five of the convict shepherds on Robert McKenzie's property. The spearings were in response to loss of hunting and fishing grounds, as flocks of sheep and herds of cattle replaced native game, destroyed native vegetation and fouled waterholes. Punitive expeditions were organised to hunt down the offenders; a band of time-expired soldiers retained by the A.A. Company rode out with settlers from the Williams and Allyn Rivers. They found Aboriginals camped near Mt McKenzie and killed them, they also gunned down another group who made a stand on a flat

60 D.J. Mulvaney, "The End of the Beginning: 6,000 years ago to 1788", p66, p105 in D.J. Mulvaney et al (eds), *Australians to 1788*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1987.

61 Richard Broome, "The statistics of frontier conflict", pp88–98 in B. Attwood and S.G. Foster (eds), *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, 2003.

62 David Horton (ed), *Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, vol 1 (1994), pp287–89; Barry Morris, *Domesticating Resistance: The Dhan-Gadi Aborigines and the Australian State*, Berg, Oxford, 1989, p22.

63 R.H.W. Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists: Aborigines and Colonial Society in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1974, p49.

on the Bowman River.[64] Evidence of these incidents in 1833 and 1835 rests largely on a resilient tradition of settler oral testimony; the number of Aboriginals actually killed are unknown.[65] These two accounts of frontier conflict were too distant from centres of population to receive proper reportage, and we cannot be certain about what actually happened in either account. In the first decade or so of contact punitive expeditions of great ferocity were a fact of frontier life, and it seems when shepherds and hut keepers or their livestock were threatened or harmed, settlers were prepared to administer their own brand of summary justice. On the Manning frontier there is a "dark figure" of unrecorded and/or uncorroborated incidents, and the number of unrecorded Aboriginal deaths can never be established.[66]

On the frontiers, the response of the European settler to indigenous peoples was largely dependent on the attitudes of individual settlers, and also on their convict servants, who were often brutal and degraded men, hardened by their own society. Beyond the limits of location at the 1841 census, the ratio of convict or ex-convict to native-born was 5:1.[67] In remote areas ex-convict sawyers, shepherds, hut keepers and stockmen had few opportunities to assert themselves, and, on occasion, Aboriginals became targets for their aggressive and violent behaviour. The frontiers were places of opportunity, freedom and anonymity of life on the margins. However, violence against Aboriginals cannot be solely attributed to convicts or ex-convicts. Free men, acting under the precepts of colonialism, exercised their right to take Aboriginal land, and the act of dispossession often led to conflict as Aboriginals defended their territory.[68] Early Aboriginal resistance was effective against settlers armed with muzzle-loading weapons, but after breech-loading weapons were introduced in the 1870s, the odds were stacked against them.

On the northern slopes and plains of New South Wales, the Kamilaroi faced barbaric reprisals conducted by Major James Nunn from December 1837. An enquiry examined the savage killings, but Nunn was acquitted on the ground of self defence. After Nunn withdrew, ruthless campaigns by private vigilante forces continued. In the winter of 1838 at Henry Dangar's Myall Creek station, north of Bingara, convict stockmen rounded up a group of at least twenty eight Aboriginal women, old men and children, bound them together and led them a short distance to a clearing where most were decapitated with cutlasses. The bodies were then piled up and set alight. Twelve stockmen were tried and convicted of murder; squatters rallied to their defence, but Governor Gipps succeeded in putting seven of the death sentences into effect.[69] Justice was seen to be done at Myall Creek, and it had an impact on public opinion. But throughout the 1840s there was ample evidence to suggest that the nature of frontier violence changed little, though settlers now tended to remain silent about any violence. The Commissioners of Crown Lands were less than diligent in protecting Aborigines from white aggressions.[70]

64 Geoffrey Blomfield, *Baal Belbora: The End of the Dancing*, The Alternative Publishing Co-operative, Chippendale, 1981, pp119–24.

65 David Kent, "Frontier Conflict and Aboriginal Deaths: How do we measure the evidence?", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol 8 (2006), pp23–42.

66 Ibid, p25.

67 Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1956, p72.

68 David Roberts, "Bells Falls and Bathurst's history of violence: local tradition and Australian historiography", *Historical Studies*, no 105 (October 1995), pp624–33; Richard Broome, "Aboriginal Victims and Voyagers: Confronting Frontier Myths", *Journal of Australian Studies*, no 42 (1994), pp70–77.

69 B. Wilson, "Edward Denny Day's Investigations at Myall Creek", *Push from the Bush*, no 20 (1985), pp35–57.

70 Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales 1770–1972*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996, pp31–32; Jan Kociumbas, *The Oxford History of Australia: Possessions 1770–1860*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp202–03.

In the first two decades after colonisation on the Manning, the Biripi resisted the newcomers. In 1827, Thomas Florance's survey party to the Manning was confronted by twenty to thirty Aborigines wielding spears—overt evidence of Biripi resistance to invasion of their land.[71] On the troubled northern frontier police magistrate E.D. Day (1801–1876), whose diligent investigations laid bare the atrocities at Myall Creek, told the select committee on the police in 1839 that Aboriginals "were repeatedly pursued by parties of mounted and armed stockmen, assembled for the purpose, and that great numbers of them had been killed at various spots".[72] Four men were charged with the murder of an Aboriginal at Mt George in 1848, but they were later discharged when the trial did not proceed. Convict John Chapman, charged with the murder of a Biripi man at Bungay, was committed for trial but there was no response from the Attorney General and Chapman was released without being tried.[73] The *Maitland Mercury* was the only regional newspaper to carry reports of frontier conflict on the Manning. At the Fenwick brothers cattle run, and at Johnston's station in the Upper Manning, the Biripi resisted invasion of their hunting lands by herds of cattle which, from time to time, they speared. The Biripi presence persuaded the Fenwick's to abandon their run. Robert Herkes came across Aboriginals roasting a calf; they gesticulated to him to clear out, and a spear whizzing through the air convinced Herkes to hasten on his way.[74]

John Henderson and Clement Hodgkinson provide rich European representations of Aboriginal life and customs on the north coast in the mid-nineteenth century in their reminiscences. Henderson, an ex-army officer who sold his commission to become a pastoralist on the Upper Macleay, reveals in *Excursions and Adventures in New South Wales* that he had little sympathy for the "Antipodial savages" pushed off their land by his cattle, and who, he wrote, engaged in treacherous and murderous attacks on hut keepers. On the Macleay, Henderson recalled "two or three dozen men were slaughtered" in punitive expeditions. As they sought to control the valley, raids by squatters on small groups of Aboriginal men, women and children often turned into indiscriminate attacks. The strategy to administer the frontier brand of summary justice was simple; "They sleep more soundly towards the morning", he observed, "and when expeditions have been made against them by the whites they have always endeavoured to surprise them in the grey light of dawn".[75]

Clement Hodgkinson (1818–1893) was a sensitive and perceptive man, and a different type of observer to squatter Henderson. He had studied civil engineering in France, inherited money at twenty one years of age and sailed to New South Wales, where, from 1840 to 1842, Hodgkinson was a contract surveyor for the government on the northern rivers. A man of science, with eclectic interests, he regarded the simple life of the indigenous peoples as a virtue largely lost to civilisation.[76]

Another contemporary observer during this period of conflict wrote "The convict servants scattered over the face of the country have ever used the natives as their passions dictated, and whenever the latter attempted resistance or retaliation, the fire-arms of the whites swept them off by hundreds".[77]

71 B.T. Dowd, "Thomas Florance 1783–1867", *JRAHS*, vol 58 (1972), pp89–100.

72 Select Committee on the Police, V and P, NSWLC, 1839, p224.

73 John Ramsland, *Custodians of the Soil*, Greater Taree City Council, Taree, 2001, pp28–30; *Maitland Mercury*, 10 June 1848; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 1843.

74 *Maitland Mercury*, 1 March 1848, 27 August 1849; F.A. Fitzpatrick, *Peeps into the Past: Pioneering Days on the Manning*, 1914, p9.

75 John Henderson, *Excursions and Adventures in New South Wales*, vol 2, W. Schoberl, London, 1851, pp109–10.

76 H.W. Nunn, "Clement Hodgkinson", *ADB*, 4, pp403–04.

77 J.C. Byrne, *Twelve Years' Wanderings in the British Colonies from 1835 to 1847*, vol 1, Richard Bentley, London, 1848, pp275–77.

The Biripi resisted growing settler encroachment of their lands and key water resources as best they could. After withdrawal of much of the labouring population to the goldfields in the 1850s pastoralists and farmers desperately needed Aboriginal labour. As hostilities ceased, the Biripi gradually began to re-occupy some of their lands, something that was not contemplated earlier, and they engaged in farming work—clearing land, fencing, ringbarking, working as agricultural labourers and as stockmen.[78]

Blankets were issued to Aboriginals on a regular basis from 1826. The practice of blanket distribution came to consolidate the idea of the Aboriginal as pauper, but it was an idea that evolved in a number of stages, thinking that embraced peacekeeping and self-help imperatives at the time of depletion of indigenous food supplies. Governor Fitzroy took advice in 1846 that indigenous people had become dependent on blankets in winter and that they were a form of official recognition.[79] One of the earliest records of blankets being distributed at Wingham was between 1857 and 1861, when a total of 465 blankets were handed out to local Aboriginals during these years.[80]

The evangelical association of poverty with indolence and vice was strong among the white population, and was increasingly applied to Aboriginals whose dependence increased as their traditional hunting grounds were appropriated and denuded. The perceived failure of the missions seemed a confirmation that Aborigines were intractable, and the idea that they should work for rations rather than wages became the norm. Aborigines did not respond to civilising missions but saw the giving of blankets as compensation for material losses brought about by colonisation.[81]

J.B. Polding, Catholic Bishop of Australia from 1835–1873, told a select committee on Aborigines in 1845 of the bad feeling "naturally caused by the mode in which possession has been taken of this country—occupation by force, accompanied by murders, ill-treatment, ravishment of their women". The Aborigines view, according to Bishop Polding, was that the European settlers were "essentially unjust . . . you take away our lands, you drive away our means of subsistence".[82]

From the 1880s, a time when Aborigines were no longer perceived as a threat, there were observations that those turning up on the Queen's Birthday to receive their annual allocation of blankets were fewer and older than in previous years. After the cataclysm of disease and the depredations of taming and settling the wilderness, the nostalgia lavished on the indigenous population was in direct proportion to the speed with which they were believed to be dying out.[83]

Aboriginal reliance on traditional methods of subsistence was changing as stock ate, trampled and fouled Biripi sources of food and water, and transformed the ecology. Logging exploited the forests, and damaged sacred sites. Settlers by clearing vegetation, and fencing off the lands, signalled the final destruction of the economic base of the Biripi, and prevented their traditional movements. Underlying the destruction of traditional Aboriginal society was dispossession, for land was the physical and symbolic basis for almost every aspect of Aboriginal life. "The

78 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, pp57–60.

79 Anne O'Brien, "'Kitchen Fragments and Garden Stuff': Poor Law Discourse and Indigenous People in Early Colonial New South Wales", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 39, no 2 (June 2008), pp162–63.

80 Wingham Police District 1857–1861, V and P, NSWLA, 1862, vol 5, pp171–72.

81 Anne O'Brien, op cit, note 79, p164.

82 New South Wales Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, 1845, V and P, NSWLC, p9.

83 A.T and C.P., 22 April 1882, 6 June 1883; Richard Waterhouse, "Australian Legends: Representations of the Bush 1813–1913", *Historical Studies*, no 115 (2000), p209.

onslaught", Goodall has observed, "took a terrible toll of the lives of countless senior, authoritative and knowledgeable men and women who died because of introduced disease, violence and then the illness arising from poverty and repression".[84]

Aboriginal culture was highly specialised, especially in their profoundly complex marriage rules, reciprocal social obligations, unusual exchange practices and high mobility. Their material culture, in contrast, remained relatively simple; their implements were limited—bundi, axe, spear, nulla, boomerang, fishing line—but highly versatile.[85] The Biripi's social life consisted of intersecting and overlapping social categories in social and religious structure with four divisions or classes for both females (Gooran, Karragan, Wangan, Wirragan) and males (Wombo, Kurraboo, Wirran, Murrong). So a Wombo could marry a Gooran; the female children belonged to the Karragan and the male offspring belonged to the Murrong.

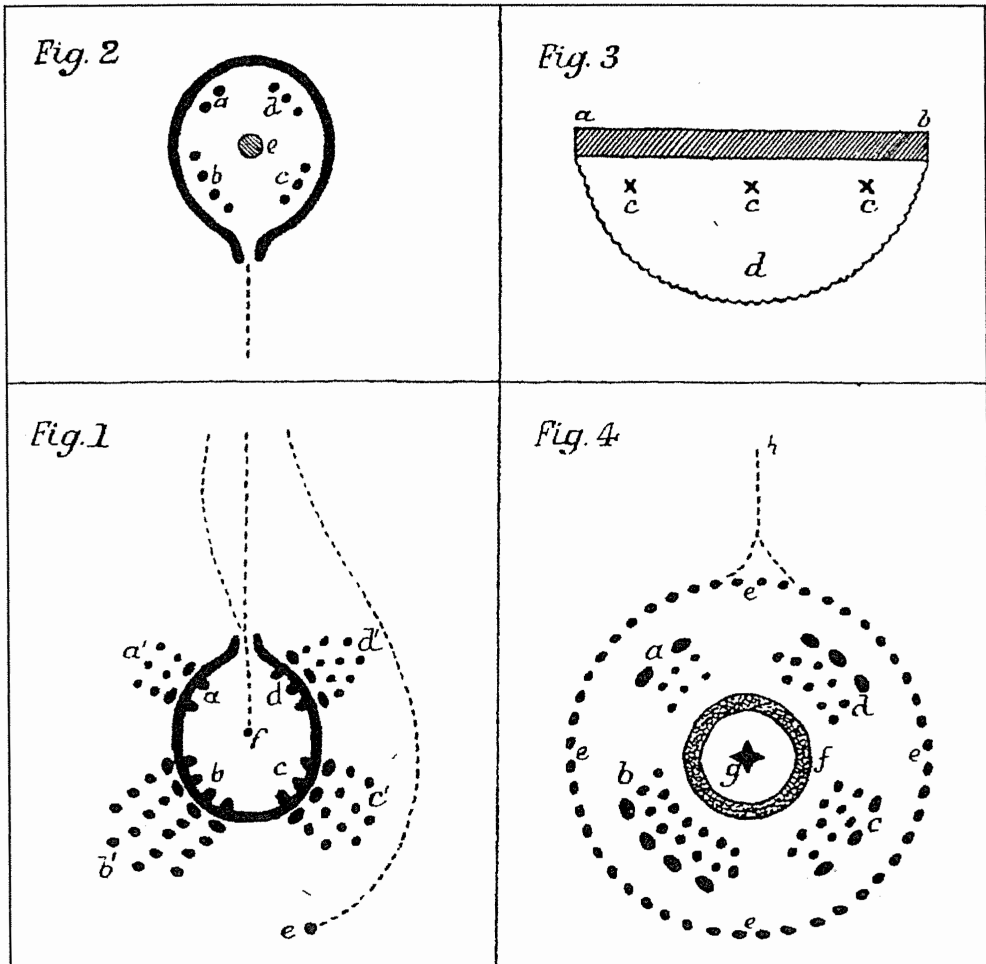
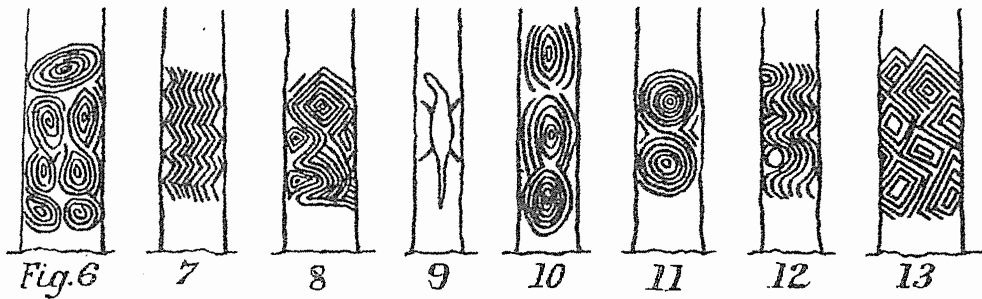


Diagram of the Keeparra ceremony of initiation observed by R.H. Mathews at Stony Creek in 1889. The figures describe the position and movement of those taking part in the ceremony.

84 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p18.
85 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p115.



Ritual designs carved into trees surrounding the location of the ceremony. Drawings by R.H. Mathews.

If the mother died the children became Wombo.[86] The Biripi rejected John Oxley's offer of a large shark (tinobe), their totem, in 1818, as they believed they would become ill, and possibly die if they ate the shark. The spiritual life of the Biripi was rich. Tribal lore gave special significance to the creating and resting places of the great ancestors who moved across tribal territory. Thomas D. Trotter, born in 1847, recalled as a young boy observing a corroboree at Gillawarra, and John Allan (b.1830) also remembered a Biripi corroboree, probably at Kimbriki. A large assembly to mark a significant occasion, corroborees celebrated group identity and spirituality through song, dance and story-telling. Allan recorded men dancing in line before an evening fire, with white pipeclay stripes painted down their arms and legs and on their faces, with a boomerang in one hand and a nulla in the other. Chanting and clap sticks accompanied the dancing, but the corroboree passed into folklore with Biripi dispossession and displacement.[87]

Belief in a creative period was pervasive and pre-contact sites of the Biripi's symbolic and religious world have been identified at Mt Goonook, Mooral Creek, Dingo Creek, Stony Creek, Baker's Creek and Kirrawak. Features were not simply mountains, rocks, trees and waterholes, but places their ancestors had created and where they lived. Aborigines believed in the survival of the human spirit, and spectacular initiation ceremonies served to reinforce ties to sacred sites and pass on traditional lore to younger generations.

R.H. Mathews provided a detailed record of a male initiation ceremony on Stony Creek near Kimbriki in 1889. Twenty one trees carved with ritual designs, which Mathews drew, surrounded two raised-earth circles. This was possibly the last initiation ceremony on the Manning. Rituals such as body scarring and the knocking out of a boy's front tooth, like the corroboree, ended with Biripi dispossession, though the Biripi tongue continued to be spoken in 1932 and beyond.[88] Young male Biripi were remembered with their eyelids smeared with red ochre, and their bodies striped with white pipeclay.[89] A bora ring near No 1 Station was recorded by Enright.[90]

The mode of burial, and attention paid to graves was related to custom and tradition.[91] A Biripi man at Krambach in the 1870s was carried to his grave on a bark

86 W.J. Enright, "Social Divisions of the Biripi", *Mankind*, vol 1, no 5, August 1932, p102.

87 John Allan, op cit, note 56, pp53–54. See also Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, pp121–22.

88 R.H. Mathews, "The Keepara Ceremony of Initiation", *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol 26, no 4 (1897), pp320–40.

89 W.J. Enright, op cit, note 86, p102; John Oxley, *Journal of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales*, London, 1820.

90 W.J. Enright, "Notes on the Aborigines of the North Coast of New South Wales", *Mankind*, vol 2, no 4, p89.

91 Judith Littleton, "Time and memory: historic accounts of Aboriginal burials in south-eastern Australia", *Aboriginal History*, vol 31 (2007), pp103–21.

sheet with his knees tied to his chest and buried with his weapons. Biripi warriors and elders, in accordance with tribal custom, were buried in a sitting position with the chin resting on the knees in a burial ground on the western edge of Wingham, a short distance from a camp. For the Biripi, burial grounds evoke feelings of reverence for beloved ancestors, the land, and a yearning to remain connected with the departed and protect their memories. But traditional burial practices ended when government authorities in the early years of Federation compelled the Biripi to use a cemetery set aside at Purfleet till 1965, and thereafter Biripi were interred at Redbank cemetery.[92]

Evidence of seasonal migration on the coast at first contact is slight. Later claims that coastal populations moved some distance each season may indicate new social alliances rather than traditional economic movements. By the late nineteenth century greater mobility due to large-scale depopulation may have been essential for any form of traditional ceremonial life to continue.[93]

The richness and reliability of the Manning Valley's resources meant the Biripi, like other coastal tribes, were generally less mobile than tribes west of the Divide, traversing shorter distances between the seasons.[94] But there is evidence that some Biripi did travel more extensively, using the Coorabakh escarpment as a vital route for migrations and communications between peoples of the coastal plain and the Comboyne Plateau. According to the grandmother of Biripi woman, Ella Simon, the Aboriginal mountain women, called Winnamurra, were bigger and more heavily-built than the coastal plain women, called Mariket. The Winnamurra, it was said, were very possessive about their men.[95]

The hunting, gathering and fishing of the Biripi used a technology of stone, wood, fibre, bone, sinew and skin. There was a marked division of labour. Women predominantly gathered vegetables, and shellfish, hunting small game and in some areas, fishing. The men mainly fished, using small hand hoops and stone traps built in a circular pattern.

The Biripi developed a sophisticated range of implements and devices for hunting and fishing. The flowering stems of grass trees, hardened by fire, were fitted with ironbark points and tightened with honey wax to make an ordinary spear (gummi). Upriver the fishing spear was a three-pronged weapon with ironbark tips, but downriver the fishing spear had flint or quartz heads (mutti).[96] Grass tree resin cement was used to secure spear tips and hafted stone axes.[97] Local clans also used nullas extensively, fashioned from heavy wood, generally white myrtle, shields from the buttressed roots of fig trees, the woomera and the fighting boomerang, broader and heavier than the normal type. Hatchets, made of stone and tightly bound by fibre, were used for cutting out possums and robbing wild bee hives, and the extraordinary agility of the Biripi in climbing trees was recorded by early settlers. But the old stone hatchet was quickly abandoned for the highly prized and much more efficient iron-headed tomahawk, hammered out on forges by local blacksmiths.[98] "Metal axes and knives", Philip Jones observed, "quickly rendered

92 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, p46; *Wingham Chronicle*, 29 March 1902.

93 J. Kohen and R. Lampert, "Hunters and Fishers in the Sydney Region" in D.J. Mulvaney and J.P. White (eds), *Australians to 1788*, 1988, p349.

94 Tony Dingle, *Aboriginal Economy: Patterns of Experience*, McPhee/Gribble, Melbourne, 1988, p4.

95 B. Meehan, *Shell bed to shell midden*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1982; Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p23.

96 John Allan, op cit, note 56, pp34–45.

97 F.D. McCarthy, *Australian Aboriginal Stone Implements*, The Australian Museum Trust, Sydney, 1976.

98 John Allan, op cit, note 56, p33, p39.

their stone equivalents redundant across Australia. The rapidity with which the new material was incorporated surprised European observers".[99] Aboriginal culture could be as dynamic and adaptable as any other culture.

The reminiscences of John Allan, an untrained observer, recorded in 1905, when he was 75 years of age, provide a contemporary account of post-contact Biripi life and customs on the Upper Manning. Although Biripi culture had already felt the impact of dramatic change by the time Allan arrived on the Manning in 1851. Evidence taken by the inquiry on the condition of Aborigines in 1845, indicated the ravages of European disease on local tribes, and their depopulation. Nevertheless, despite the rambling nature of Allan's reminiscences, his observations were acute and intelligent, and reveal much about a wide range of aspects of Biripi life and customs.[100]

Clement Hodgkinson noted about 1842 that small parties of eight or ten men with their women and children on the northern rivers would "roam over any part of the country within prescribed limits" collecting food; "crayfish, clams, oyster, cockles and crabs" on the foreshores, and "several kinds of fish, large eels, lobsters and freshwater mussels" in the estuaries. Away from the coast he noted an abundance of kangaroos, pademelons, possums, brush turkey and snakes and a variety of vegetable foods.[101]

Research suggests the hunting and gathering mode of subsistence required a daily average of four or five hours to obtain an adequate diet, and anthropologists stress the land management aspects of hunting and gathering through selective burning off to stimulate regrowth and attract game. Along the seashore the Biripi collected pipis and crustaceans, and in the estuaries, lakes and freshwater rivers they caught flathead (mabuia), catfish (willung), mullet (markoro), crabs, turtles and ducks. Fishing hooks were made from shells or bone, and lines made from the inner bark of certain trees. Canoes (towen), fashioned from the bark of casuarinas or ti-trees, were used extensively in the Lower Manning for fishing, but in the Upper Manning they were not nearly as conspicuous, and were mainly used to cross the river or creeks.[102] Turtles were roasted and their eggs eaten raw. Roasted wood grubs, especially those extracted from acacias, were another delicacy.[103] Small groups of Biripi hunted possum, wallaby, pademelon, kangaroo rat, bandicoot and snake on the open woodlands of the Manning with spears, nullas and boomerangs. Kangaroos, according to Allan, were not that numerous. Hodgkinson recorded an Aboriginal hunt for wallabies and pademelons on the Nambucca:

> As we entered the brush we heard the loud shouts of blacks who were busily engaged in hunting. The plan adopted by the natives in this pursuit, was somewhat similar, on a small scale, to the mode of hunting pursued by some of the Indian princes. The blacks first of all dispersed, and formed in the brush a circle of a quarter of a mile in diameter, and then, on a given signal, they all commenced shouting and advancing towards the centre, gradually lessening the circle. The brush-kangaroos or pademelons were thus gradually enclosed, and driven into a small space, where, being surrounded on all sides, they were dispatched by the natives, who carried for this purpose short cylindrical pieces of wood, formed from a species of tree growing in the brushes, and which is of greater specific gravity than any wood I am acquainted with.[104]

99 Philip Jones, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Wakefield Press, 2007, p123.

100 John Allan, op cit, note 56, pp25–75. See also reminiscences of G.S. Hill and John Allan and photographs, "Early Aborigines on the Manning", *Wingham Chronicle*, 28 March 1924, and "The Aboriginals", *Wingham Chronicle*, 4 December 1925.

101 Clement Hodgkinson, *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*, London, 1845, pp222–29.

102 John Allan, op cit, note 56, p50.

103 John Allan, op cit, note 56, p38, p44.

104 Clement Hodgkinson, *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*, London, 1845, p45.

Echidnas, considered a delicacy, were rolled in clay and baked in ashes; the cooked clay removed the quills. Meat and fish were generally broiled over an open fire or roasted on hot coals. Possums and other small marsupials were, wrapped in leaves or ti-tree bark and steamed in the hollow of a scooped out ant hill.[105]

Rainforests were a fertile source for the Biripi, yielding fruits, yams, nuts and seeds, fruit bats and brush turkey. It provided them with a well-balanced diet, decidedly better than that of the first European settlers and convicts.[106] Plant gathering required tools like the bark or wooden coolamon, and Biripi women used digging sticks to dig out towruck (the root of a brush vine). Roots of the cunjevoi were made edible by pounding and then soaking to remove their toxicity. New South Wales rainforests, according to Denis Byrne, contain an estimated seventy four edible fruits, twenty two edible roots and nineteen edible seeds; its animals range from pademelons and wallabies to possums, fruit bats, frogs and lizards, with pigeons, lyrebirds and brush turkeys among the larger birds.[107] Plants were also used for medicinal purposes. Cunjevoi leaves were used to treat festering sores or boils, and the Biripi twisted the vine of the myall potato, a brush plant, around their neck to treat a cold.[108] The nuts of geebung were chewed, as was charcoal, for teeth and for indigestion; the gum of the bloodwood was gathered into a ball, placed in boiling water, and the liquid drunk as an aid for diarrhoea.[109]

Traditional Biripi ways were reshaped by the colonial encounter. They lived in two worlds—their own, and the European. In the first decade or so of contact, Biripi forms of subsistence would have been similar to those described by Hodgkinson a little further north.[110] Fifty years later the vastly reduced number of Biripi still sought to retain a social distance and economic autonomy from settlers.

The Manning's landscape was undergoing an agrarian transformation from about 1900, as farmers began to diversify, moving into dairying which they combined with growing maize and pig raising. The small scale of their farming meant they sought labouring work to supplement their income, competing with the Biripi for this type of work. The Biripi adapted to a changing landscape, gathering together in scattered camps on farms and at other localities in small kin-based groups. A reciprocal relationship developed between the farming community and Biripi men and their dependants, where food and a place to stay were exchanged for a pool of cheap labour. It allowed the Biripi to supplement their bush tucker diet with European foodstuffs—flour, tea, sugar.[111] The way farmers used Aboriginal labour allowed the Biripi to maintain a relatively autonomous way of life, generally sustained through traditional food sources—pademelon, possum, wallaby and echidna were regular sources of meat while the foreshores and estuaries yielded other sources of protein—mullet, crabs, oysters, bream, flathead and blackfish.[112]

Only spasmodic reports about Aborigines appeared in regional newspapers from the 1860s, most frequently concerning blanket distribution. Settlers were troubled by cattle being speared at Dingo Creek (Johnston's) in 1863; a large funeral

105 John Allan, op cit, note 56, pp43–44, p127.

106 Tom Kellner (ed), *The Biripi of Taree*, Regional Council of Adult Education (North Coast), 1991, pp10–18.

107 Denis Byrne, *The Aboriginal and Archaeological Significance of New South Wales Rainforests*, Forestry Commission of New South Wales, Sydney, 1987, pp39–49.

108 John Allan, op cit, note 56, p42, pp51–52.

109 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, pp126–27.

110 Clement Hodgkinson, *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*, London, 1845, pp222–29.

111 V and P, NSWLA, 1883, vol 3, p891, 1889, vol 5, p659, 1901, vol 3, p1261.

112 Tom Kellner (ed), *The Biripi of Taree*, Regional Council of Adult Education (North Coast), 1991, pp10–12.

procession of boats to an Aboriginal burial ground at Cundletown was recorded in 1865. The Biripi collected honey for agents to sell at the Sydney market, and a group of local Aborigines travelled by ketch to Sydney in 1868 to meet the Duke of Edinburgh.[113] An Aboriginal contingent of the Salvation Army, learning to play the cornet, visited Wingham in July 1891.[114]

Many Biripi place names, adopted during the period T.L. Mitchell was Surveyor General, have survived on the region's landscape. The manager of the A.A. Company named the river which served as the northernmost limit of its vast estate, the Manning River, after William Manning, the company's deputy governor, but the Biripi knew the river as Boolambaayte. The fruit from the sandpaper fig tree was called tareebit, and the 1829 grant was initially known as Tarree or Tarlie; Belbouribit, a large paper bark; the corkwood tree was known as Marleebit; and a steep, stoney mountain, Krambuch. Wingham is derived from the Kattang word, wingan, a place where bats drink. The Biripi called bats goolat. Burrell Creek is derived from the Kattang, burrill, a tree with a green and white leaf; Kimbriki, a water reed; Bungay meant now, or today; Kundibakh, wild apples; Killabakh from keila, tree, and bakh, location; Killawarra, a rainforest, or scrub; Bulga, a mountain; Chinny Chinny, mud crabs; Ganghat, a white-breasted sea eagle; Mooto, a black snake; and Booti Booti, plenty of honey or bees. Riverside location,Tinonee, is a corruption of tinobe, a shark; and Cubbah Cubbah means all green. Three other settlements are derived from local indigenous language—Comboyne, a female Aborigine, Coopernook, the elbow, and Croki, a toad fish.[115]

Place names on the Manning adopted in the 1840s, at the peak of the Surveyor General's long tenure, reflect Mitchell's expressed commitment to record indigenous names for the landscape of their ancestors. Some early settlers and surveyors did record Biripi words and a long list of Biripi words were collected and maintained at Wingham Court, presumably to assist magistrates hearing matters involving the local Aboriginal population. This collection was included by E.M. Curr, compiler of the four volumes, in *The Australian Race*, published in 1886/7.[116]

Thomas New invited the Biripi into his home at Bungay in the early 1840s, and from 1851 the Allan's of Kimbriki often employed, and worked with Biripi men on their farm, while at Lansdowne Ben Saville formed a long and close association with Jacky Davis, a Keepara or lawman.[117] Biripi numbers had dramatically declined within fifty years of first contact with Europeans, when they came under a Protector of Aborigines with the intention of letting them die out peacefully on supervised segregated reserves; perhaps poet Henry Kendall (1839–1882), who worked for the Fagan family in their store and timber business at Kendall between 1876 and 1881, might well have had the Biripi in mind when he wrote the maudlin and sentimental representation of Aborigines in *The Last of his Tribe*, but Kendall did not explore the causes of Aboriginal depopulation.[118] Following an inquiry in 1882, the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) was appointed (1883) "to ameliorate the conditions of the

113 Wingham Police District 1857–1861, V and P, NSWLA, 1862, vol 5, pp171–72; *The Empire*, 12 December 1863; *Manning River News*, 22 April 1865, p2, 1 December 1866, p2, 21 March 1868, p3.

114 *Wingham Chronicle*, 1 August 1891.

115 Tom Kellner (ed), *The Biripi of Taree*, Regional Council of Adult Education (North Coast), 1991, pp5–6.

116 Edward Curr, "Manning River", pp350–51 in *The Australian Race: its origins, languages, customs*, vol 3 (1886/7), Melbourne.

117 W.F. Connors, *Pioneering Days around Taree*, self-published, 1985, p92.

118 Beatrice Davis, *Australian Verse: An Illustrated Treasury*, State Library of New South Wales Press, 1996, p32; Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p107.

blacks and to exercise a general guardianship over them". The police became the agents of the Board, reporting on the condition of the Aborigines, and distributing rations and clothing.

The first reliable estimate of the number of local Aborigines on the Manning comes from the police report of 1882, when seventy seven full-bloods and twenty nine half-castes were counted, a mere remnant of the pre-contact Biripi population. By the 1890s the number of mixed race people overtook the number of full-bloods but insufficiently to prevent a decline in the number of persons of Aboriginal blood, reflecting the general decline in Australia. At Wingham the number of full-bloods declined from forty six in 1882 to twelve in 1901. The police report for 1901 listed forty one full-bloods, and eighty eight half-castes living on the Manning.[119]

After an initial humanitarian concern to "protect" the indigenous population, the APB was soon perverted by paternalism exercising a rigid control of their daily lives. The board was restrictive and tyrannical, and often a powerful force in the destruction of Aboriginal culture, life and identity. Legislation prevented Aborigines from travelling, working, marrying, drinking alcohol or performing traditional ceremonies without permission, and a policy was introduced to remove children from their parents sending them away to be "educated" so they could work as farm labourers or domestic servants. A host of regulations tried to shape Aboriginal morals and manners, and intruded into private and family life in ways never experienced by white Australians, who would have been outraged by such infringements on their autonomy. Aboriginals could not vote, and were not included in the census as Australians in the land of their ancestors.[120] In September 1884 the APB on the Manning supplied local Aborigines with a fishing boat and tackle, which were kept at Taree. Fishing provided a source of food and income, and merged traditional knowledge and skills with the realities of survival. They also used the boat for collecting honey from the area surrounding nearby beaches and lagoons, especially at Saltwater—a traditional Biripi camp site with several sacred places.[121] Aboriginal tribes came from as far north as Kempsey and as far south as Port Stephens to meet for a big corroboree (keepah) and other ceremonies at Saltwater, a very special sacred place where young males were initiated into manhood. After white settlement, local Aboriginals continued the ritual of their ancestors, setting up camps at least twice every year, retaining their special affinity with Saltwater. In the roots of a large fig beside the lagoon, a sacred tree, lived a large rainbow serpent, and it was taboo for anyone to go there after sunset.[122] A solitary mangrove tree at Blackhead beach was not to be touched otherwise it would bring heavy rain.[123] Other sacred meeting places on the Manning were elevated sites—Hanging Rock on Cross Mountain, Johnstons Peak, Mount Gibraltar, Simons Peak, Gangat, Blue Knob and Kangaroo Tops.[124]

The extent of Aboriginal involvement in the rural workforce is difficult to determine, but as long as convict labour was available, their participation in the capitalist economy was limited. The lower paid, and physically more strenuous jobs that the Biripi obtained remained marginal to the European economy. The men

119 V and P, NSWLA, 1883, vol 3, p891, 1892/3, vol 7, p115, 1901, vol 3, p1261.
120 V and P, NSWLA, 1883, vol 3, p891, 1901, vol 3, p1261; Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, pp88–97.
121 V and P, NSWLA, 1889, vol 5, p659.
122 Patricia Davis-Hurst, *Sunrise Station*, Sunbird Publications, 1996, pp156–59.
123 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p23.
124 W.F. Connors, *Pioneering Days around Taree*, self-published, 1985, p87.

engaged in four main types of work. They ringbarked and cleared woodlands and rainforests, were skilled stockmen, and worked as agricultural labourers; fencing was a source of contract work that could be done at any time, while corn pulling provided the main source of work in late summer.[125] Honey they collected was marketed by city merchants in Sydney. A number hunted dingo, where the returns, 10 shillings to 1 pound per scalp, were good; the trapping of possums in winter provided a source of income as well as food; rabbits, trapped for their pelts, were not eaten Possum skins were sold to a Tinonee trader who shipped them off to Sydney.[126] Dispossessed, the Biripi lacked quality land to sustain themselves, apart from the McLennan's plot at Purfleet, so they continued their participation in the capitalist economy. Employment of Biripi women was much more limited, and irregular. Washing clothes was the main domestic work they obtained—repetitive and monotonous labour. Many, like Ella Simon, also engaged in general housework, washing, taking in clothes, ironing, bedmaking, dusting and child minding.[127]

Employers needed a workforce that could be hired and fired at will, and one that would work at cheap rates. Aborigines filled this need. Aboriginal shepherds in the A.A. Company were paid half the rate of non-Aboriginal shepherds. The poor wages, casual work, and handouts they received gave an Aboriginal little incentive to work, or work consistently. Aborigine William Rush successfully cultivated crops and grazed horses at Killawarra for about fifteen years, and in the northern rivers region of New South Wales some Aborigines became timber contractors, land clearing contractors and farmers.[128]

Four separate Aboriginal reserves were created on the Manning—6 acres at Tinonee (1890), 112 acres at Killawarra (1894), 18 acres at Purfleet (1900) and 10 acres at Dingo Creek (1906).[129] It was hoped Aborigines would move to the reserves, which offered them opportunities for self-sufficiency. The number of reserves reached its peak in the decade before 1914, but during and after the war, the government sought to drive Aborigines from fringe camps and into the missions, and from 1916 the Aboriginal Protection Board began removing children it deemed to be neglected.Reserves gave Aborigines little protection, as they were only permissive occupancies subject to government policy, and reserves could be revoked without consultation at the whim of a neighbour.[130] Only 6 acres of the heavily timbered Killawarra Reserve was fit for cultivation. Maize, potatoes and tobacco were grown there by Aborigine Billy Johnston at least twelve years before the reserve was proclaimed.[131] Peter Della, who owned land adjoining the Killawarra Reserve, repeatedly requested the Lands Department to lease the reserve to him. In 1911 G.S. Hill wrote to the Aboriginal Protection Board to "strongly protest" that "another attempt (by Della) is being made to deprive the Aboriginals" of

125 V and P, NSWLA, 1901, vol 3, p1261.

126 V and P, NSWLA, 1883, vol 3, p891, 1892/3, vol 7, p115, 1901, vol 3, p1261; Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p51.

127 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, pp74–75.

128 Mark Hannah, "Aboriginal workers in the Australian Agricultural Company 1824–1857", *Labour History*, no 82 (2002), pp17–34; Richard Broome, "Aboriginal workers on South-eastern Frontiers", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 26, no 103 (1994), pp203–20; Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, p102.

129 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 1894, p3.

130 H. Goodall, "A history of Aboriginal communities in New South Wales 1909–1939", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sydney, 1982, p219; H. Goodall, "Land in our own: The Aboriginal Land Rights movement in South-Eastern Australia 1860 to 1914", *Aboriginal History*, vol 14 (1990), p17.

131 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, pp101–02.

Killawarra reserve. In the report on this reserve, the surveyor Hungerford observed that Aboriginals were "hunted about like beasts when they camp on the roads".[132] Killawarra would have been a camping ground for millenia, and a stopping place for Aborigines moving up and down the Manning Valley. However in 1919 Peter Della argued that "the Aboriginals told me they did not care about the reserve", which seems to have been sufficient evidence for revocation of the reserve on 28 October 1921, with the property leased out. From 1914 to 1927, much of the reserve land was revoked or leased out without the consent, and sometimes even without the knowledge of Aborigines.[133]

Dingo Creek reserve was continually occupied by Aborigines from the 1880s despite complaints about their occupation from adjoining farmers. Dingo Creek, like Killawarra, served as a base for Aborigines moving around the region. The hill country Aboriginal community occupying Dingo Creek in the 1930s originated from further up the mountain range. Their well-defined visiting patterns extended to scattered settlements, including the territory of coastal groups.[134] This reserve was revoked on 16 September 1960.

The emergence of fringe Aboriginal camps on the Manning was an attempt to escape institutional control and defy local authorities. Different types of camps could be identified. Aboriginals lived on farms at Bungay, Lansdowne, Burrell Creek and Cooplacurripa while there were small independent camps at Cundle Cundle, Stony Creek, The Bight, Kimbriki, Krambach, Oxley Island and Jones Island. Other groups moved to the Bend (Mt George), Dingo Creek, Purfleet and Old Bar; Biripi also lived at Happy Valley, Tinonee, at three places in Wingham—the Common, in Richardson Street near the Presbyterian church, and at Mills Creek, Taree. The largest known camp consisted of seventy Aborigines at Browns Hill in 1900.[135] From about 1900 the Biripi were to experience a second dispossession, brought about by the APB's dispersal policies. Government segregation policies underpinned growing white pressure on the Biripi to move from wherever they were living.[136] In Taree and Wingham they continued to experience strident antipathy from the white population who refused them all but the most marginal places. In Wingham there were complaints regarding the antagonism, rowdiness and drinking of Aboriginals camping within the town limits, reinforcing calls for their permanent removal. The capture of Aboriginal outlaw Jimmy Governor at Bobin in October 1900 excited the *Wingham Chronicle*, who treated the eight local farmers that shared the £1,000 reward as heroes.[137] Over the next two decades the *Chronicle* reported grimly determined efforts to expel remnant Biripi from the municipality. The *Wingham Chronicle* editorialised on 1 June 1901, "We consider it high time that some steps were taken to have the blacks removed"—to a single location at Purfleet.[138] An Aboriginal population of forty nine adults and thirty seven children were reported living at Purfleet station in 1890. The APB report of 1905 recorded forty seven Aborigines living in the Wingham area, but only listed

132 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, p51.

133 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p122.

134 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, pp104–05.

135 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, pp57–59.

136 Peter Read, "'A Rape of the Soul So Profound': Some Reflections on the Dispersal Policy in New South Wales", *Aboriginal History*, vol 7 (1983), pp23–33.

137 *Wingham Chronicle*, 31 October 1900, p2, 3 November 1900, p6, 7 November 1900, p3.

138 *Wingham Chronicle*, 1 June 1901.

one full-blood, while some 120 Aborigines lived on the fringes of Taree, with thirty listed as full-blood.[139]

Townspeople continued to seek their removal from the town common in 1908, and again in 1915 when Wingham Council suggested rounding them up and shifting them to the coast, but the Local Government Association advised that the trustees had no power to move the Biripi camped there.[140] The Aboriginals still remained in 1920, when Wingham Council was urged to make every effort to have them removed.[141] Four years later police were recommending enforced removal. Harassment of small Aboriginal groups around Wingham continued in 1931 when they camped near Cemetery Road, at Hall's Quarry Reserve in 1932, and at Ashlea Bridge in 1940.[142] The last record of a full-blood living within the Wingham police district was in 1939 when the Manning's Aboriginal population of 189 (seven full-bloods, ninety seven adults and eighty five children) lived under supervision at Purfleet.[143]

Robert Mathews (1841–1918), a surveyor in northern New South Wales from the 1870s, had an unrivalled opportunity to observe the remnants of traditional Aboriginal life and customs in regions being opened for settlement. Though lacking a formal training in anthropology, Mathews' field investigations produced research data on linguistics, social structure, ceremonial life, customs and art. His work was published in journals of learned societies, encompassing more than 2,200 pages of ethnographic observations. His reports on ceremonial life and language at this time remain the only record for large areas of northern New South Wales.[144] Mathews' Aboriginal research stimulated the interest in anthropology of Maitland solicitor Walter Enright (1874–1949). In 1932 Enright wrote that on attaining puberty the male Biripi reached the most eventful period of his life, as he passed through a ceremony which admitted him to a brotherhood whose secrets are inviolable. Enright met four Aborigines at Wauchope who spoke the Biripi tongue, and recorded the classes of the Biripi.[145] Port Macquarie oyster farmer and photographer, Thomas Dick (1877–1927), added to the work of Mathews and Enright on traditional Biripi life and customs. His photographs taken between 1913 and 1927, though staged, represent the best visual record that survives of the traditional activities of the Biripi.[146]

A part of the collective memory of Biripi in the nineteenth century is vividly recalled by Les Murray:

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139 Aboriginal Protection Board Report, NSWPP, 1906, vol 1, p863.

140 *Wingham Chronicle*, 18 November 1908, 30 January 1915; Wingham Council minutes, 22 November 1915, p450.

141 *Wingham Chronicle*, 29 December 1920.

142 Wingham Council minutes, 16 February 1931, p171, 2 August 1932, p298, 4 October 1932, p317, 6 February 1940, p335.

143 Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Taree Police Patrol District, 30 June 1938, Wingham Police Patrol District, 30 June 1939.

144 Isabel McBryde, "Robert Hamilton Mathews", *ADB*, vol 5, pp225–26. Martin Thomas, "R.H. Mathews and anthropological warfare: on writing the biography of a 'self-contained' man", *Aboriginal History*, vol 28 (2004), pp1–32.

145 W.A.G. Enright, "Walter John Enright", *ADB*, vol 8, pp439–40; W.J. Enright, op cit, note 86, p102.

146 Isobel McBryde, "Thomas Dick's Photographic Vision", pp137–63 in I. and T. Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the First Australians*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985. Thomas Dick died 13 May 1927, aged 50 years, at Port Macquarie.

> Long after the Biripi . . . had lost their best land and become dependent on wages or handouts from the whites, a few solitary hunters kept to the high country along the eastern fall of the Dividing Range, maintaining themselves by traditional means. One such lone warrior was captured at Johnston's Peak outside Wingham in the early 1880s. A powerfully built man, wholly naked, speaking no English at all, he was suspected of cattle spearing and may have been lucky to have escaped some cattleman's rifle. Lodged overnight in Wingham lockup, he was brought before magistrate Joshua Cochrane the next day. The "camp blacks" living on the fringe of town were said to be terrified of him, but perhaps their apparent fear was tinged with respect and shame . . . Nothing was proven against the "wild blackfellow" in court and he was released to go back to the mountains. He went unhurriedly, with dignity. Wingham people could see his campfire two nights later, winking away on the mountain, and then he vanished, perhaps to meet with a cattleman's bullet after all.

"He was the end of a world", Murray observed, "and no one like him was ever to be seen again".[147]

Billy Johnston recalled his ancestors believed the scrub about the Bulga was frequented by an evil spirit. If they became aware of this evil spirit, they would take off for the open forest because the evil spirit would not leave the scrub.[148] Ella Simon writes with a poignancy, affection and deep sense of sadness about remnant full-blood members of her Biripi clan, and others from neighbouring tribes. She remembers Paddy Barlow and Cookal Barlow, a keepara (law man), their sisters Burrang and Walka, Albert Lobban, Arthur Marr, Jim Moy, Jim Crinton and Granny Sally. Simon remembered the powerfully built Tommy Boomer with special affection. Boomer was born at Dingo Creek in 1865, and in later years camped and fished at Saltwater. He was a great fisherman, and with the pipis and black periwinkles Ella Simon collected they would feast at Saltwater. Boomer often went on long walks, and in December 1928 sixty three year old Tommy, then quite deaf, was struck by the train while walking along the line to Wingham.[149] Two outstanding horsemen on the Manning, Harry Combo, the talk of the 1920 Wingham Show, and Albert Widders, were also remembered with great affection.[150]

The movement of the Biripi to Purfleet was an Aboriginal initiative. Purfleet farmer Hector McLennan (1831–1913) offered Ella Simon's grandfather part of his land; he brought three or four other families with him in 1902 and constructed timber dwellings there. The largest Biripi camp at Browns Hill soon moved to Purfleet where the McLennans provided a large vegetable patch for the growing population. Proclaimed an 18 acre reserve, an interdenominational body established the United Aboriginal Mission, and built a church, mission home, and a school, posting a teacher there in 1903.[151] The Purfleet Aboriginal school closed in July 1953. There were also Aboriginal schools at Barrington (1890–1900) and Forster (1891–1951).

In 1916 thirteen Aboriginal children from Purfleet enrolled at Glenthorne Public School. They quickly experienced the general practices of exclusion operating in white society. All the white children were withdrawn and the school was closed in June 1916 on the recommendation of the ironically named Inspector Black.[152]

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147 Les Murray, *A working forest: selected prose*, Duffy and Snellgrove, 1997, p59; *Wingham Chronicle*, 6 September 1932; F.A. Fitzpatrick, op cit, note 74, p56.

148 *Wingham Chronicle*, 28 March 1924.

149 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 1928, p16.

150 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, pp109–30; *Wingham Chronicle*, 14 December 1928; *Sydney Mail*, 5 May 1920.

151 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p25; David Horton (ed), *Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, vol 2 (1994), p908.

152 Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, op cit, note 50, p51.

Glenthorne Public School re-opened in January 1923 and closed again in 1940. The arrival of Inspector Robert Donaldson at Purfleet between 1915 and 1929 heralded the removal of young Aboriginals from their kin to be trained at special, segregated children's homes, and boarded out or placed in "apprenticeships" as farm labourers or in domestic service.[153] By the 1920s Aboriginals faced the contraction of vacant land as well as the closure of access to public schools which was then general on the north coast. Some Aboriginal families decided to move to less closely supervised reserves where a "special" school existed but where there was no resident manager. Purfleet was one such alternative, a place where they were free to come and go.[154] The United Aboriginal Mission continued its administration of the Purfleet reserve until 1932, when the Aboriginal Protection Board assumed direct control, appointed a resident teacher-manager and expanded the reserve.[155]

The new world set about manipulating old ideas to bring them within European conventions. The native peoples and their possessions could be appropriated, subsumed or removed to create the legal space for the Australian colonies. Soon the newcomers found the indigenous populations were dying at an alarming rate, as disease and death opened up the country, making the land available. At the time of first contact there were perhaps 750,000 to 900,000 native inhabitants of the land that became Australia.[156] By the end of the nineteenth century they were thought to number about 67,000.

Early artists depicted native peoples after neo-classical traditions, and their engravings rendered the Aboriginal as a noble savage. But they soon moved from this invented abstraction to the social Darwinian idea of civilisations, peoples and races as being destined by nature to adapt or perish. Aborigines were thought of as a primitive race of nomads, incapable of self-management and predestined to extinction. By Federation Aborigines were a small enough minority to be ignored in the Commonwealth Constitution, and the new nation that was proclaimed was ninety eight per cent British, more British than any other dominion; the estimated 67,000 Aborigines were not counted in the 1901 census, and their exclusion from census taking had profound, unforeseen consequences. At worst they could be ignored altogether, and their absence from census data meant historians were dependent on estimates. The political decision to exclude the indigenous population from the census, and from citizenship, was perhaps based on the premise that they were a "dying race".[157] The decision to enumerate Aborigines in the census made at a referendum in 1967 had symbolic importance. For the first time, the Commonwealth counted Aborigines as people.[158]

By 1902 the Aboriginal population of New South Wales had fallen to its lowest level, only 6,828 inhabitants.[159] Social anthropologists at the University of Sydney in the 1920s pronounced unequivocally on the doom of Aboriginal culture. In August 1926 F.A. Fitzpatrick pursued a common nostalgic theme, "A vanishing race", in

153 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, pp117–18; Philip Fenton, "Robert Thomas Donaldson", *ADB*, 8, p319.
154 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p145.
155 E.J. Telfer, *Amongst Australian Aborigines, Forty Years of Missionary Work, The Story of the United Aborigines' Mission*, Sydney, 1939.
156 D.J. Mulvaney, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians, 1606–1985*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1989, pxv.
157 Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p112.
158 K.S. Inglis, *Observing Australia 1959 to 1999*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p153.
159 Len Smith, *The Aboriginal Population of Australia*, ANU, Canberra, 1980, table 7.1.2.

the *Wingham Chronicle*,[160] although Fitzpatrick was among those earlier urging their removal from Wingham.

The substantial minority of Aboriginals who Charles Rowley portrayed as "outcasts in white Australia" continued to live under state tutelage for three quarters of the twentieth century, though the majority of Aboriginal people moved into towns of rural New South Wales, and the major cities.[161] The Aboriginal population in Australia declined to a low point of 73,828 in 1933, but has been recovering steadily ever since, reaching 106,124 in 1961 and 139,456 in 1971. In 1976, when comprehensive census data was first collected, the Aboriginal population was estimated at 160,915; by 1982 it was 220,000, and since then each census records a larger number than the one before.[162] At the 2006 census the indigenous population of Australia was 517,200 (2.5 per cent of total Australian population), of which 148,200 people (twenty nine per cent) lived in New South Wales, 146,400 (twenty eight per cent) in Queensland, 77,900 (fifteen per cent) in Western Australia and 66,600 (thirteen per cent) in the Northern Territory.[163]

The imposition of a manager at Purfleet Station in 1932 indicated the APB's intention to assert more control over their lives. It proved to be a very restrictive regime rigidly controlling the movements of Purfleet's residents, part of a series of indignities inflicted on a proud culture. Legislation prevented Aboriginals from travelling, working, marrying, drinking alcohol and performing traditional ceremonies without permission. At the Yarrabah mission, for example,

> Aborigines . . . could follow the rules; perform small acts of rebellion . . . or sink into apathy. Few other choices remained . . . The priest/supervisor made all the decisions . . . Aborigines could be searched at any time, had their property confiscated, their mail read, their children confined to dormitories and their traditional practices prohibited.[164]

Already a small minority in a predominantly white workforce, increasingly segregationist government policies began to force Aboriginals out of the workforce. The railways, without any discriminatory employment practices, was one of the few places that employed many Aboriginals. During the Depression, Aboriginals, once they were on the APB's ration lists, were required to do a number of days' work to "earn" their rations. Many found themselves out of work when it was made obligatory to pay Aboriginal workers the same wages as white workers. Unemployed Aboriginals insisted that, just like white unemployed, they were prepared to work for wages but not for food. It resulted in stop-works, protests and strikes at Purfleet from 1936 to 1938.[165]

After 1934, policies of the Aboriginal Protection Board were described by Goodall as "systematic segregation", as they were corralled into a limited number of supervised reserves.[166] The 1936 amendments to the Aboriginal Protection Act declared that Aboriginals would be confined on reserves until they had been educated so they could be assimilated into white society. It stirred Aboriginal trade unionist Bill

160 *Wingham Chronicle*, 27 August 1926, 28 March 1924, 4 December 1925; Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, 1997, p113.

161 C.D. Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, Penguin Books, Hammondsworth, 1973.

162 Wray Vamplew (ed), *Australians: Historical Statistics*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Sydney, 1987, pp2–4.

163 Year Book Australia, 2008, p196.

164 Lynne Hume, "Them days: Life on an Aboriginal reserve 1892–1960", *Aboriginal History*, 15 (1991), pp15–16.

165 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p182.

166 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p84.

Ferguson (1882–1950) to action, launching the Aborigines Progressive Association at Dubbo, later opening branches on reserves. In November 1937 Ferguson was a witness before the New South Wales Legislative Assembly's select committee on the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board; when the proceedings failed to initiate reform, Ferguson, with two Aboriginal leaders, William Cooper and John Patten, organised a "Day of Mourning" on Australia Day in 1938.[167]

The repressive regime ensconced at Purfleet deprived the Aboriginal families at Purfleet of their greatest pleasure: the Easter and Christmas camping trips to their traditional ground at Saltwater. Horrie Saunders told Kevin Gilbert in 1977,

> I think our people lost it (community spirit) when they took Saltwater away from them (in the 1950s) . . . It was something we lived for. Christmas is coming . . . we're going to the beach. Just the natural way of living. We hunted, we swam, we caught worms for bait, we fished at night, the mothers cooked amperes in the ashes, we'd come home 'n roast oysters in the fires, joked 'n sang. We went to the beach 'n got honey out of the trees, cooked our Christmas pudding in big tins . . . All the bush skills they're goin' now. You don't see the bush now . . . We used to dig our own wells before that because there was no water. We were the only ones that knew where to get it. We knew where to go in those places and really enjoy life.[168]

The Orwellian surveillance and repression Purfleet families experienced lasted for thirty six years until the Purfleet station management ended.

During the Depression some local Aboriginal men obtained seasonal work on local farms and work at the Tinonee broom factory, and women worked as domestic servants. Aboriginal women often worked as domestics in north coast towns, which, apart from some seasonal farm labour, was the only paid employment many could find. They received a pittance for their labour. Ella Simon (1902–1981), born on the edge of Taree and raised by her grandmother at Purfleet, wanted to be a nurse but was not accepted. She worked for numerous employers including one in Taree who expected her to live in an old barn behind the house.[169] In her autobiography, *Through My Eyes*, Ella reveals a reflective and gentle person who devoted much of her life to helping people at Purfleet.

Domestics employed through protection boards complained that they often did not receive their full entitlement of spending money, clothes and food, and that the money deposited in the bank was much reduced by the time they were able to draw on it.[170] The population on the Purfleet reserve increased from 145 in 1939 to 200 in 1948; Purfleet had 249 residents in 1955 but the population had declined to 224 by 1963. Under the pretext of "rescuing" Aboriginal children from "neglect" young Aboriginals were taken from their parents at Purfleet; boys were sent to Kinchela Boys' Home and girls to Cootamundra Girls' Home. Families were forced into extreme defence of their children by fleeing from the land they had considered home; one family on the Hastings River confronted Inspector Donaldson with spears and shields, signifying the depth of their anger and their right to resist.[171]

167 Jack Horner, "William Ferguson", *ADB*, 8, pp487–88; Select Committee on Administration of Aborigines Protection Board, NSWPP, 1938–40, vol 7.

168 J. Klaver and K.J. Keffernan, Greater Taree Aboriginal Heritage Study, Greater Taree City Council, 2001, pp2–3; Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, p111.

169 Ella Simon, op cit, note 55, pp74–75.

170 B.W. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p172; Inara Walden, "That was Slavery Days: Aboriginal Domestic Servants in New South Wales in the Twentieth Century", pp196–209 in Ann McGrath et al (eds), "Aboriginal Workers", *Labour History*, no 69 (November 1995).

171 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p149.

Bill Simon was born on 30 March 1947 at Purfleet to Ike, from the Black Duck clan near Wallaga Lake, and mother Grace, from the Biripi people. He recalled the rules imposed by the Aborigines Welfare Board had a devastating effect on the men. The mission life "obliterated their role and their identities. Their hereditary ways were not just discouraged; they were outlawed. If my dad brought a kangaroo back to the mission to cook, he would be punished by a reduction in flour rations. If the kangaroo was shared with other families, their rations were also cut".[172]

The Simon family quietly slipped out of Purfleet in 1953 and moved to Kendall where they were pursued by welfare people who ordered them back to Purfleet. So in the dark of night they took flight to Newcastle. But in the winter of 1957 welfare men and policemen tracked them down and arrived at their home when the father wasn't there. Bill, aged ten, Murray, David and Lenny were forced into a car. Grace Simon ran out on the road after them, fell on her knees and belted her fists into the bitumen as she screamed. The parents, Ike and Grace Simon, were charged in court with negligence.[173]

Mr Norris took the four boys on a long car journey. Two year old Lenny was dropped off at a boys' home in Taree and then Bill, Murray and David were driven to Kinchela Boys' Home near Kempsey. At the home the boys were handed a pair of pyjamas with a number that Mr Borland, the manager, had assigned them printed on the pocket, a shirt and pair of shorts. "Not Bill, Not even Simon. Just number 33", Simon recalled. At the home they experienced many methods of alienating them from their own parents and culture. Many boys were told that their mother or their father (often both) was dead when in fact they were alive. Being told this news caused many to suffer severe depression which would go undiagnosed and untreated. After a couple of years, it became obvious that their parents were not coming to get them. But they found out years later that all relatives were denied access to the home.[174]

At punishment parade at four o'clock each afternoon, boys received two to six savage hits by Mr Borland across bare buttocks with a 4 foot cane for any wrongdoing during the day. Finally after eight years at the home, departure day arrived for Bill Simon. He was given his sealed file, some small change and a ticket to Sydney. "After many hours the train finally pulled in at Central Station", Bill recalled, "and I walked into my new life, the last words of Mr Worthington still beating in my brain: 'Remember, 33, black people are the scum of the earth'."[175]

Horrie Saunders, a fisherman with six children, led a rent strike at Purfleet with the Welfare Board threatening to prosecute and evict twenty families. Their protest highlighted the injustice of their lack of control over any of their land. The Welfare Board admitted in 1961 the widespread civil disobedience was basically in protest "for dispossessing them of their lands". Conflict at Purfleet continued in 1965 with families evicted for non-payment of rent; the strategy was widely recognised as a "protest at dispossession as well as poor-quality housing".[176]

172 "A Long Way from Home", "Good Weekend", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 May 2009, p19.

173 Ibid, pp19–20.

174 Ibid, pp20–22.

175 Ibid, p22. These extracts are from Bill Simon, Des Montgomerie and Jo Tuscano, *Back on the Block*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2009.

176 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p303, p322.

Many of Purfleet residents were born at Taree, and almost all came from the area between Port Stephens to the south and Kempsey to the north. The Purfleet families were closely interrelated, and had many close relatives at Karuah, Forster and Kempsey.

Twenty five of the thirty one houses at Purfleet in 1966 had three bedrooms, and six had two bedrooms, with an average of 7.1 people per house.[177] The Purfleet Station management ended in 1968, the United Aboriginal Mission departed in 1971, and the Purfleet Aboriginal Advancement League, composed of nine residents, administered its own affairs. Residents of Purfleet expressed a strong sense of identification with the land of their ancestors; "This reserve (Purfleet) is the black fellows', though Welfare own it. We're here because our parents came from here, we were reared here and went to school here. We identify with it. This land means everything, it means survival, it's the only home we know. It belonged to my forefathers and I'll fight for it".[178] By 1981 the Aboriginal population was estimated at 512, but the community continued to be plagued by high unemployment. In 1986, when the community gained freehold title to the former reserve land, the population had grown to 680. Since then the indigenous population within the Greater Taree City Council area has experienced growth, from 811 in 1991, to 822 in 1996,and 1,627 in 2001.[179] The indigenous population of the Greater Taree local government area at the 2006 census was 2,028, representing 4.3 per cent of a population of 46,979, and mainly concentrated at Purfleet, Taree and Wingham.[180]

Identifiable Aboriginal groups were bound to the land geographically and ecologically by unbroken occupancy in Australia from time immemorial, and yet they found no place in histories of Australia up to the 1960s other than as a melancholy footnote. Their physical marginalisation to the fringes of towns contributed to perceptions since white settlement that they have been expunged from their ancestral country.

Museums and individual collectors gathered thousands of artefacts of dispossessed indigenous peoples. Each of the countless frontier encounters left its traces in these objects, images and memories, but any meaningful connection between Aboriginal groups and their original tribal territory is denied. The museum artefacts were often collected in conscious attempts to document the customs of a people whom Europeans assumed would soon be swept aside by the forces of progress.[181] W.E.H. Stanner (1905–1981), one of the few professionally trained social anthropologists working in Australia before 1939, wrote perceptively of "the Great Australian silence", a strategic forgetting—"a cult of disremembering"—that legitimised European occupation, rendering the indigenous population invisible on the colonised landscape.[182]

Geoffrey Gray asserts that in the four decades after 1925, "a career in anthropology in Australia required a cautious silence about what was often witnessed, read or heard", namely a silence about mistreatment and/or misunderstanding of indigenous peoples perpetrated by those positioned to do them harm. Any person whose

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177 J.P.M. Long, *Aboriginal Settlements*, ANU, Canberra, 1970, pp49–52.

178 Heather Goodall, op cit, note 70, p348.

179 Commonwealth Census, 1991, 1996 and 2001.

180 Ibid, 2006.

181 Philip Jones, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Wakefield Press, 2007, p5.

182 W.E.H. Stanner, "The Great Australian Silence", 1968 Boyer Lecture, pp112–23 in *Highlights of the Boyer Lectures 1959–2000*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2001.

behaviour violated conventions could find himself unemployable. Gray suggests the only adaptive, career-serving course of conduct was that followed by W.E.H. Stanner; to moderate critical analyses of government policy.[183]

The colonisation of Australia has only happened within the space of nine generations so the recording of oral testimony of Aboriginal elders in the Manning Valley and Great Lakes in 2004/5 is a valuable resource. They tell us much about their culture and have resolutely clung to their social mores and some of their traditional ideas, beliefs, practices and language, stories and sacred sites. From the 1820s the lives of indigenous peoples on the Manning were reshaped; since then they have lived in two worlds—their own, and the European. They were dispossessed of their land, the physical and symbolic basis of almost every aspect of Aboriginal life, and memories of stolen children, and social exclusion they experienced operating in white society remain vivid. It is a chronicle that demonstrates that links between people and place run deep in their ancestral country. The stories convey a sense of vitality and immediacy, an affinity with the land, and feelings about the effects of dispossession and cultural fragmentation and a determination to ensure that the language of their forebears survives.[184]

From collective memory Biripi tribal boundaries extended to Port Macquarie in the north, Walcha and Nowendoc to the west and south to the Manning River. The land and waters consisted in part of the substance of ancestors, and were inhabited by them; so that natural forces were explained as actions of these beings. Loss of their ancestral land is deeply felt; "Queen Victoria gave us the land there and they lost the map so we lost all our land out there. Now they built a big hospital on our land, and, um, they don't allow us to go to the hospital, its private".[185] Boundaries of Biripi territory are linked by language, and bound to the land.

Aunty Helen Lobban taught Horrie Saunders the language of the Biripi, but at the mission school the manager told young Saunders, "don't come here with that gibberish. I don't want to hear it in this school". The language was spoken at home and Horrie reflected, "Language is identity". Elders remembered tribal people who couldn't speak a word of English. They also recalled the much loved Eddie Lobban, who spoke three languages, none of them English.[186] Poet Les Murray, travelling behind his mother's hearse, remembered seeing Uncle Eddie Lobban "who stood by the roadside in Purfleet with his hat in his hands and his eyes lowered . . . I was twelve then, but that man has stayed with me".[187]

The elders retain vivid memories and experiences of overt discrimination by white society—exclusion from public schools ("we weren't allowed in white school, us Aboriginals"), the segregated picture theatre at Taree ("the front row used to be sectioned off with a rope. They used to let us in when the lights were down"), and segregated Manning Base Hospital, ("the white people . . . are not allowed to be with the dark people").[188] And generally from the 1930s they were subjected to systematic segregation, confinement to supervised reserves, and a policy of removal of their children by white society. Les Jarrett, one of the stolen children, in

183 Geoffrey Gray, *A Cautious Silence: The Politics of Australian Anthropology*, Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007, p113, p139.

184 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, "Oral Histories and Portraits of members of the Aboriginal Community recorded in the Manning Valley and Great Lakes", Manning Regional Art Gallery, 2005.

185 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Pat Hurst-Davis, p11, Madge Bolt, p1.

186 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Horrie Saunders, p36, John Clark, p6.

187 Peter F. Alexander, *Les Murray: A Life in Progress*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p38.

188 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Eric Dumas, p15, John Clark, p6, Ruth Thorpe, p49.

particular recalled a hard life at Kinchela Boys' Home. [189] Music was very important to mission culture; it was, Warner Saunders recalled, the main part of mission life. "We had our own band, Aboriginal band in the Salvation Army . . . I used to be in a Corroboree group with my uncles . . . do our Corroboree in front of the Elders. The Elders used to sit around and watch us make sure we made no mistake".[190]

A central part of Aboriginal customs and practices was the traditional hunting and gathering mode of subsistence. Betty Bungie recalled her husband went out and got bush tucker; "wallaby, kangaroo, porcupine, everything he wants, he gets it". "Yam . . . like potato, nice . . . it's lovely that kangaroo, I don't eat wallaby. It's got a different taste to kangaroo". Knowledge of bush tucker must be passed on to the children, future bearers of ancient knowledge. Harold Saunders stressed the importance of knowing about "fishing, about all the plants in the bush, the fruit of the bush. Plus your wallaby, kangaroo, the meat you eat. You must always remember that food is there for you and to know how to get it".[191]

In Aboriginal lore the Willie Wagtail was often a purveyor of bad news. "The Willie Wagtail would sing and talk to [an old Aboriginal] in the lingo! And he'd say 'What are they doing up there in Kempsey?' And [Willie Wagtail would] answer back and then he'd tell them what the bird told him 'oh so and so died up there and someone's sick'. Next minute it would come through that so and so had died".[192]

Mission children sold blackberries and mushrooms to the guest houses. "We used to sell bunches of Christmas Bells. And now they won't let you. What I can't work out, they won't let you pick the Christmas Bells, they fine you over that. Yet they'll go and plough them up, the white fella, and throw them out. But we only want to pick them and put them in a vase and admire them. They just want to destroy them".[193]

Settlement of the Manning Valley

Sea levels were much lower about 18,000 years ago, a time of peak glaciation, when the coastline of New South Wales extended some 15–20 kilometres further to the east. As climates warmed and ice sheets started to melt, ocean levels rose steadily before stabilising around their present tidal range about 6,500 years ago. After the end of this glacial period the present alluvial flood plains and valley flats of the northern coastal rivers were established. Sand, earlier carried to the sea, was returned shoreward, and deposited to form broad beaches. The irregularly shaped coastline reflects to some extent the climatic fluctuations of the Pleistocene epoch with its glacial and interglacial periods, and accompanying variations in sea level. The concept of sequent occupance is a useful tool or device to examine frontier areas of recent settlement. During the nineteenth century geographer Dennis Jeans noted the northern coastal rivers of New South Wales experienced similar patterns of of occupancies; Aborigines, cedar getters, shipbuilders, farmers and so on, one after the other, with each occupancy making their own special contribution to spatial development of the region. Then came the pervasive influence of government "unlocking the land" for yeoman farmers. Settlement in these regions was limited before 1861, when tenant farmers, occupying small 40–60 acre holdings were in

189 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Les Jarrett, pp18–19.
190 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Warner Saunders, pp43–44.
191 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Betty Bungie, p4, Harold (Mick) Saunders, p39.
192 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Fay Patterson, p28.
193 Barbara Jackson and Ralph Saunders, op cit, note 184, Fay Patterson, p28.