

4 Landscapes and Legacies: Cherbourg past to present

What you see here are remnants of a concentration camp (Ted Watson, Cherbourg Mental Health Worker).¹⁷

The study community, its population, health concerns and facilities are described in this chapter to provide context for the present study. As the situation and character of the community have been very much shaped by its history as a government settlement, the historical context is explored to further understandings of Cherbourg today.

4.1. Landscapes

Cherbourg is a relatively large Aboriginal community in southeast Queensland. Situated 270km north-west of Brisbane in the South Burnett region (Figure 4.1), Cherbourg was established on the traditional land of the Wakka Wakka people, near the border with the Kabi Kabi to the east (O'Sullivan 1986). Murgon is the nearest town, about 5.5 km to the north. The total population of the Murgon area, which includes Murgon, Cherbourg and surrounding farms, is approximately 4570 (ABS 2002a). Whereas in Cherbourg the population is more than 95% Indigenous, in the town of Murgon it is about 95% European. Distinctions between the two towns are visible in many spheres other than ethnicity; each is the antithesis of the other, operating within a context of mutual dependency. This is a persistent theme, as it relates both to the historical development of the two towns and to the current relationship between the towns. It is inadequate to discuss one without considering, at least at some level, the context of the other through the relationships and interdependency between them. For example, Murgon retailers rely heavily on custom from Cherbourg, but transactions are predominantly asymmetrical as reciprocity does not extend beyond the supply of goods and services for money.

¹⁷ This remark was made to me soon after arriving in Cherbourg for the first time in 1999. It is a recurring theme in the personal accounts of Cherbourg residents, and is echoed throughout the historical literature.

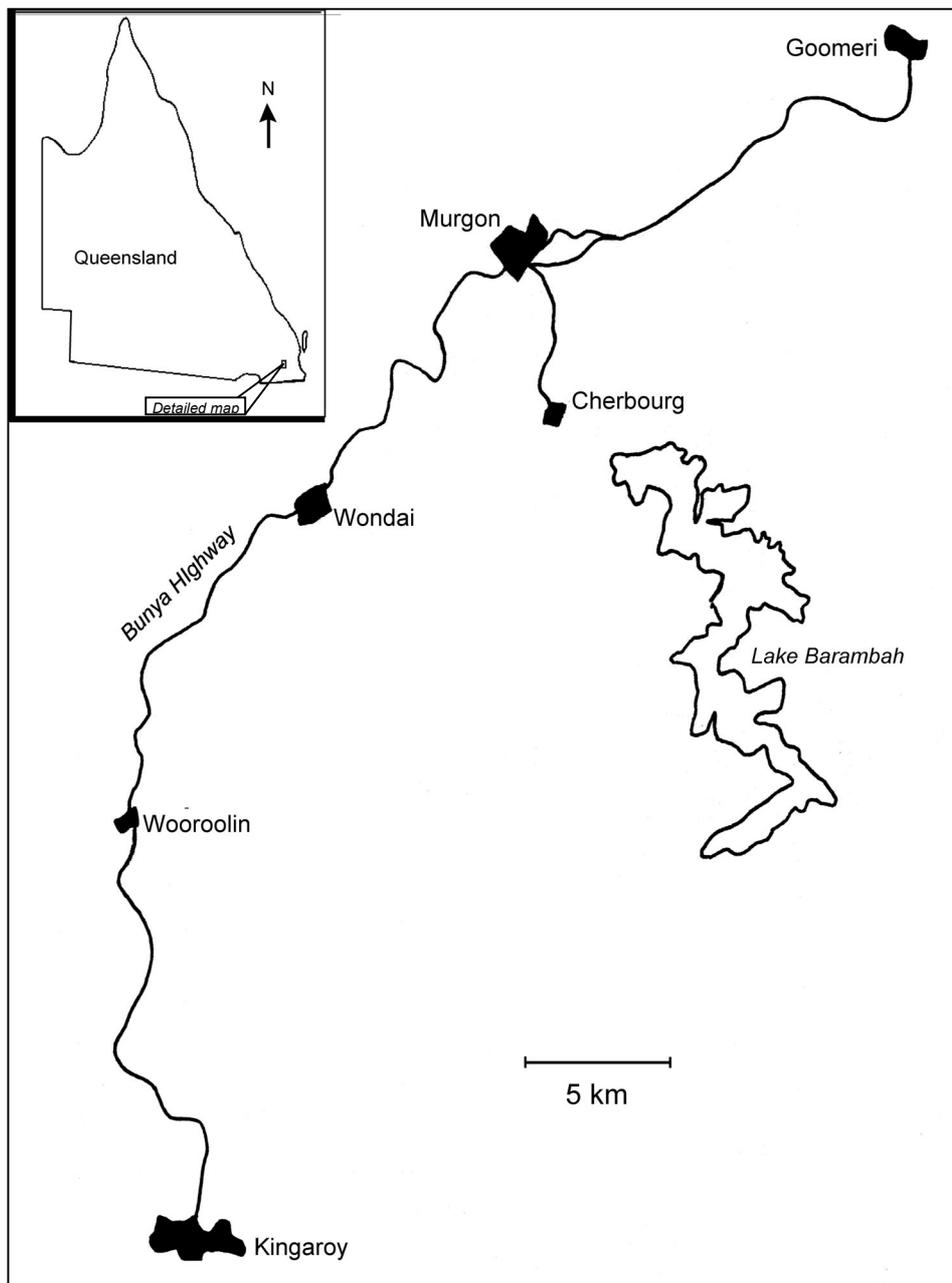


Figure 4.1. Location of Cherbourg and nearby towns.

The main industries of the South Burnett area are agricultural; a sign on the highway approaching Murgon welcomes travellers to 'The beef capital of the South Burnett'. Other major economic pursuits of the area are peanut, pumpkin and cotton farming. The mean annual rainfall is 777mm, falling mostly during summer. The hottest month is January with a mean daily temperature range of 18°C to 30°C, and the coldest month is July with a mean daily temperature range from 3°C to 18°C (Commonwealth of Australia 1982). Thick overnight

frosts with temperatures falling to around -4°C are not uncommon, due to the altitude of the region (350m above sea level).

The original name for Cherbourg was Barambah, thought to have been named from the Wakka Wakka name for the region, 'Burrumbeer', which means 'the wind is coming' (Bond 1988, p. 45). The name was changed in 1932 to the name of the parish where the settlement was located, owing to ongoing postal confusion with nearby Barambah station (Cherbourg Anniversary Organizing Committee 1979).

Kingaroy, home of the former National Party Premier of Queensland Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, is located approximately 50km south of Cherbourg. Bjelke-Petersen was a member of the Queensland state parliament from 1941 and state Premier from 1968 until 1987. In 1981 he was the sitting member for the seat of Barambah when one of the local Cherbourg residents, Henry Collins, ran against him (unsuccessfully) as an independent candidate, as a protest against perceived continuing mistreatment of Aboriginal people by the National Party (Redlight vs. Joh Bjelke 1981).

Voters in the South Burnett have traditionally been conservative and remain so, more recently supporting the far right-wing One Nation Party. Legacies of the political history of this region are evident in place names. Homage is paid to the former Premier and his wife through the naming of Florence Bjelke-Petersen Place, a small park in Murgon, and the Bjelke-Petersen Dam on Barambah Lake, situated just a few kilometres from Cherbourg and a favourite fishing spot for Cherbourg residents (although Bjelke-Petersen was not noted for his fondness of Cherbourg). The Bjelke-Petersens have more recently become tourist attractions of the area; several postcards are available of the couple, and a visit to their home is billed as a highlight for many regional tours. The money raised during these tours is used to pay debts incurred during corruption proceedings against the former Premier (Herald and Weekly Times 2000; Adamson 2001).

The history of Cherbourg as a settlement began in 1900 with sanctioned segregation under the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld), and since then, Cherbourg has suffered a continuing loss of cultural identity and erosion of traditional values. It has survived the segregationist policies of the early 20th century, the assimilation ideals first arising in the 1930s and legislated for in the 1950s, and eventually arrived at a level of autonomous control as recently as the 1980s.

There are a number historical accounts and thorough analyses regarding Queensland's treatment of its first inhabitants, its Aboriginal legislation and the devastating effects it has had on the state's Indigenous population (for example, Tennant Kelly 1935; Craig 1979; Evans *et al.* 1988; Blake 1991; Scott and Evans 1996; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997; Kidd 1997; Matthews 1997; Hegarty 1999) . Detailed examination of this history is beyond the scope of this thesis; instead a brief overview of the political legacies as they have carried through to the present is provided. Some personal recollections from Cherbourg community members are also included; as these are their stories, their own words are used and attributed wherever possible.

4.2. Out of sight, out of mind: 'the Act'

I have always advocated that the greatest possible assistance should be given to the race from whom we have taken this territory, and to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude for the splendid possession we have. The least we can do is to make their time here, which will not be a very long time, as pleasant as possible, and their departure as gentle as circumstances will permit (Archibald Meston, Queensland Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXVIII, 1897, cited by State Library of Queensland (2002)).

4.2.1. Violence and vice

That Queensland in the 19th century was a 'hostile frontier' is a relatively recent but strongly supported historical interpretation. By the late 19th century, the large established pastoral settlements were undergoing subdivision, creating an influx of settlers into certain areas, leading to the growth of towns and intensifying existing conflict over resources (Evans 1988b). The violent response from the Aboriginal inhabitants was at the time seen as savagery rather than legitimate defence of scarce resources, and this conflict and incomprehension led to further fear and hatred felt by the white settlers (Williams 1981; Evans 1988b). Nomadism, like vagrancy, was at that time perceived as 'akin to criminality' (Kidd 1997, p. 23).

No longer able to use their land, many Aboriginal people became fringe-dwellers, congregating around newly settled areas and towns living off what they could find and the minimal rations that were sometimes provided. Settlers controlled the movement of people around the settlements through segregation and curfews (Evans 1988b). Occasionally, settlers allowed camping on their properties and sometimes provided some rations, on the understanding that their stock would be left alone (Craig 1979). Relations between blacks and whites were not harmonious. Cherbourg residents, for example, speak of a massacre that took place during this time approximately 100km south of Cherbourg at Maidenwell, now considered a sacred site.

Raids on fringe camps with guns and dogs occurred, although attacks on the locals were not always so overt; there is evidence that poisoned food, such as arsenic or strychnine in flour, was sometimes supplied by settlers desperate about stock losses, as occurred in Kilcoy in 1842 (Lack 1967; Evans 1988b).

Negative stereotyping was employed to justify the actions of the whites. For example, Aboriginal people were said to be cannibals (Mathew 1910) and ‘inveterate sheep stealers’ (Lack 1967, p. 17). They were perceived as ‘miserable specimens’; inferior in physique, unclean, and their speech described as ‘grunts’ or ‘jabbering’ (Evans 1988b, p. 31). They were viewed as ‘incapable of abstract reasoning and sustained mental effort’ (Mathew 1910, p. 76), their cultural practices were perceived as childish and amoral, and they were perceived as ‘completely lacking in artistic capabilities’ (Evans 1988b, p. 69). Evans (1988b) believes that what was understood to be inherent laziness was probably lack of energy due to malnutrition and illness, with fringe-dwellers in the worst state of all.

Aside from encroachment on lands and deliberate killings, drugs and disease were also responsible for a rapid decline in population. Aboriginal intellectual inferiority was seen by some settlers as evidenced by their readiness to imitate European vices; it was believed that they were ‘only able to absorb immorality and degradation’ (Evans 1988b, p. 83). Addiction to alcohol and other drugs were contributing to population ill-health and decline from the time of early white settlement. Alcohol sold to Aboriginal people was often a mixture of leftovers and had a higher alcohol content than many other drinks, while the culture of excessive drinking was learnt from the European settlers at that time (Evans 1988b). This culture is echoed within Cherbourg community today, with heavy drinking explained by one informant in his 30s as, ‘it’s just the Australian way: you work hard, you drink hard’ (see Section 8.2.2).

Opium was another extensively used drug during intensive white settlement in the late 19th century. Aboriginal people were sold opium dross, the leftover ash after the opium had been smoked. This was mixed with water and eaten, forming sediment in the stomach and leading to ‘painful cravings’ (Evans 1988b, p. 94). While alcohol problems were blamed on Aboriginal weakness, the spread of opium could also conveniently be blamed on another non-white influence: the influx of Chinese in the 1880s. Both opium and alcohol were used by pastoralists to induce compliance and dependency among their Aboriginal labourers (Evans 1988b).

Infectious diseases brought by whites included measles, influenza and syphilis, which was reported to be almost universal among Aboriginal adults in some areas; acknowledging syphilis

as an Aboriginal problem meant recognising that ‘the colour line had been sexually breached in alarming proportions’ (Evans 1988a, p. 102). Evans (1988b) concluded that rape and oppression were key features of Aboriginal-European relations during the late 1800s; women were often abducted, bought and sold. The presence of Aborigines, especially the visibility of problems such as venereal disease, prostitutes and ‘half-caste’¹⁸ children, were offensive and threatening to the whites.

Aboriginal people were assumed to be a ‘doomed race’, whose survival depended upon protection. The earliest missions in what is now Queensland were established by the Lutheran church in the 1830s, in the north of the colony, with the intention to protect the race and save souls by Christian conversion; such church missions depended on Aboriginal labour as government financing was sporadic, if available at all (Kidd 1997). The success of this recruitment of cheap labour was perhaps a motivating force in establishing subsequent government reserves in the latter half of the 19th century. Up until this time there had been very little government interest in Aboriginal welfare, aside from occasional rations and blanket distribution (Matthews 1997).

Until a Federal referendum in 1967, legislation relating to Aboriginal people was an issue for the colonies (later the states after Federation in 1901) to deal with. The first legislative attempt by the Queensland government to control the lives of Aboriginal people occurred in 1865, with the introduction of the *Industrial and Reformatories School Act 1865* (Qld), where a child under 15 of an Aboriginal mother could be removed to a children’s home without further grounds; being Aboriginal was considered proof enough of neglect (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997; Kidd 2000).¹⁹ Queensland’s attempt to control the welfare of Aboriginal people was considered at the time to be innovative (Craig 1979). The 1865 Act initiated more than a century of discriminatory policies and practice in the form of state-sanctioned control and removal of Aboriginal children and adults from their land and families.

¹⁸ A term used to indicate the offspring of an Aboriginal woman and a non-Aboriginal man. It was considered either unthinkable or very rare that an Aboriginal man could be the father of a half-caste (Craig 1979). The term is now considered derogatory and is only used in this discussion as it relates to the historical context.

¹⁹ Much media attention in recent years has been paid to the ‘stolen generations’, referring to the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, ignited by the release of the report, *Bringing them home* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997).

In 1894 Archibald Meston, ‘journalist and ardent reformer for the Aboriginal cause’ (Evans 1988b, p. 86), ‘self proclaimed expert on Aborigines’ (Blake 1991, p. 12), ‘ex-parliamentarian’ and ‘showman’ (Kidd 1997, p. 41) was commissioned by the government to report on the condition of the Aboriginal people in Queensland, and their need for ‘protection’ from the vices of settlers (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). Meston ‘resurrected the positive stereotype of the Noble Savage, and used this as a yardstick to measure the natives’ present miserable and derelict condition’ and concluded that Aborigines were in need of protection (Evans 1988a, p. 344). His ideal became law in the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld) (‘the Act’), which was intended to control opium supply and labour and appoint ‘protectors’ of Aborigines, as they were deemed vulnerable to exploitation (Kidd 1997). In the same year Meston became the first Protector of Aborigines for South Queensland, holding the post for nine years (State Library of Queensland 2002). The Act’s most tangible outcome was the creation by the government of Aboriginal settlements, including Cherbourg, in 1900 (Blake 1991), enabling the removal of Aboriginal people to designated reserves. Removal was heralded as a means of rescuing Aboriginal people from vice, but essentially became a means of training them to undertake menial labour (Kidd 1997). What followed was a period of discrimination and paternalism that survived in various forms through legislation into the 1980s.²⁰

4.2.2. Fear of miscegenation

Although Meston’s original emphasis was ostensibly on protection from the vices that arrived with expanding white settlement, he saw racial integrity as especially important, and his focus was on the protection of race *per se*; both from dying out and from dilution. He believed that segregation was the only way to ensure this (Kidd 1997). Meston’s initial plan was to allow more traditional remote dwellers who were distant from white settlers to remain untouched but to segregate the fringe-dwellers from white society (Kidd 1997). Meston’s intentions are more recently thought to have arisen out of fear of miscegenation and contamination of the ‘white race’, or at the very best to ‘smooth the pillow of the dying’ as Aborigines were supposed

²⁰ Amendments in 1934 (*Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act Amendment Act 1897-1934*) (Qld), provided the Protector of Aborigines with greater control over Aboriginal people’s lives, such as the ‘control of all monies and properties belonging to any ‘half-castes’ even after they had been give an exemption from the Act’ (State Library of Queensland 2002). Replaced by the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act* in 1939 (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). See Craig (1979) and Nettheim (1981) for analyses of the impact of the legislation.

destined for extinction. The ‘protection’ policies enabled this to continue free of governmental guilt (for example, Evans *et al.* 1988; Blake 1991; Kidd 1997). Blake (1991) for instance has interpreted the purpose of segregation as to keep Aboriginal people away from whites, rather than to keep whites away from Aboriginal people.

The Act and its various amendments over the following decades ensured that until the late 1970s,²¹ the daily lives of people legally classed as Aboriginal were under government control (Kidd 2000). Under the Act they were considered wards of the state, their lower status thus formalised through legislation (Craig 1979). Aboriginal people were told where to live and placed there, their lives limited to the institution (L’Oste-Brown *et al.* 1995). Coercion into dependency on government handouts began as the responsibility for organising their daily lives was removed. In short, the Act treated Aboriginal people like children incapable of looking after themselves (Loos 1982).

While the trade in, abduction and rape of Aboriginal women were tolerated by whites and recognised as common practice during expanding white settlement in the late 19th century (Kidd 1997), consenting sexual relations between blacks and whites were viewed as offensive, and formalisation of an interracial sexual relationship through marriage was considered far worse. Meston described white men who wanted to marry Aboriginal women as of a ‘very low type’, and argued that it would be degrading to any decent Aboriginal woman that she should accept a man unable to marry a woman of his own race (Evans 1988b, p. 108). The offspring of black and white unions were believed to inherit the worst stereotypical qualities of both. In 1901 an amendment to the Act gave Protectors the power to regulate the marriage of women considered to be Aboriginal. In the 1920s the marriage of a half-caste woman to a non-half-caste was prohibited, and any uncertainty of ethnic heritage was settled by a magistrate (Craig 1979).

4.2.3. Cheap labour

Blake questions whether, in addition to miscegenation fears, the Act arose out of a desire to have greater control over the Aboriginal population, to exploit their labour systematically, and to create cultural hegemony (Blake 1991). Evidence for this interpretation comes from the neglect and poor living conditions that residents were subjected to, and the creation of a

²¹ The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Queensland Reserves and Communities Self Management) Act 1978* (Qld) replaced previous legislation and followed from the Federal government’s policy of self-determination announced in 1972 (State Library of Queensland 2002).

labouring underclass of reserve residents. The reserve system enabled the Aboriginal 'problem' to be hidden while still ensuring access to cheap labour for land clearing, droving and domestic service to aid the expanding white settlement.

That the motivation behind establishing settlements was at all philanthropic is unlikely as any existing government funds were withdrawn if there was an attempt by officials on the settlements to improve education, housing or other facilities (Evans 1988b). Even at the inception of the reserves there were contradictions as to their intended role; whether they were to protect Aborigines from white vices, or to 'smooth the way to the grave' of a dying race, or to act as training centres where Aborigines could be taught European ways of life (Evans 1988b). Evans (1988b) concluded that neither 'rescuing' the race nor social education were the real motivation. The 'doomed-race' conviction was widespread, and even when apparently humanitarian acts occurred they were probably motivated by other concerns, such as rationing as an alternative to losing livestock and as a means of maintaining a cheap labour force. Evans (1988b) proposed that even blanket rations may have been motivated by abhorrence for Aboriginal nakedness. At the time of Cherbourg's creation, it was acknowledged by the government that this reserve was to be a 'centre to which Aborigines can be sent and make their home and from which...settlers desiring aboriginal [*sic*] labour can obtain it' ("Community Profile" folder, Cherbourg Hospital. c.1993). Meston's protectionist ideology overlooked links with tribal land, forced disparate remnants of groups together and created permanent settlements (Evans 1988a).

The Act was amended several times after 1897, for example, initially 'half-castes' were not considered Aboriginal if they did not live with or associate with other 'Aboriginals'. In the 1934 and 1939 amendments, 'superior' half-castes could be exempted from the Act but full citizenship rights could be revoked at any time; an exempted person could still be classed as Aboriginal, and thus not a citizen, by a judge or police after a trial.

The 1965 amendments sought to promote assimilation by abolishing reserves, but did not state a time-frame. These amendments also established the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA) whose task it was to administer these changes (Nettheim 1981). Provision was made for the establishment of Aboriginal Councils on reserves, consisting of two elected and two appointed Aboriginal members, any of whom could be removed from their council position by the Director of DAIA. The Director also had the power to move people between reserves.

In the 1971 amendments, this last power was removed and movement on and off reserves became less restricted. However, the right to be on the reserve was also removed; residents now had to have a permit to be allowed on reserves and could be directed to leave at any time (Nettheim 1981).

The permit system was abolished in 1975. In 1979, Queensland government policy of 'assimilation' became 'integration', but little changed other than terminology; the Queensland government of the time did not consider Australia to be a plural society, nor did it think it should become one (Craig 1979).

4.3. '...on someone else's land': the creation of Cherbourg

Instead of killing the person, the reserves killed the soul (Koepping 1976).

Cherbourg was one of the reserves created under the Act. It was initially established in 1900 on a 1280 acre block on a cattle station surrounded by pastoral holdings, and the first 40 people arrived in May 1901, followed soon after by another 33 from the surrounding area. The first arrivals were local Wakka Wakka, and subsequently others arrived from throughout much of the state, mainly from central Queensland, Wide Bay, Moreton Bay and southwest Queensland. Accommodation and provisions for new arrivals on the settlement were inadequate (Blake 1991). In 1904 the settlement was expanded to include 7000 acres, and by that time there were 140 residents, but the minimal government financial assistance had been reduced (Blake 1991, p. 25). Although removals to Cherbourg were from all over the state, they were especially from where 'tribal life had been broken up through the coming of the white settler' (Tennant Kelly 1935, p. 461), referring to fringe-dwellers and those otherwise in the way of white settlement. The primary reasons for removal included being considered lazy or immoral or in moral danger (Koepping 1976). Being removed usually meant being rounded up by police and enduring a long and frightening journey to unfamiliar country (Tennant Kelly 1935).

By 1905 there were about 250 people on the reserve, which by then had become fully organised as a labour source (Koepping 1976). Labour had become the primary source of income for administration of the reserve, as deductions were made from the wages of those employed outside the reserve (State Library of Queensland 2002). There was a high demand for cheap labour at the time (for example: clearing, fencing, droving, domestic work) as land use in the

surrounding area changed from large pastoral areas to hundreds of smaller selections (Blake 1991).

There were 350 people living at Cherbourg in 1910 (Blake 1991). In 1913 there were about 550 people on the reserve (Kidd 1997), and an estimated 900 in 1934, from 28 language groups (Tennant Kelly 1935). Official DAIA figures in 1976 put the population at 1260 (Koepping 1977), slightly higher than the current estimate (Section 4.4.1). Removals to Cherbourg continued until the 1970s (Kidd 2000).

When Cherbourg was established, neighbouring stations feared that the reserve residents would not be kept under control and that their stock would be stolen. Thus began the long history of opposition by local residents to the presence of an Aboriginal reserve in the area (Blake 1991). Within a decade of its inception there was pressure on the government to close the reserve. The new whites settling in the area were afraid of the large numbers of Aboriginal people, were concerned that the reserve was for criminals, and were fearful of disease. In 1906, the Murgon Progress Association declared the settlement a ‘depot of semi-starvation, disease and misery’ (cited by Blake 1991). In 1915 the Wondai Chamber of Commerce lobbied the government to reduce the reserve size so more land would be available as selections, and in 1919 the Murgon Farmers’ Union lobbied for the settlement to be moved elsewhere (Blake 1991). Some local groups, such as the Murgon Progress Association, continued to be very vocal in their protests for several decades (for example, Whitton 1977). Such negative sentiment is still expressed today (Section 4.4.10).

Aboriginal resistance to removal was common. To be removed from one’s land was to be removed from a source of ‘meaning and identity’ (Blake 1991, p. 79). Not only was the act of removal from country traumatic in itself, but maintaining links with land from a distant reserve was difficult.²² Ancestral ties were also broken; many people today are unaware of who their ancestors were beyond a generation or two. They might know geographically where they are from, but are not likely to know specific details. For example, one 72-year-old man knows his mother was brought to Cherbourg from Dalby (120km southeast of Cherbourg), but little else

²² In the late 1990s, some Cherbourg residents put a native title claim before the Native Title Tribunal. At the time of writing, this claim had not gone beyond the tribunal stage due to the difficulty in establishing continuous links with country, all but erased through past government policies forcing cultural disintegration and geographic dislocation.

about his family history. A 51-year-old female health worker recalls her own family history thus:

My mother was sent here, my grandmother was sent here, my father was sent here as a young boy from Cooktown (her father was taken from his family as a child).

Another informant's elderly mother had thought she was an only child until a few years ago when she discovered that she had three siblings who were still alive. One young male informant is planning to travel 'up north' to find his ancestral roots, to learn where his grandmother is from and what her totem is. Thus discontinuity with ancestral ties persists today, with a number of participants in the current study unable to say where their mother was born (Section 9.1).²³

The bringing together of people from different locations and tribal groups promoted friction between them as well as cultural loss. Those who were brought in from areas outside Wakka Wakka country felt they were trespassing because they were on someone else's land. Throughout the more than 70 years of removals, it was usual for 'half-castes' to be sent to Cherbourg, as they were supposedly more malleable and easier to assimilate, to be kept away from 'full-bloods' who were sent elsewhere, such as Palm Island or Woorabinda (Tennant Kelly 1935; Robinson 1989; Huggins 1994), another settlement approximately 500km to the northeast of Cherbourg.

Despite recent interpretations of the motivations behind removals, some of the older members of Cherbourg community still see their own and their families' removal as 'protection'. The following is the story of one 60 year old man's removal to Cherbourg as a young child:

Albert Dynevor was born near Quilpie on a cattle-track by the lake. His father was a drover on Dynevor station. Albert belongs to the Kulali tribe. In 1945 when he was five years old, he and his mother, father, five brothers and two sisters were removed to Cherbourg settlement, because they 'didn't have housing'. Until then they lived in a gnyah outside of town near the river, and this was how his parents wanted to live. He remembers being 'happy running around out there' until they were removed. When they came to Cherbourg, his mother told the children they would all have to behave well, because they were now on someone else's land. Within a short time of arriving at Cherbourg both he and his mother contracted tuberculosis, which he blames on the change in climate from Quilpie. His mother died from TB

²³ Mother's place of birth was included in the questionnaire (see Section 5.4.1) because of potential connections between a person's health as an infant and their mother's health early in her life. Father's place of birth was not included.

in 1951. Albert expresses sadness at the loss of language, laws and customs, and at the poor treatment he and his family received from Cherbourg officials. Despite this sadness, he interprets his removal as having been for his 'own good' (Albert Dynevor 2000, personal communication).

This apparent paradox of feeling both loss and gain is demonstrated frequently among older members of Cherbourg community. They see their own and their families' removal as protection from white vices, while they mourn deeply the cultural losses, and feel anger at the corruption, the restrictions placed on freedom and the exploitation that occurred under white administration.

4.3.1. Inmates

We who lived on reserves or missions
 The stories we all could tell
 Of the rules and regulations
 And the fear of the Mission Bell.
 It rang morning, noon and also at night
 This bell which was the Protector's tool
 The bell tolled to start and finish work
 It forced upon us the white man's rule.

Cecil Fisher, from *Memories of Cherbourg Mission Bell*.²⁴

For most of the 20th century, Cherbourg was more akin to a prison or an asylum than a community.²⁵ Movement on and off the mission was strictly regulated, with a permit required for any absence, such as for shopping in Murgon. Cherbourg residents had to produce their permit if requested by police, and could spend a week or more in gaol if they did not have one (Arnold 1976). Police not only brought people to the settlement initially but brought them back when they absconded (Blake 1991). Permits would usually only be granted for special circumstances, such as employment, medical treatment and family funerals, but even these were not guaranteed (Huggins 1994). People who were employed off-settlement also had to have permission to return.

²⁴ The bell rang eleven times between 6.00am and 9.00pm each weekday, replaced by a siren in later years (Fisher: 'the screaming noise from hell'). The entire poem is available at the Queensland State Library website, <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/ils/100years/bells.htm#Cherbourg>. Viewed 22 Feb 2003.

²⁵ Residents of Cherbourg and other missions are frequently referred to as 'inmates' throughout the historical literature.

The need for permits to move on and off the mission is a vivid memory for many Cherbourg residents today. One woman only in her 40s remembers having to obtain a permit for going in and out of Cherbourg just to attend school in Murgon. Although movement of Aboriginal people on and off the reserve was strictly regulated, that of white people was less enforced; for decades men from Murgon were known to be ‘slipping out to Cherbourg’ to have sex with Cherbourg women (Whitton 1977, p. 20).

One woman in her 50s says Cherbourg was more like a concentration camp while her parents were growing up. She remembers vividly, however, when she was ‘only a little girl’ a siren in the middle of the reserve would sound each morning at eight o’clock for ‘line-up’. All the men had to assemble outside the DAIA building to be counted. If men were not there on time, when they were found they would be locked up in the settlement’s gaol. Even children could be sent to the gaol for misbehaviour, such as ‘answering back’ to a white person (Arnold 1976, p. 9), and gaol was a frequent punishment used on young girls caught socialising with boys (Huggins 1994).

The superintendent – the senior white man in charge at the settlement – had the power of punishment and reward, and could send people to gaol or to other reserves, such as Palm Island which was also used as a penal colony (Arnold 1976). The threat of removal to other communities was employed as additional means of social control.

Some of the early entertainment on the reserve included cricket, football and films. Films shown on reserves were vetted by the superintendent, and not being allowed to see a film was a common form of punishment. Robinson (1989) argued that popular culture, especially films, was the major Westernising influence on the reserves in the 1930s, rather than legislation.

Most traditional customs and practices were ‘strongly discouraged by missionaries and managers’ (Huggins 1991, p. 89),²⁶ although some corroborees were permitted at times as entertainment, where whitewash rather than the traditional clay was used to paint corroboree designs onto bodies (Mackenzie 1973). In the 1930s there were still some traditions such as rules of exogamous marriage and taboos on eating one’s own totem, but interest in totemic ancestors became ‘choked under missionary influence’ (Tennant Kelly 1935, p. 471).

²⁶ Various Christian churches have had a strong influence on Cherbourg life since the settlement was established (Patton 1981) (Section 4.4.10).

Settlement residents were also discouraged from speaking their own languages (Huggins 1994). A man in his 70s remembers that they were told never to speak the language of the Wakka Wakka whenever they 'came through the gate', they were only allowed to speak English, and today he feels sad about the loss of language. Only a few words from the local language remain in use today, even fewer in polite company. In 2001, only six people in Cherbourg reported speaking an Indigenous language (ABS 2002a).

Upon arrival at the settlement, families were separated from each other by fences (Huggins 1994). Not only were people forcibly removed from their own land, but many of their children were further removed from their families to be brought up in dormitories. Kidd (1997) argues that this double removal caused further, lasting, psychological and social damage.

4.3.2. Dormitory living

Soon after its inception, Cherbourg reserve established a dormitory system for children, mainly orphans and those whose parents were not considered to be able to look after them properly, and for single women, often those sent back to the settlement pregnant after working in domestic service. Even in situations where relatives were available to take care of them, children (especially girls) whose mothers had died were candidates for the dormitory. It was also used as a form of necessary foster care; if women could not earn enough working on the reserve to support their children, they would leave them in the dormitory while they worked away from the settlement (Arnold 1976). The dormitory system in Cherbourg remained operational until the 1970s (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). This separation of children from their parents was yet another mode of social control, weakening family relationships and removing any disciplinary powers parents had over their children (Huggins 1991).

One informant now in his 70s grew up as a camp kid (i.e. not in the dormitory) until he was ten years old, but was placed in the dormitory when his mother became ill. He remembers the dormitory was disciplined and harsh. The children were assigned jobs such as scrubbing floors, cleaning yards and making beds. He says they 'had to work hard for the manager' or they 'got a hiding'.

Dormitory girls and boys were not allowed to socialise with each other, and were kept strictly separate, even during social events such as film screenings (Robinson 1989). The dormitory residents were locked in at night and the dormitories were 'more like a prison than a home', with wire over the windows (Arnold 1976, p. 9).

Some inconsistencies in the reports on the amount and quality of the food available to dormitory children suggest that the food improved over time. Earlier accounts report that there was barely enough and it was poor quality; hunger in the dormitories was chronic (Blake 1991; Hegarty 1999); although the children received three meals each day, both the quantity and quality were poor. For example, breakfast was often porridge and bread, stale and mildewed and soaked in treacle (Blake 1991).

The dormitory children were often described by visiting officials as being underfed: 'Vegetables and fruit were irregular and meat [was] reserved for male workers' (Kidd 2000, p. 11). In the earlier years, most of the vegetables grown on the reserve went to the white officials (Huggins 1994).

Later accounts of dormitory food suggest there was plenty, including some vegetables. Some of the people I spoke to who had spent time in the dormitories thought the food was 'wonderful'. A man in his 70s remembers that they grew their own vegetables which he says they ate every day. Unlike the camp children, children in the dormitories were unable to supplement their meals with hunting and fishing, but they were able to swap lunches at school, for example dried peas for bush tucker, and would sometimes steal fruit from the superintendent's trees (Blake 1991).

Overcrowding and deprivation were common on the missions, especially in the dormitories. In 1918 at Cherbourg, children were reported to be sleeping on the ground with one blanket under them and one for cover (Kidd 2000, p. 11).

In 1934, the acting matron at Cherbourg detailed the following conditions of the Cherbourg dormitories: empty storeroom, not enough kitchen utensils, filthy food pantry, rotting floors, cockroaches, and poor condition of lavatories. Fewer than half of the 90 people then sleeping in the dormitory had a pillow, and there were only two blankets each, insufficient during the cold winter. In the girls' dorm, two or three beds were often pushed together with seven or eight girls sharing, while boys shared two to a bed 'on chilly nights'. Clothing was insufficient, and no provision had been made for girls who were menstruating (Crawford 1934). The acting matron also noted the prevalence of skin disease in the community, among both the camp and dormitory children. Girls who were eligible to work as domestic labourers but with skin 'sores' (most likely scabies) were being treated with sulphur baths and inspected daily to enable them to get a 'pass from the doctor as soon as possible' (Crawford 1934).

The matron also described the children as generally being clean as they bathed each morning. Lacking from this description, however, is that the bath water was frequently cold and dirty, having been shared by several children, and that the towels were also shared (Hegarty 1999). Conditions of poor sanitation, inadequate clothing and beds, bedding which was infested with bed bugs, and the dormitories as a fire hazard continued well into the 1940s, despite Cherbourg being marketed strongly as a government showpiece (Kidd 2000).

Dormitory life was a mix of 'boredom and drudgery' outside school hours (Kidd 2000, p. 15). Boys fetched water and firewood, tended vegetable gardens and performed other tasks. Girls were responsible for cleaning, such as twice daily scrubbing of floors and tables (Crawford 1934; Hegarty 1999). There was no electricity, so there was no reading or playing after dusk (Kidd 2000). Freedom among dormitory children was strictly limited, especially for the girls.

The threat of being sent to the dormitory was used as a further means of social control, for example, camp girls might be sent there for socialising with boys (Huggins 1991). One female informant who did not grow up in the dormitories was placed in the dormitory when she tried to run away from the settlement, and soon afterwards she was sent out to work as a domestic in the west of the state.

Conditions in the dormitories improved over the decades, at least in terms of meeting children's physical requirements. One man now in his 50s has fond memories of growing up as a dormitory child, although he maintains very strong feelings of resentment towards his mother who he believed for many years had abandoned him. More recently he has come to accept that she probably had little choice other than to leave him at the dormitory so she could leave the settlement for work.

Despite evidence available to the government for many decades that dormitory life was physically and mentally damaging (for example, Crawford 1934), the system was in place in Cherbourg and other missions until the late 1970s (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). The care of institutionalised children was in line with government ideals of 'processing to remove them from government support and into the workforce' (Kidd 2000, p. 17).

Kidd (2000) questions the Federal Government's contention, in response to *Bringing them Home* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997), that actions were based on welfare considerations in accordance with the standards of the time and that they were well-

intentioned. Instead, Kidd cites the state government's policy of paying far less for Aboriginal children in care than for white children (Kidd 2000).

4.3.3. Up at top camp

In the later years of the settlement, the majority of children in Cherbourg grew up outside the dormitory system with their families, 'up at top camp'. Those living in the dormitories were not encouraged to associate with the camp dwellers, and required permission to do so. Dormitory children required a permit to visit even their own family in the camp (Arnold 1976). Visits were usually during the day, but sometimes children were allowed to stay over at weekends. 'Camp kids' and 'dormitory kids' saw each other only at school. One informant's father used to 'ask for', i.e. request permission for, her friend to be allowed out of the dormitory for a visit. This used to happen at weekends and she would sometimes stay over.

A 72-year-old male informant who grew up in the camp has married twice to women who grew up in the dormitory. As he was a camp kid, not a dormitory kid: 'I don't know how I come to marry two girls from the dormitory'. Another man now in his 30s remembers the dormitories were just closing when he was growing up, and rules of association were a little more relaxed by that stage. Although he was a camp kid he made friends with some dormitory boys whom he 'claims as brothers'. He says he felt sorry for them because they did not have their own families.

Camp life was more interesting than growing up in the dormitories as children had more freedom. 'There was always something for us to do' said one informant in her 50s about growing up in the camp. She used to go out into the bush, usually with an adult, collecting gum (sap), sometimes fishing for jewfish, and hunting freshwater turtle. One male in his 30s recalls that when he was a 'little gundoo' (child) he used to go bush every weekend to eat gum and catch witchetty grubs, which he describes as 'living the mission life'.

As in the dormitories, dwellings in the camp were in poor condition for many decades. Initially people made their own gunyahs, then small wooden cottages were built and now most houses are brick or fibro. A description of housing at Cherbourg in the 1940s states that huts were filthy and overcrowded, toilets were leaking, clothing and bedding was unwashed (Kidd 2000). By the 1950s there was a house inspection each week by the DAIA. One female informant, who grew up during this period in a two-bedroom house she shared with eleven other people, remembers the weekly flurry of helping to get the house ready for the inspections. Another

male informant who grew up elsewhere remembers that before the inspectors came he and his siblings would polish the floor by 'dragging the rug around with a kid on it', because a dust-free floor, to the officials, signified hygiene.

4.3.4. Rations

Rations on the reserves were initially intended as a supplement to hunting and gathering but, by the 1930s with fixed settlement, reliance on availability of bush food was no longer feasible. Soon inmates were dependent on the 'ration trilogy' of flour (one pound per day) sugar (two ounces initially, rising to four) and meat; meat was differentially distributed, working men receiving the highest ration of one pound, women and children received eight ounces initially, declining to two ounces in 1932, while non-working men received none (Blake 1991, p. 195). By the 1930s over 90% of the energy intake came from rations, with small supplements from farming (Blake 1991). People holding certain positions on the settlement also received a small wage in addition to rations (Tennant Kelly 1935).

Rations were given out each fortnight, but were usually consumed within a few days (Huggins 1994). A man in his 70s remembers that rations were not enough to live on, and were further reduced whenever new people were brought in to the settlement. To supplement the rations, he used to hunt for possum, 'porky' (porcupine = echidna: *budbria* in Wakka), wallaby and goanna.

A woman now in her 50s remembers collecting rations as a child in calico bags which her mother had made. They would be given sugar, flour, rice, porridge, syrup and tea. She says the meat they received was 'more bones than meat, the good stuff going to the white official'. A man in his 70s recalls additional rations of small amounts of tea, split peas and rice. Another woman in her 40s remembers how much she loved to get tripe with the rations, and she and her siblings 'used to be given a taste sometimes to help us on our long walk home again'. To supplement the rations, her father used to steal fruit and vegetables for the family from nearby farms when they went out fishing, but they did not know until years afterwards how he obtained it. Not all younger residents remember rations favourably:

The meat was awful, if you got any at all, and sometimes there would be someone you didn't know handing it out and then you may not get any, or the worst bits (female in her mid-30s).

For those in the camp, rations could also be supplemented by some bush foods and what was growing in the back yard. In the 1950s some families had their own vegetable garden or fruit trees, and many people kept chickens.

Aside from food rations, there used to be a blanket issue twice a year (Arnold 1976). One informant, now in her 40s, recalls growing up in Cherbourg was 'very hard', in particular that they 'didn't have a lot of blankets at that time' so sometimes they would sleep under a mattress to keep warm.

4.3.5. Educated to earn their keep

The reserve system was intended to be as self-sufficient as possible (L'Oste-Brown *et al.* 1995). Those living on the settlement were expected to earn their keep, and children were educated only to a degree that would enable them to function effectively in menial work as domestics and labourers. Both women and men on Aboriginal settlements were educated for the purposes of menial labour, with even basic literacy and numeracy rarely achieved (Scott and Evans 1996). This history of Cherbourg as a training base for manual labourers was overt. As recently as twenty years ago a government report in *Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement News* (Cherbourg: development spotlight 1983), referred to the cattle farms and the piggery as the 'training farm'.

The school at Cherbourg was for many decades a token gesture, with classes in the 1930s twice the size of those in most state schools; it offered a state curriculum, but 'with some modifications' (Tennant Kelly 1935, p. 461). Both the schools and the dormitories were used as a training ground for obedience, labour and settlement life, intended to facilitate cultural hegemony (Blake 1991). The aims of early Aboriginal education were indeed met at Cherbourg; Mathew (1910, p. 81) described the school as a 'bright spot' because the 'children [were] very tractable and docile'.

For several decades, children at Cherbourg remained at school only until grade four. In the 1950s, in a bid for better resources, a teacher argued that the children had the intelligence to progress but this potential was being stifled through overcrowding due to lack of classrooms and teachers (Kidd 2000). A man now in his 70s who spent some time in the dormitories remembers the boys spent one day a week at school, two days a week working on the farm and another day a week at rural school. This was where the boys were taught trades such as wood and leatherwork, and tin-snipping (for roofs). He ran away from school when he was 13 so he

could learn more trade. In 1934, two boys from Cherbourg and two from Woorabinda were enrolled at Murgon Rural School to be taught subjects unavailable to them on the settlements. Protests ensued from both the Murgon parents and from the school, threatening decreased attendance of the white children until the Aboriginal children were removed from the school (Scott and Evans 1996).

One woman in her 50s recalls that when she started high school, Cherbourg children were taken to Murgon High School on the back of a truck, which was used for carrying cattle during the day. Children of the white officials living at Cherbourg had their own bus for travelling to the same school, and therefore did not travel on the cattle truck. When children from Cherbourg played sport against other schools, such as in Gayndah or Goomeri, again they were taken there on the cattle truck. Contrasts such as this between blacks and whites on the reserve, and in housing standards and privileges, did 'not make for relationships of mutual trust' (Koepping 1976, p. 37).

At 14 years of age, girls were usually sent to work for white settlers as domestic staff. A common sight in the 1930s was of Cherbourg women walking to and from Murgon each day to do domestic cleaning (Whitton 1977). Although outside employment was government-regulated, working conditions were not checked regularly and abuse of both the system and staff was common (Kidd 1997). Being a domestic 'was the worst employment option available to women' (Scott and Evans 1996, p. 140). In Cherbourg it was the only option. Pay and work conditions were poor, there was low status and harassment. Young women at Cherbourg had never been taught anything about sex (Blake 1991), and while at work they were often mistreated, sexually abused and exploited. An estimated 90% of Cherbourg girls sent out to work as domestics came back pregnant to a white man (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). Girls who became pregnant while working were sent back to the mission, and hired out again after the birth. Their infants remained in the dormitories, or if they were lighter skinned they were often sent to a white orphanage (Kidd 2000). Many young women used marriage as a means to escape the dormitory system (Blake 1991), but they had to seek permission to marry from the settlement superintendent (L'Oste-Brown *et al.* 1995; Hegarty 1999).

Even those young men and women 'in training' were actually providing work for the community, such as sewing clothes and building houses (Scott and Evans 1996). In the 1950s, it was compulsory for young men to spend a year after they finished school learning trade skills,

being paid very little (Albert Dynevor 2000, personal communication). Sometimes their pay was administered by the police, and many are certain they kept some for themselves. As there was no recourse this had to be tolerated.

4.3.6. Wages

In the 1930s, wages in Cherbourg were about 12% of the comparable wage paid to non-Aboriginal people, and workers were often given only a small portion of this, the rest was claimed to have been spent on food and clothing (Arnold 1976; Lorelle Watcho 2001, personal communication). Some never saw any cash at all, nor did they have access to their own bank account. Workers had to seek permission to access their own savings, which was rarely granted (Arnold 1976).²⁷ Others were only ever given small amounts as ‘pocket money’ (Kidd 2000, p. 36). DAIA maintained control of bank accounts until 1974 (Craig 1979). Aboriginal workers paid the same taxes as white workers, as well as workers’ compensation once this was introduced in 1916. Those suffering injuries or death, however, were entitled to significantly lower rates of compensation (Craig 1979).

By 1950, the Aboriginal wage had improved to 25% of the comparable non-Aboriginal wage, by 1972 this had increased to 58%. By this time there was new legislation that full wages be paid wherever award conditions applied, but there was an ‘unspoken assumption that...reserves were outside this category’ (Kidd 2000, p. 50).

One woman in her 50s remembers her first job training to be a domestic cleaner in the early 1960s. Here they were ‘taught hygiene’: how to keep clean, how to cook, how to sew. They were paid the equivalent of approximately \$1.50 a fortnight. She was then sent out to work on a station at the other side of Quilpie. Her income from this job was paid to the DAIA – she was never given the money, ‘not in our hand’. The money instead was put into a ‘welfare fund’. If she needed clothes or any other personal items she had to ring her father (the postmaster) to ask him to ask the department to send these items to where she was working. She feels bitter about those days, but says that at least it was not as bad as in her parents’ time.

Work contracts were usually for 12 months, and to refuse employment was to risk gaol or removal to another settlement (Arnold 1976), a threat that lasted well into the 1970s. In 1975 a

²⁷ Janie Arnold was a resident of Cherbourg and the Purga mission.

number of people had been expelled from Cherbourg for failing to find work, and were found living in a storm water drain in Murgon a fortnight later. After threats of state-wide protests they were allowed to return home but remained subject to petty harassment from the officials (Clarke 1976).

In the same year, the Bjelke-Petersen government called on the Federal government to pay the difference in wages that were by then required under the new Federal anti-discrimination laws, arguing that full wages for Aboriginal workers were beyond the state's resources. In other words, the state had become reliant on the cheap manual Aboriginal labour supply. The two governments came to an agreement whereby unemployment benefits were diverted to the councils, and residents received a portion of this depending on the number of hours they worked: thus began the scheme which became labelled as Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) (Kidd 2000). The CDEP became widespread in Aboriginal communities by the mid-1980s and remains an important source of income today (Section 4.4.3).²⁸

There has rarely been enough work to go around, and this coupled with the low wages ensured that financial independence from the government was frequently unattainable; for example in 1976 in Cherbourg, 43 people were dependent on each wage earner (Kidd 2000). By 1980, the average Aboriginal wage was still only 72% of the Federal minimum wage (Kidd 2000). In 2001, 619 people reported receiving any sort of income (just over half of the population, see Section 4.4.3), and the median weekly income (before tax) was between \$160 and \$199, compared with a median income of between \$300 and \$399 for Australia as a whole (ABS 2002a). On average, each person in Cherbourg receiving an income in 2001 (but not necessarily 'earning a wage') was supporting 1.8 people, and an average of 3.5 people were dependent on each wage earner, or 6.8 people for every full-time wage earner.²⁹

In 1999, the Queensland Labor government finally acknowledged the past wage discrimination across the state and provided \$25 million to finance claims of those employed on government communities between 1975 and 1986. Kidd (2000) calculates that this is roughly the profit made annually by the state from underpaying Aboriginal workers during this period.

²⁸ A similar program, the 'work for the dole' scheme, has been introduced in the wider community.

²⁹ Calculated from: number employed / total population. Data from ABS (2002a).

4.3.7. Health

In the early days of the reserve, mortality was very high and population numbers were maintained only through frequent new arrivals (Koepping 1977). The main causes of death were from infections, namely influenza, pneumonia and tuberculosis (L'Oste-Brown *et al.* 1995). Poor nutrition, overcrowding, poor living conditions and a lack of immunity to European diseases were the background causes. Medical care first appeared in the form of a nurse in 1910, and a doctor who made weekly visits (Kidd 1997).

Mortality on all Queensland reserves was high, especially among younger people, and it was often attributed to the filthy conditions of dormitories, huts and gunyahs, and the sentiment among health workers was that no-one could learn hygienic habits in the absence of suitable facilities for hygiene (Kidd 2000). High rates of morbidity and mortality on the settlement were blamed on the inmates themselves, as sickness was attributed to their vulnerability to disease (Blake 1991), rather than recognition of the overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions and inadequate nutrition.

Health problems continued over several decades. Blake (1991, p. 172) estimates that in the early years of the mission, half of all infants died, by 1925 the rate was one in three. By the late 1950s, this rate had declined to one in four. The main childhood infections contributing to mortality were whooping cough and measles. Maternal mortality in the 1930s (2% of deliveries) was three times the national average of the time. The influenza outbreak of 1918-19 killed at a rate of 143 per 1000 residents, seven times the rate for Australia overall (Blake 1991, p. 176). In the 1960s, the stillbirth rate among Queensland Indigenous infants was four times that for non-Aboriginal infants, deaths under six years were more than six times as high, and were more than 13 times the rate for children under four; malnutrition was found to be the key factor in half the child deaths under three years and for 85% of deaths under four years (Kidd 2000).

A report on the number and types of complaints treated at hospital between July and December 1920 included influenza (61 people treated), hookworm (12), beri-beri (19), gastritis (10),

pneumonia (8), tuberculosis (4), blood poisoning (7), and bronchitis (5) (Bleakley 1921). At this time there were approximately 660 people on the settlement.³⁰

Between 1906 and 1920, the death rate at the settlement was approximately 10 times higher than the rate for the Australian population at the time, and approximately four times higher than for rural Aboriginal people (Blake 1991). Movement on and off the settlement contributed to high mortality; death rates were highest at times when the greatest numbers of removals were brought in (Blake 1991). Given the better health of those living outside settlements, this is unlikely to be due to the poor health of new arrivals. Overcrowding on the settlement probably contributed to the spread of infections. Living and sleeping conditions in private dwellings were often no better than in the dormitories; people slept on floors and in cramped conditions (Blake 1991). A survey in 1976 found there to be an average of six to ten people living in each of the wooden cottages, and sometimes as many as 16 people (Koepping 1977). Crowding is still common, although it appears to be declining; in 1996 more than 80 households were usually home to six or more people (ABS 1997). In 2001, the mean number of people in each household was 4.5, nearly twice that for Australia as a whole, and 70 households (about 31%) were usually home to six or more people (ABS 2002a).

Kidd (2000) claims that hundreds of Aboriginal people in Queensland have died directly as a result of state government policies over many decades through illness, malnutrition and deprivation, and that many more deaths, such as through alcohol, violence and suicide, have been the indirect result of these policies.

Trigger *et al.* (1983) examined mortality at 14 Queensland settlements between 1976 and 1980, and found that mortality rates were directly associated with state government Aboriginal policy and government administration of the reserves. The Cherbourg mortality rate at the time was between about 50 and 60 per 1000 population. The profile of Cherbourg fits with Trigger *et al.*'s (1983) analysis of highest mortality rates on Queensland settlements from a variety of causes; most causes of death, including CVD, were found to be positively associated where the community:

³⁰ Calculated from estimates of population size in 1913 and 1934, Section 4.3.

1. had received people from geographically wide-ranging areas;
2. was located close to a town;
3. the majority of residents were of mixed racial descent, and
4. was less traditional (measured partly by whether the majority of dwellings had a sewerage/septic system).

Infections were common causes of death where population size was greater than 800 and less homogeneous. Accidents and violence were especially important contributors to mortality in communities satisfying the same criteria, with the additional characteristic of the settlement having never been administered by a church, i.e. that it had always been administered by government (Trigger *et al.* 1983). Two characteristics of Cherbourg appear to have been somewhat protective: the absence of a beer canteen at Cherbourg and its majority European-style housing were associated with fewer deaths from trauma and infections.

Local politicians have been publicly blind to the problems caused by removal policies and settlement administration, with Murgon councillor Roberts in 1979 praising a superficial article in *The Bulletin* which pronounced that Aboriginal people were getting an 'extremely good deal' by living on welfare (Roberts 1979, p. 14).

4.4. Cherbourg today

Despite the bleak historical context and continuing social problems, what was 'Australia's largest prisoner of war camp' (Whitton 1977, p. 16) has for many years been used as an example of success by the Queensland government, frequently heralded as 'a model reserve' (What now bunge? 1981, p. 10). For example, a tour for overseas dignitaries was arranged in preparation for the 1982 Commonwealth Games, held in Brisbane, to avert a potential boycott of the games in protest of Queensland's treatment of its Indigenous people.

Tourists and visiting dignitaries are regularly taken there as there is a recognised path for guided tours. All the houses and roads on the path are well kept but outside that path the conditions are as bad as any other reserve' (What now bunge? 1981, p. 10).

Houses along the route of the tour were renovated especially for the occasion (Huggins 1994), and remain looking somewhat brighter as a group than many others to this day, as its position as

a showpiece continues. When the Olympic Torch relay was weaving its way around the nation in June 2000, Cherbourg was the only Queensland Aboriginal community to ‘host’ the torch, and received national media coverage of the event.

4.4.1. Population

The 2001 Census of Population and Housing placed the total number of people in Cherbourg on Census night at 1141, and 96% of the respondents identify themselves as either Aboriginal or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Some estimates made by Cherbourg residents are that the community is very much larger, home to 2000 to 2500 people.

The national Indigenous undercount was estimated to be 7.1% in 1996, compared to 1.6% for all of Australia (ABS 2002a).³¹ No additional breakdown of the undercount is available for individual communities or even geographic region or state. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has a special Indigenous Enumeration Strategy to reduce the Indigenous undercount. This includes special collection procedures, and efforts in raising awareness about the Census through newspaper articles, posters, radio and television, and brochures designed to address cultural barriers and highlight the potential benefits of the Census (ABS and AIHW 2001). Remoteness, lower levels of literacy and perceived lack of tangible personal relevance probably contribute to the Census’s high Indigenous undercount on a national level. Cherbourg, however, is not a remote community; literacy levels are good relative to more remote communities, and the community as a whole is socially and politically aware. The undercount in Cherbourg would have been further minimised as local community members were recruited as Census collectors, and enumeration was conducted by interview in many cases (Alex McNaughton, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000, personal communication). If the national Indigenous undercount were representative of Cherbourg, this would bring the population estimates to approximately 1228 people. The Census therefore remains a good estimate of population size and structure.

Even with the maximum likely undercount considered, the Census count falls well short of the higher local estimates. Residents of Cherbourg have kinship ties to many populations around Queensland, partly a result of its history as a settlement. The geographical scope of these

³¹At the time of writing, Indigenous undercount estimates were unavailable for the 2001 Census. Given the continuing efforts to improve Indigenous enumeration, it is unlikely that a more recent undercount estimate would be greater than that for 1996.

kinship ties means that if there is an important gathering, such as a wedding or a funeral, there will be many visitors to the community at one time. It is therefore feasible that the population may, on occasion, temporarily swell to the upper estimate of 2500.

The Cherbourg population has a relatively young age structure (Figure 4.2), which is similar to that of Australia’s Indigenous population as a whole. This structure reflects both a high birth rate, and high mortality rates, not just in childhood but across age groups. This pyramid shape more closely resembles that of a less industrialised nation, rather than that of a highly industrialised country such as Australia. Since the previous Census in 1996, there has been a net increase in the Cherbourg population count of 40 people.

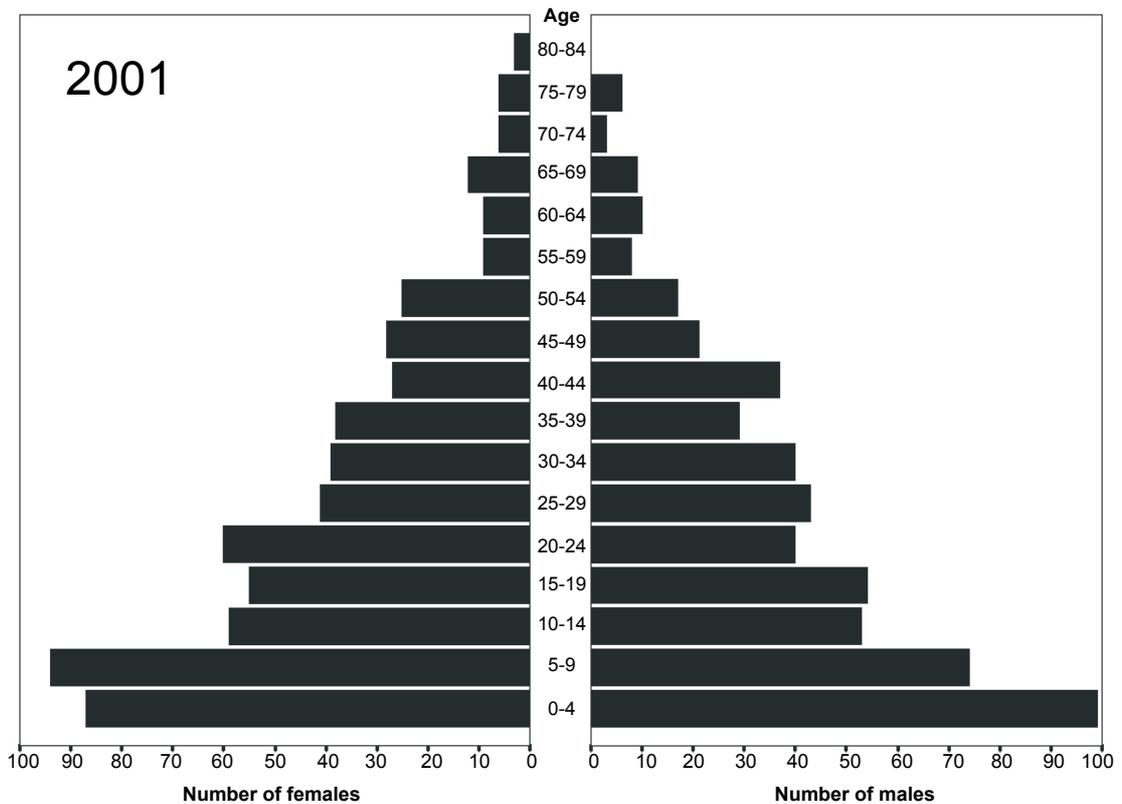


Figure 4.2. Population structure of Cherbourg, 2001. Data from 2001 Census (ABS 2002a).

The annual birth rate in Cherbourg is very likely in excess of 33 per 1000 population, based on increase in number since the 1996 Census of those under five years. This does not include those infants who were born after the 1996 Census but did not survive to the 2001 count (see discussion of infant mortality in Cherbourg, Section 7.1), and takes no account of migration. This estimated birth rate is typical of Indigenous communities, as birth rates tend to be high for Indigenous women (Day *et al.* 1999).

There have also been substantial decreases in the numbers of people in several cohorts. Cohort-specific population changes that have occurred in the Cherbourg community since 1996 are shown in Figure 4.3. Although there are increases in some age groups, without considering births the picture is one of decline.

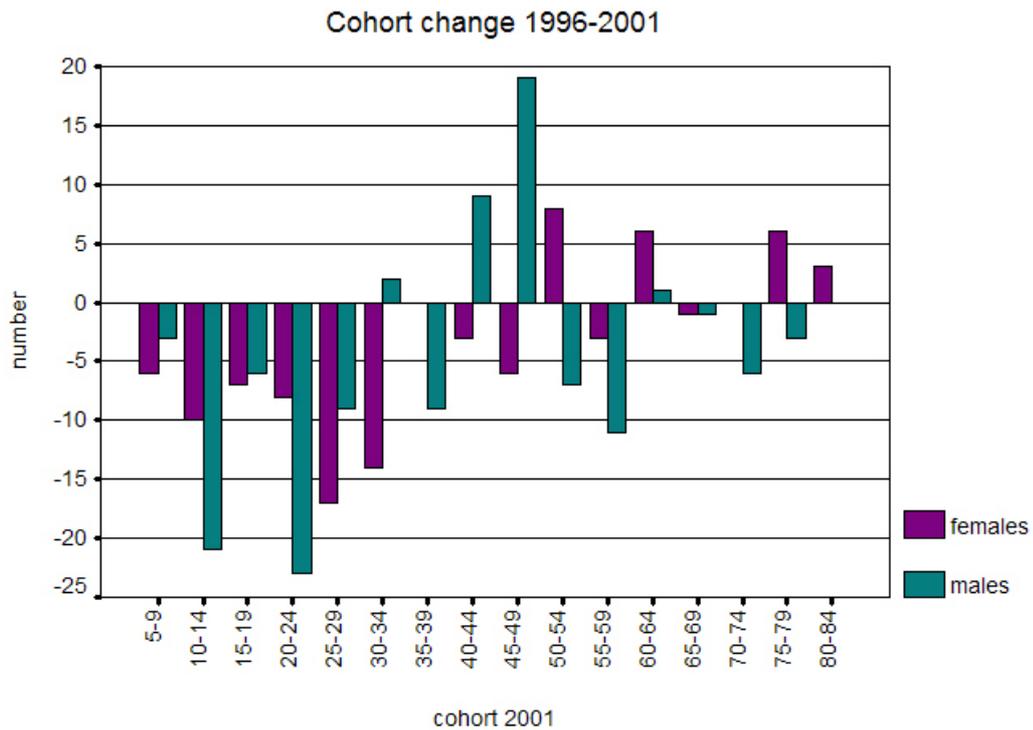


Figure 4.3. Changes in cohort numbers between 1996 and 2001. The baseline, '0', represents the 1996 figures. The horizontal axis refers to the age-group of each cohort at the 2001 Census, so for example those in the 5-9 years cohort were 0-4 years in 1996, 10-14 years were 5-9 in 1996 and so forth. The birth to 4 years cohort is not shown as those in this cohort did not exist in the 1996 Census. For example, in 2001 there were 9 fewer 5-9 year olds than there were 0-4 year olds in 1996.

Of course, some cohort change may be due to migration and decline is not necessarily due to mortality, but it does provide an indication of loss to the Cherbourg community. At younger ages, accidents and trauma are primary causes of death,³² while diabetes-related conditions form the primary contribution to deaths at later ages.

³² The Cherbourg community has lost a significant number of young people due to car accidents, especially on the 5.5km road between Cherbourg and Murgon (a special tree-planting ceremony was held at the school in early 2000 to remember the young people lost to the community). In the latter half of 2000, extensive upgrading of the road occurred.

At almost all ages, the decrease among males is greater than among females. This picture becomes intensified when age-group is also considered in calculating rate of cohort population decline per thousand (Figure 4.4). Although the greatest rates of decline are in the oldest age groups, there is considerable decline at younger ages, especially among young men.

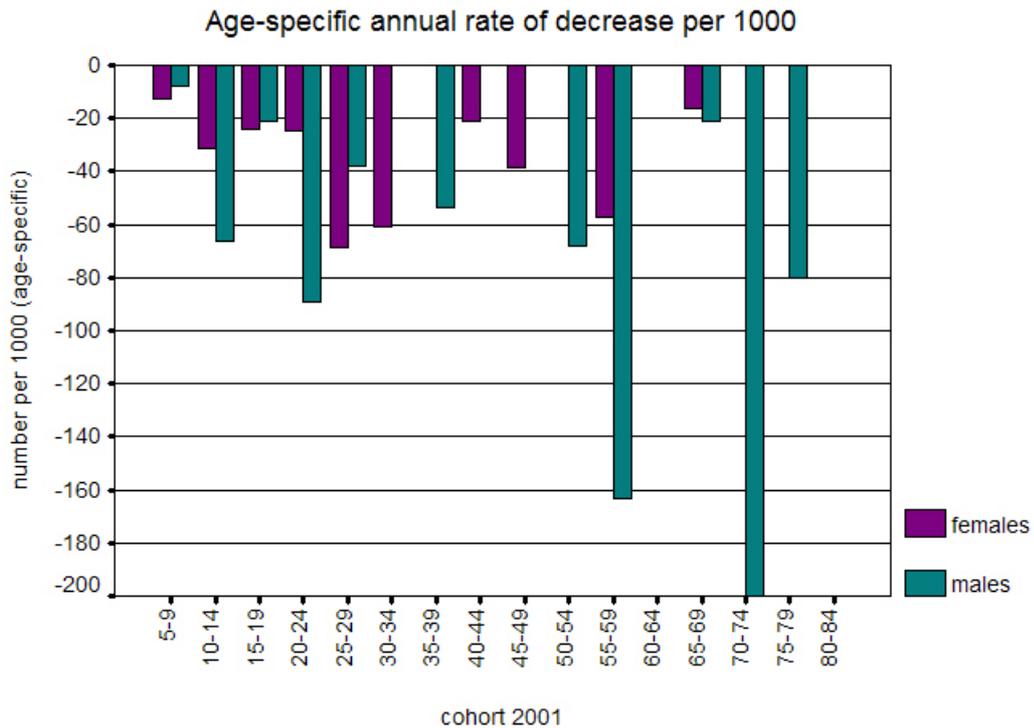


Figure 4.4. Annual rate of decrease per 1000. These rates are age and sex specific, i.e. rate of decrease in the 75-79 cohort of males is per thousand males aged 75-79. This cohort was aged 70-74 in the 1996 census. Cohort size was taken as the average number for a given cohort from the 1996 and 2001 Censuses.

Estimates of annual mortality rates for females and males were derived from the rates of change in the Cherbourg population between 1996 and 2001. Crude mortality rate in Cherbourg is estimated to be between 21 and 31 per thousand for the population overall. Females appear to have a lower mortality rate than males (17 to 25 per thousand females versus 25 to 36 per thousand males). The lower figure for each was calculated using the total rate of change (positives as well as negatives) while the upper estimate was derived from negative changes only. These mortality estimates, although imprecise, are supported by the number of funerals that are held in Cherbourg (Section 4.4.4).

Given the above estimates for birth and death rates, and the age structure of the population, Cherbourg is still 'in transition' according to Omran's model (Section 2.1.1), not having reached the low rates of fertility and mortality expected in wealthy industrialised countries.

4.4.2. Autonomy

The first community council was elected in 1966 (Cherbourg Anniversary Organizing Committee 1979), although these early councillors filled more of a liaison role with the white administration. In these early days of the council, councillors were looked upon by most of the population with suspicion; although they were held in high regard as individuals they were powerless to achieve anything (Koepping 1977).

Cherbourg is now under community control within a system called a deed of grant in trust (DOGIT) which was awarded in 1986. This means that although the community members do not have outright ownership of the land as individuals, they have an elected council which makes planning and funding decisions for the community, much like a shire council, only with greater direct contact with community members. The council elections are held on the same days as for other shires. A similar system is now in place in other Queensland Indigenous communities, such as Palm Island.

Cherbourg sees itself as having come a long way forward and hence has a more positive outlook on the future than some other communities, and is actively investing in this future through various community projects. Cherbourg's industries include emu farming for eggs, meat and leather, specialist meat processing, and dairy cattle. Its facilities include a hospital, a primary school, an aged care hostel, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, a women's shelter, a TAFE (Technical and Further Education) college, a shop and a sports centre. A map of Cherbourg is provided in Figure 4.5.

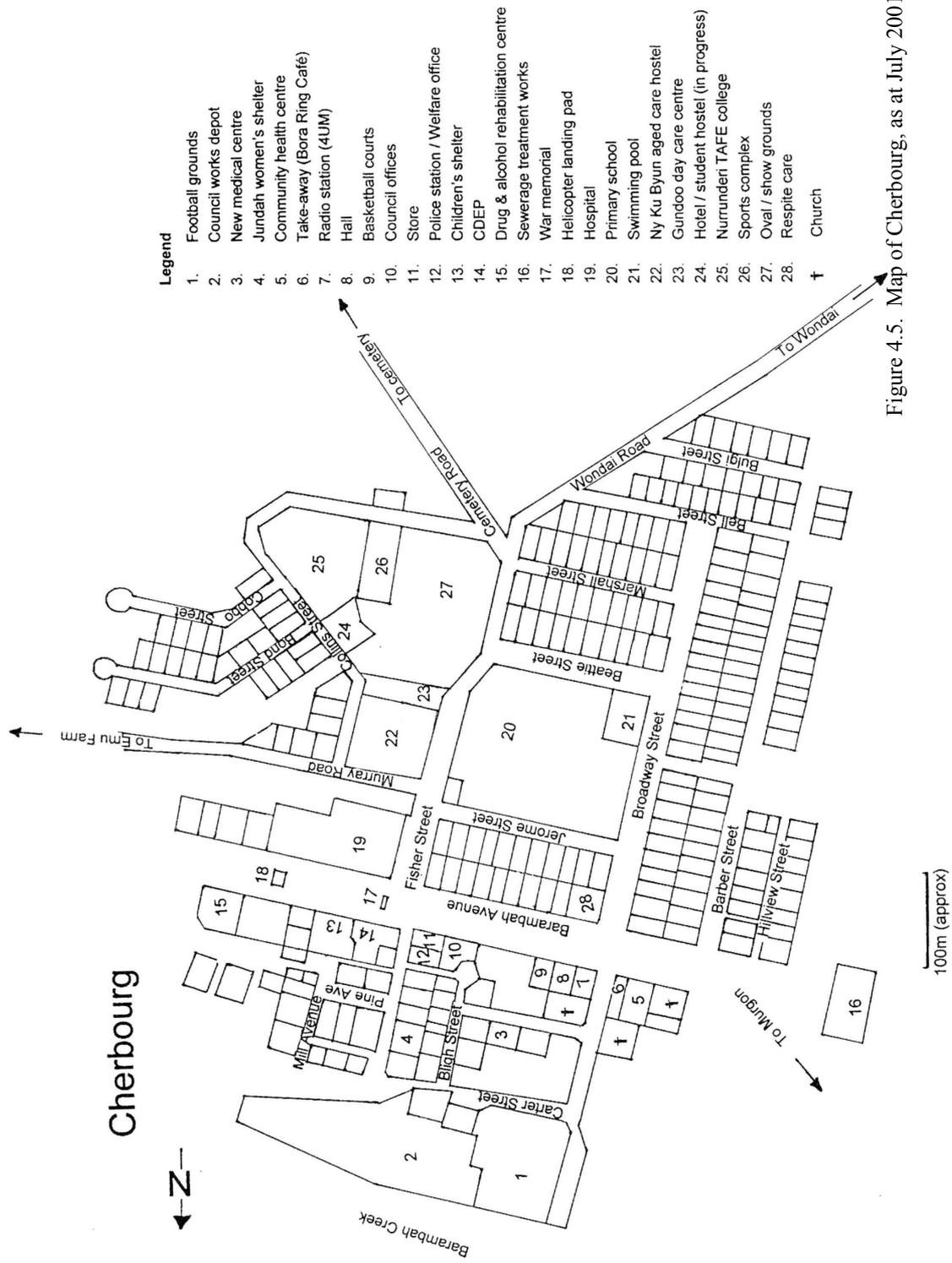


Figure 4.5. Map of Cherbourg, as at July 2001

4.4.3. Education and employment

There is a primary school in Cherbourg (grades one to seven) and a high school in Murgon (grades eight to twelve) which also serves the Cherbourg community. Chris Sarra has been principal of Cherbourg State Primary since 1998. The school's first Murri principal, he is developing a good reputation for keeping children in school. Since he became principal, truancy rates have dropped by 94% (Wilson 2003). He is very proud of the fact that there are now a few children from Murgon attending Cherbourg school, a result of its improving reputation. A book of Wakka Wakka words, such as names for birds and animals, has been written for the school by one of the elders, so that the school children can learn some of the language. The author, Joe Button, says he feels positive because he has 'put our language back in the school' (personal communication, 2001).

Despite the decline in school absences in recent years, there was invariably a small gang of young children roaming around the town each day during my field research. Sometimes they said they were sick and could not go to school. Sometimes these children would spend the day following me and talking with me, disappearing only to go home for lunch. On one occasion a boy of about six stayed with me all day – he said he couldn't go home for lunch because his mum thought he was at school.

One informant told me children might sometimes be absent from school if there was no food for them to take for lunch, or no money for them to buy food: 'the parents don't want them scabbing off other kids 'cos they're embarrassed [so] they just don't send them to school'. At present, if a child turns up to school obviously hungry they are given a 'Vegemite sandwich and some milk', but the wider long term issues promoting and surrounding household food shortage have not yet been adequately addressed. The school is in the process of developing a nutrition program, through which children will be taught about healthy eating.

Murgon High School is the main secondary school for the area. A few children travel as far as Kingaroy. Like the primary school, the high school has also come into recent favour with parents following the arrival of a progressive principal, who has been keen to be readily accessible to Cherbourg parents, implementing a system whereby the primary school will assist to organise a meeting between parents and the high school principal to discuss any concerns that may arise.

In the past there have been problems for Cherbourg children in the transition between primary and secondary school for both education and social reasons. Education in the 1980s at Cherbourg was still not up to state standard (Markus 1982). In a bid to assist social adjustment, the Cherbourg school and Murgon High School now run a joint camp towards the end of the school year for those in year seven (the final year of primary) to mix with those in year eight (the first year of high school). Very few of the children from Cherbourg currently remain at school to complete Year 12, and even fewer attempt tertiary education (Chris Sarra 2000, personal communication).

Nurrunderi TAFE, situated in Cherbourg, runs vocational courses aimed primarily at Indigenous students from Cherbourg and elsewhere. A hotel/student hostel is in the process of completion, which is expected to serve primarily as student accommodation for those from out of town. There are several regional university campuses within a few hours drive of Cherbourg, which have programs aimed at increasing Indigenous enrolment. For example, at the time of my fieldwork, two women from Cherbourg were studying nursing at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland.

Official unemployment in the community is fairly low, at 7.1% of women and 6.8% of men. However, 50% of the population aged over 15 years is not in the labour force (ABS 2002a). Those not in the labour force include those participating in CDEP or receiving other government benefits (such as parenting allowance, disability pension or old age pension), and a small number in full-time education.

Participants in the CDEP are expected to work two days per week to receive unemployment benefits. As the small income they receive from this affects their rent assistance, the Council provides an additional incentive to CDEP participants of about \$20 per week. CDEP workers are responsible for most of the maintenance work around the community, such as fencing, gardening, painting and litter removal.

Much of the work that is available in the community is manual labour, for example, 'in hygienics' (the sewerage works), or as community painter, or school janitor. One informant in his 70s remembers his first job was as a member of the 'beetle gang' who cleaned up the town, picking up papers and bottles. His other jobs have included working on railways, at the abattoir, in forestry, as a bullock driver and as a community police sergeant in the 1960s. He also helped to build the first fence around Cherbourg (although he says people soon collected the palings for firewood as it was easier than going looking for wood in the bush). Today, the main employers

include the Community Council, the emu farm, the hospital and the health centre, and the school (Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Table 4.1. Employment industries, Cherbourg: data from 2001 Census (ABS 2002a).

Industry ^a	Females	Males	Total
Government administration	71	135	206
Health and community services	18	6	24
Education	15	7	22
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0	7	7
Property and business services	0	3	3
Personal and other services	0	3	3

^a ABS categories

Table 4.2. Occupation, Cherbourg: data from 2001 Census (ABS 2002a).

Occupation ^a	Females	Males	Total
Labourers and related workers	51	92	143
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	30	6	36
Tradespersons and related workers	3	27	30
Associate professionals	9	13	22
Professionals	11	9	20
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	6	6	12
Managers and administrators	3	7	10
Intermediate production and transport workers	0	9	9

^a ABS categories

High underemployment is an additional social burden. For every part-time worker there are 0.63 full-time workers, and the ratio of full-time workers to part-time workers and those not in the labour force is 0.22:1. For every full-time worker there are three people over the age of 15 who are not working at all.³³ Both unemployment and underemployment remain major social issues within the community, especially among young people who have left school early. The forms that need to be completed to receive government benefits can also be daunting for those who are less literate. One male informant aged 33 was unemployed for a few years while he

³³ Calculated using data from 2001 Census (ABS 2002a).

was living in Brisbane. As his literacy was very poor, he found it very hard to fill out all the social security forms, and felt he was never prepared at school for what lay ahead. He says it can be difficult in a community where the majority are unemployed or underemployed: 'how can you have self-esteem when no-one's working and everyone's drinking?' For some there is a lot of spare time and little money, and not much to do in the way of entertainment or organised activities. The nearest cinema, for example, is in Kingaroy, 50km away; out of reach for those without their own car, and once fuel costs are factored in, seeing a movie is a major expense.

4.4.4. Health and health care

Our people are still dying fast, and young (Huggins 1994, p. 135).

The Cherbourg community has a 15-bed hospital, originally built as a tuberculosis clinic for the South Burnett region, which is funded by the state and administered by the Regional Health Authority in Kingaroy (Figure 4.6). Until recently, the hospital also functioned as an outpatient clinic due to the absence of a general practice. The new medical centre, intended to relieve the hospital of its outpatient functions by providing a general medical practice within the community, opened during NAIDOC³⁴ week, July 2002.

In the 1980s the only doctor available in Cherbourg was one who would visit from Murgon for half an hour each day (Markus 1982). More recently two doctors' positions were created, but were most often filled by recent medical graduates undertaking short contracts of between about six to 12 weeks each. In mid 2000, two doctors filled new general practitioner positions on five-year contracts. In the eyes of the community members, this continuity of care is much needed and has been a long time coming:

You tell one doctor all your secrets and then they leave and you have to tell them all over again to someone else (male with diabetes, in his early 50s).

They'd put you on one thing, and then a new doctor would come and they'd put you on something else...they'd put you on whatever their favourite medication was...I felt like a walking chemist shop (female with diabetes, in her late 50s).

³⁴ National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration.

Specialist clinics are held at the hospital by visiting medical officers from Brisbane and larger regional centres such as Kingaroy. For example, there is an ear, nose, and throat clinic every month. Most of the nursing staff at the hospital are non-Indigenous, although the two women from the community completing their nursing qualifications undertake their practical placements there. There are also frequently nursing students from Brisbane and interstate who elect to have a placement at Cherbourg. Some of the nursing staff have been at the hospital for many years and know the regular patients very well.



Figure 4.6. Cherbourg Hospital (location 19 on map).

The hospital facilities are basic. There used to be a maternity care section but since 1990 most women are taken to Kingaroy to give birth (Powell and Dugdale 1999), as there had been a number of maternal and neonatal deaths at the hospital due to a lack of specialist equipment and expertise (Tarita Fisher 2000, personal communication). Women are taken by ambulance when labour begins and are usually gone for a few days, or longer if it is their first child. As place of birth is still very important to many people in Cherbourg (Powell and Dugdale 1999), it is common practice for women to delay attending Cherbourg hospital until labour has significantly progressed, too late for them to be taken to Kingaroy (Tarita Fisher 2000, personal communication), endangering the health of both the mother and newborn should there be complications.

The Community Health Centre (Figure 4.7) is also state-funded, and acts chiefly as a place of referral and the centre for health promotion within the community. For example, Tarita Fisher (nutritionist) and Genette Simpson (diabetes health worker) run diabetes clinics every fortnight, with approximately 20 scheduled clients each session, seen on a rotation basis. Tarita or

Genette make a home visit, or pick up the scheduled client if necessary, and check their weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and HbA_{1c} levels.³⁵ They record the changes, and discuss with the clients ways to improve their health through lifestyle change. These clinics also usually involve a check-up by one of the hospital doctors, or a visiting specialist, such as a podiatrist or ophthalmologist.

Other workers at the health centre include a social worker/mental health worker, a health promotions officer, and more recently, a midwife.



Figure 4.7. Community Health Centre, left, and the Bora Ring Café (5 and 6 on map).

There are many health problems affecting the Cherbourg community (Figure 4.8 illustrates hospital data on these from 1995, before the opening of the general practice). In addition to diabetes and degenerative disorders with shared risk factors, such as CVD, there are several infectious diseases which remain important. Skin infections, such as scabies, impetigo and ringworm remain common, especially among children but not infrequently among adults. There is also at least one person who has had leprosy. Contributing factors to infection include poor nutrition (sometimes associated in adults with heavy alcohol consumption, see Section 8.2.2), overcrowding, and poor hygiene, which act, often in synergy, to lower immunity.

³⁵ A measure of long-term (two to three months) average blood glucose levels.

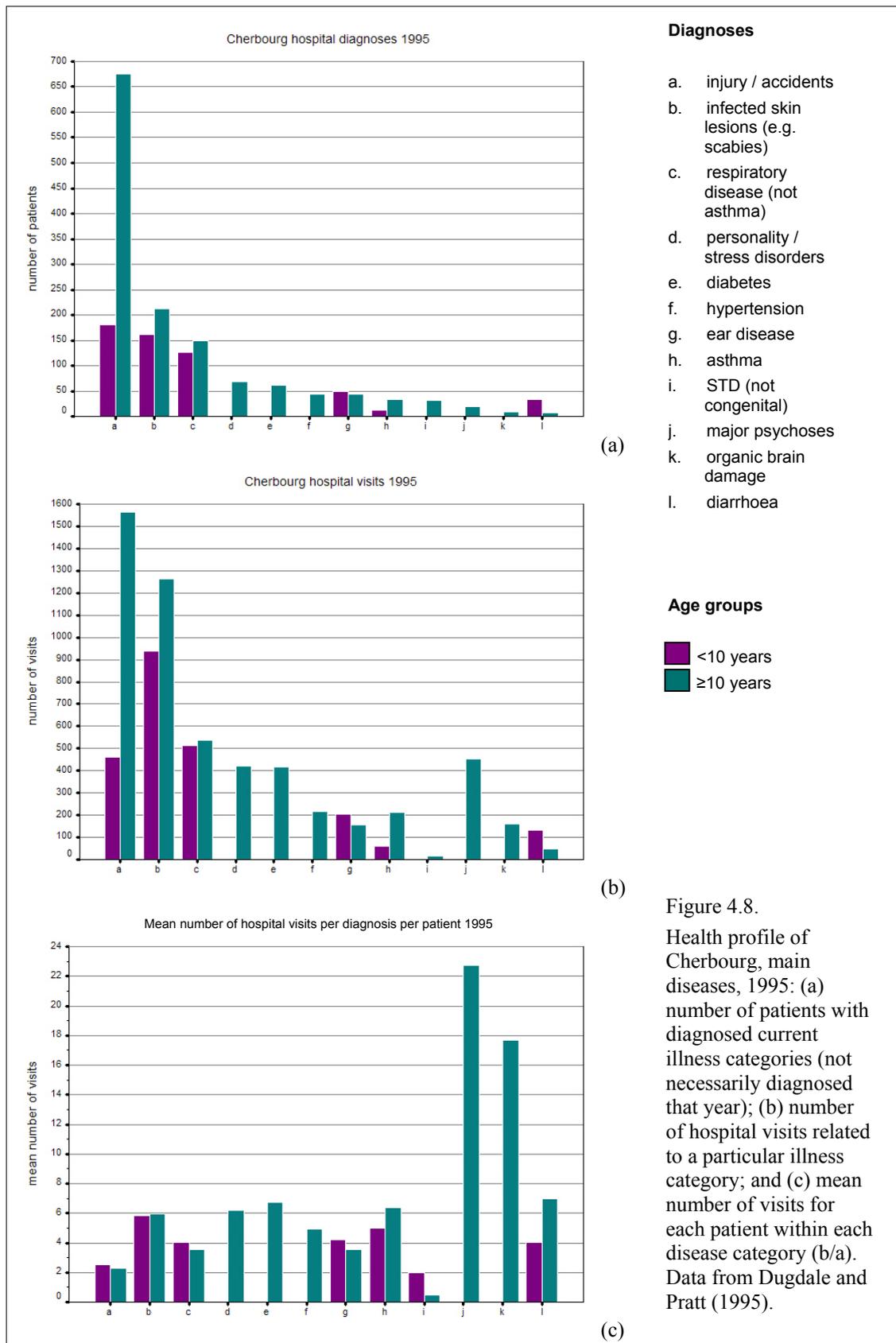


Figure 4.8. Health profile of Cherbourg, main diseases, 1995: (a) number of patients with diagnosed current illness categories (not necessarily diagnosed that year); (b) number of hospital visits related to a particular illness category; and (c) mean number of visits for each patient within each disease category (b/a). Data from Dugdale and Pratt (1995).

Diabetes is one of the most intensively treated chronic illnesses. In 1995, diabetes was responsible for the greatest number of hospital visits per person with a particular disease, after mental disorders and diarrhoea (Dugdale and Pratt 1995) (Figure 4.8). The number of people diagnosed with diabetes has since doubled (Section 6.1), which has undoubtedly increased the burden on the community health services substantially.

There are various other health problems which are less visible. For example, towards the end of my fieldwork, I was asked to give a young woman a lift to the hospital. She was feeling very unwell and was in obvious discomfort. Inquiring after her health a few days later, I was told she had been admitted to the hospital with rheumatic fever. This and other secondary infections are quite common, as they thrive in those conditions of overcrowding and poor nutrition which reduce immune function. Another less visible but important health issue is that of sexually transmitted infections. Anecdotal evidence suggests that syphilis, gonorrhoea and various strains of hepatitis occur at higher rates than in the general community.

Alcohol and other substance abuse, especially paint-sniffing among young people, are significant, particularly in terms of mental and social health. One young informant described himself as 'having a drinking problem...but I cut down a lot. I seen the ugly side of me when I was drunk'. Until recently, alcohol was not permitted onto the community, but there was always 'sly grog'. In the 1980s, even to be in the company of someone bringing alcohol onto the settlement was punishable by gaol (Markus 1982). Today alcohol is not sold in Cherbourg, but may be brought in from Murgon. Paint-sniffing among young people often occurs openly.

Cannabis ('yandi') is another main drug of choice. The reason for its popularity and often chronic use, as expressed to me by two teenage boys heavily under its influence, is that there is 'nothing else to do' in Cherbourg. It is usually brought in to the community from Brisbane, Bundaberg or Hervey Bay. At present, intravenous drug use occurs at a relatively low level within the community, probably at least partly due to the distance from the city, but is expected by many locals to increase in the near future. If this does occur, it is very likely that the prevalence of blood-borne viruses, such as Hepatitis B and C and HIV, will increase drastically.

More recently, there are several other community problems, in addition to (and contributing to) poor health, recognised by community members as resulting from Cherbourg's history as a settlement. These include a lack of feeling of community togetherness, boredom and frustration leading to drug and alcohol abuse, violence against people and destruction of property. Teenage

pregnancy is seen by many young women as a way to escape the boredom of unemployment ("Community Profile" folder, Cherbourg Hospital. c.1993), much as marriage was a means to escape the dormitory system in the past. According to Sutton (2001), the history of Aboriginal politics in Queensland has much to answer for in the case of alcohol and other drug abuse, through its discrimination, coercive assimilation, devaluing of traditional roles and promotion of low self-esteem.

A funeral every fortnight

Death is an all too common occurrence in Cherbourg. In the first three years of his ministry to mid-2000, the pastor of the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) church had conducted 79 funerals (John Tonge 2000, personal communication). This is an average of more than one funeral every fortnight, but sometimes there might be three in a single week. Cherbourg has the dubious honour of having the largest cemetery for a town its size in the region (Figure 4.9). Sutton's description of one cemetery in another Aboriginal community fits that of Cherbourg well:

[Reminiscent of] Australian war graves at Villers-Bretonneaux in France...White crosses, many of them fresh, stretch away seemingly for hundreds of metres (Sutton 2001, p. 3)



Figure 4.9. Cherbourg cemetery. The cemetery extends another frame width to the right, and much further down the hill at the back than can be seen in this photograph.

Diabetes and related disorders, such as CVD, account for many of the deaths among those aged over 40. Violence and other trauma are other recognised health problems, and are frequently associated with alcohol consumption. Older people in particular say there was little violence in the days before grog was allowed on the community (Huggins 1994). Car accidents, especially

involving young people, occur all too frequently. Traffic calming measures have been installed on several of the community streets (Figure 4.10).

As it is a close-knit community, and many people are related one way or another, this high frequency of death means that people do not have time to grieve for one person before they grieve for another (Tarita Fisher 2000, personal communication), so that grieving can be somewhat continuous. The stress that this then places on individuals and families is substantial.



Figure 4.10. Pedestrian crossing and speed bump on Barber Street.

4.4.5. Housing

Housing in Cherbourg traverses spectra of age, size and complexity; older, small simple brick or fibro structures to more recently built large Queensland-style homesteads. While the newer homes are being built many older ones are still occupied but falling into disrepair. There is a considerable waiting list for new homes. The newer areas being developed are located on the hill behind the hospital – ‘Snob Hill’ as it is referred to by the locals (Figure 4.11). Many of the older houses have broken windows and doors (Figure 4.12), and little in the way of furniture.



Figure 4.11. ‘Snob Hill’ viewed from Fisher Street (Murray Road is shown). The hospital sits to the left of the frame.



Figure 4.12. Mill Avenue. The house on the left is an example of the simpler houses. The house on the right had been substantially damaged by fire.

4.4.6. Retail

In Cherbourg there is a take-away, the Bora Ring Café (Figure 4.8), and a supermarket (Figure 4.13). The supermarket is not well stocked with fresh produce, and acts more as a take-away and a convenience food store. The prices at this store are high. When the Healthy Food Basket Survey took place in 1997, it was found that Cherbourg prices were 140% of Brisbane prices on

specified healthy food items (Leonard *et al.* 1999). Even this figure is likely to underestimate the problem, as the items that were not found to be available were given a Brisbane price rating as a default, and then calculations were made on the average. In Cherbourg, very few of the items would have been available, for example in 1999 it had less than 50% of the basic fruit and vegetable items listed in the survey (Leonard *et al.* 1999). Shelves are very often empty, and the store does not present an impression of cleanliness (Figure 4.14). The sales assistant during my fieldwork smoked at the counter. Cherbourg residents use the shop mainly for buying snacks:

... only [go there] to buy a drink and that – it's scabby and dirty (female in her early 20s).



Figure 4.13. Cherbourg Retail Store. View from Barambah Avenue (11 on map).



Figure 4.14. Corridor towards Cherbourg store, showing about a dozen loaves of white bread. This emptiness and lack of variety was typical of the shelves within the rest of the store (I subsequently asked the sales assistant if I could take a photograph from inside the shop, but she refused).

In Murgon there are three supermarkets, and people from Cherbourg do the majority of their shopping at one of these but transport can be a problem (Section 8.1.2). There is also a small fruit market, a bakery, a hardware store and a small department store, amongst others.

There are two hotels (pubs) in Murgon. Gambling, predominantly in the form of poker machines, is available at both of them. One of these is much more popular than the other with people from Cherbourg. In early 2000 there was a move by the less popular pub to extend its trading hours into earlier in the morning. Cherbourg health workers argued against this move and it was eventually set aside. There is also a TAB³⁶ in Murgon.

4.4.7. Community enterprise

The Cherbourg emu farm established in 1990 is run by the community primarily as a tourist venture, selling carved eggs. There is also a specialist meat (emu and goat) abattoir at the farm, and this is one of the main employers in the community, but it is not very popular due to the early morning starts (six o'clock), long hours, messy work and low rates of pay (around \$12 an hour in 2000).

The Cherbourg community has approximately 90 head of dairy cattle. The milk is transported daily to Nambour for processing (and then residents 'buy it back in a bottle'³⁷).

There is a community joinery workshop which manufactures furniture and fittings for buildings within Cherbourg as well as across the state, and serves as a work placement for apprentices from Nurrunderi TAFE.

4.4.8. Community groups, sporting and social activities

There are many community organisations that exist to help residents with health, social, recreational and welfare issues.

The Diabetes Support Group was established in early 2000 by community nutritionist Tarita Fisher. The group meets on a monthly basis to discuss their concerns with keeping healthy while living with diabetes. Aside from peer support, one of the main functions of the group is

³⁶ Totalisator Agency Board: sports gambling facility.

³⁷ Ken Bone (Community Council Chair) said this with a laugh when I asked him what happened to the milk that is produced in Cherbourg.

education. Guest speakers are arranged to provide specialist information on diabetes care, and the group also resolves to educate their families and the young people of the community about healthy lifestyle habits. For example, during my fieldwork there was talk of filming a video aimed specifically at Cherbourg's young people to help them avoid developing the disease when they get older. Other activities include learning to prepare healthy snacks, and during my fieldwork there was a bush-tucker feast of 'porky' and yellow-belly (golden perch: *Macquaria ambigua*) (Figure 4.15).



Figure 4.15. Bush-tucker feast for the Diabetes Support Group, held at the rehabilitation centre in June 2000.

Cherbourg has a sports complex which includes an oval, basketball courts and a well-equipped gym which runs low-priced circuit classes three times a week (cost in 2000 was \$2.20 per session, including GST), which a number of older rather than younger residents attend (Figure 4.16). There is also a 25m swimming pool in Cherbourg (location 21 on map), although there was no water in it for the duration of my fieldwork as it awaited repairs. The 50m swimming pool in Murgon, however, was very popular with both Murgon and Cherbourg children during summer.

Cherbourg has several sporting teams in all age groups which play throughout the district, with rugby league and netball being the most popular. Golf is also a very popular sport among many of the Cherbourg men.³⁸ At present, golf is usually played at Murgon or Wondai, but Cherbourg Council is intending to build a high standard course in the near future.



Figure 4.16. Cherbourg Sports Complex (location 26 on map)

Card games and gambling were introduced in the early days of the settlement (Huggins 1994) and remain popular today. Bingo is held on three mornings a week in either the Murgon Returned Services League Club or the Murgon Town Hall. It is an extremely popular pastime; when I was organising the pilot study (Section 5.2), it was strongly recommended that I choose to start on a day of the week when there was no Bingo, just so there would be some people left in Cherbourg to take part. Several players consider themselves ‘addicted’ to bingo.

Cherbourg has several welfare organisations. Jundah women’s shelter (location 4 on map) primarily acts as a safe house for women escaping domestic violence. Women who have been assaulted, however, do not always seek help from the shelter – they may be embarrassed or feel uncomfortable because they do not know, or are not close to, the people there, and may seek support from family and friends instead.

The Youth and Community Care Agency (YACCA), situated in Murgon, is a state government organisation established to provide support and alternative activities for young people considered ‘at risk’ of offending. It is aimed at developing a positive relationship between Murgon and Cherbourg youth through programs intended to teach respect for themselves and for others. Barambah Aboriginal Community Case Agency (BACCA, location 13 on map) is

³⁸ I did not hear of any women who played golf.

targeted towards helping children younger than those seen by YACCA. Its aims are to re-establish and strengthen ties within families, and to strengthen the role of the family within the community. It runs counselling and discussion groups for parents, and workshops teaching parenting skills and conflict resolution. Gundoo Day Care Centre (location 23 on map) caters for preschool children and runs after-school care for those in primary school with working parents.

The drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre (location 15 on map) has facilities for approximately 12 residential clients, most of whom have had problems with alcohol abuse rather than other drugs. The number of centre residents fluctuates, and duration of their stay may be relatively short or long term. The rehabilitation centre is not used while people are 'detoxing' but as a safe and supportive place of residence after detox.

Ny Ku Byun aged care hostel (location 22) cares for those who are not able to look after themselves, regardless of age. There is also a respite care centre (location 28) in Cherbourg which organises activities and events for the elderly and others who require care.

An informal but very important group within the Cherbourg community is the elders. The elders provide advice to the Council on community needs, and as a group they are well-respected in the community. The elders also assist in dealing with misdemeanours ("Community Profile" folder, Cherbourg Hospital. c.1993). They meet regularly at the school to keep abreast of community events.

Cherbourg has a community welfare worker to provide counselling and assist with emergency housing and financial relief. There is a local police station (location 12) with two state Police officers and several Community Police. There is also a police station in Murgon. The Wakka Wakka Aboriginal Legal Aid service is also situated in Murgon.

There is a local community-run FM radio station, 4UM ('for us mob') (Figure 4.17). Community members, young and old, are presenters at the station (including the Council Chair), each having their favoured play lists. There is a very heavy leaning towards country music, with an emphasis on Indigenous artists, and also a thriving Christian component. 4UM is an important means to get information out to the community. For example, the health workers use it for regular health promotion, and I used it as a means to introduce myself to a broad audience when I first arrived, and to keep the community informed about my study as it progressed. The

Community Council leases a hall (location 8) which is available for hire for social gatherings and community meetings.



Figure 4.17. Radio 4UM (location 7). View from Broadway Street. The community hall is shown in the right of the frame.

There are many talented local artists within the community (Figure 4.18). Paintings and carvings from Cherbourg were displayed in a small gallery on the main street in Murgon until it closed in mid-2000. More recently though, a gallery and shop have been opened in Cherbourg itself at the newly built picnic area and gardens overlooking Lake Barambah (Figure 4.19). This, in addition to the emu farm, is aimed at attracting tourists to the community. While Murgon itself is on the highway, a visit to Cherbourg requires some incentive. It is hoped ventures like these will not only bring tourists and their dollars to the community, but also build stronger and more positive relations with the white community.



Figure 4.18. Venus Rabbitt and Michael Donas painting the outside of the Cherbourg store in December 2000.



Figure 4.19. Inside the Cherbourg Art Gallery and Shop.

4.4.9. Traditions and spirituality

Hunting bush tucker has remained a favourite leisure activity for a number of Cherbourg residents, although few people do it regularly. Many claim to know the bush around Cherbourg very well, and still go out collecting bush tucker occasionally. Some older residents are teaching their young relatives how to hunt. Possum, yellow-belly and grubs are the usual fare. 'Porky' remains a favourite, mainly caught in winter when they are fat and easy to find. The meat is boiled for several hours, and is very dark, strong, fibrous and oily. Nuts from the bunya pine (*Araucaria budwillii*) are also still prized. Before European settlement and in the early

decades following there would be large gatherings every three years or so, to coincide with the major bunya harvests (O'Sullivan 1986; Tarita Fisher 2001, personal communication).

Although traditional rites and practices have ceased, a firm belief in spirits remains, often in the form of contact with dead ancestors or an awareness of a 'presence' (O'Sullivan 1985).

There are beliefs in other spirit beings, both good and malevolent. For example, the *jonjardi* are small hairy men who make people happy, play with sick children and help them to heal (those a *jonjardi* plays with will recover), although they may abduct children if disturbed (O'Sullivan 1985). Today the *jonjardi* still visit sick children in hospital (Earl Brown³⁹ 2001, personal communication). *Mundagarde* is a large creature who lives in water holes and eats people if it catches them. It used to live just in one particular place along the river, but now has a family who inhabit many areas (Tarita Fisher 2000, personal communication). Children are told about the *Mundagarde* to keep them away from dangerous places (O'Sullivan 1985). There are some places, such as Ban Ban Springs to the north, that are avoided because of spirits (O'Sullivan 1985), and others such as Maidenwell to the south are considered sacred for various reasons.

Min min (or *Mimi*) lights appear at night and look like a car headlight approaching (Tarita Fisher 2000, personal communication). They are not considered to be either especially good or evil, but they should never be followed, and 'you feel it' when they pass and safety returns (Earl Brown 2001, personal communication).

Two young women informed me that sometimes a woman may be 'sung' by a man who wants her sexually, so that she then feels drawn to be with him even if she dislikes him. She may feel his presence in a room, or even see him. Not many men have the ability to sing a woman, but the trait is passed down through the female line.

A dog howling at night is taken as a sign that someone has died (O'Sullivan 1985). There are many dogs in Cherbourg - many of them strays which hang together in a pack - and a great deal of howling. The call of a plover brings misfortune, which can be avoided by spitting. Plovers flying overhead cause a series of people to spit at them as they pass (Earl Brown 2001, personal communication). A willy-wagtail is a 'message bird', often signalling an impending guest, or telling of an impending death (Tarita Fisher 2000, Earl Brown 2001, personal communication).

³⁹ Not his real name. A respected elder in the community who chose not to be identified.

Traditional spiritual beliefs are not perceived to be at odds with Christianity. Ninety-three percent of Cherbourg residents profess to belong to a Christian denomination (ABS 2002a), although the number attending regular services is only a fraction of this. There are three Christian churches in Cherbourg. The largest of these, claimed by about 50% of the population, is the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) church (Presbyterian) (ABS 2002a), established in Cherbourg in 1958 (Lloyd 1979) after initial rejection during the earlier days of the settlement (Cummings 1990), and now ministered to by Pastor John Tonge. The AIM plays a role as a behaviour modifier, creating positions of prestige and encouraging abstinence from alcohol (Koepping 1977). Attending church regularly and abstaining from alcohol appear to go hand in hand.

The other major denominations are Anglican and Catholic, each with 20% of the population (ABS 2002a), and ministers of these two churches visit from Murgon to take services (Figure 4.20). Fewer than 2% of the population claim affiliation with one of the Uniting, Pentecostal and Lutheran Churches. The strong religious affiliations people feel are a legacy of the early days of the settlement when any Christian church was allowed on to the settlement to conduct services (Tennant Kelly 1935) and residents were forced to attend services (Arnold 1976).



Figure 4.20. The Anglican Church in Cherbourg

4.4.10. Tensions and prejudice

You'd think we were in South Africa the way they treat us

This was the response I received when I asked Council Chair Ken Bone in 1999 whether any Murgon children attended the Cherbourg primary school. Although there are now a 'handful' of children from Murgon attending Cherbourg primary school (Section 4.4.3), the general relationship between Cherbourg and Murgon remains somewhat tense.

By the 1970s, Queensland had reduced restrictions on Aboriginal people, but the new visibility in Murgon of Cherbourg residents was not seen as progress by Murgon residents (Whitton 1977). I encountered many examples of racial tension and outspoken prejudice against members of the Cherbourg community while on fieldwork. Typical responses I would receive from whites when I explained that I was working in Cherbourg included 'why bother?' Or if I got as far as mentioning diabetes, it was 'it's the alcohol, isn't it' framed as a foregone conclusion rather than a question. I was also regularly offered solutions to the Cherbourg diabetes problem, which usually involved cutting off government benefits and enforcing alcohol restrictions 'like in the old days'. Thus although the law has progressed in terms of equality, many people in Murgon have not changed their attitudes, and still find the visibility of Aboriginal people in 'their' town offensive. For example, an elderly man came to my door in Murgon, to tell me, among other things, that there had once been a beautiful garden at the house where I was staying, 'but then they let the blacks move in'. Racism is not just the prerogative of the older generations. A young female shop assistant in Murgon loudly chastised a young Aboriginal man ('boy', in her terms) for not wearing a shirt.⁴⁰ He and (I presume) his mother remained silent and kept their heads bent down as the assistant continued to berate him loudly and at length while completing their transaction.

Even those who work within the community are not shy about expressing their racist views and making prejudiced statements. On hearing I was an anthropologist, one of the white nurses in Cherbourg said jokingly, 'I *thought* they were monkeys' as if my presence somehow confirmed her long held suspicions of Cherbourg people.

⁴⁰ Naked male torsos are not an uncommon sight around Queensland, although probably more accepted in coastal areas.

I heard of Aboriginal people being turned away by Murgon real estate agents who informed them that there were no houses available to rent, but that a white friend who makes the same enquiry later the same day would be given a very different response. Many others told me how they are often overlooked in queues in shops as white people behind them are served first.

Without Cherbourg there would be no Murgon; it is a town born of Aboriginal labour on surrounding selections, and continues to rely on Cherbourg custom today. The economic relationship between Cherbourg and Murgon is put succinctly by O'Sullivan:

[Murgon's] economic stability, regardless of the fluctuations in the rural industry, is assured by the regularity of the Social Service payments of its Aboriginal neighbours whose existence it would prefer to ignore (O'Sullivan 1986, p. 6).

Murgon residents frequently regaled me with tales of Aboriginal theft and cunning, drunkenness and violence. Negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people abound. Some of the more subtle ways in which these are continually reinforced are when some well-intentioned person emphasises how 'good' a particular Aboriginal person is, as if they somehow stand out in a moral sense, having shaken off natural tendencies for laziness, alcoholism and violence that shackle the majority. Some of these feelings have been internalised. Some people in Cherbourg say that you can always tell if a person has a 'touch of sars',⁴¹ no matter how much they try to hide it, because sooner or later they'll let down their guard and do something wrong.

On a positive note, there have been some recent steps taken to improve the relationship between Murgon and Cherbourg. For example, in 1991 Cherbourg and Murgon Councils established a joint committee to identify matters of mutual concern and to work actively to improve relations between the two towns (Pope 1992). This was partly in response to ongoing negative portrayals in the media of black-white relations (for example, Clarke 1976; Queensland Parliament-Legislative Assembly 1979; Redlight vs. Joh Bjelke 1981; What now Bunge? 1981)(Redlight vs. Joh Bjelke). Several years ago there was a locally instigated scheme through which Cherbourg workers donated a proportion of their pay to raise funds for a new ambulance for Murgon.

⁴¹ Sarsaparilla, slang for Aboriginal heritage.

4.4.11. 'This is home'

Despite the social and health problems, Cherbourg is seen as home and most people have no desire to live elsewhere. Some have travelled a little, usually to Brisbane, sometimes to other cities, but many choose not to leave Cherbourg. One man in his 30s thinks people who have not spent time away would not be able to cope elsewhere, especially in a city, as they wouldn't know where to pay their bills or simply how to 'get on'.

Others I spoke to did not like the city and were always relieved to return to Cherbourg after visiting relatives. One woman in her 40s said she was frightened whenever she went to Brisbane because there were 'so many murders'.

It is widely agreed upon by adults in Cherbourg that 'kids today have a lot more opportunities', than they used to. Those over 30 and old enough to remember Cherbourg before it became a DOGIT community think that young people are unaware how lucky they are:

This new generation here – they never had it hard. I had it hard, but never as hard as my aunties (male in his mid-30s).

Even back in the 1970s young people were seen as 'too fresh, too outspoken, [having] too much freedom...[they] do not obey the older generation, they do not listen' (Koepping 1976, p. 36).

Several informants talked about how the kids control Cherbourg today. For example, there used to be a 6pm curfew, whereas now 'kids walk the street at all hours'. A sentiment often expressed to me by those over 30 was that there is a lack of discipline, that the 'children run the parents now'. One informant in his mid-30s thinks young people are unaware that 'they got it good', but he thinks there could be more in the way of entertainment. 'They need something to do so there's less thieving and property damage'. He wanted to know what happened to the pony club that had been talked about for some time. A common theme in suggestions for community improvement was to provide something for the youth 'instead of a big golf course for the old people'. One male informant in his late 30s believed it was an absence of any rites of passage: while these existed in the wider community, such as going to university or leaving home, in Cherbourg nothing had replaced the traditional equivalents, such as initiation to become a warrior, which were discouraged under the white settlement administration. He believes it is this absence of structured ceremony to signal adulthood that encouraged teenage boys to drift.

Drugs are seen as a significant and growing problem in Cherbourg, their use exacerbated by boredom. Cannabis use is feared by many in the community as a 'stepping stone' towards 'more serious' drugs, such as amphetamines and heroin. One informant connects drug use directly to vandalism and says that neither used to be a problem in the community.

Changes to Cherbourg seen during the lifetimes of the informants are for the most part perceived as positive by those who live there. The most frequently cited modifications observed in the lifetimes of my informants had more to do with building and infrastructure than with changes in government and social attitudes. New housing and other buildings, especially the TAFE, are viewed as particularly important and symbols of progress. On the less positive side of change, people say that people in the community are no longer as close to each other as they used to be.

The Queensland government's various forms of Aboriginal legislation, from the 1890s to the 1980s, have shaped the current status of Aboriginal health through the removal of personal control, entrenched dependence, and creation of a socioeconomic underclass through decades of sanctioned exploitation.

In 100 years Cherbourg has been transformed from a government 'concentration camp', where individuals had no autonomy or control over their lives, to a largely self-administered community operating its own enterprises. Although equality is now set in legislation, Cherbourg still bears some scars of its political history. The legacies of this history, which created the socioeconomic characteristics of Cherbourg today, are perhaps most clearly evidenced by a relatively poor state of health.

The following chapter describes the design and methods of the present study.